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The Rhetorical Nature of Narrative

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Background

I thought my eyes and ears were deceiving me. The scene before me was a rare sight at best and certainly not one I expected so late in the year. Here it was two weeks after the AP English exam and my students were carrying on an in-depth analytical discussion amongst themselves of a chapter from Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried*. Please don't misunderstand me; I was not leading the discussion, nor was it based on questions or worksheets that I had handed out. Rather it was the result of their own findings in the text, their own decisions about what mattered. Animated, passionate, and full of constant references to the text, how had they come to this? What had I done to achieve this moment of classroom nirvana? As I pondered this scene I realized that much of the credit could be laid at Hollywood's feet.

In true Hollywood fashion then, let me establish the scene before advancing the narrative. I am the English Department Chair, the AP English teacher (both Language and Literature), and the Film & Video teacher at a visual and performing arts magnet public school in Charlotte, North Carolina. The student population is approximately forty-percent free and reduced lunch. Our physical location is in an urban setting from which we draw a portion of our population. We are a relatively small school (approximately 600 high school students) and while we have auditions they do not determine entrance; they are only for placement. We do not draw only the artistically inclined. About one third of our students are dedicated to their art, one third are art enthusiasts, and one third are just enthusiastic, though rarely about art or academics.

Our district is keenly aware of test scores and attempts to structure curriculum so that high test scores will result. The district is more concerned with tests that are counted in No Child Left Behind; it has begun to offer suggestions as to how to teach AP English classes. Alongside of this our district has made the decision that if a student is interested in an AP class, regardless of their previous English grades/abilities, then they can enroll in the course. While fears of the workload may keep a few intrepid souls at bay, my classes are usually comprised of students with a variety of backgrounds and abilities. However what they almost all do not bring to the class is a developed ability to skillfully use textual evidence to construct meaning in their discussion and their writing. In order for them to be successful on the AP exams, this is an absolute necessity. It is one of the goals of this unit to bridge that gap and in order to do so I find myself turning to cinema.

Rationale

The majority of available films, both foreign and domestic, is constructed in narrative form.¹ Narrative can be defined as "the art and craft of constructing a story with a particular plot and point of view."² The key words in this definition are "constructing" and "particular," both of which imply the drive towards specific goals or viewpoints. Stories are manmade, not found in nature, so they must be built. In this construction process several key things happen. One is that stories acquire a particular voice because of who is doing the telling and a significant part of this voice is the perceived audience for the story. The linguistic sophistication of the narrative is pitched to the appropriate audience level so that the events of the narrative are clearly conveyed. For example, the initial audience for Dr. Seuss books is quite different from the audience for James Joyce novels. Each of these narratives imagines a different audience that requires different linguistic abilities and that is built into the story from the outset.

Along with the author pitching the story in a specific voice, s/he at the same time is using that voice to create a particular plot, a unique sequence of events, generally involving characters who go through some kind of conflict and achieve some kind of resolution to the conflict, though not always. The audience listens, reads, or views all of this because they want to find out what will happen to the characters in the story and they are hoping that it will be different from many of the other narratives they have already been told. The particularness of the story can be in the sequencing of events, which can be rather simplistic or extremely intricate and convoluted. As with the language of the story, the complexity of the plot is also constructed with the audience in mind.

The final key event in narrative construction, for our purposes, is the crafting of a point of view within the narrative itself. This is closely aligned with the linguistic voice of the story but differs in that this viewpoint exists within the narrative itself. Whether it is told in first, second, or third person, this decision is made in an attempt to achieve particular effects. Within each of these possibilities are variations as well and a skillful author will take great care in choosing which to use. How different would *Huckleberry Finn* be if instead of being told from Huck's point of view we knew what each character was thinking? Or if we did not know what any of them thought, only what they did? Who is talking to us within the story will affect how we perceive the events of the narrative and will help the narrative achieve a sense of being unique or particular.

Taking into account just these three keys begins to reveal that much that goes into narrative construction is done with the audience in mind. Storytellers strive to make their stories stand out and that building process leads us to consider the particularity, the uniqueness of the narrative plot and point of view. What is this story about? Who is telling this story? The worst thing a storyteller can hear is that the listener has already heard that one. Thus new stories are continually sought out or old ones re-told but constructed differently so that the audience will remain and listen.

