



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2008 Volume II: Storytelling: Fictional Narratives, Imaginary People, and the Reader's Real Life

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## **Animal Farm: Critical Approaches -- Unpeeling the Layers**

Curriculum Unit 08.02.03  
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### **Introduction**

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The study of English Language and Literature, on the middle school level, is referred to as Language Arts. Inherent in this reference is the fact that, as an educator, I am not only responsible to teach English as a language with all its complexities, but also as an art with all its interpretations. Merriam-Webster defines language as a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs or words, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings; it defines art as a creative product of human activity, fashioned with the intention of stimulating the human mind and senses thus transmitting ideas and emotions. Literature is art; it stimulates the mind and embodies emotion. It does this. The question is, "How do I get my students to unravel this stimulus of senses, mind, emotion, and ideas and gather more than a sophomoric meaning from the written word?"

### **Rationale**

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Currently, if I present my students with a particular text, selected from the many genres -- novel, short story, play, or poem -- and ask them for discourse on it, their immediate discussion would be of its plot. This discussion would not even occur without my first reading the text to them. Many of my students are English Language Learners (ELL). As a teacher, I try to help them form a general understanding of the text through Socratic questioning because orally they are very apt. They are encouraged to discuss the events of the story, perhaps in sequential order using graphic organizers as an aid. I often ask them to consider the structure and organizational patterns in the story, trying to bring them to an understanding of why an author chooses one genre over another. I might ask them to consider literary elements such as plot, setting, characterization, personification, irony, and metaphor that have been integrated within the text. After recognizing and discussing their own personal, cultural, and social mores and experiences, they are asked to consider how these might be represented and embedded within the specific texts and why, unless they apply these understandings to these selected texts, it may have no meaning. These reader-response connections and analysis are emphasized on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), within the New Haven School District Goals

for elementary and middle schools, and later on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) for Connecticut high schools. Yet my student's discussions are often rudimentary. Seldom do they analyze, synthesize, or evaluate in any depth. This has been their experience with analysis of the written word. They would not examine it past the story line without extensive guidance. Understanding why it is important that young people in the inner city experience the traditional literary genre, the "classic canon," as well as other kinds of narrative forms, in more diversified ways, is a vitally important question that needs a solid answer. Convincing my students that reading is necessary as a source of information and enjoyment is, very often, a hard sell. This does not mean that they are not capable of coming to recognize what reading can offer.

It is a challenge in today's educational environment to convince teachers that the pedagogical issues of standards-based teaching, where state standards drive the creation and development of curriculum, and differentiation, where the needs of each student must be the main concern of curriculum development, are not mutually exclusive. Teachers are inundated with the notion that assessment and standards must drive instruction. Some feel that standards throw up huge impediments when it comes to differentiated instruction. Differences in learning styles, readiness, experiences, and interests seemingly impose mountains to overcome in our high-stakes testing environment. Prescription is often used to describe today's race to compete in education. But I believe there is no contradiction between effective standards-based instruction and differentiation. With a learning environment that is student-centered, complex in terms of resources and methods used, open and accepting, and highly mobile, in terms of student movement and desk placement; with content modification including complex and abstract relationships, and a variety of methods of inquiry; and finally where process modification includes higher levels of creative thinking, variable pacing, open-endedness and group interaction, most students can learn a great deal. Curriculum tells us *what* to teach, differentiation tells us *how*. This *how* is the key to instilling the love of learning, the desire to dig deeper and demand more of everything they read.

The purpose of this unit is to bridge the gap between my student's cursory examination of a text and a more highly developed assessment, in which they dig deeper and demand more of what they experience. It is my goal to get them to a place where they can consider a piece of literature on several levels, being able to "unpeel" the structure and expose the complexities and sophisticated nuances of the text. In other words, they will see and appreciate literature as a multilayered construct of meaning. I will use an interdisciplinary, differentiated modality of instruction to accomplish my goals.

## Overall Strategies

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The main text to be examined in this unit is George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Due to the complex nature of the text for the middle school student, it is important to present clear-cut, incremental steps as a way of demonstrating the intricacies of the narrative. Because my students can "read" visual images with ease, I will start with a visual lesson presenting several scenes from the Sistine Chapel, adding background knowledge to expand understanding and appreciation of a piece of art. Next, I will show the literary counterpart, the metaphor. From here, my students will be exposed to the critical approaches to literature through the use of brief selections chosen for their obvious demonstration of the approach. Segueing into our main text, *Animal Farm*, will occur through a discussion of allegory present in the novel. Student groups will be assigned chapters. They will be required to present the chapter as a power point presentation, demonstrating understanding of the critical approach concepts using evidence from the text. They will also be asked to

highlight vocabulary that is new or interesting in some way and develop an assessment of the chapter for fellow students to complete. Finally, this unit will culminate in a written critique of the text using the various approaches as its basis as well as a visual project, perhaps a series of comic strips, capturing the essence of each chapter.

## **Introducing Students to the Unit: The Interdisciplinary Bridge Using Art**

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Middle school students in my classes are strong visual and verbal learners. It is necessary, however, to lay the groundwork, supply background information, and *bridge* the deeper comprehension gap in order for any intellectual impact to occur. To highlight the process of understanding the complexities of the arts using these strengths, I will present my students first with images of Michelangelo's *God Creating Adam* and *The Last Judgment* from the Sistine Chapel on an overhead projector and elicit from them what they see. Here, my expectation is that they will record in their journals the figures they see, the positions they are in, the nudity present, the colorations of the frescos, and their understanding of what the picture might represent. This is layer one. Using these visual representations will be a stepping stone to help the students understand that, like visual art, language, too, has many layers. I will use two sources for this activity: the website [http://mv.vatican.va/3\\_EN/pages/CSN/CSN\\_Volta.html](http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/CSN/CSN_Volta.html), which contains excellent background information and a virtual tour of the Chapel, and Trewin Coppleston's *Michelangelo*, which supplies an extensive look into the life and times of the artist. This resource contains excellent photographs that can be shown as added examples of the Chapel's wonderful art.

Once answers are shared, it will be important to solicit from the students what information would be needed to help them understand the paintings more completely, perhaps by asking, "What *doesn't* the picture tell us?" Guidance here will be necessary as I will want to encourage them to think about this question in its broadest context. The more obvious responses might be: more about the painter and his life, the history of the time, what the entire chapel looked like, the process the artist used to paint the ceiling, and whether any restorative work was ever needed to maintain the ceiling. These suggestions will act as an introduction to the contextual backgrounds of information on Michelangelo and historical information on the Medici family of Florence and Pope Julius II of the Catholic Church in Rome, as well as graphic information on the dimensional layout of the Chapel.

It is not my intent to burden my students with extensive historical background on any of these topics but rather to introduce them to the concept that a reader can draw a richer and more comprehensive view of literature and, for that matter, life by probing the background of the piece. The following sections represent brief introductions that I feel my students can handle with ease.

### **Biographical Information**

There are several websites that provide adequate biographical background information to supply my students for the purposes of this unit.

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/M/Michelangelo.htm> and [http://www.wga.hu/tours/sistina/index\\_a.html](http://www.wga.hu/tours/sistina/index_a.html). These documents can be used with highlighters to underscore the relevant information about Michelangelo's quick rise as an artist and sculptor, his agony and ecstasy as he worked on the Sistine Chapel, and his

exceptionally long life for a man of his time.

## **The Chapel**

Students are always interested in how Michelangelo came to “understand” the human figure represented so poignantly in the scenes of the Chapel. The Chapel itself consists of main scenes -- the histories -- in the center of the shallow barrel vault. Alternate larger and smaller panels represent the opening passages of the Bible, from the “Creation” to the “Drunkenness of Noah.” At each of the corners of the smaller panels there are pictured idealized nude youth, variously interpreted as angels or Neo-platonic perfections of human beauty. These nudes were directly influenced by Michelangelo’s intense study of the human form at the Carraro quarries, north of Florence. The Prior of Santo Spirito also provided Michelangelo with access to human corpses upon which he performed bodily dissections. He performed these dissections by candlelight, during the middle of the night while everyone was asleep, often leaving him with little sleep to continue work the next day. This story is one that shows Michelangelo’s obsession with his craft and always grabs the attention of students. His portrayals of the human form are arguably the best ever completed.

In 1527, Pope Clement VIII commissioned him to paint the fresco of “The Last Judgment” for the Sistine Chapel but work commenced under Pope Paul III in 1536 and was completed in 1541. The spirit of the work is totally different from that of the ceiling unveiled 29 years earlier. I will ask my students to compare the “Creation” scene to “The Last Judgment” to see if they recognize the differences in style and form between the two.

