

Engaging

American

Novels

Lessons from
the Classroom

Edited by Joseph O. Milner and Carol A. Pope



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2 Reading between the Lines: Helping Teenagers Respond to American Literature

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Force-feeding has never been a successful instructional practice. It didn't work in the good old days—whenever those were—and it doesn't work today. The “Take this. It's good for you. You'll hate it now but thank me later” approach only sends kids to CliffsNotes/SparkNotes/tomorrow's version of shortcuts to reading. If we want students to read and respond to American literature, we will need to persuade them that what can be found between the lines in the stories of Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Rudolfo Anaya, and Toni Morrison is important and enduring. We also need to help students learn how to read between those lines for themselves.

Too often instruction in English classes has been an occasion for teachers who know and love literature to showcase what they love and show off what they know. Students come away from such classes—and this is when they are done well—in awe of their teachers but with little confidence in their own ability to read literature. Louise M. Rosenblatt (1983) asserts in *Literature as Exploration* that “[t]he problem that a teacher faces first of all, then, is the creation of a situation favorable to a vital experience of literature. Unfortunately, many of the practices and much of the tone of literature teaching have precisely the opposite effect” (p. 61). So what should we be doing differently? How can we help students respond to literature in authentic ways? What kinds of classroom practices foster “a vital experience of literature”?

Maybe I was just lucky. I came to teaching English reluctantly and without strong background in literature studies. I had always been a reader, but the need to waitress my way through college—I remember slipping out of my American Literature 202 classes early, outfitted in a

Heidi's Pies uniform, to make it to work in time for the lunch shift—meant that I began teaching with a Swiss cheese understanding of traditional works and literary periods. While my best friend could retrieve her notes from UCLA to help her prepare her lectures, I had only myself, the book, and my students to rely on.

I didn't have to pretend not to know what Dr. T. J. Eckleburg's eyes in *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1999) symbolized. I didn't. But I trusted that if we put our heads together, my students and I could make sense of F. Scott Fitzgerald's use of symbols. We read and reread, asked questions of one another, and talked our way into an understanding of passages that puzzled us. We took interpretive leaps. I never gave multiple-choice quizzes, because I wasn't sure of the correct answers myself. Instead we wrote about our emerging understanding and used that understanding to help us read on. Were these students short-changed? Probably. In fact, I am sure I owe them a refund. What is interesting, though, is that when students from my early years in teaching tell stories about their time in American Literature class, they use words like *fun* and *pleasure*. They tell me what they remember was how happy I always seemed, how much I loved the books, and how I made them feel smart. This unscientific sample of former students who find me online and send email messages to their old teacher may be an anomaly, but I truly loved American literature and loved reading it in their company.

Over the years, with help from scholars such as Rosenblatt and colleagues who were applying reader response theory to their practice, I learned techniques that help students have a vital experience with American literature. I'm still learning.

Question Papers

One technique that invites students to grapple with literature on their own is the use of question papers. The method is simple. Have students select a passage that puzzled them from the previous night's homework reading. Ask them to reread the passage and then to write for ten minutes nonstop, posing question after question on the page. I tell students not to worry about having answers to their questions, but if they find themselves thinking about something that feels like an answer, to write those down, too. They should let their minds range freely over the passage, speculating on meaning. It often helps to list the following sentence starters on the board:

- "I wonder if . . ."
 - "Could it be that . . .?"
-

- “What if . . . ?”
- “Maybe the author was trying to say . . .”
- “It seems to me that . . .”
- “I suppose it’s possible that . . .”

I tell students to keep their pens moving nonstop. If they find themselves running out of questions, they should start copying the passage, trusting that a new question will soon pop into their heads. Students find this kind of exploratory writing liberating. They often surprise themselves with what they figure out for themselves. No questions of mine—and how many hours have I spent writing discussion questions that no one cared about!—have ever accomplished this half as well. Naomi Sanchez, an eleventh grader, wrote a question paper in response to the following passage from *The Great Gatsby*:

But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a nonexistent nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground. (Fitzgerald, 1999, p. 16)

Student Question Paper

Who is this guy Dr. Eckleburg? And what is so special about his eyes? The narrator was talking about roads and cars in the paragraph just before this so it must be like a billboard. How can you have eyes with glasses but no face? Weird. And what is a wild wag of an oculist? Maybe it’s an eye doctor or something and this is just how he was trying to get business, but what does this have to do with the place and the story? An eye doctor who goes blind? No, eternal blindness must mean the guy died. Are these eyes on the billboard supposed to be like an evil Big Brother watching over everybody? Or God? I suppose it’s possible it’s a reference to Nick who sees things the others don’t. Well, he should if he’s telling the story. Why does Nick describe the eyes as fading? Is he saying that God is getting tired of this world? But then why do the eyes brood on? I guess it could be that Nick is going to brood on over the story.

The question paper assignment invited Naomi to interrogate the text and the images in it with her own genuine questions. Her response

was authentic and probing. Notice how she corrected her initial misunderstanding of “eternal blindness.” Consider how she wrote her way out of a literal interpretation and into a metaphoric one. Naomi is well on her way to becoming a very good reader of American literature. How can I tell this? Because she is responding powerfully and personally to Fitzgerald’s charged language.

You may be wondering why I didn’t just begin the lesson on Chapter 2 of *The Great Gatsby* with an explanation of symbolism and walk students through the various examples of eye imagery in Fitzgerald’s novel. Wouldn’t it have been a more efficient use of classroom time just to tell them what they need to know? The problem is that my explanation would have been just that, mine and not Naomi’s. What I try to do with the question paper assignment is to offer an alternative to the following scenario:

1. Teacher poses a discussion question to the class.
2. Students have no idea how to answer. They hope they won’t be called on and hide behind their books pretending to reread the passage.
3. Teacher is made nervous by the silence and starts answering her own question.
4. Students breathe a sigh of relief. They go through the motions of taking notes while glancing up at the clock.
5. The bell rings.

A question paper can also be a springboard for classroom discussion, genuine discussion that isn’t dominated by the teacher’s voice. Have students highlight a question in their question paper that they feel they found a tentative answer to and then turn and talk with a partner about what they discovered. After a few minutes—I always give students a little less time than they need; it keeps them wanting more—open up the conversation to the whole class. Ask for questions that are still pending. Then comes the really hard part: *Resist answering these questions yourself*. Instead, turn to the class and ask if anyone can help. Wait patiently. Count to sixty in your head. Scan the room for promising visages, faces with ideas shining in quiet eyes or poking out from under heavy bangs. Gently, gently call on these students, not to put them on the spot but to invite them to enter the conversation.

The most thoughtful students are not always the ones who raise their hands first. Teachers need to find ways to reach beyond the ubiquitous waving arms of rapid-fire thinkers to the other thirty students in the room. The question paper activity gave everyone time to think. The

time talking with a partner allowed students to practice their “answers” in an unthreatening environment. With a bit of gentle prodding, many are ready to speak up.

My students like writing question papers so much that they often ask to substitute them for essays. Don’t fall for this. While question papers make an outstanding prewriting task, they should not replace the discipline of crafting a literary analysis paper. One reason students struggle with such writing is that we often ask them to analyze a text before they understand it. No wonder their responses seem one-dimensional and a limp restatement of what you told them in your introductory remarks. If we want students to write lively and original literary analysis essays, we need to make space in our classrooms for speculative thinking. This will never happen if all the questions are ours.

Show, Don’t Tell

Everyone is familiar with the injunction to “show, don’t tell” in writing instruction, but the same guideline applies to teaching literary analysis. Rather than telling students everything you know about a text, try showing them how you think. Make your thinking visible by reading aloud a passage and stopping to comment and question as you read. Pause to make connections. Demonstrate how even an expert reader rarely understands complex literature the first time through. When we offer students only our expert interpretations, interpretations that have been acquired through careful close reading and thinking, we inadvertently contribute to young readers’ mistaken belief that there must either be something wrong with the text or something wrong with them. Neither is the case. As Walt Whitman said, “the process of reading is not a half-sleep; but in the highest sense an exercise, a gymnastic struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself” (qtd. in Triggs, 1898, p. 66).

Warning: Don’t try to model the think-aloud process off the top of your head. Prepare the paragraph you plan to read aloud to students before class and be sure to include in your commentary the following:

- Questions about vocabulary or unusual uses of familiar words
 - Comments that make connections to your life
 - Observations about how a detail contributes to the effect of the passage
 - Remarks about places in the passage that are unclear to you
 - A question that is cleared up as you read on in the passage
-

Here is an example of a think-aloud of the first paragraphs of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The original text is in bold type. My comments and questions are in italics.

You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; Hmm . . . I did but years and years ago but that ain't no matter. Good, because I don't really remember it at all. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. What's going on? Mark Twain is the author of this book. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. Oh, I get it. Twain is having a bit of fun here letting his narrator comment on his writing. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was I'm not understanding this construction "without it was." Does it mean "except for"? That would work. Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly—Tom's Aunt Polly, she is—and Mary, and the Widow Douglas Who are all these characters??? is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before.

Now the way that the book winds up is this: So I guess Huck is giving readers a synopsis of what happens just before this book starts. Tom and me found the money that the robbers hid in the cave, and it made us rich. We got six thousand dollars apiece—all gold. It was an awful sight of money when it was piled up. Well, Judge Thatcher he took it and put it out at interest, and it fetched us *The language seems folksy.* a dollar a day apiece all the year round—more than a body could tell what to do with. A dollar a day sure wouldn't go far these days. Money must have been worth a lot more back then. The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; *Why does he spell civilize this way instead of the right way?* but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. *It's interesting how Huck calls her both dismal and decent. I guess he recognizes that she means well even if it drives him crazy.* I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied. "Lit out" must mean run away. But Tom Sawyer he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. So I went back.

After I model my thinking aloud to students, I ask them to turn to a partner and to do the same with the next paragraph, taking turns sentence by sentence to pause and question, to stop and think aloud. The noise level in the room can get quite high with fifteen or more students reading and talking at once, but so is the energy level. It is such a low-stakes task that everyone feels comfortable participating. No one

is worrying about wrong answers because everyone is too busy trying to make sense of the text with a little help from friends. Students are reassured to learn that their partner is struggling with the same word or phrase that is giving them trouble. They begin to see that reading literature—particularly the initial pages of a novel—requires serious thinking and work. But it is work they are capable of doing if they are willing to put their minds to it.

One of the things I like best about the think-aloud protocol is that it forces students to slow the pace of their reading. Teenagers spend a great deal of time reading online, skipping and scanning large volumes of text at an amazing rate. Many have lost, if they ever possessed, the habit of paying attention to every word. In *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, Marianne Wolf (2007) explains how the invention of reading “rearranged the very organization of our brain, which in turn expanded the ways we were able to think” (p. 22). She goes on to discuss how our brains are changing as a result of our twenty-first-century reading habits, raising questions about what has been lost and gained as young people replace reading books with the multidimensional “continuous partial attention” reading that takes place online. Wolf’s research suggests that the American literature we offer students—*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Out of the Dust*—and the methods for reading literature that we teach students have the potential to change the way they think. Considered in this light, teachers play an important role in the development of the human race. I believe it is our responsibility to make sure students learn to linger over text, puzzling over its full meaning, musing on connections to their own lives. I want my students to be good readers of both literature and websites. I want them to know when it is effective practice to skip and scan and when to slow right down and ponder every word—sometimes a tortoise, sometimes a hare.

Rereading

The most commonly used reading strategy is so easy to employ that you might not think of it as a strategy at all. It doesn’t require a fancy graphic organizer and doesn’t have a cool acronym for a name. It’s simply called rereading. Good readers instinctively reread when a passage in a procedural document doesn’t make sense to us. We need to help students get into the habit of doing the same when a passage in the novel they are reading puzzles them. It can be a challenge to get students to revisit a passage they already read; it’s hard enough getting them to read the

text once let alone twice or three times. Yet, with rich literature such as the excerpt below from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), the full meaning only emerges after several readings.

To help students experience the power of rereading, begin by making copies of a passage chosen from the pages you assigned for homework reading. There is no need to retype the passage; just go to the online text and copy, cut, and paste. Ask students to reread the passage, underlining phrases or sentences that they found interesting and/or difficult to understand.

Atticus was feeble: he was nearly fifty. When Jem and I asked him why he was so old, he said he got started late, which we felt reflected upon his abilities and manliness. He was much older than the parents of our school contemporaries, and there was nothing Jem or I could say about him when our classmates said, "My father—"

Jem was football crazy. Atticus was never too tired to play keep-away, but when Jem wanted to tackle him Atticus would say, "I'm too old for that, son."

Our father didn't do anything. He worked in an office, not in a drugstore. Atticus did not drive a dump-truck for the county, he was not the sheriff, he did not farm, work in a garage, or do anything that could possibly arouse the admiration of anyone.

Besides that, he wore glasses. He was nearly blind in his left eye, and said left eyes were the tribal curse of the Finches. Whenever he wanted to see something well, he turned his head and looked from his right eye.

He did not do the things our schoolmates' fathers did: he never went hunting, he did not play poker or fish or drink or smoke. He sat in the livingroom and read.

With these attributes, however, he would not remain as inconspicuous as we wished him to: that year, the school buzzed with talk about him defending Tom Robinson, none of which was complimentary. After my bout with Cecil Jacobs when I committed myself to a policy of cowardice, word got around that Scout Finch wouldn't fight any more, her daddy wouldn't let her. This was not entirely correct: I wouldn't fight publicly for Atticus, but the family was private ground. I would fight anyone from a third cousin upwards tooth and nail. Francis Hancock, for example, knew that.

When he gave us our air-rifles Atticus wouldn't teach us to shoot. Uncle Jack instructed us in the rudiments thereof; he said Atticus wasn't interested in guns. Atticus said to Jem one day, "I'd rather you shot at tin cans in the back yard, but I know you'll go after birds. Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."

That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it. "Your father's right," she said. "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." (Lee, 1962, pp. 94–95)

Once students have finished rereading the passage, ask them to write for five minutes about the lines they underlined. Put the following questions on the board to help guide students' writing, but assure them that these are only suggestions to trigger their thinking.

- Why did you choose this line?
- What does it say to you?
- How did it make you feel?
- How does this line relate to the rest of the passage?
- What does this description remind you of?

