



Love: The Art of Seeing, Knowing and Writing Today and in the Past

Curriculum Unit 09.01.07
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Introduction

This unit focuses on the theme of love in its widest meaning -- love for a son, love for a parent, love for a special person, love for seeing, love for writing -- and on what a lover sees. The goal is to discover how many details we usually miss because we pay no attention to what passes in front of our eyes. The unit is appropriate for College English 3 and 4, AP English Literature and Composition, and AP English Language and Composition. The unit starts with the following essential questions: "What do I see? What do I notice? Is this love?" It includes a visual section that primarily teaches students to see details, interpret them, and discuss what an artist/author wants to communicate with a visual image. The same section trains students to observe, infer, analyze the context of what they see, draw conclusions, discuss by agreeing or disagreeing, and write. A second section focuses on critical thinking and takes into consideration the following essays: "Seeing" by Annie Dillard, "I Want A Wife" by Judy Brady, "The Breakups That Got Under My Skin" by Kerry Cohen published in The New York Times, and the novel *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. The objective is to enhance students' ability to see details, pay close attention to context, think, close-read, analyze, discuss, synthesize, and evaluate the theme expressed by an author. It also requires various writing activities throughout the entire unit together with a final project in the form of a documented essay or, for those students who have special needs, a simple documented visual.

Rationale

The unit takes into account my students' needs, their specific backgrounds, the curriculum requirements of the New Haven Public Schools, and the characteristics of my school. Demographically, my students come from all possible backgrounds - 69% African-Americans, 15 % White and 16% Hispanics. This year I have a group of five students who are not native speakers and do not have an ESL teacher in the school. Another group of about nineteen students has various special needs. They are included in all my classes, and the Special Education teacher does not co-teach with me. Therefore I have to modify my lessons. About 10% of all the juniors and seniors in my classes excel in both writing and reading, whereas all the others have serious

difficulty writing one full page. Despite such problems and discrepancies, I can see effective improvements in the work of both the struggling and proficient students between the beginning and the end of the school year.

Our curriculum goals are to develop an understanding and an appreciation of the variety of texts we analyze. The curriculum also requires students to respond to these texts critically and individually in order to achieve a true independence of thought and to build the character of a productive citizen. It also points out the fact the students need to acquire simple and straightforward strategies both in reading and writing to enhance their abilities to analyze and criticize texts. I also use differentiated instruction by implementing different strategies in the same class according to the specific student's needs. At the beginning of each unit, my students and I determine an essential question that will lead us through various texts. This essential question is important because it helps them understand, analyze, and evaluate the material we cover. It is also a steady reference for the promotion of formal-operational thinking, which is identified by Piaget as the stage at which mental tasks involve abstract thinking and the coordination of a number of variables. ¹ When students reach this stage, they explore hypothetical questions, explore and understand individual contributions, discuss and accept different positions, and reflect on the social life of human beings.

My school's core subjects are the visual arts, and each unit must have interdisciplinary connections to dance, music, theater, painting, photography, and videography. The students' talents and their interests play a basic role in this unit by helping them understand, interpret, synthesize, and evaluate. In fact, I know from previous experiences that they easily understand difficult concepts if these concepts are presented and studied first in their art, then identified and analyzed in literary texts. For instance, when I explain the concept of audience and its importance in writing, I require each student to come to class with a sample from his or her art class - music, visual arts, drawing, dance, and theater. By looking at the specific details and by discussing the artist's choices, my students see whom the artist addresses and how he or she does that. At this point, the transition to the written text is easier because each student has understood the meaning and the importance of audience. I have to teach them only the literary devices and conventions the writer uses to address an audience. By following the students' artistic interests, I have an opportunity to accomplish tasks that are normally considered "boring."

Another factor needs to be considered: my students belong to a modern and technological society in which everything is fast. They tend to reject the study of literary texts because they think they are boring and do not connect to their lives. My challenge is to show them how literature reflects issues, values, and themes that are still present in our society. They need to see the connections between a literary text and their world in order to appreciate the text. For this reason the unit is planned around their interests and their stage of development, the zone of proximal development that is "the area where the child cannot solve the problem alone, but can be successful under adult guidance or in collaboration with more advanced peers." ² In this way, I can have an effective learning segment with a high percentage of proficiency. Moreover, I know my students' lives constantly revolve around the discovery of what love is and should be. This theme recurs continuously in their life, and it is the constant object of their interest. This fact gives me the opportunity to overcome their lack of motivation and to make learning real, not "boring."

I also need to consider two other important matters: thinking and writing. The great majority of my students spend just few seconds thinking. They do not know where to begin, what to think, and why they should ever stop their frenetic life to think. When it comes to writing, they do not have ideas; they do not know what to write and how to write. They respond with just a few words or a few lines because they do not see the details either in the page they read or in an ordinary event. I also notice they do not spend more than a few seconds reading a document, and their reading does not reach its second or third line most of the time. My students

usually define a detailed text as "slow" and consequently boring or useless.

Timing is also another important factor for the failure or success of this unit. If I plan to use it too early in the school year, I would not be able to adapt the unit to the specific problems of different students because I would not know each of them well. This unit is set for the beginning of the second marking period because I then know the specific needs of each student and also because they have already seen how to start from a concrete prompt or visual aid and move to more sophisticated or abstract thinking. They have internalized how to respond to an essential question about a literary text, and they have already learned the Socratic seminar method that I deem pivotal for the development of their skills and thoughts.

