



Yale-New Haven
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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1983 Volume III: Reading the Twentieth Century Short Story

Short Stories Reflections of Two Worlds

Curriculum Unit 83.03.05
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Introduction

Reading is a substantial component of any given curriculum. Whether I am teaching Italian or English, I will come across the reading of short stories. This unit will aid me in dealing with the reading of short stories with the English as a Second Language (ESL) class and the Italian class.

The unit is designed to serve two distinct groups of students. It will be used with an ESL class and an Italian class. The unit exposes the ESL student to some American writers, American short stories, the analyzing of them and also the English language itself. The ESL student is a student whose native language is not English. They have not been exposed to American writers. This unit does give them the opportunity of becoming aware of some of these personalities and their works. Using it with an Italian class, mainly third year, the students will become acquainted with some Italian writers and some of their works. The students will also deal with the language and vocabulary.

The majority of the activities incorporated in this unit will concentrate on reading, becoming familiar with American and Italian short story writers and some of their works, the language; primarily vocabulary and analyzing the short story and its parts.

The unit is divided into two sections. Section A illustrates the ESL component. Section B concentrates on the unit's usage with the Italian class. Both sections of the unit contain an appendix with topics for research. The assignments given allow the student to explore further the lives of the authors mentioned, their writing style and other works related to the same theme treated in class. Both sections are preceded by an introductory preface; "Parts of a Short Story". It outlines what a short story is, its content, its historical background and briefly defines the plot, the theme, the characters and the setting. Both groups of students, with whom this unit is used, are introduced to the components of a short story.

Parts of a Short Story

A short story is, like the name says, a short literary composition. The action is compact and every single event is crucial to the development of the plot. The time span covered within the action of a short story could vary from few hours to days or years. A short story could have elements of present events, flashbacks to account for what happens and futuristic insights. The short story composition has a very old history. We can go back to the cave men. Through their simple drawings found in caves, they have left us brief accounts of their daily lives. The story material is there, but because of language limitations the stories are very simple. Later we come across the method of oral story-telling. With the invention of writing many of the orally told stories were compiled in written volumes. Great examples of very old collections of short stories are *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Many of the episodes of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* come very close to short story examples. Other famous illustrations of short stories are *Aesop's Fables*. They are very brief compositions whose themes do occur frequently even in recently written short stories. *The Bible* is also very rich of short story examples.

During the Middle Ages, between the fifth and the fifteenth Centuries, Europe suffered great movements. With the many movements, the Latin language, which had been the official language of the Roman Empire, began to fade away giving birth to the Romance Languages. With the evolution of the new languages we have a separation in literary compositions.

Looking at the Italian literature, the earliest composition goes back to the thirteenth century. It is a collection of one hundred stories by an unknown writer. Later we have Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*. This book won immediate fame and it is frequently imitated.

In France too, there was a great deal of literary activity. We have the development of "chausons" (songs), "fabliaux" (fables) and the "lai". The last one is a kind of fairy tale made popular by a French woman, Marie de France.

Short stories continued to be written all over the world. In the United States, beginning with Edgar Allan Poe, we have the development of short story writing. With Poe we have a clear definition of types of short stories. His style, his characters, his themes have influenced others. In one of his critical essays Poe clearly states the requirements of a short story. It has to be short. It has to be read in one sitting and has to maintain the reader's attention.

Still today short stories continue to be written offering the reader intriguing plots, relevant themes, amazing conflicts and extraordinary endings making reading an enjoyable activity.

The essential parts of a short story are: the plot, the theme, the characters and the setting.

The plot-The plot answers the questions what happened? When did it happen? In what order did the events happen? What is the story about? The plot comprises a series of intertwined events which create problems for the characters. These problems are followed by solutions. The turning point of the plot, toward the solution, is the climax, The time factor and the sequence of events are also important in the development of the plot.

The theme-The theme is the basic idea of the story. It is what the author tries to tell us by writing the story. A short story can concentrate around one specific theme or a sequence of themes related to one another. The plot evolves around the theme.

The characters-The characters are the people involved in the action of the plot. The plot of the story is developed by the characters. Their actions, their dialogues and their point of view combined form the development of the plot. Who they are? What they do? How well what they do follows who they are? are important questions which need to be addressed in discussing the characters of a short story. The characters have to interact with the plot. It is through this interaction that we determine the characteristics and the development of the characters.

