

“The Lost Boy, Part IV”

Lesson Plan for Teachers 2020

Overview:

This lesson plan will provide teachers with additional information about Thomas Wolfe, methods of analysis for this chapter, part IV of the novella *The Lost Boy*, 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 “The Lost Boy, Part IV” 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 is still considered by many to be North Carolina's most famous author. He was born on October 3, 1900 in Asheville, NC. As a writer he drew upon his personal experiences for story material. His 1929 novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, followed the Gant family, and the life of young Eugene Gant, whose background and family closely resembled Wolfe's own.

One of Wolfe's earliest memories was moving to St. Louis at age three in the spring of 1904 with his mother and several siblings for the opening of the World's Fair. Julia Wolfe established a boardinghouse in St. Louis to earn extra money for the family. She believed the 1904 World's Fair would be an excellent opportunity to profit from the many visitors needing a place to stay while visiting the Fair. She called her boardinghouse "The North Carolina" in hopes of attracting boarders from her home state.

Thomas Wolfe recalled at age three being bewildered and curious about the trip. While in St. Louis throughout the summer of 1904, he and his siblings visited the fair to ride the carnival rides. They saw people from all over the world and witnessed the display of the latest new technologies. They experienced life far beyond what they knew in their hometown of Asheville, NC. The excitement turned to disappointment one night in November, just a few weeks before the Fair was set to close. Tom's older brother Grover died of Typhoid Fever at age twelve. Tom's sister Mabel recalled that Grover had a job working at a newsstand for a hotel inside the fairgrounds. Growing worse after a couple of days feeling sickly, Grover told the family that he had eaten some soft pears that were discarded from the exhibit of fruits. Mabel felt that maybe he had picked up the typhoid germ from the pears.

Although having only recently turned four years old, Wolfe vividly remembered and later wrote about St. Louis, the World's Fair, and Grover. To help remember his brother and the experience, he returned to St. Louis in 1935 and subsequently wrote his novella, *The Lost Boy*. This short novel is based on family stories about Grover, the trip to St. Louis, and Wolfe's return visit to St. Louis. Like most of his writings, it is hard to see where the real life of Thomas Wolfe ends, and the fiction begins.

Background on the World's Fair:

The first World's Fair or Exposition was in London in 1851. These fairs highlighted the latest achievements in commercial technology, fine arts, manufacturing, science, foreign policy, and education. The 1904 St. Louis World's Fair was also known as the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. It officially opened on April 30, 1904. Visitors were greeted with 1,500 buildings spread across 1,200 acres. The goal was to demonstrate America's progress since the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Buildings included The Palace of Agriculture, The Palace of Education and Social Economy, The Palace of Electricity and Machinery, The Palace of Fine Arts, The Palace of Forestry, Fish, and Game, and the Palace of Transportation.

In addition to educational exhibits, the 1904 World's Fair also offered opportunities for entertainment. A mile-long arcade and carnival, known as the Pike, held fifty different amusements including contortionists, reenactments of the Bore War, dancing girls, an educated horse, and an elephant water slide. A Ferris wheel, or observation wheel, gave riders an aerial view of the fairgrounds and its attractions from 265 feet. By the time the gates closed on December 1, 1904, an estimated 20 million people had visited the Fair. Visitors returned to their homes with stories of foreign cultures, new technologies, fine arts, and fun from their time in St. Louis. The most recent World's Fair was held in 2015 in Milan, Italy. One is potentially set for later this year in Dubai, and again in Osaka, Japan in 2025.

Plot and themes:

In much of Wolfe's fiction, he portrays the Wolfe family as the Gant family. His fictional name for himself is Eugene Gant. His mother Julia becomes Eliza. Some names did not change. Because his brother Grover died so young, his name remains Grover. The city of Asheville is known as Altamont. Thomas Wolfe writes about Grover and St. Louis in *Look Homeward, Angel*. He returns to the story and the character Eugene Gant in the novella, *The Lost Boy*. The story contains four parts or chapters. Each part is told from the perspective of a different family member; Part I by his brother Grover Gant, Part II by his mother Eliza Gant, Part III by his sister Helen Gant (Mabel Wolfe), and Part IV is narrated through the eyes of the author himself. The novella captures what it was like growing up in Altamont, and the excitement of traveling by train to experience the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. It also discusses the tragedy of loss when young Grover comes down with Typhoid. You will

find a full copy of *The Lost Boy* as it appeared in Thomas Wolfe's *The Hills Beyond* starting on page 655 of this pdf:

http://www.survivorlibrary.com/library/thomas_wolfe_reader_1962.pdf

Part IV of *The Lost Boy* takes place thirty years after the death of his brother Grover. The narrator is not specifically named in the chapter in which Eugene Gant (Thomas Wolfe) returns to St. Louis to find the house the family lived in during the World's Fair. He hoped to better remember the past, especially times spent in the house and with his family and his brother Grover. He finds the house and discovers all is not as he remembered. Major themes evident in Part IV include memory, change with the passage of time, and family.

Characters and Setting:

Characters in Part IV include the narrator searching for memories of his childhood in St. Louis, a random man on street who is a resident of St. Louis who is trying to help the narrator with directions, and Mrs. Bell, a young woman currently living in the house that had once been the 1904 boardinghouse. Grover Gant is remembered at age 12 as he tries to teach his younger brother how to say his name. The scene takes place on the street, in front of the house, and inside, as the narrator is invited in by Mrs. Bell to look around and discover what he remembers.

