



Architecture and Setting in the Shaping of Fictional Characters

Curriculum Unit 05.03.05
by Sean T. Griffin

Introduction

In this computerized age of high tech entertainment and push-button satisfaction the printed word is being forced to compete like never before. How do we give the edge to literature? How do we make the jump from the printed page to the working minds of children? One answer is the arts. The arts are a wonderful vehicle by which students can bridge their lives and the literature. Dance, visual arts, photography, film and architecture can all be used to make that leap, to move from the printed page to the mind, to help children live literature.

This unit is designed as a way to help students make a bridge from literature to real life through the examination of architecture and place in the development of fictional characters and plot. I will ask students to look at several short stories, which I have paired up with poems. This is literature that my eighth graders would be reading normally anyway, but the difference is that I am trying to emphasize techniques authors use to create a sense of place.

Purpose

I want students to see how fictional and real life characters are, as the cliché suggests, products of their surroundings. The way place and setting affect fictional characters mirrors life in many ways. What characters do and say, how they act, what decisions they make are often influenced by their surroundings. Similarly, place and architecture actually help to shape what type of personality we have and what sort of people we become. A Native American growing up on a reservation in South Dakota has quite a different outlook on life than does a young girl growing up on a farm in New England. Of course there are other factors that shape our lives and our personalities, but place is a huge factor in decisions and ideas that we are involved with daily.

Students will examine fictional characters in relation to their setting and environment in pairs of works that will allow them to see characters interacting in the same setting or the same type of setting. Students will be able to compare and contrast the importance of architecture and setting in the pairs and, most importantly what effect setting and architecture have on the characters, authors and ultimately the reader. How does

where a character lives affect the manner in which he/she acts and reacts to the story that unfolds around him/her? How important does place become to a character without him/her even knowing it? I believe that by examining characters in relation to their surroundings, students will make discoveries not only about the protagonists, but about themselves as well.

I have also included a literature pair that will allow students to think about what happens when a character is taken out of his/her setting, out of his/her element and put into something very foreign to them. How does it feel to be out of one's place? How do real people react when taken out of their element? What sort of adjustments must we make? How do we deal with the strangeness of a new setting?

Finally I will introduce an artistic element to this unit, which will allow the students to bring all of what we have been discussing around to themselves. In the story map section of the unit students will be encouraged to look closely at how all of this talk of setting and architecture can fit into their own lives.

Students will be preparing themselves for CAPT testing by making connections with the literature and examining authors' craft in discussion that will lead to critical thinking. Using the pairs of literature, students will be comparing and contrasting and looking closely at authors' craft as we make our way through this unit.

Connecticut Writing Project

The Connecticut Writing Project is a University of Connecticut writing program that is a part of the larger National Writing Project. The program is designed to help students and teachers explore writing through various creative writing strategies. Teachers in New Haven have been fortunate enough to be introduced to the program as a part of the English curriculum. Due to our inclusion in the Connecticut Writing Project, teachers in New Haven have been introduced to various ways to help our students become more comfortable with their writing as they discover new ways to express themselves. Journal writing in which content is the focus, I-search research papers, dialogical notebooks and writer conferences are all techniques that New Haven teachers have been invited to explore as they lead students through writing that emphasizes connecting literature and self, taking critical stances and focusing on higher order thinking skills in their writing.

The main impact the Connecticut Writing Project has had on my teaching is the concept of journal writing. Before the Connecticut Writing Project came to New Haven I would have students write in their journals and then go through and correct every spelling mistake, grammar mistake, etc. I was told at one of our first meetings that I was using journal writing incorrectly. My attacks on students journals with the red pen was simply stifling their writing. Students were not letting their writing flow in their journals because they knew I would be correcting and grading every entry. At first overlooking the spelling and grammar mistakes was very difficult for me as an English teacher, but as we went on through the training I realized that I simply wasn't letting the students write. If I had someone stopping me after every sentence of a short story or chapter that I had written I would never get anything worthy written. It is the same thing with the journals. We use the journals to make breakthroughs on the writing. The writing workshop, the essay, the research report were all places where students would be held accountable for spelling and grammar, but the journal was meant for letting the writing flow.

I will always be greatly indebted to the Connecticut Writing Project for making a huge difference in my students' and my own writing. I encourage other systems to get involved with the National Writing Project and to encourage innovative creative writing in the classroom.

Journal Writing

Journal writing will be a big part of this unit. I find that journal writing is one of the most exciting and creative types of writing that my students regularly take part in. I emphasize creativity in the journals that I require my eighth graders to keep. They are never penalized for spelling or grammar in their journals because the entries are all about their ideas. I want students to feel free to express themselves in their writing. I want them to enjoy their ideas and allow themselves the freedom to not worry about form, structure, grammar and the elements that we regularly examine during other types of writing such as essay and research writing.

Journal writing combined with literature is meant to lead students to the type of higher-order thinking that the latest changes in educational curriculum aim to enhance. Students make connections, take critical stances and are able to think past the literal interpretation that so often characterizes traditional assessment.

Journal writing will work easily into this unit. After class discussions on the pairs of literature students will be asked to comment in their journals. Another aspect of journal writing that is especially helpful is that it is an easy way to get students to share their work. I always ask students to share what they have written with classmates when they are done writing. It is not mandatory to share, but it is encouraged, and I find that most students enjoy reading their work out loud. The more they share, the more they enjoy the writing. In this unit journal writing will help to extend the conversation that we have about the literature and about architecture. I will ask my students to set aside a section of their journals for this unit. The possible topics are endless. Trying to get students to choose a topic that makes those connections to higher order thinking is key to a successful unit.

Some possible journal topics:

- Write a story based on the pair
- List the elements of place and architecture that shape the characters in the story
- Write one character's description of how his/her setting makes him/her feel
- Describe a setting that affects you and your personality
- How do different buildings make you feel?
- Write a soliloquy from a place's point of view
- Compare two settings
- Analyze an aspect of a place (shading, texture, color, composition)
- Describe your special place. How does it make you feel?

- How might your most comfortable place make others feel?
- Write an interview with one character in another's setting

Art

Finally, the unit will also involve the plotting of stories on maps as well as the creation of "Life Maps" to share with the class. After each set of readings students will be asked to map out the setting of stories, including any landmarks or land features that may have impact on the characters' growth. In a culminating art project student will make their own life maps which will show not how other characters were shaped by their environment, but how the students' personalities have been shaped by their own surroundings. This will be a creative, artistic project, which will help students to make discoveries about themselves as they have discovered others through their reading.

The Unit

Objectives

After examining the literature pairs, students will be able to:

- Express interpretations of the work both written and orally
- Use details from the literature to write narratives, make connections and examine their own interpretations in their journals
- Share their work with their classmates
- Create their own "Life Map" which shows students' own connections to place and architecture
- Understand the importance of setting, place and architecture in the creation of fictional characters as well as the shaping of their own lives.
- Comfortably discuss architecture as it relates to fiction

Overview

While this unit is designed for an eighth grade Language Arts class, there is no reason why it could not be adapted to any number of other classes. Why not look at the connection between setting and architecture in the shaping of the Plymouth Plantation and the Pilgrims in History class? How was the planning of Washington D.C. a reflection of the people's lives during the late 18th Century? How do people's dwellings in different cultures reflect who they are? It is a natural place to begin any number of lessons in any number of different subjects. What I am really proposing here is a concept rather than a curriculum unit.

Similarly, if you are intending on using this unit for an English class, you are by no means limited to the pairs of stories and poems that I am suggesting be used here. Feel free to adjust the materials to any number of other stories and characters for any number of different levels of English Language Arts. How does setting affect or reflect the characters in the story *Robinson Crusoe*? How are characters in science fiction shaped by their surroundings? What is the role of place in biography? Again, the possibilities are endless. The units in the Yale New Haven Teachers Institute are a wonderful resource by themselves, but the true beauty of these units is the endless possibilities that they create for teachers who are willing to borrow this piece or that piece for their own use.

Since I teach at an Arts Magnet school I will also be incorporating artwork into the beginning and ending of each section of the unit. Students will view an image or several images of similar places that they are about to explore. We will brainstorm on the images to see how different places make us feel or think before going on to the literature. So the viewing of images really becomes a sort of pre-reading activity for the classes. I have listed some possible references in my bibliography, but the sources of images are endless. Teachers would lead the classes through the use of questions such as:

- What do you see in this picture?
- How does it make you feel?
- If you lived here what would you have to change about yourself?
- Describe someone who might live here.
- Imaging someone in this picture. What might they be doing? Help us visualize the character that you can imagine.

