



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2004 Volume III: Representations of American Culture, 1760-1960: Art and Literature

Discovering American Identity through Writings and Paintings, 1800-1845

Curriculum Unit 04.03.10
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Statement of Purpose

This is an *art-and-literature* course, using pioneering methods of teaching *both* in order to make some difficult texts, and a difficult period of American history, more exciting and accessible to students who usually find this material challenging if not downright off-putting. This unit will be used in a sophomore high school class entitled “American Nation”, which covers American History and Literature from the Native Americans to the Civil War. American Nation is a team-taught double-block class with history instruction for one and one-half hours and English instruction for the same amount of time. By working together as teachers in the same classroom, the students study history and English simultaneously. For example, when Mr. Roman, the history instructor, teaches the Navaho timeline, I, as the language arts instructor, might do a story such as “It Was the Wind that Gave them Life,” an excellent Navaho creation story; or when studying the Revolutionary War the students might read, *My Brother Sam is Dead*. Team teaching is great not only for matching content across curriculum, but also for classroom management and individual instruction because two teachers are always in the classroom.

American Nation was developed at High School in the Community as a course to help beginner and intermediate students learn United States history and literature as thoroughly as possible, as well as, prepare students for the CAPT exams. After star testing this year, 75% of the sophomores in our class read at a 6th grade or below reading level. For these students to pass a testing exam which requires them to interpret, reflect, connect, and assess, a piece of literature, as the CAPT requires, they need to learn efficient reading and thinking techniques within a short time. One way to do so is to reintroduce reading as a concept, and a skill that needs to be learned again. From the first day of class I reinvent reading for my students to make literature approachable, fun, and meaningful. I do this through the development of five skills: predicting, visualizing, clarifying, summarizing, and questioning. By repeating these steps in chronological order during each reading assignment, the students should find that active reading is much different than word decoding. I have included in the appendix, (Overhead 1.0), a text-rendering worksheet I use with my students when introducing this concept.

My unit, “Discovering American Identity through Writings and Paintings, 1800-1845”, concentrates directly on the visualization skill of the five-part reading process. Even though this unit concentrates specifically on one

skill, visualization, it does not mean that the other skills will be neglected or useless. For example, one could read the title of a picture to the students before showing them the picture and ask them to predict what the picture might look like. By doing so, the students begin to create their own vision, working the gears of their imagination, and when the picture is shown they are invested in its study, at the least -- "is it like my picture or is it not?" Once the picture is displayed, the students then are set on the task of decipher meaning from the image, or reading the image.

An image is wonderful because it isolates student thinking. If a student struggles with reading, analysis becomes another hurdle to leap on an ever-ascending mountain. An image allows the student to concentrate on analysis only, for words are only needed to describe what a student is thinking, not the impetus on which to ponder. For example, a student struggling with critical analysis of a short story might be struggling because s/he was unable to interpret, or, for lack of a better word, "read" the story. With a painting this obstacle is removed and this student might then respond loquaciously to the image because it necessitates a different type of reading. The confidence a struggling reader may gain through an activity such as this is invaluable. As teachers and cognitive scientists become more aware of the multiple ways the brain demonstrates intelligence, activities such as picture reading will become further tools of intellectual insight. Ultimately, the activity should serve to give students confidence in analyzing all forms of expression, especially art and literature.

Lastly, the unit gains greater momentum through content. Because the images the students will view have been hand-selected for their interest and excitement, each painting furthers the students' understanding of American culture and its representation, from the Native Americans to the Civil War. Ultimately, the students will exit the class with a strong, holistic, and critical view of American literature, artwork and culture.

Narrative: Objectives, Lesson Plans, and Assessment

The Revolutionary War gave birth to the American nation, the Constitution, and a newly formed society of American citizens. This time, often referred to as the Era of Good Feeling, was comprised of optimism, frontiers, and growth. America was growing, and in the process America began to develop an identity. Yet despite the unifying effects of the Revolutionary War, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, American citizens remained divided on how to view society, life, and purpose. Some held on to the Puritan ideal, others embraced the wild unexplored West, while others remained enslaved in the capitalist American system. Through diverse, influential paintings and writings, this unit explores the development of American identity in its infancy.