Pedagogical Theory

The majority of my students, except those in the Advanced Placement class, are still at the concrete-operational stage. They cannot think abstractly and do not understand what is inferred in a written or visual text. According to Piaget, the concrete-operational stage occurs when the child is able to solve concrete problems. It is the time when the child displays a logic which is based on what he or she can see, touch or hear. The goal I set for my term is to move my students from this initial stage to the formal-operational one in which they are able to solve abstract problems. This means the students can infer, as well as develop theories and concerns about the social world surrounding him or her. At this stage students are able to think hypothetically and reason deductively. The formal-operational thinker can identify general principles or use specific observations to identify a solution or a new theory. This goal cannot be achieved at the end of a single unit since it requires a long and consistently planned path primarily oriented toward the formal-operational thinking process. This unit reflects just the beginning of a process that will be consistently reinforced throughout the year.

In planning all my units, I also take into consideration Vygotsky's theory that the teacher has to assist and guide students in their learning experience. The Department of Education in the state of Connecticut and the New Haven School District also follow Vygotsky. This theory requires that the teacher provide continuous scaffolding - giving information, prompts, reminders, and allowing the students to gain ownership of their learning. This is particularly important for this unit, which is based on critical thinking, because my students would never follow me if I did not empower them.

Another important theory presented by Vygotsky is the "zone of proximal development," which is the level at which a student cannot solve problems or do things alone because he or she does not know how. At this point real learning occurs, and the teacher is needed to guide the student to the solution of the problem. It is only at this level that learning is directed by the teacher, who models appropriate strategies to meet a goal and guides the students in their use of strategies. It is also important to plan a consistent repetition of the task, making them aware of the specific strategies they are using so that they can achieve a degree of automaticity.

My unit also takes into account Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. Gardner's theory states that there are separate abilities, but also it confirms that these abilities may not be so separate as is commonly thought and that there are connections between them. My students are a clear example of this idea. I have students with a specific musical talent who have logical-mathematical skills because they are able to handle long

chains of reasoning. I have dancers who have interpersonal skills since they are able to respond appropriately to the moods, desires, and motivations of other students. I have many students in the AP and honors classes who have a clear intrapersonal intelligence but also have capacities to perceive the visual-spatial world or have a particular sensitivity for the meanings of words, sounds, and language in general. The concept of different intelligences, extremely important in teaching, should never be minimized. All individuals are different, and they have different and multiple intelligences because they can excel in one or more disciplines or areas.

My unit is based on the cultivation of all these capabilities. As an educator, I feel a responsibility to prepare my students for the community they live in and, in a broader sense, for our society. The multiple-intelligences theory allows me to approach my unit goals in a variety of ways. I can spend a significant amount of time on generating ideas or essential questions by asking students to use what they already know in their particular art in order to make them understand how to see details, how to infer what the image may refer to, and finally draw conclusion about what they see. Gardner's theory offers me the effective possibility to introduce the principle of differentiation because I will use music, drawing, dance, creative writing, and theater, while leading my students to understand how details are relevant in the analysis of a text. Due to these considerations, the unit begins with the students researching images of love as it is represented in their artistic disciplines.

Strategies

In teaching this unit, I implement various strategies and modifications. Specifically, I start the unit with a pre-reading/writing activity for each text, either written or visual. The previewing activity, also known as a warm-up, is an essential strategy to motivate my students. The choice of effective strategies is the basis of the entire unit. Research shows that the level of motivation students bring to a task impacts whether and how they will use comprehension strategies. Reading for a real reason and creating an environment rich in high-quality texts are equally important. Sometimes an oral preview of stories, which are then turned into discussions and predictions, increases the comprehension of the story, and a creative variation of the preview that asks students to compose a narrative based on key words from the upcoming story can also trigger a deeper comprehension of it. ³

Consequently, I use two different activities: a Quick Write activity at the very beginning of the unit and whenever it is necessary, and the Tea Party exercise before the reading of each written document/excerpt for the weakest students who may be in a regular class. The Quick Write strategy makes the students predict, reflect, and/or draw conclusions. It is recommended for the AP and regular students. Differently, the Tea Party strategy encourages an active participation with the text. This pre-reading strategy allows students to predict what they think will happen in the text while inferring, comparing and contrasting, see casual relationships, and use their prior knowledge. It is extremely effective with unmotivated and/or struggling readers, ⁴ and it is an excellent way to achieve the formal-operational stage.

Throughout the unit, modeling and scaffolding are recurrent, as is the use of writing prompts. Following both Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories, I extensively use Class Discussion, Questioning, Comparing and Contrasting either to move students from the concrete-operational stage to the formal-operational one or to bring them to the nearest zone of proximal learning. Actually, I find the Class Discussion strategy, which I usually call

Sharing Time, very beneficial because many of my students refrain from saying what they think. In order to overcome their resistance, I usually present this strategy as a celebratory time, in which we share whatever we have done or whatever we think without being or becoming judgmental. My students need to accept diversity while developing the ownership of learning. This technique generally works very well, and it helps to move the concrete-operational students to the formal-operational stage.

