



Grammar, the Gateway to Language Manipulation

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
English I, English II

Keywords: (style, grammar, syntax, writing, crafting writing, language manipulation)

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: The purpose of this unit is to teach the fundamental basics of grammar and to demonstrate how students and teachers, through masterful examples, have been manipulated through style and may in turn manipulate through a written text. Students will understand how professional writers use grammar as a tool in aiding their manipulation of the language. Students will also in turn practice and apply those same techniques in their own writing. Once students become conscious of how they are influenced to feel and see as the author does, they in turn will practice these same techniques of manipulation and style in their own writing to influence others. Once these elements of the text are revealed to the students—once the unconscious is made conscious – they will in turn see the relevance of grammar. Instead of teaching grammar in isolation, this unit emphasizes the importance of treating grammar like a tool in order to develop style and cohesiveness in a piece of writing. All of the texts chosen for study are engaging texts for teenage minds, all grammatical principles covered are clearly laid out in each text, and all elements of this unit will support the Common Core state standards.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming school year to 120 students in English II.

I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.

Teaching Style as a Gateway to Learning Grammar

Melissa Mitchell

Introduction

In the past few years of my teaching experience I have often struggled to find a solution for one of the most difficult problems a teacher has to solve: How do I teach grammar to my students, and how can I show them that it matters? After much consideration and frustration on the matter I attempted to put myself in my students' shoes. What caused me to form a love for the English language and to appreciate grammar when I was their age? Like most of my students who struggle with a particular aspect of my class, it's not until they reach an "ah-hah" moment that things begin to click and all that was once meaningless and random bits of useless information all of a sudden become vitally important and relevant. This was the troublesome part, how to get my students to reach the point where they would say "Ah-hah! This makes sense! Of course this matters!"

Is it fantastical to believe that my students might actually acquire an appreciation for grammar? I do not believe it is fantastical at all! I believe it's possible, because I remember how I was when I was the same age as my students. Once I tapped into my own past experiences and blended them with my present experiences, I began to grasp a single concept which I believe maybe one solution to this difficult problem. I believe that one of the ways in which we can teach grammar effectively is by teaching its relevance to style. The unit I have created, "Teaching Style as a Gateway to Learning Grammar," will provide practical ways in which grammar is vital to creating quality writing and establishing a writer's style. My purpose for this unit is to show how teaching grammar in isolation alone will not result in quality writing from our students. We must show them how learning proper grammar and syntax can be used as a tool for manipulating their style and identifying another writer's style as well.

My own "ah-hah" moment took place at the age of sixteen, during my first year of college, when I was sitting in my first British Lit class. The professor had assigned *Jane Eyre* – a book I misjudged at first as being dull and grueling. While sitting in class one day, I cracked open the cover and began flipping through the pages. I landed on one particular page somewhere in the middle and read the following lines:

Because, he said, "I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you - especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous channel, and two hundred miles or so of land some broad between us, I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapped; and then I've a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. As for you, – you'd forget me."ⁱ

After reading those lines, I for the first time began to see the relevance of grammar. I began to see how the colon was used to extend the long-winded thoughts of Mr. Rochester – the spewing out of his aching heart; the vital importance of the em-dash for dramatic pause; and the emotions which may be evoked from the use of both complex and simple sentences in combination. For the first time I felt the emotion being poured out by Mr. Rochester through complex sentences, and then the dismissal of his worst fear with an abrupt ending with a simple sentence. Were these intentional decisions made by Charlotte Brontë? Without a doubt, my answer is, yes!

Brontë knew what she was doing. She knew how to manipulate the language to formulate her style and impact her reader's emotions – and it was her knowledge of grammar and syntax that enabled her to do so. The same ways in which grammar became practical and valuable to me as a teenager, I believe would be helpful for other teenage students. My goal for this unit is that they would learn grammar and produce quality writing by understanding how the masters of the language themselves were able to produce such texts as the one shown above.

Vertical Alignment

Another aspect of teaching grammar which we must consider is vertical alignment. We do not want our students to simply master what is appropriate for their grade level, but challenge them to be prepared for the next level of their educational experience. My ultimate goal in regards to vertical alignment is to challenge and prepare our students to the point that they make a comfortable transition into a college or university once they leave the high school. I want us to not only see our students improve the quantity of their writing, but I want to see their writing become quality as well. We have to ask ourselves, are our students prepared to produce quality literary texts at the college level?

