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“Everything for the English Classroom!”

Free Lesson of the Month July, 2010

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Please feel free to share this lesson with all your colleagues. We hope that they find these classroom-proven lessons to be as useful as you do.

This month’s Free Lesson comes from the [Great American Short Stories Activity Pack](#) and features Charlotte Perkins’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.” This lesson includes two journaling activities and one point of view activity.

Please feel free to browse through our complete list of [Past Free Lessons](#) or subscribe to the [Prestwick House Footnotes Newsletter](#).

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“The Yellow Wallpaper”

Journaling

Objective: Using journaling as a means of self-expression

Activity

The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is writing in secret because her husband believes that writing threatens her health. In reality, writing your thoughts in a journal can relieve stress and contribute to a healthier mental outlook.

Journaling is more than writing entries in a diary to keep track of daily events, although it may include that. Journaling is more about recording how you respond to those events. It may be said that Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” in response to events in her own life. She suffered severe depression and anxiety and was forced to submit to the Victorian rest cure, which consisted of immobility and isolation. Her short story illustrates that such a treatment can have the opposite effect; it can cause a person’s mental health to deteriorate, and in this story, it causes the narrator to lose her sanity.

Write a journal entry in response to one of the following incidents from your own life:

- the last time you won something; a game, a prize, first chair in band class, etc.
- your most recent bad or good grade
- a time when you were sick
- a loss; as in the death of a loved one, a broken friendship, or a move

While journaling, first recount the event and then describe how it made you feel and how long that feeling lasted. Think about what the event may have taught you about the world or about yourself.

Note to the Teacher: If students need more options for topics, you can add to the list. Some students may be uncomfortable journaling about a personal event. In this situation, you could give them the option of creating a journal entry based on a fictional event.

Name: _____

Date: _____

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“The Yellow Wallpaper”

Point of View

Objective: Understanding how point of view affects a story

Activity

Gilman employs first-person point of view to narrate the story. Since the story is a character study of a woman descending into madness, the first-person narration allows the reader to enter into her deteriorating mind. The reader knows the protagonist's motivation, sympathizes with her, and becomes afraid both for her and with her. As she begins to envision things in the wallpaper, the line between reality and fantasy blur for her and for readers. The first-person narration heightens the anxiety until the climax, when the reader realizes that the protagonist is indeed insane.

How would the story change if Gilman used a different point of view? If she had told the story from John's or Jennie's perspective, would it lose the impact she achieves by inhabiting the protagonist's mind?

Choose a passage from the story, and rewrite it from either John's or Jennie's point of view. If the passage does not directly involve either character, you may write it as if the character is observing the action. Be sure your revision reflects the personality of the character and his or her relationship to the protagonist. After you've finished, decide whether the change in perspective changed the story. Be prepared to share your opinion in a class discussion.