



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1983 Volume V: Drama

The American Dream and Experience in Literature

Curriculum Unit 83.05.01
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The American Dream unit is appropriate for College English 3, College English 4, Basic English 3 and 4 classes. The three parts of the unit will take one marking period or eight weeks. The first part of the trilogy on the American dream, American values and the American experience will require one week and will consist of reading pertinent essays from American Literature. Next, the second week will be set aside for viewing American paintings, listening to “*America: An Epic Rhapsody in Three Parts for Orchestra*” by Ernest Bloch and reading stories and poems which exemplify the themes of the unit. The last part of the trilogy will take six weeks and will include reading, performing and doing related activities from *Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller, *The American Dream* by Edward Albee and *A Soldier’s Play* by Charles Fuller.

When beginning the unit, students will write an essay about their interpretation of the American dream. What does the idea mean to them and why? How can their ideas or values be achieved in society? When we complete the three parts of the unit, students will write an extended essay expressing how their concept of the American dream has changed, how Arthur Miller, Edward Albee and Charles Fuller have defined it in their respective plays. I will suggest some of the following points to be included in the essay: What are the goals Americans should strive to achieve? What are the important assumptions of American society? What happens when a dream is unfulfilled? What is the nature of your own dreams? How can you attain your dreams? What aspects of The American dream do Arthur Miller, Edward Albee and Charles Fuller express in their respective plays?

The first week of the unit will include the reading of five essays expressing concepts about the American dream, the American experience and American values. “This Is an American” by Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, written in 1782 will be read first. This essay expresses ideas about the 18th century American character as “a new man who acts upon new principles” and as one who has left behind old prejudices and traits and has taken on a new way of life. ¹ Then, students will read “Of Individualism in Democratic Countries” from *Democracy in America* (1835) by Alexis de Tocqueville. ² In 1832, the French aristocrat and government official traveled across the United States for nine months and recorded his observations in his book. This is a thoughtful analysis of the American character and experience which can be compared to de Crevecoeur’s essay for similarities and differences of ideas. Next, students will read Alfred Ferguson’s essay about “Dreams and Goals” in which he explains that a dream is a vision that we receive from our imaginations while a goal is something exact and precise that can be achieved by deliberate effort. Dreams can be changed to goals if we imagine them precisely and work to make them real. From the earliest times of the American experience there was a wide discrepancy between what we imagined was the American dream and what we were able to

realize. Nevertheless, “the dream of America as a land of opportunity for a new way of life” has persisted ³ Morse Peckham’s essays, “Ideas and The Arts” and “Music” from *Themes in American Literature* will be assigned after Ferguson’s “Dreams and Goals”. The reading of the essays will be assigned for homework, followed by a class discussion. In the essay “Ideas and The Arts” Peckham provides pictures with commentaries on American paintings which relate to the American dream or experience themes. Also, the pictures will provide inspiration for and links to the various literary selections. For example, one painting, Edward Hicks’s “Peaceable Kingdom”, depicts many creatures and humans living together peacefully. The Quaker, Edward Hicks was inspired by William Penn’s treaty with the Indians which supposedly established coexistence between the settlers and the Indians. One aspect of the American dream was the idea that America was a Garden of Eden without hatred or war. ⁴ At this time, we will attend an art exhibit of American paintings at the Yale Art Museum and students will be assigned to bring to class pictures, prints or paintings that illustrate the American dream or experience theme. Finally, students will read the essay, “Music” by Morse Peckham which discusses the American dream and the American promise. He tells about Ernest Bloch, a musician, who was born in Switzerland and in 1916 immigrated to America. Bloch wrote a musical composition, *America: An Epic Rhapsody in Three Parts for Orchestra*. “This symphony has been written in love for this country, in Reverence for its Past, in Faith in its Future. It is dedicated to the memory of Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman whose vision has upheld its inspiration.” ⁵ One day will be set aside to listen to the classical recording, to interpret the music and to discuss Peckham’s essay on “Music.”

To gain more contemporary insights about the American experience, the following stories and poems from *American Literature and Themes in American Literature* will be included:

“I Hear America Singing” by Walt Whitman.

“Burning the Christmas Greens” by William Carlos Williams.

“Winter Dreams” by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

“The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” by Katherine Ann Porter.

“Let America Be America Again” by Langston Hughes. (All of the above are from *Themes in American Literature*) ⁶

“The Prison” by Bernard Malamud.

“Did you Ever Dream Lucky?” by Ralph Ellison.

“I Am a Black Woman” by Mari Evans.

“Dead Boy” by John Crowe Ransom.

“Dreaming America” by Joyce Carol Oates.

