

Approaching Walden 2005

Making Lowell Our Place An ELL Writing Unit about Developing a Sense of Place in a New City

Ann Taylor
Lowell High School
Lowell, Massachusetts

August 2005

Introduction to the Class: English Language Learners

This unit explores the theme of place for high school students new to the United States. Students in this class are ELL (English Language Learning) students who are often new to Lowell and the United States. It is hoped that this unit will give them a start to making Lowell their own. The class in which this unit will be taught is a 90-minute daily period for the whole year. It is the highest level sheltered English class before entering mainstream English. Next year these students will be in mainstream classes. This year is a year for them to solidify their grammar, to greatly refine reading skills, to learn literary terms, to identify and practice the various writing forms, to learn to write research papers, and to improve listening skills. They are reading many types of literature: poetry, novels, biography, drama, short stories, and essays at this level.

As students are placed in this class based on English ability, they may be from 14 to 21 years in age, in grades 9-12, and have a wide range of abilities and interests in learning. They may have arrived in the U.S. two weeks ago, or they may have lived here for a few years. In Lowell, most classes have students with many different first languages.

Introduction to the Unit: Rationale and Purpose

This unit explores the theme of place based community education for students new to United States. In this unit students will have an opportunity to learn about the public resources or public areas of the city they live in and how they can use them. By learning about the public areas and an introduction to the history of Lowell it is hoped that these ELL students can start to make Lowell their place. These ELL students have moved to Lowell for a number of reasons: economic, political, or familial. Most of them did not choose to move to Lowell but rather were sent or brought to Lowell by family. Often they feel uprooted and lost. This unit can give them an opportunity to make Lowell their place while learning English. The unit is interdisciplinary in nature in that while achieving their

primary purpose of learning English, students will also be learning history, natural history, about the arts, local geography, and spatial referencing.

Summary of the Unit: Making Lowell Our Place

Making Lowell Our Place will through readings, class discussions and walk-to field trips show students new to Lowell what resources are available right here in their own city. Most new ELL students learn where the school is, the grocery, the mall, and sometimes the hospital is. That is it. They are unaware of the great public resources that are usually right next door. This unit will touch on broad categories of (1) public outdoor space (2) transportation systems (3) the public library (4) famous people from Lowell (5) outside art – sculpture or statues. The unit lessons will be presented over a three month period this fall, with classroom work and field trips occurring every two weeks. Keeping journals and a final essay will be the means of evaluation. This unit could be continued or expanded in the spring.

Objectives for the students

- Learn what keeping a journal is
- Learn about the benefits of journaling for themselves
- Learn about the city of Lowell:
- Make Lowell their new home
- learn to use the public spaces of Lowell
- Find that they have the ability and inner resources to do this kind of “to them” unstructured project
- Learn to observe, reflect, and later draw upon those memories to write
- Recognize the difference in essays between informative and persuasive
- Sharpen listening skills by listening to other speakers of English
- Improve their writing skills in both creative and descriptive writing

Assessment

1. Class discussion and engagement and participation in field trips

Classroom discussion and comprehension of readings will also be used in evaluation in the form of daily classwork grades or class quizzes.

2. Journals

Students will maintain a journal specifically for this unit. There will be at least ten entries. Journal entries will be directly tied to the individual field trips. Journals will be collected, evaluated, and responded to.

Journal entries will be of two types and will be at least two pages.

Part one: A journal entry will be asked for in direct response to the field trip location. Students will be given specific prompts before the trip. They might be asked to consider: the physical space – how big, how small, the number of entrances: what is happening, how the space is being used: what does it look like, what does it smell like.

Part two: students will be asked to write a fictional account of something to do with the public space that we visited. This may be in the form of a poem, a story, a letter, and may involve drawings, but it must be fiction.

3. Essay: There will be a written essay at the end of this unit which will count as a test grade. Use of different styles of writing is one of the emphases of the course, and this test will use this as assessment. Probably it will require using compare and contrast in an essay, but might also address expository or persuasive essays.

