

## Literature as Mirror, Literature as Healer

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### INTRODUCTION

I had a literature professor in college who ranted about the difference between reading to escape from the world and reading to connect with the world. She emphasized the value of using literature as a means for interpreting and understanding ourselves and our relationships. “To hell with distracting ourselves from our problems through books; let’s use literature as a way to get our minds around what is going on in society, what is going on within us...”

It is this very concept that I wish to convey to my students through my curriculum unit, “Literature as Mirror, Literature as Healer.” My students—ninth and tenth graders studying English as a Second Language (ESL) at Lee High School—come to the table (or in this case the classroom) with experiences and backgrounds that run the gamut. From literally all over the world, my students convene here in Houston, TX, to achieve the seemingly insurmountable—to forge their way through adolescence while learning enough English to pass the dreaded exit-level standardized tests. Unfortunately, many students (and admittedly, some teachers) wind up seeing reading as the humdrum chore they are forced to do to earn a passing standardized test score. Reading then becomes a practice *apart* from real life and real issues, one that has nothing to do with the relationships and experiences that surround us, but everything to do with processed, regurgitated, obligatory test-taking.

My goal for this unit is to help students revise their concept of literature. I want to bring students together through stories, not only to become better readers and writers, but also to *use* literature as a means for understanding and for healing. Students will study and identify with characters in situations that relate to their own lives. By questioning and analyzing these characters, and the way these characters are ‘healed,’ students will better understand themselves and the people they interact with every day; students will know themselves better while developing a deeper appreciation and tolerance for others. Thus the unit’s purpose is two-fold—to realize literature first as a breathing, thinking mirror through which we reflect insights about ourselves, and second, as a means for healing.

### UNIT OVERVIEW

In our work to better understand the world, healing, and ourselves, we’ll focus on short stories written by Japanese author Banana Yoshimoto and Haitian-born writer Edwidge Danticat. We’ll begin with several short stories from Yoshimoto’s collection *Lizard*. Yoshimoto’s work is a good starting point because her characters face issues and

emotions that are familiar to most people. In her stories, and in the situations/contexts of her characters, Yoshimoto presents questions around religion, forgiveness, uncertainty and instability, loneliness, and fate. Each short story in her collection seems to address a specific affliction from which characters find healing. Yoshimoto believes that healing comes from a sense of hope, which then transforms characters and compels them to change their lives. We'll study each story individually to determine and later question the ways in which characters find hope and how this found hope works in their lives for healing.

Themes in two of Yoshimoto's stories suggest healing through forgiveness and through forgetting. This serves as an interesting segue into the second set of short stories we'll read from Edwidge Danticat. Danticat's work suggests that healing is only possible through *remembering*. Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* is a collection of short stories that profiles characters' suffering, survival, and healing in the context of past and present-day Haiti. Danticat presents themes of exile and war which—as Yoshimoto's work is relevant to people everywhere—is especially relevant to my ESL students, all of whom come here from another place, and some of whom come here as war refugees.

Before delving further into individual readings or individual pre-reading strategies, I'd like to establish the focus and purpose of the unit as I will present it to students. Grabbing students' attention from the beginning with a solid purpose and central focal point will ensure greater stability for the course of the study. In my experience, students are most successful when their expectations have been established from the beginning in clear, realistic, attainable terms.

### **Establishing a Focus for the Unit**

In order to create a focus or central question for the unit, I will introduce an idea put forth by Banana Yoshimoto in the Afterword to her collection of short stories, *Lizard*.

I believe that we are not born with hope, but rather that it comes to us as a transforming force. The people in my stories are encountering hope for the first time. The process of discovery usually starts when they notice something about themselves or their surroundings that they were never aware of before, or experience anew a forgotten sensation. That type of awakening compels them to act and to change things (175-176).

Yoshimoto's suggestion that healing comes through a new or renewed sense of hope struck me as an interesting and valid suggestion through which we can study texts and the implications they make about healing. Since hope comes from and takes many forms, I agree that it is a universal healer—however, the question remains whether or not it is *the* universal healer. Also to grapple with are questions about hope itself—where it comes

from and what form it takes for the characters in each of our stories and in our own real-world experiences.

To introduce Yoshimoto's concept to my students—from intermediate-level ESL through transitional—I'd like to begin with a brainstorming activity. First, students will brainstorm afflictions that plague their lives and the lives of the people around them. I will possibly give them two minutes to write down everything they know that causes people pain; I could possibly also phrase it as "everything that causes people to cry." Ideally, students will come up with many of the same afflictions that our characters will face in the stories to come. Students will pair-share their ideas, and agree upon two or three to share with the class. This activity activates their prior knowledge and prepares them for the themes we'll read about.