A short story often begins with an exposition which introduces readers to the setting, characters, and conflict. Like a story, students need to be taught how to view a painting to best interpret its meaning. Reading a simple, "How to View Art Guide," sitting in on a college art history class, or taking a museum tour are all great ways of becoming more familiar with viewing paintings. Initially one must view the painting at face value and begin asking questions such as, "Who is in the painting?", "What is the setting?", "What are the main elements to the painting?" These are all compositional elements which, through progress, force the viewer to look closer at the painting. For example, "What are the characters wearing?", "Where do the subjects eyes point?", and "What colors does the artist use to represent his subject?" A particularly important compositional

element is doubling. Artists use this technique of matching similar compositional lines, colors or patterns, to highlight a particular compositional element. For example, a rower's long straight oar might double his profile. An artist might create this "double" to suggest that the man is skinny, straight, and strong - an honest man with potential.

Second is the story behind the painting. There are three ways to look at this inquiry. One, "What story is the painting telling?" Two, "Why was the painting made, for whom, or what? And three, "What has the artist, and the artist's story brought to this painting?" These methods of inquiry can become infinitely deep. When attempting to answer these questions, the artist's biography, and training become important to uncovering the nuances. I strongly recommend the Socratic Method when viewing paintings, with the majority of the dialogue emanating from the viewers, students in this case, as they interact and respond to the painting.

To help the student become comfortable interpreting artwork the first piece which I discuss is not a painting. I introduce students to the close analysis of art, and the 1790's through a poker table on display in the Yale Art Gallery's permanent third floor collection.

The first question is, "What do you see?" At first the students will say, a pool table, or an old piece of junk. Then ask: "What is the table made of?" "Why was it made in this fashion?" "And are there any interesting design elements?" One observation I like to make is the candleholders. By pointing out four, round, embedded candleholders in each of the four corners of the table the student's realize the absence of electricity. Logically, without electricity there were no televisions, telephones, or microwaves, so playing poker became a means of entertainment. Although, basic and cliché, these types of realizations help students imagine and recreate the lifestyle of 18th century Americans.

An important element following the Revolutionary War was the development of the American and American lifestyle. To witness the diverse melting pot that characterizes Americans I begin the post-revolutionary period with family portraits. The family unit was characteristically strong at this time and it became fashionable for artists to add elements to the traditional two-dimensional family portrait. As some families moved westward, with tales of grandeur, other members of the American public attempted to uphold the aristocratic nature of mother England and the other European nations.

John Singleton Copley's painting, *The Copley Family*, painted in 1776-77, portrays the American family's attempt at old-world sophistication. Copley, himself, appears in the painting triumphantly gripping two sheets of paper as he gazes back to the viewer, fully confident. The other members of the family show little interest in the viewer and give the painting its less formal tone. The mother's embrace and gaze upon the smiling child empowers her with the more nurturing, family-rearing attitude with which women were identified then as now. However the softer side of parental direction is implied, and the mother seems to want to help the child out of love and self-worth rather than a societal dictate as would have been customary in Puritan America. (Pohl, 125)

A great example of Puritan stiffness and child rearing is found in Ammi Phillips's painting *Mrs. Mayer and Her Daughter*, painted ca. 1830-40. In this flat, traditional portrait, Mrs. Mayer sits center in the canvas wearing an all black, plain, rather large dress with a white lace bonnet. The daughter provides contrast, seated in the left corner in a red dress perched upon her mother's knee. Ammi Phillips had a successful 50-year career painting these two dimensional portraits.

At this point it is important that the students compare and contrast Ammi Phillips's *Mrs. Mayer and Her Daughter* to Copley's, *The Copley Family*. Phillips's clientele were fans of tradition, and probably only dabbled

in the “gentler” practice of child bearing. There is some hint to this effect in the sharing of the flower: Mrs. Mayer holds a flower in her left hand from which the child has taken a leaf. Additionally, the mother’s and daughter’s necklines match, and although the mother’s neckline is higher, Phillips colors the daughter’s dress red. This, combined with the daughter’s red necklace and red shoes, suggests that “mom” is allowing her daughter some freedoms. Red, for one, would not have been a proper color for a dress or shoes in Puritan America.