The setting-The setting can be defined as the place where the story happens, the time when it happens and the conditions under which the story is told. The setting can be any determined area or time. It is the stage that demonstrates the attributes of a character. The setting can be an object and how it fits in a certain category. The setting can also be personified.

Section A—Class: English as a Second Language (ESL)

Objectives

Given that the student in this class has not had a great amount of exposure to American writers, one of the objectives is to introduce the foreign student to American literature. The foreign student who will be working with these writers and their selected works, is in need of becoming acquainted with American personalities in the literary field.

Secondly, I intend to have the student analyze American short stories. We will examine the parts of three short stories. The student will be made aware of the meaning of plot, theme, characters and setting, and be able to recognize these parts as the stories are discussed.

The third objective will be to increase the student's reading comprehension. The short stories will be read out loud in class. The reading will be paraphrased and discussed by the student. I found that reading out loud in class, helps the student retain more and at the same time improve pronunciation skills.

The last objective will be to increase the student's vocabulary. In practice each short story will be preceded by a list of vocabulary words. The student will work with the meaning and the usage of these vocabulary words in written and spoken English.

Strategies

The students will read the following short stories by prominent American writers. "The Egg", Sherwood Anderson; "A Rose for Emily", William Faulkner, and " Désirée's Baby" by Kate Chopin.

An analysis and discussion of the theme, the plot, the setting and the characters of each story read will follow the reading.

The students will be required to complete all the exercises given at the end of each analyzed short story.

* "Désirée's Baby" by Kate Chopin is available upon request from the Institute office.

Sherwood Anderson, "The Egg"

Plot

The short story “The Egg” presents the story of a family and their desire to make it in life. At the beginning we see the father as a farmhand. He has a horse. He goes out on Saturday without a care in the world and he has no desire to advance. He gets married. With the marriage and a son new responsibilities and ambitions arise. Both parents want to rise in the world.

The wife convinces him to begin a business of his own. Their enterprise develops around raising chickens. Here the story explores the “vicious cycle” of the chicken: The baby chicks are pleasant to admire, but many don’t make it to maturity. The ones that survive lay eggs and the cycle starts over again. Here there is a comparison between people and chickens. Chicks just starting out appear to be smart and alive, but in fact they are stupid just like people who are mixed up about life’s priorities.

They struggle with the chicken farm for ten years. It doesn’t pay off. They move away and become involved with the restaurant business. The description of moving is very vivid. They drive down the road looking like refugees full of hopes. Everything is packed on a borrowed cart. The furniture is old and cheap, but very dear to them. In the midst of this furniture, some jars, containing deformed chicks, occupy a special place. The father plans to use them to entertain people.

As a child, the narrator used to sit and stare at his father’s head, comparing it to a broad road. This causes him to dream of walking to a far beautiful place where there are no chicken farms, no eggs.

When they get to Bidwell Ohio, they open a restaurant. It is situated across the railroad station. The mother sees this as a profitable business. They work very hard to get the place in shape and to run it.

The father becomes ambitious. He wants to provide entertainment for the people who come to the restaurant. It is this desire that destroys the last film of hope built up in him, as he tries to amuse Joe Kane. He spends one whole night trying to get Joe Kane interested in his tricks with the egg, but it doesn’t work. Joe Kane laughs at him. The father becomes momentarily insane. After being calmed by his wife, he puts aside the egg and goes to sleep.

Analysis

The short story “The Egg” illustrates the harsh realities of life. The life of the father has been a “vicious cycle”. He hasn’t been able to detach himself from failure. His failure is caused by the internal ambition for success. One venture after the other shows this man that he can’t make it, just like the egg which can’t stand up without breaking its shell.

Theme

The themes of this story are: The atrocities of life, disappointment, failure, and the “vicious cycle” of the egg in comparison to the life of this family.

Characters

The narrator—The narrator is the son. He characterizes himself as being a “gloomy man inclined to see the darker side of life”. He blames this on his childhood days spent on the chicken farm, instead of having experienced the happiest, joyous days of his life. He is the son of his father and like his father, he has been engulfed in this “vicious cycle”, life itself.

The father—The father is a farmhand. He is cheerful up to the age of 35. He is a kindly man satisfied with very little. By 45 he is bald-headed, fat and has become silent and discouraged. He wants success. He wants to entertain people. He tries, but failure overtakes him. He remains shut in his enclosed world and inability to succeed.

The mother—She is a school teacher. She convinces her husband to give up being a farmhand, sell the horse and put up some independent enterprise of his own.

