



## Women Writing: 1890-Present

Curriculum Unit 78.03.09

by Lou Bohman and Marilyn Lipton

### COURSE OUTLINE

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#### Literature Unit for Grades 10 and 12

- I. Content objectives and introductory material
  - A. Purpose of Course
  - B. Consciousness raising strategy—male/female role stereotypes
  - C. Consciousness raising strategy—Women in TV commercials
  - D. Consciousness raising strategy—Power/powerlessness in stereotypical roles
- II. Discussion of strategies to provide transition to lecture about British women writers
- III. Introductory lecture to British women writers
  - A. Lecture/discussion for 12th grade
  - B. Lecture distributed to 10th grade as outside reading to be followed by in-class discussion
- IV. 10th grade—American literature lecture using lecture and panel format
- V. 10th and 12th grades—Read excerpt from *A Room of One's Own* as a transition to main body of literature
- VI. 10th grade—3 week unit— *The Awakening*
- VII. 10th grade—3 week unit— *The Bell Jar*
  - A. 3 week course outline



of women's names from both of these lists. A discussion of why this might be will ensue, and some generalizations will be made. These might include: women have historically been excluded from most fields of work outside the home; those women who have made contributions are excluded from textbooks we study; women's history has been somewhat different from men's history, and their concerns have not been taken seriously. It is hoped that these discussions will help students ponder the issue of women's powerlessness and exclusion from society's mainstream.

Students will then be assigned as a second strategy an exercise entitled "Ring Around the TV Set—Women in Television Commercials,"<sup>2</sup> as outlined in TABS. They will be asked to take down the words of two television commercials that feature females and/or their presumed concerns and will be asked to describe the action that takes place on the screen. The lesson assumes that television is a powerful source of sex role models and that programs and commercials are accepted by most people, especially young viewers, without conscious evaluation and without an awareness of the impressions such messages make. The aim is to make the student more conscious of the image of women in TV commercials and to encourage more critical viewing.<sup>3</sup> The implications of the settings, the activities, and the types of products will be discussed. Students will, for example, see that in some commercials, a woman persuades a man to use a certain product; in others a man persuades a woman. They will compare the methods of persuasion used by men and women. They will describe the problems of men and women in commercials and the solutions to those problems. They will then evaluate what the commercial says about women and about men.

The student-centered discussions following these strategies should provide a natural transition to the lecture material.

## **INTRODUCTORY LECTURE**

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Literature by women was being written in Britain as far back as the Middle Ages. Most of this literature was in the form of diaries, autobiographies, letters, protests, stories, and poems. When women wrote, they touched upon experiences rarely touched upon by men, and they spoke in different ways about these experiences. They wrote about childbirth, about housework, about relationships with men, about friendships with other women. They wrote about themselves as girls and as mature women, as wives, mothers, widows, lovers, workers, thinkers, and rebels. They also wrote about themselves as writers and about the discrimination against them and the pain and courage with which they faced it.

However, most women writing before 1800 did not see their writing as an aspect of their female experience or an expression of it. Writing was not an acceptable profession for women. There were women who were interested in women's writings, and women writers often knew and praised each other's works. But all these women were dependent upon men because it was men who were the critics, the publishers, the professors, and the sources of financial support. It was men who had the power to praise women's works, to bring them to public attention, or to ridicule them, to doom them, too often, to obscurity.<sup>4</sup> From about 1750 English women began to make inroads into the literary marketplace, but writing did not become a recognizable profession for women until the 1840's.<sup>5</sup>

In 1869, John Stuart Mill argued that women would have a hard struggle to overcome the influence of the male literary tradition. "If women's literature is destined to have a different collective character from that of men, much longer time is necessary than has yet elapsed before it can emancipate itself from the influence of

accepted models, and guide itself by its own impulses.”<sup>6</sup> In the light of much recent research it would seem that women have in fact been able to define and to develop a literary tradition, not only on the basis of traditional forms and themes, but also on the basis of what gave shape to their lives.

In her critical work, *A Literature of Their Own*, from which most of this lecture material has been drawn, Elaine Showalter contends that the female literary tradition comes from the still-evolving relationships between women writers and their society. The development of the “female literary tradition” is similar to the development of any literary subculture. And, like all literary subcultures there are three major phases: 1) imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles; 2) protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values; 3) self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. Showalter’s terminology for these phases in the female literary subculture is: 1) Feminine phase—the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840’s to the death of George Eliot in 1880; 2) Feminist phase—1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote; 3) Female phase—1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness about 1960.<sup>7</sup>

Nancy Cott, an historian, discusses the female subculture in the introduction to her work, *Root of Bitterness*. She points out that “we can view women’s group consciousness as a subculture uniquely divided against itself by ties to the dominant culture. While the ties to the dominant culture are the informing and restricting ones, they provoke within the subculture certain strengths as well as weaknesses, enduring values as well as accommodations.”<sup>8</sup> The proper role for middle-class women in the Victorian period—1837-1901—in both England and America, was that of the “Perfect Lady.” She was to be contentedly submissive to men but strong in inner purity—“An Angel in the House.” It was proper for women to serve outside the home as nurses, social reformers, governesses, as long as these roles were extensions of the feminine role as teacher, helper, and mother of mankind. For women in England, the female subculture was first defined by a shared and increasingly secretive and ritualized physical experience. Puberty, menstruation, sexual initiation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause—the entire female sexual life cycle constituted a habit of living that had to be concealed.\* The female experience could not be openly discussed or acknowledged, but women writers were culturally united by their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. From the beginning, women novelists’ awareness of each other and of their female audience showed a kind of covert solidarity that sometimes amounted to a genteel conspiracy. Few English women writers openly advocated the use of fiction as revenge against a patriarchal society, but many confessed to sentiments of “maternal feeling, sisterly affection, esprit de corps” for their readers. The clergyman’s daughter, going to buy her three-decker novel by another clergyman’s daughter, participated in a cultural exchange that had a special personal significance.

The role of professional writer was an uneasy one for women writing in the early nineteenth century. These women novelists exploited a stereotype of helpless femininity to win chivalrous protection from male reviewers and to minimize their unwomanly self-assertion. Many novels which appeared around 1840 were published anonymously or with male pseudonyms. The use of the male pseudonym is a strong marker of an historical shift, for it is a sign that women understood the necessity of role-playing if they desired to participate in the mainstream of literary culture. These women saw the will to write as a vocation in direct conflict with their status as women. Victorian women thus found themselves in a double bind. They felt humiliated by the condescension of male critics and spoke intensely of their desire to avoid special treatment and to achieve genuine excellence, but they were deeply anxious about the possibility of appearing unwomanly. Rather than confronting the values of their society, these women novelists were competing for its rewards. For women, as for other subcultures, literature became a symbol of achievement.

In the face of this dilemma, women novelists developed several strategies. Among their personal reactions was a persistent self-deprecation of themselves as women. The novelists tried to atone for their willfulness in choosing to write by working in the home, by preaching submission and self-sacrifice, and by denouncing female self-assertiveness. Victorian women were not accustomed to choosing a vocation; womanhood was a vocation in itself. For women, work meant laboring for others. Work, as a kind of self-development, conflicted with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal defined by a patriarchal society. The self-centeredness implicit in the act of writing made a writing career an especially threatening one. It required an engagement with feeling and a cultivation of the ego rather than its negation. Many women writers found it necessary to justify their work by recourse to some external stimulus or ideology. In their novels, the heroine's aspirations for a full, independent life are undermined, punished, or replaced by marriage. ( *Jane Eyre: The Awakening* )

The training that Victorian girls received to repress, conceal, and to censor themselves was deeply inhibiting, especially for those who wanted to write. The verbal range permitted to English gentlewomen amounted almost to a special language. The verbal inhibitions that were part of the upbringing of a lady were reinforced by the critics' vigilance. "Coarseness" was the term Victorian readers used to rebuke unconventional language in women's literature. It could refer to the "damns" in *Jane Eyre* or more generally to the moral tone of a work. Reduced to a pastoral flatness, deprived of a language in which to describe their bodies, denied the expression of pain as well as the expression of pleasure, women writers seemed unable to depict passion.

