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Grade 11, Level 2, American Literature  
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### **How They See Us & How We See Ourselves**

#### Abstract & Overarching Objectives:

Editor James Atlas' *How They See Us* is intended to be an introduction into eleventh grade American literature at Westwood High School. This is a new text to our curriculum as of the 2010-2011 school year, and it has been instated with the goals of 1) integrating non-fiction into the cannon, 2) providing students with an understanding that American culture is shaped not only by its history and politics, but also by its literature, 3) offering an "outsiders" perspective of America since the entirety of the academic year is based on offering "insiders" viewpoints, and 4) allowing students to formulate their own philosophies of what it means to be American. These goals also aim to answer our essential curriculum question: What role does American society play in forming individual identity?

As this is a very challenging text, my goal is to personalize it and help students discover their own identities as Americans, and on a smaller scale, as citizens of Westwood, MA. By utilizing PBS' POV Borders : American ID, I hope to expose students to more "voices" from across the world. By implementing an observation and perception journal, I aim to shrink the scale of scope and have students focus on their home environment.

This introductory unit will lead into our analyses of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huck Finn*, Frederick Douglass' *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, selections from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. All of these texts emphasize the importance of place in shaping one's identity. For Huck and Jim, it is the Antebellum South and the Mississippi River; for Douglass, the Antebellum South and the Abolitionist North; for Holden, the streets of New York City and his privileged prep school. Each of these settings provides contrasting notions of home and comfort for their respective characters. The observation and perception journal will be an especially useful tool in providing continuity throughout the entire school year, and it will culminate with an 'agent of change' project in June.

#### Duration:

Two – three weeks

## State Standards & Guiding Principles:

### *Guiding Principle 1*

An effective English language arts curriculum develops thinking and language together through interactive learning.

### *Guiding Principle 4*

An effective language arts curriculum emphasizes writing as an essential way to develop, clarify, and communicate ideas in persuasive, expository, narrative and expressive details.

### *Standard 1: Discussion*

Students will use agreed-upon rules for informal and formal discussion in small and large groups.

### *Standard 2: Questioning, Listening, and Contributing*

Students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute their own information or ideas in group discussions in order to acquire new information.

### *Standard 3: Understanding a Text*

Students will identify basic facts and main ideas in a text and use them as the basis for interpretation.

### *Standard 19: Writing*

Students will write with a clear focus, coherent organization, and sufficient detail.

### *Standard 20: Consideration of Audience and Purpose*

Students will write for different audiences and purposes.

*Civics, Standard 11:* Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society.

## List of Materials:

- Computers with internet access
- Projector or Means to Watch Online Video Clips
- Notebooks
- Writing utensils

## Lesson Outline & Details:

Each lesson contains a title, briefly explains an objective or objectives, and offers a procedure. All lessons and resources are heavily adapted from PBS' POV Borders : American ID and are able to be accessed at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders>. I selected these lessons and resources to best compliment James Atlas' *How They See Us*.

## ***Lessons 1: USA in Three Words***

### *Objectives:*

*Students will explore diverse perspectives of the United States.*

### *Day One -- Procedure:*

Students will watch the approximately two-minute video clip, USA in Three Words.

Students will choose their own three words that they think best describe the United States and explain their rationale. Students must explain how their word choices reflect their backgrounds, interests, and hopes for the future.

Students will select one of their three words to share with the class to generate a class list. Discussion will ensue.

### *Homework:*

Students will be told to ask a parent, grandparent (or another person from the same generation), and a third person of their choosing how they would describe America in three words and why. Once compiled, students should create some type of visual display to capture and showcase these perspectives.

### *Day Two -- Procedure:*

Students will briefly share their creative displays and discuss their reactions

Students will watch clips from PBS' "What They Talk About When They Talk About the U.S." featuring global perspectives from Afghanistan, Lebanon, Venezuela, and South Africa. Following each clip, students will be given Handout #2 ("What do you think?") to complete to generate discussion.

Students will read Atlas' Introduction to *How They See Us* as a class with teacher prompted questions.

### *Homework:*

Read *The Rift* by Luis Fernando Verissimo with Q/A

### *Links to resources and video clips:*

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2006/foreducators.html>

## **Lesson 2: *America's Best Identity***

### Objective:

Students will explore the idea of “place branding” and develop a slogan that captures what they feel is America’s best identity.

