



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2002 Volume IV: The Craft of Writing

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## **Writers as Artists, Artists as Writers; Response to Literature and Visual Arts**

Curriculum Unit 02.04.06  
by Sean Griffin

### **Introduction**

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Being an English teacher at an arts magnet school has made me become more appreciative of the benefits of using art in the academic classroom. Having recently moved into a brand new, state-of-the-art facility, the teachers and students of Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School have begun anew their relationship with the arts in the classroom. Students are encouraged to express themselves through the arts in all of their classrooms. Both students and teachers come in contact with professional artists in six areas; visual arts, theater, dance, music, creative writing and photography. Within a month of moving into the new facility the walls of the school were decorated with various pieces of artwork the students had created in preparation for the annual “As Far as the Eye Can See” student art opening. It was clear from those first months at the new facility that the students and teachers at Betsy Ross had renewed their dedication to the arts. The school has also renewed its partnerships and affiliations with the city’s cultural and artistic nerve centers; the Neighborhood School of Music, The Shubert Theater, Long Wharf Theater and the Yale Center for British Art. Academic teachers are encouraged to interact with the arts and artists in the school as we develop and work on our curriculums for the classrooms. English classes on grammar become exciting and intriguing when we add colors or illustrations to a poster on adverbs. Sentence diagrams come to life when color is added to them. All the academic lessons take on a new life and aspect when art is introduced into the lesson. Students’ differing learning abilities are reached on a more widespread basis through the arts. Art makes all subjects interesting and exciting. Art touches us all in different ways and invites all students to explore the academics in a different and more personal way.

In this unit I will be focusing on visual art and its connection with personal written expression. Creative writing and the visual arts are naturally linked in their ability to bring out personal qualities in the reader or the viewer. An interpretation of a work of art is different to each person who observes a painting just as the interpretation of or interaction with the written word can be a very personal and individual experience. Numerous authors are also painters or illustrators. William Blake’s engravings are artistic masterpieces. Edgar Allan Poe did sketches of himself and of loved ones. Alexander Pushkin regularly garnished his work with doodles, sketches and comical self-portraits. The list goes on and on: O. Henry, Winston Churchill, Mikhail Lermontov, John Ruskin, D.H. Lawrence, the Bronte sisters, Henry Miller, E.E. Cummings, Hermann Hesse and James Thurber were all both writers and authors to a certain degree.

Students will begin this unit in the Yale Center for British Art, where they will be led through and encouraged to interpret artwork in the museum. Using a method of interpretation introduced to New Haven teachers in a workshop given by New York's Museum of Modern Art, students will be encouraged to voice their own interpretations of the artwork as a class. On their third visit to the museum (the program Betsy Ross is involved in with the museum is divided into three visits yearly) students will be given clipboards to take notes on and will be encouraged to take notes on their own and their classmates' observations in the museum. The knowledge and comfort established orally in the museum will then be applied to written work back in the classroom. Students will then be introduced to a writer/artist through classroom reading. Students will be asked to mimic the writer/artist in both the written and visual art. Finally students will be encouraged to utilize the art facilities available to them at Betsy Ross in order to create their own artwork for oral and written interpretation by their classmates.

## Purpose

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My aim in this unit is to unite and bring out both the artist and writer in my students. I believe that all of us have the potential to be both writers and artists in our own way. Who among us has not spent time doodling pictures of our thoughts on a lazy summer afternoon, or spent time drawing pictures on notes during a class in which our attention had slipped away? What child doesn't jump at the chance to draw when a box of crayons and paper is taken out of the bottom of a drawer? Visual art is a natural communicator that we have all dabbled in at one time or another. The written word is also a medium we all utilize to reach other and ourselves. Who among us has not tried their hand at poetry or written in a diary or journal, or simply written a letter? A child learning the ABCs is fascinated at his/her ability to communicate an idea through words to an adult. We all have the desire to communicate our thoughts and ideas through both art and the written word. I want to help students to tap into this innate desire to communicate and share of themselves through their writing and art. I want students to examine others who have communicated through art and creative writing, and for students to learn through these people who both wrote and drew or painted. There are a wide variety of artists to examine, all of them with differing abilities and desires in their art and all of them with different focuses and goals. But all of them did find their artwork, like their writing, a way of communicating with themselves and/or with their world. While my unit here will focus more on Thurber and Poe than any of the other artists mentioned above, the techniques and strategies to be outlined can easily be adapted to fit any of these or other individuals. In fact, the degree of difficulty in performing some of the tasks I will propose could also be altered based upon the artists focused on. My Thurber/Poe focus in these pages will be aimed at seventh and/or eighth graders.

## Objectives

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I really want my students to be able to feel comfortable viewing and talking about art in museums and in the classroom. I want my students to feel confident in their interpretations and to be able to express them freely. I also want my students to make connections between visual art and the written word. By studying writers who are also artists, I hope to remind students that we are all writers and artists to some extent. I hope by helping

students study and imitate different styles of writing and art that they will be able to make discoveries about themselves through creative arts.

