Teaching American Literature Through Native American Literature: Unit 1- Types of Storytelling
A mini-unit designed for ENGL 261: American Literature
Brandi Benson
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, May 2012

Class or Grade Levels Targeted: English/American Literature 9-10
Time Frame: 5 class periods (50 minutes each)

Rationale: Throughout the course of their academic career, students learn various ways to tell stories. They are taught to read fiction and nonfiction, they learn to write in multiple different genres, and even practice their public speaking skills. However, very few of these students probably know the origins of where storytelling began. For this reason, I believe it is highly necessary to give students a brief overview of where storytelling began and to give them the opportunity to practice storytelling in the original way that Native Americans began, with oral tradition. This mini-unit will also be the opening to the Native American literature unit as well as some brief Native American history.

Objectives: By the end of this mini unit, students will have a better understanding of Native American history and the origins of Native American literature. Students will be able to identify the ways that our country has evolved throughout history, beginning with the first settlers in America. It is my hope that when we are finished with this unit, students will be able to enter into the next few weeks with a clearer concept of how we came to write the stories that we read through putting our oral traditions down on paper.

Day One: Introduction to Native American literature/history.
• Journal prompt: What do you know about NA literature/history? 10 minutes
• Discuss as a class what students know/do not know about this topic 05 minutes
• Have students individually research certain aspects of this topic 15 minutes
  o What is storytelling?
  o Who are some famous Native Americans?
  o Who are some historical American writers?
• Meet up as a group to discuss (5 most important things each student found) 10 minutes
• Hand out map of Native American territories before American settlers 02 minutes
• Discuss how these territories have changed
  o What do we recognize about this map?
  o Where are states we are familiar with on this map?
  o What do the borders look like 08 minutes
• HW: Read “The First American Authors” (Gleason 7-13)

Day Two: The first authors.
• Journal prompt: What did you learn from the article assigned as HW? 10 minutes
• Discuss as a class the various ways that we preserve the stories we tell 10 minutes
• Show students pictures from Native American history and have them write about what they think these pictures are saying. What is the story behind this art? (Do this with 3 examples) 15 minutes
• Go back through and tell students what the story actually is with each picture 15 minutes
• HW: Read “Origin of Folk Stories” (Belasco & Johnson 34-37)

Day Three: Folk stories.
• Journal prompt: What was your favorite part of the story? Why? 10 minutes
• Read introduction to “Origin of Folk Stories” (Belasco & Johnson 34) 05 minutes
• Discuss what it means to be an “oral culture” 05 minutes
• Have students pair up with a partner and write a list of the oral traditions (if any) that we see or hear today 05 minutes
• Make a list as a class of any oral traditions students came up with 05 minutes
• Read Native American Stories forward by N. Scott Momaday. 13 minutes
• Discuss the importance of storytelling. Is it important? Why? What do we use stories for? Does it work? 07 minutes
• HW: Read “How Grandmother Spider Stole the Sun” (Bruchac 26-29)

Day Four: Different types of storytelling.
• Journal prompt: What parts of the HW did you find most interesting? 10 minutes
• Discuss the HW. Look at the art, the animals in the story, the word choice 10 minutes
• Discuss and write the different ways we tell stories 05 minutes
• Have students listen to a song, speech, read a poem, look at pictures. All of these things will be examples of ways that we tell stories. 10 minutes
• Read “How Raven Made the Tides” (Bruchac 72-74) 10 minutes
• Students will draw themes out of a hat. These themes will be the topic of a story that students will write, similar to the Native American oral story 05 minutes
• HW: Students will go home and brainstorm different ways that they can write their story

Day Five: Writing the oral story.
• Students will pair up with a classmate and tell them their story ideas. Students will help each other with brainstorming ideas. This will happen with 2-3 partners 25 minutes
• Students will begin typing their story 25 minutes
• HW: Students will continue typing their Native American stories

