



And the Beat Goes On: American Art and Literature from 1950 to Present

Curriculum Unit 09.02.11
by Matthew S. Monahan

Section One: Introduction

1.1 Statement of Context

Their [the Beats] politics were not leftist as much as libertarian and the purpose was to rouse, to challenge, to question the changes caused by new technologies, to help Americans remember that this too was once a place where men could dream of a better future (Knight 1988, pg. X).

The American Dream has a starring role in New Haven's eleventh grade English curriculum. One of its "Essential Question(s)" is "What does it mean to be an American?" For the Beats it apparently meant to rebel against suburbia and the conventional/traditional types of work that were necessary in order to participate in the capitalist consumer culture that it represents (Charters, xx). One might argue, that there has never been a better time to teach or study the Beats, than there is now; the real estate bubble has burst, the Big Three automakers are going down and American troops continue to rack up casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan. Is it ironic that Edward Foster firmly identifies the Beats as being a small cluster of writers (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs and Corso) situated in NYC specifically? For NYC is home to both Wall Street and Ground Zero.

It has been said that one of the reasons that the Beats are so widely ignored by academics is because of their antiestablishment ethos. The larger question for me is, is their work teachable? What is my motivation? I claim that it my wish to find high interest literature that will fit the larger context of the curriculum. What evidence do I have that the Beats are capable of peaking my students' interests and why is it that high interest selections have become such a concern of my colleagues and mine? Although this last question, may for the time go unanswered, I do believe over the course of my reading and research, the answer to whether or not

their work is teachable is a resounding "Yes!"

The argument has been made that the teaching of Beat literature may be perilous in that one's students may adopt the Beat attitude and use it as an excuse for not completing assignments or even skipping class; however, Foster points out in his *Understanding the Beats* that almost all of the core members of the group were Ivy League educated,

Columbia had taught Kerouac and Ginsberg the classics but Burroughs [who had studied anthropology at Harvard and later medicine in Vienna (Miles 329)] showed them what had been left out- Hart Crane, T.S. Eliot, Celine, Kafka, Cocteau and other modern writers (5).

Although the term beat appears to have broad application going beyond the movements founding fathers and the fringe characters with whom they associated and from whom they drew inspiration e.g. Neal Cassidy, Herbert Huncke, Bill Cannistra et al., the Beat Generation is generally used to describe the big four who ended up dedicating their lives to literary pursuits.

In my four years as a professional educator I have taught very few examples of Beat literature; therefore, I have included reflections on my teaching of other modernist and postmodernist writers, most notably Toni Morrison. In his book *Beat Collection* editor Barry Miles discusses how the Beats "challenged existing literary forms" (xvii), Morrison, particularly in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, appears to be an inheritor of their experimental writing styles. In terms of its high-interest appeal my students were split on Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison made some interesting choices in terms of blending "[the] speakerly, [the] aural, [the] colloquial" (Morrison 215) and other language; her use of typography whether it be italics, absence of punctuation (and sometimes even spacing) or the ever-shifting justified/unjustified right margin (signifying the shift in perspective) appeared to me, even now, twenty plus years later, quite innovative. And so, her novel is undoubtedly modern, if not entirely successful in terms of meeting its author's stated purpose of breaking the narrative into parts that required reassembly on the part of its readers so that they would not be led "into the comfort of pitying her [Pecola] rather [than] into an interrogation of themselves for the smashing" (211).

Although Morrison wrote her novel in the 1970s, its narrative takes place in the year 1941, approximately a decade before Kerouac cemented his status as the symbolic father of all things Beat with the publishing of his novel *On the Road*; I have noticed that some anthologies (e.g. McDougall Littell's *The Language of Literature*) place certain works according to their settings rather than their dates of publication (i.e. Arthur Miller's drama *The Crucible* appears amidst Colonial works rather than alongside those of his contemporaries). This issue is not as complex for Beat writings in as much that they were not writing historical fiction. However, Miller's examination of our nation's Puritanical roots would make a nice precursor to the study of Beat literature especially in light of its antiestablishment ethos.