After viewing the museum artwork, students will be able to:

- express their interpretations of the work both orally and written;
- use details from a piece of art to create their own creative setting to match the work;
- present their interpretations to their peers.

After being introduced to the stories of James Thurber and other writer/artists students will be able to:

- write a Thurber fable;
- create a Thurber illustration for their fable;
- express their interpretations of classmates work

After being introduced to the stories and poems of Edgar Allen Poe students will be able to:

- write a Poe story based on the readings
- create a Poe illustration based on the work of Poe
- express their interpretations of classmates' work

At the end of the unit students will be asked to:

- Create a self-portrait
- Write a short autobiographical essay to accompany the portrait

## Standards

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The objectives mentioned above are also geared towards both state and city standards for the language arts and art. The state of Connecticut's standards are listed on the Education Department web site. Some of the standards that apply are listed below.

### Connecticut's Common Core of Learning Program Goals

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When done with this unit students will have achieved the following Connecticut's Common Core of Learning program goals for Language Arts:

- create works using the language arts in visual, oral and written texts;
- read, write, speak, listen and view to construct meaning of written, visual and oral texts;
- choose and apply strategies that enhance the fluent and proficient use of the language arts;
- read with understanding and respond thoughtfully to a variety of texts.

When done with this unit, students will have achieved the following Connecticut's Common Core of Learning program goals for the arts:

- create (imagine, experiment, plan, make, evaluate, refine and present/exhibit) art works that express concepts, ideas and feelings in each art form;
- respond (select, experience, describe, analyze, interpret and evaluate) with understanding to diverse art works and performances in each art form;
- understand the connections among the arts, other disciplines and daily life.

## New Haven Public Schools Academic Performance Standards

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Students will also achieve the following goals from the New Haven Public Schools Academic Performance standards for eighth grade Language Arts:

Students will demonstrate strategic reading skills before, during and after reading. Students will demonstrate strategic writing behaviors. Students will participate in a wide variety of writing experiences.

### The Museum Visit

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Students begin this unit with a visit to an art gallery or museum. Students in New Haven are fortunate to have several excellent museums and galleries to choose from right in their neighborhood. This unit begins at the Yale Center for British Art. This museum holds the largest collection of British art outside of Great Britain. Artists from the 16th Century on are represented in the museum, which includes fine examples of a variety work from a large spectrum of British artists. Both permanent and changing exhibitions combined with lectures, gallery talks, tours, films and concerts make the museum one of the focal points of education in the New Haven area.

The museum works closely with area schools and for several years has welcomed Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School students to the center. Students are led through the museums by teachers and docents and are encouraged to examine and interpret the art. While the Yale Center for British Art is the starting point of my unit, any museum or gallery will do just fine for the start of the unit. Students just need a place to go, look at and talk about art.

### The Writer as Artist

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The number of writers who were also visual artists is astounding when looked at closely. Perhaps it is because of their great fame with the written word that we tend to overlook these authors' equally talented artistic side. We do not think of William Faulkner, D.H. Lawrence or Oscar Wilde as sweeping a paintbrush against canvas rather than taking a pen to paper. When we think of the poems of William Blake or the incredibly successful life Winston Churchill lived as a statesman and author, rarely do most of us think of their artistic pursuits as among their strong points. But there is little doubt in my mind that all of these authors and dozens of others like them would at least give a nod to the importance that art played in their lives. So is there a connection between the writer and the artist that serves as a natural bridge? Is there a reason that the successful author is also an accomplished artist? Kathleen G. Hjerter ponders the connection in the introduction to her collection of works from many writer/artists, *Doubly Gifted: The Author as Visual Artist*:

Artworks created in the minds that excel in literature sometimes hold more of the excess of their creators' energies than do their words. Freed from the stringent restraints of traditional art training and demands of the

current artistic schools, authors who eschew the limits of the language of their trade for brief moment have discovered a weightlessness when yielding a paintbrush that they found intoxicating. <sup>1</sup>

So perhaps there is something that authors were able to relate in painting or drawing that they could not reach through their writings. Perhaps all of us are better able to communicate through both language and art than we are with one rather than the other. I hope that my students will be able to as well.

One of the things that is wonderful about this unit is its adaptability. This unit can be taught to first graders or it can be taught to twelfth graders. All any teacher has to do in order to adapt the unit is to switch around the authors being studied in the classroom. The range, scope, tones and focus of all of the writer/artists are so different that different grade levels naturally fit into various authors.