“Dream of Rebirth” by Roberta Hill. (All of the above are from *American Literature*.) ⁷

The reading of the above will take one week. From the list, students will choose six selections and show how each writer expresses or defines the theme of the American dream. The authors of *Themes in American Literature* have suggested an assignment that will stimulate discussion and prime the pumps: Thomas Wolfe has written, "I believe that we are lost here in America, . . . I think that the true discovery of America is before us. I think the true fulfillment of our spirit, of our people, of our mighty and immortal land is yet to come." ⁸ The teacher will take students through a brainstorming discussion, prewriting, writing and rewriting stages of a composition analyzing Wolfe's statement and what his specific vision for contemporary America is.

Objectives for Drama Unit

1. To explore the themes of "The American Dream" and "American Way of Life" in depth from many different angles and points of view in short stories, essays, poems and three contemporary plays.
2. To understand what implications for contemporary American society *Death of a Salesman*, *The American Dream* and *A Soldier's Play* have.
3. To help students explore and understand the intentions, characterizations and meanings of the three plays.
4. To encourage students to analyze and interpret the development of the main characters.
5. To understand dramatic elements such as symbols, flashbacks, figurative language, foreshadowing, and irony and to understand how they are used in the context of the plays.
6. To enrich students', vocabulary and to encourage *them* to use the vocabulary of the theater such as: climax, exposition, melodrama, props, atmosphere, dialogue, fantasy, setting, tragedy, stage directions, tempo, and theme. Students should understand how the vocabulary is used in each of the plays.
7. To improve writing skills by providing a variety of writing assignments related to the literary selections and plays.
8. To help students become aware of the interrelations of the arts by using records, tapes, slides, paintings, filmstrips and films which relate to the main theme of American life.
9. To improve "literary analysis skills" and comprehension by understanding cause and effect, the differences between fantasy and reality and past and present.
10. To provide students with a springboard to choose a concept of the American dream for themselves.

The third part of the unit will take approximately six weeks in order to explore fully the three plays and will

start with *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. It won the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for the best play of 1949.

*Death of a Salesman*⁹ gives different insights and different meanings to the American dream of success and shows what can happen when the dream is false, distorted or unfulfilled. The American dream was in serious trouble for Willy Loman and his family because of his fervent pursuit of success, wealth and status. He believed in the myth that success was based on popularity, personality and personal attractiveness. "Be liked and you will never want." (p.33) and "Riding on a smile and a shoeshine," and ". . . personality always wins the day." (p. 65) are the deceptions that Willy and contemporary American society are preoccupied with.

Willy Loman, a 63 year old traveling salesman returns home to Brooklyn exhausted and in a state of mental anguish. He can't concentrate, he is unable to drive safely, he talks to himself and he complains of strange thoughts. One of his most vehement complaints is about his son Biff who was very popular in high school, an outstanding athlete and had three scholarships to choose from. Yet, he has not found a successful job and has bummed around with numerous jobs since he left high school without a diploma. Another cause of Willy's mental anguish is his inability to secure a desk job in the New York office after thirty-six years as a salesman on the road. Willy will be a challenge for students to analyze because of the complex and contradictory nature of his personality. In the early part of the play Willy exclaims, "The trouble is Biff's lazy, goddamit: Later he says, "There's one thing about Biff—he's not lazy." (p. 16) Also Willy is contradictory when he tells Biff how to approach Oliver for the loan to buy a ranch: "A business suit, and talk as little as possible, and don't crack any jokes." Later he advises, "Walk in with a big laugh. Don't look worried. Start off with a couple of your good stories to lighten things up." (pp. 64-65). Finally, Willy has trouble distinguishing the past from the present, reconciling his contradictory feelings about Biff and he is trapped between two sets of opposing values.¹⁰ There is the brutality, cut-throat competitiveness and cruelty of the business world and there is Willy's desire to be "well-liked." He does not understand that one can't be well-liked in the business world and that "respect, comradeship and gratitude" (p. 81) which he admires from Dave Singleman can't be reconciled with Ben's advice to "never fight fair with a stranger."¹¹ (p.49)

Alan B. Howes has presented some helpful and successful guidelines for teaching *Death of a Salesman* which can be modified and adapted for different levels and classes.

1. Be selective in teaching the play.¹² It has been suggested by Tom Whitaker to have the students read the play once, take notes on the characters, plot and action, then read it a second time, looking for dialogue and exposition "that confirms, complicates or . . . questions" their first interpretation. Then read it "as an actor who has been assigned a character"—either Willy, Linda, Biff or Happy. The third reading could be done in class to discuss the most significant speeches "and to explain . . . the character's feelings, thoughts-and intentions."¹³ To enhance the class reading students will listen to the recording of the play or watch a film of it. Also, students will select significant scenes and act them out with props and clothing in class.
2. Place important passages or scenes side by side.¹⁴ Use several brief scenes such as the one where Linda is trying to mediate the argument between Willy and Biff (p. 15); Happy and Biff are discussing their father's driving (p. 19); some of the contradictions in Willy's mind (pp. 16,64-65, 34,36); Bernard is warning Willy that Biff better study (pp. 32,33); Willy's fantasy about his funeral (p. 126), the real funeral (p. 137) and Dave Singleman's funeral (p. 81). As students read or act out the passages, urge them to imagine the setting, understand and express the dialogue

and interpret the stage directions.

