



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **A Study of Twentieth Century British Culture Through Art and Literature**

Curriculum Unit 85.06.05  
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Studying has become a “lost art” in many public school situations. Too many of today’s students equate a brief and cursory educational encounter with deep understanding or complete knowledge of the subject at hand. Yet there are distinct levels of comprehension one can and should move through when one is studying literature, history, or the arts. This unit attempts to provide students with a comfortable learning environment which will help to engage them in a multileveled learning process. I want my students to become excited about the emergence of their own ideas and about the learning process itself. The knowledge that they will gain as a result of this unit is not nearly as important as their heightened awareness of the way in which they gained that knowledge. In short, I wish to instill in my students the desire to approach things more intensively than they have in the past; I hope they will remember the enjoyable experience that evolves from such engagement.

Students are often not aware of the existence of levels of understanding since they do not experience comparable extended analysis in everyday life. This unit will introduce a method of analysis in which students participate actively from the beginning. They will be encouraged to express ideas of their own from the start. They will also be encouraged to explore additional ideas which will build upon their first discoveries. This will enable them to realize the existence of levels of meaning through their own creative mental processes.

A method which takes one beyond superficial engagement with material does in fact already exist. Professor Jules Prown, of Yale University, has developed a method of object study which engages the student in a stepbystep approach to learning. As a member of his “Time Machines” seminar, I have learned much about various cultures through the application of his method to artifacts. I believe that the method can be applied to mentifacts as well; that is, a comparable methodology can be used effectively as a means for better understanding short stories and poetry and the cultures which produced these art forms.

The material culture methodology allows the student a comfortable approach to objects. The student learns to see more, and thus is better able to appreciate the art form. Ultimately, he is led to consider the culture behind the work. The student moves from the specific to the general, and in the process becomes a historian of sorts. He learns to recognize details, and to appreciate the significance of details. Finally, he is able to place the knowledge in its proper cultural perspective. The study of culture becomes an active experience for students. They do not learn about cultural beliefs in a passive lecture-hall setting, but rather discover meanings actively on their own.

In this unit my students and I will study twentieth century British culture through short stories, poetry, and paintings. I believe this broadbased approach will enable students to understand better the particular place and period. In addition, such an approach may serve to delineate more fully the allimportant learning process. I believe the methodology will be accepted quickly by students if it is introduced initially as a visualthinking skill. We will begin our study of twentieth century Britain by learning how to read/decipher the meanings of paintings. An explanation of Professor Prown’s methodology follows:

## MATERIAL CULTURE

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The method suggests that one study a painting in three stages. The first stage requires a *description* of what is seen. The student approaches the painting as a view through a window, and lists what is seen—beginning with large observations and then progressing to smaller details. It is important that the student remain objective at this stage; he must hold to the objective stance long enough to insure a complete inventory of what is presented in the painting. To do otherwise would be to risk overlooking a detail which in the end might be enormously significant. Formal analysis is part of the description stage. It includes descriptions of the twodimensional and threedimensional organizations of the painting. When one looks at a painting twodimensionally, one notes the configuration of lines and flat shapes. A threedimensional study enables the viewer to comment on the depth of field as well as solid geometrical shapes. (I believe that students will enjoy discovering small details; the articulation of the two and threedimensional organizations of the painting may require practice, but here too students will be actively discovering a new aspect of visual analysis.)

The second stage, *deduction*, enables the viewer to relate to the painting; that is, he becomes empathetically involved with what is depicted. It is at this stage that students will be encouraged to voice their own initial ideas about the painting. Deduction involves three steps: sensory engagement, intellectual engagement, and emotional response. Sensory engagement asks that the viewer project himself into the picture to imagine what he would see, hear, smell, taste, and feel. Such an activity provides a nonthreatening beginning for student articulation. Intellectual engagement poses various questions such as “What is the time of day?” and “In the relationship between ourselves and the depicted world, where are we positioned?” The third step calls for the viewer’s emotional response. Reactions may vary, but often it is found that this subjective response is shared by many. This shared response is significant and says something important about the painting at hand. At this point students will take part in a discussion of their responses which will promote deeper involvement with the process of studying.

The final stage is *speculation*. The viewer attempts to speculate about the culture which produced the work. One develops theories and hypotheses to explain the “effects observed and felt.” This stage will enable students to discover what it is that makes up a culture. I believe that important questions will naturally arise at this point, and that students can provide answers to these questions. Such answers will reflect the artist’s articulation of beliefs. Students themselves will have discovered unique cultural phenomena, and their awareness of this discovery should be very much in evidence.