To round out the depiction of the new Americans I chose Charles Bird King’s *Young Omawhaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri, and Pawnees* , painted in 1822. The painting is composed of five separate men in traditional Native American costume. The Native American was unique to America and the depiction of Native Americans by European Americans provides further insight into the American psyche. King attempted to create faces which European Americans would like. William Faux, a traveling English writer who witnessed the painting’s unveiling, described the men as being “of large stature, very muscular, having fine open countenances, with the real noble Roman nose, dignified in their manners, and peaceful and quiet in their habits” (Pohl, 110). In addition, the central figure, War Eagle, wears the James Monroe peace medal, reinforcing his peacefulness. However, “the face paint, jewelry, hair styles, and war club (its blade pointed ominously at War Eagle’s neck) signify their difference and their potential threat to European Americans.”

When juxtaposed with John Singleton Copley’s family portrait and Ammi Phillips’s *Mrs. Mayer and her Daughter* , King’s painting depicts a drastically different culture. It has been noted that all the men’s faces in King’s painting appear similar. Amongst tall tales, and folklore, these men, Native Americans, appear to be from a distant land unlike anything Mrs. Mayer or Mrs. Copley were to experience. This distinction will become all the more apparent as more sophisticated Americans traveled westward.

Western Expansion forced Americans to face wilderness for the first time. Judging by the Copley and Phillips portraits these citizens were unaccustomed to a subsistence lifestyle. Just the concept of having a family portrait contradicts the wild roving frontier lifestyle. Thus, to lighten the atmosphere and subdue the scary reality of uncharted territory Americans invented Tall Tales. Most of the students already have a basic knowledge of the Tall Tale and might remember Pecos Bill, Davey Crockett, Casey Jones and/or Paul Bunyan. I teach a lesser-known tale called, *The Taming of Powder River* . In this story, Paul Bunyan has problems trying to float his logs down the Powder River. Because of all the twists and turns in the river, which are unflinchingly exaggerated, Paul has to continually push the logs from the beach. To resolve his first conflict, Paul ties a chain around the river, hitches up the reliable Babe, and pulls the river, “as straight as a yardstick.” (Beagle, 101) However, Paul’s nemesis is not easily defeated. Although the river flows straight for a mile it then would, “spread out over the flat country and become a mile wide and an inch deep.” At the story’s climax, Paul wrestles the river into submission, it runs away, and dives into the ground, Paul dives after, and eventually the personified river gives up. What remains? - The Grand Canyon.

After reading the story out loud in class, or assigning it as homework, I have the students complete a basic plot chart to make sure they understand and know the plot. A plot chart is a worksheet that I developed for the short story. Along the left hand side of a sheet of paper are six focus issues in the following order: Setting(s); Characters; Conflict One; Resolution One; Conflict Two; Resolution Two; and Purpose of Story/Theme. The rest of the chart is left open for the students to fill in their answers. (See Overhead 1.1). The answers that I look for are: Purpose of story -- to explain Paul’s role in the creation of the Grand Canyon; Characters -- Paul Bunyan, Babe the Blue Ox, and Ole the Big Swede; Setting -- The Powder River; Conflict I -- The River’s course was so irregular that the loggers had difficulty floating logs down it; Resolution -- Paul tied an iron chain to the river and then to Babe; Babe pulled the river straight.

This story demonstrates all of the qualities of a Tall Tale: the Hero has supernatural power or ability; nature is personified; a natural phenomenon occurs; and it was told as part of the oral tradition. I usually have the students come up with these characteristics by using “The Taming of the Powder River” as their contextual clue.

At this point lively discussion can ensue as to why tall tales were immensely popular and frequently created at this time in America. This open-ended question has innumerable responses; however, I always make sure the students realize that the Tall Tale was created out of frontier experiences and western expansion. To stave off boredom and fear, frontier men, woman, and children would tell tall tales to one another. By making the stories extraordinary and the hero’s supernatural, the men and woman were awed and inspired as civilization faded and Americans moved west. This worked to counteract feelings of fear, isolation, and loneliness.

A great assessment tool for the tall tale is oral presentations. Rather than assigning the students further specific tales or question and answer worksheets, it can help to take a trip to the library. By splitting the classroom into evenly sized small groups (I use groups of three) the students can become teachers of the material. While at the library each member of the group has a different job. Student One must give the background information on the tall tale hero of their choice. Student Two characterizes the hero with specific biological, physical and mental characteristics; and Student Three tells a specific tale about the hero. For assessment, I have the students give an oral presentation, and to ensure participation, each student in the group is graded individually for their specific subcategory, and then as a group (see Table 1.2). Having witnessed three different family units and enjoying the fiction of the time period, I introduce James Fenimore Cooper, an American author who attempted, unlike the tall-tale tellers, to accurately portray life on the American frontier.

