

NEH Hudson River Workshop Lesson Plan 2013

Teacher: Connie Booth

Subject: American Literature

Grade Level: 11th Grade

Summary:

Students will be able to compare and contrast Hawthorne and Irving by looking at their writing styles. Students will read specific sections of *Sleepy Hollow* and *The Scarlet Letter*. Students will have to come up with their own conclusions on the similarities and differences of the authors. Students will be required to create their own short passage based on one of the passages covered in class. They must write the passage copying the writing style of either Hawthorne or Irving. Students will learn the basis of Romanticism through this lesson plan.

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Honors American Literature—Grade 11

**Two Views of American Romanticism:
The Works of Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne**

Rationale:

Our current American Literature curriculum does not include Washington Irving's works or make any reference to the Hudson River area writers and their contributions to the body of American literature. While reading the texts assigned to prepare for the NEH program *The Hudson River in the 19th Century and the Modernization of America* and while participating in the program, it occurred to me that a very interesting connection could be made between the early New England writers studied in my Honors American Literature course, particularly Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Washington Irving. Since Hawthorne is so heavily influenced by his Puritan ancestors and his stark setting, his writing offers an interesting contrast to Irving's, whose lighter culture and lush environment allows for a different type of fiction. This lesson plan will serve as an introduction to American Romanticism and allow the students to delve into two different approaches to Romanticism, both directly influenced by place and culture.

Essential Questions:

- How does the writing of Washington Irving compare and/or contrast with the writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne, since they both write in the same time period in American history and are both considered to be writing in the Romantic tradition?
- How does setting and culture influence literary style, focus, plot, theme, and characterization?
- Why do Irving and Hawthorne develop differently as writers when they are geographically and chronologically close?
- What conclusions can be drawn about the influence of place on writers and their writing?
- Based on our study, how do we characterize the literature of American Romanticism?

Objectives:

- The students will closely examine textual details.
- The students will compare and contrast the settings, culture, and writings of New England and the Hudson River valley.
- The students will be able to explain how setting and culture influence a writer's subjects and style.
- The students will discuss how many different kinds of writing contribute to our understanding of American Romanticism.

Procedure:

Prior to these lessons, students will have read the first five chapters of Genesis, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, and Jonathan Edwards's *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. Through these readings, students gain an understanding of the heavy influence that religion had on America's early inhabitants.

Day 1

1. Without prior introduction, read Irving's lovely description of the meal at the Van Tassels' home in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Discuss with students the details and consider Ichabod Crane's focus on this meal. (Interestingly, after an exhaustive search, I cannot find a single description of a meal in any of Hawthorne's short stories or *The Scarlet Letter*.) Tell the students about my fruitless search and have them suggest reasons for Hawthorne's seeming disinterest in writing about food.
2. Have students closely read a description of the Kaatskil mountains as an example of setting in "Rip Van Winkle." Discuss the descriptive details, the author's tone and intent, and the effect on the reader. Then have students read a description of Hester Prynne's cottage and surroundings in *The Scarlet Letter*. Discuss the descriptive details, the author's tone and intent, and the effect on the reader. Both are picturesque settings, yet the beauty comes through in only one description. Which deliberate word choices influence our interpretation of these passages?
3. Encourage the students to draw conclusions about the two writers. Which uses detail to entice the reader? Which uses detail to provoke readers' interest in the setting? Which do you like better as a reader? Why? How do these writers differ in their intents?
4. Assignment: Students are to choose one of the three paragraphs and write a descriptive paragraph of their own, imitating one studied in class.

Day 2

1. Have students share their descriptive paragraphs with a partner. Partners should underline the description and decide which writer is being imitated. Each partner should choose his/her favorite sentence to read aloud. Have students share sentences in small groups, then choose one to read to the class. Students should be able to identify which passage is being imitated.
2. Begin class with a history of the Hudson River Valley. Include Dutch ancestry and religion, the setting on the Hudson River, the area's proximity to civilization. Using a map and historical connections, students should be able to understand the neutrality of the area in the American Revolution and the less influential role of religion as compared to the Puritan influence in works already studied.
3. Students may attempt to connect this information to the descriptive paragraphs studied on Day 1. Based on earlier studies of Puritan literature, why do these differences seem to exist? How do students see the influence of religion and the conception of sin in these passages?
4. Assignment: Students will read "Rip Van Winkle" using a handout so that they can mark passages. They should come to class tomorrow with the story annotated and three questions from their reading.

Day 3

1. Review historical and cultural connections discussed in class yesterday. Ask students where they were able to use this information to make the text more meaningful. Have them point to specific passages.

