

NEH Hudson River Workshop Lesson Plan 2013

Teacher: Cheryl Freyou

Subject: Language Arts

Grade Level: 9th–12th Grade

Summary:

This lesson requires students to create an epitaph for a character from Irving's *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Students will have the opportunity to be creative. They will be required to come up with background information on the character they chose and make connections between their character and the other characters in the book.

In 1915, American writer **Edgar Lee Masters** (1869-1950) published *The Spoon River Anthology*, (1915) a book of 244 poems spoken by the deceased residents of the fictitious, small town Spoon River (based in part on Lewistown, Illinois). The work consists of a series of interrelated free-verse monologues in which the dead citizens speak about their past lives. In a style characterized by its brevity and clarity, each poem stands as an epitaph created by the individual it commemorates. Although the *Anthology* does offer descriptions of simple, honest and even happy lives, it focuses primarily on the ironies, the sordidness and the hardships of existence.

Jonas Keene

WHY did Albert Schirding kill himself
Trying to be County Superintendent of Schools,
Blest as he was with the means of life
And wonderful children, bringing him honor
Ere he was sixty?
If even one of my boys could have run a news-stand,
Or one of my girls could have married a decent man,
I should not have walked in the rain
And jumped into bed with clothes all wet,

Albert Schirding

JONAS KEENE thought his lot a hard one
Because his children were all failures.
But I know of a fate more trying than that:
It is to be a failure while your children are successes.
For I raised a brood of eagles
Who flew away at last, leaving me
A crow on the abandoned bough.
Then, with the ambition to prefix Honorable to my name,
And thus to win my children's admiration,
I ran for County Superintendent of Schools,
Spending my accumulations to win—and lost.
That fall my daughter received first prize in Paris
For her picture, entitled, "The Old Mill"—
(It was of the water mill before Henry Wilkin put in steam.)
The feeling that I was not worthy of her finished me.



Welcome to *Sleepy Hollow Cemetery*,
the eternal resting place for many residents of the Hudson
River Valley.

Your objective is to create an epitaph using your selected Sleepy Hollow resident's perspective, while emulating the style of Edgar Lee Master's Spoon River Anthology.

Things to do:

- Meet with your partner and research the residents of Sleepy Hollow cemetery.
- Discuss possible scenarios, and then decide upon a scenario involving each character and his/her relationship with the other characters- resulting in each character's death.

*Use a bit of humor—not graphic violence!

- As a group decide upon the following **facts** leading to each character's death:
 - Who was involved?
 - What happened? (How did he/she die?)
 - When did it occur?
 - Where did it occur?
 - Why did it occur? (**MOTIVATION**)

Remember: Just the FACTS!

This is an opportunity for you to express your creative side yet remember to only answer the questions.

Do not write a personal narrative divulging all of your character's hidden secrets.

-**Individually**, write a free verse epitaph divulging an incomplete explanation [use **1st** person POV] of your resident's death and the circumstances surrounding it.

* From the Sleepy Hollow resident's perspective, reveal significant character traits about him/herself, involvement with other characters, and clues to the circumstances surrounding his/her untimely death.

Epitaph Format: [100 points]

- Proper Heading [*On Rough Draft only]
- Fifteen-lines **minimum** using **free verse** for epitaph
- Epitaph**- Typed, 14-point font, Style must be legible, 1" margins (if applicable), Single-spaced-centered

*Remember the poetic explanation should be **fragmented** and told from the **jaded perspective** of your character. Only when **all** the characters from your group have **read** his /her epitaphs will the **TRUTH** be revealed!

Visual Publishing Medium:

- Create an **artistically unique, character-defining “epitaph display”** revealing the character’s name and poetically incomplete epitaph (epitaph must be legible- typed)
- Use various art mediums to “breathe life” into your character’s visual epitaph
- Character’s Name (top-center) of visual epitaph
- Proper Heading on **back** of epitaph
- *It must **NOT** look like a typical tombstone- *Use your wonderful sense of **Creativity!*** 😊