## **Fresco Buono-- Wall Plaster Painting**

The next subject, for our purposes, necessary in understanding the complexities of the Sistine Chapel is the artistic process of wall plaster painting known as fresco buono. Using this process, Michelangelo mixed the plaster, ground the pigments into paint, pounded his charcoal guides onto the wet plaster, and began applying the many layers of thin pure color pigment paint to the wall, which created a lasting piece of art, a chemical process which continued for 200 years all while the pigments grew in intensity. Copleston’s *Michelangelo* , has a wonderful description of this process (258). I will bring this process directly into the classroom, demonstrating to my students by actually bringing in plaster, oil paints, a charcoal guide, and brushes to demonstrate the arduous and tedious process. My intent is to show them that each small section had to be completed quickly before the plaster dried. Showing them the dimensions of the Chapel would be critical to their realization of why Michelangelo took so long to complete the Chapel. The sheer size was overwhelming. As a math connection, I might guide them to calculate the area we covered in our demonstration and compare it that of the area of the whole decorated chapel.

## **Restoration**

Finally it might be important for the students to understand that between 1984 and 1994, because of widespread degradation of the Chapel, the Nippon Television Network Corporation of Japan helped to finance yet another in a series of restorations of the Chapel with a \$ 4.2 million grant in return for exclusive photographic and filming rights, a process that proved very controversial. The goal of the new restoration was to remove the layers of soot, glue, and past restoration additions and also to reattach the fresco where the paint had begun to pull away from the ceiling. These procedures were to restore the frescos to the state of brilliance and color that Michelangelo had intended.

Seeing pictures of before and after will help the students visualize its condition. Cracks had opened in the ceiling, frequently letting in the rain and thus causing water damage in many regions of the frescos. Humidity

stains were also evident, and salt left behind from evaporating water had accumulated enough to create whitish stains that mottled the work, leaving some paint to blister. The ceiling was also covered in a layer of caked glue and smoke deposits. Additions of smaller, previous restorations subdued the brilliance of color that had once belonged to the frescos. The opinion that the damage to Michelangelo’s frescos was so great that scholars began to describe the artist as a “painter insensitive to color” was put to rest with the restoration. This will be our final layer of understanding.

At the end of this process, which should take three days, I will ask them to list and discuss what they now know about the piece, explaining that broad spectrum understanding comes from a more complete investigation and that this process can be applied to literature as well.

## The “Extended” Bridge -- Understanding Metaphor

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As part of the bridge between the paintings and the novel, I’ve decide to use the short poem, “Oh Captain, My Captain” written by Walt Whitman because of its use of extended metaphor. For my purposes, the extended metaphor is an intermediary step I have chosen to use to transition my students from the visual arts to the literary arts. It is my hope that they will see that this selection has multiple layers of meaning, preparing them to see that *Animal Farm* is yet a longer literary version called allegory. This particular poem was also chosen because the class does an extensive study of slavery, the Civil War, and Lincoln in their social studies class. I will present them with a hard copy of this poem so that they can work at their own pace to complete the graphic organizer below. Adding to our word wall, I will introduce the concept of extended metaphor, through which two people, places, or things are compared at some length without the use of like or as.

After asking students to read the poem silently as well as to listen to it read aloud with the whole class, I will ask them to record, on a two column graphic organizer, what they envisioned Whitman was trying to say. (It is helpful to include an example of how the organizer should be completed)

### **The Ship’s Captain**

### **Lincoln as President**

Speaker says to the Captain that their trip through rough waters and difficult times is done	President Lincoln, you have brought us through the difficult Civil War

Typical answers might include the fact the Captain led the ship through dangerous waters and how strong he was to be able to do so, how upset the speaker was that the man he considered as his father was now dead, how proud everyone was of the returning hero, and how he looked pale and still at death. As a refresher of their studies of the Civil War period, students will then be presented with a brief history of Lincoln’s time, informing them that Whitman was a contemporary of Lincoln. With this, they should be able to return to the poem and see that it is actually an extended metaphor written as a tribute to Lincoln. The second column of their organizer could then be filled in with the understanding that Lincoln was, in fact, the Captain. This one-day exercise should lead me nicely to the exploration of the different critical approaches to literature and also the introduction of allegory.