She is tall, silent, with a long nose and troubled gray eyes. For herself she doesn't desire anything, but for the son and the father she is very ambitious. At the end she softens a little. She consoles her husband, acknowledging his defeat.

Joe Kane—He is the son of a merchant of Bidwell Ohio.

Setting

The setting shifts from a chicken farm in the country, to a restaurant in Bidwell Ohio. Both settings reflect the internal states of the characters: Everything dies; the son isn't happy on the chicken farm; they are unsuccessful. The restaurant, a gloomy looking place, serves as a background for the failure about to happen.

Activities

Questions for Comprehension

1. Who is narrating the story?
2. How does the father appear to be at the beginning of the story?
3. How is the mother described?
4. Why did they become ambitious? What is their ambition?
5. How does the narrator describe himself?
6. How successful are they in raising chickens? Why?
7. Describe the moving from the chicken farm to the town. What does it tell you about these people?
8. What is very valuable to the father? What do these jars represent?
9. Their second venture; the restaurant business, how do they manage to keep up the place? Are they successful?
10. Toward the end, how is the father changed? How and where does he see success?
11. Describe the father's attempt at being an entertainer. Why does he want to put up a show for Joe Kane?
12. Is the mother changed by the end of the story? How?
13. What does the father realize at the end?
14. In the last six or seven lines of the short story, we have the narrator's comment and observation about the egg; what does he say? What does it tell us about life, people and the narrator himself?
15. Why is the story entitled "The Egg"? What is its importance? As a symbol, does the egg stand for something else? Explain?

Vocabulary

cheerful scrub
wriggle solemn
ambitious lurk
fame mutter
venture struggle
tragic consummate
pip nonchalantly
vermin roar
incubators inarticulate
refugees evidence
flee triumph
wonders exhibit
monstrous

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the theme of the short story? How does it develop through the story?
2. Who are the characters? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each one?
3. What is the setting? Does it reflect the internal states of the characters? Explain?
4. What is the plot?
5. Why is this a story about “The Egg”? What does the egg symbolize?

William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily”

Plot

This short story “A Rose for Emily” is an account of the life and death of Miss Emily Grierson.

Miss Emily’s house has been closed to the public for ten years. At the time of her death, many people come to pay their respects and see the house. The house, old and majestic, still reigns among the more modern structures of the town. The house and its furniture are old. The parlor is furnished with heavy leather covered furniture. By the fireplace there is a crayon portrait of Miss Emily’s father. The state of the house can be compared to the physical appearance of Miss Emily.

In 1894 Colonel Sartoris, the mayor, established that Miss Emily would not pay any taxes since her father had loaned some money to the city. Time passed, new laws were established. When the tax notice is mailed to her, she doesn’t reply. After vain attempts to get in touch with her, she returns the tax notice, enclosing a note and no payment. A special meeting of the board of Aldermen is called, and a visit to Miss Emily’s house is arranged. After a brief conversation, she stubbornly tells them that she doesn’t have any taxes to pay in

Jefferson. Her taxes were abolished by Colonel Sartoris. She doesn't realize that Colonel Sartoris has been dead for 10 years.

The death of two people very close to her, contribute to the specification of Miss Emily's character. Her father and her sweet-heart die. When her father dies, the people have a hard time trying to convince her to bury him. After three days she does accept the fact that he is dead and should be buried. The people begin to feel sorry for her. The only thing left to her is the house. Now she is alone and pauper. She becomes sick. When the town's people see her again, she has her hair cut, and looks sort of tragic and serene.

A new event, the paving of the sidewalks, brings over a new group of people. Among them a foreman, Homer Barron. He is a nice looking fellow. Soon he begins to court Miss Emily. She begins to go out with Homer Barron. The town's people are not at all pleased with Miss Emily's actions. They talk to the minister. She is approached about the matter, but with no results. The minister's wife writes to her relatives in Alabama. They come to visit and she has to deal with them.

For a while nothing happens. Then she goes to the Jeweler's and orders a man's toilet set in silver. Later she buys a complete outfit of man's clothes and a nightshirt. The people in town look at this and think that she and Homer Barron are going to get married.

The paving of the sidewalks is finished. Homer Barron leaves. The people think that he has gone home ahead to prepare for Miss Emily. Few days later he returns and he is seen entering the house. He isn't seen ever again. Miss Emily is seen after some time. She appears fat and her hair has grown gray.

When she is around forty, she puts up a studio for china painting. She gives lessons but as the pupils grow, she has to close it since the new generation isn't interested. This was her last attempt to socialize. She dies alone, in the big, old, moldy house. The people go to pay their respects. They act more out of curiosity than sadness.

The last unrevealed secret; a room which has been locked for forty years, is opened. The room is attired as if ready for a bride. A sense of dume fills it. A silver man's toilet pices are darkened by time. A collar and a tie remain on a dressing table. A suit carefully folded and a pair of shoes and worn socks, can be seen by a chair. The bed is occupied by a fleshless skeleton. It lies there in an embracing motion. The nightshirt and the rotting body are plastered to the bed. Dust covers everything. On the pillow beside him, can be seen the indentation of a head and on it a long strand of iron gray hair.

Analysis

The short story " A Rose for Emily", investigates Miss Emily's intimate life. She becomes what she is because of her father and what happens to her with Homer Barron. Her father never gave her the freedom of acting on her own. He deprived her of a boyfriend. Her boyfriend, Homer Barron, is also a big reason why she becomes secluded from life. She wants to marry him. He wants to pass the time, and as he states, he likes mem. Another relevant point of the story is the comparison that can be made between Miss Emily's life and the house. The house is in a state of decay just like Miss Emily's life.

Theme

The themes are: bitterness, resentment, generation gap, disillusionment and suppressed forbidden love.

Characters

Miss Emily Grierson—At first we see her as an old, small fat woman in black. She walks with a cane. Her skeleton is small but her body is obese. She looks bloated as if her body has been submerged in motionless water. Her eyes are small and lost in the fatness of her face. Her voice is dry and cold. She does things with pride. She is a bit eccentric. She does not move with time. She remains secluded in her own little world.

The father—He is stubborn. He is seen with a horsewhip. He feels that no one is good enough for his daughter. He has driven away all the young men who were interested in Miss Emily.

Homer Barron—He is a Yankee. He is big and dark. He has a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. He likes men. He isn't the "marrying man".

Colonel Sartoris—He is the mayor of the town contemporary of Miss Emily's father.

Judge Stevens—He is the mayor during Miss Emily's time. He is eighty years old.

Lady Wyatt—She is Miss Emily's great grand-mother.

The Negro—He is Miss Emily's servant. He is very faithful. He stays with her until she dies.

The town's people—They believe that Miss Emily is crazy.

Setting

The setting is Miss Emily's house. It is old, big, gloomy and decayed. It is filled with dust. It is located in the middle of a new growing section of the town. *Activities*

Questions for Comprehension

1. What is the time span of the short story?
2. Who is telling the story?
3. What has Colonel Sartoris done in relation to Miss Emily's father?
4. What conflict exists between Miss Emily and City Hall? Is it ever resolved?
5. At the first meeting with the towns-people, how is Miss Emily pictured?
6. It seems that Miss Emily is always having problems with rules and regulations. What is the problem which she has had thirty years prior to the tax conflict? How does the town deal with it?
7. How would you characterize Miss Emily's family?
8. When her father dies, why doesn't she want his body to be buried?
9. Who is the new man in Miss Emily's life? What kind of relationship develops between the two?
10. As the people of the town watch this relationship grow, how do they react to it?
11. Why are the towns-people always saying "poor Emily"?
12. Why does she buy arsenic?
13. What kind of man is Homer Barron?
14. What evidence is there that allows the people to say "They are Married."?
15. When Miss Emily is about forty, she opens a studio where she gives lessons in china-painting. As time moves on, what happens?
16. The last section of the story reveals Miss Emily's secret. What is this secret? Why did she kill Homer Barron?

Vocabulary

squarish	cupolas
spires	scrolled
encroached	coquettish
archaic	calligraphy
tarnished	easel
obese	bloated
pallid	hue
holt	vanquish
temerily	depreciation
pauper	insanity
tragic	serene
cabal	imperviousness
thwart	circumvent
fasten	virulent
impervious	inescapable
perverse	tranquil
macabre	sibilant
array	pall
monogram	tarnish
grimace	mute

Questions for Discussion

1. Is there evidence of a generation gap? Explain?
2. How does the relationship that existed between Miss Emily and her father influence her entire life? Is she able to get away from her father's ideals?
3. In the town and the people, we see a certain progression. Is it the same for Miss Emily? Explain?
4. Miss Emily is pitied by the people of the town, why? Quote evidence from the reading.
5. Why does Miss Emily kill Homer Barron? Do you think she should have gone to that extreme? Why? Why not?
6. What is the theme or themes of the story? Support your answer with evidence from the reading.
7. Who are the characters of this short story? What are the characteristics of each?
8. Why do you think the story is entitled "A Rose for Emily"?
9. What does the old house symbolize?

Topics for Research

- A. Write a short biography of Sherwood Anderson.
- B. The Sherwood Anderson's short story "The Egg", is a good example of symbolism. Choose another short story written by Sherwood Anderson which concentrates on symbolism and the underlined meaning within. Analyze it and point out its symbolic attributes.
- C. Write a short biography of William Faulkner. Comment on William Faulkner's writing characteristics.
- D. Choose another short story written by William Faulkner. Summarize it and point out the plot, the theme, the characters and the setting.
- E. Write a concise biography of Kate Chopin including also some of her literary works.
- F. Find another short story written by Kate Chopin. Analyze it. Point out the plot, the theme, the characters and the setting. Compare and contrast it with the short story read in class; "Désirée's Baby".

Note

Kate Chopin's short story "Désirée's Baby" is available at the office of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute.

Section B—Class: Italian III

Objectives

The main objective of this section is to expose the American students to some Italian writers and selections from their short story collections. The short stories chosen are representatives of the works of famous Italian authors. These offer the students a glimpse of Italian literature.

Secondly I am striving to increase students' vocabulary. Each short story is accompanied by a vocabulary list. The students will work with these words before reading the selection. Being familiar with the meaning of the vocabulary words it is easier to comprehend what is read.

Thirdly I want to expose the students to the Italian language, increase their reading comprehension and

improve their pronunciation. The reading is done in class by individual students. Immediately following the reading the students are asked to paraphrase it in Italian.

The last objective is to have the students analyze the short stories in terms of plot, theme, characters and setting. Through these analysis the students will demonstrate their knowledge of identifying the parts of a short story.

Strategies

The students will read the following short stories by representative Italian writers. "The Pot of Basil", Giovanni Boccaccio; "The Mother", Italo Svevo; "The She-Wolf", Giovanni Verga.

Each short story is available in Italian and English. To increase the students' exposure to the Italian language, the stories will be read in their original version and analyzed in Italian.

Each student is expected to read out loud in class. The reading will be paraphrased, orally, by the students. The plot, the theme, the characters and the setting will be analyzed and discussed.

* "The She-Wolf" by Giovanni Verga is available upon request from the Institute office.

Italo Svevo, "The Mother"

Plot

The story begins with an explicit description of the setting; a valley between two hills. Here located are two large houses. They are exactly the same, but the inhabitants have different fates. The gardens are the spots where the action of the story concentrates. In a corner, the chicks are talking about their experiences. The small chicks, recently born are very much interested in the life which they are living. These chicks have known joy and suffering from being in the egg. They know the importance of studying things carefully to see what is good and what is bad.

One of the chicks is not satisfied. He acknowledges the fact that they are fine, but points out that they don't have a mother. Another chick responds with the idea that the egg is the mother. The chick who has brought up the fact, envisioned a mother bigger than the garden, warm, satisfying and ready to protect them. A third voice is heard. This chick is the product of the same beginning. He has a wider beak and shorter legs. He is called the "bad-manner chick". Because of what he has witnessed, he says that when chicks have a mother they can't die. An older chick swears that he will find a mother. His name is Curra.

Curra gets out of his garden. He finds a vast open space. He goes through the hedge of the other garden and finds himself in a garden similar to his home. As he looks around the same population is present. There is also another creature bigger than everybody else and with the aspect of a ruler. Curra notices that she shields and protects the small chicks. Immediately he calls it "mother". Hungry for her love and protection, Curra runs to her. Eager to obey, he eats a worm which she has dug for her chicks. "Poor Curra". The hen is on him instantly. He thinks she wants to caress him, but as he feels the sharp beak tear at him, he realizes that his presumptions are wrong. Curra runs away.

Soon after Curra finds himself among grown companions. They are all talking about their mothers. He looks and says that his mother is a "revolting creature". He wishes he had never known her.

Analysis

The symbolism of the story is present everywhere. The gardens are enclosed limited spaces. Some of the chicks are satisfied, some are not. Others are curious to see what is outside, just like Curra. The same curiosity is found in man. The symbol of the mother is very important. Everyone seeks out a mother. The mother is a synonym of comfort, love, understanding and protection. All these push Curra to seek the long wanted mother. He finds her, but by intruding on her, he is chased away.

