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Targeting Truisms in Welty's Works

Unit Goals:

To help students find their own voice in writing by analyzing the works of Eudora Welty, including One Writer's Beginnings, "The Winds," "A Curtain of Green," and The Optimist's Daughter.

To introduce the idea about how writers, such as Welty, use universal truths or truisms to animate their writing.

To move students interpretations and methods of understanding from the personal and concrete to the universal, or vice versa.

Specific Instructional Objectives:

Have students demonstrate understanding of the writing process in creating their own pieces of writing, including: pre-writing, drafting, revision, and publication of the final draft.

Identify literary devices which influence time, place and the influences of nature in Welty's writing.

Identify how a writer of fiction, such as Welty, uses universal truths in fiction writing, and thus have a model to follow in sharing universal truths in the writing produced by the student.

Strategies for Teaching Objectives:

Students will be given a handout with universal truths culled from Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings*. Students will be given the opportunity to free write or create journal entries for several of the universal truths (see attached list).

Students will be introduced to creating their own truisms or universal truths. This can be done through several methods:

- 1) use of color transparencies from Gretchen Bernabei's CD *Lightning in a Bottle* or from some original photography enlarged
- 2) ads without text from magazines or newspapers
- 3) appropriate calendar pictures (not too cute, trite, or sentimental)
- 4) enlarged Welty photographs (or on transparencies)

Procedure: Students are given a definition of "truism" and then will be divided into groups of 3-6. They will be shown a photograph and asked to create at least one truism appropriate to the photo. Groups will share truisms with the class, eliminating clichés or

second-person pronouns. For practice, groups should go through this procedure at least 2 to 3 times.

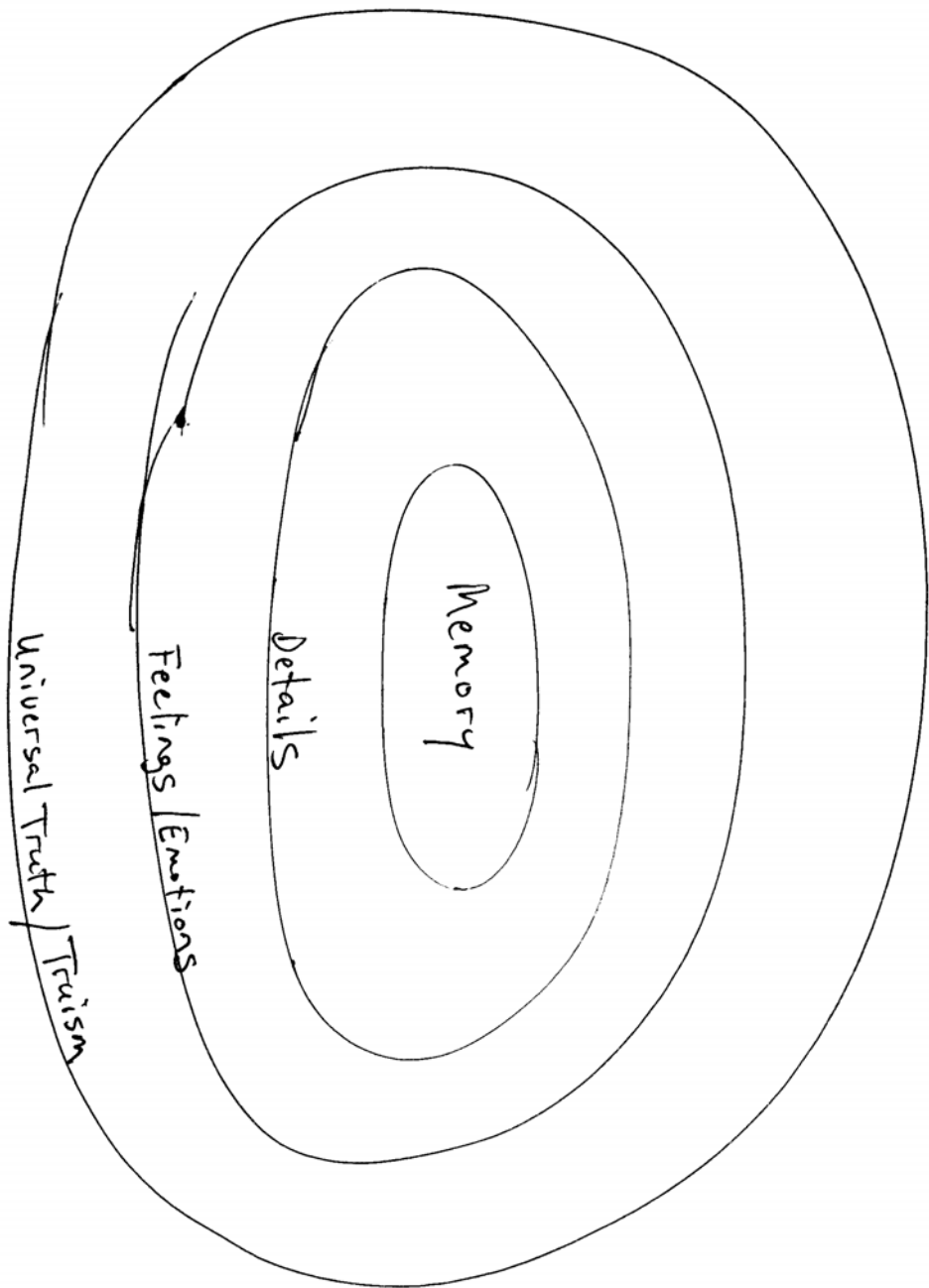
Now that students understand truisms, they are ready to move into literary analysis. The teacher will choose an appropriate Eudora Welty story for this activity. The story should have a scene rich in sensory detail that evokes a memory. In groups of 2 to 4, students will create a target (or a concentric circle)*. In the circle in the center, students will write a summary sentence for the scene. The second circle will be labeled *details* and will be completed by pulling sensory details from the story, such as sound, smell, nature, dialogue, and sense of place. The third circle, labeled *feelings/emotions*, will be filled in with quotations from the story that reveal emotion. Next, a student in the group will sketch the scene and a truism/universal truth will be created (unless they find one already in the text of the story) that fits the drawing and therefore the scene.

