Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1999 Volume I: Women's Voices in Fiction

Women Writers and the Contemporary Short Story

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Unit Philosophy

In my language arts class we study the short story near the beginning of the school year. I begin with short stories in order to gradually introduce to students terms frequently used in literature discussions. Some of those terms which I will explain in greater detail include plot, character and conflict. Covering the short story thoroughly before dealing with novels is an efficient approach to teaching both the terms and concepts which middle school students need to move on to high school and the texts which are required by the city of New Haven.

In this unit I explain the specific benefits and advantages to teaching components of the short story and other literary terms while using a selection of contemporary texts representing a wide variety of women writers. There are several advantages to benefit from by using this combination of material. Some side effects may seem apparent while others do not. Specific advantages lie in using short stories, contemporary literature, and the writing of women.

Why the Short Story?

When students are expected to read and comprehend longer texts, such as the novel, it can become difficult to grapple with the difficulties of sorting out the differences between terms such as "third person omniscient" and "first person limited" narrators for example. On the other hand, when students are given shorter texts and asked to focus on only a couple literary components at a time, their ability to comprehend and their capacity to retain are improved greatly. When students are allowed to fully comprehend components of literature in smaller, less intimidating chunks, they will feel more confident of their knowledge and more assured of their potential to understand the sometimes confusing world of literature. This is what we need to be focusing towards as educators, coaching our students to be confident participants in games of the intellect.

As I suggested before, when reading short stories our students are confronted with a less daunting task to complete. I think all would agree that many adults remain today intimidated by the mere size of big thick books with hundreds of pages. Our students too are often intimidated by the size of many novels. When offered smaller less imposing stories or sets of stories to read, students will feel more that they already have the skill and time to handle the expectations. When they are given novels in September, many feel overwhelmed and quickly begin slipping behind. The short story offers us a genre that students perceive as accessible and compatible with their busy lives. After all, they can be read in a short time.

Why Contemporary Literature?

Contemporary literature is advantageous to use in the class, because it helps to catch and hold the attention of adolescent readers. Again, it is clear that this holds true for the majority of adults as well. When we as

educators pick something to read, do we not choose what we are genuinely interested in? It may be mystery, newspapers, poetry or professional journals, but we read it, because we want to. And frequently, that which we are required to read or obligated to read, we read with disdain and less than our complete attention. If we want to engage our students as readers, we must do our best to find material that will entice their participation. Contemporary short stories can aid in this cause in a couple ways. One way they are helpful is in their language. The language used in most contemporary writing is more accessible to our students. Stories and poetry written in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries frequently contain vocabulary which our students will never use or hear in their daily environments. The old stories many adults loved as children do not speak in words that children today readily understand or appreciate. Another advantage they offer is their subject material. The majority of students would prefer to read tales about characters that are more like themselves and their friends. Once again, the classics of the past centuries rarely focus on characters which children today can readily identify with. They are more enthusiastic when they have the opportunity to read something that is more directly related to the reality of the world that they know and live in.

Why Women Writers?

Focusing on literature written by women is also beneficial. Among the short stories anthologized in our textbooks and the required fiction and non-fiction we have to cover, women writers, women characters, and women role models are underrepresented. By focusing a unit on short stories written by women, this imbalance can be amended to some degree. This is important, because we do not want our students to get the impression that men have a greater creative talent or authority in the realm or the arts. A result of using women's literature will be the encouragement and inspiration which some of our students will receive through reading a variety of stories by women who have been successful in recent times. Perhaps most importantly, working with a wide selection of contemporary women authors will offer students the chance to dispel any assumptions or stereotypes they may hold regarding the type of writing women produce. The truth is, there are as many types of women's writing as there are women writers. Though similarities may be found among products by different women, there still remains the fact that every woman, or any person for that matter, who writes, writes with an individual voice. Is that not why people write, to express themselves in their own words, however similar those words might look to another writer's words written on paper at in different time? This also will further encourage our students to believe in their ability to write and the legitimacy of what they have to write.