Writer/artists such as Shel Silverstein or Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr Seuss) provide light, fun poetry and stories that younger children can easily work with. Both authors began their careers as cartoonists and became children's book writers later in their lives. Silverstein wrote for newspapers and magazines before becoming a writer of children's books. Silverstein's lighthearted poetry and comical sketches, which fill books such as *Falling Up* or *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, are wonderful resources for allowing children to both write and draw. Like Silverstein's books, Dr. Seuss' books are a wonderful source for allowing students to make their own connections between writing and art just as these authors did.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* seems to beg the reader to examine the connections and discoveries made between the written word and the visual arts. In a book adorned with more than forty watercolors, de Saint-Exupéry challenges children and adults to look at the world and themselves a little differently;

My picture was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. But since the grown ups were not able to understand it, I made another drawing: I drew the inside of the boa constrictor, so that the grown ups could see it clearly. They always need to have things explained. <sup>2</sup>

Throughout the book de Saint-Exupéry plays with the connections between academics, writing, drawing, communication and life.

The artwork and writings of Winston Churchill would serve as subject matter for a more mature classroom. The statesman, who is so famous for his iron-willed leadership during WWII, was also an accomplished writer and artist. In his lifetime Churchill wrote forty-four books, received the Nobel Prize for literature and painted over five hundred paintings.<sup>3</sup> His childhood correspondences are filled with sketches and cartoon like figures that contrast greatly with his beautifully painted landscapes that currently adorn art museums throughout the world. The statesman found that his painting provided him with "relaxation and great solace in times of war and peace all over the world."<sup>4</sup>

John Ruskin's interpretation and criticisms of art made him a recognized literary voice during the Victorian era. His fascination with and study of architecture during the 1850s led him to become a leading advocate of Gothic architecture and reform of modern society. He also "never left home without a sketchbook."<sup>5</sup> His sketches of various architectural intricacies make him a writer/artist worthy of in depth study.

There are a number of writer/artists whose manuscripts are covered with sketches and cartoons that show talent in the visual arts as well as a tendency to portray themselves in art. Alexander Pushkin, the father of Russian poetry, regularly sketched subjects on his manuscripts. One can trace his development through

examination of his many self-portraits that adorn his work. Kahlil Gibran's famous self-portrait adorns the cover of his 1923 book, *The Prophet*. E.E. Cummings, Tennessee Williams, Edgar Allen Poe and Dylan Thomas also produced self-portraits.

There are also artists who could be studied for their writing. Vincent Van Gogh's letters to his brother provide an interesting narrative into the artist's life. Journals and pieces written by famed artists such as Picasso, Degas, Chagall and O'Keefe serve as reminders of the connection between art and the written word.

Other examples of writers as artists and artists as writers, too numerous to examine here, can be found quite easily. Writer/artists more appropriate for the age level; grade level or academic focus can be substituted in the unit to fit teachers' academic needs.

### **Thurber and Poe**

There are several reasons why I have chosen James Thurber and Edgar Allan Poe as the writer/artists with whom I will conduct the lessons of the unit. First, both Poe and Thurber wrote material that I feel fits into the eighth grade curriculum well. Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" is one of many great stories included in our eighth grade textbooks, *The Language of Literature*. Both authors also did self-portraits. This was important to me as students will be asked to produce self-portraits at the end of this unit.

Thurber and Poe had some common characteristics that might play out well in classroom discussions of the writer/artists. Both men came from a journalistic background. Both did freelance writing early in their careers and both went on to become editors at either magazine or newspaper publishers. Both men wrote detective stories, which would serve as another means of studying the writers in comparison.

Contrast was also important to me. Thurber and Poe's written works are overall quite different. Thurber is a light-hearted writer who loved to poke fun at society and often wrote stories "tongue in cheek." Poe on the other hand often writes of the darker side of the human condition. His short stories and poems are often sad and mournful, or, as with "The Tell-Tale-Heart" terrifying. Their art also reflects this difference in the writers' work. Like his writing, Thurber's artwork is light hearted and comical. His pictures are simple sketches that reflect the lightheartedness of his prose. Poe's sketches, on the other hand, seem to epitomize the author's tortured soul. (See Hjerter's *Doubly Gifted: The Author as Visual Artist* .) Poe's dark eyes stare out from a self-portrait that reveals the uneasiness of the writer's soul.

## **Part I. Museum Lessons**

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The first part of the unit takes place in the museum. The partnership that the Yale British Arts Center has with Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School gives us the chance to visit the museum with the same class for three trips during the school year. Scheduling of the trips depends on a lot of factors, but we try to schedule the trips fairly closely together so as to allow students to get comfortable with the museum, the artwork and their own interpretations of the artwork.

