

The River Reader Eleventh Edition

Instructor's Resource Manual

INTRODUCTION

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Shakespeare's Sister

QUESTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE

1. Students should be made aware that the question of women and creativity is indeed perennial. Woolf's concerns are not new. Point out that they were concerns she had about her own life and her own writing, making this essay partially autobiographical.
2. Woolf's concerns could be restated as things that prevent "living up to one's potential"—an idea probably familiar to many students. Ask students how environments and social restraints affect accomplishments, both physical and non-physical.

QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE

1. Students may not have the cultural background that Woolf assumes. Elicit from the students, or point out to them as necessary, phrases Woolf uses (consciously or unconsciously) to address a specific audience—such as "Elizabethan" or "song or sonnet" (para 1), "that old gentleman, who is dead now, but was a bishop" (para 2).
2. This question assumes men and women are attracted to different types of argument. Is this something Woolf (implicitly or explicitly) believed? A poll of the class on this question may provide interesting discussion, especially if it divides along gender lines.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRATEGIES

1. Ask students whether the details of Woolf's speculation seem verifiable. Her choice of a name for the fictional character might be a starting point, as Judith is the name of one of Shakespeare's children. Do the students believe that only *verifiable* evidence is worthy? What are Woolf's reasonable but unverifiable speculations?
2. Students may not identify the statement, "...genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people," as the argument. Point out the restatement, by comparison, in "It is not born today among the working classes." Make students aware that Woolf herself had to fight against "being forced to [do traditional woman's work] by [her] parents, and held to it by all the power of law and custom."

CHAPTER 1

NARRATION AND DESCRIPTION

QUESTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE

1. Students may be unfamiliar with the terms “debutant” and “finishing school” and what was learned there. They may also question why girls attended such a school if what they learned was “irrelevant.”
2. Elicit from students opinions about why the type of exactitude described is “inhuman.” Point out that the purpose of the narration is in part to *humanize* Margaret and to *dehumanize* Mrs. Cullinan.

QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE

1. Ask students about the various connotations of “liberal” and lead them to the one that is pertinent for this essay. Ask if students think the terms “woman” and “from Texas” (other ways Angelou describes this person) give further clues to her intended audience.
2. Angelou assumes her readers understand the cause and the tone of the laughter she describes. Discussion should reveal whether students understand this. Suggest reasons why Angelou calls what she hears “giggles” rather than “laughter” or “guffaws.”

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRATEGIES

1. The three discussions of her name allow Angelou to show her innocence, her integrity, and eventually her power over Mrs. Cullinan. Discuss the way the pace slows as the conflict between Margaret and Mrs. Cullinan comes to a climax.
2. A good discussion point is asking students if they recognize that the intention to write a poem about a person implies the writer’s superiority over the subject, as does pity. Mrs. Cullinan’s use of “Mary” rather than “Margaret” changes Angelou’s pity to anger. Ask students how this is demonstrated by Angelou’s use of diction and phrasing when referring to her employer.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE

1. The two meanings of “watchman” (one who watches over another and one who watches out for the approach of others) should be investigated. Students may find other meanings/significances of the term. Have them discuss why the meanings are important and what they bring to the essay.

2. The Wolf Pole simultaneously separates and includes the audience in the author's own aboriginal culture. Individual students may feel included or excluded. Allow students to discuss their feelings of inclusion or exclusion and why these feelings may occur. Does this add or detract from their reading experience?

QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE

1. The use of "our" intends to join the reader and author in the same culture, while still judging the attitudes of the aboriginal culture as superior. Students will probably be aware of this, but may not be aware of the subtle way in which Williams has accomplished the task. Discussion may elucidate the process.
2. Williams uses "us" to indicate members of her family, which is different from her use of "our" to include the reader and herself in the same group. Non-family members (which include the reader, of course) are separated by calling them "the public." Students with similar family experiences may have valuable insights to add to the discussion.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRATEGIES

1. The Rilke poem speaks of a wholeness and integrity Alan and his family may not have easily recognized in his life up to the point of his baptism. Elicit from students other times, events, or ceremonies that may create these feelings (perhaps from their own lives).
2. The visits to the school, because of their similarity, slow the narrative by removing these events from "forward motion" in time. Alan's descriptions of his feelings and sense of disconnection do not progress but remain static, also slowing the narrative to its climax.

Judith Ortiz Cofer

The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria

QUESTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE

1. The use of "custom" and "chromosome" makes a metaphor most students will be able to understand. Remind them that stereotypes are based on specific examples, generalized out of proportion. Find out if students have been the focus of this type of generalization. How did it make them feel? Have they generalized someone based on that person's characteristics? How do they feel about that after having read the essay?
2. Cofer shows herself as far more interesting than any of the stereotypes she mentions. She expresses truths—a desire to be accepted, the need to be oneself, the difficulties of finding one's way among judgmental and prejudiced peoples—that students are likely to have experienced. Create a class discussion or essay prompts about students' experiences with stereotypes. For example, students can pick one stereotype or generalization they

have been seen as and write about how that stereotype or generalization does not reflect their personality.

QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE

1. Maria and Evita are examples of Latinas that students might not recognize—even more so Rita Moeno. Cofer's audience is those who would recognize these references. Students may need to be led to these examples.
2. Most non-Latin students will not recognize the term “piropos,” nor the activity, nor even the concept. Distinguish between “piropos” and “catcalls” with which they are more likely familiar. “Piropos” are not entirely unwelcome, but are always ignored, whereas “catcalls” tend to border on harassment or assault.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRATEGIES

1. Cofer shows that stereotypes can be perpetuated unintentionally by well-meaning people, like her teachers (nuns) and friends (the Italian-American girl). Have students comment on nuns as judges of appropriate attire (they would have all worn religious habits at the time to which Cofer is referring). Are their opinions also indicative of stereotypes (of nuns)?
2. By describing the change in attitude (and even in behavior and body language) of the woman at her first poetry reading who assumed Cofer was a waitress, Cofer shows stereotypes are best changed by providing specific examples that do not fit the stereotype. By showing the incident from the point of view of the woman, then from her own point of view, Cofer draws the reader *from* one side *to* the other. Students might want to discuss or write about similar situations that may have happened in their own lives.

Andre Dubus

Digging

QUESTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE

1. Dubus himself wanted to be “a man” as revealed in his description of his time with his father. Neither he nor his father knew how to accomplish this task. His father, however, knew that the foreman did. Dubus's purpose is made clear by both the request and his father's response to his first day's efforts.
2. Dubus leads a dual life in many ways. He is both shy and assertive, a “momma's boy” and “daddy's little man.” Elicit from students other examples of his duality and their judgments about the credibility of this type of duality.

QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE

1. Students are likely to identify with the “sensitive and shy” descriptions, since in different situations, they have likely been both. Elicit from them other examples of similar experiences they have had, such as the suffering Dubus endures the first day of work, or how this suffering is transformed.
2. Ask students to discuss Dubus’s race. His friendship with the black workmen breaks “rules” or at least customs, but is never condemned, even subtly. (We hear of no such attachments between Dubus and white men). The justice revealed here is quiet, expected, and accepted without fanfare.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRATEGIES

1. By slowing the pace, Dubus elongates the first day, thus making his suffering more long-lasting for the reader. That he does not give up, even when his body does (as seen by his vomiting), shows his intensity. Elicit from students their opinions on whether he responds to these challenges reasonably.
2. Dubus shows the reader that going home to lunch would have prevented him from becoming “a man.” Phrases such as “nestled in ... love,” “yearning to be someone I respected,” and “yearning to be a man among men” all point to the purpose of this essay and of the events it describes. Ask students whether they have had similar experiences that may have helped them mature, perhaps painfully.

George Orwell

Shooting an Elephant

QUESTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE

1. Orwell clearly shows that he has no personal choice to shoot or not shoot the elephant. He thus exemplifies his thesis about imperialism, that “when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.” Elicit from students opinions about why Orwell seems to belittle the incident by calling it “tiny.”
2. Orwell considers the monetary worth of the elephant, the practicality of leaving it alone, and the derision to which he would be subjected were he to fail. Have students voice opinions on which of these reasons is the most powerful for Orwell and why.

QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE

1. Discussion should reveal whether or not students recognize Orwell as a type of victim. As the imperialist amid subjugated people, as a rational man being forced by expectations to act irrationally, and as the previous butt of jokes unwilling (unable?) to endure it again, Orwell presents himself as trapped.

2. Student opinion may vary here. The legality of Orwell's action may attract some. Others may agree that it was "a damn shame" but hopefully not because "an elephant was worth more than any damn Corrighee coolie." The importance of avoiding "looking a fool" should be familiar to many. A fruitful discussion may be prompted by eliciting examples of things students have done "to avoid looking a fool."

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRATEGIES

1. Have students give details of the activities of the Burmese, the actions of the authorities, both British and native, the actions of "the crowd" as an entity, and his own slow, methodical, step-by-step preparations, which heighten the coming conflict.
2. The pace of paragraphs 11 and 12 is slowed by Orwell's description of events "out of time"—the usual slowing of physical time in the perceptions of those involved in catastrophic events. The elephant's suffering, unable to move or even react, but still unable to die, and especially the death of the elephant *outside* of the narrative ("I heard later that it took him half an hour to die") slow time and intensify the horror of the scene. Ask students if shortening paragraphs 11 and 12 (totaling over 500 words) to a short, less detailed paragraph would improve or damage the essay.

CHAPTER 2

PROCESS ANALYSIS

Ann Zwinger

Drawing on Experience

QUESTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE

1. There are many purposes for drawing mentioned in the essay. Do not refuse any that students can connect to the text. The first mentioned is to "establish a connection between hand and eye that reinforces the connection between eye and memory." More succinctly, "Drawing fastens [things] in memory."
2. If individuals do not "impose goals you can't meet," they will continue to practice. Have students examine further the parallels Zwinger makes between drawing and musical composition, pottery making, and musical performance. Perhaps some of them will share experiences where success only came after ignoring many less-than-perfect attempts.

QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE