



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2012 Volume II: The Art of Biography

Virginia Woolf and Roger Fry: Distant Experiences United in Style

Curriculum Unit 12.02.08
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Introduction

On a spring day in London, Margaret Fry writes: "Years ago, after one of those discussions upon the methods of the arts which illuminated his long and happy friendship with you, Roger suggested, half seriously, that you should put into practice your theories of the biographer's craft in a portrait of himself." With these words, Virginia Woolf forewords the biography of her best friend from the Bloomsbury group. Roger Fry, art critic and post-impressionist painter, held a pivotal place in Virginia's life and literary career. His theories on aestheticism and art led Virginia to experiment with new writing techniques in an attempt to create a literary narrative which would be the pure reflection of reality. According to Roger, a purely realistic page could not contain any impure use of adjectives or metaphors, the usual writer's distortions. Fry guided Woolf in the crafting of some of her most painterly short stories, *Kew Gardens*, or *Monday or Tuesday*, and some of her most famous novels. Such an influential presence could not go unremembered. After Roger Fry's demise, Virginia Woolf wanted to honor his contribution to the world of art and literature by writing his biography, which she published in 1940.

Woolf's texts are often misunderstood or rejected by students. The reason I have been given many times is that Woolf's style of writing is difficult and seems to be a long collection of words with no particular meaning. This reaction has led me to research what or who guided Woolf to create such a distinctive writing style. My investigation has started with the Bloomsbury group, a group of writers and painters who regularly met at Virginia's home in London to discuss art in their respective fields. Among these friends, Roger Fry stands out as the most influential, with his innovative ideas that the arts of painting and writing were one. In his view, words should be used as painters treat paint, and this theory affected Virginia's writing style. For instance, *Kew Gardens* and *Monday or Tuesdays* seem the perfect reflections of Roger's vision. Each scene and every word are colors on a canvas. They reflect reality with the quiet contemplative pleasure Fry envisions for a viewer in front of a canvas. Fry's suggestions guided Virginia Woolf. Her written works lead the reader toward new emotional experiences. I want my students to discover this pleasure as I have found it.

My unit's goal is therefore to teach how to understand and appreciate Virginia Woolf's fictional and non-fictional works. One way to do this is to focus on the relationship between Woolf, the biographer, and Fry, her subject. In order to achieve these objectives, I will enlist my students' artistic talents to help them see relationships between written works and the visual arts. I want them to understand how writers and artists

reach audiences, and how audiences, in turn, respond.

I will begin by having my students visit the art gallery in our school, and then the Yale Art Gallery or the British Art Center, to familiarize with how to interpret a visual image. The next step will be to introduce them to Impressionism and Post-Impressionism: through this, they will learn about style – how two artists can paint the same scene (or person) in very different ways. I want my students to describe what they see, and then explain how what they've seen makes them feel. From this, they will learn that no two viewers of a work of art will respond to it in just the same way.

This initial section of my curriculum unit will conclude with my students' own art project. They will choose a person who plays an important role in their life, take photographs first, and then paint or draw the same person. They can also choose to do a self-portrait. This assignment will help my students to experience how to create a life on a canvas. The skills they will learn in this segment of the unit can be transferred to the creation of life by using words instead of colors.

After this initial session on the reading and interpretation of visual texts, I will begin a session which focuses on the reading of Woolf's biography of Roger Fry. Since the unit addresses both the students who are in the Advanced Placement Literature class and the juniors who are in my College class, my approach to the biography will vary. The AP students will read extensive passages about Fry's childhood, his working experience in Europe and in America, his experiment with Omega (his studio in London), his vision of art, and his years of transformation as artist and art critic. Each chapter of this biography contains interesting insights about his artistic development. The same details clarify and explain Woolf's choices in her writing style.

The College students will read passages from the same biography, but my selection will have a different objective because I expect them to understand how to write a biography. These students will read mostly about Roger's childhood, and some other excerpts from the chapter on Transformation, so that they can see what events should be included in a biography -- these pages are also a good model to teach them critical thinking. Both groups will also read passages from Hermione Lee's biography of Virginia Woolf and from *Orlando*, Woolf's own spoof of biography, to compare the quality of her choices and those of her biographer.

A third session will include the reading of the short story, *Kew Gardens*. This part is reserved to the AP students and while we are doing this reading, we will compare Woolf's writing style to Fry's theories about art, and to some of the Post-Impressionism paintings. The College students will only compare the passages from *Orlando* to Fry's biography, and *Kew Gardens* to his vision of art and some visual texts. I also expect them to experience Fry's theories by completing a visual project. They can choose the topic or/and they can either paint it or take pictures. The same visual texts have to include a detailed written analysis.

Both groups will conclude the unit with two different assessments: the Advanced Placement students have to analyze the short story *Monday or Tuesday*, compare it to Fry's theories about art, and argue which of the two artists –Virginia Woolf or an Impressionist/Post-Impressionist painter (they can choose the artist they want) – have depicted realism more powerfully and accurately. The College students will conclude their experience by writing a personal essay which they can use for their college application.

Rationale: Students' Context

This unit addresses a very specific population composed by a good group of Advanced Placement students and another quite large group of juniors who attend a regular College class – according to our district the college class includes all those students who are struggling readers, or have low intrinsic motivation, and/or specific needs due to emotional and behavioral problems. Both populations are formed by students from different ethnicities, mostly African-American and Latinos with free or reduced lunch status.

Since my school is an art school, its mission is to cultivate different artistic talents while maintaining a high level of rigor in the academics. On one side, this aspect is an excellent tool I can use to encourage the interest of the strugglers or to introduce difficult topics or concepts. Each class is rich of individuals with a vivid creativity in many different fields and a great variety of learning styles. At the same time, my students often miss regular instructions in the academics because they are involved in numerous rehearsals throughout the school year.

This particular context opens up a variety of possibilities in the selection of teaching strategies and learning styles. To begin with, the AP students do not reflect the "traditional" population of students who enter the class with adequate skills and knowledge. These students have good writing skills but they have never been exposed to a rigorous curriculum covering a variety of texts from all literary genres like drama, fiction, poetry from the sixteenth century on. Their first hardship is reading and understanding canonical texts, not to mention poetry since our curriculum just brushes it. The College students struggle because they lack motivation and because of reading difficulties they proudly hide with the commonest excuse: this text is slow and boring. My students learn through continuous and differentiated modeling and scaffolding – a useful combination of I do (I show them how to write or what strategy they need to follow for reading and understanding), we do (we repeat the same writing or reading together so it becomes more familiar), and they do (they have learned and can write or read proficiently) -- in combination with continuous references to the visual arts.

Unit Objectives

The focus of this unit is to teach my students how to analyze fictional and non-fictional texts before writing a page of literary criticism or a personal statement. I want my students to apply their artistic talents as a vehicle to understand difficult literary passages and make sense of complex and ambiguous narrators or characters. Every lesson plan has specific objectives to show the skills I am going to touch upon in order to measure the students' learning, reflect on the outcome of the lesson, and plan the follow up accordingly – differentiated instruction. These daily objectives are stated according to the Bloom's taxonomy so I can easily equilibrate the activity from the lowest to the highest intellectual skills. The Bloom taxonomy includes six levels of intellectual behavior connected to learning: knowledge (recall data or information), comprehension (understand the meaning), application (use a concept in a new area), analyze (break down concepts into components), evaluate (make judgments), and create (create a new product or point of view).

Taking into account the long term goals, I will specifically implement the following objectives for the daily

lesson plans:

1. read and understand, interpret, analyze and discuss excerpts from the biography of Roger Fry by Virginia Woolf, her own spoof on biography Orlando, visual texts, and the short story *Kew Gardens* ;
2. understand the concepts of specific rhetorical and literary devices like point of view or narrative perspective, diction, allusions, figurative language, tone, syntax, and structure;
3. analyze, discuss, and write how setting, point of view or narrative perspective, diction, allusions, figurative language, tone, syntax, and structure reveal meaning;
4. determine the purpose(s) and audience of each visual and non-visual document/text;
5. write the close analysis of both the written and visual documents;
6. discuss the close analysis of the written and visual documents with peers;
7. compare and contrast the various written and visual documents, and draw the appropriate conclusions;
8. write an analytical essay, or a documented essay;
9. write the personal statement for college application;
10. choose a theme or topic, create a visual text, and write one page analysis or more.

Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in Painting

The first step of this unit will be to teach my student what Impressionism and Post-Impressionism mean, and how the artists convey their message to the audience. When the Impressionist theory is clear and they know how to read and analyze an Impressionist painting, they will begin to understand Roger Fry's argument and how his belief has affected Virginia Woolf's writing style.

The Impressionists believe that one object can be seen in many different ways according to where it is situated and to what other objects appear next to it. They state that "a mutual interaction takes place between" the object which is the focus of the painting and the viewer. The artist's responsibility is to paint this object in a way that its quality appears. In order to do that, the artist uses a combination of colors and light which help convey very specific visual sensations. This belief has led the impressionist artists to aim at a "new

unity of color harmony in their pictures" as it exists in nature. ¹

At the same time, the first characteristic of this new style in painting is also characterized by short brush strokes of bright colors and fewer specific details or ornaments. The initial reaction to these paintings is one of a great surprise and even of rejection because of the intense colors and the unusual ways of interpreting and representing nature or a human figure. They paint a picture from a single focus or fixed point that is what the artist calls center of interest. Because of this fixed focus, the surrounding images are blurred. At the same time, these blurred surrounding are not meaningless because they represent the artist's impressions on his canvas. "If the artist is painting a portrait, he keeps the face in focus and only represents the vague and generalized impressions" he perceives. ² The goal of the Impressionist painters, according to Christopher Reed, is the truth, but this truth is the truth that the artist perceives.