### **A Note on the Viewing Method**

Students are led through their museum visits in a method of open discussion introduced to New Haven

teachers through the Yale British Art Museum and New York's Museum of Modern Art. The teacher's role in the discussion of the paintings is really that of a middleman; the teacher helps the students to respond and discuss their observations without any interference. By beginning with the phrase "What do you see here?" teachers are inviting students to make their own observations and draw their own conclusions based on their own viewing. Basically all of the students have some feeling or point of view about what they are observing. It is simply the teacher's role to help them communicate what they feel, think or see. Simply repetition, paraphrasing and questioning allows teachers to do what they naturally do in class on a daily basis; strive to help students realize and share their own potential and abilities that make them individuals. There will be more said on the method in the first lesson plan presented later in the unit.

## **Objectives**

The objective of the museum visits is to introduce students to the museum atmosphere, encourage them to make their own oral and written interpretations of the work, and build a comfort level in the interpretation of visual art.

## **Procedure**

During the first day visit to the museum one of my main objectives is to get the students to understand what is expected of them in the museum (behaviorally). Some of my students have never been to a museum, so part of the learning here is on the museum atmosphere. Students need to know to keep their voices down. They need to know that the artwork and the walls are not to be touched. They are given a brief overview of the museum, what is on which floor, who is in charge, who the security guards are and why they are there. They need to know that gum chewing and eating or drinking are absolutely out of the question. Sometimes they are introduced to the director or curator of the museum and they are welcomed. Students are also introduced to their first piece of artwork during the first museum visit. Students sit in front of the work, observe quietly for a few minutes and then are asked to share their feelings on the work. I ask probing questions to get the students to share their thoughts; what do you see? What makes you say that? Does anyone see anything else? What else do you see? What is this? What do you think this is? Why? Does anyone else see that? Does anyone else see anything different? All the students' comments are welcomed and encouraged. No answer is wrong and no answer or interpretation is any better or worse than any other. When we get back to the classroom I take photocopies of slides of the artwork (provided by the museum), frame them on construction paper and hang them on the wall. We talk about the artwork again in the class.

The second scheduled museum visit goes very much like the first one. Students are just given brief reminders of museum etiquette and expectations before leaving the bus to go into the museum. During the second visit we are able to see three or four paintings and the oral interpretation of the artwork proceeds as it did on the first day. When we return to the classroom, I again display the photocopies on the wall of our classroom. Students are encouraged to talk about the work and add anything that was not touched on in the museum.

The third visit to the museum proceeds in the same manner as the first and second visits with students interpreting artwork and voicing their opinions of several aspects of the work, except that on the third visit, when they are responding to the last painting, students are given clipboards with paper and pencils and asked to take notes on their feelings and interpretations of the artwork. The last sets of paintings that we view are portraits. We hold off on the discussion of the last painting. When we return to the classroom all of the paintings that we examined during this visit are again posted on the wall of the classroom. Unlike the conclusions of the other museum visits, this time I ask students to write about their portrait based on the interpretations that they noted in the museum. They are to become that person in the portrait they chose. We



review first-person point of view and review the portraits that we viewed. Students are asked to imagine what kind of person was in the portrait and write a first person introduction of one of the paintings to share with the class. This writing takes place in their journals and should be about one page. Students may need to finish their monologues at home.

When students have completed their creative monologues, I ask them to share their work with the class. Students stand next to the artwork in the classroom and read their interpretations to their classmates.

### **A Note on the Writing Process**

For a student to truly understand how to write and how to develop his/her own writing style he/she must go through the process of writing. Whenever my students are asked to write something they must go through several steps before getting to a first draft. The production of any piece of writing goes through several stages or steps;

*Brainstorming* : Usually done as a class, brainstorming takes place when we pool our ideas on a topic. Usually I will have a student write the ideas on the board while the others share their ideas.

*Quick Write* : This is when I give the students an idea, perhaps one that we came up with in brainstorming and ask them to write a few quick sentences about the idea. The students are thinking a little bit deeper about their topics at this point.

*Graphic Organizer* : Once we know what our focus will be, a graphic organizer helps us to get more details organized before we begin to create a draft.

*Teacher rubric* : These are my instructions. Students should always be given a rubric before they begin writing a piece. A rubric gives clear instructions to the students as to what you, the teacher, expect from the students.

*First draft* : Students create their first draft or “sloppy copy.” Students need to know that a first draft is for editing.

*Peer edit* : Students check each other’s work. Often the students need to know exactly what they are expected to check, i.e., grammar or content or both. One or two students may check a single copy.

*Second draft* : Students rewrite their first drafts based on the input their classmates have given them.

*Teacher edit* : After the second draft is written, the teacher makes corrections to the draft and gives it back to the student.

*Final draft*: The students’ final publishable copy.