3. Move beyond the stereotypes in discussing the characters. ¹⁵ Although the minor characters, Ben, Howard Wagner, Miss Francis, Bill Oliver and Woman in Boston may be stereotypical and symbolical, the major characters should be discussed in their contradictions, complexity and individuality. Willy may be partly unrealistic, irrational, confused, superficial and mentally disturbed, but these stereotypes do not fully interpret his “unique” plight nor the importance “of the tragedy.” ¹⁶

4. In helping the students to understand the play, urge them to move from what happens to why it happens. ¹⁷ Since the shifting back and forth from reality to fantasy and past and present may be bewildering to students, help them understand whether the dialogue takes place in the real world or in Willy’s mind. Present a list of all the scenes in the play after the first reading and review with your students whether they happened in the past or present, in reality or in fantasy in Willy’s mind. In addition, focus on “Willy and his relationships to other people and to his society . . .” ¹⁸

5. Lead students to see the controversy over the various interpretations of the play by reading the reviews and criticism which are reprinted in Gerald Weale’s edition of *Death of a Salesman*. For example, in “The Success Dream On The American Stage”, Harold Clurman has written that “. . . There are two versions of the American dream. The historical . . . dream is the promise of a land of freedom with opportunity and equality for all.” However since 1900, the American dream has come to mean a dream of financial success. “. . . The death of Arthur Miller’s salesman is symbolic of the breakdown of the whole concept of salesmanship in our society.” ¹⁹ Other critics such as Robert Garland, William Hawkins and John Mason Brown view Willy’s downfall as his personal problem and not that of all salesmen as Clurman has interpreted it. The critics who disagree with Clurman believe that Willy’s destruction was caused by his own limitations, his lack of competence and his false values which were not those of American society. After reading the play, students will discuss the various interpretations and conclude in a thoughtful and coherent paper whether Willy’s plight and tragedy result from contemporary American society or from his own personality and character or from both. Also, after students view the play, they will read Eudora Welty’s “Death of a Traveling Salesman” Tennessee William’s “The Last of My Solid Gold Watches” and compare Willy with R. J. Bowman or Charlie Colton.

The following two classroom activities from *Death of a Salesman* will involve students more fully in the play and help them to increase their appreciation of it. The pantomiming activity will help set the stage for understanding or dramatizing parts of the play since the scenes deal with some of the major ideas of *Death of a Salesman*. The literary analysis activity requires students to think about the quotations and discuss their criticism of American society. This is a follow-up discussion activity best used after the play is viewed or read.

Pantomiming Activity Pantomime A helpful activity to develop characters and scenes and to impose concentration, coordination and expressiveness is through the use of pantomime. Use your complete body in every action. Concentrate in order to make each aspect of your action very

clear, vivid and exact. Perform each of the following activities from *Death of a Salesman* using only imaginary objects. Try to make your audience see what object you are using and concentrate on doing the movement and using the object as if it were real!

1. Willy Loman returning early from his unsuccessful business trip and dropping his two large sample cases. He is exhausted. He unlocks the door, lets his cases down and feels the soreness of his palms. (p. 12)
2. Willy alone in the kitchen removes a quart of milk from the refrigerator. He talks to himself, pours a glass of milk and faintly smiles at a kitchen chair. (pp. 27, 28)
3. Linda mending a pair of nylon stockings. (p. 39)
4. Coming to visit Willy, Uncle Ben is carrying a suitcase and umbrella. He looks all around and at his watch. He inspects the room. (p. 44)
5. Howard Wagner brings in a typewriter table with a taping machine on it and plugs it in. He continues to play with it. (p. 76)
6. Stanley, the waiter enters, carrying a table while Happy is carrying two chairs. Stanley puts the table down, takes the chairs from Happy and puts them at the table. (p. 98)
7. Happy carrying a bunch of roses. He walks into the kitchen and looks around for his mother. He does not see her. He freezes when he sees her. Happy retreats to the kitchen looking scared. (p. 122)
8. Biff kneeling slowly picks up the roses off the floor. Then he throws them into the wastebasket. (p. 124)
9. Willy with a flashlight, a hoe and seed packages fixes the hoe. Then he measures an area with his foot while planting carrots, beets and lettuce. He talks with an imaginary Ben about suicide and his funeral. (pp. 125, 126)
10. Linda at the grave of her husband places some flowers there, sits back and “stares at the grave.” (p. 139)