Narratives vary widely in many of their characteristics but overwhelmingly, the goal of all narratives is to create an effect in the reader/viewer. This goal could be to elicit an emotional response, to teach, to warn, to entertain, or to do any number of things but they are seldom crafted just to exist for themselves. The more I taught AP English Language and Film, the more I could not help but notice the similarities between narrative construction and argument. Both are designed to elicit a response and in the best ones everything in them is working towards getting something specific across to the reader/viewer. Slowly I have found myself thinking of narrative in rhetorical terms. Literary texts, films, and arguments are arranged in a very specific order, are

delivered in a specific style, and are striving to deliver specific results. In this sense then, they are all functioning in a rhetorical fashion and thus I began looking for similarities in the way we make meaning out them.³ It was this quest that eventually developed into the technique that comprises this unit, which I feel can be used universally. Thus my goal for this unit is to give the fellow AP English and/or film teacher a method for examining texts — be they film, prose fiction, or argument - that can be used again and again as well as freely modified. While it would not make all students into budding scholars instantly, I feel that through repeated use it will begin to make them more sophisticated readers and, hopefully, writers of deeper substance.⁴

In film studies there exists an analysis technique that is called "narrative segmentation." In this process, an attempt is made to divide the film into its narrative parts or components.⁵ One basic way to analyze the meaning of a narrative text — visual or written — is to break it into its component parts and examine the relationships between them. Segmentation gives us a means to do this and helps us understand the connections from micro units to macro units. By making these connections apparent and studying the relationships from segment to segment and then overall, one can begin to see that it is these relationships that attempt to control our understanding of and responses to the text. Using segmentation to dissect a text is the main teaching strategy of my unit.

Segmentation works because the students themselves are the ones performing the slow unraveling of the text, not necessarily the teacher. They begin to take responsibility for textual interpretation and understanding. When I have done this in my classroom, it places me immediately in more of an advisor role, shifting the class to a student-centered classroom and away from a teacher-centered classroom. When I am coaching them from the sidelines during a discussion of the components of a text, it slowly becomes apparent to them that they are the ones making the knowledge, making the text mean. The long-range goal of this practice is to then help them take ownership of this skill so that they will be able to perform throughout the year. Hopefully by revisiting this practice throughout the year they become so proficient at it that they can perform a mini-version of it on the AP exam.

The best way to teach students to segment a text is with film. Film is something that the students are immediately familiar with and tends to elicit a larger positive response than an assigned story/poem/novel. Students also regard themselves as equals in the realm of film interpretation. They expect others (English teachers, for example) to have deeper interpretations of literary texts but concerning film, in part because it is so ubiquitous, they do not see any one interpretation as being more sophisticated than another. By the time they reach eleventh and twelfth grade, many students have already imposed on themselves a limit on their abilities to understand a literary text. These limits work to hinder student growth because some students will have convinced themselves that they just "don't get" novels, poems, etc. . . and in doing so they have set limits on their abilities that in turn have an indirect effect on the classroom. Fewer students contributing means fewer minds being put together to build comprehension skills. By starting with a film, hopefully this "tune-out" will be prevented.

Strategy (Past and Present)

Most students, by the time they get to AP English, are familiar with Aristotle's plot line of introduction/rising action/ climax/falling action/denouement that is usually understood to be underlying most narratives. Still, a quick review of this structure could be helpful because a narrative segment is usually considered a micro-

version of this pattern. Inside the text, these segments can be demarcated by a significant change in setting, action, or any other kind of shift in the flow of the narrative, not necessarily in the characters' lives. The narrative space in between these shifts can be thought of as a narrative segment.

In my experience I have found that it is best to start with a fairly innocuous film, one that is easy to follow and does not give rise to a lot of emotional investment, something light and enjoyable. Whatever film you choose, I strongly encourage you to preview it with pen and paper in hand so that you can perform your own quickly sketched segmentation. This will give you a feel for the rhythms of the film and help you facilitate the students' own segmentation. It is important though that you do not impose your segment divisions on your class. Once they have begun their work, then you can guide, but you will find that they will generally agree with one another. Nor is it necessary that they all always agree about where to break it up, though they should be asked to defend and justify their decisions, either in discussion or in writing. My first segmentation was done with Richard Linklater's *School of Rock*, which worked wonderfully.

The ideal situation is to show the film all the way through once before beginning to work on it. This may seem like a lot of time given over to watching movies but I have found that it is time well invested. If they can master this skill then the pay-off will be ongoing. I did this with *School of Rock* and it worked very well. As they watched it, they did take brief notes on it and we had a short follow-up discussion to ensure that everyone had the basic synopsis of the film. It is important that this discussion not be one of "Well, I liked it because. . ." or "I didn't like this part. . ." We are not interested in their tastes but rather their ability to parse a narrative to justify how meanings are crafted. I then showed it a second time, in five-minute increments, so that it was divided arbitrarily but in small enough portions that they could remember clearly what had gone on. At each five-minute mark I would pause the film and give them a chance to take notes on the narrative and to begin the dividing of it. They should be formulating in their notes the reasons for their segments. A discussion of this allows them to consolidate their choices and provides for a dividing of the entire film. Many of their choices follow existent edits in the film and this is exactly what you are hoping for because it moves the discussion to the choices the filmmaker made when constructing the narrative. In this case, why did Richard Linklater make the choices he did? What is he trying to convey by constructing segments the way he does? Going through the film in short increments also allows students to begin picking up on some of the basic film techniques that help to craft our understanding of the segments. An example from this particular film is the use of soundtrack music. Anytime an edit to a new scene includes upbeat "classic" rock music, Jack Black's character, Dewey, is going to solve another of the obstacles that are keeping him from his goal. For this kind of analysis the students do not need a sophisticated understanding of all the film techniques, just some basic knowledge which can be gained through a basic film text or can be found on the Yale film studies website⁶ .