Following the brainstorming exercise, either students will create or I will pre-prepare posters, each one conveying an "affliction" familiar to students, ranging from abuse to boredom to homesickness to guilt. Each poster will include the name/word for that affliction and pictures (probably cut out of magazines) portraying it. I will hang these "affliction posters" on the chalkboard or around the room and ask students to brainstorm (individually or in pairs) one way a person could be healed from all of them. Since the assignment is abstract (thinking of one way a person can be healed from all afflictions) the posters offer a concrete, visual starting point. Pairs will share their ideas with the class, and we'll see if there's any consensus.

After talking briefly about the issue, I'll introduce Yoshimoto's idea about hope. To clarify the concept, I'll present it visually, through some kind of idea map. I may have students engage in some sort of extension activity to deepen their understanding of the concept. Assignment ideas include writing a short story about a fictional or non-fictional character whom is healed by hope from one of the posted afflictions. This assignment will offer students a picture of how hope could potentially play through a character's situation for healing. The point is to clarify the "hope as healer" concept for students before they have to grapple with it in a text. I could also have them read a simple story, possibly a children's book, in which characters find healing through hope. I'll then introduce the unit, explaining that we will use Yoshimoto's idea as a basic reference point, and that we will consider it when talking about characters and the way they find healing or refuge from the burdens they carry.

### **Establishing a Common Thread for the Unit**

Each short story on our reading list tackles the healing issue from a different angle—various characters face various afflictions and find healing through varied means. In order to make the most of the unit and keep clear these stories and the suggestions they make about healing, students will record their reactions and responses to each story in a guided reading journal. Although we will stretch each text in different ways to hone varied reading and writing skills, we will use the reading journal as a central place for

reflecting on and grappling with the ideas put forth by each story. As is outlined above, we will assume hope as the universal healer, and students will ask the following kinds of questions of each story:

- How do characters find hope? In what form does it come?
- Once characters have found hope, specifically how does it heal or transform them?
- Does it seem, in any instance, that characters/people find healing without hope?
- What other ways do characters/people find healing (apart from hope)?

Prior to this unit, students will have learned and practiced incorporating textual evidence into their responses; students will also have learned my expectations for journal organization and content. The reading journal will serve as reinforcement in writing with textual evidence, a skill necessary for the open-ended response questions on the exit-level TAKS test. Weekly, I will collect and grade students' individual journal entries according to a rubric that measures organization of ideas and the effective use of textual evidence in supporting their ideas. The key to maintaining quality student responses is consistent modeling and assessment.

## **LITERATURE TO BE STUDIED**

### **Yoshimoto's Work**

#### ***Pre-reading Strategy: Journal Writing***

Before approaching any text with my students, I take them through a series of pre-reading exercises. Together we explore some of the topics and themes they will find in the text—I assess their prior knowledge, and they (without knowing it) become increasingly more curious about the story/novel/article/play to come.

Because Yoshimoto's work is so accessible and carries themes common for most people, we will not need to spend a lot of time pre-reading. At this point in the unit I will have already introduced the focus (hope as healer) and the common thread that will bind the unit (the guided reading journal).

For each of Yoshimoto's stories, we will likely do no more than a quick journal write before each short story. For example, I will give students clues about the coming story (possibly character and conflict descriptions) and they will have to write a prediction about the story's plot. Included in the journal prediction, students must address the issue of healing—*how* the character(s) find healing and *in what form* it comes. I may also give students a hypothetical situation (which they will later realize is the plight of the main character) for which they write their own reactions.

### ***Individual Story Summaries and Implementation Strategies: “Newlywed”***

Yoshimoto’s “Newlywed” is the story of a newlywed male narrator who, on his subway ride home one night after drinking, decides he may not choose to return home at all. He’s plagued by the mundanity of his life and feels discontented. As he sits in the train car, allowing his stop to go by, a homeless man takes the seat beside him. As the narrator sits and possibly dozes a bit, the homeless man transforms into a woman who asks about his life and his wife. She poses the idea of his never returning to his life again. He begins to reminisce and realizes that he adores his life and no longer wants to wait and allow it to slip through his fingertips. After losing himself in thoughts and memories he looks back at the woman to find the homeless man once again lying there asleep.

Although the characters in this story are a little older than my students, I think the theme is relevant to their lives. I’m certain that most students will be able to relate to the narrator who feels that his life is getting boring or mundane—I’m also certain that many of those students have had some “wake-up call” experience, like the narrator’s, in which they’ve realized how special their lives are. As we read this story, I’m eager to explore my students’ experiences of healing from this “affliction.”