I currently teach three sections of junior level/eleventh grade English and a course entitled Visual Art and Literature. Although the focus of the eleventh grade curriculum is American literature I do find it helpful to contrast texts (print and non print) with those from other parts of the world especially those that deal with similar themes and motifs. In my experience I have found that modern and contemporary works generate a higher level of interest among my students than those that predate the Great Wars. My participation in this seminar has provided me with the opportunities to consider modernism on a deeper level and to explore the motivations of twentieth-century artists whether they were members of the Beat Generation disillusioned with post-New Deal America or the New York School gravitating toward abstraction.

Before studying education I studied studio art and art history at Hunter College, CUNY (City University of New

York). This experience profoundly enriched my life and further developed my analytical and critical reasoning skills, two areas in which my students need support. My curriculum unit focuses on student development in these areas through the study of such modern masters as Pollock, Kerouac, Ginsberg, et al.

1.2 Descriptive Overview and Long Term Plan

As previously noted, in the context of this unit, the Beat Generation is a term by which Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs and Corso may be referred collectively; however, the study of these four writers is book-ended by the inclusion of Thomas Wolfe and LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka. Although Jones was not a core member of the group, his activities in New York City's Greenwich Village neighborhood have often given rise to his labeling as beat.

As Foster states,

These four writers [Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs and Corso] are in many ways so distinctively individual that at times it may seem that the entire beat movement were nothing but a journalists or a critics fantasy. Nonetheless, when one puts [their work]... next to... John Updike, Saul Bellow... Anne Sexton... it is clear that [they] do comprise a separate group, not only because they strongly encouraged and influenced each other aesthetically but also because they shared a particular attitude... about what they felt had gone wrong with America (pp. 4-5).

The works I have selected for inclusion in this unit of study do not all explicitly state what exactly that was that "had gone wrong with America." Kerouac's piece "The Jazz of the Beat Generation" is rather a celebration of or rather an antidote to it. It is my belief that it is in the poetry of Ginsberg ("America"), Corso ("The Bomb") and Baraka/Jones (both "Preface.." and "Somebody Blew Up America") that these wrongs are more fully realized and explored. This leaves Burroughs, who although is identified as a core member of the Beat Generation is nonetheless an outsider, and is the Beats' one member whose work most clearly fits the postmodern paradigm. What it is to be modern, and the disambiguation between it and postmodern, were concepts that I clearly struggled with early in my research.

Serendipitously I stumbled upon an article in an old New Yorker (would that qualify as a back-issue?) about a dinner party hosted by David Barthelme. Not long before I had updated my FB (facebook) status as: Matthew Monahan is contemplating what it is to be postmodern; and eureka, I've found it, or at least I found a dueling banjos theoretical approach:

Postmodernism is the Swiss Army knife of critical concepts. It's definitionally overloaded, it can do almost any job you need done. This is partly because, like many terms that begin with "post," it is fundamentally ambidextrous. Postmodernism can mean, "We're all modernist now. Modernism has won." Or it can mean, "No one can be a modernist anymore. Modernism is over" (Menand 2008, pg. 68).

I could not help but be transported back to the fall of 1990 when I was first introduced to the concept of "-isms" in Marshall Fishwick's Introduction to Humanities and the Arts course at the university most commonly referred to today as Virginia Tech. There with the help of Socrates, Robert Hughes, Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman et al I began to ask the Big Question, why?

It seems to me there can be only one logical solution, regardless of what texts one decides to teach, if the unit is to be an exploration of modernism and contemporary art, the culminating activity must be a multi-genre paper. I have struggled with the how. How do I engage students while exposing them to modern literature and art of the twentieth century? The cliché, "Teach what you love and love what you teach," is often bandied about in educational circles, and this is all well and good, as long as your (teacher/facilitator) enthusiasm is infectious and the work being explored is able to transcend student ennui.

I originally intended to focus primarily on Kerouac's *On The Road*; however, I think I have stumbled onto something more exciting, a thematic unit for the teaching of American literature from the 1930s into the twenty-first century: Wolfe (*Piggy Logan*/*Alexander Calder*), Kerouac ("*Jazz of the Beat Generation*")/Pollock, Ginsberg ("*A Supermarket in California*" and "*America*") and Jones/Baraka ("*Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*" and "*Somebody Blew Up America*").

