

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 195

CS 510 915

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TITLE Don Quixote. [Lesson Plan].
INSTITUTION Discovery Communications, Inc., Bethesda, MD.
PUB DATE 2002-00-00
NOTE 11p.; Audio and video clips included in the web site version of this lesson plan are not available from ERIC.
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PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; English Instruction; Language Arts; Language Usage; Lesson Plans; *Literary Devices; Literature Appreciation; *Metaphors; *Novels; *Poetry; Secondary Education; Vocabulary Development; Writing Assignments

ABSTRACT

Based on Miguel de Cervantes' novel "Don Quixote," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that Quixote's misperceptions are understandable; writers often describe one object to sound as if it were something else; and metaphors help readers see with new eyes. The main activity of the lesson involves students writing quixotic, or imaginative, descriptions of ordinary objects after reading and discussing highly metaphorical poems. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)



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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

Don Quixote

LENGTH OF LESSON: One class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

CREDIT: Kristen Rooks, an earth and life science teacher at Ivey Leaf School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. Quixote's misperceptions are understandable.
2. Writers often describe one object to sound as if it were something else.
3. Metaphors help us see with new eyes.

MATERIALS:

For this lesson, you will need:

Copies of poems listed below

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask students to defend Quixote's perception that the windmills are an enemy force. That is, ask them to explain what in the appearance of the windmills and in Quixote's self-image causes the error in perception. Explain that because of an illness Quixote's imagination is distorted, but go on to suggest that sometimes even the sanest of people see an everyday object as something else entirely. Often, the people who perceive one object and describe it as something else are poets. In this activity, you will help students write quixotic, or imaginative, descriptions of ordinary objects. Other students will try to figure out what real-world object the writer had in mind.

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2. Share with students a few examples of highly metaphoric poetry. Examples include

- Emily Dickinson's "I Like to See It Lap the Miles"—a train described as a horse
- Robert Francis's "The Base Stealer"—a baseball player described as a tightrope-walker among other things
- Carl Sandburg's "Fog"—fog described as a cat
- May Swenson's "Southbound on the Freeway"—automobiles described (by a tourist from Orbitville) as living objects

Read the poems listed or other poems without telling students the titles, and then lead a discussion of what the poet seems to be describing and what he or she really is describing. You might consider the question of why the poet took this indirect approach to description.

3. Ask students to think (to themselves) of objects that might be seen—especially, by someone (such as the tourist from Orbitville) who has never seen them before—as something else. Here are some suggestions to stimulate students' thinking:

- a movie projected on a free-standing screen thought to be _____
- a toaster without any bread in it thought to be _____
- a lampshade thrown out with the trash thought to be _____
- a fire extinguisher thought to be _____

4. With the prewriting notes that the students have prepared in the preceding step, they should now be ready to draft a metaphoric description of their objects in prose or poetry.

5. Give each student a chance to read his prose or poem to one or more other students in the class. Can the listeners figure out what the reader, below the surface of the prose or poem, is describing? Do the listeners find the description apt and entertaining or obvious and boring? Encourage classmates to give revising and editing advice to one another.

ADAPTATIONS:

You may want to have students generate short similes rather than extended metaphors, actually using the word *like* or *as* and completing frame sentences such as the following:

- The windmills look like _____ because _____
- The lampshade tossed out with the trash looks like _____
because _____

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss how Miguel de Cervantes' life is mirrored in Don Quixote's.
2. Explain how the eight people shown in the introduction refused to abandon their dreams despite popular sentiment that those dreams were unattainable. (Amelia Earhart, Nelson Mandela, women suffragettes, Mahatma Gandhi, John F. Kennedy, Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Theresa)
3. At the end of Cervantes' sequel, the Knight of the White Moon, Sampson Curasco, forces Don Quixote to give up his fantasies "for his own good." Discuss why people like Curasco feel the need to destroy the illusions and dreams of those who do not subscribe to a practical approach to life.

EVALUATION:

After students have read their revised descriptions to the class, take a vote on which descriptions the students like best.

EXTENSION:

To Dream the Impossible Dream

Don Quixote might be seen as not simply crazy in his refusal to see things as they really are but more like a person who wants to accomplish a greater good and so refuses to compromise his ideals. Examples of such people include Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. Ask students to discuss (with examples and other evidence) whether or not they think Quixote deserves to be put in the company of real-world idealists or is merely delusional.

Tackling the Issues

Ask the class to discuss solutions to an issue that plagues contemporary society at large or just your community—for example, homelessness, violence, environmental degradation, hunger. Half the class should mention idealistic solutions to the chosen issue; the other half should mention only realistic approaches to solving the problem. See if, in listening to both sides, someone can come up with a proposal that is both realistic *and* unconventional—an idea that hasn't been tried yet.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Miguel de Cervantes

Jake Goldberg, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1993

Learn about the life and times of this 17th-century Spanish writer. Did you know that this writer was also a soldier, that he was in prison, and that he survived the plague?