As outlined at the beginning of the unit, students will keep a guided reading journal as a means for organized reflection. I will pose the following questions during and after reading “Newlywed.” Students will record their responses in their reading journals and later have the opportunity to share their responses verbally with a partner. I will use a similar protocol with each short story in the unit.

- What’s wrong with the narrator? How can you connect his experience with one from your own life?
- How does the narrator find healing?
- Does the narrator find hope? How? Is he transformed by this hope? How?
- Is what happens to the narrator in this story a dream? His imagination? The workings of a higher power? Magic realism?
- This short story was originally serialized on posters in the railway in Tokyo. Do you think the story itself could have “healed” passengers?

### ***“Lizard”***

“Lizard” deals with some weightier, darker issues surrounding healing from horrific childhood experiences. The story is about a counselor/therapist male narrator and his aerobics instructor girlfriend, Lizard, who hardly speaks to anybody. One day she tells him her big secret, that she lost her sight at the age of five because she saw someone stab her mother. Although she eventually re-gained sight, Lizard put a curse on the guy who stabbed her mother, and sometime later he threw himself in front of a truck. Now Lizard thinks it will come back to haunt her. As all of this unfolds, the reader also learns that the narrator’s mother committed suicide when he was five years old. His father’s brother had

raped his mother and she became pregnant with him (the narrator). After the father's insistence that she have the baby, she suffered a mental breakdown and committed suicide when the narrator was just five years old. To heal from the horror they've witnessed, the narrator and Lizard have each other and their healer occupations. The story has an open-ended conclusion after the couple dialogues about suffering, the possibility/impossibility of a higher power, and death.

Reading journal reflection questions for "Lizard":

- Have these characters found healing?
- Do they find healing by helping to heal others? (The narrator, whose mother committed suicide in part because his father was crazy, now works as a therapist to help heal others' minds. Lizard, whose mother was stabbed, now works as an aerobics instructor and acupuncture specialist to help heal others' bodies.)
- Can these characters ever be completely healed? (The narrator is the fruit of a rape; later the woman who gives birth to him takes her own life. Lizard feels that she indirectly murdered another person.)
- Have these characters found hope? If so, how? Have they found hope through a new discovery?
- Is healing ever hopeless? In what case? Why?

### **"Helix"**

"Helix" suggests the idea of healing oneself by voluntarily, purposely forgetting everything. The story opens with a male narrator who is meeting a woman for coffee—the reader later discovers that the narrator and this woman were previously in a romantic relationship. This woman's friend is trying to forget her divorce, so much so that she plans to attend a seminar in which the participants' minds are completely cleared or erased. The idea is that if your mind is washed clean of everything, you are free to start over again. The woman's friend wants her to attend the seminar; the narrator, meanwhile, tries to convince her *not* to go because then she'll forget about their relationship. She insists that she would never forget about him and that even if she did initially, she'd remember again. The pair reminisces and the narrator concludes that they are an "infinite helix."

Reading journal reflection questions for "Helix":

- Do you agree or disagree that purposely forgetting can cause healing? Why or why not? In what situations do you think forgetting could be a valid means for healing?
- Where is the healing in this story? Could we say that the proposed idea of *forgetting* causes the main characters to *remember* the intimate moments they shared and thus find healing? Why or why not?

### ***“Blood and Water”***

“Blood and Water” touches on the issues of healing from feelings of instability, uncertainty, and loneliness; it also questions healing through religion or spirituality. The woman narrator, Chikako, brings readers back to her childhood when her parents moved to an esoteric Buddhist village after her father’s business partner stole all their money. The narrator saw her parents’ move as defeat, and as soon as she was old enough, she moved to Tokyo to start her own life. Although she sometimes desperately misses her parents, she refuses to go back to the village. She moves in with her boyfriend, Akira, who makes wooden amulets, charms worn to ward off evil. Chikako seems to find healing in her relationship with Akira and the kind words of hope he offers. Chikako’s parents, on the other hand, have become devout Buddhists and have found their healing and sense of peace through their religion. At one point in the story, Chikako makes the suggestion that hope (a precursor for healing according to Yoshimoto) often comes from another person’s kind words, and that the timing of those words can change a person’s life. Chikako reflects that for her father, it was the kind words of the village leader that gave him hope and that for her it has been words from Akira.

