

Sherwood A nderson

“Death in the Woods”

Overview

Students will begin by telling stories that they know well from their past or that have been handed down in their families. They will learn about point of view and voice, then apply what they have learned by writing the story they have already told, but this time from the point of view of someone else, such as a grandparent or a sibling. They will then discuss the qualities that good storytellers have in common.

As a transition to the Anderson story, they will be asked to listen to the story aloud. For this, teachers have the option of reading the story to the class or allowing students to view the dramatic reading of the work featured on *The Ohio Reading Road Trip* DVD/videocassette.

Anderson wrote his story in five sections, so activities for each section determine the pacing for this part of the lesson. Students explore the concepts of plot, setting, character development, making inferences, and drawing conclusions as they read and think about the text. Extension activities provide cross-curricular opportunities in the areas of social studies, drama, and art, as well as creative and non-fiction writing.

Getting Started

Lesson Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Write a story based on a real-life event that uses a first-person narrator other than the student in order to demonstrate understanding of point of view
- Create charts that demonstrate an understanding of the concepts of voice and plot
- Write a newspaper story that includes the main idea and details of the story “Death in the Woods”
- Write short essays that explain aspects of storytelling, making inferences, point of view, and the kinds of questions newspaper stories should include

Note: This story contains adult themes and situations. It is best suited for grade 8.

Grade Level Indicators

In meeting the above lesson objectives, students will:

- A** Use the text to demonstrate reading comprehension strategies, including the ability to compare and contrast and make inferences
- D** Identify and explain the writer’s technique in describing characters, characters’ interactions and conflicts, and how these interactions and conflicts affect the plot
- F** Identify the main and minor events of the plot, explain how each incident leads to the next, and identify aspects of plot, such as pace, subplots, parallel episodes, and climax
- G** Generate writing ideas through discussions with others and from printed material, and keep a list of writing ideas
- K** Produce informal writings (e.g. journals, notes, and poems) for various purposes
- M** Compare and contrast important details about a topic using different sources of information, including books, magazines, newspapers, and



Information about Sherwood Anderson’s life and writing can be found at <http://www.ohioreadingroadtrip.org/anderson.html>

Time Required: 10 class periods or more

Five class periods (approximately 45 minutes each) are suggested for reading and skill-building activities, with an additional five class periods devoted to working with the story. For planning purposes, the estimated time required for each activity is shown here.

Activity	Pacing	Activity	Pacing
Storytelling	15 minutes	Section I	25 minutes
A Different Point of View	10 minutes	Section II	10 minutes
One Story, Two Points of View	30 minutes	Making Inferences	45 minutes
Qualities of Good Storytellers	15 minutes	Section III	10 minutes
Preparing to Write	20 minutes	Understanding How Writers	
Visualizing and Hearing		Use Plot	30 minutes
Characters	25 minutes	Section IV	20 minutes
A Story in the Voice of		Section V	10 minutes
Someone Else	25 minutes	Memoir Writing	30 minutes
Listening to Students’ Stories	10 minutes	What Makes It Newsworthy?	30 minutes
Listening to			
“Death In The Woods”	30 minutes		
Omniscient and Limited			
Omniscient Narration	25 minutes		

online resources

Reading Strategies

Determining Importance in a Text, Synthesizing Information, Activating Prior Knowledge

Materials Needed

- Chalkboard or whiteboard
- Student copies of the Short Fiction Glossary (found on page 196 of this Instructor's Guide)
- Materials/equipment for presenting One Story, Two Points of View (access to website, overhead projector with transparency, or handouts)
- Student copies of the story "Death in the Woods"

Additional Resources

- (optional) Access to computers with word processing and printing capability
- (optional) Internet access
- (optional) The *Ohio Reading Road Trip* Instructional DVD/ videocassette, television monitor, DVD player or VCR

Prepare to Learn

Storytelling

Ask students to think about stories they know from their own or their family's experience. Some examples might be how their grandparents met or things their parents did when they were teenagers. Allow students to spend a few minutes reflecting on the story they would most like to tell.

