

Literature 1 Lesson Plan



Lesson Plans

“An Occurrence At Owl Creek Bridge: Heroes or Cowards”

Subject:

- **Language Arts:** Literature 1

Level:

- Grades 9-12

Abstract:

- In this lesson, students will read and respond in a variety of ways to *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* by Ambrose Bierce. The activities are designed to enhance the students’ interpretation of literature and their writing skills.
- Students will explicate the story and create interpretation in narrative and spreadsheets to outline the story.
- Students will explore how etymology and subtle meanings of words can influence the meaning of a story by creating an Excel table with words and definitions.
- Students will discuss the common forms of short story structure, how this story differs in structure and what effect that variation has on the impact of the story.

Invitation:

Today’s newspapers, television, music and conversations are littered with words like “hero, coward, brave, cause, martyr.” Those words are used so frequently and by so many that they may have lost their meaning. Can a sports figure really be a *hero*? What exactly is a *cause*?

In this lesson, the protagonist makes several choices. But, are his choices a reflection of his courage or his arrogance? Is he a hero or a coward? Each reader will need to read each word and passage carefully. What are the implications of how Bierce tells the story that helps us to understand it? The meanings of words, their origins and the way that stories are told all help us to make meaning and draw conclusions as to what we understand of a story. “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” contains, even within its title, implications that the reader should be aware and read carefully while making meaning from Bierce’s words.

Situations:

- **Where:** Students will be expected to read the story aloud in class. Written responses will occur both in class and out of class.
- **When:** This unit takes place during language arts.
- **How Long:** This unit can take one to two weeks.

Tasks:

- **Task 1:**
The teacher will introduce the unit by paraphrasing the invitation above by focusing on courage, cowardice and the structure of the story.
- **Task 2:**
Students take turns reading sections of the story aloud in class.
- **Task 3:**
Students should be urged to place any word that they can't easily define on a master list created by the teacher. The teacher will encourage students to put all words on the list they are unsure of.
- **Task 4:**
Students should identify main characters in the story.
- **Task 5:**
Students will complete the "Short Story Structure Worksheet" including the order of occurrence in which the elements occur.
- **Task 6:**
Students will take the words from the master list of words they can't easily define, and in small groups, look up the meanings using Dictionary.com. They will track the words and their definitions in an Excel spreadsheet.
- **Task 7:**
The teacher will lead a discussion about the story using the "Occurrence at Owl Creek Questions."
- **Task 8:**
Students will define the word "Hero" in one page using examples and qualities, and the word "Coward" in one page using examples and qualities, using Microsoft Word.

- Task 9:**
When students have completed their "Hero" and "Coward" narratives, the teacher will lead a discussion listing all the qualities of each on master lists. This discussion will begin as a brainstorm with all suggestions being recorded. Students will then be asked to vote to narrow each list to the top ten qualities.
- Task 10:**
The teacher will share the example of "The 100% Hero Scale" spreadsheet with students. Students will then create their own spreadsheets titled "The 100% Hero Scale" using the ten selected qualities across the top of the spreadsheet. The teacher will share the example of "The 100% Hero Scale Sample" spreadsheet with students. The teacher can choose to give copies of the sample to students or allow them to create their own spreadsheets from scratch.
- Task 11:**
Have students repeat the process in Task 10 to create a spreadsheet titled "The 100% Coward Scale."
- Task 12:**
Students will generate three names of people for each list that must be unique from the rest of the class. The teacher will select students at random to give their three names. The next student must give three different names, and so on. Students must be able to legitimately defend their choices. Teachers will record the names on a master list. Students will then place their three hero character names along the left side of the spreadsheet, creating a matrix for rating each person's Hero Scale based on the qualities. They will then do the same for their three selected cowards. The people selected must be human beings, not inanimate or fictional characters.
- Task 13:**
Using their completed 100% Scales, students will rate each of their selected people using the ten class qualities for "Heroes" or "Cowards." Each of the ten qualities can receive 1 through 10 points, with 10 being high. Therefore, if one person on the "Hero" scale receives all 10s, that person would be considered a 100% hero. Similarly, a 100% coward would have to receive all 10s as well.
- Task 14:**
Students will share their ratings with the class. The teacher will track each student's ratings on a "Master List Spreadsheet," modified from the template supplied with this unit.