     For these reasons I have chosen to produce a unit designed to teach the basic structural components of the short story using samples of contemporary writings by women of diverse cultures and styles. In the course of the unit, many literary terms will also be taught. A list of those terms and descriptions follows. Depending on grade level and skill, this list of terms can either be reduced or expanded. The stories which I have selected to use also can be altered or substituted to suit the needs of any particular class. What remains essential is to search out texts that will entice and engage the interest and participation of the students. Survey your students to keep track of what they are interested in. Ask them which stories they had fun reading, and reuse them; the ones they did not like, stop using. Also keep in mind that these components and terms need to be presented to students in a fashion that helps to ensure their success not only at the end of this unit, but at the end of this year and the end of their senior year as well.

Objectives and Strategies

Checking for Prior Knowledge

Teaching the short story in seventh grade, I have found that students enter the classroom with a wide range of prior knowledge of literature and the short story. For this reason, I always begin this unit by asking students to respond for five to ten minutes in their journals to a writing prompt which asks them to recall everything they can remember about the short story. (All students in my English class are required to have with them a personal journal used for prompt responses and free writing) This always elicits a wide variety of responses ranging from, "I don't know anything," to students who are quite well versed in many of the terms listed below. This student feedback is how I establish my starting point for the unit. For example, if all the students in a class recall the "beginning, middle, end" description of the parts of a story, but no more, I know all the students will need careful guidance in being introduced to and understanding the more expanded descriptions including "exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution." On the other hand, if some of the class is already familiar with some of those words, those students should be identified and employed as teaching aids to the class.

Very often children who already understand a concept have a more productive time explaining those concepts to their peers in a more intimate setting. This is a legitimate form of cooperative learning. If you have students in the class who can teach others what you want them to master, let them help, in many cases they will also benefit. They will benefit by practicing and reinforcing their knowledge on the subject, and questions they are presented with from their "student peer" will help them identify gaps in their understanding which they might not have perceived previously.

Initial Lesson

Once prior knowledge is established, begin with a short short story which can be read and discussed within the remaining class time. I plan to use the vignettes "Hairs" and "My Name" from Sandra Cisneros' book The House on Mango Street. These two very short stories contain strong character descriptions in the first person. At this point I focus on just a couple terms and concepts. It is important to only offer students one or two potentially confusing ideas in each lesson. For example, if the majority of a class does not recall what the differences are between first and third person point of view, they must have a solid understanding of those terms before they are expected to learn and comprehend the differences between "omniscient" and "limited points of view." However, if the instructor and the majority of the class is already confident of their comprehension of those first and third person distinctions, then terms like "omniscient" and "limited point of view" can be introduced to the students immediately. "Hairs" also has several examples of metaphor and simile which could be introduced if a class is ready to jump right in. "My Name" also raises the issue of the significance of names of both fictional characters and people. This is a theme I return to frequently in my class: what does a character or a person's name suggest about that individual, if anything?

Introducing Basic Terms

A good set of terms to begin the first lesson with are character, narrator, setting, and point of view. Students usually have some familiarity with these terms, but it is necessary that they become confident in using these words before moving on to plot. For this part of the unit I plan to use some more selections from The House on Mango Street. This book is composed of a series of what are short and loosely connected vignettes from the

perspective of a Mexican-American girl. These vignettes are easy to read through and offer examples of everyday events as literary material for example riding a bike in the city. I also anticipate using Gwedolyn Brooks's "spring landscape: detail" from her book Maud Martha to illustrate description of setting. If students cannot explain the differences between the narrator, main character, and secondary characters, it will make later discussion of theme, conflict, and characterization much more confusing for students and teacher alike. As stated above, if a higher grade level class already has a greater knowledge of these terms, then more specific terms relating to point of view can be introduced earlier. Generally, I hold terms like "omniscient" and "limited point of view" until later in the unit when students feel confident with their understanding several less imposing words. These selections by Cisneros and Brooks will also serve as models for student writing at the end of the unit.