While I do try to follow all of these steps in the writing process, the one exception to this procedure is journal writing. I use the journals for a sort of expanded quick write. My focus in the journal writing is not on grammar and punctuation, but on content. Journal writing is a good way to let students get their feelings and ideas down without thinking too, too much. As a writer, I think that this type of exercise is also important for the development of a student’s writing. Journal writing is not as complex as the writing of essays or publishable material, but is without a doubt a worthwhile endeavor. Sometimes parts of the writing process will be used in journal writing (brainstorming, quick write) but rarely are all the steps followed in this type of writing. In this

unit, the museum monologues and the Thurber fables will be written in journals. The Poe tale and the autobiographical piece at the end of the unit will follow the writing process, although the details of the process will be omitted in the writing of the unit.

### **Student Assessment**

Students will be told before the writing begins that they will be given a grade for their work. It will not be graded for grammar and/or spelling mistakes. In fact, I will not collect the work, but they will be graded on the basis of the creative story rubric that will be given to them at the beginning of the writing section of the third visit. The criteria for the evaluation will be based on five points:

1. Student's monologue displays his/her own interpretation of the work.
2. Student's monologue displays his/her eye for detail in the work.
3. Student uses sensory details in monologue
4. Student shares work with class
5. Student welcomes discussion/interpretation from classmates.

Students will be encouraged to share in their interpretations of both the artwork and the written work of their classmates in an open forum after everyone has read their individual pieces.

## **Part II Thurber and Poe**

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The second part of my unit takes place in the classroom where students are encouraged to read several Thurber fables and examine several of his illustrations. I will be inviting students to interpret Thurber's work both orally and in written format. Thurber's rendition of Poe's "The Raven" will serve as a transition for the students to examine Poe's work and interpret his writing.

### **Objective**

This section of the unit is where I expect students to interpret the artwork and the written work of Thurber. Students will respond to Thurber's characters orally and in written format and will be asked to make up their own "Thurber fable" based on several Thurber fables and illustrations, which we will look at in class. Later students will look at Poe as an artist and writer and create their own "Poe story" and illustration.

## Procedure

We begin section two by reading several of Thurber's illustrated fables. First we will review what a fable is, share one or two traditional fables and then discuss Thurber's fables. Each group will be given one fable and illustration to share with the class. I use Thurber's "The Tortoise and the Hair," "The Little Girl and the Wolf," and "The Fairly Intelligent Fly" because they are based on fairy tales that most of the children know and they have good examples of what I call the "Thurber Twist" or a surprise ending, Thurber style. These comical fables are short, easy to read and are simply illustrated. See Thurber's *Fables for our Time* for a host of illustrated tales that can be used in this section. After each group has shared the fable we will discuss as a class the Thurber fable. During class discussions I will ask students to make connections between the illustrations and the work, to draw conclusions about the author based on the fables and to summarize what they think a Thurber fable is. Students will work in groups to discuss Thurber's illustrations and will be given a picture that the author has drawn to accompany his fables. Students in each group will be asked to create a fable based on the illustrations. Groups will utilize the Thurber Fable Graphic Organizer, which I will provide to each group. A group of four or five students will have the same illustration, and come up with a group fable. Students will share their group members' interpretation of the work with the rest of the class. For homework each individual will have his/her own fable title to rewrite and to share with the class.

Once the students have all shared their Thurber fables and illustrations, the class will be introduced to two of Thurber's illustrated poems. Several Thurber collections have copies of poems that the author illustrated. (See *Fables for Our Time*, *The Thurber Carnival* or *Collecting Himself*.) We will begin this section of the unit with a reading of A.E. Housman's "Oh When I Was...." This is one of many poems that Thurber illustrated. It is a short, two-stanza poem that will be easy for the students to grasp and fun to illustrate. After reading the poem a couple of times, I will ask students to imagine how Thurber might have illustrated the two stanzas based on what they know of Thurber by now. We will spend a class period illustrating the poem, sharing our illustrations and finally looking at Thurber's comical illustration of the poem. Next we will read the poem "The Raven" several times in class and once again illustrate the poem. Since this poem is considerably longer than the Housman poem, I will allow students to choose one or two stanzas to illustrate rather than illustrate every stanza in the poem. Once again we will share our illustrations and then share Thurber's rendition. This will serve as a connection into Poe.

## Student Assessment-Thurber Section

Students will be assessed on both individual and group work at the end of this session. The rubric used for scoring will be given to students before the session begins and will enable students to successfully complete the assignment. Among other points, students will be assessed on:

- Student participated in-group discussion on the fable/illustration.
- Student shared group findings with class.
- Student completed a Thurber fable based on an assigned fable
- Student added an illustration to his/her work.
- Student's work was consistent with style and tone of other Thurber fables.

The Poe section of the unit will center on the reading of “The Tell-Tale-Heart.” Many of my students love this story. It is an exciting, suspenseful and scary story that typifies much of Poe’s work in its look into the darker side of human nature. Students will be given a brief introduction to Poe and his life and then will read the short story as a class. After the reading students will discuss the difference in writing styles that Poe and Thurber have. We will use a Venn diagram to highlight the differences between the authors’ writing styles. I expect the students to be able to point out that Thurber’s writing is often comical as opposed to Poe’s serious, often dark, writing style. Thurber is sarcastic; Poe is glum. Thurber is funny; Poe sometimes scary. Then we begin to brainstorm titles of what might be a “Poe story.” Students will choose a title and do a quick write what might be the plot of the story.

