

**Bridging Literary Elements and the Dramatic Experience using
*Bridge to Terabithia***

Brandi Allen
Johnston Middle School

Creative drama in grades four through six performs a dual role within the language arts curriculum: as a discrete component as drama and for engaging students in a variety of work in speaking, listening, writing, reading, and with literature. It can keep students reading aloud with understanding and expression even after they are competent silent readers.

- June Cottrell, *Creative Drama in the Classroom*

INTRODUCTION

My first year teaching middle school was a wonderful new experience. It was an invigorating change from the second graders I'd taught for two years prior. I loved the little ones. I also enjoyed teaching them how to read and how to refine their knowledge of phonics and comprehension. However, I longed for an older population of students to whom I could present more challenging lessons. I thought it would be revitalizing to teach an academic reading class where I could influence mature minds with the love of literature and reading that I so cherished.

Subsequently, I found myself teaching sixth grade reading at a fine arts middle school, and it proved to be all I anticipated. I quickly realized that being in a middle school environment not only meant having access to intriguing students, but intriguing faculty as well. I was in the company of dedicated teachers who shared engaging lesson plans, novel ideas, and professional advice. Needless to say, I made several marvelous acquaintances that first year. Amongst them was a theatre arts/drama teacher whose classroom was across the hall from mine. I'd always found acting and theatre interesting and was curious about the enthusiastic learning echoing from her class. As they were in need of an audience, I began to bring my class over to watch their mini performances and visit during my planning periods. I became inspired and began thinking of new ways to incorporate dramatic activities into the reading curriculum. These ideas grew into lesson plans for talk show styled character interviews, writing and acting out missing movie scenes to the novels we'd read, and designing movie posters.

I also learned from my colleague that every year our school puts on a school-wide theatrical production. That year's theme revolved around the dedication of our student art gallery to a remarkable artist and Texas Southern University professor, John Biggers. This talented drama teacher took it upon herself to write and direct a musical about Mr. Biggers' life and accomplishments. I immediately volunteered to help. From beginning to end, I was awestruck by the process of bringing this creation to life. From the development of the script to casting and rehearsals, I witnessed the magic of theatre and

the dramatic experience. I saw students who had no prior knowledge of drama or theatre transform into young actors and actresses. I learned as they learned, and from that moment a most memorable experience was etched in our minds. I was convinced that drama and literature must be presented to young students hand-in-hand early in their school careers.

UNIT BACKGROUND

The current theme for a unit used in my sixth grade reading class is titled, “Don’t Judge a Book by Its Movie.” In this unit, we read three different novels that have been made into movies. After reading each book, we compare and contrast the text version to the dramatic performance. Objectives targeted are aligned with the district’s curriculum to familiarize students with basic literary elements and devices such as the development of plot, the organization and presentation of ideas, representation of characters, imagery, and author’s perspective.

“Bridging Literary Elements and the Dramatic Experience” will carry many similarities to my current theme. In addition to reading the novel, *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, we will view the movie and read the play with the dramatic presentation in mind. Direct emphasis on comparing and contrasting written text with visual representation will persist, as will our attempts to achieve the student-centered objectives. The theme will involve the dramatic experience and how it differs from reading a novel or poem. It will invite students into a world of dramatic effects; what they are, and how they are created. This exploration of dramatic art will hopefully spark students’ imaginations. I want them to be able to re-create, in the “mind”, the dramatist’s intention, which was to write a play for acting and theatre, contrary to a novel or poem that’s written primarily for the individual reader to make a private and personal connection to the text. According to J.L. Styan, author of *The Dramatic Experience: A Guide to the Reading of Plays*, “The difference here is partly because the poet, like the novelist, thinks of his reader as an individual; the playwright must always think of an audience as a group. *Drama is a social activity; reading is usually a private one*” (2).

BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA SYNOPSIS

The following synopsis and explanation of themes was adapted from information provided by Sparknotes.com:

Jesse (Jess) Aarons is very unique 11-year-old boy who loves to run. He lives with his family in a rural area of Lark Creek, Virginia and dreams of being the fastest boy in the fifth grade. Being the only boy among five sisters, he’s constantly vying for his father’s attention and hopes to gain it by winning this macho title. Jess loves to run, but it is not his first love. He’s an extremely talented artist who enjoys sketching, drawing, and painting. Unfortunately, becoming an artist is not viewed as a masculine endeavor during this 1977 time period. On the contrary, such a pursuit could result in being labeled as a

“sissy” by the world, and most importantly, by his father. Jess is pestered by many pressures of a poverty stricken, rural life, some of which are limited luxuries, overbearing chores, overworked parents, and a stifled identity that results in isolation from his peers. As an escape, Jess runs every day with the anticipation of victory. Ironically, he never suspects that the new girl, Leslie Burke, who just moved in next door to him, will join the races and beat everyone.

