Contemporary American Fiction: One-Year Lesson Plan

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Kelli Jo Carmichael

Thesis Advisor:
Dr. Patti White

Ball State University
Muncie, IN

May 1992

Expected Date of Graduation: May 1992
Purpose of Thesis:

The lesson plan which follows has been designed for a 12th grade academic English general elective class. It explores several contemporary novels and short stories, focusing primarily upon the postmodern literature of recent years. Many different instructional and evaluative techniques are described by which the teacher will monitor the progress of students throughout the year. The materials included become progressively more difficult and complex as the weeks unfold, carefully leading the students to an understanding of the unique techniques employed by contemporary authors as they seek to create meaning and comment upon postmodern reality. Individual growth throughout the first semester culminates in a term paper, allowing the students to showcase their burgeoning knowledge and creativity, while cooperative group work throughout the entire year is capped by a challenging final project, forcing the students to test their limits and push themselves harder than ever before. This is a very advanced lesson plan designed for mature and responsible college-bound seniors. It will require a great deal of effort on the part of both teacher and students, but will likely pay high dividends in the depth and quality of learning that takes place.
Week One (August 24-28)

Objectives: Introduce contemporary American Literature; Discuss Welty and "Why I Live at the P.O.;" Introduce the study of character.

Activities:
   Day 1-Hand out introduction, syllabus, and author information; introduce the course; hand out books and assign story to be read for tomorrow.
   Day 2-Hand out study guide and assign study groups of four students each to work together to complete and turn in for homework grades.
   Day 3-Discuss Welty, story, and study guide; begin to discuss the development of character within the situation and setting of the story; briefly examine possible relationship between story and postmodernism.
   Day 4-Assign ten minute character sketch of narrator; have students read, critique, and defend character sketch in study groups; collect character sketches for informal evaluation.
   Day 5-Hand back character sketches; discuss grading techniques; allow time for students to revise sketch and turn in for composition grades.

Week Two (August 31-September 4)

Objectives: Discuss O'Connor and "A Good Man Is Hard to Find;" Introduce the study of contemporary morality/ethics.

Activities:
   Day 1-Assign story to be read in class.
   Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to complete in study groups and turn in for homework grades.
   Day 3-Discuss O'Connor, story, and study guide; discuss conflict of ethics between the grandmother and the convict; assign short synopses of both characters' moral philosophies to be completed for tomorrow.
   Day 4-Have students compare short synopses in study groups and prepare a 5 minute group presentation to present to the class during the last 20 minutes of the period for participation grades.
   Day 5-Discuss group work from yesterday, discuss possible relationship between story and postmodernism, assign ten minute synopses of students' own current moral philosophies to be collected and held until end of year.
Week Three (September 7-11)

Objectives: Discuss Kerouac and *On The Road*; Introduce the study of the history of Postmodern reality.

Activities:
- Day 1: Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
- Day 2: Hand out study guide for chapters ------- and allow students to work on them in study groups.
- Day 3: Discuss Kerouac, chapters -------, study guide, and the social and political history of America between 1945 and 1960; allow study groups to work with encyclopedias to examine different aspects of the time period, focusing on the "beat generation," and develop a 5 minute presentation for the class.
- Day 4: Allow study groups to make presentations for participation grades and discuss; assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
- Day 5: Hand out study guide for chapters ------- and allow students to work on them in study groups; assign chapters -------.

Week Four (September 14-18)

Objectives: Finish discussion of Kerouac and *On The Road*; Introduce the study of writing style; Introduce term paper.

Activities:
- Day 1: Hand out study guide for chapters ------- and allow students to work on them in study groups and turn in complete study guide for a homework grade.
- Day 2: Discuss chapters -------, study guide, and writing style; assign worksheet exploring Kerouac's writing style to be completed individually and turned in for homework grades.
- Day 3: Discuss worksheets; assign a 1 page explanation of Kerouac's writing style and allow time for students to complete in class.
- Day 4: Allow students to share, revise, and critique papers in class; assign final draft of explanation to be turned in for a composition grade by tomorrow.
- Day 5: Discuss guidelines, requirements, and possible topics for term paper; take class to library to become familiar with resources available for paper.
Week Five (September 21-25)

Objectives: Introduce Updike and *Rabbit, Run*; Continue studies of character and contemporary morality/ethics.

Activities:
Day 1-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
Day 2-Hand out study guide for chapters ------- and allow students to work in study groups to complete.
Day 3-Discuss Updike, chapters -------, and study guide; hand out worksheet on Rabbits' moral philosophy to be completed individually for homework grades.
Day 4-Discuss Rabbit; assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
Day 5-Hand out study guide for chapters ------- and allow students to work in study groups to complete; assign chapters -------.

