

Project-based unit

***“Oh, The Places We Know”*: written portraits of our Houston**

By Natalie Lund

YES PREP East End

Intended for 8th/9th Creative Writing

Needed:

Journals

Disposable cameras

Funds for developing

Project description and rubric

Copies of “The Little Store,” p. 171 of “A Worn Path”, p134-5 of Optimist’s Daughter

Excerpts TBD of “Place in Fiction,” “Memory and Imagination,” For Whom the Bell

Tolls, and Chicago Poems

Copies of selected Welty photographs as well as photo of secretary’s desk from Welty house

Unit Goals

Each student will compose either 1 short story or 4 poems inspired by images of their “places”

Each student’s final piece(s) will be collected in the Explorer Journal in a chapter dedicated to the mapping of Houston with words.

Unit Objectives

SWBAT describe settings using concrete details

SWBAT explain the importance of setting in relation to character

SWBAT compose creative pieces inspired by images

SWBAT reflect on the writing process

Assessment

Final story or poem collection

Approx. outline

Day 1:

Teacher intros E. Welty life/historical context.

Intro photos by E. Welty in gallery walk. Students write post-it comments to respond to content/subjects of photos and each other. Discussion follows.

“The Little Store” assigned with guiding questions re: what does the essay show us about place and time.

Day 2:

Discuss guiding questions from “The Little Store.”

A study of the similarities between description in “A Worn Path” (from p. 171) and Welty’s photos.

Show photo of desk in Welty house and read description of desk from Optimist’s Daughter (p. 134). Brief discussion of how place (and people/objects that are part of those places) inspired Welty’s writing.

Project description and rubric is given to students.

Rough project description: Students are given disposable cameras (hopefully donated from donorschoose.org)* and asked to document their “paths.” In other words, they are to take pictures of places that are important to them—places they find beautiful and familiar. Photos that have people in them are acceptable as long as subject is not posed (in order to encourage students to stray from capturing pix of school friends). Once photos are developed, they will choose a few and use these photos as inspiration for their journal writing. Eventually, they will convert their journaling into a final project piece of their choice (either a collection of 4 poems or 1 short story). Final project will also include a book-like display of the photo(s) that inspired the work and a reflection on how the image was integral to their writing. The projects will then be included in a chapter of the Explorer Journal. The chapter aims to “map our Houston with words.”

*If needed, project can be amended to use newspaper and magazine photographs.

Days 3-5:

Outside of school, students are busy taking photos in neighborhoods and around the city.

At school, students read excerpts from “Place in Fiction” and For Whom the Bell Tolls as well as poems by Carl Sandburg. More discussion of how place is used in stories and poems.

Cameras submitted for developing on Day 5.

(Weekend used to develop pictures)

Day 6:

Students study their returned pictures and choose 5 to put on their desk. Students rotate around desks looking at each student’s chosen 5 and leave post-it comments. With each photo, they consider: Can truths or secrets be learned and observed in these places?

Days 7-9:

Renew study of descriptive language by returning to previously mentioned texts. Students begin to use writing to describe places in 3-5 of their own photos. Students share their journaling about places and discuss with each other how descriptions may become stories and poems.

Day 10:

Read excerpt of “Memory and Imagination” by Patricia Hampl and discuss what the author has altered in the retelling of the story. Discuss “truth” and reconsider our own memories of the places we photographed. Consider: what events did happen here (in the described places)? What could have happened here? What sort of people do/could populate this place? What objects could be symbolic?

Students reflect on above questions in their journals.

Day 11-14:

Students compose pieces based upon descriptions and reflections

Day 15:

First drafts submitted and copied for work-shopping.

Days 16-20:

Workshops

Day 21-27:

Revisions/peer editing

Day 28:

Final creative piece(s) and photo reflections due.