Next the class moves onto the literature section of the unit. Basically we will be reading two short literary works in each section of this unit. Each pair will consist of a poem and a short story. Each pair will also be arranged under a given theme that will shape discussion of character and setting. Students will read the literature as they do in any class. But the difference in this unit is that teachers will emphasize character and character interaction with his/her surroundings.

The next part of each section will focus on the journal writing and the theme of the pairs. Students will be asked to reflect in their journals and share their reflections with the class. I ask students to utilize the "TAG" method of sharing which was introduced to me by the Connecticut Writing Project. Simply write the letters T, A, G on the blackboard vertically. Tell the students T stands for tell the reader something you liked about the journal, A stands for ask a question about the work and G stands for give a suggestion on how to improve the writing. The TAG method provides a nice give and take among the students during the journal sharing.

Finally students will be asked to wrap up each section with an artistic interpretation of some sort. This might include a drawing in a journal, a mini collage or sculpture or a creative map of the story. As mentioned before I will ask students to create a cumulative "life map" at the end of the unit also.

Each of the four sections of the unit will follow this pattern; View-Read-Write in Journals-Share-Create. Since there are four literature pairs making up the four sections of the entire unit, teachers should plan on spending at least an entire month teaching the unit.

The Pairs

Pair One: Nature shaping character and narration; "The King of Mazy May" by Jack London and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost.

Jack London's story "The King of Mazy May" will transport students to the frozen Yukon during the gold rush of the late 19th Century. The hero of the story, Walt Masters, has been left behind in the rugged land to watch over the land claims of his father and a neighbor. When claim jumpers arrive and attempt to steal the land, Walt does all he can to outwit the claim jumpers and race for help in a nearby city. Much of the story is centered on a chase scene in which Walt is racing across the land on a dog sled while claim jumpers follow in hot pursuit. While there is no architecture to study in the story, the setting or sense of place is very much a part of the story. The Yukon is a rugged place with tough people and a hard life. By the end of the story, Walt has shown how tough he is as he works within his rugged and disagreeable setting to do the right thing.

Robert Frost's classic poem provides a perfect contrast with the Yukon in "The King of Mazy May." Although both places are frosty and cold, the mood in Frost's poem is definitely quite different from the adventurous mood of London's short story. Here the narrator has stopped as opposed to the almost constant action taking place in London's story. In Frost's poem the woods are "lovely, dark and deep" while Walt's Yukon is filled with temperatures of forty below, ice jams and a "deceiving moon." Yet both works do give the reader a sense of urgency. It is the place that makes the characters or the narrator want to act. The frigid, icy setting sets the characters to motion, perhaps fearing the lack of movement.

Take some time to discuss how authors use place to create moods. Emphasize how and why authors are able to use setting for shaping of mood and readers' and characters' feelings. What affect does repetition or personification have in the creation of setting? How do Frost and London use language devices to create moods and settings and characters?

Find some pictures of frosty landscapes to start off this section of the unit. What would it take to live in the icy setting? What adjectives or images come to mind when we look at the pictures? Think about incorporating W.A. Bentley's *Snowflakes in Photographs*. Which work better illustrates the beauty that Bentley found in snowflakes? How does the individual beauty of the photographed snowflakes compliment the reading?

After reading the works I think a journal entry comparing and contrasting the literature would work well here. Have students compare the effects the setting has on the thinking of the characters. A good way to start this would be with a Venn Diagram. Walt Masterson in the Yukon compared with the narrator in Frost's poem in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." How do the two settings affect the thinking or the plans of the two?

A nice way to close this section of the unit would be to allow students to create a winter landscape. Ask them to put themselves into one of the frosty scenes they have just entered. They could produce snowflakes, go out on a walk in the snow or try to examine snowflakes as Bentley did. If you are in New England doing this unit in the winter that will be easy. If you are at an arts magnet school it should be equally easy. Have them share and discuss their work with the class.

Pair Two: Uncomfortable Places; "The Moustache" by Robert Cormier and "I Stepped from Plank to Plank" by Emily Dickinson.

