

Lesson Plan

“The Sun and the Rain”

Objective

This attachment will provide teachers with extra information on Thomas Wolfe, some analysis of his short story “The Sun and the Rain,” and an overview of the myth of Antaeus. The information here will provide material for discussion of Wolfe and the story in class. After the overview, students should understand the concept of writing fiction based on one’s own life, and can use Thomas Wolfe’s writing as an example for them to write a story. Students will use their own life experience about a time that they left a busy place for a simpler setting. Perhaps they met someone from a different culture, experienced a language barrier, but achieved a level of understanding beyond the spoken word through nature.

Standards/Goals: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3

Grades 4-5: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

Grades 6-8: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Grades 9-12: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Procedure

- **Have students read “The Sun and the Rain” to themselves.**
- **Have students read about Hercules and Antaeus.**
- **Begin session by distributing “Ideas for Students to Consider” handout.**
- **Discuss background of Thomas Wolfe and his writing:**
 - o Thomas Wolfe, North Carolina’s most famous author was born October 3rd, 1900 in Asheville. One of his great skills was taking experiences from his own life and reinventing them for writing fiction. His first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), told the childhood story of Eugene Gant. While much of his writing was autobiographical, Wolfe inserted many fictitious elements of drama, romance, and humor into his stories.
 - o Wolfe’s books sold well in both the United States and Europe. However, he handled his finances poorly, leading him to publish sections of future books as short stories to make ends meet. One such story was “The Sun and the Rain,” which was published by Scribner’s Magazine in May 1934. The story would later

become a part of *Of Time and the River*, a direct sequel to *Look Homeward, Angel* that tells the story of Eugene Gant's adult life.

- **Discuss “The Sun and the Rain” and discuss moments that define the events within the narrative.**

- In the story, Eugene Gant (referred to simply as “the youth” in the short story) is on a train from Chartres to Orleans in France, leaving the city for the countryside. During his trip he encounters a French peasant traveling with his wife and daughter. The differences between them are apparent, as the Frenchman is poor, while Eugene is a relatively wealthy American tourist. Intrigued by the presence of an American, the peasant questions the young man about his travels, though the two men have difficulty understanding each other.
- The peasant's daughter is clearly irritated by her father's inability to comprehend what Eugene is saying, to the point that she seems not to notice the personal connection her father and Eugene are making.
- Eugene and the peasant man form a lasting connection with each other when they notice the rain beginning to fall outside. The old Frenchman takes the opportunity to teach Eugene some French words, namely the words for “sun,” “rain,” and “earth.” This exchange provides a powerful lesson for Eugene. The two men are able to overcome their cultural differences by highlighting what they have in common: nature. These words emphasize the importance of nature for the younger man, and the need to reconnect with the world outside the busy cities.

- **Discuss the myth of Hercules and Antaeus and discuss how it connects to Wolfe's writing.**

- When Thomas Wolfe completed his second novel “Of Time and the River” in 1935, he titled Book VI “Antaeus: Earth Again.” It is the story “The Sun and the Rain.”
- The title of the chapter refers to the Greek myth of Antaeus from the twelve labors of Hercules. Antaeus was a giant of Libya, the son of the sea-god Poseidon and the earth-goddess Gaea. He challenged all travelers through his country to a wrestling match that he always won. Because he was the son of the earth goddess, he remained invincible to any physical challenge so long as he was in contact with the earth. This behavior continued until he met Hercules. Hercules had been wandering for eight years, and was currently in search of the Golden Apples of Hesperides. Hercules discovered the secret power of Antaeus and used his immense strength to lift the giant into the air and crush him.
- In the context of Wolfe's writing, the comparison to Antaeus relates to wandering and making contact with the earth or nature. Eugene Gant takes a trip and learned

a lesson that conveys a sense of place and the need to reconnect with the natural world.