



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **An Aesthetic Overview of the Narrative for the Ninth Grade**

Curriculum Unit 79.05.07  
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The strategies in this unit are designed to get students to do some critical reading, thinking and writing. The three genres chosen emphasize activities which will provide opportunities for students to experience analyzing and judging good narratives. Students should gain knowledge and appreciation for the various techniques authors use to tell their stories. The satisfying works I have chosen should help students understand how good stories or narratives are made. Learning how authors develop fictional characters can help students understand themselves and other people. Learning the author's plan for telling a story should motivate their reading. Their imagination will sharpen as they study the author's organization of events to control the point of view, and how characters unfold in a series of responses in thought and action to their created world. Defining characters according to their responses to their changing experiences can help students understand their own responses to the changes they experience in real life.

For a period of ten weeks, I plan to teach ninth-graders to appreciate examples of better narratives by getting them to interpret experiences writers create in fiction. I hope to get students to respond emotionally and imaginatively to the language of fiction and poetry. Students should become readers who can feel the joys and sorrows of fiction. They will experience the excitement of literature and have it come alive for them as they discover the many techniques of writers. I have planned to make my students become independent readers who can make their own judgments about narratives of glorious deeds, love, and sadness. My intentions are to arouse emotions, and to raise questions concerning ideas and values found in literature. Their aesthetic values should increase as we explore form, content, and authors' styles. I intend to make them aware of the personal satisfaction and joy one can gain from understanding and appreciating a well-made story.

The three genres to be viewed are the short story, the novel, and the narrative poem. Since it is difficult to separate content and form, I will teach the qualities of the short story first. The short story writer manipulates his craft to interweave characters, plot, setting and theme into his own style. The author's literary structure is so unified that he achieves the same effect as the novelist, who continues to involve his characters in different events. We will explore the many techniques—tone, symbol, point of view and ambiguity—authors use to tell their stories. We will discover how the author uses language, focusing on how diction creates atmosphere or tone. We will determine how the author uses first and third person to tell his story; how he uses dialogue to dramatize his story; how he can change point of view by changing the speaking voice; how the author reveals the personality of the main character; and how the author becomes involved in his story. Some of these creative skills are found in the three different genres we will study. Dramatic narrators, who speak in the first

or third person, are found in all three genres. Major characters are often placed in a situation or moral crisis; their responses to their environment and their respect for themselves and for Nature are also traced. Finally, the authors can employ myths, irony, and symbolism in their work.

Students should be guided to work out meanings for characters, plot, setting and theme. They should understand and recognize that characters are innocent people or animals evolved by their creators to take the reader through a series of events which may or may not show all the qualities of a character. They will get to know that the author is in control of the character and can develop that character's personality as he wishes. The author may choose to present a single character in consecutive actions, or he may choose to interrupt the narrative and introduce other characters. It is the author's choice to change the personality of a character by changing the character's values or attitudes. The author can parallel or contrast characters and events by changing the relationships among characters; he may shift the point of view. To help students have an understandable definition of character, I ask these questions: What does the author do to make his character appear real? What character or characters participate in the action? Is there another character parallel to the main character? Student responses should be about the personality traits of characters, the relationships among characters, the recognition of the characters' ideas, habits, attitudes, and inner feelings about life and the environment.

To help students understand setting, motivating questions should be asked, such as: How much setting does the author allow you to see with your own eyes? What do the characters tell you about the setting? How does time relate to place? How does the created world relate to our own? Where do certain events happen?

Students' responses should be about the time and place of the action, the environment created for the characters to perform in, the effect of the physical surroundings on the emotions of the characters, and the author's control of his scenes. Students should discover that plot is the sequence of events which causes things to happen in a narrative. A planned plot may be an author's presentation of the beginning, middle and end of a story in a causal sequence. He may also decide to present the results of the narrative at the beginning of the story and then reveal how it all happened. Another possible method is the use of flashbacks—reflections on things not caused by the present action; these inner feelings (monologues, dialogues, soliloquies, and so on) may interrupt the narrative. Two things important to plot are complications and conflicts. To get students thinking about plot, the following questions and tasks might be posed: In what other order could these events have occurred? Pick out the highlights of the story in the order they appear in the narrative; rearrange them in the way you would have them happen. Students must realize that climax is very important to the plot. It is the crisis in the narrative; it divides the major part from the other parts of the story; it is the moment when the character makes a decision which cannot be reversed; it is the turning point of his fortunes or misfortunes. Students will be asked to identify this point.

Point of view is another important part of the narrative. The author controls how he wants the reader to see his story. He can keep the reader "on the outside looking in" as an observer, or he may decide to reveal everything about the character. The author may reveal his character without directly reporting his thoughts and feelings; he can leave them to be inferred from the character's behavior and speech. This is the "objective" point of view. In fiction, point of view is imagined from what is said or told.