The threelevel approach described above does not end the study of the painting. The viewer is slated to move to external evidence which will support the internal evidence uncovered through description, deduction, and speculation. I will discuss this more fully later in the unit.

Just as a quick glance at a painting affords the viewer little in the way of intellectual or emotional stimulation,

so too does a quick reading of a poem or short story engage and/or enlighten the reader only in a very minimal sense. Paintings, poetry, and short stories compact experience by way of their imagery and structure. In order to “unpack” a poem or short story and experience it, one must provide time. (Now to convince the student to slow down and smell the roses.)

Students can transfer the stance learned in the visual process to their encounters with literature. As Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren suggest in *Understanding Poetry*, “poetry is concerned with the world as responded to sensorially, emotionally, and intellectually.” Thus the material culture methodology can be neatly, albeit partially, transplanted to the study of (some) poetry; this approach will provide a “bridge” of sorts for students. An explanatory lesson for the analysis of poetry follows. (The particular poem was chosen for its brevity; the method seems to work with some other poetry as well.)

(given to students untitled)

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.  
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

The first stage involves *description* or a listing of all objects mentioned through the imagery of the poem. (Nouns come first in the structure of the English language; students should follow a natural thinking progression in describing what is articulated in the poem.)

### **Stage One**

- A. Listing
- 1. crag
- 2. crooked hands
- 3. sun
- 4. lonely lands
- 5. azure world
- 6. wrinkled sea
- 7. mountain walls
- 8. thunderbolt

One would exclude, at this point, any emotional authorial comment, for such sophisticated ideas belong to a later stage, deduction. Action verbs will be omitted as well; this allows students an uninterrupted focus on specific details (nouns). In the second step of this stage students are deliberately “slowed down” as with paintings. They are asked to focus their attention on one poetic device. This enables them to give maximum attention to detail.

- B. Simile
- like a thunderbolt

Stage Two Allows the reader to take a deductive stance. (Verbs may now be noted. Students are now asked to make note of another poetic device, personification.)

### Stage Two

- A. Listing
- 1. clasps
- 2. ring’d
- 3. stands
- 4. crawls
- 5. watches
- 6. falls
- B. Personification
- wrinkled sea beneath him crawls

At this point the reader experiences sensory imagery by noting and imagining the various projections of the senses.

- C. Sensory Imagery (some examples)
- 1. clasps—touch
- 2. crooked hands—sight
- 3. ring’d with azure world—sight
- 4. wrinkled sea crawls—sight

Intellectual queries follow.

- D. Intellectual queries
- 1. Where is this? (mountain top)
- 2. What is described? (eagle—see metaphor/“crooked hands”)

The next step calls for emotional response. (How does what is being described make you feel?) Presumably there will be some shared response; if so, both the teacher and the students will feel confident that they are on

the right track.

E. Emotional Response

1. lonely
2. powerful

The third stage, *speculation*, may not give definitive answers as to the culture which gave rise to the poem. Certainly, though, the student can develop theories about the poet's relationship with his world. These may remain theories, but should serve to enhance the students's engagement with the work and with his/her own mental processes.

**Stage Three**

- A. Why did the poet choose to describe the eagle? (Interested in qualities of?)
- B. Is the poet making a statement about power? Is it lonely? Note verbs again. When one is connected with power, must one watch? clasp?

(Note: Answers to questions/responses in Stage Two (D&E) were provided above, and questions in Stage Three were made "leading" in nature in order to expedite the explanation of the methodology. Teachers should be restrained in asking students leading questions or providing answers. Given time, and through discussion, students will work into an appropriate analysis of their own.)

At the very least, this method of approaching poetry which is related to traditional "new criticism" will slow students down and give them a scheme of sorts which might serve to reduce the anxiety associated with studying poetry. More importantly, I believe it will allow new insights to emerge, and that is the point of study in the classic sense of the word.

A variant methodology for approaching the short story is also possible. Such methodology would necessarily involve multiple readings of the story. The first reading would require a literal response to the work. "Who? What? Where? When? Why?" type questions might be asked of students. Together students and teacher would write a summary of the basic plot of the story. (This summary *describes* the story.) Students would then be encouraged to take note of figurative language and/or recurrent images employed by the writer. A second full reading of the story would lead to sensory, intellectual, and emotional *deductions*. At this point students would be familiar enough with the work to be able to articulate its theme(s). Finally, students would be asked to speculate as to the culture behind the work. An appropriate question to ask students would be "How does the author see his world?"