The last paragraph leaves us with an ambiguous feeling. Are mothers all the same? What do they represent? Negative answers to the above questions leave Curra with a pessimistic idea about “Mother”.

Theme

The themes of this short story are: Protection, wanted love, exploration of the unknown, disappointment and learning about the realities of life.

Characters

The mother—It is a very symbolic figure. She represents love, protection, warmth and at the same time disappointment.

Curra—Curra is a curious, eager, childish and unsure chick.

The chicks—The chicks are the crowd. This crowd is a combination of mixed emotions and characters.

Setting

The settings are the two gardens behind the two houses. The settings can be anywhere.

Activities

Questions for Comprehension

1. What is the setting given at the beginning?
2. What is the population of the gardens?
3. What is the topic of discussion among the inhabitants of the first introduced garden? Why?
4. The chicks are dealing with the idea of a “mother”, how do they explain the necessity of a mother?
5. Who is Curra?
6. Why did Curra want a mother?
7. As soon as Curra is out of his garden, what is he faced with?
8. As Curra get into the other garden, what does he discover?
9. What misunderstandings does Curra have about the newly found mother?
10. As soon as Curra decides to become a part of the mother’s group, what happens?
11. What happens to Curra? How does it change his feelings about “mother”?

Vocabulary

radiant mortar
orchard plunge
down gratitude
to speak up impeccable
exhaustion gormless-looking
poultry-yard strong
resolute bound
escape dazed
immense bewilderment
qualms swarming
crowd lording
down powerful
chief warmth
delight majestic
submit helpless
claws bare
enraptured idiots
worm caresses
jabs beak
belly tremendous
cheeping foliage
intruder numbly
disdainfully nostalgia
dreadful revolting creature

Questions for Discussion

1. What symbolism can we see within the short story?
2. Compare the chicks, the hen and the setting to man. What possible symbolism can we see in respect to man?
3. Who are the characters? What does Curra represent? How has Curra changed from the beginning to the end?
4. What is the theme of the story? Support your answer with examples from the reading.
5. What are the strong points of this story?

Giovanni Boccaccio, "The Pot of Basil"

Plot

This is the fifth story of the fourth day of *The Decameron*. The story is told by Filomena. It is about three brothers and a sister. They are merchants. They hire Lorenzo, a young man from Pisa, to work in one of their establishments. Lorenzo is very handsome and Elizabeth likes him. As soon as Lorenzo realizes that Elizabeth likes him he does his best to win her affection.

They both fall in love. Secretly they consummate their passion. They try to keep it a secret, but one night Elizabeth is seen by her older brother as she enters Lorenzo's bedroom. Her brother is greatly affected by the discovery. He spends the whole night trying to figure out how to approach the problem. The following morning, he talks to his brothers. They decide that they should take care of the matter secretly to avoid a scandal.

One day they make believe they are going on a pleasure trip. When they are out of sight, they attack Lorenzo, kill him and bury his body leaving no trace. When Lorenzo is nowhere to be found, Elizabeth asks her brothers. Her continuous asking annoys her brothers, who are very well aware of Lorenzo's fate.

One night she dreams about him. In her sleep he tells her the entire story pointing out where he is buried. The following day she searches for him. When she arrives at the spot described by Lorenzo, she digs and finds the body. She weeps for a long time. She cuts the head and puts it in a pot. Covers it with soil and plants basil.

The constant crying makes her lose her beauty. The brothers are concerned. They find out about the pot. They prohibit her to cry, but she doesn't listen. Finally they take the pot away. She weeps so much that she gets sick.

The brothers are so taken by the sister's love for the pot of basil that they decide to examine the soil. When they do, they discover Lorenzo's head. They bury it again and leave Messina. Elizabeth keeps on weeping and finally dies.

Analysis

The short story "The Pot of Basil" concentrates on the strong emotions and passion of Lorenzo and Elizabeth, Their love is terminated by the social convictions of Elizabeth's brothers, This sentiment destroys Elizabeth's life.

Theme

The theme of this short story is: All for love. Elizabeth does everything for Lorenzo's love.

Characters

Elizabeth—She is gracious and beautiful, She loves Lorenzo. She dies for his love. She is the victim of her brother's social convictions.

