

DUSTY IMAGES: The White Glove Treatment of Imagery and Point of View

English Grades 11-12

Overview: This lesson focuses on the author’s (and the filmmaker’s) use of imagery and point of view for effect on the reader/viewer. Students will analyze text for an author’s use of imagery and will reflect on the effect of visual imagery in video. They will read one chapter of a novel and view approximately 14 minutes of a documentary.

Primetime Series:

The American Experience/Surviving the Dustbowl

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

identify visual imagery and the effect created by the use of imagery in text and in video.

evaluate the effect of narrative point of view.

compose a found poem from diction and details of other authors.

Materials:

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck - 1 copy for every student

5-6 pieces of chart paper and 5-6 packages of markers

Handout entitled “Responding to Chapter One” (see attachment) - 1 copy for every student

Vocabulary

imagery

point of view

Pre-viewing Activities:

1. Students will freewrite, in journal entry to the following prompt:
“Consider an occasion when you were stranded or when your activities were hindered because of weather, when you were forced indoors for a number of days. Describe the situation and your feelings at the time.”
2. Orally review the definition of imagery as “description in figurative language used to create a word picture.” Also review the definition of point of view as “the perspective from which a story is told.”
3. Read the first chapter of *The Grapes of Wrath* in class. Have students complete the questions on “Responding to Chapter One.” When students have finished this, briefly discuss their responses.

Focus for Viewing:

To give students a specific responsibility for viewing, say, “You are going to watch a video on the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. This documentary will shift points of view from a third person narrator to first person testimonial and will occasionally include excerpts from a journal written by Lawrence Svobida who moved to Nebraska to become a farmer. As you watch, write down any phrases or words you feel create images. Also pay close attention to the visual images and write down the effects of those images as you view them.”

Viewing Activities:

Start the video after J.R. Davison's lines "They got the whole country plowed up nearly and, ah, that's about the time it turned off terribly dry."

Pause the video after Svobida's line, "As far as my eyes could see, my fields were completely bare."

Ask students, "How are Svobida's description different from the narrator's? What effect does point of view have?"

Allow students to respond. After listening to the responses, resume the video.

Pause the video after Floyd Cohen's question, "Will this be damaging?"

Ask students, "How does this image compare with Steinbeck's description of the people's efforts to protect themselves?" Allow students to respond. Resume the video.

Pause the video after the narrator's line, "A journalist traveling through the region called it the Dust Bowl." Read the definition provided by the "Teacher's Guide" from *The American Experience* website at

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dustbowl/filmmore/transcript/enhance/dustbowl.html>

The Dust Bowl was an area on the southern plains that included parts of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. Coined by a reporter from the Associated Press, who had passed through the area, the term spread rapidly.

Originally covered with grasses that held the fine soil in place, the area was over-plowed and over-grazed by farmers who came west during the Homesteading period. When drought hit the area in the 1930s, the unprotected land blew away in huge dust storms.

Ask students, "Why did the journalist use this particular term? Why a bowl? Can you think of other descriptive terms derived by journalists or the media? After discussing these, resume the video.

Pause the video after the narrator's statement, "The dust permeated the tiniest cracks and crevices." Ask students, "How does Steinbeck recreate this omnipresence of the dust in his chapter?" Look back at the text and ask students to read particular passages aloud.

Encourage the students to simply read words, phrases, or sentences aloud as a choral reading without waiting to be called on. After students have voiced these images, resume the video.

Pause the video after Melt White's lines, "But she realized how Dad was havin' to work, what little he was makin', and we'as about to starve to death." Ask students, "What image does Steinbeck use to communicate this reliance by the family on the men of the family? What is the effect of that image?" Discuss other ways the image might have been created and evaluate which is the most effective. Resume the video.

Pause the video after the narrator says, "Piece by piece, farmers were losing everything they cherished." Ask students, "How do you predict Steinbeck will convey this humiliation and pride of the farmers? Visually how has the video communicated their dignity?"

Pause the video after the narrator's lines, "the only difference between the Dust Bowl and the Sahara Desert was that a lot of 'damned fools' were not trying to farm the sands of North Africa."

Post Viewing Activities:

Group Activity - Found Poetry
Assign students to groups of four or five.

They are first to share the images from the novel and from the video. Tell them to decide on a “scribe” for the group who will write the images they choose. Each group should have a big piece of paper (Chart paper or a large piece of butcher paper is preferable) and markers.

The students are to arrange 12 – 15 lines of images into a found poem. Remind the student of the definition of free verse which has no rhyme or rhythm and that they may use free verse for their found poems so they don’t spend too much time worrying about finding images/details that rhyme.

Before they begin writing, assign each group a narrative point of view, either first or third, varying these from group to group.

Orally share the found poems, pausing to discuss and compare the effects of first and third person narrative.