Literary Analysis Activity

From careful reading and perceptive viewing of *Death of a Salesman*, it is evident that Arthur Miller not only indicts the shallowness and weaknesses of Willy Loman, but also indicts many weaknesses of 20th century America society. Explain the broader social criticism of each of the following quotations:

1. "As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile seeming home. An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality." (p.11)
2. "Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it." (p. 15)
3. "The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air The grass don't grow, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard." (p. 17)
4. "I don't know what the hell I'm workin' for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment—all alone My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I'm lonely." (p. 23)
5. ". . . you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest is the man who gets ahead." (p. 33)
6. "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way." (p.49)
7. I'm always in a race with the junkyard: I just finished paying for the car and its on its last legs. The refrigerator consumes belts . . . They time those things so when you finally paid for them they're used up." (p. 73)
8. "Business is definitely business" (p. 80) "The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell." (p. 97)
9. "Be liked and you will never want." (p. 33)
10. "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit!" (p. 82)

The American Dream

The second play, *The American Dream*, a long one-act play, made its debut at the York Playhouse, New York City on January 24, 1961. ²⁰ It suggests Albee's influence and association with the European Theater of the Absurd. Many plays of the Absurdist convention were produced in France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Switzerland and Great Britain. ²¹ Plays of this style express despair and disillusionment and suggest that there is no meaning, purpose or progress in contemporary life. This was a prevalent feeling in France and Britain after World War II. ²² The movement in the United States probably resulted from Russian space accomplishments racial conflicts, President Kennedy's murder, and the Vietnam War. ²³ Other characteristics of the Absurdist convention are: an expression of absurdity and futility; ²⁴ a strong sense of irony and satire; caricatured or stereotyped characters who personify certain ideas; meaningless or empty conversation and manners; disparate or inconsistent action and many symbolical objects.

The American Dream is set in a middle-class American living room with three main characters, Mommy, Daddy and Grandma. Edward Albee bitterly satirizes the American family, "The American Dream" and the "American Way of Life". In his Preface he writes: "The play is an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation

and vacuity; . . . a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peechy-keen.”²⁵

The play will arouse students’ interests because of its bitterly satirical tone, its psychological insights, and its outrageous bickering characters, whom students will certainly not want to identify with. Also, students will enjoy the humor of Mommy’s shopping expedition for the beige hat, Mommy and Grandma continually insulting each other, the arrival of Mrs. Barker who removes her dress and Mamma’s cutting off of the adopted son’s genitals. Finally, the play raises questions that will stimulate the most jaded student such as: What is wrong with Mommy and Daddy’s relationship? What Absurdist devices, conventions and techniques does Albee make use of? What is the relationship between Mommy and Grandma? What kind of people are they? Why do Mommy and Grandma insult and attack each other so cruelly? Do Grandma’s character and behavior seem appropriate for a woman her age? Who or what does the visitor, Mrs. Barker represent? What happened to the “unsatisfactory child” and why? Who is the Young Man who knocks on the door? Who or what does he represent? What is the reason for Mrs. Barker and the Young Man in the play? Is there any plot development? What does the play say about the American dream? Do you agree or disagree with Albee’s concept. Why or why not?

The following biographical information will be presented in a lecture, as an introduction to *The American Dream*. The circumstances and background of Edward Albee’s life will surely engage student’s interests. He was born in Washington, D.C. on March 12, 1928. When he was only two weeks old, he was adopted by millionaires, Reed and Francis Albee.²⁶ The February 1963, edition of Show magazine in the article “Who isn’t Afraid of Edward Albee?” (p. 83) stated that his early life was very affluent. He had many “servants, tutors, riding lessons, winters in Miami, summers sailing on the Sound”, a fantastic wardrobe and many visits to the theater in a Rolls Royce. During his school years, he was not a very successful student. He was either transferred or dismissed from Rye Country Day School, Laurenceville, a preparatory school, and Valley Forge Military Academy. Then he settled more comfortably at Choate where he started writing, reading extensively and publishing poems, short stories and a one-act play in *Schism*, the Choate Literary Magazine.²⁷ In 1947 after two years at Trinity College in Hartford, he left to write for a music program on WNYC radio. From 1948–1958 with the financial help of a trust fund from his grandmother and working at various jobs, he was able to live independently in Greenwich Village.²⁸ In 1958, Albee wrote his first important play, *The Zoo Story* in three weeks. Through a long route, it reached a theatre in Berlin on September 28, 1959 where it was enthusiastically received.²⁹ The German success opened doors for Albee in New York. Soon with the production of *The Zoo Story* Off-Broadway in 1960, Albee became a promising new American playwright. In three years Albee evolved from a playwright who couldn’t find an American producer for *The Zoo Story* to very high critical and audience esteem in major American and European cities. C.W.E. Bigsby has written that Edward Albee has been often “misunderstood, misrepresented, over-praised, denigrated, and dismissed. He has received much recognition for his earlier plays and much negative criticism for his later ones. Although his reputation has declined recently, “Albee has brought to the theater . . . a magnificent command of language, a control of rhythm and tone . . . and a sensitivity to dramatic tradition . . . particularly . . . European dramatists.”³⁰ Some critics consider Edward Albee one of the most important playwrights of this century.

