

Lesson Plan

“Gulliver The Story of a Tall Man”

Overview

This lesson plan will provide teachers with extra information about Thomas Wolfe, some analysis of his short story “Gulliver: The Story of a Tall Man,” and an overview of Gulliver’s Travels by Jonathan Swift. The information here will provide material for discussion about these stories in class.

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 autobiographical.
3. Students will be able to summarize Gulliver's adventure in Lilliput and make connections between this story and “Gulliver: The Story of a Tall Man.”

Suitable for classes in grades 4-12.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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.

Procedures

Procedures may be adapted for the needs of the class.

Total time: 1-1.5 hours

Preparation:

- Print the Wolfe's short story and chapter one of Gulliver's Travels, and Ideas for Student Consideration.
- Make a list of connections between Wolfe's short story and chapter one of Gulliver's Travels.

Step 1: Discuss Thomas Wolfe and his work.

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.

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 "Gulliver: The Story of a Tall Man" which was published by Scribner's Magazine in July 1935. The story would also become a part of his first book of short stories *From Death to Morning* (1935).

Step 2: Pass around copies of "Gulliver: The Story of a Tall Man." Give students about 10 minutes to begin to read through Wolfe's story. Ask students to explain what they read. Does the story have an overall theme? If so, what is it?

Note that the story is particularly about being different. Inform the class of the average man's height during Wolfe's lifetime (5' 9"). Thomas Wolfe was (6' 6"). Discuss things that would be difficult for a person of Wolfe's size (beds, clothing, transportation, etc.).

Adaptation/Extension: Go over vocabulary words on worksheet given to students.

Step 3: Go over chapter one of Gulliver's Travels. Discuss the story's beginnings as a satire of similar stories written by explorers telling fantastical (and wildly embellished) stories of their experiences in far-away lands.

Commonly known as Gulliver's Travels, Jonathan Swift's 1726 book was originally titled "Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships. It has never been out of print. Despite the depth of the book, it is often classified as a children's story because of the popularity of part one, the Lilliput section. One can still buy books entitled Gulliver's Travels which contain only parts of the Lilliput voyage. The original work actually contained four parts. The major themes of the book included;

- A satirical view of the state of European government, and of petty differences between religions.
- An inquiry into whether men are inherently corrupt or whether they become corrupted.
- A restatement of the older "ancients versus moderns" controversy previously addressed by Swift in his writings.

Gulliver embarks on four distinct journeys, each of which begins with a shipwreck and ends with either a daring escape or a congenial decision that it is time for Gulliver to leave. The societies Gulliver comes into contact with help him, and the reader, to examine his own culture more closely. Gulliver is presented as a commonplace "everyman", lacking higher education, he possesses a remarkable natural gift for language. He quickly becomes fluent in the native tongue of any strange land in which he finds himself. Gulliver is presented as being gullible; he believes what he is told, never perceives deeper meanings, is an honest man, and expects others to be honest. This makes for fun and irony in the story. Each part of the book is the reverse of the preceding part, for example; Gulliver is big then small, wise then ignorant. The countries he describes are each different, simple versus scientific, and the forms of government are either worse or better than England's.

Step 5: Compare the two stories. As a class, make connections between Wolfe and Gulliver's Travels (Wolfe and Gulliver's towering height over others, height as a spectacle for others, height seen as handy by others, etc.), and write students' answers on a dry-erase board or typing them up on a word document. Note how Wolfe's writings are based more closely on personal experience (though he is often known to add elements of fantasy), and uses Gulliver to help illustrate his story. Using the answers on the board, reiterate Wolfe's love of using mythology to help illustrate his stories.

Step 6: Ask class what they think of as a "normal" or "typical" person.

Step 7: Ask class what it means for a person to be "different." Have students name the title of a classic story or classic character with a "different" or unique trait (good or bad) on a dry erase board. Ex: The Ugly Duckling, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, various superheroes, ancient myths, etc. Discuss how the lives of the characters in these stories are defined by their unique trait.

Alternate Step: Instead of writing down the name of a story or character, ask class to draw picture.

Step 8: Pass out the “Ideas for Students” sheets to class. Reiterate/discuss further how Wolfe took from his own life when writing short stories and novels. Have the class think of things that make them or someone they know "different" or unique, and create a character based on these differences and write a short description of this character/their differences. Go over writing assignment before wrapping up lesson.

Writing Assignment: Have students write short story based on criteria outlined “Ideas for Students.”