Lesson Plan

Classroom: Zeeland West High School, English 10 (Sophomore)
Mentor Teacher: Michael Costello
Date & Time: October 18, 2013 at 8:50am
Subject: “Dead Men’s Path” by Chinua Achebe

• Anticipatory set: freewrite on conflict (5 minutes) — (in the moment, decided to switch this freewrite to after the reading)
• Students read “Dead Men’s Path” silently to themselves (10-15 minutes)
• Classroom discussion of themes (5-10 minutes)
• Read Chinua Achebe background handout aloud (5 minutes)
• Spontaneous memory monologue on a personal connection with the story (5 min)
• Three-person discussion groups to share memory monologues & other connections (rest of class time)
“Dead Men’s Path” by Chinua Achebe

Background & Context

About Chinua Achebe

• He was born in a Nigerian Igbo village in 1930, to parents who were converts to the Protestant Church Mission Society
• His full name was Albert Chinualumogu Achebe – he and his five siblings all had half-Anglican, half-Nigerian names
• He attended several different schools – some giving him Christian & English perspectives in education, some a more traditional view
• He was accepted into the first class of Nigeria’s first university – where he wrote “Dead Men’s Path” in 1953

“Modern Africa as the Crossroads of Culture” - Chinua Achebe, 1980

On one arm of the cross we sang hymns and read the Bible night and day. On the other my father’s brother and his family, blinded by heathenism, offered food to idols. That was how it was supposed to be anyhow. But I knew without knowing why that it was too simple a way to describe what was going on. Those idols and that food had a strange pull on me in spite of my being such a thorough little Christian that often at Sunday services at the height of the grandeur of “Te Deum Laudamus” I would have dreams of a mantle of gold falling on me as the choir of angels drowned our mortal song and the voice of God himself thundering: This my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Yet, despite those delusions of divine destiny I was not past taking my little sister to our neighbor’s house when our parents were not looking and partaking of heathen festival meals. I never found their rice and stew to have the flavor of idolatry. I was about ten then. If anyone likes to believe that I was torn by spiritual agonies or stretched on the rack of my ambivalence, he certainly may suit himself. I do not remember any undue distress. What I do remember is a fascination for the ritual and the life on the other arm of the crossroads. And I believe two things were in my favor—that curiosity, and the little distance imposed between me and it by the accident of my birth. The distance becomes not a separation but a bringing together like the necessary backward step which a judicious viewer may take in order to see a canvas steadily and fully.
Feedback from Mr. Costello

Mr Connor. Oct 18 2013. Lesson on Dead Man’s Path

9:15 nice introduction of yourself. Well done. Far too often young teachers skip this. Might consider allowing them to ask a few quick questions of you.
9:16 text books.
9:17. Asked them to read silently the short story for today. Might want to front load the piece with clueing them in for what to look for. Or having them write about the theme as it relates to them (obviously they don't know the theme at this point yet but you do). Get them thinking about the theme by having them write about it then when they read they will bring personal connections to it.
- having a group of people read something silently in a room can be unnerving to some. They feel like it is a race and often they skip stuff on the way to the finish line.
- reading aloud to them also has pros and cons. It may have given you a chance to win them over with your ability to perform. But there are students who shut down and pretend to listen during reading aloud. So keep an eye out for the pitfalls here too.
- physical presence among the students is a powerful motivator. It looks from where I am sitting as though all are reading. Stroll through the group to ensure that they are and they see that you are monitoring them. During silent reading at the beginning of every hour I model reading for/with them, but during this silent reading time I would stroll among them.
9:25 instructions delivered clearly and politely. Please and thanks you are huge I think. Model good manners. Well done to this point.
9:26. 5 minute quick write. Instructions are relatively clear. Might ask if there are any questions about what to do. Once this is going it will be silent and students will be reluctant to ask if they missed your instructions. Sometimes I repeat the set of instructions a second time to catch those who may have been daydreaming or finishing up the reading.
9:27 actually started reading. This class at this point is respecting you. They are not resisting the activities. You have already created a rapport. With them. They are good kids but they would push you by now if you didn't command respect and or win them over. You seem to have won them over at least to this point.
9:29 writing time. All appear to be writing.
9:32 nice closure of writing activity.
9:33. Three questions to start discussion. Impressions, enjoy, pull out of the story. Mark started your discussion.
9:33. Michael agrees. Same point that mark made.
9:34. Turning into a "show and tell" time. Each kid is giving his or her point. No real discussion is happening yet. Nice empowerment of students. Each voice is heard. Now discussion is starting. Michael throws in two cents. Now some discussion happening
9:37 good question: where does conflict come from? Started discussion again.
9:38 decent wait time. You asked does anybody have anything more to add on themes before we jump to personal connections. I would estimate your wit time was 3 seconds. Let it simmer. Some kids need encouragement to speak up. That encouragement can come in the form of wait time. The message here is I will wait for you all to compose some thoughts in your head and they are all important. Just because a thought doesn't come quickly doesn't mean it is not a good thought.
9:40 reading background info on Achebe to the class.
942. You have a presence in front of the class. You do not appear nervous or anxious at all. You appear comfortable.
9:43. Spontaneous memory monologue activity. Asked for questions after giving the prompt. None asked. Not so sure they get it though. Be sure to look for non-verbal communication. Do they seem to get what to do based on what their faces look like? My understanding is that they are to try to connect with this piece on a personal level.
9:45. All are quiet. Most are writing.
9:50. I feel like I would discuss the motif of "you think you are doing the right thing but you are not". The irony in the end of the piece seems to be a powerful element that could have been covered. Otherwise I really like what you have done with the piece. Your presence in front of the group is a natural talent that you have. That cannot be taught. You already have that so you ARE a teacher. You should focus on lesson development, curricular growth etc. I do not think this was a weak lesson at all. You generated some good discussion. You delivered some heavy themes. The students have an understanding of this piece and the theme and that is because you took them through it.
You give clear instructions. They follow you. They respect you. Even if they don't get everything in the piece they are still making an attempt. That is a testament to you. Very nicely done. You should be proud of yourself.
9:51. The discussions going on around me are on topic. On a Friday, with 2 minutes left in the period, they are still on task.
9:53 students are starting to put books back on shelf. Nice personal closure.