Narrators and Gender

To address the specific focus of this unit, women writers, I will use a brief text which can be read in ten minutes. Select a text that does not overtly suggest the narrator is a woman. Furthermore, the story should have a dominant narrator/character whose gender may be male or female. I suggest Grace Paley's "Mother." The purpose in this is to begin addressing potential assumptions and stereotypes which students may hold regarding the writing of women. After reading the story in class, check for understanding in respect to who the narrator is, which point of view is being used, and who the characters are. Once this discussion is finalized, ask students to respond to the question/prompt "Was this story written by a man or a woman, and what makes you come to that conclusion?" Allow students to write for five to ten minutes in their personal journals. Student responses should offer a good indication of what students may consider as typical male or female writing. One of the goals of this unit is to dispel those assumptions. For that reason, it is important to begin this discussion on what women write about from the first lesson. This way, students will be more likely to focus their attention on the similarities and differences between the stories by different women that they will read over the course of several weeks. Regardless of which texts are selected for use in class, questions about student expectations from women writers should be brought up regularly.

Role Models

Another theme of my unit will be the introduction of positive role models in the literature we read in class. As I mentioned earlier, it is important for young readers to see examples of superior women's writing. All of the stories I will read with class obviously can be considered examples of great writing by women authors. I expect that this alone will inspire some of the young writers I have in my classes to recognize that they too, regardless of their ethnic or social/economic background, have the capacity to be authors themselves. This might seem like a high expectation. However, if only one student finishes the year with an urge and a firm belief in herself as a potential writer, I could ask for little else. My hope is that each year several young writers will leave my classroom with confidence in their ability to communicate both in the written and the spoken word. Regardless of the style of writing students choose to practice, whether it be fictional or non-fictional, prose or poetry, if students leave the course with a invigorated belief in their own abilities to succeed, then the time spent in the English class was productive and beneficial to their growth and development as individuals.

In addition to presenting my class with strong role models who are writers, I also intend to present them with characters who are models of independence and who are in control of their own destinies. I plan to use two stories by Charolotte Perkins Gilman to specifically address this topic during the unit. One of the stories is "Deserted." This story describes a woman who does all the stereotypical "housework" for her family and also

takes care of her husband's financial concerns. Because of her husband's personal debts, she ultimately leaves him, taking their children and all their assets, informing him that if he mends his ways she will gladly inform him where she is with the children and welcome him back. The final line of the story, "It made a new man of him" suggests that her choice of actions where successful.

The other Gilman story I intend on using is "Five Girls." This tale concerns five educated women who decide to always stay together and not allow love relationships to separate them. By the story's end, it becomes apparent that they have fallen in love over time and become wives and mothers; however, they have stood by their convictions and required their husbands to move into the house they all occupy together where additions are made on the house to accommodate the growing families. The importance of both these stories is they show female characters who are successful working professionals who refuse to compromise their original convictions for the desires or conveniences of their husbands.

Homework and Independent Study

After the first lessons, students should be sent home with another brief short story to read independently. This will be a student responsibility three to five nights per week, depending on class needs and abilities. While answering comprehension questions they should also be required to identify all the components the class has covered thus far. For example, they should identify the point of view as completely as their knowledge allows. This means it is not necessary for all students in one class to do identical work. Although the majority of the class may be asked only to identify the narrator, characters, and first or third person point of view, more advanced students should be pushed to label a protagonist and antagonist in the story. From the first day they can be expected to identify "first" or "third person" narrative, or, if the class is more advanced, the limit or omniscience of the narrator's point of view. These expectations should be consistent though out the course of the unit.

As new terms are added to the students' vocabularies, they need to be expected to use all the terms they have learned collectively. Once students have mastered the differences between points of view, character types, and setting descriptions, they need to be held accountable for that information later in the unit when the focus has gone beyond plot and is looking at themes, symbols, and motifs. An effective way to explain it to students is as a matter of detailed explanation. If they want to discuss theme or characterization, and they will be required to, they need to speak in terms of narration, point of view, and conflict. All these terms are interrelated. They build upon one another. Thorough knowledge of the simpler terms helps students to talk about more complex terms with confidence and authority. In other words, once they have mastered the more basic terms like character and setting, they need to keep using those words as part of their new vocabulary when discussing stories.

