



A Universal Thematic Study through the Moroccan Cultural Lens

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Background:

These lessons were created after spending a month abroad in Morocco as part of a Fulbright-Hays Group Program Abroad sponsored by The University of Arizona's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. The intent of the lessons is to integrate High School English/Language Arts standards while simultaneously providing a global platform for student learning. These three lessons center around major strands of the English Language Arts High School curriculum: reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing. Through active critical thinking, reading, viewing, and research, students will not only refine English/Language Arts content skills, but also become well versed as global, informed citizens.

Common Core ELA Standards Addressed:

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Essential Questions:

- How is reading a multi-tiered, active process?
- How can visual analysis strategies be applied to reading text?
- Do universal human themes exist? If so, what are they?

Through the completion of these lessons, students will be able to –

1. Understand the literal, interpretive, and applied levels of reading comprehension
2. Increase understanding of visual and literary analysis
3. Improve geographic research skills
4. Understand author's purpose
5. Address the concept of universal themes as portrayed in literature
6. Write from various personas to show complexity and sophistication of thought

All materials for each lesson are embedded within each specific lesson plan. The lessons are designed for high school English/Language Arts students (grades 9-12). This study is comprised of three lessons:

Lesson #1: Understanding Levels of Reading Comprehension through the Lens of a Moroccan Painter

Lesson #2: An Exploration of Universal Human Themes through Laila Lalami's "The Storyteller"

Lesson #3: Levels of Reading Comprehension through a Cumulative Understanding of Visual Analysis and Universal Human Themes

Lesson #1: Understanding Levels of Reading Comprehension through the Lens of a Moroccan Painter

Time: One Class Period

1. Students will receive background information regarding three levels of reading comprehension: literal, interpretive, and applied levels of reading.
 - a. Literal Level of Reading Comprehension – Readers can recall main points, facts, and ideas from the text. Readers can summarize.
 - b. Interpretive Level of Reading Comprehension – Readers can analyze ideas to relay deeper meaning about the text. Readers can discover.
 - c. Applied Level of Reading Comprehension – Readers can apply what they have learned to a skill beyond the scope of the text. Readers can transfer.

Note: As readers progress from one level to the next, they are using higher levels of critical thinking. Therefore, each level becomes progressively more difficult to master.

2. Students will utilize the literal, interpretive, and applied levels of reading to “read” a visual text from a painter, Mohammed, who resides in Ouarzazate, Morocco. This will allow students to understand the levels of reading comprehension by means of a visual analysis.
3. Students will be placed into groups of four. Students will view the image of the painting created by the Moroccan artist. Students will first conduct a literal level comprehension by “summarizing” the visual image. They will write down what they see in the painting to try and divulge a big picture view of the art piece. (See handout #1 for area to “summarize” the visual).

Image of the Painting Photographed by Omar Hakim (project this image for students):

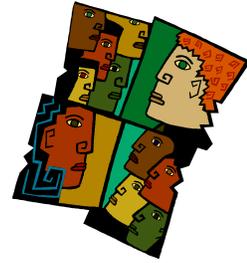


4. Students will then share answers with the class, and the teacher will place answers on a large display for students. Then the question will be posed for classroom discussion: How do these answers represent a literal level of comprehension? Students will share answers to gauge student understanding.
5. Students will go back to their groups, utilizing their answers to progress to the interpretive level. Some questions include: What do the parts they observe mean on a deeper level? What do they symbolize? What do you believe is the author's purpose in creating this piece? (See handout #1 for area to "interpret" the visual).
6. Students will share answers with the class, and the teacher will place answers on a large display for students. Again, the question will be posed for classroom discussion: How do these answers represent an interpretive level of comprehension? Students will share answers to gauge student understanding.
7. Students will resume work with groups to move to the final level of reading comprehension: applied. Questions include: How is this similar to/different from understanding the author's purpose of written text? How can you apply this same skill when reading text rather than using a visual piece?
8. Students will then watch a video clip I created asking Mohammed, the artist, to explain the purpose behind his painting. The video is available on YouTube for teacher access: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNEoGk2CJNg>
9. As a conclusion to this lesson, students will compare their findings to what creator intended. Students will evaluate: Did I accurately assess the painting as the artist intended? Students will post answers to an online blog for homework, and respond to one of their classmate's responses.