Reading journal reflection questions for “Blood and Water”:

- What suggestion does Chikako make about hope and healing? Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? Give specific evidence for your response.
- Pretend that Chikako’s father has been interviewed about his philosophy concerning hope and healing. What do you think he would say?
- Who in this story has found healing? Chikako? Her parents? Both? How or how not?
- Do you think that one character’s means for healing is more valid than the others’? Why or why not?

### ***Supplemental Activities: Banana Yoshimoto Interview***

So far I haven’t been able to find very much information about Banana Yoshimoto. I will search more, but if I don’t find anything, I may have students work through an assignment in which they make up questions they have for Yoshimoto. We would do this assignment after a significant period of time reading and studying her work. I may even take it as far as having pairs complete the assignment, coming up with inferential answers to their own questions. We could then have the pairs present to the class—one student as interviewer and one as Banana Yoshimoto—and vote (after all the presentations) on which interview we think to be the most realistic representation based on her work.

## Danticat's Work

### *Pre-reading Strategies: Setting the Stage*

Because Danticat's work carries a strong historical context, and because her writing style will likely be unfamiliar for students, we need to spend significant time preparing to read her work. Through a series of lessons and activities, we will "set the stage" for the story by learning about Haitian history, the author's life and purpose for writing, and her use of polyphonic narration.

### *Haitian History*

To capture the backdrop for Danticat's stories, I want to familiarize students with a basic historical and present-day picture of Haiti. Since *Krik? Krak!* wasn't written (to my knowledge) to portray a specific year or decade, its stories seem to illuminate the general situation in Haiti from the 1950s through the present. If possible, I'd like to show the documentary film *Haiti: A Painted History*, which chronicles the country's political and artistic history from 1492-1997. I would highlight crucial points (relevant to the readings) by giving students an organizer or structured note-taking paper to use during the film. If I'm not able to put my hands on the film (it's not currently available in the school or city public library) I will at least work through a timeline with students, showing them as many photographs as I can, gathered from the internet and/or from books.

According to an article written by Thomas Mathews published in *World Book Online Americas Edition*, Francois Duvalier ruled Haiti with absolute power from 1957 until his death in 1971. He was elected in 1957, declared himself re-elected in 1961, and was elected president for life in 1964 by the National Assembly, a group which he had hand-picked. Duvalier used the majority of the country's money to pay government employees and left the rest of the country to suffer. Because of this, rebel groups formed, their members later killed or exiled by Duvalier's regime.

When Francois Duvalier died, his son Jean-Claude became president. During his rule, Jean-Claude declared amnesty for the 400,000 Haitians who were exiled during his father's rule, and set terms that would allow the Haitian people to form opposition parties to his government. Although his administration seemed more positive, conflict and tension remained, and he too ruled as a dictator. In 1986, rebels overthrew his government, and he fled the country.

In 1990 Haiti elected its latest president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, an ex-priest. Despite high hopes, his presidency collapsed within a year and since then, according to Stephen Johnson in his article entitled "Haiti: Democracy or Dictatorship," Haiti has had even more problems. Following Aristide, a repressive military junta took over, causing an exodus of over 41,000 people. The situations Danticat portrays in her fiction are the real-



life events found in history books and current news reports—stories of Haitian people leaving on boats oftentimes only to be picked up by the Coast Guard. Amnesty International reported in 2001 that Haiti’s human rights situation is at a critical level. Freedom is being repressed, and the police and other justice officials are not protecting the rights of their citizens.

A background knowledge of Haitian history is necessary for understanding Danticat’s fiction. I will most likely not expect that students learn and remember the specific politics of Haiti; I do, however, want them to understand the persecution the Haitian people face so they understand Danticat’s characters’ motivations for leaving, suffering, and healing.

### ***Edwidge Danticat: Biographical Information and Purpose for Writing***

When studying any piece of literature, I like to present students with information about the author. To fully understand a piece, students need to understand why the author wrote it and why the piece’s themes, characters, and events are important to him or her. As we delve into Danticat’s stories and learn about *their* historical and political backdrop, I’d also like to share Danticat’s background with students.

Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti in 1969, but only lived there until she was twelve when she moved to Brooklyn, New York, where her parents were already living. Her first language was Creole, and she spoke French and English at school. She started writing in high school for a newspaper that was sent out to all the public schools in New York City. She continued writing and completed her undergraduate degree at Barnard. She later went on to earn a Master’s of Fine Arts from Brown University.

Although she has moved to the United States at a young age, and although she writes in English (not Creole or French), she considers the Haitian culture and history central in her life. Danticat goes back to Haiti whenever she can and sometimes broadcasts her work in Creole over the radio.

