

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AP[®] English Literature
and Composition
Close Reading of Contemporary
Literature

Curriculum Module

About the College Board

The College Board is a mission-driven not-for-profit organization that connects students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board was created to expand access to higher education. Today, the membership association is made up of more than 5,900 of the world's leading educational institutions and is dedicated to promoting excellence and equity in education. Each year, the College Board helps more than seven million students prepare for a successful transition to college through programs and services in college readiness and college success — including the SAT® and the Advanced Placement Program®. The organization also serves the education community through research and advocacy on behalf of students, educators and schools.

For further information, visit www.collegeboard.org.

Pages 5–6: Robert Penn Warren, “Evening Hawk,” and excerpts from “Kentucky Mountain Farm” and “The Leaf” from *The Collected Poems of Robert Penn Warren*, edited by John Burt. Copyright © 1985 by Robert Penn Warren. Reprinted with the permission of William Morris Agency, Inc., on behalf of the estate of Robert Penn Warren.

Page 33: John Updike, “The Great Scarf of Birds” from *Collected Poems 1953–1993*. Copyright © 1993 by John Updike. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.

Pages 35–37: Joyce Carol Oates, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” from *The Wheel of Love and Other Stories* (New York: Vanguard, 1970). Copyright © 1970 by Joyce Carol Oates. Reprinted by permission of John Hawkins & Associates, Inc.

Contents

Introduction

Deborah Shepard..... 1

Lesson 1: Teaching the Poem “Evening Hawk”

Sally P. Pfeifer..... 3

Lesson 2: Teaching Edwidge Danticat’s “The Funeral Singer” — A Study in Voices

Renee H. Shea..... 11

Lesson 3: Bridging the Gap Between Literature and Life

Melissa Scholes Young..... 21

Appendixes 27

About the Contributors 39

Introduction

Deborah Shepard
College Board's Florida Partnership
Tallahassee, Florida

The data from the 2007 administration of the AP® English Literature and Composition Exam revealed something quite unexpected: students performed better on pre-nineteenth-century literature questions than they did with questions about more contemporary selections. Students often think the older works are “archaic,” “written in old English,” and very difficult to understand. However, their impressions are not borne out on the AP Exam; students apparently are more skilled at reading and understanding earlier works than they realize. Based on this data, I decided that this Curriculum Module should focus on teaching twentieth-century literature. Each lesson in the module provides a great background for teaching its respective text along with differentiated strategies and activities that I know you will find interesting and useful. I have also offered some suggested works to add to the lessons if you are interested in taking these authors’ ideas further.

Lesson 1, contributed by Sally Pfeifer, builds upon her presentation at the 2007 AP Annual Conference in Las Vegas. Those who attended gave it rave reviews, so we thought sharing it here would benefit even more teachers. Her topic explores Robert Penn Warren’s poem, “Evening Hawk,” from the 2006 AP English Literature and Composition Exam. (Pfeifer’s husband took the two photos of hawks that she uses in her piece.) I recommend that you check out the following Warren poems: “Birth of Love,” “True Love,” and “Little Girl Wakes Early.” Appendix B of this Curriculum Module includes a formative assessment, which is intended for use in conjunction with Pfeifer’s suggested instructional activities for “Evening Hawk.”

Renee Shea, who knows author Edwidge Danticat, presents a great approach to teaching Danticat’s short story, “The Funeral Singer,” in Lesson 2. She describes this work as “a story of contrasts: the past in Haiti and the present in the U.S., the cloistered classroom and the brutal world of experience, the hopeful faith in education and the stark danger of political oppression, and the pain of exile and the dream of freedom.” These oppositions present a text full of wonderful teaching opportunities. I suggest pairing the story with Junot Diaz’s novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

Melissa Young teaches Joyce Carol Oates's story, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" in her classes, as described here in Lesson 3. Oates's story is about a young man who seduced and murdered three women in Arizona in the 1960s. Young's lesson looks at the story "in terms of illusion versus reality." She uses close reading strategies to guide students along their journey into a seemingly innocent story that turns disturbingly. Students will certainly have lots to say after reading this story. *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold makes a nice companion piece to this story, too.

Lesson 1: Teaching the Poem

“Evening Hawk”

Sally P. Pfeifer
Spokane Public Schools
Spokane, Washington

Plan the Lesson

“Evening Hawk” appears as the free-response essay question on poetry on the 2006 AP English Literature and Composition Exam. As an assessment tool after teaching this poem to your students, you might want to look at the prompt, scoring guide, and samples from the 2006 AP Exam: http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/exam/exam_questions/2002.html.

Evening Hawk

From plane of light to plane, wings dipping through
Geometries and orchids that the sunset builds,
Out of the peak’s black angularity of shadow, riding
The last tumultuous avalanche of
Light above pines and the guttural gorge,
The hawk comes.

His wing
Scythes down another day, his motion
Is that of the honed steel-edge, we hear
The crashless fall of stalks of Time.

The head of each stalk is heavy with the gold of our error.
Look! Look! he is climbing the last light
Who knows neither Time nor error, and under
Whose eye, unforgiving, the world, unforgiven, swings
Into shadow.

Long now,
The last thrush is still, the last bat
Now cruises in his sharp hieroglyphics. His wisdom
Is ancient, too, and immense. The star
Is steady, like Plato, over the mountain.

If there were no wind we might, we think, hear
The earth grind on its axis, or history
Drip in darkness like a leaking pipe in the cellar.

—Robert Penn Warren

Background Information

When I first started looking at this poem and the poetry of Robert Penn Warren, I must admit that I was not as familiar with Warren's poetry as I was with his novel, *All the King's Men*. I did discover, however, that Warren considered himself and was considered by others as a poet first and a novelist second. Warren was the first to be called "Poet Laureate"—originally the title was "Consultant in Poetry," but the title was changed in 1986 to become "Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry." I realized that I needed to delve further. I found some interesting moments in his poetry and his life.

Born in Guthrie, Kentucky, in 1901, Warren would write about the South in many of his works. In a century that offered young men unparalleled opportunities for action, he was destined to play the role of observer and commentator. So many great artists have tried to participate in life, only to realize the role of the artist is to observe and re-create life as they see it.

I learned that hawks have played a major part in Warren's poetry. Lines from earlier poems include:

The sunset hawk now rides
The tall light up the climbing deep of air
—"Kentucky Mountain Farm"

The hawk tower, his wings the light take, ...
—"To a Friend Parting"

The hawk shudders in the high sky, he shudders
To hold position in the blazing wind, in relation to
The firmament, he shudders and the world is a metaphor, his eye
Sees, white, the flicker of hare-scut, the movement of vole.
—"The Leaf"

These hawks have much in common with Warren's "Evening Hawk."