Leslie stands out from the rest of the kids not only because she is the new girl, but because of her unconventional background. Leslie’s parents are highly intellectual, affluent, and liberal, qualities that are very different from the conformist population in their new hometown. They have exposed her to many worldly things and have encouraged in her a great imagination coupled with creativity and fun-loving mischief. It is this personality that accelerates an intense friendship between her and Jess. They began to spend time together at school and at home. One day, during one of their many adventures, the two wander into uncharted territory. They crawl across a fallen tree branch, over a creek, and into a secluded area in the nearby woods. Immediately, the kids adopt it as their make-believe kingdom, “Terabithia,” where Jess will reign as King, and Leslie as Queen. This fantasy refuge provides, for the kids, an escape from all their worries: the kids at school, Jess’ mediocre family, and Leslie’s adjustment into her new surroundings. Terabithia is the place where their problems are solved or merely forgotten.

Their time in Terabithia is therapeutic, especially for Jess. His friendship with Leslie sparks the surge of confidence and fearlessness he has coveted for so long. Leslie also introduces Jess to a world of make-believe and fantasy that he has never thought to entertain outside of his art. Her elaborate stories and unending imagination provides the support and encouragement he needs to continually improve his artistic ambitions. Some of his best ideas are sparked by their Terabithian conquests. In exchange, Leslie learns quite a few things from Jess. Her open-minded, liberal upbringing has left her unexposed to any religious ideologies. Jess takes time to share his in-depth knowledge of Christ and invites her to church for the first time on Easter Sunday. Their friendship, though criticized for its cross-gender nature, does wonders to break Jess of his shy and timid personality.

Like most introverted, artistic students, Jess loves to draw in class. One day, his music teacher Miss Edmunds, discovers some of his artwork. She is pleasantly surprised at the talent he possesses and invites him to spend the day with her touring art galleries in Washington. This is an extraordinary experience for Jess, one that exposes him to art on a broader scale and makes him feel important. Unfortunately, things take a turn for the worst. While out with Miss Edmunds, he remembers that he forgot to tell Leslie that he wouldn’t meet her at Terabithia. Back in Lark Creek, there’s a rainstorm that floods the creek in their fantasy kingdom. Leslie, being the fearless free spirit she is, goes alone. As she tries to swing across on the rope they usually use to get to the other side, it breaks and she drowns. Upon hearing the bad news, Jess was horribly distraught. He’s overwhelmed by emotion and doesn’t believe what has happened. It’s evident that he’s

in denial. As he tries to cope with the tragic death of his best friend, he begins to display the five stages of grief—denial, anger, fear, sadness, and finally acceptance. Once Jess is able to accept the reality that Leslie is gone and that it isn't his fault, he decides to make Terabithia a memorial for his best friend. Although he's no longer plagued by the insecurities that made this childhood hide-away a necessity for him, Jess decides to crown his little sister May Belle as successor to Leslie's throne. He proceeds to build a bridge across the stream so that anytime she wants to come there, she can do so safely. The bridge serves not only as a safe passage to Terabithia but as assurance that Leslie's memory, as well as his own newfound sense of self, will live on (Hourihan).

THEMES IN *BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA*

Friendship

Paterson's central point of friendship is evident throughout the novel. The majesty of Jess and Leslie's union is woven amidst threads of fantasy and imagination. Furthermore, this union is encouraged by the common need to escape certain problems and pressures that weigh heavily on their young spirits—particularly Jess, who was hopeless, and repressed. Had he not found an outlet for his stress and a way to expand his mind, he might have reluctantly given into his less-than-satisfactory surroundings and accepted conformity. Paterson also dares to create an aura of controversy within this innocent story of boy meets girl. In 1977, when the story takes place, cross-gender friendships were frowned upon. Not only do the characters in the book tease and mock, but Paterson herself was criticized for presenting what at the time was an unorthodox friendship.