Unbeknownst to my students they have already witnessed one of Cooper’s tales. While studying the events leading up to the Revolutionary War we take a class period to view, *The Last of the Mohicans*, starring Daniel Day Lewis. This movie is riddled with graphic violence and might require a parental permission slip home; however, it is worth the effort, for Cooper consciously and unconsciously codifies a popular American sentiment following the Revolution. Teaching the *The Last of the Mohicans* stimulates the students and I often begin with a reference to the film and a brief biography of the author. Born in 1789 in Burlington, New Jersey, Cooper began writing after reading a novel and claiming he could write better. On a dare from his wife he wrote his first novel, which failed. However, he continued and composed over 30 “Leatherstocking Tales,” *The Last of the Mohicans* being one of these. (Beagle, 113) Through these novels and others, Cooper became the first American author to make extensive use of the American frontier. Setting his tales in the virgin wilderness from New York to the Mississippi, Cooper details the ongoing struggle between Indians and Americans.

As a prelude question to Cooper’s *Deerslayer* I ask the students, “Who do you consider to be literary/fictional heroes today?” The response is overwhelming -- Mickey Mouse, Spongebob, Power Rangers, Blade, James Bond, Neo, etc. Then I ask, “What characteristics or qualities constitute heroes? After generating a list of heroic traits I steer the students toward the reading with the preceding prelude question.

For this class, I choose an excerpt from Cooper’s *The Deerslayer*. Published in 1841, *The Deerslayer*, the book features a hero, Deerslayer, who is the same Natty Bumppo of *The Last of the Mohicans*. In this excerpt, Deerslayer kills his first human being. However, Deerslayer is not an aggressor, or murderer, because he is forced to retaliate. Happening upon a Native American attempting to steal a canoe Deerslayer is assaulted. When within striking distance Bumppo traps the Indian and gives him a chance to be saved. Despite his efforts, the Indian remains obdurate and Bumppo is forced to kill the Indian. The excerpt ends with Deerslayer

holding the Indian, giving him water and compassion as he dies. This passage is particularly clear in demonstrating the values Cooper believed in most strongly and with which he fully endows his characters. His moral judgements are basic and Christian (Beagle, 113). Deerslayer flawlessly embraces the Christian maxim, "Do unto others as you would have done unto you." For example, Deerslayer only kills the Indian when forced too, and upon doing so, the Deerslayer nurtures and comforts him in the moments before his death. Cooper's novel shows the principles of an intelligent, heroic frontiersman through the character of Deerslayer.

Despite all good intentions, however, Cooper also supports a popular bias or prejudice of the early 1800's. In describing Bumpo's foe, a Native American, Cooper derogatorily labels him "savage," "beast," and "Injun." These particular colloquial figures of speech, although somewhat obvious today, would have gone unnoticed in 1841. I use this as a poignant commentary on human awareness. Although Bumpo is heroic, moral, and even attempts to comfort the Native American in his dying moments, Bumpo and Cooper are unable to see the Indian as human. Once this becomes apparent the students begin to see the ways in which prejudice and bias can go unnoticed due to its prevalence and dominance in society. In other words, Cooper, who respects Native Americans and Native American culture, directly insults Indians because of his perverse perspective created by his culture.

Although wordy, deep, and possibly difficult to teach, Cooper's novel features the concept of an entranced society, unaware of their transgressions, visible in society today. An often overlooked problem in studying Cooper and the early 1800's is that some students may not be able to read well. Rather than casting children into a difficult situation, use a painting.

A great way to convey American attitudes toward Native Americans during the early to mid 1800's is through the painting *Pigeon's Egghead Going to and From Washington* by George Catlin. Born in 1796, Catlin, like Cooper, was fascinated with Indians and the wilderness. This was compounded by his mother's stories of the Iroquois learned while she was held in captivity when Catlin was seven. In 1823 he gave up a start-up law firm and began painting. "After seven years as a successful portraitist, he had the good fortune to meet William Clark, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, then Superintendent of Indian Affairs, who became his patron. Between the years, 1830 and 1836, Catlin made several excursions west and sketched, painted and recorded in his journal all aspects of contemporary Indian life. Although his works are today much prized for their realistic accuracy and historical value, and are proudly displayed by our most prestigious institutions, in his lifetime they - and he - were largely dismissed as worthless." (<http://freepages.history>).

