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Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan

Text: "Fern Hill" by Dylan Thomas

Grade/Subject: Adult

Ideas, Values: Beauty, Childhood, Happiness, Nature, Time

Date of Origin: 7/1/2018

Pre-Seminar Content

Launch Activity:

Ask all participants to write a definition of childhood on an index card. First share the definition with a partner and then with the whole group while a volunteer writes common elements from the definitions on the (interactive) white board.

Inspectional Read:

Ask participants to letter the stanzas A-F and then number the lines within each stanza 1-9. Read the poem aloud for the first time while participants highlight any unfamiliar words.

Background Information:

"Fern Hill" (1945) is a poem by Dylan Thomas (27 October 1914 – 9 November 1953) was a Welsh poet and writer whose works include the poems "Do not go gentle into that good night" and "And death shall have no dominion"; the 'play for voices,' *Under Milk Wood*; and stories and radio broadcasts such as *A Child's Christmas in Wales* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*. He became widely popular in his lifetime and remained so after his premature death at the age of 39 in New York City. By then he had acquired a reputation, which he had encouraged, as a "roistering, drunken and doomed poet."

The house Fernhill is just outside Llangain in Carmarthenshire. Thomas had extended stays here in the 1920s with his aunt Annie and her husband, Jim Jones.

Vocabulary:

Ask participants to identify any unfamiliar vocabulary from the poem and discuss the literal meaning of these terms as an entire group. Consider including: *dingle*, *windfall*, *nightjars*, *ricks*, etc. Discuss as needed the use of figurative and creative language.

Analytical Read:

Divide the class into groups. Ask them to read the whole text aloud in their groups. Assign each of the groups to create a summary phrase for one stanza, and provide 5-10 minutes work time for the groups to complete the summary phrase. Share them in turn. Encourage all to take notes.

Pre-Seminar Process:

- ✓ **Define and State the purpose for the seminar.**

“A Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open ended questions.

“The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the textual ideas and values, of ourselves, and of each other.

- ✓ **Describe the responsibilities of facilitator and participants.**

“I am primarily responsible for asking challenging, open-ended questions, and I will take a variety of notes to keep up with the talk turns and flow of ideas. I will help move the discussion along in a productive direction by asking follow-up questions based on my notes. “I am asking you to think, listen and speak candidly about your thoughts, reactions and ideas. You can help each other do this by using each other’s names.

“You do not need to raise your hands in order to speak, rather, the discussion is collaborative in that you try to stay focused on the main speaker and wait your turn to talk.

“You should try to both agree and disagree in a courteous, thoughtful manner. For example, you might say, ‘I disagree with Joanna because...,’ focusing on the ideas involved not the individuals.

- ✓ **Have participants set a Personal Goal.**

“Now, please reflect on how you normally participate in a discussion as a group. What goal can you set for yourself that will help the flow and meaning of the seminar? “Please consider the list of personal participation goals – either on the Speaking and Listening Checklist or on the board.”

- ✓ **To speak at least three times**
- ✓ **To refer to the text**
- ✓ **To ask a question**
- ✓ **To speak out of uncertainty**

- ✓ **To build on others' comments**

“Is there one that is relevant for you? Please choose one goal from the list or that you feel is best and commit to achieving it during the discussion we are about to have... write down (or circle) your personal goal.”

- ✓ **Agree on a Group Goal.**

For this seminar, I will suggest our group goal (select display for all to see).

Seminar Questions:

- ✓ **Opening (Identify main ideas from the text):**

- ❖ What phrase from the first four stanzas best captures the mood of the speaker's childhood at Fern Hill? (round-robin response)
- ❖ What about that phrase is so evocative? (spontaneous discussion)

- ✓ **Core (Analyze textual details):**

- ❖ How would you describe the tone of the first four stanzas of this poem? What specific words best capture that tone?
- ❖ What do you think the speaker of the poem means when he writes (in D-6) “So it must have been after the birth of the simple light / In the first, spinning place”?
- ❖ Is there a spiritual element to this poem? What in the text makes you think so (or not)?
- ❖ At what point in this poem does the tone shift? How would you describe the tone of the last stanza? Refer to the text.
- ❖ The word “time” appears six times in this poem (the first two stanzas and the last two stanzas). What is the role of time in this lyric?