Ask two or three students to share their stories with the class. Ask them to stand in the front of the room so that everyone can hear the story clearly. Or, in groups of three or four students, ask each member of the group to tell his or her story to the others.

A Different Point of View

Ask one of the students who told a story in the Storytelling activity to go to the board and make a list of all the people in his or her story. Ask the class to choose one of the people from the list. Ask the student at the board to talk about the ways in which the story would be different if that person told it instead and then to state possible reasons for these differences. (*Possible answer: A student's younger sibling may not be able to remember all of the details of the story.*)



Additional instruction for point of view can be found in the Additional Activities section on page 187.

Pre-Assessment: Voice

This quick activity will enable you to assess students' readiness for upcoming instruction. Make sure that students turn in their work when they are finished.

On a separate piece of paper, ask students to draw a vertical line and a horizontal line that intersect. In the upper left quadrant (#1), ask them to write the word "voice." Then ask them to write "definition" in the quadrant below (#2), but remind them that we are not talking about the voice that comes out of our throats, but rather the writer's or character's voice. Next, in the upper right quadrant (#3), ask them to write "examples." Finally, in the quadrant below (#4), ask them to write "anti-examples"—things that are not examples of voice. Now ask students to complete the three quadrants they have labeled.



Homework

Tell students they do not have to write their stories yet, but they do have to act as storytellers and make two lists for homework. Have each student

- Tell his or her own story to a friend or family member
- Make a list of the people in this story
- Make a separate list of the people who are not in the story but who know the story, perhaps because they have heard it told many times

One Story, Two Points of View

Before reading the following stories to the class, tell them that both are written from the point of view of a first-person ("I") narrator, and both stories are about the same event. Ask students to observe differences between the stories as they listen.



You can find printable versions of both stories at <http://www.ohioreadingroadtrip.org/anderson.html>

Jamie's story:

"My grandparents met at a high school dance in the 1940s. My grandmother said that at first, she didn't think she would like my grandfather because he wasn't a very good dancer. Then she realized that he was only nervous. So she said that she didn't want to dance anymore and they sat down. I guess that's when they realized they had a lot in common. My grandfather said that he remembers the way she laughed at his jokes that night."

Grandpa's story:

"I met my wife at the Spring Fling Dance in April of 1946. We both went to Central High School but I didn't know her before the dance because I was a senior and she was a junior. We didn't have any classes together. Anyway, I saw her standing with her friends. She had a smile that lit up the whole gymnasium. I asked her to dance, but the music was loud. What I really wanted to do was talk to her, so I was glad when she said that she was tired of dancing. It turns out that she and I both had many brothers and sisters, and we liked all the same movies. She was easy to talk to. I'll never forget the way she threw her head back and laughed at my jokes. I knew she meant it and that she wasn't just laughing to be polite. That was the night I started to fall in love with her."

Ask students these questions:

- What details do the stories have in common?
- Which story is more specific? Why?
- What are some reasons why Jamie's story does not contain all of the details that Grandpa's story has?
- In what other ways is point of view different if the person telling the story is actually in the story and not just someone who has heard the story told many times?

Ask students to write a paragraph to answer the following questions:

- Which is the story you would rather hear? Why?
- Which of the two stories is the better one? How do you define "better" in this case?

Qualities of Good Storytellers

On the board, write "Qualities of Good Storytellers." Ask students to scan their paragraphs, looking for things that drew them into the story. Write main ideas on the board. Then ask them to think about other stories they know and how their tellers also help to "pull" listeners into the stories. Add these qualities to the list on the board as well. (*Possible student answers include visual description, suspense, humor, use of details, etc.*)

Homework

- Ask students to choose a story to tell. It can be the story already shared with the class/small group, or it can be a different story.
- Ask students to jot down a list of ideas, create an outline, or write a paragraph of details from the story in order to jog their memories. They should not yet write their stories, as more directions will follow.

