

Who Has Seen the Wind: Novel Study
Grade 11: English Language Arts, 20-1
Crescent Heights High School
March-April 2006 (4 weeks)
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Overview

As a novel study focused on W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*, this unit will explore the book and the wider context -- its elements, themes, and characters, along with the Depression era and the prairie setting. Canadian fiction, particularly Western writing, will be an important topic, as will the notions of identity, morality, and mortality. The central emphasis will be on reading, understanding, and responding to the novel in a variety of critical and creative ways, including journal entries, poems, a biography, and visual illustrations.

In addition to the book itself, the material in this unit will be presented through mini-lessons, group work, class discussions, individual research and projects, visual representation, films, artifacts from the 1930s, and related literature including poems and memoirs on the Canadian West or the Depression. Supplemental texts will include the original poem, "Who Has Seen the Wind," by Christina Rossetti, highlights from *Raisins and Almonds*, by Fredelle Bruser Maynard, passages from Sinclair Ross, Margaret Lawrence, and Mark Twain, media clips from CBC's T.V. series "Jake and the Kid," recordings of W. O. Mitchell reading aloud during a radio interview, letters written by Canadians to Prime Minister Bennet, and images of the prairie (ex. dust storms).

Throughout the novel study students will compile a portfolio as their final submission for the unit. This portfolio will feature at least 3 response journal entries (selected by the student out of regular entries), a model or illustration of a meaningful landscape, a biography based on an interview, at least one found poem, a visual or written representation of a character, a creative prose piece (i.e. a section of the novel rewritten from a different perspective), and any other relevant materials that the student wishes to include. Students will also complete four quizzes and a vocabulary sheet as necessary.

Students will incorporate all language arts throughout the unit. They will read the novel and related texts, write responses, poems, and non-fiction, listen to class discussions and song excerpts, speak during group work and a project presentation, view film clips and photographs, and represent their ideas through a model, diagram, drawing, skit, or other creative piece.

Assessment

Unit Assessment Blueprint

Quizzes (4)	20
Portfolio	65
<i>-setting (visual representation)</i>	15
<i>-found poem</i>	5
<i>-point of view</i>	5
<i>-character sketch</i>	5
<i>-interview/biography</i>	20
<i>-response journal entries (8)</i>	15
Presentation	10
Participation	5

Students will have approximately two projects due each week, along with a very short quiz at the end of each part in the novel. Quizzes should be administered at the beginning or mid-point of the week, and will generally consist of multiple choice and short answer. These are intended to keep students on-track, while ensuring a basic level of comprehension.

Throughout the unit, journal entries will be marked for completion and relevance (to the theme or prompt). The poems will be marked according to a checklist, while the visual representation, character sketch, biography, presentation, and perspective rewrite will each follow a specific, customized rubric (see Appendix B).

Most of the assignments should be assessed before the end of the unit. Thus, rather than considering specific content, the portfolios will be marked overall for "revision, risk-taking, and process/change" (that is, completion, presentation, effort, and evidence of revision where appropriate). Students will select one piece out of the collection to be evaluated separately. They will also include a rationale and self-reflection as part of their grade.

One possible rubric considers three levels of concern for writing:

- ◆ High-order concerns: focus (topic), development, organization and voice
- ◆ Middle-order concerns: style, sentence structure and sentence variety
- ◆ Lower-order concerns: spelling, punctuation, usage

Extension Enrichment and Special Considerations

Since this unit is designed for an English 20-1 class, standards and expectations are high, while content materials and assignments are relatively advanced. Much of the learning is student-directed, involving research, analysis, and critical thinking. Since there are no coded children in this class, differentiation here consists mainly of flexibility and choice within the parameters of the unit. Indeed, this unit involves a variety of projects that incorporate a range of skills and interests. These should appeal to students while empowering them to take ownership of their learning. Since they have the opportunity to make decisions, particularly in regards to their visual representation project, students should be able to meet expectations while pursuing their own interests and gifts. Plus, while class-time will involve group work and discussions, most of the assignments are individually based. This could be modified, particularly with the visual representation of a setting, to allow pairs or small groups to work together on creating a portfolio that demonstrates understanding and equal contribution; group members would complete a self-assessment and evaluation of their peers in the project, as part of their final mark. Stronger students would follow a modified rubric with more emphasis on analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation required, while linguistically weaker students would concentrate on less complex tasks and potentially less writing compared to visual or kinesthetic projects.