Harold Bloom says Warren has "converted...the light into the appalling speed that sounds the wind of time, for time is Warren's trope, the center of his poetics. The hawk shudders

to hold position in the blazing wind of time, and so transforms the world into a temporal metaphor.” Bloom says, as well, that the poem “is surely one of his dozen or so lyric masterpieces, a culmination of 40 years of his art.” (Bloom, “Sunset Hawk.”)

Teach the Lesson

The 2006 AP English Literature and Composition free-response question on poetry asked students to analyze how the poet uses language to describe the scene and to convey mood and meaning. This is how I guide my students to begin to look at the craft of poetry—FIC: Facts, Interpretation, and Central Idea or Question (this could be Theme—but I seldom use the word “theme” in my classroom because then the acronym would be FIT).

Picture or Paraphrase the Poem

After my students and I read the poem, possibly several times, we would first decide on the scene that is taking place or do a quick paraphrase.



© 2006 Patrick Pfeifer

Above is a picture of a red-tailed hawk soaring above my house at sunset. A hawk can be a terrifying bird—its wingspan and size can literally create a large shadow on the land. If you teach in an area where there might not be hawks, I would suggest using a picture.

Possible paraphrase of the poem:

“The orchid colors of sunset build shadows on the landscape. High above, riding on an avalanche of wind and light, comes a hawk. As the speaker observes the hawk’s flight, he enthusiastically calls to us or another observer, ‘Look, Look’—he (the hawk) is climbing the last light as the world swings into shadow. The speaker remains for some time. The songbirds—with the onset of the dark—stop singing. A last bat, hoping for a few insects in

the light of the stars, cruises overhead at sharp angles. Over the mountaintop, the speaker sees the North Star and speculates what he might perceive about the world and our Time on it, and about human history.”

Interpret the Poem

After the scene or the paraphrase is established, I would ask my students to share some ideas or items that have struck them. Then we can begin to ask the tough questions and do some interpretation. By structuring our classes in an inquiry format, we tend to push students to ask the questions themselves. Some simple prompts may help: What do you think? What did you notice? What are the facts? Do you trust this speaker? Why or why not? Once students click into this mode of thinking, it seems to become second nature.

We would then look at the *language* that the poet uses to bring this scene and his mood and meaning to us. I would ask my students to look for and underline or highlight words, phrases, and images to complete their analyses; we would particularly attend to the following types of language:

- *Diction*, describing the “visual imagery,” can be seen in the repeated words of *light-dark, shadow, black, darkness, and starlight*. In addition, the *geometries* formed by the sunset on the landscape and the flight of the hawk and the bat create *geometries, mountains, gorges, peaks, hieroglyphics, and an axis*.
- The poem is full of “kinesthetic words and images”—the movement *dips, builds, rides, tumults, avalanches, motions, scythes, climbs, heaves, falls, cruises, steadies, grinds, rotates, leaks, and drips*.
- And, finally, the “auditory and visual imagery” comes to our ears and our eyes as the *avalanche of light* and wind, the *guttural* call of the *gorge*, the *scythe of wings* cutting through the grain of the day, the “apostrophe” call to us, the sound of the *earth grinding on its axis*, and *history dripping in the cellar*.

All of these create a feast for the senses: the sights, the movements, and the sounds—or the sounds of silence.

As my students and I move through the questions and ideas, I use the following techniques and questions to help guide the discussion. The metaphor of the hawk to Father Time is fairly clear.

The hawk comes.

His wing
Scythes down another day, his motion
Is that of the honed steel-edge, we hear
The crashless fall of stalks of Time.



© 2006 Patrick Pfeifer

The end of the day immortalized by the predatory soaring through the sunset cutting down the man-made stalks of time makes sense, yet there are some lines that give us pause.

“The head of each stalk is heavy with the gold of our error.”

- What sort of error???
- A *universal* error?
- One that is shared by all humankind?
- The grain, or the corn, is grown by man. Is that why it is the grain of our error?
- Why is it given the value of gold? Or, is gold the moment when our errors are the ripest? The heaviest?
- What connections can we make at this time?

Some ideas for students to consider might include the following:

- When the poet speaks of the earth it seems to be in angles of shadows and darkness. We are bound to the earth—unlike the hawk. Perhaps the error is all our missteps—big and small—as we move through life. Yet the hawk and the light are unforgiving of our errors as we swing into shadows.

- Are the *bat* and the *hawk* equal in wisdom? Or because the bat only operates in the darkness, does it contain a greater and more immense wisdom?

With the mention of the *bat* (which brings up a whole other issue—bats—batman—etc.), the *North Star*, and *Plato*, we can begin to ask the philosophic questions:

- Philosophy—a field of study in which people ask questions as to whether God exists, what is the nature of reality, whether knowledge is possible, and what makes actions right or wrong.
- If the hawk “knows neither Time nor error” and is “unforgiving”—the world then must accept and question existence and time.

Note: Appendix A to this Curriculum Module presents the poem with a number of possible annotations that incorporate most of the above ideas. I use the technique of annotations prior to having students write a paper on the poem. The annotation included is already complete—I would suggest giving students a blank poem—or a poem with blank boxes and having them take notes on the poem as you discuss it, and/or complete their own annotations after the discussion. My students create annotated poems on the computer using the draw program in Microsoft Word as my class is online.

Appendix B to this Curriculum Module presents an example of a formative assessment of John Updike’s poem “The Great Scarf of Birds.” The formative assessment can be used either to introduce or reinforce the concepts emphasized in this instructional activity.

Now it is time to point out the final speculation of the speaker who imagines the impossible or paradoxical and then suddenly shifts in idea and verb tense—from present to the speculative subjunctive...

If there were no wind we might, we think, hear
The earth grind on its axis, or history
Drip in darkness like a leaking pipe in the cellar.

...if there were no wind—perhaps we could hear the earth grind on its axis, or history drip in the darkness in the cellar. The images of light and darkness coupled with Plato provide “a teachable moment”—an allusion to Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” or the “Metaphor of the Sun.”



We are chained in a cave facing the wall. We see images as shadows that parade in front of a fire behind us. But what would occur if one of us were suddenly released and let out into the world and the light of the sun? Would we wish to return to the cave and our familiar dark existence, or would we, by the light of the sun, see the world as it truly is? Most likely if we returned to the cave to tell the others, the reality of the light would not be believed.

I would present this famous allegory to the students, and we would discuss the significance and connection to this poem.

- So, is our history in the cellar or the cave?
- Do we turn from the light?
- Is our history the composite of our error?

Certainly, a very philosophic mood and, from this, our students will make meaning. Instead of the word or term “theme,” I would now ask, “So what?” A good question to explain or get at the “theme idea.”

The poet has put together these images and used these slick devices—so what? What’s he getting at?

After all, there *is* wind and the North Star is “an ever-fixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken; It is the star to every wandering bark, whose worth’s unknown although his height be taken.” (Shakespeare, Sonnet 116)

So, even though the grain is heavy with our error, and we seem to live in shadow and our history guiltily drips in the basement, there is hope for those of us who turn to the flight of the hawk and the truth of the light.