Childhood and Imagination

Paterson shows that amongst the problems, the two friends were able to escape into their childhood and find their true identity. Most times we assume that childhood is an optimistic, utopian state of being. This belief is utterly contradicted by the reality of the children having to battle identity crises, social isolation, and acceptance of death. The imaginary land of Terabithia is a representation of the perfect childhood, one void of any adult chastisement or ridicule from peers. This fantasy world is fully intact within the imaginations of Jess and Leslie. That is, until Leslie's untimely demise.

Stages of Grief

It's quite distressing to read about Leslie's death and how agonizing it is for Jess to deal with it. Nonetheless, we become part of his journey through the stages of grief. Let's explore these stages in detail as outlined on Roberts Bowers' website, *What is Grief?*

Denial – In the denial stage, Jess refuses to believe that Leslie is gone. He dismisses his family and even imagines that Leslie's is still alive in Terabithia.

Anger – Once he becomes aware of what has taken place, Jess becomes angry with Leslie. He curses her because she has left him all alone. He also feels betrayed by Terabithia for being the place where her accident occurred.

Fear – Feelings of intimidation began to haunt our main character as he realizes that he is alone again. He questions how he will remain strong without his confidant. Jess also doubts that the magic of Terabithia will persist without Leslie to reign as queen.

Sadness – Depression and sadness is normal for anyone grieving a loss. This may be the most difficult stage to deal with. Emotional fatigue may begin to set in after no longer being able to fight back tears. Random outbursts of crying, feelings of guilt, and the thought of being punished are all different way that this stage of grief can manifest itself.

Acceptance – The final stage of grief is acceptance. As Jess ultimately accepts Leslie's death; the reader is also relieved of the emotional burden. Jess is able to move on and deal with logical solutions to a most unfortunate situation. It is here where he builds the bridge to Terabithia as a memorial to Leslie and a safe passage for the new reigning queen, May Belle, his little sister.

IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIT

The dramatic experience will initially be introduced by looking at a favorite story, one the students know and understand. Reading the book first will allow students to make a personal connection with the rich literary elements presented in the text. *Bridge to Terabithia* explores themes of loneliness, friendship, gender issues, and personal tragedy. These are themes that have been prevalent throughout American life and times. I believe that students will benefit if they are first introduced to these themes by making a private connection with the novel. Further discovery of literary devices such as mood, tone, personification, simile, and metaphor will be touched upon as we interpret the play version of the novel. With the play, we will make learning into a social activity where groups will be formed, scenes will be acted out and/or pantomimed, and games like charades will be played. I hope to have the opportunity to hold some classes on stage in the auditorium so students can become familiar with the “feel” of being an actor on stage. Here, students will have the opportunity to pair up and physically re-enact their own selected events from the story that portray intense moods and emotions. Students will also be encouraged to create different scenarios and/or conclusions to the original story.

My yearly lesson plan generally consists of reading five to six novels with direct focus on comprehension, vocabulary, literary elements, literary devices, writing activities, and other special projects. It will be quite simple to further explore a novel by watching the movie and reading the adapted play as well. I've chosen *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, which is a wonderful story for sixth graders and an excellent choice for this unit considering it has been adapted into a play with the help of Stephanie Tolan and Steve Leibman. I predict that the same amount of time used to

present a novel unit – six to eight weeks – could be dedicated to teaching this unit. My usual unit format includes a series of pre-reading activities, quick research assignments, individual reading, classroom discussions, and homework that reinforces comprehension. I will divide the book and the play into several sections and create a worksheet based on the *Novel-Ties* format that my students are familiar with. This format includes the introduction of new vocabulary, an understanding of language, questions that review comprehension, exercises that reinforce knowledge of literary elements and devices, writing activities that promote higher-order thinking and discussions of opinion, development of new ideas, and personal experiences and current events that are directly related what was read. These components will be integrated into the daily lesson plan. In addition to the numerous classroom activities that can be created from this unit, the personal involvement required for the drama can generate heightened interest in topics explored. Research may segue into other academic content areas that will spawn an interdisciplinary experience (Cottrell 185). What follows is a description of the importance of these concepts in detail.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

These activities will provide an introduction to the novel and play’s time period, social history, issues, settings, social issues, and geography. The activities will also allow the students to relate these aspects of the novel and play to their personal experiences and modern times. Resources used will include a synopsis of the play, an Internet web-quest, videos of previous performances, personal interviews of family members and other members of the community, and classroom discussions.