Section Two: General Guide

2.1 Special Issues

Other than the fact that Beat literature is generally subversive, it is of note that it often deals with "subject matter that few people had dared to describe before, and [sic] were the subjects of numerous obscenity cases because of it" (Miles, xvii). As a result I have wrestled with which works to include. Although Ginsberg's landmark poem "Howl" has gained mainstream acceptance, so much so that it is now included in the Norton Anthology of American Literature, I feel that its frank depictions of homosexuality are more appropriate for discussion at the college level. The same is true for much of the writings of William S. Burroughs, whose early novels *Junky* and *Queer* not only include graphic depictions of sex acts but also include protracted descriptions of the use of hard drugs i.e. opiates.

2.2 Aims: Objectives and Goals

By completion of this unit of study students will be able to do the following: work individually and cooperatively in defining Beat, the American Dream and related terms, have an understanding of the role that literature and art had in shaping the culture of postwar America, read and appreciate multiple works by the Beat writers Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, LeRoi Jones AKA Amiri Baraka, analyze both literary elements and the historical significance of these works and develop theories that relate these works to their own lives and to present day American life.

Section Three: Unit Description

3.1 Outline: Texts and Methods

Jack Kerouac was greatly influenced by Thomas Wolfe. Although Wolfe's writing predates World War II, it has been said that no study of American literature would be complete without his inclusion. Faulkner went as far as to say that Wolfe was the most important writer of his generation (rating himself a close second). Wolfe's novels are too sprawling and dense for inclusion in this, or any other unit designed for my high school level courses; however, there is one chapter from his novel *You Can't Go Home Again* that would fit quite nicely as a companion piece, especially in its description of a fictionalized version of the visionary sculptor Alexander Calder. "Piggy Logan's Circus" describes a New York society party at which Logan/Calder has been hired to perform; although Calder is best known for his abstract mobiles (he is said to have invented the mobile in 1931) his wire circus *Cirque Calder*, that is on permanent display at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

3.1.1 *Onomatopoeia and Figurative Language in Kerouac's "Jazz of the Beat Generation"*

In his introduction to *Beat Collection* Miles observes that the "Beats not only questioned society's norms but challenged existing literary forms... they experimented with... strange words not in the dictionary, slang and obscenities never before seen in poetry or prose" (xvii) nowhere is this more clear than in Kerouac's "Jazz..." "Jazz..." relies heavily on the use of onomatopoeia, the formation of words such as buzz that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to, in recreating the world of subterranean bop clubs and gin mills of Chicago in the 1940s. Kerouac goes as far as to include onomatopoeia in the opening line of this excerpt from *On the Road* that was published in short form under the title by which I am referring,

OUT WE JUMPED in the warm mad night hearing a wild tenor-man's bawling
horn across the way going "EE-YAH! EE-YAH! And hands clapping to the beat
and folks yelling "Go, go, go!" (Miles 9)

The tracking down of Kerouac's short form prose was not an easy task. Few references are even made to "Jazz..." and another excerpted piece entitled "The Mexican Girl." Updike makes reference to these works and even goes as far as to say that the editors of *Best American Short Stories of the Year* allowed at least one of

them to "creep in" past the bellwether that excluded excerpts from larger works (xv).

Although my focus has shifted to literature, this would be an appropriate time to introduce students to the work of the American painter Jackson Pollock, who shares with Kerouac his love of experimental Jazz, the music that had unquestionable influence on these artists and their work.

3.1.2 The Irreverent Free Verse Of Alan Ginsberg and His Use of Personification, Allusion and Symbol

Although I will later make reference to Ginsberg's quintessential Beat poem "Howl" I would advise against using it in its entirety in the high school classroom unless one has extensive knowledge of his or her students. This is not to say that I advocate censorship in any shape or form; however, Ginsberg's depiction of "the best minds of [his] generation... who let themselves be [sodomized] by saintly motor cyclists, and screamed with joy," is arguably worthy of an NC-17 rating.

In his poem "A Supermarket in California" Ginsberg inverts Walt Whitman's notion of "oneness among people" (Foster 107); whereas Whitman writes in his poem "Song of Myself," "in all people I see myself, none more and not one a barleycorn less," Ginsberg, writes:

I saw you Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber,
poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys (Miles
98).

