



Yale-New Haven
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2009 Volume II: The Modern World in Literature and the Arts

What Lies Beneath: A Strategy for Introducing Literary Symbolism

Curriculum Unit 09.02.10
by Sandra K. Friday

Contents of Curriculum

- Introduction
- Rationale
- Literal Interpretation: an initial step
- The Parable of the Eagle: political and personal lessons
- Aesop's Fables: practicing the process
- Allegories: Dr. Seuss isn't just for children
- The Bear: the quintessential rite of passage
- Students write their own stories
- Language Arts CAPT preparation
- Lesson Plan # 1 Students explore the literal and symbolic meaning in the fable, The Moth and the Star
- Lesson Plan # 2 Students explore how belly-stars on Sneetches represent both literal and symbolic meaning in an allegory
- Lesson Plan # 3 Students explore the literal and symbolic meaning in the original short story, The Bear
- Websites
- Working Bibliography
- Appendix: Implementing Language Arts Standards

Introduction

Entranced and horrified, I stood in the grip Picasso's Guernica, an eleven-by twenty-seven foot black, white, and grey mural inspired by Hitler's 1937 bombing and obliteration of Guernica, a little Basque village in northern Spain. While this encounter at the Museum of Modern Art in New York was years ago, I have never forgotten feeling dwarfed by this larger-than-life testimony against war, sometimes called, the end of innocence. I remember, once asking a student who knew nothing about the bombing of the village, what he thought of a large poster of Guernica hanging in my classroom, and he studied the body parts strewn across the canvas, the woman cradling a dead baby, her head thrown back as she cried out, and a naked light bulb illuminating the atrocities, and then he said rather matter-of-factly, "That's my life." His response confirmed for me that in the broken bodies laid bare by the light from a naked bulb Picasso had created, on his canvas, images that evoked very diverse meanings, in the eyes of his viewers.

Participating in the seminar The Modern World in Literature and the Arts has given me the opportunity to craft a unit that challenges my 10th grade college prep. students at New Haven Academy to peel back the layers of meaning found in the symbolism in parables as brief as a paragraph, and short stories that are many pages in length. While I have focused largely on literature, I will introduce Picasso's Guernica, whose highly charged symbols layered with meaning, may serve as a metaphor for this unit. With luck and coordination, my students will make a replica of the mural with the art teacher at NHA, while they read and learn about symbolism in literature. Modern literature and art may require more effort on the part of readers or viewers as they encounter new representations of reality, but these media invite and allow for a diversity of interpretations as well.

The most challenging story in my unit is The Bear by William Faulkner, first published in 1942 in The Saturday Evening Post before Faulkner expanded it to a novella; therefore, I am backing into symbolism with parables and fables that are brief and, perhaps familiar. Among these is the African The Parable of the Eagle by James Aggrey, Little Red Riding Hood which admittedly is not modern literature, but The Little Girl and the Wolf, a parody by James Thurber, in which the little girl, when she gets to grandma's house, takes a revolver out of her basket and shoots the wolf dead, is modern. Students will enjoy reading both versions to see how dramatically the little girl in the hood has changed. Among the fables that we will study for their symbolism are a few of Aesop's Fables. Symbolism can be found in the winsome children's rhymes of Dr. Seuss, such as in the allegories, The Sneetches and The Lorax, both of which I have incorporated in my unit in the media of books, and videos that are accessible on the Internet. But it is in reading The Bear that I will throw down the gauntlet.

With this diversity of stories that incorporate symbols, students will engage their creativity to craft their own fables, parables, allegories, or symbolic stories. They may use some of the skills for crafting their stories that they will have practiced in deciphering the symbols in the stories in this unit.

Rationale

Obviously stories may be read and enjoyed at face value, but I plan to challenge my students to practice the skill of peeling back the top layer of literary symbols to see what lies beneath. And as with an onion, some of the symbols may be multi-layered. Literary symbols gain their meaning from the context of the work. Practicing the skill of peeling back the layers becomes a way of making connections and exercising our imaginations.

As my students begin to explore literary symbols in the various genres that I have selected, they will also begin to learn to distinguish the differences, although sometimes subtle, between allegory, parable, and fable. *The Sneetches* and *The Lorax* are allegories in which the characters, and their actions, and in one case, the setting, cohere at a literal or surface level, giving the stories meaning; but at the same time characters, actions and settings are symbols or extended metaphors, cohering figuratively or abstractly to bring another, more significant meaning to the stories. There are political, social, and historical allegories as well as allegories that express ideas or human qualities such as greed or goodness. "A parable is a very short narrative about human beings presented so as to stress the tacit analogy, or parallel, with a general thesis or lesson that the narrator is trying to bring home to his audience" (Abrams 7). Parables sometimes end with a stated lesson or moral, but this is not always the case. The one-page Parable of the Eagle coheres to impart a lesson that may be interpreted as political or personal, but the lesson is not stated. Fables are short narratives, whose characters are often animals who talk, and through what they say and do, indirectly convey a moral that is usually stated at the end of the fable. Among the most familiar fables are probably Aesop's Fables: *The Fox and the Crow*, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, and *The Wolf and the Grapes*. Among my favorite fables is *The Moth and the Star* by James Thurber.

The Bear, in its original short story form, written during what is known as the Modern Period, following World War I, makes use of symbolism, but does not necessarily fit the genre of parable, fable, nor allegory. Like them, it may be read simply as a story about a boy hunting a tremendous, legendary bear that moved through the wilderness with the "irresistible deliberation of a locomotive" (Faulkner 281). But, if one considers what lies beneath the symbols--the agents and their actions, the objects, such as the gun and compass, and the setting--the story embodies Faulkner's 1950 Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech in which he clarifies his definition for enduring and significant literature: the writer must "leave no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed - love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice" (Bloom 109). The characters or agents, their actions, and the objects such as the gun and compass, and the deep wilderness in *The Bear* embody these verities.

