



AMERICAN LITERATURE: AN OBLIQUE INT

Level: high school, 11th grade

Course: English, library skills

Rationale

The study of American literature at the eleventh grade level traditionally begins with an examination of early New England documents such as Anne Bradstreet's journal, William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation, Jonathan Edward's "Sermon in the Hands of an Angry God," and some metaphysical poetry. More recent textbooks include some native American poems. The influence of the Spanish in American literature is omitted or, at best, a few accounts of Vasquez and Cortez may be included. Our purpose is to provide an alternative introduction to the study of American literature by inviting students to take a more critical look at the story of Columbus and the ramifications of his "discovery" on all of the Americas. Hopefully, this approach will whet "students' appetites so that they will not only question why American literature is Euro-centered, but also encourage them to seek out Latin American and Caribbean authors to read and to study in addition to the traditional required authors. Furthermore, students will be given the opportunity to experience a variety of resources that will go beyond the constraints of state adopted texts. This approach should be particularly meaningful for students living in the Southwest region of the United States.

by
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Objectives

- * To encourage critical analysis by having students research texts, journals, periodicals and other print media which present various accounts of Columbus and other Latin American topics.
- * To teach students how to access electronic media for research.
- * To promote cultural sensitivity by having students research indigenous civilizations.
- * To invite students to include Central and South America and the Caribbean authors in their studies of American literature by designing their own curriculum.

Lesson Overview

Pedagogy

- * Socratic Method of Questioning
- * Critical library research and assessment
- * Hands on experience (video production)
- * Guest speakers

Major Topics/Issues

- * Indigenous peoples/Human Rights
- * Religion
- * Economics
- * Politics

Activities

- * Dialectical journals
- * Library Research
- * Visual Essays (researched issues)
- * Video taping of the "hearing" of Columbus

Time Needed

4 Weeks

Materials

Library resources

Video equipment

Print and electronic media

- * Books (see annotated bibliography at end)

- * *Encarta Encyclopedia*: CD-ROM
- * *New Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia*: CD-ROM
- * CD World Atlas: CD-ROM
- * Exigy: CD-ROM
- * Social Issues ResourceSeries: CD-ROM
- * Text on Microform: CD-ROM
- * Internet/World Wide Web through Netscape
- * Latin America Data Base articles

Procedures

Week One

Day 1: Students will free write in journals recalling all they know about Christopher Columbus. This activity will be used to launch a discussion about shared perceptions and shared misperceptions. A list of themes and issues should emerge.

Days 2-5: Students will watch 1492: Conquest of Paradise and record their reactions and/or questions in their journals. They will choose a theme to follow throughout the movie, noting questions for research.

Week Two

Day 1: Students will form teams based on the themes they have chosen. They will share their reactions from their journals and then generate a list of questions (one per team member) to research in the library. For example: Were the civilizations of indigenous people as sophisticated as the European cultures which conquered them? What does the word "primitive" imply?

Days 2, 3, 4: Using the enclosed bibliography as a starting point, students will use both print and electronic research to explore information pertinent to their questions.

Day 5: This information will be presented in the format of a visual essay which will be used for the "hearing."

Week Three

Video Workshop conducted by guest presenter either from within the school or from the community.

Week Four

Day 1: Students will elect one member of their team to sit on a panel of judges who will evaluate the evidence presented by each team, summarize the evidence and facilitate a discussion which aims at comparing old perceptions with new insights.

Days 2, 3, 4: Presentations of evidence by teams.

Day 5: Summary, evaluation, and debriefing. During the debriefing students will be asked to make “connections” to present day issues and will be invited to help choose the literature selections and to design the activities for the remainder of the semester.

The activities in Week 4 will be video-taped by students and serve as an evaluation of the entire project.

Lesson Plan 1: “Clueless with Columbus”

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters,
compared to what lies within us.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Topic

Free Writing

Time Needed

1 Class Period

Objectives

Students will:

- * be able to draw distinctions between formal edited essay writing and unedited journal writing.
- * be able to categorize topics/issues derived from a shared discourse of journal entries.

Teacher's Resources

Cameron, Julia. The Artist's Way. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigee, 1992.

Galeano, Eduardo. Memory of Fire. I. Genesis. Trans. by Cedric Belfrage. NY: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Goldberg, Natalie. Writing Down the Bones. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1986.

Julia Cameron's and Natalie Goldberg's books have excellent chapters on journal writing, particularly the latter's. They are included here as resources for the teacher; however, there are many passages and exercises in Goldberg's text which could be used by students.

Procedures

1. Read aloud selected journal entries from Memory of Fire to trigger student discussion.
2. Question the purpose of a journal.
3. Question the value of a journal.
4. Define the parameters of journal free writing vs. edited formal writing.
5. Have students free write for 10 minutes. PROMPT: Recall everything you know about the story of Christopher Columbus.
6. Have students volunteer their perceptions. On a large newsprint pad, record all perceptions and misperceptions. Arrange them according to themes/issues. These will begin a focus for library research.
7. For homework, ask students to select 1 or 2 themes/issues that they might like to explore and to create a list of sub topics or questions about the issues.
8. Conclude the lesson by having students free write for 5-10 minutes about any new perceptions that may have surfaced.