Extra scaffolding will be offered to students who may struggle to grasp certain concepts or come up with new, creative ideas. Along with the assignment sheets, exemplars will be available and students may also ask for more specific instructions as necessary (i.e., some students may need more guidance and support on the visual representation assignment, while others may be able to simply take the idea and fly). In addition, since some students may be very uncomfortable presenting orally in front of the class, they will have the opportunity to make a video and present that instead. Moreover, students will be able to get feedback on their initial work before submitting it in the portfolio. This will give them a chance to grow and improve before earning a final mark. This should reduce anxiety and provide more direction for weaker students.

This unit also has potential for gifted students to excel and extend. Interest in the era or setting could prompt further historical and geographical research, while listening to Mitchell's own comments could lead to a creative writing assignment (following "Mitchell's Messy Method"). Students may want to read Huck Finn and compare Twain's writing to Mitchell's, while others may be more interested in reading Sinclair Ross. The "found poems" assignment could also be a springboard into a poetry unit or a mini-portfolio of poems based on a theme or concept from the novel (the prairies, the wind, death, childhood, epiphanies, life-cycles and nature, etc).

Learning Activities (Instructional Strategies)

Students will begin the unit by briefly studying the Great Depression. This will provide the background knowledge and context necessary to appreciate the book itself. Students will also learn about the life and works of W. O. Mitchell, again providing a stronger framework for reading and analysing the novel.

Once the class has established a foundation and a direction for study, we will begin reading the novel. Students will be assigned a certain number of chapters per week. Each class (or pair of classes) will look at a different topic, theme, or literary element. At the end of each of the four parts in the novel, students will write a brief quiz to ensure that they are keeping up with the reading. Every week, students will also write several response journals on related topics, such as emotions or turning points, the influence of friends, racism, poverty, death/loss/grieving, or the landscape (wind). A series of projects will be assigned throughout the four weeks.

The unit will close with a series of oral presentations and time of self-reflection on the themes and impacts of the novel.

Introductory Approaches

1. Brief overview of the Depression -- factors leading up to the 1929 stock market crash, the drought, the desperation and poverty, the dust-bowl, the reactions -- relief, letters to Bennet, On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riots. Include sample letters, photos, memoirs (such as Maynard), and film clips. Encourage students to imagine "what it was like" emotionally and physically as well as financially (2 periods). Begin with a power-point slide show or a video clip. If time permits, play a life-sized board game where students experience various crop failures and disasters (if based on the novel it could be played at the end as a closure activity).

2. Introduce Mitchell: puzzle activity. Distribute slips of paper on which brief quotes, biographical information, and reviews are printed. A third of the class should belong to each category, and each group should work together to come up with a summary of their impressions. Those with biographical details should arrange their slips in order and present an overview of Mitchell's life to the class. Those with quotes from Mitchell's speeches and stories should describe what they notice about the content, style, and tone. Those with comments from reviewers should be able to discuss the hallmarks of his writing, and its significance or impact on Canadian literature. All three groups should also share what intrigues them and what they would like to know more about. If time remains, include some AV clips of Mitchell or of "Jake and the Kid."

3. Compare Mitchell's writing with examples of other Canadian authors (Sinclair Ross, Margaret Lawrence, etc.), and other writers who focus on the importance of place, such as Mark Twain. Include radio recordings of Mitchell.

4. Poetry connection: Read Rossetti's poem. Why is this the title of Mitchell's book? Does it seem appropriate (why or why not)? What might it signify? Look at examples of other related poetry. Also consider songs written during or about the Depression. What can poems convey about an era or experience? (Discuss emotion, imagery, etc). Include both silent and oral reading, along with some visual illustrations, and consider the tone and mood of texts connected with the 1930s, since that sets the stage for the novel.

Development.

1. The first assignment is to create a representation of a meaningful setting or landscape. In class, students will be given the opportunity to close their eyes and imagine a place that has impacted their lives. They will then brainstorm a list of adjectives describing that place; they should choose the most significant or meaningful aspects of the landscape and concentrate on communicating or representing those features. Then students should begin planning a way to represent their chosen place. They may create a map, 3-D model, collage, diagram, chart, painting, drawing, dance, song, or descriptive story (or submit another idea for approval). Students will have a week to complete the representation. The assignment should also include a brief, written summary that explains the significance of their artistic piece.