Then put students into small groups and have one person in the group read the passage aloud. Following this rereading, have students take turns sharing their lines and thoughts about the lines they have chosen. It isn't necessary to have students read their quickwrites to one another. The purpose of their writing was simply to help prepare them for discussing the passage. The goal is to get students talking naturally about Harper Lee's novel. Writing about the lines helps students marshal their thoughts and have something to say about the lines they have chosen. Ideally, the group conversation will have a momentum and become more than simply a matter of taking turns to read and talk about lines from the passage. I encourage students to let their discussion of a single line grow into a discussion of the passage.

After about fifteen minutes in their small groups, I bring the whole class back together and ask students to read the passage again. Once we have done this, I instigate a full-class discussion by asking, "Who heard a really interesting comment in your group that would help the rest of us understand the passage?" We talk until the period is almost over, when I point out that they have now read this same passage four times. I ask them, "How did your understanding of the characters, of the idea of a mockingbird, of the novel change with each rereading?" We discuss how this reading strategy made a difference for us as readers until the bell rings.

Here is the rereading protocol set out as a series of steps:

1. Read the passage silently, choosing a phrase or sentence that strikes you.
-

2. Write for five minutes about this line.
3. In small groups, reread the passage aloud.
4. Share lines and comments in small groups.
5. Come together as a whole class and reread the passage.
6. Discuss the passage in large group with the teacher.
7. Discuss how rereading helped you understand the text.

The final metacognitive step in this protocol is extremely important. Students need to articulate for themselves how rereading a passage leads to deeper understanding. I want them to employ this simple, effective practice often when reading literature. For this to happen, they need to make it their own. One of the things I love best about being an English teacher is that it allows me to return again and again to luminous passages, pages that are so perfectly wrought that each time I reread them I see more. English teachers can't be so obsessed with getting students through a novel that we forget to design lessons that use rereading to draw them into the literature.

Why are we reading this?

It's a question my students pose often—and a question we need to have a good answer for. Our integrity depends on it. Here is mine: Great literature speaks to the human condition, offering readers solace in times of trouble, laughter in times of woe. It helps us see our own struggles in perspective by offering stories about others who like Huck Finn must fend for themselves in a cruel world. It invites us to measure our own mettle beside that of Scout and Atticus Finch. It takes us to places we could never travel outside the pages of a book. Few students come to class interested in visiting Yoknapatawpha County, but it is hard to resist a conversation about William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* when the topic is Caddy's muddy drawers and what they might suggest about her natural sexuality. Students come to loathe her brother Jason, not because I told them to but because a close reading of the text persuades them of what a loathsome creature he really is. Along with the rest of the Compsons, they come to rely on Dilsey for her hard work keeping the family fed and being the only reliable narration in the whole story. My goal for students is that they learn how to read complex text with a measure of comprehension and—I hope—pleasure.

When making the argument for reading literature, I focus on my own love for the books I am inviting them to read. My first role is that of a cheerleader, drumming up enthusiasm in the somewhat lethargic crowd

for the books themselves. "I think you are going to find this novel compelling. It's going to be a challenge, but I'm here to help you. We'll help one another. Don't worry if you don't understand everything. Neither do I. We're going to talk our way and think our way through it together. All questions are welcome. All honest responses are invited. My only plea is that you hold off judgment of the novel until you have read it."

It disconcerts me to hear stories of teachers dragging their students through books that they themselves hate. If you are unmoved by a novel or author, it is highly unlikely that you will be able to summon up enthusiasm for it in your students. It won't work. Kids see through us. They can tell when we are just going through the motions. While I recognize that many teachers do not have the luxury of choosing their own books, we sometimes have more power than we think in terms of shaping curriculum. Teach texts that speak to you, and you will find it much less of an uphill battle to bring your students along for the ride.

In his collection of essays *A Voice from the Attic*, Robertson Davies (1960) describes the kind of readers I hope my students become, "those who read for pleasure, but not for idleness; who read for pastime but not to kill time; who love books, but do not live by books" (p. 7). Davies defines a love of literature, "not as a manifestation of fashion, not as a substitute for life, but as one of the greatest of the arts, existing for the delight of mankind." I measure my success in the classroom by the intellectual delight my students take in their reading.

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V Lesson Plans for *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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The never-ending controversy over Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is sufficient reason to keep the American classic in the repertoire of the American literature classroom. Our first words about the novel should be: "Students! The book we are about to read has offended many, been banned in numerous schools, burned, and created heated arguments across our nation!" Without a doubt, heads will come off desks, spines will unfurl, and brains will flicker on.

If parents, religious leaders, politicians, and teachers have a wide array of opinions about the novel, we can guarantee that high school students will be drawn into this debate. As any teacher knows, a controversial topic generally means students will become engaged; each student will want to make his or her opinion heard. Developmentally, secondary students are learning to formulate ideas and are eager to argue about these ideas. Their newly acquired skill in argumentation is fun, compelling, and, therefore, should be harnessed in the classroom. Huck Finn's journey can become the ideal vehicle for discussing and digesting social expectations of the present and past, understanding literary elements such as satire, and exploring the breathing, personal lives of both characters and our students.

The lessons in this section focus on engaging students in real, self-directed learning. Each teacher presents lessons that engage, encourage, challenge, and inspire young students. Echoing the book's five literary theorists, the contributing teachers want to transcend the mundane by broadening the weaponry of language arts teachers. They offer lessons that incorporate screenplay writing, contemporary films and literature, formal letter writing, and oral debate. The pedagogical stances of the

teachers clearly create interactive and energetic classrooms through their strong lessons.

Jago (Chapter 2) encourages us: "If we want students to read and respond to American literature, we will need to persuade them that what can be found between the lines in the stories of Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Rudolfo Anaya, and Toni Morrison is important and enduring." The ingenuity of Mark Twain is abundantly clear in creating Huck Finn, a lasting character. Huck is totally relatable; he is the early embodiment of present, discontent teens. His actions, thoughts, dilemmas, and decisions mirror the lives of our students, creating the ideal platform to springboard our students into real, self-directed learning. As Wilhelm argues (Chapter 3), learning should be personal; in fact, *real* learning can only occur if it is personal. If students are "expecting their teachers to provide them with a sense of the meaning of what they read" then there is no real process of engagement. The students are simply spouting others' thoughts. You will find the following lessons do just what Jago and Wilhelm suggest, discovering literature and life.

17 The Journey Is the Destination: Self-Realization in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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Purpose

Teenagers are strange and complicated human specimens. Discontent with the wagging fingers of their parents, many of them thrive on the instinct to break away. They soon realize, however, that breaking away means they have to find themselves, and that finding oneself requires a great deal of effort. Many may abandon the arduous process of true self-realization for the simpler, more immediately gratifying path of social conformity. This is why they need Huck Finn in their lives.

Huck Finn does what most every young person dreams of doing: He gets fed up and runs away. And yet, Huck is not intimidated by the self-discovery that such an action entails because it is disguised as an adventure. As he sets off with Jim down the Mississippi River and endures various trials, he unwittingly shows his readership how to steer around conformity, through self-discovery, and toward self-realization.

For many, the appeal of running away lies not in the destination but in the action itself. While the idea of self-discovery may frighten us, the idea of a road trip is enticing. The journey of Huck Finn gives students a language, a framework with which they can discuss the instincts that they themselves may have. The main purpose of my unit on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is to help students use this framework to guide them as they make their own decisions and engage in their own process of self-realization.

Before we can use literature to affect students' lives, we must first help them to understand it. Thus, I have a second purpose that supports the first: to aid students in summarizing the main events of the novel and identifying the patterns of change throughout particular scenes. To do so, I encourage them to think like filmmakers making adaptations of the novel. Filmmakers are often forced to read and analyze a text critically, pulling out the most significant events and presenting them in an understandable and entertaining way. By adopting the role of the filmmaker, students can come to a better understanding of the novel's message of self-realization, and then use it as an inspiration for their own self-realization.

Materials

For the activities in this unit, I use a PowerPoint presentation (Figure 17.1) to review the Hero's Journey, an example of screenplay writing, and sticky notes to mark the identification of beats in the screenplay.

Introduction

To begin my unit on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, I ask my students whether any of them have ever been on a road trip before (sometimes in a journal entry, sometimes just in discussion). Being only recently licensed drivers, they usually have not, although some of them surprise me. In addition to drawing on their own experiences, I ask them to name examples of road trips from movies they have seen. They may shout out things like *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Dumb and Dumber*, or *The Motorcycle Diaries*. Once students exhaust the possibilities, I ask them to give some reasons why people go on road trips. First, they may instinctively suggest that the reason to go on a road trip is to get somewhere, and even offer their own suggestions for places to go ("Warped Tour!" or "To see the world's biggest ball of twine!"). Acknowledging these as possibilities, I challenge them to think of other reasons to go on a road trip besides just wanting to get somewhere. Pretty soon, they pick up on the fact that, sometimes, we just need to get *away*. And what do we need to get away from? Our parents. Drama. Boyfriend / girlfriend problems. School. You name it. So, often, people who go on road trips are somehow discontent. Is seeing the world's biggest ball of twine going to make them content? Not necessarily. But all the adventures they have on their journey to see it—will those help make them content? Quite possibly.

Hopefully, by this point, students have had at least some exposure to the Hero's Journey of Joseph Campbell. If they have not, I use a PowerPoint presentation (Figure 17.1) to remind them of the pattern the journey follows: After getting some kind of Call, a Hero goes on a journey into a new realm, where he encounters many trials before achieving his final task. To achieve that task, though, he has to learn some kind of lesson from his trials. For this reason, the true purpose of a journey is not the destination, but the process it takes to get there. It's the process that makes it possible for us to even complete our final task, and ultimately helps us grow as people. The journey *is* the destination.

By this point, students should have read the first seven chapters of *Huck Finn*, so I ask them to do a writing exercise where they explain the reasons why they think Huck decides to run away, and then draw parallels between those reasons and the problems in their own lives. I ask them: Have you ever wanted to run away from home? Have you ever wanted to escape from something? Why? What are some things about your life that make you unhappy? In this manner, the stage is set for students to begin their own journey.

Connections

The task of understanding a text, much like the process of self-discovery, can be overwhelming for some students. As Blau suggests (Chapter 1), they are often able to avoid the ardor of having to hash out the meaning for themselves when their teachers simply dictate the meaning to them. What they do not realize, however, is that this dictation is dangerously akin to the parents or other significant societal figures who stand above them, wagging their fingers and telling them who to be. It is just as necessary for us to avoid conformity in understanding texts as it is to avoid conformity in living our lives, for to truly understand a text is to learn something about your life. As Wilhelm argues (Chapter 3), the study of literature is a personal endeavor, and the process should be as personal as the outcome.

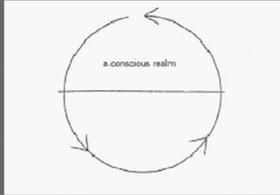
To avoid preaching meaning to my students in this unit, I bypass most of the traditional language used in discussing literature in favor of the language of film. Perhaps one reason teachers are tempted to explain texts to students is because they are so used to explaining them a certain way. When the language of literature is complemented by the language of film, it becomes ripe for the personalized analysis of a new generation of readers.

Joseph Campbell



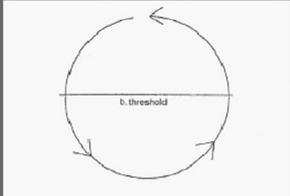
- ▶ The journey of the hero follows a similar pattern throughout myth and literature from around the world
- ▶ *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*
- ▶ Why do you think he chose this title for his book?

a. Conscious Realm



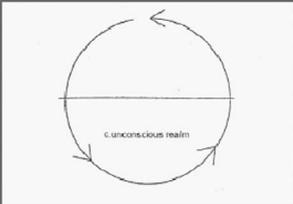
- ▶ **Conscious realm:** The known world of the hero; normal, day-to-day life.

b. Threshold



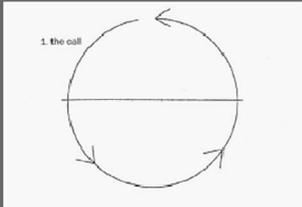
- ▶ **Threshold:** The border between the known and the unknown.

c. Unconscious Realm



- ▶ **Unconscious realm:** The unknown world; the wilderness into which the hero must venture.

1. The Call

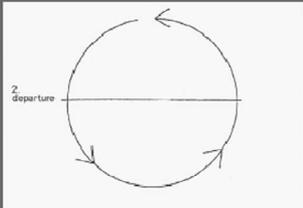


- ▶ **The Call:** A problem, challenge or request triggers the hero's desire to head into the unknown

The Call

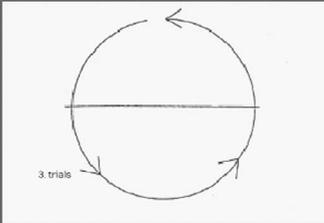
1. Concrete Object—a princess, a parent or family member, a treasure or magical charm
2. Abstract Concept—information, truth, wisdom, the meaning of life

2. Departure



- ▶ **Departure:** The hero moves from the conscious realm to the unconscious realm.