If our goals are to have students learn grammar in such a way that they may become masters of the language, then it would make sense for them to learn from the masters themselves. I want this unit to teach students how grammar may become a tool for implementing and composing quality writing. Before a student receives an acceptance letter from their desired university, they will need to impress members of the board with their college application essays. I do not want our students to be denied a quality education or their preferred program of choice because they were not prepared in high school to simply write a quality letter.

Basic Demographics and Class description

The school where I teach is located in a suburban neighborhood and attended by a combination of urban and suburban children. The student body population is at about 1,750 students. Approximately 62% of that population is comprised of minority students, and about 59% of the student body is considered economically disadvantaged. According to *U.S. News*, approximately 80% of our school's student population is

proficient in English. This particular high school also has a college readiness index of 32.7,ⁱⁱ a number which is calculated based upon the amount of AP exam participation rate of the school (55% in this case) and then multiplied by .25; this number is then added to the quality-adjusted participation rate (the percentage of students who passed the exam – in this case 25% of the school’s whole 12th grade population) and then multiplied by .75. This website also indicated that the student-to-teacher ratio is 19:1, which means that most class sizes are not too overwhelming, but any larger and instruction will become more burdensome.ⁱⁱⁱ

The particular class I teach is 10th grade English. I teach an interesting combination of IB MYP (International Bachelorette Middle Years Program) and remedial standard level classes. Due to the nature of teaching in an IB MYP program (a magnet program which has an international focus), most of my classes are very diverse. About 60% of my IB classes are comprised of minority students (Hispanic, Asian, African, etc.) Most of these children come from middle class or high-income homes where a value for education is communicated and instilled in them. These students also come from different countries and cultures, which creates an environment that embraces multiple cultural experiences and diverse cultural perspectives; but not necessarily diverse economically. Currently, only about 20% of the IB MYP students I teach are considered to live at the poverty level. In contrast, in my remedial standard level classes, the majority of the students come from either middle class or low-income homes where other priorities, such as working night jobs to supplement household income, tend to come before education. It is not uncommon for nearly 25% of these students to drop out of school over the course of a semester or to fail the course for a third or fourth time. Most of the students in my remedial standard class are repeating English II for a second or third time or did so poorly in English I that they need extra attention in English II.

Literature

The list of literature for this unit’s study will be comprised of short stories only. The short stories in this unit encompass a wide range of styles, themes, cultures, and writers. These texts are not only useful as prime examples of each specific lesson’s objectives for grammar and syntax, but they meet the 10th grade’s world literature standard as well. The five short stories which I’ve chosen to use are *Hills like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway, *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* by Ambrose Bierce, *Shooting an Elephant* by George Orwell, *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allen Poe, and *A Good Man is Hard to Find* by Flannery O’Connor. The first piece, *Hills like White Elephants* will be the text I use to study simple sentences. We’ll look at the purpose of simple sentences; how limited communication sometimes is the most effective for particular styles in writing. The second text we’ll look at is Ambrose Bierce’s *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*. This particular text will be used to discuss compound sentences and to what advantage it is to create writing that employs a heavy amount of compound sentences vs. short quick simple sentences. When teaching about the craft of the

complex sentence, we'll read George Orwell's piece, *Shooting an Elephant*. Orwell's use of complex sentences and long, detailed descriptions also has its purposes. After discussing sentence structure, we'll study the uses of punctuation and how writers use it as a way to craft their writing. Edgar Allen Poe's story, *The Tell-Tale Heart* for example, contains a high amount of em-dashes and semicolons, both of which are vital to his style in telling the story from a stream-of-consciousness perspective. Finally, in Flannery O'Conner's *A Good Man is Hard to Find* there are a scarce few lines that contain exclamation marks and ellipses (a contrast between the overly vocal children and the adults who lack the ability to finish sentences).

