Six –Week Thematic Unit Plan

“The difficulty in life is the choice.” –George Moore, author

While reading Nancie Atwell’s In the Middle: New Understanding about Writing, Reading, and Learning, I found George Moore’s quote that inspired my thematic unit plan (520). I teach ninth graders at Cartersville High School, and I know that ninth graders are faced with many choices; therefore, my semester theme will be Choice with three sub-themes: life or death, family, and personal. Along with my thematic unit, I am making the transition from a traditional literature class to an active reading/writing workshop environment because of our discussions in English 7701, Dr. Cope’s activities, and the connected research. I have had several aha moments during the summer semester, and the reading/writing workshop method is the most profound aha for me theoretically and logically. I know I am a good teacher now for my students, but I want to be “…their teacher with a capital T” (Atwell 25).

Cartersville High School is on the 4x4 block, so I teach three 90-minute blocks. Since I want to have both the reading and writing workshops, I will split the 90-minute class into two sections: 45 minutes for reading workshop and 45 minutes for writing workshops. For this six-week unit plan, I have only included the reading workshop portion since it was supposed to focus on the literature to be taught. When I began thinking about the reading workshop component, I found plenty of information for elementary and middle school classrooms, but very little for the high school classroom
until I came across Gary Muschla’s *Reading Workshop Survival Kit*. Muschla includes practical organization ideas, which informed me about setting up my classroom schedule: dividing the class time into two workshops and dividing the workshops into workable time units (13). Our class discussions did not provide the blueprint for setting up the workshops, so when I read Muschla’s book, I found the information that I needed to *get my brain in gear*. During some of our class discussions, questions would be asked about the workshop method, and inevitably someone would say, “Get Atwell’s book—her second *In the Middle*.” I did, and they were right. Atwell reflects on nearly twenty years of her own reading/writing workshops, and it has been her reflective thoughts and ideas that have given me the *push* that I needed.

In looking at my six-week plan, I cannot believe how much literature I have included, and I was able to “free-up” some space because I simply asked myself, “Why have you been teaching this piece of literature?” If I could not come up with a substantial answer, then I simply removed the literature from my curriculum. My freshmen will be reading poetry, short stories, a novel, a play, and independent readings, as well as listening to a memoir and watching a movie. Along with these selections, students will use literature circles, have ABR presentations, experience read alouds, and create a tableau performance.

I have selected the following short stories for this unit: *The Lady or the Tiger?, The Most Dangerous Game, The Scarlet Ibis,* and *The Gift of the Magi*. Thematically these short stories work because the characters are faced with decisions about choice and the consequences. As a class, we will read aloud the short stories in class because I want my students reading their “choice” readings at home each night. I am
requiring students to read at least thirty minutes each night for homework, keeping a
reading log in which parents confirm the readings, and writing in a reading journal.
Sometimes I will do the reading, and sometimes students will read voluntarily. Students
call it “popcorn” reading. One student reads until he does not want to read any longer,
and he calls on someone else to continue. If a student does not want to read, I allow
the reluctant reader to pick someone else, but if that same person gets picked later,
then he will have to read—even if it is just one sentence.

In *The Lady or the Tiger?* A man gets put into an arena where he has to decide
which door to pick—behind one is a lady and the other a tiger. The story ends without
the reader knowing which door the man selects. Students will be frustrated with the
ending, but it will lead to a lively discussion and possibly written works by the students,
giving the story an ending—making that choice for the man.

Our second story will be *The Most Dangerous Game* where Rainsford meets
General Zaroff in a life or death choice. Freshmen tend to like this story because it is
suspenseful to the end. They are never sure just how the story is going to end, so it
keeps their attention. I will introduce Literature Circles to my students with this story. I
like the literature circles concepts because everyone is held accountable for a segment
of the assignment. All the work does not fall on one person with the others sitting back
not contributing, yet getting the same grade. After reading about and discussing
literature circles, I found a website, [www.literaturecircles.com](http://www.literaturecircles.com), which was created by
Walloon Institute and Stenhouse, the publisher of Harvey Daniels’ book *Literature
Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*. This website offers free
information and support for the use of literature circles in the classroom. In Dr. Cope’s
English 7701 class, I experienced literature circles once a week. I liked having the variety of assignments connected to our readings, and from a teacher’s perspective, I like the ease of grading: one connector per group gets a thorough evaluation, while the other participants get a check just for turning in the work. Jobs are rotated and someone else gets the thorough evaluation. English teachers have enough grading without creating more.