Another story middle school children love to read is Robert Cormier's "The Moustache."

The main character in this story, seventeen-year-old Mike, is anxious to grow up at the beginning of the story. He likes to drive his father's Le Mans, he has a girlfriend and he has grown a moustache. When his mother insists that Mike go to visit his grandmother at Lawnrest Nursing Home, he begrudgingly goes. The nursing home is one of Mike's least favorite places to go. He describes the nursing home with the "terrible cemetery kind of name." The reader feels the character's discomfort. Mike's grandmother has Alzheimer's and when she mistakenly takes Mike for her deceased husband, Mike is forced to empathize with her as he has never before.

Similarly, Dickinson's poem reveals the narrator's discomfort with walking on rickety dock-type planks over the water. The narrator is clearly uncomfortable, but finally admits that this is where you get experience. We all must go to those uncomfortable places in order to grow.

Start off this section with some uncomfortable images--pictures of nursing homes, cemeteries, prisons, operating rooms, dentist's offices, and small uncomfortable places. Look at the on-line sources that I've listed in the back of the unit. There are plenty of images available to teachers via the web. Discuss the images with the students. After reading discuss Mike's feelings with the class. I find that, unfortunately, many students are equally as disgusted with nursing homes as Mike was. Talk to them about that. Ask them how that setting makes them act. Do they act the same way in a nursing home as they do in a school? Again how are these public places affecting them as individuals? Why do these places make us feel uncomfortable? What does this reveal about us? What does this reveal about the characters we meet in literature?

For their journal topic, ask students to discuss an uncomfortable public place for them. What place makes them squirm a little? What place makes them feel most uncomfortable? How do they act there? Have them tell their story in their journal. This might be a good place to have places speak in soliloquies in students' journals. Think of all the stories those uncomfortable places could tell! Sharing the journal entries should be fun, but be careful about students' feelings and privacy on this one.

For a concluding project ask students to sketch themselves in their uncomfortable place. A simple pencil sketch on one page of their journal should suffice for this concluding section of the unit.

Pair Three: Out of Place; "Rain, Rain Go Away" by Isaac Asimov and "People Zoo" by Shel Silverstein

In his story, "Rain, Rain Go Away," Isaac Asimov portrays newcomers moving into typical American suburbia. The Wright family, especially Mrs. Wright, is fascinated with the arrival of new neighbors. Lillian Wright is constantly peeking out of her curtains at the newly arrived Sakkaros who just don't seem to fit into the neighborhood. By the end of the story it is obvious that Lillian was truly right as the Sakkaros seem to sort of melt away in a rainstorm, revealing to the reader how they really did not belong not only in the neighborhood, but on earth.

Shel Silverstein's poetry provides endless possibilities for this section of the unit. Children love his comical poems and sketches that accompany them. "The People Zoo" is a poem in which a child talks about being put behind bars for animals to gawk at. The sketch which accompanies the poem illustrates how "out of place" Silverstein's characters sometimes are.

This section of the unit should focus on characters being out of place. What happens when a character who has grown up in one place, who essentially becomes that place, is transported to another. How do they look? How do they feel? How must they adjust?

Again the true value of this unit will come through in journal writing. Have students write a monologue of a person taken out of his/her element. The entry can be fictional or autobiographical. We have all felt out of place in different settings. What is it that makes being in that setting or place uncomfortable for us? What happens to us when we are transported to a place where we don't really belong or we feel lost? Most importantly, how can we grow from being forced to step outside of the box? Remind them of Dickinson's poem. The journal entries should be quite interesting and fun to share. Again be mindful of feelings and privacy. Never force students to share their journals.

For a closing art piece ask students to draw a symbol of something or some place misplaced. Ask them to think about their city or their neighborhoods. Are there any buildings that seem out of place in town? Talk about scale, size, and style in this section of the unit. Take a walk or a field trip with your class. Look for odd places and buildings that just don't belong. For a more elementary approach ask students to simply draw objects out of place; a dog in a bird's nest, a man in a cage with animals looking in on him. These should also be fun to share.