Lesson Plan 2

The true mystery of the world is the visible not the invisible.

—Oscar Wilde

Topic

Film Critiquing

Time Needed

1 Class Period

Objectives

- * Students will question what makes an effective film.
- * Students will create a set of criteria for evaluating a film.

Teacher's Resources

Handout "Some Observations on Film" taken from Barnet, Berman and Burto. Introduction to Literature. 8th ed. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1985.

1492: Conquest of Paradise. With Gerard Depardieu. Paramount, 1992.

Procedures

1. Students will free write in their journals for 10 minutes. PROMPT: "...the cinema is the description of man and his surroundings." (Swiss director Eric Rohmer)
2. Initiate a class discussion: "What makes a good film?"
3. Use the handout "Some Observations on Film" to supplement the discussion if necessary.
4. Invite students to create a set of criteria for evaluating a film.
5. Introduce the concept of a dialectical journal. This type of journal is used to record reactions to significant or meaningful passages which the student has read. The passage is recorded or summarized on the left hand side of the journal, leaving the right hand side for uncensored intellectual or emotional responses. Usually after the text is finished, the students will re-read their entries, marking those pages which will become the "compost" for a longer critical or creative writing assignment. In this case the students will be watching the film 1492: Conquest of Paradise and going through the same process.
6. Conclude the lesson with a 5 minute film clip (teacher's choice) from 1492: Conquest of Paradise by having students practice the process. Clear up any questions at this time.

During the next 3 to 4 days students will be watching the film and using their journals to record and to question whatever issues that they see as controversial research topics.

Lesson Plan 3

Your are lost the instant you know what the result will be.
—Juan Gris

Topic

Themes/Issues as a Focus for Research

Time Needed

1 Class Period

Objectives

- * After watching the film 1492: Conquest of Paradise and recording their observations and responses, students working in teams will be able to select one umbrella theme with a list of sub topics for research.
- * Students will be able to turn these themes into questions which they will attempt to answer by using a variety of library research tools, print and non print.

Procedures

1. Brainstorm and web all student reactions to the film.
2. Categorize these responses into approximately 5 or 6 areas such as indigenous peoples, disease, the Church, exploitation, etc.
3. Select as many student teams for research.
4. Instruct each team to meet and to create a list of sub topics under their umbrella areas. In order to avoid unwieldy topics and repetition, each team member will choose a sub topic which must be turned into a question to be researched.
5. Monitor each group and check all questions before approving the search. Rule out topics that are obscure, irrelevant, or superficial.
6. Have each team record their umbrella issue on newsprint with their lists of questions.
7. Tape each team's newsprint on a blank wall for the course of this assignment to allow students to annotate their findings and to make revisions if necessary.

It is assumed that students at this level will have had a library orientation. However, it is a good idea to meet with the librarian well in advance to discuss the nature of the project and to request the kinds of materials which will be needed so that resources will be available and not checked out. If the library has its own computer lab, students may need to be up dated on new additions of electronic media and how to access them.

Lesson Plan 4

Man can learn nothing except by going from the known to the unknown.
—Claude Bernard

Topic

Library Reorientation and Research Time

Time Needed

Approximately 3 days

Procedures

No detailed lesson plan appears here because this segment depends upon the individual library situation. In addition to traditional library resources, the following electronic media are suggested:

Books (see annotated bibliography at end), Encarta Encyclopedia (CD-Rom), New Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia (CD-Rom), CD World Atlas (CD-Rom), Exigency (CD-Rom), Social Issues ResourceSeries (CD-Rom), Text on Microform (CD-Rom), Internet/World Wide Web through *Netscape*, Latin America Data Base articles

Lesson Plan 5

Art is a technique of communication. The image is the most complete technique of all communication.

—Claus Oldenburg

Topic

Video Taping Workshop

Time Needed

1 Week

This component of the unit calls for using community resources, in particular, Public Access Television or other studios which are willing to cooperate with the school in sharing their expertise, training programs, and equipment. The purpose of this component is to teach students through hands-on experience how to manage taping, lighting, sound, and editing so that they will be able to produce a professional product as an evaluative tool and as a record of an alternative learning process.

Lesson Plan 6

We learn to do something by doing it. There is no other way.

—John Holt

Topics

Presentation of Research (Visual Essays) , Evaluation by a Panel of Peers, Video Taping.

Time Needed

1 Week

This component is "under construction." While the initial panel was to come from within the class, an alternative would be to invite another discipline to join in this concluding activity. In addition, the initial "trial" should be renamed to a "hearing" or a "symposium" because the major pedagogy of this unit is to teach students to question and to critically evaluate. The implications of a "trial" suggest a right or wrong, guilty vs. not guilty conclusion.

This activity should serve as another beginning, not conclusion, inspiring students to look critically at the traditional approach to American literature and to become active participants in designing a new direction that will include Latin American and Caribbean authors.

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Books

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Details the daily, religious, cultural and political life of these peoples.

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Trilogy recounting history of Latin-America from pre-Columbian time to the present.

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Information on a variety of topics which should be included in High School curricula.

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