What we found the second time through is that nearly all of the choices that Linklater made about how to craft the film are working together to drive the narrative, to focus our attention on how Dewey will reach his goal. Within the opening seven minutes of the film Linklater has used an overhead shot of Dewey lying facedown, first on the floor of a club after an unsuccessful stage dive which transitions to the same camera angle, this time to Dewey facedown in bed. Linklater uses this "Dewey on the bottom" shot to introduce us to the myriad of problems that are weighing him down. He is confronted by a lack of money to pay his share of the rent, an extreme dislike for his roommate's girlfriend, lack of a job, and being fired by his band. All of these conflicts set in motion the events that will set Dewey on the pathway to discovery and on this journey he will learn ways to resolve these conflicts. These small events inter-relate and work together to comprise the larger concerns of the film. Breaking them into segments begins to demonstrate to the students that the overarching narrative was driven by decisions at the micro-level. This is where they began to see that it was more than just a movie about a guy trying to form a band. By looking at the film in small segments, they began to see

connections between these segments. These links, when stretched over several segments, began to bring forth some of the themes of the film. Dewey comes to understand that education is not a waste of time; he both learns to teach and in turn is taught by the students. The sarcasm and outright contempt he has for his roommate's desire to become more than a substitute teacher is repeated for the school's policies when he becomes a substitute teacher. Yet when he begins teaching rock history, rock appreciation, etc, he finds himself imposing structure and work on the students. Both the students and Dewey have their perspectives on life broadened. Dewey learns that not all revolutions are loud noisy ones that physically tear down societal structures, some are quiet ones that infiltrate and change societal thinking by using the means of society. This is the case when, at the end of the film, he starts his own school, a school of rock. All of these larger themes are slowly revealed to us by much smaller events, the order in which they are revealed, and the way these events are delivered to us in the film.

At this point I placed the students in small groups with instructions to craft a completed segmentation for the entire movie as well as to place the multiple smaller themes into larger categories. A follow-up discussion allowed the students to exchange perceptions and their understanding of the interlocking categories. This then gave them the necessary foundation to demonstrate their new-found skill in writing. To ensure that they have mastered this analytical skill, I asked them to identify one of the major themes and justify its importance by demonstrating that it permeates the film. Another closing assignment might ask them to evaluate Linklater's success in building one of his overarching themes. This would also require them to be able to point to specific moments in the film and use them to advance an argument as to the merits of Linklater's construction of the film. Both of these assignments are good practice for the kinds of writing that students will have to do on the AP exams where they will have to be able to marshal evidence from a text to build a case for a specific interpretation.

Essentially what segmentation does is give the teacher another means to develop close reading skills in the students. It also immediately capitalizes on these skills by asking the student to use the information that they have unearthed to formulate an argument. Very little of what happens in a segmentation unit is actually teacher directed. Rather, what you are doing is giving the students the means to develop the classroom discussion. If they all participate (and that is why using film is such a great hook), then they all have the means to contribute to the discussion and to any kind of group or individual writing that you choose to use as follow-up.

Since the students are developing close reading skills of narrative in this exercise then it becomes transferable to literary works as well. Narratives, whether in film or literature, share many of the same characteristics and thus are subject to similar methods of reading. Without drawing the parallels too closely, the devices that make a film — the edits, shots, sequences, lighting, camera moves, soundtrack, etc. - function as a kind of language and thus can be read as such. So the jump now to literature should not be that dramatic for the students. In order to make the transition as easy as possible, I use either short stories or works told in vignettes, like Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* or Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, which I will be using this fall. These two novels are both comprised of short chapters, some as brief as two pages, and the chapters can, if necessary, be understood in isolation from the rest of the novel. Thus they make good works to use as they allow for any difficulties to be worked out without any student being left behind.

I have used the chapter from O'Brien's novel entitled "The Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" and it has worked well. The basic principle remains the same. Ensure that all of the students have the same text (important if you are in a place where the students will be purchasing their own texts). Then have them go

through the same process, though now you can have them do the first reading and the segmenting in one move or over the course of several days as you discuss the text in class. On an assigned day they should have their segmentations in class with them. I have found success in placing them in groups at this point, asking each group to arrive at a master segmentation. This gives them the chance to interact with each other with regard to their findings and I have found that many of these conversations are full of debate with students referencing the text in order to make their case. From here I had them appoint a spokesperson from their groups and we organized their group segmentations into one for the whole class.