The following guidelines in teaching *The American Dream* should help students increase their understanding of, involvement with and experience of the play.

1. “The staging and production” of brief scenes of a play enhance and give insights to its meaning.³¹ Reading a play is a different activity than reading a novel or essay. Students should

keep in mind that drama is intended to be produced. In order to help students imagine the scene where the action takes place, this exercise will be used before starting the dramatization of the play. One student will read the description of the stage setting out loud (p. 57) while other students will write down their answers to the following questions in their notebooks:

Where does the play take place?

How is the room furnished?

Where do the doors lead to?

Where does the archway lead to?

Is there anything in the foreground?

What kind of lighting should be used?

What kind of atmosphere or impression does the setting make?

What kind of music would you choose for the setting?

The American Dream has only five characters, all of whom are stereotypes and damaged in some ways. I will ask the students to gain as much insight as they can into each character's actions, motivations, emotional natures and relationships when they read the play. They should focus on the language, activities and objects associated with each character. I will assign the first reading for homework. Then groups of students will select several scenes, memorize the script and prepare to act them out before the class using props and costumes. The dramatizations will enhance their previous reading of the play.

2. Attention should be given to dramatic techniques which contribute to the understanding of character.³² I will ask the students to try to see the gestures, facial expressions, movements on stage and clothes of the characters while reading the script. I will choose and juxtapose several scenes from *An American Dream* such as the introductory one where Mommy and Daddy are seated in armchairs making small talk when she tells about her experience shopping for a hat; the scene where Grandma appears and tells about her daughter wanting to get rid of her; the scene when Mrs. Barker arrives and Mommy asks her to sit down and take off her dress; the scene where Grandma tells Mrs. Barker the story of Mommy and Daddy's dead child; and the arrival of the Young Man, the personification of the American Dream. I will have students dramatically read each scene, interpreting the lines and following the stage directions. Then students will study, rehearse, memorize the dialogue and act out the scenes. Several couples or groups of students, whichever is needed for the scene will act out the same scenes to show how they could be interpreted and played in different ways. Afterwards the class will discuss the different interpretations, characterizations and resultant meaning.

To aid in close reading and to stimulate writing, I will assign the following exercise. Imagine that you are a psychiatrist. You must write an extensive report about one of your patients: Mommy, Daddy, Grandma, Mrs. Barker or the Young Man. Express your ideas, thoughts and conclusions about the behavior of one of the characters. What is the relationship of this character to others? What do you think will happen to this character in the future?

Another activity which will involve the students in judging the characters will be done after the reading or acting out of the play. Write the name of the character next to the words which describe him or her.

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|------------------|---|
| 1. Mommy | A Detached, money-hungry,
handsome, sexy, muscular |
| 2. Daddy | B Demanding, tyrannical,
domineering, predatory, aggressive |
| 3. Grandma | C Enigmatic, complacent, insincere |
| 4. Mrs. Barker | D Outspoken, caustic, mean, witty,
funny, complaining |
| 5. The Young Man | E Useless, ineffective, weak, spiritless,
synical, acquiescent |
| 6. The Dead Twin | F Wild, sensitive, resentful,
unconquerable. |

A Soldiers' Play

Finally, *A Soldiers' Play* by Charles Fuller, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1982, will be dramatically read. The play opened in New York City at Theater Four, performed by the Negro Ensemble Company on November 26, 1981. The play relates to the American experience theme in that it is about the nature of self-hate, the conflict between blacks and whites, the effects of racism, and the black soldiers' aspirations to improve their status in the civilian world. "It is also a play about relations between northerners and southerners and officers and enlisted men." ³³

A Soldier's Play is the teacher's trump card for any mature junior or senior class of basic, college or honor's students. Its dramatic situation is exciting: A black Tech/Sergeant Vernon C. Waters has been killed while in a drunken stupor. His last words, "They still hate you" (p. 8) reverberate through the microcosm of the United States Army at Fort Neal, Louisiana in 1944. Students' interests will be further aroused as they probe the meaning of the Sergeant's last statement. Almost all the dozen characters go beyond black and white stereotypes and are presented individually, from Sergeant Waters through Captain Davenport. The only two who aren't are the bigoted, white officers, Lieutenant Byrd and Captain Wilcox. Both black and white students will be able to identify with many of the characters, especially with Sergeant Waters who tries to achieve status and esteem by imitating others, the fairminded investigator, Captain Davenport and the guitar playing, blues-singing, fun-loving Private C.J. Memphis.