3. Trials

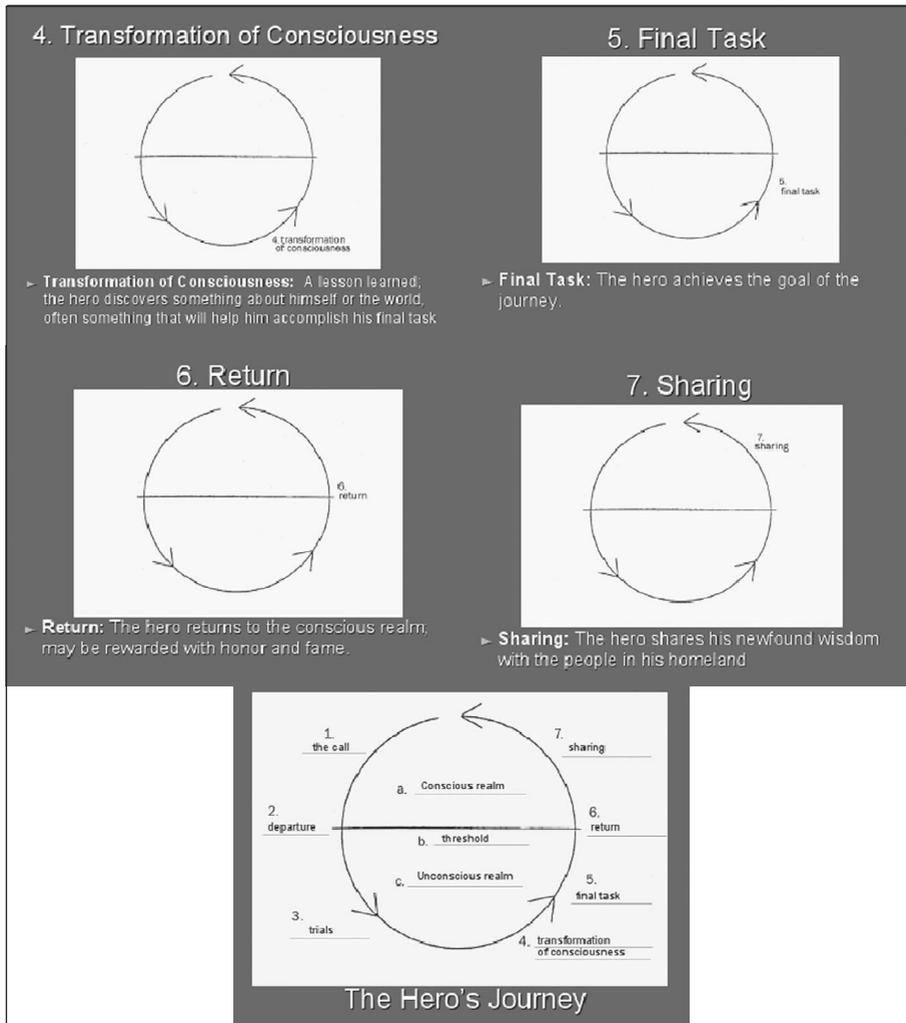


- ▶ **Trials:** The hero encounters obstacles on the way to his final task.

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Figure 17.1. The Hero's Journey PowerPoint.

Figure 17.1 continued



Activities

Phase I: Bildungsroman

In an introduction to *Huck Finn*, George Saunders (2001) noted that Huck's story has inspired derivative works by many young writers who are trying to "figure out what their River is, and who their Jim is, and what America's current most noxious trait is, so they can lampoon it" (p. xiii). As an overarching activity for my unit on *Huck Finn*, I prompt my students to do just that. First, I ask them to look back at their journal entries from the day I introduced the unit. After discussing their answers as a class, I ask them to imagine that they really did run away from home. That, I tell them, is going to be their assignment. As they read about Huck's escapades on the Mississippi River, they are going to plan an imaginary Road Trip of their own, across the United States.

I explain the genre bildungsroman: stories about self-development. As *Huck Finn* is considered a bildungsroman, their Road Trips should also be bildungsroman. The journey they take should somehow help them deal with the problems that caused them to run away—it should bring them some kind of contentment if they are discontent, it should make them stronger if they are weak, it should help them to see some aspect of the world in a different light.

Phase II: Screenplay Format

To keep things interesting, I tell students that instead of writing their bildungsroman in ordinary prose, they are going to write it in screenplay format. I spend a section of the lesson teaching them about screenplay writing and then exemplify the concept by guiding the class through the composition of a screenplay about Jim's and Huck's first meeting and conversation. First, I ask students to go through and pull out aspects of this initial meeting that they find most significant. Then, together, we write these out as a screenplay on the overhead, making sure to describe the setting and action.

A filmmaking concept that I find fascinating is the *beat*—an event, decision, or discovery (usually occurring every five minutes or so) that alters the way the protagonist pursues his or her goal. In teaching about screenwriting, I introduce this concept to students to show them that the self-development they find in a bildungsroman will not be characterized by one sudden "aha" moment where everything makes sense; instead, it will be a constant, gradual process, a series of tiny circumstances that alter characters' viewpoints, strategies, and attitudes and lead them toward maturity. As a class, we work together to identify the beats in the

scene we have just developed. I give students sticky notes and ask them to place them on their own papers wherever a beat occurs in the scene, writing out a brief explanation of how this event, decision, or discovery has affected Huck's approach to his adventure *and* his life.

Once this activity allows the class to come to an understanding of Jim and Huck's relationship, I ask them to make predictions about how their developing friendship may help Huck develop as a person. After students discuss the ways this new acquaintance may give Huck new insights about the common values of the society in which he lives, I challenge them to apply the dynamic potential of this relationship to the decision that they, too, have to make about *who* will accompany them on their own Road Trip. I challenge them to select someone who is not necessarily a close friend, someone with whom they would not normally associate, but someone who has the potential to change them, influence them in a positive way. The journey becomes more internal if it involves a developing relationship.

Phase III: Using Film Language to Unlock the Text

Throughout our study of the novel *Huck Finn*, I ask students to get into groups of three or four and use the screenplay-writing format to write their own brief screenplays of various stages of Huck's journey. It works best to break each chapter into smaller scenes and assign each scene to a different group. Depending on time constraints (and the maturity of the class), I sometimes allow students to act out the scenes they write. This helps to give the class a visual representation of the text, in addition to showing them what lines and events resonated with them the most. I always require them to identify the beats in each scene, using sticky notes to explain how each beat represents some sort of change.

Depending on the type of class, I either give them time during the class period to work on the screenplays for their own Road Trips or just have them complete them at home. Either way, I remind them to include trials throughout their journey that help them to grow as people and gradually teach them some sort of lesson, possibly helping them solve whatever problem inspired them to run away in the first place. I also instruct them to follow the same pattern as the in-class screenplays we work on for *Huck Finn*, including the identification of beats using sticky notes.

Phase IV: Evaluating Text and Self

At the end of the unit, I ask students to evaluate the ending of *Huck Finn*. Since it turns out that Jim was free all along, was the journey pointless?

My hope is that students will not find it so, and instead recognize the value of the trials Jim and Huck endured together. Reminding them of the process of the Hero's Journey (Figure 17.1), I ask them to determine what kind of lesson Huck learned from his trials, and then ask them to mirror this process in their own Road Trips. What lesson did they learn as a result of the imaginary trials they endured while traveling across the United States? Hopefully students will come out of this unit with an enlightened, positive outlook on an issue that previously troubled them, having learned something about themselves along the way.

Assessment

Journal Entries

Depending on the type of class, any of the questions posed for discussion may be preceded by a journal entry. I score any journal entries students write throughout this unit using a check scale: a check-minus signifies a one-sentence, underdeveloped response; a check represents a response that elaborates but could still be more detailed; and a check-plus signifies a response that is well-written, well-developed, and detailed.

Screenplay Rewrites

When I score the screenplay rewrites that students compose for the various scenes in *Huck Finn*, I look for three things: their selection of significant excerpts, their identification and explanation of various beats, and the quality of writing, including technical adherence to screenplay format.

Road Trip Screenplay

When I score students' individual Road Trip screenplays, I examine the creativity of their trials, the relationship development between the characters on the road trip, and the quality of writing, including technical adherence to screenplay format. Overall, I determine whether the Road Trip qualifies as a bildungsroman. Does it show evidence of some kind of self-development? Is that development the gradual result of the trials the characters experienced on their journey?

Considerations

For teachers who feel uncomfortable adopting the filmmaking thread of this unit, it is entirely possible to have students simply write about their Road Trips in prose. I do, however, recommend that you incorporate

the concept of the *beat* into your lessons, as it fits perfectly with the idea of gradual change and development presented in the bildungsroman. If you do decide to use the screenplay approach, you can easily find resources online and adapt them to whatever level of complexity you think will work for your students. Also, when helping your students to plan and execute their Road Trip screenplays, be sure that you encourage them to take it seriously. It's okay for them to have fun with it—indeed, Huck Finn seems to take a lighthearted and carefree approach to life, himself—but continuously challenge them to frame their trials in a manner that promotes self-development. When students are planning their trials, some of them may feel the need to do research on activities, locations, and events that they may encounter on their journeys. While it is perfectly reasonable for them to do so, remind them that these imaginary trials can come in many forms that do not necessarily require research: they could be robbed, their car could break down, they could run into some interesting character along the way. They may also feel compelled to have some sort of destination for their Road Trip. While I do not discourage them from having one, I always remind them that the destination should not be the focal point of their stories. The journey itself—both internal and external—is the true destination.

Reference

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18 Student as Expert: Working within and Going beyond a Framework in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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Purpose

This lesson prompts students to take on the role of expert, moving from student to teacher. Students are equipped with a framework to model their executive decisions but ultimately must engage in the text to an extent that they are discerning what is valuable. The provided framework offers a variety of ways to engage students and, hopefully, spark enthusiasm for the classroom and Twain's *Huck Finn*. Ultimately students are asked to find, interpret, and expertly teach concepts, themes, motifs, and other important literary elements.

Materials

At all stages of the lesson students will need class notes to direct their literary decisions and study guides from previous texts (Figure 18.1) to offer a framework for their final product. Students will work individually, in small groups, and as a class. Individual work will require students to have a copy of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, paper, and pen. Small groups will need transparency papers and transparency pens. The whole-class discussion will utilize individual and small-group work.

Introduction

As a teacher of eleventh-grade students, I find my biggest blockade is the students' preconditioned mindset. At sixteen or seventeen, students come to class with fixed ideas of how to approach literature, and often those ideas do not involve the best pedagogical practices. Students *ask*

for worksheets, preferring to “get it over with” rather than spending time engaging with the text. I often hear, “but if you don’t give us a worksheet how will we know what is on the test?”

If I cannot steer the students from the safety net of worksheets, then I’ll adapt the worksheet to fit my hopes for them. I start by simple guides for students’ reading of the text; however, it is not simply a matter of copying notes and passively answering questions. Each point along the way asks students to provide an array of different answers: illustrating, defining, interpreting, and even summarizing. In the end my questions become starting points for class debates and, most importantly, for challenging the teacher’s ideas and expertly defending their own. One guideline states: “tattoo scene—illustrate and explain.” Students must artistically interpret the scene through a sketch, emblem, or some sort of visual representation. Visual and kinesthetic learners enthusiastically engage in interpreting the scene without the restraints of written defense. Other points on the guides are written to encourage students to search for passages to find the information needed to answer my questions. For example, the ninth bullet point in Figure 18.1 reads, “**IRONY** p. 193. What is the significance of this?” When providing answers, students must first read the passage. The act of reading for discernment ensures that they are deeply processing the text. At other points True/False items are even included. All types of questions are fair game, because they add variety to the lesson and engage more learning styles. I have found that a variety of questions creates a spark of energy as students search for answers and attempt to show their literary prowess.

As more years pass, I realize the importance presentation plays in creating the right, most invigorating environment. I encourage students to challenge my choices in making the guiding questions. For example, one particular student felt the ending of Chapter 28 did not deserve an exclamation point (Figure 18.1) because she did not find it exciting. When such a challenge is offered the class awakening is visibly apparent! The one contingency to the right to challenge is that students must defend their grievance with valid, text-proven evidence. The students enthusiastically devour the text with the demands of becoming an expert to challenge the teacher.

Connections

Louise Rosenblatt (1994) states, “taking somebody else’s reading as your own is like having somebody else eat your dinner for you” (p. 86). Providing broad guiding questions gives students a starting point and offers

(The rest of) *Huck Finn* Chapters 27–29. Be the first to answer/explain each item.

- Why does Huck want Mary Jane to leave?
- True or False: Huck tells Mary Jane where he left the gold.
- Awww! (186)
- Huck thinks he is “bad.” Explain why. (186)
- lies (187)
- end of Chapter 28!
- Who is Hines?
- Who isn’t gullible? 3 people.
- IRONY p. 193. What is the significance of this?
- handwriting
- tattoo scene- illustrate and explain
- foolishness of the people (196)
- greed and Huck’s escape
- *Excitement and Disappointment*
- lies about escape (199)
- king and duke argue
- duke stands up for himself
- “thick as thieves”

Figure 18.1. Teacher-created outline.

them the freedom to interpret the text for themselves. Furthermore, the Students as Experts activity gives students the freedom to lead the class’s exploration of the text, putting full power in their hands. The teacher is no longer the single expert in the room; instead, each student is expertly navigating the text. My students come back to me saying my classes made them feel smart because they were not asked to simply recall my interpretation of a text, a similar experience to what Jago (Chapter 2) recalls. When given such freedom, students will begin to explore texts in ways that are rich and full of agency. The role I strive to fulfill is one of guidance, providing the framework for students and then allowing them to go beyond.

Activities

Phase I: Providing the Framework and Setting the Stage for Challenges

I ask students to read Chapters 27–29 in class or as a homework assignment and provide the guiding questions for the chapters (Figure

18.1). This prompts students to thoroughly defend their answers and develop challenges for the teacher. The following day students meet in small groups to discuss their answers and any grievances they want to present to the class. These questions are used as leads for debates and whole-group discussions. We spend as much time as needed on each point but allot twenty minutes at the end of class to introduce the collaborative learning assignment and give students time to get started.

Phase II: Students as Experts

At the conclusion of the discussion (Figure 18.1), I assign groups and inform students they will be creating their own guiding questions for Chapters 30–32. They should have read those chapters the previous night and determined what is valuable in the chapters. I encourage them with, “You are now the expert; you must decide how the class will proceed with these chapters. I’m no longer in charge, but you, as expert, will determine what we learn!” Students work for the rest of the period and have the following class period to complete the assignment. The guides provide a framework but students have the liberty to diverge. Students are encouraged to come up with creative ways to engage their classmates. The rules are simple: (1) include something about the climax of the novel that occurs in this set of chapters and (2) provide, on the back of their sheets of paper, the answers to all of their clues/questions as well as page and paragraph numbers for each. Once students decide what to include they transcribe the information on a transparency to present to the class the following day.

While students work in their groups I move around the room and prompt all members to participate. Students spend the next class period working in their groups, polishing their outlines, and turning them in for grading. The next class period is spent discussing Chapters 30–32 using the students’ own work (Figure 18.2). Each group presents its guiding questions and the class decides which questions to include in the final version. Students must decide which questions are most worthy of inclusion, which are worded best, and which are most challenging. Using student work to lead class puts the students in the role of expert; I find students love seeing their work displayed and feel more inclined to question each other and defend their arguments.