*(figure available in print form)*

*The Merry-Go-Round* —Mark Gertler

Reprinted by permission from *The Centruy of Change: British Painting Since 1900*, by Oxford, England: Paidon Press Limited, 1977.

I believe that students would benefit by studying specific pairings of paintings and works of literature, for this dual analysis of the visual and written would enable them to understand the learning process better. Paired study would also provide students with varying experiences or two “keys” which would facilitate their discoveries of the cultural beliefs (of twentieth century Britain). Therefore my students will compare and contrast visual and written works of thematic similarity. (Students might be encouraged to think about what impact each medium, in its own way, affords the astute student of literature and the arts. Also, they might consider what a painting can say that literature cannot, and vice versa.)

This unit includes two examples of particular comparisons which follow the methodology heretofore explained. However, the unit also provides suggested pairings which I have not studied. It is important that students and teacher have the experience of studying together; such an approach might yield an important element of freshness or excitement in learning.

(Note: The pairings which directly follow provide the teacher with extensive analyses of four works. Such analyses serve as particular examples of the methodology at work. They also provide the timeconstrained teacher with ready material for the classroom. However, the methodology is most enjoyable when applied to “new” material; I hope that teachers as well as students will be “turned on” by the method and will want to try it out for themselves.)

Painting: *The Merry GO Round*— Mark Gertler

Short Story: “The RockingHorse Winner”—D.H. Lawrence

D.H. Lawrence wrote of Gertler’s *The MerryGoRound* “(with its) violent mechanized rotation and complex involution, and ghastly, utterly mindless human intensity of sensational extremity, you have made a real and ultimate revelation. I think this picture is your arrival—it marks a great arrival.”<sup>2</sup> Having now spent some time studying both *The MerryGoRound* and Lawrence’s own “The RockingHorse Winner”, I have concluded that the insight stated above is in fact expressed distinctly, albeit differently, in both works of art. Studying the painting, which was completed some years prior to the writing of the story, enabled me to see “The RockingHorse Winner” more clearly. As I concluded my study, I couldn’t help but wonder whether Gertler’s masterpiece was the impetus for—or in some way gave rise to—Lawrence’s story.

The following section is divided into the three steps alluded to in the previously discussed methodology: description, deduction, and speculation. The description stage of studying a painting requires much time. Each detail that I noted will not be listed here. Rather, I will make mention of the specific descriptions which proved to be relevant to the experience of the entire process of the method. However, it is important that users of this unit not take a “short cut” or ignore the process of listing all that can be seen. To do so would be to undermine the process of the study of the painting.

***Descriptions The viewer notes that virtually the entire canvas is filled. Sixteen men and women are depicted on horseback within a carousel. All but one man are shown in groupings of three, and all but the single rider face the viewer frontally or in profile. The elongated funnelshaped top of the carousel hides the tops of some riders’ heads. Near the bottom of the painting a crescentshaped frame continues around and in back of the horses and riders, encircling them. Seven vertical poles appear to be attached to the top; they are visible behind the horses and riders and meet the bottom crescentshaped piece. The trios of figures are situated in such a manner that all are visible; they lean forwards or backwards alternately, allowing this visibility,***

**while the horses are more nearly parallel. All of the visible figures are openmouthed as are the horses. The costumes of the riders vary. Many wear hats, and some of the men are dressed in military uniform. At least one of the groups of riders is composed of clonelike figures. Riders in other groupings are not identical, but are similar. All of the figures look stiff or dummylike, and they appear to be gazing straight ahead. Strange banana shapes can be seen above and behind the top of the carousel; the poles previously mentioned do not appear to be connected to the horses.**

Twodimensionally, the painting contains conflicting horizontal and vertical lines. The horses themselves project horizontal lines, and the horse grouping creates an oval shape; the vertical riders form another overlapping oval shape. The crescent-shaped bottom and the top provide additional horizontal lines which are met by the vertical poles. Threedimensionally the carousel forms a cylinder. All of the riders and horses are enclosed within this structure. Bright primary colors, blue and red, dominate in this painting. The texture of the canvas is smooth.