2. The second assignment will be writing a found poem. Once students have read at least the first part of the novel, we (as a class) will discuss Mitchell's style and use of language. Students will then look for lines which they feel are "poetic." (This will also involve a discussion on what poetry or poeticism is). Students should compile at least 10 sample lines from the book. These will be used to create "found" poems, which incorporate phrases from other texts as inspiration. Students may write as many of these poems as they wish, but at least one must be polished and included in their final portfolio.

3. Thirdly, we will consider the literary techniques and elements used by Mitchell in his writing. In particular, we will discuss point of view and characterization. In relation to the first, students will identify at least three passages which are written from different points of view, and then select one of these (a significant episode at least 2 pages long) and rewrite it from a different point of view. Students may wish to experiment with language, although they should try to remain consistent with Mitchell's tone and characterization.

For the second element (characterization), students should choose a favourite or intriguing character and write a character sketch analyzing him or her, his/her role, development, effectiveness, and verisimilitude. In class we will draw figures and discuss costuming.

4. Fourthly, we will discuss life stories and biographies, as compared to historical fiction. Students will conduct an interview with an individual who experienced the Depression. They will be required to submit a list of prepared questions before the interview, and the interview itself should be taped or filmed. After the interview, students

Rationale

As a powerful Canadian novel, *Who Has Seen the Wind* invites students to explore familiar territory and meaningful landscapes while they consider their individual and national (or regional) identities. The novel deals with a number of profound life questions, including the notions of right and wrong, death (or birth), and spirituality, and this depth should enable students to consider and respond to important issues in their own lives. Moreover, the artistry of the novel, including Mitchell's use of symbolism, metaphor, and place, and his development of such memorable characters, provides the class with numerous opportunities to study the techniques and elements of writing in an engaging context. Finally, the novel's setting also allows for a multitude of rich connections to be made with other literature and media, and even with the social studies curriculum.

Each of the activities selected relates to a specific objective or important aspect of the novel, as well as supporting the five general outcomes for English Language Arts. Although many more topics or outcomes could be identified, some of the most significant elements include the novel's setting, the context (the historical time period and the life of the author), the characters, the linguistic and literary style, the points of view, and the themes (morality, mortality, turning points, aging). Thus, students will study the Depression through class activities and artifacts, and through an interview with an individual (perhaps a grandparent) who lived during the 1930s. Students will also create a model or image of a landscape that is meaningful to them, in order to appreciate the use of place in Mitchell's writing. They will respond to the characters by creating a sketch or visual representation (cartoon, illustration, film, etc.). They will explore the style and artistry of the language by writing found poems based on lines from the novel. They will examine point of view by rewriting a passage from a different perspective. They will comprehend and analyze the themes through response journals, and through an oral presentation to the class.

These activities have also been selected in order to appeal to as many students as possible, including a range of intelligences and learning styles. The unit combines a variety of approaches and assignments, many of which allow for students to make choices and take responsibility.

will write a biography of their subject. The finished story should be at least four pages long, and may include photographs or other relevant material. Students should also write an introductory preface and conclude with a self-reflection on the process of interviewing and writing the biography.

Students will condense their biography into a 5 minute oral presentation for the class. The presentation should communicate the important details of the interviewee's life and experiences in the Depression, along with any similarities or differences from *Who Has Seen the Wind*. Students may be as creative as they wish during the presentation (i.e. a film, skit, entertaining anecdote, or costume).

5. Alternately, if a student is extremely reluctant (or unable) to present their interview in front of the class, he or she may choose to write a personal essay related to one of the novel's themes.

6. Throughout the unit, the class (either as a whole or in small groups) will also be challenged to discuss and comment on the various themes of the novel, including right and wrong, death, and spirituality. For example, in relation to character development and the growth of Brian, the class will discuss coming-of-age (bildungsroman) and the process of aging. These discussions should help students gather their thoughts before writing an entry in their response journal.

7. Other activities:

- in addition to the above assignments, each class will be devoted to a different theme, element, or topic (see chart in appendix)
- while discussing racism, students will look at Freidelle Maynard's poignant account in *Raisins and Almonds*, as well as a series of memoirs and articles dealing with the experiences of Chinese immigrants
- students will review by making a mind-map at the end of the unit
- placemat activity can be used as a KWL
- PMI activity after films
- think, pair, share as a discussion strategy
- students should find a poster, painting, or photograph that represents a significant episode or emotion and bring it to the review

Closure/Culmination

Once the presentations are finished, students will have a class to gather, review, and polish submissions for their portfolio. They will have the freedom and responsibility to choose their best pieces, many of which will have been marked already. (Students may wish to revise assignments in order to earn a better grade). Students will also create a mind-map, which will summarize the main concepts of the unit.