Post-Impressionism does not differ so much from the Impressionism from which it has developed. The Post-Impressionists are still interested in analyzing the play of colors, light, and shade, but they are less concerned with the recording of impressions, colors, and light. They are interested in discovering and exploring the emotional significance which lies in things. This belief has brought the artist to an oversimplification of nature with the consequence that the details are completely ignored. In fact, some of the most important paintings by Cezanne and Monet seem masterpieces of primitive art. The design is of an astonishing geometrical simplicity to give space to the emotions perceived by the painter and conveyed through the wildest and strangest images. ³

Art Gallery: Reading and Painting

After explaining Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, I plan to teach my students how to analyze visual texts -- paintings as well as sculptures. First of all we will visit the school art gallery where we have an interesting collection of paintings: portraits, objects, landscapes, and abstract images. Our first activity will be to sit in front of a landscape painting and to observe it for a few minutes. Soon after that, each student will have five minutes to describe the painting. Each will then share his/her writing while the others will take notes of the details they might have missed. At this point, I will prompt them to carefully observe the colors used by the painter, discuss their brightness and gradation. They will have to find the focus of the painting and describe how they think the artist has reproduced the contrast between light and shade.

After this first detailed description of the painting, I will ask them to take few minutes and focus on the specific colors used by the artist before writing a paragraph in which they describe what emotions those colors evoke. We will share these reflections and discuss the various interpretations. We will also analyze how the artist has reproduced the shapes, paying particular attention to whether the painter has been quite accurate or whether the design is simple, maybe somewhat primitive. I will point out the design or shape in the painting because I want them to understand what the Impressionist and Post-impressionist painters mean with those terms.

Our second class will be again in the school gallery, but this time they will work in groups of three and they will select one of the artifacts in the exhibit. They will have to describe, analyze and discuss the piece they will choose as they did during our first visit (the specific instructions are in the lesson plan section of this unit). Once they have concluded their analysis, we will open up the discussion and we will take brief notes on the following relationships:

- colors emotions/feelings
- design/shape emotions/feeling

I will also ask them to analyze and discuss whether these artifacts are rich in specific details or whether they simply represent the object of the painting. They will discuss what emotions and/or feelings they think the painter has tried to convey, and what emotions they experience. To conclude this lesson on visual texts, we will visit the Yale Art Gallery. During that visit, each student will choose one painting to closely analyze and discuss.

Once we have returned from our trip to the Yale Art Gallery, the students will conclude this part with a painting project. Each student has the opportunity to select the subject of his/her work (self-portrait, landscape, object - i.e. fruit, vase with flowers, or another person). When they have finished this project, each student will display his/her artifact, and as a group we will analyze and discuss each work. At this point, we are ready to write about the most important characteristics of modern painting.

Roger Fry: Biography of a Charismatic and Influential Friend

AP English Literature Students

This segment of the unit is intended for my students in the AP English class, who will read Roger Fry's entire biography, which is not as challenging as Virginia Woolf's short story *Kew Gardens* .

While the reading will be completed at home, in class we will focus on specific excerpts on Roger Fry's vision of art in painting and in writing. The first of these passage - from the very beginning of "Childhood: School" up to Roger's reflection on his garden ⁴ - introduces Roger's family. Beyond confirming that his parents were Quakers, Virginia Woolf adds the note that "undoubtedly, the Quakers society ... was very narrow in outlook and bounded in interests; very bourgeois as to its members." ⁵ Being a Quaker means more than being different from other people in society. It means opposing the rules and customs most people follow. Roger, according to his biographer, seems to have the same defying attitude toward the accepted canons of painting and what makes a work of art.

The same excerpt is important because it contains an autobiographical piece Roger has written about his garden where he experiences the "first passion and suffers for his first disillusion." ⁶ The emotions are the focus of his research in a work of art and the red color stands out for its very special effect on Roger's emotions; it is "a real passion, nearly a sincere worship." ⁷ The red color in itself does not correspond to any particular emotion or meaning. It is important because it reflects what the young Roger Fry notices in his diaries. This focus on bright colors becomes a fundamental element he expects in a painting as reflections of the author's emotions. (When we will be reading the short story *Kew Gardens* , I will make the students compare Virginia Woolf's description of the flower bed to this description of the garden. In particular we will focus our attention on the colors and the emotions they arouse.)

The years that follow see Roger Fry in Cambridge at King's College where he begins to develop his interest for art in spite of his family's objections. In the meantime, Roger is learning "how to analyze his impressions more

than how to move his pencil" and ultimately to painting very specific details. ⁸ A trip to Italy with his friend, Pip Hughes, is the turning point for him as Virginia Woolf states, "It was a change from compromise and obedience to independence and certainty." ⁹ Roger spends his time seeing the masterpieces of various artists and in the meantime he paints, makes new friends, and dines with them. His next trip is to Paris, but this time he does not seem to be too much impressed by modern French painting. It is only during other visits to Paris that this place and some artists, Cezanne and Matisse, inspire him to become an art critic.