Students will view the literal parts and pieces in *Guernica* for what they are, just as they will see from the illustrations and from reading the text that some of the *Sneetches* literally have stars on their bellies, and some don't. There is no question that, literally, it is a wolf waiting in the woods for the little girl with the red hood. But when one views the *Guernica* in its entirety and asks what is happening here literally, and what sounds are emanating from the figures, it becomes impossible to deny that both humans and animals alike are suffering torturously. Students will see the cataclysm in this mural, and I can count on them to suggest where this is going on in the world. The student, who viewed the poster in my classroom several years ago, knew immediately where the suffering that is represented in this mural was occurring; it was in his life. For him the tortured creatures symbolized his own tortured existence.

Practicing Language Arts CAPT skills

Also, among the skills that students will practice in my unit are strategies for answering the four questions on the Connecticut Academic Performance Language Arts Test that my sophomores will take in March. In a unit that I wrote in a YNHTI seminar several years ago on reading and writing children's literature, I used children's literature to effectively teach strategies for answering the questions that appear on the Language Arts CAPT. The parables, fables, and stories that I have chosen for my unit will be effective tools for teaching strategies for answering the Language Arts CAPT questions.

Literal Interpretation: an initial step

Before we can identify the layers of meaning in literary symbols in a story, we establish the literal relationship of these symbols to each other and their meaning within the context of the story. Sophisticated readers have learned to do this automatically as they read, and often "connect the dots," that is, recognize the literal meaning and symbolic meaning almost simultaneously.

For my students the first step in this process is to establish the literal relationships between the symbols within the context of the story. This can be achieved through graphic organizers that establish a sequence of events or cause and effect, that is, how an initial action by an agent or character precipitates another action, and the unfolding of this action to its conclusion. This graphic organizer must include significant characters, their actions, significant objects, and the setting. Students will include important text along with the actions as they unfold. Sequence of events and cause and effect graphic organizers are available on the Internet for those who do not already have them among their teaching tools.

Another effective graphic organizer that is very useful for establishing relationships is the story board, also available on the Internet. Students retell the story in frames of simple sketches that include the agents, their actions and interactions, significant objects, and the setting. These frames must be accompanied by the essential, abbreviated text. All of these graphic organizers lend themselves to team or group activities where students collaborate on what must be included in the literal story. Upon completion, comparing these team-generated graphic organizers is illuminating and often precipitates highly animated discussion among the teams about the necessary components of the literal story.

In both cases, in the sequence of event, and cause and effect, and in the story board graphic organizers, it may be useful to keep a separate list of the characteristics or qualities of the agents. For example, in the two paragraph fable, *The Moth and the Star* by James Thurber, the young moth who chose to fly towards a star, instead of the typical street lamp every night, can easily be seen as independent-minded and a non-conformist. In fact, his father scolded him roundly for not conforming and following the lead of his brothers and sisters flying into street lamps and getting their wings badly burned, and the father may even be perceived as kicking the moth out, "Come on now, get out of here and get yourself scorched! A big strapping moth like you without a mark on him" (Thurber 261).

Students will also answer the question, "Within the sequence of events, (a.) when does the action begin to create a problem or conflict, (b.) when does the problem become most urgent, and (c.) and when does it get resolved?" Students may identify the answers to these questions next to the part of the sequence where they

occur. This should also be part of the story board graphic organizer. In *The Moth and the Star*, the problem is introduced almost immediately when, in the second sentence, the young moth tells his mother that his heart is set on a star, "and she counseled him to set his heart on a bridge lamp instead." Because the moth is independent and non-conforming, he spends his entire long life trying to reach the star, and according to the fable, when he became old he really believed that he had reached the star, and "This gave him a deep and lasting pleasure, . . . while his parents and brothers and sisters had all been burned to death when they were quite young" (261).

As with most fables, the lesson or moral is stated at the conclusion. Students will begin by deciphering the literal meaning. The moral stated at the end of *The Moth and the Star* is: "Who flies afar from the sphere of our sorrow is here today and here tomorrow" (261). A few simple questions may help in deciphering the literal meaning of the moral: To whom in the story is the moral referring? What is the action in which this agent (or character) is engaged, according to the moral? What is the sphere of sorrow in the fable? Why is it referred to as a sphere of sorrow? And why is this character here today and here tomorrow?

Whether or not there is a stated moral at the end of the story, students will rely on their sequence of events or story board graphic organizers to discern the literal relationship of the symbols to one another in the context or setting and, as I have stated, sometimes the setting, itself, is symbolic, as in *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Little Girl and the Wolf*, where the little girl, "on her way through a wood meets old Father Wolf" in Charles Perrault's parable, and "a big wolf waits [for her] in a dark forest" in Thurber's parody. Clearly the woods and dark forest are significant symbols as settings for the little girls' encounters with the wolves. Objects are significant symbols in their relationship to the story as well, as in *Little Red Riding Hood*, the little girl is carrying a basket of cakes with some butter tucked in; in *The Little Girl and the Wolf*, the little girl also has food in her basket, but tucked in among her goodies is an automatic weapon, causing a dramatic change in the outcome from the original story.

It may seem elementary to deconstruct what appear to be simple fables, parables, and allegories by Dr. Seuss, but if my students are to study symbols and the complexity of their meanings, it is necessary that they practice deciphering the literal relationship of the symbols in a story before they begin to imagine their relationship in layers of meaning.

The Parable of the Eagle: political and personal lessons

While *The Parable of the Eagle*, an African parable by James Aggrey, appears to be about an eagle that has lost its way, on a closer look, it is as much about the differences of opinion between two other agents, a farmer and a naturalist. This parable, because of its chronological progression, may be charted on a sequence of events, or cause and effect graphic organizer, or it is easily adapted to the story board.

