

Web Unit Plan

Title: The Pearl

Description: Is more ever enough? Poverty, greed, living for the future instead of in the moment—these are the timeless foibles of human nature that middle school students understand better after reading and rewriting John Steinbeck’s novella *The Pearl*.

At a Glance

Grade Level: 6–9

Subject sort (for Web site index): Language Arts

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Topics: Literature, Writing

Higher-Order Thinking Skills: Flexibility, Elaboration, Generalizing

Key Learnings: Parable, Story Grammar, Cultural Geography

Time Needed: 4 weeks, 50 minutes daily

Background: Rhode Island, United States

Unit Summary

Can I ever be content with my place in life? Is more ever enough? Poverty, greed, living for the future instead of accepting what I have now—these are part of the human condition in *The Pearl*.

Appreciating the writer’s craft is this unit’s second major component. This unit helps middle school students appreciate John Steinbeck’s novella *The Pearl* as an engaging story and a way to address the timeless question all middle school students seek to understand, *Who am I?* As students read, they consider the universal qualities represented in the story. Students study the writer’s craft and find specific ways Steinbeck brings his story to life.

Curriculum-Framing Questions

- **Essential Question**
Is more ever enough?
- **Unit Questions**
How can stories like *The Pearl* help me understand more about myself?
How can others determine a person’s fate?
- **Content Questions**
What choices in language, point of view, plot devices, symbolism, and other narrative features did John Steinbeck make?
What are the major themes in the story?
Why does Steinbeck choose the parable as the vehicle for telling his story?
To what degree does each character influence Kino’s life decisions?

Assessment Processes

View how a variety of student-centered [assessments](#) are used in The Pearl Unit Plan. These assessments help students and teachers set goals; monitor student progress; provide feedback; assess thinking, processes, performances, and products; and reflect on learning throughout the learning cycle.

Instructional Procedures

Proverbs and Parables (Two Periods)

Steinbeck uses the parable to good effect in this novella. By definition, a parable is a comparison drawn from nature or common experience in life and is designed to illustrate a moral or universal truth.

Introduce the study of *The Pearl* by discussing students' previous experiences of trying to understand and interpret proverbs they have heard parents and grandparents use as well as insights from stories they have read.

Ask students to recall any proverbs they remember. Have them pick five proverbs (either story proverbs or spoken proverbs) and tell what they mean.

Ask students to give or create a proverb for the following:

Mary Had a Little Lamb

Humpty Dumpty

Little Boy Blue

Little Miss Muffet

Ugly Duckling

Cinderella

Next, have students focus on real world situations, such as:

Bullies

Saying "no" to the crowd

Being yourself

Friend's parents divorcing

Avoiding temptation

Would the proverb be the same if the reference was to an event that happened when students' grandparents were children? In other words, is it timeless?

An extended proverb becomes a parable when the message it provides is more like a story that is true to life and is told for the purpose of teaching a moral or universal truth. Tell students that they will study elements in *The Pearl* that make it a parable.

Before Reading

Tell students that the book will cause them to think about good and bad qualities of human nature. Ask them to write a five-minute response to the question, *Is more ever enough?* To get their juices flowing, encourage debate about the meaning of the question before they write their responses. Afterward, have students share their responses and discuss further. Before students read, show a map and other pictures to give them a sense of the setting of *The Pearl*. Select Web pages showing coastal Baja California and the Sea of Cortez.

As You Read (Three to Four Periods)

Though books are not read aloud frequently at these grade levels, *The Pearl* should be the exception! The experience is enhanced through shared reading. Have good,

expressive readers take turns reading aloud, and discuss the book at pivotal points. Students can make evolving lists and written commentary as they read, to capture characterization, plot devices, symbolism, and other features for later work. A useful Web site to use during the reading phase include [Junior Great Books discussion questions](#)*.

As the novella is read, have students address the following in their journals:

- The story has three main parts—the setting, story, and universal truth. Describe the setting, the story itself, and the universal truth associated with the story's characters.
- Parables tend to have a number of details with special significance of their own, and yet every parable has a certain universal truth that the author wants readers to appreciate. *What are examples of details with special significance in this novella?*
- The novella's special details relate to peoples lives. *How do the details relate to your life?*

Review student journals to assess understanding and provide feedback or additional instruction as necessary.

After Reading (Two Periods)

During this section's summary activities, write key language, quoted selections, and story elements on chart paper for later reference. Focus on the writer's craft. Ask students, *What choices in language, point of view, plot devices, symbolism, and other narrative features did John Steinbeck make?* Ask students to find details and examples from their journals to add to the chart.