Bibliography

Bloom, Harold, ed., “Sunset Hawk: Warren’s Poetry and Tradition.” In *Robert Penn Warren (Bloom’s Modern Critical Views)*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.

Lesson 2: Teaching Edwidge Danticat’s “The Funeral Singer”— A Study in Voices

Renee H. Shea
Bowie State University
Bowie, Maryland

Plan the Lesson

“Show-offy rather than interesting, guarded and self-conscious rather than gloriously open, and worst of all, written for editors and teachers rather than for readers”—so claims Stephen King in his description of today’s short story in an article entitled “What Ails the Short Story” (*New York Times Book Review*, September 30, 2007). As editor of the *Best American Short Stories of 2007* and an author himself, King lamented the state of short fiction being published in *The New Yorker*, *Kenyon Review*, *Granta*, and other contemporary publications. Although I’m not prepared to argue here with the larger picture he paints, I am glad to point out that none of his criticism applies to Edwidge Danticat, the Haitian-born author of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; *Krik? Krak!*; *The Farming of Bones*; *The Dew Breaker*; and most recently, *Brother, I’m Dying*, nominated for the 2007 National Book Award in Nonfiction. Danticat’s works, including her short stories, are, in King’s terms, interesting, gloriously open and, perhaps best of all, appealing to both teachers and readers.

The Dew Breaker (2004), a collection of nine interrelated stories, several published independently, centers on a Haitian immigrant currently living in New York City but who has a past as a torturer, one of the Ton Ton Macoutes during the 1960s Duvalier regime. Although I highly recommend the complete book, I’ve recently found “The Funeral Singer” especially successful in the classroom in large measure because of a recording of Danticat reading the entire story, part of the Lannan Foundation Reading Series (2000). The audio includes an introduction by Junot Diaz, who speculates that, like him, most of the audience have come “to hear Edwidge.” The audio, which includes a downloadable podcast, is available at <http://www.lannan.org/lf/rc/event/edwidge-danticat/>.

Background Information

Told as a first-person narrative by Freda, one of three Haitian exiles studying for their GED, “The Funeral Singer” is divided into 14 sections. Freda, Mariselle, and Rezia meet during the class and connect through their shared past, though they are from different social classes (in their past as well as the present). During the reading, Danticat explains that she experimented with form in this story and considered a structure that reflected a song, but she settled on the short divisions (the story is only about 15 pages long) because they reflect a 14-week session of preparing for the GED, one route to a high-school equivalency degree.

This story works well in the classroom for many reasons but, first and foremost, it is eloquently written, offers insights into an ongoing chapter of history with which many of our students are unfamiliar, and leaves readers with questions about whether it is always true, as Mariselle claims, that “You have so much time ahead to redo these things, retake these tests, reshape your whole life” (174). Furthermore, the story has resonance for English language learners who are themselves new to the United States or whose parents might have been in situations similar to those of the characters Freda, Mariselle, or Rezia. The beauty is that out of these ordinary lives, Danticat creates art that speaks to all of us.

“The Funeral Singer” is a story of contrasts: the past in Haiti and the present in the U.S., the cloistered classroom and the brutal world of experience, the hopeful faith in education and the stark danger of political oppression, and the pain of exile and the dream of freedom. These collisions of cultural perspectives and circumstances create ironies throughout the story, some of them even humorous in their odd juxtaposition. For instance, after a conversation about Jackie Kennedy’s visit to Haiti, Rezia observes, “Isn’t it amazing?... Jackie Kennedy can go to Haiti anytime she wants, but we can’t” (179). Another is a math problem the GED instructor poses, one that involves computing the height of two trees based on their shadows. “It sounds like a riddle,” Freda suggests, “that could take a lifetime to solve. We have too much on our minds to unravel these types of mysteries. M’bwe pwa” (171). That last phrase is one of the examples of Danticat including Haitian Creole in the narrative, not enough to pose any difficulty of comprehension but a subtle reminder that these women are studying for their GED in English, not French or Creole, languages with which they are likely more familiar.

Teach the Lesson

My objective in teaching this story is for students to experience the unsettling, often confusing, usually ambiguous, and generally uncertain world that the characters inhabit. To achieve that, I take several approaches to the story, increasing, I hope, the depth of the students’ appreciation and understanding:

- Write a response to a GED essay prompt as a preread.
- Read and listen to the text of the story.

- Analyze the story using a graphic organizer.
- Use role playing as a stimulus for class discussion.
- Rewrite the response to the GED prompt in the voice of one of the characters.
- Write a response to the 2007 AP English Literature and Composition open essay question.

Prereading: What's the GED?

The GED includes a required writing sample, a brief essay. Simulated GED essay prompts are available online and in test-preparation booklets. Here are three that I created to resemble actual topics:

- Each of us has responsibility for his or her own life and cannot expect others to act on our behalf. Write an essay explaining whether you agree or disagree with this statement.
- What does success mean to you? Write an essay, using specific details to explain your views.
- *Place* may refer to a geographical location such as a city or to a particular space such as a room in your home or a public park. Write an essay explaining why a specific place has meaning for you.

Although it might be easy to make sport of such general topics, reminding students of the large and diverse population who take the GED explains the need for such broad-based prompts. Then, taking even 10 minutes to write gives the students a sense of what the characters they will meet in this story are facing—a performance that will influence whether they do or do not earn their high school equivalency degree.

Listen and Read

I begin by asking students to listen to the first section of “The Funeral Singer” without ever having read the text. Pure listening—no note-taking, no expectations of quiz, nothing: just listen to the story. After they listen, we talk about what they have learned about the person “speaking.” Most students laugh at Rezia’s recitation: “Four scones and seven tears ago, our fathers blew up this condiment” (165). It’s funny, at least at the beginning before there is any context for knowing whether these are unintentional malapropisms or intentional parody. Freda introduces us to the characters in this first section and provides “clues” of a sort to each of them, herself included.

At this point, students also comment on Danticat’s voice, an authentic voice that could be that of one of the women in the story. Most find it soft and, as one student suggested, “kind of innocent.” Others hear an edge of amusement as she reads the description of the GED instructor. Most note how Danticat’s voice emphasizes the glibness inherent in the teacher’s assurance to the students that passing the test will be “a piece of cake” (167). We

talk about whether Freda's statement "I do nothing" is read with defiance, resignation, or neutrality. Nearly all notice Danticat's voice pause, then drop, as she reads the final sentence of this section after Freda announces that she is a professional funeral singer: "At least I was" (167). The past comes into high relief, softly, clearly, and somewhat menacingly. Foreshadowing indeed, but signaled with the voice as much as the short, simple sentence ending with a past tense verb.