## The “Critical Approach” Bridge

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As a means of effectively introducing critical approaches or layered understandings of literature, to allow my students to begin to see the “depths and expanses” of reading, it would be impractical to hand out a sheet of descriptions of each. It would provide little, if any, meaning, would bore my students to death, and would have them asking, “What does this mean?” Instead, my plan is to use a range of fictional and non fictional texts as a testing ground for the critical insights of narrative. It will be of the utmost importance to approach these forms of literary criticism in the appropriate way. As a guide, I will pose several essential questions that capture the essence of each of the approaches that I want my students to consider as they read the text. Rather than giving them a purely academic explanation, to help my students generate appropriate questions to ask of the text, I will ask them to think, instead as an historian, writing the world’s story; a psychiatrist, looking at the reasons for a person’s behavior so as to understand and perhaps empathize with him or her; or a feminist, looking at the text from a woman’s point of view. With the completion of each literary piece, I will ask my students what impact the selection had on their previously held perceptions. The approaches that I have chosen to highlight -- historical, biographical, feminist, formalistic, -- are ones that easily find their way into *Animal Farm* .

## Introduction to the Historical Approach -- “Stop the Sun”

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There are several essential questions that need to be asked in order to introduce this section -- “What exactly is the job of history and the historian? Does the historian only answer the questions *who, what, where, when, why, and how* of an event, and from whose point of view does this information flow? What does a fair and balance point of view mean? Do *story and voice* play essential roles in history? Does it matter who is relating the information? and How does one arrive at the truth of history?” These will be the questions we will wrestle with as we begin this part of the unit. It goes without saying that an entire academic course could be devoted to these questions and answers, but I plan on spending a full day having students work in groups to consider these ideas and come back together to list in their journals as much pertinent information as possible. From here, we will read the short story, “Stop the Sun” by Gary Paulsen.

In this story, Terry Erickson’s father is suffering from Vietnam syndrome. No one would talk about it and Terry could only find out a “dry” history with “nothing but numbers, cold numbers, and nothing of what had *happened.*”

During a routine trip to the mall, Terry and his father split up to do separate errands. When his father fails to meet him at the designated entrance, Terry goes to the hardware store to see what the delay was. The image that he sees is burned into his mind and Terry wants to run away. Instead he moves into the store, finding his father squirming on the floor, crying, and panting like a hurt animal. What follows is a journey into the bowels of the Vietnam War. Terry’s father must try to explain to him how, during a military sweep, the Vietcong killed 54 of his fellow soldiers, how fear had consumed him, and how he thought if he could only stop the sun from rising, he might live.

Using this selection will definitely engage my students in discussion and development of questions

investigating the time and place called Vietnam. Students will want answers to the 5 W's: Who, What, Where, When, and Why. It would be hard to fully grasp the haunting memories Terry's father endured without this all-important background information. My students will be guided back to the essential questions as they try to apply their listed ideas to the text. They should leave this text seeing the importance of considering the history behind the story as a layer of constructed meaning.

## **Introduction to the Biographical Approach -- *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank***

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An understanding of the impact of an author's life on a text is another layer that I want my students to explore. The essential questions to be asked are, "Do any influences in the author's life appear in the story? What personal experiences do you think led this author to become a writer? Why did the author write this story? and Do the author's educational experiences, politics, economics, ethical beliefs, or religion play a role in his or her writing?" Using Anne Frank as a backdrop, I will ask my students to read selected excerpts from Lindwer's *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank*. Because we will have read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, earlier in the year, I believe reading these primary source accounts of survivors' friendship and interaction with Anne will serve to augment our understanding of who Anne really was. Her diaries are written from her perspective. These survivors' accounts will add more depth and appreciation as they provide us with others' perceptions of Anne. These biographical glimpses should round out and enhance our picture of the real Anne Frank. Again we will confront the implications of the background knowledge as we struggle with the answers to the essential questions posed above.

## **Introduction to the Feminist Approach- "Legacies" and "Mother to Son"**

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To help articulate and crystallize my students' awareness of several aspects of the feminist approach to literature, I have chosen several poems: "Legacies" by Nikki Giovanni and "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes. In Nikki Giovanni's poems, we see the struggle of a child as she is torn between doing what is expected of her and what she wants to do. In "Legacies," a grandmother is proud of her homemade rolls and wants to teach her granddaughter how to make them. After all, this is the expected "role" of a woman -- one who nurtures, one who bakes for her family. Is this a denigrating image of womanhood? In "Mother to Son," we see the struggle of a mother climbing life's staircase, which is represented as dark, dangerous, and frightening. In the poem, the speaker explains that

"Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
and splinters,  
and boards torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor-  
Bare.

But I've been a-climbin' on ..."