Assessment

To assess student learning for this lesson I use class participation and the concrete outlines. Teachers can evaluate student effort and participation

Huck Finn, Chapters 30–32Chapter 30

- Title of Chapter 30
- Huck lies
- Duke defends Huck (200)
- Relationship between king and duke (shift?)
- Why does the king admit to hiding the money?
- “thick as thieves again”

Chapter 31

- days and days . . .
- Success of king and duke (203)—what do they try?
- Secretive talk
- JIM IS GONE! (Huck’s conversation with boy—civilization or natural instincts?)
- CIVILIZATION VS NATURAL INSTINCTS! (205–206)
 - How does Huck make himself feel better after Jim is sold?
 - Represents :
 - Huck starts to think about . . . (207)
 - CLIMAX!
 - Huck is forced to . . .
 - IRONY (207)
- Huck sees duke
 - Duke’s attempts to trick Huck

Chapter 32

- An indirect message about equality (212)
- Tom? (213)
- T F Huck is Silas and Sally’s nephew.
- Realistic Racism (213)
- Satire in Chapter 32?
- Haha! (end of chapter)

Figure 18.2. Compiled student-made outlines.

during the individual, small-group, and whole-class work. Circulating during the group-work time, I can assess student understanding of the novel and listen to their thought processes when deciding what to include in guides. Additionally, student-created guides provide a concrete means of measuring student comprehension.

Considerations

The idea of introducing concepts and having students trace them throughout the novel provides an important framework that gives them the stability to embrace the idea of student experts. Students can find examples of what they know will recur in the novel but also add new insights, ask and answer new questions, and formulate fresh ideas. Enabling structures are there to guide them, but they are always encouraged to go beyond the framework. Additionally the freedom to create validates student ideas and opinions as experts of the text. Students are free to experiment with creative ways to cover important material in individual, small-group, and class environments.

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19 Helping Students Recognize Stereotypes and Understand Satire in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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Purpose

Students have no shortage of opinions on the value of reading *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in school, and I generally encourage this debate to become the centerpiece for my class's study of the novel. Emotion and conviction can run high when it comes to the discussion of racist language or stereotypes in the novel. Yet, in my experience, students engage in a more in-depth debate about the novel after a lesson that highlights its historical context and Mark Twain's interest in satire. In this lesson, students first review the concept of satire through contemporary examples. Students then identify particular instances of satire in *Huck Finn* and analyze the features of nineteenth-century America that Twain satirizes. After breaking down Twain's use of satire, students return to the central debate over the value of the novel with a better understanding of the author's intent. Ultimately, the class will address the question of whether or not the satire in this social critique justifies its use of racist language and stereotypes.

Materials

Each student needs an unabridged copy of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Additionally, give students a page of notes defining satire and other useful literary terms (Figure 19.1). The teacher needs a specific example of modern satire to share with the class. For this lesson, I chose a clip from the TV show *The Simpsons* (Season 20, Episode 4). Each student will need two copies of "The Tools for Analyzing Satire" (Figure 19.2).

Introduction

My class's study of *Huck Finn* begins with a candid discussion on the topic of racism and racist language. It is a teacher's responsibility to preface this novel with an explanation about the context of the language and to gauge students' comfort level with that language. Often, I present students with articles written by critics on both sides of the debate (of the value of Twain's use of racist language in the text). I have found the essay "The Struggle for Tolerance: Race and Censorship in *Huckleberry Finn*," by Baylor University professor Peaches Henry (1992), useful for outlining the arguments of those in favor of teaching the classic and those opposed. If this essay is not accessible to less able students, there are news articles about challenges to the novel that can provide an overview of the debate. Once students hear experts from both sides, they have an easier time forming their own arguments for or against reading the novel in school.

Discussing Twain's use of satire and stereotypes enhances the debate on the value of the novel. While some students instantly pick up on Twain's satire and tongue-in-cheek tone, those who struggle just to interpret the dialect and to follow the plot need guidance. Recognizing and understanding satire requires knowledge of the culture and time period in which the piece was written. At some point, I realized that I was asking students to engage in a debate that requires an understanding of literary elements such as tone, satire, and stereotypes without explicitly teaching about any of them. By teaching students about Twain's techniques for creating satire, I offer a tool they can use to advance their own exploration and opinion of the novel.

Connections

Probst (Chapter 4) posits that the central role of any English teacher is to teach students to be thoughtful, discerning readers. He states, in unequivocal terms, that, "Our primary job, our fundamental obligation, our central goal, is to teach readers to be responsible." That obligation, in my opinion, is especially important to uphold when teaching a powerful and controversial text such as *Huck Finn*. For a modern-day student to read this text without critical thought about the author's satirical tone and intent is a dangerous thing. Any superficial or unguided reading of the text can lead to those unfortunate instances, often cited by opponents of the novel, in which immature students use the story to justify their own racial prejudice or use of hurtful language in the classroom. With such consequences in mind, Probst's requisite for teaching responsible

reading becomes imperative. He writes, “If we are inclined, or have been taught, to question and wonder, then we are more likely to pause and think.” This lesson plan teaches students to ask questions of the novel and discourages them from accepting Twain’s writing at face value.

Contributors Blau, Jago, and Wilhelm (Chapters 1–3) all promote the idea of explicitly modeling literary analysis for students. This process can encompass the think-aloud strategy in which the teacher makes internal dialogue as a reader evident to the class by commenting and questioning publicly. All of these educators propose that modeling this critical process encourages students to become more active and inquisitive readers. By first modeling an analysis of satire in *The Simpsons* (or any other contemporary example), I give students the opportunity to hear my thought process. They hear me speculate about what aspect of society each character represents and guess, rightly or wrongly, about how the writers or artists mock or criticize society. I may do the same think-aloud analysis for an early passage in *Huck Finn*. Hopefully, students see that while I do not know as much about the culture of nineteenth-century America as twenty-first-century America, I do not hesitate to question and speculate meaning.

Activities

Phase I: Modeling Analysis of Satire

Most eleventh-grade students have been introduced to satire and related literary terms such as irony and parody. However, I find that it never hurts to offer a refresher before the start of this lesson, which I usually teach at the mid-point of the novel. Figure 19.1 offers a useful glossary of terms for the study of satire. Teachers may present students with these definitions or require that students search for the definitions on their own.

In terms of modeling an analysis of satire, clips and characters from *The Simpsons* are easily accessible and fun examples. South Carolina teacher Junius Wright has an excellent lesson on the NCTE website readwritethink.org about using *The Simpsons* to teach satire. If you are not familiar with the show, follow Wright’s lead and simply show the opening credits as an example of satire. The opening offers great caricatures of the stereotypical American family. Beyond the opening credits, I recently used a clip from the first two minutes of Episode 4, Season 20, in which Homer tries to vote in the 2008 election. After viewing the clip with the class, I used the talk-aloud method to guide students through

Satire: The literary art of ridiculing a folly or vice to expose or correct it. The object of satire is usually some human frailty; people, institutions, ideas, and things are all fair game for satirists (Example: the *Saturday Night Live* skits that offer “fake news” and ridicule politicians).

Authors can employ many techniques when it comes to creating satire:

- **Parody:** A humorous imitation of another, usually serious, work. It can take any fixed or open form, because parodists imitate the tone, language, and shape of the original in order to deflate the subject matter, making the original work seem absurd (Example: *Austin Powers* mocks old spy movies by imitating them).
- **Irony:** A literary device that uses contradictory statements or situations to reveal a reality different from what appears to be true (Don’t forget the difference between verbal irony, dramatic irony, and situational irony!).
- **Hyperbole:** A figure of speech using deliberate exaggeration or overstatement. Hyperboles sometimes have a comic effect; however, a serious effect is possible.
- **Understatement:** The ironic minimizing of fact, understatement presents something as less significant than it is. The effect can frequently be humorous and emphatic. Understatement is the opposite of hyperbole.
- **Wit:** In modern usage, wit is intellectually amusing language that surprises and delights. A witty statement is humorous, while suggesting the speaker’s verbal power in creating ingenious and perceptive remarks.
- **Sarcasm:** From the Greek meaning, “to tear flesh,” sarcasm involves bitter, caustic language that is meant to hurt or ridicule someone or something. It may use irony as a device, but not all ironic statements are sarcastic. When well done, sarcasm can be witty and insightful; when poorly done, it’s simply cruel.
- **Juxtaposition:** Placing dissimilar items, descriptions, or ideas close together or side by side, especially for comparison or contrast.

These notes were adapted from the following sources:

Murfin, R. C., & Supryia, M. R. (2009). *The Bedford glossary of critical and literary terms* (3rd ed.). Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s.

Swovelin, B. V. (2008). *English language and composition* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Figure 19.1. Literary terms useful for the study of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

the satire. I also put a copy of Figure 19.2 on the overhead to record my thoughts about the guiding questions (see italics):

1. What character or scene are you analyzing? *The clip in which Homer tries to vote.*
2. What is the general subject of the satire? *Corruption in politics and the election process. The naiveté and oblivion of some American voters.*

3. Describe the character or scene as presented. *Homer walks into a gymnasium and demands to vote for "President, Governor, and anything that will take money away from our parks and libraries." After trying unsuccessfully to fit into the standard voting booth, the attendant tells him to use the "double-wide." Once in the booth, Homer marvels at the electronic voting machine. He enthusiastically pushes the button for Obama, but the machine registers a vote for McCain. After frantically pushing the button for Obama but being told he voted for McCain, Homer is eaten alive by the machine as he yells, "This doesn't happen in America, maybe in Ohio, but not in America!"*
4. What comment or criticism about society is being made? *Well, both the voter and the election process seem to be ridiculed. Homer shows that he really has no interest in the public good with his first comment. We also get the same old representation of Homer as the overweight, unhealthy American when he can't fit into the booth. The clip seems to reference the 2004 debacle with the voting machine in Florida when Bush was reelected. I think he yells about Ohio, because there were a lot of questions about their elections in 2004?*
5. What method is used to create this satire? *Exaggeration and verbal irony.*

I explain to students that I did not use the election clip to make any kind of political statement; rather, I chose the clip because understanding its satire is so dependent on the viewers' knowledge of politics and current events at a specific period in America's history. Viewers of the clip 100 years from now may have a tough time picking up on the satire and humor ("Who was John McCain, anyway?"). Similarly, many readers today do not immediately recognize the satire or critical tone in *Huck Finn* because we were not around 125 years ago to experience the culture and political climate—which included growing support for the abolitionist movement and an unpopular public opinion of the ways of the Old South.

Phase II: Students Find and Analyze Modern Satire

After modeling an analysis of satire with the class, I ask students to brainstorm their own satire example for homework and to answer the guiding questions (Figure 19.2) about their chosen example. My only requirement is that their examples satirize something specific to twenty-first-century American society. The next day in class, I assign small groups to compare examples. The examples students bring may include movies such as *Clueless*, *Not Another Teen Movie*, *Scary Movie*, *Shaun of the Dead*, or *Fight Club*. They could also name TV shows such as *The Daily*

Use these guiding questions to analyze each example of satire:

1. What character or scene are you analyzing?
2. What is the general subject of the satire?
3. Describe the character or scene as presented.
4. What comment or criticism about society is being made?
5. What method is used to create this satire?

Figure 19.2. The Tools for Analyzing Satire handout.

Show, 30 Rock, South Park, Family Guy, or Saturday Night Live. Some bring print examples such as *The Onion* or various political cartoons. Each student should share answers to the guiding questions with the group and discuss any similarities between examples.

Phase III: Students Analyze Satire in *Huck Finn*

By the third stage of the lesson, students' attention should turn to analyzing satire in *Huck Finn*. I usually question students before this activity, asking: "Why was it so easy to see that Homer represents the stereotype of the lazy, overindulgent American? Why was it so easy to see that Bart represents the apathy of American teens?" Through this questioning, I hope to reiterate that recognizing stereotypes and satire depends on cultural familiarity. I reassure them that it is understandable that twenty-first-century teens would not immediately recognize the stereotypes of Southern antebellum society, but that it is important to use what we do know about this time period to make educated guesses about the satire and Twain's message. At this point, I model one more think-aloud analysis for the early chapter "The Hair-Ball Oracle," which is filled with many of the minstrel-show stereotypes that recur in other chapters about Jim. In this way, I offer students a little background about the time period and model my analytical process.

At this point there is the option of letting students find scenes that they believe are satirical, or posting a list of suggested scenes on the board to guide students. Students should work together in small groups to read selected passages and talk through an analysis of the satire or stereotypes. The groups should appoint a recorder to keep notes on the guiding questions (Figure 19.2). However, I emphasize to students that there are no right or wrong answers in their analysis. The activity is simply designed to encourage a dialogue about why Twain

used the language and images that he did. Assuming that students are halfway through the novel (Chapter 21), they should be able to discuss the following characters and scenes:

1. Tom Sawyer—in “Our Gang’s Dark Oath” and “We Ambuscade the A-rabs”
2. Jim—in “I Spare Miss Watson’s Jim” and “Fooling Poor Old Jim”
3. Pap Finn—in “Pap Struggles with the Death Angel”
4. The Grangerford Family—in “Why Harney Road Away for His Hat”
5. Emmeline Grangerford—in “The Grangerfords Take Me In”
6. Colonel Sherburn—in “Why the Lynching Bee Failed”
7. Duke and King—in “What Royalty Did to Parksville” or in “An Arkansaw Difficulty”

Assessment

To assess student learning for this lesson, I review the groups’ notes about satire in *Huck Finn* and engage the whole class in a discussion about the message behind the satirical scenes. I also require that students take what they have learned about stereotypes and satire back to our debate on the value of the novel. Ultimately, I want students to return to the question of whether or not Twain’s efforts at satire justify his use of racist language and stereotypes. Does Twain make a clear point through his satire? Did ridiculing the prejudices of Southern society require using the language of the day? Who exactly does Twain ridicule? Did Twain use satire for his own amusement or was he truly concerned about pointing out the problem of racism? All of these questions can lead to another lively debate on the novel. After this final discussion, students record their responses in a reflective journal entry that I then collect for a grade.

Considerations

The novelty of this lesson is its availability to tailoring, taking the interests and needs of any class into account. Struggling students may need guidance through more examples of satire before thinking of their own or delving into Twain’s. Upper-level students may be able to brainstorm and dissect their own examples of satire right off the bat. Additionally, the initial examples of satire that I discuss with the class vary depending on their interests and exposure. Every year I teach about satire the list of contemporary examples grows and changes with the times.