Love and Seeing

Love is a very important feeling everyone experiences in life, but the word love does not necessarily mean romantic attachment. It can be a passion for a specific art or a deep admiration. Mikulincer and Goodman confirm that romantic love is only one of the various types of love that we can encounter. It is the attachment any person can experience in life. Love is the kind of "positive affect or syndrome of emotions, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors." ⁵ The same authors construct a taxonomy of love in order to correctly identify the behavioral differentiations that scientists distinguish.

Moreover, Hal Kelly has observed that "any particular conception or theory of love has associated with it a cluster of ideas that include observable manifestations - actions and feelings - that are the characteristic indications of that kind of love." ⁶ Love is a feeling that is reflected in specific behaviors that we can notice and describe in detail. At this point the act of seeing merges with an emotion as strong and powerful as love. Seeing is the result of what our retina captures of the physical world. Our retina will never construct the image of love because it is not a physical object. However, being in love leads to very specific behaviors that are either physical changes - the person in love shows a relaxed or happy face, or even different attire - and/or attitudes. These are certainly visible, but in order to see such a change, we need to be careful observers. The person who is in love displays certain physical differences that our retina can certainly capture. The analysis of these differences or changes in behavior can result in the conclusion that they are due to an emotion or feeling like love.

Objectives

The objectives of this unit, as well as the daily assessments made when teaching it, are always based on Bloom's taxonomy, which is another important conception of the development of critical thinking. I usually try to include all or most of the six steps of the taxonomy in each lesson plan just to guide the students in their thinking process. Specifically, I want my students to see the details in a visual image and in a written text. At the same time, I expect them to learn how to understand, infer, discuss, synthesize, and evaluate purpose, audience, structure, point of view in written and visual texts, and the tone also of written texts, as well as how the writer/artist uses these devices to compose. The advanced class can also learn what focal point, repetition or similarity of shape and size, and color contrast mean in an image, and how they contribute to its themes. In studying written texts, the students have to understand, analyze, discuss and evaluate primary and secondary characters, but they also have to consider how setting, symbols, diction, figurative language, and tone contribute to characterization. They conclude by writing an essay in which they theorize about love and how

they can see it.

Unit Overview

The unit starts with the students reflecting and responding to one of these essential questions: What is love? What is your definition of love? I expect them to come up with the usual answer that love is a special feeling between two individuals. They might also write about personal experiences or whatever they think love is. I give my students five minutes for this initial activity, and then I add a second question: How do you know it is love? This question requires them to use their prior knowledge to identify one example of love, analyze it, and draw a conclusion. They have another eight minutes before sharing their writings aloud. At this point, I ask them to write a few lines explaining how, after listening to the peers, they have changed or have a different perspective on love. We share our reflections again, and we discuss them in order to determine which aspect of this definition, if any, is the most important and why it is so relevant to them. I also ask them to use their experience and write a detailed description of an example of love. Of course, this pre-reading activity taps into their prior knowledge and leads them to reflect, synthesize and evaluate their views on their reality while understanding how to think abstractly. They are also in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development because they can respond to the essential questions by referring to their personal lives, but they need the teacher's guidance to become more analytical and reflective in their reading and writing activities.

After this initial activity, I ask the students to research visual documents representing love. In doing this activity, each student researches an image of love that involves his or her specific artistic talent. This means the dancer has to find images in which love is expressed through dance; similarly, the drawing student looks for paintings or sculptures that represent love. The students in the Honors and Advanced Placements class do the same initial research, but they have to find today's images, advertisements or video clips as well as image from past centuries, and written texts to compare and contrast. All the visual documents are studied following a well-determined structure. Our first activity is to learn analyzing a visual image by looking at it, making sense, and responding in writing. I ask my students to describe the details they see in the picture as well as the feeling connected to the same image. These visual texts also offer the opportunity to learn how to discuss and write about an image by using a specific language based upon perception. It may include terms such as focal point, figure-ground contrast, repetition or similarity (shape and size), and color contrast. I also require my students to compare and contrast the visual images to the literary texts covered in this unit. I want my students to learn that a visual text is the result of a creative process that is not different from the one the author follows in composing a written text.

The written documents we study all follow a precise order that helps my students understand, analyze, discuss, synthesize and evaluate. First of all, all my students read *Great Expectations*. The AP students complete the first reading at home, and they also have to annotate the text. They are asked to focus on traditional literary features like tone, symbols, theme, and conflict. The other students have a modified plan that allows time for class reading since they need my help to understand the text. The AP students also have to select quotes, phrases, or words about Pip's visions that they deem relevant to start a daily discussion on Facebook. In class, I require some journal writings in response to passages that the students or I select. They also have to write analytical responses about the characters we encounter while considering how certain literary elements like diction, setting, and tone contribute to their characterization.

The essays included in this unit have different reading levels, so that each group reads the text that is appropriate to its reading skills. A pre-reading activity that varies according to the needs of different students precedes the reading and annotation of the essay, and they are followed in class and at home by various writing assignments focusing first on details and then on other literary elements. During our class discussions, I expect my students to write their notes in their journals while I write on a poster that I keep on the board, so that the weakest students can always refer to find ideas for their written responses or further analyze their initial thoughts.