C. Carter Colwell, in *A Student's Guide to Literature*, presents point of view as follows:

#### I. Looking on.

- A. Objective. Third-person narration; no thoughts are read.
- B. Omniscient. Third-person narration; all thoughts may be read.
- II. Looking through a character's eyes.
  - Subjective. First-person narration; the narrator tells his thoughts and feelings.
- III. Looking over the character's shoulder.
  - A. Limited Objective. Third-person narration; the thoughts of the character with the shoulder may be told.
  - B. Limited omniscient. Third-person narration; the thoughts of the character with the shoulder may be told.

It is worth distinguishing whether the character in types II and III is a major participant in the main action or merely an observer. Students will discuss and come to understand that theme is the controlling idea found in narratives. Theme is a conviction about the world we live in. We will talk about the devices authors use to communicate thematic and philosophical views.

Students will discover the styles of various authors. They will become acquainted with the way authors use language to control scenes, give descriptive details, create deliberate ambiguities, relate their characters' emotions and thoughts, set tone, and imply opinions. Students should understand symbolic overtones used in the development of character. Authors may choose to use their characters to comment on mankind or to make ironical criticisms about social and moral life. Students should study the syntax of the narrative in order to explore the author's ambiguities or to uncover his intent.

After we thoroughly cover the structure and organization of narration, the various ways authors "show and tell" stories, students should be able to make individual choices from the suggested list supplied for the three genres. Their knowledge about the narrative and the authors' styles should help them interpret and enjoy the narrative. To get students to make fruitful literary responses, I will strive to get them to understand certain vocabulary words used in fiction. A list will be made available; when we need these words, we will spend some time discussing them. Students will identify the various types of narrators and the control the narrators have over "showing and telling" stories.

Classroom techniques to be used are: lecturing, notetaking, research on related facts about an author's life and works, finding answers to questions about characters' responses to certain experiences, class discussions, viewing of audio-visual materials, and writing exercises. I hope that having students do research on authors' lives, works, speeches, and personal comments, and having them read critical comments, and introductions to literary works will help students realize that authors are real people. Their use of source materials should strengthen their evaluations and interpretations.

I will start the unit by teaching short stories. The first story will be "Impulse" by Conrad Aiken. The plan for

teaching "Impulse" is at the end of this unit, After I teach this story, I will teach the following short stories: "The Open Window," by H.H. Muro; "Lottery," by Shirley Jackson; "The Killers," by Ernest Hemingway; "Haircut," by Ring Lardner. Another ten stories will be made available in a suggested list.

I will teach the novel after the short story because of their similar structure. Because of the extended length of the novel, the author has a chance to develop a greater complexity of plot. He can also develop fuller and more complex characters by extensive use of incidents, and he can be more selective in his organization and structure because of the length of his narrative.

The pure novelist writes fiction that is intended to be taken as fiction; its relevance to actual life is not less, but more, than that of documentary fiction, since its engagement with experience is at a much deeper level. Both author and reader step back from the limelight; the relationship between them is no longer a matter of simple give and take; this is life, and they are sharing in the experience of contemplating it. <sup>1</sup>

I have chosen novels which will provide the experience mentioned above. I will teach Steinbeck's *The Pearl* ; this will be taught in twelve lessons. I will point out Steinbeck's speaking voice in the story, the techniques he uses to narrate the story, his style of writing, and how his life experiences helped him create the natural world in *The Pearl* . Students will be given a literary glossary explaining symbolism, irony, allegory, myths, legends, fables, parables, metaphors, and so on. The following themes of *The Pearl* can be discussed or written about: greed and materialism, beauty, freedom, good and evil, and medical ethics. We can also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a primitive society. We will explore Steinbeck's knowledge of medieval English literature to find the source of *The Pearl* . I will explain Steinbeck's allegorical journey, and how he delineates Kino as a character. Questions given might be: What set of values does Kino have at the beginning of the story? Why do his values change? What set of values does he arrive at in the narrative? Can you describe in detail the results of Kino's search? What does Kino reject in the story? First, we will review a few fables, myths and parables. Oral reading during the class period will introduce the beginning of the story and help students understand the characters and setting of the novel. The climactic chapter, "The Chase," will be read in class. The return to the village will be read orally in class to help students understand the ending thoroughly.

