



Yale-New Haven
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2004 Volume II: Children's Literature in the Classroom

Sacred Cows for High School Creative Writing Students

Guide for Curriculum Unit 04.02.10
by Yel Hannon Brayton

The *Sacred Cows* curriculum unit uses stories and information about animals - mainly cows and bulls - to discuss various themes that deal with human behavior and serve as inspiration for writing assignments. The unit begins with a light-hearted look at cows mirroring human foibles in the children's story *Click, Clack, Cows That Type* and several Gary Larson cartoons. It then focuses on ideas about food and eating. We will read "To Serve Man," a short story by Damon Knight, which challenges human arrogance with respect to our place in the food chain.

The unit progresses to themes that deal with hunting and survival and uses historical information about early hunter/gatherers for whom there appears to have been mutual reverence and a sense of reciprocity in sacrifice where animals were concerned. Contrasting such sensibilities, we will read another short story by Richard Connell, "The Most Dangerous Game," wherein the hunter becomes the hunted.

We explore issues of greed in viewing the film *Dances With Wolves* wherein a viable food source - the buffalo - is on the brink of extinction because of the fur trade and the Sioux are equally endangered by the U.S. government. Students will also learn about the infamous massacre at Wounded Knee and the Christian/Indian hybrid religion of the Ghost Dance. Lastly, the unit ends with the children's book *The Story of Ferdinand*, a story about integrity and peace.

The reading and writing exercises and projects in this unit have been designed to make students aware of a sense of *place* in their writings and to develop situations and characters that speak to philosophical concepts of sacrifice, reverence, and renewal.

(Recommended for Creative Writing and language Arts, grades 9-12.)

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>