### Procedure:

Students will complete *How They See Us* Journal and discuss homework (Verissimo’s *The Rift*)

Journal: I will tell students that money is no option and that they can choose anyplace to go on vacation. Then, I will give them a few minutes to select their vacation destination and write down why they want to go there. I will ask a few students to share their thinking and then discuss why each vacation spot has the reputation that it does. Explain that a place's reputation is its "brand," and that eff

Small Group Work: Next, we will explore that this idea of "place branding" also applies to countries. I will divide the class into small groups to read and discuss the articles, "Nation Branding" and “Bono and Brand Africa”. Students will answer the following questions: Why is a country's reputation such an important asset? What is the United States known for? What are the characteristics of a good nation brand?

Each group should then develop a slogan that captures America's best identity. It should be brief, memorable, and communicate what the group thinks the U.S. should be known for around the world. (I will also give students a list of state slogans, country nicknames, and top advertising slogans to help generate their ideas.)

### Homework:

Read Leilah Nadir’s *How I See America as an Iraqi-Canadian* with Q/A

### Links to resources and articles:

[http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2006/foreducators\\_slogan.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2006/foreducators_slogan.html)

### **Lesson 3: American Image Abroad**

#### Objective:

Students will begin to understand some world opinions of the United States

#### Procedure:

Students will complete *How They See Us* Journal and discuss homework (Nadir's *How I See America As an Iraqi-Canadian*)

Students will reflect on the work they have completed over the past 2 days and how it has shaped their thinking of their country.

Then, students will watch the 12-minute multimedia presentation, Advertising Democracy. We will then discuss which aspects of each featured public relations strategy led to success or failure? How might the social and political circumstances of the day have influenced which strategies were used?

Students will then listen to and follow the 14-min. transcript of "The Myth of the Ugly American"

#### Homework:

Read Da Chen's *A Double Life* with Q/A

#### Links to resources, video clips, and podcast:

[http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2006/foreducators\\_americanimage.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2006/foreducators_americanimage.html)

#### **Lesson 4: Cross Country Rhythms**

Objective:

Students will explore the relationship between music, history, and culture.

Procedure:

Students will complete *How They See Us* Journal and discuss homework (Chen's *A Double Life*)

Students will be divided into small groups that are as diverse as possible. I will ask the to read Jeff Chang's "A Hip-Hop America" and answer the following questions:

Next, I will share a playlist that I compiled of five essential songs that would form the soundtrack for a road trip across the United States. I might have had one of these songs playing as students came in and got settled for class to peak their curiosity. I will explain that the song would be required listening for you should you embark on a cross-country road trip, and then I will give details about the song's significance to me, emphasizing its connection to my American identity. I will share the rest of my playlist and allow students to react.

I will ask group members to negotiate with one another to develop a group playlist of five songs that they would play on a road trip across America. Students will be able to sample online music sites to sample songs that aren't familiar to everyone. Afterwards, students will answer the following questions and share with the class: discuss what criteria each group used to choose their songs. What kind of an image of America did these songs convey? What songs or musical genres did the groups have in common with one other? Discuss how music can be a transmitter of cultural tradition and a way to connect diverse groups of people.

Homework:

Read Chris Abani's *The American Empire: A Libretto in Eight Movements* with Q/A

Links to resources and article:

[http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2006/foreducators\\_crosscountry.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2006/foreducators_crosscountry.html)

## **Lesson 5: Patriotism and American Identity**

### Objective:

Students will explore the concepts of "patriotism" and "American identity."

### Procedure:

Students will complete *How They See Us* Journal and discuss homework (Abani's *The American Empire: A Libretto in Eight Movements*)

Journal: "What is patriotism?" Then, have students share headlines from their thinking and discuss where the thoughts of some agree or disagree with those of others. Point out that the term "patriotism" means different things to different people, and that in a multicultural society, a person's identity as an American may be built on a complex foundation.

I will introduce students to author and playwright Ariel Dorfman who is featured in the six-minute video, Patriotism. We will watch the video which follows Dorfman's path from the U.S., where his father's dissidence triggered the family's expulsion, to Chile where he became a rebel in the revolution there and says he felt like a true patriot as he struggled to bring about democracy. Then, a U.S.-backed coup forced him to leave Chile and move to several cities before he eventually returned to the U.S. and settled in North Carolina. Determined to not move anymore, he became a U.S. citizen, saying he'd rather go to jail than be deported. He now continues the democratic tradition by quietly casting his vote on election days.