Activity/Assignment Description
At the culmination of this unit, students will be expected to turn in a short story that they have written in a similar format to that of the Native American stories they have been studying throughout the week. While the mini unit above does not grant enough time, ideally, this unit would continue on into the next week. During the next week, students would craft their stories while also incorporating pictures and images to coincide with what they have written. This way, students would be given the opportunity to practice two types of storytelling: picture and writing. It would also be nice if there could be time allotted for students to present their pieces similar to that of an oral story presentation. Then students could get to experience all of the types of storytelling and would have a better understanding of the Native American practice.
Teaching American Literature Through Native American Literature: Unit 2 - Different Perspectives (Occom)
A mini-unit designed for ENGL 261: American Literature
Brandi Benson
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, May 2012

Class or Grade Levels Targeted: English/American Literature 9-10
Time Frame: 5 class periods (50 minutes each)

Rationale: Understanding Native American history and culture is a very important piece in education. There are not a lot of schools that offer this literature in the classroom. We learn about the history of our country from the Westerner’s perspective, and we reiterate this learning in our history classes, but very few students get the opportunity to learn about the Native American people impacted the historical advancements of America. We have several accounts of literature that were written by numerous settlers from Europe or “Americans,” but there are very few written works that were derived from the Native Americans during the 18th and 19th centuries. For this reason, I feel it is necessary to implement a mini unit that exposes students to the works of various Native American authors such as Samuel Occom.

Objectives: By the end of this mini unit, students will have a new or developed perspective of America from a Native American authors perspective. Students will read multiple texts that are influenced by Native American authors to develop a deeper understanding of the literature. The main focus of this unit will be to help students begin to understand the idea of multiple perspectives. By learning to appreciate and respect different viewpoints, students will hopefully be able to use this understanding in various situations in their lives.

Day One: Introduction to Samson Occum.
• Journal prompt: Who is or whom do you think Samson Occum is? 05 minutes
• Class discussion. Discuss what students wrote down for their answers 05 minutes
• Journal prompt: What is a narrative? 05 minutes
• Class discussion. Discuss what students wrote down for their answers 05 minutes
• Give students the “narrative handout” that explains what a narrative is 10 minutes
• Have students read Occum biography highlighting places that:
  o Catch their attention
  o Have exceptional imagery
  o Confuse them
• HW: Read Occum’s “A Short Narrative of My Life” (Belasco & Johnson 404-409)

Day Two: Analysis of a narrative.
• Journal prompt: What did you like/dislike about Occum’s narrative? 10 minutes
• Class discussion. Discuss hearing/reading someone else’s story 05 minutes
• Have students begin drafting a narrative. 35 minutes
  o Narrative prompt: Think of a time in your life when you remember changing something about yourself. Did you change what you believed? Did you change your opinion of someone?
Write 1-2 pages about your experience and what you learned about yourself.

- HW: Students finish their narrative drafts

**Day Three: Another perspective on your story.**

- Read: “The Diary of Samson Occum” by James Ottery 15 minutes
  - Have students look for connections between this piece and the narrative of Occum
- Journal prompt: What is Ottery’s interpretation of Occum’s narrative? 10 minutes
- Class discussion. Discuss what students found in Ottery’s piece 05 minutes
- Class discussion. Why do our perceptions change when we read someone else’s work? How do they change?
- Read: “He will use any means to get what he wants” (Nabokov 6) 10 minutes
- Have students begin to write a poem on their perspective of this story and how it correlates with Occum’s narrative 10 minutes
- HW: Finish writing perspective poem/Finish second draft of narrative

**Day Four: Creating our own perspective.**

- Journal prompt: Why is it important to have different perspectives?
  What do we gain from seeing different viewpoints? 10 minutes
- Give students a narrative of one of their classmates 03 minutes
- Have students read through the narratives 05 minutes
- Have students reread and underline important passages in the narratives 12 minutes
- Have students begin to write a perspective poem about their classmate’s narrative 20 minutes
- HW: Students will finish their narrative perspective poems

**Day Five: What have we learned?**

- Students will get into groups of four. Each person will read his/her narrative. Then the person who wrote the perspective poem will read the poem. The group will discuss the different ways that the poem and narrative compare/contrast. 30 minutes
- Class discussion. Discuss what we found out about our perceptions of the narratives. Questions to consider: 10 minutes
  - How were our poems accurate?
  - How were our poems inaccurate?
  - What have we learned about our perceptions of someone else’s story?
- Journal prompt: Why is it important to look at American literature through a Native American perspective? 10 minutes
- HW: With what they know now, students will rewrite their perspective poem from the new perspective they have about the narrative.