The next chapter in Roger Fry's biography discusses his work as art critic and underlines what he believes is important in a work of art. ¹⁰ As his biographer states, "it was to take him many years and much drudgery before he forged for himself a language that wound itself into the heart of sensation." ¹¹ Essentially, Roger believes that a real work of art is the one that even the "common seer" can understand the meaning behind. He also pushes to abandon all the details that have a glaring effect to focus on the emotional and intellectual conditions through the use of intense colors and the effect of strong opposition of light and shade.

The real artist – the term refers to whoever creates a work of art, a painter as well a poet or writer – approaches nature to analyze not what he sees but how it appears. He has to "penetrate the cause of its form and structure." ¹² This method "allows inexhaustible possibilities of expressions and of deeper appeal to the emotion." ¹³ A work of art, he also adds, must have the power of making the "outsider" – the audience – "whose eyes are the least active of his senses, aware of something real and exciting, ... in perfect simplicity."

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Another excerpt I intend to read and discuss in class with my students is the chapter on "Post Impressionism." In 1910 Roger Fry pays another visit to Paris because he has been asked to arrange an exhibition at the Grafton Gallery. In a letter to his mother he writes he has been "the instigator of an exhibition of modern French art and I am bound to do a great deal of advising." ¹⁵ As Virginia Woolf notices, he is much more than interested, he is excited by the French Impressionist painters, in particular by Cezanne. He believes that this new way of painting represents a reaction and a transition, a true revolution of the culture of his time. He also thinks that the Impressionist unusual method to paint "penetrates through values to the causes in actual form and structure." ¹⁶

Roger Fry's interest in French Impressionism has a huge influence on Virginia Woolf's writing style. As her close friend and active member of the Bloomsbury group, he likes to theorize on what makes true art and what a real artist should do to revolutionize the current customs and create something that is simple, in a certain way primitive, but that has the power to shake the reader or the viewer of a painting and arouse intense emotions. Roger thinks that "literature was suffering a plethora of old clothes – the writer's vice of distorting reality through impure associations of contaminating adjectives." ¹⁷ The development of the unconscious in art – in painting as well in literature – in such a way as to bring a purer message is also relevant in Roger's belief. Conveying the unconscious in art is how the artist can express spirituality. ¹⁸ My AP students will annotate these principles and will then analyze the writing style of *Kew Gardens* by Virginia Woolf to determine the extent of his influence on her writing.

At this point, I will let my students continue reading and analyzing the biography. In accomplishing this task, I want them to analyze this text and select those passages which explain his thoughts about art. While doing this, they also have to determine his visions about poets and literature, and compare them to his vision in painting in relations to what he calls true reality, true emotions, and spirituality through colors in painting and words in literature.

Roger Fry and his Experiences of Transformations

College Students

College students will read only few excerpts from Roger Fry's biography so they can learn how to narrate personal experience as a model before writing their personal statement.

The chapter "Transformations" offers my students the opportunity to see how to choose a specific event in their life for the personal statement, how to give that piece of writing a voice, and how to express critical thinking. To begin with, we will read about Roger's choices in his life and the transformations which follow. We will analyze the description of his illness and discuss the effect of the appealing adjectives his biographer uses. We will discuss how Virginia Woolf reflects on the possibility that Roger's pains are caused by cancer or simple indigestion -- important examples of how to express voice in a biographical page. Essentially, we will focus on Woolf's change in the narrative technique. One great example is when she quotes Roger himself because it makes this biographical page more appealing and interesting. Another captivating technique is to add friendly and ironic remarks on Roger's open-mindedness toward his "mysterious ailment." ¹⁹

Another interesting episode from the same chapter titled "Transformations" deals with Roger's contempt, as Virginia Woolf writes, for the hypocrisies of his youth. Of course, these hypocrisies refer to how the body can be seen when sexuality is involved, and on how Roger has no hesitation recalling the pleasure, "perhaps the very necessity, and certainly the amusements" of his "passing affairs." ²⁰ Of similar interest is the page describing Roger's experience with a French woman in Nancy, France. After reading the first pages closely, they will have to finish the entire chapter and take notes on how Virginia Woolf expresses critical thinking and voice in her narration. (Other specific passages referring to Roger's experience with the Omega studio will be detailed in the lesson plans session).

Orlando: Inspiring Novel

Both AP student and College students will read excerpts from Virginia Woolf's novel, *Orlando* . I have chosen this text because it offers my students another excellent example of how the biographer selects the events he/she includes and how he/she describes them..

AP English and Literature Students

My AP students will read the entire novel and I want them to take the following notes:

- for each chapter they have to briefly annotate the time when the narrated events take place and where they occur
- they also have to annotate what or how the narrator relates about Orlando's life without recurring to a long list of dull biographical events
- take notes of the conflicts Orlando faces in each century

- take notes of the conflict(s) Orlando faces when he/she falls in love
- take notes about his changes as a man and when he becomes a woman.