**Deductions This painting elicits an intense sensory reaction. One can imagine hearing the screams of the openmouthed riders, repetitive music, and the mechanical sound of the carousel at work. One can also imagine what it would feel like to be on this carousel. It would be like being pulled into a vortex. It seems to be only a matter of time before the centripetal force of the mechanism will pull top and bottom together crushing the inhabitants of the merrygoround.**

Intellectual deductions focus on the experience of the riders. The patterned positions of the people depict a total surrender of movement to the carousel's mechanism, The expressions of the riders, the openmouthed smilelike grimaces, seem to indicate that the experience of riding on this carousel is one of agitation.

My emotional response to *The MerryGoRound* is quite unpleasant. When I imagine myself as a rider on the carousel, I feel dominated by the machine. I have little or no freedom of movement. My response to the experience is one of excitement, but not one of pleasure. I cannot leave the carousel when I wish; essentially my experience is totally reactive (though I might not be aware even of this). As an observer of the scene I am troubled by the movement of the carousel. Watching the participants causes me to respond with a feeling of dizziness or a loss of equilibrium. One could be mesmerized by this mechanized ride. The individuals on the carousel become a blur. The dominant colors of blue and red retain their conflicting values because they are intensely oppositional.

**Speculation The MerryGoRound seems to depict the horror of a society dominated by machinery or a mechanistic condition. The subjects of the painting are mindless people caught in and controlled by a mechanized environment. They retain little individuality. The varying clothing seems to underscore the power of the mechanistic experience by implying that these people were individuals before they were homogenized by this experience. Their clonelike quality is more a matter of expression and position than of dress or physical description.**

The entire mechanism of the carousel is sinister. The riders are caught between the heavy top which appears to be moving downward in a crushing movement, while they experience a disorienting repetitive motion. The horses' openmouthed expressions seem to reflect some evil intent. Even the bananashaped clouds conform to the shape of the carousel, creating an aura of claustrophobia and/or destruction.

The painting in its essence emphasizes sensational experience. The participants are not, however, engaged intellectually with this experience. The ride is a seemingly neverending climactic event—harsh in its denial of individual response. The very colors used in the creation of the painting echo this harshness. They are not natural, but rather are garish, oppositional, and unnerving. The horizontal and vertical configuration

underscores the harsh quality of the painting; one can almost hear the sound of the grinding gears of the ultimate machine. *The MerryGoRound* thus depicts the conflict and pain of a mechanism given complete freedom. The human participants appear to have lost intellect, heart, and soul; they have become mere extensions of the machinery itself, and all seems hopeless.

Does the artist intend to warn us of man's ultimate surrender to machine? Are we fast becoming rats on a turning wheel? Does the world feel more manmade and less natural? People are in hot pursuit of marketable pleasures. Perhaps Gertler wished to warn twentieth century man of the "downside" of scientific progress. *The MerryGoRound* seems to portend the demise of individuality and humanity.

(Note: Students may need to go through several levels of speculation before linking the metaphor of the carousel to the grinding mechanism of society.)

*"The RockingHorse Winner"*

### **Description Basic Plot**

The story opens with a fairytalelike description of a mother who cannot feel love for anybody. Though she overcompensates in loving actions toward her children, they too are aware of her lack of true feeling. We soon learn that the family endures yet another lack—a lack of money. An unspoken phrase, "There must be more money!" haunts the household as an incessant whisper. Early on, Paul, the oldest child, asks his mother why there isn't enough money and is told that the family has no luck. Determined to please his mother, he announces that he is lucky, but is not readily believed. In response Paul commands his rockinghorse to "take him where there is luck." His ride is described as a "mad little journey."

On another day Paul's uncle observes Paul's ride and learns that Paul "has gone where he wanted to go." The rides provide Paul with the names of winners in various horse races, and Paul has been betting and winning regularly. The uncle becomes a partner with Paul and Bassett, the young gardener who places bets for Paul, because Paul views the uncle as also lucky. Paul's first winner occurred with a tenshilling note given to him by his uncle. Paul also insists that no one else become aware of the partnership. The uncle, skeptical at first, soon realizes that Paul's intuition for calling a winner is uncanny.

When the uncle asks Paul what he's going to do with his money, Paul replies that the money is for his mother, and that he wishes to stop "the whispering". As Paul does not want his mother to know what he has been doing, the uncle arranges with the family lawyer for the money to come to her from an "unknown" relative every year on her birthday. On the day that his mother is to receive the first installment of the money, Paul anxiously awaits her happy response. He is disappointed, however; the gift is described by her as "quite moderately nice." The mother also confers with the lawyer, for she wants all of the money at once. This Paul agrees to.