Pigeon's Egghead depicts an Indian on the road to Washington, and his subsequent return home. At the beginning of his journey the Chief stands erect, composed, and focused. His stature is significant and his appearance suggests a certain mastery of Native American Culture and as a result mastery of the American frontier. He carries a peace pipe in one hand, a serious frown, and a ritualized headdress. In a way, the Indian appears as an extreme stereotype, nearly all of our Indian associations are manifest in the Indians approach to Washington.

The person who returns, on the left side of the painting, however, is a drastically different man. Dressed in a black suit with a top hat, armed with whiskey and a cigarette, we see the Indian's attempt to adapt to American culture. He appears to saunter, as if drunk, an impression created by the arch of his back and the presence of a umbrella behind his heels, indicated its need to prop him up. By juxtaposing the two images, Catlin embodies the rift between what existed before European influence and what will come after European domination.

I like to compare Catlin's image and message to Cooper's. Whereas Cooper is unaware of society's influence

on perception, Catlin appears overly concerned. In Cooper's mind the Deerslayer is a hero, of the highest order, despite his biased opinion of Indians. Catlin, on the other hand, realistically portrays why Americans and Indians seem unable to compromise. As an Indian, the man in the painting appears almost unapproachable out of respect, wonder, and awe. It can be assumed that Washington considered the ways of the Indian esoteric much as the Indian perceived whites. In the uniform, however, the Indian looks juvenile and foolish. Historically, the Indian's return from Washington to his native village was tragic. Fearing this new, European creation, the Indian's tribe eventually murders the man, out of fear of the new ways learned from Europeans. Through both implication and historical fact these two pieces of art, Cooper's *Deerslayer* and Catlin's *Pigeon's Egghead*, convey the effects of society on the individual. In Cooper's *Deerslayer*, Bumpo's naiveté can be blamed for his prejudice, in Catlin's *Pigeon Egghead*, a tragic truth about the inability of Native American culture and European culture to ever meld.

Cooper and Catlin were not the only artists of the 1800's to offer their views on the formation of America's identity. Beginning in the early 1800's and led by Ralph Waldo Emerson a new literary theory and way of life developed called transcendentalism. Disillusioned by puritan life and developing urban communities, Emerson preached a return to nature, "inner light," and study. Rather than rely on society to make a person's moral decisions and guide his daily life, Emerson spoke of self reliance, and the ills of society. I strongly recommend using excerpts from Emerson's essays and lectures.

New Haven, unlike Emerson's acreage, does not allow students the full capacity to understand transcendentalism in the way Emerson and Thoreau embody it. Because of my school's proximity to Wooster Square park, taking the students into a natural or rural setting might heighten students' first experience with transcendentalism and would create a break in classroom monotony. Although reading in literature circles, and writing in writing circles, outside, are both successful practices, I often like to have the students write riddle poems. A riddle poem is a poem which defines as accurately as possible an object without naming it. The name of the object becomes the title of the poem. After introducing riddle poems to my students, in much the same way I did to you, and giving them an example, I bring the students to the park and let them free. (The park contains walls on all four sides with good visibility.) While at the park they pick any object they wish to describe and do so. Then we return to the classroom and play the riddle game, where I sit in the front of the class and read the riddle poem as students compete to provide the quickest answer.

In addition to observing nature, looking at objects closely, and writing sensory descriptions; the riddle poem often forces students to use personification. For example, Jasmine Ellis, a sophomore, wrote the following riddle poem in one of my classes, "It is white/It has handles/It is light in weight/ It has wrinkles/ It has red letters / It floats / It slides / It glides / It is flexible / It holds / It carries. / Easily gets caught. / Can change size and shape. / It's free." (Ellis, 1) Now the answer came slowly to my class but one student did manage to guess, a plastic bag.

Now Emerson might not appreciate a student's first observation of nature to be a white, discarded, plastic bag; however, the student used personification correctly, used five state-of-being verbs, and five action verbs (specific parameters for this assignment). Furthermore, it gave Jasmine the experience of literary creation amongst nature.

