

Short Stories

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s): **Creative Writing**
Time Period: **7 weeks**
Length: **7 weeks**
Status: **Published**

Unit Overview

This unit is a hybrid of reading and writing, with much more of a focus on reading than might initially be expected. Students often do not have a great exposure to the reading of the modern short story, much less very close-readings of those stories with the purpose of taking and adapting technique. Thus, this unit might be considering as “Creative Reading” at the start, with a focus on reading the short stories for ideas about specific usable technique, effects in the texts that are immediately applicable to an original short story. Stories chosen as example texts should have varied voice, culture, structure, tone, and style, so that students might be exposed to some aspect of a story that might challenge their assumptions of their own style or expectations, or that some aspect of the story might encourage something in the student’s base level of writing.

As with other units in the course, the approach to each text is to locate and isolate a writer’s technique, analyze that technique, examine that technique as it relates to the rest of the text, and to apply that technique to one’s own writing. The instructor must pay close attention to writing samples of the students to see which stories might be emphasized, left out, replaced with some other story exhibiting some other technique that particular group might need to wrestle with.

The writing portions of the unit might occur after several stories in a row so that students might group techniques in their minds to build upon with each new attempt. Pre-Writing, world-building, character, scene, background building should be used in some manner; however, emphasis on these might be adjusted based on individual students or group need. The goal with the pre-writing is to help students create a fully realized narrative and world to the extent that that world fits with the vision of what they want their story to be. Some students might me more of an O’Connor, while others might be more of a Hemingway, while another student might like the strangeness of the magical realism of Marquez. The instructor’s role, then, is to help students notice what they are writing so that they might align that piece with what the student’s grander vision was.

Main assignments for this unit include the a shorter short story, a longer short story, close-readings of essays, storyboarding, and journaling about possible topics of interest, as well as character, scene, and background building to make each story feel like it is part of a more complete world. Assignments about specific skills (I.e., description in writing, etc) occur over the entire course and are used as necessary.

Transfer and Understanding

Students will understand the following:

- Ways in which they might adjust their sentence structure and length to adjust tone to a desired effect.
- Ways in which they might use their words of different origin, tone, and mood to adjust tone to a desired effect.
- Ways in which they might follow a traditional structure to build narrative, and how that structure clarifies a story's vision, pacing, or creates a desired effect in the reader.
- Ways in which manipulating the structure of a story can play with the reader’s expectations, and how to balance typical and atypical structure.
- When and how to use metaphor, simile, specific or unique description, imagery, symbol, and specific detail to move through the ideas and emotions they wish to in the way they aim to move through them.
- Ways in which characters are built to more full or stock characters as desired.

- Ways in which a story's sense of background world is built through various specific techniques (I.e., direct explanation, passing references, dialogue).
- How dialogue is built and becomes relevant to a story and character.
- That self-criticism is important and necessary to be successful at the above.

Essential Questions

Students will continually consider the following:

- What type of structure does a specific short story have, how much does it follow or deviate from a traditional structure, and what is the effect of the structure on the story?
- What types of literary devices does an author use in a story, and what effect do those devices achieve?
- How does the author build in the meaning, symbolism, clues, et cetera into the story?
- What ideas in one's own writing must be expanded, altered, or omitted to serve the story in either what the writer actually intends of the story or what the story might ideally become?
- How might a sentence or paragraph be manipulated or adjusted get the feeling of that sentence or paragraph closer to what the story either is or is desired to be?
- How is dialogue used to build character, reveal information or background, or push the plot forward?
- How does the writer use and manipulate elements of the story build the sense of the world of the story?
- Why might I be reluctant to change something about my writing, and how can I move past that to make the writing better?

Application of Knowledge and Skill

Students will be able to do the following:

Students will be able to independently using their learning to do the following in both reading another's text and writing their own stories:

- Examine and analyze how sentence style and length contributes to authorial voice or the texture or tone of a story.
- Examine and analyze how an author organizes the narrative structure to build ideas and push the plot forward.
- Examine and analyze how an author plays with expectations of narrative structure so that that structure might be manipulated or shifted to surprise the reader, and to understand the effect that shift in structure has on the theme, plot, character, etc.
- Examine and analyze areas in which an author used detailed description of varying lengths and the effects those descriptions have.
- Examine and analyze situations in which an author employs specific, original detail of varying lengths and the effects that specificity has.
- Examine and analyze situations in which an author employs specific, original metaphor/simile of varying lengths and the effects that metaphor/simile has.
- Examine and analyze the techniques used to introduce and build the importance of a symbol in the story.
- Examine how characters are given specific voice as characters and how dialogue is used to push the plot, reveal information, and build character.
- Students will write and self-critically revise their own attempts at personal and literary essays using the skills in analysis

practiced above.