Soon the voices in the house go "mad." The money is spent lavishly and "there must be more money!—more than ever!" Paul becomes frightened and is unable to call the next two races. His mother notices that he is overwrought and suggests that he go to the seaside, but Paul is adamant that he remain in the house until after the Derby. In the meantime Paul has had his rockinghorse moved up to his room.

On a particular night the mother is more than usually anxious about Paul and returns home from a party to find him madly riding his rockinghorse. In a strange and powerful voice, Paul screams, "It's Malabar!", and then falls unconscious from the horse. Paul is described as having brainfever. After he is told that Malabar has won the Derby, Paul tells his mother that he is lucky, and dies. The story ends with the uncle's statement: ."



.he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rockinghorse to find a winner."

The second step in the first stage of the short story description requires the student to list recurrent descriptions. It is important, as well, to take note of the author's use of figurative language such as simile or personification. Perhaps the most important of the recurrent descriptions in "The RockingHorse Winner" are Paul's repeated "mad journeys" on the rockinghorse. We experience no less than four of these descriptions, which become more detailed as the story progresses. Paul's eyes are repeatedly described as well. Again, the descriptions become more intense during the course of the story. Initially Paul's eyes are described as "big, hot, blue," later they are "blazing with a sort of madness," and, finally, they become burnedout "blue stones." Apparently in keeping with the fairytale motif alluded to in the plot summary, the number three turns up throughout the story. The mother has three children. Three partners engage in betting on horses. Paul dies on the third day of his illness. The use of metaphors or similes is spare but important. Betting on horses is, in Paul's words, "sure as eggs." Paul's eyes are likened to fire or a blaze. There is also a curious use of personification near the beginning of the story. The children's toys are able to hear the whispering in the house; "the big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram, could hear it quite plainly."

Deduction: The viewer becomes aware of things heard and things felt. One can imagine the sound of the whispering throughout the house. Near the end of the story the sound of the mechanism of the rockinghorse becomes audible;" ... it was a strange, heavy, and yet not loud noise. Something huge, in violent hushed motion. Paul's rides can be imagined too by the reader. Though we remain observers of the frenzied mechanical motion, we can, at least to some degree, feel the vehemence of the experience.

Paul attempts to fill the void in his mother's life by winning money. But, his mother does not become happier; rather, she continues to want more. Paul is ultimately destroyed by his need to please her. His strange rides on the rockinghorse are allconsuming. His spirit is inflamed during these experiences, and ultimately both his spirit and body are burned out by their energy. There is no love in this story. There is misguided emotional agitation which ends in destruction or death.

This story has been called a horror story; it is for me horrific and yet unreal. I have feelings of regret. I feel pity for the boy, and anger for the mother. Yet, I also feel distanced from the experience in some way. This is a fairy tale or an allegory. One is aware primarily of the intellectual responses: this is a picture of a loveless world.

***Speculation D.H. Lawrence seemed to be aware and uneasy about the materialistic concerns of twentieth century (English) society. Paul's mother, Hester, is a woman who is passionately concerned about image. She wants to appear the good mother. She wants material things to prove she is an important member of society. The "center of her heart (is) hard," for she has no identity, and knows no love, She i6 like her children's toys. She and the toys are capable of sensory experience, yet, neither possesses "heart. "Her neurosis is passed on to her son who can only react to her needs in a magical but mechanistic way. The ultimate tragedy is that he forfeits his life. Hester's marriage is described as one of "love turned to dust," and in the end the product of this marriage, Paul, too turns to dust. The simile, betting on horses was "as sure as eggs," then expresses a strong, ironic meaning.***

It seems (and others have noted) that Lawrence was intrigued by the meaning of sexuality. One can read Paul's rides on his rockinghorse as incestuous longings for his mother. Mark Spilka in *The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence* sees "The RockingHorse Winner" as a "frontal attack on Freudian psychology." "Incestcraving is never the normal outcome of the parentchild relationship, but always the result of impressions planted in the

child's unconscious mind by an unsatisfied parent. But therefore oedipal love is mechanistic, and if mechanistic, then destructive and abnormal in itself." <sup>3</sup>

Questions which ultimately arise after studying "The Rocking Horse Winner" mirror, to some extent, those mentioned previously in connection with *The MerryGoRound*. Is man becoming more robotic because of his abnormal craving for material things?

(figure available in print form)

*We Are Making A New World* —Paul Nash

Reprinted by permission from *The Century of Change: British Painting Since 1900*, by Oxford, England: Paidon Press Limited, 1977.

