



Wunderkammer: Nests—A Cabinet of Curiosities (Part Two)

Paula Simonson; Wasatch Range Writing Project

Summary:

In this lesson, students will read, discuss, and conduct an informal analysis of a piece of poetry as well as a personal narrative essay. The readings will serve as a means for students to dig deeper into the interconnectedness of the natural and human world. This lesson can be taught in addition to Part One or independently.

Students will have the opportunity to reflect on their own curiosities of nature and consider the connections and differences between scientific, data-driven research and the less explainable phenomenon of personal reaction and connection that often requires creative writing to truly capture.

Core Standards:

- English Language Arts Grade 9–10
Writing: Standard 3

Objectives:

- After reading, “The Fallen Nest,” a poem by Jane Yolen and “Nests,” a personal narrative essay by Helen Macdonald, students will be able to draw and communicate connections between the two pieces of writing.
- Students will analyze, understand, and identify the basic elements of a personal narrative essay.
- Students will create a personal narrative making a connection between the natural world and their own thoughts on the human experience.

Context:

This lesson is intended for secondary classrooms.

Materials:

- Classroom copies of “The Fallen Nest” from *Fly With Me*
- Individual copies of “Nests” from *Vesper Flights*
- Individual copies of “Personal Narrative Building Blocks” by Pearson



Time Frame:

Expect this lesson to take 5–7 days based upon the depth of instruction and class time given to complete the personal narrative.

Procedures:

1. Begin with a whole group reading of “The Fallen Nest” by Jane Yolen. Give time for brief discussion and thoughts on the poem. Ask students to share a time when they may have encountered a nest and how they interacted with it. Focus on the questions that the poet asked herself after finding the nest and what she pictured happening to the inhabitants of the fallen nest.
2. Distribute individual copies of “Nests” by Helen Macdonald, along with a list of the “Personal Narrative Building Blocks” by Pearson. Go over the list before you begin reading.
3. You can choose to read the essay as a class or independently (see extension ideas for ways to make this essay more interactive for the students).
4. Have students use highlighters and a pencil to annotate while reading through the essay. Annotations should be based on their identification of Personal Narrative Building Blocks.
5. Allow time for discussion about how “Nests” satisfied the elements of personal narrative. Ask students to identify the key features of personal narrative versus a simple story. Focus on the need for a transformative lesson or observation that impacts the subject of the narrative.
6. Assign students to now create their own narrative, using “Nests” as a map. Narratives should be based upon a personal experience from a time spent in observing or interacting with nature.

Extensions:

- Create a Webquest that students will complete as they read through the essay. This could be done quickly by highlighting particular words, species, etc. and having students conduct brief research.
- Ask students to research one or more of the types of species noted in “Nests” and sketch the bird, an image of an egg, as well as an image of the nest and how it is described by Macdonald. This activity could also be incorporated into the Webquest and could lead to a deeper research project.
- This lesson would serve as a great lead into a short poetry unit/lesson.

Rationale:

This lesson will help students to connect to the power of literature to communicate important ideas, experiences, and lessons that we have and will continue to experience throughout our lives. In addition, students will develop important skills for shaping and sharing seemingly insignificant events into life changing lessons.



Resources:

McDonald, Helen. *Vesper Flights*. New York: Grove Press, 2020.

“Personal Narrative Building Blocks,” Pearson.

http://ptgmedia.pearsoncmg.com/imprint_downloads/merrill_professional/images/personalnarrativeteachingstrategies.pdf

Yolen, Jane, et al. *Fly With Me: A Celebration of Birds Through Pictures, Poems, and Stories*. National Geographic, Washington D.C. 2018.

Contact Information: pasimonson@wsd.net