Teaching Plot

When students are comfortable with identifying and discussing components including characters, point of view, and setting, then the stages of plot can be introduced. Depending on the skills and dynamics of particular classes, it may take from one to several lessons for students to master those terms and use them confidently in writing and discussion. If they are not comfortable with those terms of reference, they will be at a significant disadvantage when the class moves on to learn about plot. The most difficult obstacle in selecting good contemporary short stories for plot discussion is finding those that have clear examples of the five stages of plot common to traditional short stories.

It is very easy to find traditional short stories in anthologies that go through all the five stages of a plot. The

problem lies in the fact that the vast majority of these stories are what students and teachers alike frequently deem boring stories. We continue to use them as a matter of convenience to ourselves; they are there ready to use, and they are easy to teach due to the following reasons: 1) They all have clear exposition sections where the reader is introduced to the setting and the characters. 2) The conflict is clearly stated introducing rising action and building suspense. 3) The climatic event is usually an obvious physical event such as the defeat of a villain by the hero. 4) Falling action is brief and involves replacing or rebuilding what was disrupted during the conflict. 5) Resolution is evident from the common fairy tale type of ending wherein it is suggested that protagonist and her supporting characters will live happily ever after. The shortcoming of these stories lies in the fact that they have been used for decades and are understandably tired examples of literature that our students are also tired of.

There are many factors that influence many contemporary writers to depart from the traditional plot organization. Regardless of their motives, many fine examples can still be found that include all five steps. In many contemporary stories resolution is either not complete or at times absent from the conclusion. While traditional short stories leave us with our questions and concerns regarding the characters answered, many contemporary stories leave us with lingering questions and concerns about the characters' fate. The latter type of story can also be taught in this unit, but it is best to save examples of these "incomplete" short stories for the end of the unit. Otherwise, great confusion will arise when discussing the resolution of a story that to the students may not be able to identify as an "end." Most of these five stages can, however, be found in a large array of contemporary short stories. A few stories I plan on using in my class that have a solid resolution are Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery", Toni Cade Bambara's "Raymond's Run," Gwendolyn Brooks' "death of Grandmother" and "Maud Martha spares the mouse" from Maud Martha, and Hisaye Yamamoto's "Seventeen Syllables." Although all these stories have good examples of resolution, they also leave the reader with a couple questions. I am doing this purposefully. By discussing these stories resolutions early in the unit, students will be asked what might happen next if the author where to write a continuation the story. I have learned that this approach makes it easier for young readers to then read stories later in the unit that leave the reader with nothing but questions. Reading stories with little resolution early in a unit on short stories leads to confusion and frustration among many students who are accustomed to "happy endings."

Discussing Plot

When covering plot, I use graphic tools to help students visualize the stages of plot. Diagrams like Freytag's Pyramid or sequence charts are very helpful in aiding students to see how the independent parts of a short story work together. Freytag's Pyramid is a very common graphic organizer used when diagramming plot. Freytag's was originally designed to discuss the stages of a play, but it is frequently seen in middle and high school texts in this format(Cudden 359).

(climax)

(rising action)   (falling action)

(exposition)   (resolution)

_____   _____
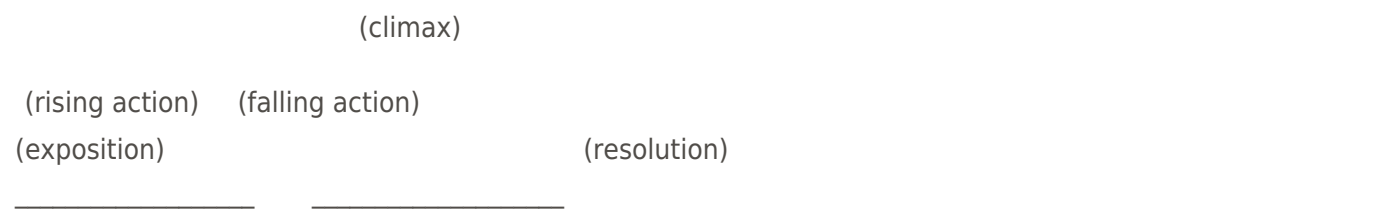
Initially with teacher aid but ultimately independently, the task of the student is to place the events of a given story along the diagram according to which part of the plot those specific events illustrate. There is always some disagreement among individuals regarding when rising action begins or when falling action turns to resolution. This is to be expected. There is no need for all involved to come to unanimous consensus on these nuances, at least, not in seventh grade. These occasions can lead to great class discussions on how different

individuals view the same material differently. What is important is that students are not perceiving setting descriptions or character descriptions as action, climax, or resolution.