Good readers relate what they’ve read to what they already know. They ask themselves questions, make initial predictions, and create meanings as they move through a text. Good readers also know that as they read, they will likely change their mind about some of their early ideas and assumptions (TAKS 16).

VOCABULARY/LANGUAGE

Bridge to Terabithia contains colloquial speech, figurative language, and vocabulary that is exclusive to the particular time period and social setting. Many figures of speech and idioms used will not be familiar to the students. Therefore, it will be helpful to explore these concepts beforehand in order for students to obtain a true understanding of the dialogue. The vocabulary assignments will allow students to acquire meaning through activities that incorporate matching synonyms, antonyms, inference through context clues, word analogies, language and word study, fill in the blank, and crossword puzzles. As mentioned in the *TAKS Information Booklet for Reading Grade 6*, “In order to develop an initial understanding of what they read, students must be able to use context and other word identification strategies to help them understand the meaning of the words they read” (TAKS 10).

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

These questions will cover all levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy to ensure all students are challenged to exhibit higher order thinking. Questions will extend beyond surface level thinking and instead require students to think outside of the box. Students will also learn to write their own questions using a strategy called Question-Answer Relationships (QAR) developed by Taffy Raphael:

Raphael classifies questions into two broad categories: **Text Explicit Questions** and **Text Implicit Questions**. With text explicit questions, information for generating the question and answer are found directly in the text. Text implicit questions require students to take what they know from the story and relate it to their personal experiences and ideas (Santos 41, 43).

This statement further supports the standard promoted by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) that effective readers are able to answer their own questions, think critically about what they’ve read, develop their own interpretations, and use relevant parts of the text to support these interpretations (TAKS 16).

LITERARY ELEMENTS

Bridge to Terabithia will be a great hands-on opportunity to grasp concepts of plot, setting, point of view, characterization, themes, tone, mood, climax, and other literary elements. Student activities used will include plot diagrams, character analysis charts, character interviews to exercise point of view, and discussions of theme, conflict, and resolution. Once young readers develop an understanding of literary elements, they are more likely to develop an intense interest and a sense of meaning in the stories they read. As these readers learn to make connections between events, characters, and other elements of a story, they will naturally relate what they have read to their own lives and experiences. Consequently, awareness of a story’s characters, setting, and problems gives students an opportunity to relate to the story in concrete terms while learning about emotions and events that are beyond their own personal experiences (TAKS 12).

LITERARY DEVICE

Bridge to Terabithia is full of literary devices that are essential in creating a dramatic performance. Mechanisms such as similes, symbolism, allusion, flashback, and foreshadowing are persistent throughout this novel and play, and will provide opportunities for great literary discussions and exciting dramatic activities. Numerous role-playing and pantomiming exercises can be used for teaching metaphor, alliteration, and onomatopoeia. For example, students can experiment with sounds and the power of words by reciting and pantomiming actions of a popular tongue twister such as “Peter

Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled Peppers” or “Sally Sort Sea Shells by the Seashore” (Cottrell 10, 11).

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Students will be required to think and imagine how certain concepts from the story relate to their personal experiences. It will also allow students to bring ideas that are set in the past to modern times. Creative writing topics will trigger student’s imaginations to put themselves in the characters’ shoes, or even the place of the actors portraying the characters on stage. Dramatic activities may spark students’ curiosity and provide motivation for writing expository essays. Types of writing assignments may include letters to characters or as characters in a story, writing invitations, thank-you notes, and letters of sympathy to or as literary figures (Cottrell 180).

INTERDISCIPLINARY UNITS

Furthermore, interdisciplinary units can be created in conjunction with the social studies academic classes and the drama/theatre arts class. My unit can be adjusted to complement a social studies academic class by exposing students to topics of American life and times with this play. *Bridge To Terabithia* carries several relevant topics of past and current events, debates, and issues. It will also have the flexibility to connect with the magnet program’s yearly school-wide theatrical production. In cooperation with the theatre arts instructor, we can implement an interdisciplinary unit that will introduce students to reading and analyzing the script and exploring early developmental stages of bringing the play to life before auditions are held. This will give students and potential cast members a preview of what it takes to create dramatic art. Once the production is staged, students can compare and contrast the dramatic performance to the written text.