- **Task 15:**

The teacher will then create a chart using the Excel Chart Wizard function, based on the step sheet, "Creating Charts from the 100% Spreadsheets."

- **Task 16:**

Students will rate themselves on the "Hero" scale, using their original scales, not the class scale. Because students probably didn't have ten qualities on their original lists, their scores will be raw numbers rather than percentages. Students will write a Personal Hero Essay indicating if they are satisfied with their scores, why or why not, and how they might change them.

Interactions:

- **Full Class:** The teacher will:
 - Introduce the project and invite students.
 - Provide students with copies of the *An Occurrence at Owl Creek* story.
 - Provide instruction on creating charts from Excel spreadsheets.
 - Lead discussions and create master lists of vocabulary words and hero and coward qualities.
 - Facilitate group activities.
- **Small Group:** Students will work in small groups to use Dictionary.com to define selected vocabulary words.
- **Individual:** Each student will identify unknown vocabulary words, write hero and coward narratives including identifying qualities, create 100% scales, identify three unique cowards and heroes, and write a final Personal Hero Narrative.

Standards:

READING

- **2.0 WORD ANALYSIS, FLUENCY, AND SYSTEMATIC VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT**

- Students apply their knowledge of word origins both to determine the meaning of new words encountered in reading materials and to use those words accurately.

LITERARY RESPONSE AND ANALYSIS

- 2.0 Students read and respond to historically or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science. They conduct in-depth analyses of recurrent themes.
- 3.2 Analyze how the theme or meaning of a selection represents a view or comment on life, using textual evidence to support the claims.

- 3.6 Analyze the way in which authors through the centuries have used archetypes drawn from myth and tradition in literature, film, political speeches, and religious writings.

WRITING STRATEGIES

- 1.0 Students write coherent and focused texts that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly-reasoned argument. Student writing demonstrates awareness of audience and purpose and use of the stages of the writing process, as needed.
- 1.3. Structure ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way and support them with precise and relevant examples.
- 1.5. Use language in natural, fresh, and vivid ways to create a specific tone.
- 1.9. Revise writing to highlight individual voice, improve the style and sentence variety, and enhance subtlety of meaning and tone in ways that are consistent with purpose, audience, and genre.
- 2.2 Write responses to literature.
- 2.3 Write reflective compositions.

WRITTEN AND ORAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS:

- 1.0 Students write and speak with a command of standard English conventions.

Assessment:

- Students will be assessed on the final Personal Hero Essay using the Personal Hero Essay Rubric.

Tools:

- An Internet browser
- Microsoft Excel
- Microsoft Word

Project Tips and Alternatives:

- **Tip #1:**
Create your own web page for this unit, including vocabulary words, and use the processor at www.vocabulary.com, to link each word on the page to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

Attachments:

- "Short Story Structure Worksheet"
- "Vocabulary Word Spreadsheet Template"
- "*Occurrence at Owl Creek* Questions"
- "100% Scale Spreadsheet"
- "Hero Master List Spreadsheet Template"
- "Coward Master List Spreadsheet Template"
- "Personal Hero Essay Rubric"
- "Step Sheet: Creating Charts from the 100% Scale Spreadsheets"

Web Resources - Content:

[Ambrose Bierce](#)

[Ambrose Bierce Portrait](#)

[Ambrose Bierce to his Niece](#)

[Ambrose Bierce- An Occurren](#)

[Ambrose Bierce](#)

[An Occurrence At Owl Creek](#)

[Biographies- Men of Literat](#)

[Dictionary.com/imperious](#)

[Dictionary.com/occurrence](#)

[Dictionary.com/protagonist](#)

[Dictionary.com/secession](#)

[Dictionary.com/secessionist](#)

[Notes/Text on "Occurrence a](#)

[The Devil's Dictionary by A](#)

Web Resources – Excel:

- A list of linked web resources for Excel can be found on the [Excel Resources](#) page.

Assistive Technology:

- Please refer to the [Assistive Technology](#) section for information on methods and devices to help ensure that all students have access to the curricula in the least restrictive environment.