Next, I ask students to read Week 2, the second section, to themselves; afterward, but prior to any further discussion, we listen to the recording. We take stock of the additional information we're learning, but we also discuss the different impact that hearing and reading have on our understanding. This short section, for instance, is reminiscence, beginning, "When I was a girl in Leogone..." and telling a story about Freda's mother and father. It includes figurative language and interplays of color that students quickly note are both idyllic and unsettling, e.g., "My father used to look at the way the sunset outshone the clouds to decide what the sea would be like the next day. A ruby twilight would mean a calm sea, but a blood-red dawn might spoil everything" (168). Listening rather than reading makes the students more authentically Freda's audience and encourages visualization of the scenes she recounts.

Next, I play the rest of the recording and let the students follow along in the text or close their eyes and listen, whichever they prefer. Various sequences and combinations of listening or reading straight through, selecting passages, etc. are useful, depending upon the students' attention span and inclinations, but in any case, the bonus is "rereading" the text whether visually or aurally. As a personal aside, I have to say that I thoroughly enjoy the unadorned listening. As I was preparing to write this lesson, I sat down on a busy day when I had been commenting on student papers and reading in preparation for another class; I clicked on the computer—and what a pleasure! As I sat and simply listened (even though it was about the fifth time) without following along a written text, I relaxed and let the story take over. I'm primarily a visual learner who can't seem to hold onto anything she doesn't see in print, yet I found myself gathering all manner of information by slowing down and hearing the language. I can imagine how this experience affects students who are more attuned than I to the spoken word.

Close Reading Exercise

- Compare and contrast the style Danticat uses to describe Week 2 and Week 6. Pay attention to sentence structure, use of dialogue, and connotative language.
- One of the hallmarks of this story is wordplay. Analyze the effect of wordplay that results from both miscues and double entendres. In Week 3, for instance, “Marigolds, the flower of a thousand lives” is put into play with “Yellow like my boyfriend... the man of a thousand lies”; and the “dead spots” of a painting is followed by the narrator’s thought, “Life is full of dead spots.”

Analysis

To interpret and analyze larger thematic issues, the next step for me is to ask students to capture and organize some of what they are gleaning from the text. Early in the process, I put them on the alert for information about Haitian politics and history that form the immediate context for the story: What references do they know? Which are unfamiliar? The following table helps them to capture both this information and the dualities that are central to the story. It also situates them right in the text.

Character	Life in Haiti	Life in the U.S.	Your Comments
Freda			
Mariselle			
Rezia			

As a basic way to organize information, this template helps students collect details about the women’s lives as they are revealed in the story, where the linear plot (i.e., the march of the GED classes) is continually interrupted with remembrances and

events from the characters' pasts. Like many of my colleagues, I find such organizers prescriptive, yet they are usually helpful to students as a means of analytic note-taking that leads to interpretation.

Role Playing

I often use role playing in my classes, so “The Funeral Singer” with its 14 sections and first-person narrative, along with the availability of the recording of Danticat, makes this approach a natural. If it's the first time we've done this, I explain during one class that at the next meeting a few students will assume the roles of characters in the story and the author; the other students will ask them questions. They won't know until they come to class who will play which role. Those who are role playing must respond in the voice of the character and may—in fact, I encourage it—respond by reading something in the actual text of the story. Although I often start out with a few questions to get things going, developing those questions is a homework assignment, and students learn to prepare them as a way to “rehearse” a role as respondent as well as questioner, as performer as well as audience.

This story has three women and a woman author. While I have no trouble with gender switches where a male student plays a female character or vice versa, in this case I add one male character. Freda's father, though not an actual character, is central as a remembered one. Whether I ask for volunteers or do the “volunteering” arbitrarily, those playing characters and author sit in a semicircle before the class as questions are posed. I encourage the “characters” to engage one another in conversation, following up with questions or challenging the response. Prior to role playing, we talk about developing questions that encourage discursive responses rather than yes/no answers. Here are a few that have resulted in pretty lively discussions:

- (To any of the three women) Why did you sign up for this class?
- Freda, do you wish you had sung in Haiti? Then you wouldn't have had to leave, would you?
- Freda, why were you willing to become one of the people who the others read about in the newspaper?
- (To Freda's father) Would you want your daughter to return to fight for her people's freedom, or do you think she should stay here and make a new life?
- Mariselle or Freda, why did you stay with the class once you realized you'd probably never pass the GED test?
- Rezia, do you believe in the “American Dream”?
- Ms. Danticat, are you suggesting in this story that education does not matter, that a GED, or any degree, is meaningless given the violent experiences these characters have had?

- Mariselle, why would you ever want to return to Haiti after what happened to you there? (One caveat about teaching this story is that Mariselle is raped as a girl, though the scene is not described in any detail. Danticat’s “off stage” description is sensitively rendered, and it’s clear that this sexual violence is part of the political violence.)
- Freda, at the end are you singing your own funeral song?
- (To any of the three women) You often drink after you leave the class. Why do you drink so much?
- Ms. Danticat, why did you end the story this way? It’s so open. Why not give a resolution?

As students respond in the voice of the characters, they are getting inside those characters—and to respond in a creative or even intelligible way, they must know the specifics of the story, both the literal goings-on and the thematic implications. This exercise more often than not results in a good time in class. Inevitably, some students ask deliberately obtuse or unrelated questions (e.g., “Freda, do you think Hillary Clinton will be elected president?” “Rezia, what do you serve in your restaurant?”), but then in their own way, these questions can gauge understanding of a character, even if the text analysis may be harder to rein in. Usually, though, students enjoy becoming the characters and authors and may even add accents or physical mannerisms they think appropriate.

Close Reading Exercise

- Drawing on the discussions and role plays, choose one of the characters and analyze how she has changed from the time of her life in Haiti (as we know it from this story) to her life in New York. Use examples from the text to explain how Danticat conveys these changes.
- How would you describe the overall tone of this story? Discuss how Danticat uses juxtaposition (of cultural beliefs and practices; of life in Haiti with life in the U.S.; of life inside and outside the GED class; of languages) to develop tone.

Summative Evaluation

Students can demonstrate their understanding of the story’s themes in two significantly different ways. One is to continue the role playing by rewriting the GED essay that was their prewriting exercise, but this time in the voice of one of the three women taking the exam. Reading or performing it in front of the class (or less publicly to a smaller group or the teacher) offers the opportunity to interpret a character indirectly. How would Mariselle (or Rezia or Freda) define “success”? Would she believe that we live isolated lives and cannot expect others to act on our behalf? This assignment also gives students

the freedom to use less formal language and a structure that may be more narrative than expository. The performance aspect offers even more opportunity to students for whom writing is not the best display of their strengths.

