



War of the Worlds-Multimedia Adaptations

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Objectives

Alameda Middle School is an impoverished, 100% free breakfast, free lunch middle school lying in the heart of a multigenerational barrio in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The population is 98% Hispanic, with a few handfuls of Native American and Anglo students as well. We have been "looping" at Alameda for the past four years; thus, a team of seventh grade teachers will teach their same students when they are in eighth grade. It has been amazingly successful in providing a coherent, smooth approach to curriculum, and it established a close two year bond between the staff and students. I find looping to be especially relevant and exciting in light of my current Yale curriculum unit, War of the Worlds-Multimedia Adaptations. I am privileged to be a participant in Dr. Dudley Andrew's film seminar for the second year, and looping allows me the freedom to fashion a curriculum which builds upon the film essentials my students learned last fall when I taught last year's Yale unit on Oral Tradition and Memory in African Film. It developed into a highlight for my entire school. Continuing the scope and sequence of teaching through the medium of film is a most important objective of mine again for this coming fall.

Film as an instructional genre fits well into my full-inclusion, differentiated-instruction classroom sessions. The promise that many of my special needs students hold truly blossoms when they are afforded a new learning tool and a creative means for assessing what they've learned. My current unit will look at H. G. Wells' famous 1898 text, *The War of the Worlds*, and the societal times during which it was written. We will listen to the 1938 Halloween Eve radio broadcast of Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre adaptation of the text which managed to petrify the nation. Students will be the judges of how the political times in America set the scene for their gullibility. Two very different cinematic versions of *The War of the Worlds* were released in 1953 and 1996. We'll view them in their entirety. A fourth medium, periodicals, will allow students to read journalistic reports of the fallout from the radio broadcast and reviews of the book, the broadcast, and the two movies.

All necessary background research will be included in this unit for you, my teaching colleagues. An annotated book bibliography will aid in your selecting which texts you may want to peruse. All are easily obtained, and I also sincerely welcome your questions and comments. I afford a selection of teaching strategies and lesson plans which you can accommodate to a vast heterogeneous population of students. They correlate with the content standards for all states. Lastly, assessment techniques will be included for teacher perusal as a measurable means of student success.

Introduction

Teaching the era which begins with H.G. Wells' writing of *The War of the Worlds* in 1898 has been challenging to me, and it satisfies my need to produce a unit which teaches various types of media. It is important to me to enable my eighth graders to piece together a working concept of how an artist's personal life and his/her society propel him to write an original work as famous as *The War of the Worlds* which would later be adapted into radio, film, and abridged book versions. We will look carefully at the twentieth century's changing political and social arenas through these versions of a compelling story. My students will work on the pressing questions that arise with a burgeoning film industry in America over that century, the world's first film having been released shortly before Wells' text. Does film educate? Does it present a true reality or a false reality that may actually miseducate? How do we, as viewers, determine validity? We will read, research, watch, study, and discuss *The War of the Worlds* and its adaptations for a nine week quarter.

Rationale

The opportunity to attend a seminar on Adaptation at the Yale National Teachers' Institute provided the resources, expertise, and collegiality I needed to research my unit's topic. I am very grateful to share the resources of Yale University's Sterling Memorial library, Beinecke Library of rare manuscripts, and the Yale Film Library. I'm also grateful for the opportunity to share my research with fellow educators. This experience has truly changed the ways in which I used film in my classroom for the last 17 years, and it offers an exciting new pedagogy. Not only my long time love for Wells' *The War of the Worlds* but also the knowledge that much help would be available to me led to this pursuit and the hard work it entailed on researching the century beginning with 1898 and designing a curriculum appropriate for middle school.. The end result is a unit which you will find easy to incorporate into your classroom and to possibly use as an interdisciplinary unit with your social studies colleague. It easily adapts itself to your teaching style, teaching goals, and course content. New Mexico Language Arts content standard three states that student will use literature and the media to develop an understanding of society and the self. Exposing them to a century of books, radio, periodicals and film masters speaks to this standard. In our quest to teach critical thinking skills to our students, we teach them to look at what is known, what is excellent. I picture our students working each to his/her own level of expertise, involved and engaged, with *The War of the Worlds* media.

Background

I need freedom of mind. I want peace for work. I am distressed by immediate circumstances. My thoughts and work are encumbered by claims and vexations and I cannot see any hope of release from them; any hope of a period of serene and beneficent activity, before I am overtaken altogether by infirmity and death. I am in a phase of fatigue and of that discouragement which is a concomitant of fatigue, the petty things of to-morrow skirmish in my wakeful brain, and I find it difficult to assemble my forces to confront this problem which paralyses the proper use of myself.

These are words which H.G. Wells spoke at age 64, writing an autobiographical account of his life, in which he addresses the societal phenomena which changed not only the direction of his life but also that of his colleagues, such as Henry James. The second half of the 19th century introduced in many middle class people an emancipation from a former existence in which one's life was necessarily devoted to primary needs and satisfactions, allowing a wider sustaining interest in pure science, art, and literature. Wells spent a large part of his life's energy in a drive to make a practically applicable science out of history and sociology, to find the working key for humankind to master a new world order with a clear sense of purpose and conviction. In his final book, he wrote that time was running out.

H.G. Wells was born in 1866, at Bromley, in Kent, England, the son of a professional cricketer turned failed shopkeeper. He spent the years 1880-1883 apprenticed to a draper and then to a pharmacist before winning a scholarship to further his education at the Normal School of Science in London. During his undergraduate days Wells was deeply influenced by the writings of Rudyard Kipling. Kiplingism became a philosophical genre which provided the phrases he and his peers needed to express their desire for discipline, devotion, and an organized effort furthering the socialist movement. (Those peers included Julian Huxley and G.B. Shaw.) Wells studied under the famous biologist, T.H. Huxley, and earned a degree in Zoology, the subject matter of which played a large role in his subsequent science fiction writing. A preoccupation with the near future, the remote future, and time-traveling forecasts filled his hours and gave him success as a writer; he was innately able to put into words his unusual approach to things in general. Many of his creative scientific theories proved to be accurate.