To illuminate how personalities and histories of a character help shape the story, have students dramatize bits of action from the story, and consider the motivations and struggles of several characters. Encourage students to find lines or actions of each character that exemplify the character's personality. Discuss the protagonists and antagonists, and introduce the idea that Kino is not a protagonist but a "flawed hero."

Assign different settings from the story, and have students draw pictures that illustrate the real or symbolic influence setting has on the story. Have students write quotations from the story or even single words that evoke a mood or visual image. Ask them to share their pictures with the class and describe how the setting affects the story. For example:

- *The Village*: In many ways, the village in which most of the story takes place is a symbol of the oppression of the people. To create this symbol, Steinbeck personifies the town.
- *The Gulf*: An important element of the setting is the sea. It takes on symbolic importance in the story. The Gulf provides the villagers with their livelihood and sustenance—fish and pearls. However, like the town, it cannot be trusted. Steinbeck uses the sea to make readers aware that things are not always what they seem. "Although the morning was young, the hazy mirage was up. The uncertain air that magnified some things and blotted out others hung over the whole Gulf so that all sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted.... There was no certainty in seeing, no proof that what you saw was there or not there." ([Teachers Guide: Penguin Edition](#)* (PDF; 6 pages)

Because this is a story about *want*, have readers study the physical objects in the story, and discuss the importance "things" have for different characters. Ask students, *How does Steinbeck describe the material world or his characters' reactions to the material world to show how important or unimportant they are?* Have each student write or speak in the character of the doctor, Kino, Juana, or another character, and tell what the character desires and why. Take anecdotal notes during the speeches and review written work to assess student understanding.

Have students pair up to tell the story to each other. Ask them to create poster charts of the main elements in the story. From time to time, have students meet with other pairs to consider what elements they have added to their poster charts. Students will find that they agree on some parts and disagree on others. This is a great opportunity to talk about how stories spring up from oral tradition all around the world, and how some elements change while others are universal and unchanging.

Challenges of Character (One Period)

Explain to students that a good writer like John Steinbeck invests his characters with many challenges. Oftentimes, the greatest challenges to the main character or protagonist being successful in overcoming conflicts in the story involve understanding the role family and neighbors play in the character's life. This is definitely true in *The Pearl*. There are those who love and support Kino, but there are also many whose greed impacts what happens to Kino and his family. Lead a class discussion around the Content Question, *To what degree does each character influence Kino's life decisions?* If desired, use the [Visual Ranking Tool](#) to help rank the characters from greatest impact to least impact.

Final Writing and Accompanying Multimedia Presentation

Discuss the timeless and placeless feature of parables—a parable (and *The Pearl*) resonates with everyone regardless of their cultural beliefs or experiences. Look at the symbolism of the story, and discuss which artifacts might hold the same symbolic weight in a different setting or time. The characters in *The Pearl* are flat and archetypal. Discuss the characters' features and imagine how their personal qualities might transfer intact to another setting or time period. Discuss how theatre directors frequently change the settings and contexts of a best-loved plays to breathe new life into them. The audience "sees" the play anew when tired and trite trappings are set aside. This is the task student writers are charged with—making the story "new" while retaining its universal elements.

Writing from a Different Perspective—Setting (Four to Six Periods)

Have students use the following story elements to write the story structure of *The Pearl*:

- *Characterization*: The main protagonists and antagonists in the story. What qualities do the characters show that...?
- *Setting*: The place(s), period in history, and time span of the story.
- *Situation*: How the story begins. What the everyday life is like for the main character.
- *Events*: What occurs that thrusts the character into a problem. Write the series of events, detailing how they....
- *Conflict*: The main problem in the story. Several problems might build to a greatest problem...

- *Climax*: The high point or turning point of the story when the main character often makes an irrevocable decision—a decision that forever changes the course of the character’s life (and often the character’s family’s lives as well). This is usually the most exciting part of the story.
- *Resolution*: The action that results from the main character’s irrevocable decision.
- *Denouement*: What the main characters are doing when you leave them at the end of the story. How they have been transformed.

Review the drafts with students during conferences and provide feedback as necessary. After drafts are acceptable, have students reinvent the story in a different setting, keeping the basic theme intact. Students will find that replacing some elements from *The Pearl* with others to make the unique setting demands work is a creative challenge. [The Walrus Tusk Story](#) is one version that could be used as a guiding sample. The writing process may take three or four days, during which time students can rotate through the lab to create a multimedia enhancement. [The Walrus Tusk Slideshow](#) example demonstrates how slides can be used to point out key language and imagery from each student’s story.

Writing from a Different Perspective—Character (Four to Six Periods) **Introduction**

Begin by having students brainstorm a list of important and difficult decisions that Kino had to make throughout the story (for example, to hide or not hide the pearl after he knew the doctor had determined where he hid the pearl). Have students put these decisions in the order in which they occurred.