Initially a farmer walking through the forest finds a young eagle and takes it home to his barnyard where he raises it on chicken feed, and conditions it to behave like the chickens around it. In the first two sentences of the parable one senses there is a potential problem. When the eagle is grown, along comes a naturalist and, seeing the grown eagle among the chickens, insists to the farmer that it is the king of birds and should not be confined in a barnyard among chickens. The farmer replies that it eats and behaves like a chicken and has never learned to fly. But he agrees to give the naturalist a chance to prove him wrong. The naturalist, taking

the eagle in his arms, entreats the eagle to fly into the sky where it belongs. Looking around, the eagle sees the chickens feeding in the yard and hops down to feed with them. The naturalist asks for one more chance to prove that the eagle still has the heart of an eagle; the farmer, being self-assured, agrees that the next day the naturalist may try again.

The second day the naturalist takes the eagle to the top of the barn and again entreats it to fly from the roof top into the sky where he tells the eagle it belongs. The eagle looks around, somewhat confused and perhaps fearful about this unfamiliar location, and finally flutters down into the familiar barnyard where he sees the chickens feeding. But the naturalist refuses to give up on this bird that he knows has the heart of an eagle, and he pleads with the farmer for just one more chance to liberate this king of birds.

The third morning the naturalist takes the eagle out to the mountain, and lifting the eagle straight into the rising sun, he implores it to fly into the sky. The trembling eagle, looking straight into the rising sun, stretches its wings and soars into the sky with a triumphant cry, and never returns, even though it has been raised as a chicken.

The three agents, the actions, and the settings establish a literal relationship about an eagle domesticated and conditioned by a farmer to behave like a chicken until a naturalist comes along who believes in the intrinsic nature of the eagle, regardless of its conditioning. The relationship between the eagle and the barnyard, the eagle and the roof top, and the eagle and the mountain top are crucial to the literal and symbolic meanings of the parable. Once students have established the literal relationship between the agents, actions, and settings, they should be able to bring their imaginations to chart the symbolic meaning.

To imagine the symbolic representations it might be helpful to use another graphic organizer that lists the agents, actions, and settings at the tops of columns across the long side, landscape, of a piece of paper: Eagle / Farmer / Naturalist / barnyard: hopping down / roof top: fluttering down / mountain top: soaring into the sky. In each column students may imagine individually, at first, and then collectively, what the agents, actions, and settings symbolize.

Once they have determined the literal relationship between the agents, actions, and settings, they may be ready to venture the lesson which they can expand upon when they imagine what these symbolize, something along the lines of youth being conditioned (by the farmer who represents a controlling outside force) to believe they are something less than who they are, not yet knowing who they are. They settle for it, even find security in it, until someone (the naturalist) or some positive outside force awakens in them so that they can realize their own intrinsic potential, even though it may feel risky to be out of what has come to feel like their comfort zone. There is also political symbolism in this parable; South Africans conditioned to apartheid for so many years that it became a way of life, African Americans conditioned to slavery for hundreds of years, that some did not know what to do with their new-found freedom when it came. I am sure my students will surprise me with possibilities.

Aesop's Fables: practicing the process

Indeed, fables may be the easiest place to begin learning about literary symbolism because the stories are usually no more than a paragraph in length, and there are one or two agents or characters. Of Aesop's Fables, three come to mind that are no longer than a few sentences: The Fox and the Crow, The Tortoise and the Hare, and The Fox and the Grapes. While the agents or characters in fables are usually talking animals, the lessons they convey are about human nature; in the case of these three, guile, persistence, and rationalization.

In The Fox and the Crow, the crow, the protagonist, is sitting on a branch of a tree, minding its business, clutching a piece of cheese in its beak, when along comes a fox, the antagonist, who decides that he will use his cunning to get the cheese. Standing under the tree, the fox exclaims what a noble and beautiful bird the crow is, exclaiming on her beautiful plumage. After this, he says he wonders if her voice is as sweet as her appearance is grand. Of course, the crow, succumbing to flattery, lets out a loud caw, dropping the cheese that is subsequently snatched up by the fox, who derides her. "You have a voice madam, but what you lack is wits."

If students, working in teams, put this on a story board, in frame one they might draw a sketch of the protagonist in its undisturbed, normal, setting, cheese in beak. Frame two might be a sketch of the fox, seeing the crow with the cheese, and plotting to get it. Frame three might be a sketch of the fox executing its plan and flattering the crow; in frame four, the crow is singing and dropping the cheese. In frame five, the fox has the cheese, and is demeaning the gullible crow. Once students see what has happened to the crow as a result of its naiveté and conceit, they consider what the agents and their actions may represent in the world of human nature. Using the landscape graphic organizer, they might write Crow, Fox, and Cheese at the tops of three columns, and brainstorm what these agents and this object represent in the world they know, e.g., a girl being sweet-talked by a guy, and giving up her virginity, and subsequently, getting dumped, is one representation that is bound to come up.

This same strategy may be used for the other two fables. In fact, students will pick one of the many Aesop's fables and create their own story board, following through with the landscape graphic organizer, making a short presentation to the class. These will be displayed in class.

Allegories: Dr. Seuss isn't just for children

Dr. Seuss's allegories, The Sneetches, written in 1961, and the Lorax, in 1971, are highly entertaining, appealing to young children with their zany, lyrical, and alliterative rhymes, and engaging illustrations; but they are as educational for older children and adults, as they are entertaining, and are easily accessible for teaching allegory. Students may read the storybooks and view the highly animated video versions on the Internet.