Once we have an agreed upon segmentation, I send them back to the text to look inside each narrative unit and re-examine them for possible thematic elements, smaller conflicts, character development, anything that seems to advance our knowledge or understanding of the text. In "The Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" this includes Rat Kiley's discussion of storytelling and lies in the first pages, Maryanne's dancing to music (occurs twice in the story), the descriptions of Maryanne's attire and the way she and her boyfriend, Fosse, set up housekeeping in the early part of the chapter. These and other details that fill out the narrative in small but soon to be revealed important ways were spread out throughout the text. As they revealed themselves in our readings and discussions, we moved from the micro details to macro issues or themes such as of the nature of storytelling, descriptions of the emotional side of war, the very specific use of music as a marker of an important reversal, as well as early 1960's gender roles and their reversal.

The students' conversations and the work that they performed while they developed their narrative analyses resulted in the class discussion mentioned in the first paragraph, the one that helped me to realize that this might be more than just another exercise. The close reading that a successful segmentation demands gave the students a sense of power over and ownership of the text. It gave them the tools necessary to take a text apart in such a way that not only their understanding improved, but they also realized that they had the skills to get what they needed from a text in order to craft and justify their own interpretations. If segmentation can bring this dynamic to my classroom on even an occasional basis, then it is worth the time and effort it may take to teach students to do it. It gives them the means to engage with texts on a critical analytical level, providing them with the feeling of confidence in their abilities that I want them to have when they take the AP exam.

Strategy One (Future)

Giving the strengths of segmentation for developing close reading skills, I intend to keep using it and expanding it in various ways. In what follows I am going to lay out some of the strategies I will use to develop my students' abilities to read closely and write careful analytic papers.

As mentioned previously, I use Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* in my AP English classes. It is written as a series of vignettes making it an easy place to start working with textual segmentation. It also has the added benefit of having a film made from some of the chapters in the book. Where the book is not a strict linear narrative, to make the film the director, Chris Eyre, and Sherman Alexie reconfigured some of the events of the novel into a linear narrative. The novel is a more open-ended text whereas the film is a more tightly constructed one. This allows for further exploration into the nature of narrative and the rhetorical way it strives to construct meaning. It would allow for a discussion concerning the very definition of a narrative: how open-ended can a text be and still be a narrative? Which text is closer to

the construction of our own real-life experience? The differences between the two types of texts and what our expectations are when we think of a novel versus a film provide immediate discussion of our expectations when we confront a text that we deem a "narrative." Consideration of these issues would also allow for a variety of written assignments that could be used to assess the students' abilities with narrative analysis as well as their skills in using textual evidence to support their argument.

Lesson One Methodology

Start the unit by introducing the film and the novel. Explain that you will be working extensively with both and that they should start reading the novel immediately so that they are ready to go once we have segmented the film. Then go over a list of general questions that they will help students begin to understand how films use technical and structural devices to craft narrative. Most good college film books will contain a set of basic film analysis questions that you could use. My district uses *The Art of Watching Film* and there is an extensive question set on pp. 83-84 that I use.⁷ Have the students work on these questions while watching the film. A helpful website to look at for information on the film is imdb.com. It is a valuable resource for technical info and reviews. Now show *Smoke Signals*. (While there is nothing too strong in the film, it is always a good idea to preview the film so that you will be ready to answer any questions that may arise.) The movie is readily available on DVD and is rated PG-13 so it should be no problem for the AP classroom.

Once you have introduced and shown the film and gone over the questions in discussion, you are ready to begin the segmentation part of the unit. Model a segmentation for them using the opening several minutes of the movie. Demonstrate that many of the thematic elements of the film are laid out in the opening sequences. By working with them for the first five to ten minutes, they should be able to go through the rest of the film by themselves with you stopping it every five to seven minutes and giving them time to write notes. Essentially you are following the procedure laid out above for *School of Rock*. Once you have finished this, allow time for a brief discussion, then break them into small groups (I find that three students to a group keeps the distraction level down) so that they can work on a group segmentation. As above, this should be followed by coming back together as a class to develop a single segmentation that hopefully everyone agrees on. This process allows students to work on their analytic skill since they will be examining their notes and divisions for their effectiveness. It also allows them to work on their persuasive abilities, especially if they feel strongly about particular moments. They should be ready to ably defend the segment divisions they chose.

Right after the discussion that crafts the overarching segmentation is a good time to evaluate the students' progress. A written assignment that requires them to draw upon their segmentation as a resource for understanding issues, theme(s), and the consequences of these issues and themes would fit nicely here. It does not have to be long but it should require them to justify their assertions by referencing the text. This is an effective way to assess what is working for the students and what needs to be revisited. It also gives them good practice in making interpretive choices that need defending.