Pair Four: Hearing the voice of a city; "Raymond's Run" by Toni Cade Bambara and "Harlem" by Walter Dean Meyers

Toni Cade Bambara's story "Raymond's Run" is one that my eighth graders love to read every year. It is the story of a girl named Squeaky who is growing up in modern day Harlem. Squeaky is a tough girl who really has two loves at this point in her life; one is taking care of her handicapped brother Raymond, the other is running. Like all children at her age, Squeaky has challenges and rivalries which she faces daily and it quickly becomes clear in the story that Squeaky is very much shaped by her environment.

Living in New York, she is a tough girl with tough language and a tough attitude. At one point she sees her arch enemy coming up the street and thinks for a second about what to do:

So they are steady coming up Broadway and I see right away that it's going to be one of those Dodge City scenes 'cause the street ain't that big and they're close to the buildings just as we are. First I think I'll step into the candy store and look over the new comics and let them pass. But that's chicken and I've got a reputation to consider. (page 36)

Not only is Squeaky a byproduct of her environment, but also she really is a part of the city. She thinks about blending in for a moment to let the crisis pass. She knows how easy it is to disappear in the city, but decides against it due to what the city has taught her.

Now pairing up "Raymond's Run" with Walter Dean Meyer's award winning poem "Harlem," gives us a look at the same area, but from a different perspective. Meyers examines Harlem, its legends, its images, its growth and its metamorphosis in a beautifully written work filled with images and a mood that we can find in Squeaky as well. How has Harlem and its many landmarks shaped Squeaky and hundreds upon thousands of others? Through this study we can see how an environment, or a setting, can become a parental influence on us. I believe that breaking the stories down in this manner will not only help student see the connection between place and being in the literature, but in their own lives as well. Students in our urban school district may find relating to Squeaky and Raymond easier than relating to one of Sherman Alexie's Native American characters, but they may be able to see how place shapes others to become different characters or people.

Understanding of this concept, I believe, will lead to more acceptance, respect and understanding of others.

There are plenty of images of Harlem for students to examine in this section of the unit. James Van Der Zee gives us a wonderful look at Harlem through his photography. Look at the artwork of Jacob Lawrence, or others from the Harlem Renaissance for numerous examples of Harlem at the beginning of the 20th Century.

After reading the works, it will become apparent to the students that Harlem has given both Squeaky and the narrator in Meyer's poem a unique voice. For the journal writing of this section I am proposing two options: students can imitate the voice of Squeaky in their journals or they can write a poem on their hometown. I have done both with students and they will love to share either. If you decide to let students imitate Squeaky it is helpful to give them a situation to write about. They can write about a bad day they had, a conflict with a teacher or friend, how frustrating it is taking care of Raymond. Just a little focus will help them immensely.

If you decide to write a hometown poem, first discuss images with the students. After choosing some of their favorite images from the poem "Harlem" I asked students to list images of New Haven for me. We shared the images and then I asked them to incorporate their images into a poem.

Final Art Project: Life Maps

For the final art project in the unit I will ask students to create their own "Life Maps." I envision a life map as a sort of map of the places that have created the personalities that we are. I suggest that teachers make their own "Life Maps" before getting to this part of the project.

Start by listing all the important places that have shaped your personality throughout the years. Of course the older you are the more complicated your map will be. Think of places, important towns or cities, countries that have shaped your personality. List them. Think of actual physical places; homes, churches, schools, jobs. List them. Now get ready to create your life map.

Your life map can be a simple drawing map or can be more of a 3-D project. It is up to you. But I think the "Life Map" should work chronologically, almost like a time line. The earlier influences should be on one side of the map while the most recent ones will be on the right side. Allow your students to create the maps any way they want. It might be drawn; they might use their own photos or create a collage with images cut out from magazines. Give the students all the creative license that you can.

In order to make students utilize what you have been talking about as a class, require them to include four places in their own lives that relate to the four themes we discussed. Have them include a natural setting, an uncomfortable public place, a place out of place and a city or town neighborhood that influenced them.

This map should be a work of art. The places and settings should be drawn not simply designated. Although your birthplace is not really right next to your nursery school, on your life map they may well be. The map should be colorful and interesting. You can even allow students to fill some of the empty spaces on their map with important places from the unit. Be creative. Use the scoring rubric in the appendix for scoring the project.