H.G. Wells began his writing career as a writer of textbooks. Soon afterward, he was publishing articles and fiction in prominent journals. Science fiction being his chosen genre, he gained recognition by pioneering influential books such as *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and *The War of the Worlds*. Later in life, he wrote realist and comic accounts of lower-middle-class life. Theatre was definitely an option for Wells as many of his contemporaries embraced the theatre and felt that it offered great opportunities to the human mind. He tried working there but felt out of place, found the experience dull and boring and denounced the use of its existing methods and machinery. I find this honorable. In modern times, we look at book authors' desires for film adaptations, which may not only serve to disseminate the author's themes, but also to make many trips to the bank. Did H.G. Wells picture a theatre presentation of his work? Absolutely not.

In addition to his literary pursuits, H.G. Wells joined the socialist Fabian Society in 1903; a committed internationalist, he was appointed a member of the Research Committee for the League of Nations and wrote several books about the world organization. H. G. Wells married three times, to his cousin Isabel in 1891, to one of his students, Amy Catherine, in 1895, and to a young English author, Rebecca West, in 1914. I discovered a rare copy of a book about the latter relationship in the Beinecke Library at Yale. He continued to write prolifically, his later works devoted to realist and comic accounts of lower-middle-class life. *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, his final book, was published in 1945, one year before his death. I find my readings about the life of H.G. Wells absolutely fascinating, especially his autobiography wherein he states he was immensely unsure of himself throughout much of his life, and he regretted that his greatest hobby was playing what he termed the effeminate game of croquet. Even a quick reading by students of the author's life will surprise them. He felt a deep sense of both imperfection and incompleteness as he strove to write about universal interests, beauty, and truth and gained great fame as a writer of science fiction.

The War of the Worlds, the book, 1898

"The idea of treating time as a fourth dimension was, I think, due to an original impulse; I do not remember picking that up. But I may have picked it up, because it was in the air. If I did not then the bias was innate."²

Wells writes in his autobiography that he drew inspiration for his book from one specific scientific occurrence, Mars' close position to the Earth in 1894. This occurrence led to much observation and discussion amongst scientists, philosophers, and others of various pursuits. Italian astronomer, Giovanni Schiaparelli, reported seeing "channels" on Mars that year. At the beginning of the century which my unit addresses, the science fiction writer, H. G. Wells, gazed through the English sky at Mars, the planet he knew to be most like the planet Earth. Intelligent life might exist on the red planet, he surmised; how else might one explain the markings on the planet that look like canals? The idea for the book, *The War of the Worlds*, came to him. If the intelligent life on Mars were in peril, the planet dying, might not they look through their telescopes aimed at Earth? Might they be looking for a new place to live? The legendary book, *The War of the Worlds*, made H.G. Wells rich and famous. The book also fixed in the minds of earthlings just what might happen if Martians should invade the Earth. Wells writes of massively intelligent aliens from Mars touching down in Victorian England and threatening to destroy the civilized world. He sets his tale of extraterrestrial warfare in specific places near his home.

Three political themes are written about in the book: colonization, expatriation, and war in England. In *The War of the Worlds*, Wells draws some parallels between the Martians' strategies with the Earth's inhabitants and Britain's treatment of its colonies. For example, the British almost eliminated native Tasmanians when they turned Tasmania, an island located off the coast of Australia, into a penal colony. Perhaps the most important historical event that influenced Wells to write his book was Germany unification and mobilization of its military forces. I can only guess. Incorporating the history of England in the 1890's into your unit can be a starting point for a strong interdisciplinary unit with your social studies department.

Humanity's esteemed knowledge proved to be of little use. No one would have believed that an intelligence far greater than man's and yet as mortal as our own could exist. No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger nor did they think of those older worlds, only to dismiss the idea of life upon them as impossible or improbable. At most, Earthlings fancied there might be humans on Mars, most likely inferior to us. Then came the great disillusionment. Fortunately, there exist three versions of *The War of the Worlds* that suit the reading levels of the majority of our students, as editors have written at least two abridged editions.

Adaptation #1, The War of the Worlds, the radio broadcast, 1938

On just another ordinary Sunday evening, October 30, 1938, my mother, Dorothy Kaczala, her parents and three brothers, sat by their old Philco Radio, awaiting the weekly ceremonious 8:00 p.m. beginning of the Charlie McCarthy Show on NBC. At 7:55 p.m., in CBS Studio 1, Orson Welles and other actors assembled in front of their microphones. The CBS announcer welcomed radio listeners to the presentation of H.G. Well's *The War of the Worlds* in the form of a play. This was clearly announced. The announcement was followed by the playing of ballroom dance music. Within a few minutes, the dance music was suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted by a "news report" from Princeton University. A Professor Pierson of the Princeton Observatory was anxiously reporting in a scientific, controlled manner, a series of unusual gas explosions on the planet Mars. The ballroom music then continued, and thus Orson Welles' hastily written but beautifully orchestrated script had already begun to cause the part of the Sunday evening radio audience to listen and react, beginning to

panic and spellbound. My mother and her family heard their first news report when NBC took its first commercial break, about 12 minutes into the Charlie McCarthy Show. Welles was reporting that a huge, flaming meteorite had fallen on a farm in Grovers Mill, NJ, not far from where the Kaczalas lived. Grandpa Kaczala forced the family into the damp, dank coal cellar, where they stayed, in fear, all night. Gramps listened to the "news broadcast" and ran up and down the steps every couple of minutes to report to the family. (He neither changed the station nor checked the day's newspapers for a listing of the radio play on CBS.)