Week Six (September 28-October 2)

Objectives: Finish discussion of Updike and *Rabbit, Run*, Continue studies of character, contemporary morality/ethics, and writing style.

Activities:
Day 1-Hand out study guide for chapters ------- and allow students to work in study groups and turn in complete study guides for homework grades.
Day 2-Discuss chapters -------, study guide, and Updike's writing style; allow students to work in study groups to examine a small section of novel and discuss aspects of style, in order to develop 1 page report of their collective discoveries to be turned in for homework grades.
Day 3-Discuss the conclusions reached by the various study groups; continue the discussion of Rabbit and other characters, especially focusing on aspects of morality/ethics.
Day 4-Allow thirty minutes for students to complete an in-class essay exploring the morality/ethics of a secondary character in *Rabbit, Run* for composition grades; review for comprehensive test over material covered to this point.
Week Seven (October 5-9)

Objectives: Discuss Barthelme and "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning;" Begin the study of non-traditional story-telling techniques.

Activities:
Day 1-Provide several video-taped examples of fast-paced and fragmented commercials and discuss the process of making meaning out of these varied stimuli; assign story to be read in class.
Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to work in new study groups to complete and turn in for a homework grade.
Day 3-Discuss Barthelme, story, and study guide; work through writing style together as a class to come up with possible interpretations of the story.
Day 4.Assign individual creative compositions of approximately 2 pages in which the students attempt tell a story by employing Barthelme's unusual style, and allow time for work in class.
Day 5-Allow students to share, critique, and proofread creative writing in study groups; assign revised final copy to be turned in by Monday for a composition grade.

Week Eight (October 12-16)

Objectives: Discuss Mailer and The Armies of the Night; Continue the studies of character and the history of Postmodern reality.

Activities:
Day 1-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
Day 2-Hand out study guide for chapters ------- and allow students to complete them in study groups.
Day 3-Discuss Mailer, chapters -------, and study guide; allow study groups to research and develop a 5 minute report on some aspect of either Mailer or the march.
Day 4-Allow study groups to make presentations for participation grades and discuss; Discuss Mailer as a character in his own novel, comparing him especially to Kerouac's Sal Paradise.
Day 5-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
Week Nine (October 26-28)

Objectives: Continue discussion of Mailer and *The Armies of the Night*; Continue study of writing style.

Activities:
Day 1-Hand out study guide for chapters ------- and allow students to complete them in study groups.
Day 2-Discuss chapters -------, and study guide; as a class examine Mailer's style, focusing especially on his unorthodox combination of real history and the fictional novel form; referring to the material covered to this point, explore the question, "What is a novel?"
Day 3-Assign succinct 1 page explanation of Mailer's writing style, admitting to the students that this is a very difficult task, and allow time for work in class.
Day 4-Allow students to share, defend, and critique their work in study groups, and assign revised final copy to be turned in for a composition grade by tomorrow.
Day 5-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.

Week Ten (October 26-28)

Objectives: Finish discussion of Mailer and *The Armies of the Night*; Continue study of writing style; Introduce Oral Report portion of Term Paper.

Activities:
Day 1-Hand out study guide for chapters ------- and allow students to work on them in study groups and turn in complete study guide for homework grades.
Day 2-Discuss chapters -------, and study guide; as a class explore the difference between the two sections of the novel.
Day 3-Allow thirty minutes for the students to complete an in-class essay comparing the sections of the novel; Discuss requirements and guidelines of oral report portion of term paper.

Fall Break (October 29-30)
Week Eleven (November 2-6)

Objectives: Discuss Didion and "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream;" Continue study of contemporary morality/ethics.

Activities:
Day 1 - Assign story to be read in class.
Day 2 - Hand out study guide to be completed in study groups and turned in for homework grades.
Day 3 - Discuss Didion, story, and study guide. Hand out worksheets about the morality/ethics of the major characters to be completed individually for homework grades.
Day 4 - Assign study groups the task of reaching consensus in regard to the moral philosophy of a particular character and presenting their decision, with support from the novel, to the class in a 7-9 minute presentation.
Day 5 - Allow groups to give their presentations for participation grades and allow very free discussion and disagreement among the class as a whole.

Week Twelve (November 9-13)

Objectives: Discuss Barth and "The Literature of Exhaustion;" Begin an in-depth study of the characteristics of Postmodern literature.