Once they have finished reading the novel, they will respond to the following prompts:

- analyze Orlando's love for Princess Marousha Stanilovska Dagmar Natasha Iliana Romanovitch
- compare Orlando's love for the Princess to the "old Queen's love for him"
- analyze Orlando when he becomes a woman, in particular compare and contrast his view of women when he is a man and her view of women when she is a woman
- discuss the main emotional conflicts Orlando has as a man and as a woman
- analyze the narrative techniques and explain how these techniques characterize Orlando and other characters in the novel
- discuss how Orlando is conflicted by compelling desires, ambition, obligations, and/or influences
- determine the central question which the novel raises and the extent to which it offers an answer
- analyze how Orlando conforms outwardly while questioning inwardly
- discuss how a specific setting in the novel plays a significant role
- discuss the overall effect of writing a spoof (think about what or who the narrator intends to mock)
- write a two–pages biography or autobiography
- rewrite the same as a spoof.

College Students

My college students will read chapter one, three and four. In class, we will reread each of the assigned chapters and will take notes on:

- the main event occurring in each chapter
- their reflections and/or questions while they are reading
- the main traits they notice in Orlando
- the main characteristic of the setting in each chapter
- the main conflicts Orlando faces
- differences and/or similarities between Orlando, the man, and Orlando, the woman
- Phrases or statements that contribute to the tone and that, as the narrator says, create "life'.

After rereading, we will have a class discussion based on their notes, reflections, and questions. In particular, we will focus on the change of sex and whether it plays a role on Orlando's belief. We will also discuss the role of the narrator and the suggestions she includes in reference to the writing of a biography. We will also spend some time comparing and contrasting passages from Roger Fry's biography and *Orlando* to understand what a spoof is.

To conclude, they will write a biographical page following the style Virginia Woolf has used for this novel. This assignment can refer to just one specific year in their life or a period of time, and has to be of substantial length. Once they have completed this creative piece, they can use it as a model or just a spring board for

writing the personal statement for college admission. Before they start drafting their personal statement, I expect them to research Virginia Woolf's life (I will suggest them Hermione Lee's biography). They will read it and select three important events or encounters in her life. Once they have selected the excerpts, they will have to analyze the narrative techniques which they will share and discuss in class. (The details for the analysis of narrative techniques and the instruction for writing the personal statement/college essay are specified in the Lesson Plans Session).

Kew Gardens: Colorful and Atypical

Virginia Woolf's short story, *Kew Gardens* written in 1919, describes the scenes of people passing by a flower-bed in Kew Gardens. It opens with a very detailed image of the flowers, their colors, and shapes while "stirred by the summer breeze." ²¹ Different people, men and women, pass by and stop at this flower-bed while reminiscing about their past, discussing about a secretive project, eccentrically talking, or just chatting. Every time people stop or pass by the flower bed, the flower-bed life seems to stop too to observe and understand the newcomers, and what their discourses are about. A snail carefully studies its surroundings and all its various obstacles before it finally finds how to overcome whatever apparently interrupts its crawl. The resulting image is an extraordinary work of art where both men and nature become an integral part of a much more sophisticated world which makes no distinction between them.

AP English Literature Students

First of all we will read and analyze the short story. While they analyze Virginia Woolf's text, they will have to:

- Determine the purpose, the audience, and the theme or main idea
- Analyze the narrative technique (syntax, diction, imagery, and figurative language)
- Analyze the effect of the various literary techniques Virginia Wools uses to convey the theme and purpose.

A second reading of the short story will follow. At this point, I also want the students to reread the notes they have taken while reading the biography of Roger Fry. Specifically, they have to focus on his reflections of his garden, his emotional reaction to the red color, and the eventual effect of his upbringing and education. Before concluding the analysis of Virginia's narrative style in *Kew Gardens*, my students will research and read excerpts or the entire work (they can choose the passages based on their argument for the unit final assessment) from Hermione Lee's *Virginia Woolf*.

Once they have learned about Virginia's life and friends, we will reflect and determine how her writing style has developed. Specifically, I will make the students respond to the following questions:

- What is the extent of the Quaker faith influence on Roger Fry's vision of art?

- What are the main events which you think may have had a relevant effect on her writing style?
- Explain how these can be detected in her stylistic choices
- Compare Fry's vision of art with Woolf's narrative techniques
- Compare Woolf's narrative technique in *Kew Gardens* and in Roger Fry's biography. What is different and what is similar? Which of the two texts is more effective in creating strong emotions to the reader?
- Discuss the detailed description of the flower bed in the short story, the emotions, if any, it arouses and then compare these feelings to the reaction or emotions aroused by an Impressionist painting (you can choose any painting by Matisse or Cezanne).

As final assessment for this session of the unit, the AP students will write an essay in class responding to one of the following prompts:

- In a well-organized essay, analyze how Virginia Woolf uses such techniques as point of view, selections of details, figurative language, and syntax to characterize the relationship between the flower bed and the people walking in *Kew Gardens* that day.
- In a well-written essay, analyze how Virginia Woolf establishes the characters' relationship to the setting through different literary devices.
- Read *Monday or Tuesday* , analyze the brief short story, and compare it to one painting by Matisse or Cezanne.

