**Advocacy Writing through Multiple Genres:**

**The Evolution of *The Grapes of Wrath***

Amber Jensen, NEH Steinbeck Scholar 2013
Thomas A. Edison High School, Alexandria, VA

**Texts Needed:** *Working Days: The Journals of the Grapes of Wrath*

*The Grapes of Wrath* (selections)

*Harvest Gypsies* (selections)

Optional for Extensions: Dorothea Lange photographs, Dust Bowl era newspapers

**Grade Level(s):** 9-12 (works for literature or composition courses)

**Overview:** Because of the rich history of *The Grapes of Wrath*, as well as the nuanced understanding we get of the writing process through reading the author’s journal, *Working Days*, this lesson is intended to help students learn about how Steinbeck conceptualized the novel through its many forms. It underscores the major themes and objectives of his writing the novel while highlighting the importance of writing as a process. These two outcomes, one or both, can drive the aims of this lesson, to be taught either as the beginning of a literary study of the novel as a whole, or as an exploration of genre in advocacy writing.

**Objective:**

* **For a literary study of *The Grapes of Wrath***, this pre-reading lesson will introduce students to some of the background and historical context underlying its themes. It will encourage students to think of the situation surrounding the text, and it will prime them for common themes to explore in the further study of the text.
* **For a composition focused course**, this lesson will expose students to one author’s consideration of genre, audience, purpose, and style as his text evolved over time. It will then challenge students to evaluate and make effective rhetorical choices to compose an advocacy text on a topic of modern relevance.

**Goals:**

* Introduce historical and literary context of *The Grapes of Wrath*
* Analyze and interpret authorial choices of audience, purpose, genre and style
* Demonstrate understanding of advocacy writing by composing an original piece, accompanied by a reflection that explains the choices in terms of audience, purpose, genre and style as discussed

**Lesson Procedures:**

1. Contextualize with background information

* Distribute copies of pgs. xxxiii – xlvi from the Introduction to *Working Days: The Journals of the Grapes of Wrath,* written by Robert DeMott.
* Read together, aloud, to lay the groundwork for our study and to help students understand why Steinbeck was so devoted to this cause (from pg. xxxiii):

“Between 1936 and 1938 Steinbeck’s commitment to his material evolved through at least four major stages of writing: (1) a seven-part series of newspaper articles, “The Harvest Gypsies”; (2) an unfinished novel, “The Oklahomans”; (3) a completed, but destroyed, satire, “L’Affaire Lettuceberg”; and (4) a final fictional version, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Each stage varied in audience, intention, and tone from the one before it. All the versions overlapped, however, because they shared—with differing highlights and resolutions—a fixed core of elements: one one side, the entrenched power, wealth, authority, and consequent tyranny of California’s industrialized agriculture system (symbolized by Associated Farmers, Inc.), which produced flagrant violations of the migrants’ civil and human rights and ensured their continuing peonage, their loss of dignity through threats, reprisals, and violence; on the other side, the powerlessness, poverty, victimization and fear of the nomadic American migrants whose willingness to work, desire to retain their dignity, and enduring wish to settle land of their own were kept alive by their innate resilience and resourcefulness, and by the democratic benefits of the government sanitary camps.”

* Have student read the remainder of the passage (12 pages) and fill out a table to differentiate the content and the style of each piece of writing that eventually brought him to the writing of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Students can work independently or in groups. (See sample for potential answers students may find from the reading; this sample is not exhaustive, nor should younger students be expected to glean all of the details. Note that younger students may need more guidance or modeling through this process if a genre study has not been modeled and practiced before)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***The Harvest Gypsies*** | ***The Oklahomans*** | ***L’Affaire Lettuceburg*** | ***Grapes of Wrath*** |
| Dates  | Oct 1936 | Oct 1937-Jan 1938 | Feb-May 1938 | May – Winter 1938 |
| Author’s life, attitude & feelings at the time |  | * Pity/need for involvement
* Frustrated
* Powerless
* Angry
 | * Inspired by an event
* Thought it necessary to write
 | * Thought it necessary to write
* Needed to gestate
* Conscience
* Visalia
 |
| Purpose of the text | * Helped him interpret and understand events
* Recommendations
* Explain/examine
* Reveal/expose
* Advocacy journalism
 | * Wish fulfillment
* Pulp fiction
 | * Serve a political cause
* “Vituperative satire”
 |  |
| Public/critical reaction to the text | * Published in SF news
* Solidified his credibility
 | * Never published
* Manuscript never found
 | * Never published
 | * Truly American novel
 |
| Textual/stylistic features of the text | * Methodological
* Lange’s photographs elicit pathos
* Investigative reports
* Measured, restrained
* Empirical
* Case studies
* Facts
* Observations
* Recommendations
 |  | * Angry
* Thesis-ridden
* “Vulgar” tract
* Satire
* Smart alec book
 | * Concrete detail of human form, language and landscape
* Animate
* Human context
* Emotional content
* “Know these people”
 |

2. Discuss evolution of the writing. Define the following genres, based on students’ own understanding, their notes from the *Working Days* introduction, and the definitions provided below. Consider sharing modern or historical examples of each type of genre (suggestions provided).