Activities:
Day 1 - Assign essay to be read in class.
Day 2 - Hand out study guide to be completed in study groups and turned in for homework grades.
Day 3 - Discuss Barth, essay, and study guide; as a class develop a list of the major points about contemporary literature contained within the essay.
Day 4 - Allow study groups to work on a condensed version of Barth's essay, translating it into language they or their peers could easily understand, and turning it in for composition grades.
Day 5 - Assign students the task of choosing one of the works covered to this point, testing it by Barth's measurements to see if it meets the standards he has set for quality literature, and turning in their evaluation for homework grades.
Week Thirteen (November 16-20)

Objectives: Discuss "Lost in the Funhouse;" Begin in-depth study of narrator.

Activities:
Day 1-Assign story to be read in class.
Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to complete in study groups and turn in for homework grades.
Day 3-Discuss story and study guide; as a class identify the different narrators present in "Lost in the Funhouse" and trace their development throughout the story.
Day 4-Allow students to work in study groups to develop a character based on evidence in the story sketch for one of the narrators to present to the class in a 10 minute report.
Day 5-Allow groups to give presentations for participation grades and critique each as a class.

Week Fourteen (November 23-25)

Objectives: Continue discussing "Lost in the Funhouse;" Begin the study of narrative technique.

Activities:
Day 1-Hand out worksheets on narrative technique to be completed individually and turned in for homework grades.
Day 2-Discuss self-conscious narrative techniques employed in "Lost in the Funhouse;" assign 1 page paper explaining the use of one technique throughout the story.
Day 3-Allow students to defend, proofread, and critique papers in study groups; assign final draft of paper to be turned in for a composition grade by Monday.

Thanksgiving Break (November 26-27)
Week Fifteen (November 30-December 4)

Objectives: Discuss "The Literature of Replenishment;" Continue in-depth study of the characteristics of Postmodern literature.

Activities:
   Day 1-Assign essay to be read in class.
   Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow student to work in study groups to complete and turn in for homework grades.
   Day 3-Discuss essay and study guide; as a class outline the major characteristics of Postmodern literature identified in the essay.
   Day 4-Allow students 30 minutes to develop 1/2 page explanation of Barth's definition of Postmodern literature; review for comprehensive test over materials covered since October 5.

Week Sixteen (December 7-11)

Objective: Research topic for Term Paper and Oral Report.

Activities:
   Day 1-Review guidelines and requirements of term paper and oral report, review research procedures, answer questions about research paper and oral report, provide topic suggestions.
   Day 2-Research in library.
   Day 3-Research in library; check and give permission for topics.
   Day 4-Research in library.
   Day 5-Research in library.
Week Seventeen (December 14-18)

Objectives: Work through the process of writing a research paper.

Activities:
  Day 1 - Begin first draft of term paper.
  Day 2 - Complete first draft of term paper.
  Day 3 - Check first drafts for major problems; allow students to work in study groups to critique term papers.
  Day 4 - Work on second draft of term paper.
  Day 5 - Finish second draft of term paper; work in study groups to evaluate and proofread term papers.

Week Eighteen (December 21-23)

Objectives: Polish term papers; Develop and prepare oral report.

Activities:
  Day 1 - Complete final draft of term paper to be turned in for double composition grades by tomorrow.
  Day 2 - Begin preparing 10 minute oral report.
  Day 3 - Check oral reports for major problems; polish and practice oral report.

Winter Break (December 24-January 3)
Week Nineteen (January 4-8)

Objectives: Present and critique oral reports.

Activities:
  Day 1-Presentation of 4 oral reports with short critiques following each.
  Day 2-Same.
  Day 3-Same.
  Day 4-Same.
  Day 5-Same.

Week Twenty (January 11-14)

Objectives: Check knowledge base built over previous semester.

Activities:
  Day 1-Explain format and expectations of comprehensive semester exam over all material covered during Fall semester; begin reviewing for exam.
  Day 2-Continue reviewing for exam; answer specific questions about exam.
  Day 3-Administer objective portion of comprehensive semester exam.
  Day 4-Administer essay portion of comprehensive semester exam.

Semester Break (January 15)
Martin Luther King Day (January 18)

Week Twenty-One (January 19-22)

Objectives: Discuss Olsen and "Tell Me a Riddle;" Continue the study of character; Begin the study of Postmodern reality.

Activities:
Day 1-Assign story to be read in class.
Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to complete in new study groups and turn in for homework grades.
Day 3-Discuss Olsen, story, and study guide; as a class develop a character sketch of the main character.
Day 4-Allow students to work in study groups to outline the circumstances surrounding the main character's life and develop an argument for how these circumstances shaped her character.

Week Twenty-Two (January 25-29)

Objectives: Continue discussing "Tell Me a Riddle;" Continue the study of character through oral interpretation.