Additionally, the class's analysis of satire in *Huck Finn* often varies based on their exposure to the history of the time period. I have had the greatest success with this lesson when I coordinate my unit on *Huck Finn* with their studies in US History. Students pick up on the stereotypes and satire in the novel all the better when they have studied the Romantic and Victorian periods or, most importantly, the culture surrounding slavery in the South.

Reference

Henry, P. (1992). The struggle for tolerance: Race and censorship in *Huckleberry Finn*. In J. S. Leonard, T. A. Tenney, & T. M. Davis (Eds.), *Satire or evasion: Black perspectives on Huckleberry Finn* (pp. 25–48). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

20 Wisdom from the Unexpected in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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Purpose

An oracle, sage, elder, and nature have all been considered sources in finding wisdom, a most sought treasure. But wisdom that comes to us in humble forms are all the more valuable. In this lesson, students will confront their ideas of wisdom: What is wisdom? Where and how can someone gain wisdom? In addition, students are asked to, at the very least, *listen* to counter ideas of wisdom from an individual who adheres to ideals that fall outside their personal convictions. The class will journey through the process of exploration, consideration, connection, and application through class discussions, formal letter writing, and journal entries. Following Huck, students will begin or continue to become valuable members of a democratic society that allows them to hold on to their personal convictions but also to respectfully listen to and wrestle with the ideas of others.

Materials

The materials necessary for this lesson include class copies of the following: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, any copied materials for Phase I, and any of the questions in handout form used from Figures 20.1–20.4. Phase I's materials will vary depending on which stories you decide to ask your students to explore; materials may include some but not all of the following: any movies and DVD player used, Internet access and speakers if listening to NPR clips; copies of excerpts from comparative texts. Phase II's project will require students to have access to a computer

and printer from which they can type their business letters. Additionally, highlighters, pencils, and paper can be used as students interact with the text.

Introduction

High school students are obsessed with relationships: “Did you hear Joe is dating Hannah now? Oh! Tara and Cynthia aren’t talking anymore? Did you notice how those two teachers always hang out together?” The teen obsession with relationships then makes it natural for teachers to focus on relationships within literature. The relationship between Huck and Jim now becomes a focal point to explore concepts of wisdom. Do Huck and Jim gain wisdom in their river adventure? From where and whom, expected and unexpected, does this wisdom come? How does the wisdom change the two characters and their relationship with each other?

To prep students for our exploration of wisdom, we must first create a working idea of their conceptions of wisdom. I have students write a paragraph in their journal about a person in their life they consider to be extremely wise. Each student is to answer why he or she feels this person is wise and to question how this person has influenced his or her own ideals. After five minutes, we discuss the students’ journal entries to establish an idea of what they, as students, value as wise and how that wisdom plays out in each life. Students are to keep the journal entries on wisdom and will come back to reconsider the definitions proposed.

The lesson begins at Chapter 14; therefore, students should feel confident in their previous exposure to and understanding of the relationship between Huck and Jim. I have found that Jago’s (Chapter 2) seven-step discovery process is a fine tool for digging deeper into Huck and Jim’s relationship, launching into the study of wisdom. First, use Jago’s seven-step discovery process to dissect Huck and Jim’s discussion of Solomon in Chapter 14. As laid out by Carol, the steps are as follows:

1. Reread the passage silently, choosing a phrase or sentence that strikes you.
 2. Write for five minutes about this line.
 3. In small groups reread the passage aloud.
 4. Share lines and comments in small groups.
 5. Come together as a whole class and reread the passage.
 6. Discuss passage in large group with teacher.
 7. Discuss how rereading helped you understand the text.
-

Additionally, I use questions from Figure 20.1 to guide my interaction with the students as they explore Huck and Jim's discussion of Solomon. Figure 20.1's questions lead students to focus on the unusual relationship between the two characters and in particular to highlight Jim's imparting wisdom to Huck. Ultimately I want students to transfer their considerations of Jim as wise to their interactions with others. Where can I, as a student, gain wisdom from an unexpected source? The teacher can further the discussion to include Huck's relationships with other characters and what he learns from their wisdom and/or folly (Figure 20.2).

Connections

As teachers, we do not want to tell students *what* to believe but use our time to teach them how to question and re-question so as to affect "personal and social transformation" (Wilhelm, Chapter 3). Having been in the classroom during the times of debate in our nation's last election, it has been interesting to hear students so staunchly defend their beliefs (and many times their parents' beliefs) without even a small consideration for each other's ideas. The activities of this lesson, therefore, seek to help students put aside a stubborn resolve to cling to their ideas, their wisdom, at any cost "as it becomes itself an obstacle to further learning" (Blau, Chapter 1).

This lesson plan directly incorporates the philosophies of Jago, Probst, Wilhelm, and Blau (Chapters 1–4). First, the precursor to the lesson is the exploration of Chapter 14 using Jago's proposed seven steps to help students reread and interact with Jim's imparting wisdom to Huck. As all four authors suggest, the study of literature should be about discovering humanity. The activities prompt students to discover not only Jim and Huck's humanity or that of someone much unlike themselves, but also their own humanity as they hopefully identify and begin to overcome some of their misconceptions of those unlike themselves. As Probst suggests, this lesson asks each student to "question what he is not inclined to question, to question what he firmly and absolutely believes" not only in the novel but in his or her own community as well.

Activities

Phase I: Connections

After discussing the relationship between Jim and Huck with the seven-step discovery process and Figure 20.1, transition into Phase I is natural.

1. Compare and contrast Jim's family situation with others from the novel. Consider how you believe family is defined and what constitutes the ideal family.
2. How do you define wisdom? Who do you consider wise in your own life? Is Jim wise? If so, in what way?
3. How are Jim and Huck's situations similar? Provide examples.
4. Why do you think Huck is hesitant to even consider Jim's values and ideas as valuable/plausible? What tends to make *you* hesitant to consider others' beliefs and ideas?
5. Many of the adults in Huck's life are trying to "sivilize" him. How would you describe a civilized person? Do you believe that Jim offers Huck a good example of how to conduct oneself in a civilized manner?
6. Make a rough list of Jim's superstitions. Do some of Jim's superstitions prove to be true? Give specific examples of superstitions and how they are proven true. Does this make you more prone to believe in superstitions? Why or why not?

Figure 20.1. Questions about Jim.

1. Is he or she wise? Why or why not? (Use examples from text and tie to your own idea of what wisdom is and how it is displayed interpersonally and within society.)
2. Does he or she offer Huck a good example of family values? Use examples and tie them to your own ideas of family.

Figure 20.2. Questions about other characters.

This phase offers students other relationships in literature, film, and/or real life in which a character gains wisdom from an unexpected source. I regularly use an excerpt from *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Mitch and Morrie) and/or a clip from *Finding Forrester* (Jamal and Forrester), but there are many texts/films to choose from that highlight peculiar relationships where one character learns unexpected lessons from another character. Other sources are the novels *She's Come Undone*, *Ender's Game*, *Malcolm X*, *Great Expectations*, and *Pride and Prejudice*; the films *Driving Miss Daisy*, *The Power of One*, and *UP*; the play *Oedipus the King*; and the following recordings from NPR:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104979771>
(marriage story)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89164759>
(mugger story)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1111091624>
(millionaire story)

1. Who taught whom what in this story?
2. In what way was the wisdom of these parties unconventional, both to you and to the other individual(s) in the reading?
3. Compare and contrast this relationship to (1) a relationship in your life, (2) to that of Jim and Huck.
4. Can you recall other examples of peculiar relationships where wisdom comes from unexpected sources in literature, film, or real life?

Figure 20.3. Questions about relationships in Connections (Phase I).

Figure 20.3 offers general questions that can be used to engage the reading/viewing of these excerpts/clips and then to compare these examples with the relationship between Huck and Jim. A modified form of Jago's seven-step process can also be used. Before starting Phase II, I ask students to recall their working definitions of wisdom arrived at through the initial journal entry and I remind students to keep their views of wisdom in mind as we begin Phase II of the lesson.

Phase II: Unconventional Wisdom in My World (Project/Assessment)

Distribute the handout from Figure 20.4. The business letter handout (Figure 20.4) directs students to write a formal business letter to the teacher about a person they know and consider to have opposing ideas on life and wisdom from themselves. The letter should include a list of ten student-generated questions that each student believes the interviewee would love to answer. (While I go over the handout I harp on the idea that they are to ask questions that their interviewee would *love* to talk about rather than questions that are driven by their own desire to show the interviewee that he or she is "wrong" or misguided.) For homework, they type the final draft of this letter in the format provided. The next day I collect the letters and inform students that within the next week they need to interview their chosen person. I most often collect the letters on a Thursday or Friday so that I can read them over the weekend and return them the following Monday. We continue with the discussion and reading of the novel while students embark on the interview project mostly outside of class time.

In one week's time the typed transcript of students' interviews, including both their ten questions and the answers, are due. In class, students use the transcript to write a first-person monologue from the point of view of the interviewee describing his or her worldview. I find having students take on the voice of the interviewee helps them

This is an activity that will benefit you in other areas of your education and life in general. Knowing how to write a business letter is important in establishing a favorable image of yourself to people you have never met. If, for example, you are applying for a job and have to write a cover letter to explain more about yourself, it will not look favorable if you do not follow correct formatting or misspell every other word. Whether you like it or not, people do judge you by the way you write and talk. Some rules to remember when writing your letter are:

1. The letter needs a one-inch margin.
2. The body of the letter is single-spaced, with double spaces between each paragraph (each at least four sentences in length).

Your assignment is to write a final draft of your letter of intent. Be very careful with your spelling and grammar. The following page is a formula for the letter of intent to help you remember what you need to address in your letter.

Format of Letter of Intent

YOUR STREET ADDRESS
YOUR CITY, STATE AND ZIP CODE

DATE

TEACHER'S NAME
SCHOOL NAME
SCHOOL STREET ADDRESS
SCHOOL CITY, STATE AND ZIP CODE

DEAR (TEACHER'S NAME):

PARAGRAPH 1: Give an introduction explaining the assignment, the person you have chosen to interview, as well as your feelings about the assignment itself.

PARAGRAPH 2: Give a brief description of your own values and beliefs.

PARAGRAPH 3: Compare and contrast yourself with your interviewee and expound on why you have chosen him or her to interview.

PARAGRAPH 4: Pledge that your ten questions are intended to genuinely inquire into the ideas and beliefs that your interviewee holds to be true and valuable, rather than an attempt to prove to your interviewee that his/her worldview is wrong or strange. Include your ten questions.

Sincerely,

Your signature (four spaces between Sincerely and your typed name)

YOUR NAME TYPED

Figure 20.4. Business letter of intent to teacher.

to understand the humanity of and honest human experience of that person. In years past, we have recorded these as podcasts (we change the names of those we are representing) or class recordings; we've also performed the monologues in class. Hopefully through the interview and monologue the students gain a different perspective. It is important to encourage students to relate their own experience with the interviewee to that of Huck and Jim. In a class discussion I ask: "Did Huck see Jim as imparting wisdom? Why was Jim's perspective valuable in Huck's development as a person? Has the experience with your interviewee changed your 'wisdom,' and if so, how?"

The final part of the project is to bring an addressed, stamped envelope to class. We then make thank-you cards for those we have interviewed. I let students know before their interview that they must acquire an address so as to send the thank-you card. If the interviewee would prefer an email or to put their letter in a homeroom teacher's box rather than give out a street address, we make accommodations. I usually borrow laptops from the library this day for students who will need to email. You can also make them copy the email to you for homework that night if you do not have the luxury of having computers in your classroom.

Assessment

To assess student learning teachers can easily use the activities of the lesson as concrete barometers and can use class discussions as a measurement of comprehension. Collecting the initial journal entry, the business letter, typed monologue, and final thank-you letter offers gradual forms of assessment at various points in the lesson. Furthermore, teachers can use the discussions to gauge student comprehension and enthusiasm. In past years I have used an essay prompt as a final form of assessment (Figure 20.5).

Considerations

Depending on the students that make up your classroom, this lesson may offer unique challenges; however, those of us whose populations make us the most tentative to embark on the lesson may find the most rewards through the adventure. Teachers can choose to have the students reflect on the process in their writing journals or as a take-home assignment as reflection often forces the student to consider the caliber of participation and effort he or she offered to the process. There are

In Chapter 14, Huck reflects to himself that Jim “had an uncommon level head for a nigger.” We have wondered about and discussed in-depth Jim’s impact on Huck. In a convincing five-paragraph essay, discuss Jim’s wisdom, no matter how unconventional in Huck’s mind or your own, and its impact on Huck. A stellar essay will include a convincing assertion in thesis form, textual evidence and analysis thereof to support the thesis, as well as overall coherency of the essay. Remember that any assertion can be “correct” if backed sufficiently by textual evidence.

Figure 20.5. Unit test essay question.

many parts of the process outlined above that teachers can modify and shorten as necessary for their curriculum and professional learning community (PLC) demands.

VII Talking Back to *The Bluest Eye*

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My copy of *The Bluest Eye* is worn with frayed edges and dark, tan pages. It looks like someone decided to take a bite out of the front cover, and it smells like it has been packed away with a batch of chocolate chip cookies. I bought it at a used bookstore, but the stamp on the spine says it belonged to a local university bookstore at some point. I do not know how many owners it had before me, but I was the first to mark it up. The novel was assigned reading in my college African American Novel II class.

The Bluest Eye is Toni Morrison's first novel. Claudia MacTeer, the nine-year-old narrator, looks back at her eleven-year-old friend Pecola Breedlove's demise, beginning with being raped and impregnated by her father. Pecola prays for blonde hair and blue eyes, symbols of beauty she hopes will bring her love, and when they do not, she goes insane. Set in the 1940s in Lorain, Ohio, the novel's major themes surround internalized racism, beauty aesthetics, and stifling oppression. Passages from a *Dick and Jane* reader serve as chapter headings throughout, reinforcing and juxtaposing characteristics of mainstream US society, such as the narrow definition of family and beauty aesthetics.