These two examples will direct our attention to important discussions of the role of women within a family or community and whether women are relegated to inferior positions within a male dominated world. I would also explore the concept of constructed language, language intended to be recognized as "women talk" within a story structure. Is the voice of a woman different from that of a man? Where and how does gender identity show up? Is it in ideas, attitudes, cadence, or language? In the selected examples above, would my students be able to identify the feminine voice speaking and, if so, how? What happens to one of the most linguistically-marked concepts of narrative theory, voice, when gender changes? These are some issues I hope to raise within their consciousness. What happens if we have dissonant opinions on this? Is it OK that males have one way of looking at text and females another?

## **Introduction to the Formalistic Approach -- "Tell-Tale Heart"**

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Exposure to the language and literary devices of the formalistic approach can be wonderfully displayed through the use of Edgar Allen Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart." Playing the 13 minute audio tape together with a physical copy of the text will not only chill students' spines but allow them to see first hand the elements of suspense, tension, imagery, repetition, atmosphere, first person narrative, and of course, descriptive language.

Providing students with guided analytical questions and organizers will engage them on many levels. Students should be expected to complete the following:

1. Explain how the opening statement creates suspense.
2. Highlight all the words that suggest fear and horror.
3. Poe often repeats words -- "very, very slowly."-- Highlight three examples and explain what effect it has on the story and the reader.
4. List how Poe uses time to pace the story and your heart. When does he slow it down? Why? When does he speed it up? Why?
5. The noises in the story create atmosphere. Fill in the graphic organizer below



Noise	Effect on Reader	Reason Poe chose the noise
Hinges creaked	Send chills down spine; who's behind the door	Focuses fear; slows down action; Visualize old house

6. Poe uses imagery in phrases like, "I found the eye always closed, and so it was impossible to do the work, for it was not the old man who vexed me but his Evil Eye." to get the reader to "see" his story as a film.

Highlight three examples.

How does he make the eye and death sound disgusting?

The introductory phase of the approaches should be completed in six days. It is at this point that I will present my students with grade-appropriate descriptions of each of the critical approaches that will be highlighted in *Animal Farm*. We will tease out similarities between the academic descriptions and the sample texts we considered.

## The Approach Descriptions

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### Biographical Approach

The Biographical Approach uses information about an author's life and background to better understand and analyze his or her work. Why is this important? A writer's life may shed light on his or her literature and the literature of the era. It may act to explain an author's biases within the text. It may also help the reader understand elements the author uses in his work, such as words, allusions, themes, characters. The allegorical implications in the narrative often come to the fore with this information. Time, place, and persons take on value as the text is interrogated. Understanding the author's political and religious leanings often adds clarity and significance to the written work while, at the same time, they help the reader discover the author's audience and intention. Correlations are better understood using the author's life but care must be taken.

For our purposes, authenticating the author's biographical information is essential in forming strong connections to the text. Did the author's personal experience act as an impetus in the formulation of the overall content of the story or even a part of it? What part of the story is purely imaginative? Does the author express social themes founded in his or her own situation? It is essential to avoid such mistakes as assuming that the author's life is necessarily the same as the work's contents.

## **Feminist/Gender Approach**

Feminist/gender issues in literature raise several complex concerns. Broadly speaking, this approach examines how gender and sexual identity influences the creation and reception of literary works. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* states that this approach looks at masculinity/femininity as binaries and the representation of women within the text. Feminist critics insist that man has been assumed to be representative of the essence of humanity while women are relegated or demoted to the role of subservience. The tradition of men's writing, they claim, expresses the male point of view from the male point of view and symbolizes and enforces male dominance of the world. Patriarchy is highlighted as truth, while the value of women is often dismissed and marginalized.

Other feminists want to explore and interrogate the issues of race, class, religion, and culture and their effects on the women through time and place. How do these factors influence attitudes, ideas, and language in the narrative? What are the implications of "white" "woman" "pretty" "rich" "wealth" and their opposed terms? Have these changed with the passage of time? The essential questions raised above lie at the heart of the feminist approach for the purposes of this unit.

## **Formalistic Approach**

The formalistic approach to an open text allows the reader to decide what is important about the words on the page as well as the reasons and actions of the characters themselves. It is more concerned with form rather than content. Literary devices are essential to this approach. The reader is able to derive reasonable explanations for the elements of plot, setting, characterization, and theme of the text. In Poe's *Tell Tale Heart* formal questions of sound and patterns of language, pacing, and imagery are raised. Awareness of the use of these devices within the text is essential to the understanding of it. According to *The Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, "When all the words, phrases, metaphors, images, and symbols are examined in terms of each other and of the whole, any literary text worth our efforts will display its own internal logic" (Guerin 75). Formal analysis explores the significance of individual details, affects, or parts within the self-endorsed whole of a work of art rather than investigating the relationship of those parts to things outside the text. When practicing the formalistic approach, the reader must scrutinize the text for tools such as form, texture, literary conventions, style, symbolism, point of view, theme, and so on to expose the beauty of the novel. With this approach, readers must understand what is meant by such conventions as metaphor and allegory, where a deeper idea is represented using a more easily accessible one; satire and irony, where human folly and vice are held up to scorn, derision, or ridicule; and parody, where a piece of text is used to ridicule another subject or text.

