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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2010 Volume II: The Art of Reading People: Character, Expression, Interpretation

The Shelleys: Author and Character, Reality and Fiction

Guide for Curriculum Unit 10.02.01
by Simon C. Edgett

In this curriculum unit, students will explore the lives of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, major forces in the Romantic Period in English literature. By exploring the two writers' personal lives and experiences, students will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the impact of their writing. Percy Shelley's life is evident in the themes and imagery of his poetry. Many of Mary Shelley's experiences mold characters and themes of her novels. Students will apply what they glean from their biographical study to several of the authors' works (poetical and fictional) to develop thorough analyses which take into account the historical and personal forces at work in their writings.

While this unit focuses specifically on the Shelleys and their writings, it has potential to be adapted to other authors. I have selected the Shelleys because of their dramatic lives and the impact they have on students in my classroom. Helping students see as individuals those writers they are exposed to will create an arena for deeper connection to their writings and help mold our students as lifelong learners and readers.

(Developed for English 12 and AP English, grade 12; recommended for English, grade 12)

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