The Sneetches, as everyone who knows the story knows, is about a community of rather unattractive pear-shaped yellow birds who frequent a beach. Some have a small green star on their bellies and some don't, immediately setting the stage, or in this case, the beach, for the star-bellied Sneetches to brag about the stars

"upon thars," to the exclusion of the Sneetches who have none. The star-bellied Sneetches find all manner of ways to exclude the non-star-bellied Sneetches from all of their activities and encourage their children to do the same with the non-star-bellied children. The more they are excluded, the worse they feel, until along comes Sylvester McMonkey McBean with his star-on machine and for a fee, he applies stars to the bellies of anyone who wants to pay for the process.

When the star-bellied Sneetches discover, to their horror, that they have lost their exclusivity, and they can no longer determine who is who, McBean advertises his star-off machine, and for a fee, he removes the stars from the bellies of any Sneetch who can pay his fee. As we know this star-on, star-off process continues at a break-neck rate until none of the Sneetches has any money nor any idea who is who, and McBean packs up his machines and his wads of money, and drives on down the road, leaving the Sneetches, some with stars and some without, standing on the beach, wondering.

Fortunately, out of money and exhausted, they come to their senses and realize that it really doesn't matter who has stars and who doesn't. Of course, this star war fought on the bellies of these creatures is an extended metaphor about discrimination, racism and diversity. Students might go right to the graphic organizer with the headings across the top and the columns, entering (1) Sneetches with stars, (2) Sneetches without stars, (3) Means of Exclusion, such as marshmallow roasts, and games, and (4) a Feelings heading over a column as to how the non-star-bellied Sneetches were made to feel. When students peel back the superficial dynamics between the star-bellied Sneetches and those without stars, they can't miss the ramifications of social discrimination that may be perpetrated in a place as familiar as a playground, a classroom, or a school cafeteria, or the life-threatening consequences that it held for Jews in the Holocaust. Genocides and the Holocaust, in particular, are phenomena that NHA students study extensively, and someone is bound to point out that, ironically, the Jews were made to wear a star on their clothes to exclude them from the rest of the German population, and ultimately single them out for extermination.

The Lorax: an environmental allegory

The Lorax, on the other hand, is an environmental allegory about the ravages of industry, represented by one man known as the Once-ler and the environment, represented by the Lorax who "speaks for the trees," written, prophetically, almost 40 years ago. It can be seen as a doomsayer, portraying what will happen if we don't practice sustainable development. Much grimmer than The Sneetches, in its illustrations and tone, it too ends on a note of hope.

Again students may read the storybook and view the six-part video on the Internet. On the surface, it is about a businessman who comes to a forest of trees and discovers a way to make money by chopping down the very colorful Truffula trees and manufacturing their tufts into apparel, with no regard for the limited supply of trees. The Lorax, a curious little brown creature who speaks for the trees because they can't speak for themselves, implores Once-ler to spare the Truffula trees, but Once-ler refuses to listen to him, and not only is he ravaging the Truffula trees, but his industry is spewing smoke into the environment, driving all the wildlife away. And, of course, Once-ler has found a market for his Truffula products because people are eager to buy anything new and different. Finally, the Lorax himself is forced to flee. Eventually all the trees have been chopped down and Once-ler and his employees must abandon his industry, having wreaked havoc on the land.

However, Once-ler, alone and living in the midst of the devastation he created, finally understands the ramifications of what he has done. He has in his possession one remaining seed, from the Truffula trees, that he entrusts to the care of a small boy, after telling him the sad story of the Lorax and the trees.

Students may complete a Sequence of Events graphic organizer or a Storyboard for *The Lorax*, including significant text. They will be able to see the relationship between the agents, their actions, the objects such as the Thneeds that Once-ler manufactures, the factory stacks that spew out clouds of dark smoke, the all-important trees, and of course, the one last Truffula seed. But the setting, including the Truffula trees, the little brown Bar-ba-loots, the Swomee-Swans, the Humming-Fish and, of course, the Lorax are all the victims of Once-Ler's greed and disregard for the environment as his industry pollutes the water, the air, and destroys every last Truffula tree, driving from the land every creature who lived and played under the trees.

Once students, working in groups, have created the sequence of events, or cause and effect, or story board graphic organizers with the significant text, they will have laid out the literal story, and they will be ready to make their column graphic organizers with headings across the top: Once-Ler (and eventually all of his relatives who work for him, Truffula trees (and the Bar-ba-loots, Swomee-Swans, Humming-Fish), Thneeds, the factory spewing, and The Lorax (speaking for the trees until they are all, all gone). Next, groups will decide what all of these symbols represent abstractly, and fill in the columns under the headings. In doing this activity, students should be able to see how, in allegory, everything coheres at the literal or primary level, and at a level beneath this.

It will be very informative to share what the teams came up with and what they think Seuss's lesson or message is. Somewhere along the way I will introduce the concept of sustainable development which might be broken down into: human needs, technology needs, economic needs, and environmental needs. Students might start with the dynamics of *The Lorax* to discuss how Once-Ler could have adopted sustainable development methods.

The Bear: the quintessential rite of passage

It is a bit of a leap to segue from Seuss's *Lorax* to Faulkner's *Bear*, but both have a boy who is crucial to the story, and both are set in nature, *The Bear* in the deep wilderness of the South. While *The Bear* is written in prose, the poetry of the language and phraseology is compelling. Each time I read the story, I feel a reverence which is almost inexplicable, transcendent. The boy, who we learn in the first two sentences is ten, "had already inherited then, without ever having seen it, the tremendous bear with one trap-ruined foot which, in an area almost a hundred miles deep, had earned for itself a name, a definite designation like a living man" (Faulkner 281). Faulkner establishes at the outset that this bear is legendary; "rifles and shotguns failed even to bleed it, in the yearly pageant of the old bear's furious immortality" (282). So, twice a year the boy's father and a few of his comrades make a ritual trip to their camp in the deep wilderness to hunt in, and commune with, that wilderness. Finally, when the boy turns ten, he is allowed to go with them and pursue the legendary bear. Not only does the power lie in the poetry of the language and Faulkner's signature phraseology but, it is the interaction among the agents or characters in this rite of passage: the boy, his mentor, Sam Fathers, who is the son of a slave woman and a Chickasaw chief, and "the old bear, solitary, indomitable and alone, widowed, childless and absolved of mortality ____." (282). This bear, unlike the talking animals in fables, is wholly a bear, fully of the wilderness, and yet seems to exude a degree of mystique in the way the boy

experiences his encounters with it.