The unit concludes with the writing of a document: a synthesis essay in which each student will be required to discuss the feeling of love, the details that make it visible, and ultimately what the lover can see. They have to document their thesis with facts or details from the various visual and written documents examined and studied in the unit. The students with special needs conclude it with the PowerPoint presentation only.

Students' Journey

Visual Section

After the initial activity mentioned in the Unit Overview, my students' homework involves researching any images or video clips representative of how they initially think love is or think that they see it. They have to bring to class photographs, cards, printed images from magazines or whatever they find on the Internet. On the next day, I have a variety of images that they like so that they can start learning how to see the details in them. First of all, I ask them to spend few minutes observing the image they have and then respond to the following question: What do you see? This question requires them to observe the details in the picture, and by writing these details they practice how to describe something or someone they see. The second question follows after about five minutes, and it asks my students to write what they notice in that image. By asking them to notice details, I lead them to focus on specific colors, shapes, or other minutiae that may suggest what the creator of the picture means to communicate. When they complete their five-minute-long writing task, they have to pass the image they are writing about to their peer and share what they have written. Since the peer has the visual image that is the object of the writing, we can have a brief discussion that may help the writer see other details in it. When this activity is completed, I ask the students to respond to the following questions: After listening to your peer's feedback, do you notice other details? Why are these details important? Before passing to other questions, I add the following question: What is the purpose of this visual image? Why is it important?

At this point, I start to use the word composition, and I explain that the composition of each text, either visual or written, is "both the process of creating a text and the way in which a text is put together." ⁷ The author uses compositional techniques that include the purpose (why do I present this picture and why do I want to include or exclude certain details?), structure (the subject of the picture, the color, the focus, the lines or patterns of color and shape), audience (for whom is this picture intended or what does this image need to have to appeal to the person or group of people I want to address or what details does it need to speak to the targeted audience?), and point of view (the perspective from which the artist presents the story). Point of view also involves the way the artist presents readers with materials. ⁸ I tell my students that when we refer to point of view in visual images, we use the word frame. I explain the meaning of this word by displaying on the board an image (it can be any picture) and zooming in or out. When I zoom in, I want to frame a specific

detail. Alternately, when I zoom out, I want to frame other surrounding details, and that variation changes my point of view because I give relevance to other elements that I think are important to an understanding of the image in its context. In order for them to understand this concept, I display on the board (LCD) four different framings of Dorothea Lange's Migrant Mother, ⁹ and I ask the students to respond to what they see and what they notice in each photograph, but I also require them to compare and contrast the different versions to notice how the point of view or framing changes and how each different frame affects the overall meaning of the image.

I continue explaining that the context of a visual image is very important to thoroughly understand the artist's message. ¹⁰ The context refers to all those specific events that occurred and contributed to the creation of the idea in the mind of the artist or of the writer if it is a written text. These circumstances can be connected to the personal experiences of the author or to the historical, political, or events that take place at the time when the idea is conceived and that can directly or indirectly affect the text. It is important to understand the origins of the idea presented in the text, the cultural assumptions of the author, and the assumptions that derive from a shared body of knowledge (I use the phrase common sense with the struggling students) on the part of the audience. ¹¹ I ask my students to research and define who the author of the visual text is, when he or she created this picture, his or her personal background, and their own assumption(s) about this picture. This exercise is extremely important for a second objective: to teach my students to determine the validity of their sources. Most of them, if not all of them, accept without questioning everything they find on the Internet. Now, researching the context of an image makes them aware that when they do not know the author of a source or when they cannot find other sources/documents validating what they have found, the source is not reliable.

The struggling students can benefit a lot from this section. The modification I implement for this group is based on the scaffolding of the skills they have just learned. In fact, I prepare a poster I keep in the classroom with the essential steps they need to follow in their critical analysis: see details, purpose, audience, structure, point of view, context by researching, and then write a close analysis.

Written Text Section

Now my next challenge is to use the skills we have learned in analyzing a visual text in reading and writing about a written text. At the same time, this section requires more specific modifications to reach all my students. I also differentiate texts and the length of the text. For instance, both the regular and AP students will read *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, but the essays we study are different: the Honors and AP students read "Seeing" by Annie Dillard and the regular students read "I Want a Wife" by Judy Brady, which is easier in its vocabulary and reading level and has a more evident connection to the theme of the unit. "Seeing" by Annie Dillard connects to the theme of love, but it can also scaffold or reinforce the ability to see details and reflect on the literary conventions - purpose, structure, audience, and point of view -- that we have just applied in the previous section. All the other struggling students read "The Breakups That Got under My Skin" by Kerry Cohen.