At this point, I provide the students with a brief biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Born in 1803, Emerson grew up to become a Unitarian minister as was his father and seven generations of fathers before him. A Harvard Graduate, Emerson preached as a minister for thirteen years then, based on his reputation, he traveled extensively giving lectures. For sixty minutes nightly, Emerson would lecture, and

through his lectures he laid down the foundations of Transcendentalism. Known for discouraging note-taking, Emerson would tell his note-less audience to take away only what they can carry in their memories. (Beagle, 145) In Overhead 1.4 I have provided a list of memorable Emerson quotes. As a class we often read the axioms, and then each student orally presents which quote they wish to remember and why, through a method called the whip-round (a technique where the teacher visually clues the students one after another to give their response. It is fast, effective, and ensures 100% on-task behavior.)

For clarity, I will ultimately have the students read, think critically and write about Emerson's and Thoreau's writing through close analysis. However, I often feel students become instantly disillusioned when page one of "Self-Reliance" is slapped on nice white bond paper in front of them. The language, attitude, and soul of the piece falls on glassy eyes. First, the students must learn to see nature, and come to realize some of the awe of wilderness before dissecting the loftiest of romantic prose.

Albert Bierstadt's painting *Yosemite Valley*, at the Yale University Art Gallery, depicts a light-diffused scene of natural splendor. In the left foreground stand several men while others ride horses. Painted in 1873, Bierstadt's picture documents the beginning of nature travel. The Transcontinental Railroad, finished in 1869, provided Easterners the opportunity to travel west to witness the virgin Yosemite landscape. Here, Bierstadt depicts tourists on a horseback ride with guides. As they pause, Bierstadt leads the viewer toward the hazy horizon via the Merced River. As the river undulates from the left foreground into the sun the viewer, like the tourists, is lured by the warm soft sun. Bierstadt's purpose appears to give this landscape a "divine" quality, supported by the immense size of the painting. Nearly 6 feet by 10 feet the massive painting, framed in gold flake, can only be appreciated by viewing it in person. Fortunately, Bierstadt's painting is part of the Yale Art Gallery's 3rd floor American Art permanent collection. Thus my students, when studying the painting, are always treated by a field trip to the gallery. With this in mind, I show the picture beforehand in reproduction in class, but I give no hint as to the size of the painting. As the students round the corner of the gallery they are struck speechless at the large size of Bierstadt's painting. Perspective is stressed and the students begin to realize that despite the painting's massiveness, the characters, the tourists and their guides, are no larger than six inches. In this way the grandeur, awe, and divine like quality of Yosemite, and more so, wilderness is actualized.

To support students' conception of the American frontier a slide-show presentation is adequate. After viewing Bierstadt in depth, feel free to experiment with these painters and paintings: Asher B. Durand, *Kindred Spirits* (1849); John Trumbull, *Niagara Falls from an Upper Bank on the British Side* (1808); Thomas Cole, *Distant View on Niagara Falls*; Cole, *The Falls of The Kaaterskill* (1826); Cole: *View of the Falls of Munda*; Robert S. Duncanson, *The Garden of Eden* (1852); and Duncanson, *Blue Hole, Little Miami River* (1851).

The first sustained reading of Emerson on the syllabus comes from his essay "Nature." Although there has been considerable buildup in creating the idea that nature is divine, massive, and inspiring -- Emerson's political message attacks society, the ills of mankind, and the limitations and degradations of technology. I begin my reading at "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society..." and at "The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population." The first reading of this excerpt must be basic. I ask some simple questions which could be found in any textbook: "According to Emerson, what is one of the best ways one can really be alone?; what distinguishes the "stick of timber of the wood-cutter from the tree of the poet.?; in what part of Nature does Emerson describe the most profound change taking place? and where does Emerson find the source of the power to produce delight? In addition, we discuss how this excerpt from nature does not fit the traditional plot triangle format, for Emerson writes academic texts which are essays, not short stories.

English teachers could use this time to go over the elements of a good essay or paragraph. However, since I teach oftentimes struggling sophomores, I often use this excerpt as a great way to teach close reading of the sentence. (If you wish to teach paragraphs, I strongly recommend *The Thinker's Guide to How to Read a Paragraph and Beyond* by Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder.) Oftentimes Emerson's essays are not seen as containing exemplary paragraphs but rather "carefully wrought sentences" (189, American Lit, Chronological Approach). Emerson's paragraphs at times do not seem to be in logical sequence or have any clear connection to one another. This style makes Emerson difficult to read. However, it forces students to look closely at individual sentences. Just as the students pick a Emerson quote which they enjoyed previously in this unit, you might have the students pick out one or two lines which they find especially meaningful or well written and have them be prepared to discuss that line in class the following day.

