

Linda Vaught  
NEH Landmark Institute: Eudora Welty  
July 23, 2008

## **Unit Plan for Eudora Welty's Secret Sharer: the Outside World and the Writer's Imagination**

**Rationale:** Students in my high school English as a Second Language classes are lacking in exposure to and experience with the southern part of the United States. Additionally, they have a limited understanding of the language and the literature of the United States and with racially divergent human experiences. I want to introduce the students to a white, American female author from the south and to the cultural nuances of the south as they are expressed in southern literature. I want them to think imaginatively when they read her work so that they can form a lasting impression of the southern experience, especially as it is tied to a specific historic framework.

**Goal:** This unit will introduce the English as a Second Language students to Eudora Welty's fiction/essays, reinforce the significance of setting and the background knowledge of an author in order to inform their understanding of quality literature, and give students a strategy for creating a perception of Mississippi during Miss Welty's lifetime using her fiction as the basis of that discovery. In addition, this unit will help students understand the dramatic events and circumstances that lead to the struggles of the civil rights movement.

**Objective 1:** Students will read, understand, and actively engage in discussions on various elements and themes using some of Eudora Welty's short stories and writings.

**Objective 2** Students will be able to identify essential elements of setting as they are used in Welty's fiction, and be able to show how the setting places a piece of literature within a historical and cultural time period.

**Objective 3:** Students will familiarize themselves with significant events and important people who defined the Civil Rights struggle in the south.

**Objective 4:** Students will create a photographic/visual montage of the Mississippi region/culture after reading and discussing Welty's fiction and biography, and after listening to music excerpts native to the Mississippi region.

### **Activities**

1. To set the tone and the mood for this unit of study, students will listen to musical pieces including blues and jazz, and themes that relate to the civil rights

- movement that will help illustrate the cultural influences that Eudora Welty may have experienced as she grew up and developed into a renowned author. Some musicians include Fats Waller, Bobby Short, and assorted music about the civil rights movement (See list at end). Students will analyze the lyrics and discuss the predominant themes of life at Welty's time.
2. Next, I will introduce Eudora Welty and her Mississippi to the students. A map will be put up of the United States and of Mississippi. They will be shown pictures of Eudora Welty, her home, and some photographs that she took (via internet) ( we will see this in the computer lab) and discuss what kind of person they believed her to be and in what ways she is a product of the culture in which she lives. Websites that we will use include: [www.eudorawelty.org](http://www.eudorawelty.org); <http://mdah.state.ms.us/welty>; <http://pro.corbis.com>; <http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwewn>; In addition, students will receive a copy of "Eudora Welty: A Chronology." Students will watch the PBS documentary on Eudora Welty.
  3. Students will read One Writer's Beginning in class, aloud, and create a personal list of vocabulary and cultural items that they are unfamiliar with which they will be responsible for learning. This list will be kept in a section of their notebook labeled "Welty," and will be turned in at the end of the unit for evaluation. Students will listen to excerpts of her CDs of lectures given at Harvard University and compare the lecture content with the actual written publication.
  4. After reading One Writer's Beginning, students will create a two-sided chart, one side labeled NEW YORK, and the other labeled MISSISSIPPI. On the chart, they will begin to note differences in the way people live and behave between the northern state of NY, where they live, and the southern state of MISSISSIPPI, where Eudora Welty lived. Students will make further comparisons with their native country.
  5. Students will, in turn, read "The Whistle," aloud.

Students will focus on the essential question "How do the effects of poverty determine the nature of a person's relationships with others?"

    - Students will discuss evidences of poverty in the story, and the manifestations of hopelessness that results.
    - Students will identify the physical and temporal setting of the work, especially as it informs the actions and behaviors of the characters, and its connection to Eudora Welty's background.
    - Students will discuss the quote "*Then the kitchen table. To think that a solid, steady four-legged table like that, that had stood thirty years in one place, should be consumed in such a little while! Sara stared almost greedily at the waving flames,*" in terms of its connection to the relationship that Sara and Jason have shared. Students will defend their view of the quote ( do they believe or not believe in its message), and explain what the quote means.
    - Students will go to the food science classroom and prepare a southern recipe for fried tomatoes to get a sense of the importance of the fruit and the texture of southern cooking.