A more directly academic approach is for students to use this short story to write a response to the 2007 AP English Literature and Composition open question. The question reads:

In many works of literature, past events can affect, positively or negatively, the present actions, attitudes, or values of a character. Choose a novel or play in which a character must contend with some aspect of the past, either personal or societal. Then write an essay in which you show how the character's relationship to the past contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

In fact, any number of the previous AP English Literature and Composition open questions might work, but this most recent one seems tailor-made. Some of my colleagues question the wisdom of having students practice with a short story, fearing that they might use one on the actual exam. The concern is legitimate, but my feeling is that most AP English students are pretty savvy and respond to occasion and audience. Plus, students get more practice (since, presumably, they read more short fiction than novels) in managing the twin demands of a specific technique (in this case the character's relationship to the past) and the question of the larger thematic meaning the AP prompts require.

Larger Issues

The approaches I'm describing, though varied in some ways, are all essentially formalist and reader-response. By its very nature, however, Danticat's work invites a cultural studies perspective. Although one story may be an insufficient basis for a study of Haitian culture and politics, it certainly opens up some history and geography, not to mention current events. Danticat has become an activist on immigration policy, even testifying before Congress; she and her young daughter Mira appear as sponsors of educational centers in Haiti where students are reading and writing in their native Creole language. Regardless of whether we take steps beyond "The Funeral Singer" to explore such issues as these, starting with the author's own voice provides a framework for encouraging students to develop their own.

Resources

Interviews with Danticat discussing *Brother, I'm Dying*—

National Public Radio:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14721447>

The Washington Post:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/video/2007/10/12/VI2007101201132.html>

Lecture by Danticat at the University of California at Santa Barbara:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ritiJ-gmpqg>

Reading and discussion at the Library of Congress, National Book Festival 2003:

http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=3533

Notes

Quotations are from *The Dew Breaker* by Edwidge Danticat (Vintage Books, 2004).

An interview that Renee Shea did with Danticat on *The Dew Breaker* is in *The Caribbean Writer*, Vol. 18 (2004). It includes a special section of articles on Danticat. Copies are available through www.caribbeanwriter.com.

To learn more about the Matenwa Community Learning Center, see www.matenwa.org.

Lesson 3: Bridging the Gap Between Literature and Life

Melissa Scholes Young
Lincoln High School
Tallahassee, Florida

Plan the Lesson

Students struggling with twentieth-century literature often feel that the themes and topics are archaic in relation to their own life experiences. One of our goals as AP English Literature and Composition teachers should be to bridge this gap between literature and life. With the opening lines, “Her name was Connie. She was fifteen and she had a quick, nervous giggling habit of craning her neck to glance into mirrors or checking other people’s faces to make sure her own was all right,” Joyce Carol Oates’s short story “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” hooks readers. They respond to Connie’s 15-year-old precociousness; they understand the pressure to conform, to please, and to sort out one’s identity. Readers may pity Connie or they may dislike her self-absorption, but teenagers can always relate to her. If we can show our students that literature is indeed alive and applicable to their own lives, we can encourage them to see connections between universal themes in literature and their own personal experiences.

Background Information

Oates was inspired to write “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” after reading about a young man, featured in *Life* magazine, who seduced and murdered three young women in Tucson, Arizona, in the 1960s. This story is considered one of Oates’s greatest literary accomplishments because close reading reveals a wide range of possible analyses. Oates uses realistic settings and characters, yet subjects them to terror and psychological tragedy. The story’s patterns of images, symbols, and allusions are available for analysis on the literary level, but the story can also be discussed in terms of illusion versus reality. Scholar G. F. Waller wrote that it is “one of the masterpieces of the genre.”

The story begins with an introduction to the main character, Connie, who is a typical suburban teenager preoccupied with her looks and popular music. The first few pages of the story are an exposition into the normalcy of Connie’s life: She argues with her mother, dislikes her older

sister, and hangs out with friends. One day Connie chooses to skip a family gathering and stay home to wash her hair. A car with two unknown men appears unexpectedly in the driveway. Connie chats with the driver, Arnold Friend, through the screen door until the flirtation takes a dangerous turn. Arnold, who seems to know many things about Connie and her family, insists that she leave with them. She tries to call for help but is unable. The story's ending is ambiguous, but Connie does leave with Arnold and knows she will never return.

Lesson Overview

Students begin with a 10-minute writing prompt that they've chosen from five broad questions. They are grouped according to their chosen topics so they can share their responses with each other. Next, they annotate the story as they engage in close reading. Finally, they write a simulated AP essay prompt as a summative assessment. The lesson assessment could be expanded even further with a timed writing based on student-generated prompts.

Instructional Goals

1. Students engage in a meaningful way with twentieth-century text.
2. Students make connections between the themes of twentieth-century text and their own lives.
3. Students extrapolate themes and literary techniques through the writing of simulated AP prompts.

Teach the Lesson

To begin the lesson, students are assigned 10-minute journal topics. They choose from the following prompts:

1. What kind of music do you find most appealing? How does this music represent you and your peers?
2. Is there a difference between how you identify yourself and how others see you? Which is the truth?
3. Write about a time when you found yourself in a situation that you thought you could manage only to learn later that you couldn't. In retrospect, how would you handle yourself differently?
4. In your opinion, how important is outward appearance? Have you ever been judged based solely on your looks or how you dress?
5. Write about a time when regret/guilt was your best teacher.

Following the 10-minute free write, I signal the conclusion of the journal by playing the Bob Dylan song “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” which Oates claims she listened to before she wrote the story. I ask whether anyone knows the song or its singer. Students usually enjoy the music but are either unfamiliar with the artist or identify the song with their parents’ generation. Joyce Carol Oates dedicated the story to Bob Dylan, and this short immersion activity sets the tone for the critical reading. I lead a brief discussion about the culture of the 1960s when Oates first published this story and how Dylan’s music is applicable.

I ask students to meet in small groups based on the journal prompt about which they chose to write. The five groups are given copies of the story and asked to complete an annotated close read. (See the example of close reading with sample annotations in Appendix A of this Curriculum Module.) Following the close read, I ask them to choose a part of their own journal to read aloud to their peers and have them explain how their topic relates to Oates’s story. For example, the group that wrote about the importance of music notes the allusions to popular music throughout the story and may discuss the role of music in young people’s lives or in American culture as a whole. The group that wrote about identity may talk about Connie’s vulnerability due to her fragile ego that leads to her being exploited by Arnold Friend. Finally, each group writes a simulated AP essay prompt as a summative assessment.

Literature Discussion

After the close read and group activities, I lead a whole class discussion using the following broad questions. This allows each group to share their topic expertise with the whole class.

1. What is the role of identity within the story? How should identity be formed in adolescence?
2. How does Connie’s home life and lack of male role model contribute to her alienation? Why does she seek approval from Arnold Friend?
3. Connie believes that life and love will be “the way it was in movies and promised in songs.” What impact does Connie’s version of reality have on her actions?
4. What kind of mood is created by the lack of resolution in the story? How might readers react to the ambivalent ending?
5. Does beauty buy power? Should it?