Ask if any students feel they would have made a different choice from Kino for one of the items on the list. Provide an example, if necessary, to start the discussion.

Predict how the story would have been different if Kino had made a different decision.

Show an example of a *Choose Your Own Adventure* book, and ask students if they are familiar with these types of books. Then, read a selection to demonstrate how these books provide multiple plots based on the choices the reader makes.

Share that *The Pearl* would be a great *Choose Your Own Adventure* book told from a different character’s perspective. All you have to do is pick some of the important decisions listed and write new parts that incorporate the changed decisions. For example, ask students, *How might events have changed if Juana were telling the story?* Have students predict how the story would change.

Introduce the project by telling students that they will each choose a portion of the new *Choose Your Own Adventure* to write based on the list of the new character’s decisions (Juana’s, for instance).

Allow students to choose the character and dilemma they want to write about, and allow them to determine whether they will work alone or in groups. Students who work in groups take their character/narrator and plots through more decisions, so each member of the group has a portion to write. For example, a three person group would have one member write the part of the new story line from Ann’s different decision until another dilemma arises with two options. The other two group members would then write the rest of the story for each of the dilemma options. This

is accomplished by having the group work together in the prewriting phase to plan the plot sequences, and then individuals write their portions. During revision, students work together to ensure that transitions fit between the parts. As in *Choose Your Own Adventures*, alternative plotlines can potentially lead back to a later portion of the original plot.

Pass out and review the [writing rubric](#) to help guide students through the writing process. Also, review the [assessment scoring guide](#) with students and let them know that this is the criteria used for the final writing piece and presentation.

Prewriting

After students have organized their workgroups, have them choose a dilemma to take on. Discuss cause and effect, and how plotline often centers around the “what-if-then” development in story plotlines.

Students plan their writing by making cause-and-effect charts. Each chart begins with their choice and follows a logical path to reach a clear ending that leads back to the original text.

Review the charts during student conferences and provide feedback as necessary.

Drafting

Before students begin writing, remind them of the importance of maintaining perspective from another character’s point of view when retelling the story.

Students use their completed cause-and-effect charts to develop their stories.

Editing and Revisions

For revision purposes, have students use the [peer feedback form](#). Schedule conference time for students to review their feedback with each other.

Then, ask students to make suggested revisions as needed. As a final step, have students proofread their text and ask a classmate to proofread the piece for them.

Publication

Have students type, proofread, and print their final drafts.

Next, have students develop multimedia presentations to enhance their story presentations to the class. The slide “backdrops” will illustrate students’ stories as they tell them as well as depict author strategies and parallels to *The Pearl* that students used. Each slideshow should include:

- 2 to 4 slides that are a story teaser to the story students will share with the class. The goal is to get the audience’s undivided attention.
- 10 to 15 slides with images and meaningful sound effects or music to accompany the parallel story, which the student shares with the class.
- Summary slides that show highlights from the story and show how the story’s elements parallel characters, setting, and plotline from *The Pearl*.

Assess presentations and parallel story rewrites using the [assessment scoring guide](#).

As a final activity, ask students to answer the Unit Question, *How can stories like The Pearl help me understand more about myself?* Ask students to refer to their journals,

their parallel stories, and their presentations to find details and examples to support their thinking.

Differentiated Instruction

Resource Student

- Provide audiotapes (see the Materials and Resources section)
- Narrow tasks to essential parts
- Provide frequent feedback
- Solicit help from teaching assistants and special educators
- Make modifications as specified in the student's IEP

Gifted Student

- Have the student compare the themes of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Pearl*
- Encourage the student to develop a thematic Web site that other class members can contribute to

English Language Learner

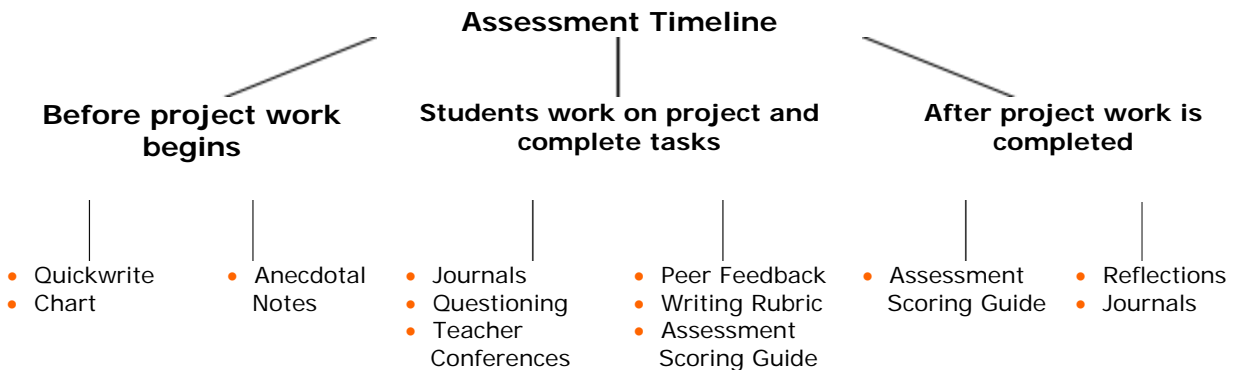
- Provide audiotapes (see the Technology and Resources section)
- Enlist help from an ESL instructor
- Provide texts with translation