On the first trip into the wilderness, the boy has a rifle that is too big for him to fire, but Sam Fathers is by his side, and of course the boy does not see the bear on this first foray because that is, one might say, a sacrament that must be grown into and earned. Over subsequent trips to the camp with his father and the band of regulars, the boy grows into his gun, and learns from Sam how to wander in the deep wilderness alone with the aid of a compass, a watch, and a stick to fend off snakes. While he has sensed the presence of the bear, seen its trap-ruined footprint, and felt its eyes on him, he has not yet seen it. Ironically, Sam points out to him that if he has any hope of seeing the bear, he must abandon his conventions of civilization: the gun, the compass, his watch, and the stick. Sam Fathers says to the boy, "You will have to choose" (288). If the boy wants to see the immortal, legendary bear, he must meet the bear on equal footing, and as Sam tells him, "Ain't nothing in the woods going to hurt you, unless you corner it, or it smells that you are afraid. A bear or a deer, too, has got to be scared of a coward the same as a brave man has got to be" (288).

Faulkner takes the reader with the boy, one morning long before daylight, into the wilderness, where even the boy has never gone. But it is not until well into midday, when the boy, who has left his gun back at the camp, abandons his compass, his watch, and even his snake stick, but not his courage, and is sitting on a log, suddenly "saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear, it was just there, immobile, solid, fixed in the hot dappling of the green and windless noon. . . .Then it moved. It made no sound. . . .Then it was gone. It didn't walk into the woods, the undergrowth. It faded, sank back into the wilderness . . ." (290).

There were other bears in the wilderness, but communion with this bear was unique in nature. "If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the backyard rabbits and squirrels at home his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was his college, the old male bear itself, so long unwifed and childless as to have become its own ungendered progenitor, was his alma mater" (290-291). "They looked at each other, they had emerged from the wilderness old as earth, synchronized to that instant by something more than the blood that moved the flesh and bones which bore them, and touched, pledged something, affirmed something more lasting than the frail web of bones and flesh which any accident could obliterate" (291).

And then, after many trips to the camp, when the boy was sixteen, and Sam had initiated him with respect for and humility in the wilderness that the bear represents, he convinced his father to let him go to the camp alone, just with Sam Fathers and a feisty little dog that weighed about six pounds, that might be the dog that could bay the bear. And on this trip, in a sudden head-on encounter with the bear, the brave little dog ran right up under the bear as it reared on its hind feet, growing taller and taller; and in that instant, the boy threw down his gun, and ran in, grabbing the dog from under the bear, so close he saw a wood tick inside its right hind leg. When Sam Fathers pointed out that he couldn't have missed it if he had shot at it, the boy pointed out that Sam could have shot it as well, nor did he.

Once back home his father, reading to him about truth from, Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn, attempts, albeit somewhat ambiguously, to talk the boy through the significance of what had happened there in the wilderness. But, "He didn't know. Somehow it was simpler than that. There was an old bear . . . proud enough of liberty and freedom to see it threatened without fear or even alarm, . . . to put them in jeopardy in order to savor them. There was an old man, son of a Negro slave and an Indian king . . . There was a boy who wished to learn humility and pride in order to become skillful in the woods . . . And a little dog, nameless and mongrel, and weighing only six pounds, but brave" (294). It was as if the boy's experience, his ultimate encounter that bonded him with the bear, and with the wilderness, and with himself, was beyond words, beyond even the poetry of words.

If my students use the skills they have learned and practiced, they should be able to create, in teams, a very necessary story board graphic organizer for *The Bear* that will visually establish the relationship, to one another, of the agents, including the bear, and their actions, and the objects, and, in this case, the wilderness that is almost the largest player in the story. Especially it will establish the relationship of the boy, a neophyte and novice, on a journey that is his rite of passage, with Sam Fathers, who will teach him and imbue him with everything he knows about nature, the wilderness, and the indomitable old bear. It may be necessary for some teams to do a sequence graphic organizer, so that teams will be able to learn from each other's story board and sequence graphic organizers.

Once students have control of what happened in sequence, and of the interaction of agents and their actions, objects (such as the gun and compass), and the bear that almost is the wilderness, with a text to go with the story board, they might venture to make a landscape graphic organizer, having chosen the column headings which might read something like this: the boy, Sam Fathers, the wilderness, the old bear, the boy's father, the gun (compass and watch), and the feisty little dog, and then begin to ask themselves what each represents in this ritual rite of passage, playing out in the deep, southern wilderness over a hundred years ago.

Connecting the boy's rite of passage with those of my students

While gaining a sense of control of the literary symbolism in *The Bear* will be challenging for my students, one question that intrigues me is how cultures, or sub-cultures, determine what a rite of passage is. Sam Fathers taught the boy everything he knew about the wilderness, every little detail, and to have a profound respect and reverence for it, and that, sometimes, not shooting is manlier than shooting. What did the boy, in his rite of passage, understand about himself in relation to the bear, and the wilderness that the bear represents, which is the boy's culture? How instrumental was Sam Fathers in the boy's rite? And what was the role of the boy's father?