The first text of this unit is *Great Expectations*. Charles Dickens successfully depicts the emotions that Pip feels for Estella, Pip's sister, Joe, Magwitch, and Miss Havisham. The detailed descriptions of the characters or of the setting, the adjectives Dickens uses for specific psychological situations, and the appropriateness of the symbols in the novel can help my students understand how one sees and describes a specific behavior that is the result of a specific feeling. For instance, Barbara Hardy states that in *Great Expectations* "food is used to define various aspect of love ... and meals are often carefully placed in order to underline and explain

motivation and development." ¹² Magwitch asks for food when he meets Pip for the first time. The convict needs someone to love or take care of, and Pip will be the person to work and live for. The hands and the chains described in the novel are symbolic too, and they help the reader understand Pip's feelings on various occasions. Other important symbols connected to certain feelings are Miss Havisham's wedding dress, the household, and Pip's room. My students have to infer different feelings from the detailed descriptions of how Estella speaks to Pip or laughs or how his sister, Joe, and Miss Havisham treat him. Dickens's novel requires "deep attention" in order to be fully understood, but, according to N. Katherine Hayles, today's students are more capable of "hyper attention" because they "have acquired a shield, so that normal stimulation is felt as boredom." ¹³ Her hypothesis is that we need to find a stimulant to help the students concentrate. Media affects the brains of children by favoring a different synaptogenesis, which means that today's students have brains wired differently from those of people in previous generations when media was not such an important aspect of everyday life. Hayles also suggests that "media stimulation, if structured appropriately, may contribute to a synergistic combination of hyper and deep attention." ¹⁴ My students, at least not those who are in the AP class, will probably find the novel slow and boring because they are not able to concentrate on it for a long period of time. They switch focus rapidly and seek high levels of stimulation. ¹⁵ My challenge is to help everyone appreciate the details of this text and hopefully engage them in a close analysis of it.

In order to achieve this goal, I want to use the extremely popular Facebook to help students write, discuss, analyze and see how Pip reacts to Estella's attitude of superiority over and her disgust for a simple boy. Facebook is something that students really like, and it may stimulate their interest. I also want to implement differentiated instruction and, consequently, the AP and Honors students, who have some deep attention, first start reading and annotating Dickens's novel as homework, and we then open the discussion by selecting one short quote about how Pip sees Estella. That quote is put on Facebook together with a brief comment and/or question. I expect them to point out how beautiful, unreachable, but alluring she looks to Pip. All the other students will read the novel in class, so I can help them understand the text and the vocabulary before joining the discussion. At this point, all my students and I have to be on line together and start our analytical conversation. We can do this at school in the computer lab or at home at a predetermined time. In any case, during our on-line conversation, I continuously intervene by prompting them to reflect on specific adjectives, setting and characters, detailed descriptions, symbols, as well as the specifics of certain behaviors. One example of how I might interact with them could be the quote referring to the first encounter between Pip and Estella at Miss Havisham's house in chapter eight when Pip notices that Estella calls him a "boy" with "carelessness." Why? What does it tell him about her? Why does Pip notice this attitude? I will also direct them to reflect on another adjective, "scornful," and the related comparison of Estella to a queen. How does Pip see Estella? Is this love? Why? I can also add other quotes from the same chapter describing how he sees Estella and how he feels. I also lead the students to focus on the symbolic value of hands: how does she see Pip's hands and what meaning does this vision have?

In class, the students have to write their reactions to this new approach in their journal, and I also require them to reread the passage and/or chapter we have discussed on Facebook. I also want them to use Pip's vision of his first encounter with Estella as a model to describe the vision they first had of a boy or a girl they like(d) or love(d). I follow this strategy - a Facebook discussion connected to in-class writings -- to analyze Pip's different feelings for his sister, Joe, Miss Havisham, and Magwitch; and we conclude with an analysis of how Pip changes his vision of all these characters throughout the novel. We discuss if his changes in vision are the direct consequence of changes he really sees or if they depend on his feelings. To maintain a high level of interest and understanding, I also ask my students to research an image that best reflects the topic of the daily discussion and to post it. This would certainly help the struggling students understand the main

character of the novel.

While using Facebook, I want to use Twitter too because it accepts longer texts. This might involve other users of the same website in our literary discussion and therefore provide a rich exchange of analysis and interpretations my students can use in their own writing. The second benefit of this technique is that they witness that this text is still studied and read. Of course, I lead the discussion in order to notice and appreciate the details that makes the reader infer about reasons and feelings from the tone, the structure, diction, and figurative language that Dickens uses to convey his vision of love. This experiment also requires me to read the novel with the students and prompt analytical questions while the discussion evolves. In class, every day we write our reflections and work on the analysis of the character and on Dickens's uses of diction, tone, and setting to convey his vision.

After completing Dickens novel, we read "Seeing" by Annie Dillard in the AP and Honors classes. This essay focuses on the author's passion to see things closely, and it is also an excellent way to show my students how to observe the ordinary to such an extent that it becomes the love of one's life. Annie Dillard encourages the reader to look at simple things like the penny one sees and stop to pick it up or the fish that one sees in the water and one second later disappears; she does so to signify how much the act of seeing is "a deliberate gift, the revelation" because "nature does reveal as well as conceal." The author clearly underlines how she cannot see minutiae even though she tries "to keep her eyes open." Everything that is common and ordinary does not catch our attention as easily as the unusual event does, with the consequence that whatever is "utterly common" becomes "unseen."¹⁶ Dillard also reminds her readers that one sees what one expects to see. Therefore, I write on the board as pre-writing activity: "I see what I expect to see." I ask the students: What does Annie Dillard mean? Why? Explain your thought and support it with examples from your own experience. I want them to reflect on the fact we often create images in our minds, and we expect to see what we think or we expect that our peers understand what we mean because it is obvious to us. The reality is that the image we have does not correspond to reality, as Dillard clearly proves when she is looking for a bullfrog that she cannot see, whereas other campers could. She had to ask what color it is, and a fellow says, "Green." When at last she sees it, "the thing wasn't green at all, but the color of wet hickory bark." What does Annie Dillard mean? Why? To answer these questions, my students have to explain their thoughts and support them with examples from their own experience. Another interesting quote for a pre-reading activity is, "The point is that I just don't know what the lover knows; I just can't see the artificial obvious that those in the know construct."¹⁷ Annie Dillard ironically reminds the readers that we can see the infinite details only if we are driven by passion to look for those minutiae. When we love something we can see, and my desire is to help my students understand that it is absolutely normal not to see details. At the same time, we can learn how to see, and once we know how to see, we will love observing and writing.

