



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1985 Volume III: Twentieth Century American Fiction, Biography, and Autobiography

Katherine Anne Porter's Artistry and Vision in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," "Flowering Judas," and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider,"

Guide for Curriculum Unit 85.03.01
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This curriculum unit will include "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" (1930), "Flowering Judas" (1935) and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" (1937). These are representative samples of Katherine Anne Porter's literary craftsmanship and among the classics of twentieth-century literature. The three stories will have a profound and powerful effect on the intelligence, imagination, and feelings of either enthusiastic, casual, or indifferent students. On the whole, the virtues of these three stories are true-to-life, complex characters, multilevelled meanings, richness of literal and figurative details, and illuminating visions of reality.

The life of the author, Katherine Anne Porter is reflected in many of the themes expressed in her fiction. Her most famous stories dramatize her liberal political and social beliefs. Also, her stories employ a variety of religious symbols and mythology which resulted from her Catholic upbringing. Her characters are inspired from her travels and life in the South, Mexico, the Rocky Mountains, Eastern cities, and Europe. In some of her most artistic stories, she uses her own past experiences and herself as a main character.

The students will see the seeds of the author's later artistic development of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" which is partly written in Granny's stream-of-consciousness perspective during the time the eighty year old woman is dying. The story has the power to stimulate profound feelings and an intellectual understanding of life and death. Since many students have lived with or visited grandparents or have experienced the pain and grief of a grandparent dying, they will be deeply touched by this story.

The triumph of Porter's second story "Flowering Judas," set in Mexico after the Obregon revolution, lies in its vividly evocative narration, its captivating characters (Laura and Braggioni), and its complex insights into human nature. The complexly portrayed characters, the subtlety of meaning, and the rich symbolism will raise provocative questions that will stimulate students to think about revolutionary movements, leaders, and human relationships.

In the "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" many artistic elements have been painstakingly woven together to express a powerful and illuminating statement about Porter's vision of the human condition during World War I. The autobiographical experience has been enriched and elaborated on by the author's imagination which makes it have the reality of actual experience lived. The unique quality of this story is achieved through the penetrating depiction of Miranda's character, the rich figurative language, and the very effective design of the short novel. The facing of the knowledge gained through approaching death and evil is a theme woven

through the three stories and links Granny Weatherall from “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” Laura from “Flowering Judas” and Miranda from “Pale Horse, Pale Rider.”

(Recommended for English and American Literature classes, grades 11 and 12)

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