

*Seeming versus Being
Sweet Are the Uses of Adversity
For Some, Melodrama is normal!*

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**Course: AP Language (11th)
AP Literature (12th)**

Background information

Marshall Fundamental is a “poor” urban school, grades 6 –12. Most of our students are on reduced lunch, speak a language other than English at home and are from under-represented minorities. We have an AP prep 6th -12th (40% of overall population). Most of the students in this program test at “average” or just “below average” for their grade-level.

I teach two AP Lit classes for seniors and two AP Language classes for juniors
Average class size by period: 40. Technology is not up to speed. I have one computer in my classroom and no Internet access. Our school adheres to the California State Standards and the Established School-wide Learning Results for our district. We have the usual battery of state tests and national exams, which take up a great deal of the year.

The classes for this unit, Advanced Placement Language (grade 11) and Advanced Placement Literature (grade 12), have forty students per period. Our school has a special Advanced Placement Program (to promote college bound classes for those who would generally not think about college and for those whose parents did not, themselves, attend college). Nearly seventy-percent of the young people in my AP class are on reduced lunch, which means that they are from economically disadvantaged homes. More than half speak a language other than English at home and many of these kids are more comfortable in that language (predominantly Spanish and Armenian, with a few Chinese and Korean students). The diverse races and ethnicities are well-balanced purposefully. For example, for the last nine years: African-American (between 23% - 28%), Hispanic (38%), Armenian (13%), Asian (7%), and Caucasian. These students are proud of their separate cultures, glad to be in the USA, and respectful of each other. I know that with

the reputation of youth these days, this sounds Pollyanna-like, but this is the way it is and represents a great part of our entire student population.

Though these are Advanced Placement classes, less than thirty percent of the students are assessed as “gifted.” Some of the kids have attention deficit, but these same students (who talk too much and move about) are, frequently, also the ones who help the more reluctant and shy scholars speak up and express themselves.

Objectives

I do not want to create Venn diagrams, create a collage, design an objective test, or have a well-researched debate and oratory contest. I do NOT want to do any of the things I can find in booklets for frazzled teachers from any online unit resource center (for the low, low, price of...) I want to bring to my students what I discovered at this institute. I want to sit and talk about what I learned and what it means. I want them to understand how scary it is to read startling and odious sentiments from those who loom large and noble in our great history. I want my students to know that I had no clue about most of the writers I read these past four weeks and I want them to read many of these works with me. I want them to know that as thunderingly enraged as I became again and again, I recognize that they must be far, FAR angrier, and with good reason. I want to keep on reading, sharing what I know, learning, listening, and staying open. I want my kids to hear that it is so amazing (but not impossible) to sit in a room and grow comfortable enough to sound stupid, or be wrong, or feel confused, or disagree TOTALLY with others because you can find, or make, a place where the correct, the programmed, the expected is unnecessary – you are safe just opening up and examine the fear-generated hate that eats away at entire societies.

Long-term goals and thematic connections:

I have two central ideas that I have promoted throughout each school year, one from Shakespeare's "As you Like It," "Sweet are the uses of adversity" and the other addresses the notion of *seeming* as opposed to *being*. From the first week of school, I bring up these issues in my English classes and we visit and re-visit these concepts in each work that I teach. There are complexities to every existence. Most of my students are from families that struggle with finances. I want them to understand that hardship can, paradoxically, have benefits (thus, the quote "sweet are the uses of adversity"). I also need kids to know that there is a difference between appearances and realities. Plato's flickering images on the cave wall still, a couple thousand years later, hold true. What a thing "seems" may be nothing more than well-packaged hype. What *seems* idyllic can preserve what is ugly and destructive and wrong. It can be terrifying to dismantle the sacred, the *self-evident*. However, if we openly recognize the hypocritical, the false, the contradictory, and the destructive, we can reconstruct and improve social systems, hopefully bringing a principal closer to its ideal, an agency closer to its own rhetoric. This year, I want to work through these two notions using some of the literature and passages from this institute. In my AP Language, I plan to spend 50% of the year on various works and pieces from this institute.

Instructional/long-term goals:

Students will develop personal philosophical positions on racism, radicalism, hardship, duty, and how something can be great without being *perfect*. Many, particularly teens, think in absolutes, "democracy is always good" or "radicalism is

nothing but evil.” Students need to recognize that in many things there is both good *and* bad and in order to appreciate the values of something, one must evaluate its prismatic qualities and distinguish obfuscation and paradox, noting subtle and overt differences. [As professor Wallace asserts, “You can be a radical abolitionist *and* racist at the same time when you subscribe to the notion of Anglo Saxon supremacy and African adolescence.”] *However*, I also believe that each student should also be able to ultimately recognize, define, and express with clarity a personal position (that, hopefully, will be consistently reconsidered over a lifetime).