Assessment

Following the class discussion, I collect the guided worksheets and assess the simulated writing prompts. For the next class period, I type the prompts onto an overhead, and the class collectively creates a rubric for each prompt. This leads to a discussion of what a good response for each prompt would include and what would be necessary within the writing to show mastery of the story. I have the class define standards for scoring a 5–9 on each prompt.

The 2003 AP English Literature and Composition Exam included a question regarding Oates's characterization of Judd Mulvaney in *We Were the Mulvaney* (1966), and the scoring rubric for that question can be adapted for this lesson or used as a model for students developing their own rubrics. This activity helps students internalize the rubric and develop a skill that will help them with future timed writings. As students practice writing their own rubrics, they begin to understand elements in their own writing that will improve their AP essay scores.

Finally, students return to their original journal. I ask them to again write for 10 minutes on the following culminating prompt:

How does literature reflect life? What can we learn about our world and our lives within it through fiction? Cite examples from the story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" to support your claims.

Going Beyond the Lesson

The lesson assessment could be expanded even further with a timed writing based on student-generated prompts. Students use the class-generated prompts and rubrics to score each other's papers. I require them to give written feedback justifying their scores. Individual or group writing workshops would provide further discussion of effective writing techniques.

Another way to expand the lesson is to read the 1966 *Life* magazine article, "The Pied Piper of Tucson," which inspired Oates's story. Students might compare the fictional and factual interpretations of the event. They could also assess the writing styles and the characterization of Arnold Friend.

These short story strategies are also applicable to other short stories that include thematic elements of identity and isolation, such as "Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Gilman, "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner, or "A&P" by John Updike.

Finally, students might be asked to do an additional close read using either a Marxist/sociological critical approach or a feminist critical approach. Students will need background information and questions to guide each methodology.

Readers who utilize a **Marxist/sociological approach** assume all art has political roots that can be decoded.

1. What is the literature's cultural, economic, or political context? Cite an example from the text.
2. Identify the societal values that are promoted by the story.
3. Are the social messages within the story implicit or explicit? How does the role of the audience shape this view?

Readers who utilize a **feminist critical approach** assume literature reveals gender-based power relations in our society.

1. Who has the power in this story? How is the power defined and/or gained?
2. How is a woman's cultural, social, or literary identity formed through the characters or plot of the story? Give an example from the text.
3. Does the message of the story help to challenge or perpetuate stereotypes of women?

Reflecting on the Lesson

In the past 10 years of teaching this story in varying contexts, I've found that its accessibility and suspense keep young readers interested. On the surface of a first read, students often just enjoy the unexpected outcome of the conclusion, but a closer read always reveals deeper themes with which they can relate. At a time of their own self-discovery, AP English students seem to relish in the characterization of Connie and, in turn, themselves.

Appendix A

Sample Close Read with Annotations

Evening Hawk^A

From plane of light to plane, wings dipping through
Geometries and orchids that the sunset builds,
Out of the peak's black angularity of shadow, riding
The last tumultuous avalanche of
Light above pines and the guttural gorge,
The hawk comes.^B

His wing

Scythes down another day^C, his motion
Is that of the honed steel-edge, we hear
The crashless fall of stalks of Time^D.

The head of each stalk is heavy with the gold of our error^E.

Look! Look! he is climbing the last light
Who knows^F neither Time nor error, and under
Whose eye, unforgiving, the world, unforgiven, swings
Into shadow.^G

Long now,

The last thrush is still, the last bat^H
Now cruises in his sharp hieroglyphics. His wisdom
Is ancient, too, and immense. The star^I
Is steady, like Plato^J, over the mountain.

If there were no wind we might, we think, hear
The earth grind^K on its axis, or history
Drip in darkness^L like a leaking pipe in the cellar.

A. Sunset—end of day:
A predatory bird that often comes
out at twilight.

B. 1st stanza—sets the scene—
periodic sentence ending with the
hawk coming into it.

C. The hawk is consistent—he comes
at the end of the day. Related to
Father Time. Time itself is likened to
stalks of grain.

D. Stalks are golden grain,
man-made—represent our error,
humankind's.

E. The gold of our error?

F. Philosophy is a field of study in
which people ask questions such
as whether God exists, what is the
nature of reality, whether knowledge
is possible, and what makes actions
right or wrong.

G. Syntax: The light or the hawk
knows neither time nor error? Why
is the world unforgiven? What needs
to be forgiven?

H. Syntax: Does a bat replace the
hawk?

I. North Star—is an ever-fixed mark.

J. Plato? Allegory of the Cave?
Metaphor of the Sun?

K. Auditory imagery: avalanche,
guttural, scythes, crashless,
apostrophe, hear, wind, drip, grind.

L. Images of light, dark, shadow,
black, darkness, starlight.

Appendix B

Close Reading of Poetry—A Formative Assessment

Each year at the AP English Literature and Composition Exam Reading, the Question Leaders present a “state of the reading” address to the entire group of essay Readers. Their comments summarize the strengths and weaknesses evidenced in the students’ essays, with the intent that AP teachers will take the suggestions for improvements back to their classrooms and adjust their teaching of literature accordingly.

Warren Carson, the 2006 Poetry Question Leader for the AP English Literature and Composition Exam, observed that many students knew the terminology of literary devices but were unable to analyze how a poet uses particular literary devices to establish mood and explain meaning in a poem. This formative assessment can be used to confirm the ability of students to identify and apply literary devices as a strategy for the close reading of poetry. It also allows you to assess student progress toward the goal of developing the capacity to read closely to construct meaning.

Often poets signal something important in the titles of poems and suggest meaning in the last stanza or last few lines of their poems. This assessment includes John Updike’s poem, “The Great Scarf of Birds.”¹ You should first give students just the title of the poem and ask them to respond to what they think the poem will be about. The responses will be quick and short and will probably include remarks such as the following:

“There are lots of birds on a scarf.”

“The scarf might be important because it is called ‘great.’”

“The scarf must be large because it is described as ‘great.’”

“What could be so great about a scarf with birds on it that someone has written a poem about it?”

Although these responses may seem overly simplistic, students are actually beginning to formulate an interpretation of the poem before they read it. Next, display the first stanza of the poem (“Playing golf on Cape Ann in October/I saw something to remember”) and ask students, “What comes to mind when you read these lines?” Responses may include the following:

“Where is Cape Ann?”

1. Updike, John. “The Great Scarf of Birds.” Originally published in *The New Yorker* (October 27, 1962): 52.

“What does playing golf have to do with a scarf of birds?”

“The setting of the poem is outdoors, and it’s in the fall.”

“I wonder what happened on the golf course that was so important.”

“Who is the speaker?”