It was one of the hardest texts I read in college, if I do not count the huge book of collected Shakespearean plays assigned that semester. At the time, I thought *The Bluest Eye* was a much needed respite, since it is so thin. I still have both texts, but *The Bluest Eye* is filled with marginalia, though the collection of the bard's plays is not. My copy is filled with questions: "How does Pecola first learn she is ugly? Did Morrison read Brooks' *Maud Martha* (1953)? Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952)? How does Claudia know what society is up to? Why is he called Cholly and the mother is called Mrs. Breedlove? Why didn't Cholly hate the white men who humiliated him? Is colorism to blame too? Gender? Poverty?" It is

also filled with notes. On the title page where I summarized the text, I wrote, "Pauline cannot show love nor demonstrate affection or concern for her children or husband." On page 11, I wrote, "A few run together sentences describe Dick and Jane's pretty house. The Breedlove's house is a converted store with beaverboard panels providing the only inner walls."

Questions and notes often fill the margins of a difficult text, a text that makes one uncomfortable and maybe even afraid. Issues of racism and poverty are explicit and raw, the rape scene cruel and unthinkable. The lessons featured in this section tackle these tough issues and argue that identity is socially constructed and constantly changing. Under the guidance of professional educators, students can make sense of the world in the text and the one around them.

Where was *The Bluest Eye* in my teen years, I wondered during my twenties. The television and magazine ads had nearly gotten the best of me, too. Being beautiful was impossible. Terms such as "good hair" and "bad hair" plagued me. Where I grew up, someone with "good hair" had hair that was straight and silky while a person with "bad hair" had hair that looked like mine. As a young girl running around slinging my toweled head from side to side, perception and the urge to develop my own understanding of beauty became important. In fact, one lesson that follows (Chapter 24) asks students to wrestle with those deeply seated opinions about beauty and self. Other lessons confront issues of identity formation, examine Morrison's craft, and lead students to question behaviors and values in texts and society. Together, the lessons encourage reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and evaluating. Donning multiple lenses, manipulating graphic organizers, tinkering with technology, and applying real-world connections are a few of the best practices at the heart of these plans. Instruction around *The Bluest Eye* requires a focus on how the characters respond to multiple oppressive forces such as racism, classism, and sexism, topics pursued forthrightly here. Finally, the lessons move beyond an analysis and critique of the novel toward acting against social injustice. The plans critically embody the concepts and guidance of our introductory essayists.

24 Beauty and Identity in *The Bluest Eye*

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Purpose

The Bluest Eye is an ideal text for incorporating different epistemologies and metacognitive strategies. The goal is to help students read and re-read the text while effectively utilizing reader response and other lenses, theories, or methods of looking at words, context, voice, and other textual factors. Pecola's life exposes both the journey for acceptance and the adverse effects of heartache and rejection. Literary theory pushes students to expand their critical thinking skills in the midst of Pecola's extreme emotions and moments of self-awareness.

Toni Morrison's text may be students' first exposure to literature from the point of view of the perceived "other" or marginalized voice. Therefore, the following lesson is an effort to introduce students to a few basic, yet problematic, concepts that affect all who are searching for identity, particularly those marginalized by race or gender.

Through the unit experiences, students examine and differentiate methods of perception as well as analyze representations of beauty in our culture as not merely arbitrary and esoteric but unavoidably fictitious and hyper-real while creating a new way of perceiving beauty, describing identity for the twenty-first century. They also identify and contest the power of language as well as explore the powerful language used to describe characters and notions of identity.

Materials

- *The Bluest Eye*, LCD projector, computer with Internet, Figure 24.1 (4-2-1 worksheet), Figure 24.2 (Close Reading Practice worksheet), Figure 24.3 (list of quotations), and a series of articles help articulate the concepts of beauty / gender / race / reader response theory:
-

- Cheng, Anne. "Wounded Beauty: An Exploratory Essay on Race, Feminism, and the Aesthetic Question." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 19.2 (2000): 191–217.
- Sekayi, Dia. "Aesthetic Resistance to Commercial Influences: The Impact of the Eurocentric Beauty Standard on Black College Women." *The Journal of Negro Education* 72.4 (2003): 467–77.
- Soublis, Theoni, and Erik Winkler. "Snapshots: Transcending Bias through Reader-Response Theory" *English Journal* 94.2 (2004): 12–14.

Introduction

Using literary theory to approach the novel may strike students as, well, novel. Many are not exposed to literary theory and may cover behind complaints that these concepts are useless and complicated. However, this approach examines why many students may resist *The Bluest Eye* because it is written by someone who does not look, think, or experience a familiar lifestyle or because it starkly reveals the grotesque realities that hit too close to home.

Theory, as it applies to Toni Morrison's texts, gives validity to several perspectives and forces students to deliberate and ponder why they react to texts with such distaste or disinterest. In addition, it guides students to engage with the text and the never-ending questions it evokes, both with personal fervor and critical distance. In fact, by dealing with realistic ideas and problems, such as beauty, identity, friendship, and loss, students evolve in self-awareness while learning to embrace different perspectives and "historical" viewpoints simultaneously.

Connections

One way to engage student minds into multiple, critical readings of a text is to consider several perspectives and interpretations of the same text. Literary theory not only diminishes authoritative dictums of interpretation but also, in a digital age when everyone has an opinion, delineates multiple pathways for the twenty-first century student to discern how opinions may or may not be valid. Today, students are unaware that the latest gossip blog is a censorious reader response essay, which interprets pop culture as a text. Literary theory, as Moore (Chapter 5) reminds us in his essay, helps facilitate discussion about concepts such as beauty, identity, perception, and context in the "high" and "low" texts. Reading

The Bluest Eye opens the minds and hearts of students to the awareness of how to read and interpret the world.

Activities

Activity 1: First Thought, First Word: I am beautiful.

As soon as the bell rings, I ask the students to respond to the statement above on a blank sheet of paper. They consider the following questions: Do they agree? What do they believe about beauty? (Fun add-on: Students repeat the statement aloud several times and stand up to strike a pose every time they use the word *beautiful*. This technique helps student engagement if it is brief and quick and energetically suggested.)

After five minutes, students respond to the Essential Question displayed on the board: How do you know what is beautiful? They write how they know what is beautiful, creating a bulleted list, fragments, run-on sentences, or other form. I encourage them to use specific examples of things, people, and places they believe are beautiful. Then, they write about the most beautiful thing they have ever seen and explain why it was so beautiful. After discussing the aesthetics of art, culture, landscapes, and other ideas they may have listed in their answers, I shift the conversation to “beauty” as it applies to people. How do we know / decide someone is beautiful? How do we decide whether I / you / we are / were beautiful? This discussion leads them to describe the ideally beautiful person.

They reflect on their freewrite and find reasons for their opinions by identifying a specific instance / experience that led them to a specific conclusion about beauty.

Opinion	Experience
1.	1.
2.	2.

Debrief: Do we all find the same things beautiful? What does that word really mean?

Activity 2

Part 1: What are beauty and identity?

To begin this activity, I write my own definition of “time” on the board and explain why I think it is valid. Next, students write quickly a definition of “love” on a note card and pass it to the front. As I read them aloud, I discuss my thought process as I compare and contrast the given definitions. Students then combine two or three of the best definitions and explain why they find them to be the most valid. For example, love may be a feeling of excitement to one student, but a large group of students may disagree and say that it is more of a commitment that increases in worth and value over time, regardless of feelings. The class members argue, dispute, and eventually agree on what their experience and lives “tell them” is the best definition of love.

Using the 4-2-1 worksheet (Figure 24.1), each student receives either the word *identity* or *beauty* and writes four definitions of the word in the first four boxes. Students then have two minutes to find someone else with the same word and collaborate to create two possible definitions; then two students meet with two more students (to total four) to agree on one definition. Each group writes this definition on a giant piece of paper and tapes it on the board. They stand and defend the definitions they created using their experiences; as a class, we vote for the best one. Finally, students answer the following questions individually:

Identity: What is identity? How do you know?

Beauty: What is it? How do you know if you are beautiful?

Summation: Students explain how they answered these questions based on their perception (of experience) and context.

Part 2: What roles do perception and context play in our understanding?

I begin this activity by asking students the following questions about their definitions of beauty and identity: Would my next class create the same definition? Would a class in California? In Australia? In Africa? Would you create the same definition for identity and beauty five years from now? Why or why not?

Next, I use the following minilesson.

1. I create a bubble map on the board with “context” in the middle and label all the factors that change context of situations, reading, and understanding. I do the same for “perspective” and take some time to show how our eyes play tricks on us using the following website: Illusions and Paradoxes: Seeing Is Believing? (www.scientificpsychic.com/graphics/). Students discuss

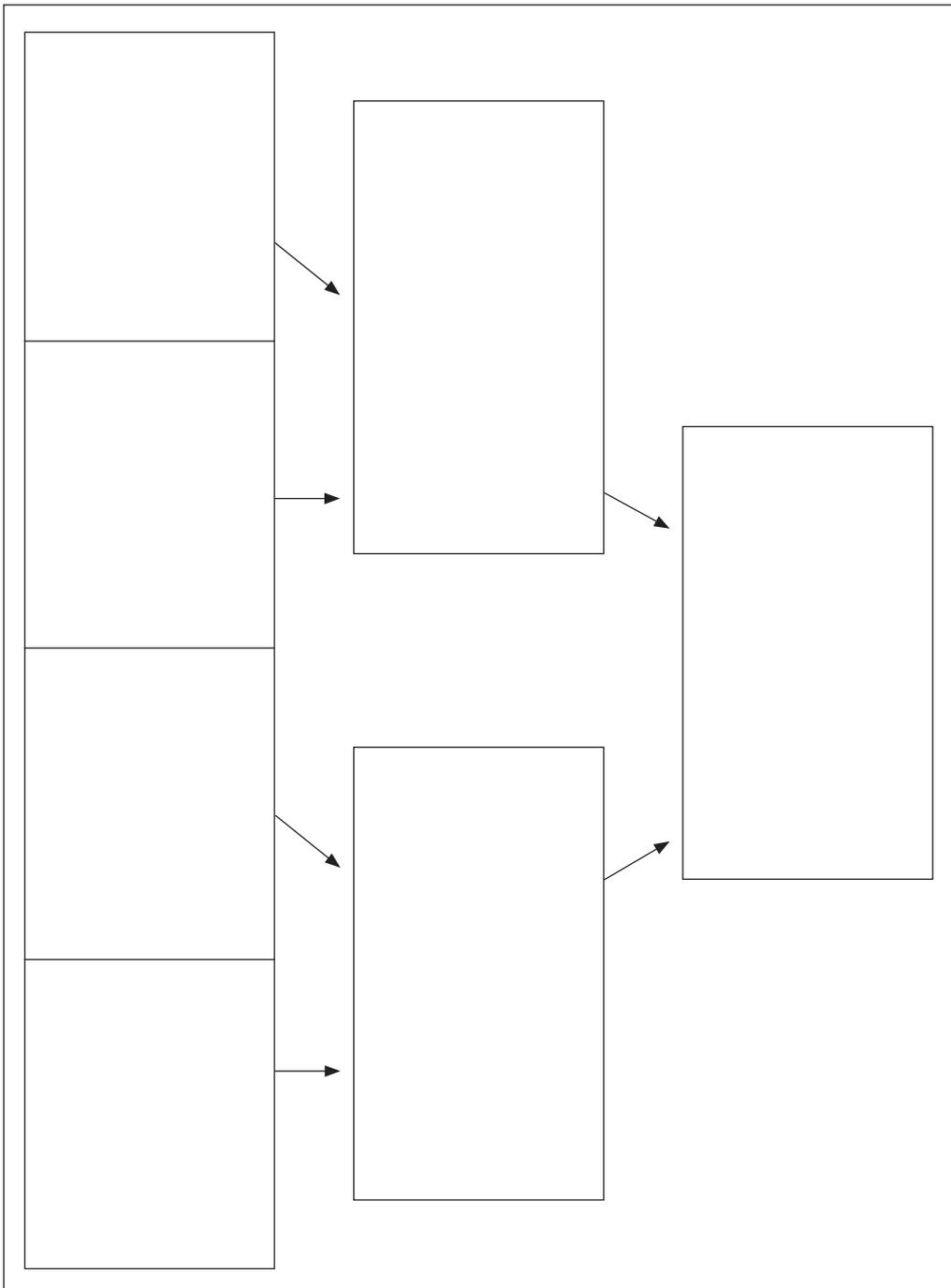


Figure 24.1. 4-2-1 worksheet.

briefly the way these tricks happen on the way from the eye to the brain and are scientifically fascinating and engaging.

2. I ask students to imagine a beautiful flamingo in a Sprite Zero bottle. I follow with the questions, "Can you imagine it? Can it really exist?" Students explore how the flamingo can exist in the mind, but not in reality. I follow with, "What do these two ideas [perception tricks and flamingo in the mind] show us about the validity of perception?" We then review how context can be one of the many factors that shift perception by referring back to the bubble maps.
3. For the next step of the activity, I ask students to complete the following sentences: "Discuss how beautiful you think ____ is to you. (It can be a type of stuffed animal, a pet, a place, and so on.) Explain how throughout your life and since childhood it has meant ____ and made you feel _____. Show how these experiences with _____ were affected by the context and your perception." Students proceed to tell a partner about someone who would fit their ideal of a beautiful person and discuss the reasons and experiences they used to validate their opinion. They take notes on their partner's reasoning to share with the class.

Other questions I use to guide an expanded discussion: What factors may affect or de-validate students' opinions? Does a person exist who fits the criteria for beautiful? Did you know about the person in advance, or was it the other way around? In other words, why did you choose those characteristics? Or, why did the person next to you have different words and a different image of beauty?

4. In the next part of the activity, students write an argument in response to one of the following statements.

Perception: How do you know that what you see is truly what is?

Context: What are the factors that shift our understanding and perception of words and meaning?

The follow-up discussion explores how we can be aware of these concepts as we read a text.

Part 3: What are textual examples of the nuance of context and perception as they influence beauty and identity?

With the entire class, I conduct a close reading exercise using the following quotation from *The Bluest Eye*:

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. (46)

Close Reading Practice 

Rewrite quote in large handwriting:



1. Circle the most important word(s).
2. Draw a cloud around a word that discusses beauty.
3. Shade a word that relates to concepts about identity.

What does this quote reveal about perception?

How does this quote define beauty?

How does this quote discuss identity?

Why might this quote be important?

So what? Why did Toni Morrison include this passage in the novel?

