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Indianapolis, Indiana

Lesson Plan: Literary and biographical allusions in Eudora Welty's,
"A Curtain of Green"

Duration: Three days, 50 minute classes.

Objective: To illustrate the potential of literary and biographical allusions as tools for literary analysis.

Assignment: Students will read "A Curtain of Green" prior to class.

Initial Assessment: Check up quiz. (In order to engage in a close reading/discussion of the assignment, it is imperative that all students will have read the assignment.)

Preparatory Activities:

1. Review the terms: literary and biographical allusions.
2. Students will quickly list as many allusions as they can. They should consider literary works, films, art, music, news events, pop culture, etc.
3. Briefly discuss a sampling of the student generated examples. (Hopefully, there will be both literary and biographical examples.)
4. Pass out biographical timelines of Herman Melville and Eudora Welty and briefly present. (See Library of America volumes on Welty/Melville.)
5. Briefly review Moby Dick's Ahab's obsessive hunt for the white whale.
6. Pass out an original epitaph poem by the teacher which begins with the line, "Ahab would not recognize me." The poem details Melville's own development from the angry Ahab persona to the resigned/accepting Ishmael/Billy Budd persona of his later years. [Copy of my poem will be sent with the final copy of the plan.]
7. With the information presented, re-read the Welty story aloud in class with various student readers participating.

8. Provide the students with a series of guiding questions, such as:
 - a) To what character in Moby Dick could Mrs. Larkin be compared? To what persons in Welty's and Melville's lives?
 - b) Why was Mrs. Larkin so determined to plant more plants rather than the routine maintenance of already existing vegetation?
 - c) Find examples of Mrs. Larkin's isolated status.
 - d) Who was Jamey? Could he suggest a person in Welty's life? In Moby Dick or Melville's life?
 - e) Why did Mrs. Larkin contemplate killing Jamey? Why did she relent? What was her physical reaction?
 - f) Did Mrs. Larkin learn anything from the above experience? Does the rain have a symbolic function?
 - g) Why did Jamey run away? Why does he refer to Mrs. Larkin as Mrs. Lark?
 - h) What is the significance of the story's title?

Activities/Strategies:

1. Divide the class into four groups. Each group will be responsible for two questions but will be permitted to agree or disagree with the other class groups.
2. Each group must have extensive textual support for their work.
3. Following the class presentations/discussions, the teacher will lead a discussion as to the overall utility of the use of literary and biographical allusions as keys to the understanding of the thematic content of the story.

Brief Unit Assessment:

Reader's response (200 words): In your opinion, what is/are the theme(s) of the story? How did you arrive at your conclusion? What role, if any, did allusions, implied or stated, play in your understanding of the meaning of the story?

HERMAN MELVILLE, 1819-1891: A Personal Epitaph

Ahab would not recognize me.

After having sailed the seven sea in search of truth and friendship,

I, back in port, puffed up with the winds of confidence and power,

Sat down to write the books that would bring me fame.

At the outset, I wrote about my true life adventures

Among the brown skinned folk of South Sea isles--

Those books that brought me acclaim

And the idolatrous affection of the reading public, but little else.

So then I wrote those works that dealt with the great cosmic questions,

That ripped the genteel and elegant clothing from the form of a gentleman God,

Only to reveal the soiled and bloody bandages of the blackguard buccaneer beneath.

Embittered, like an exiled and ragged Lear

Rejected and despised by his ungrateful subjects, I railed against my fate.

But my gales of time gave way to gentle breezes,

And my view of life's ship to that of its Pilot's eye.

And I went to my grave a chastened and accepting soul.