- ✓ **Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas):**

- ❖ What part of your own childhood do you recall most fondly and most lament losing?
- Or

- ❖ Is it possible to escape the ravages of time and keep alive the spirit of childhood? Why or why not?

Post-Seminar Process:

“Thank you for your focused and thoughtful participation in our seminar”.

- ✓ **Have participants do a written self-assessment of their personal goal.**

“As part of the post-seminar process, I would first like to ask you to take a few minutes to reflect on your relative success in meeting the personal process goal you set prior to beginning the discussion. Please review the goal you set for yourself and reflect in writing to what extent you met the goal. In addition, note why you think you performed as you did”. (Pause for reflection.)

- ✓ **Do a group assessment of the social and intellectual goals of the seminar.**

“Now I would like us to talk together about how we did in relation to the group goal we set for ourselves (insert your group goal). On a scale of one to five, five being perfect, how would you say we did? Why?” (Pause for discussion.)

“Now, would someone be willing to (volunteer) to share your personal self-assessment and reflection?”

- ✓ **Note reminders for the next seminar.**

Post Seminar Content:

- ✓ **Transition to Writing:**

Have all participants write a spontaneous list of (poetic) phrases that recall an especially beautiful part of their own childhood. Once the list is complete, ask them to add as many sensory details as they can recall from that special period and add those details to the list.

- ✓ **Writing Task:**

After reading and discussing “Fern Hill” by Dylan Thomas, write a short poem in which you capture the poetic essence of a special moment in your own childhood. Use Thomas’ lyric as a model for your poem. When you have finished the poem to your satisfaction, share it with the children in your family (or if a teacher, with the students in your class).

✓ **Brainstorm:**

Have participants share the list of details they wrote in the Transition to Writing phase in small groups (of two or three), as a way of introducing the experiences they wish to write about in response to the *Writing Task*. Discuss with the group phrases that are especially powerful in conveying that experience.

✓ **Structure the Writing:**

Ask that the participants mimic Thomas’ lyric by writing one or two nine-line stanzas in an initial draft of the poem (noting that they can depart from this structure in subsequent drafts).

✓ **First Draft:**

Have participants take 10-15 minutes to compose a first draft of their poems.

✓ **Collaborative Revision:**

Now have participants share their first drafts with the original one or two partners by reading the drafts aloud and discussing with the group how best to capture (using as many senses as possible) the power and significance of that childhood experience. Then have participants create a second draft of the poem based on that discussion.

✓ **Edit:**

Once the second draft is complete, have participants work in their writing groups and this time take turns reading each other’s second drafts slowly and silently, marking any spelling or grammar errors they find, in order to create a final copy for publication.

✓ **Publish:**

Have all the participants share their poems by reading them aloud to and then sharing a written draft with the children in their lives.

This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:

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Organization: National Paideia Center

***Text is attached if open sourced.**

***Text is cited if it needs to be procured.**

“Fern Hill” (1945) by Dylan Thomas

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
 The night above the dingle starry,
 Time let me hail and climb
 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
 And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
 Trail with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
 In the sun that is young once only,
 Time let me play and be
 Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
 And the sabbath rang slowly
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
 And playing, lovely and watery
 And fire green as grass.
 And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
 Flying with the ricks, and the horses
 Flashing into the dark.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
 Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
 The sky gathered again
 And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
 Out of the whinnying green stable
 On to the fields of praise

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
 In the sun born over and over,
 I ran my heedless ways,

My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace.

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
In the moon that is always rising,
Nor that riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.