These questions set the stage for students to look more closely at elements of the poem such as setting, speaker, imagery, and meaning. Now display the last stanza of the poem (“Long had it been since my heart/had been lifted as it was by the lifting of that great/scarf”); student responses to the stanza may include the following:

“Why is the word ‘scarf’ on a line by itself?”

“I wonder what was weighing on the speaker’s heart since he says it was lifted by the scarf?”

“How can a scarf lift your heart?”

“The scarf must have been very beautiful if lifting it raised the speaker’s heart.”

“I don’t think the scarf was a real scarf since the poem is set on a golf course and people don’t wear scarves there.”

“What does a scarf and golf have to do with lifting the speaker’s heart?”

Next, divide the class into small groups and distribute copies of the In-class Formative Assessment (also included in this assessment), as well as the full text of the poem. Note that in steps 1–7 of the handout, no discussion of the poem is requested. Students may start to do this, but they have been working through a close reading of the poem by focusing on a few basic skills, which will lead them to a better understanding of the poem as a whole and eventually closer to a deeper understanding of meaning in the poem. After about 20 minutes, ask each group to take one example from what they marked in steps 2–6 and discuss how those elements of the poem are important to understanding the meaning of the poem. They then share this part of their discussion with the whole class.

The second segment of the group work is where the challenges of the assessment are found, so this is where you should attend carefully to the students’ progress. Assuming that students can identify literary devices and other elements, and that they are able to engage in the process of close reading, you should pose questions that let students articulate any problems they are having in reaching the objectives. These questions allow you to confirm the validity of that assumption. If students are having difficulty with this first part of the assessment, the whole group discussion at the midpoint of the assessment will be helpful to them.

As the students share their responses, the teacher records them on the board or on an overhead so that students can see them as well as hear them. Responses will probably vary as there are almost always multiple meanings in a literary work, so this is a good opportunity for the

teacher to encourage students to go back to the poem and identify where they have found that meaning through lines where the diction, imagery, mood, and tone are established.

Interpretive Framework

Cues to Depth of Analysis

Responses to the question, “How important is it that you know the meaning or use of that word?” might be a cue that close reading is not happening. This might be followed by an effort within the group to clarify the meaning of the word with the teacher absent. The teacher could then return and get the group to confirm the importance of each word: “How does knowing the meaning of that word help you to understand what the speaker is saying in that part of the poem?”

Likewise, if students are not analyzing the parts of the poem that they identified as puzzling, then this may also be a cue that close reading is not happening. The teacher may ask, “What was confusing to you about the section of the poem you placed a question mark next to?” When they have pursued (perhaps within the group) a resolution of this part of the work, the teacher could then return to the group and let the students confirm the value of close reading by asking, “How does finding an answer to your question affect your understanding of the poem?”

Examples of other questions that the teacher may pose in conjunction with the students’ group work are as follows:

“What do you think the poet is trying to accomplish by using that literary device?”

“What feeling/**mood** is created by that image you selected?”

“How important to the poem as a whole is that particular image?”

“What is the connotation of the word you put the box around?”

“How might the **tone** of the poem change if you changed that word?”

“How effective do you think the example of that device is to the purpose of using that device?”

After the students have spent time on the close reading skills, the teacher again directs their attention to the beginning and ending stanzas of the poem. Now they are instructed to reread the two stanzas and to think about the meaning Updike was trying to convey in the poem. Allow five minutes for students to write a sentence or two on what they think that meaning is and then have them share those responses with the class.

Bibliography

Updike, John. "The Great Scarf of Birds." *The New Yorker* (October 27, 1962): 52.

In-class Formative Assessment

In your groups, consider Updike's poem and do the following:

1. Read the entire poem silently to yourself.
2. **Circle** words that you do not know the meaning of or are confused by how they are being used in the context of the poem. [VOCABULARY]
3. **Underline** examples of poetic devices found in the poem. [LITERARY DEVICES]
4. Put **brackets** around images that stand out. [IMAGERY]
5. Put **boxes** around words that are used for a specific effect. [DICTION]
6. Place **question marks** next to lines that you do not understand. [ANNOTATION]
7. Read the poem aloud in a "round robin," where each group member reads until she or he comes to a period, semicolon, colon, question mark, or exclamation point.²
8. As you read, share with the group what was marked in the poem.

In 10 minutes the entire class will discuss the analysis. A spokesperson for each group will present the identification by the group of particular elements of the poem.

Close reading requires that the role of these elements, which have been identified in establishing the meaning of the poem, can be expressed by the reader. Working with your group again, discuss how these elements are used by the author. One member of the group should record key ideas on how these elements are used to convey meaning.

When your group has developed a shared sense of how meaning is conveyed by these elements, develop a summary that expresses the group's understanding. If there are unresolved differences within the group, include these in your summary.

Near the end of the period each group will be asked to present their work.

2. Sometimes it is easier for students to understand meaning in a poem when they read for end marks. Later, instruction can be provided regarding the structure of the poem (i.e., the way the poem appears on the page), how structure contributes to meaning, and why the poet might have chosen to use a certain structure.

“The Great Scarf of Birds”

by John Updike

Playing golf on Cape Ann in October
I saw something to remember.

Ripe apples were caught like red fish in the nets
of their branches. The maples
were colored like apples, (5)
part orange and red, part green.
The elms, already transparent trees,
seemed swaying vases full of sky. The sky
was dramatic with great straggling V’s
of geese streaming south, mare’s-tails above them. (10)
Their trumpeting made us look up and around.
The course sloped into salt marshes,
and this seemed to cause the abundance of birds.

As if out of the Bible
or science fiction, (15)
a cloud appeared, a cloud of dots
like iron filings which a magnet
underneath the paper undulates.
It dartingly darkened in spots,
paled, pulsed compressed, distended, yet
held an identity firm: a flock
of starlings, as much one thing as a rock
One will moved above the trees
the liquid and hesitant drift.

Come nearer, it became less marvelous,
more legible, and merely huge.

“I never saw so many birds!” my friend exclaimed.
We returned our eyes to the game.
Later, as Lot’s wife must have done, (30)
in a pause of walking, not thinking
of calling down a consequence,
I lazily looked around.

The rise of the fairway above us was tinted,
so evenly tinted I might not have noticed (35)
but that at the rim of the delicate shadow
the starlings were thicker and outlined the flock
as an inkstain in drying pronounces its edges.
The gradual rise of green was vastly covered;
I had thought nothing in nature could be so broad
but grass. (40)

(15) And as
I watched, one bird,

prompted by accident or will to lead,
ceased resting; and, lifting in a casual billow, (45)
(20) the flock ascended as a lady’s scarf,
transparent, of gray, might be twitched

by one corner, drawn upward and then,
decided against, negligently tossed toward a chair:
the southward cloud withdrew into the air.

(25) Long had it been since my heart (50)
had been lifted as it was by the lifting of that great
scarf.