At the end of each previewing activity, the students share and discuss their writing before I give them the text to read. I might not have the time to read the document in class, and consequently it is assigned as homework. They also have to underline three unknown words and determine their meanings from the context or consult a dictionary. I do not ask them to underline more unknown words because it becomes counterproductive even in higher-level classes. This strategy does not burden them, so they accomplish what I want and have the chance to remember new words and their meanings. In class, we share their homework, and this activity gives them the opportunity to learn other words presented by their peers.

The first close-reading of the article follows. For this activity, I want the students to reinforce the importance of annotating the text by asking them to highlight all those sentence(s), word(s), phrase(s) that grab their attention and to write brief notes in the form of questions, comments and/or connections. This is not the first

time they have annotated a text, but I may model again how to determine the author's main idea, purpose, point of view, tone, structure, and diction. This process lets me underline how Dillard's first-person point of view enhances the childlike, enthusiastic tone she uses to lead the reader to discover the "surprise ahead."¹⁸ Her point of view reflects her passion and the joy she feels when she can see minutiae in the drop of water or the flying fish that stuns her and makes her desire to know more. Her passion is love, but it is also a feeling that slowly builds in the observer and helps him or her see more each time. At this point I ask the students to respond to our essential questions and to use Annie Dillard's essay to support their assumptions. A discussion of their quick write follows.

In class, we reread the essay, and I ask the students to point out quotes they think are interesting. They may underline various statements such as "What you see is what you get," "Many newly sighted people speak well of the world, and teach us how dull is our own vision," "Seeing is very much a matter of verbalization," "The secret of seeing is the pearl of great price. But although the pearl may be found, it may not be sought, ..."¹⁹ This activity gives us an opportunity to further analyze the theme of the essay and the powerful imagery Dillard uses. When we conclude the discussion, I ask the students to choose one of those quotes and write one-page reflections. As homework, I want them to isolate one passage like the one about Tinker Creek in which Dillard evidences her love, read it carefully and differentiate the descriptive part from the reflective one. Once they have done that, they need to follow her example by observing something that is common and ordinary in their surroundings. Another possible writing activity is to identify the words and phrases that determine the tone of her essay and explain how they create or contribute to Dillard's enthusiastic feeling, her passion. The last writing I assign requires my students to study the context - either biographical or historical -- surrounding this essay and explain how its effects contribute to Dillard's work. In concluding the study of this document, I ask my students to respond to the essential questions of the unit and use Dillard's essay to support their theories.

The next text I present is "I Want a Wife" by Judy Brady. This essay is homework for the AP and Honors students to reinforce the skills we learned with the visual section and the close reading of "Seeing." The students who are in the regular class study Brady's essay because it has an easier vocabulary with short sentences, and the repetitions it contains help them understand its ironic and humorous tone. Before my students read this essay, I play a quick video clip²⁰ as a pre-reading activity. This visual is based on an interpretation of a wife's role, and it has close connections to Brady's essay. In fact, both the video clip and the essay emphasize that a woman does what a man expects. She is not the decision maker in the couple. In the video, my students see numbers quickly passing by on a black background. They cannot read those numbers because they are blurred, but the color, red, attracts their attention. Then, they begin to distinctly read digital numbers, which clearly refer to time. Their color is still red, and the background is still black. The next image is quite interesting because they see a man and a woman who are in love. The scenes that follow show the man walking quickly as if he were running, but alone. A blurred image shows a figure that can be either the same man or the woman trying to follow him, but disappearing in a background of blurred white and grey clouds. The final scene shows the corner of a kitchen that is perfectly organized and clean to suggest what a wife, housewife, is expected to do every day. This image shows what a wife or woman in love can see, which is also Judy Brady's message in her essay.

I play the video first, and I ask my students to describe the details they see. I reinforce the same skills I use in the previous section on visual images in order to help them see, infer, and draw conclusions. On a poster I keep for the entire unit, I write their conclusions about this love relationship, the details they see that make them think it is love, as well as the ironic conclusion the creator of the video suggests. At the end of this pre-reading activity, I give the students the essay to read and annotate. At this point, I have to consider that the

regular college class has students with different reading levels. I therefore create groups according to their reading skills, and those who struggle will work first with index cards containing scattered phrases or words from the essay. Specifically, I choose: "While I am going to school, I want a wife," "keep track of mine too," "keep them mended," "my physical needs," "I guess I can tolerate that," "details of my social life," "rambling complaints," "sensitive to my sexual needs," "when I feel like," "who wouldn't want a wife?"²¹ These students have to discuss and determine who the speaker is, what they see in this relationship, why the speaker says "who wouldn't want a wife?", what the tone is, and what words specifically express the tone. A discussion in the group follows. At this point they are ready to read the essay.