OBJECTIVES

Objective related areas where this unit will be helpful to all students are numerous. Primarily, this topic will offer a better understanding of literature and culturally diverse written texts by remaining consistent with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) objectives. Concurrently, students will be exposed to many drama objectives, outlined in *Creative Drama in the Classroom* by June Cottrell, that complement and reiterate skills associated with the exploration of literature in dramatic form. As a result of mastering these objectives, students will perform better on TAKS Standardized testing and be inspired to pursue life-long learning.

1. Students will analyze characters traits, motivations, conflicts, and the changes undergone as the storyline and plot unfold.
2. Students will continue to learn how to recognize plot, setting, and problem resolution in addition to interpreting literary devices such as symbolism, tone, style, and mood.

3. Students will also become successful in applying these literary devices to understand how they contribute to the effect of the written text and the dramatic performance.
4. Students will be able to manipulate the elements of a story (characters, conflict, setting, mood) to create a new story.
5. Students will identify what motivates a character in a literary offering as well as compare and contrast the point-of-view of different characters.
6. Students will dramatize a literary selection using pantomime and some improvised speech

SEQUENCE OF CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Week One: Pre-reading Research to Awaken Prior Knowledge

The first week will serve as an introduction to the unit. To get students acquainted with the learning that is about to take place, we will first discuss a variety of topics and issues that relates to them and to the story. The major theme that is consistent throughout this story is friendship. I'd like to have the students think about what a best friend is. Does this person share the same interests and talents or do they have an opposite personality? Does it matter if that best friend is of a different gender? (Friedland 2). *Bridge to Terabithia's* secondary theme is that of gender differences. I want students to think about the double standards for boys and girls that exist around their social settings, sports, academic classes, and special interests. We will use these ideas to springboard into a discussion of how prevalent double standards were in the 1960s and 70s. In this story, we have a young boy who becomes very close friends with his new neighbor, who happens to be a girl. At the time this novel was released, it received a lot of criticism and censorship for what was at that time a unique relationship. Nonetheless, it depicts the blossoming of childhood and a magical friendship conjured on the euphoria of imaginative play, our third topic of discussion. Terabithia is an imaginary kingdom thought up by the two leading characters, Jess and Leslie. I'd like to challenge students to imagine their own private refuge. Unfortunately, imagination has been replaced with television and video games. I'd like to re-ignite students' imaginations as we begin this dramatic voyage with the novel version and move into reading, acting, and pantomiming the scripted play. Finally, before we began to read, I'd like to prepare the students for the novel's tragic ending. Death is a universal factor that everyone has to deal with. Katherine Paterson does an excellent job at portraying the different stages a person goes through after suffering a personal tragedy. I'd like students to think about times when they've possibly experienced denial, anger, and finally acceptance of something tragic in their lives. It could be the death of a loved one or a pet, the loss of a friendship, or a divorce among parents.

Weeks Two through Four: Reading the Novel

The novel, *Bridge to Terabithia*, contains 13 chapters, which I have divided into seven sections. We will read the book with the accompaniment of an unabridged dramatized

audiotape. This technique proves beneficial in many areas. Reading along with audiotapes allows all students to stay on the same pace. Sometimes, students with low reading levels feel discouraged when they are stressed with struggling through a text. The audiotape breaks through this barrier while increasing interest with dramatic voice interpretations. Each day we will read a section of the book. In addition to reading, students will complete the worksheet assignment that reviews vocabulary and language study, questions their comprehension of the text, and analyzes literary elements and literary devices. I will further encourage students to make a personal connection to the text with discussions that question characters' development, decisions, and changes they undergo. Students will also be expected to relate their personal experiences through quick creative writing activities that prompt them to share similar experiences and to give opinions and thoughts on particular events that took place in the novel.

Week Five: Book Report

We will conclude reading the novel, *Bridge to Terabithia*, with a traditional book report. The book report will be organized from a simple outline that covers major literary elements and devices including characterization, theme, setting, mood, and tone. However, the major goal of this book report is to introduce to students the plot diagram and its parts: exposition, rising action, climax, conflict, falling action, and resolution. A plot diagram is a triangular-shaped graphic organizer with the labeled sides mentioned previously. It depicts how the progression of events that occur in a story develop into the formulation of conflicts and problems and how the characters obtain resolution. This discovery will give students the opportunity to visualize plot development first in the novel before physically experiencing it in dramatic form.