Lorenzo—He is from Pisa. He is handsome, He loves Elizabeth. He is killed by her brothers.

The brothers—They are rich merchants. They are traitors. They ruin Elizabeth's life.

Filomena—She is the narrator. She is a member of the group of narrators gathered to tell the stories of *The Decameron*.

Setting

The story takes place in the town of Messina. At the time of the short story, it was a small town still attached to strong moral ideals, Messina is in Sicily.

Activities

Questions for Comprehension

1. Who is telling the story?
2. Who is Elizabeth?
3. Who is Lorenzo? How does he meet Elizabeth?
4. What kind of relationship develops between Elizabeth and Lorenzo?
5. How are they discovered?
6. How do her brothers take care of the matter?
7. How does Elizabeth react to Lorenzo's disappearance?
8. How does Elizabeth find out where Lorenzo is?
9. What does Elizabeth do with Lorenzo's head?
10. How does she treat the pot of basil?
11. What happens to the pot of basil?
12. Why is the pot of basil taken away by her brothers, and what do they discover?
13. What happens to Elizabeth at the end?

Vocabulary

merchants gracious handsomely proportioned
beautiful establishment determined
sister talking pretending
sad pallid-looking dishevelled
decomposed marjoram basil

Questions for Discussion

1. Who are the characters of the story? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?
2. Are Elizabeth's brothers concerned with social appearances? What evidence is there in the story?
3. What is the theme? Explain?
4. Why does Elizabeth go to the extreme of cutting Lorenzo's head? Does this action contribute to her character's development? Explain?
5. According to you what should have happened to the brothers?
6. If you were Elizabeth, what would you have done? Why?
7. What symbolic significance can be attached to the pot of basil?

Appendix—Section B

Topics for Research

- A. Write a short biography of Italo Svevo. Concentrate also on Italo Svevo's relevant points in his narrative. Could his themes be called universal?
- B. Find another short story by Italo Svevo. Read it. Summarize it. Analyze it pointing out the plot, the theme, the setting and the characters.
- C. Write a short biography of Giovanni Boccaccio.
- D. *The Decameron* is probably one of the most famous books all over the world. Briefly explain why Giovanni Boccaccio decided to write this book? What is the technical set up of the book? and What are the themes explored?
- E. *The Decameron* is introduced by a preface. What are the basic points of this preface? What historical insights do we get from this preface?
- F. Write a short biography of Giovanni Verga.
- G. Giovanni Verga's writings are classified as belonging to a literary current called "Realism". What are the basic thematic points of this current?
- H. Many of Giovanni Verga's short stories treat the theme of the "Vinti" the vanquished ones. People are vanquished either by destiny, greediness, social convictions, religion or other uncontrollable forces. Choose a short story and explore this theme in detail.
- I. Read one of the following short stories by Giovanni Verga: "Cavalleria Rusticana", "Yeli", "Nedda". Analyze it pointing out the plot, the theme, the characters and the setting. Compare it to "The She-Wolf" read in class.

Note

Giovanni Verga's "The She-Wolf" is available at the office of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute.

Lesson Plan #1

Objectives: To give the students an explanation of short stories and introduce the basic parts of a short story.

To introduce the students to the vocabulary related to Sherwood Anderson's story "The Egg".

Briefly discuss the elements of the short story. List these elements on the board. Hand out copies of the unit's section "Parts of a Short Story". Discuss the definitions given. Hand out the vocabulary related to the short story "The Egg". Allow the students to find synonyms for those words.

Assignment Let the students use each vocabulary word in a sentence.

Lesson Plan #2

Objectives: Increase students' reading comprehension.

Let the students discuss the reading. Point out the plot, the theme, the characters and the setting.

In class allow the students to read Sherwood Anderson's short story "The Egg". Paraphrase the reading. Discuss the basic parts of the story. Point out the theme, the plot, the characters and the setting.

Assignment Hand out the questions for comprehension. Let the students answer them.

Lesson Plan #3

Objectives: Have the students share their research done in relation to the questions on *The Decameron* in the appendix to Section B.

To increase the students' pronunciation and comprehension of the Italian language, read the story "The Pot of Basil".

Let each student read the short research paper compiled on Giovanni Boccaccio. Discuss the book and its intention. Let the students read the story "The Pot of Basil". Paraphrase it and discuss it.

Assignment Hand out the questions for comprehension included in the unit.

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These books are used by students and teachers.