The last narrative I teach will be "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Students will be acquainted with some of the aspects of poetic craft. I hope to get them to enjoy narrative poetry, to help them understand the essential characteristics of this distinct literary form, to promote the reading of poetry to help them recognize various poetic forms and understand the language of the poet by emphasizing word order and diction. Students will be acquainted with the poet's use of sound and imagery, and of simple words; they will make critical analysis of poems, poetic craft and voices, form and language. I hope students will become more observant and learn to express their own ideas about what they see, hear, feel, and so on. I will teach how poets present their narratives, and how they try to communicate with their readers. I will also teach how poets develop characters in their narratives and how their organization shows the narrator's responses to their changing experiences. In this particular narrative poem, the archetypal pattern of death-rebirth is presented, the skill of telling a story within a story is used, the storyteller's quest is presented by putting the character through a series of trials and adventures. Emphasis will be placed on symbolism, tone, irony and ambiguity as techniques.

Suggested reading lists for each of the narrative types are a part of the unit. I hope what is taught will help students make a comparative study of the narrative qualities found in the three genres. After students have been introduced to all the mentioned techniques of authors (including poets), they should become independent in their selection of literature, and should begin to appreciate the three genres presented. I hope

that they will learn how to obtain for themselves the kind of aesthetic pleasure derived from a knowledge of literary craftsmanship. My desire is to create narrative enthusiasts who will read, understand and become involved in self-discovery through stories. Their chance to make personal responses will enhance their judgment of life's changes. I hope this unit will supply some of the skills which later will give students the freedom and the knowhow to capture the enjoyment which a narrative can give.

### **A Five-Day Plan for Teaching Conrad Aiken's Short Story, "Impulse"**

The first day will be spent motivating the students. I will exhibit the stolen item, a razor, and ask a student to volunteer to show the class how one would try to steal this item from a counter in a store. After this demonstration, the following questions will be asked: If you were buying an item and someone beside you tried to steal it, what would you do? If a member of your family was a security guard in a store and you saw there was someone stealing something, what would you do? What would you do if you saw a friend steal something? After these questions are answered and answers are discussed, we will start to read the story aloud in class. I may read the first few paragraphs to get students interested in the story. Students will finish the story for homework and answer the following questions for class discussion on the second day: Who tells the story? How does the narrator tell the story? Divide the story into as many episodes as you feel you need to show the important things that happen. What is Michael's relationship with Dora, his so-called friends, and the security guard? How does the setting involve the characters?

The second day will be spent discussing individual answers for homework and talking about aspects of the short story. We will discuss the following questions: Who is the main character? How are the characters involved? Pick out your favorite scenes; how do the characters relate to these scenes? How does Aiken keep the narrative moving? Where in the story does Aiken involve Michael in a moral crisis? What evidence lead us to this point? Why is Michael an important person to the story? These questions should help students formulate definitions for characters, plot, setting, climax and crisis.

Activities for the third day will consist of a lecture on the short story—its history and its form. We will talk about the author's life and his style of writing. (The better students may research this.) Our continuing discussions about character, plot, setting, and theme as seen in this story should help students be aware of the parts of a short story and how these parts are related to each other.

On the fourth day we will reread the story to get what we missed on the first reading. Students will be encouraged to ask questions about anything of which they were unsure.

On the fifth day, we will start writing exercises. Students may choose one or two of the following: 1) Write a paragraph explaining your technique for doing something perfectly. 2) Write your own short story using the following questions as guidelines: How will you tell your story? Will your characters be interesting people or animals? Will you put them in interesting places? What might be source materials for your narrative? Will your events follow in sequence or will you use flashbacks to tell your story? Will you create a conflict, a climax and a logical ending? What emotional response do you want from your reader? Students might rewrite what they feel is the most interesting part of their short story, changing the time and place. 3) They may prepare questions for a news conference. (Michael can be either innocent or guilty.) They may choose to write a full testimony for one of Michael's friends using facts from the story.

The class might engage in other activities, such as searching for interesting facts about authors in biographies, encyclopedias, notebooks, diaries, and in critical works. Students will be given a chance to identify various techniques used in short stories—monologues, soliloquy, dialogue, and the use of first and

third person narrators. We will organize speech choirs. Students will select passages from interesting episodes in stories, which will be compiled; and those who choose the same incidents will read them together. The class will keep a dated Literary Notebook with comments about the narratives read. To start the notebook, students will answer questions such as: What do you look for in a good narrative? Responses should include things we have covered about the form of the short story, the content of stories read, and comments about the authors' techniques. They will rewrite stories from another point of view, write their own endings for stories, or change the action in scenes. An example of changing the point of view might be telling "Impulse" from the wife's or the friend's point of view. We will plan to hold a mock trial. They will search for other stories by Aiken and compare technique. A class anthology can be made of the best stories read.