Week Six: Comparison of Book to Movie

Students will also watch the movie, *Bridge to Terabithia*. While watching this dramatic performance, I will encourage them to look into the actor's interpretation of emotions and events taking place. Students will also complete a movie questionnaire. This questionnaire first defines job titles of people who help put a production of this caliber together. Students will learn the roles of a cinematographer, director, producer, and screenwriter/scriptwriter. They will then answer thought-provoking questions intended to spark interest about how a production of this magnitude comes to life. Students are encouraged to consider what problems might be encountered while adapting the work into a movie, what size budget might be needed for costumes and special effects, what details help establish time and place, and their favorite question: what scenes were changed or left out? I will attempt to illustrate the difference between books, movies, and plays, as well as detail their unique attributes.

Weeks Seven through Eight: Reading the Play

Before reading the play, we will review another questionnaire. This play questionnaire has been adapted from the movie questionnaire. The information provided and the questions posed will have many similarities; however, the major difference to be considered is that this performance is live on stage. The roles introduced will be that of director, playwright, actor, designer (musical, costume, scene, technical, etc.), and understudy. Students will be challenged to imagine this performance on stage, void of special effects and limited in most aspects of settings and scenery. I intend to hold some classes on stage in the auditorium so that students will become familiar with simple stage directions and layouts.

The play will be divided into sections and read daily in a round-robin discussion. Class will begin with a brief review of where we left off and an introduction of the day's selection. Students will first be given time to read the section of the day silently. Next, we will read aloud and begin discussion of major points in the story. No characters will be permanently selected amongst the students, as I would like to give everyone a chance to read a different part. Each student will be expected to point out scenes, quotations, and/or events that stood out to them. The thinking I hope to foster in my students is how the playwright intended the play to be viewed on stage. I will give students the opportunity to pair off and act out selected scenes that personify highlighted literary elements and devices. Variations of this activity will include pantomime games and charades. Pantomiming highly emotional parts in the play will help students develop an understanding of tone and mood and how they are portrayed on stage as well as the effect they produce for the audience. Charades will also be used to play a guessing game to recall events that took place in the play. Acting out themes, conflicts, and climax will provide students with learning in motion as they use active learning strategies to obtain knowledge. According to June Cottrell, author of *Creative Drama In the Classroom*:

By about 6th grade, as students prepare to move into secondary school, many are cognitively functioning much like adults – are able to reason both deductively and inductively, to hypothesize, and to deal with a number of variables at one time in solving problems. They can use drama to practice new cognitive skills (12).

CONCLUSION

This unit presents an excellent opportunity for students to explore a different genre of literature. In order for young teens to mature into cultured, well-rounded individuals, it is important to expose them to the fine arts. Drama may perhaps be one of the arts whose true, raw form is being overshadowed by modern advancements in television and movies. Plays are currently a pastime for only a privileged few. Some students don't have the opportunity or motivation to ever attend a theatrical production if it has not first been introduced in school, by a teacher, or on a field trip. Plays represent an evolution of oral

traditions and folklore. They are the way in which stories, traditions, and lessons were passed down through generations. Later, when written text became more frequent and popular, plays eventually lost their immediate purpose of directly teaching the community and became increasingly known as a form of entertainment.

Johnston Middle School, like most other fine arts magnet schools, has a renowned drama/theatre arts department. This topic will not only motivate many of the theatre arts magnet students, but will also provide additional learning experiences in drama-related topics. It will also give drama students an opportunity to share insight and expertise in drama and theatre with their classmates. Other students who are not in a theatre arts magnet program will benefit simply from being exposed to playwrights and plays, perhaps for the first time.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Face To Face—A Character Interview

Objectives

Students will analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts, points of view, relationships, and changes undergone (TEKS 6.12 F)

Materials Needed

Character interview outline
Homemade costumes
Rubric grading scale

Procedure

This activity is a hands-on approach to understanding point of view and character development throughout the story. Kids love to play dress up and pretend to be someone they're not. Our character interviews will provide this opportunity.

Each student will either choose or be assigned a character to ensure all significant and partially significant characters from the story are represented. Students will then receive a handout that outlines five specific questions that will be asked during the interview. These questions are:

1. How do you feel about the way you were portrayed in this book?
2. What was your most difficult moment in this book?
3. What was going through your mind during this difficult moment?
4. If you could change any of your actions in the book, what would you do differently?
5. How did you really feel about the other main characters in the book?