Are we becoming (solely) participants in mere mechanistic pleasures? Both painting and short story depict a spiritual or aesthetic void in the life of modern man.

Painting: *We Are Making A New World* —Paul Nash

Poem: "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries"—A.E. Housman

Both *We Are Making A New World* and "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries" reflect views of war circa 1918. Gone are the heroic imaginings evident in earlier poetry and printings; the reality of the pain and destruction of war is evident in both works.

### **We Are Making A New World**

***Description Virtually the entire canvas is filled with land structures. The foreground is comprised of a random pattern of hillocks and holes; the holes are of varying shapes. One uprooted tree lies diagonally across the left side of the foreground. The middle portion of the painting consists of a grouping of shattered but standing tree trunks. Some branches are visible, but appear to be broken; they hang lifelessly pointing toward the earth. Other branches are simply partial stumps. Many shadows are also visible in this middle portion of the painting. The background of the painting depicts additional tree trunks and holes in the land. (This repetitive scene stretches toward the horizon.) Behind the trees are bare mountainous forms over which a brilliant setting sun diffuses its rays.***

Intersecting lines comprise the twodimensional organization of the painting. Many triangular shapes are evident. Threedimensionally the painting projects small, undulating, rounded forms in the foreground, rounded vertical shapes in the middle-ground, and large undulating masses in the background.

***Deduction Initial sensory reaction to this painting is visual. The viewer first notes the sombre broken forms (earth, trees) of the foreground, and the brilliant light of the background. All seems quiet; one cannot imagine hearing anything in the context of this landscape. One can imagine smelling the odor of death and decay, for everything in the painting appears to be dead.***

We are viewing the aftermath of some climactic event. We might initially assume that the painting reveals some form of natural destruction (earthquake). The holes in the foreground specifically remind us of shellholes, however, and the title, *We Are Making A New World*, strongly suggests that man, not nature, is responsible for the destruction.

When I project myself into the painting I feel desolate, depressed, and lost. I cannot travel easily among the holes and hillocks, and food and shelter cannot be found. The utter hopelessness of the environment cannot be borne. The brilliant sky reminds me of blood and stands opposed to the dark shadows and trees; such contrast underscores the aftermath of the horrific conflict portrayed.

***Speculation We Are Making A New World depicts the aftermath of a holocaust. It is a bitter painting whose thematic statement is that all war is senseless. The very land which is fought over is destroyed in the fight. Nothing lives. The twodimensional organization of the painting is one of triangles which remind us of many directions; these shapes do not denote cohesiveness or agreement. Rather, they imply disagreement or conflict. Ultimately, the viewer is left with only one question, why? The British poet and critic Herbert Read once described the aftermath of battle. His statement, which is placed alongside the reproduction of the painting in The Century of Change , perhaps captures best the impact of We Are Making A New World . “All was black and upriver. In the valley the shellholes were full of water and reflected the harsh sky. Devil’s Wood was a naked congregation of shattered trunks, like an old broken comb against the skyline. This was his earth. . . Now riven and violated, . . . a black diseased scab, erupted and pustulous.”*** <sup>4</sup>

*“Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries” by A. E. Housman*

These, in the day when Heaven was falling.  
The hour when earth’s foundations fled,  
Followed their mercenary calling  
And took their wages and are deed.  
Their shoulders held the sky suspended;  
They stood, and earth’s foundations stay;  
What God abandoned, these defended,  
And saved the sum of things for pay. <sup>5</sup>

I. Stage One

A. Listing (nouns)

- |                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| 1. day         | 7. shoulders |
| 2. heaven      | 8. sky       |
| 3. hour        | 9. God       |
| 4. earth       | 10. sum      |
| 5. foundations | 11. things   |

6. wages 12. pay

B. Allusion/ Personification (Atlas)

—Their shoulders held the sky suspended.

## II. Stage Two

A. Verbs

1. falling

2. fled

3. calling

4. followed

5. took

6. to be dead

7. held

8. abandoned

9. stood

10. saved

11. defended

B. Sensory Imagery

1. heaven falling (sight)

2. earth's foundations fled (sight, touch/feel)

C. Intellectual Queries

1. What is described? (war)

2. Who is fighting? Why? (mercenaries/money)

3. What is the result? (country defended/mercenaries' deaths)

4. What are the "sum of things"? (fragments of what existed before?)

D. Emotional Response

1. bitter/angry

2. senseless/horrific feeling

3. ironic

## III. Stage Three

A. Why did the poet choose to describe mercenary soldiers? (Are all wars fought for money? out of greed?)

B. Why did the poet make use of personification? Does man see everything only in his own limited/materialistic way?

Has God abandoned man?—or has man abandoned God?

