

Justification Paper

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User Assumptions

This unit is intended for students in a traditional English 10 (American Literature) course. It is expected that there would be a wide range of abilities among the students in this course, as well as students with various levels of personal motivation. Modified instruction and assessments will be provided for students with needs as noted on 504 plans and IEPs, and a variety of instructional strategies will be used to accommodate learners with different strengths and weaknesses.

This unit meets the following Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2: 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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.4a: Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Graphic Descriptions

Typography Graphic

This graphic takes advantage of elements of typography to create word art, and it will be used as part of the introduction to the unit of instruction. Each of the words and phrases on this graphic is related in some way to the novel and/or the concepts that students will learn throughout the unit. "Roaring 20s" is designed with a black, decorative font with a yellow glow and calls to mind a marquee sign and the glamour of Hollywood. "Color" is typed in a simple, sans serif font but is repeated multiple times in various colors to show how different colors can provide different moods and emotions for the viewer. "Image" was created with a traditional serif font,

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but each letter is in a different color to illustrate the effort a person might put into appearances. I also gave it a drop shadow to show that a person may be trying to hide things...things "lurking in the shadows." Finally, "Revenge" was designed using a decorative font, with the emphasis placed on the pointed "V" in the word. The "V" is red with a "paint splatter" effect below its tip to bring to mind dripping blood. This was done to create a mood that would call to mind anger and a desire to exact revenge.

Unit Graphic Organizer

This graphic organizer will also be used as an overview for the unit during the first lesson, and students will use it to take notes as they progress throughout the unit. The design of this graphic focused on the importance of organization as a key element in instructional messages. The major organizational elements used in this graphic organizer are chunking and visual cues, as well as, to a lesser extent, hierarchy. I wanted the students to easily see and differentiate between the four major concepts covered in this unit: plot development, vocabulary, figurative language, and symbolism. Therefore, I chunked the information according to these four topics, which follows the research that suggests that working memory can handle three to five chunks of information (Lohr, 2008, p. 125). I used contrast to draw attention to the name of the topic in each section; these words are printed in a different font with the use of italics and a drop shadow. I used the visual cues of bullet points to help organize the subtopics within each category, which provides "both a big picture and detail at the same time" (Lohr, 2008, p. 126). Additionally, the use of bullet points mimics the typical form of hierarchy used in books and in electronic presentations (Lohr, 2008, p. 143). Initially, I wanted to use white space to show the chunks of information; however, I felt that adding the line between topics was more appealing visually and added another organizational element (Lohr, 2008, p. 123). The concept of hierarchy also came into play with my decision to organize the information in a top-to-bottom manner. While the first topic on the list is no more "important" than the last, the graphic organizer is designed for students from a Western culture, who will naturally read the information from the top to the bottom (Lohr, 2008, p. 121).

Plot Diagram

The Plot Diagram graphic will be used to help students review the elements of a story and will provide an organizational strategy for them to use as they take notes and complete an assignment. As I created this particular image, I tried to keep some general principles in mind. First, one may notice that the display shape here is a rectangle, with the width being longer than the height. The rectangular shape better accommodates the triangular shape of the diagram than a square display shape would. The two darker lines with arrowheads are used to make connections between the parts of the plot (such as between the exposition and the climax) as well as to indicate direction (Lohr, 2008). The overall shape of the plot diagram resembles that of a triangle (though it doesn't technically have a base). According to Lohr (2008), this shape can help to organize and unify information. At the top of the triangle is the part of the plot known as the "climax." I used a rectangle around this label because squares and rectangles can be used to contain information and focus attention. That is also why I put the rectangle around the "Plot Diagram" label.