It maybe somewhat ironic that the other poet to whom Ginsberg alludes (other than Whitman) in "Supermarket In California" is Garcia Lorca and not Pablo Neruda; I say this because Neruda often wrote of fruits and vegetables, most notably of artichokes and tomatoes both of which appear in "Supermarket In California,"

... Whole families shop-
ping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in avocados, babies
in the tomatoes! ---and you, Garcia Lorca, what were you doing
down by the watermelons?

And later in lines 17-20,

We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary

Fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never
Passing the cashier (98).

Ginsberg not only alludes to literary giants in his poem but also to Greek and Roman mythology, specifically to the "Devil's Boatsman" Charon and to "the black waters of Lethe."

In his poem "America" Ginsberg continues to incorporate the device of allusion; however, this time he ups the ante by including historical events rather than simply referencing literary mammoths and earlier well-known works such as Roman myths,

America free Tom Mooney
America save the Spanish loyalists
America Sacco & Vanzetti must not die
America I am the Scottsboro Boys...
America you really do not want to go to war (Miles 102).

The metaphor "America I am the Scottsboro Boys" is especially interesting when contrasted with Ginsberg's earlier statement in the same poem, "It occurs to me that I am America./ I am talking to myself again" (102). I am also struck by the Scottsboro Boys reference because I have had a great deal of success teaching their story in conjunction with Harper Lee's novel *To Kill A Mockingbird*; the PBS documentary *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy* is most effective in capturing students' interests and generating meaningful class discussions and student writings.

3.1.3. The Inclusion of the Illustrious William S Burroughs

Burroughs was the oldest of the core group and was more interested in the anthropological study of the fringe characters that inhabited Times Square and its surrounding area and in experimenting with drugs than in writing; it was Kerouac who encouraged him to pursue writing seriously. His early novels, those mentioned in the Special Issues section of this unit, were genre novels whose style were firmly rooted in the hard-boiled detective novels of likes of Hammet and Chandler and would certainly sit comfortably alongside the works of Jim Thomson (e.g. *Pop. 1280*, *The Killer Inside Me*, *The Getaway* etc.). It was not until he had completed the watershed *Naked Lunch* that he took a seat at the head of the table of America's postmodern writers.

Burroughs is difficult to include for numerous reasons; he had difficulty finding anyone willing to publish *Queer*, his follow-up to the immensely popular *Junky* which according to Foster sold in excess of one hundred thousand copies its first year in print.

Junky talks about the homosexual world in Mexico City, but the subject is secondary to drugs. Queer deals explicitly with homosexual relationships, emotions, and fantasies, and according to Burrough's biographer, "the people at A.A. Wyn [the publisher of Ace Books] decided that publishing Junky was dangerous enough without teaming it with a book ... that might land them in jail" (Foster pp.153-154).

Foster goes on to explain that as a result the book went unpublished for over thirty years. And so, if one is to exclude these early novels, one is primarily left with the cut-ups and or the possibility of including Naked Lunch in some type of excerpted form, which of course offer challenges all their own. The filmmaker David Cronenberg wrote the following about his early attempts at adapting Burroughs for the screen,

There are two main problems. One is the scope of it [Naked Lunch] It really is quite epic. It would cost \$ 400-500 million if you were to film it literally, and of course it would be banned in every country of the world. There would be no culture that could withstand [it].... As a book, you dip into it, you don't read it start to finish. It's like the Bible; it's a little bit here; cross-references. You find your favorite parts, like the I Ching. You look in it when you need it and you find something there (Rodley, 161).

One might assume that its (Naked Lunch's) nonlinear narrative would facilitate its being excerpted; and it does, but the challenge of finding a passage or passages that are classroom appropriate at the high school level remains.

3.1.4 Gregory Corso: Or How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Bomb

Gregory Corso is arguably the least known of the Beat Generation writers. Whether it is in the creative writing classroom or the traditional English classroom I enjoy dedicating a brief moment of time to the study of concrete or visual poetry; one of the major challenges in the teaching of concrete/visual poetry is locating good examples.

Concrete poetry is poetry in which the text or typography visually conveys the poem's subject or theme. I have taught e.e. cummings' poem "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" in the past, as well as an anonymously published poem "The Parallelogram." Corso's poem "Bomb" from 1958 is an example of concrete poetry. Originally published as a pull-out centerfold ala Mad magazine, it is constructed in the shape of a mushroom cloud; adding to its visual effectiveness, its reprint in Miles' Beat Collection runs five pages in length, the first page/cap of the mushroom cloud doubles as the shape of the bomb itself.