As we prepare to write our own “Poe stories” students will be reminded of the elements of a short story (setting, character, plot, rising action, climax, resolution) and will be asked to identify the elements in “The Tell-Tale-Heart.” In order to help them get started with their stories a graphic organizer will be provided. Students will complete work on their Poe stories in accordance with the writing process guidelines set down earlier in the unit. Upon completion of the story the students will be asked to illustrate their stories, not as Thurber would have, but rather as they imagine Poe might illustrate the work himself. Students will be asked to share both their creative “Poe Stories” and their illustrations accompanying the story.

### **Student Assessment-Poe Section**

Students will be assessed on individual work at the end of this session. The rubric used for scoring will be given to students before the session begins and will enable students to successfully complete the assignment. Among other points, students will be assessed on:

Student participated in discussion on “The Tell-Tale Heart.”

Student filled out short story organizer on “The Tell-Tale Heart.”

Student completed a Poe story based on an organizer

Student added an illustration to his/her work.

Student’s work was consistent with style and tone of “The Tell-Tale-Heart.”

## Part III- Self Portraits

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The final section of this unit is meant to bring the unit together through the utilization of the art classroom. While Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School provides an excellent setting for this part of the unit, it is not totally necessary to use an art classroom to complete the unit. All you need is the supplies; some paper, paints, chalk, charcoal, pastels, pencil and whatever else you think your students might need to create their self-portraits. If there is an art teacher in your school willing to help you with the final section of the unit it will surely be an asset. This section of the unit should be fun for the teachers and students and hopefully will help students to make some discoveries about themselves.

### Objective

In this section of the unit I want my students to be able to create a self-portrait and an autobiographical essay to accompany the piece. I want them to draw some conclusions by looking at the self-portraits of both Thurber and Poe and to make connections between the art and the writing that these artists produce. I hope that my students will once again be able to see something of themselves and make connections between their writing and their self-portraits.

### Procedure

We begin this section of the unit by examining some self-portraits as a class. We will spend a class period simply looking at self-portraits and making observations and drawing inferences as to what we see. We will look at self-portraits of artists such as Van Gogh and Picasso as well as writers such as Dylan Thomas, Tennessee Williams and others. Finally we will look at the self-portraits of James Thurber and Edgar Allen Poe. Students will once again reveal what they know about the author/writers and I will ask one student to come up, hold up the portrait and say a few words as if he were that author. There is always at least one student ready to take a chance. Once the student has said his piece on Thurber, Poe or any of the other artists, I will explain to them our goals. We will create our own portraits and write a brief autobiographical piece on ourselves. The piece will be set in the future, as if the author/artist's life has been a long and prosperous one.

Basically students need the tools for this part of the project and then they will be on their own. First students need to decide what medium they will use (watercolor, pencil, etc.). Immediately they are putting a part of themselves into the work. Their choices will eventually tell something about themselves. The students will also need mirrors. Ask students to do a really rough draft first before beginning on the self-portraits. They can simply use pencil or crayon on smaller paper for their rough draft, but they do need to have an idea of where they are headed with the self-portraits. Once they've done their rough drafts, they should be given the materials they need and set to work.

The second section of this part of the lesson, the autobiographical essay, can be taking place simultaneously if the art section is done in an art classroom. Students can brainstorm titles for their essays, quick write a few important points, and then utilize the graphic organizer and teacher rubric to complete the assignment. Drafts, peer editing and teacher editing as mentioned before should be utilized on these essays.

Final copies of the essay can be typed and stuck to the back of the self-portraits. Students should share their work with the class and final products should be displayed in the classroom.

## Sample Lesson Plans

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### From Section 1-The Museum Visits (third of three visits)

This lesson plan is for the third of three museum visits the students will be undertaking. As mentioned in the introduction, these visits that my class takes are to the Yale Center for British Art, but any museum visit will work just as well. In the third visit my students will be focusing on portraits in preparation for the monologues that they will create and also to give them a glimpse at portraits, which will play a major role in the completion of the unit with the creation of students' self-portraits at the end of the unit.

#### *Objectives*

- Students will review museum rules and etiquette
- Students will observe several paintings in the museum
- Students will share observations and ideas on paintings through oral discussion
- Students will use graphic organizer to take notes on one portrait
- Students will write a monologue in their journal from the point of view of one of the painted characters

#### *Initiation*

In the classroom students are asked who remembers the rules for going to the museum. As this is the third trip to the museum, many of the students should remember rules and procedures from previous trips. It will take five to ten minutes for the students to run through the rules; no chewing gum, no touching the walls, no leaning on the walls, no touching the paintings, no running in the museum, use museum voices in the museum, be polite, raise your hand, etc.