The play's themes are stimulating and compelling, such as the effects of racism on blacks and whites; the issues of "good versus evil" and "guilt versus innocence"; the causes and effects of self-hatred and blacks' aspirations for a better life. Added to the racial and psychological insights is the historical accuracy of the segregated situation of blacks in the United States Army of World War II. Students will be impressed with

Charles Fuller's realistic portrayal of the officers and enlisted men. He will convince students that complex and contradictory motives caused C.J.'s and Sergeant Water's deaths as well as Peterson's imprisonment for murder.

I will assign parts to students for reading aloud, pantomiming and dramatizing. Several students will read the scene with Peterson, Taylor, Ellis and Cobb in Scene 1 or between Captain Davenport and Captain Taylor, the beginning scene or the concluding one. Several pairs or groups of students will read some of the significant scenes into a tape recorder and the most effective one or ones will be played for the class. Also, the class, working as a group because the cast is large will cast the play with actors whom they know from TV, the stage or from the movies. The students will write a memorandum about their choice for the roles and their reasons for their choices just as a casting director does. It will be more rewarding for the students if they can imagine the stage setting or make their own, understand and interpret the stage directions, dramatize the dialogue and practice using facial expressions and gestures when they are playing scenes or reading parts.

In order for students to imagine and envision what the stage setting and scenery looks like, have one student read the stage directions out loud. (pp. 7,8) Then ask the following questions:

Where is the location and what is the time of the play?

What color is the background of the stage?

Why do you think it is this color?

How is the stage shaped?

What kind of furniture and decoration are used?

What is in the background? in the foreground?

What kind of lighting is used?

What atmosphere does the opening of the play make you feel?

What music is played? Why do you think this music was chosen?

To help the students understand the sequence and structure of the play the following activity will be assigned after the first reading of the play. Charles Fuller used many flashbacks to develop the character of Sergeant Waters and to help the audience discover the murderer. The author changes frequently from the present to the past. Following are scenes from Act I and II. If the scene, dialogue or event happened in the present, write P on the line. If it happened in a flashback, write F on the line. Then arrange all of the events or scenes in the sequence in which they happened.

Act I:

1. Five enlisted men are being searched by Corporal Ellis. (p. 9)
2. A person steps into the light with a 45 caliber pistol and fires twice at Water's head. (p. 8)
3. Sergeant Waters is drunk, trying to stand and mumbling to himself. (p. 8)
4. Captain Taylor says he shall miss Sergeant Waters. (p. 10)
5. Captain Davenport from the Military Police Corps Unit arrives to investigate the Sergeant's death. (p. 16)
6. The town of Tynin was placed off limits to all military personnel. (p. 11)
7. Sergeant Waters punishes Private Wilkie.
8. Captain Taylor stands up for the black soldiers when Sergeant Waters tries to make them work after their winning baseball game. (p. 42)
9. Byrd shoves Waters onto the ground and kicks him, until restrained by Wilcox. (p. 53)
10. Lieutenant Byrd and Captain Wilcox see Sergeant Waters marching in a circle. He is mumbling, smiling, doing a "Juba" and groveling on his knees. (p. 51)

Act II:

1. Someone sneaks into the barracks and puts a gun under C.J.'s bed. (p. 62)
2. Davenport interrogates Henson. (pp. 60, 61, 62)
3. Two colored soldiers and one white M.P. were shot at William's Golden Palace. (p. 63)
4. Davenport relates that the Allies were making preparations to invade Europe.
5. C.J. hits Waters in the chest and C.J. is grabbed by Private James Wilkie. (p. 66)
6. C.J. sitting on the edge of a bunk in jail is visited by Corporal Cobb, and later by Sergeant Waters. (p. 70)
7. Captain Wilcox and Lieutenant Byrd are interrogated by Captain Davenport. (p. 79)
8. C.J. killed himself in prison. (p. 74)
9. Captain Taylor accuses Byrd and Wilcox of Water's murder. (p. 82)
10. Captain Taylor congratulates Captain Davenport for his investigation of Water's murder. (p. 100)
11. Sergeant Waters staggers and falls down. He is drunk and looks as if he's been beaten. (p. 96)
12. Pfc Peterson enters the scene with his pistol, rifle and pistol belt on. He pushes Waters down when he tries to get up and kicks him. (pp. 96-97)
13. "A style of guitar-pickin" and a C.J. dance became popular in Tynin in 1945. (p. 99)
14. Peterson fires his gun twice at Waters. (p. 98)
15. The officers and enlisted men of the 221st Chemical Smoke Generating Company were

“wiped out in the Ruhr Valley during a German advance.” (p. 100)

All of the major characters experience conflict. A useful exercise to help students focus on conflict and characterization is to have them describe the most important conflicts that each of the following major characters face in Act I and II.