Where you take the "Life Map" from here is up to you. It would be a great place to start an autobiography. You could have students extract stories from the map and allow them to write them or tell them to the class. Hang

up the maps in the room and have students do critical commentary on other maps. Students could write essays, one act plays, or articles on the maps. The maps can become a great teaching resource. Keep them around!

Lesson Plans

The following lesson plans are designed for an eighth grade classroom. The period for each class is 52 minutes. The lesson may need to be adapted in certain ways for your classroom, but this will give you the basic format of the course. I have taken one pair, "Raymond's Run" and "Harlem," to show how the unit should work. These three lessons will take you from the observation of artwork, discussion, journal entries and sharing and a transition to the next pair. Simply repeat the pattern with the other pairs.

By the time you are at this point, you'll have already read Bambara's "Raymond's Run," discussed the story as you do any literature and are ready to move to the second piece, "Harlem." What are not shown here are your pre-reading exercises with the artwork and your basic literary comprehension work that you normally do when teaching a story.

Sample Lesson One-Squeaky's Voice

Objectives

- Students will brainstorm adjectives that describe Squeaky and her world; Harlem
- Students will read sections of the story out loud
- Students will imitate Squeaky's voice in their journals
- Students will share journals

Materials

- Text, journals

Initiation

Start the class by asking students what an adjective is. Someone will give you a good definition with some prodding and then you can ask students to call out some adjectives for you. Now ask students to list some adjectives that describe Squeaky and her setting. Some adjectives they might come up with will be hard, beautiful, tough, daring, etc. Share some lists with the class.

Procedure

Once students have shared some of their adjectives have a conversation about how Squeaky resembles the city, how she has become a product of her environment. Students should be sort of primed for this exercise because by this point in the unit you have already gone through several pairs and discussed characters relation to setting.

Next have some brave student read some dialogue from the text. There are plenty of places in the text where Squeaky's character really shines through her words. Students love reading it out loud and using dramatic license to act tough like squeaky. This leads to the journal assignment for this lesson.

Ask students to imitate Bambara's style in a monologue that they can share with the class. They can make up their own character or just use Squeaky. Ask students to keep close to the theme by having their character describe a place in their lives, a home, a hideaway, their favorite hang out. Ask students to share their work. If you don't get to everyone in one class let them continue the next day.

Closure

Go back to the adjectives you started the class with. Do any of them apply to the students' new characters? What is it that makes the characters that they created similar to the one that Bambara created?

Sample Lesson Plan-Two- Harlem in Poetry

Objectives

- Students will listen to the poem "Harlem" written by Walter Dean Meyers
- Students will identify images from the poem
- Students will create a web in which they will write images of their own hometown
- Students will write poems named after their own hometowns
- Students will share poetry

Materials

- Students' journals
- "Harlem" by Walter Dean Meyers (recorded version if possible)
- tape recorder
- web organizers

Initiation

Ask students what an image is. Take a few minutes to talk about how important images are to poets. I often tell students poets paint pictures in our minds through words and images. Ask students to give you examples of images from literature or poetry that they are familiar with.

Procedure

After talking about images, ask students to listen closely as Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs reads Harlem to them from cassette. The Scholastic Book recording and illustrated version of this poem is wonderful for this part of the unit. Students listen very closely and you can have a student show the class the illustrations in the book as it is read. Before beginning ask students to jot down the images that really strike them. There are many

images in the poem that the students love.

Ask the class to share the images that they enjoyed. Reiterate how images really put a picture in our minds through some of the examples. Now give students a web organizer. Ask them to write their own hometown in the center and to think of some images that remind them of their hometown. Share some of the images they come up with.

Now students are ready to write their own hometown poem. They may have to finish it for homework. Be sure to share with the class.

Closure

If anyone is ready ask them to share their poem!

Sample Lesson Three- The Life Maps

Sample lesson three begins the cumulating art project for the unit, the Life Map. I want students to create a map of the places and buildings and settings that have made them what they are today. They can illustrate, make collages, sculpture, whatever you and they agree on. I highly recommend that teachers go ahead and make their own life maps before asking the students to do so. It may be a hard project to do if it is simply an abstract idea inside of your head. Take a look at the rubric in the back of this unit (Appendix B)

Objectives

- Students will brainstorm places and settings that have been a part of their lives
- Students will create a fictional map of these places in a creative arts project
- Students will connect the literature to their projects (examples of uncomfortable public places, feeling out of place, etc.)
- Students will share projects with the class

Materials

- Maps
- Magazines that can be cut up
- Art supplies (glue, scissors, crayons markers, pencils, rulers, colored paper, etc)

Initiation

Show students a map of New York. Identify Harlem. Ask students to name some of the places that Squeaky would want to identify if she were labeling a map of Harlem. What might Walter Dean Meyers label? Would Robert Frost know any places in Harlem?

