Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2010 Volume II: The Art of Reading People: Character, Expression, Interpretation

Macbeth and Tess of the d'Urbervilles: Intriguing Individuals Revealed through Structure, Setting, Imagery, and Symbols

Guide for Curriculum Unit 10.02.13
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Lisa Zunshine, a literary critic, argues that "fiction engages, teases, and pushes to its tentative limits our mind-reading capacity." Her conclusion relates to "recent findings of cognitive psychologists into literary studies" that "explain behavior in terms of underlying states of mind -- or mind-reading ability." Hence, this unit focuses on the students'/readers' ability to understand and explain a character's behavior, thoughts, feelings, and desires through a close consideration of all the details that are conveyed by several different aspects of the text: its structure, its description of setting, its imagery, and its symbols. The unit starts with the following essential questions: "Who is this character/person? What does he/she think? What are his/her feelings? How do you know?" In order to achieve this objective, the students start by reading a real person through specific external cues like facial expressions, tone of voice, clothing, hair style, environment, and/or interests. This is followed by the second section that explores two specific texts, *Macbeth* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* , with particular emphasis on the above mentioned literary conventions. The unit concludes with the writing of an essay focused on the characterization of Macbeth and Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

(Recommended for English and Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition, grades 11 and 12)