Instead of just giving students notes about Danticat’s past, they’ll read a November 2000 interview with her written by Alexander Laurence. This exposes students to yet another genre of writing, the interview, which will be less common to them and therefore more interesting. Reading an author interview makes the author more human and more real. Instead of finding out who Edwidge Danticat is through a series of stated facts, students will experience her personality and her voice first-hand (more or less). They will learn about her personality and her life through her own words, her own answers to probing questions. I will complete the Edwidge Danticat picture by filling in the factual data not present in the interview—birthplace, educational background, etc.

### ***Healing through Memory and Testimony in Danticat's Work***

The epigraph to Danticat's book of short stories *Krik? Krak!* contains a quote from the Haitian writer Sal Scalora who writes, "We tell the stories so that the young ones will know what came before them. They ask Krik? We say Krak! Our stories are kept in our hearts" (1). This simple preface seems to epitomize Danticat's concept for writing—to pass along stories to the next generation, to keep alive the stories of her people, to heal through memory. For Danticat, her people are healed and will live on because their stories are housed in the hearts of their own future generations. This is an important concept when reading Danticat's work—to realize that the stories themselves serve as a healing balm for the people.

In addition to the stories themselves acting as a healing power for the people, the writing—the very act of transcribing the stories—also serves as a healer. In her critical essay "Returns to native lands, reclaiming the other's language: Kincaid and Danticat," Gerise Herndon asserts that "memory and trauma live in the physical self, inseparable from the present moment. Remembering in writing, however, fulfills the desire for testimony, so that trauma doesn't isolate the individual self" (5). Thus, Danticat "remembers" for her own healing of that which persecuted her ancestors. She does not re-surface the atrocities her people suffered to hurt, but rather to *help* and to heal. Gerise Herndon adds, "Danticat works against the historical amnesia so common in the U.S., the active forgetting of a shameful past" (5).

These interrelated concepts of healing through memory—both in the passage of stories *and* in the writing (testifying) of these stories—is key to understanding the author's purpose and the importance of these writings to Danticat. As we read "Children of the Sea" from *Krik? Krak!* I'll bring these ideas to my students and possibly expand on them with a writing assignment. In one way, I think it could be constructive to model Danticat's concept and write (testify) about that which plagues us and our families. In another way, I don't want to force students outside their comfort level, especially those students who are very private about their family life.

### ***Understanding Danticat's Polyphonic Narration***

Before reading Danticat's "Children of the Sea," I will familiarize students with polyphonic narration (or in this case, dual-narration). "Children of the Sea" is the story of two narrators who are writing letters back and forth, the male character on a boat headed for the United States, the female character living in war-torn Haiti. The reader reads only the characters' letters to each other, but quickly pieces together the story of their romantic relationship and the war that now divides them. The characters may never meet again, may truly never know the other's story/perspective (created in letters), but the reader is in touch with both sides. Through polyphonic narration, the reader sees the fate of each character unfolding, even as the characters—victims of war and exile—are too far removed from each other to (possibly ever) know.

In her article “New ways of telling: Latina’s narratives of exile and return,” Jacqueline Stefanko explains that in order to heal wounds caused by exile and migration, Latin American women writers use the polyphonic narration technique. Latina writers create texts that carry changing narrators or “multiple voicings” in order to break down the constructed boundaries between their people. Within a heterogeneous dialogue, the reader is faced with the perspective of two (or sometimes more) characters in a migration or exile situation.

Before reading, I will explain this technique and its purpose so that students can better understand the text. During and after reading, I will ask students to reflect on this technique as a means of healing. Does polyphonic narration function the way this critic says it does? Is polyphonic narration a way to break down boundaries and build bridges, or does it only accentuate the distance and intensity of the struggle? If indeed it does accentuate the distance and intensity of the struggle, does it work towards the purpose of healing and breaking down boundaries, or does it have a different effect?

### ***Individual Story Summary and Implementation Strategies: “Children of the Sea”***

As I outlined in the paragraphs above about polyphonic narration, “Children of the Sea” is the powerful story of two lovers separated by war in Haiti. Written in the form of a dual narrative, the story presents two accounts of survival—the male character on a boat headed for the United States, the female character still living in war-torn Haiti. The male’s letters profile miserable life on the boat—he speaks of a pregnant girl, Celianne, who eventually gives birth to a stillborn baby. She throws herself off the boat after she is forced to throw her dead baby overboard. The female’s letters profile war life as she witnesses a neighbor being bludgeoned to death for supposedly working against the government. Although the reader is in touch with both sides of the narrative through the characters’ letters to each other, the characters themselves may never meet again. By the end of the story, the male narrator is forced to throw his book of letters overboard. The female narrator has fled Port-au-Prince with her family and is living in the country, continuing to write letters to her beloved, questioning if he’s still alive.