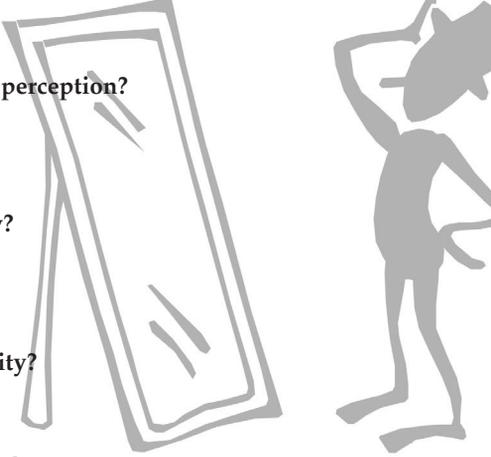


Figure 24.2. Close Reading Practice worksheet.

We explore the questions, “What point of view is the quotation arguing? Predict what the context might be for Pecola. What is her perception? What is she saying about perception?” Students discuss these ideas as they complete the Close Reading Practice sheet (Figure 24.2).

“We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth.” (9)

- ❖ “Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. ‘Here,’ they said, ‘this is beautiful, and if you are on this day “worthy” you may have it.’” (20–21)
- ❖ “Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike.” (45)
- ❖ “Dandelions. A dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back. She thinks, ‘They are ugly. They are weeds.’ Preoccupied with that revelation, she trips on the sidewalk crack. Anger stirs and wakes in her; it opens its mouth, and like a hot-mouthed puppy, laps up the dredges of her shame. Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth.” (50)
- ❖ “It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds—cooled—and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path.” (65)
- ❖ “In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap. . . . She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen.” (122)
- ❖ “I thought about the baby that everyone wanted dead, and saw it very clearly. It was in a dark, wet place, its head covered with O’s of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin. No synthetic yellow bangs suspended over marble-blue eyes, no pinched nose and bowline mouth. More strongly than my fondness for Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live—just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals.” (190)

Figure 24.3. Other quotations to consider.

The Bluest Eye contains numerous other references to beauty and identity that I use for further experiences with close reading (Figure 24.3). Students practice with new quotations independently. I provide Figure 24.2 on the front and back of the sheet, so they can practice once with the class and once individually.

Summation: Students consider the following questions independently, in groups, or in whole-class discussion. “How do you know what

is beautiful? How do you think Pecola decides what is beautiful? What do you predict is her identity? What do you predict is her context? What sort of things do you think shift her perception throughout her story?"

Activity 3: I am beautiful.

I show pictures of celebrities with and without makeup (check out <http://seehere.blogspot.com/2006/08/celebrities-without-makeup.html>) and ask students to rethink their standard of beauty and where it originates. I then ask them to think twice when they read the world around them, to think about why they believe people, places, and ideas are or are not beautiful. Is beauty in the eye of the beholder, or is it both perception and beauty that are more than skin deep?

Assessment

The number-one topic of conversation for high school adolescents begins with "I think." Therefore, when students express themselves and find new ways to relate to the world, it allows for endless teachable moments, especially with Toni Morrison's text as the inspiration. Using these activities as a catalyst, students write daily reflection papers of no more than a page as they read. These papers lead to an extended dialogue, where I ask students further open-ended questions to guide their thinking. Students receive credit both for their participation in these activities and for their papers.

Considerations

With several possible layers and questions embedded in the plot and in the relationships among the characters, students can be overwhelmed with the trauma and miss the nuances of *The Bluest Eye*. Even though civil rights is a well-covered topic in high schools, rarely are the effects of slavery and segregation shared from the black, female perspective. It is because the text is challenging and complex and comes from a marginalized voice that secondary students should read it. The issues of identity and beauty are still relevant. The harsh events that Pecola and her friends experience are still realities for teens today. It is important to consistently point out the atrocity of the moments and the reality that these are not just fictional plot points. This lesson allows for chaos and unbridled limits of thought and direction, so it may be useful to take the discussions to online discussion boards.

25 American Naturalism in *The Bluest Eye*

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Purpose

By building on students' prior knowledge of issues of social justice, this lesson enables students to develop a deeper understanding of the literary tradition of American naturalism and how the novel *The Bluest Eye* represents the technique in characterization, theme, and plot structure. Because naturalism relies on social science to explain the phenomenon of social stratification, the lesson also introduces students to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The activities in this lesson series guide students to read and analyze relationships among American literature, history, and culture while also using a variety of informational materials. In this process they write in a variety of forms, with a particular emphasis on persuasion and research. They also explore the philosophical underpinnings of naturalism to interpret *The Bluest Eye* from that perspective.

Materials

- LCD Projector, computer, Internet access, Blackboard, and Figure 25.1 (PowerPoint)
 - Internet sites:
 - Naturalism in American Literature: <http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/natural.htm>
 - From "Novel Expert Evidence in Federal Civil Rights Litigation" by Gordon Beggs: http://varenne.tc.columbia.edu/class/common/dolls_in_brown_vs_board.html
 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/maslow.htm>
 - Novels:
 - *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain)
-

- *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison)
- *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood)
- *Woman at Point Zero* (Wright)
- Short stories:
 - "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" (Wright)
 - "Roselily" (Walker)

Introduction

According to *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*, "Questions are effective learning tools even when asked before a learning experience. We generally think of questioning as something teachers do *after* students have been engaged in a learning experience. . . . Teachers, however, can use questions *before* a learning experience to establish a 'mental set' with which students process the learning experience" (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock 2001, 114). This lesson begins with a question—"Why do we need literature that shows *how* people fail to overcome certain obstacles?"—to encourage students to think about *The Bluest Eye* in light of a larger purpose and to encourage them to create their own rationale for the importance of reading the novel.

Following the initial question, students view a picture of a rat being lowered into a terrarium with a snake whose mouth is wide open as if poised to strike. The image is a powerful one and is indicative of the experience of protagonists in naturalist novels in general, and of Pecola Breedlove, the main character of *The Bluest Eye*, in particular. With Pecola's existence—surrounded by poverty, violence, racial discrimination, and dysfunctional adults—Morrison portrays a young girl who will not overcome obstacles. The task of the reader, then, is not to search for the happy ending but to critique the degree to which the author is true to the portrayal of Pecola's loss of sanity. Is this really how it happens? Are these the forces that drive people mad? Hence, students leap into the realm of literary criticism and evaluate the author's attempt at an authentic depiction of how social stratification contributes to psychological frailty.

Connections

In the introductory essays of this text, both Jago (Chapter 2) and Moore (Chapter 5) focus on American literary history and critical reading strategies that are born out of an understanding of the philosophical

underpinnings of American naturalism. The study of American naturalism, in general, and *The Bluest Eye*, in particular, lends itself to psychoanalytic criticism, Marxist criticism, and historical criticism.

Activities

Activity 1: American Naturalist Literature

I begin the lesson by displaying Figure 25.1 (PowerPoint), a picture of a rat and a snake, and I ask the students to respond orally to the following questions:

Given the rat's current environment, does it have a chance to survive and live a long life? What barrier exists?

Can this rat's reality mirror the reality of some people?

Next, students respond to the following question either in writing or orally:

Given a person's environment at birth, can their future be predetermined, assuming there is no intervention? Explain in detail.

Students offer examples to support their position on the topic.

Extension: Students may keep a journal as they read the novel to determine if their response to the prior question changes over time.

Activity 2: Dick and Jane

Students read the novel's opening Dick and Jane story. Then students draw a picture of the characters and events in the Dick and Jane story. Next, they read the italicized section at the beginning of the novel and draw a picture inspired by the passage. Once the drawings are complete, students write about the contrast between both environments using the drawings as a guide. Students should also use excerpts from the text to support their written response.

Extension: Students write about how Toni Morrison creates this contrast by responding to the following question:

What effect is created by juxtaposing the two passages, and how does the author create this effect (e.g., symbols, archetypes, imagery, and so on)?

Activity 3: The Plight of the Protagonist

In this activity students research interventions that could change Pecola Breedlove's story, and they develop recommendations for a plan of action to remedy Pecola's situation.

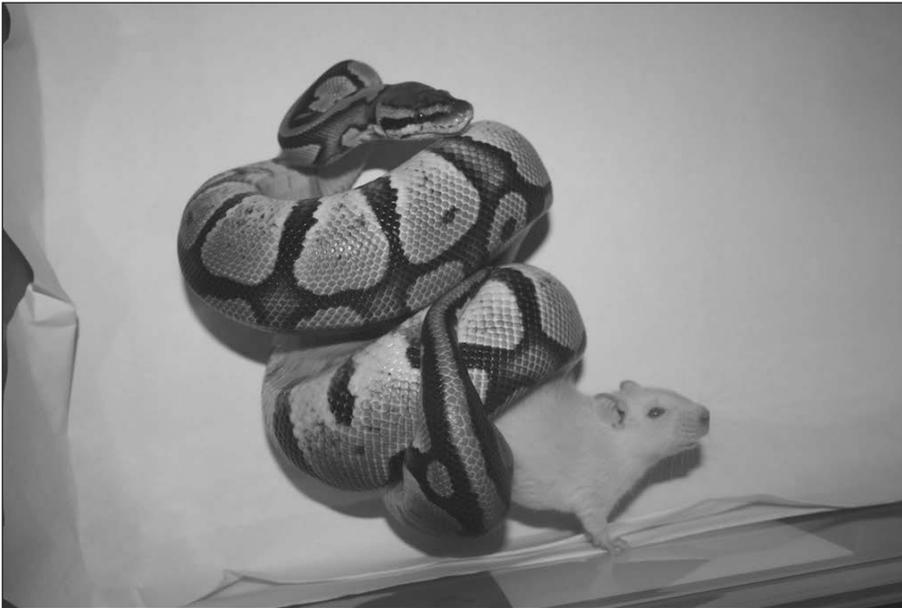


Figure 25.1. Oral response activity.

Suggestions:

- Students identify specific quotations and instances in the novel where a particular problem occurs. For example, students find excerpts and examples of economic problems that impact the life of the main character either directly or indirectly. Then they identify a research-based approach for resolving the issue—connection to an agency, an existing program, or pending legislation.
- Students work in groups of no more than five to focus on one of the specific intervention areas: psychological, economic, educational, media.
- Students research organizations that work to address issues presented in the novel.
- Students make a group oral presentation on instances of the problem in the novel and recommendations for solutions.

The following organizations and sources provide helpful information.

- Psychological: American Counseling Association, local school counselor
 - Economic: National Urban League, NAACP, Children’s Defense Fund
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- Educational: Office of Student Achievement, National Alliance of Black School Educators
- Media: National Association of Black Journalists, Black Actors Guild

Activity 4: Comparative Analysis of Literature

Students read excerpts from one of the following texts and note how these selections compare to *The Bluest Eye* in terms of effect, form, characterization, theme, and atmosphere:

- *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a novel by Mark Twain
Students may find similarities in the characterization of the fathers in both texts.
- *Woman at Point Zero*, a novel by Nawal El Saadawi
Students may find similarities in the environment of the protagonists and the author's close observation of cultural views of beauty and femininity.
- "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," a short story by Richard Wright
Students may find similarities in the symbolic significance of the gun and its connection to the blue eyes in Morrison's novel.
- "Roselily," a short story by Alice Walker
Students may find similarities in the use of italics and the deconstruction of the institution of marriage.
- *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel by Margaret Atwood
Students may find similarities in the conflicts of the protagonists and the point of view of the narrator.

Suggested guiding questions throughout the exercise are the following:

In what ways do both Morrison and the other author have a similar effect in some part of their writing? How do they establish that effect? Do they use the same technique to create the same effect or are different techniques used to create a similar impact on the reader and story? Explain.

After considering these questions, students write a comparative essay in which they explore some specific similarity between *The Bluest Eye* and one of the other texts.

Extension: Students may also give an oral presentation.

Activity 5: Technology and the Study of Literature

Students read and post comments on Blackboard concerning each of the following links.

- Naturalism in American Literature.
<http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/natural.htm>
This link explains the characteristics of naturalistic literature and mentions famous writers of the genre.
Discussion board question: What characteristics of naturalism are evident in *The Bluest Eye*?
- “Novel Expert Evidence in Federal Civil Rights Litigation” by Gordon Beggs.
http://varenne.tc.columbia.edu/class/common/dolls_in_brown_vs_board.html
This link discusses the experiment conducted by Dr. Kenneth Clark that exposed the damaging effects of segregation on the self-image of African American children.
Discussion board question: How does this information help you to understand the development of Pecola’s character?
- Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.
<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/maslow.htm>
This link discusses Dr. Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. This serves as a valuable resource in the discussion of character development.
Discussion board question: How does this information help you understand the conflicts encountered by the protagonist?

Extension: Students may write a fictional story in which they demonstrate the findings of Dr. Clark or Dr. Maslow.

Assessment

Forms of assessment I employ include oral presentations that require students to compare a literary aspect of the novel to that of another work read during the unit. For example, students may decide to discuss the similarities and differences between the quest of the protagonist in *The Bluest Eye* and that of a protagonist in another work of realism such as *Woman at Point Zero*. Students are also assessed by reading a passage from the text and explaining why the text is indicative of naturalism. Other assessments include responding to questions posted on Blackboard and conversing with classmates online.

Considerations

The approach I use in teaching *The Bluest Eye* helps to make it among the most popular novels students read at my school. It affords them the opportunity to learn conceptual frameworks that equip them to answer difficult and complicated questions concerning systemic injustice and symbolic violence. Further, the incorporation of social sciences in the evaluation of the author's characterization of the protagonist encourages students to stretch their thinking and make connections between the text and real life. These activities enable students to gain valuable exposure to the art of critical analysis and ideas related to challenging the status quo and providing seeds for possible solutions.

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26 *The Bluest Eye* and the Power of Culture Scripts

Darlene Russell

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Purpose

As a practitioner of critical teaching and social reconstructionism, I believe that it is imperative for educators to adopt transformative curricular practices that precipitate critical thinking and problem solving in the classroom. As such, teachers must be nontraditional in their practices to foster and encourage students to become increasingly inquisitive about the importance of accurately reading the written word and the world to better the human condition (Freire, 1970). The activities included here encourage students to think critically about themselves, others, and societal issues. They learn to understand how cultural scripts are performed in fiction and reality and shape how one thinks, sees oneself, and sees the world. They are then able to juxtapose their cultural and personal scripts with the protagonist, Pecola.

