

Unit Description

Writing (and Rewriting) the Rules of Short Story

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Our seminar, “A History of Story,” examines how and why stories are told. Narrative is everywhere—from the grocery lists we make to the details we include or leave out when we recount what happened this morning. We use stories to answer the questions that drive the big ideas in our lives. Creation myths, for example, help us understand how life began and why certain values, like religion, matter. Heroes inspire us: they conquer evil forces, teach us lessons, and make the ordinary something extra. This unit treats storytelling as a process, one with “rules” that can be learned, refined, and rewritten to fit the needs of both author and audience. It uses the genres of short story and personal narrative to help high school students understand that stories are constructed with purpose, and that telling a great story requires us to think critically about what we are trying to say. Using selections such as Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado” and Lilana Heker’s “The Stolen Party,” students will see how short stories employ the “rules” of storytelling. They will then take these lessons and apply them to their own stories by way of a personal narrative. This unit is intended for use in a 9th-grade English Language Arts class.