Another way to approach the subject is informally as well. After showing Bierdstadt's painting and reading Emerson you might ask, How does this painting or writing make you feel? or Who are these people? (both the characters of the art and the artists themselves)? Have you ever met someone who thought or upheld the ideals Emerson suggests? This allows the students to personalize the literature and art, and forces them to make connections. As a sophomore English teacher in Connecticut one is blatantly aware of CAPT testing, of which one of the questions is loosely, "make a connection to what you are reading."

The second Emerson reading, from "Self-Reliance" begins, "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance...." After text rendering "Self-Reliance," the student's can answer the questions on Table 1.3. When answering these questions you might want to keep several landscape paintings accessible. As the students read Emerson with the Landscape paintings present, hopefully they will begin to see the motivations behind Emerson's teachings and philosophy. An interesting literary note is that Gandhi based his theories of passive resistance after reading and interpreting Emerson's, Self-Reliance and Thoreau's essay Civil Disobedience.

The culminating activity for this unit requires viewing Frederic Edwin Church's painting *Mount Ktaadn*, 1853, also located at the Yale Art Gallery. Readily visible in the background is the silhouette of Mt. Ktaadn, Maine. Church picked Mt. Ktaadn because he believed the mountain represented all of America. With this attitude he created the mill, grazing cattle, and wooden building on the bank of a lake in the foreground. These compositional elements were not there and invented by Church. Church was a firm believer in the power and success of combining technology and nature. He felt that Americans would further incorporate technological advances in nature to create a positive effect that would benefit both technology and nature, a sentiment held by numerous Americans at this time. Hence, Ktaadn appears relaxed and permanent even with the presence of settlement. The size of the mill is small in comparison to the rest of the painting and almost fades into the landscape.

Church also painted landscapes based on the advice of the premier art critic of the time, John Ruskin, who taught young artists that to observe nature closely was to "follow the finger of God" (www.tate.americans). In one way Church honors pioneers in his painting by showing them existing, and clearing new land in a massive wilderness. On the other hand, Mount Ktaadn was painted in 1853 and Church himself explained how difficult it was to find the virgin, uninhabited wilderness he depicts. In this way Church's paintings show the last in a dying age of American frontierism. Soon the country will be at civil war and these places and numerous others will become sites of vicious, massive death.

The logic in using Ktaadn becomes obvious when you compare the painting to Henry David Thoreau's description of Maine in an essay entitled, "Ktaadn." The last of Thoreau's finished writings, "Ktaadn" details

Thoreau's trip to the mountain in 1857. "Sitting on the shore of Moosehead Lake one September morning in 1857, Henry David Thoreau made a deal with his American Indian guide, Joe Polis: Tell me all you know, and I'll tell you all I know." This deal turned out to be profitable. For the next 11 days Thoreau traveled through Maine noting details, descriptions, and facts in his notebook. The writing itself is again romantic and difficult; however, the painting will sufficiently help students envision the setting, conflict, and tone. Where true merit develops is in thinking critically about Thoreau and Emerson's transcendentalist philosophy. Thoreau writes, "This was primal, untamed, and forever untamable Nature.... It is difficult to conceive of a region uninhabited by man. We habitually assume his influence and presence everywhere. And yet we have not seen Nature, unless we have seen her thus." More so today than yesterday, Thoreau's philosophy is applicable. Today, amongst schoolchildren especially is a general sentiment that nothing can be achieved through nature and that a park or town green serves the same purpose as Thoreau's wilderness. But hopefully your students will disagree. In this exercise, I play the oppositional role, or that role which the students are most accustomed. "Natures boring. Who cares? Why would anyone want to write or paint nature?" Removing the possibility of this pre-programmed response forces the students to think in a new way.

Ultimately, I do not propose that my students become nature radicals; instead I hope they will begin to realize that this was all America had at this time. As America expanded it was important and powerful to acquire new, divine land. Through the history component the students are aware of the principals of Manifest Destiny, the Louisiana Purchase, and Jackson's ideals on land acquisition. What students need to gain is an understanding that in 1850, land was a large commodity at the forefront of American Culture. Rights and voting privileges were calculated through land ownership. Families often worked together to farm their land in order to eat and sustain their winter stores. Thus, artists like Emerson, Thoreau and Church, used nature to reflect their philosophies and way of life.