### ***A Suggested List of Short Stories***

1. "Love" by Jesse Stuart
2. "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allen Poe
3. "Barn-Burning" by William Faulkner
4. "The Sniper" by Liam O'Flaherty
5. "The Answer" by Okley Wylie
6. The Necklace by Guy de Maupassant
7. " A Time of Learning" by Jessamyn West
8. "The Rocking Horse Winner" by D.H. Lawrence
9. "After Twenty Years" by O. Henry
10. "Snake Dance" by Carey Ford

### *A Suggested List of Novels*

1. *Little Women* . Louisa May Alcott
2. *The Story of My Life* . Helen Keller
3. *One Step Apart* . Joan Oppenheimer
4. *Swiss Family Robinson* . Johanne Wyss
5. *Roll of Thunder— Hear My Cry* . Mildred Taylor
6. *The Light in the Forest* . Conrad Richter
7. *The Faraway Lurs* . Harry Behn
8. *Animal Farm* . George Orwell
9. *The Yearling* . Majorie K. Rawling
10. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Harper Lee

## **A Suggested List of Narrative Poems**

1. "Creation"
2. "The Highwayman"
3. "Barbara Allen"
4. "The Pardoner's Tale"
5. "Casey at the Bat"
6. "Hiawatha"
7. "Richard Corey"
8. "Mending Wall"
9. "Silas Marner"
10. "The Shooting of Dan McGrew"

## **Notes**

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1. Robert Murray Davis, *The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1969), p. 304

## **A Bibliography for Teachers**

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Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

(Chapters I, VI, VII, VIII most helpful for this unit.)

Brooks, Cleanth and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Fiction* . New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. 1959.

(Provides a lot of information about plot, characters, and theme present in short stories by certain authors.)

Calderwood, James L.. et al. *Perspectives on Poetry* . New York. Oxford University Press, 1968.

———. *Perspectives on Fiction* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Colwell, C. Carter. *A Student's Guide to Literature* . New York: Washington Square Press, 1968.

Davies, Robert Murray. *The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism* . Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall. 1969.

(Excellent essays on the novel, especially Mark Schorer's "Technique as Discovery.")

Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel* . New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1927.

(Even though the book isn't very recent, Forster's views about the importance and function of the story and his examples of people in fiction as works of art make for interesting reading.)

Friedman, Alan. *The Turn of the Novel* . London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

(Discusses the openness and endlessness of the novel, with an interesting chapter explaining stream of consciousness.)

Miller, J. Hillis. *Aspects of Narrative* . New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.

(Gives insight into what constitutes narrative.)

Scholes, Robert. *Approaches to the Novel* . Scranton: Chandler Press, 1961.

(Many ways are given for presenting the novel.)

Wheelock, John Hall. *What is Poetry* . New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1963.

(An explanation of poetry and how to get delight from reading it.)

## A Bibliography for Students

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1. *Little Women* . Louise May Alcott.  
(An account of girls growing up in a remote place and time.)
2. *The Story of My Life* . Helen Keller.  
(The life story of a blind girl coping with life and becoming an independent person.)
3. *One Step Apart* . Joan Oppenheimer.  
(The problems of divorced parents and step-children.)
4. *Swiss Family Robinson* . Johanne Wyss.  
(The struggles of a shipwrecked family with the wilderness and wild beasts for survival.)
5. *Roll of Thunder—Hear My Cry* . Mildred Taylor.



- (A young girl's account of how she and her family faced the depression years.)
6. *The Light in the Forest* . Conrad Richter.  
(A young boy's attempt to define family relationship. In spite of his youth, he uses good judgment and mature emotion.)
7. *The Faraway Lurs* . Harry Behn.  
(An innocent love is thwarted by hatred and ignorance; it may be compared to *Romeo and Juliet* or *West Side Story* .)
8. *Animal Farm* . George Orwell.  
(An allegorical novel condemning the abuse of power in any government.)
9. *Jane Eyre* . Charlotte Bronte.  
(A suspense narrative about a young girl's first romance.)
10. *To Kill a Mockingbird* . Harper Lee.  
(An account of the problems one might encounter growing up in a community rife with hatred and ignorance.)
11. *The Yearling* . Majorie Kinnan Rawlings  
(A young boy's love for a young deer.)
12. *Short Story Masterpieces* . Edited by Robert Penn Warren and Albert Erskine.  
(Twenty-four printings.)
13. *Great American Short Stories* . Edited by Wallace and Mary Stegner.  
(Short stories by many famous authors.)
14. *Tales in Verse* . Edited by Dr. Lewis G. Sterner and Dr. Marcus Konick.  
(A selected list of narrative poems.)

## Materials for Classroom Use

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1. *Short Story Masterpieces* . Class text.
2. *The Pearl* . John Steinbeck. Class text.
3. *Three Narrative Poems* . George A. Watrous. Class text.
4. Two Recorded Lectures. Recordings: “The Enjoyment of Fiction” and “The Enjoyment of Poetry.”
5. “The Pearl”, the film (if it can be acquired).
6. Bulletin board for displays; pictures on the walls pertaining to scenes and characters; tape recorder; record player and other useful audio-visual materials.

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