Teaching Strategies

The purpose of this unit is to teach the fundamental basics of grammar and to demonstrate how students and teachers, through masterful examples, have been manipulated through style and may in turn manipulate through a written text. Once students become conscious of how they are influenced to feel and see as the author does, they in turn will practice these same techniques of manipulation and style in their own writing to influence others. Once these elements of the text are revealed to the students—once the unconscious is made conscious – they will hopefully in turn see the relevance of grammar in their own writing. All of the texts chosen for study are engaging texts for teenage minds, all grammatical principles covered are clearly laid out in each text, all elements of this unit will support the Common Core state standards, and all activities included are backed up with research.

Objectives/rationale

Many students do not see how important it is to learn the rules of grammar in a practical sense. While my curriculum unit will aid in meeting the common core standards outlined in L9-10.1 (demonstrating command of the conventions of standard English grammar) it will also meet the standards of RL9-10.4 and RL9-10.5, which call for students to understand the different styles an author may develop through the use of grammatical principles and to what purpose such a style develops in the first place. It is through these examples and unveiling what is typically unconscious to the reader that they will begin to see how a writer crafts the language to manipulate an audience to feel a particular way about the subjects being presented in a given piece of writing. My goal is to create a unit which outlines the principles of grammar as well as the more practical uses of it.

Beyond the more formal Common Core objectives, some goals I have for my students would be to learn the basic functions of punctuation marks and to have intelligent conversations about them. For example, a common mistake made with punctuation is when to use a colon vs. a semi-colon. I want my students to not only understand what each punctuation mark is used for, but I want them to be able to use those pieces of punctuation with confidence and use them as an asset in their writing. I also want students to be able to identify elements of the author's crafted style in such a

way that they'll be able to speak intelligently about them during a Socratic seminar or a class discussion. I also would like to keep at the forefront the idea that those same students who will be sitting in my high school English class will also be sitting in a college English class one day. My students should leave my class prepared to discuss pieces of literature and to write intelligibly at a college level.

Activities

The activities I plan on doing with my kids are a range of differentiated instructional strategies. My main goal is to implement activities that will have a lasting effect on my student's memory. In other words, the lessons and activities used will specifically target putting the rules of grammar and syntax, which I've taught them, into their long-term memory. The main purpose of this unit is to make the learning of grammar practical and effective. I don't want students to go away after a lesson and remember half of what they were taught or come back a year later having forgotten everything.

Activity 1

One of the main activities that I find works well with any content is a Socratic seminar. There are multiple benefits of a Socratic seminar. The first obvious benefit is that a Socratic seminar requires students to think critically and have a discussion about the assigned topic. The people who are the most invested into something or the most involved are the ones who get the most out of it. If the students own the discussion, if they are the ones being challenged by other students or doing the challenging, it is very unlikely that they will miss what is being said. If I stand at the front of the room lecturing about grammar while the students take notes, chances are they will miss out on half of what I say. The reason for this is because of what is being communicated. If I am doing the talking, students know that grammar is important to me, because I am the one who owns the discussion about grammar. On the other hand, if it is the students who are driving the conversation, ownership is transferred to them, investment is transferred over to them and, therefore, they are the ones learning as a result. Students also associate conversations with being social. If they are having conversations about grammar, they not only share their ideas, but also the concept that grammar can be something practical and social.^{iv}

Activity 2

Another activity which I've integrated into the unit and, for lack of a better name decided to call the *Non-exemplar activity*, strives to imitate what not to do in order to show the students the benefits of proper grammar.^v Most of us would agree that when we learn something well, it's usually as a result of making a mistake the first time around. For many of us, we tend to let our brains store the negative aspects of our lives into our long-term memory instead of all the things we do right. I believe this has

something to do with our need and instinct to survive, and anytime we make a mistake a “red flag” seems to go off in which we say, “I’m never doing that again.”

I would like to apply this same concept of learning to students who are learning grammar. What I would like for them to do is to view texts that are done poorly and recreate that same poor writing in their own work. For example, I might ask my students to write an entire paragraph written completely in simple sentences. Students will then read them aloud to the other students. They will see their fellow classmates react unfavorably and will also feel that their writing is lacking in creativity. They will then need to go back and correct their own writing by implementing forms of punctuation and varied sentence structures to transform their piece into a well-crafted text. This will also cause students to make conscious, deliberate decisions about where they place punctuation and what purpose it is serving in enhancing their own writing style.