If students cannot immediately think of a story, ask them to spend some time talking to parents, other adults, or friends about a story that is often told when friends or family get together. Students should take notes about the people and events in the story, and they should bring those notes to class.

Preparing to Write

Tell students that they will spend time today and during the next class period writing the story that they have come to class prepared to write.

Revisit the concept of *voice*. This is a term writers use to make characters or people sound different from one another. No two characters speak exactly the same, just as no two people speak exactly the same. Some examples of voice are expressions that one character may use frequently, the degree of formality a character uses when speaking, and regionalisms (terms understood by all people in a particular place, but not in use everywhere). For example, Grandpa uses the word “gymnasium” though Jamie is more likely to call the same place the “gym.” Regionalisms include “pop” versus “soda”; it is the same product, but where we live often determines which word we use.

Our time period also shapes voice. For example, a young person in the 1960s or 1970s might have described something they liked as “groovy.” In the 1980s, it might have been “gnarly” or “rad.” A young person in the 1990s might have called it “sweet.”

Visualizing and Hearing Characters

Tell students that they will now prepare to write the stories they told someone else for homework. However, instead of writing from their own point of view, ask them to assume the point of view of another person who was part of the event. In their writing, students will let this other person do the talking from a first-person point of view.

Since their stories will be written in the voice of another person, have students spend time doing one or both of the following activities to prepare to write:

- Draw a picture of the person who will be the story’s narrator. Be as detailed as possible. Encourage students to bring in photographs of the narrator, if possible, to help them capture details about that person in their drawing.
- Make a list of expressions and regionalisms that are used frequently by the person who will be the narrator of the story. Encourage students to “hear” the person’s voice in their minds as they gather their thoughts and begin writing.

A Story in the Voice of Someone Else

Give students enough time to write their stories (from the point of view of the person they selected earlier) in their notebooks or on computers.

Listening to Students’ Stories

Ask 2–3 student volunteers to read their stories aloud. As a class, discuss the process of writing from the point of view of another person. How was this experience different from telling the story from their own point of view?

Listening to “Death in the Woods”

Students will observe and listen to a reading of Anderson’s story. The goal of this activity is to help students experience the narrator’s voice.

If you prefer to read the story yourself, prepare by reading the story aloud a few times beforehand. This familiarity with the story will enable you to



TECHNOLOGY LINK

A dramatic reading of the story appears on the Ohio Reading Road Trip Instructional DVD/videocassette. This runs approximately 30 minutes. More information about Sherwood Anderson and his life can be found there as well.

give a confident reading and speak in the narrator's voice more consistently. It will also give you an accurate estimate of the time needed to read the story to the class.

Advice for Teachers Who Plan to Read the Story Themselves:

- Plan to finish the reading in a single session. Tell students that this will take about thirty minutes.
- Do not distribute copies of the story to students prior to the reading.
- Resist letting students take turns reading the passages from the story. One reader for the entire story will maintain consistency.
- The story is divided into five sections. In order to help students pace themselves as they listen, tell them that there will be five sections and that you will say the number of each one as you encounter it.

Advice to Teachers Who Plan to Show the DVD/Videocassette Version of the Story:

- Tell students that the reading will last about thirty minutes.
- Do not turn the lights off while you show the reading.
- Ask students to record observations about the story in their notebooks as they watch.

You might want to focus their observations around this question:

“What surprises you about the story?”

Omniscient and Limited Omniscient Narration

The word *omniscient* means “knowing all things.” *Omniscient narration* occurs in a story that is told from the point of view of someone who knows everything that has happened and will happen in a story. This narrator also knows the minds of the characters and their feelings at any given time.

Limited omniscient narration occurs in a story that is told from the point of view of someone who knows many (but not all) things about events that occurred or will occur in the story. This narrator also knows the thoughts and feelings of some (but not all) of the characters.