The results of a restrictive education and intensive conditioning were taken as innate evidence of natural preference. When G. H. Lewes complained in 1852 that the literature of women was "too much a literature of imitation" and demanded that women should express "what they have really known, felt and suffered," he was asking for something that Victorian society had made impossible. Feminine novelists had been deprived of the language and the consciousness for such an enterprise. Their deprivation extended beyond Victoria's reign and into the twentieth century. But the repression in which the feminine novel was situated also forced women to find innovative and covert ways to dramatize the inner life, and led to a fiction that was intense, compact, symbolic, and profound. There is Charlotte Bronte's extraordinary subversion of the Gothic in *Jane Eyre* , in which the mad wife locked in the attic symbolizes the passionate and sexual side of Jane's personality, an alter ego that her upbringing, her religion, and her society have commanded her to incarcerate. There is the crippled artist heroine in *Olive* , by Dinah Craik, whose deformity represents her very womanhood. There are the murderous little wives of Mary Braddon's sensation novels, golden-haired killers whose actions are a sardonic commentary on the real feelings of the "Angel in the House."

Many of the fantasies of feminine novels are related to money, mobility, and power. Although feminine novelists punished assertive heroines, they dealt with personal ambition by projecting the ideology of success onto male characters, whose initiative, thrift, industry, and perseverance came straight from the woman author's experience.

Protest fiction represented another projection of female experience onto another group. It translated the felt pain and oppression of women into the championship of mill workers, child laborers, prostitutes, and slaves. From Jane Austen to George Eliot, the woman's novel had moved in the direction of an all-inclusive female realism, a broad, socially informed exploration of the daily lives and values of women within the family and the community. With the death of George Eliot and the appearance of a new generation of writers, the woman's novel moved into a Feminist phase, a confrontation with male society which had elevated Victorian sexual stereotypes into a cult. The feminist writers were not important artists. Yet in their insistence on exploring and defining womanhood, in their rejection of self-sacrifice, and even in their outspoken hostility to men, the

feminist writers represented an important stage, a declaration of independence, in the female tradition. They did produce some interesting and original works, and they introduced new subjects for later novelists.

The literature of the last generation of Victorian women writers, born between 1880 and 1900, moved beyond feminism to a Female phase of courageous self-exploration. This literature sought refuge from the harsh realities and vicious practices of the male world. Its favorite symbol, the enclosed and secret room, had been a potent image in women's novels since *Jane Eyre*, but by the end of the century it came to be identified with the womb and with female conflict.

The fiction of Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, and Virginia Woolf created a female aesthetic which transformed the feminine code of self-sacrifice into annihilation of the narrative self. Like D. H. Lawrence, these women novelists tended to see the world as mystically and almost totally polarized by sex. Paradoxically, the more female this literature became in the formal and theoretical sense, the farther it moved from exploring the physical experience of women. Sexuality hovers on the fringes of the women's novels of this period, disguised, veiled, or denied. Androgyny, the sexual ethic of Bloomsbury and an important concept of the period, provided an escape from the confrontation with the body. Erotically charged and filled with sexual symbolism, their novels are oddly sexless. <sup>9</sup> Virginia Woolf defined women's literature of this period: "It is courageous; it is sincere, it keeps closely to what women feel. It is not bitter. It does not insist upon its femininity. But at the same time, a woman's book is not written as a man would write it." <sup>10</sup>

After the death of Virginia Woolf in 1941, the English woman's novel seemed adrift. In the 1960's the female novel entered a new and dynamic phase, which has been strongly influenced by the energy of the international women's movement. Contemporary women writers are concerned with the conflicts between art and love, between self-fulfillment and duty. They have insisted upon the right to use vocabularies previously reserved for male writers and to describe formerly taboo areas of female experience. For the first time anger and sexuality are accepted not only as attributes of realistic characters but also as sources of female creative power. Contemporary women writers are aware of their place in a political system and their connections with other women. Like Virginia Woolf and the novelists of the female aesthetic, women novelists today, especially Doris Lessing and Margaret Drabble, see themselves as trying to unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision, and they are concerned with the definition of autonomy for the woman writer. <sup>11</sup>

Perhaps Virginia Woolf says best what it meant and still means to be a woman writer: "So long as you write what you wish to write, that is all that matters; and whether it matters for ages or only hours, nobody can say. But to sacrifice a hair of the head of your vision, a shade of its colour, in deference to some Headmaster with a silver pot in his hand or to some professor with a measuring rod up his sleeve, is the most abject treachery." <sup>12</sup>

This lecture will be distributed to the 10th graders and will be supplemented by a brief history of American women to provide a further historical context. The history will focus on three general areas: legal status of American women, women and work, and higher education. It will briefly explore the colonial and pre-Civil War woman, but will concentrate on the post-Civil War period through the present. It will emphasize the liberating effects of industrialization, unionization, mandatory education, and war itself, on women's status in the United States.

The third strategy is taken from *Consciousness Raising Guidelines*, published by the Women's Action Alliance. It assumes that men and women are subjected to sex-role and personality stereotyping and that the effects deny genuine personal freedom. It should be pointed out that one of the results of this process has been that women have been considered unfit for positions of power in society.

Students will be placed in groups and asked to write down two lists of words that immediately come to their minds when they hear the words “masculine” and “feminine.” They will examine the lists to see how society has conditioned people to see women and men. Group members will consider such questions as: Which list has the qualities of people you want as friends? Would a person in power or seeking it, such as a political candidate or the president of a corporation, wish to be characterized by the words of the feminine list? Would you be influenced to vote for a person so characterized? When and how did you become aware that certain actions or character traits were “masculine” or “feminine”? Which traits on the “masculine” list do you like or have or want in yourself? Which traits on the “feminine” list? How do you feel about women who are described as “masculine”? How does society feel about such women? How do society’s views affect the women in developing the traits she likes from the masculine list? What does the masculine man get from society and the feminine woman? How does society regard and “reward” the masculine man and the feminine woman? What is the total effect of the social pressure of the stereotypes on women?

## NOTES

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1. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* , (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 36.
2. Lucy P. Simpson, *Tabs* , (New York, Summer, 1977), p. 6.
3. *Consciousness Raising Guidelines* , Women’s Action Alliance, (1973), p. 32.
4. Joan Gouliano, *By A Woman Writt* , (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), p. xviii.
5. Showalter, p. 16.
6. John Stuart Mill, “The Subjection of Women,” *The Feminist Papers* , Alice Rossi, ea., (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 196.
7. Showalter, pp. 12-13.
8. Nancy Cott, intro. to *Root of Bitterness* , (New York: E. P. Button, 1972), pp. 3-4.
9. Showalter, pp. 14-22.
10. Virginia Woolf, “Women and Fiction,” *Collected Essays* , (London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1967), p. 147.
11. Showalter, pp. 28-36.
12. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* , (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957), p. 110.

\*See Virginia Woolf’s *The Pargiters* , (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977).

Note: We have drawn heavily from Elaine Showalter’s work not only for this lecture, but also for the actual framework of the course.

Following the consciousness-raising strategies and the introductory lecture, students will do

- I. panel discussions. The panel topics are selected to focus attention on the historical context of the literature the students will be reading.  
Suggested topics for panel discussions: Victorian England, The Suffrage Movement in America, The Suffrage Movement in Britain (based on *Shoulder to Shoulder* by Midge Mackenzie), Selected chapters from *Literary Women* , Moers; *A Literature of Their Own* , Showalter; *Women and Madness* , Chesler; *The Female Imagination* , Spacks.
- II. Film strips: Images of Women in Literature from the Bible to 20th century literature
- III. Journals. Students will be asked to respond to various pro- and anti-feminist statements.