This story suggests healing through varied means and on varied levels. The characters themselves seem to find healing in recording their experiences and attempting to communicate with each other, however futile that may be. The author, as outlined earlier, finds healing for her people in recording their stories and sharing them with the world.

Reading journal reflection questions for “Children of the Sea”:

- Have these characters found healing? Why or why not? If so, in what form does their hope come?

- What advice could you offer to help these characters find healing? Do you think Yoshimoto’s theory could help them to find hope in their situation?
- Is it ever too late to heal? When? Was Celianne beyond the point of no return?
- Do you think healing is a *choice* that people make or do you think it is a result of their circumstances?
- Make a prediction about what you think will happen to these two narrators.

### ***Nonfiction Paired Reading***

As a means for comparison and TAKS test preparation, I wanted to pair Danticat’s “Children of the Sea” with a nonfiction account written by a Haitian man or woman. The Reading TAKS exit-level test will contain two pieces—one literary and one informational. I thought this would be an excellent opportunity to simulate in the classroom the kinds of expectations students will meet when taking standardized tests. Beverly Bell’s *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women’s Stories of Survival and Resistance*, an anthology of Haitian women’s true stories, was the perfect match.

Although Bell began research for *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women’s Stories of Survival and Resistance* during one of Haiti’s military dictatorships from 1991-1994, she says the book really took off in 1994 when the elected government was restored and women could speak publicly. *Walking on Fire* breaks down into five main sections: Resistance in Survival, Resistance as Expression, Resistance for Political and Economic Change, Resistance for Gender Justice, and Resistance Transforming Power. Each section offers a handful of personal accounts, many of which would be wonderful for the ESL classroom because of their vivid story-telling and simple language. I’ve selected the story outlined below, however, because of its relevance to our unit focused on healing.

### ***“Sharing the Breadfruit”***

“Sharing the Breadfruit” is an account from a Christian woman, Marie Sonia Dely, who stresses the importance of community and faith in God. She lives in the community of Bizoton where she describes great poverty that can only be endured through solidarity in the community. Neighbors share everything with each other, to the point of splitting up a single breadfruit when families in the community don’t have anything to eat. She stresses that the strength that community and faith bring offer hope that allows the people to carry on.

Reading journal reflection questions for “Sharing the Breadfruit”:

- Make a connection between this story and one of the other stories we’ve read.
- Do you think that a sense of community and faith in God as suggested by Marie Sonia Dely are valid means for healing? Why or why not?

- What is one difference between how characters find healing in “Children of the Sea” and how they find healing in “Sharing the Breadfruit”? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

### ***Supplemental Activities: Guest Speakers***

Once students are familiar with and interested in the Haitian situation, I’d like to bring in a guest speaker. I’m thinking that an older person from Haiti could come and share his/her accounts of various historical events that we’ve studied. Students would prepare questions ahead of time, which would also force them to think more critically about what they’ve learned. A Haitian guest speaker would serve as an interesting contrast to the written pieces and would bring many of the book’s themes to life.

If a knowledgeable Haitian guest speaker were not a possibility, I could also seek out a Haitian scholar, possibly a professor from one of the universities here in town. This fall, while teaching the history of Guatemala along with a series of teenage refugee accounts, I realized that my students (especially those who have persevered through similar situations) generate political questions that I have not considered. Someone who is educated in Haitian issues and politics could answer these more profound and complicated political questions. Also, a scholar could help us grapple with questions of healing for the Haitian people and possibly identify sources of political hope.

### **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

This unit is intended for use as part of the English as a Second Language curriculum in my classroom. Below I’ve outlined the specific objectives that we will cover through the course of the unit. The lessons will focus most heavily on reading and writing TEKS established by the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

#### **TEKS Writing Objectives**

(4) Writing/inquiry/research. The student uses writing as a tool for learning.

#### **TEKS Reading Objectives**

(7) Reading/comprehension. The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies.

(8) Reading/variety of texts. The student reads extensively and intensively for different purposes in varied sources, including world literature.

(9) Reading/culture. The student reads widely, including world literature, to increase knowledge of his/her culture, the culture of others, and common elements across cultures.

(10) Reading/literary response. The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts.

(11) Reading/literary concepts. The student analyzes literary elements for their contributions to meaning in literary texts.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson Plan I: Reading Strategies and Themed Writing Assignment for Yoshimoto's "Newlywed"**

#### ***Student Objectives***

Comprehend the text by monitoring reading strategies and modifying them when understanding breaks down; making predictions; asking questions; visualizing, summarizing; connecting the text to their own lives, the world, and other texts; and evaluating what they're reading.

