**“No Cure For It”**

**Lesson Plan for Teachers 2018**

**Overview:**

This lesson plan will provide teachers with additional information about Thomas Wolfe, methods of analysis for his short story “No Cure For It,” and a brief background of the story’s historical context. The information will provide material for discussion of the text as a companion to the “Telling Our Tales” student writing competition.

**Objectives:**   
1. Students will create a work of fiction based on their own personal experiences or the

experiences of someone they know.

2. Students will be able to explain how Thomas Wolfe's writing was based on his experiences.

3. Students will be able to identify major themes in the story “No Cure For It” and connect those themes to ideas from their own lives.

Suitable for classes in grades 4-12.

**NC ELA Standards W.4-12.3**

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.

**NC ELA Standards RL.4-12.2**

Grades 4-5: Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text.

Grade 6: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

Grades 7-8: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; including further grade appropriate analysis.

Grades 9-10: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Grades 11-12: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

**NC ELA Standards L.4-12.4**

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on (grade appropriate) reading content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies: context clues, word parts, word relationships, and reference materials.

**NC ELA Standards L.4-12.5a**  
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language and nuances in word meanings.

**a)** Explain and interpret figurative language in context with grade appropriate reading and context.

**Historical Context & Story Analysis for Teacher Reference**

**Context:**

Thomas Wolfe was born on October 3, 1900 in Asheville, NC. As an adult he lived in New York City and travelled the world, but never forgot his North Carolina roots. As a writer he drew heavily on his personal experiences for story material. His first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, followed the life of Eugene Gant, whose background and family closely resemble Wolfe’s own. His fiction so closely resembled fact that the Asheville Times newspaper accused *Look Homeward, Angel* of taking people’s negative features, making them seem like their defining features, and laying out the town’s gossip for everyone to read.

The short story titled “No Cure For It,” returns to the life of Eugene Gant. It was published in 1941 three years after Wolfe’s death in a collection of short stories titled *The Hills Beyond*. Like Eugene Gant, Wolfe grew up with a busy and nervous mother, a loud and tall father (6’4”), and he himself achieved an immense height that people felt the need to comment upon wherever he went. He grew to be 6’6½” during a time when the average height for men was 5’9”.

**Summary:**  
 A concerned mother summons a doctor to examine her seven-year-old son, who has grown quite tall and awkwardly proportioned for his age. The doctor comes in, examines the boy, and informs the mother that she has nothing to fear because her son is perfectly healthy, just odd looking. Soon afterwards the boy’s father, himself a very tall man, returns home and receives the news. After a moment of relief from both parents, the adults express anticipation for how tall the young boy will grow up to be, while the boy himself simply smiles.

**Setting:**

The story takes place inside the Gant family home. Little information is given about the world outside the house. We know Thomas Wolfe was born and raised in Asheville, NC, which was then a small community. The community is small enough for a community doctor to walk where he needs to go, and for Eugene’s father to walk to and from his own place of work. The description of the house interior, and its contents, suggest that the family enjoys a comfortable lifestyle. Since Wolfe was born on October 3, 1900, and in the story Eugene Gant is 7 years old “going on eight,” we can assume that the story is taking place in 1908. In a small town of 1908 being “different” from the general “normal” populace would be a curiosity.

**Plot:**

Main Problem – Young Eugene’s parents (particularly his mother Eliza) are worried that he is unhealthy because of the great height he is beginning to reach at the tender age of seven.

Climax – A visiting doctor gives a brief physical examination, saying nothing except giving instructions to Eugene and gruffly teasing him while the mother looks on anxiously. Eugene’s stature is revealed to be perfectly healthy.

Resolution – The doctor gleefully tells Eugene’s mother that he is perfectly healthy and will grow to great size. Eugene’s father “Gant” returns home and is given the same news. After a moment of relief from the parents, their attitude shifts from one of apprehension about Eugene’s height to one of anticipation. Eugene is still seen as “different,” but now in a good way.

**Characters:**

Eugene Gant: The early protagonist of Wolfe’s works, 7 years old, is a carefree child who doesn’t seem to have any concern for the future.

Eliza Gant – Eugene’s mother. A nervous personality who likes to keep busy, which occasionally includes checking in on the health of her youngest child (Eugene).

W.O. Gant – Eugene’s father, Eliza’s husband, a large nervous man who likes to use large words.