Judy Brady's essay contains a very detailed description of all the numerous things a loving wife accomplishes every day, from taking care of children, to preparing meals, ironing, cleaning, being open to doing everything the husband needs, entertaining his guests, being sensitive to his needs, and ultimately being ready to step aside when a new wife appears on the horizon. Is this the perfect image of a wife who shows true love? I also ask my students first to determine the audience of the essay and its purpose and then to identify which words or phrases support their conclusions. I have them read the essay a second time, focusing on how the stylistic device of repetition can contribute to the tone and the atmosphere the author creates. After we share and discuss their written responses, the students have to write how Judy Brady sees a wife and what connections they notice between the essay and the video. As the last activity for this part of the unit, I require the students to write a detailed description of what they see their mother do. They can use this essay as a model to learn how to see details and how to express a specific tone. An alternative to this writing prompt can be to select a quote or a few quotes that characterize a wife's love as the author sees it, and explain what specific details contribute to this vision. Another alternative essay can focus on how the sentence structure, repetition, and diction of the text contribute to its satirical tone.

My weakest students read "The Breakups That Got under My Skin" by Kerry Cohen published in The New York Times on July 27, 2008. This essay includes a very interesting visual image of a young woman, most likely a teenager or a college student because the lines of her face and upper body are soft but precise. This woman does not show her eyes, and the focus of the image is the tattoo of a "beat-up teddy bear" on her right arm next to her shoulder. One can clearly see three of the bear's paws with long white nails and three bandages. Her face is quite serious as if she were frozen in her grief. My weakest students read this image first, and then they write what they see, what they notice, what they do not see but they would expect to see, and why. After our initial sharing, I follow the same strategies I mentioned in describing the visual section of this unit in order to teach them to see as many details as possible. Before passing to the reading of the essay, I expect my students to reflect on why the tattoo shows a bear. What does the bear represent? Why a "teddy bear"? The students have to think about what they see and what their peers have seen, noticed, or expected, and to conclude whether the woman's attitude in the visual can be connected to love. If they think that it does reflect love, they explain what details lead them to this conclusion. At the end of this pre-reading activity, they are ready to read the essay by Kerry Cohen.

Since this is the struggling group, they need a vocabulary list containing all the words that they might not know. They read together first, and then they share their initial understanding of the essay. The tattoo, the bear, in the visual represents the author's grief in being separated from her father as well as her subconscious desire to support her mother after her divorce. The bear also reminds Cohen's negative experiences with three college students. If I see them losing interest or if they do not understand the theme, I ask them whether they know anyone who has experienced being in love and breaking up. I ask them to use their prior knowledge to describe the emotions involved in such experiences before rereading the essay and underlining all those details that refer to the author's emotions. I expect the students to notice the insecurities the author

shares with her mother and this desire to let everyone know how much she suffers every time a relationship ends. They compare and contrast the author's behavior when the relationship ends and when she meets the man she marries. I want them to notice that every time she looks at her tattoos in the mirror, she sees the love she felt for some man and her similar feeling for her abandoned mother. Before concluding, I write on the board the following prompt: Have you ever been in love? Describe the feelings and the emotions you experienced. How did you show your happiness or grief? What were you thinking? You can use the essay by Cohen as a model for your writing.

Lesson Plans

Visual Materials

1. Looking and understanding (I look at the image and say what I see holistically).
2. Analyzing images
 - Focal Point: it is one central figure that attracts your eye first.
 - Figure-ground contrast: it emphasizes the difference between what is in the front and what is in the back (ground). The figure is often the focal point.
 - Grouping according to proximity and similarity is also an important element in visuals.
 - Color in visuals has a specific connotation and conveys meaning and feelings. It can focus our attention, create contrast, appeal to emotions and help communicate the message.
 - Lines can convey mood; they can create a sense of calm and equilibrium, uncertainty, or movement and stress. Soft lines may imply flow or change.
3. Sharing time: sitting in a circle, teacher and students read aloud and discuss the various interpretations of an image.

Comparing and contrasting the image with a specific piece of expository text or essay. Write in the essay format. Modification: first draw a T-chart and list all the essential elements,
4. feelings, reactions, and/or interpretations of the visual and of the text. Secondly, draw connecting lines between the similarities, and then write about these similarities and differences.

Pre-reading

Quick Write activity:

Every day, I start my class with a five-minute writing activity, and I also want my students to come prepared with a quotation from the part of the text that they read as homework or in class the day before.

1. Select one quote with a specific detail you want to comment on either for its insightfulness or its power to make you see something.
2. Sharing Time: Teacher and students sit in a circle, read aloud, take brief notes, and discuss the various responses.

3. Ask the students to review their notes, identify the most relevant ones and write them on a Post-It board.
4. Ask the students to write whether their initial position has changed after our discussion or sharing time, and why.

Tea Party activity:

(I would not suggest modeling it because not knowing how to do it triggers more thinking.)

1. Prepare fifteen or twenty index card with one phrase from the document they will be reading. Repeat those phrases two or three times in order to have one card per student. Distribute one card to each student and ask them to move from student to student, sharing
2. their cards, listen to others as they read their cards, discuss what these cards might refer to, and suggest what these cards might mean.
3. After ten minutes, divide the students into small groups and ask them to write their reflections.
4. Sharing Time
5. Read the text aloud.
6. After reading the text, compare and contrast their predictions and the text.