Activity 3

Just as I had said previously that a Socratic seminar creates an environment in which the student is forced to interact and get involved, so is the interaction with a text through annotations. Many students complain about annotating a text because they don’t like to be slowed down during the process, but that is exactly what we want them to do. It goes back to my emphasis on a quality learning experience vs. a quantity one. A student may have read 10 books in a month, but may only recall 1/10 of the information from those texts. On the other hand, a student who has read one book in a month’s time and has annotated it will remember some of the most intimate details about a text and notice elements that, to the other reader, would not have been noticed. When it comes to learning an author’s style and learning the craft of quality writing, a quality study is necessary. An amateur artist can only improve a painting through studying the brush strokes of someone who is better than they are – a professional – and putting into practice those same methods. Likewise, annotating a text brings into focus the specific elements of a writer’s piece. In this particular case, students will be asked to annotate and take note of the writer’s style, craft, sentences structures, and use of punctuation. They will be asked to interact with the text and point out specific elements of grammar and how the writer uses those elements to communicate their message more effectively.

Unit Lessons

Lesson 1

Common Core Objectives:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1b Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

Texts:

1. *Hills like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway

Important concepts:

1. Simple Sentences; Independent Clauses
2. Crafting writing for intention

Activities:

1. The lesson will begin by completing an introductory journal entry. The teacher will begin by writing the following sentence on the board: *This is a simple sentence*. Each student will copy this sentence down in their notebook and will complete the following prompt to go along with it: *In a one-paragraph explanation, please, prove that the sentence, "this is a simple sentence," really is a simple sentence*. The students should be given approximately 5 minutes to complete this journal entry.
2. The teacher will then ask for 3 volunteers to give their response to the prompt. With each volunteer the teacher should guide the discussion by asking the class, "does anyone agree or disagree with this response and why?" Ultimately, the correct response should be that a simple sentence is also an independent clause that expresses a complete thought and contains a subject and a verb, the subject being "simple sentence" and the verb being "is". The teacher will underline and label the subject and circle and label the verb in the sentence for the students to see.
3. The students should then be instructed to complete the following writing assignment in their journals: *Think about something you are passionate about (favorite food, favorite game, a particular person, a particular subject in school, etc.) and write a one-paragraph description of that passion using only simple sentences*. Students should be given about 5 minutes to complete this assignment and then the teacher will ask for 3 volunteers to share their responses. As each student reads his/her paragraph comprised of only simple sentences, the students will begin to see how robotic and monotonous talking about their favorite subjects can be when they use only simple sentences.
4. The teacher will then pass out a Gary Provost excerpt called "Vary Sentence Length." The teacher should give the students about two minutes to read and process the piece before asking them the following questions:
 - a. What was the first thing you noticed about this excerpt?
 - b. What impact did the sentence length have on you as the reader?

- c. What point is Gary Provost trying to make?

The ultimate conclusion that the discussion should create is that Gary Provost is showing that the monotony of using only simple and “safe” sentences to express thought in writing will make reading dull and forgettable for the reader. If you want to impact your reader and capture their attention, you must have variety in your writing.

5. The teacher will then instruct students to take out their high lighters and pens. Each student will receive a paper copy of the short story *Hills like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway. The teacher will instruct the students to pay attention to the simple sentences – highlighting them and writing comments on any observed relationships between the story’s content and the use of simple sentences. The students should then be given approximately 10 minutes to both read and annotate the story independently. When the time is up the teacher will ask the class the following questions:
 - a. What the effect of the simple sentences in the story?
 - b. When the dialogue shifted from simple sentences to compound and complex sentences, what was happening in the conversation?
 - c. What was the effect of this shift in sentence length in relation to the conversation the characters were having?

The class discussion should lead to the conclusion that Hemingway is drawing our attention to the “unnamed problem” in the story by making the unimportant part of the conversation seem monotonous with simple sentences and the important part of the conversation full of varied sentence structures. It should also be noted that the excitement and tension of the “unnamed” problem in the conversation is brought out through the use of sentence structure as well.

