**Aligning a lesson Plan to the Common Core: Imagery, Theme, and Essay Skills**

**By Daniel Weinstein**

*All italicized phrases are taken directly from the CCR shifts*.

This lesson can be as quick as one day but it should probably stretch out to nearly a week or more. One of the guiding principles of the CCR is *teachers that are patient, create more time and space and support in the curriculum for close reading*.

**Goals:**

* Students will advance towards greater *college and career readiness* through a patient, in-depth exploration of both *informational* and *literary texts.*
* Students will learn “theme” & “imagery” – and other *academic vocabulary.*
* Students will *build knowledge about the world through texts* by studying both “Annabelle Lee” and a current newspaper article.
* Students will learn to annotate a text so they can better *write from sources*.
* Students will climb to the highest vocabulary levels on *the staircase of complexity*.
* Students will practice *writing from sources* by developing a *rich and rigorous* paragraph.

**Chalkboard Goal:** “You will learn how to analyze a poem for its literary elements, and write a paragraph about how those elements create a theme.”

**Procedure and Script**:

1. “Please open a notebook to a blank page and take out your pens, pencils, and magic markers. Put all your tools in front of you.”
2. Direct students to create a mind map. “In the center of your page write two words: Theme and Imagery. Let’s make sure we understand what these words mean first. I’m going to give you the definitions, and you write them down. We also want to write down some examples we know from literature, tv, or the movies. OK, theme is …. Imagery is …..”
3. “Now, take three minutes to write down some good examples we already know each category. For example, who can give me one example of a theme from a story you know? What about imagery that remains in your head long after you read it or saw it? OK, for three minutes you should mind map out your examples. Feel free to talk to each other about your ideas, but stick to our goal: list examples of imagery and theme.”
4. **At this point in your lesson, the atmosphere should be social and enjoyable – that’s okay! That’s good. The whole key is this: Do all the students have a mind map in front of them? Has EVERYONE taken notes??**
5. Hand out “Annabelle Lee” – or any other piece of writing you wish to teach. The whole key is what’s on the back. I would put something really hardcore informative – a New York Times story on Sandy, for example. The CCR encourages *paired passages* and *a true balance of informational and literary texts*.
6. Distribute your handout: Poe on one side, the Times on the other. “First a bit of history about this poem’s author … please take notes.” Then you tell them a bit about how creepy Poe was, tell them some other stuff he’s done, and about how he died a young drunk. Set the mood.” (Hint: I love Wikipedia for this stuff. I will just read them info straight from Wikipedia or – even better – create some bullet points about the history of the poem and the author and put them on top of the poem.)
7. “I am going to read the poem twice. The first time just to feel it, just to hear it. The second time we’re going to analyze it and take notes about it as a class.”
8. Read the poem once. Practice!! Give them a show. I always read sample-poems aloud to my students. When they read them aloud they tend to lose their poetry. You should be a model for public speaking and dramatic oration right here.
9. “OK, now let’s read it a second time and I want you to focus on a few goals here: What imagery do you see? What other literary devices do you see? And what might be the theme of this poem?”
10. Lead them through the poem now one stanza at a time. Read it aloud and then start guiding them through a conversation about the imagery and other literary elements. Define vocabulary like “maiden” and “seraph”. Be sure students see the following: repetition, parallel structure, end rhyme, interior rhyme, antithesis (angels in heaven above/demons down under), symbolism, long dashes, semicolon, compound noun (night-tide), and diction (word choice – “darling” is a particularly effective word in the final stanza, for example. These are all very easy to point out in this poem – it’s a gold mine of valuable writing lessons!!
11. Next stanza, etc. By the end of this process you will have been successful if EVERY kid has a poem filled with annotations.
12. “Now, it’s time to develop a theme. The central question is this: What is this poem about? What lesson does it hold for readers? Take three minutes to work on one sentence: the topic sentence of a paragraph that asks: What is the theme of this poem?”
13. This should be some real quiet, thoughtful time. After three minutes, give them three more minutes: “This time, I want you to show your theme to a few people, talk about the possibilities, and possibly rewrite it so it’s even stronger, clearer, and better written.”
14. Coach each and every student to come up with a thematic statement about the poem. Tell them they will be writing a paragraph about the poem’s them, and picture this as the opening statement.
15. COLD CALL: “I am going to cold call on four random students to read their sentences aloud to the class. After that, anybody who wishes to can read theirs.”
16. Cold Call four names. Now, you’re really hot in some amazing teaching. You’ve been through “Annabelle Lee,” you’ve gotten all those terms out there, they’ve taken all these notes …. But, now is when you hit your apex: teaching them to write about it! When each sentence is read aloud you have to gently critique it and talk about its pros and cons. Coach the reader to revise it and make it better – in front of the whole class. Heap on the praise, but do some real teaching here!
17. After the Cold Call, I like challenge them “Who WANTS to get a critique?”
18. Next up: Same exact exercise with the nonfiction article on the back.
19. You have to lead them through all the writing lessons you see in the article. And get them to write a topic sentence about the theme of the piece.
20. Time for the writing assignment: Write a paragraph of 300 words or less that analyzes the theme of either piece. To properly *analyze* writing, discuss how the author’s choices of literary elements – particularly imagery! – help create the theme.
21. Reminders/mini-lessons on writing a paragraph: topic sentence, citing sources, building an argument. Show models of writing from all groups: you and other teachers, your former students, and professional writers. I would try to show at least two models at this part of the lesson.
22. Next: Handout **a rubric** for this assignment. Rubrics are so important to teach and evaluate writing. It gives students and teachers a common language and common goals. The whole key to using rubrics is using three key words: “Outstanding. Adequate. Inadequate.” My rubric has five categories (same as the NY State Regents – with similar wording) and each one is rated on a 10-point scale. I teach my students “An 8 is *adequate*. A 9 or 10 means it was *outstanding* in that category. Below an 8 means it was inadequate. A handout for a **self-evaluation** or a **peer coaching session** would also be helpful, but not mandatory here.
23. For the next two days you should tell your class “This is writing workshop. I want you to work on those paragraphs. You can get help from anyone you want, get editing, make revisions, and go through a process of writing a GREAT paragraph analyzing the themes of one of those works. When you turn your paragraph into me, I want you to staple all the drafts – all the evidence of how much you worked on this task.” It’s important for both you and the student to see the layers that went into the piece of writing. Documenting the process also builds up the pride and the motivation to achieve. No matter what you are teaching, you should always be emphasizing the writing cycle of draft-and-revise.
24. When all the goals are accomplished, collect the work! Be sure to save some great examples for next year’s models!
25. If possible, grade each paragraph WITH the student – outside of class. Read the paragraph back and talk about its strengths and weaknesses. Tell students why you score an area as “inadequate” or “outstanding”.
26. Encourage the student to publish the piece and/or put it in the final portfolio.