## **Historical Approach**

Simply put, this approach tries to understand how history impacts the written word. According to Kennedy and Gioia in *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, this approach "seeks to understand a literary work by investigating the social, cultural, and intellectual context that produced it--a context that necessarily includes the artist's biography and milieu" (Kennedy 23). A key goal for historical critics is to understand the effect of a literary work upon its original readers. Another focus may be how the times in which a writer lived influenced him or her. In other words, was he or she in step with or working against the popular culture of the day? The reader must be careful not to impose historical facts on a narrative if the connections are too vague or unclear. This approach actually helps a reader understand the text because without the historical background the deeper meaning of the text is lost. An example of this is in the story "Stop the Sun" where the reader, like the character, Terry, within the narrative, must develop an

understanding of the Vietnam War to comprehend Terry's father and the Vietnam War Syndrome.

## The "Long" Bridge -- Allegory

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Allegory will be introduced as a symbolic device used to represent abstract ideas or points of reference beyond the surface meaning. *Animal Farm*, Orwell's strongly allegorical and political satire, uses animals and a farm setting as a representation of human society and a critique of Russian politics of the day. I will explain that, like "Oh Captain, My Captain," *Animal Farm* is a sustained metaphor continued through the whole book length work. Recognizing allegory will include looking for a didactic theme or moral, taking note of other literary devices, in this case satire, and finally searching for the personification of such abstract ideas as greed, envy, hatred, charity, and laziness.

This rhetorical trope, an extended metaphor, is seen when objects, persons, and actions in a narrative are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself using Orwell's life experiences and the politics of the day. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious, or political significance, and characters are often personifications of historic figures-- e.g., Queen Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queen* or Stalin in *Animal Farm*, -as well as of the abstract ideas of avarice, power, and envy. These underlying meanings will become quite transparent as we read the novel. My students will come to understand that allegory is a story with two or more meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic ones.

## The Walk Across the Farm

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Using the internet, biographical background on the author, George Orwell, will be gathered. We will research and examine the life of Orwell to determine, as we read the text, the relevance, if any, of his life on the story. Graphic organizers will be completed to solidify their understanding of the life and times of the narrative. At the same time we will complete an historic study to see the impact of history on the novel. These two websites provide easy and accessible information to set the stage for the reading of the novel. [http://www.george-orwell.org/l\\_biography.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/l_biography.html) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Orwell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Orwell)

As we begin our exploration of the text, it will be essential to remind the students that they will be applying their new found knowledge of the critical approaches to the text. Groups of three students will work together to analyze assigned chapters. Next year's eighth grade classes are scheduled to be divided into three groups making each class number eighteen. There will thus be six groups in each class. Each group will be asked to consider and complete four sections for its assigned chapter: to list salient points for a power point presentation using one of the critical approaches as reference points; to highlight the important vocabulary of the chapter; to develop a creative way to present their chapter; and to develop insightful questions to ask of their classmates.

It is my intent to meet with each group before their presentation and review their information, offering help where needed. I will model the first two chapters, showing them exactly what I expect of their power point

presentation. I will continue to model both chapters 5 and 8 while providing time for the remaining groups to read and prepare. In the critical approach portion, I will ask them to describe the approach they chose to highlight, and then provide examples from the text where there is evidence that the approach applies. An example of this might be the representation of historical figures as the major characters within the novel; Stalin as Napoleon, Trotsky as Snowball, etc. This information would be gleaned through the historical background we discuss at the beginning of the novel. I would expect my students to be able to show how these characters' actions mimic actual events in history.

The important vocabulary must first appear on their power point presentation as a list with definitions. The group should provide the class with a written list for their binders. It will then be up to them to decide how the vocabulary will be reinforced. Some suggestion might be a worksheet with blanks to be filled in, a vocabulary game similar to *Jeopardy*, a matching sheet, a synonym/antonym sheet, etc. Some of these can be suggested as homework assignments. It should be emphasized here that the use of vocabulary in their culminating essay will receive extra credit.