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Venn Diagram Overview Graphic

This graphic will be used at the beginning of the second lesson in the unit, and it will help the students to see how symbolism, characters, and imagery can all work together to help develop a theme in a novel. I used the ACE (analyze, create, evaluate) process while creating this image, and I eventually decided to use the Venn Diagram with three circles to show how the elements of Symbolism, Characters and Character Development, and Imagery all contribute to the fourth literary element of Theme. Additionally, these elements *can* overlap each other (such as some imagery also being used as a symbol), which this diagram helps to show. I wrote the title of the book and unit in the same style that I used for the words “Roaring 1920s” in the Typography graphic. The book is set in New York in the 1920s, and I wanted to portray the glitzy, glamorous mood of that time period. The quote underneath the title are the opening lines of the novel, and students will be asked to respond to the lines in a journal entry. The class will also discuss these lines prior to starting the full unit of study. For the items within the Venn Diagram, the eyes are an important symbol in the book. I listed four of the main characters in that circle, and I used a different font for each character in an effort to illustrate the characters’ personalities. Finally, the image of a big white house on the water is an important one in the novel. All three of these elements work together to help illustrate the theme, “Don’t judge people based on appearances.” Since I couldn’t fit that entire statement in the center of the Venn Diagram, I chose to use the clip art image of the judge’s gavel there instead, and use the arrow to connect that space with the rectangle outside the diagram.

Symbolism

This Symbolism graphic will be used to help students understand the general concept, and it will also be used to guide them in discussing a specific symbol from the novel (the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg). While designing this graphic, the primary focus was on the use of color and depth. I decided to use a colored background with black text instead of trying to use various colors within the text itself. According to Lohr, “colors that fall in the middle of the color spectrum — yellow, green, white, and blue — are associated with greater acuity” (2008, p. 267). Because of this, I chose to use a light green background with black text. Ideally, this provides a good amount of contrast and allows the students to easily focus on the important text. Additionally, the two example symbols (the flag and the heart) use a good amount of red. Since red and green fall directly opposite each other on the color wheel, they are considered complementary (Lohr, 2008, p. 269); the colors work well together, and the red pops off of the green background. When deciding which symbol to use from the book, I chose to use this particular symbol because the colors used by Fitzgerald in the description (blue eyes, yellow spectacles) are, themselves, symbolic. As Lohr (2008) points out on page 270, colors hold symbolic meaning, and this is one of the concepts that the students will be studying in this unit. I also included the element of depth in this graphic through the use of scale and dimension. The words “Symbolism,” “Examples,” and “Examples From *The Great Gatsby*,” are printed in a larger, bolder font than the other text on the page. This helps to provide organizational cues for the learner. Additionally, these words, along with the examples images of the flag and the heart, have been given a drop shadow, providing dimension and weight to these elements.

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Word Meanings

This graphic will be used to help explain the difference between the “denotation” and the “connotation” of a word. This image uses the three characteristics of effective visuals identified by Lohr’s (2008, p. 102) text that facilitate the cognitive task of **selection**: concentrated, concise, and concrete. By using the gray box at the top of the image, I have emphasized the topic of “word meanings,” which shows that the image is “concentrated.” The image is also “concise;” a brief definition is given for each of the important words (denotation and connotation), and the same pair of words is used to give examples of each, as well. No extraneous information is included here. Finally, the image is “concrete.” The title words are separated visually from the content of the image, and the concepts of denotation and connotation are separated by a thick line. Additionally, the CARP Principles (contrast, alignment, repetition, and proximity) were used to help the viewer focus on the important elements of the graphic. To address the concept of figure-ground, I did play around with various background colors for the image. However, I decided to keep the background (ground) white so that it would not be distracting to the viewer who is reading the text of the graphic (figure).

Importance of Color

This graphic will be used to show students that the use of color in images is important, and they will also discuss the ways in which color can be symbolic. While creating this graphic, I actually tried to focus on incorporating whitespace into the overall image. I chose to keep the background of this image white so that it would not compete with the colors used in the individual images that students will be looking at; I wanted the eye to be drawn to the colored words and pictures on the graphic. I left small amounts of space between the title of the graphic, the first sentence of text/information, and the second chunk of information. By putting these elements closer together, I think that the students will know to keep reading until they see the first question, yet it also clarifies the text (Lohr, 2008, p. 272). The first picture also comes just a little bit below the question so that students know where to look in order to answer that question. However, I purposely left extra white space between the first picture and the second question on the page. I want the viewer to pause while looking at the first picture instead of immediately having the eye drawn down to the next line of text. The additional white space at the bottom of the graphic provides symmetry on the page (Lohr, 2008, p. 275), and again gives the opportunity for the viewer to pause while looking at the image. This is also why I chose to include limited text in this graphic; I simply want the viewers to focus on the two pictures so that they can see how the use of color can affect the way a person responds to an image.

