

Homelessness in America: An Introduction to The Glass Castle

Time: 50-Minute Period

Setting: 9th grade World Literature classroom, 22 students

Theory:

1, This lesson plan is derived from the theories presented in Jeffery Wilhelm's book *Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension*, specifically from the chapter *Frontloading: Intro activities that build prior knowledge*. The lesson incorporates the "response to pictures" technique as a bell ringer activity that "builds background necessary for a successful reading and helps students practice strategies like inferring the setting, situation, characterization, author's purpose, and how all of this is related to the information and presentation of the photograph" (49). In addition, this lesson incorporates Wilhelm's theory of using primary resources as a frontloading technique to make the subject matter more relevant to the lives of students in the way it uses a video clip from the documentary *Homelessness in America* to reveal shocking statistics about the nation's homeless (52).

The guided reading strategy used to begin the book is reminiscent of Vygotsky's theory on the Zone of Proximal Development. By modeling the skills one should use when thinking about literature, the teacher is "encouraging and advancing individual learning" ("Zone of Proximal Development"). The teacher should guide students in picking appropriate quotes and analyzing them until the student becomes proficient. In essence, guided reading serves as a form of scaffolding in this lesson.

2. Students are expected to build on their prior knowledge of the components of autobiographies and memoirs established during the first week of the unit.

3. Students will view 2 video clips, one from a documentary entitled *Homelessness in America* and the other from a segment on the *Stephen Colbert Report*. The first video clip establishes homelessness as a real-life problem and helps to provide a context for *The Glass Castle*. The second video clip consists of an interview with the author of *The Glass Castle*, Jeannette Walls and serves as a preview to her story. Visit the link *The Glass Castle* for a detailed summary of the book.

4. This is an introductory lesson to a 2-week mini-unit on the memoir *The Glass Castle*. This lesson is part of a larger 9-week unit on the genre of autobiography.

Objectives:

1. Students will produce a written response to the image of a homeless family
2. Students will view and discuss the most recent homelessness statistics for America.
3. Students will be introduced to Jeannette Walls, the author of *The Glass Castle* through a television interview.
4. Students will participate in a guided reading discussion of the first chapter of *The Glass Castle*

Materials: Computer with projection capabilities, *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, Reading Journal Worksheet

Preparation: Prior to class, the teacher will need to have downloaded the video clips. In addition, the teacher should have designated points in the text to stop and engage in class discussion. See the examples on the Reading Journal Worksheet for suggested stopping points.

Procedure

1. As students come into class, display the image below on the projector. Ask students to write a personal reflection to the image. Have the following questions written on the board for reflection ideas: “What would you think if you saw this family on the street? What kinds of assumptions and judgments would you make? Have you seen families like this before? How do you think they feel? (5 minutes)



*photo courtesy of awesomedc.com

2. Ask students to share their responses. Discuss conflicting opinions and whether or not it is fair to make judgments about people based on their appearances. (5 minutes)
3. Reveal that the picture is of a homeless family from Arizona. View *Homelessness in America* video clip. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TelyWI6oko&feature=related> (3 minutes)

4. Have students draw a line underneath their initial response and write a reaction to the statistic they found most surprising. Discuss responses. (5 minutes).
5. Begin video clip of Jeannette Walls on the *Stephen Colbert Report* in which she discusses her experience with homelessness and introduces her memoir *The Glass Castle*. (7 minutes)
6. Inform students they will be reading *The Glass Castle* as the first novel in the autobiography unit. Establish the purpose for reading as a means to understand how a memoir can help one come to terms with the difficult times in their life, as well as the aspects of the novel that reflect the hallmarks of American culture.
7. Begin reading aloud from Chapter 1, interrupting yourself to think aloud and model the way in which students will keep a reading journal. (See examples on “Reading Journal” worksheet). Distribute the reading journal worksheet with the requirements and example entries.
8. For homework: Students will read pgs. 9-38 and complete at least 4 journal entries. Journal entries will serve as an “entrance pass” to the following class period.

Discussion Ideas

1. What kinds of stereotypes exist about people who are homeless?
2. What is being done to help the homeless population in America?
3. In looking at Jeannette Walls, would you have ever guessed she spent her childhood in poverty?
4. What do you think about Jeannette’s reaction to seeing her mother digging in the trash?