- IV. Compositions. Topics will be assigned during the reading of the novels, short stories, and poetry.

## A Look at the History of American Women

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The following material, with the exception of the introduction and the conclusion, is taken from Eleanor Flexner's *Century of Struggle*, much of it verbatim from the text.

The history of American women is, in many ways, very different from the American history we study. Since the birth of this nation, men have shaped government policy, men have elected their representatives, men have held our country's positions of power, and men have controlled money.

During the colonial period, English Common Law predominated. Women had many duties but few rights. Married women in particular suffered "civil death," having no right to property and no legal entity or existence apart from their husbands.

This concept of "femme couverte" (clouded and overshadowed) continued into the 19th century. Married women could not sign contracts, they had no title to their earnings, to property even when it was their own by inheritance or dower, or to their children when there was a legal separation or divorce.

Next to common law, the most potent force in maintaining woman's subordinate position was religion. The colonists might have been dissenters of one kind or another against the Church of England, but they did believe that woman's place was determined by the limitations of mind and body, a punishment for the original sin of Eve. However, in order to make her fit for the proper role of motherhood, God had endowed woman with such virtues as modesty, compassion, affability and piety.

Although women would be regarded as inferior and therefore properly subordinate human beings for hundreds of years, forces were at work undermining such attitudes from the earliest colonial days. It was not merely the Protestant ethic that held idleness to be a sin and therefore required women to weave, spin, make lace, soap, shoes, and candles as well as care for homes and families. The economy itself needed this labor and the goods; it had no other source for them. Colonial men spent time exploring, hunting, fishing, migrating, and fighting, leaving many women widowed, forced to provide for their children. Some women became seamstresses, milliners, servants, while others carried on a former husband's business—inkeeping, printing, managing a store.

(Panel report on Anne Hutchinson)

During the Revolutionary War, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband John in 1776.

In the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in



which we have no voice or representation.

The movement to improve and widen education in the young democracy, after the war had been won, included extending free education to wider sections of the population, professional training for teachers and development of institutions for advanced education and research. Women, however, were almost universally believed to have smaller brains of inferior quality to men's. Therefore, some of the earliest women to demand greater educational advantages merely wanted knowledge in order to make them better mothers and housewives, and not for the opportunity to advance in other less domestic ways. In fact, many of these women opposed the woman's rights movement when it began to emerge. It was a younger generation of women who advanced the legal and economic position of their sex.

The French philosopher Rousseau offered the following comment on woman's proper sphere:

The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life sweet and agreeable to them—these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy.

Changes, however, at least from the woman's point of view, were in the making.

(Panel reports on Mary Wollstonecraft, Emma Hart Willard, Frances Wright, Mary Lyon, Prudence Crandall, and Margaret Fuller.)

The issue of slavery proved to be a major rallying point for women. Thousands of men and women were drawn into the Abolition Movement and the Underground Railroad. Among the women were the first conscious feminists, who in the struggle to free the slaves, began to launch their own fight for equality. It was in the abolition movement that women first learned to organize, to hold public meetings, to conduct petition campaigns. As abolitionists they won the right to speak in public and began to evolve a philosophy of their place in society and of their basic rights. For a quarter of a century the two movements, Abolition and Women's Liberation, nourished and strengthened each other. (It is interesting to note that Southern women, who were for the most part excluded from this activity and from the industrialization of the North, were slower in their demands for suffrage.) It is, therefore, not surprising that so many women abolitionists became active on behalf of greater rights for women. The pioneers were the Grimke sisters, Sarah and Angelina, the daughters of a South Carolina slaveholding family, who, moved to Philadelphia, became Quakers, and then began writing and speaking for abolition. They paved the way for an impressive roster of women orators for both causes.

(Panel reports on Angelina and Sarah Grimke, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lucy Stone.)

The seed for the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, from which the inception of the woman's rights movement in the U.S. is commonly dated, can be said to have been planted in the summer of 1840. A World Anti-Slavery Convention in London was attended by an American delegation, which included a number of women, but only the men delegates were seated. Lucretia Mott, one of the delegates barred from participation, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the young wife of another delegate, talked about the need to remedy the injustice.

(Panel reports on Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.)

Several years later, Mrs. Stanton, whose husband's work often took him away from home, wrote of her life in

## Seneca Falls, the Finger Lakes region of New York:

I now fully understood the practical difficulties most women had to contend with in the isolated household, and the impossibility of woman's best development if in contact, the chief part of her life, with servants and children... Emerson says: "A healthy discontent is the first step to progress." The general discontent I felt with woman's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, and chaotic condition into which everything fell without her constant supervision, and the wearied, anxious look of the majority of women, impressed me with the strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs of society in general and of women in particular. My experiences at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, all I had read of the legal status of women, and the oppression I saw everywhere, together swept across my soul, intensified now by many personal experiences. It seemed as if all the elements had conspired to impel me to some onward step. I could not see what to do or where to begin—my only thought was a public meeting for protest and discussion.

Five women: Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Jane Hunt, Martha Wright, and Mary Ann McClintock, seated at a mahogany table (now at the Smithsonian Institute), put the following announcement in the next day's paper:

Woman's Rights Convention—A convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious rights of woman will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, Seneca Falls, New York, on... During the first day the meeting will be held exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day when Lucretia Mott of Philadelphia and other ladies and gentlemen will address the convention."

They then paraphrased the Declaration of Independence and wrote a Declaration of Principles that would serve three generations of women:

. . . We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed with certain inalienable . . .

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this let facts be submitted to a candid world.

The facts presented ranged over every aspect of woman's status. In its conclusion the Declaration stated:

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object.

Women and men, numbering about three hundred, came from a radius of about 50 miles on that day. (The 40 or so men present were allowed to attend on the first day.) They heard Elizabeth Cady Stanton's maiden speech, other speakers, lively discussions, and the unanimous passage of all their resolutions, except for #9, which read, "Resolved, that it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to elective franchise." Many felt that it was necessary to go slowly, Lucretia Mott among them. Resolution #9 did carry by a small margin, and Frederick Douglass spoke on its behalf. Of those present at the convention, only Charlotte Woodard lived to vote for the first time in 1920.

Beginning in 1848, then, it was possible for women who rebelled against circumstances of their lives to know they were not alone.

The ensuing woman's rights movement showed little interest in getting the vote; few felt its importance as strongly as did Mrs. Stanton. Of more immediate concern were the control of property, of earnings, guardianship, divorce rights, opportunities for education and employment, legal status (the right to sue or bear witness) and the whole concept of female inferiority perpetuated by established religion. However, the women had no real weapons with which to win their demands, and, although what can be considered vast progress was made in these areas in some states, especially the west, between the Seneca Falls Convention and the Civil War, the possibility of winning support for the platform through the predominantly hostile press and the Church was severely limited. Even attempts at reforming Victorian dress styles which were uncomfortable and vastly unhealthy were met with ridicule from the press and public.

(Panel report on Susan B. Anthony, the organizing force of the woman's movement for 50 years.)

The last woman's rights convention before the Civil War was held in Albany in Feb. 1861; thereafter, all activity for woman's rights came to a standstill for several years.

The emancipation of the slaves had brought to the fore the question of enlarging the electorate. If the Negro was free and a citizen, then he was entitled to the suffrage rights of a citizen. The women leaders saw this movement as one which might also bring the women the vote.

In seventeen years—1848 to 1865—vast changes had occurred due to the many woman's rights conventions, the speechmaking, articles, pamphlets, women's contributions to the war effort in the North, including the National Woman's Loyal League (which also helped keep the resolutions of Seneca Falls alive through the war years), the limited admission of women into some professions, the expansion of higher learning institutions which admitted women, the birth of trade unionism, and the rising numbers of women in factories.