* **Advocacy journalism**
	+ **“**Advocacy Journalism **intentionally and transparently assumes a non-objective viewpoint to achieve a social, political or environmental purpose**. It is different than media bias because it doesn’t claim to be objective or neutral, and it’s not the same as propaganda because the reporting is intended to be factual and informative.You can find great examples of advocacy journalism on a national level in publications like [The Nation](http://www.thenation.com/), [Mother Jones](http://motherjones.com/), [Grist](http://grist.org/), [Truthout](http://truth-out.org/), and [AlterNet](http://www.alternet.org/).” <http://www.thefineprintuf.org/about/>
	+ [USA Today article on the rise of advocacy journalism](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2007-03-05-social-journalism_N.htm)
* **Satire:** [Definition of satire with links to examples](#http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satire)
* **Pulp Fiction**: “Mass market novels printed cheaply and intended for a general audience. The content was usually melodramatic, titillating, or thrilling. The earliest samples are the “penny dreadfuls” or “bloods” of the eighteenth century, which were followed in the nineteenth century by so-called “dime novels” (which were sold for ten cents). Examples included westerns, Horatio Alger novels, soft science fiction series, murder mysteries in serialized format, and melodramatic crime stories. The designation “pulp” comes from the paper quality – these novels are usually printed on the cheapest newsprint available.” <http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_P.html>

3. Read excerpts of modern/classical examples of each genre (from the list of suggestions or from your own list), and evaluate them rhetorically. This can be done by distributing a packet of excerpts to the students and asking them to work in groups to analyze/annotate the texts, looking specifically for some of the features discussed both in their notes on *Working Days* and in the class discussion about genre. Students who are less familiar with genre study will likely need more teacher guidance for this step. Guiding questions include:

* + What stylistic and textual feature(s) do you notice throughout texts of similar genres?
	+ How do the texts appeal to the particular audience for which they are intended?
	+ In what way(s) do the author(s) play on the sympathies of the audience or draw attention to the social issue?
	+ How effective is one approach versus another? Which would be most persuasive and why?
	+ How do image and word combine to persuade in the texts?

4. Read and evaluate samples of Steinbeck texts, including excerpts from the interchapters and the narrative chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath* as well as excerpts from *The Harvest Gypsies*. To assess students’ understanding of genre, it is a good idea to distribute the texts without their titles, to see if students can identify the features of the text and then match it to the phase of Steinbeck’s process that the text represents. This can be followed with a rich discussion of how effective each text was in achieving the purposes he set out (from their reading in the Introduction of *Working Days*).

* *Possible Extension, if time:* Collect and read samples of other works in those genres: to extrapolate understanding of these genres/approaches for exposure and to give students ideas of the kinds of issues that are relevant to them and us in our day.
* *Possible Extension:* Include Dorothea Lange photography and Dust Bowl era newspapers as a way to contextualize the historical time period and offer other genre options.

5. Summative Evaluation of Student Learning

* **For a literary study**: Students will write (or discuss) the thematic threads they see running through all of the phases of Steinbeck’s process that culminated in *The Grapes of Wrath*. They can prepare to read the text in its entirety from a biographical/historical lens, with an understanding of the guiding themes that led to this seminal work. Teachers may choose to have students select one theme to trace through the development of the novel during reading, and write on it when completing the reading of the novel.
* **For a composition study**: Students will write a piece of advocacy literature in the genre (journalism, satire, pulp fiction, humanistic fiction, or possibly photography or documentary if the lesson unit included a media extension) on a topic that is relevant to them today. They will be assessed on their ability to accurately represent the researched topic, create an effective call to action, and use rhetorical conventions of their selected genre to persuade the reader toward their stated objective. This should be accompanied by a reflection of their own writing, in which they identify the features from their genre study that they incorporated in their final piece, and why they thought their authorial choices were or were not effective.