Students will apply their knowledge to create or accurately and thoughtfully complete the following:

- Critiques of professional writers' stories or chapter excerpts.
- Close-readings (that is, marking up texts) of texts, with emphasis on the writer's technique.
- Pre-writing exercises developing various literary elements to use in their stories.
- Short-Short Story – Done midway through the unit to assess skill, application of technique, etc.
- Longer-Short Story – Culminating activity, creating a story that aligns with the stylistic, thematic, stylistic vision of each student.
- Critiques of fellow-students' and their own writing.

Academic Vocabulary

- Metaphor
- Simile
- Detail
- Description
- Noun
- Verb
- Adjective
- Adverb
- Structure
- Mood
- Tone
- Dialogue
- Structure

Learning Goal 1

Students will understand how word choice (I.e., noun, verb, adjective, adverb) and sentence type create style, and how they can adjust their word choice and syntax to create their own unique writer's style.

Target 1

Students can analyze a published work for the specific diction and syntax an author uses to achieve tone, drive, pacing, etc in a story.

LA.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly

fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (e.g., Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

Target 2

Students will adjust their word choice and syntax to achieve their own desired, unique style in their own story.

LA.L.11-12.3.A	Vary syntax for effect, apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts.
LA.L.11-12.5.B	Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.
LA.W.11-12.3.D	Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

Learning Goal 2

Students will understand and be able to employ specific short story structure, and they will understand how that structure contributes to a desired literary effect.

Target 1

Students will be able to analyze specific structural elements of published texts and their effects on the freshness of texts being analyzed.

LA.RL.11-12.2	Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
LA.RL.11-12.5	Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Target 2

Students will analyze the relationship between structural technique and desired theme/effect in a published text.

LA.RL.11-12.2	Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
LA.RL.11-12.5	Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Target 3

Students will employ knowledge of the range of structural elements of a short story to their own short story.

LA.W.11-12.3.A	Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
LA.W.11-12.3.B	Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
LA.W.11-12.3.C	Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

Learning Goal 3

Students will understand and be able to employ knowledge of when and how to use metaphor, simile, specific or unique description, imagery, symbol, dialogue, and specific detail to fittingly portray the themes, personae, and emotions they wish to in the way they aim to move through them.

Target 3

Students will employ knowledge of the range of literary elements of a short story to their own short story in a way that is fitting with the tone and theme of their short story.

LA.W.11-12.3.A	Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
LA.W.11-12.3.B	Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
LA.W.11-12.3.C	Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).
LA.W.11-12.3.D	Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

Formative Assessment and Performance Opportunities

- Discussion
- Handouts/Worksheets
- Journaling
- Text Mark-Ups/Close-Readings
- Pre-Writing (Storyboarding, scene-, character-, background-building activities)
- Shorter Short Story
- Do Nows/Closures/Daily Writes

Summative Assessment

- Long Short Story

Differentiation

- Allow for shorter responses on daily written assignments
- Grouping students with others of greater ability

Enrichment

- Write longer works
- Compile, edit literary magazine for the class.

Unit Resources

- Background notes on above academic terms
 - Junot Diaz, “How to Date a Brown Girl, Black Girl, White Girl, or Halfie”
 - John Steinbeck, “With Your Wings”
 - Gabriel Garcia Marquez, “Light Is Like Water” and “I Sell My Dreams”
 - Jorge Luis Borges, “The Gospel According to Mark”
 - Simon Rich, “The Center of the Universe”
 - John Updike, “A & P”
 - John Cheever, “The Swimmer”
 - Flannery O’Connor, “Good Country People”
 - John Lanchester, “Signal”
 - Arthur Conan Doyle, Selected Short Stories
 - Edgar Allan Poe, Selected Short Stories
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- Background Notes
 - Original Texts
 - Video
 - Vocabulary words and examples