I want my students to explore the rites of passage that are part of our culture and subcultures. On what does our culture or subculture place a value as a rite of passage? How does a youth experience a rite of passage; who is charged with the role of Sam Fathers; is anyone? What do they come to understand about themselves in relation to, what I will call here, the Other, as a result of their rite of passage? What rites of passage are more significant than others? Like the boy who had the courage to lay down his gun to become a man, are there manifestations of society and civilization that a teen might lay down in a rite of passage? I am pushing the boundaries here but I believe that a lively discussion and exploration of these questions grounded in *The Bear* might lead my students to a deeper understanding of the significance, or the lack of it, of their own rites of passage. It also may lead to their understanding of what the agents, their actions, the objects, the setting, and perhaps even the feisty little dog as a catalyst might represent or symbolize beyond what they mean in the story.

Every sophomore at New Haven Academy must complete and present a project in the spring called a Gateway that is, for all intents and purposes, a rite of passage, in which he or she reflects upon his/her personal growth over the two years at New Haven Academy. Students must pick five projects they have completed from freshman to sophomore year, and connect them to the five Habits of Mind which encourage students to become independent thinkers who raise critical questions. Teachers at New Haven Academy are heavily invested in the Habits of Mind, and plan their lessons and class activities around these five Habits of Mind, and, in a significant way, act as mentors to their students, preparing them for their rite of passage at the end of their sophomore year. They must present their Gateway to a panel of students and staff, of their choosing, and their parents. It couldn't be more fitting that they read *The Bear* and discuss the boy's rite of passage in

the wilderness . . . "that was his college" (291).

Students write their own stories

It seems obvious, after laying the groundwork for an understanding of literary symbolism in parables, fables, allegories, and the very complex relationship of symbols in *The Bear*, that students will craft their own stories that include symbols. They will have many examples upon which to draw, and may even choose to model their stories after one of the fables, parables or allegories we have read. The unit will have laid the groundwork for their own experimentation with story telling and literary symbols.

Language Arts CAPT preparation

As I mentioned in the Rationale, my unit will incorporate the questions that invariably appear on the Language Arts component of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test. Students will have numerous opportunities to practice answering these questions which could be construed as, "Teaching to the test." However, these questions provide an excellent guide in exploring literature, including questions such as: How does a character change from the beginning to the end of the story, and what do you think causes the change? Students are expected to back up their observations with evidence from the story, which is always a useful skill. Another of the questions that my students will be asked to practice answering is: Do you consider this story to be good or effective, based on its literary characteristics? For this students will refer to characteristics such as: conflict, character change, action, message or theme, details, realism, surprise ending, imagery, intrigue, effective dialogue, etc. Students need to learn the terminology in order to answer this question competently.

Lesson Plan # 1 Students explore the literal and symbolic meaning in the fable, *The Moth and the Star*

The Essential Question of this lesson: What are the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing one's dream, and defying the status quo?

Objective: To explore how literature addresses this question through talking moths, their actions, and significant objects in the fable, *The Moth and the Star*. To begin students will watch an excerpt from the movie, *Man on Wire*, documenting the death-defying high wire walk made in 1974 by Frenchman, Phillippe Petit, between the Twin Trade Towers. For six years Petit pursued his dream, and planned his illegal, death-defying tight rope act between the Towers. He definitely was reaching for the stars . . . he practically was in the stars.

Most of us have seen tight rope walkers perform in the circus, with a net under the cable to save their lives, should a performer slip or lose his/her balance. But Phillippe Petit is a nonconformist among tight rope walkers,

first because he aspired to cross a wire stretched two hundred feet between the swaying towers, and second because, had he fallen, no net 1,500 feet below could possibly have saved him. After watching an excerpt from *Man on Wire*, or a short from YouTube, students will take some time discussing whether it was a good thing for Petit to pursue his dream, or whether it was really too dangerous, and illegal, and even though he succeeded, the risk was too great. In a review of the documentary movie I read, at Amazon.com, a father said after watching the documentary, he wanted to grab his young son sitting next to him, and say to him, "Be sure that your art is never more important than your life."

Students will then read the fable, *The Moth and the Star*, and in groups will fill out a graphic organizer to chart the question, "Literally, what causes what in the story?," or in their groups they will create a story board illustrating significant scenes in the story with a skeletal script that tells what causes what, or the plot. They will be asked to include: the agents (characters), action, objects, and setting. At this level, students will be focused on the literal events in the story. At this preliminary level, the star that the obdurate young moth pursues every night is literally a star.

Groups will then share their observations as to what causes what, to be sure that they agree on the plot, and causes and effects. In this activity, students will observe what seems to make the young moth fixated on the star that he tried to reach every night, and why his brothers, sisters, and parents seem to prefer flying around street lamps, ultimately getting burned to death.

Once students agree as to what literally happened in the story, they will be ready, in their groups, to tackle the graphic organizer to unlock the symbolic meaning in the fable. Across the top of a landscape graphic organizer, divided into columns, they will discuss the headings that they need to enter. Something like: (1) young moth, (2) his parents, (3) his siblings, (4) street lamps, and (5) the star. Groups will brainstorm all the possible symbolic representations for each column, including the star that the young moth is trying to reach, and the representations of the street lamps where the moth's siblings and parents lost their lives conforming to the lifestyle of a typical moth.

The young moth is a dreamer or a person who is reaching for something beyond his immediate environment, and even though he is ridiculed and chided by his parents, for being a non-conformist, he persists. Even though he never achieves his dream, he grows old and is happy, because eventually he thinks he has reached it, and his siblings have all long-since died, with no dream or passion to keep them alive. I read in the newspaper this morning about a young man who has been pressured to join a gang in the hood, but he has held out because he has other ideas about his life and future. The occasion for the article is that one of his acquaintances who did conform and join the gang has been murdered . . . flying around street lamps.

