

Let's Read! 2022
Foundational lesson: Character Analysis
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Topic: Poetry, writing, language, and storytelling (Maybe we should shorten this topic/theme to just Language; any other ideas?)

Essential Questions: How do vignettes explore characters?
How does setting impact characters and their choices?

Time: 125 Minutes (3 lessons 45+45+45 minutes; can be done selectively)

Materials: Post-its, markers, board or wall, writing paper, pens, strips of paper

Chapter focus: Mango Says Goodbye (and chapters introducing other characters)

Language focus: Writing; Character analysis; Vignettes (a short piece of writing, describing a single instance or episode in life)

LESSON ONE: Focus on the theme of Home

Language focus: Introducing vignettes, introducing key concepts and vocabulary

EQ: What shapes our collective relationship to home?

Time: 45 Minutes

Engage (15 Min)

Visual Mapping

Step 1:

Split students into 4 groups. Give several prompts on the topic of home. Groups use post-its to write the first words or phrases that come to mind. One word or phrase per post-it.

- 1) *When you think of your home in Bosnia and Herzegovina, what word(s) or phrase(s) come to mind?*
- 2) *When you think of a home outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina, what word(s) or phrase(s) come to mind?*

Step 2:

Divide the board in two columns (or use two flipchart papers on a wall). Mark the two columns/papers as 1 for question 1) and 2 for question 2). Groups stick their post-its in the two columns/papers according to their responses to the questions. First, visually map responses to question 1). The whole group is invited to “map” and categorize the words and phrases into related groups. Multiple arrangements can be made to reach a final visual map. Once grouped, students can provide a name for each category of a group of responses if desired, or consider how some responses might bridge or connect between categories. Repeat with question 2). *What new insights do the two maps give you? Where do the maps connect/differ? What do the maps tell us about our perceptions on this topic?*

Share Information (10 Min)

What is a vignette?

Students are invited to read the chapter Mango Says Goodbye. Since *The House on Mango Street*, including Mango Says Goodbye, is written as a collection of vignettes, brainstorm with students what a “vignette” could mean. Ask students to think about how the last and other chapters were written and how they differ from a short story or a novel. Write the elements of a vignette on the board, making the point that a vignette is like a snapshot or photo of a life, such as *A vignette is short and describes a specific scene or event with evocative language. Vignettes lack a plot diagram (a clear beginning, middle, end, conflict, climax, and resolution). Vignettes span a very short “story time” (minutes or hours). Vignettes provide fewer specifics about a character (e.g., age, name, appearance, clothing, race, ethnicity). We may learn some of these details, but we won’t learn them in the same depth as in a short story or novel. Vignettes focus on a character’s thoughts and feelings over a short span of time.* (Jennie Weng, <https://teachersandwritersmagazine.org/>).

Invite students to agree on a definition of a vignette, or provide them with a definition: *A vignette is a brief and evocative description, account, or episode.*

Explore (15 Min)

Snowball into Vignette creation

Continue engaging the students in the topic. *The last chapter leaves us with the impression that Esperanza eventually does say goodbye to Mango Street. In fact, nearly all the characters in the book dream of escaping. Looking at your visual maps, would you say that some of you feel similarly/differently? Where would you go? What would be different? The three sisters tell Esperanza, “When you leave you must remember to come back for the others.” What do they mean by this?*

Invite students to write a one-sentence response to the prompt: How would you choose to remain faithful to a place you wanted or needed to leave? *Please put your response on a half sheet of paper.* Once students are finished, have them bring their paper and stand in a circle. Invite them to “ball up” their writing and toss it into the center of the circle. Then, each student grabs a ball and opens it (if they get their paper it doesn’t matter). Then invite students to read out loud the writing as a choral vignette. If time, invite students to put the papers in a specific order or group together certain writing to create a vignette of their own and have individuals or groups share their vignettes with each other.

Reflect (5 Min)

Ask each student to reflect on the previous activities (visual mapping and snowball into vignettes) and think of one word or short phrase that captures their opinion and completes the phrase “_____, it made me think.” The phrase can describe something that intrigued or inspired them during class or something that was thought provoking or memorable. After they’ve had a moment to choose, students go around the circle and say their word or words, followed by the phrase “It made me think.” Demonstrate with an example, such as *Life choices, it made me think.* Write some of the more powerful phrases on the board.

LESSON TWO: Focus on Character

Language focus: Character analysis, writing skills

EQ: What shapes a character’s relationship to home?

Time: 45 Min

Engage (5 Min)

Review Information (depending on whether Lesson One was used)

Write the word vignette on the board and draw a line dividing the board into two columns. Invite students to form two teams and to stand in two lines facing the board and the two columns. Review vignettes by inviting students to write down as many words and/or phrases that they can think of in relation to a vignette. The teams will write on the board in a relay for 1 or 2 minutes. They stop as soon as you shout stop. Review what was written and ask students to discuss their choices. Finally, write the definition of a vignette on the board (e.g. *A vignette is a brief and evocative description, account, or episode.*)

If you skipped the previous activities and are introducing vignettes for the first time, view Lesson One, segment Share Information.

Explore (35 Min)

Role on the Wall (10 Min)

Step 1:

Students are invited to choose a character from the book (Meme, Marin, Alicia, Lucy, Rachel, Ruthie, Earl, Mamacita, Sally, Minerva, Esperanza, Mama, Papa).