3.1.5 LeRoi Jones AKA Amiri Baraka the Black Beat

According to John Updike in his introduction to *The Best American Short Stories of the Century*, "The African-American has inhabited, and to a lamentable degree still inhabits, another country within the United States, where most white signposts of security and stability are absent" (xviii). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the work of Amiri Baraka. Baraka who wrote under the name of LeRoi Jones during the time that he was associated with the Beats may be best known for the controversy surrounding his poem "Somebody Blew Up America" and his subsequent dismissal from the post of Poet Laureate of the great state of New Jersey.

"Somebody Blew Up America" echoes Ginsberg's "Howl" (especially its "Part I") in that both works rely heavily on repetition and on the repetition of the word "who" specifically. A major point of contrast is that Ginsberg's who statements (first off, are statements) describe

...the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry
dynamo in the machinery of night,

Whereas Baraka's who's are blatantly accusatory, "Like an owl exploding...

Like the acid vomit of the fire of Hell
Who and Who and Who (+) who who ^
Whoooo and Whoooooooooooooooooooooo!

As previously noted Baraka's poetic rant (bordering on the polemical) cost him his position as state Poet Laureate; conversely, it has provided me with some of my most memorable classroom experiences to date

Although the study of Morrison is not directly included in this unit, it may be of interest that both she, in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, and Baraka in "Somebody..." attempt, quite successfully I might add, to adopt a

conspiratorial tone. Morrison begins the narrative of her novel with the phrase "Quiet as it is kept...." This creates the impression that the reader is being let "in on" a big secret. Baraka begins his poem, "(All thinking people/ oppose terrorism/ both domestic/ and international.../ But one should/ be used/ To cover the other)." Ultimately both writers are creating a kind of expose that serves both to enlighten and, at the same time, to implicate its audience.

I regularly read the Baraka/LeRoi Jones poem "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note" with my students when studying poetry. Although many of the modernist writers and even the example of "Somebody Blew Up America" may fit the absurdist paradigm "Preface," in my assessment, is its polar opposite. This is just to say, that writers working in this mode, especially Barthelme, describe an "existence in a meaningless and irrational universe in which an individual's life has no meaning or purpose." Although the speaker in the Jones' poem is being pulled into a state of melancholy while he grapples with the everyday problems of modern life i.e. the tedium of walking the dog and waiting for the bus, he is brought back from the precipice of his despair by the image of his young daughter praying.

3.1.6 Post-Script: Postmodern American Literature after the Beats

At the time of my conception of this unit, I had read but one Barthelme story, "The City of Churches," which was included in *The Best American Short Stories of the Century*. I had hoped that his story "The Joker's Greatest Triumph" would be of high interest to my students with its incorporation of popular/well-known characters from DC Comics, especially in light of actor Heath Ledger's posthumous receipt of the Academy Award for his portrayal of the story's titular character (not to be confused with titular character of the film, *The Dark Knight*); alas, I was foiled. The story is quite innovative in its use of grammar and punctuation but reads a little too much like Salinger's "Uncle Wiggley in Connecticut" with its focus on the 1950's era fascination with the rolling cocktail hour; however, in his short story "A Shower of Gold," Barthelme presaged reality television, this was something my students were able to tap into, not to mention the fun they had making R Kelly jokes in their directed pre-reading writing exercise.

Section 3.2 Details: Sample Lesson Plans

3.2.1 Teaching Jack Kerouac's "Jazz of the Beat Generation"

Journal/Motivation: Today we are going to read a short prose piece entitled "Jazz of the Beat Generation." This piece was written in the nineteen-fifties and incorporates the use of a specific genre of music as a symbol of the time. Brainstorm a list of types of music that is representative of your generation. Next, jot down your ideas as to what moniker (e.g. the Beat Generation) might best accompany the types of music from your initial list in describing you and your peers. Finally, choose one or two examples from your lists and provide a brief explanation of your labels significance.

Word of the Day:

moniker NOUN: A descriptive name added to or replacing the actual name of a person, place or thing.

Aim: How can we identify and analyze the use of onomatopoeia and figurative language in Jack Kerouac's short story "Jazz of the Beat Generation," so that we may incorporate these techniques in our own writing?