(Panel reports on Elizabeth Blackwell and Myra Bradwell.)

The 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution gravely disappointed and caused some rifts among the feminists. Some believed that this was the "Negro's hour" and that nothing must interfere with it; others felt that linking Negro and woman suffrage would be mutually helpful. A number of others felt the inclusion of the word "male" in the 14th Amendment was a detriment to the woman question that would take years to undo. The passage of the 15th Amendment without the inclusion of women helped delay women's suffrage for over another 50 years. The establishment of two organizations at this time—the more radical National Woman Suffrage Association, for women only, headed by Mrs. Stanton and Ms. Anthony, and the more moderate, respectable American Woman Suffrage Association of Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell—also helped split the movement for about 20 years.

Also during this period, however, a great number of other women's organizations emerged, and a domestic revolution was under way. Technology, industrialization, and immigration were having a great impact on women's traditional roles. By the 1890's, women's activities broadened to include among other things, the settlement-house movement and the organization of women as consumers with social responsibilities.

(Panel reports on Dorothea Dix and Jane Addams.)

The Women's Christian Temperance Union, founded in 1874 by Annie Wittenmyer and Frances Willard (who later changed the nature of the organization), was tremendously successful at drawing large numbers of women not previously receptive to the issue of greater rights for women into activity which could lead them in that direction. It is significant that women reformers were concerned with the temperance question not merely

out of sympathy with an abstract ideal, but because the law placed married women so much at the mercy of their husbands. If a husband was a heavy drinker who consumed not only his own earnings but his wife's as well, this could be a tragic situation for women.

In more recent history, women made gains in their working conditions, in the guarantee of more equal wages, and in insuring a greater range of job opportunities, although vast numbers of women workers still remain unorganized (office work, retail, and domestic work). As in earlier days, their jobs are ill paid and represent special problems of organization.

After, and partially as a result of WWI and 50 years of legislative battles, protest demonstrations, jailings and forced-feedings, women finally won the right to vote in 1920, with Carrie Chapman Catt as president of the merged National American Woman's Suffrage Association.

Wartimes (especially the World Wars) have necessarily been periods of increased job opportunities for women. However, periods following wars have been characterized by rigorous returns to family life and the dismissal of women from higher paying and more responsible jobs. Although it would be presumptuous to say that these periods were without rewards, it seems fair to assume that this transition was, for many women, difficult, perhaps impossible.

An explanation of why the Equal Rights Amendment, first introduced into Congress in 1923, has become an explosive political issue lies in the emergence of a highly active wave of the woman's rights movement in the 1960's. Like the suffrage issue, the fight over the E.R.A. has become a highly emotional one. It is still a long way from becoming a reality.

(Panel report on Alice Paul.)

Although much of what is said here might be described as "interesting" or even "provocative," perhaps the greatest significance is the extent to which these events and these women are omitted from the history books most of us study.

In the same way, woman's writing has been largely ignored. If writers express their life experiences and perspectives in their work, and if that work makes statements about the positions and problems of people in relation to their society and their roles in society, then women's writing must somehow be different from men's writing, because at least some of the experiences which have served as inspiration have been so dissimilar.

As a transition, following the American History lecture, students will read an excerpt from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own (By Women : An Anthology of Literature, Kirschner and Folsom)*. This will provide a vehicle for the synthesis of woman's literary and social history. Woolf points out that "woman writing could not be considered in isolation from the social economic and political facts that dictate much of women's condition."

On completion of the essay, students will be asked what possible meanings may be attached to the phrase, "women and fiction."

### **Sample Lesson Plan: *The Bell Jar***

-Introductory material

-Biographical information

-Purposes of the novel

-Historical perspective

When *The Bell Jar* was first published, the author's name was Victoria Lucas; it was not published in Sylvia Plath's name until after her death (1966). The use of a pseudonym may be considered significant in that other women writers before Plath such as George Eliot (Marian Evans), Charlotte Bronte (Currer Bell), Louisa May Alcott (A. M. Barnard), used other names, perhaps for different reasons, but with the same result: lack of open recognition for their work. Victoria Lucas is an interesting choice because it combines the nationalities of Plath's husband (British) and father (Polish). Lois Ames, in her biographical notes, points out that Ms. Plath used a pen name because she questioned the literary value of *The Bell Jar* and because she doubted its "seriousness."

The following is biographical data which relates to the publication of Ms. Plath's only novel:

1932-Born in Winthrop, Mass.

1940-Death of father. In the novel, Esther says that the last time she could remember being happy was when she was nine years old.

1950-First published short story in *Seventeen* magazine.

1950-Entrance into Smith College on scholarship, partially by endowment from a writer, Olive Higgins Prouty. In the novel, Esther's patron, Philomena Guinea, is also a writer.

1951-Won *Mademoiselle* magazine's fiction contest.

1952-Won two Smith poetry prizes and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

1953-Spends the month of June in New York City as a Guest Editor for *Mademoiselle*. On August 24, tries to commit suicide by swallowing sleeping pills and hiding in a crawl space under the porch of her house, but is found two days later and rushed to the hospital. Will spend five months at McLean's, an expensive private institution in Belmont, paid for by Mrs. Prouty. This almost exactly parallels Esther's experience.

1954>Returns to Smith, having lost a year.

1955-Graduates from Smith summa cum laude.

1956-Marries Ted Hughes, British poet and critic

1957-Instructor of English at Smith.

1958-Application for Eugene F. Saxon Memorial fellowship to complete book of poetry rejected.

1959>Returns to England.

1960-Birth of first child.

1960- *The Colossus*, her book of poetry, finally accepted for publication after several unsuccessful attempts.

1961-Reapplied for Saxon fellowship—this time approved.

1962-Second child born.

1962-Separated from husband.

1963(Jan)- *The Bell Jar* published; Plath distressed by the reviews.

1963(Feb)-Ends her life by gas.

The novel:

1. Treats adolescence from a mature point of view, although the narrator is an adolescent.
2. Chronicles a nervous breakdown and consequent therapy in nonclinical language.
3. Gives a sympathetic portrait of what happens to one who has genuinely feminist aspirations in our society—of a young woman who refuses to be simply an event in anyone's life.

Esther Greenwood's despair with the alternatives adult life offers her drives her to self-destruction. The narrator of *The Bell Jar* struggles to reconstruct the "real" world. Using language to make fun of her ingenuous disorder, Esther manages to maintain a pervasive, biting sense of humor.

The historical setting of the novel is significant, for the 1950's posed difficult questions for women. After the Depression and WW II, there seemed to be a resurging interest in family life. This was the period of the "baby boom," and it was portrayed by the media and Madison Avenue as a time of "happy households," security, and stability. Yet, it was also a time of increased educational opportunities for women and it preceded the reemergence of the woman's liberation movement in the 1960's, which, in retrospect, poses some doubts about the real satisfaction of women during this time. In this light, *The Bell Jar* also chronicles the dilemma of a talented, intellectual female trying to make choices which will insure a socially acceptable *and* intellectually productive adult life.

### **Sample Lesson Plan: *The Bell Jar***

-Motivation for reading

-Introduction of imagery

-Foreshadowing

-Three-part structure and major conflicts explored

A. Poem: "The Fourth of July" by Emily Dickinson (on ditto)

We were waked by the ticking

of bells—the bells tick in  
Amherst for a fire to tell the  
firemen . . . I could hear the  
buildings falling and the oil  
exploding and people walking  
and talking gaily, and cannons  
soft as velvet from the parishes  
that did not know we were burning  
up . . . And so much brighter than  
day was it, that I saw a cater-  
pillar measure a leaf far down in  
the orchard; and Vinnie kept  
saying bravely, 'It's only The  
Fourth of July.'

*Discussion:*

What are the signals for rejoicing?

