



## Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan

**Text:** “The Second Coming” by William Butler Yeats

**Grade/Subject:** HS / ELA

**Ideas, Values:** Chaos, Cycles, Revelation, Supernatural, Uncertainty

**Date of Origin:** 12/2/2018

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### Pre-Seminar Content

#### Launch Activity:

In order to engage students in the poetic process of using imagery to create cultural symbols, have students draw or write a description of an animal that they think best represents the political and/or social climate of the United States as it exists right now. Tell students that this animal may be an amalgamation of parts from different animals (such as a horse with owl's wings, or a chicken with lion's roar). Once finished, have students pair-share, where they turn to a partner and succinctly explain their image and what it symbolizes. Facilitate a whole class share-out where Partner A briefly describes Partner B's symbol. Have students note trends and patterns across the class.

#### Inspectional Read:

Distribute the text and discuss type, genre, etc. How is it organized? How is it similar to and different from other poetry they have read? Number the lines 1-22.

Read the text aloud slowly, while students highlight in their copies of the text any unfamiliar words or phrases.

#### Background Information:

William Butler Yeats, an Irish poet who lived from 1865 to 1939, is considered to be one of the greatest poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yeats wanted his poetry to engage the full complexity of human life and draw on the direct experiences of his life, in an effort to transform the personal to the universal for his readers. He was a Symbolist poet, using allusions, imagery, and symbolic structures so that things in his poetry represent both what they actually are and, at the same time, suggest something else altogether. Yeats believed the world has cyclical structures that repeat throughout time, and he held mystical inclinations that were informed by Hinduism, Theosophy, and the occult.

Yeats published the poem “The Second Coming” in 1920 soon after several instances of world violence and chaos, including World War I, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Irish Easter Rising of 1916. “The Second Coming” has resonated in cultures all over the world since its first publication, and many writers have alluded to it in their own work. It was written during what is now known as the Modernist era. Modernist poetry often sought to extract certainty from a destabilized world order and attempted to challenge, and even overturn, traditionalist views of experience and meaning-making.

### **Vocabulary:**

Compile a list of student-identified unfamiliar words. Divide students into groups and assign different words to each group. Provide various resources for students to use to define the words in context. Facilitate each group sharing its definitions while the remaining students annotate their texts with the definitions as needed.

Introduce the term *cultural symbol* (an object, action, situation, etc. that represents meaning beyond the literal) and explain human cultures use symbols to express specific ideologies, social structures, and to represent aspects of their specific culture. Symbols carry meanings that depend upon one’s cultural background and experience. In other words, the meaning of a symbol is not inherent in the symbol itself but is culturally taught and learned. A cultural symbol embodies ideas, emotions, and meaning that is collectively shared and recognized among a cultural group. Examples for discussion with students might include, the bald eagle in North America (strength and freedom of the U.S.), the lamb in Christianity (Christ’s sacrifice), the crane in Japan (good fortune and longevity), the V (peace) hand sign adopted by counterculture of Vietnam War era (peace).

### **Analytical Read:**

Facilitate students marking the text into three sections—lines 1-8, 9-17, and 18-22. Provide time for students to read in partners or triads to translate the sections of the poem into more accessible language. Have students work together to annotate the imagery in the poem and create a list of the things they see and hear. Circulate the room to provide coaching and support to students as needed. Be sure to check in with all partners/triads as there is no whole group share-out. The goal of the analytical read is to provide an opportunity for students to begin to explore the content of the poem. Note: Consider adding additional spacing between lines of the poem and printing for students so that they have additional room to annotate and interact with the text during while engaging in the analytical read.

### **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 do you think is the most important word or phrase from the poem? (round-robin response)
  
- ❖ Why did you pick that word or phrase? (spontaneous discussion)

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

- ❖ What examples of impactful imagery do you see within the poem?

What is the effect of Yeats' imagery on the mood of the poem?

- ❖ Where in the poem do you see word choice that impacts the tone of the poem? Explain your thinking.
  - ❖ Based on the poem, what might Yeats suggest about the world the speaker lives in?
  - ❖ How does Yeats create or corrupt cultural symbols in the poem? (What do you think about his treatment of the Biblical allusions he uses?)
  - ❖ Why might Yeats end the poem with a question?
  - ❖ Considering the poem as a whole, what do you think Yeats means in line 3 when he writes, "Things fall apart"? (Based on our discussion of the poem, why do you think Chinua Achebe selected this line as the title of his novel?)
- ✓ **Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas):**
- ❖ Is Yeats' poem relevant for today's society and you as readers? If so, how?

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## 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 participants take notes to brainstorm ideas that they heard, read, and thought during seminar related to the poetic devices (imagery, mood, word choice, tone, symbolism).

- ✓ **Writing Task:**

How do writers create and corrupt cultural symbols? After reading William Butler Yeats’ “The Second Coming,” write an editorial in which you address the question and argue whether or not Yeats’ poem is relevant to today’s society and readers. Be sure to justify your response with evidence from the text.

- ✓ **Brainstorm:**

Invite participants to talk in pairs for two minutes to share thoughts about what the writing task is asking.

- ✓ **Structure the Writing:**

Allow a few minutes for all to sketch an outline for their writing. Have students draft an outline for their writing and refine their thinking using graphic organizers and other writing resources as needed.

- ✓ **First Draft:**

Challenge all to draft their essays by listing imagery and symbolism from the poem and determining whether or not the poem has connections to today’s society and readers.

- ✓ **Collaborative Revision:**

Have participants work in pairs to read their first drafts aloud to each other with emphasis on reader as creator and editor. Listener says back one point heard clearly and asks one question for clarification. Switch roles. Give time for full revisions resulting in a second draft.

✓ **Edit:**

Once the second draft is complete, have participants work in groups of three or four and this time take turns reading each other's second drafts slowly and silently, marking any spelling or grammar errors they find. (Have dictionaries and grammar handbooks available for reference.) Take this opportunity to clarify/reteach any specific grammar strategies you have identified your students needing. Give time for full revisions resulting in a third and final draft.

✓ **Publish:**

Have students submit their editorials to the school or local newspapers for publication.

**This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:**

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

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

## The Second Coming

by William Butler Yeats

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

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