The demonstration of the plot line is the creative piece of their presentation. Its form might be a play with a small cast of characters, a poem, or a puppet show. Obviously this section allows those students who are visually, artistically, creatively, and verbally, to shine. A time constraint of 5 - 8 minutes should be set on this activity to allow enough time for all 4 sections to be completed within a 45 minute time period.

Students will next create the final portion of their power point presentation -- an assessment of their choosing. This could be a crossword puzzle, a quick quiz, a *Jeopardy* -like game, or an open-ended question. In addition, students will write a critique of the text using the various approaches as well as creating a visual project, perhaps a series of comic strips, capturing the essence of each chapter. For my ELL students, the plot line should be depicted in these comics. For my advanced students, I will expect the satire to be shown, modeling this with samples of some *New York Times* political cartoons.

The final piece of this unit is undoubtedly the most significant for my students --the discussion of the book as a whole. A series of ethical and literary questions and connections will hopefully be generated and answered. Although I would never use these questions worded as such, these are the essential questions of my unit. Questions such as: Is fiction an issue of "truthfulness" or relevance? Is it important, as Aristotle claims, that there be a certain "distance" between a work of art and life in order to achieve catharsis? Do art and literature necessarily have to imitate life, as a simulated representation or mimesis, in order to give us a way of understanding a character's feelings? Do stories have irreconcilably contradictory meanings as defined in the deconstructionist approach to literature? Are women relegated to secondary positions, as feminist criticism contends or should Freud be consulted when reading literary works? Should literature be examined historically/economically; is it even a relevant form of criticism? It will be at this point that we will also try to resolve any unanswered questions that have been raised in hopes of satisfying my students' innate curiosity that they so often display while reading together as a class.

Hopefully this introduction to the critical approaches will spawn awareness of the depths to which literature reaches. This exposure will set the groundwork for high school and beyond.

## Appendix

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### Reading Comprehension Strands -- New Haven and Connecticut State Standards

#### *The "A" Strand: Forming General Understanding*

A1. In this strand, students are asked to discover:

- What lessons are learned
- What the main idea of the text was
- What the theme of the story was
- All answered by POWER CORRUPTS

A2. A second relevant part of this strand helps students understand:

- Characters as developing or static
- Conflict and resolution
- Setting

#### *The "B" Strand: Developing an Interpretation*

B1. This strand helps students identify or infer the author's use of structure and organizational patterning. It is here where we will discover:

- Cause and effect
- Character comparison
- Differences in description, explanation, dialog, and argument

B2. This subsection delves into author's purpose

B3. Helps students use evidence to support a conclusion

## *The “C” Strand: Make Reader/Text Connections*

The subsections of this strand are really self evident in terms of our textual analysis.

## *The “D” Strand: Examining the Content and Structure*

This strand underscores the formalistic approach as it asks students to consider:

D1. The author’s craft

· The use of allegory, personification, satire, and irony

D3. Understanding what’s important to the author

## References

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### Texts

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (6th ed) New York: Modern Language Association. 2003. For use with high school and undergraduate students. It contains chapters on preparing, writing, (mechanics of writing and the documentation of sources) and formatting the research paper.

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Style Manual and Guide To Scholarly Publishing* (3sup> rd ed). New York: Modern Language Association. 2008. Aimed at graduate students, scholars, and professional writers, this book contains common practices among these groups, legal issues in scholarly publishing, and chapters on the mechanics of writing and the documentation of sources.

Kennedy, X.J and Gioia’s, Dana. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, Sixth Edition. New York: HarperCollins, 1995 Descriptions of the critical approaches to literature.

Labor, Earle G.; Willingham, John R.; Morgan, Lee; Reesman, Jeanne C. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). North Carolina: Oxford University Press. 1998. A helpful tool for teachers in the understanding of the critical approaches to literature.

Lindwer, Willy. *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank*. New York: Pantheon. 1991 *This book provides six accounts of survivors of the Holocaust who knew Anne Frank. It is a primary source to be used in discussions of the historical approach to literature.*

Murfin, Ross and Ray M. Supriya. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. New York: Bedford Books. 1998.

Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*. New York: Penquin Group. 1996. A satirical allegory and pointed criticism of Stalinist Russia for use with students to discover the critical ways in which to view literature.

Perrine, Laurence. *Story and Structure* .New York: Harcourt. 1992. A teacher resource for use in understanding the complexities of

the literary word.