When students have completed the column graphic organizer, entering as many scenarios as they can imagine, they will have a class discussion of their observations as to what they wrote in the columns. And, because fables are characterized by morals, often stated at the end, they will brainstorm and reach consensus on the moral of this fable. Of course, at some point I will divulge Thurber's moral.

Assessment: Once students have completed the cause and effect graphic organizer/or story board graphic organizer, and filled out the column graphic organizer where they explore the sweeping possibilities of the representations or meaning in the symbols in the fable, and the moral, they will write a Reflection in which they clarify their understanding of this fable and how it represents, or is symbolic, their own lives, the lives of people they know, or people they know about. This activity will address one of the Language Arts CAPT questions that asks students to make connections between the piece of literature and their own lives, observations of the lives of others, books they have read, movies they have seen, etc.

Having been immersed in this fable, and in other lessons focusing on Aesop's Fables, I will encourage them to write and share their own fables, preferably now, or as part of the culminating project for this unit. This will also be part of the assessment.

Lesson Plan # 2 Students explore how belly-stars on a group of Sneetches represent both literal and symbolic meaning in an allegory

The Essential Question of this lesson is: What causes a person or a group of people to feel superior or inferior to others?

Objective: To explore how literature addresses this question through the extended metaphor in an allegory. To begin, students will read "The Sneetches," and watch a video of the story to answer the question, "Literally, what causes what in the story?" Students working in groups will fill out a graphic organizer to chart and answer this question, or will create a story board, illustrating significant scenes in the story with a skeletal script that tells what causes what. Students will be asked to include the agents, actions, significant objects, and the setting. At this level, students will be concerned with the literal events of cause and effect in the story. At this level, literally, the stars are nothing but green stars on the bellies of a select group of Sneetches.

Groups will share their findings as to what causes what to be sure that they agree on the plot, and cause and effect. In this activity, they will observe what seems to make the star-bellied Sneetches superior to the Sneetches without. A discussion of some sort will ensue, having to do with scarcity of the stars and possibly the fact that they are stars, or at least in the shape of stars, objects that connote quality and/or superiority.

Students will be assigned to seek out all the ways that stars are used in our culture today and, in each case, why? Of course we have stars on our flag, and there is a star on energy- efficient appliances.

After they share their cause and effect graphic organizers and their storyboards, they will be able to make observations as to how the Sneetches change in the course of the story and why they change. Making these observations, backed up with evidence from the story is an excellent exercise for Language Arts CAPT preparation, addressing the question that often shows up on the test: How does a character in the story change, and what causes the change?

Once students have clarity as to what literally causes what in the story, also, by the way, not leaving out Sylvester McMonkey McBean's motives and effect, they will be ready to tackle the graphic organizer to unlock the symbolic meaning (and in some cases ramifications) of the Sneetches's stars. Across the top of a landscape graphic organizer divided into columns, continuing to work in their groups, they will enter categories, such as: (1) Sneetches with stars, (2) Sneetches without stars, (3) Means of exclusion (such as marshmallow roasts and games, and (4) Feelings of non-star-bellied Sneetches. Because NHA students study the Holocaust extensively, there is no doubt that they will be able to fill in the columns as victims and perpetrators in the Holocaust fit the headings. As I observed in my narrative section of this unit, ironically, the Jews were made to wear stars to single them out from the rest of the population. Groups will brainstorm and record on the graphic organizer all possible symbolic meanings, from how they experience this in their own lives, both as having stars on their bellies and without, and their observations as to how this manifests itself in our culture, sub-cultures, and in the world.

Once students have immersed themselves in the cause and effect of star-wearers and non star-wearers at the symbolic level, they will engage in a formal discussion about how the simple star on the bellies of a few Seuss characters has the potential to explode as a symbol, and all that this entails.

Assessment: Once students have: completed the cause and effect graphic organizer and/or story board, and filled out the column graphic organizer where they explore the sweeping possibilities of a simple symbol in an allegorical story, and discussed the extended meanings of this star-on phenomenon, they will write a Reflection in which they clarify their understanding of allegory as it manifests itself in the extended metaphor in *The Sneetches*. In a sense, they will take the literal star and run with it as an abstract, extended metaphor.

Also as part of the assessment, because students will have been exposed to other allegories, I will encourage them to write and share their own allegories now, or as part of their culminating project for this unit.

Lesson Plan #3: Students explore the literal and symbolic meaning in the original short story, *The Bear*

The Essential Question: What are the life-changing rites of passage that teens experience and how do they unfold?

Objective: To explore how literature addresses this question through the agents, their actions, significant objects, and the all-important setting, the deep wilderness, in *The Bear*. First, students will brainstorm what comes to mind when they think of a rite of passage. We will record their ideas, definitions, and examples on the board. Then they will read a short article (there are many on the Internet) explaining a rite of passage in a culture, including the concept of transition and ritual that, in minor and major ways, changes our understanding of ourselves in the world. Or they will do their brainstorming in groups, and then share on the board what they have found, followed by reading the short article. Once they have read the article, they will create categories for the rites of passage they have put on the board: perhaps from straight forward rites of passage such as getting a driver's license to more profound rites of passage such as experiencing the death of a loved one, or becoming a parent.

Because of Faulkner's use of poetic prose, his phraseology, the length of his sentences, and his sophisticated vocabulary, the class will begin by reading the story aloud. This will establish the relationship of the characters, their initial actions, and the deep wilderness ultimately represented in the persona of the bear. It will also give the class an opportunity to throw up on the board visual images that Faulkner creates in the first few paragraphs, such as: ". . . grown pigs and calves carried bodily into the woods, . . . shotgun and even rifle charges delivered at point-blank, . . . [with]the deliberation of a locomotive, . . . puny humans . . . about the ankles of a drowsing elephant" (Faulkner 281).

