



HUMANITIES AND THE SUNSHINE STATE

TEACHING FLORIDA'S CLIMATES

In partnership with the Florida Humanities Council

JUNE 24-28, 2019 UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

“TAKING IT BACK TO THE CLASSROOM” ACTION PLANS

Teacher(s): Gina Elia

Grade(s): 9th

Subject(s): English as a Second Language (ESL) Literature and Grammar

Idea 1 – Essential Questions About Our Environment

Organize lesson plans by a few essential questions, rather than by texts. The texts then become examples, a means by which students address the question, narratives that help them respond to the initial question pose as well as open up new questions and possibilities.

Examples of possible essential questions:

- How is human life in Florida influenced by the state's natural environment, and vice versa? How does where we live impact how we live?
- What is your responsibility to yourself, to your natural environment, and to your community? How do these responsibilities intersect?
- Why should we study different cultures?
- How do beliefs and values of individuals affect society?

Learning Goals/Standards:

Organizing ESL lessons according to essential questions and using texts to explore those questions, rather than organizing by text alone, will get students in the habit of thinking about the interconnectedness of ideas across disciplines and the importance of looking to many different sources when trying to solve a problem. Organizing units by questions also opens up the possibility for the teacher to incorporate many kinds of media into the curriculum--fiction and non-fiction, film and video as well as text--to exemplify this process of finding the connections between superficially unrelated ideas--pairing a short story in Lauren Groff's *Florida* with an article on the concept of the anthropocene, for example. It also demonstrates the continuing significance of studying fiction, as well as narrative and language more generally, by automatically placing the students' study within the context of exploring questions that are vital to understanding themselves, their community, and their world.

Idea 2 – Human/Environment Interaction in Florida

A unit plan on the interaction of people and their environment in Florida, as well as how that interaction and relationship is changing, using short stories from Lauren Groff's *Florida* as a

primary text for exploring that theme. Florida's environment is described in rich detail in Lauren Groff's stories, and forms an inextricable part of how her characters think about the world. Even her characters who are sojourning in Europe can't get away from the influence of Florida's environment--the heat, the swamp, the alligators--on how they think about and frame the world around them. It is thus a rich text for exploring this relationship, and a unit plan set on achieving this goal would pick a few short stories and tie in specific details in the stories with relevant "texts" (articles, films, web videos, etc.) on Florida's environment and the relationship of Florida's inhabitants and their environment.

Some specific ideas of individual lessons/days in the unit:

- "The Midnight Zone" is about dark things that happen in the forest, though the woman takes pains to point out that it isn't the forest's fault; "the forest is made of light"--pair with texts on history of interpreting forests as strange, liminal places, why we might represent them that way, how Groff's story is/is not trying to showcase forests in a different light, and the long-term effects in real-life of how we culturally understand forests and represent them in our texts
- "Snake Stories" and "At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners"--how snakes are represented therein, pair with texts on cultural representations and understandings of snakes, similar questions--how does our cultural understanding of snakes and reptiles, in lit and otherwise, influence our relationship with them, and what are the consequences?

Essential questions: How is human life in Florida influenced by the state's natural environment, and vice versa? How does where we live impact how we live?

Learning Goals/Standards:

A lot--some examples are "Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text" and "Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas." See paragraph under "Idea 1" for detailed rationale behind a unit like this.

Idea 3 – Oral Histories and Intercultural Exchange

Have my American students studying Chinese and my ESL students interview each other about their experiences growing up in the U.S. versus whatever country the ESL student hails from respectively.

Learning Goals/Standards:

Use oral histories as a living way to bring narratives alive to students and demonstrate to them how narratives have so much power to instill greater understanding and empathy in us for experiences we do not have personal knowledge of. They also are a powerful way to understand the "human," "subjective" experience of something in a way that news and political narratives cannot give us. This would also serve the corollary goal of connecting my American and international students with one another, which is an ongoing issue at my school.

Idea 4 – Big/Little

A “big-little”-style extracurricular program connecting international and American students (thank you Gary! :))

Learning Goals/Standards:

Like the above idea, connects American and international students with one another and tries to inculcate an overall more integrated community at my school.