- Students will read an excerpt of Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*, pg 228 and 229 and make comparisons between the relationship of the couples in *Jazz* and in “The Whistle.”
  - Students will receive a copy of revisions that Eudora Welty made in “The Whistle” and locate changes she made between drafts and final copies. Students will discuss how the changes affect the meaning of the text. Students will discuss the process and significance of revision.
6. Students will read “A Curtain of Green,” aloud in class. Students will focus on the essential question “How does the environment in which we exist mirror our states of mind, and in what ways do we have the power to make changes?”
- Students will discuss the nature of grief, and the details provided to describe the natural environment in the story.
  - Students will identify the physical and temporal setting of the work, especially as it informs the actions and behaviors of the characters, and its connection to Eudora Welty’s background.
  - Students will discuss the quote “*Only by ceaseless activity could she cope with the rich blackness of this soil. Only by cutting, and separating, thinning, and tying back in the clumps of flowers and bushes and vines could she have kept them from overreaching their boundaries and multiplying out of all reason.*” Students will defend their agreement or disagreement with this quote and explain what it means.
  - Students will locate and notate the comparisons that Eudora Welty makes with objects, people and situations in the story. Students will elaborate on why they think Eudora Welty made those comparisons. Look for her use of “like.”
  - Students will learn about the history of bottle trees, a landscape item deep in southern culture and meaning, will design and then create a replica of a bottle tree.
7. Using internet sources and handouts, students will read and identify events that lead up to and include the death of Medgar Evers. The handouts include: A pamphlet of Medgar Wiley Evers produced by the Medgar Evers Library; Medgar Evers: A Death Not in Vain; and Ordinary People living Extraordinary Lives [www.usm.edu/crdp/html/cd/timeline.htm](http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/cd/timeline.htm). Students will attend the computer lab to do research on Evers at [www.everstrIBUTE.org](http://www.everstrIBUTE.org). Students will prepare a two page research driven document on his life and connection to the Civil Rights struggle.
8. Students will watch the movie “Ghosts of Mississippi” (1996) about Medgar Evers life and death. Students will discuss the events in the context of the civil rights movement.
9. Students will read the speech “ I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King, Jr., and compare the lives of the two men and their impact on their southern environment.
10. Students will read the short story “Where is the Voice Coming From?” aloud in class.

- Students will focus on the essential question “In what ways can we make sense of tragic events, even comprehend them, without accepting them?”
  - Students will identify the physical and temporal setting of the work, especially as it informs the actions and behaviors of the characters, and its connection to Eudora Welty’s background.
  - Students will discuss the quote “*Everybody: It don’t get you nowhere to take nothing from nobody unless you make sure it’s for keeps, for good and all, for ever and amen.*” Students will write a written explanation of the quote and defend their belief and/or disbelief of the quote.
11. Students will make connections between the facts presented in the handouts, internet sources, the movie, and the fictional elements in the story “Where is the Voice Coming From?”
  12. Students will choose one of the short stories and create a visual montage that demonstrates their understanding of that story and the effect of place on a piece of fiction. Students will draw, paint, photograph, or cut out pictures that show elements of culture and setting and history from the pieces they read.

### **Assessments:**

Students will participate in an oral summary of the unit. They will comment on all three short stories and One Writer’s Beginning and share their impressions regarding their new knowledge of Mississippi, Eudora Welty, and how the setting of stories are influenced by the author’s background, and how stories can inform our understanding of real places. (Members of the English Department faculty will be invited to sit in on the oral summary and will be encouraged to ask questions of the students.)

This unit will segue into a unit on drama which will include reading and attending the Syracuse Stage production of “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom,” by August Wilson. Students will then write their own drama to be submitted to the Syracuse Stage Youth Playwright contest.

### **Lyrics of Songs by Fats Waller**

#### **Ain't Misbehavin'**

No one to talk with, all by myself

No one to walk with, but I'm happy on the shelf

Ain't misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you.

I know for certain the one you love

I'm through with flirtin', it's just you I'm thinkin' of

Ain't Misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you.

Like Jack Horner in the corner

don't go nowhere, what do I care

Your kisses are worth waitin' for . . . Believe me.

I don't stay out late, don't care to go

I'm home about 8, just me and my radio

Ain't Misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you

**Can't Give You Anything But Love**

Music: Jimmy McHugh

Words: Dorothy Fields

I can't give you anything but love, Baby,

That's the only thing I've plenty of, Baby.

Dream awhile, scheme awhile, We're sure to find,

Happiness, and I guess, All those things you've always pined for.

Gee, I'd like to see you looking swell, Baby,

Diamond bracelets Woolworth doesn't sell, Baby.

Till that lucky day, you know darned well, Baby,

I can't give you anything but love.

**Take It Easy**

Take it easy, be a sport

Just remeber life is short

If you've got to take it

Take it easy

Never hurry to a date

Eat your supper; let 'em wait

Don't get indegestion

Take it easy

Go stick your chest out

And rest out

Of doors in the sun

Lay off

You'll pay off

In plenty of fun

So don't be one to tear your hair

If your girl gives you the air

If she makes you take it,

Take it easy!

----Fats Waller

**Civil Rights music titles:**

We Shall Overcome

When Will We Be Paid for the Work We've Done

Oh Freedom

I Shall Not Be Moved

Blowin' in the Wind

This Little Light of Mine

Goin' Down to Mississippi

Only a Pawn in Their Game

**Bobby Short ( performed by)**

Nobody Else But Me

The Most Beautiful Girl in the World

Never Again