Handout #1



Levels of Reading Comprehension.... Through the Eyes of a Moroccan Painter



Levels of Reading Comprehension:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Apply these 3 levels of reading comprehension to “reading” a visual text.

<i>Literal Level of Reading Comprehension</i>	<i>Interpretive Level of Reading Comprehension</i>	<i>Applied Level of Reading Comprehension</i>
What do you see in the painting? List all observations. “Summarize” the painting.	What do the parts in the painting mean? Do they symbolize more than just objects? What do you believe is the author’s purpose in creating this piece? Explain.	How is analyzing the author’s purpose similar to/different from analyzing written text? How can you apply this same skill when reading text?

To Conclude – Watch the video of the Moroccan artist, Mohammed, as he explains his picture and his purpose for creating it. How well did you analyze this author’s purpose? Do you feel you accurately assessed the author’s original intent?

Lesson 2: An Exploration of Universal Human Themes through Laila Lalami’s “The Storyteller”

Time: One/Two Class Periods

1. Students will review the three levels of reading comprehension – literal, interpretive, and applied.
2. Students will understand the term theme and how it applies to literature. Post the term:
 - a. Theme - a message about society, life, or human nature as depicted by a work. A theme is not lesson but rather a statement representing an aspect of the world surrounding us.
3. The question then arises – Do *universal* human themes exist? Themes that transcend geographic location, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, etc.? This will be the major question that drives the lesson. Students will write their responses on note cards without names, and the teacher will collect and redistribute to new students. Students will respond to what the student has written on the back of the card. Teacher will read and evaluate responses.
4. Students will be introduced to a chapter from the novel, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* by Laila Lalami, entitled “The Storyteller.” Lalami is a Moroccan-American author who writes her novels and short stories from the perspective of Moroccan voices. Students will read the chapter while applying the three levels of reading comprehension studied earlier. The text has been scanned and is available as an attachment with the lesson plan.

The teacher will indicate that the purpose for reading is to discover overriding themes of the text in order to evaluate these themes. Are the themes universal or are they particular to these Moroccan characters?

Students will set up their reading journals as shown below:

Level of Reading Comprehension	Response Prompts
Literal Level of Reading Comprehension (Level One)	This chapter begins... Then... It ends by...
Interpretative Level of Reading Comprehension (Level Two)	The major theme of the text is... This is demonstrated when... (cite specific text)
Applied Level of Reading Comprehension (Level Three)	This theme is universal/not universal because... This theme relates to me/doesn't relate to me because...

5. Students will employ the THINK-PAIR-SHARE model to facilitate a classroom discussion regarding the text. Students will work in pairs, share responses for each level of comprehension, and report the partner's major theme and whether or not it is universal to the class. This will drive a discussion regarding the text and idea of universal human themes.

6. As a ticket out the door, students will write a new response regarding their beliefs about universal human themes. After the classroom discussion, have their feelings regarding universal human themes changed/stayed the same? Why/why not?

Lesson 3: Levels of Reading Comprehension through a Cumulative Understanding of Visual Analysis and Universal Human Themes

Time: Two Class Periods (one for research, one for writing)

1. Students will receive one of the following pictures taken on the 2010 Fulbright-Hays Group Program Abroad to Morocco. Photos were taken by Elorie Bechtel and Michelle Molnar.

1.



Photo #1: Foug Zguid, Morocco

2.

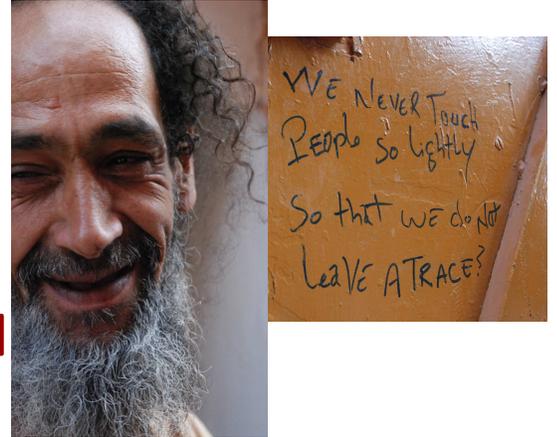


Photo #2: Ouarzazate, Morocco

3.