Once there is mastery of the skill of segmentation, it is time to turn their attention to the novel. I will use the first chapter, "Every Little Hurricane," to teach the basics of literary segmentation. The procedure for this should follow the procedure given for the O'Brien chapter, dividing it at those moments when the story takes a turn or there is a new development in character, plot, action, or setting. As with the movie they should do this singly, then in groups, then as a class. As you work through this chapter it will allow for further discussion of setting, characterization, conflict, and point of view. By discussing them in this context, it serves dual purposes. The more time spent on these elements in preparation for the AP exams the better. It also allows the students to explore the ways in which these elements work together to develop and construct a particular

story. The close reading necessitated by segmentation will force them to spend time examining the ways these elements are built up from the micro level into macro structures that shape our understanding of the text.

Once the class has achieved a general comfort level with segmentation, you can assign one or two chapters to individual students for them to segment on their own. In this fashion the whole work will wind up segmented and can be compiled into a master layout enabling a variety of practices to be brought into use. By examining how Alexie has structured the entire work you will have the means to see how he develops particular themes or concepts throughout the book and you will be able to pinpoint the specific devices he uses to do this. It will begin revealing the way that he uses literary devices to construct the narrative and control the reader's response to it.

At this point in this particular unit I begin to branch out into assessments that require higher order thinking skills. Because we are working with a film that the director drew from a novel without trying to duplicate the novel, it is not quite a full adaptation, though there is enough overlap that it is worth exploring that connection. It also opens up plenty of other areas for exploration. One higher order thinking skill that can be engaged is that of synthetic thinking by asking the students to evaluate the effectiveness of Eyre's choices in including some sections and not others. They can evaluate the differences in the way the movie and the novel handle the narrative voice as well as the differences in the way the mood and tone of the texts were handled. How did Eyre change them? Where and how did they stay the same? Why? These and other questions regarding the basic literary elements are readily available because of the choices the filmmaker made in bringing this book to screen.

Lesson One Plan

Goal: To develop the students' ability to read a narrative closely and analytically through use of segmentation.

Objectives: As a result of this lesson students will be able to:

1. Examine the ways in which narratives are crafted at the micro level, and the way that small constituent parts work together to create a larger narrative,
2. Defend their segmentation choices,
3. Write an essay in which they defend a particular understanding of the text by using the information gleaned in the segmentation process.

Student materials: pen, paper, copies of Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

Teacher materials: *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, *Smoke Signals* (preferably on DVD), DVD player with remote, TV, board, markers, set of questions for watching films (to be distributed to the class).

Procedure:

1. Watch the movie using the questions to guide discussion afterwards.
2. Assign the novel.
3. Have the students segment the film while you show it in short (5-7 minute) increments. This can be modeled for the students by using the opening five minutes.
4. Divide the class into small groups where they will compile a collaborative segmentation.
5. Use the group segmentations to create a master segmentation based on the whole class's work.

6. Assign an essay, or other written assessment that requires them to draw from the choices they have made and use the class's textual analysis to defend their understanding of the text.
7. Using the novel, work through a segmentation of the first chapter together as a class.
8. Divide the novel up to be segmented by individual students
9. Compile a master segmentation of the novel using the students' work. Copy and distribute it to the class.
10. Using the two segmentations (film and novel), have the students evaluate (in writing) the choices made by the director, the effect of the differences on the viewer/reader, and/or the way these decisions affect our understanding, especially as they pertain to literary elements.

Strategy Two (Future)

In this lesson, I use a variation on segmentation to give my students an approach to poetic mood and effect. Segmentation looks at what is already there visually and divides it into discrete narrative/textual units. For this lesson I reverse the process. Instead of looking at what is already there, the way segmentation does, I teach them to start with the text and craft what is to come visually, as if they were the filmmaker. They, in effect, become the ones creating the segments because I am asking them to break a poem into small constituent units and storyboard it. This approach helps them to analyze a poem and the effects that poetic elements have on their understanding of it. By looking at it in small pieces they begin to see how the poet structured the poem to craft specific effects and mood. I call the resulting storyboard a "film poem" and I have found that it is especially useful for getting those resistant readers of poetry into the often more difficult lyric poetry. By using the film technique of storyboarding, students are forced to examine the poem in small units and are able to understand how the poet builds an overall effect through diction, syntax, and stylistic choices.

Lesson Two Methodology

The work to be done to get this lesson started begins with deciding on a list of poems to be used. The text my district uses is Michael Meyer's *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, which includes an extensive amount of poetry to draw from. This text allows me to compile the list with regard to the poetic elements or types of poetry my students need practice working with. At this point you can choose to create a list that is long enough so that no two students will have the same poem or you can structure it so that there will be more than one student per poem. It all depends on whether you want to allow them to work together later on in this lesson. It is crucial to pick poems that are not overtly narrative or too long. While I hesitate to give a specific length suggestion in terms of line numbers, try to judge the appropriate length by bearing in mind what you are asking the students to do with the poem.