#### *Procedure*

Once at the museum, students hang up their jackets, reassemble and head up to one of the paintings. On the third visit our focus will be portraits. Students will sit in front of a painting, observe silently for about a minute and then the teacher will initiate the discussion.

As mentioned earlier in the unit the teacher plays the role of mediator or moderator during the museum visits. To get the discussion rolling, the teacher simply asks, "What's going on in this painting?" The conversation begins and the teacher acts as mediator, repeating, paraphrasing and asking the students more questions that allow the students to look closer and think more deeply. "What makes you say that?" "What else do you notice?" "Does anyone see anything else?" are all questions that the teacher will ask to keep the conversation on the art going amongst the children. The teacher concludes the session by summarizing the observations made by the students.

Finally students are asked to utilize the “Portrait Monologue” graphic organizer in order to take notes for the monologues that they will create in their journals and share with the class.

When students return to the classroom they are reminded of the portraits that they observed and encouraged to discuss them as a class. Students are to take the notes they created in the museum and write a journal entry in first person format to answer the question, “Who are you and what’s your story?”

Students can write their monologues for homework or in class. They need to stand and share their work with the class. Student Assessment Rubric

### Museum Creative Monologues

The creative monologues you write based on paintings viewed in the Yale Center for British Art will be assessed on five points. Each category is worth two points. The total points times ten gives you your score.

#### Self Teacher

1. Student’s monologue displays his/her own interpretation of the work
2. Student’s monologue displays his/her own eye for detail
3. Student relies on sensory detail to frame images in monologue
4. Student shares work with class
5. Student welcomes discussion/interpretation, contributes to discussion

Total Points

X 10= Score

### Sample Lesson From Section 2- Thurber Fables

This lesson is located in section two of the unit. Students are being asked to create both a Thurber fable and a Poe story in section two. This lesson occurs right at the beginning of the section when the class has been introduced to Thurber.

#### *Objectives*

Students will review fables.

Students will be introduced to Thurber fables.

Utilizing graphic organizers, students will work in groups to create and present an oral Thurber fable.

Students will rewrite a well-known fable in the style of James Thurber.

Students will illustrate their fables.

Students will share fables with the class.

## *Initiation*

Quick write-students are asked to do a “quick write” on fables. They are given about two minutes to write, then the class shares ideas on what a fable is. One student might come to the board in order to jot down ideas being shared by the class. After we have been reminded what a fable is, the students are asked to recall some fables. Some students might remember a fable that they can share with the class. The teacher should prepare one or two short fables as well.

## *Procedure*

Once the students have recalled the fable, students are split into groups and assigned fables by James Thurber to share with the class. One at a time the groups share their assigned fables. Once all the fables have been shared we discuss as a class what makes a Thurber fable different from others. Students will say things like they are funny, that they have a unexpected ending and things like that. Once we have shared our ideas each group is given the Thurber Fable Organizer. The group is asked to go over their fable and fill in the graphic organizer. After about ten minutes the class shares its findings by group.

Finally, students are asked to think of a fable that they know. If they cannot think of one, the teacher should be prepared to assign one. Once the student knows his/her fable he/she is given the Thurber Fable graphic organizer. Students are told that they will rewrite their fable as if it was a Thuber fable. This project is to be done in their journals and a Thurber type of simple illustration should accompany each fable. When students finish they should share their fables with the class.

## Thurber Fable Organizer

Title of Fable:

Characters in Fable:

Basic (two or three sentence) description of plot:

Thurber “Twist”:

Moral of Fable

Thurber Fable

Assessment Rubric

After completing the Thurber fable, which you have been working on with your group, you will be assessed on your individual fable based on the following criteria:

Self Teacher

1. Student completed a Thurber fable based on another fable
2. Student participated in-group discussion on the fables
3. Student added a Thurber illustration to his/her work



4. Student shared work with class

5. Student's work was consistent with style and tone of other Thurber fables

Total Points

X 10= Score

Sample lesson plan from section three- Self Portraits

This final lesson plan is from the third section of the unit when students are asked to create a self-portrait and an autobiographical essay to go with the artwork. Ideally these lessons are done in an art room with the assistance of an art teacher, but it is not vital that the lessons are developed in that way. If the students are working with an art teacher, the language arts teacher can get the students started on their autobiographical essays.

### *Objectives*

Students will recall what "autobiography" is

Students will recall what a "time line" is

Students will help create a class time line

Students will create their own time lines and use as an organizer for their autobiographical essays

### *Initiation*

I draw a time line on the board and ask students who can identify the line. Eighth graders have been introduced to time lines before so there should be a response from the students. I begin to ask students questions that they will more than likely have the same answers for, i.e. "What year were you born?" "When will you graduate from middle school? High school? College?" At this point we begin to fill in the time line, looking ahead into the future for the students. After a few minutes we will have a "class time line" on the board. This is the example for the students.