Objectives: SWBAT...

1. Define, identify and analyze the use of onomatopoeia in a work of short fiction by the American author Jack

Kerouac.

2. Identify and analyze the use of figurative language in Kerouac.

3. Demonstrate content area knowledge by incorporating the literary devices of onomatopoeia and figurative language in original written work.

Mini Lesson:

Onomatopoeia, from the Greek, is one or more words that imitate or suggest the source of the sound they are describing. Common occurrences include animal noises, such as "oink" or "meow" or "roar". Onomatopoeia are not universally the same across all languages; they conform to some extent to the broader linguistic system they are part of; hence the sound of a clock may be tick tock in English and tik tak in Dutch or tic-tac in French.

Figurative language

Workshop:

A. Whole class reads Kerouac's "Jazz of the Beat Generation."

B. Reader Response and Analysis (note: although responses to Workshop B. may be generated in pairs or in small groups all students are individually responsible for recording responses in their required English notebooks):

Summary/Review

Homework:

Draft a long poem or short prose piece in which you incorporate more than one example of both onomatopoeia and figurative language. Remember you are not limited to but may include examples of the figurative comparisons simile and metaphor.

3.2.2 Teaching Allen Ginsberg's poem "Supermarket in California"

Journal/Motivation: What associations do you have with supermarkets? How do you and your family members view shopping for groceries? Does shopping for groceries differ from shopping for other types of items? Explain.

Word of the Day:

misnomer NOUN: 1. An error in naming a person or place. 2a. Application of a wrong name. b. A name wrongly or unsuitably applied to a person or object.

Aim: How may we identify the use of literary allusion in Ginsberg's poem "Supermarket in California," so that we may incorporate this technique in our own writing?

Objectives: SWBAT...

1. Define the literary device of allusion.

2. Identify and analyze the use of allusion in Ginsberg's poem "Supermarket in California."

3. Demonstrate their understanding of the literary device of allusion by incorporating this device in original written work.

Mini Lesson:

Allusion- is a figure of speech that makes a reference to, or representation of, a place, event, literary work, myth, or work of art, either directly or by implication. M.H. Abrams defined allusion as "a brief reference, explicit or indirect, to a person, place or event, or to another literary work or passage". It is left to the reader or hearer to make the connection (Fowler); an overt allusion is a misnomer for what is simply a reference.

In a freer more informal definition, allusion is a passing or casual reference; an incidental mention of something, either directly or by implication.

Workshop:

A. Whole Class reads and annotates Ginsberg's poem "Supermarket in California."

B. Reader Response and Analysis (note: although responses to Workshop B. may be generated in pairs or in small groups all students are individually responsible for recording responses in their required English notebooks):

1. What images do you find most striking? Explain.

2. Does Ginsberg use the device of literary allusion in his poem? If yes, provide examples.

3. Your partnership or group may designate a "researcher" whose task it is to use electronic resources to gather information on the subjects of any allusions found in the poem; all group members are to include these findings.

Summary/Review

Homework:

Draft a long poem or short prose piece in which you incorporate the device of literary allusion. Although you are not limited works covered by this class, you are required to have one or more of your allusions refer to a work or works of American literature that we have read this year.

3.2.3 Teaching Gregory Corso's poem "Bomb"

Journal/Motivation: What associations do you have with the word bomb? Do you have any opinions or thoughts about the US's relationship with the bomb (literally)? Is there a difference between "the bomb," "a bomb" and an "A-bomb?" Explain.

Word of the Day:

perturb VERB: To disturb greatly; make uneasy or anxious.

Aim: How can we read, appreciate and analyze Gregory Corso's concrete poem "Bomb" so that we may

incorporate this technique into our own writing?

Objectives: SWBAT...

1. Define and identify examples of concrete poetry.
2. Respond to a work of American literature by creating original examples of concrete poetry.

Mini Lesson:

Concrete or visual poetry- poetry in which the text or typography visually conveys the poem's subject or theme.

Workshop:

- A. Whole class reads and annotates Gregory Corso's poem "Bomb."
- B. Analysis and Creative Response to Literature

Summary/Review

Homework:

Either create a "clean copy"/published version of the concrete or visual poem you began drafting in class or repeat steps one and two of the five-step writing process in drafting a second poem (visual or concrete).