Now students are ready to move to the writing process to produce their own memory piece/memoir utilizing the target. They will be given a topic and brainstorm several memories before settling on one. The topic will go in the first circle of the target. In the second circle, they will begin listing details about the memory. They need to be reminded to use sensory details, create a sense of place, and use some dialogue. When students begin filling in the third circle (emotions), they should be reminded to show, not tell feelings. They may also need to include the emotions of others present in the memory. When targets are completed through the third circle, they should begin writing. After they are almost completed with the rough draft, each student will sketch a significant scene from the piece and create a truism. This truism will be incorporated into the concluding paragraph and also provides a focus for revising the narrative.

Besides incorporating the truism into the concluding paragraph, students will use a strategy called revision roulette. For this activity, students are put into small groups and each group is given a different laminated card that has a stylistic device with examples (pulled from Welty's stories and novels). They are also given a stack of Post-it notes and each student in the group creates an original simile, personification, alliteration, allusion, metaphor, or parallel structure that could be incorporated into their drafts. Students move the cards around so that at the end of the roulette activity, each student has created six stylistic devices (on six Post-its). Students will then incorporate at least three of their Post-it revisions into the finished, polished final draft.

*The idea for this target is based on a teacher's presentation at the New Jersey Writing Project in Texas workshop in spring, 2004. Please see rough sketch on next page.

Target for Writing Memoir



Handout for Teaching Strategies:

USING UNIVERSAL TRUTHS OR TRUISMS IN EUDORA WELTY'S ONE WRITER'S BEGINNINGS TO STIMULATE THE STUDENT WRITING PROCESS

(Page numbers in parentheses refer to the First Harvard University Press paperback edition, 1995)

“Listening”

1. “Learning stamps you with its moments. Childhood’s learning is made up of moments. It isn’t steady. It’s a pulse.” (9)
2. “Children, like animals, use all their senses to discover the world.” (10)
3. “Movement must be at the very heart of listening.” (11)
4. “I had to grow up and learn to listen for the unspoken as well as the spoken—and to know a truth, I also had to recognize a lie.” (15)
5. “...one secret is liable to be revealed in the place of another that is harder to tell, and the substitute secret when nakedly exposed is often the more appalling.” (17)
6. “There is no wonder that a passion for independence sprang up in me at the earliest age.” (19)
7. “From the first I was clamorous to learn—I wanted to know and begged to be told not so much what, or how, or why, or where, as when. How soon?” (22)
8. “It is not for nothing that an ominous feeling often attaches itself to a procession.”(37)

“Learning to See”

9. “Writers and travelers are mesmerized alike by knowing of their destinations.” (44)
10. “She was teaching me one more, almost last, lesson: emotions do not grow old. I knew that I would feel as she did, and I do.” (52)
11. “...the very element in my character...the fierce independence...was my chief inheritance from my mother...It was what we shared, it made the strongest bond between us and the strongest tension. To grow up is to fight for it, to grow old is to lose it after having possessed it.” (60)
12. “The events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order, a timetable not necessarily—perhaps not possibly—chronological. The time as we know it subjectively is often the chronology that stories and novels follow: it is the continuous thread of revelation.” (68-9)

“Finding a Voice”

13. “My work...is as dearly matched to the world as its secret sharer. My imagination takes its strength and guides its direction from what I see and hear and learn and feel and remember of my living world.” (76)
14. “Life doesn’t hold still. A good snapshot stopped a moment from running away.” (84)
15. “The fictional eye sees in, through, and around what is really there.” (85)
16. “Daydreaming had started me on the way; but story writing, once I was truly in its grip, took me and shook me awake.” (87)
17. “Writing fiction has developed in me an abiding respect for the unknown in a human lifetime and a sense of where to look for the threads...The strands are all there: to the memory nothing is ever really lost.” (90)
18. “Destination, when the train isn’t moving, seems only a forgotten dream.” (96)
19. “Travel itself is part of some longer continuity.” (97)
20. “Exposing yourself to risk is a truth Miss Eckhart and I had in common. What animates and possesses me is what drives Miss Eckhart, the love of her art and the giving it, the desire to give it until there is no more left.” (101)
21. “It is our inward journey that leads us through time...Each of us is moving, changing, with respect to others. As we discover, we remember; remembering, we discover; and most intensely do we experience this when our separate journeys converge. Our living experience at those meeting points is one of the charged dramatic fields of fiction.” (102)
22. “The memory is a living thing...all that is remembered joins, and lives....” (104)
23. “As you have seen, I am a writer who came of a sheltered life. A sheltered life can be a daring life as well. For all serious daring starts from within.” (104)

These universal truths or truisms may be used as jumpstarts to journal writing; story starters; introductions to personal narratives, autobiography, or biography; or segues to literary criticism (paragraph, essay, research paper). Be creative! Use your imagination! Enjoy!

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Assessments for Objectives:

The student will write a memoir utilizing the steps of the writing process and standard conventions of English grammar that shares some universal truth the student has learned in his or her own life to be read and evaluated by the teacher.