My wish is for my students to interview my mother on a speaker phone from my classroom about this very scary night in her life. After all, she was teenager at the time, just like they are now. I called her at her home in San Diego several weeks ago to have her tell me about the radio broadcast from her own perspective. Radio at that time, she said, was not just the major entertainment of the day; it was the news authority. The President was used to speaking to the American public through this media. The fact that her immigrant Ukrainian parents were able to purchase a radio was a big deal, Mom said. Looking back into her memories, she remembers listening to the Charlie McCarthy Show until its first commercial break, when they switched from NBC to CBS. They then heard frantic voices from the station and then a report from Princeton University, about reporting a meteorite falling in a nearby town. Mom was allowed to hear nothing else of the report, although she begged to, as Grandpa rushed the four children and Grandma down into the coal cellar. (I was born in that house; I remember how dark and dank the cellar was, yet safe and secure. In 1938, coal heated the small house, coming up the one single grate in the living room. There was no indoor plumbing there until I was nine years old.) Her Uncle Nick and Aunt Millie ran down the street with their three children to crowd in the cellar too, for familial comfort in a time of grave danger. Gram had put up jars of rhubarb, corn, and pickles from her garden. The family lived on them that night, shivered, and prayed. Uncle Nick and Grandpa Kaczala said the Martians were attacking the Earth. Mom says she was in ninth grade at Ridgewood High School, and she immediately doubted what he said. How could folks be so gullible, I asked? She replied it was all in the timing. War clouds gathered in Europe, as people feared an imminent attack by Hitler's Germany; propaganda abounded. In addition, one of the actor's voices sounded to her just like that of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Scientists were all the time talking about the canals on the red planet of Mars, signifying the likely existence of life there. "Wouldn't you be petrified too?" she said.³

It is essential here to play the radio broadcast for your students. It is available in most public libraries. The ballroom music is an historic lesson in itself, and my students giggled and loved it. Set the historic scene for them, have them close their eyes and listen without comment to the Mercury Theatre performance of *The War of the Worlds*.

It lasts sixty minutes.

A short study of Orson Welles is most appropriate here, too, as your students, might continue to view him in his future theatre and film roles in later classes. Writing about himself at his earliest age, he publicly construed himself as "ACTOR, POET, CARTOONIST-AND ONLY TEN" in a press clipping.⁴ He both courted and denounced the newspaper media in equal measure, while sensation-hungry newspapers meteorically advanced his popularity. Only his death, which provoked an unbelievable orgy of journalism, dissolved the co-dependency which Orson Welles and the newspapers seem to share. You might want to think about his most famous film, "*Citizen Kane*," and its relationship to the newspaper. In the future, your students may study his famous acting career, his brilliance, his many misgivings. You can plant the seed.

The following is a short interview with Orson Welles by reporter Kenneth Tynan:

OW: I don't want any description of me to be accurate; I want it to be flattering. I don't think people who have to sing for their supper ever like to be described truthfully-not in print anyway. We need to sell tickets, so we need good reviews.

KT: How do you reconcile that with-

OW: For thirty years people have been asking me how I reconcile X with Y! The truthful answer is that I don't. Everything about me is a contradiction, and so is everything about everybody else. We are made out of oppositions; we live between two poles. There's a philistine and an aesthete in all of us, and a murderer and a saint. You don't reconcile the poles. You just recognize them.⁵

An ambitious, arrogant, and precocious producer, director, and actor at the age of 23, Orson Welles was already a radio personality, first gaining fame as the man of mystery known as "The Shadow" on the radio show of that name. (My mom's Kaczala family in New Jersey adored listening to this show too, mom says.) However, Welles was not yet the star he wished to become. Naming a new theatre after the radical magazine edited by H.L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, "American Mercury," Welles and a financial partner wrote their plans for a new radio theater, the Mercury Theatre, in *The New York Times* on August 29, 1937. It would play to people who either had never been to the theatre at all or who had ignored it for a long time. Thus, creating a new and eager audience was foremost in his mind. As of Wednesday, October 26, 1938, there was no script for the Mercury Theatre's upcoming CBS Sunday evening 8:00p.m. radio show. He tossed a copy of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* on the table in front of the show's writers and demanded that, together, they write a script perfect for the night before Halloween.

Challenged by the reality that he had only 36 hours in which to write the script for Sunday night, Welles used his innate brilliance in order to attract a huge audience and newspaper publicity in one fell swoop. He modernized H.G. Wells' formal British language and placed the action close to the listeners, on a farm in New Jersey, to make it credible. He used Princeton University scientists as scientific sources and included news flashes for fake news bulletins in order to incite fear into the audience. Knowing that radio listeners relied on their sense of hearing, Welles was ready to deceive them with innovative sound effects. The script was written in a mere, amazing 36 hours.

Orson Welles' goal of inciting fear in the public came to fruition within 24 hours of the radio show: in Newark, N.J., more than 20 families rushed out of their houses with wet handkerchiefs and towels over their faces to flee from what they believed to be a gas raid. Five students at Brevard College in North Carolina fainted. A Pittsburgh man returned home to find his wife in a state of hysteria. Before he stopped her, she was about to swallow a household poison rather than die at the hands of the aliens. Thousands of Americans panicked upon hearing the broadcast. Meeting reporters afterwards, Orson Welles pretended he was sorry for that, but it's just what he hoped they would do. Did he break a law? If so, which one? Having become a national celebrity within the space of a week, his career took off. You can discuss the following issue with your students in various formats: Was Orson Welles acting responsibly when he broadcast the radio play? Should the media be held accountable for the public's reaction to a broadcast on radio or T.V.?

Adaptation #2, *The War of the Worlds*, the first film, 1953

"The moving image arrests its viewer inside motion; from this vantage we experience frames and bits and pieces of things as if they were fluid." ⁶

Film is a medium that engages its audience primarily as spectators; obviously, images are very powerful. Politicians and advertisers alike know that the viewed image is more powerful than words. I attempt to get

that point across to my middle school students by teaching them an intensive unit on media literacy. Teenagers comprise one of the largest targeted audiences for products sold in the United States. The viewed image of film changes our lives and their lives, what we buy, whom we adore, the music and actions we adopt, the styles we wear, and our views of historical events, past, present, and future.