Differentiated Learning: Additional Instruction

If some students are not sure what *limited omniscient narration* and *omniscient narration* mean, then ask them to think about the narrators in stories and books they have already read. Ask them to answer this question about each work: Was the narrator able to know all things about all characters or only some things about some characters?

Ask students questions such as these:

- What aspects of this story seem to be omniscient narration? (*Possible student answers: The boy knows details of events that occurred in the woman's life before he was born; he knows the history of the Grimes family.*)
- What aspects prove that the narrator does not know everything about the events, proving that he is a limited omniscient narrator? (*Possible student answers: He doesn't seem to know the woman's name; he isn't sure if the woman's father knew that he had a daughter; he doesn't seem to know how the woman feels about her life.*)



Further instruction on narration can be found in the Relevant Literary Terms section on page 185.

Section I

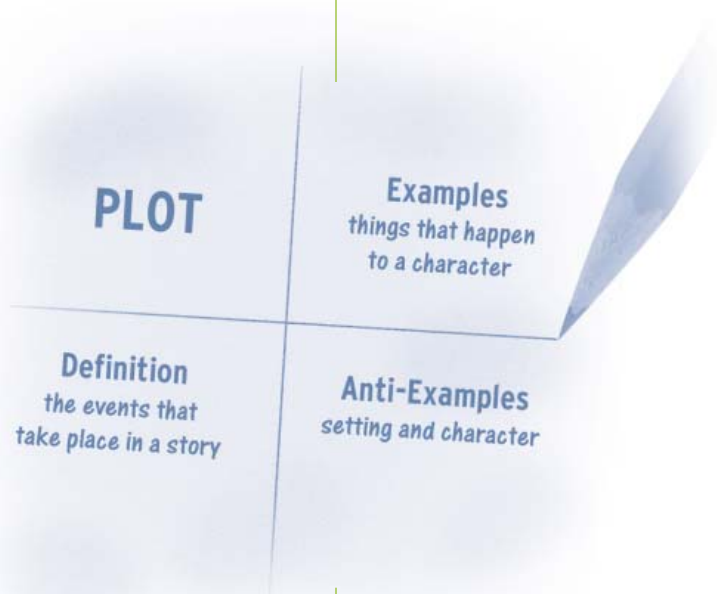
Hand out copies of the entire story and ask students to read Section I silently. This should take about 10 minutes. As they read, ask students to look for specific passages that prove that the narrator is not an omniscient narrator. After all students have finished reading, ask them to look for details from the story to support their answers to these questions:

- How old is the speaker at the time he tells his story to us, the readers? How old was he when the story took place?
- Why did the woman travel to town? How do you think she felt as she traveled?
- Why did the townspeople dislike Jake Grimes, the woman's husband?
- How might Jake Grimes' reputation have affected his wife's interactions with others? Why?
- Where do you think the story takes place? In what time period do you think it takes place? Explain your answers.
- What are some of the problems the woman faced?

Pre-Assessment: Plot

This quick activity will enable you to assess students' readiness for upcoming instruction. Make sure that students turn in their work when they are finished.

On a separate sheet of paper, ask each student to create another chart that has one vertical line and one horizontal line that intersect (like the one they made earlier in the lesson). In the upper left quadrant (#1), ask them to write the word "plot." Then ask them to write "definition" in the quadrant below (#2). Next, in the upper right quadrant (#3), ask them to write "examples." Finally, in the quadrant below (#4), ask them to write "anti-examples," which are things that are not examples of plot. Now ask students to complete the three quadrants they have labeled.



Section II

Students can read Section II silently or take turns reading aloud.

Making Inferences

Explain that an *inference* is a conclusion that is drawn by observation or by using facts. For example, if you saw someone smiling and humming as he walked down the street, you might make an inference that he is having a really good day. Another way of saying this is that you *infer* that the smiling, humming man is having a really good day. You make this connection based on what you see.