Final Assessment

AP English Literature Students

The AP students will conclude this unit with an argumentative essay. After reading three biographical texts, *Roger Fry A Biography* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* , Hermione Lee's *Virginia Woolf* , and two short stories, *Kew Gardens* , and *Monday or Tuesday* , they have to use these texts in support of an argument of their choice. This argument has to relate to the discussions and analysis we have completed in the course of the unit. In writing their argument, they can also discuss a counterargument which will have to be supported by two or more scholarly sources.

College Students

My College students will write their personal statement/college essay. They can use Virginia Woolf's biography as a model, or the excerpts from her novel, *Orlando* . We will start in class working around possible themes that they will briefly draft before selecting the one they want to completely develop. Each drafting will be followed by peer revision and discussion.

Before drafting the final essay, I will ask my seniors students who have already been accepted in college to revise and discuss the drafts before finishing the essay. (The detailed instructions for writing this essay are in the Lesson Plans Section).

Lesson Plans

Visual Texts

To look at images, respond, and then analyze what you see may be difficult, but the hardest of all is to communicate what you see and feel to the others. The students need a strategy or a combination of strategies so they can easily understand how to read and analyze a visual text.

1. Looking and understanding (I look at the image and say what I see holistically)

- What do you see in this image?
- What do you notice specifically?
- What does it remind you of?
- What do you feel looking at this image?

2. Analyzing images

Usually there is one central figure that attracts your eye first, and that is called *focal point* . This is important because it guides you to understand the image.

- What detail catches your attention first?
- Why would the artist focus on this detail? What are your theories?

Another important element of analysis is the *figure-ground contrast* which emphasizes the difference between what is in the front and what is in the back (ground). The figure is often the focal point.

- What other details do you see other than the focal point?
- Why would the artist include those details? What are your theories?
- Write down any elements or details that seem important.

OR

- What are the key elements or features of this image?
- How do they contribute to what you see?

Grouping according to *proximity and similarity* is also an important element in visuals.

- Which elements and/or details are in the same space? (proximity)

- Look for elements that are positioned close together. What connections do you see between/among them?

Similarity

- Which elements and/or details are close to each other or have the same shape, or size? (similarity)
- What is/are the effect(s) of those elements on your response to the image?
- Why would the artist include those details? What are your theories?

Color in visuals has a specific connotation and conveys meaning and feelings. In fact, it can focus on our attention, create contrast, appeal to emotions and help communicate the message.

- How do the color(s) or degree of shading appeal to emotions?
- Did the artist use colors that you did not expect? What are your theories?
- What emotions does this specific color appeal to?

Lines also provide a sense of movement. A line can convey mood. Lines can create a sense of calm and equilibrium, uncertainty, or movement and stress. Soft lines may imply softness, flow, or change.

- Look at the lines in this image. Describe these lines (horizontal, vertical, soft, thick, or wavy).
- Why did the artist include those lines? What are your theories?
- What do you think the artist wanted to tell us?

Most times artists do not include all the details in their image. This is because they want the viewer to predict and imagine. Leaving information out creates interest, generates tension contributing to the understanding of the artist's message, and promotes the viewer's participation. This is said to be *closure* .

- What is not visible? Why? What are your theories?
- What question you would ask the artist? Why?
- Does this image suggest you a story?
- What can you infer?

3. Sharing out and discussing the analysis of the visual text

4. Conclusion

- What is the purpose of this image?
- What detail or details mentioned by your peers caused you to see this image differently?
- How do your experience and knowledge affect the reading of the image? Think about the image in term of context: historical, personal, technical, or cultural
- Use the title if available as a theory and parts of the visual as clues to detect and specify the interrelationships in the graphic
- Highlight the words of the title of the visual if available
- Are there any connections between the title and the visual?
- Draw a conclusion about the visual as a whole.

5. Sharing out and final discussion.

Reading a Non-Fictional Text (biography)

- Read the assigned chapter or excerpt
- Annotate the most relevant or interesting details and write brief reflections in the margins
- Read a second time
- Add more annotations (other details or even words that stand out and draw your attention)
- Share out in your group and to the class
- Select a quotation from the excerpt or chapter you have read
- Write one page reflections

OR

- Write a creative page following the style used by the author in the biography
- Share out in your group and to the class.

The AP students read the entire biography but the College students read only some selected excerpts. Beyond the passages mentioned in the narrative section under College Students subtitle, we will read also the following excerpts from the Omega chapter:

- Page 182 (from the very beginning) up to page 184 ("And the center of civilization would be removed once more to dwelling)
- Page 190, Section II up to page 191 ("a week from my workshop")
- Page 196 (second paragraph, "Roger Fry had to say ...") up to page 199 (the end of the chapter). ²²

All these passage are interesting models on how to select and describe specific events or experiences and how to analyze and reflect on the same occurrence(s).