The first film adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* was produced by George Pal and directed by Byron Haskin. George Pal was renowned for his Puppetoon animation technique and for two live-action science fiction films. Cecil B. DeMille was due to direct the film when the rights were originally purchased but was not enamored by the subject matter and was pleased later on to hand over the job to Byron Haskin. *The War of the Worlds* was released in 1953 by Paramount Studios and won an Academy Award for special effects. These effects are my favorite feature of the film. This movie is appropriate for use in the middle school classroom, and it teaches not only the famous science fiction story but also the cinematic techniques of the era, the dress, religious and romantic conventions, scientific knowledge, and, of course, societal and political ideas. Therefore, it is a treasure for students. The movie is amazing and terrifying when one considers that, at the height of the Cold War, the 1950s viewer might just have replaced the Martians with Russians in their minds, in a direct assault to the planet where major cities are destroyed one after another. Neither humans nor the atomic bomb could stop *The War of the Worlds* Martians.

At my first of many viewings of this film, I was quite shocked to see *The War of the Worlds* set in California. I rented the VHS version, and it cracked and popped on the sound track. My DVD is excellent, and I've viewed it with excitement. A meteor lands in the hills outside a small town not far from Los Angeles. Dr. Clayton Forrester comes from a prestigious California university to investigate the meteor, which opens to reveal several deadly Martian machines whose weapons and defenses are unmatched by anything that man has known. This is a change in adaptation from the H.G. Wells book, wherein Dr. Forrester is a reporter, and the meteor lands in England. In the 1953 movie, in a nearby town, Dr. Forrester meets Sylvia Van Buren and her uncle Matthew Collins, a church pastor. There is a new religious overtone in this film which I found fascinating; to me, it seemed to form a sort of barrier between religion and science. A romance develops between Dr. Forrester and Sylvia, and I so appreciated its depth without a sex scene. Dr. Forrester's relentless search for Sylvia as he battles the frightened mobs of Los Angeles was memorable.

In my research at Yale, I've discovered facts about the film which have me totally fascinated. Orson Welles, being pressured into making this his first feature film, wanted no part of it. Two days into the filming, Paramount Pictures discovered that their filming rights to the novel were only for a silent version. This was resolved through the kind permission of H. G. Wells' estate. George Pal, the producer, did not know how to film Wells' Martian war machines on walking tripods, so he went with flying machines. The sound effects were created from three electric guitars playing backwards, and the sound of a Martian screaming after Dr. Forester hit it was a mixture of a microphone scraping along dry ice and a woman's scream played backwards. These sound effects became widely used stock sound effects after the film was released, and they are in use to this day.

Adaptation #3, *The War of the Worlds*, the second film, 2005.

The second film adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* was directed by Steven Spielberg and released in 2005, and it reflects the societal, political, historic era of its time, but it deviates so much from the original text that I cannot embrace it, although my seminar professor, Dudley Andrew, spoke to us of the validity of borrowing in adaptation from the cultural reservoir. How does viewing a film make us feel? What values come out? What are the qualities of the experience? I've viewed the 2005 adaptation several times, and the 1953 version

remains much more to my liking. Taking into account the Martians are attacking California, not England, it still seems more faithful to the spirit of the original H.G. Wells text, and that is important to me. I cannot yet gauge my students' responses; they've all seen the Spielberg as they are very much into modern day cinema, but, with their continuing study of the history of cinema, they will hopefully glean the respective genius of filming in both decades. A great lesson might be for the students to tell how they would film it.

I think the Spielberg film deals with our current fears of terrorism, just as the 1953 film did with the Cold War. Buildings are collapsing; airplanes fall from the sky, and walls are lined with "missing" posters. There is a snowfall of ash and clothes that occurs during several scenes. The movie reminded me so much of my September 11, 2001, 7:15 a.m. viewing of the Today show, the exact time I should have been out the door to school. As the attacks were happening in front of me, I truly believed they might be unreal, another Orson Welles trick being played on the public. Within 30 seconds, I knew differently. Adapting *The War of the Worlds* text to modern society was logical, but Tom Cruise's family problems deviated too far from the text for my comfort level. However, my college roommate who lives in New York says it was reassuring to sit eating popcorn in a warm theatre in the city watching the movie with family and friends. She felt better equipped to process the terror and confusion of 9/11 even given Tom Cruise's personal problems. For her and her New York friends, the film was a cathartic therapy session.

Dr. Dudley Andrew spoke to the Yale film seminar group about a phenomenon in war films after the post Cold War era. As the United States no longer has an enemy, such as Japan or Russia, war movies are centered around the saving of someone. This is true in *Saving Private Ryan*, and it is also true in the second film adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*.

There is a good sense of realism in Steven Spielberg's masterful special effects, and we have moved into computer generated imagery combined with what I think is wonderful music. I missed not being taken into the original text quickly here, as we are in the 1953 film. Indeed, we first are introduced to Tom Cruise's life and quirks and his relationship with his ex-wife and boyfriend and his two kids. He appears irresponsible and hardly able to lead us through an alien invasion nightmare, a character whom I didn't want to root for at the end. The atom bomb of the 1953 film is not present; instead, Cruise eventually seems to succeed with a simple hand grenade, liberating his daughter from abduction/captivity, even though the world in modern times has 1,000+ times more firepower. There is much for our young students to listen to, watch, and judge as they grow in their ability to critique cinema. The teacher should remind the students that each of the two films exists in its own time.

My conclusions are that the characteristic thoughts and judgments we make are deeply rooted in the culture that surrounds us. The prevailing social conditions provide the context for our making decisions. Media affect our decisions greatly: text, radio, newspaper, and film.