Exposition is when the reader is introduced to the setting and characters. With stories that begin immediately with action, confusion may arise. "What happened to exposition? This author started with rising action! You said yesterday that stories begin with exposition!" Situations and responses such as these are good signs. It shows that the students are reading carefully and learning the basic framework of a plot. Occasions like this can also be used as a teachable moments. I reiterate with my classes throughout the year that writers in the last century have challenged what the "acceptable" approaches to composition are. Many writers have chosen for one reason or another to "break the rules" and offer readers a new view of things. Then, inevitably, the next question arises, "Then why do we have to learn to diagram a plot if writers don't pay attention to the rules?" My cliché response to this is, "You cannot break the rules until you know what the rules are." I use early and late Williams Carlos Williams poems to illustrate this in my poetry unit. Many people assume he always used lower case letters, but he did not. For his own reasons he found working within the boundaries of the "rules" limiting or insufficient, and he made a deliberate decision to change his style. I explain the same is true of short story authors; some have chosen to break the rules, but they knew the rules they were breaking. In the case of the author who begins with action, the reader has to understand that the exposition of setting and character is interwoven with the rising action.

I have found in past short story units that diagramming with Freytag's Pyramid can be challenging for some students. It is often necessary to go through diagramming several plots before students feel confident doing the work independently. Another method is to use sequencing charts. Theses are very much like story-boards. Students are given charts that have six to nine empty boxes with arrows from one to the next showing the direction of the story. The first boxes are filled in with details from the exposition of the story. The next few boxes contain the introduction of conflict and the rising action. The climax should be described in one box. The following boxes show the falling action, and the last box should describe the resolution. I have found it is most effective to leave the boxes unlabeled, have the students put the events of the story into the boxes they feel are essential to the story, then go back over the chart and label each box or boxes according to which part of the plot it/they illustrate. This seems to work well with visual learners. I also allow students to draw the events of the story in the boxes if they prefer that to writing. All students work with both Freytag's Pyramid and sequence charts. This ensures that the learning styles of all students are addressed. When I test students on plot, I then offer them the option of using the method they feel most comfortable with. What they are assessed on is their ability to identify the five parts of plot in a story accurately.

Cooperative Learning

During this unit I will also take advantage of cooperative learning strategies. I have knowledgeable students coach those who are struggling with identifying parts of the plots and any other terms or concepts the class may be working on. This is very similar to a tutoring process. Within the lessons on plot, for example, more key terms need to be introduced, and students need to learn to use them with the same confidence they use setting and character. I have observed that when students help or are helped by their peers, their confidence builds more rapidly for all parties involved. When we work on lists of terms in the unit, I use larger groups. In groups of four to five, students are given short lists of words, usually the same number as there are students in the group. Each student is expected to master one or two terms. It is then that individual's responsibility to teach their term(s) to the members of their group. Once this stage is complete, there are a couple options. Each student can then be asked to explain their term(s) to the whole class, or the members of the groups can be jig-sawed into new groups. The numbers do not always work out for this, but then I fill in any gaps with

myself. Once students are jig-sawed into new groups without any of their original partners, it is each student's responsibility to teach their new group all the terms they learned with their last group. Normally, I warn the students that they will be quizzed at the end of class to motivate on task behavior.

Along with the stages of the plot they will need to understand: internal conflict, external conflict, specific types of conflict for example, human v. nature, suspense, and characterization.