Section I

defiance
formerly
gaunt
livery-barn
loaf
slight
thresh

Definitions for these words can be found in the Short Fiction Glossary on page 196.



Section II

scheme

The definition for this word can be found in the Short Fiction Glossary on page 196.

Differentiated Learning: Additional Instruction

If pre-assessment reveals that students are encountering the term “infer” for the first time, or if you feel additional reinforcement would be beneficial, then ask, “Has anyone ever made an inference about you based on an observation that was correct? Has anyone ever inferred something about you that was not correct?” Discuss reasons why people might make incorrect inferences, and remind students that it is important for them to be alert and careful when they make inferences, both about fictional characters and about real people.

Ask the students:

- What can you infer about the woman in the story?
- What can you infer about the narrator?

Have the students explain their inferences using details that the narrator provides about himself and about the woman. They should use these examples after the word “because” in their inferences. For example: “I think the woman was really lonely *because* she didn’t have anyone to talk to her,” or “The narrator seemed sad for the woman *because* he talked about all of the difficulties that she faced in keeping the animals fed.”

Ask students to be aware of how they make inferences as they answer these questions:

- Why was it difficult for Jake Grimes’ business to succeed?
- How would you describe the woman’s relationship with her husband and son?
- What did the woman’s husband and son expect her to provide for them? What did they offer in return?
- Why did the butcher treat the woman kindly on this particular trip to town?
- In what ways would the woman’s life be affected if she couldn’t feed the animals?
- In what ways was the woman’s married life like her life at the German’s farm? In what ways was it different?

Section III

Have students read Section III.

Understanding How Writers Use Plot

Plot is the series of events that take place in a story. Not all events are equally important, but many events build on each other. These events usually build to a high point, which is the most exciting or important action in the story. This high point is called the *climax*. Writers often use *suspense* to help build plots. Suspense is a feeling of uncertainty or confusion that occurs when readers are concerned for characters’ safety because they believe something violent or frightening is about to happen.



Section III

adjoining
clearing
forage
instinct
laden
primitive

Definitions for these words can be found in the Short Fiction Glossary on page 196.

Differentiated Learning: Additional Instruction

If students would benefit from more discussion of suspense, then ask, “What is the most suspenseful part of a horror movie?” (Generally, suspense occurs when we know that something is going to happen, but we don’t know what it will be.)

Reading Strategy: Synthesizing Information

Ask, “How is plot used in this story?” Have the students scan Section III for:

- details in the woman’s life that the narrator shares with the reader.
- challenges that the woman faced on the day she died (a snowstorm, the heavy sack of food, etc.).
- descriptions of the dogs’ strange behavior as the woman died.

(Possible student answers include: The events in the story show how hard it was for the woman to keep the animals fed, and this makes the reader feel concern for her; suspense is used at the end of this section when the reader isn’t sure what the dogs are going to do.)

Ask students to discuss how the narrator develops suspense at the end of this section.

Gauge student comprehension by asking students:

- How does the narrator explain the dogs’ behavior?
- What similar experience did the narrator have with dogs? How was his experience different?
- What is the high point of the action in the story so far? Why?
- What could the author have done to make this section even more suspenseful?

Section IV

Have students read Section IV. As they read, ask them to keep in mind the high point of the plot they identified in Section III.

Gauge reading comprehension by asking students:

- Is the climax of the story identified in Section III still the climax of the story, or has something else replaced it?
- How did the townspeople find out about the woman’s death?
- What were some of the things the hunter, the other men, and the narrator were afraid of as they entered the woods that day?
- Why did the narrator and his brother want to join the men in the woods?
- Why do you think no one recognized the woman at first?
- How do the events in this section use suspense to keep the reader interested?
- Why do you think no women joined the men as they followed the hunter to the place where he found the dead woman?



More instruction on plot can be found in the Additional Activities section on page 187.