Captain Davenport —The conflict with Captain Taylor who first tries to intimidate him.

Sergeant Waters —His conflict is against himself, Wilkie, Cobb and C.J.

C.J. Memphis —Sergeant Water’s conflict against C.J. Memphis because Waters believes him to be the stereotype of the shiftless Negro.

Private Wilkie —Sergeant Water’s conflict with Private Wilkie for being subservient and weak.

Corporal Cobb —Conflict with Sergeant Waters because of Water’s cruel treatment of C.J. Memphis.

While reading and dramatizing scenes from *A Soldier’s Play* students can think about and answer the following study questions which will help them understand the relationships of the characters, follow the sequence of events, and understand the main themes of the play. Students must write their answers in their notebooks.

Act I: Study Questions

1. Where does *A Soldier’s Play* take place? When?

2. What is Tech/Sergeant Vernon Waters doing when the play begins?

3. Describe the following characters:

Corporal Bernard Cobb

Private James Wilkie

Private Louis Henson

Pfc. Melvin Peterson

Private Tony Smalls

Corporate Ellis

Captain Charles Taylor

Private C.J. Memphis

4. What happened to the enlisted men after Sergeant Waters was shot?

5. What is Captain Davenport's role in the play?

6. What was Captain Taylor's initial reaction to Captain Davenport's investigation of Water's death?

7. Why is it significant that when they found Water's body all his stripes and insignia were still on his uniform?

8. Would you like Sergeant Waters to be a friend of yours? Why?

9. Would you like C.J. to be a friend of yours? Why?

10. What did C.J. mean when he said: "Any man ain't sure where he belongs must be in a whole lotta pain"?

Act II:

11. How did the white M.P. and the two black soldiers get shot?

12. What did Cobb mean when he said to Davenport: "C.J., he liked the wide-open spaces . . . That cell. It started closin' in on him right away."?

13. Why did Wilkie lose his stripes?

14. Who killed Sergeant Waters? What was the motive?
15. Why does Captain Taylor change his mind about the investigation?
16. What happened to the men of the 221st Company?
17. Do you think the ending is effective? If not, how would you change it?
18. What is one of the themes of the play?
19. What does *A Soldier's Play* say about the American experience or the "American Dream" theme?

Notes

1. Andrew J. Porter, Jr., Henry L. Tarrie, Jr. and Robert A. Bennett, *American Literature* (Lexington, Mass.: Ginn and Co., 1981), pp. 201-202.
2. Porter, p. 45.
- 3-5. Philip McFarland, Allen Kirschner, Alfred Ferguson, Larry D. Benson and Morse Peckham, *Themes in American Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972), p. 661, 712-721.
6. McFarland, pp. 670-737.
7. Porter, pp. 580-713.
8. McFarland, p. 788.
9. Gerald Weales, ed., *Arthur Miller: Death of a Salesman* (New York: The Viking Critical Library, 1981 ed.) All subsequent references to this book will be in parenthesis in the body of the paper.
- 10-12. Alan B. Howes, *Teaching Literature to Adolescents : Plays* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1968), pp. 75-77.
13. Tom Whitaker, Drama Seminar for May 10, 1983.
- 14-18. Howes, pp. 77-79.
19. Gerald Weales, ed., pp. 212, 213.
20. Martin Esslin, *The Theater of the Absurd* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969 ed.) p. 267.
- 21-24. Esslin, p. 266, 267.
25. Edward Albee, *The American Dream and The Zoo Story* (New York: New American Library, 1961) pp. 53, 54. All subsequent references to this play will be in parenthesis in the body of the paper.
26. Lois S. Josephs, ed., *Insight-American Literature : The Modern Quest for Identity* (New York: Noble and Noble, Inc., 1969) p. 382.

- 27, 28. C.W.E. Bigsby ed., *Edward Albee : A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1975) pp. 175, 176.
- 29, 30. Bigsby, pp. 1-8.
- 31, 32. Howes, pp. 14, 24.
33. Michael Spring, *Literary Cavalcade* , (New York: Scholastic Inc.) p. 4.
34. Charles Fuller, *A Soldier's Play* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). All subsequent references to this play will be in parenthesis in the body of the paper.

Student and Teacher Bibliography

Most of the following books were used in doing research in writing this unit. They are good reference books for both the teacher and students. Books especially relevant for students are marked with an asterisk (*).

*Albee, Edward. *The American Dream and The Zoo Story* . New York: NAL, Signet, 1961.

This is the play book that I will use for this unit.

*Atkinson, Brooks. *The Lively Years, 1973* .

Brief discussions of the outstanding plays of 1920-73 by the former New York Times Drama critic.

Barnfield, Gabriel. *Creative Drama in Schools* . New York: Macmillan 1971.