Strategies

In my state of New Mexico, there are three content standards for Language Arts. They are as follows: students will apply strategies and skills to comprehend information that is read, heard, and viewed. Students will communicate effectively through speaking and writing. Students will use literature and the media to develop an understanding of people, society, and the self. My Yale unit attends to each of these in detail, the third

standard pre-eminent, as exhibited in my lesson plans. The study of media has become an essential part of my classroom each year, ever since 1997 when I became certified as a media literacy catalyst following an intensive week of study in Taos with the New Mexico Media Literacy Project. The use of film media as an integral part of my curriculum is recent. I'm assuming that this is true of most American school districts. Its effect is positively measurable, and for the first time this year, Santa Fe teachers were offered a professional development all-day Saturday session in film. I incorporate my forte for grammar into my film unit. I insist on my students' mastering sentence diagramming each year. This, plus vocabulary, journal and essay writing, editing, and presenting, will be highly applicable to *The War of the Worlds* unit. It is so much more exciting and engaging for students than the stilted grammar text. It's also a lot of hard work.

You, as I, know your classroom best. We know that empowerment can come from the application of a superior professional development experience such as I have had at Yale. Now there is the exciting application of film in my curriculum, and I shared it early this summer in a scope and sequence two-day meeting with Language Arts teachers at all levels in Santa Fe. Film and the study of adaptations espouse a new approach to delivering the established curriculum. As we adapted this genre to the state standards, we discovered that all full-inclusion students can learn from and show achievement through this medium. Now, the elements of a classical education can be combined with an artistic experience.

Watching all 123 eighth graders walking into my classroom with the required 2" binder is a dream which in no way would be financially fulfilled. We reside in the 49th poorest state for education in America. I therefore wrote two grants for the required materials last fall, wrote the children's names on their binders with a big black marker, arranged the dividers, and handed them out with the accompanying accoutrements. They were astonished and so proud. I'll repeat this process this fall. In addition, I will verbally build up this unit so that their expectations for their work are high. I place their binders, which do not leave the classroom, on a special previously unused set of shelves. Having new clean possessions of one's own, placed in a new clean setting, sets the stage for a very special learning experience.

Lesson Plans

Lesson 1. Reading H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* text, 1898.

Objectives

The following essential question will be highlighted on the chalkboard for the duration of the War of The Worlds unit: How is the original 1898 book, *The War of the Worlds*, presented in three different media adaptations spanning the century beginning in 1898? What have you learned about adaptations? For the first lesson, students will demonstrate mastery of the Wells text by Cornell notations and a classroom presentation.

Teacher Materials

Three versions of *The War of the Worlds*, which address reading levels from 3rd grade to 9th grade.

Student Materials

2" binder

Wide ruled paper

#2 pencils

Blue and black pens

5 dividers

Highlighter pens

Colored pencils

A ruler

Glue stick

Procedure

I need my five daily heterogeneous classes of students to become familiar with the H.G. Wells' text of *The War of the Worlds* in a relatively short period of time. I have searched for and found three different versions of the text in order to span reading levels from 3rd to 9th grade. (The original is actually at a present 10th grade student's reading level. I have a small group of students who can read it in each class.)

I have decided to use a book club approach for this lesson. First, I place the three texts on the floor of the classroom after students have moved their desks into a circle. I tell the students that it is very important for them to feel comfortable with the version of *The War of the Worlds* text which they choose. They should do the 5-finger test on any page in the book. If they can place their five fingers on words that they cannot recognize, the text is probably too difficult. There are multiple copies of each text, so the sizes of the three groups are accommodated and will vary in size from class to class.

Students with the same text sit with each other in a group. Students will pair up, and you will assign one or two chapters from the text for them to read to each other, covering all the chapters in the book. When the readings are completed, the student pairs log notes and prepare an informational presentation which summarizes their work, starting with chapter one and going right through the book. Thus, if there are six students in a group, six chapters can be covered with expediency. I will sit with the students in their small groups and move throughout them talking and lecturing on the points they should be logging for presentation. You, as the teacher, are assessing the students on their notes, their timely readings, and their presentations, taking into account differentiation for all student levels. This is not a formidable task; indeed, my students have learned to all read aloud at the same time, to be patient while listening, and to log their notes cooperatively.

I have introduced Cornell note taking to my students this past year and will be employing this method again in the fall. The student folds a lined paper in half lengthwise, forming two columns. The left column is headed QUESTIONS and the right one, RESPONSES. I modeled what this should look like last fall. This fall, students must strive for complete excellence in succinctly putting down their thoughts. Phrases can be used in the QUESTION column, but complete sentences are required for RESPONSES. They are encouraged to artistically annotate their responses too, in order to render their thoughts complete. They love doing this, and the result is a beautiful page of work. It will make the *War of the Worlds* binder visual and personal. What does a student write in the QUESTIONS column? Everything a student wants to know more about goes here, including a

strange vocabulary word, a question prompted by the teacher, or perhaps one

they have about the politics or science of *War of the Worlds*. Included here, also, are questions the students have about what their peers are reporting on their chapters.

The pairs of students need to log the facts about their chapters and practice presenting them to the class. While some of my last year's seventh graders jumped at the chance to present and perform in front of the class, many were reluctant. I let them decide who does most of the speaking, but it needed to be well planned. By the end of the school year, all were comfortable in front of the class, and I was so proud of them. Their peers were encouraging, non-judgmental, and positive. The Cornell notation system will be used by the class members while pairs are presenting. I will be moving around the room, looking at their work, giving suggestions, asking students to help one another and, thus, assessing the quality of their work.

The Cornell notes should include a separate page for each presentation, and I grade them weekly. As my forte is grammar, I will spend the following Monday on grammar instruction. Happily, it will not address a grammar text which has no relevance to the subject matter. It will, however, be intense. On a typical Monday, I'll show an overhead transparency of students' sentences from their RESPONSES column. These will be from a different class. The students will have a handout of the same sentences and will be asked to proofread them with editing marks, and then I'll have them come up and edit the transparency. One grammatical convention will be studied in detail that day, and students will be taught an additional diagramming technique. We were just starting prepositional phrases at the end of the school year. I do want to add that my grammar comments on their Cornell notes are not written with a red pen. Over the years, I have seen this as a basically degrading influence not only on self-esteem but also on the quality of the work which follows.