6. The students will finish the lesson by returning to their one-paragraph piece constructed of only simple sentences and will need to rewrite the paragraph to give it more variety. The requirements of this final activity are that the students will need to rewrite their paragraph in the exact same order and using the exact same words, but may insert conjunctions and punctuation in order to give the paragraph more variety. Ask for a few students to share their first paragraph and their second paragraph with the class. The students will see the benefit of using a variety of sentence structures.

Example

(First write) I love Andrew. He is my soul mate. We do so many fun things together. He is my life rock. Life would be so monotonous without him. Losing him would be heartbreaking.

(second write) I love Andrew; he is my soul mate. We do so many fun things together. He is my life rock, and life would be so monotonous without him. Losing him would be heartbreaking.

Lesson 2

Common Core Objectives:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1b Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

Texts:

Shooting an Elephant by George Orwell

Important Concepts:

1. Compound sentences
2. Coordinating conjunctions
3. Crafting writing for intention

Activities:

1. The lesson will begin with the students copying the following acronym into their journals to help them remember the coordinating conjunctions: FANBOYS (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So.)
2. The teacher will begin a journal entry by writing the following sentence on the board: *I tried to speak English, and my friend tried to speak German.* Each student will copy this sentence down in their notebook and will complete the following prompt to go along with it: *In a one paragraph explanation, please, prove that the sentence, “I tried to speak English, and my friend tried to speak German” is a compound sentence.* The students should be given approximately 5 minutes to complete this journal entry.
3. The teacher will then ask for 3 volunteers to give their response to the prompt. With each volunteer the teacher should guide the discussion by asking the class, “does anyone agree or disagree with this response and why?” Ultimately, the correct response should be that “*I tried to speak English*” and “*my friend tried to speak German*” are both independent clauses joined together by a coordinate

- conjunction, and therefore, make up a compound sentence. The teacher will underline and label the subjects and verbs with the color red, the independent clauses in the color green, and the coordinate conjunction in the color purple so the students can see the structure of a compound sentence.
4. The teacher will then instruct students to take out their high lighters and pens. Each student will receive a paper copy of the short story *Shooting an Elephant* by George Orwell. The teacher will instruct the students to pay attention to the compound sentences – highlighting them and writing comments on any observed relationships between the story’s content and the use of compound sentences. The students should then be given approximately 20 minutes to both read and annotate the story independently.
 5. When the 20 minutes are finished, the students will complete a Socratic seminar in which the teacher will ask the students questions about how the compound sentence works in the piece in order to stimulate discussion from the students and come to conclusions about how Orwell uses compound sentences to craft his piece. Each student will receive a copy of the “Compound Sentences in *Shooting an Elephant*” hand out and will be able to view the complex sentences from the story in list form to help stimulate discussion. During the discussion, the teacher may refer to the “Socratic Seminar Stimulation Questions” sheet in order to facilitate the discussion.

Lesson 3

Common Core Objectives:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1b Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

Text: *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* by Ambrose Bierce

Important Concepts:

1. Complex sentences
2. Subordinators
3. Crafting writing for intention

Activities:

1. The lesson will begin with the students receive a copy of the “List of Subordinate Conjunctions” as an aid before beginning the lesson.

2. The teacher will begin a journal entry by writing the following sentence on the board: *After the students studied math, they went to the movies.* Each student will copy this sentence down in their notebook and will complete the following prompt to go along with it: *In a one-paragraph explanation, please, prove that the sentence, “After the students studied math, they went to the movies” is a complex sentence.* The students should be given approximately 5 minutes to complete this journal entry.
3. The teacher will then ask for 3 volunteers to give their response to the prompt. With each volunteer the teacher should guide the discussion by asking the class, “does anyone agree or disagree with this response and why?” Ultimately, the conclusion must be that it is a complex sentences because the sentences possess an independent clause (*they went to the movies*) linked with at least one dependent clause (*After the students studied math*) with the use of a subordinate conjunction (*After*).
4. The teacher will then instruct students to take out their high lighters and pens. Each student will receive a paper copy of the short story *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* by Ambrose Bierce. The teacher will instruct the students to pay attention to the complex sentences – highlighting them and writing comments on any observed relationships between the story’s content and the use of compound sentences. The students should then be given approximately 20 minutes to both read and annotate the story independently.
5. When the 20 minutes are finished, the students will complete a Socratic seminar in which the teacher will ask the students questions about how the complex sentence works in the piece in order to stimulate discussion from the students and come to conclusions about how Bierce uses complex sentences to craft his piece. During the discussion the teacher may refer to the “Socratic Seminar Stimulation Questions” sheet in order to facilitate the discussion.