Procedures

***These may be changed for the needs of the class. We know many of your lessons may be taught digitally and online, therefore we developed this lesson plan to be as adaptable as possible. Any classroom handouts referenced below are made fully available to students as pdfs, via our website <http://wolfememorial.com/for-teachers/student-writing-contest/>. Also at that link, in the "Ideas for Student Consideration" document, students can find associated links to supplemental information, including the Prezi presentation.**

Preparation:

1. Pull up, or have the students pull up the slide program on Prezi of Thomas Wolfe and *The Lost Boy*. This will support the activities described below.

<https://prezi.com/view/Tx18PNrXY6ecZKWtmDE3/>

The photos display Thomas Wolfe at various ages, the Wolfe family, the St. Louis World's Fair, his brother Grover Cleveland Wolfe, a picture of the boardinghouse in St. Louis, and assorted photos for the memory activity. The background image of the presentation is an image of the St. Louis Fairgrounds.

2. Have students download and pull up the following documents from the Wolfe Memorial Website (or print and pass out if in the classroom):

<http://wolfememorial.com/for-teachers/student-writing-contest/>

- Thomas Wolfe's short story "The Lost Boy part IV"
- Lost Boy part IV Vocabulary
- Ideas for Student Consideration
- Writing Competition Guidelines and Instructions 2020
- Submission Form 2020

Step 1: Using the Prezi, introduce Thomas Wolfe and family and the story of their World's Fair experience, and have students take notes to help them better understand *The Lost Boy*

- A. Refer to the photographs of Thomas Wolfe (there are three at different ages of his life) and ask who within the class knows about 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.
- B. Display Wolfe family photos and describe that he was raised by his mother Julia Wolfe, a businesswoman who was eager to make money for the family. Further explain that this led Julia Wolfe to take her family to St. Louis in 1904, where she occupied a large Victorian-style home she dubbed "The North Carolina" to rent to people travelling to the World's Fair.
- C. Go over highlights of the Fair with associated images to explain the excitement and importance of World's Fairs.
- D. To set up Part IV of the novella, note the death of Grover from Typhoid fever, which he contracted on the Fair Grounds by eating a contaminated pear. He died in the front room of the St. Louis boardinghouse. In grief, the family left the city early to return to the mountains of Asheville to bury Grover. At just four years old, Thomas remembered portions of this visit to St. Louis and his brother Grover, but years later he wanted to return to the house to see if he could remember more.

Optional Extension: Refer to pages under the "History" tab of our webpage at www.wolfememorial.com for more specific information about Thomas Wolfe, his family, his work, and the history of Asheville. For more imagery from the fair, you can visit <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2019/09/the-1904-st-louis-worlds-fair-photos/597658/>

Step 2: Have students pull up "The Lost Boy part IV" and the accompanying "Lost Boy part IV Vocabulary," and allow students 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 at the beginning of this lesson plan for support. Remind students that because Thomas Wolfe wrote heavily about his own life, students can look back at their notes on Thomas Wolfe’s life to help draw connections. Ask students what parallels they noticed between the short story and Wolfe’s own experiences, and have them write their thoughts/answers. If in the classroom, you may write the class’ thoughts on a chalk/white/smartboard for reference as well, or if teaching remotely have students also take individual notes on other answers. Summarize the story by considering the setting, plot, characters, and theme.

Step 4: Activity/Discussion 1 – What is Eugene looking for?

Ask the class what Eugene is looking for at the beginning of the scene. Are his memories of where things were located correct? Why is he having such a hard time finding what he was looking for? Ask the class if they have been somewhere that has changed from how they once remembered it- give examples.

Step 5: Activity/Discussion 2 – The Memory Game

Option 1: Memory Master- Flip to last section of the Prezi (E). Students stare at Memory Master photo 1 for sixty seconds. After the time is up, quiz the students about what they can remember. For example, how many boys or girls are in the picture? Are there trees? What was in the background/foreground? Keep a list of what they specifically remember. Then show them the image again and see what they correctly and falsely remembered. Repeat for Memory Master photo 2.

Photo 1: from the Missouri Historical Society, photo featuring fair goers with the Lincoln Museum and the Observation/Ferris Wheel in the background

Photo 2: from Pack Memorial Library, image of Pack Square looking north, circa 1880s

Option 2- to be done if teaching in the classroom: Divide students into two teams. One team leaves the room while the other team changes things around in the room– maybe it is the placement of furniture, lamps, rugs, etc. When the second team returns to the room, they find the changes and get a point for each. Then the first team leaves the room while team two takes a turn at making changes. The team with the highest score wins the game.

Wrap up by focusing on how tricky it can be to remember details, and why going back to St. Louis helped Wolfe remember more about the brother he lost.

Step 6: Assignment.

Pass out or have students pull up the “Writing Competition Guidelines and Instructions 2020” and “Ideas for Student Consideration.” Go over the writing assignment before wrapping up the lesson. Using Part IV of *The Lost Boy* as an example, have students write a short story based on one (or more) of the prompts they were given (included in “Ideas for Student Consideration”) and by following the guidelines listed on the “Writing Competition Guidelines and Instructions 2020” page. Please let students know they must also fill out, sign, and submit the “Submission Form 2020” with their stories for any work to be considered.