Recognize the theme within the text and analyze the characters.

Write a story from their own lives that profiles an event similar to the one that happened in the "Newlywed."

#### ***Pre-reading***

Students have prepared for the text in previous pre-reading lessons—they're familiar with the setting (Tokyo subway) and understand previously unfamiliar vocabulary words.

#### ***Reading***

Today students are seated in pairs to read the first part of "Newlywed." Between them is an envelope of cards, one for each of the six reading strategies. (They already know how to use the six reading strategies: predicting, questioning, connecting, visualizing, summarizing, and evaluating.) To read, one student begins and reads two-three paragraphs. When he/she finishes, his/her partner takes a card from the envelope and has to practice that reading strategy aloud. For example, after reading the first page of "Newlywed" a student may pick the "predict" reading strategy card and predict that the narrator will cheat on his wife. Then, the student who has just predicted (but hasn't read yet) will read from where the first student left off. After he/she has read for a few paragraphs his/her partner will pick a strategy and exercise the strategy found on that card. Students continue to read the story, alternating paragraphs with their partners while practicing the reading strategies.

#### ***Guided Reading Journal***

As I outlined in the unit, students will fill in a guided reading journal and share their responses with each other and possibly the whole class. The following questions, as outlined earlier, will be journal reflection questions for this story:

- What’s wrong with the narrator? How can you connect his experience with one from your own life?
- How does the narrator find healing?
- Does the narrator find hope? How? Is he transformed by this hope? How?
- Is what happens to the narrator in this story a dream? His imagination? The workings of a higher power? Magic realism?
- This short story was originally serialized on posters in the railway in Tokyo. Do you think the story itself could have “healed” passengers?

I will also point out to students that this story was serialized on posters in trains in Tokyo. That said, I will ask them to consider the following:

- Why do you think the rail company in Tokyo wanted to post this story for its passengers?
- Do you think it helped to heal any passengers? How?

***Assignment***

After students have responded to the story in their journals, students will write their own stories. Their story should be one from their own lives that profiles an event similar to the one that happened in the “Newlywed.”

**Lesson Plan II: Comic Strip Storyboard for “Lizard”**

***Student Objectives:***

Construct storyboard graphic organizer to summarize plot.

***Assignment***

Create a comic strip that shows what happened during “Lizard.” Include at least 10 frames, each with an illustration and a written commentary (explanation) about what’s going on. Include dialogue within frames when necessary. To earn full credit, you must use accurate information and SPECIFIC EVIDENCE from the story in both your illustrations and your written explanations.

**Lesson Plan III: Readers’ Theater for “Children of the Sea”**

***Student Objectives***

Compile written ideas and representations into reports, summaries, or other formats and draw conclusions. Create a play that portrays the characters, setting, and plot of “Children of the Sea” through use of accurate and logical character dialogue, stage directions, and props.

### ***Explanation***

After students have read “Children of the Sea” and we have discussed it through the guided reading journals, I will put students in groups (of four or five), where they will re-create their assigned section of the story in a theater production—they will later perform these plays for the class.

To begin, each group will brainstorm ideas about what it would have been like to *live* through their assigned story section. The idea is to get students thinking in realistic, visual, sensual terms about their section. For an assigned story section that takes place on the boat (written by the male narrator) students would respond to the following questions:

- What was it like for the narrator on the boat escaping Haiti?
- What was he wearing? What was he carrying?
- What did the scene look like? What did the other people look like?
- How did it smell?
- What kinds of noises could he hear?
- How did he feel?

For an assigned story section that takes place in the midst of the war on the Haitian mainland, students would respond to the following questions:

- What was it like for the narrator in the war during this story section?
- What was she wearing? Who was she with?
- What did the scene look like? What specifically did she see?
- What kinds of noises could she hear?
- How did she feel?

### ***Assignment***

After groups have focused on their story section and recorded some ideas, I’ll explain the Readers’ Theater assignment. The whole point is to bring the story to life in the classroom, for students to learn to see the story with more depth. Students will create a script where they will record (and create when necessary) character lines and stage directions. They will then perform their script for the class, after creating a set and props that reflect the story’s setting. Below is the rubric they will receive to plan their assignment. I will use the same rubric to grade their work.

### **Script (100 points)**

#### ***Basic Information (15)***

Title for your section (5)

Cast of Characters (10)

(Include names of characters from the story and the names of all group members playing those parts; also include who will read the parts of the narrator.)