Bilingual/ESL Accommodations

If an ESL student needs more time to complete the reaction to the photograph, he/she should be allowed to finish it for homework. The student should do his/her best to complete the response in English. For students who are not yet English proficient, the teacher should be sure to have the subtitles playing during both video clips. If the student is still in the early stages of learning English, reduce his/her reading load to only the most important chapters and provide graphic organizers that will help to fill in some of the more general plot details. Make sure the child always has access to a translation device during class discussion.

AAVE: Standard English is not required for any of the assessments in this lesson. Student responses should be written in the English the student feels most comfortable using.

Special Education Accommodations: Dyslexia
(<http://www.dyslexia.com/library/classroom.htm>)

Students with dyslexia often display poor auditory short-term memory and have difficulty making sense of the sequence of letters and words. In order to accommodate a student with this disability, the teacher should do the following:

- Provide a hard copy of the transcripts from the video clips.
- Make sure all discussion questions are also written on the board or included in the presentation
- Provide the student with an electronic form of the book.
- Encourage the student to keep a color-coded reading journal.

Assessment

- The personal reflection will serve as the primary mode of assessment for this lesson. Students will receive a +, ✓, or - for their responses.
- Students will also be evaluated on their participation and attentiveness throughout the lesson. Active, meaningful engagement will count towards participation grades.
- The reading journal will serve as an informal assessment of reading comprehension and student ability to distinguish and interpret important information.

**This lesson requires the teacher to use informal observation as a means of assessment. The teacher should closely monitor student attentiveness/ engagement and make written notes.

Extension Ideas

- Students can start a school-wide canned goods collection for a local homeless shelter.
- Students can create their own “YouTube documentaries” that reveal the latest statistics on homelessness or the homelessness statistics for the local area.
- Students can create movie montages to present the quotes they selected.

Resource and References

"Helping Dyslexic Children within the Classroom." *Dyslexia the Gift. Information and Resources for Dyslexia*. Web. 18 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.dyslexia.com/library/classroom.htm>>.

Notre Dame Academy. *Notre Dame Academy*. English Department, June 2010. Web. 08 Dec. 2010. <<http://ndapandas.org/Default.aspx?tabid=377>>.

Shams, Elias. "Homeless People Down, But Homeless Families Up in America «." *Awesome DC*. 17 June 2010. Web. 08 Dec. 2010. <<http://awesomedc.com/2010/06/17/homeless-people-down-but-homeless-families-up-in-america/>>.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension: [role Plays, Text Structure Tableaux, Talking Statues, and Other Enactment Techniques That Engage Students with Text]*. New York [u.a.: Scholastic Professional, 2006. Print.

"Zone of Proximal Development." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. 14 Nov. 2010. Web. 12 Dec. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone_of_proximal_development>.

Source of Activity

Thanks to Jeffery Wilhelm for his ideas on frontloading pre-reading activities.

Thanks to the English Department at Notre Dame Academy in Park Hills, Kentucky for the example worksheet.

Illinois State English/Reading/Language Arts Goals

2.B.4a Critique ideas and impressions generated by oral, visual, written and electronic materials: *This standard is met in the way students write a reflection about their impression of a photograph of a homeless family.*

1.B.4a Preview reading materials, clarify meaning, analyze overall themes and coherence, and relate reading with information from other sources. *This standard is addressed in the way the teacher leads the class in a guided reading of the first chapter. Students will compare the first chapter to the documentary video clip on homelessness.*

2.B.4b Analyze form, content, purpose and major themes of American literature and literature of other countries in their historical perspectives. *This standard is an overarching goal of the unit. Students will use their reading journals to continually reflect and analyze the way in which The Walls Family embodies American cultural values.*

Reflection

I do not anticipate any major problems for this lesson, but it will be important to be considerate of any students who have had experiences with poverty or homelessness. It is important to frame homelessness as a real problem, not some abstract concept that only affects sick or lazy people.

Furthermore, this is a longer book, so students will have to read significant amounts of it for homework. To be considerate of students' workload, the teacher should refrain from assigning many additional homework

assignments. If it becomes apparent during class discussions that students are not doing the reading, the teacher might want to consider giving reading quizzes or reading guides that students will complete for homework and turn in as “entrance passes” the following day.

If any students find independent reading particularly challenging, consider offering students the opportunity to come into your classroom before or after school to listen to the audio book version of the text. If possible, try to supply the student with a copy of the audio book to listen to at home.