What are the signals for doomsday?

How do the narrator and Vinnie see the events differently?

While others sense only the celebration, the narrator senses that they are all literally burning up. The explanation that Vinnie offers to calm her is 'true' and kind, but the clinical consequences are clear: The neurotic sees herself as suspect by those less perceptive than herself, and through accumulated experiences becomes unable to trust any description of reality except her own.

Does a person, then, become "sick" when she sees things differently from others? Is imagination bad?

It might be pointed out that when this vision is always ignored, it becomes internalized and the health of the seer may degenerate. It may be that this is the origin of art; but it is also, according to society, the origin of sickness.

This is the relationship with the world that Esther Greenwood relates. Gradually, the eccentricity of her perception, her fastidiousness, her candor, isolate her from the real world—her mother, Buddy, her peers. The bell jar descends, isolating her in the vacuum of her own ego. “The silence depressed me. It wasn’t the silence of the silence of silence. It was my own silence.” (p.15)

She is determined to record her own inability to communicate, and in doing so, gives the crisis of female adolescence dignity.

B.

1.

What words on page 1 set the tone of the novel?  
What images are presented by the narrator?

examples: queer, sultry, sick, fake, fussy,  
mirage-gray

2.

How does the narrator personalize the  
electrocution of the Rosenbergs?

What image does this event conjure up for  
3. her? In what light does it introduce Buddy  
Willard?

Threefold effect of the image of death on page 1:

- It establishes the subjective condition of Esther’s mind. (She knows there is something wrong
- with her; she is perceiving things around her differently from others and is unable to find a sense of balance between herself and the outside world.)
  - It foreshadows the hospital episode and introduces Buddy Willard.  
It foreshadows that the final culmination of Esther’s disturbance will be an attempt to fuse her
  - identity with the real corpse she saw in the hospital and the metaphorical corpse that has become part of her world.

\*Students will be asked to keep a careful record of all references to death and to electricity through the novel. Hopefully, they will notice that birth and death imagery merge as the narrator becomes more ill. Her perceptions of childbirth and childcare will also be explored as will her deep conflict about the traditional roles of women.

C. Main conflicts in the novel:

1. Sheltering world of school and university and the complex, demanding world of adulthood.
2. Intellectual ability (identified in academic world) and her lack of social experience and confidence.



- The desire for sophistication and her disastrous social and sexual encounters. (The personal qualities that work for Esther in an academic environment work against her in the social arena.)
3. qualities that work for Esther in an academic environment work against her in the social arena.)
  - D. Three part structure of the novel:
    1. Part I-The reactions and dilemmas of the sheltered, middle-class girl who finds herself in the wilderness of city life. (High expectations result in shattered illusions.)
    2. Part II-Rapid downfall after failure to achieve social integration and positive sexual experience. Rebellion against expectations of her mother. Desperate need to be unique. Attempted suicide.
    3. Part III-Recovery

## ***The Bell Jar* : A three week literature unit for Grade 10**

### *Week 1*

- I. Introductory lecture
  - A. Biographical information
  - B. Historical perspective
  - C. Motivation for reading
  - D. Literary techniques in the novel
- II. Vocabulary—Chapter 1-9
 

Journal assignment—"The whole education of women relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to
- III. care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and make life sweet and agreeable to them—these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught to them from their infancy." Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
- IV. Reading assignment—Chapters 1-5, pp. 150.
- V. Discussion topics
  - A. Setting of novel
  - B. Tone: first sentence, paragraphs 4,5, "I was supposed to . . . ?"
  - C. Point of view
  - D. How does the narrator see herself?
  - E. Character introduction, character development, especially Doreen, Betsy, and Jay Cee as Esther sees them.
  - F. In what context is Buddy Willard introduced?
  - G. Introduction to imagery in the novel: electricity, birth, death, movement
  - H. Development of Esther's relationship with Buddy
  - I. Establishment of major themes and conflicts in the novel:

1.

Sheltering world of school, university and the complex demanding world of adulthood

2.

Intellectual ability (identified so far only in the academic world) and her lack of social experience, ease and confidence

3.

Desire for sophistication and disastrous social and sexual encounters

VI. Short paper Without the cynicism of the narrator (and her vision), how might you imagine the 12 women who win the writing contest? How should their time in New York have been spent? Which particular visions shatter this fantasy the most?

Week 2

I. Vocabulary—Chapters 10-13

Journal assignment—"What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants is infinite security. A man is

II. an arrow into the future and a woman is the place the arrow shoots off from." Mrs. Willard, p. 58.

III. Reading—Chapters 6-13, pp. 51-138

IV. Discussion topics

A.

What is Esther's impression of the childbirth she witnesses? What factors contribute to this impression? (Chaps. 6) Note: The pain of motherhood, found elsewhere in the novel, focuses with special clarity on Esther's fear of life, representing the ultimate way in which women serve men. Wherever she looks Esther sees the ugliness that protects her from the necessity of commitment. (P. Spacks, *The Female Imagination*)

B.

In what ways is Esther's reaction to Buddy's affair rational? irrational? How might a different reaction have been healthier for her?

C.

How does she indicate confusion about human sexuality? (p.66) This is the beginning of rapid movement from past to present.

D.

What incidents in these chapters help Esther build a strong case against the social side of her personality? (Chapters 7-9)

E.

Why does she cry at the picture-taking? How is Jay Cee's character reinforced here?

- F. How does the death imagery introduced at the beginning of the novel recur at the end of Chapter 9, only this time more strongly? (cremation imagery, p.91)
- G. Chapters 10-13—Part II of the novel—rapid downfall after failure to achieve social integration and positive sexual experience, compounded by intellectual putdown, i.e., rejection from summer writing program.
- H. What are the implications of Esther’s spending a summer in the suburbs?
- I. What is Esther’s impression of Dodo Conway? What colors this impression?  
When Esther says, “I had nothing to look forward to.” p. 96, what is she feeling? What conflicts are emerging in this section? Note: Esther believes herself theoretically capable of doing almost anything, but the possibilities of confident anticipation no longer exist for her. Dreams, fantasies cannot substitute for accomplishment, for which she seems incapacitated, at least at the moment. Her dreams intensify this frustration and weaken her. (P. Spacks, *The Female Imagination* .) This helps explain her inability to read or write during this section of the novel.
- J.
- K. How do Esther’s experiences with the sailor, with her mother, and with her peers further isolate her?
- L. How is her drama of disorder—her plunge into madness—paradoxically a kind of personal success?

### Week 3

- I. Vocabulary—Chapters 14-20  
Journal assignment—“The poet is representative. She stands among partial women for the complete woman...The young woman reveres women of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more herself than she is . . . For all women live by truth and stand in need of expression.” Emerson
- II. Paper assignment—Esther’s heroism in the novel depends on defiance rather than accomplishment.
- III. Support or reject this statement using at least three concrete references to incidents in the text.
- IV. Reading—Chapters 14-20, pp. 138-216
- V. Discussion topics—Part III-Recovery and Rehabilitation
- A. Why might there be no references to past events in this section?
- B. What statements does Esther make about herself and the treatment she received at the first hospital?
- C. Describe Esther’s relationship with Dr. Nolan. How is it different from that with Dr. Gordon?

D.

What are the circumstances surrounding and the results of Esther's first sexual encounter? What might she learn from it?

E.

On what note does the novel end? Is recovery credible? How has Esther changed?

**By Women: An Anthology of Literature: A two week short story unit, for Grades 10 and 12**

*Week 1*

"I Stand Here Ironing" by Tillie Olsen, p. 211. Almost certainly every mother reflects upon her child's dependent years with a sense of fulfillment or frustration, with a feeling of sorrow or joy. But even in the best of situations, how

I.

does a mother look back on those years without becoming engulfed "with what should have been and what cannot be helped"? The mother's situation, in this story, has been far from the best; her sense of frustration, great, her feelings of guilt, deep.