Character interviews will preferably be held on stage in a “talk show” fashion. Each student will represent his/her assigned character in costume and be interviewed by a classmate. Both will be expected to give a believable performance.

Students will be assessed using a Rubric Grading Scale of 100 points based on the following terms:

Depth of character; character is true to the book and believable	20 points
Interview is thoughtfully planned and easy to understand	20 points
Content of presentation is elaborate, accurate, and complete	20 points
Delivery and speech is clear and useful with few mistakes	20 points
Timing is between five and eight minutes	10 points
Creative Costume	10 points
<hr/>	
Total Grade	100 points

Lesson Plan 2: *Bridge to Terabithia* Movie

Objectives

Students will compare communication in different forms such as [contrasting a dramatic performance with a print version of the same story or] comparing story variants (TEKS 6.10 C).

Materials Needed

Bridge to Terabithia videocassette
VCR
Television
Movie questionnaire

Procedure

After completing the novel, students will view the *Bridge to Terabithia* movie. Students are expected to analyze this dramatic presentation for several traits. First, I expect them to look into the actors’ interpretation of their characters’ emotions and how many of the words from the novel were replaced with gestures, facial expressions, other nonverbal cues, and props.

Students will also complete a movie questionnaire. The questionnaire will provide definitions of four major roles necessary to create a movie production: cinematographer, director, producer, and screen/scriptwriter.

Other questions students will be asked to answer include:

1. What problems might a screenwriter have in adapting this work into a movie?
2. Will the producer need a large budget for costumes and special effects for this story to be told effectively on film? Why or why not?

3. Which scene(s) do you think will be the most challenging for the director? For the cinematographer? Why?
4. What do the costumes reveal about the characters? Explain.
5. What details help establish the time and place?
6. Did you prefer imagining the scenes as you read the book or as you viewed the settings on film?
7. Were the characters in this video more believable and real for you than the characters in the book? Why or why not?
8. Which character(s) was totally different from the way you imagined him or her? Why do you think that character was changed in the movie version? Do you like or dislike the change? Explain.
9. What events were most effective in the video version of the story? Which events were the most effective in the book?
10. What events were changed or left out?

Lesson Plan 3: Plot Diagram Bridge

Objectives

Students will recognize and analyze story plot, setting, and problem resolution. (TAKS Objective 2; TEKS 6.12 G)

Students will represent text information in different ways such as outline, timeline, or graphic organizer. (TAKS Objective 3; TEKS 6.10 L)

Materials Needed

Large bulletin paper or poster board

Markers

Pictures of arched bridges

Plot diagram outline

Procedure

To begin this lesson, the students will learn the terms and definitions that are associated with the plot diagram. This modified version can be found in the *Novel-Ties* teacher resource booklet. The terms are as follows:

Exposition or explanation of the situation

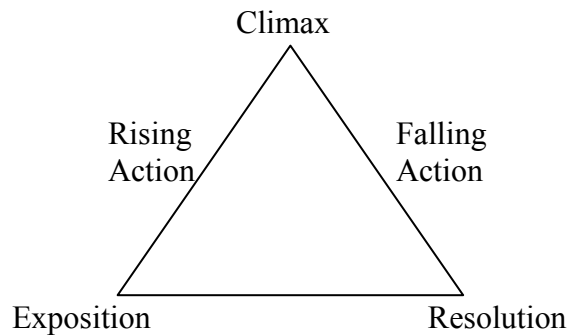
Rising Action or build up of story

Climax or most intense point

Falling Action works out decisions discovered during the climax

Resolution solves the problem, brings story to an ending

Next, we will discuss and create short, one- to two-sentence summaries of major events that relate to each term after which students will complete a blank plot diagram individually on their own.



Students will then form small groups of four to six members to create our Plot Diagram Bridges. Each group will be monitored to ensure the participation of all members. This exercise will result in a visual representation of a plot diagram complete with summaries of each section. Since the typical plot diagram takes on the shape of a triangle (see above), I will provide pictures of different bridges that are styled with the traditional arched shape. Students have the option of copying these styles or creating their own.