Lesson 4

Common Core Objectives:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.2a Use a semicolon (and perhaps a conjunctive adverb) to link two or more closely related independent clauses.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Important Concepts:

1. The use of an em-dash

2. The use of a semi-colon
3. Stream of consciousness

Texts: *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allen Poe

Activities:

1. The lesson will begin with a journal prompt. The students will be asked to write a one-page response to the following: *The literary technique called “stream of consciousness” is a literary style in which the author writes exactly what they are thinking as they are thinking it. It’s a very abstract and free way of writing which Edgar Allen Poe uses when telling the Tell-Tale Heart from the narrator’s perspective. Write a one page response in which you freely write exactly what you’re thinking as you think it and record it onto the page.* Students should take about 10 minutes on this journal entry.
2. After the 10 minutes are up, ask the class if anyone know what an “em-dash” is and what it’s used for. If no one can properly explain, then tell them that it’s a punctuation mark which looks like a long dash and is used writing to show a pause in thought or sentence structure. It introduces a new phrase inserted for emphasis, definition, or explanation, and can also be used to separate two clauses. Then ask someone in the class to explain the purposes of the semi-colon. If no student gives a proper response then explain that the semi-colon is used to bring together two independent clauses and shows that it’s necessary to link the two independent clauses together. Explain to the students that these are punctuation marks that Poe uses frequently in his short story *The Tell-Tale Heart* (the em-dash 66 times and the semi-colon 16 times).
3. Each student should receive a copy of *The Tell-Tale Heart* to read. The students will be given approximately 10 minutes to read the short story independently.
4. At the end of the 10 minutes ask the class the following questions:
 - a. What impact does the use of the semi-colon and em-dash have on the text?
 - b. How would the text change if the semi-colons and em-dashes were replaced with commas and periods?
 - c. Why do you think Poe decided to tell this story in this particular way?
 - d. How does the punctuation add to the style of the text?
 - e. How does the punctuation add to the tone and mood of the text?
 - f. How does the punctuation make the narrator and his tale seem believable?
5. Just as the students had begun the lesson writing a free write using stream of consciousness perspective, have them write a second journal entry using the same prompt. For this particular entry, ask the students to use semi-colons and em-dashes to help create a more fluid and smooth style in expressing their thoughts.

Lesson 5

Common Core Objectives:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Important Concepts:

1. Using ellipses in writing
2. Using exclamation marks in writing
3. Crafting writing for intention

Texts: *A Good Man is Hard to Find* by Flannery O'Connor

Activities:

1. Begin class by having the students reflect in their journals on the following prompt for approximately 5 minutes: *So many times when we read and write we forget that it's not just the words which make sounds. Besides the words, punctuation makes sound too. Reflect in your journals about how punctuation sounds and the importance of that in crafting a writer's style. What sound does a period and a comma make? Reflect on what sounds an ellipse, an em-dash, and an exclamation mark make. How are these symbols of punctuation vitally important to a writer's craft? What do they communicate to the reader while still keeping within the principles of grammar?* After the allotted time, ask students to share with the class what their responses were to the prompt. Specifically bring out the points about what the purposes are of ellipses and exclamation marks.
2. Each student will then receive a copy of the short story *A Good Man is Hard to Find* by Flannery O'Connor. The students should then be given approximately 20 minutes to read the story. Instruct the students to highlight all exclamation marks and ellipses as they read and write comments about any observations they make about the relationship between the content and the punctuation in the margins.
3. At the end of the allotted time, students will then be arranged into a Socratic Seminar arrangement. Explain to the students that the use of the exclamation mark and ellipses is particular import to O'Connor's style (44 exclamation marks and 4 ellipses in this short story) and the Socratic seminar will discuss how she uses them to develop her style.
4. The students will then participate in a Socratic Seminar discussion about the short story and how punctuation is vital to O'Connor's style. The teacher should refer to the Socratic Seminar Stimulation Question sheet a list of questions for the *A Good Man is Hard to Find* Socratic seminar.