Section IV

blacksmith
conspicuous
dray
marshal
uncanny
worry

Definitions for these words can be found in the Short Fiction Glossary on page 196.

Section V

Give students time to read Section V silently, or have them take turns reading aloud. Ask students to think about any conclusions that they (as readers) or the narrator (as the storyteller) make as the story ends.

Ask students to look for details from the story to support their answers.

- What did the narrator need to do in order to tell this story?
- Why do you think “the town was against” the husband and son?
- How do you think the narrator felt when he stood near the woman’s abandoned house and the dogs ran out?

What Makes It Newsworthy?

This activity gives students the experience of writing from a journalist’s point of view. It also gives students the opportunity to read newspaper articles from the daily paper, either the printed or online version.

Ask students to rewrite one of the stories from this lesson as a newspaper article. They can choose from “Death in the Woods,” Jamie’s story, Grandpa’s story, the story that they wrote or told, or a story that a classmate wrote or told. Give the students these directions:

1. Find the most newsworthy part of the story—the thing that would interest the general public. For instance, Grandpa’s story would be newsworthy if it was his and Grandma’s fiftieth wedding anniversary, if one or both of them were famous, or if there had been a fire at the high school shortly after the dance ended. Ask students to look at local newspapers (online or in the library) to find out what types of information are considered newsworthy.
2. Determine the headline for the story. This is a short title that summarizes the newsworthy aspects of the article. For example, two possible headlines for “Death in the Woods” might be “Unknown Woman Found Dead” or “Grimes Men Sought for Questioning.”
3. Use a journalist’s point of view—third-person narration that relies on facts, not opinions. Keep in mind that making inferences can be dangerous because our observations are not always correct. Remember the inference that the smiling, humming man was having a good day? Perhaps he was acting that way because he thought he was on camera, or maybe what sounded like humming was actually his moaning in pain because someone had just stepped on his foot, and the smile was actually a scowl.
4. Present the most important information first, using the “Six W’s”: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How.

Assessment

Have students complete the reading comprehension test found on the following page.



Section V

alibi
articulate
destined

Definitions for these words can be found in the Short Fiction Glossary on page 196.



A list of links to the Internet sites of many Ohio newspapers can be found at <http://www.ohioreadingroadtrip.org/ohio-newspapers.html>

Extension Activities that connect this lesson to nonfiction and creative writing, social studies, art, and drama can be found at <http://www.ohioreadingroadtrip.org/anderson.html>



Answers to the matching portion of the test:

- | | | |
|------|------|------|
| 1. b | 4. e | 7. d |
| 2. f | 5. i | 8. a |
| 3. h | 6. c | 9. g |

Name _____ Date _____

Sherwood Anderson

“Death in the Woods”

Directions: Ask students to answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper. Remind them to use complete sentences.

1. In your own words, explain as many aspects of good storytelling as you can.
2. Define the following terms, then compare and contrast them: *making inferences* and *drawing conclusions*.
3. What six questions do newspaper stories try to answer?
4. Explain how a story told by a narrator with limited omniscience is different from a story told by a narrator who is omniscient.

Directions: Match each term with its definition below.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. ___ point of view | a. The most important or exciting event in a story |
| 2. ___ voice | b. The position from which a situation is observed |
| 3. ___ regionalism | c. A conclusion that is drawn by observation or by using facts |
| 4. ___ omniscient narration | d. The series of events that take place in a story |
| 5. ___ limited omniscient narration | e. A story told from the point of view of someone who knows all things |
| 6. ___ inference | f. A way of speaking that makes people or characters sound different from one another |
| 7. ___ plot | g. A feeling of uncertainty or confusion that occurs when readers are concerned for the safety of the characters because they feel something frightening or violent is about to happen |
| 8. ___ climax | h. A term that is understood by everyone in a particular place but is not in use everywhere |
| 9. ___ suspense | i. A story told from the point of view of someone who knows many things but not all things |