Discuss with students the contradictions Dorfman has faced in his relationship with the U.S. How do students think these factors influence his patriotism and identity as an American? Have other immigrants faced similar contradictions? What makes a person "American?"

Explanation of summative essay assignment

### Homework:

Stage 1 of essay assignment

### Links to resources and video:

[http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2006/foreducators\\_patriotism.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2006/foreducators_patriotism.html)

### **Concluding Lessons:**

Over the course of the next few days....

...students will select one essay of their own choice from Atlas' *How They See Us* to read independently in class and compose their final journal entry.

...students will reflect on their cumulative entries and use them to progress through the stages of their essay assignment.

...students will share their thesis statements and developing ideas regarding their own identities as Americans.

... students will continue to construct their Observation and Perception Journal on “sense of place” and Westwood, MA.



Assessments:

- Homework and Classwork
- In-class response journal
- Observation and Perception Journal
- Personal Essay

*See attached standard rubric*

Works Cited:

American Documentary, Inc. (2006) Retrieved from  
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders/foreducators.html>

Abani, Chris. (2010). *How They See Us*. Atlas, James (Ed.). New York, NY: Atlas & Co.

Chen, Da. (2010). *How They See Us*. Atlas, James (Ed.). New York, NY: Atlas & Co.

Nadir, Leilah. (2010). *How They See Us*. Atlas, James (Ed.). New York, NY: Atlas & Co.

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## Appendix A:

### *How They See Us*

Over the course of the next few weeks, you will hear from an international assembly of voices who bring into sharp focus the post-9/11 United States and its damaged relations with other countries. As you will soon discover, some of these voices are enraged, others are betrayed, disappointed, awed, and hopeful. I am not asking you to agree with these voices; instead, I want you to carefully listen to them with a critical ear. Our goal is to discover not only how outsiders perceive America and Americans, but also how we view our own selves.

For each assigned essay, you will maintain a response journal, which you will complete at the start of every class. In this journal you will “talk back” to specific comments the authors make. You should know that these essays are challenging and thought provoking, often focusing on foreign policy and pop culture. My hope is that they guide you toward shaping your own philosophy of what it means to be an American. Therefore, it is imperative that you take each assignment seriously and carefully read each essay when it is assigned to you. I also encourage you to conduct your own inquiries wherever possible.

#### **Reading Assignments:**

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Rift* by Luis Fernando Verissimo (pg. 13-20)

\_\_\_\_\_ *How I See America as an Iraqi-Canadian* by Leilah Nadir (pg. 21-34)

\_\_\_\_\_ *A Double Life* by Da Chen (pg. 47-59)

\_\_\_\_\_ *The American Empire: A Libretto in Eight Movements* by Chris Abani (pg. 175-185)

\_\_\_\_\_ Your Choice

## Observation and Perception Journal

### Situation:

Over the past few days, we have begun to explore diverse voices from around the world rendering their impressions of the United States. We have discussed how our identities are shaped not only by how we see our own selves as individuals, as community members, as Americans, and as humans, but also how others see us as well. For the most part, our discussions have been centered on America and the world. Now it is time to zoom in.

### Assignment:

For this assignment, I would like you to get to know a place in your own hometown. To do so, you will complete an Observation and Perception Journal. Your journal will have two parts:

Part 1 – Observations: Reflect on your own observations of the world around you.

Part 2 – Perceptions: Step inside the shoes of one or two people around you. Consider and explain what you assume are his/her perceptions of you.

### Process:

- \_\_\_\_ 1. Brainstorm a list of possible spaces to observe. Choose spaces that are meaningful and accessible to you, places that you can visit easily and often. Then, select your location.
- \_\_\_\_ 2. Visit your space a minimum of one time per month, for a minimum of thirty minutes.
- \_\_\_\_ 3. When you visit it: observe, think, respond.
- \_\_\_\_ 4. Record your thoughts (handwrite only!) in a single subject notebook, standard size, in the form of an informal essay that follows wherever your mind wanders. Be sure to include your observations (Part 1) and your assumed perceptions (Part 2).

This assignment will culminate with a capstone project whereby you will use your “field notes” to be an agent of change to your space (more on this in June!).