Credits

A teacher participated in the Intel® Teach Program, which resulted in this idea for a classroom project. A team of teachers expanded the plan into the example you see here.

THINGS YOU NEED (highlight box)

Assessment Plan



Assess student's prior knowledge by reviewing a quickwrite and taking anecdotal notes during a debate to answer the Essential Question, *Is more ever enough?* Chart student responses to key story elements, such as language, point of view, plot devices, symbolism, and other narrative features, to assess understanding during class discussions. Review student journals throughout the unit and provide feedback or additional instruction as necessary. Schedule individual conferences during the

writing process and ask students to provide feedback to each other using the [peer feedback form](#).

Review the [writing rubric](#) and the [assessment scoring guide](#) with students before they start project work to help guide them through the writing process and ensure they understand the assessment criteria. Use the same scoring guide to assess the final parallel stories and presentations. Review final reflections to the Unit Question, *How can stories like The Pearl help me understand more about myself?* focusing on students' abilities to make connections between what they have learned and their own lives.

Content Standards and Objectives

Targeted Oregon Content Standards & Benchmarks

Reading and Literature: Grade 8

- Students examine implicit relationships, such as cause and effect, sequence-time relationships, comparisons, classifications, and generalizations; and
 - Infer an author's unstated meaning by drawing conclusions based on facts, events, images, patterns, or symbols in the text.
 - Identify unstated reasons for actions or beliefs based on explicitly stated information.
- Students analyze and evaluate whether a conclusion is validated by the evidence in a selection; and
 - Draw conclusions about the author's motivation or purpose for writing a passage or story based on evidence in the selection.
- Students extend and deepen comprehension by relating text to other texts, experiences, issues, and events.

Writing

- Students convey clear, focused main ideas supported by details and examples in ways appropriate to topic, audience, and purpose.
- Students structure writing in a sequence by developing a beginning, middle, and end and by making transitions among ideas and paragraphs.
- Students write in a variety of modes (such as, narrative, imaginative, expository, persuasive) and forms (such as, essays, stories, letters, research papers, reports) appropriate to audience and purpose.

Student Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Recognize symbolism in writing and the parable story form, which is usually a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle
- Understand how an author's choices of point of view, language, and characterization affect a story

- Demonstrate understanding of a novel's characters, setting, and plot by predicting how characters would react and how the plot would change if the characters made different choices
- Engage in all the stages of the writing process (including prewriting, drafting, editing and revising, and publishing) while writing alternative endings, settings, or plot sequences for a story

Resources

Materials and Resources

Printed Materials

Steinbeck, J. (1992). *The pearl*. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Audiotape

Steinbeck, J. (1999). *The pearl*. [Audiotape]. Read by Frank Muller. Prince Frederick, MD: Recorded Books.

Internet Resources

Student Web Sites

- Monterey County Historical Society: John Steinbeck (1902-1968)
www.mchsmuseum.com/steinbeck.html*
Monterey and John Steinbeck
- Steinbeck: The California Novels
www.wvu.edu/~stephan/Steinbeck*
- Steinbeck's Pacific Grove
www.93950.com/steinbeck*
A self-guided driving tour of John Steinbeck's Pacific Grove

Teacher Web Sites

- The Great Books Foundation
www.greatbooks.org/no-cache/library/guides/the-grapes-of-wrath-of-mice-and-men-and-the-pearl.html?sword_list%5B%5D=steinbeck*
Discussion questions from the Junior Great Books program
- The Pearl
<http://hometown.aol.com/mezim/Pearl.html>*
Format for student presentations related to theme
- SCORE: Teacher Guide—The Pearl
www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/pearl/pearltg.html*
Five activities

Technology—Hardware

- Printer for printing stories
- Projection system for displaying multimedia presentations
- Computers for writing stories and creating multimedia presentations

Technology—Software

- Desktop publishing for writing and publishing stories

- Image processing to add graphics to multimedia presentation
- Internet Web browser for using the reading activity resources
- Multimedia for presentations