Modification (this strategy can be used when students do not understand the text)

1. Read the text and while you are reading it put a slash mark at the end of each sentence
2. Read it a second time
3. Circle the words that either you understand or grab your attention
4. Make a list of those words (keep them separate per paragraph so it is easier to infer the main idea)
5. Write a gist of what the paragraph says using the words you have listed and/or use those words to infer the possible main idea of the paragraph
6. Share out in your group and take notes of other student's interpretations
7. As a group or as a whole class write down the main ideas of each paragraph
8. Complete this activity by determining and writing the topic or theme of the entire reading.

Close Reading of Narrative Technique

This strategy can be used to analyze various literary techniques like Point of View, Syntax, Diction, Figurative Language, Setting, or others. I usually determine what to analyze according to literary technique that is relevant in the excerpt.

- Read the assigned excerpt or passage
- Annotate it (I determine the purpose of annotation, i.e. diction)
- Write a brief summary of the excerpt (I usually tell them to synthesize the summary in no more than two sentences)
- Share out
- Read the excerpt a second time
- Take notes on how that specific literary technique adds meaning to the theme/main idea
- Discuss the various interpretations as a class and take notes
- Write two pages analysis of how the author uses the specific literary technique to convey the theme of the passage.

Personal Statement or College essay

The College Students conclude the unit with the writing of their college essay or personal statement.

- List five or six important moments, experiences, or events that have occurred to you
- Write a one or two paragraph description for each of the listed events
- Share out and discuss your description in your group or a class
- Determine the one that is the most relevant
- Write a very detailed description of that event and use the excerpts from Roger Fry's biography or from *Orlando* as models

Continue your draft by discussing what you have learned from that experience, how it has changed you or your future plans, and how you are going to use this learning experience as a freshman in college.

Comparison of Roger Fry's Theory and Virginia Woolf's Style in "Kew Gardens"

This strategy will help the students understand the influence of Roger Fry's Theory on Virginia Woolf's style. For this theory, they will refer to Woolf's biography of Roger Fry.

- Write down Fry's theory about color, shape, texture, light, focus
- Since Fry's theory corresponds to the techniques used by Henri Matisse, download a copy of Matisse's painting, *Lilacs*, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art ²³ (it well represents Fry's theories)
- Describe the painting following the strategy on how to read visual text (the first in this lesson plans section)
- Read the first paragraph from *Kew Gardens*
- Annotate for imagery and diction
- Describe the effect/feelings/emotions that colors and light (imagery and diction) convey in this paragraph
- Compare the feelings and emotions that colors and light convey in Woolf's passage with the feelings you perceive from the colors and light in Matisse's painting
- Do the painting by Matisse and the passage by Woolf reflect Fry's theory about color, light, and shape? How? Why?
- Annotate the same passage from *Kew Gardens* for syntax (specifically for the use of dash, commas, and sentence structure), and make a list
- Describe the texture of Matisse's painting; in particular, describe whether the design is regular or irregular, the brush-strokes are clear or invisible, or the contouring lines are brief or long, regular or irregular (follow the steps indicated in the Visual Text section)
- Describe and discuss the effects this painting technique conveys
- Describe the use of syntax in the first paragraph of *Kew Gardens* and discuss the effects it helps convey
- Describe the similarities and/or differences between Woolf's style and Matisse's painting technique.

At this point, I will ask the students to choose another novel or short story by Virginia Woolf. Once they have come to class with that chosen text, I will make them select a passage, and then I will ask them to:

- Annotate and analyze their chosen passage
- Write one page reflections on how Roger Fry's theories affect the writing style of Virginia Woolf after analyzing Kew Garden and the excerpt from their selected fictional text.

Appendix: Implementing State and District Standards

The teaching implemented in this unit reflects the Common Core State Standards for Reading Fictional and Informational texts, Writing, Speaking and Listening, the College Board requirements for the AP English Literature and Composition course, and the Language Arts Curriculum for the New Haven Public District – our Language Arts Curriculum adheres to the CCSS standards. Specifically, this unit will teach students to analyze complex ideas and sequences of events in informational texts (biography), explain how specific events or ideas interact and develop, and read and analyze complex thematic ideas, structures, and other literary techniques in fictional texts. It will also focus on the analysis of multiple interpretations of the stylistic choices made by the author and its effects on the thematic idea(s), the overall meaning of the text, as well as its aesthetic impact. The unit will also focus on argumentative writing supported by valid reasons and relevant and sufficient evidence (final assessment for AP students), and informative/explanatory writing (personal statement or college essay for College students). Both the argumentative and the informative/explanatory writings will be sufficiently supported with evidence from literary and/or informative texts. Throughout the entire unit students will initiate or present and discuss in one-on-one and in groups. The application of differentiated instruction with flexible groups and modified strategies facilitates the achievement of the above mentioned standards.

Annotated Bibliography: Resources for Teachers and Students

Beers, Kylene. *When Kids Can't Read What Teachers Can Do* . Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003.

An effective text with strategies for struggling readers.

Desrochers, Stephen. "Identity Theory." http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=242. 26 June 2011.

