Lesson Description

After reading the *The Alchemist* and exploring the Hero’s Journey / Pattern of Human Experience, students will investigate an author’s choice based on personal experience and surrounding culture. By comparing an original manuscript of “Oh Me! Oh Life!” by Walt Whitman to its published, circulated copy, students will explore the potential reasoning behind edits and revisions. Placing text in the context of when and how it was written – looking at outside variables affecting the author – can give depth to the choices made in the text's creation and consideration for what may have been shaped by outside influences. Students then will move from examining Whitman’s choices reflecting public image and demands to their own as writers through a stream-of-consciousness writing activity.

Objectives

- After independently reading Whitman’s “Oh Me! Oh Life!” students will have five minutes to draw similarities between the content of the poem and Santiago’s journey before sharing as a class.
- After looking at both versions of “Oh Me! Oh Life!” and hearing a mini-background lesson on Whitman, students will work with a partner for five minutes to brainstorm at least two reasons why Whitman made changes to the poem before publishing and will then share their ideas with the class.
- After seeing a picture of Whitman’s mass of musings and an example of the teacher’s own stream-of-consciousness writing, students will independently write a stream of consciousness for 10 minutes on one of the following topics or one of their own choosing: love, changes, independence, fear, expectations, or nostalgia.
- Once students have completed the write, the teacher will ask them a series of questions to pinpoint certain areas in their free write, marking areas that would not meet the expectations or desires of others.
- For homework, students will create (at least) an eight-line poem in any form they choose using only words from their stream-of-consciousness write (with the exception of conjunctions and linking words).

Enduring Understanding(s) & Essential Questions

1. Surrounding culture, expectations, and societal norms can hinder an individual’s sharing of personal discovery in favor of presenting a public image that meets the perceived desires or needs of others.
   - What are some thoughts you have had that you wouldn’t share with others? Why?
   - What could we lose by only sharing what is pleasant and favorable to others?
   - Where can we see this sort of ‘image manipulation’ by authors – of any kind – today?

2. Authors revise and edit their work to shape not only their desires, but often to meet the desires and expectations of their potential audience and culture surrounding them.
   - What have you revised and reworked that isn’t a text?
   - Why do we revise? What is the benefit of revision?
• How do we alter our texts—or anything we have “revised”—if we know someone else will be looking at it or reading it?
• Is the original purpose lost in Whitman’s work with the changes he made?
• How did Whitman’s surrounding culture affect his writing and the changes he made?
• Who are we thinking of when we revise, if anyone?
• Should we revise and edit to fit an audience? Why or why not?
• Why do we guard our thoughts?

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (Target standards)

English IV AP, grade 12th:

(3) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Poetry. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of poetry and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

(8) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author’s purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze the consistency and clarity of the expression of the controlling idea and the ways in which the organizational and rhetorical patterns of text support or confound the author’s meaning or purpose.

(13) Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:
(A) plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea;
(C) revise drafts to clarify meaning and achieve specific rhetorical purposes, consistency of tone, and logical organization by rearranging the words, sentences, and paragraphs to employ tropes (e.g., metaphors, similes, analogies, hyperbole, understatement, rhetorical questions, irony), schemes (e.g., parallelism, antithesis, inverted word order, repetition, reversed structures), and by adding transitional words and phrases;
(D) edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling; and
(E) . . . and publish written work for appropriate audiences.
Pre-requisite Knowledge and Skills
- Analyzing and understanding poetry
- Stream of consciousness / internal monologue
- The Hero’s Journey / Pattern of Human Experience
- Revision and editing strategies
- Utilizing background context clues
- Intended audience

Vocabulary
- Manuscript v. published form
- Stream of consciousness

Time Required
60(+) minutes + homework

Materials Required
- Writer’s notebooks or journals
- “OPS Lesson 1, Whitman” PowerPoint document
  Contact Lori Hahn at the UTeach-LA office to request an electronic copy of this PDF which includes the journal entry free write question, picture of Whitman, and “Oh Me! Oh Life!” manuscript and published form
- Printed “Questions from Others” Activity (available within this document)
- Printed instructions for stream-of-consciousness poem homework assignment (available within this document)—on reverse side of “Questions from Others” sheet
- Colored pencils/highlighters

Procedure
Students will have read The Alchemist and should have an understanding of the Hero’s Journey / Pattern of Human Experience. This will be used later in the unit to compare the “purified” and “prescriptive” life pattern of Santiago in comparison to the realities faced by Whitman and Sexton (see “Our Public Selves, Lesson 2”) and how they fit into the Hero’s Journey.