## Websites

<http://www.agweb.dk/ah/gys/The%20Tell-Tale%20Heart.htm> . A great site for Edgar Allen Poe's *Tell-Tale Heart*. Questions to be used with story.

<http://www.alohatuscany.com/buonfresco.html> This site provides an understanding of the process of plaster painting called fresco buono.

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/M/Michelangelo.html> . This site provides a brief biography of Michelangelo to be used in the introductory lesson.

[http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/Virtualit/poetry/critical\\_define/crit\\_decons.html](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/Virtualit/poetry/critical_define/crit_decons.html) . This site provides an extended discussion of the major critical approaches that can be used with higher level students.

<http://brainstorm-services.com/wcu/critical-approaches.html> .A bulleted overview of the critical approaches to literature which can be useful for struggling students.

<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/blackmon/engl360k/critical.html> .A brief overview of many critical approaches to literature with several links that provide further information.

[http://www.de-breul.nl/Vakken/Engels/WQ2/stop\\_the\\_sun.htm](http://www.de-breul.nl/Vakken/Engels/WQ2/stop_the_sun.htm) A copy of the story *Stop the Sun* by Gary Paulsen to be used in a discussion of the historical approach to literature.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Orwell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Orwell). Bibliographic and historical context of George Orwell. Easy to understand information for students.

<http://home.olemiss.edu/~egjbp/200/litcrit.html> . A succinct introduction to the critical approaches in paragraph form that can be presented immediately following the Michelangelo introduction.

[http://www.george-orwell.org/l\\_biography.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/l_biography.html) A manageable biography of George Orwell to be presented to students

<http://gullibletravel.tripod.com/CriticalApproachesLiterature.html> Another site to gather information about critical approaches. It can be used to create your own definitions and discussion points on the critical approaches.

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm113.html> Information on Whitman's "O Captain, My Captain" as well as primary source newspaper articles on Lincoln's death

[http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hd/pope/hd\\_pope.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hd/pope/hd_pope.htm) Historic background on Pope Julius II

[http://www.michelangelomodels.com/m-models/sistine\\_chapel.shtml](http://www.michelangelomodels.com/m-models/sistine_chapel.shtml) Great pictures of the individual sections of the Sistine Chapel. Shows restoration of major areas.

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/atrisk/at6lk38.htm> Defines the concept of reciprocal teaching

<http://nonesuch.flyingredslippers.org/lindwer.html> This website gives a sample of the book *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank* which can be used in the introductory discussion of the historic approach to literature.

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=177836> A copy of the poem *Legacies* by Nikki Giovanni to be used in the discussion of the feminist approach to literature.

<http://www.reidsguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/lazio/rome/>

[sights/vatican\\_sistine.html](sights/vatican_sistine.html) This site provides general background information of the Sistine Chapel

<http://students.ou.edu/C/Kara.C.Chiodo-1/orwell.html> Help with the comparison of Orwell and Marxism

<http://www.thisnation.com/library/songs/ocaptain.html> Copy of Whitman's "Oh, Captain, My Captain" with notes from Whitman.

<http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/matoson.html> A copy of the poem "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes to be used in the discussion of the feminist approach to literature

<http://users.wfu.edu/boguka5/FYS100/sistineceiling.htm> Understanding the restoration process of the Sistine Chapel

[http://www.wga.hu/tours/sistina/index\\_a.html](http://www.wga.hu/tours/sistina/index_a.html) Background on Michelangelo, Pope Julius II and the Medici Family

[http://mv.vatican.va/3\\_EN/pages/CSN/CSN\\_Volta.html](http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/CSN/CSN_Volta.html) This website provides valuable information and a virtual visual tour of the Sistine Chapel.

## Student Texts

Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. New York: Bantam Books. 1993. This is the story of a young Jewish girl who leaves in hiding in Holland during the Holocaust.

Lindwer, Willy. *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank*. New York: Pantheon. 1991 This book provides six accounts of survivors of the Holocaust who knew Anne Frank. It is a primary source to be used in discussions of the historical approach to literature.

McDougal Littell. *The Language Of Literature*. New York: Pearson Education. 1993. This is a comprehensive literature series with several stories and poems mentioned in this unit: *Oh Captain, My Captain*, *Stop the Sun*, *Legacies*, and *Mother and Son*.

Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*. New York: Penguin Group. 1996. A satirical allegory and pointed criticism of Stalinist Russia for use with students to discover the critical ways in which to view literature.

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