Action Plan: Students are to interview survivors of a recent natural disaster (flood or tornado), the depression, or a war---someone who has survived a natural or man-made (war) misfortune. Suggested resources for finding such survivors include family members, nursing homes, various veterans’ websites, or senior citizens websites. Using the found poetry structure in the Post-Viewing Activity, students write a found poem resulting from the interview. Students may conduct an “open mic” poetry reading of these found poems and invite the public as well as those individuals interviewed, or students may post their poetry on a class website. (Students should, however, first share the poems with the individuals they interviewed and get their authorization for making these public. Additionally, the students should credit the interviewed individuals as co-writers.)

Extensions:

ENGLISH

Narrative Writing - Predict what will happen to the families in *The Grapes of Wrath* in chapters 2-9. Read these chapters, and consider how Steinbeck shifts his narration from an observant description to a story with character and dialogue. How does this technique compare to the narration in the video?

Descriptive Writing - Students are to find a painting or photograph of a landscape. They need to provide a copy of the visual. They will write a description of the visual using imagery which best recreates the effect on the viewer. They may use first or third person point of view but must also be able to state, in one sentence, the effect they are attempting to recreate.

Comparison Essay - View the 1940 movie *Grapes of Wrath* and write an essay comparing the movie’s depiction of the Dust Bowl to that of that documentary. For a complete description of the movie, go to <<http://www.filmsite.org/grap.html>>.

HISTORY

Research programs offered by FDR’s New Deal to help survivors of the Dust Bowl, the migrant workers in California, the Federal Theatre Project at <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fedtp/fthome.html>> and the Federal Writers’ Project at <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro/wpahome.html>>.

SCIENCE

Research patterns in climate, especially drought, flooding, land depletion, and erosion. Determine what role, if any, man has in these patterns and changes. Some helpful sites include

<<http://enso.unl.edu/ndmc/enigma/dustbowl/1930s1.htm>>
(National Drought Mitigation Center)
<<http://drylands.nasm.edu:1995/drylands.html>>
(the Smithsonian Museum's electronic exhibit)
<<http://www.weru.ksu.edu/>>
(Wind Erosion Research Unit)

ART

Research famous artists who portrayed the common laborer of the 1930s, principally Dorothea Lange, Thomas Hart Benton, and Diego Rivera's murals.

Useful internet sources can be found at

<<http://www.nara.gov/exhall/newdeal/newdeal.html>>
"A New Deal for the Arts" (National Archives and Records Administration)
<<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html>>
FSA-OWI photographs (Library of Congress).

MUSIC

Find folk songs prevalent during the 1930s, especially those of Woody Guthrie.

Look at the lyrics of these songs by Guthrie entitled "Talking Dust Bowl Blues" at the site

<<http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~stephan/Steinbeck/grapes.song.dustbowl.html>>
or "Dust Pneumonia" at the site
<<http://www.mudcat.org/!!-song99.cfm?stuff=Spring99+D+3633558>>
or "Pastures of Plenty" at the site
<<http://www.mudcat.org/!!-song99.cfm?stuff=Spring99+D+9283350>> .
You can hear "Pastures of Plenty" at
<http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~davida/woody_sounds.html>.

References:

The American Experience "Surviving the Dustbowl" – This site contains timelines, maps, and a teacher's guide to the video.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dustbowl/>

This is a thorough site on *The Grapes of Wrath* with chapter summaries, notes, and links to many other relevant sites.

<http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~stephan/Steinbeck/grapes.html>

Library of Congress Farm Security Admin. Collection – This site houses a collection of famous documentary photographs which emphasize rural life and the devastation of the Depression.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html>

Voices from the Dust Bowl – This is an "online presentation documenting the everyday life of residents in migrant work camps in central California in 1940 and 1941. This collection consists of audio recordings, photographs, manuscript materials, publications, and ephemera generated during two separate documentation trips supported by the Archive of American Folk."

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afctshhtml/tshome.html>

Links to sites about the Dust Bowl – This set of links located at the National Drought Mitigation Center provides links to pictures, videos, poems, and personal accounts of the Dust Bowl.

<http://enso.unl.edu/ndmc/enigma/dustbowl/1930s9.htm>

Discover Channel's production of "Day of the Black Blizzard" - This site contains photographs, audio recordings, and links about one October Sunday during the dust storm.

<http://www.discovery.com/area/history/dustbowl/dustbowl1.1.html>

RESPONDING TO CHAPTER ONE

The Grapes of Wrath

1. List the phrases and details that Steinbeck uses in this chapter which describe the wind, sun, or dust in hostile, warlike images.
2. What colors does Steinbeck use in this chapter to describe Oklahoma?
3. Explain the progression of colors he uses? What message might this convey?
4. List the details that Steinbeck uses to create sound imagery.
5. In the last paragraph, what does Steinbeck communicate about the men?
6. What was the source of strength for the families?