Does man see himself as God?(Atlas)

What is the result of playing God? (destruction)

Both painting and poem were created prior to the development of the atomic bomb; both works indicate that life continues after war. Though man may ravage the landscape in *We Are Making A New World*, someone lives to see the sun rise. Despite the imaginings of the end of the world in "Epitaph on an Army of

Mercenaries” (“earth’s foundations fled”/ “heaven was falling”), ultimately “earth’s foundations stay.” Man may view himself as all powerful or “Godlike” in both works, but in the end he is unable to make a new world or, for that matter, completely destroy what has come before him—he is more likely destroyed himself instead.

For reasons alluded to earlier in this unit, my students and I will simultaneously discover various twentieth century societal beliefs through engagement with specific art forms. The following pairings of literature and paintings might also form interesting study units, though I have not as yet worked them up as such. Such pairings could be used to enhance the understanding of a theme; the students would have an opportunity to put to use ideas learned from one study into play again immediately in another. A brief thematic statement follows each grouping.

*The IdentiKit Man*— Derek Boshier

“The Unknown Citizen”—W.H. Auden (poem)

(Anonymity is a byproduct of modern societal systems; the experience of anonymity may be harsh in its sterility.)

*Storm in the Jungle*— Edward Burra

“The Truth About Pyecraft”—H.G. Wells (short story)

(Values espoused by twentieth century society are absurd; the lifestyles of “important” members of society can (should) be easily satirized.)

*The Chess Players* —Merlyn Evans

“The Wasteland” (Part Three—A Game of Chess)—T.S. Eliot (poem)

(Relationships among twentieth century men and women may consist of games of sexual intrigue; the outcome of such gameplaying is stalemate, sterility, death.)

## **IDEAS FOR LESSON PLANS:**

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### *I. Explanation of Methodology (Why—description, deduction, speculation?)*

It might prove useful to ask students to analyze a painting prior to learning the method. (What is the theme of this painting?) Students may be able to respond intuitively to the work, yet many important details and ideas will presumably be left out. Important omissions will become evident during the course of the (followup) enactment of the method. Obviously, students should not be made to feel inadequate. Explain that studying art requires time and patience. The human eye/brain cannot instantaneously record everything depicted in a painting. More importantly, the meanings of details are often not readily available to the viewer. Explain that the method enables the viewer to study logically what is before him. Emphasize that the method is not for the novice, but is used by Yale professors, critics, and historians, among others.

Students will be required to slow down and study painstakingly—perhaps for the first time. Such an attitude can be learned, but it will undoubtedly take some time. Therefore it might prove useful to initially “practice” with some works of art familiar to students. Past experience has taught me not to try to teach method and new content simultaneously. Often important content is lost in the first attempt of understanding method, and such content cannot be easily retrieved.

## *II. The MerryGoRound—Mark Gertler*

The basic lesson plan for approaching this work is imbedded in the previous discussion of the painting. Students will work through the description, deduction, and speculation phases of the methodology. The following examples of questions may need to be asked of students to insure that they make the necessary connections in their thinking about the work.

### **Description**

1. How are the people positioned?
2. Describe their expressions, dress.
3. What exists outside of the merrygoround?
4. What shapes are inherent in the painting?
5. What sort of lines exist in the painting?
6. Compare/contrast the people and the horses.
7. Describe the colors used in the painting.

### **Deduction**

1. Imagine you are a rider on the merrygoround. What would you see and hear?
2. What are the reactions of the riders to the experience of the merrygoround? How do you know?
3. What would it feel like to be a rider? What would it feel like to watch the riders?

### **Speculation**

1. What sort of experience is depicted?
2. Why are the individuals involved so similar?
3. What does the machine have to do with the riders’ responses?
4. What happens when men are dominated by machines?
5. Is twentieth century society mechanistic?

## *III. “The RockingHorse Winner”—D.H. Lawrence*

The following outline simply lists major points to be covered in a study of the short story. Students should be

encouraged to:

### **Description**

- A. Write a plot summary.
- B. Find examples of figurative language (simile, personification).

### **Deduction**

- C. Discuss Lawrence's appeal to the senses (especially hearing).
- D. Relate the outcome of the story and reasons for this outcome.
- E. Tell of and explain emotional responses to the story.