Simile

This graphic will be used to help students understand simile, which is one type of figurative language. While creating this graphic, I focused on using the CARP (Contrast, Alignment, Repetition, and Proximity) Principles. I used Contrast by making the font of the words “simile,” “definition,” and “example” is different than the font used for the definition and the example sentence. Additionally, I tried to leave a good amount of white space in the image to contrast with the black lettering of the text. Within the definition and the example, I chose to use blue and

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red with specific words in order to call attention to the key elements of the concept of simile. Alignment is used to show the relationship between elements of the graphic (Lohr 2008). In this image, the words “Definition” and Example” are aligned on the left side, and the actual definition and example sentence are also aligned on their left edges. Additionally, both the word “Simile” at the top of the page and the photo example are aligned in the middle of the page. Repetition in this graphic is subtle, but it is there. The words “Simile,” “Definition,” and “Example” are written in the same font, underlined, and with the first letter of each word typed in a larger type size. Additionally, the definition and the example sentence are written in the same font and size. Proximity is also used in this image. There is extra white space between the definition and the example, whereas the photo that illustrates the example is placed just beneath the example sentence.

Design Process

This website was designed to house this particular instructional unit. It was created with the assumption that a learner would be participating in a classroom setting with an instructor to guide and provide additional information; however, all of the necessary term explanations, instructional activities, and assessments for this unit can be found within these web pages. Each web page was designed using Weebly and its design features.

My main goal when designing this website was to make something that is easy to navigate. As Williams and Tollett (2006) explain, "Good web site design begins with a good site plan" (p. 136). When learners first access the site, I wanted them to come to a simple landing page that would give a very basic overview of the unit. I also felt that it was important to make sure that students would easily be able to know how to navigate from one lesson to the next. So I began with a simple "Home" page, and then I labeled the navigation bar clearly with links to "Lesson One," "Lesson Two," etc. Most of the lessons are actually broken into multiple pages to help the learners feel less overwhelmed. For example, students begin "Lesson One" on the first page, and then they can use the navigation button at the bottom of the page to move on to the next part of the lesson. Unfortunately, I did notice that "Lesson One" is no longer highlighted on the navigation bar once the user clicks to the next page of the lesson, and there doesn't seem to be a way to change this within the Weebly website. In an effort to avoid any confusion this may cause, I changed the text of the navigation buttons so that they remind students which lesson they are currently working on. For example, instead of a button at the bottom of the page that simply says "Go on to next part of the lesson," the navigation button now says "Go on to next part of Lesson One."

I wanted the entire site to have a unified look and feel, so I relied heavily on the principle of repetition. I created a simple title image that served as the header on every page of the site. (The title of each lesson was added to the header on the appropriate lesson pages.) Additionally, each element of the web pages looks the same: the section titles use a particular font, size, and color;

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the explanatory texts use the same font and font size; a downloadable copy follows each image; and a dividing line is used to separate parts of each lesson.

I also wanted to make all of the unit files easily accessible for both the learners and the instructor who might be using this web site. Learners are able to download each file as they progress throughout the unit, when it makes sense to do so. I created a separate page, however, for the instructor, where she can access all of the lesson plans and the unit of instruction outline in one location. Additionally, this page has a link to another web page that offers the ability to download every file needed for the unit, arranged and organized by lesson.

The instructional unit itself was designed following sound educational practices. Each lesson begins with an activity to spark the learners' interest as well as review and activate prior knowledge. Each graphic used in the unit provides learners with information that addresses one or more of the Common Core Standards being taught, and many of the graphics also incorporate a learning activity that students will complete alone or with a partner or small group. Instruction is somewhat circular in nature, as various concepts are discussed multiple times throughout the unit and overlap with other concepts and assessments, so students are given multiple opportunities to learn the material and demonstrate what they have learned. The instructor will use both informal and formal assessments throughout the unit, which will give ample opportunity to provide students with valuable feedback.

References

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