Don Quixote, Part I

Miguel de Cervantes. Translated and adapted by Magda Bogin. Illustrated by Manuel Boix, New York, Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1991

Meet Don Quixote, champion of causes and famous in legends and stories, in this beautifully illustrated edition. The illustrations in this classic will make you believe you are riding with this knight and his friend Sancho Panza through the Spanish countryside.

Cervantes the writer and the painter of Don Quijote / Helena Percas de Ponseti

Helena Percas de Ponseti, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988

Contains information on the life of Miguel de Cervantes.

The Sanctification of Don Quixote: From Hidalgo to Priest

Eric Jozef Ziolkowski, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991

Explores issues of Christianity in Don Quixote.

WEB LINKS:

The Don Quixote Exhibit

This site contains two tours through Don Quixote. Each of the 35 stations has text, images, and legends associated with the novel.

<http://milton.mse.jhu.edu:8003/quixote/index.html>

Cervantes 2001 Project

This site contains several electronic editions of Cervantes's work. It also has a digital archive of photographic images on Cervantes's times and works suitable for teaching and research purposes, plus a Spanish index.

<http://csdl.tamu.edu/cervantes/>

Don Quijote de la Mancha

This is a fantastic site that presents the works of Cervantes in English and Spanish. The Webmaster has collected a few links on Cervantes and his novel. There are also links to Spanish theater and poetry.

<http://wso.williams.edu/~agonzale/quijote>

Knighthood, Chivalry and Tournaments Resource Library

If your dream is to tilt with knights, this is an excellent resource site. You will find information on armor and arms.

<http://www.chronique.com/>

Discover Spain with Spain Online

Discover La Mancha and tour the country as Don Quixote must have traveled it on his faithful steed, Rocinante.

<http://194.224.61.247/>

VOCABULARY:

tilt

To engage in combat with lances; to joust.

Context:

It is one of the most enduring, if ridiculous, images in all of literature—a madman tilting at windmills.

sally

A venture or excursion usually off the beaten path.

Context:

On his sallies through the landscape of La Mancha, Don Quixote encounters hundreds of characters.

knight-errant

A knight traveling in search of adventures in which to exhibit military skill, prowess, and generosity.

Context:

Alonso Quixano steps into his literary world and becomes a knight-errant, just like those in his books of chivalry.

quixotic

Foolishly impractical, especially in the pursuit of ideals.

Context:

We have come to describe this type of vaulting ambition as quixotic—full of lofty, yet impractical ideals.

coping mechanism

A method by which an individual contends with difficulties and attempts to overcome them.

Context:

Psychiatrists would call Don Quixote's altering of reality his coping mechanism.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks: Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks: Recognizes archetypes and symbols across literary texts.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks: Understands the effects of complex literary devices and techniques on the overall quality of the work.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks: Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks: Makes abstract connections between his or her own life and the characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict in texts.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks: Relates personal response to the text with that seemingly intended by the author.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: foreign language

Standard: Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of traditional ideas and perspectives, institutions, professions, literary and artistic expressions, and other components of target culture.

Benchmarks: Understands age-appropriate expressive forms of the target culture (e.g., literature) and their significance in the wider community.

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© Video Information and Comprehension Questions



Video Description

The image of Don Quixote tilting at windmills is one of the most enduring in literature. Through this addled protagonist and his pudgy sidekick, Sancho Panza, Cervantes skewers the courtly romances of his day and explores the line between fantasy and reality.

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[Download Comprehension Questions & Answers](#) ▶

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

TITLE OF VIDEO:

Don Quixote

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. According to the story, how did Alonso Quixano, Don Quixote's original persona, go mad?
2. What literal and symbolic role does Sancho Panza play in the story?
3. What two events in Miguel de Cervantes' life caused much of his disillusionment and disappointment?
4. How long after the original "Don Quixote de la Mancha" did Cervantes write the sequel?

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Don Quixote

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. According to the story, how did Alonso Quixano, Don Quixote's original persona, go mad?

According to the story, Alonso Quixano read tales of heroism and chivalry—like the Legend of King Arthur—day and night until “from little sleep and much reading, his brain dried up and he lost his wits.”

2. What literal and symbolic role does Sancho Panza play in the story?

Sancho Panza serves as Don Quixote's squire. With his peasant wit and common sense, he is the antithesis of his irrational master.

3. What two events in Miguel de Cervantes' life caused much of his disillusionment and disappointment?

Much of Miguel de Cervantes' disillusionment and disappointment came from being denied financial support by the King of Spain, even after coming home a war hero. He was later arrested and jailed for suspected embezzlement while serving as a tax collector.

4. How long after the original “Don Quixote de la Mancha” did Cervantes write the sequel?

Cervantes wrote the sequel to “Don Quixote de la Mancha” almost 10 years after the original and three months after an imposter's sequel was published.

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