Lesson 6

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 9–10 here.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

Important Concepts:

1. Simple Sentences; Independent Clauses
2. Compound sentences
3. Coordinating conjunctions
4. Complex sentences
5. Subordinators
6. The use of an em-dash
7. The use of a semi-colon
8. Using ellipses in writing
9. Using exclamation marks in writing
10. Putting into practice grammatical concepts to craft and style writing

Texts:

1. *Hills like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway
2. *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* by Ambrose Bierce
3. *Shooting an Elephant* by George Orwell
4. *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allen Poe
5. *A Good Man is Hard to Find* by Flannery O’Connor.

Activities:

1. The final assessment as a part of this unit will be creating a piece of writing and putting into practice the principals of grammar which were taught in previous lessons. The students will receive the following prompt: *create either a poem (40 lines or more) or a short story (1 ½ pages or more) in which you model your writing style after one of the author’s we’ve read in the unit. For example, if you were to write a poem and model the style after Edgar Allen Poe, you would*

integrate many em-dashes and semi-colons while crafting your piece. While you may write about any subject of your choice, the subject you chose to write about may also determine what style you chose to write in. For example, if you wanted to write a short story in which the main character is at odds with another character, you may choose to use many simple sentences in the dialogue just as Hemingway does in his piece.

2. The students should be given approximately 20 minutes to write these pieces and then split into small reading groups. Within these groups the students will share their pieces with their group members and give and receive feedback about each group member's pieces.
3. The students will then go to the computer lab and have the opportunity to type up their piece. They will also be asked to use the Readability calculator online in order to improve sophistication in their writing style. They will be able to copy and paste their piece into the Readability calculator and see if they are at an appropriate grade level of sophistication in their writing.

Resources for Teachers/ Students

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<http://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/north-carolina/districts/charlotte-mecklenburg-schools/north-mecklenburg-high-14571>.

This source was an easy website to follow and a reliable source for demographic information on my school.

"Gary Provost ~ The Writer's Writer." *Garyprovost*. October 31, 2013.
http://www.garyprovost.com/_i_100_ways_to_improve_your_writing__proven_professional_techniques_for_writing__109049.htm

This was a great resource for one of my grammar assignments. There is one particular section, which I used for one of my lessons, that illustrates the monotony of simple sentences. It provided the perfect example to show my students what not to do when writing.

"Readability Index Calculator." *Standards Schmandards*. October 31, 2013.
<http://www.standards-schmandards.com/exhibits/rix/index.php>.

This particular website provided a piece of technology for my students that will help them produce more quality grade-level-appropriate writing pieces.

Bacon, Nora. *The Well-Crafted Sentence*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009.

This is an easy to follow and brilliant book which lays out the various elements of grammar and its relationship to developing an author's writing style.

Gallagher, Kelly. *Deeper Reading*. Portland, Main: Stenhouse Publishers, 2004.

This easy-to-read and convenient book helps outline for teachers some of the best ways to engage students during reading to ensure that they get the most out of their reading.

Gallagher, Kelly. *Write Like This*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2011.

This book, yet another book by Kelly Gallagher, is also typical of his books – easy to read and convenient for teachers – and it outlines multiple strategies for teachers to use in order to guide students to becoming better writers.

Harber, Jean. 1979. "Syntactic Complexity". *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. 12 (7): 437-443.

This scholarly article gives some background knowledge about text complexity and how it's measured. Harber argues that it's not just word amount and word length alone which should be calculated during readability tests – which determine lexile scores – but that the syntactical elements must be considered as well.

This is a great online resource for one of the texts we'll be studying during the unit.

Honegger, Mark. *English Grammar for Writing*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005.

This book was particular instrumental in helping me form a stronger foundation for understanding grammar. Many times I understood the "what" of grammar but not necessarily "how" or "why" or able to give a solid explanation. I feel more confident now in my ability to teach grammar after reading this.

Morse, Robert. "Education: The Ranking Formula." *U.S. News*. October 31, 2013.
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This was a helpful resource in explain to me how the college readiness index was formulated in the first place. I wanted to know what determines that a child is ready for college according to statistics.