Theoretical study on what identity is and how it affects the formation and the perception of the self in an individual.

Farstrup, Alan E., Samuels S. Jay. eds. *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction* . Newark: International Reading Association, 2002.

Duke, Nell K., Pearson P. David. *Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension* . Farstrup and Samuels 205-236.

A compelling chapter where the authors analyze, compare and contrast the validity of various strategies teachers use for an effective reading comprehension.

Fry, Roger. *Vision and Design* . New York: Meridian Books, 1957.

Written by Roger Fry, this text illustrates his analysis of famous impressionist painters as well as the connection between art and science in order to define his own theory of art.

George, Paul S. "A Rationale for Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom," *Theory into Practice* , 44, no. 3 (2005): 185-193, www.jstor.org/stable/3496997.

Based on the theory of differentiated instruction, the article evaluates the benefits of heterogeneous classrooms and differentiated instruction.

Green, Nancy, and Christopher Reed. *A Room of Their Own. The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections* . New York: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 2008.

The text is an in-depth study of the Bloomsbury's art as writers and painters interpret and convey it to their audience.

Hannay, Howard. *Roger Fry and Other essays* . London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1937.

Interesting analysis of Roger Fry's theory of art, Cezanne's artistic production, cubism, and modern art more in general. The same text discusses the relationship between morality and art as well as the principles and standards in art in its broadest meaning.

Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf* . New York: A.A. Knopf, 1998.

It is the most interesting and complete biography of Virginia Woolf. Due to the complexity of the text, students should only read excerpts or short passages of the most important moments in her life.

Reed, Christopher. *Bloomsbury Room* . New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Outstanding analysis of the Bloomsbury artists, Vanessa Bell, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, their work, and their theories of art. The author's vision of Post-Impressionism on feminism offers interesting insights.

Reed, Christopher. *A Roger Fry Reader* . Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1996.

The text discusses some of the most important theories in art including interesting comparison to French Impressionism. It also offers a new interpretation of Fry, his theories, and his work as art critic.

Roe, Susan, and Susan Sellers. *Virginia Woolf* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Outstanding collections of scholarly essay which analyze Virginia Woolf's relations to the Bloomsbury group, her vision of modernisms in writing, and, most importantly, the impact of Post-Impressionism on her stylistic choices.

Rosenbaum, S.P. *A Bloomsbury Group Reader* . Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

Interesting collection of essays about art from the various members of the Bloomsbury group.

Smart, J.J.C. "The Identity Theory of Mind." <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mind-identity>. 26 June 2011.

Interesting illustration of the Identity Theory, its validity and the correlations between the phenomenal experiences and neurophysiological processes.

Steinberg, Robert, Li-fang Zhang. "Style of Thinking as a Basis of Differentiated Instruction," *Theory into Practice* , 44, no. 3 (2005): 245-253, www.jstor.org/stable/3497004.

Based on the theory of thinking styles, the study offers a useful method to identify each student preferences in order to determine the most appropriate assignment in response to a specific task.

Strassman, Barbara K, Jersey Ewing. "Differentiated Instruction in the English classroom: Content, Process, Product and Assessment," 48, no. 4 (2005): 358-359, www.jstor.org/stable/40016933.

Useful suggestions of methods and strategies to effectively teach in a differentiated classroom.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando* . New York: Canongate, 2012.

The text is a fictional biography and tells about the life of Orlando who is born as a man and becomes a woman after the first two hundred years of his life. As a woman, Orlando lives another two hundred years.

Woolf, Virginia. *Kew Gardens* . London: Hogarth Press, 1999.

Short story decorated by Virginia's sister, Vanessa Bell, for the first edition.

Woolf, Virginia. *Roger Fry A Biography* . London: Hogarth Press, 1940.

Very detailed description of Roger Fry, his childhood and adult life as a husband, friend, and art critic.

Woolfolk, Anita. *Educational Psychology* . Allyn and Bacon: Boston, 2001.

An essential text in educational psychology based on the theories of some of the most important scholars like J. Piaget and L. Vygotsky. It prepares for teaching, counseling, speech therapy, or psychology.

Endnotes

1. Christopher Reed. *A Roger Fry Reader* . 12-16
2. Christopher Reed. *A Roger Fry Reader* . 19
3. Ibid. 81-84
4. Virginia Woolf. *Roger Fry A Biography* , 11-16
5. Virginia Woolf. *Roger Fry A Biography* .12
6. Ibid. 15
7. Ibid. 15
8. Ibid. 62
9. Ibid. 66
10. Ibid. 105-133
11. Ibid. 106
12. Ibid. 114
13. Ibid 114
14. Ibid. 116
15. Ibid. 151
16. Ibid. 160
17. Ibid. 172
18. Ibid. 249
19. Ibid 246-247
20. Ibid. 250-251
21. Virginia Woolf. *Kew Gardens*
22. Virginia Woolf. *Roger Fry A Biography* . 182-199
23. <http://metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/210014437>

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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