To conclude the unit, students will write a brief self-reflection summarizing the novel and commenting on their growth, the things they discovered and accomplished, and what mark (with justifications) they feel they deserve.

Resources

CBC. *Jake and the Kid*. [Television Series]. 1990s.

Maynard, Fredelle Bruser. *Raisins and Almonds*. Don Mills, ON: PaperJacks, 1973. pp. 57-60.

Mitchell, W. O. *Who Has Seen the Wind*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1947.

Naismith Family Letters (personal collection), 1920-1939.

Rosetti, Christina. "Who Has Seen the Wind." Online at Poetry Archives, 2003:
<<http://www.emule.com/poetry/?page=poem&poem=3723>>

Ross, Sinclair. *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1968.

Twain, Mark. *Huckleberry Finn*.

Websites

I. The Depression

Writing Den: <http://204.244.141.13/writ_den/h15/direct.htm>

AB history sites: <<http://student.myio.org/1487/Resources.html>>

II. Racism

a. http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/calgary/chinese.html

b. http://www.abheritage.ca/pasttopresent/settlement/chinese_laundry_owner.html

c. http://www.abheritage.ca/pasttopresent/settlement/chinese_community_growth.html

d. Chinese Canadian National Council: <http://www.ccnc.ca/>

III. W. O. Mitchell

a. Tribute: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/lib-old/SpecColl/mitchell/>

b. Radio and Audio-Visual clips

i. Autobiography and "How I Spent my Summer Holidays:"
<http://66.244.199.219/CKUA_Archives/eng/archive/speaker_mitchell.aspx>

ii. J. D. Salinger, filth, and artist recognition
<http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-68-2069-12864-11/that_was_then/arts_entertainment/twt>

iii. Curling (T.V. mini-documentary)
<<http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-41-550-2789/sports/curling/>>

- iv. Eaton's Catalogue
<http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-69-377-2340/life_society/eatons/>
- v. On Writing
<<http://www.albertasource.ca/aoe/ui/indexx.aspx?callpage=44>>
<http://www.abheritage.ca/abarts/audio/art_124_5209-5358.ram>
- vi. Writing plays vs. drama
http://www.abheritage.ca/abarts/database/artist_bio.php?artist_id=48§ion_id=0 (3 min)
- c. Locations: <<http://www.courtneymilne.com/womitchell/woportfolio.html>>
- d. Photos: <http://www.albertasource.ca/aoe/ui/indexx.aspx?callpage=45>
- e. Biography and reviews
 - i. Rex Murphy's 1998 Eulogy: CBC Radio One: Cross Country Checkup:
<<http://www.radio.cbc.ca/programs/checkup/rexmitchell.html>>
 - ii. Review of new edition, 1992
<<http://www.saskpublishers.sk.ca/sampler/spotlight/wo2.htm>>
 - iii. Globe and Mail Eulogy
<<http://www.saskpublishers.sk.ca/sampler/spotlight/wo3.htm>>
 - iv. Review from the University of Toronto Quarterly
<<http://www.utpjournals.com/product/utq/701/wo134.html>>
 - v. Alberta Arts Heritage Eulogy (Ed. Journal Books Editor)
http://www.abheritage.ca/abarts/articles/articles_legacy_womitchell.htm

Connections to Other Curriculum Areas or Language Units

As suggested above, the various components of this unit could easily inspire or lead into other language units, including a poetry unit or a short-story unit (particularly story-writing). Many of the topics and themes in Mitchell's writing could connect the novel to a larger, thematic unit (perhaps on turning points and aging, or identity).

In addition, the interview and biography could provide an appropriate connection to non-fiction and/or journalism studies. The assignment also links closely to Social Studies and the nature of historical research, life-stories, and anthropology. The book's setting, including its emphasis on the difficulties of the Great Depression, compliments Social Studies as well, while issues of climate and geography could be linked to Science and ecosystems.

Bulletin board display

Although there is no accompanying bulletin board display planned for this unit, student artwork will be posted on the walls throughout the novel study, as appropriate (based on their comfort-levels with displaying personal pieces). Several posters of the Great Depression "dust-bowl" would be also effective, placed near the front of the classroom.