II. Discussion focus

A.

It is probable that Emily has needed help for nineteen years and may never receive the specific help she needs. Her mother sees clearly now what was needed, "the face of joy, and not of care or tightness or worry." p. 212

B.

Although the mother loves her daughter deeply, she admits she has no "key" to her daughter. "There is all that life that has happened outside of me, beyond me," she says of Emily's life. p. 211 She feels guilty that she was not able to provide for Emily as she did for the other children, but she is aware that the circumstances of life prevented her. p. 217 At the same time, she faces the burden of her guilt as she recognizes that Emily "has much in her and probably nothing will come of it" as a result of the emotional deprivation of her childhood. p. 217

C.

The mother has adjusted to a difficult life. She has never had time in the past to "total" up the years, and even now constant interruptions keep her from gathering the past together for evaluation.

- D. Although she knows that evaluation of Emily's past can only lead to greater feelings of recrimination, the mother does become engulfed as she stands ironing and dredging up the past until she concludes, "Let her be."
- E. Susan is everything Emily isn't but wishes she could be. She was brought up under more secure and happy circumstances, and life was made easier for her. Students can trace this resentment.
- III. Discussion or composition topics
- A. Note that Emily is nineteen, the same age as her mother when Emily was born. What possible significance might this fact have in the story?
- B. To what extent is the time of the story and the events that take place a factor of Emily's character?
- C. Explain the mother's comment: "My wisdom came too late."
- IV. "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin, p. 3.  
In "The Story of an Hour" Mrs. Mallard, when informed of her husband's death, experiences a sense of overwhelming joy and freedom at her release from years of repression.
- V. Discussion focus
- A. The freedom means that she would no longer be bound in a relationship that imposed "a private will upon a fellow creature." She will be free to live for herself—"this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being." p. 4
- B. It is not selfishness that the author wants the reader to see, but the powerful, human impulse to independence and self-assertion.
- C. Mrs. Mallard's sister and friend are afraid that she will have a heart attack when she hears of her husband's death. Instead, she has the fatal attack when she discovers that he is alive after all. The shock of having her newfound freedom snatched away is too much for her. There is further irony in that the others think she has died of joy from seeing her husband alive.
- VI. Discussion or composition topics
- A. Chopin states that Mrs. Mallard's reaction to the news of her husband's death differs from that of most women. What might this indicate about Mrs. Mallard as a person and about her relationship with her husband? What hints are given about this relationship?
- B. After weeping over her husband's death, Mrs. Mallard returns to her room alone. What does she see as she looks out the window, and how does the scene reflect her awakening sense of freedom?

C. Describe an ironic situation that happened in your life or that you know about. In your description, make clear the incongruity between what was expected to happen and what actually happened, or between what was thought to be true and what turned out to be true.

“The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” by Katherine Anne Porter, p. 11. At the end of a long life, surrounded by her loving children, Granny Weatherall should be filled with happy memories. Instead, an old hurt still rankles her fading mind and leads her to the pain of her dying moments.

VIII. Discussion focus

A. The technique is effective because it conveys the vagueness of Granny’s mind and the confusion between past and present that is common to old people. Also, as her mind shifts between past and present we learn about her entire life. Granny thinks about being jilted, her subsequent marriage, her children, the years of hard work. She remembers her readiness for death when she was sixty, but is aware of her lack of preparation for it at eighty. Again and again, she remembers how George jilted her. Her thoughts reveal the successful, hard life of a strong, capable woman—but a woman who has remained vulnerable over the years because of one terrible hurt.

B. She grieves because she has received no sign from God that she has been accepted and saved. She feels as if she has been jilted again. The second rejection is much more devastating because it comes after a lifetime of expectation.

IX. Discussion or composition topics

A. The major portion of Granny’s life has occurred between the first jilting and the second one. What has this life been like for her?

B. Notice Granny’s last name. What significance does it have?

Week 2

“The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, p. 286.

- I. Trapped in a world which credits her with neither intellect nor soul, the narrator of this tale escapes in the only manner available to her.

II. Discussion focus

A. It seems that John dominates his wife’s life, while she passively submits to his orders and demands. Initially she acquiesces to this role for John is “very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.” p. 287 He has already made her feel guilty for being the cause of their summer move; her guilt increases whenever she attempts to rebel against one of his wishes. As the story progresses, the wife becomes angry with John’s total blindness to what she experiences. She tries to explain her feelings to him, but as a doctor he only sees that scientifically she is improving. No reason for further discussion exists. The wife begins to spend her days deceiving her husband, hiding from him all suggestions of her true feelings. The wallpaper becomes an obsession towards which she directs her mind and emotions, locking John out of her thoughts.

A.

B. The wife, trapped in the culture and mores of 19th-century America, is aware of the hopelessness of her situation. The men in her life, the masters of her fate, say nothing is wrong with her other than “a slight hysterical tendency.” p. 286 Their prescription of rest is not to be quarreled with since she is only a woman. She may want to write, to express herself creatively but she has been convinced by others that this would be damaging to her health. Her simple desire for activity and intellectual stimulation is met with disapproval. p. 286

B.

C. From a personal point of view, John treats her lovingly, but like a child. She is given no credit for good sense or for emotions worth noting. His laughing at her and ignoring her are precisely what brings her to the edge of insanity. Medically her husband has treated her in a typically 19th-century fashion. Her mental state is not to be questioned; her position as a woman, not to be considered. Her illness more than partially results from this total disregard for her needs. As John continues to treat her with a growing lack of comprehension of her real problems, her condition worsens irreparably.

C.

III. Discussion or composition topics

A.

To what extent does the point of view contribute to the effectiveness of the story?

B.

What contrasts can you detect in the nature or general outlook of the husband and wife? How do these contrasts contribute to the woman’s deteriorating mental state?

C.

What happens on those specific occasions when the wife makes a conscious attempt to talk with her husband?

D. Several decades before the publication of this story, Emily Dickinson wrote, "Much madness is divinest sense...Much sense the starkest madness." How might these words apply to the situation presented in this story?

E. The wife feels her health would improve if she were allowed to write. What in her personality makes writing necessary? What role does it play in her life? What contribution toward the retention of her sanity might writing have provided?

"An Old Woman and Her Cat" by Doris Lessing, p. 417 To be old and alone can be a frightening prospect. How a person will experience this

IV. depends upon the strength of her character. While the old woman in this story may be old and alone, she remains independent and undaunted to the end.

V. Discussion focus

A. Hetty is a strong woman, a totally independent being, capable of finding her own way in the streets and alleys of London. Even while she appeared to be happily married to Pennefeather, she had been considered a little strange. After his death and her children's departure, her strange behavior intensified until she became a person totally freed from familial and social restraints. She no longer saw any reason to pretend to be a part of traditional society. She enjoyed the more nomadic gypsy life of trading and selling. Thus, consciously she rejected the "traditional occupations for middle-aged women living alone" and took up begging. p. 418

B. As she becomes ostracized from former friends and neighbors, and lonely, Hetty chose Tibby to become her companion. Both Tibby and Hetty display a spirit of independence and a strong will to survive. Hetty, like Tibby, becomes a "scarred warrior." She, too, was a colorful creature dressed in her acquired rags, "a long way down the scale" from the aristocracy or the middle class. As Hetty ages, the cat becomes more and more important to her very survival. It delivers food, provides warmth. At the same time it is indirectly responsible for Hetty's death by being the factor that prevents her from going to a home.

C. While Hetty is healthy, she appears to have a clear understanding of herself. It is only when winter and bad health weaken her that she overestimates her capabilities. Before that she realizes that she is happy only when living as freely as she possibly can.