### **Speculation**

- F. Discuss Lawrence's main point. (How did Lawrence see his world?)

#### *IV. Comparison/Contrast—The MerryGoRound/ "The RockingHorse Winner"*

Students should be encouraged to articulate similarities and differences between the two works. I believe the thematic similarity—the problem of a mechanistic condition—will be readily apparent to students. Differences will then be noted. For example, students may feel that Lawrence is more particular in his delineation of theme. The story enables us to see the effect of a mechanized existence on one individual, Paul; *The MerryGoRound*, on the other hand, affords the viewer an image of its effect on a microcosm of society. A question should be posed: What did the painting "say" which the story could not, and vice versa?

#### *V. We Are Making A New World/ "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries"*

It is probably unnecessary at this point to provide specific questions or outlines for studying these works. Again, students should follow the method, and when necessary the teacher should pose questions which will insure the completion of the method.

Following the analyses of the works, students will be asked to look at earlier war poetry which is of a heroic nature. The romantic recruitment posters of the period might be viewed as well. I believe that the obvious contrast between the earlier and later visual and written works will be quickly noted by students; most probably they will react by questioning this abrupt shift in outlook on war. Students will be encouraged to look at historical texts at this point in order to understand the mood of the country prior to the war. (What led Britain to welcome war?) The casualties and conditions of World War I should be assessed as well. We might then understand more fully the radical turnabout of mood evident in British war poetry of the early twentieth century. Such an exercise will also allow students to complete the material culture methodology. We will be noting evidence which will attest to our earlier analyses of *We Are Making A New World* and "Epitaph on an

Army of Mercenaries”.

#### VI. Closing the Unit/Creative Endeavors for Students

I believe that students best understand and remember study experiences which are in some way connected to their own creative impulses. Therefore this unit will conclude with a creative activity for students. They will be asked to depict a particular theme visually and in writing (short story, poem). Such an activity will require time, and thus becomes viewed by students as a major project. Students will be asked to illustrate emotionally charged words: love, justice, war, etc. Visual expressions would include drawings or collages. (Students will be encouraged to experiment with color, shapes, line, etc.) Writing projects will follow which articulate in words that which was expressed visually.

Works of art and creative writing will eventually be shared in class. We will follow the method in endeavoring to uncover meanings projected in these works. Student artists/writers may be surprised to learn something new about themselves and their expression. They may see for the first time their own unconscious expressions of values. Such values will most probably reflect the culture of which they are a part. I believe that resultant discussions (which will follow our analyses) will prove exciting and enlightening for us all.

## Study Material for Students

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### Paintings

*The MerryGoRound*— Mark Gertler  
*We Are Making A New World*— Paul Nash  
*The Identikit Man*— Derek Boshier  
*Storm in the Jungle*— Edward Burra  
*The Chess Players*— Merlyn Evans

### Literature

“The Eagle”—Alfred Lord Tennyson  
“The RockingHorse Winner”—D.H. Lawrence  
“Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries”—A.E. Housman  
“The Unknown Citizen”—W.H. Auden  
“The Truth About Pyecraft”—H.G. Wells  
“The Wasteland” (Part III—A Game of Chess)—T.S. Elliot



## Notes

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1. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Poetry*, p. 9.
2. Richard Shone, *The Century of Chance*, plate # 50.
3. Mark Spilka, *The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence*, p. 80.
4. Richard Shone, *The Century of Chance*, plate # 53.
5. Reprinted by permission from *Understanding Poetry*, page 373, by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976.

## Teacher Bibliography

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Brooks, Cleanth and Penn Warren, Robert, *Understanding Poetry*. New York, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.

This lengthy and marvelous book might serve as an especially useful reference for teachers of poetry.

Prown, Jules D., "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 17, no. 1, Spring 1982, pp. 119.

This article is a "must" for teachers who wish to use this unit. The article will enable teachers to understand better the methodology and the theory behind this methodology.

Shone, Richard, *The Century of Chance : British Painting Since 1900*. Oxford, England: Phaidon Press Limited, 1977.

This book provides an extensive array of reproductions of twentieth century British paintings, and is the source of the paintings discussed in this unit. Useful commentary is often placed near the plates. Various time periods and "schools" are also discussed.

Wilson, Simon, *British Art from Holbein to the Present Day*. Woodbury, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1979.

This book presents a comprehensive survey of British art. Teachers may wish to use such a book when teaching eighteenth or nineteenth century British culture. Many fine plates are included.

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