Lesson Plans:

Lesson 1 Parks and Statues

Readings about public parks in the U.S., statues, and the reason for statues.

Some readings will be assigned for homework; some will be read and discussed in class as part of one of our 90 minute classes. Journals will be passed out, we will have a discussion of what journals are, their purpose, and how they will be used in this class.

The next day we will visit the statues in Lucy Larkham Park, which is beside the school, then Boardinghouse Park, which is a couple of blocks away, then Jack Kerouac Park, which is just a little further down the street. In each park the students will first explore the parks, commenting or asking questions. Then we will sit and observe without talking to each other. At the last park we will sit and reflect, make notes, drawings, and observe how these spaces are used. I will talk with the students for a few minutes about these spaces: how big they are, the entrances, the green spaces, the paved areas, the trees, the bushes, the maintenance, the feelings they might have here.

Students and teacher will either write in the journal there, or return to classroom to write about this experience. The second part of the journal writing will occur within the week. Students will write in their journal a fictional account involving the space that we just visited.

Lesson 2 Transportation

Readings: Canals, Mills, History of Lowell

Homework will consist of readings about the history of Lowell as an industrial city. In class we will look at maps, and do some further reading about how the canals were used in Lowell. The role of the National Park Service will be discussed. Out of class we will either go for a ride on the canal boats at the National Historic Park, ride on the trolley, or take the free bus to the train station

Observation: while on the boat or bus make notes, observe, and ask questions about the canals and moving things by water versus moving things by land.

Write in journal about transportation in Lowell in the past, write about transportation in the present. Again, the second part of the journal writing will involve a fictional account involving transportation.

Lesson 3 The Public Library

Read about public libraries, history of libraries in the U.S. about Lowell library

Visit the Pollard Memorial Library and get a tour.

After the tour, Sit in the library - the Pollard Library has some very nice reading rooms- and reflect about the library: observe, what does it look like, smell like, and feel like to you. How do you feel while you are there? After ten minutes of reflection I will ask the students to write in their journals. We will again have a brief discussion of what a journal is. Part two of the journal writing may be a homework assignment.

Lesson 4: Some famous people from Lowell: Jack Kerouac and James MacNeill Whistler

In class read about Jack Kerouac and James MacNeill Whistler. Some of Whistler's paintings will be presented. Part of this lesson will be spent in the computer lab so that students can research to find information about other famous people from Lowell.

Visit the Whistler Museum, and have a guided tour. The building that houses the museum is also an excellent example of a factory foreman's house during the age of the mills in Lowell. Works of other painters of America's Industrial Era are also on display. Reflections upon the tour will be written in the journal as a homework assignment. In part two of the journal writing students will be encouraged to create a fictional piece, which could include drawing or painting.

Lesson 5 : Public spaces and public events

In class we will brainstorm about what other public spaces there are in a city. Then students will visit one of their choices on their own time. They will write in their journal about that space. By this point in the journaling exercise students will have a good idea of what to write both for the first piece and the second piece of this assignment.

Resources/ Bibliography

The Pollard Memorial Library

The Whistler House Museum of Art

The parks of Lowell: Lucy Larkham, Boardinghouse, and Jack Kerouac

The National Historic Site: Lowell Canal Tour/ Trolley Car Ride

Gallagher Transportation Terminal

<http://www.beatmuseum.org/kerouac/jackkerouac.html>

<http://www.artcom.com/Museums/nv/sz/01852-18.htm>

<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/whistler/>

<http://www.pollardml.org/libhistory.html>

<http://www.nps.gov/>

Continuation or Extension:

This lesson has many possibilities of extension. There are several other spheres in which students could be introduced to their new home and ways in which to make it theirs. There are further possibilities in the areas of art galleries, the community college and the public opportunities there, the local festivals: in Lowell the folk festival and the winter carnival events, the many recreational venues such as the YMCA and the Boys and Girls clubs, and the communications field: specifically the local cable TV station.