Appendix C

Close Read and Annotations—Teacher Version “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”

by Joyce Carol Oates

First published in *Epoch*, Fall 1966. Included in *Prize Stories: O. Henry Award Winners* (1968) and *The Best American Short Stories* (1967). © Joyce Carol Oates.

Her name was Connie. She was fifteen and she had a quick, nervous giggling habit of craning her neck to glance into mirrors or checking other people’s faces to make sure her own was all right. Her mother, who noticed everything and knew everything and who hadn’t much reason any longer to look at her own face, always scolded Connie about it. “Stop gawking at yourself. Who are you? You think you’re so pretty?” she would say. Connie would raise her eyebrows at these familiar old complaints and look right through her mother, into a shadowy vision of herself as she was right at that moment: she knew she was pretty and that was everything. Her mother had been pretty once too, if you could believe those old snapshots in the album, but now her looks were gone and that was why she was always after Connie.

(Paragraph One)

What role does identity play throughout the story? How does Connie define her identity? *The role of identity is prominent throughout this story as Connie, like most teenagers, tries to define herself by testing parental and societal boundaries.*

Identify the point of view in the story. How does Oates effectively use point of view to communicate the character of Connie to the reader? *The third person narrator reveals Connie’s point of view. Through the narrator we learn Connie’s thoughts and feelings without additional commentary or judgment. This allows the reader to feel Connie’s fear and eventual victimization.*

...Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home: her walk, which could be childlike and bobbing, or languid enough to make anyone think she was hearing music in her head; her mouth, which was pale and smirking most of the time, but bright and pink on these evenings out; her laugh, which was cynical and drawling at

home—“Ha, ha, very funny,”—but high-pitched and nervous anywhere else, like the jingling of the charms on her bracelet.

(Paragraph 4)

How is Connie’s behavior typical of most teens? How does it differ?
Like many teens, Connie establishes a different identity at home than she does with her peers. She identifies her worth with her physical attractiveness.

Why do you think Oates wrote this story? What message might she want to relay to the audience?
Connie fulfills the role of a typical, pretty teenage girl. Oates created this fragile persona to show how unstable one is when one relies on looks alone. Teenage girls may be especially susceptible and easier to exploit. Oates originally titled the story “Death and the Maiden,” which she said was meant to show the “fatal attractions of death” for a girl “seduced by her own vanity.”

...Connie sat with her eyes closed in the sun, dreaming and dazed with the warmth about her as if this were a kind of love, the caresses of love, and her mind slipped over onto thoughts of the boy she had been with the night before and how nice he had been, how sweet it always was, not the way someone like June would suppose but sweet, gentle, the way it was in movies and promised in songs; and when she opened her eyes she hardly knew where she was, the back yard ran off into weeds and a fence-like line of trees and behind it the sky was perfectly blue and still. The asbestos ranch house that was now three years old startled her—it looked small. She shook her head as if to get awake.

(Paragraph 12)

Why is the setting of the story significant? How does Oates create tension throughout the story?
The setting of the story is purposely vague and uneventful. The unexpected violence is juxtaposed with the boring, generic suburban life. This creates an additional tension.

How does Connie view the idea of love? Is it a realistic portrayal? Why or why not?
Connie’s view of love reveals her naivety. She considers herself a talented flirt and enjoys the power that comes from gaining boys’ attention.

There were two boys in the car and now she recognized the driver: he had shaggy, shabby black hair that looked crazy as a wig and he was grinning at her.

“I ain’t late, am I?” he said.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” Connie said.

“Toldja I’d be out, didn’t I?”

“I don’t even know who you are.”

She spoke sullenly, careful to show no interest or pleasure, and he spoke in a fast, bright monotone. Connie looked past him to the other boy, taking her time. He had fair brown hair, with a lock that fell onto his forehead. His sideburns gave him a fierce, embarrassed look, but so far he hadn’t even bothered to glance at her. Both boys wore sunglasses. The driver’s glasses were metallic and mirrored everything in miniature.

“You wanta come for a ride?” he said.

Connie smirked and let her hair fall loose over one shoulder.

(Paragraph 17)

Identify Oates’s use of symbolism throughout the story. What might Arnold Friend represent? *Many literary critics have read Arnold Friend as a “devil” figure representing evil. He misrepresents himself and deceives Connie, which leads to her eventual downfall.*

How is Arnold Friend characterized? Describe the relationship between Arnold and Connie. *Oates’s descriptions show us that Arnold is not as he seems. He is clearly much older than Connie. She flirts and banters with him as if he were a peer. Arnold’s character is not genuine, but he is skillful at manipulating Connie. She is not experienced enough to realize what she is dealing with.*

Guiding Questions

1. What was the topic of your journal? How does this topic relate to Joyce Carol Oates’s story? Explain with two text references.
2. What message do you think Oates sought to convey to the audience through this story? What questions does she pose to the audience? List at least three questions.
3. Compare Oates’s style of writing with other authors you’ve read. Discuss patterns of symbols, images, and allusions in your analysis.

About the Contributors

Deborah Shepard is an educational manager with the College Board's Florida Partnership in Tallahassee. Previously, she taught AP® English Literature and Composition at Lincoln High School in Tallahassee and served as a member of the AP English Literature and Composition Development Committee.

Sally P. Pfeifer is currently an online AP English Literature and Composition teacher and a Career in Teaching consulting teacher for Spokane Public Schools in Spokane, Washington. In her 37 years of teaching, Pfeifer has taught English in grades 7–12, and Advanced Placement® English at Lewis and Clark High School from 1982 to 2001. Pfeifer has been a College Board faculty consultant and has served as an AP English Literature and Composition Exam Reader, Table Leader, and Assistant Question Leader. She was a member of the AP English Literature Test Development Committee from 2004 to 2008.

Renee H. Shea, professor of English and modern languages at Bowie State University in Bowie, Maryland, has served on the AP English Language and Composition Development Committee as the College Board adviser for that committee. An active faculty consultant to the College Board, she has served as a Reader, Table Leader, and Question Leader for both the AP English Literature and Composition and AP English Language and Composition Exam Readings. Shea has written several articles of instructional strategies that are on AP Central® on both the Language and the Literature sites and frequently leads workshops for AP teachers. She is the co-author of *The Language of Composition: Reading, Writing, Rhetoric* and *Teaching Nonfiction in AP English*. She also co-authored *Amy Tan in the Classroom* (part of the NCTE High School Literature Series) and is working on *Zora Neale Hurston in the Classroom*.

Melissa Scholes Young teaches AP English at Lincoln High School in Tallahassee, Florida. She has been a teacher since 1997 and has taught at all levels from middle school to high school, from community college to university, and also at an international school in Brazil. Her works have been published in *Family Forum Magazine*, *A Cup of Comfort for Teachers*, *Literary Mama*, *Front Porch Magazine*, *Motherhood Magazine*, and *The Tallahassee Democrat*.



CM10ELTHB01001