Materials

- *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1970)
 - *Nappy Hair* (Herron, 1997)
 - *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984)
 - *Twilight Zone* (1960) episode titled “The Eye of the Beholder” (Serling, 2006)
 - *I Am Not My Hair* (Arie, 2005)
 - Newspapers
 - Chart paper
 - Figure 26.1 (The Abuse Wheel)
 - Figure 26.2 (Cultural Scripts Chart)
 - Figure 26.3 (Beauty and the Beholder’s Eye)
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Introduction

I have been making chocolate chip cookies since I was twelve years old. Over the years, I have made modifications to the recipe, but I always make it a point to clean the bowl. I try not to leave even a moist crumb of batter behind. This is one of my metaphors for teaching. I believe that effective teachers get the maximum mileage out of all classroom activities, not necessarily by employing a plethora of activities. Instead, it is important to clean the bowl for every activity while thinking anew.

Teachers need to groom students into individuals who are intellectually charged, exposed to the sociopolitical problems of the world, and committed to making the world a more inclusive, pluralistic, human, and democratic place to live. It is this type of human rights curriculum that transforms students into independent critical thinkers who are in tune with themselves and others in this changing global society.

The activities here invigorate and challenge students' thinking through literacy and real-world connections. They incorporate technology and multiple intelligences and can be modified to differentiate instruction.

Connections

As Probst (Chapter 4), Wilhelm (Chapter 3), and Blau (Chapter 1) indicate in the opening essays of this text, literature is a vehicle to study history, language, humanity, and societal and cultural practices. These activities for *The Bluest Eye* offer myriad approaches to teaching the text. Reader response, through reader-text-world connections, is at the nucleus of all the lesson's activities. Each activity is student-centered and allows students to use different lenses to view the text. These lenses call for movement in students' thinking—analyzing characters and deconstructing how characters see themselves and the world, how the world sees them, and why—to participate in critical discourse and be able to organize thinking into creative writing (Moore). This chapter invites critical inquiry and creative thinking through the use of multiple literacies; the literacy constructs activate prior knowledge and metacognition. It is important for English teachers to use a cultural studies criticism framework for teaching literature to augment critical thought in students. Cultural studies criticism summons students to juxtapose their behaviors, values, and perceptions with societies in the text and the world by asking critical and complex questions: Who am I? How does my cultural background shape the essence of who I am and how the world sees me? What are the societal norms and values that confront characters in modern American

literature and those who people the world? How are these norms and values embraced or negated? Who created these norms and what power do they have? This lesson series showcases some activities that support a human and pluralistic curriculum that encourages students to be innovative critical thinkers in the twenty-first century.

Activities

Activity 1: The Abuse Wheel

This activity prods students to think about a social problem that has plagued the universe since the beginning of time: abuse. Studying how both society and people serve as perpetrators of abuse, students engage in social activism by utilizing artistic and technological skills to convey messages against abuse.

I begin this activity by defining and discussing the types of abuse that exist. Excerpts from newspapers and broadcast news serve as sample texts of abuse and how abuse is reported. After reading *The Bluest Eye*, students work collaboratively to discuss how one of the following characters has been abused by another individual or society: Pecola, Pauline Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, Maureen Peal, and Geraldine. Each group uses “the abuse wheel” to plot or track (complete with page references from the book) how a selected character has endured physical, emotional, and psychological abuse (see Figure 26.1). Each group writes its sentences around the perimeter of the respective area on the wheel. As a culminating activity, each group creates a public awareness message on abuse. The public awareness message focuses on abuse of a specific population (e.g., senior citizens, females, children, etc.) and includes ideas to help eradicate abuse. The message can be expressed in (1) a T-shirt design; (2) a bookmark; (3) a video; or (4) a webpage. The goal is for students to create a product that reaches a real audience.

Extend: Students seek opportunities to market their announcements. Perhaps the T-shirts and bookmarks can be marketed and sold at a store in the community or school, and the videos can be used on a local public television network.

Activity 2: Understanding and Charting Cultural Scripts

I begin the lesson by asking students to respond to the following questions in their writer’s notebook: “What is culture? What are your values and beliefs?” Next, I draw a mammoth circle on the board so students can post their responses to the first question (What is culture?) outside

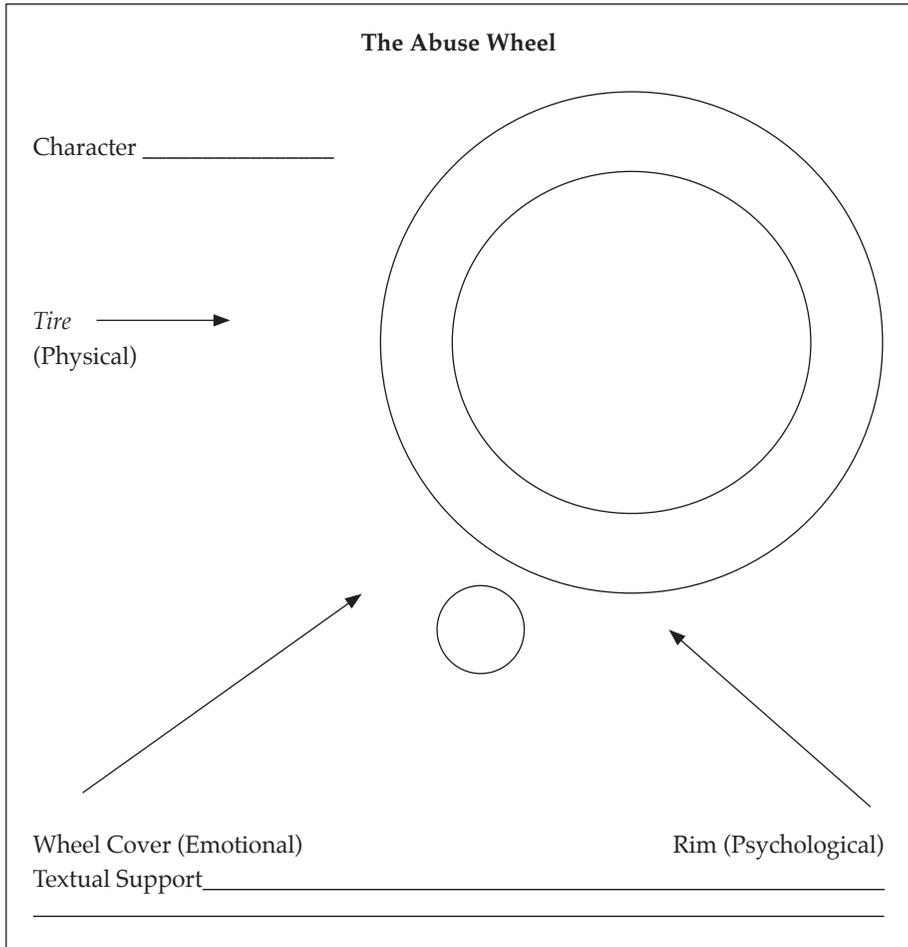


Figure 26.1. The abuse wheel.

the circle. I illustrate how culture is both constant and evolving by drawing a semicircle with arrows inside the circle on the board. Then I guide students toward connecting their values and beliefs—as indicated by the definition on their paper—with the definition of culture already on the board.

I then explain that cultural scripts are sayings—repeated sayings—that govern or contribute to daily practices and outlook on self, others, and life. Some movies with salient cultural scripts include *Mississippi Masala*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Boys in the Hood*. Cultural scripts are the compilation of what one has been taught to act like, to believe in, and to practice by family and community (James & Jongeward, 1996).

In *Boys in the Hood*, the prevailing cultural script for young African American males consists of selling and using drugs, becoming entangled in gang activity, spending time in prison, and living lives absent of direction and purpose. This script, which is shaped by the local community and macro-society, is clearly evinced in the character Doughboy and other neighborhood boys. There is, however, one character, Tre Styles, whose father counters this cultural script that permeates the “Hood.” Tre’s mother sends him to live with his father, Furious Styles, when he begins to have some problems in school. Throughout the movie, Tre’s father creates, shapes, and fosters a cultural script of hope, discipline, and dignity for his son.

To reinforce the cultural script concept, I ask a volunteer to read *Nappy Hair* by Carolina Herron, a picture book that explores self-image and affirms a little girl’s feelings about her hair. Then, I read “Hair” from *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and encourage students to listen to popular neo-soul artist India Arie’s song titled “I Am Not My Hair.” The class holds a mini-discussion about the three eclectic works and the cultural scripts they suggest. The following questions expand students’ thinking: “Why aren’t there books about loving your straight hair? Why are books such as *Nappy Hair* written?” Since hair is the focus of these works and is an obvious part of outward appearance, students think about their own cultural script for hair and the episodes in their lives that generate or perpetuate the script. Students then complete the cultural scripts chart (see Figure 26.2), using evidence from *The Bluest Eye* to complete the episodes for Pecola.

Using the chart as a springboard, students write a draft of an essay juxtaposing how they practice their cultural script and how Pecola practices hers. For example, one of the lines in Pecola’s script is the absence of love. As students write about cultural scripts, they think about whether stereotypes are present in cultural scripts. Stereotypes can become embedded in the crevices of cultural scripts. If students write about how their cultural script is practiced, they can examine their script and decide what the script, silently or loudly, echoes about their racial, ethnic, social, and gender identities.

Activity 3: Why Questions

Classrooms should be high-traffic areas for weighty *why* questions, the cornerstone of an inquiry-based classroom. This activity catapults students to think about *why* questions while placing themselves in the shoes of Pecola and pondering what matters.

Cultural Scripts Chart	
Self	Pecola
On Hair: Episodes:	
On Education: Episodes:	
Other Physical/Personality Traits: Episodes:	

Figure 26.2. Cultural scripts chart.

Students begin the lesson by listening to “Why” by Traci Chapman and discussing the speaker’s intention, tone, and word choice. I then read the following passage aloud: “*There is really nothing more to say—except why*” [Italics in original] (Morrison p. 9). Students create a *why* question for every season of Pecola’s life; they pose questions from Pecola’s perspective and as an outsider looking at her circumstances. Since the entire text is arranged by four seasons, this activity is ongoing and can lead to creating a *why* poem.

Activity 4: Beauty and the Beholder's Eye

Students create word webs for *beautiful* and *acceptance*. Then I lead them in a discussion about "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." To explore these words and ideas associated with them, students watch the *Twilight Zone* episode titled "The Eye of the Beholder." This episode explores the notion of beauty and what it means to look "normal." Next I arrange the students in groups and tell them to research how beauty is perceived in a particular country. (Each group can brainstorm a list of countries and select one.) The goal is to expose students to countries that are considered eclectic, receive poor or inadequate media coverage, or have a host of stereotypical views attached to it. Some key words to discuss are *beauty*, *perception*, *icon*, *societal*, and *norm*. Students use as many primary resources to inform their research as possible.

Each group completes a mini-research project on their assigned country (see Figure 26.3). The research questions (RQ) stimulate students to explore beauty from various perspectives. Once students have responded to the research questions, they construct a large eye on a poster board.

To create eyelashes, students use long strips of paper to write each one of their findings about the country's view on physical beauty (RQ#1). Next, students plot words on the pupil that capture how the societal view of beauty negates or confirms women's actual appearances (RQ#2). Then students create a repetition of a ring of words around or inside the iris that reflect their opinions of all of the characteristics that capture the inner beauty of the people in the studied country (RQ#3). Students then write a reflective summary of the research process and findings at the bottom of the poster board. The following questions guide this reflection: "What did you learn about yourself as a researcher as a result of this assignment? What did your findings reveal to you about the word *beauty*? Who really defines beauty and why? Discuss how your views on beauty have shifted or solidified as a result of your research." Following the group-work assignment, students work independently on an essay juxtaposing the prevailing societal notions of beauty in the world where Pecola lives and their researched country.

Activity 5: Characterization through Wikipedia

Many students use, and perhaps overuse, the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, created by the public. This activity intertwines students' knowledge of the characters in *The Bluest Eye* with technology, giving students license to critically and creatively illustrate characters with

Research Questions:
Your group will collaboratively respond to the following research questions (RQ) for your assigned country and cite sources.

RQ#1. What is the prevailing societal view on the physical beauty of women?

RQ#2. How does the societal view of beauty compete with or affirm women's actual appearance?

RQ#3. In your opinion, what might be the inner beauty of the people in your assigned country?

Poster Board Presentation:
Your group will create an artistic eye and plot your responses to the research questions in the appropriate places in the eye on a poster board. The *pupil* will represent the country's views on beauty and women's actual appearance. The *lashes* will capture the country's perceptions of beauty in a broader sense. The *iris* will reflect women's inner beauty concluded in research of the country. Your group will craft a collective reflective summary under the graphic representation of the eye. The reflective summary should report the group's research process and reactions to the research findings.

Figure 26.3. Beauty and the Beholder's Eye mini-research project.

words. After reading the autumn and winter sections of the text, students work in groups to create a descriptive overview for all of the major and minor characters in the text, which will be loosely based on Wikipedia entries. Each group includes the following to create their own Wikipedia character descriptions: (1) adjectives for internal and external descriptions; (2) meanings of characters' names; (3) a song that best reflects each character; and (4) a motto that best suits the character. Students are encouraged to use colloquial expressions as well as different languages to define characters. The teacher can consider publishing each group's definitions on the Wikipedia website or the school's webpage.

Assessment

The activities are assessed through reflective journals and critical discourse. The writing activities and research project are peer evaluated on the basis of content, creativity, and delivery. The criteria are designed and decided by students to aid student-centered learning and student ownership. Ongoing classroom observation, critique notes, and quality of work produced on the unit activities provide me with further assessment data.

Considerations

These activities for *The Bluest Eye* confront the school-student disconnect by revolving around issues that are relevant to students and incorporating their interests and skills. Each activity beckons students to engage in critical and creative thought to examine identity through various frameworks. It is necessary for *community* to exist in the classroom to get the maximum mileage from activities cited in this lesson. The Abuse Wheel activity requires an awareness of many kinds and manifestations of abuse. The teacher also needs to be prepared to respond to any possible disclosures by students of abuse. In addition to the activities calling for the engagement of critical and creative thinking skills, they also call for sensitivity. Through critical and creative thought and sensitivity, these activities present students with the possibility to explore language, culture, and societal issues within and outside US borders.

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