Under my guidance, the class as a whole will design a peer evaluation rubric for the student presentations. They are quite adept at doing this now. A typical rubric for such an assignment might have three columns, numbered 1-3, with the essentials for each score written below the numbers. They might include such factors as speaking clearly, citing factual information, and obviously having read and studied the chapter. Students make a peer evaluation sheet on which they write each fellow student's name, their score, and a comment. As the teacher, you do an assessment of your own, looking at the Cornell notes, evaluating the classroom presentation. Have students used their minds well? Does your assessment address the essential learning targets that have been the focus of the lesson?

Lesson 2. Adaptation #1, *The War of the Worlds*, the radio broadcast, 1938.

Objectives: Study the background for the broadcast and listen to it carefully. Were people just plain gullible, or were they set up by an ambitious actor?

Teacher Materials:

The War of the Worlds, Mercury Theatre radio broadcast CD

Reserve your school's computer lab for three days straight.

One or more pages from four or five plays which are written at various student levels

Student Materials:

Binders

Paper

Pens

Pencils

Glue sticks

Construction paper

Scissors

Post-it chart paper

Markers

One hole punch

Large binder rings

Procedure

You will hand out a reading about Orson Welles based on my background information for this unit. Students should understand his motives for his radio broadcast adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*. Do not discuss the political and societal events of 1938 until later. The first part of this lesson enables your students to feel comfortable listening to sixty minutes of original radio broadcasting. (You may cut out a few minutes of the ballroom music if your class periods are 50-55 minutes long, as are mine.)

Students will have their *War of the Worlds* binders out and will have turned to a clean sheet of paper. As students close their eyes, you may read the following script to them: You are sitting with your family of six in your pj's in your small three room home in Paramus, NJ. The year is 1938. T.V. has not been invented, so the radio is a major source of entertainment, news, and authority. Your family gathers ceremoniously every Sunday night to listen to the Charlie McCarthy Show at 8pm on NBC. You do this tonight. It is the night before Halloween. There is an air of excitement as your Kaczala family chats in Ukranlish, a name given locally to the mixing of your parents' native Ukranian tongue and English. Post the words, skepticism and gullibility, in large block letters on the front wall of the classroom. Keep a discussion of the words alive throughout this second lesson.

At 7:55 pm, in CBS studio 1, Orson Welles and other actors assemble in front of their microphones. An announcer welcomes radio listeners to the Mercury Theatre's radio play of H.G. Wells' famous book, *The War of the Worlds*. About 12 minutes into the Charlie McCarthy Show, NBC takes its first commercial break, and your dad switches the dial to CBS, where you hear your first news report. Put yourself back into the time period and listen. As you listen, write down single words or phrases from the broadcast that you find interesting or important. You may annotate your work with small drawings or words that express your emotional responses to the words or phrases. When the students are done, put them into pairs for a Quaker Reading. Students will take a few minutes to read aloud what they've written to their partners. Then, as in a Quaker meeting, tell the students to read a word or phrase from their list when the spirit moves them. All students will participate, each reading at least two of their entries. This type of reading has a very nice effect.

The next activity is the writing of a play based on the radio show which can be performed for other classes or parents. This definitely involves higher order thinking skills, such as the synthesis of materials, application to a play format, listening, and performing. Artwork will accompany the activity as a cover will be made by each group for its play. You will need to carefully plan the composition of your student groups, which will number about 5-6 students in each of five groups. You should also assign a leader for each group and a scribe. Each group will write a two-paged script in their binders about a particular period of the radio broadcast which you will assign them. Students are to use their imaginations, not varying too much from the historical era and the facts from the book they read. Humor, terror, empathy, authority, panic, and resilience will be evident in their writings.

Students will move into a circle with their groups. This is where they will sit daily for the duration of this project other than when they use the computer lab. The groups should be located close to a wall where you have hung a large piece of Post-it chart paper. It's important that you discuss with the class the duties of the group leaders and scribes. All students are graded on their writings, their attention to the project, their research, and, of course, the ability to cooperate. Refer to the group norms you may have charted at the beginning of the school year. All ideas are to be considered and respected. Make sure the students have plenty of paper and pencils. Depending on how much work you've done with plays, you should spend some time reading excerpts from plays that you hand out to them. Remind them of the important features of writing a play: setting, plot, characterization, and climax. They should examine these features closely as they will be writing their own works now.

Begin the playwriting by assigning each group a scene, including what should be covered time wise from the radio play and a suggestion list of characters to which they may add others. The scenes may look something like this:

Scene one covers the Mercury Theatre script writers preparing for the October 28, 1938, broadcast. In three days, they'll present the play to the nation. They are still arguing over whether to use *The War of the Worlds* or not, and as the scene ends, they've been convinced by Orson Welles to write it. Possible characters for scene one include narrator(s), Anne Friedman and Howard Koch, writers for the Mercury Theatre, Orson Welles, radio producer and actor, and several others the student group wants to make up. Scene two includes the events from the beginning of the broadcast to the Martians firing on innocent people in Grover's Mills, NJ. Characters include narrator(s), Orson Welles, CBS announcer, and innocent bystanders. The military should not appear in this scene.

Scene three begins with a narrator's statement that the CBS radio show has been transmitted throughout the United States. It ends with the grave announcement that the military has lost thousands of infantrymen. Characters for this scene include the narrator(s), the CBS announcer, and at least three roles, including a military General, which the students decide upon. Scene four will begin with the CBS switchboard's being swamped with calls and will end with Orson Welles' comment that he hasn't broken a law by producing the radio play. Characters will include Orson Welles, the President of CBS, narrator(s), and at least two other characters. The final scene, scene five, begins with newspaper reporters interviewing Orson Welles. It ends with Welles' signing on to represent the Campbell Soup Company. The characters will be Orson Welles, narrator(s), a spokesman for Campbell Soup, and a number of newspaper reporters.