2. Have students ask questions about the text. These might include “What is the time of the story?” “What does Rip Van Winkle miss as he sleeps?” “How is this story like stories of today?”
3. Students are encouraged to share favorite parts of the text and to speak about why that passage was chosen. Responses might include times when students slept to avoid an event or as an escape, an interest in the wife, the fantasy of the “dream,” or the reactions of the townsfolk and family.
4. Assignment: Students are to complete the following short writing assignment—If you had missed the last five years, what would surprise you on your return? What would you not know about? Students will write ten sentences that discuss something that would be missed or bullet five items that they would not know about. (This assignment may be later extended by focusing on just one item.)

Day 4

1. Students will share what they would miss with the class. Are their concerns like Rip Van Winkle’s? Are any of their concerns humorous? Do they address family and friends or technology and media? Would they be shocked by today’s use of phones and/or the changes in methods of communication over the past five years? How would their families react?
2. Introduce *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. This novel will introduce another man who misses two crucial years in the life of his marriage, and so has many questions upon unexpectedly entering a village.
3. Unlike Irving’s rather lighthearted look at Rip Van Winkle’s disappearance, Roger Chillingworth’s disappearance has very serious consequences. To emphasize Hawthorne’s examination of the nature of sin, refer frequently to Irving’s tale to show the two views of Romanticism (light and dark) employed by two very different writers creating fiction set in similar times but dissimilar cultures.
4. Assignment: Students are to read the first three chapters in *The Scarlet Letter*. They must come to class prepared with a quotation that interests them, a question about the reading, and at least five sentences of commentary.

The Scarlet Letter typically is covered in nine readings and is followed by an analytical essay. After reading *The Scarlet Letter*, we will begin a study of the Transcendentalists, particularly Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman.

Passages for discussion:

“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”

Fain would I pause to dwell upon the world of charms that burst upon the enraptured gaze of my hero, as he entered the state parlor of Van Tassel’s mansion;—not those of the bevy of buxom lasses, with their luxurious display of red and white; but the ample charms of a genuine Dutch country tea-table, in the sumptuous time of autumn. Such heaped-up platters of cakes of various and almost indescribable kinds, known only to experienced Dutch housewives! There was the doughty dough-nut, the tenderer oly koek, and the crisp and crumbling kruller; sweet-cakes and short-cakes, ginger-cakes and honey-cakes, and the whole family of

cakes. And then there were apple-pies, and peach-pies, and pumpkin-pies; besides slices of ham and smoked beef; and moreover delectable dishes of preserved plums, and peaches, and pears, and quinces; not to mention broiled shad and roasted chickens; together with bowls of milk and cream, all mingled higgledy-piggledy, pretty much as I have enumerated them, with the motherly tea-pot sending up its clouds of vapor from the midst— Heaven bless the mark! I want breath and time to discuss this banquet as it deserves, and am too eager to get on with my story. Happily, Ichabod Crane was not in so great a hurry as his historian, but did ample justice to every dainty.

“Rip Van Winkle”

Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson must remember the Kaatskill mountains. They are a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family, and are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up to a noble height, and lording it over the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed, every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains, and they are regarded by all the good wives, far and near, as perfect barometers. When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky, but, sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of gray vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory.

At the foot of these fairy mountains, the voyager may have descried the light smoke curling up from a village, whose shingle-roofs gleam among the trees, just where the blue tints of the upland melt away into the fresh green of the nearer landscape.

The Scarlet Letter—Chapter 5

On the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation, there was a small thatched cottage. It had been built by an earlier settler, and abandoned, because the soil about it was too sterile for cultivation, while its comparative remoteness put it out of the sphere of that social activity which already marked the habits of the emigrants. It stood on the shore, looking across a basin of the sea at the forest-covered hills, towards the west. A clump of scrubby trees, such as alone grew on the peninsula, did not so much conceal the cottage from view, as seem to denote that here was some object which would fain have been, or at least ought to be, concealed. In this little lonesome dwelling, with some slender means that she possessed, and by the licence of the magistrates, who still kept an inquisitorial watch over her, Hester established herself, with her infant child. A mystic shadow of suspicion immediately attached itself to the spot. Children, too young to comprehend wherefore this woman should be shut out from the sphere of human charities, would creep nigh enough to behold her plying her needle at the cottage-window, or standing in the doorway, or labouring in her little garden, or coming forth along the pathway that led townward,

and, discerning the scarlet letter on her breast, would scamper off with a strange contagious fear.

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