Procedure

Ask students what places they would identify on a map of places in their lives. Get a couple of ideas and then

ask students to list a dozen or so. Explain to students that they will create "Life Maps" made up of the places that influenced them most in their lives.

Show the students your "Life map." Explain some of the locations on it, ask them how they think the locations touched you or made you who you are. Share some stories that rise out of your life map.

Now brainstorm some ideas with your students. Explain your map is not the only way to do the project. Ask them how else they might create "Life maps." Then simply let the students go with the project. It may take a few days to get through it, but it should be a very rewarding experience for both you and your students.

Closure

Share students' "Life Maps" daily.

Annotated Bibliography

Applebee, Arthur N., editor. *The Language of Literature* . Evanston, IL: McDougal Little, 2001. This excellent collection of literature is the textbook we use at our school. All of the short stories and many of the poems used in this unit are in this textbook.

Lathem, Edward Connery, ed. *The Poetry of Robert Frost* . New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975. This is a wonderful, complete collection of Frost's poems.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some instructions on Writing and Life* . New York: Anchor Books, 1994. This is my favorite all time book on writing. There are lots of good practical ideas for writing as well as advice on life. A must read for all writers.

Leithauser, Hailey. *UFOs* . Southwest Review. Vol. 89, iv, 2004. A great poem to pair up with the "Out of Place" section of the unit.

Lynch, Anne. *Great Buildings* . New York: Time-Life Books, 1996. This book explores different types of architecture from Ancient Rome to modern day New York. Look at the pages entitled "Inspired by Nature" and "Adventurous Shapes" for possible use in the "Out of Place" section of the unit.

Meyers, Walter Dean. *Harlem* . New York: Scholastic Books, 1997. This award winning picture book/poem is composed of a great number of images of Harlem. The book is illustrated by the author's son and comes with a cassette in which the poem is read by Sean Combs.

Sullivan, Charles, editor. *Children of Promise: African American Literature and Arts for Young People* . New York: Abradale Press, 1991. This book contains a variety of art and literature done by and about African Americans, including paintings by Jacob Lawrence and literature by Langston Hughes and others.

Student Sources

Bentley, *Snowflakes in Photographs* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1979. This book contains a collection of snowflake images that would accompany the "Nature shaping character" section of the unit.

Haskins, James. *James Van Der Zee: The Picture Takin' Man*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1979. A great book for children on one of the best African American photographers from the Harlem Renaissance.

Martin, Jacqueline Briggs. *Snowflake Bentley* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998. This biographical picture book examines the life of the first man to photograph snowflakes. It may serve as a fun addition to the "nature" section of the unit.

Silverstein, Shel. *Falling Up* . New York: Harper-Collins, 1996. This is one of three Silverstein books listed here that I often refer to when working on art and poetry in the classroom.

Silverstein, Shel. *Light in the Attic* . New York: Harper-Collins, 1981. A great collection of illustrated children's poetry.

Silverstein, Shel. *Where the Sidewalk Ends* . New York: Harper-Collins, 1981. Another fine collection of illustrated children's poetry.

Visual Resources Online

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/>

This is a great sight for searching for digital images. Thousands of images are made available to the public through various online collections.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pp/pphome.html>

Another great source for online images, readers can search the Library of Congress collection for images. The site also has an excellent teacher section with lessons and workshops for educators.

Appendix A: Standards

Connecticut's Common Core of Learning Program Goals

Having completed 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;

(brainstorming, use of graphic organizers)

- 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

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

Appendix B: Life Map Scoring Rubric

Student Teacher

20 points each

1. Life Map includes at least 7 places of influence _____
2. Life Map is labeled /colored _____
3. Life Map includes four areas from unit _____
4. Life Map is in chronological order _____
5. Life Map places are explained briefly in essay on back of work _____

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