VI. Discussion or composition topics



- Very little action occurs in this story. Yet the tension builds through the effective use of detail to make the reader see and feel the surroundings in which Hetty finds herself. What details contribute to the feeling of tension in the story? Images of sight, touch, smell, sound, and taste heighten the reader’s awareness of Hetty’s world. What images are particularly strong?
- A.
- B. Describe Hetty’s relationship with her children. Why won’t she turn to them for help? Cite passages to support this answer.

## ***The Awakening* : A three week literature unit for Grades 10 and 12**

### *Week 1*

Introductory comment—Kate Chopin wrote about the conflict women can feel over their desire to be wives and mothers and their need to be self-assertive individuals. Her stories and novels often deal with the woman who awakens to herself and is freed from societal restraints.

- I. Introductory lecture
  - A. Biographical information
  - B. Historical perspective
- II. Journal assignment
- III. Reading assignment
  - A. Chapters 1-13, pp. 1-116
  - B. Chapters 14-39, pp. 117-303
- IV. Discussion
  - A. As the title of the novel implies this is the story of a married woman “awakening,” discovering her own sexuality and a need for a complete realization of herself.
  - B. The two major symbols—the sea and the sky—will be pointed out; and students will be directed to keep a running account of the recurrence of these symbols.
  - C. Character description, moral position and life style will be emphasized in the first five chapters.
  - D. Chapter 6 is crucial to the plot and theme of the novel. Note especially, p. 34.
  - E. Chapters 7-13—attention will be given to the interaction between Edna and her husband, and to Edna’s growing attachment to the younger man. Great emphasis is placed on her growing confidence which is symbolized by her increased competence at swimming and on her first friendship with another woman.

### *Week 2 and 3*

Reading

- I. assignment—Chapters 14-39  
cont. from Week 1.
- II. Journal assignment
- III. Discussion

A.

In these chapters the initial character development is expanded. As Edna emerges she continues to assert her independence. Emphasis will be placed on the effect her actions have on her husband and her children.

B.

In the concluding chapters, when Edna says to the family doctor, "I want to be alone. . . . I don't want anything but my own way," (p. 291) her awakening has brought her to the awareness of the consequences of her freedom. This conflict can only be resolved by her death which occurs when she drowns herself.

### Suggested Topics for Discussion or Composition

1. What is Edna's moral frame at the beginning of the novel? Why is important? Why is this especially important in a female character?
2. In what way is solitude both a seduction and a trap for Edna?
3. How does Edna's developing feeling for the young man, Robert, create a layer of fantasy but also a new commitment to reality?

#### *For Grade 12 Only*

1. Compare the ending of *Jane Eyre* to the ending of *The Awakening*.
2. How does the language in this novel differ from *Jane Eyre* ? What are the implications of this language difference?
3. Compare Jane's emotional maturity to Edna's. What is the consequence of emotional/intellectual equality for these two women?

### ***Jane Eyre* : A three week literature unit for Grade 12**

#### *Week 1*

- I. Introductory lecture
  - A. Biographical information
  - B. Historical perspective
  - C. Literary techniques used in the novel
- II. Vocabulary assignment—Chapters 112

III. Reading assignment—Chapters 1-12

Journal assignment—Imagine you are 10 years old and due to a family tragedy, you have been sent to live with distant relatives whose life style is very different from the one you've known. After a few

- IV. months with your new family you are sitting alone in your room. You are looking out the window into a rainy, gray, cold November sky. What are you thinking? What are you feeling? What are you hoping for?

Discussion—To motivate interest, students will be directed to the love scene between Jane and Rochester, Ch. 24, pp. 249-51. We will discuss how this is a love scene. We will discuss why the

- V. Victorians would call this a "passion" scene rather than a love scene. Through this discussion they will be alerted to the language in *Jane Eyre*, the sentence structure, and to the love story.

A.

Structure emphasis—establishment of the point of view of narration, the surface and subplots, character introduction and plot motivation.

B.

Theme—Jane's transition from the passivity of childhood into turbulent adolescence. Jane's emotional and intellectual growth at the repressive Lowood School. Her transition to adult independence as she assumes her role as governess at Thornfield Hall.

Bronte's statement regarding the rights of women, (Ch. 12) clearly establishes the major theme.

Week 2

I. Vocabulary assignment—Chapters 13-25

II. Reading assignment—Chapters 13-25

Journal assignment—"The deepest principle

- III. in human nature is the craving to be appreciated." William James

Discussion focus—In these chapters the

- IV. theme, character development and plot are expanded.

A.

Note will be made of Bronte's use of description to maintain suspense and to expand the melodramatic (surface) plot. Attention will be directed to the use of narration to move the plot and to continually focus the reader's attention on the underlying themes.

B.

Special attention will be given to the character development of Jane and Rochester, the development of the love story, and to the character development of the ever-present but mysterious third-floor character (Bertha Mason).

### Week 3

- I. Vocabulary assignment—Chapters 27-38
- II. Reading assignment—Chapters 27-38
- III. Journal assignment—How would you define emotional maturity?
- IV. Discussion focus—The emphasis in the concluding discussions will be on the integration of the major and subplots through the main character.

- The follow-up discussion will focus on Jane's struggle for self-realization as a woman. Sections of the introductory lecture, the film strip (see Content Objectives), and additional pertinent material will be used to expand the discussion and to direct attention to the influence *Jane Eyre* had on post-Jane Victorian heroines. This will provide a transition to the next novel, *The Awakening*.
- V.

### Suggested Topics of Discussion or Composition

1. How effective is Bronte's attempt to depict a complete female identity?
2. Do you find Rochester a convincing/unconvincing character as Jane's hero?  
Discuss how Bronte arouses our curiosity and keeps up suspense with respect to the curious laugh, from the time it is heard (Ch. 11) to the point when Mr. Rochester tells the whole story (Ch. 27).
3. Explain how Jane's emotional maturity is measured during her return to Gateshead.  
Imagine you are Jane. You have been in Morton a week and are now able to reflect on your time at Thornfield. In your (Jane's journal) record your thoughts about Bertha, Rochester, and your speculations about your future.
4. Explain how Jane and Bertha exemplify Bronte's statement on p. 112: "It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity. They must have action...Women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women feel just as men feel. They need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do. They suffer from too rigid a constraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer....It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex."
5. 6.

### To the Lighthouse : A three week literature unit for Grade 12

#### Week 1

- I. Introductory lecture
  - A. Opening remarks using portions of *A Writer's Diary* .
  - B. Biographical information
  - C. Historical perspective
  - D. Literary techniques
- II. Vocabulary—complete novel
- III. Reading assignment
  - A. Book I, pp. 7-28—2 days
  - B. Book I, pp. 29-125—3 days
- Journal assignment—If one has a vision of reality
- IV. does it matter if it lasts, or are glimpses, moments of reality enough to sustain us?
- V. Lecture/discussion
  - A. Woolf's novel form
  - B. Structure of *To the Lighthouse*
- VI. Composition

## Week 2

- I. Reading assignment
  - A. Book I, pp. 125-186
  - B. Book II, pp. 189-214
- II. Journal assignment—Stream-of-consciousness account of a single scene, e.g., at dinner, at a party.
- III. Discussion
  - A. Mrs. Ramsay as unifying force
    - 1. Use of symbolism
    - 2. The Ramsay marriage
  - B. Book 3 introduction

## Week 3

- I. Reading assignment—Book III, pp. 217-310.
- II. Discussion
  - A. Poetic form of Book II
  - B. Book III—emphasis on Lily Briscoe—See detailed lesson plan.