Roger B. Goodman. *World-Wide Short Stories*. New York, N.Y.: Globe Book Company, Inc., 1966.

This book is ideal for exposing the students to world wide short stories. Each short story is prefaced with an explorative comment.

Each short story is followed by sets of activities. The introduction includes some very good points about short stories development and history.

Philip McFarland, Linda Konichek, Jeanne King, William Jamison, Morse Peckham. *Explorations in Literature* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Literature Series, 1975.

It is an anthology used in the New Haven School System in the high schools. It includes short stories, poems and dramas. The photography and reproduction of famous works of art is extraordinary.

David J. Burrows, Frederick R. Lapedes, John T. Shawcross. *Myths and Motifs in Literature* . New York: The Free Press a Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1973.

It includes literary masterpieces from all over. The readings are clustered by themes. It also has a selected bibliography at the end.

James E. Miller Jr., Robert Hayden, Robert O'Neal. *The Human Condition-Literature Written in the English Language* . Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1974.

It is a collection of American and English short stories and poetry. It contains biographies about the authors and a list of literary terms. Both the poems and the short stories are gathered by themes. Some of the themes are: guilt, the shape of the heart, faces of nature.

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Here we have a group of poems, short stories and drama. They deal with identity. It also includes literary terms and biographies on the authors.

Albert K. Ridout, Jesse Stuart. *Short Stories for Discussion*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.

It is basically a collection of American short stories. There are questions at the end of each story which could be used for class discussion.

H. C. Schweikert. *Short STories* . New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1934.

It includes short stories from many parts of the world. At the beginning it has a section on the definition of a short story, the ingredients of a short story, types of short stories and an historical sketch of the short story. Each author's biography is found at the beginning of each reading. Activities for the students include: questions, subjects for composition and a list of other stories by the same author.

M. Edmund Speare. *A Pocket Book of Short Stories* . New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1941.

It is a small book. It has American, English and Continental short stories. It doesn't have any listed activities for students.

Robert J. Dixon. *Bret Harte's Outcasts of Poker Flat , Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Stories* . New York, N.Y.: Regents Publishing Company, Inc., 1973.

It is a simplified adopted version of Bret Harte's short stories mentioned in the title. The vocabulary range is 1600 words. It has exercises for conversation and vocabulary. It contains black and white drawings picturing the story. It is good for a low level reading class.

Jack Norman. *Stories to Teach and Delight* . New York, N.Y.: Amsco School Publications, Inc., 1977.

The stories are adopted for low level reading students. At the end of each story there are exercises dealing with comprehension, vocabulary and general discussion about the reading.

Elizabeth Scheld. *Short Stories II* . New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961.

It contains works of J. Steinbeck, W. Faulkner, O. Henry, G. De Maupassant, E. A. Poe, etc.. There are also various activities included at the end of each short story.

Dorothy Danielson, Rebecca Hayden. *Reading in English for Students of English as a Second Language* . EnglewoodCliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961.

A collection of short stories designed for students of English as a Second Language. It also has a section which encompasses exercises related to the readings. These exercises concentrate on vocabulary, comprehension and discussion.

Marjorie B. Smiley, Richard Corbin, John J. Marcatante. *Stories in Song and Verse* . New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966.

It is a collection of short stories, ballads and verses. There are also stories translated in verses.

Hannah Shenton. *Stories of Love and Devotion* . New York, N.Y.: A Hearthstone Book Carlton Press, Inc., 1973.

These short stories are easily written. No authors are mentioned.

R. V. Cassill. *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction* —Second Edition. Shorter. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978.

A very well constructed anthology of short stories including American, British and world wide notorious literary works.

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It is the complete works of Giovanni Boccaccio written in Italian. Its well designed introduction gives the reader a very clear view of the masterpiece and its literary value.

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Its introduction is very clear. Each short story is preceded by a short biography about its author.

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It contains many of Pirandello's most famous short stories. The introduction concentrates on biographical data and themes of his works. Each short story is introduced by a critical essay.

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A true treasure of Italian literature. It deals with each century separately. It points out the literary trends, most famous writers and their works.

Giovanni Verga. *Novelle* a cura di Piero Nardi. Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1974.

It illustrates Verga's short stories. The short stories are footnoted by notes explaining passages from the reading.

Michele Cantarella, Paul L. Richards. *Dieci Novelle Contemporanee* . New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1956.

It deals with many authors and many themes. At the end, it also has a section containing exercises, notes and vocabulary.

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