Photo #3: Merzouga, Morocco

4.



Photo #4: Merzouga, Morocco

5.



Photo 5: Sidi Ifni, Morocco

6.



Photo #6: Foug Zguid, Morocco

2. Each picture will have an image with the Moroccan location. Students will first “read” the visual image at the literal level to answer the question: What exactly do you see? Students will recount in detail the photo and parts of the photo that make it a complete image. Students will record answers in their reading logs.
3. Students are to research the particular area the photo was taken in order to gain an understanding of the location. Students will have to answer the following questions for researching the geographic location:
 - a. What are the main features of the land?
 - b. Describe the climate.
 - c. What are the people like? What type of society is it?
 - d. What is the history of the land?
 - e. Observe and describe other pictures from the city.
 - f. Any other interesting information?
4. After research, students will create a list of possible human themes people in the area they have studied may reflect. This will serve as the interpretive level of comprehension. A list of common theme topics will be provided:

Theme Topics in Literature (taken from www.literacyrules.com)

The American Dream
The Development and Image of the Hero
The Meaning of Freedom
Individuality
Death and How To Deal With It
Religion and Faith
The Power of One
Human Relationship
Liberty and Authority
Community and Responsibility
Challenge and Success
Innocence and Experience
Guilt
Choices and Possibilities
Friendship
Family
Love

5. Students will brainstorm which thematic topics apply to their particular geographic location and image based on their observations and research.

6. Students will then create a name for the person in the picture for whom they will choose to write a reflective piece. Students will write a one/two page journal-entry through the persona of the person from the image reflecting a universal human theme they choose. The journal-entry must be written from the character's 1st person perspective and show development and sophistication of thought. The response must implicitly include information from their research as well as their literal and interpretive analysis ideas. This task serves as the applied level of comprehension. Students will be evaluated using a 6+1 Traits of Writing Rubric:

(Taken from www.uen.org)

Name: _____

Description: 6+1 Trait ® is the property of Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Used by permission.

	5	3	1
Ideas	This paper is clear and focused. It holds the reader's attention. Relevant details and quotes enrich the central theme.	The writer is beginning to define the topic, even though development is still basic or general.	As yet, the paper has no clear sense of purpose or central theme. To extract meaning from the text, the reader must make inferences based on sketchy or missing details.
Organization	The organization enhances and showcases the central idea or theme. The order, structure, or presentation of information is compelling and moves the reader through the text.	The organizational structure is strong enough to move the reader through the text without too much confusion.	The writing lacks a clear sense of direction. Ideas, details, or events seem strung together in a loose or random fashion; there is no identifiable internal structure.
Voice	The writer speaks directly to the reader in a way that is individual, compelling, and engaging. The writer crafts the writing with an awareness and respect for the audience and the purpose for writing.	The writer seems sincere but not fully engaged or involved. The result is pleasant or even personable, but not compelling.	The writer seems indifferent, uninvolved, or distanced from the topic and/or the audience.
Word Choice	Words convey the intended message in a precise, interesting, and natural way. The words are powerful and engaging.	The language is functional, even if it lacks much energy. It is easy to figure out the writer's meaning on a general level.	The writer struggles with a limited vocabulary, searching for words to convey meaning.
Sentence Fluency	The writing has an easy flow, rhythm, and cadence. Sentences are well built, with strong and varied structure that invites expressive oral reading.	The text hums along with a steady beat, but tends to be more pleasant or businesslike than musical, more mechanical than fluid.	The reader has to practice quite a bit in order to give this paper a fair interpretive reading.
Conventions	The writer demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing conventions (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, usage, paragraphing) and uses conventions effectively to enhance readability. Errors tend to be so few that just minor touchups would get this piece ready to publish.	The writer shows reasonable control over a limited range of standard writing conventions. Conventions are sometimes handled well and enhance readability; at other times, errors are distracting and impair readability.	Errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, usage, and grammar and/or paragraphing repeatedly distract the reader and make the text difficult to read.
Presentation	The form and presentation of the text enhances the ability for the reader to understand and connect with the message. It is pleasing to the eye.	The writer's message is understandable in this format.	The reader receives a garbled message due to problems relating to the presentation of the text.