***Background Information (30)***

(Paragraph or paragraphs must be well-structured to give a cohesive, understandable overview of the story/historical background up until the point of your assigned section.)

Who is involved? (5)

Where does this portion of the story take place? (5)

When does this portion of the story take place? (5)

What's going on in this section of the story? (5)

Why is the "what" happening? (5)

Paragraph is well-structured (5)

***Characters' Lines (20)***

***Stage Directions (20)***

(Include notes in parentheses to show the characters' actions, emotions, and personality traits. These notes should guide the way the actors play their roles.)

***Organization of Final Script (15)***

(This is your effort and neatness grade. Your final product must be organized, consistent, and easy-to-follow. Your group will have to plan the script in drafts so that in the end you can turn in a final, polished piece.)

***Performance (40 points)***

Your goal for this part of the assignment: Get inside your character!!!! You want to be "in character" so much that you project that character's emotions and personality to the audience. Read your part with life and expression! You will receive an individual grade for your performance. Your group will receive a group grade for the props.

***Acting in Character (10)***

(By the way you look, speak, and act, it should be obvious to the audience which character you are playing. We should feel that character's presence in the room!)

***Using a Loud Voice (10)***

(For a strong performance, we need to hear what you're saying loud and clear.)

***Following Lines and Stage Directions (10)***

(You're writing the script for a reason—so you know *what* to say, *how* to say it, and *where* to say it on the stage. Show off all your hard work on the script by following it in the performance!)

***Use of Good Props (10)***

(Be creative in making props to support your performance. Your goal is to transform your "stage" into the scene you're performing.)

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Resources for Teachers

Davis, Rocio G. "Oral narrative as short story cycle: forging community in Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!*." *MELUS* Summer 2001: 65-83. Expanded Academic ASAP. Texas Library Connection Databases. 5 Feb. 2003. <<http://web5.infotrac.gal>>.

This article outlines prevalent themes and symbols in *Krik? Krak!*, the book of interrelated short stories by Edwidge Danticat that we will read.

Herndon, Gerise. "Returns to native lands, reclaiming the other's language: Kincaid and Danticat." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 3 (2001): 1-7.

This article explores the idea of "memory and the need to testify" (through writing) as a means for healing wounds of trauma and migration. "Memory and the need to testify" will be themes that we study during the unit.

Johnson, Stephen. "Haiti: Democracy or Dictatorship." *World and I* 18 (2003): 38-40.

This commentary on Haiti's present situation is useful when researching Danticat's purpose for writing. This article confirms that Haiti's problems are not only a memory, but a present-day reality.

Laurence, Alexander. "Edwidge Danticat Interview." *Free Williamsburg* November 2000. 12 Feb. 2003. <[http://www.freewilliamsburg.com/still\\_fresh/edwidge.html](http://www.freewilliamsburg.com/still_fresh/edwidge.html)>

This is the interview that students will read to develop background knowledge about Danticat and her work.

Mathews, Thomas G. "Duvalier, Francois." *World Book Online Americas Edition* 5. March 2003. 3 Feb. 2003. <<http://www.worldbookonline.com/ar/?/na/ar/co/ar170610.htm>>.

This article focuses on the Haitian dictator, Duvalier, who ruled the country from 1957-1971.

Stefanko, Jacqueline. "New ways of telling: Latina's narratives of exile and return." *Frontiers* July 1996: 50. Expanded Academic ASAP. Texas Library

Connection Databases. 5 Feb. 2003. <<http://web5.infotrac.gal>>.

This article discusses Latin American women writer's tendency to use "polyphonic narration"—texts with multiple narrators—as a means for breaking boundaries and healing wounds caused by exile and migration.

## Reading for Students

Arthur, Charles. *Haiti: A Guide to the People, Politics, and Culture*. New York: Interlink Books, 2002.

This book provides in-depth language-accessible information about Haitian history, politics, healthcare, religion, and culture. It would be an excellent classroom resource for students interested in learning more about Haiti.

Bell, Beverly. *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001.

This is an anthology of real accounts from Haitian women about life, hope, survival, faith, healing, and oppression in Haiti.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Krik? Krak!*. New York: Random House, 1995.

This is a book of interrelated short stories about Haitian women. The writing is rich and accessible, but a couple of the stories may not be appropriate for the classroom because of sexual content.

Yoshimoto, Banana. *Lizard*. London: Faber and Faber, 1993.

This is a book of six short stories written by a Japanese writer. The stories focus on relationships and fate, and pose interesting questions about healing.