**Activity/Assignment Description**

Throughout the course of this mini unit, students will be required to do two different types of writing. They will be working on a narrative that can carry over into the following week and be...
perfected for a final portfolio. The narrative will be written about a time when they made a change in their lives and they remember what that change felt like. During additional weeks, students could begin to look at the structure of their narrative, word choice, imagery, and grammar elements as well. During this unit they will also be working on writing perspective poetry. This poem is not meant to follow any sort of specifications. It is more meant as a way to get students to understand what different perspectives mean and how a story or situation can be viewed differently from a different point of view.

Teaching American Literature Through Native American Literature: Unit 3- Taking a Stand
A mini-unit designed for ENGL 261: American Literature
Brandi Benson
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, May 2012

Class or Grade Levels Targeted: English/American Literature 9-10
Time Frame: 5 class periods (50 minutes each)

Rationale: This brief Native American literature unit has taken students through the foundation of Native American storytelling, has showcased authors who were influenced by settlers of America, and will now move into Native Americans who began to take a stand against the Europeans who began to sever their culture and traditions. As we look through the history of Native American rights, students may be familiar with the later organizations or protests that occurred in United States history, but it is highly doubtful that many students know that William Apess was one of the first Native Americans who began pushing for these rights for his people through writing. It is essential that students understand these events in history so they can properly piece together the timeline that occurred for Native American rights.

Objectives: At the culmination of this unit, students should have a firm grasp of the beginning of Native American literature. While there are several other types of literature that students can pick up that speak to the Native American lifestyle of the early 20th century, the objective for students at the end of this unit is to recognize the various ways that the Native Americans used their voices to convey a message. We have studied the foundation of oral tradition, looked at different perspectives, and now, students will be given the opportunity to present a speech on a topic/theme that they feel very strongly about.

Day One: What’s right or wrong?
• Journal prompt: With what we have learned about Native American literature so far, do you feel that the Native American people have been misrepresented? How? 10 minutes
• As a class read, “St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves” (Russell) 15 minutes
• Discuss the symbolism that occurs in this piece 05 minutes
• Discuss literary devices that are used in writing/speaking 10 minutes
• Read William Apess’ biography (Berasco & Johnson 639) 10 minutes
• HW: Read “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man”

Day Two: Does what we say and how we say it matter?
• Journal prompt: Whom is Apess speaking to in his piece? What is he saying? 10 minutes
• Class discussion. Analyzing Apess’ speech. Questions to consider: 10 minutes
  o What literary devices does he use in his speech?
  o What do these literary devices do for the written words?
  o Can you think of other examples of these devices used?
• Listen to Onondaga Chief Canassatego’s speech “On Colonizing Education” (American Rhetoric Online Speech Bank) 05 minutes
• Class discussion. Analyzing Chief Canassatego’s speech. Questions to consider: 10 minutes
  o Does this piece have any similarities with our other stories?
  o How does this piece agree/disagree with Samson Occom’s?
  o What literary devices (if any) do we see in this piece?
• Listen to Chief Powhatan’s speech “Address to Captain John Smith” (American Rhetoric Online Speech Bank) 05 minutes
• Class discussion. Analyzing Chief Powhatan’s speech. Questions to consider: 10 minutes
  o What literary devices (if any) do we see in this piece?
  o How is this piece different/similar to Chief Canassatego’s?
  o How are the white people portrayed in these pieces?
• HW: Read “Suppressed Speech on the 350th Anniversary of the Pilgrim’s Landing at Plymouth Rock” (Belasco & Johnson 149-152)