## Topics for Discussion or Composition

1. Explain the significance of the statement, "Of such moments...the thing is made that endures," in terms of Mrs. Ramsay's character.
2. What is it that binds the Ramsays so closely? What does each seek in the other?
3. What are the major symbols in the novel? Explain how each is used.
4. Write a character analysis of Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, James, Cam.
5. Explain the cyclical structure of "Time Passes."  
"Virginia Woolf concerns herself not with the width and variety of human comedy, nor the idiosyncrasies of human character. Rather it is the deep and simple human experiences, love, happiness, beauty, loneliness, death that interest her most." B. Blackstone Do you agree/disagree with Blackstone's comment about V. Woolf's fiction?
6. How do Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe exemplify the female experience as V. Woolf understood it?
7. What are the weaknesses and strengths in Mrs. Ramsay? Mr. Ramsay? Lily Briscoe? Mr. Carmichael?
8. Virginia Woolf said of women's fiction, "It is courageous; it is sincere, it keeps closely to what women feel. It is not bitter. It does not insist upon its femininity. But at the same time, a woman's book is not written as a man would write it," "Women and Fiction" A. Explain how this applies to *To the Lighthouse* . B. Would this also apply to *Jane Eyre*? *The Awakening*?
9. Compare the heroines in *Jane Eyre* (Jane), *The Awakening* (Edna), and *To the Lighthouse* (Mrs. Ramsay and Lily). What characteristics do they share? How are they different?
- 10.

## Lecture: Outlines: Structure of Virginia Woolf's Novels

### *The Development of Virginia Woolf's Novel Form (Structure)*

- V. Woolf's first novels—*The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*—were written
- I. using the basic principles of the traditional novel which she adapted to her own vision.
    - A. Characters are described and gradually made known to us.
    - B. Each book is a love story.
    - C. It is clear even in the first novels that her interest is not in the human comedy nor the idiosyncrasies of human character. Her concerns are deep and simple human experiences.
  - II. Traditional story-telling novel form allows for moments of heightened consciousness.
    - A. In addition to these intense moments are other human experiences about which she seemed to have particular understanding. (Read passage from *Moments of Being* to the class).

B. After her first two novels she moved away from romantic, passionate love and concerned herself with relationships that grow between friends or between husband-wife. She was concerned more and more with the gradual development of relationships and the art of living necessary to create them.

What she discovered to be her  
III. subject as a novelist was “what the mind receives on an ordinary day.”

A. With this discovery she had to reject the traditional novel form. She might have chosen a stream-of-consciousness form. She rejected this (at least Joyce’s form) because she felt it to be too autobiographical.

B. She chose instead to “recreate” an order upon her impressions. The result is a novel form akin to a dramatic or poetic form.

Her entire writing endeavor is towards understanding rather than  
IV. judgment. She disappears from her novels and we hear and come to know her characters—not her.

We apprehend rather than comprehend her characters. Rather than defining an identity she leads us  
V. to discover it by living in the minds of her characters. And, as in real life, there is always much we do not come to know about others.

### **To the Lighthouse : Structure**

I. The problem as Woolf perceived it was to present a world that combines finite and infinite truth—that recognizes limitations and isolation, and at the same time recognizes a transcendent unity which encompasses all existence.

In *To the Lighthouse* she combines many techniques and themes to present a marriage of two vast personalities who stand for the factual and visionary approaches to life.

II. The themes and structure of *Lighthouse* were clear in Woolf’s mind as the reader can see from various entries in her journal. (See *Writer’s Diary* )

III. The novel is controlled, concentrated, precise in its treatment of theme. Whatever other disagreement critics may have there is a general agreement about both theme and technique—the novel symbolically treats the marriage of opposites and discusses art as a means of combining opposing attitudes toward life.

- The theme of marriage is central to the novel. One critic feels that Woolf “viewed marriage from two essentially different points of view, describing it, in an intensely critical spirit as a patriarchal institution, but also expressing a visionary ideal of marriage as the ultimate relation.” (Marder) This explanation describes both the conflict and the ultimate harmony of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay’s relationship to each other.
- IV. *Lighthouse* is really a story of a contest between two kinds of truth—factual and visionary truth.
  - VI. The outward structure of the novel is simple: three movements of unequal length and two different kinds, as if it were two acts linked by a chorus.

A.

B.

C.

Part 1—“The Window”—shows essential personalities of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and the narrow and expansive meanings of marriage.

Part 2—“Time Passes”—section built upon suggestion rather than statement. Emphasis is upon the question of movement in time. There is an alteration of hope and despair, light and darkness.

Part 3—“The Lighthouse”—the cycle of hope begins again. This section opens with Lily thinking, “What does it mean then, what can it all mean?” The two truths that Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay represent come together when Lily has her “vision.”

### Lesson Plan—Character Development—Lily Briscoe

**Purpose:** To analyze character development of Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*.

**Objective:** Through close textual analysis students will discover how the character of Lily Briscoe is developed.



Introduction to discussion:

Lily Briscoe is more concerned with inner reality rather than outer aspects of reality. She admires Mrs. Ramsay, but she objects to 1) Mrs. Ramsay's way of pitying men and 2) her manipulation of other people, and 3) her insisting that "an unmarried woman

I. has missed the best of life." Despite her objections, Lily is fascinated by Mrs. Ramsay, and she tries to discover the source of Mrs. Ramsay's strength. Through her eventual understanding of Mrs. Ramsay, Lily comes to know herself and emerges, at the conclusion, as the androgynous character.

II. Discussion—can be done in large or small groups.

A. How is Lily first introduced to us? p. 29

B. How do others view Lily in Book I? pp. 29-30

C. Early on in the novel we enter Lily's mind and discover what she is searching for. What is it? pp. 31-33

D. What is it that causes Lily's confusion, her conflict?

E. Lily studies Mr. Ramsay in order to understand the Ramsay's relationship and to understand her relationship to them. pp. 72-73

F. One of the central problems for Lily is the definition of love. Again she seeks an understanding through the Ramsays, especially through Mrs. Ramsay. pp. 73-77

G. Finally she gains a desperate courage and admits she herself is an individual. p. 77

1.

What is the significance of this admission?

	2.	How does this admission allow her greater insight into Mrs. Ramsay's character?
H.	Why is it so essential for Lily to understand Mrs. Ramsay?	
I.	As Lily gains confidence she is able to share something of herself with William Bankes. What has she been able to share? p. 83	
J.	Through an understanding of Lily, what understanding do we gain about Woolf's conception of relationships?	
	1.	What are your feelings about the various relationships in the novel?
	2.	Do you agree with Lily's perceptions?
K.	In the culminating scene of Book I (the dinner party) Lily comes to terms with an important aspect of herself. What is the significance of her discovery? pp. 127-128	
	1.	How does this episode establish Lily as a main character?
	2.	What has the tree come to symbolize?
III.	Students will be guided toward the following conclusions about Lily:	
A.	Ten years later, Lily revisits the Ramsays.	
	1.	What changes have occurred? p. 219
	2.	How has Lily changed?
	3.	How has her view of Mr. Ramsay changed? pp. 221-24
B.	Lily decides to finish the picture she had started ten years earlier.	
	1.	Why had she not completed it?
	2.	What must she work through before she can complete it?

- C. Why is Lily’s statement, “She hated playing at painting,” so significant at this point in the novel?
- D. When Lily no longer “plays” at living and at relating to others, how does this help her finally to understand the Ramsays?  
“With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the center. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.”
- E. Analyze this passage.
1. What is Lily’s vision?
  2. Does Lily’s vision reflect Woolf’s androgynous vision?
  3. In the completed painting where is the tree? What does this symbolize?
- F. How does the character of Lily combine both realistic and visionary concepts?

## Concluding Statement

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The purpose of this unit, *Women Writing*, is to present material, both historical and literary, which will cause students to examine women’s history and women-authored literature in a sensitive manner. Virginia Woolf in her essay “Women and Fiction” wrote, “In dealing with women as writers, as much elasticity as possible is desirable. It is necessary to leave oneself room to deal with other things besides their work, so much has that work been influenced by conditions that have nothing to do with art.” We believe that the material is provocative and that it will raise awareness and stimulate critical thinking about the female subculture in England and America.

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