Activities:
Day 1-Introduce oral interpretation by providing some examples and by engaging the students in increasingly more complex theatre games.
Day 2-Discuss the techniques of oral interpretation and provide more examples.
Day 3-Assign small sections of the text to be interpreted by individual students and allow time for students to work in study groups to develop their interpretations.
Day 4-Allow students to present their oral interpretations in class for participation grades and critique.
Day 5-Discuss ways in which characterization can be explored through oral interpretation; allow students 15 minutes to respond to the oral interpretation experience.
Week Twenty-Three (February 1-5)

Objectives: Discuss Pynchon and *The Crying of Lot 49*; Continue the study of Postmodern reality.

Activities:
Day 1-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to complete them in study groups.
Day 3-Discuss Pynchon, chapters -------, and study guide; as a class examine the symbolism in the novel and begin to reconstruct the reality of the main character.
Day 4-Assign individual 1 page explorations of the main character's motives and needs as she begins her search for the posthorn and allow time for work in class.
Day 5-Allow students to critique, proof-read, and defend paper in study groups; assign final draft to be turned in for composition grades by Monday.

Week Twenty-Four (February 8-12)

Objectives: Continue discussion of the *The Crying of Lot 49*; Continue the study of contemporary morality/ethics.

Activities:
Day 1-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to complete in study groups and hand in for homework grades.
Day 3-Discuss story and study guide; as a class discuss the morality or lack of morality exhibited by the main character of the story.
Day 4-Allow students to work in study groups to determine the main character's most likely response to a specific teacher-supplied situation, based upon her character's actions and tendencies in the novel, and prepare a 7-9 minute report for participation grades based on conclusions.
Day 5-Allow groups to present and defend reports and have class critique.
Presidents' Day (February 15)

Week Twenty-Five (February 16-19)

Objectives: Discuss Baldwin and "Sonny's Blues;" Continue the study of character.

Activities:
Day 1-Assign story to be read in class.
Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to work in study groups to complete and hand in for homework grades.
Day 3-Discuss Baldwin, story, and study guide; assign individual 1 page character sketch of either of the main characters.
Day 4-Allow students to defend, critique, and proofread character sketches in study groups; assign final copy to be completed for composition grades and turned in by Monday.

Week Twenty-Six (February 22-26)

Objectives: Continue discussing "Sonny's Blues;" Continue the study of contemporary morality/ethics.

Activities:
Day 1-As a class discuss the differing moral philosophies of the two main characters.
Day 2-Allow students to work in study groups to develop a 5 minute role play to be presented to the class for participation grades in which the personal ethics of one of the main characters is expressed.
Day 3-Allow groups to present role plays to the class and allow open discussion afterward by all members of the class; allow students 15 minutes to write their reactions to the role playing experience.
Day 4-Allow students 30 minutes to identify the major ethical conflict between the two main characters in the novel and explain how that conflict was resolved for composition grades; review for comprehensive test over material covered to the point in the semester.
Day 5-Administer comprehensive test over "Tell Me a Riddle," The Crying of Lot 49, and "Sonny's Blues."
Week Twenty-Seven (March 8-12)

Objectives: Discuss Kingston and *The Woman Warrior*; Continue the study of writing style.

Activities:
- Day 1-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
- Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to work in new study groups to complete and turn in for homework grades.
- Day 3-Discuss Kingston, chapters -------, and study guide; as a class examine writing style, focusing especially on the talk-story.
- Day 4-Assign a 2 page creative story utilizing the talk-story technique and allow time for work in class.
- Day 5-Allow students to work in study groups to critique and edit stories; assign final copy to be completed for a composition grade and turned in by Monday.

Week Twenty-Eight (March 15-19)

Objectives: Continue discussing *The Woman Warrior*; Begin in-depth study of women's issues.

Activities:
- Day 1-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
- Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to work in study groups to complete and turn in completed study guide for homework grades.
- Day 3-Discuss chapters ------- and study guide; as a class identify the difficulties the narrator faces as a result of her gender and culture.
- Day 4-Allow study groups to use encyclopedias to research various topics within the women's movement and prepare a 5 minute report for participation grades.
- Day 5-Allow groups to present reports; allow students 30 minutes to compare and contrast the reality of the narrator's world with the reality of woman in our own society today for composition grades.
Spring Break (March 22-28)

Week Twenty-Nine (March 29-April 2)

Objectives: Discuss Erdrich and *The Beet Queen*; Continue the study of character.