Day Three: Time for change.
• Journal prompt: How do you feel about American history after reading all of these different Native American stories? Has your perception changed? Stayed the same? 10 minutes
• Give persuasive speech handout and explain 10 minutes
• Students will go to the library to begin researching an aspect of Native American history that they feel strongly about. 30 minutes
• HW: Write a first draft of your persuasive speech

Day Four: Typing your speech.
• Journal prompt: Free write about something new that you learned about Native American literature while researching your persuasive topic. 10 minutes.
• Students will spend the day either researching or typing up their persuasive speeches. At the end of class, students will turn in their speeches. 40 minutes

Day Five: Workshopping our speeches.
• Instead of journaling, students will be given a speech of one of their peers. They will read through the speech silently and make note of any places where the writer does a good job of using literary devices. 10 minutes
• Students will swap the speeches they have with someone else. Again, they will read silently and this time they will be looking for proper structure of the speech. Introduction, body, conclusion. 10 minutes
• Another swap will take place and students will look at aspects of the actual argument.
  o What is the argument of the paper?
• For the final swap, students will be looking at the mechanics of the paper to make sure everything is correct.  
• Each student will read their speech aloud and highlight/underline areas where their tone should change or they should pause.

Activity/Assignment Description
This assignment will not be finished at the remainder of the fifth day. In the following week, students will be presenting their Native American persuasive speeches. The speeches would be approximately 4-6 minutes long. Once the speeches are given, students would continue to study Native American literature and possibly turn their speeches into a persuasive essay. This could also be a nice time to start to introduce students to the Ciceroian essay format as well. It may be a bit advanced for a freshmen level class, but it is a possibility.

Works Cited/Resources


Teaching Multiple Perspectives

American literature is a fascinating subject. From the time we are small and continued throughout our schooling, we are constantly bombarded with the history of our country and of the authors that had an impact on the ways that we read and write today. I believe our history is one of the greatest gifts we can expose our students to; especially in an English or literature classroom. With that being said, I think it is extremely important for students to develop their way of thinking through experiencing multiple perspectives when it comes to American literature. One aspect of American literature that is commonly left untouched in schools is the Native American perspective. Because this subject is often times glazed over, students are done a tremendous disservice. They have the right to learn and question every part of our history, otherwise they do not understand it. Allen Carey-Webb, author of Literature and Lives wrote, “[as teachers we must] try to be conscious of how our positions in the present shape our views of the past and of ways in which understandings of literature and history change over time” (83).

With that being said, it is up to educators to find a way to bridge the historical gap students may experience with what they are reading and how it applies to their current lives. For this reason, I chose to compile a three-week unit on Native American literature as my final project for this class. As a future educator, I want my students to be exposed to as many different viewpoints as possible so they can effectively make their own decisions and develop their own opinions and beliefs. I would love to teach Native American literature or American literature to my students and I wanted to create a project that I could hopefully put in practice in the future.

This project does a nice job of highlighting some of the early Native American authors we have experienced reading throughout the course of the semester. I chose to take early Native
American storytelling, Samson Occom, and William Apess and implement all three topics within my lesson plans. These topics were in our text, *The Bedford Anthology of American Literature*, because the authors felt it was important for their audience to be exposed to the works of the Native American people. The Native American literature/author perspective is a wonderful addition to any American literature agenda because it gives students an opportunity to experience a different type of writing than they are used to reading or practicing. Plus, it is a history that deserves to be mentioned if we are going to mention other American authors. William Apess wrote, “By what you read, you may learn how deep your principles are. I should say they were skin deep” (644). If we do not include these “other” perspectives in our literature and our teaching, we are limiting the critical thinking and critical literacy skills of our students.

I absolutely loved putting together this final project. Not only did I get to incorporate our textbook for this class, but I also had the opportunity to read several other texts on Native American literature that were enjoyable to read. I had a lot of fun putting together different lesson ideas. I would love to take what I have here and expand it to become a six or eight-week unit where I could implement more historical context and other literature. I realize that what I have written below is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to education on Native American literature, but I also wanted to try as much as possible to stop my lesson plans at the year 1865. I did include one or two texts that are post 19th century, but for the most part, this is truly a lesson plan on early Native American literature.