Once students are confident with discussing plot and the related terms, it is time to begin introducing more specific literary terms which they need to learn and use. Less traditional short stories can be incorporated into the lessons at this point, if it is apparent that the students are prepared to discuss the differences. If they are still struggling with identifying the exposition, climax, or resolution of stories, they are not ready and will only be further confused by moving on at this point. The choice of terms to introduce to students at this stage in the unit is contingent upon the teacher's goals and the ability of the students. Terms I expect my seventh grade class to learn include: theme, symbol, tragic, comic, satire, parody, allegory, foreshadowing, prose, fiction, and mood. If particular students master the expectations easily, then those students should be challenged to learn and use terms such as: sub-plot, metaphor, simile, motif, leitmotif, and flashback.

Assessment

Assessment throughout the unit needs to be an ongoing process. As mentioned, the very first activity should be an assessment of students' prior knowledge. Student comprehension needs to be carefully monitored. Much like a math class, if the students do not grasp the essential components, then they will be severely disadvantaged when the instructor moves on to the more complex components of the short story. Ongoing assessment should be balanced between: 1) Careful review of written homework by the instructor. If students are expected to write a diagram of the plot showing specific example of each stage from the story, it is the teacher's responsibility to check for that understanding in the written homework. 2) Quizzes on the meanings of specific terms should be given at the end or during each sub-section of the unit to ensure technical understanding of the words they have been asked to learn. 3) Students' journal responses and verbal responses to questions in discussion need to be monitored and noted. If a student is noticeably confused, they need special attention or the aid of a peer tutor to ensure that they will not be left in the wake of a quickly moving class. At the end of the unit, a comprehensive assessment should be employed. This will require students to produce their own short stories accompanied by a detailed description of their specific use of the components and techniques. This will be further explained in the "Lessons and Class Activities" section of the unit.

Lessons and Class Activities

The following plans outline three lessons to be used in the course of the unit. Each lesson incorporates different modes of instruction and learning styles. Some of the points raised in the lesson should be recurring themes that are revisited frequently during the unit, particularly in regard to stereotypes and assumptions in regards to the writing of women. The other lessons include cooperative learning strategies and performance based assessment.

Lesson - Introducing the Short Story Unit

The goals of this lesson are to expose knowledge and questions students have about the short story as a genre, understand the terms setting, character, and point of view, and uncover any assumptions regarding the gender of a writer and what s/he produces.

Initiation: Journal Responses

Begin with the prompt, "What do you know about short stories? What are the parts or components of a short story? What short stories have you read? What questions do you have about short stories?

Allow students 5-10 minutes to respond in their journals. When they begin exhausting their ideas, have them stop and share their knowledge and questions as a group. When questions do arise, check for other students who might have the answers. This is a key to knowing the class skill level (i.e. where to start from). Explain that the class will be studying short stories for the next several weeks, and that at the end of that period they will be experts on the genre of the short story.

Activity: Reading a short short story in class by a women author.

Distribute the text to students without letting them know the name of the author.

Read the story as a group. Ask about who the characters are, the setting and the point of view which the story is written in. If students do not know these terms, then teach them at this point. Always allow knowledgeable students to explain concepts to the class first.

After students have identified the above details, have them do another journal response. This time they must respond to the prompt, "Was this written by a man or a woman? Why do you think so? What evidence in the text suggests this to you? Give specific details." After students write for a couple minutes ask for their ideas. There responses should be varied, and that is the point of discussion. How do we know the gender of a writer without knowing their true name? Is there any legitimate way to tell?

Assessment: Question students as to what they learned in the lesson that they did not know before or that they had a question about during initiation. Ask peers to verify the accuracy of students' comments. If they are mistaken, allow peers the opportunity to correct the mistake before you step in as instructor.

Closure: Remind students of setting, character, and point of view. Reiterate the ideas that

came out in the discussion at the end of the activity regarding the gender identity of writers and the pitfalls in making assumptions without evidence or using stereotypes.

Lesson - Vocabulary cooperative learning

The goal of this lesson is adaptable. It can be used at the end of the unit after all terms have been introduced to the students, or it can be used more than once during the course of the unit to help students establish and maintain a thorough comprehension of the terms and components discussed in the unit.