Doctor McGuire – A local doctors. Has a gruff but kindly personality, a large figure, and a seemingly morbid sense of humor regarding the health of others. While he is one of the more active participants in the story (besides Eliza, who talks with him throughout the story), he also plays the objective observer in that he doesn’t have much emotional role in the story compared to Eugene’s parents.

**Specific Theme for Reference:**

Human Nature/Being “Different”: While Eugene Gant is a passive participant in the overall story, the narrative centers around his height/awkward proportions and everyone’s reactions to it. To the concern of his parents, Eugene is a person who is different than others, but they learn that being different is not a bad thing. After all, as the title suggests, there is “No Cure For It."

**Procedures  
Procedures may be changed for the needs of the class.**

**Estimated Time: 60-80 minutes**

**Preparation:**

1. Pull up the photographs of Thomas Wolfe from the Wolfe Memorial website or print out to distribute to students. The photos seen here display Thomas Wolfe reaching for a light bulb, the Wolfe family and home, and a young Thomas Wolfe with his college class.
2. Download and print the following handouts for students from the Wolfe Memorial Website –

* Thomas Wolfe’s short story “No Cure For It.”
* Vocabulary List 2018.
* Guidelines and Instructions 2018
* Submission Form 2018
* Ideas for Student Consideration 2018.

**Step 1: Introduce Thomas Wolfe photos and discuss historical context.**

Refer to the photographs of Thomas Wolfe and ask who within the class knows of him and what he did. Explain that he was an author from the early 20th century who was born and raised in Asheville and heavily based his writings on his own life experiences. As illustrated in many of his stories, Wolfe was raised by his mother Julia Wolfe, a busy woman who was nervous about the health of her children, and his father W.O. Wolfe, a loud but eloquent man who hid his own nervousness behind flowery language and rants.

Further explain that Thomas Wolfe was incredibly tall for his time, and his appearance played a role in his interactions with others. Wolfe’s height most likely came from his father, who grew up to be 6’4”. Refer to the photo of the Wolfe family. W.O. Wolfe is the mustachioed man standing in the background of the family photo. Notice how even standing in the back, W.O. Wolfe still looms taller than everyone else except for Thomas Wolfe, who is standing at the left end. Julia Wolfe stands between them. Finish explaining the historical context by pointing out Thomas Wolfe’s height in the other photos: He can easily reach a light bulb as an adult in one photograph, and in college he towered over the rest of his college fraternity members.

**Optional Extension:** Refer to pages under the “History” tab of our webpage at [www.wolfememorial.com](http://www.wolfememorial.com) for more specific information about Thomas Wolfe, his family, his work, and the history of Asheville.

**Step 2: Pass out copies of “No Cure For It” and the accompanying vocabulary sheet/spelling guide and give students 15 minutes to read through the story.**

**Step 3: Story Discussion.**

Go over the story with students. Refer to the “Historical Context & Story Analysis for Teacher Reference” section of at the beginning of this lesson plan for suggestions. Ask them to ponder and discuss each section as a class and write their thoughts/answers. Write the class’ thoughts on a chalk/white/smartboard for reference as well. Summarize the story and consider setting, plot, characters, and theme. Let them know that since Thomas Wolfe wrote heavily about his own life, students can use the historical context on their sheet to help their thought process.

**Step 4: Activity/Discussion 1 – Being “Different.”**

Ask the class what first comes to mind when they think of the word “different.” Do they think good things, or do they think like Eliza Gant, “unnatural?” Make a list on the chalk/white/smartboard and ask the class if something thought to be bad can be good, and vice versa.

**Step 5: Activity/Discussion 2 – Animals & Figures of Speech.**

Once the first activity wraps up, note that the story also makes frequent use of figures of speech, particularly in comparing the characters to animals. To explore this idea and why writers use it, have students take 1 minute to write down as many animals as they can and what traits they associate with them, good or bad. Think “the eyes of a hawk” or someone with a “mama bear” personality.

**Step 6: Assignment.**

Pass out the writing contest “Guidelines and Instructions” and “Ideas for Student Consideration” sheets to class. Go over writing assignment before wrapping up lesson. Have students write short story based on the prompts on the “Ideas for Consideration” worksheet, and following the guidelines listed on the “‘Telling our Tales’ Guidelines and Instruction” page.

**Optional Extension:** Pass out copies of “Gulliver: The Story Of A Tall Man” to students and give them 10 minutes to read. Have them discuss how they think Wolfe’s height affected his everyday life in positive and negative ways. Find the story here: <http://wolfememorial.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Gulliver-The-Story-of-a-Tall-Man.pdf> .