At this point, ask the students to choose a poem from the list. I recommend that you not tell them exactly what they will be doing with the poem just yet, only that they will be working with it rather extensively. This helps eliminate any tendency to choose a poem based on what they will be doing with it. I would rather they choose a poem that appeals to them, even if it is for reasons that they do not understand yet. I also recommend that you give them a day or two to look over the poems on the list in their text. Encourage them to read some of them and consider their choice. Not every student will do this, of course, but if you tell them that they will be answering a set of poetry analysis questions to go along with the poem of their choosing, it tends to spur them on.

Once they have chosen their poem, then assign them the questions to answer. These should be basic "getting into poetry" type questions, general enough to be used for any poem. Meyer's book gives a useful set of suggestive questions early in its introduction of poetry.⁸ Most literature anthologies have something like this. Give them a day to complete this and ask general questions in class, though try to steer clear of in-depth interpretive questions. The goal is to give them the tools and practice at teasing out meanings and effects so that they can improve their reading and interpreting skills that are necessary for the AP exam rather than you telling them what the poem means.

Now you may introduce the lesson proper by teaching the students to storyboard. Storyboards are used by many filmmakers to lay out each shot in their film. They look like a comic strip in that they tell the story in images without dialogue but they also give information regarding the camera angles, movements, and composition of each shot. The images in each square will closely resemble the image for that shot in the final film though at times there are differences. Many DVDs have storyboard — shot comparisons in their special features and bringing in a few of these would be helpful for students.⁹ Work through this with the students, showing them a few scenes from a film and then looking at the storyboards, or even asking them to storyboard a film clip. The breaking down of a scene will reveal the thought process that goes into filming. By looking at this they will be enhancing their ability to dissect texts as they begin realize how the seemingly smallest decisions of a filmmaker work to create meaning and effect. With all of this in mind, they are now ready to begin storyboarding their poems. Remind them that each frame in a storyboard conveys a limited quantity of information and that is the whole storyboard that conveys the overall meaning. Likewise their frames should focus on small but significant units of the poem — a line, a phrase, an image created by figurative language. They must be cautioned against trying to capture the whole poem in a shot or two. This would gloss over too much of the author's work instead of revealing it, which is their goal.

In their storyboarding they also need to include the text of the poem. One of the goals of this lesson is to have the students explore the relationship between the language of the poem and the images that language creates. This can be done in several ways. They can plan it as a voice-over narration in which case they must then plot out which lines will be said in which shots. They can run it as subtitles, again carefully laying out where the lines go. Or they can do it in the style of silent films; they can show the text on intertitles. This is a good place for a discussion of the power of language to control the way we see images, which is precisely the work of the poet. This similarity can be drawn upon and is useful for establishing a relationship between the work the students will do in this lesson and the work of a poet. Any chance to demystify the work of the artist and reveal the processes behind it are useful for engaging the students' in their attempts to interpret the artwork. So requiring them to include the text asks them to look at it again and consider how to segment it to achieve maximum effect in their film. At this point a student is bound to ask about incorporating music into the storyboard. I usually say "No," simply because it tends to clutter up their thinking when I want their focus to be on the text and their response. If it gets to a point where we will actually make the films, then I will reconsider music but only if it is adequately justified. This is also the time to discuss what can be used as images. There are two ways to approach this. One is to let them imagine anything they want, so long as it is appropriate for the classroom. The result will generally be something that is impossible for most students to actually film. That is fine if you only want to focus on the text and your time is limited. The second way is to tell them that the images are constrained by what is immediately film-able at school. While this initially limits their choices, it forces them to think deeply about what images in their location carry the multiple meanings that they will need. It also holds out the possibility that it could be filmed if there is enough time. This can provide a great incentive to the students and if it can be pulled off, it is richly rewarding.

Normally, under each frame in a storyboard the filmmaker will give information about the camera angle,

movement, lighting, etc. In addition to that you should ask for a little more. The students need to include under each frame several sentences that briefly justify that image with regard to the actual text of the poem, specifically the diction and the syntax. While the images themselves can be almost anything, this is where the assessment of the students takes place. In these short paragraphs they need to demonstrate the relationship between the image and the poem. This is where they should be invoking the text of the poem, the elements of poetry, and exploring how these things work to create effects. Because this type of analytical justification is precisely what they will have to do on the AP exam, this lesson helps them to start thinking about the relationships between language and its effect.

At this point you have several options for the rest of the lesson. The first option is to collect the work and move on. This is enough to get the students to begin thinking about the nature of language to craft images and makes for an excellent starting point for the study of poetry.

Your second option is place them in groups and have them develop a Hollywood style pitch on which film poem deserves to be made. This is especially useful if there are several students who did the same poem. They can then decide whose film poem is the best and provide written justification for their choice. This provides another opportunity for them to argue their decision based on the text and one of their peer's interpretation of it. Again it takes them back to the text and forces them to wrestle with the actual diction and syntax of the poem. This also has the advantage of not having a right or wrong answer. Instead the evaluation is based on their ability to marshal the text in support of their reading of it. This ability is necessary for success in AP as well as college.