Later on in the unit, we will read *The Scarlet Ibis*, a childhood remembrance story, giving a brother’s account of choices he made regarding his handicapped brother, and *The Gift of the Magi*, O. Henry’s wonderful story of a couple faced with personal choices about gifts and their most-prized possessions.

In addition to short stories, I will share poetry with my students during our what I call our “Share” times, much like Dr. Cope’s 2x4 agenda. I have selected poems by Dorothy Parker, Robert Frost, George Ella Lyons, Pat Mora, and Tupac. Each of their poems deals with the topic of choice, connecting with my thematic unit. Towards the end of my six-week plan I will begin the implementation of a poetry unit, but the 2x4 poetry readings should help ease my students into the poetry study. Also, I think that some students will already be writing poetry in writing workshop before we get to the poetry unit—at least that is what I hope.

To give my students a taste of nonfiction, we will read *Only Daughter* and *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, as well as listen to Carmen Agra Deedy’s *Growing Up Cuban in Decatur Georgia*. Literature Circles and Read-alouds will help with the study of these selections. In Harvey and Goudvis’ *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding*, I learned about several reading
strategies that I want students to use during our readings, such as: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world (21). According to Harvey and Goudvis, if students make connections to the readings, then it helps them to build “a bridge from the new to the known” (21). As I am writing this paper, I have had an epiphany. I will need to create a mini-lesson, explaining the reading strategies—another aha moment!

Earlier this semester, Dr. Cope explained how he would show the movie Romeo and Juliet before reading the play because it gives the students a point of reference. At first I was not too keen on his idea. I had always read the text first, then watched the movie because that was the way I was taught; however, after giving Dr. Cope’s suggestion more thought, I am going to try it. Students will watch Romeo and Juliet first, then we will use literature groups—assigning each group an act to read. Groups will select “high” points of each scene within the acts and write a narration for a tableau performance. Liz, a colleague within my cohort, shared an article with our class about tableau performances. Simply put, it is a freeze-frame type of performance with a narration. Romeo and Juliet fit beautifully within the thematic unit because of the many choices the characters make throughout the play—with all three sub-themes, life or death, family, and personal. I hope students will be able to navigate Shakespeare’s language more readily by taking this approach with Romeo and Juliet. I am anxious and excited about using Dr. Cope’s idea.