Engage 15 minutes
- Students will free write for 10-12 minutes in their writer’s notebook or journal for this unit. The following questions will be on the board:
  o What have you revised or reshaped? (This does NOT have to be a text – if you would like to write about a text, please also discuss something that isn’t a text.)
  o Why did you revise or reshape it? Did you have a particular audience in mind? Why or why not? What was edited or removed, and/or what was added?
- For three to five minutes, discuss as a class what students wrote, leading toward the concept of outside influence on individual creation.

Introduce & Explore 7 minutes
- Students will read the published form of “Oh Me! Oh Life!” (on PowerPoint). With a partner, students will brainstorm at least two similarities from the content of the poem to Santiago’s journey. (4-5
5 minutes
- Share brainstorming as a class. (2-3 minutes)

Explain
5 minutes
- Review the PowerPoint over Whitman’s background and potential influences to the class, including the picture of his musings. Notes will be on the PowerPoint.

Apply & Elaborate
23 minutes (possibly longer)
- Students will look at the manuscript version of “Oh Me! Oh Life” next to the published version.
  - With a partner, they will write down why they think Whitman made the changes he did to his text (5 minutes) and then will discuss with a different group of partners what they came up with (3 minutes).
  - Teacher will circulate to monitor conversations.

- Stream-of-Consciousness Writing
  - Teacher will show students her own stream-of-consciousness writing and explain the activity to them, making reference to Whitman’s daily musings that he eventually used for his published pieces. (5 minutes)
  - For 10 minutes, students will freely write (without concern for grammar, punctuation, correct spelling) exactly what they are thinking in their mind and transfer it to the paper (handwriting may be messy). Remind them that no one will read this writing; it’s writing for self only.
  - They can choose one of the topics that follow or their own: love, independence, fear, changes, expectations, and nostalgia.

Evaluate
5 minutes
- After 10 minutes, students will be given a “Questions from Others” handout and will complete the objectives.

Closure
5 minutes (possibly longer)
- As a class, we will discuss – to the extent that students feel comfortable – how the “Questions from Others” impacted their stream of consciousness and what effects this could have on writers, Whitman in particular.
- Teacher will explain the homework assignment (on back of “Questions from Others” sheet).
  - Students will create a poem of at least eight lines – in any form – based on their stream-of-consciousness writing. They can only use words from their original writing (with the exception of conjunctions, articles, and tense changes needed).
  - When students return next class, discuss the selection of words for the poem and why they made those choices.

Future
The final assessment will explore the effect of other’s expectations – whether
Lessons

We know it or not or like it or not – on the writing process. See the “Two-Part Unit Essay Assignment” within the “Our Public Selves, Lesson 2” document.

Resources:
- Harry Ransom Center Archives Department, Walt Whitman Collection

Questions from Others Assignment

1. Underline in blue the phrases, words, or sentences that are personal to you.
2. Underline in red the phrases, words, or sentences that others may not like (for whatever reason).
3. Put a black squiggle under anything you wouldn’t want me to see or read.
4. Put a red squiggle under anything you wouldn’t want your parents to see or read.
5. Put a green squiggle under anything you wouldn’t want your friends to see.
6. Circle, if applicable, anything you changed in your head while you were writing before putting it to paper (as in, you thought one thing first, but put something different down).
7. Lightly cross out in pencil any words or phrases you would want to change. Write the new word or phrase next to it.
8. At the top of the page, rate your stream of consciousness from 1-10, 10 being “Yes! people would love to read this” and 1 being “This is terrible. No one should ever waste their time on this.”
9. Explain your rating below (or near) the number.
10. At the end of your stream, write how this would be beneficial to your creative writing process.

Stream-of-Consciousness Poem

Using your stream-of-consciousness writing, create a poem:
- Consisting of at least eight lines
- Can be in any form of your choosing
- Use ONLY words from your stream-of-consciousness writing (with the exception of conjunctions, articles, and tense changes needed)
- While writing, consider everything you marked in the “Questions from Others” activity. Imagine what your poem would be like if you left out everything you marked. Consider: For whom are you writing your poem?