The last option is generally the students' favorite option and that is to make the film poems. This requires a video camera and the means to edit the footage as well as the time to do this. This can be done very easily and inexpensively on a computer, if not the one in your room then there is probably one on campus that can. Some of your students will have the means to do this at home and though I discourage that, the choice is yours. If they do it at home, you have much less oversight into what they are doing, how on task they are, and your deadline is at the mercy of their equipment and any possible failures of it. By doing it at school, on your school's equipment, and during your class time, you exercise far greater control over how they use their time and what gets done by the deadlines. However, you will probably want to put them into groups and go through the process described above in the second option since you will not have time to have everyone make a film poem. This time though you will allow them to act upon their Hollywood pitch provided that their choice is filmable at school. While one group is filming, you should go ahead with teaching the others. This is often a good time for AP test practice and review. Once all the films (if you have time for more than one) are made then they can be shown in class as a little festival and the students, who by now should be familiar with all the poems, can argue, in writing, for which one is their favorite. By now they have spent more time with a poem than they ever thought possible and have dug more deeply into it than a normal research assignment would have prompted them. They have had to wrestle with the complexities of the poem, its language and structure, and how to make meaning out of those complexities. It is another way that literature can be seen as rhetorical.

Lesson Plan Two

Goal: To develop students' abilities to read a poem closely and analytically through the use of storyboarding.

Objectives: As a result of this lesson students will be able to:

1. Examine the ways in which poems are crafted and gain understanding that poets use strategies at the

micro level to create larger effects,

2. Defend the choices they make regarding the images the poem invokes in them, especially by appealing to the poem's diction and syntax,
3. Write an evaluative essay in which they argue for a particular interpretation of a poem.

Student materials: pen, paper, a textbook from which the poems will be pulled or a separate handout of poems to choose from.

Teacher materials: textbook, board, markers, 11x17 paper for the students to use for their storyboards, rulers, a set of questions for introducing the study of a poem to students.

Procedure:

1. Craft a list of poems that you want the students to work with, either from a textbook or on a handout.
2. Allow the students to choose a poem from the list. The list should be sufficiently long to minimize the number of students choosing the same poem or, conversely, if you will want them collaborating later, then the list should be short enough so that there will be overlap.
3. The students are then given a day to work with the poem, using poetry analysis questions drawn from the textbook or your own set.
4. Introduce the students to the concept of storyboarding. Use examples from films if you have them or demonstrate on the board.
5. Give the students the first part of the assignment — to storyboard the poem as if it were being turned into a film. They also must include the text of the poem in this, either in voiceover narration, subtitles, or intertitles. You should also hand out the 11x17 paper here and rulers if they are needed.
6. In addition to shot information, the students need to justify the shots they are using, they need be able to connect and justify the images they associate with the text. They should include a short paragraph for each shot explaining how the poet's diction and syntax generate the image/shot they are suggesting.
7. At this point you can collect their work and move on. However, if you have the time and the means there are several extensions of this assignment that can be carried out that will further enhance the students' abilities to work with poetry.
8. You can put them in groups and have them work with the set of poems they have and/or group them by overlapping poems. Out of this group they must choose the one film poem that they decide is the best interpretation of the poem. They then defend their choice in writing with appeals to both the storyboard and the text.
9. If you have the means you can also have them decide as a class on the best film poems. These can then be made into actual films if your school or your students have the means. Devise your own deadlines for this. The result can be fun and eye opening, especially if you have the time to have little film poem festival in class where they are all shown and discussed. Again there is room here for a written assessment of the filmmakers' interpretation with appeals made to the text and the film.

Strategy Three (Future)

Again taking its cue from film studies and segmentation, this lesson is built on the idea that narratives, in both literature and film, keep readers/viewers engaged by either denying their expectations or fulfilling them in unexpected ways. Thus the reader/viewer, having seen "A" expects and receives "B." This leads to an expectation of "C" but instead they get "D." This both confounds, though not overwhelmingly so, and also tantalizes; it keeps the reader/viewer guessing and slightly unsure of what will happen. This is part of the appeal of narratives, they attempt to keep us slightly unsettled and curious as to what comes next. These parts of the narrative, the "A", "B", "D" and so on, can be thought of as segments but they can also be thought of as lines in a poem. As each line is read, the poet has made deliberate choices about what is to come next, even down to the word that starts the next line. In this fashion, non-narrative poems can also be said to be working with reader expectation. Because an examination of how a story or poem plays with our expectations of conventions will inevitably lead us to a closer study of the text itself and its component parts, a lesson of this sort can be of benefit in an AP English classroom. It will lead to various written assignments and discussions that will range from the text itself to the function and work of narratives in our culture.