Initiation: Give students a list of vocabulary they are expected to understand. Have them highlight any of the words that they do not feel comfortable with. Ask them to share their list with the class. Have students answer peer questions verbally if they can.

Activity: Place students in cooperative groups according to class size and dynamics. Give	each group a set of words. It will be each group's responsibility to learn their words	completely in 5-10 minutes. Once the groups have accomplished that, they will be	responsible for returning to the large groups and teaching the class the meaning of	the words they were assigned to learn. This can easily be adapted to any skill level	by limiting the number and complexity of the words given to individual groups.
Assessment - Students should be quizzed either verbally or in written format to check for	understanding. Verbal is preferable at this point. Student groups can also be asked	to assess other groups effectiveness in instructing the class on their assigned words	and offering clear explanations.		
Closure - Remind students of the importance of knowing all these terms and helping each	other to understand the tasks being assigned. Take a few minutes to randomly	question a few students on the significance of specific words.			

Lesson - Producing a short story

This lesson will require several days to complete, and it will serve as a comprehensive assessment of the students understanding of all components and terms introduced in the course of the unit. The writing process will be used, as well as peer revision and editing.

Initiation - Have students respond to the prompt, "If you were to write a short story, what	type of a story would you write? What characters would you use? Where would it	be set? What theme would you incorporate?" After they have had time to write, ask	for verbal responses from the class. After hearing their ideas, explain that they will	be writing a short story of their own.		
Activity - Students will plan, draft, revise, edit, publish and share their short stories. In	addition they will be required to write a reflection on their story addressing questions	such as, "What point of view did they use? What types of conflict are in the story?	Do you have a complete resolution? Why did you choose to end the story the way	you did?"		
Assessment - This project will be graded as a performance based assessment. Students will	gain or lose points depending on the inclusion of all necessary components of a	short story. For example, if they have no forms of conflict in their story, without a	clear explanation why they omitted conflict in their story, they will loose points. If	they offer justification in their reflection as to why they omitted conflict, then they	do not	loose those points. This allows for students of all cognitive and skill levels to	work on the same assignment.

Closure - Students will share their short stories with their peers.

Lesson - Epilogues Creating Resolution

Goal: Students will understand the difference between complete and incomplete resolution and create their own resolution to a story.

Objectives: Students will read "Raymond's Run" by Toni Cade Bambara

Students will respond to the ending of the story. (What do you think will happen next? If you were the author, what would you add to the story or how would you continue the story?)

Students will then create a continuation or resolution to the story.

Activity: After reading the story in class, students will respond to the prompt in their personal writing journals. "What questions do you have left after the end of this story? Do you think this story is really over, or do you think there is more to be told about these characters? What do you think might happen in a sequel?

After sharing student responses in the class, students will be required to create a continuation or conclusion to the story. In preparation for this project, students will be placed in small groups to work on story boards depicting the stages of their story.

Then, using their story boards, they will have the option to either write a story or a dramatic one scene performance to present to the whole class when completed.

Assessment: Students will critique their peers' work based upon each group's effectiveness in bringing resolution to the story. They will also be assessed upon their creative efforts and ability to work as teams.

Terms and Vocabulary

For the needs of my seventh grade class, a fully comprehensive coverage of all aspects related to the genre of the short story is not necessary. I will, however, offer many more terms than one might expect of the average seventh grader. My purposes in offering an expanded list of terms in this section are three. First, the list will offer a simpler guide to how far this unit may be adapted to suit the needs of elementary or high school students. Second, it offers a simpler mode of modifying lessons in the classroom for special needs or enrichment purposes. Third, it will offer brief summaries of the terms and suggest how they may be described.

Plot

"Beginning, middle, and end" is the simplest method of describing plot. This way of looking at stories is straightforward and easy for students to grasp. I have found most students are familiar with these terms when I check for prior knowledge at the beginning our short story unit. This is a good point to embark from. I expect all my seventh graders to fully understand the next set of terms for referring to plot.