Activities:
- Day 1-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
- Day 2-Hand out study guides and allow students to work in study groups to complete.
- Day 3-Discuss Erdrich, chapters -------, and study guide; Briefly discuss each of the four main characters in the novel.
- Day 4-Assign character sketch of one of the main characters to be completed individually.
- Day 5-Allow students to work in study groups to critique and edit character sketches; assign final copy to be completed for composition grades and turned in by Monday.

Week Thirty (April 5-9)

Objectives: Finish discussing *The Beet Queen*; Continue the study of oral interpretation; Begin the study of relationships in the contemporary world.

Activities:
- Day 1-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
- Day 2-Hand out study guides and allow students to work in study groups to complete and turn in complete study guide for homework grades.
- Day 3-Discuss chapters ------- and study guide; as a class identify the dynamics of the major relationships in the novel; review the techniques of oral interpretation.
- Day 4-Allow study groups to work on 10 minute oral interpretations of teacher-supplied scenes.
- Day 5-Allow study groups to present interpretations and discuss each interpretation briefly.
Week Thirty-One (April 12-16)

Objectives: Discuss Mason and "Shiloh;" Continue the study of contemporary morality/ethics; continue the study of contemporary relationships.

Activities:
  Day 1-Assign story to be read in class.
  Day 2-Hand out study guide to be completed in study groups and handed in for homework grades.
  Day 3-Discuss Mason, story, and study guide; as a class define the dynamics of the spousal relationship in the story.
  Day 4-Allow study groups to determine how the differing philosophies of the two main characters affect their relationship and prepare a 5 minute presentation.
  Day 5-Allow groups to present conclusions and encourage open discussion and disagreement among students.

Week Thirty-Two (April 19-23)

Objectives: Discuss Morrison and Beloved; Continue the study of writing style.

Activities:
  Day 1-Assign chapters ------- and allow time for reading in class.
  Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to complete in study groups and hand in for homework grades.
  Day 3-Discuss Morrison, chapters -------, and study guide; as a class examine Morrison's style, focusing upon her complex use of imagery and myth.
  Day 4-Assign a 2 page individual examination of some aspect of Morrison's style using specific examples from the novel.
  Day 5-Allow students to work in study groups to evaluate, critique, and edit papers; assign final copy to be completed for composition grades and turned in by Monday.
Week Thirty-Two (April 26-30)

Objectives: Finish discussing Beloved; Continue the study of relationships (although removed from the contemporary time period).

Activities:
Day 1-Assign chapters ------ and allow time for reading in class.
Day 2-Hand out study guide and allow students to complete in study groups and hand in for homework grades.
Day 3-Discuss chapters ------ and study guide; briefly discuss the major relationships within the novel.
Day 4-Allow 30 minutes for students to examine one relationship in a 1 page paper to be completed for a composition grade; review for comprehensive test of material covered since March 8.
Day 5-Administer comprehensive exam over The Woman Warrior, The Beet Queen, "Shiloh," and Beloved.

Week Thirty-Three

Objectives: Gain experiences working in a group to organize a collective project.

Activities:
Day 1-Assign new study groups; explain guidelines and requirements of group projects; offer examples of possible projects that could be attempted; answer any questions.
Day 2-Elect informal chairpersons; brainstorm for ideas.
Day 3-Discuss ideas suggested yesterday; narrow choices to two or three.
Day 4-Make a final decision on project and have it approved; begin distributing responsibilities.
Day 5-Review guidelines and requirements of group projects; answer and questions.
Week Thirty-Three (May 10-14)

Objectives: Gain experience carrying out individual responsibilities within a group in order to accomplish a common goal.

Activities:
   Day 1-Work on individual responsibilities within study group.
   Day 2-Same
   Day 3-Same
   Day 4-Same
   Day 5-Same

Week Thirty-Four (May 17-21)

Objectives: Gain experience working in a group to accomplish a common goal.

Activities:
   Day 1-Bring together group project and polish.
   Day 2-Same
   Day 3-Same
   Day 4-Same
   Day 5-Same

Week Thirty Five (May 24-28)

Objectives: Gain experience presenting and critiquing group projects.
   Day 1-Presentation of a group project followed by an informal critique by the class.
   Day 2-Same
   Day 3-Same
   Day 4-Same
   Day 5-Same
Week Thirty-Six (June 1-4)

Objectives: Check knowledge base learned during previous semester.

Activities:
Day 1-Explain format and expectations of comprehensive semester exam over all material covered during Spring semester; answer any questions.
Day 2-Review for semester exam; answer any specific questions students have over material covered on test.
Day 3-Administer objective portion of comprehensive semester exam.
Day 4-Administer essay portion of comprehensive semester exam.