Lesson Three Methodology

This lesson is designed to work with either short stories or poems. It could be used for a section of novel, especially if the novel were written in the form of vignettes and you could use just one chapter, but to try this on an entire novel would be rather unwieldy for a classroom. This lesson's power stems from the understanding that a text can be broken down into smaller parts and that these smaller parts work towards creating larger effects and understanding. One of the jobs of these smaller segments is to create expectations and then delay the gratification of those expectations. If you are going to do this with a short story, then you should read it in advance and break it into smaller units. These units should be relatively short but long enough so that the reader's expectations are built up but not answered. The next segment should provide the fulfillment of the previous expectation and then work to build up a new one. If you are going to use a poem, then I recommend that you use each line as a segment.

Choose a work, a short story or poem that hopefully all of the students will be unfamiliar with. Because the text's unfamiliarity is important this is a good exercise to use with poetry that your students may initially perceive as difficult. If you choose a story from your textbook, then make sure that you have already decided where the breaks are going to be before reading. They will need to close their books periodically as you have them work through the written components of this lesson. If you are doing this with a poem, then it is best to project the poem onto a screen one line at a time. The students should not be looking at a copy of the poem in their books while they work through this. The lesson depends on their working only with limited amounts of information.

If it is possible as you work through the text to read it aloud, then that would be optimal. Often the very vocalization of the text will betray expectations on the part of the reader and these 'predictions' can provoke valuable discussions. At each pause point ask the students to write out what they think is coming next, what they expect to happen or be told. They need to provide as much detail as possible with regard to their expectations without going overboard (give them just 4-6 minutes). They need to then justify their expectation in writing immediately below their prediction. This also needs to be as in-depth as possible focussing on questions such as: What has come prior to this that justifies that prediction? What has been revealed about the characters, narrator, authorial persona, action, etc. that suggests their expectation? They need to point to

specific things in the previous text that brought their expectations to bear.

After each pause and their written response, you will want to discuss the options they have brought up. What is usually revealed is that many of the students will be close in their expectations of what comes next. This is a great place to discuss the nature of narratives and how we are set up for certain things. It also lends itself to a discussion of how culture and ideology work to shape our expectations. This is also a good spot to head off any budding 'surrealists' who think that any random prediction is an acceptable answer in an AP classroom. However instead of just shutting down that student and moving on, it is worth the trouble to discuss why some of those outlandish responses will not work. On the one hand, it is entirely possible that Father Christmas could ride in on a sleigh and save Miss Emily Grierson from the townspeople in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," and yet, on the other hand it is not really possible at all. The conventions surrounding a Southern gothic short story by Faulkner prohibit precisely this kind of intervention and if there had been that kind of intervention into her life then you would not be reading it in an AP English class. You might not even be reading Faulkner at all. The reasons behind these kind of narrative constrictions are worth talking about, especially since they will take the discussion into the realms of narrative, culture, and ideology to a certain degree. In the academic classroom, certain kinds of texts will get read and others will not. How these decisions are made and who makes them and for what reasons reveal much about the nature of the ideology that drives our culture's schools. If you have this discussion though, do remember that there is still a text to be finished. Ideology waits for no one.

Continue going through the text in these discrete pieces until you are done. Having gone through an entire text this way, the students can now look back over their notes and examine how their expectations were shaped, met, or left unfulfilled. This is a good place for a written response, perhaps one less academic and more reflective in nature where they can do some self-analysis as to why they expected certain things to happen and what the author did to surprise or disappoint them and why that was the case. You may want to follow that up with a more academic assignment, one that asks the students to examine the nature of narrative and how poems or stories can either constrain interpretation or open it up by their very structure.

Lesson Plan Three

Goal: to develop the students' abilities to read a text closely and analyze how it uses narrative conventions to establish reader expectations.

Objectives: As a result of this lesson students will be able to:

1. Closely analyze how the narrative elements of a text (point of view, character, authorial persona, diction, syntax, etc.) work together to control a reader's interpretation,
2. Write a reflective essay on how they understand narratives to work in literature as well as in the culture they inhabit.

Student materials: pen, paper, textbook

Teacher materials: textbook, markers, board, screen, means to project the poem on the screen (overhead, computer with LCD projector)

Procedure:

1. Choose a short story or poem that the students are unfamiliar with from your textbook. Read it in

advance and divide it into small segments based on how the text establishes reader expectation. If you are choosing a poem, it is better if the students can not see the poem immediately. You can either read it to them or place it on a screen in such a fashion that they can only see one line at a time. If it is a short story from the textbook, then they will need to close the book at specific points so that they will not read ahead.

2. At each pause, ask the students to write out what they think is coming next, what do they expect to happen or be told. They need to provide as much detail as possible.
3. Immediately following that they should provide the justification for their prediction.
4. After each pause and their written response, discuss the options they have brought up.
5. Having gone through an entire text this way, the students can now look back over their notes and examine how their expectations were shaped, met, or left unfulfilled. This is a good place for a written response, perhaps one less academic and more personal in nature where they can do some self-analysis as to why they expected certain things to happen and what the author did to surprise or disappoint them and why that was the case.

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