Move around the room with a boom box that plays the 1938 radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*, sitting with each group and playing their particular section of the CD. They should be furiously taking notes. Remind them that what they include in their section of the play should be thoughtful, true to the broadcast and the

historical period, but also including some clever characters and dialogue of their own invention. Take two or three days in the computer lab at your school. Lecture to the students on the first day about the historical setting and scientific implications for the fall of 1938. Students will follow this up by doing research from websites which they discover; newspaper citations from the days following the broadcast will excite them, as will their discovery of photos from the scenes at the Mercury Theater. This research can be downloaded and pasted into their binders; it will provide the groups with substantive facts which they'll write into their scripts. Pictures which address *The War of the Worlds* text and the three adaptations can be downloaded and added by the students to add interest. Fortunately, the two computer rooms at my school are arranged in circular pods, five pods per room. This is just perfect for the assignment at hand.

Back in the classroom, the students should be very excited about the play writing, as they are creatively producing their own first adaptation of the text. Begin by having them write everything that comes to their mind that might be applicable to their scene. They should become the characters, personify them, and come up with a serious yet clever dialogue. The group leader will then organize their group using strong group dynamics for the discussion that goes into writing the scene. The scribe will stand by the large Post-it chart and write down the number of the scene, the list of characters, and the suggested script. With arrows, circled words, and other annotations, the script will evolve into a final product which pleases the group. The scribe will rewrite it in its final form. Members of the group have also copied what the scribe writes daily and reflected upon these writings for homework, adding any other thoughts. The use of special effects for the presentation will earn extra credit.

As occurs with most creative assignment, groups will finish their scenes at different times. They should use the computers in your classroom to do a hard copy, 6" by 8".

When it has been declared finished, the groups can download their scripts and you can copy them for the members of each group. It is now presentation time, and the groups have logically decided who best fits each character. Give them a class period to practice their scene; present the play the next day. It is now time for the entire class to give their play a title. Explain that you will be handing out copies of the entire play to all students the next day and that they will need to decide how they want to put their play together: stapling, binding with cord, or using a one-hole punch and one big binder ring.

Give the classes a day or two to design a front and back cover for their play. We all know how fulfilling this is, and it adds a very personal closure to a well done writing project. Make available all the art supplies they need: markers, pens, construction paper, colored pencils, scissors, and glue sticks. After the plays are read in class, perhaps you will have all of your classes meet as a large group for a block of time which you've preplanned with your team during. Try to use a space different from your room for this special day, hang white lights, and let students sit on bean bags if they're available. I do this once or twice a year for special presentations. Each and every student participates in the reading of their group's play, and the audience is respectful. This is a day of celebration and pride. Clapping is greatly encouraged. You will take the plays home, recalling the work each student has put into them, and grade them accordingly.

Lesson 3. Adaptation #2. *The War of the Worlds*, films, 1953 and 2005.

Objectives: The student will compare and contrast the use of cinematic conventions in the two films and thus gain an appreciation for the technological advances in film production over the forty year period. Students will be prepared to address America's societal differences and its effect upon the making of these films. The culminating activity for the War of the worlds unit on adaptation will focus on each student's ability to express himself/herself by creating a 3'X 10' banner; the top 3'X3' will be their own work of art, and the bottom will be

a graphic organizer of compared and contrasted items dealing with various items from this particular adaptation study. These will be hung in the school's hallway.

Teacher materials:

Copy of *The War of the Worlds* film, 1953

Copy of *The War of the Worlds* film, 2005

Large screen from district's media center

Student Materials:

Binders

Large rolls of butcher paper in various colors

3 white rolls of butcher paper

Crayons, markers, colored pencils

Black pens

Procedure

For the first time last fall, I used film in the classroom as a new genre by which to enhance the learning process in ways unavailable through the other media I had previously taught. As a means of communication, film is an uncommonly powerful resource for teachers at all levels. For my middle school purposes, my current unit further addresses the essentials of cinema, especially, the adaptation of a treasured science fiction text dating back to the 19th century. As there are two cinematic adaptations of Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, my current eighth graders, whom I taught last year in seventh grade, should be well equipped to critically view, appreciate, and evaluate the skills of the filmmakers. It will be most helpful for you to have a copy of Timothy Corrigan's *The Film Experience*. The book will introduce you, and thus your students, to the practical tools you need to view films critically. It includes all the basics of film characteristics which include lens techniques, camera movements, camera angles, framing of shots, and film editing; these can create astonishing views not found in reality. Close-up shots allow a director to show the viewer dramatic emotions that might go unnoticed with ordinary vision, and long shots place the image and its behavior within a larger context. Looking at shots is a logical place for students to work as they are so used to the T.V., computer, and movie screens.

College of Santa Fe students in the film studies department were a big help to me last year, and being in the middle school classroom opened their eyes to an entirely new age group, eager to learn the basics. CSF gave their students who worked with me college credit for their obligatory service learning requirement, so it was a win/win. You are likely to have a similar source right in your own backyard. You and/or the college students can introduce this lesson by lecturing on the basic film conventions, writing key terms on the board, showing examples, and giving students time for questions. Students should use a Cornell Notes sheet in their binder which they've already discussed and headlined. As the lecture starts, give them time to write the items and questions about them in their left hand column. Tell students that they will focus on several of these items for their banner project. The lecturing should be slow paced and show examples of the various film conventions in order to help the students know what they're looking for as they view both films of *The War of the Worlds*. As

the lecturing is being done, tell students to feel free to come to the board to write words on a War of the Worlds Word Wall. These can be used as part of your vocabulary study.

It is time to view the 1953 version of the movie. Your room should be comfortably arranged for viewing, note taking, and discussion. (Think about where your IEP students will best be served). This will take two class periods, and the college students should be there to stop or rewatch frames and scenes of their/your choosing which demonstrate the film conventions addressed above. Your room should be comfortably arranged for viewing. Explain to students ahead of time that this is the only time they'll see this version as a group, so they must be attentive. It's easy to find at most video shops if they decide to rent it at home. The viewing of this historic film is most successful if students are as quiet as possible; they must save any comments for afterwards. Pose several thought provoking questions before the viewing which you also write on the board. What was the director thinking when he set the movie in Hollywood, CA? What scientific subjects do we learn about? What does the film teach us about the 1950's?