I have not decided, as yet, whether all groups will create story board graphic organizers for *The Bear*, or whether some may do the sequence of events graphic organizer, but all groups will begin working on these organizers as we begin reading the story in order to record accurately the interaction among agents, actions, objects, and the setting. I will ask students to pay close attention to the unfolding relationship between: (1) the boy and his wilderness mentor, Sam Fathers, (2) the unfolding relationship, beginning in the second sentence of the story, between the boy and the elusive, legendary bear that has earned itself a name, old

Ben, and (3) the relationship between the boy and his rifle with a sub textual interest in his compass, watch, and snake stick. When the groups have completed their storyboards or the equivalent, they will present them to the class and engage in a discussion about interaction among the agents, action, objects, and the deep, southern wilderness.

Now, we will revisit the essential question about whether and how this was a life-changing rite of passage for the boy. Students will prepare for this class discussion with observations, and gather evidence from the story for whatever position they take.

Then, they will once again convene, first in groups to tackle the column graphic organizer with possible headings such as: the boy, Sam Fathers, the gun (compass, etc.), the six pound dog, the bear, the boy's father, and the wilderness. It is here that they will be challenged to make connections with the boy's rite of passage and those we have discussed in preparation for reading *The Bear*, and some they may have thought of since. It is significant that the students realize that five or six years pass from the time the story begins, when the boy is ten, to the end of the story.

This activity is especially significant for students at NHA because, as I have mentioned earlier in the narrative section on *The Bear*, in the spring of their sophomore year, they prepare for and present to a panel of teachers, their parents, and their peers what is called the Gateway Portfolio Project in which they reflect upon their academic and community experience in their two years at NHA. This is a very detailed preparation that requires a great deal of reflection on the courses they have taken and the projects they have completed. Part of this project is to reflect on the past two years and how they have grown, and to look to the future and what they hope to accomplish. They must pass the Gateway Portfolio Project or make another attempt the following year. In some ways, the staff is mentoring them in preparation for this project from the time they enter NHA as freshmen.

Assessment: Students will be asked to explicate with evidence how the agents, their actions, significant objects, and the setting coalesce, culminating in the boy's rite of passage; or they may choose to explicate with evidence, the role the gun plays, what it represents, and how, each time it appears or is mentioned, it is an integral part of the boy's rite of passage. There may be other possible choices that emerge as the class interacts with the story. This assessment will be an essay that follows the writing process.

This is an ideal time to answer one of the Language Arts Capt questions which is: Is this a good story? What qualities of a good story are present in this story? Students will have been exposed, in my classroom, to characteristics of a good story through a mobile that hangs from the ceiling featuring many of these characteristics: conflict, character change, action, details, humor, surprise ending, realistic, scary, intrigue, theme, and imagery. These will be part of many lessons and activities throughout the year.

Websites

www.deb.ucdavis.edu/...ParableoftheEagleAggrey.pdf

This website strictly shows a reprint of the story, *Parable of the Eagle*, by

Ghanan, James Aggrey.

www.manonwire.com

From this website the trailer from the full length 2008 Academy Award winning Documentary, *Man on Wire*, is available, and there are a few others if you just type in: "Man on Wire" trailer. These clips show the incredible daring and tension created around Petit's 6 year plan to walk the wire between the Twin Trade Towers. "Do or die!" Or, quite possibly, "Do and die!"

www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-YOAz-4wUgt&feature=related

The Lorax by Dr Seuss is presented in a three part video directed by Hawley Pratt, posted 12/3/2006.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ln3VOHgW4eM

The Sneetches by Dr. Seuss is presented in a two part video produced by Phoenix film and video, posted in 1/11/2007.

Working Bibliography

Abrams, M.H.. *A Glossary of Literary Terms/ Seventh Edition*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999.

This book is a collection of essays that define and clarify literary terms that figure in discussions of literature. The Index of Terms make it very easy to find the literary terms one seeks.

Aesop. *Aesop's Fables*. New York: Avenel Books, 1988.

A 1988 publication of a previous version of 260 fables published in 1912, and illustrated with rare black and white sketches and whimsical color drawings by Arthur Rackham.

Bloom, Lynn Z., Francis Lee Utley and Arthur F Kinney, eds. *Bear, Man, and God: Eight Approaches to William Faulkner's "The Bear,"* Second Edition. New York: Random House, 1964.

This book contains Faulkner's Nobel Acceptance Speech (108-109) and illuminating

critical analysis of "The Bear."

Faulkner, William. "The Bear." *The Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*. Ed. Joseph Blotner. New York: Random House, 1979. 281-295.

This version of "The Bear" was originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in

May, 1942. Faulkner then added to the story and published it as a novella.

Opie, Iona and Peter, eds. *The Classic Fairy Tales*. London: Oxford University Press, 1975.

This book contains the original story of Little Red Ridinghood appearing in a

manuscript in 1695, written by Charles Perrault.

Seuss, Dr. *The Lorax*. New York: Random House, 1971.

This is Seuss's classic picture book complete with illustrations.

Seuss, Dr. *The Sneetches and other Stories*. New York: Random House, 1961.

This book contains Seuss's classic story of The Sneetches complete with illustrations.

Thurber, James. *The Thurber Carnival*. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1945.

This collection of Thurber's stories contains *The Moth and the Star* and *The Little Girl and the Wolf*.

Appendix: Implementing Language Arts Standards in my unit

Language Arts English Standard 1.0 Reading

Performance Standard 1.2

Students will use graphic organizers, and note-taking techniques to organize information.

They will interpret the text.

Language Arts English Standard 2.0 Writing

Performance Standard 2.2

Students will participate in CAPT related writing activities. They will view themselves as effective writers. They will explain goals in writing a text, and indicate the extent to which they are achieved.

Language Arts English Standard 6.0 English/ Integrated Language Arts

Performance Standard 6.1

Students will create narratives and/or original stories.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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

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