I will plan on discussion days every other week. Topics will include:

- * What Are We Afraid Of?
- * Language Inequality as Sociopolitical Reality (codes, class, social control. The Jeffersonian notion that Blacks are unable to operate in symbolic space – thought all functions on the surface)
- * Constructing the Coherent Self in a Fractured World (reclaiming agency – Black radicalism initially in ORAL culture – identity formation)
- * Terminology (BEV, Creole, Pidgin; intonational contours carrying semantic force “language to clean out psychic debris”; one-upmanship as anxiety signifier)
- * Inhabiting a Time/Space/Gender Universe (theorize, frame, forecast. Do NOT stereotype)
- * Code Switching (double-meaning, reconciliation of opposites, sacred and secular, surface and deep-structure convergence)
- * Binary Oppositionals (banish either/or; adopt both/and; double consciousness)
- * “Democracy is neither easy nor inevitable and, absent of the tradition of radicalism, may well be impossible.” (education, publication, protest, free speech)
- * The Language of Radicalism (patterns and repetitions that disclose a radical sensibility; how writers use forms to create new forms; important to see early literary works – where it begins, where it goes; How do we get to a Toni Morrison)
- * The Racial Monolith (reducing Blackness to one “shape”; unpacking received racist assumptions; silencing because of prescribed notions)
- * Inconsistency between Rhetoric and Policy

- * Authority Based on *Perfection* and Besmirching the Myth
 (“founding fathers more interested in independence than in democracy.” Sylvia Bailey)
- * Myth of “Unloaded” Rhetoric (persuasion can never escape history and psycho-social layering)
- * Thinking Beyond Boundaries by calling into Question What We already Know
 (intellectual and philosophical resources; accepting, denying, creating Morrison’s “third thing”)
- * Jeremiad
- * Religion: (culpable for the maintenance of the slave institution or inciter of
 revolutionary change? – Walker/Garnett)
- * Transformation (“You have seen how man was made a slave; now see how a slave was
 made a man.” Douglass. Garrison’s self-serving abolitionist authority vying for
 control of Douglass’s creation)
- * American History: What has been hidden from us? How does a historical event
 trigger other memories? Reclaiming childhood

Works to be covered:

Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave	(Douglass)
Declaration of Independence	
Address	(Patrick Henry)
<u>Appeal in Four Articles</u>	(David Walker)
<u>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</u>	(Harriet Jacobs)
<u>Clotel</u>	(William Wells Brown)
‘What to the Slave if the Fourth of July?’	(Frederick Douglass)

L.I.S.T Paradigm

Language

Identity

Space

Time

Language: How does the author use language to explain the human experience. What sort of choices does the author make (conventions, etc...)

Identity: Who are these people?
What are they looking for?
What do they want?
What does it cost them to get it?

Space: How do characters move through public, intimate, private, and personal space?
How does the author make use of ritualistic/symbolic space.
In what spaces does the writer invest physical, spiritual, or psychological significance?

Time: How does the author handle the passage of time?
How does the past weigh upon the present?
Does the author seek to interpret the present through the lens of the past?
Does the author's identity shape how s/he imagines the future?
How does the past weigh upon or shape the present? (access trauma)

RUBRIC - Student as Reader/Writer

Score Point 6 – Excellent Writing - An essay addresses its topic thoughtfully and:

- Is coherently organized; provides relevant, substantial and organized evidence to support major claim(s); elaborates thoughtfully and effectively
- Has exceptional control of sentence structure with precise and appropriate use of language and word choice
- Is generally free from errors in grammar, usage and the conventions of written English

Score Point 5 – Strong Writing - An essay addresses its topic effectively and:

- Is well organized; provides relevant and specific evidence to support claim(s); elaborates effectively
- Has strong control of sentence structure with appropriate use of language and word choice
- Is generally free from errors in grammar, usage and the conventions of written English

Score Point 4 – Substantial Writing - An essay addresses its topic well and:

- Is organized; provides reasonable evidence to support predictable claim(s); elaborates with purpose and some degree of specificity
- Has adequate control of sentence structure with appropriate use of language and word choice
- May have a few errors in grammar, usage and the conventions of written English, but these errors do not cause confusion

Score Point 3– Basic Writing - An essay addresses its topic in a basic manner and:

- Has some organization; provides superficial evidence or uses listed generalities to support simplistic claim(s)
- Has basic control of sentence structure with simplistic word choice
- May have serious and pervasive errors in grammar, usage and the conventions of written English; these errors may cause confusion

Score Point 2– Basic Writing - An essay addresses some aspects of the topic and:

- Has limited organization; provides limited or irrelevant evidence to support simplistic claim(s)
- May have inadequate control of sentence structure with limitations in word choice
- May have a variety of repeated errors in grammar, usage and the conventions of written English; these errors cause confusion

Score Point 1– Basic Writing - An essay that may or may not address the topic:

- Has little or no organization; provides little or no evidence to support simplistic claim(s) or may have no claims
- May have little or no control of sentence structure with limitations in word choice
- May have serious and pervasive errors in grammar, usage and the conventions of written English; these errors cause confusion

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