## Appendix C

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

L2AmLit: *How They See Us*, Handout #2

### **What Do You Think?**

As you watch each clip from PBS' "What They Talk About When They Talk About the U.S." write your reactions. Were you surprised by any of the sentiments expressed in these videos? Would you agree or disagree with them? What would you say in response to any one of these people?

### **Afghanistan**

Situation: After the events of September 11th, 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban government and find Osama Bin Laden. In December of 2008, producer Gregory Warner asked Afghans what they think of America and Americans.

Response:

### **Lebanon**

Situation: In the fall of 2005, Beirut was a beautiful, populous city and a major tourist attraction. In June of 2006, documentary filmmaker and NPR reporter Kate Seelye visited the campus of the thriving American University, a private college founded in 1866 under a charter from New York state, to talk to graduate students about their views of American policies in the Middle East.

Response:

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**Venezuela**

Situation: South America has taken a decidedly leftist turn in their recent leadership choices, with democratically elected Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez becoming the most outspoken critic of President Bush and the U.S. in the Western hemisphere. Freelance reporter Chad Heeter visited Caracas in the spring of 2006 and asked Venezuelans to share what they think about Americans, the Iraq War and President Chavez.

Response:

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**South Africa**

Situation: In Cape Town, young people are cynical about the good things television tells them about the U.S. Reporter Amy Costello took to the streets in June of 2006 to ask South Africans — both young and old — about their take on the U.S.

Response:

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

American Identity Essay

	<b>Exceeds the Standard for progress</b>	<b>Meets the Standard for progress</b>	<b>Partially Meets the Standard for progress</b>	<b>Fails to Meet the Standard for progress</b>
<b>Focus Thesis</b>	Creative, clear, highly insightful. Consistently maintained. Demonstrates strong understanding of the task.	Clear and insightful. Consistently maintained. Demonstrates clear understanding of the task.	Somewhat clear, and/or somewhat insightful. Only occasionally maintained. Demonstrates adequate understanding of the task.	Lack of clear focus. Weak or un-interpreted ideas used as thesis. Demonstrates little to no understanding of the task
<b>Structure Paragraph construction and sequencing.</b>	Sophisticated and creative introduction and conclusion. Paragraphs are focused and maintain cohesion. Effective, logical and appropriate sequencing signaled by transitions.	Effective introduction and conclusion. Paragraphs are focused and maintain cohesion. Logical and appropriate sequencing signaled by transitions.	Somewhat effective introduction and conclusion. Some paragraphs are focused and maintain cohesion. Somewhat logical and appropriate sequencing. Some abrupt transitions.	Ineffective (or missing) introduction and conclusion. Paragraphs lack focus and cohesion. No discernable organization. No transitions.
<b>Support Use of source materials for evidence and illustration.</b>	Sophisticated and creative use of details and examples to support ideas of respective paragraphs. All details are relevant and vivid.	Effective use of details and examples to support ideas of respective paragraphs. All details are relevant.	Somewhat effective use of details and examples to support ideas of respective paragraphs. Details are somewhat relevant.	Little to no use of details and examples. Irrelevant details.
<b>Idea Development</b>	Provides highly insightful interpretations of evidence used. Makes fully convincing arguments.	Provides accurate interpretations of evidence used. Makes mostly persuasive arguments.	Provides limited or incomplete interpretations of evidence used. Makes somewhat persuasive arguments, and/or makes some inaccurate arguments.	Makes no attempt to offer interpretations, or offers misinterpretations, of evidence used. Makes mostly incoherent, inaccurate, and/or inappropriate arguments.
<b>Voice Awareness of the rhetorical situation.</b>	Highly engaging and consistent voice appropriate to the task. Conveys strong engagement with the material.	Consistent voice appropriate to the task. Conveys engagement with the material.	Voice somewhat appropriate to the task. Clear, but conveys minimal engagement with the material.	Mechanical sounding or inappropriate to the task. Conveys indifference about the material.
<b>Usage and Mechanics Spelling; Coordination &amp; Subordination; Pronoun usage</b>	Sophisticated use of grade-level conventions of sentence structure, usage, formatting and punctuation. All sentences are clear.	Effective use of grade level conventions of sentence structure, usage, formatting and punctuation. Almost all sentences are clear, with isolated minor problems.	Somewhat effective use of grade-level conventions of sentence structure, usage, formatting and punctuation. Most sentences are clear, but there are some major, or repeated, problems.	Too many errors in sentence structure, usage, formatting or punctuation for grade level. Many unclear sentences.