### *Procedure*

At this point students are given paper to make their own time lines. They will begin the same as the sample, but will get more creative as they peer into their futures. Allow students to fill in the time lines, reminding them to look way ahead to some of their goal and achievements as a writer/artist. These time lines will serve as graphic organizers for the students short autobiographical essay which will go on the back of their self-portraits. I will tell students the title of their essay will be, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a Writer/Artist.

Once students have finished their time lines, they can share them with the class and then begin their rough drafts at home. I give the students the "Autobiographical Essay Rubric" before they go home so that they know exactly what I expect.

## Autobiographical Essay Rubric

The autobiographical essay you write will be pasted on the back of your self-portrait that you are creating in the art class. Your essay will be assessed on five points. Each category is worth two points. The total points times ten gives you your score.

1. Student's essay begins with designated title
2. Student's first paragraph covers his/her early life
3. Student's second paragraph covers his/her academic life
4. Student's third paragraph covers future achievements
5. Student's essay is attached to portrait and shared with class

Total Points

X 10= Score

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen G. Hjerter. *Doubly Gifted: The Author as Visual Artist* , 9.

<sup>2</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,. *The Little Prince* , 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ceilia Sandys,. *The Young Churchill: The Early Years of Winston Churchill* , 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ceilia Sandys,. *The Young Churchill: The Early Years of Winston Churchill* , 141.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen G. Hjerter,. *Doubly Gifted: The Author as Visual Artist*, 12.

## Teachers' Resources

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Applebee, Arthur N., editor. *The Language of Literature* . Evanston, IL.: McDougal Little, 2001. This is a wonderful textbook, which includes a wide variety of short stories, poetry, memoirs and other works by some well-known and some not so well known authors.

Hjerter, Kathleen G. *Doubly Gifted: The Author as Visual Artist* . New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1986. Hjerter's book is a great source for this project. The book contains examples of art from scores of writer/artists.

*Narratives of African American Art and Identity : The David C. Driscoll Collection* . San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998. This is a useful

source of African American art for use in the classroom.

Sandys, Ceilia. *The Young Churchill: The Early Years of Winston Churchill* . New York: Dutton Publishing, 1995. This book is a wonderful look at early years of one of the world's most well known writer/artists.

Smith, Edward Lucie. *Lives of the Great Twentieth Century Artists*. New York: Rizzoli International, 1986. This is a collection of biographical sketches on twentieth century artists.

Thurber, James. *Collecting Himself* . New York: Harper and Row, 1989. A posthumously published collection of Thurber works.

Thurber, James. *Fables for our Time* . New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939. This book provides more than two-dozen illustrated Thurber fables along with some poems.

Thurber, James. *My Life and Hard Times* . New York: Harper and Row, 1961. A collection of autobiographical sketches from the author's life makes this illustrated volume an enjoyable read.

Thurber, James. *The Thurber Carnival* . New York: Harper and Row, 1945. A huge collection of Thurber pieces compiled from nine previously published works.

Thurber, James. *Thurber and Company* . New York: Harper and Row, 1966. More illustrated work from the Thurber collection.

Thurber, James. *Thurber on Crime* . New York: Warner Books, 1991. This book is a collection of Thurber crime pieces.

## Children's Resources

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Horne, Lois Thomasson. *Painting for Children*. New York: Reinhold Book Corp., 1968. This book is a collection of children's paintings with commentary.

*Literary Lifelines. Volumes 1-10* . Danbury: Grolier Educational Publishing, 1998. This collection provides interesting, easy to read biographies on literary figures.

O'Keefe, Georgia. *Georgia O'Keefe by Georgia O'Keefe* . New York: Viking Press, 1976. This book is a fun autobiographical look into the art and life of Georgia O'Keefe.

Raboff, Ernest. *Marc Chagall*. New York; Doubleday, 1982. This book is an easy to read biography on the life of Marc Chagall. The book gives children an interesting insight into the artist's work.

Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de , *The Little Prince*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1943. This book is a classic example of the work of a fine writer/artist.

Silverstein, Shel. *Falling Up* . New York: Harper-Collins, 1996. This book is another classic example of the work of a fine writer/artist.

Silverstein, Shel. *Where the Sidewalk Ends* . New York: Harper-Collins, 1981. Silverstein's poems and art provide hours of fun reading

Silverstein, Shel . *Light in the Attic* . New York: Harper Collins, 1981. A great collection of illustrated poetry, Silverstein's work will be enjoyed by children of all ages.

Sullivan, Charles. *Children of Promise: African American Literature and Art for Young People*. New York: Abrams, 1991. This book provides a nice collection of African American art and literature for children

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