Take the next day or two to process what has been observed and learned. Fill in the right hand column on the Cornell Note sheet. Add a second Cornell Note sheet which addresses new questions the students have after having seen the film. The next day should be spent in the computer lab where students will find many sources of information on American life during the Cold War era, from our relationship with the Soviet Union to science and technology to fashion. Students can print this information rather than taking the time to write out copious notes. Back in the classroom, you and the students will talk about and connect their information to production of this film. Having had to listen and not talk while watching the film, your students can now bring up their questions and their reactions to *The War of the Worlds* events. Students will need plenty of time to work alone or with a friend on their Cornell Notes. Give them highlighters with which to begin marking the topics which have really caught their interest. These are the topics which they should focus on when watching the second film in order to complete the banner project.

Arrange for the college students to assist you as before, as you take the next two days to view the 2005 movie. Your classes will basically follow the same procedure as they did for the first film adaptation; however, they most likely saw the Spielberg adaptation at the movie theater. Why did the director place the setting in New York City? Is it OK for directors to change so many of the basic facts of an original text? This should be a great discussion/debate. Using Cornell Notes and the computer lab, follow the same basic format as above for the second adaptation. Now the students have garnered all they need to fashion a War of the Worlds banner.

Before or after school one day, give several students extra credit for helping you measure and cut a 3' X 3' square of white butcher paper, one for each student. Make extras. This will be the painting, drawing, or collage the student designs and finishes with pride. Naturally, rough drafts will be worked out first. Your desks can be placed against the walls, students working on the floor in the middle. Students choose the medium with which they are most comfortable. Have plenty of magazines and newspapers around for those who choose to do a collage, put some background music on, and allow students to talk. Once you've approved the initial design, they can start the final product. Survey each student for the color of butcher paper they want for the 3'X10' banner. Hang the banner on the walls outside your room. As I will teach 123 students this fall, there will be 123. Have the students write their names across the bottom in marker.

The white artwork which they've completed can be glued to the top of the banner. Then, in their best lettering possible, they'll write their title, The War of the Worlds. The bottom 6 ½ feet should be carefully planned out by the student as he/she refers back to film conventions, adaptation concepts, America in 1953 and in 2005, movie reviews of both films, and other various concepts they've captured in their Cornell Notes. This largest

section of the banner will be used to compare and contrast at least ten of these items, hopefully many more. The format is up to the student's imaginative design. It could appear like the typical graphic organizer, blocked and in columns; it might also be circles or clouds, stars, geometric or mandala designs. It must compare and contrast at least ten items, and the spelling must be perfect. The culminating project should be displayed for the whole school to observe.

New Mexico State Content Standards for Language Arts 8th grade

As you peruse my unit and its lesson plans, you will find that it directly correlates to the state standards. They are as follows. Students will comprehend materials which are read, heard, and seen. Students will communicate appropriate grammar skills through their writing. Students will use literature and the media in order to understand societies and the self.

Notes

1. H.G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain* (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1934). 1.
2. Lidia Yuknavitch. *Real to Reel* (Normal: FC2, 2003). Intro.
3. Dorothy Reigel. interview by Claudia Miller. telephone. 5 June 2007.
4. Simon Callow. *Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995) 56.
5. Simmon Callow. *Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995) 87.
6. Lidia Yuknavitch. *Real to Reel* (Normal: FC2, 2003). Intro.

Annotated Bibliography

Boretto, Alfred. H.G. Wells, Author in Agony. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972 .

The book discusses lesser known facets of the science fiction writer's life.

Callow, Simon. *Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995.

Achieving great success involved a good deal of agony for the famous actor.

Cantril, Hadley. *The Invasion From Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1947.

Cantril scientifically analyses the reaction of Americans to the Welles radio play.

Corrigan, Timothy, and White, Patricia. *The Film Experience*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2004.

This is your quintessential guide to studying film.

Gertner, Richard, and Quigley, Martin. *Films in America 1929-1969*. New York: Goldman Press, 1970.

Forty years of rapid progress in the film industry are explored.

MacKenzie, Norman and Jeanne. *H.G. Wells: a Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1973.

This is required reading for those who want to know the man inside and out.

Ray, Gordon N. *H.G. Wells and Rebecca West*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1914.

This lesser known relationship is studied.

Thompson, Kristin. *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1999.

There is good insider information here.

Warren, Bill. *Keep Watching the Skies: American Science Fiction Movies of the Fifties*. Jefferson and London: McFarland. 1986.

The book has a short section on the 1953 film.

Wells, H.G. *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain*. New York: The Macmillian Company. 1934.

Wells writes truthfully about himself with humor.

Wells, H.G. *The New Machiavelli*. New York: Duffield and Company, 1914.

Wells compares himself to Machiavelli scientifically and in outlook.

Yuknavitch, Lidia. *Real to Reel*. Normal: FC2. 2003.

This book has nothing to do with film; however, I liked the introduction.

Annotated Student Bibliography

Wells, H.G. *The War of the Worlds*. New York: The New York Review Books. 2004.

This edition is a new edition of the original with wonderful pen and ink drawings.

Wells, H.G.: abridged by Janice Greene. *The War of the Worlds*. Belmont: Fearon/Janus Quercus. 1993.

This text is written at a fourth grade reading level.

Wells, H.G.: abridged by Mary Ann Evans. *The War of the Worlds*. New York: Random House, Inc. 1991.

This text is written at a second-third grade reading level.

Wells, H.G.: abridged by Malvina G. Vogel. *The War of the Worlds*. New York: Baronet Books. 1994.

This text is written at a fifth-sixth grade reading level.

Mediaography

Orson Welles. *The War of the Worlds*: 1938 radio broadcast. Sony CD. 2007.

The War of the Worlds. Prod. and Dir. Joe Dante. 85 min. Paramount/USA. 1953.

DVD.

The War of the Worlds. Prod. and Dir. Steven Spielberg. 1hr. 57min. DreamWorks/USA. 2005. DVD.

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