To assess whether the students begin to have an understanding of art and how an artist can render a particular area, region or time period, through choice of subject, detail and craft, I will have the students become artists themselves. In an open-ended format I challenge the students to think of ways in which their culture is represented. Then I offer an open invitation for the students to represent their culture, the culture they live daily, in an artistic way. What I ask the students to do is to keep in mind the techniques and craft that we learned over the course of the unit. Thus, each compositional element will hold meaning, as will the subject matter, and the choice of representation. In combination with their artistic piece which could be a painting, a diorama, a movie, a website, advertisement, etc, I have them write a critique of their own piece indicating all the thought that went into each element of creation. Then the students will have a clear picture of what Americans thought and believed following the Revolutionary War. Through studying this material, and their artwork, the students will gain a better understanding of their culture and the myriad ways in which it is represented.

Overhead 1.0 (Eric Good, 10/02)

Five Skill Reading

English: Five Part Reading

Name: _____

Title: _____

Author: _____

Pages: _____

Date: _____

Predicting:

What I think will happen is...

What makes me think this is ...

Clarifying:

Something that I didn't understand is...

I figured out that it means...

Something that I didn't understand is...

I figured out that it means...

Questioning:

Questions that I have about what I'm reading are...

1.

2.

Visualizing:

A quote that brings an image to my mind is...

The reaction I have to this image is...

Summarizing:

In one sentence, state what the reading was about.

Overhead 1.1

Plot Chart

Tall Tale and Folklore

Setting:

Conflict One:

Resolution:

Conflict Two:

Resolution:

Purpose of story:

Overhead 1.2

Tall Tale and Folklore

Identity -- Physical characteristics, special talents, abilities (What does the hero look like? What does the hero do? What skills does the hero possess)?

Where did you get this information?

Background -- Hero's background, occupation, relationships with other characters (Where is your hero from? Is your hero married? Does your hero have a sidekick or a friend?

Where did you get this information?

Story Telling -- Read and write a synopsis (summary) of a specific story about the hero

Where did you get this story?

Overhead 1.3

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Individualism and Self-Reliance

1803-1882

Born in Boston

Follows seven generations of ministers

Graduated from Harvard

Curriculum Unit 04.03.10

Became a Unitarian minister

After 13 years he retired as a minister and became a traveling minister.

Each evening he lectured for 60 minutes.

He discouraged notetaking believing that people should take away only what they could carry in their memories.

Often associated with transcendentalism.

Transcendentalism

- Knowledge comes from inside the person
- Each person knows how to behave if he or she trusts the "inner light"
- Teaches that intuition transcends reason as a reliable human faculty

Emerson's followers were encouraged to trust their intuition. They came to be associated with optimism, nationalism, individualism, plain living and high thinking. Many tried to transcend daily preoccupations, such as making and spending money.

After reading Emerson's "Self-Reliance", answer these questions

1. What is self-reliance, according to Emerson?
2. What kinds of people most need Emerson's message?
3. Is it needed in this school?
4. If Emerson's message were taken literally, what dangers would there be to organized society?
5. Emerson said, "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." When is it true that society inhibits our personalities? When is this not true?
6. Emerson said, "The power that resides in him (any individual) is new in nature..." Are all people essentially different?

Overhead 1.4

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson says.....

- I do not like to see a sword at a man's side. If it threatens man, it threatens me.
- What is the hardest task in the world? To think.
- The sum or life ought to be valuable when the fractions are so sweet.
- Hitch your wagon to a star.
- Be an opener of doors for such as come after thee.
- So far as man thinks, he is free. Thought takes man out of servitude and into freedom.
- Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.
- The true test of civilization is not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops -- no, but the kind of man the country turns out.
- Tragedy and comedy always go hand in hand.
- A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think aloud.
- The reward of a thing well done, is to have done it.
- I gladly pay the rent of my house because I therewith get the horizon and the woods which I pay no rent for. For daybreak and evening and night, I pay no tax.
- I will trust my instincts.
- Popularity is for dolls; a hero cannot be popular.
- Keep cool: it will be all one a hundred years hence.
- Good luck is another name for tenacity of purpose.
- The Religion that is afraid of science dishonours God and commits suicide.
- The things taught in college and schools are not an education, but the means of education.
- If a man carefully examines his thoughts, he will be surprised to find how much he lives in the future. His well being is always ahead.
- Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us that are rushing into life cannot always be fed on the same remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions, arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age?

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