   "Exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution" is a more expanded and detailed way of looking at the components of a story's plot. There are obvious parallels between the simpler approach above and this one. "Beginning" matches up nicely with "exposition" as does "end" with "resolution." Exposition is generally when the reader is introduced to the characters, the setting, and often preexisting events or

conflicts. Resolution is when there is nothing else left to happen. Resolution is a more precise term to use, because it does not suggest the utter finality that the term "end" does. There are many ways to consider the resolution of a story. A tale can come to complete resolution. This we often refer to as the happy ending. Many stories end without complete resolution, however. This is why it is preferable to refer to the conclusions of stories as coming to a certain degree of resolution.

The middle of the story can then be separated for more careful inspection into the rising action, climax, and falling action. Rising action begins with the introduction of conflict to the plot. At that point suspense begins to build if we are sympathetic to the characters. Further complications and conflict add to the rising action until the climax brings the action to a high point. Usually, the climax is marked by an event that will change the characters and the direction of the story significantly. Falling action follows. In short stories this aspect of the story is sometimes difficult for readers to pinpoint. The events during falling action show the characters adjusting, or failing to adjust, to the changes that have been brought about in the course of the story.

There are many terms associated with plot. Any number of them can be incorporated into lessons or extension exercises. I expect my seventh graders to learn the majority of these terms.

characters- the fictional persons presented in a story
main character - the character the action of the story centers around
secondary or supporting characters - characters the protagonist has interactions and conflicts with, but who are not central to the story
narrator - the voice telling the story, often a character in the story but not always
protagonist - the main character, also hero and heroine
antagonist - the character opposed to the protagonist, the villain
conflict - the difficulties the character(s) confront in the story
internal conflict - when the character has difficulties with a goal she set for herself external
conflict - when conflict is caused by something outside the character's control; human v. human; human v. nature; human v. technology
types of stories - tragic, comic, satiric, and romantic
point of view - first person, third person, omniscient, limited point of view
sub plot - a second story within the main plot of the story (this is often easier to teach through novels, but many short stories employ sub plots)
suspense - anticipation built by events in a story and our predictions as to what might happen.
flashbacks - scenes in a story that recall events that occurred before the exposition of the story began, i.e. scenes from the character's past
foreshadowing - clues in the story suggesting what might befall the characters
symbols - signs the writer uses to represent other ideas or aspects of the story
prose - the common, ordinary way of writing discourse, not poetry
fiction - literature which is not factual
theme - the message behind the story
motif - a repeating or common device, occurrence, or stock character that is common to many different works of literature (the court jester of many fairy tales for example)
leitmotif - a repeating saying, image, or symbol that reoccurs within an individual piece of writing
setting - the location, time, and circumstances of the story
mood - the overall feeling of the story: happy, tense, suspenseful, joyful, calm

Bibliography

BAMBARA, Toni Cade. "Raymond's Run." Gorilla My Love. New York: Random House, 1972. This is a good story to begin with when discussing stories that end, but still leave the reader with questions lingering. It can also raise questions for a discussion of responsibilities to family and to self.

BROOKS, Gwendolyn. Maud Martha, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953. This book contains many chapters that can be extracted from the book and taught as short stories. They are tied together, but are written as episodes in the life a young African-American and her experiences growing up.

CISNEROS, Sandra. The House on Mango Street, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

This book is a series of short chapters or vignettes that can be used as short stories either separately or in groups. The chapters are loosely tied together, but all deal with the same neighborhood and there are several reappearing characters. The book is written on a level easy enough for young children to understand, and it contains themes that can be discussed with older students as well.

CUDDEN, J.A. Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, New York: Penguin, 1991. This is a comprehensive guide to more than two thousand terms concerning literature and criticism.

GILMAN, Charlotte Perkins. The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Many of the stories in this collection are more appropriate for older students, however several stories are simple enough for younger readers as well. A good source for readers who need a challenge.

JACKSON, Shirley. "The Lottery." Story and Structure. Perrine, Laurence editor, New York: Hardcourt Brace Jovanich Publishers. This story is more modern than contemporary, but it is an excellent example of near complete resolution. In addition, most students enjoy the story and it can lead to compelling discussions about culture and ethics.