Draw a large outline of a head/shoulders or human figure on the board; leave plenty of space to write inside and outside the figure. Ask students to copy the image in their notebooks or on a piece of paper. *This figure is the character you have just chosen. First, let's think about what the character is surrounded by. Write all of that in the space outside the figure (demonstrate on the board). Reflect on the characters' actions and others' actions that impacted the character; feel free to choose quotes from the book.*

Step 2:

Once finished, students **work in pairs** (they can turn to the person next to them) and share about their characters' outside influences.

Step 3:

Now, let's think about how the character is feeling or was feeling at a certain point in the book. Write all of that in the space inside the figure; feel free to choose quotes from the book. Once again, when they finish, students work in pairs and share with a partner by connecting the outer actions to the inner feelings.

Writing in Role (15 Min)

Still in the role of the character they have chosen, students are invited to write a vignette in the form of a letter. *Ten years after the events in the book, imagine that that character is writing a short letter to a person in Mango Street. They may still be there or they may have already left. It's your choice. As the character, write the letter considering all of your senses; where you are, how you feel, what you see, whom you are with, what you smell or hear.*

The following prompts can help you in the writing process: (at this point, you can use a multi-sensory approach to scaffold the students' writing process, if needed)

Dear...

I feel...

When I look outside my window, I see...

In the mornings, I smell...

In the evenings, I hear...

The street is...

I can't wait to...

Yours,

Students write for 10 minutes.

Share and Reflect (10 Min)

Once finished, students are invited to share their letters with their partner. It could happen that they wrote to characters that were somehow connected or related in the book, which would make it more fun and interesting since it would seem as though they were writing to each other. Students could further explore that interaction.

Ask each student to reflect on the poems.

Finally, the letters are posted on the wall for the whole group to engage in a gallery walk and read them. Students are invited to consider what stands out as they read across the collection of letters. *Where do you see connections between the desire/hope of a single character? Where do you see differences? What shapes the characters' relationship to their home?*

LESSON THREE: Focus on Individual Choices

Language focus: Reviewing/Introducing vignettes, writing skills

EQ: What shapes our individual relationship to home?

Time: 60 Min

Engage (5 Min)

Revisit conclusions from the previous activities (bring maps from visual mapping and poster from the word relay on vignettes). Comment on potential changed perspectives on the theme of home and belonging. Write the shared definition of a vignette on the board (e.g. *A vignette is a brief and evocative description, account, or episode.*)

If you skipped the previous activities and are introducing vignettes for the first time, view Lesson One, segment Share Information.

Explore (35 Min)

Individual vignettes (15 Min)

You will write your own vignettes, drawing on details from your daily lives related to your thoughts and feelings about home, belonging, staying or leaving. You can write it as a letter, (just like you practiced before,) a journal entry or even a poem. It can be about something that has already happened or about something that you hope will happen in the future. Before they start, write the words HOME, BELONGING, STAYING, LEAVING (or some of the words from the visual mapping activity) on the board. Ask students to think about how these words make them feel. What is the first thing that comes to mind when they think of home or belonging? (Encourage them to think about their maps).

Before they organize their vignettes, encourage students to engage in free writing, to jot down emotions, thoughts, and short descriptions of events, describing their surroundings in those moments; the sounds, textures, colors, etc. Students write for 10 minutes.

Share (10 Min)

Once finished, split students into 3 groups. In their groups, students first share their vignettes with each other. *What vignette elements do you recognize? What does the vignette tell you about the author? (How) Is the vignette similar or different from your own vignette?*

Collective Vignettes/Frozen Pictures (10 Min)

Step 1:

Introduce embodiment by generating a list of the ways the students could embody their vignettes. *Since vignettes are like snapshots or photos, we should focus on the most poignant element or aspect.* Provide an example by embodying an episode or chapter from the book, such as how Esperanza felt about dancing in “Chanclas”.

Step 2:

In their groups, students are then asked to embody their vignette (to make a statue) and to look for connections between their embodiments (statues) as a shared picture. For example, one student wrote about how much they enjoy their garden at home while another wrote about leaving by plane. The first student could embody sitting happily on the ground (in the garden) and the other could wave goodbye from the top of the desk (the plane). Encourage students to use the space and objects, when needed. (Optional: You can ask students to take a picture of their shared image on one of their phones so that they can view it together).

While their vignettes may be about different episodes in their lives, the overall topic of home and belonging will connect their embodied vignettes into a single image where the whole group can explore individual and collective emotions, experiences, and dreams.

Share (10)

Groups embody their vignettes one by one. Ask questions about each of the three embodied vignettes. *What do you see? What do you think is happening? What about the bodies that you see makes you say that? What are the individual persons telling us? What makes you say that? What is the whole image telling us?*

Reflect (10 Min)

- *What conclusions can you draw from our work today? How do you think setting impacts characters and their choices? How does the form of a vignette impact our reading experience? Where do you see that in *The House on Mango Street*?*
- *What did we learn about our similar/different expectations, dreams, reactions to events? What about the characters? Where do you see that in *The House on Mango Street*? How does that discovery help us in understanding our individual and collective experiences?*