Reflections

This unit contains a variety of activities and topics. I have done my best to prepare, research, and gather a range of related media and materials. I am also very excited about studying this novel with the class! I hope that my own will interest and efforts will motivate students. I have high expectations and look forward to seeing them excel. However, I am aware of my own lack of experience in judging and managing time requirements. I find it difficult to determine how many days should be allotted to a particular assignment or theme, especially since I'm not familiar with the pace of this particular classroom. This could potentially be a problem, if I run out of days at the end of the unit, or if I find myself searching for activities to fill the final week. However, I have placed a cushion-class near the end of the unit, to absorb any delays and to allow extra time flexibility as needed. This should lessen the stress of planning, while providing some more space to do some creative (probably dramatic) activities.

Appendices

Appendix A: Lesson Plans

Appendix B: Assessment Tools

Visual Representation Assessment

Rationale (30%)

5: Clear, insightful, and original. All relevant aspects of the artifact and the creative process are explained. Makes specific, appropriate connections to the text. Well organized and free from mechanical errors.

4: Clear. Most aspects of the artifact and the creative process are explained. Makes appropriate connections to the text. Organized and virtually free from mechanical errors.

3: Mostly clear, although some aspects of the artifact or process are unexplained. Some connections to the text. Some mechanical errors.

2: Unclear; very little description or explanation of the artifact and the process. Connections to text are vague and/or poorly justified.

1: Vague and/or confusing. Does not show a clear relationship between the artifact and the text. Unorganized; mechanical errors make the rationale very hard to read.

Artifact (60%)

1. Creativity and Uniqueness (10)

-is the work original and intriguing? Does it sustain interest or captivate the viewer's attention?

-does it provoke further interest and thought?

2. Connection or Relevance to Text (10)

-does the project accurately reflect a concept or element from the text?

-does the student demonstrate an understanding of the text?

3. Effort (5)

-does the work show evidence of thoughtful planning, risk-taking, time-investment or improvement?

4. Presentation (5)

-is the work neat, well done, and attractively or appropriately presented?

Found Poems

Since poetry tends to be very personal and difficult to mark objectively, these found poems will be marked based on a checklist of required components. Each poem should include a line or phrase from the text, with an appropriate citation (footnote or endnote). They should also feature at least 3 poetic devices (such as symbolism, imagery, metaphor/simile). Additional feedback will be given in the form of comments rather than numbers. Comments will consider form and structure, flow, clarity or creativity, vocabulary, tone/mood, and use of original language.

Sample Checklist for Found Poem (5 marks)

_____ line or phrase from text

_____ citation

_____ poetic device (1)

_____ poetic device (2)

_____ poetic device (3)

Comments: _____

Character Sketch

Students will choose a favourite or intriguing character and write a 2-3 page character sketch analyzing him or her, his/her role, development, effectiveness, and verisimilitude. They will be evaluated for the thought and detail of their response

5. Ideas are insightful, carefully considered, and confident. Character is examined from a variety of perspectives and situations. Strong, higher-level thinking skills are demonstrated (analysis and evaluation). Support is precise, thoughtfully selected, and appropriately cited. Perceptive response.
4. Ideas are thoughtful. Character is examined from several perspectives and situations. Some instances of higher-level thinking skills are demonstrated (analysis and evaluation). Support relevant and purposeful. Competent response.
3. Ideas are appropriate. Character is examined on a basic level that requires limited higher-level thinking (relies more on knowledge and recall of facts than on analysis or evaluation). Support is straightforward and matter-of-fact. Satisfactory response.
2. Ideas superficial and underdeveloped. Character is only vaguely or inaccurately examined. Support unclear and/or repetitive. Does not fulfill the task's requirements.
1. Ideas only marginally relevant and largely underdeveloped. Support inaccurate or lacking altogether. Frustrating for reader.

Perspective Rewrite

Students should select a specific episode which occurs or is mentioned in the novel. They should then rewrite the episode from a new perspective, demonstrating what another character might have thought or experienced during that event. For example, students may wish to describe a day at the school from the Wong's point of view, or the town from Milt's philosophical perspective. Students should include appropriate dialogue and description, with a particular emphasis on imagery (since this is so important in Mitchell's writing).

This piece should reflect the tone of Mitchell's writing (that is, it should remain true to the plot) and it should maintain an accurate or consistent representation of the characters. Students are expected to write at least 3 pages.

Students will be evaluated based on perspective (presenting and maintaining a clear, specific point of view), plot (narrative coherence and relation to the novel), prose (quality of language and conventions) and presentation (including appropriate identification and citation of the episode in the novel). *See attached rubric.*