Close Reading and Analytical Writing

1. Read the passage/document.
2. Underline interesting, important, and/or unusual/unexpected words, phrases, and language structures, and label them in the margin.
3. Sharing Time
4. Reread the passage/document.
5. Determine connections and draw arrows from one part of the passage to another to mark those connections.
6. Highlight the descriptions, the reflections, the details, or the purpose.

What is the main idea or subject of the text? How do you know? How is it presented? Does the
7. author introduce it immediately? Does the author express this main idea or do you have to infer it? How do you infer it? What clues support your theory?

When did this situation occur? Why? How do you know or determine the time and place this
8. situation occurred? Is it clearly stated? Do you infer it? How do you infer it? What clues confirm your theory?
9. Who is the audience? How do you know? Is it clearly indicated? How? How do you infer it? What clues confirm your theory?
10. Who is the voice telling the story? Is it the author? How do you know? What assumptions can you make about this voice? Can you identify the age, education, social status of the speaker or hidden reasons for writing this document?
11. What is/are the purpose(s) of the document? What's the reason(s) behind the text? How do you know? What reaction(s) in the audience does the writer want to achieve? Why? How do you

know? What techniques does the author use to achieve this purpose? How do you think the audience will feel? What is the effect the author wants to achieve?

12. What is the tone of this document? How do you know? What word(s) or phrase(s) determine this tone? Why? What details, sentence structures, or images convey this tone? Why?

13. What are the details that determine the setting? How does the setting contribute to the understanding of the character? How does it contribute to the understanding of the tone of the text?

14. What can you say about the diction used by the author? How does diction contribute to the understanding of the character/setting/theme?

15. Sharing Time: the students share their analysis, discuss and take notes in their journals.

Modification:

1. Read the passage/document.
2. Underline interesting, important, and/or unusual/unexpected words, phrases, and language structures.
3. Reread the passage/document.
4. Determine connections and draw arrows from one part of the passage to another to mark those connections.
5. Write a "Wonder Why" question for each interesting, important, unusual, or unexpected word/phrase. Write your theory(ies) and support it (them) with clear references to the text.
6. Sharing Time: students share, discuss their interpretations, and take notes on their peers' thoughts in their journals.

Final Paper

This synthesis essay responds to the following questions: What does the character/artist see? What does he/she notice? Is this love? Students have to support their thesis with at least two documents (written and visual texts) from this unit. A Works Cited page is required. The writing of this documented essay will follow various stages:

1. Reread your journals/responses/notes and highlight the details, information you want to use to support your theory.
2. Write a possible idea/theory, share, and discuss it with your peers.
3. Write a discovery draft with a thesis statement and reasons.

- Write a first draft containing the thesis statement, the reasons, the support/references from
4. the documents, and the analysis/discussion of why those references support your assertions. Peers' revision follows: in groups of two the students read and revise each other's work.
 5. Write a second draft including the suggestions from your peer's revision. Peers' editing follows: in groups of two the students read and edit each other's work.
 6. Write a third draft followed by a conference with the teacher.
- Write the annotated bibliography of the documents cited in the essay using MLA
7. documentation style. (Students are provided a model of the MLA requirements.) Write a fifty words summary of each source.
 8. Final draft with Works Cited page.

Modification:

9. Reread your journals/responses/notes and highlight the details, information you want to use to support your theory.
10. Write the thesis in response to the essential question and use one PowerPoint slide.
11. Determine and write the reasons for your theory/thesis and use one PowerPoint slide.
12. Find the evidences in the documents and write them in other slides.
13. Write a brief conclusion on a slide.
14. Sharing Time: each student presents and discusses his/her theory and the evidence for it with the class.

Appendix: Implementing District Standards

The teaching implemented in this unit reflects the requirements of the Connecticut's Common Core of Learning K-12 Content Standards. The curriculum for Language Arts in the New Haven District adheres to the state standards, and each part of this unit offers the opportunity to teach, deepen or scaffold the four essential standards: Reading and Responding, Exploring and Responding to Literature, Communicating with Others, and English Language Conventions. Specifically, my students read, interpret, analyze and evaluate both visual and written texts in order to extend their understanding and appreciation of details; they apply strategies to facilitate word recognition and develop a vocabulary to comprehend a text. They also explore multiple written responses to visual images, Dickens's novel and the three contemporary essays, and discuss their analysis. In composing the synthesis essay, they reinforce the conventions of Standard English.

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Notes

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² *Ibid.*, 50.

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⁶ *Ibid.*, 410.

⁷ Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade, ed., *Seeing & Writing 3* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2006), 16.

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¹⁰ Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade, ed., *Seeing & Writing 3* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2006), 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 23.

¹² Nicola Bradbury, ed., *Great Expectations* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 49.

¹³ N. Katherine Hayles, "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes," *Profession* (2007): 187.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 190-193.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁶ Annie Dillard, "Seeing," in *Seeing & Writing*, ed., Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade, (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2006), 109.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 108-117.

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²¹ Judy Brady, "I Want A Wife," in *One Hundred Essays*, ed., Robert DiYanni (New York: Penguin Academics, 2008), 108-110.

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