Appendix II

List of Subordinate Conjunctions

After	When
Because	Whether
If only	As though
Since	If
Till	Rather than
Where	Though
Although	Whenever
Before	While
In order that	
So that	
Unless	
Whereas	
As	
Even if	
Now that	
Than	
Until	
Wherever	
As if	
Even though	
Once provided	
That	

Socratic Seminar Stimulation Questions

For *Shooting an Elephant*

1. How can the use of a difference coordinating conjunction alter the relationship between the two independent clauses? (Useful for any sentence)
2. What is implied by the use of the coordinating conjunction in regards to the overall meaning of the sentence? (Useful for any sentence)
3. At the end of the story, during the elephant's death, Orwell uses a heavy amount of compound sentences containing the coordinator "but." What impact does it have on the writing and what effect does it have on the reading?
4. Some coordinators work to either compare or contrast the two independent clauses being presented, in the sentence, "They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching" how would a comparing coordinator work differently than the one which is contrasting?

For *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* by Ambrose Bierce

1. How does the format of the following complex sentence "the arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective" help emphasize his views on hangings?
2. Why do you think Bierce made the following sentence complex instead of breaking it up into smaller simple sentences: "a sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as 'support,' that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest--a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body"?
3. How does the use of the complex sentence help personify Death in the following sentences: "Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him"?
4. Why do you think Bierce linked the dependent clause "immeasurably distant or nearby" to the independent clause "he wondered what it was" in following sentence: "He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or nearby--it seemed both"? What's the effect of the arrangement of the sentence on the meaning of the text?
5. How does the arrangement of the following sentence emphasize the tone: "As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant"?

For *A Good man is Hard to Find* by Flannery O'Connor

1. In what ways do ellipses and exclamation marks work differently in a piece of writing? (ellipses stand for what is not said and exclamation marks emphasize what is said)
2. With which characters does O'Connor use the most exclamation marks during their dialogue? Why do you think this is significant? (the children and the grandmother)
3. Observe the relationships between the dialogue which ends with ellipses and the dialogue which follows. In every case, someone is cut short of what they would like to say by someone else. What messages does O'Connor present to us through these relationships?
4. What does O'Connor's use of punctuation during dialogue reveal about how the characters communicate with one another?
5. Who ultimately communicates the most in the story and whose voice is heard above all others?
6. Notice how the Misfit never communicates with a single exclamation mark and yet everyone hangs onto what he says. Why do you think O'Connor has everyone else speaking loudly, but the Misfit speaks without shouting once?
7. How does punctuation play a part in the tone of the story and the tone of particular sections of dialogue?
8. What themes or messages are created as a result of O'Connor's punctuation choices? Explain.

Implementing Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1b

Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, and absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations. This standard is met in my unit through the first three lessons. Within those lessons we discuss what qualities simple, compound, and complex sentences take on as well as study how writers use different sentence lengths to achieve a specific outcome in their style.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.2a

Use a semicolon (and perhaps a conjunctive adverb) to link two or more closely related independent clauses. In lesson 4 we discuss how an Edgar Allan Poe and other such writers use semi-colons to create a stream-of-consciousness style in their writing.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.3

Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. This standard is met in lesson 5 when we read Flannery O'Connor's story *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and discuss her use of ellipses and exclamation marks. The students will learn and discuss the different ways her punctuation choices alter her message and/or style throughout the story.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.) Students will create a poem or short story, adopting specific style techniques they were taught in order to serve their specific intention.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 9–10 here.) The students will take their final assessment writing assignments and work in groups to accomplish peer editing and produce stronger pieces.

ⁱCharlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, New York, NY: Signet Classics, 2008,

ⁱⁱ“Education High Schools,” *U.S. News*, October 31, 2013,

<http://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/north-carolina/districts/charlotte-mecklenburg-schools/north-mecklenburg-high-14571>.

ⁱⁱⁱRobert Morse, “Education: The Ranking Formula,” *U.S. News*. October 31, 2013,

<http://www.usnews.com/education/high-schools/articles/2007/11/29/the-ranking-formula>.

^{iv}Kelly Gallagher, *Deeper Reading*, Portland, Main: Stenhouse Publishers, 2004.

^v Kelly Gallagher, *Write Like This*, Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2011.