Throughout the entire semester, students will read independently daily during sustained silent reading time. Students will have approximately fifteen minutes daily in class for reading choice books. I have an in-class library already in place, and I will be adding more selections.
In addition to Atwell, Daniels, Cope, Harvey and Goudvis, I read numerous articles that helped change my philosophy and curriculum for this upcoming school year. I have not found all the answers to my questions, but at least I have questions. I realize the reading/writing workshop format will not be easy. Just putting the calendar together for this thematic unit was difficult, but it has forced me to think outside the box. The calendar is not complete, and I know it is not set in stone (thank goodness). I am thinking of the calendar as a beginning place, a rough draft. I will be learning with my students, and I am excited about being a “student” again.
| 1 | Share: “The Choice” by Dorothy Parker  
Introduce semester theme: Choices  
ML: Plot  
Read aloud: “The Lady or the Tiger?” | 2 | Share: “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost  
ML: Climax  
Read aloud: “The Most Dangerous Game” | 3 | ML: Literature Circles, using my examples from ENGL 7701  
Cont. “The Most Dangerous Game”  
Group share | 4 | M.L.: Beginnings  
Literature Circles: “The Most Dangerous Game”  
SSR and journal | 5 | ML: Understanding Character  
Listen to Carmen Agra Deedy’s “Growing Up Cuban in Decatur Georgia”; making note of characterization.  
SSR and journal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Share: “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyons  
ML: Point of View  
Introduce: The House on Mango Street  
Read aloud: 1 - 8 | 7 | ML: Conflict  
Cont. read aloud of The House on Mango Street (9-13) | 8 | Share: “Elena” by Pat Mora  
ML: Setting  
Continue read aloud of The House on Mango Street (14-21) | 9 | ML: Style and Tone  
Continue read aloud of The House on Mango Street (22-26) | 10 | Share: “Only Daughter” by Cisneros  
Continue read aloud of The House on Mango Street (27-34) | 11 | M.L.: Dialogue  
Continue read aloud of The House on Mango Street (35-39) | 12 | M.L.: Endings  
Finish read aloud of The House on Mango Street (40-45) | 13 | Literature Discussion  
Groups for The House on Mango Street  
SSR and journal | 14 | ABR presentations  
SSR and journal | 15 | ABR presentations  
SSR and journal |
| 16 | M.L.: Theme Workshop: Discuss theme & apply to in-class literature  
Read aloud: “The Scarlet Ibis” | 17 | M.L.: Putting it all together  
Read aloud: “The Gift of the Magi” | 18 | Introduce Shakespeare & drama unit  
Watch R & J use “Things to Look For” handout  
SSR and journal | 19 | Continue watching R & J; students using “Things to Look For” handout  
SSR and journal | 20 | Continue watching R & J; students using “Things to Look For” handout |
| 21  | Share: Recall scenes watched Finish watching R&J  
    | SSR and journal  |
| 22  | M.L.: Film Adaptations  
    | Groups: Acts I-V; students read an assigned act  
    | SSR and journal  |
| 23  | Groups: Complete reading of act; select “high” points of each scene & write narration for tableau performance.  
    | SSR and journal  |
| 24  | Groups: Tableau performances  
    | SSR and journal  |
| 25  | Groups: Tableau performances  
    | SSR and journal  |
| 26  | M.L.: Sonnets & Blank Verse  
    | Read several of Shakespeare’s sonnets as a class & discuss.  
    | SSR and journal  |
| 27  | ABR presentations  
    | SSR and journal  |
| 28  | ABR presentations  
    | SSR and journal  |
| 29  | Share: Student sonnets  
    | M.L.: Free Verse & Walt Whitman poems; read & discuss  
    | SSR and journal  |
| 30  | Share: Tupac’s “And Tomorrow”  
    | M.L.: Lyric poems—Poems That Could be Songs  
    | Groups: Song lyrics & poetry  
    | SSR and journal  |
Georgia Performance Standards

ELA9RL1  The student demonstrates comprehension by identifying evidence (e.g., diction, imagery, point of view, figurative language, symbolism, plot events) and main ideas in a variety of texts representative of different genres (e.g., poetry, prose, short story, novel, essay, editorial, biography, and drama) and using this evidence as the basis for interpretation. The texts are of the quality and complexity illustrated by the Grade Nine reading list.

ELA9RL2  The student identifies, analyzes, and applies knowledge of theme in literary works from various genres and provides evidence from the works to support understanding.

ELA9RL3  The student deepens understanding of literary works by relating them to contemporary context or historical background.

ELA9RL4  The student employs a variety of writing genres to demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of significant ideas in sophisticated literary works.

ELA9RL5  The student understands and acquires new vocabulary and uses it correctly in reading and writing.
Works Cited


Dr. Linda Henkel, from Fairfield University, Connecticut, described this as the photo taking impairment effect. She said, People often whip out their cameras almost mindlessly to (1) ... (a-seize) (b-grasp) (c-capture) (d-snatch) a moment, to the point that they are missing what is happening (2) (a-quite) (b-right) (c-merely) (d-barely) ....in front of them. 1-c-capture/ 2-b-right. When people rely on technology to remember for them (3) ... (a-counting) (b-settling) (c-assuming) (d-swatching) on the camera to record the event and thus not needing to (4) ... (a-engage) (b-apply) (c-attend) (d-de English News Lesson on Handwriting: Cambridge University may end handwritten exams - FREE worksheets, online activities, listening in 7 Levels...Â 5. EXAMS: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "exams". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories. Linda Templeton ENGL 7701/Dr. Cope Final Exam Project Six â€œWeek Thematic Unit Plan â€œThe difficulty in life is the choice.â€ George Moore, author While reading Nancie Atwellâ€™s In the Middle: New Understanding about Writing, Reading, and Learning, I found George Mooreâ€™s quote that inspired my thematic unit plan (520). I teach ninth graders at Cartersville High School, and I know that ninth graders are faced with many choices; therefore, my semester theme will be Choice with three sub-themes: life or death, family, and personal. Along with my thematic unit, I am making the transition from a tradi