3.2.4 Teaching Allen Ginsberg's poem "America"

Journal/Motivation: In today's reading of Allen Ginsberg's poem "America" you will encounter a short list of people and events that the poet thought definitive in the shaping of the hearts and minds of his generation. Brainstorm a list of people and events that you think are definitive of your generation. Next, choose one to three items from your list and explain what makes them so.

Word of the Day:

definitive ADJECTIVE: precisely defined or explicit; describes something which is considered an authoritative, final or conclusive example or version of its type.

Aim: How may we identify and analyze both the use of personification and historical allusion in Allen Ginsberg's poem "America," so that we may incorporate these techniques into our own writing?

Objectives: SWBAT...

1. Define, identify and analyze the use of the literary device of personification in a poem by Allen Ginsberg.
2. Identify and analyze the use of historical allusion in Ginsberg's poem "America."
3. Incorporate the literary devices of allusion and personification in original written work.

Mini Lesson:

Personification is the literary device by which an author ascribes human traits or characteristics to either an inanimate object or an animal.

Review and expansion of allusion

Workshop

Summary/Review

Homework:

Draft either a long poem or short prose piece in which you incorporate the literary device of personification. Extra credit will be awarded for the inclusion of any historical allusions.

Annotated Bibliography:

Ashton, Dore. *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.

Barthelme, Donald. *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1964.

Short story collection that is dedicated to the author's mother and includes "The Joker's Greatest Triumph" featuring characters from DC Comics. The book's title alludes to a German Expressionist film that is regarded by many as the first true horror film.

Barthelme, Donald. *Sixty Stories*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981.

Short story collection that includes "A Shower of Gold," "A City of Churches" and "Me and Mrs. Mandible."

Beat Collection. Barry Miles. London: Virgin Books, 2005.

This anthology includes Kerouac's "Jazz of The Beat Generation," Ginsberg's poems "Supermarket in California" and "America" and Corso's poem "Bomb," as well various writings/excerpts from William S. Burroughs.

Beat Reader. Ann Charters. New York: Penguin, 1992.

Burroughs, William. *Naked Lunch*. New York: Grove Press, 1991.

Burroughs postmodern masterpiece was cleared of obscenity charges by the State Supreme Court of Massachusetts in 1966 and has since found itself on numerous banned and challenged suggested reading lists.

Cronenberg on Cronenberg. Chris Rodley. London: Faber and Faber, 1997.

This installment of Faber and Faber's excellent series on conversations with filmmakers includes a chapter entitled "Bugs, Spies and Butterflies: Naked Lunch and M. Butterfly" in which director-auteur David Cronenberg discusses bringing Burroughs' work to the screen.

Foster, Edward Halsey. *Understanding the Beats*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1992.

Ginsberg, Allen. "Howl, Parts I & II." poets.org (accessed March 29, 2009).

The landmark poem in its full text is available along with an audio file of Allen Ginsberg performing/reading the work.

Hughes, Robert. *The Shock of the New: The Hundred-Year History of Modern Art, Its Rise, Its Dazzling Achievement, Its Fall*. New York: Knopf, 1980.

This overview of Modern Art includes all of the various movements or "-isms" from the late nineteenth century until its publication, includes many full color photographs and a BBC produced companion video is available on DVD through the New Haven Free Public Library.

Kerouac and The Beats: A Primary Sourcebook. Arthur and Kit Knight. New York: Paragon House, 1988.

Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York: Penguin, 1991.

Kerouac's novel challenges the American Dream and caused writer Truman Capote to famously remark, "That's not writing; that's typing."

Menand, Louis. "Saved From Drowning: Barthelme reconsidered." *The New Yorker*, February 23, 2009, 68-76.

Wolfe, Thomas. *You Can't Go Home Again*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1968.

The chapter entitled "Piggy Logan's Circus" (pp. 214-221) masterfully recreates the work and energy of American artist Alexander Calder.

Appendix: Links to English and Language Arts Standards Covered by Unit

By completion of the preceding unit of study students will be able to: 1.1e Draw conclusions and use evidence to substantiate them using text heard, read and viewed, 2.1d Analyze literary conventions and devices an author uses and how they contribute to meaning and appeal.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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

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