Upon completion of the projects, each group will present their bridge to the class complete with an explanation of parts, summaries, and decoration. All projects will be displayed in the classroom throughout the course of the unit.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

- Bowers, Robert. *What is Grief?* 2001. Mycog.com. 1 May 2004.
<<http://www.mycog.com/5stagesofgrief.htm>>.
This website explains in detail the stages of grief and bereavement.
- Cottrell, June. *Creative Drama in the Classroom: Grades 4-6*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 1987.
This work goes into great detail about how to introduce dramatic strategies to students in grades four through six.
- Friedland, Joyce and Rikki Kessler. *Novel-Ties: A Study Guide for Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson*. Learning Links Inc., 1993.
This study is full of helpful pre-reading activities, vocabulary, comprehension questions, and class activities to use with the novel.
- Hattaway, Michael. *Alternative Shakespeare: Teaching Macbeth to Children*. 2000. University of Sheffield. 1 Feb 2004.
<<http://www.dolphin.org/erik/nethernet/research.html>>.
This curriculum gives step-by-step details about how college students were able to introduce Shakespeare to a group of elementary students.
- Hourihan, Kelly. *SparkNote on Bridge to Terabithia*. 1999-2003. Sparknotes LLC. 24 Jun. 2004. <<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/terabithia>>.
This website provided a synopsis of the novel and summaries of themes and symbolism.
- Paterson, Katherine. *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: Harper Collins, 1995.
This novel is a favorite among fifth- and sixth-grade teachers. It is perfect for this unit because it has been adapted into a play.
- Santa, Carol M. et al. *Project CRISS: Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies*. Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1996.
This project was designed to help students gain independence in their learning. The strategies are applicable in all subject areas.
- Styan, J.L. *The Dramatic Experience: A Guide to the Reading of Plays*. London: Cambridge, 1965.
This work is a continuation of the previous and further compliments suggested strategies about how to read a play.

Texas Education Agency. *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Information Booklet Reading Grade 6*. Texas: TEA, 2002.

This booklet provides much-needed information about expectation and skills that will be assessed by the state of Texas each year to assure proficiency of the students in sixth-grade reading.

Supplemental Resources

Bridge to Terabithia. Directed by Eric Till. WonderWorks, 1985. (58 minutes)

This movie is adapted from the novel by Katherine Paterson.

Harris, Aurand and Coleman A. Jennings, eds. *Plays Children Love, Vol II: A Treasury of Contemporary and Classic Plays for Children*. St. Martin's Press, 1988.

The work provides a compilation of plays that are appropriate for sixth grade readers.

Jackson, Jeanie and Nancy Prince. *Exploring Theatre*. St. Paul, Minnesota: West, 1997.

A middle school textbook and teacher's guide used to teach concepts of drama and theatre and tips to teaching them to young students.

Paterson, Katherine. *Bridge to Terabithia*. Narrated by Leonard Robert Sean.

HarperCollinsAudio, 2000.

This audiotape can be used along with the novel to promote fluency in reading.

Paterson, Katherine and Stephanie Tolan. *Bridge to Terabithia: A Play with Music*. New York: Samuel French Inc., 1992.

This play has been adapted from the original novel by Katherine Paterson.

Schumacher, Julie A, ed. *Drama for Reading and Performance Collection One*. Logan, Iowa: Perfection Learning, 2000.

A middle school textbook and teacher's guide that contains plays and strategies that can be used to teach literary elements.

Sloyer, Shirlee. *Reader's Theatre: Story Dramatization in the Classroom*. National Council of Teachers, 1982.

This work is dedicated to teaching children to read with expression and to understand the aspects of performing a written selection for an audience.

Styan, J.L. *Elements of Drama*. London: Cambridge, 1960.

This work provides introduction to the art of the theatre for the general reader and the student of literature.

Tanner, Fran Averett. *Basic Drama Projects, 5th Ed*. Topeka, KS: Clark, 1987.

This is a collection of suggested drama projects appropriate for middle school students.

_____. *Reader's Theatre Fundamentals: A Cumulative Approach to Theory and activities, 2nd Ed.* Topeka, KS: Clark, 1993.

Fran Tanner has published many works regarding the subject of teaching theatre to young students. Her books are excellent sources for strategies, ideas, and general information for introducing theatre into the classroom.

_____. *Creative Communication: Projects in Acting, Speaking, and Oral Reading, 5th Ed.* Topeka, KS: Clark, 1996.

A middle school textbook and teacher's guide that includes introductions, warm up activities, and suggestions for teaching concepts of theatre to young students.