This is a concrete teaching book which emphasizes movement, dance and the technical aspects of theater.

*Bentley, Eric. *The Life of the Drama*. New York: Atheneum, 1970.

This book examines the elements of drama.

*Bigsby, C.W.C. *Albee*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Oliver and Boyd. LTD., 1969.

A thoughtful study of Albee's drama up to *A Delicate Balance*.

Duke, Charles R. *Creative Dramatics and English Teaching*. Illinois: NCTE, 1974.

This book contains lists of references and sources of information and materials.

Ehrlich, Harriet W. ed. *The Creative Dramatics Handbook*. Philadelphia: N.C.T.E.

Written by Philadelphia teachers, it provides an affective curriculum which uses creative dramatics in the regular classroom.

*Esslin, Martin. *Theatre of the Absurd*. New York: Doubleday, 1969. A study of absurdist drama by a scholar of the theater.

*Fitzgerald, Scott F. *The Great Gatsby*.

Jay Gatsby seeks his love and the American dream in swinging Long Island during the Jazz Age.

*Fuller, Charles. *A Soldier's Play*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.

The play book that I will use for this unit.

Hodgson, John and Ernest Richards. *Improvisation*. New York: Grove Press, 1979.

This helpful resource book explains how improvisation can be developed in the classroom.

Hoetker, James. *Theater Games : One Way Into Drama*. NCTE, 1975. Descriptions and directions for playing theater games.

Howes, Alan B. *Teaching Literature to Adolescents : Plays*. Chicago: Scott Foresman and Co., 1968.

Contains many stimulating guidelines for involving students with drama.

*James, Henry. *The American Scene* 1907.

Henry James describes America after an absence of twenty years.

*Kernan, Alvin B. *Character and Conflict : An Introduction to Drama*, New York: Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1963.

A very useful handbook with many ideas that can easily be adapted for this unit.

McCaslin, Nellie. *Creative Dramatics in the Classroom*. David McKay, 1974.

It contains a thorough bibliography of books and pamphlets on drama and a list of films to use in teaching drama.

*Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd* .

The handsome, innocent sailor, encounters the evils of the world as embodied in Claggert, the captain. Charles Fuller who wrote *A Soldier's Play* was inspired by the *Billy Budd* story.

*Miller, Arthur. *All My Sons* .

Joe Keller, a manufacturer of airplane parts during World War II must decide what is the right thing to do.

*———. *A View From the Bridge* .

A play about the common man who dies for what he fanatically believes.

*———. "Tragedy and the Common Man ." An essay in which Miller states that the common man can be a tragic hero.

*Rutenberg, Michael E. *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest*. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1969. A comprehensive study of Albee's plays by a director. He gives many insights into interpretation and production techniques.

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater* . Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972.

A classic study of stimulating improvisations and theater exercises.

*Wilder, Thornton. *Our Town*.

Drama of life in a New England town at the beginning of the 20th century as seen by the omniscient stage manager.

*Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

A study of the conflict between illusion and reality in a changing society.

*Wolfe, Thomas: *You Can't Go Home Again* .

George Webber, a writer, searches for a sense of meaning and purpose in his life during America's depression.

Classroom Materials

A Different Drummer . University of Southern California. This film which is 15 minutes long shows the reasoning and meaning behind abstract painting.

All My Sons . Universal Education and Visual Arts, 221 Park Avenue South, New York 10003. 92 min.

Arthur Miller's Salesman . Thomas S. Klise Co., P.O.Box 3418, Peoria, Illinois 61614. A sound/color filmstrip.

Arthur Miller: *Death of a Salesman* .

Performance by Lee J. Cobb, Mildred Dunnock, Michael Tolan, Gene Williams and Dustin Hoffman, the original cast. Caedmon CDL 5310.

Ernest Bloch, *America* :

An Epic Rhapsody in Three Parts for Orchestra .

Five Artists View the Contemporary Scene .

Filmstrip available from Yale Art Gallery. Paintings and interviews by five New York artists.

Immigrants : The American Dream told by the Men and Women Who Lived It. Caedmon, SWC 2069.

Toqueville: Democracy in America.

Edited by Henry Steele Commager. "An illuminating commentary on American character and institutions . . ." written by a foreigner Caedmon, SWC 2039.

Tennessee Williams. Thomas S. Klise Co.

A sound/color filmstrip.

Understanding American Drama . Educational Dimensions, PO0. Box 488, Great Neck, N.Y. 11022 #716.

What Is Drama ? Guidance Associates, Pleasantville, N.Y. 10570. A sound, color filmstrip in two parts of 12 minutes each.

What Is Theater ? Thomas S. Klise Co. Two sound/color filmstrips.

Whitman : The American Singer. Thomas S. Klise Co. Sound/color filmstrip. 20 min.

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