

Incorporating Rural and Farm Novels in the Secondary School Classroom: Where We Come From is Who We Are

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Place-based education has received significant attention in recent years. This article briefly surveys common place-based education models and then argues for a more place-focused English language arts classroom in secondary schools where rural and regional literature is often absent from the curricula. The author posits that teacher-education programs do not usually address rural or regional literature and consequently, teachers enter the classroom unprepared to teach it. The article presents a rationale for focusing on rural literature written before 1965 as well as a rationale for foregrounding the rural experience in such a course. The author then describes the process of researching and developing a course template for teacher-education programs wishing to focus on regional literature. Also included are the course template and materials developed using the Rural Lit. R.A.L.L.Y. regional and rural authors database.

“I went up on the rimrock and felt the sun and looked way off to the mountains. It was almost as though I told all the places I loved that I’d be back” – Mildred Walker, *Winter Wheat*, 1944

The role of place in education has received a great deal of attention in recent years. Teachers and researchers alike argue in favor of a "new localism" (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. xiii) as a counterpoint to increased globalization and the standardization of public school curricula. They ask for an attention to place in education, arguing that resisting homogenization has benefit to students, teachers and to communities. Advocates of place-based education such as Smith, Theobald, Sobel, Brooke and Gruenewald are joined by classroom teachers and community activists who see place as a disregarded and yet vital element of a holistic education. Place-based education can be “characterized as the pedagogy of community, the reintegration of the individual into her homeground and the restoration of the essential links between a person and her place” (Sobel, 2004, p.ii). Theobald (1997) argued that “schools ought to attend more consciously to their physical place on earth and the social, political and economic dynamics that surround it” (p.1) and Smith (2011) posited that place-based education can help “try to overcome alienation...one overcomes alienation by creating experiences likely to create affiliation” (Gregory Smith, personal communication, November 14, 2011). Brooke (2003) wrote, “if education...is to become more relevant, to become a real force for improving the societies in

which we live, then it must become more closely linked to the local, to the spheres of action and influence which most of us experience (p.5).

Secondary school students, in general, may feel alienated from their communities and schools. Teachers in those schools need strategies that reconnect students to their home places. Nowhere is this more important than in rural America, where communities often face poverty, outmigration and marginalization from the American mainstream. If rural students are to experience an increased sense of affiliation and empowerment, then the school must play a role. While place-based education has shown great promise in environmental education, the natural sciences and service learning, I argue that it is just as vital to consider place in the humanities, specifically in the English language arts. There is certainly commendable work being done in university English, writing, literature and composition classroom that speaks to this concern (see Brooke, Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, Gruenewald, Smith and Theobald among others). Secondary school classrooms can do so as well.

Models of Place-based Education

Place-based education is often situated within environmental education and ecological and activism (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Smith & Williams, 1999). This model encourages students to see themselves as embedded in a local ecosystem and to take action to understand and protect it. Schools such as the Kennedy High School of Sustainability in Oregon are focused on ecoliteracy, environmental stewardship and community service (Kennedy High School, 2012). This model is also includes non-profit organizations (such as the Litzsinger Road Ecology Center in Missouri) that serve public school students and partner with local schools (Litzsinger Road Ecology Center).

Another model of place-based education is historical in its focus. It asks students to consider their place in the continuum of local events and foregrounds oral histories, folklore and local tradition. This approach is epitomized by Georgia's Foxfire program which has been active for more than 40 years in promoting "a sense of place and appreciation of local people, community, and culture as essential educational tools" (Foxfire Fund Inc., 2012). Other models are rooted in indigenous knowledge (Barnhardt, 2008), service learning (Bartsch, 2008) or agricultural education (Edible Schoolyard Project, 2011; Green Mountain Farm-to-School, 2009).

A Rationale for Teaching Regional and Rural Literature

While celebrating these models, I argue that the English language arts classroom is also a powerful and a productive site for attention to place and one that is too often ignored, even by proponents of place-based education. Literature, language and story are how humans have always made sense of our lives. In his 2002 book, *Why Reading Literature in School Still Matters*, Sumara wrote, “literary experience is a place. By learning to attend to its details, readers can improve the quality of their lived experiences” (p. xiv). Stories tell us who and where we are, help us form deep connections to one another, and can be catalysts for positive social change. Robert Brooke’s (2003) *Rural Voices: Place-conscious Education and the Teaching of Writing* provides a lucid and inspiring call for attention to the local in the composition classroom as well as a rationale for place-consciousness in education.

He argues that *telling* our local stories is vital to understanding our place in the world and our responsibility to it. I extend that argument to include the reading and hearing of our local stories and literature. “As human beings we are primed to engage each other and the world through language, and stories can be deeply evocative sources of knowledge and awareness” (Bell, 2010, p.16). Literature can provide us some of that access. Phenomenological researchers have long claimed that experiential descriptions in literature can be fruitful sources of insight into the human condition (van Manen, 1990), that “They help us connect individual experiences with systemic analysis” (Bell, 2010, p. 16), and that they are a deeply human form of meaning-making (Seidman, 2006).

One of the challenges of place-based education is that it may have a tendency to romanticize the rural experience and to be overly celebratory of the “rosy past” (Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007, p.1). Place-based education models that hearken back to an imagined golden age of rural life risk alienating marginalized students and can reinforce inequitable social conditions or colonialist paradigms (Longhurst & Perea Warniment, April, 2012). A more comprehensive and critical attention to the literature of rural America may be one way to resist that tendency toward romanticization.

Placeless Curricula

Secondary school language arts curricula have certainly evolved for the better over the past decades. We are much more likely now to pay attention to the work of minority authors, of

women and of writers from marginalized social groups. We now understand that “students...need literacy experiences that ennoble their backgrounds and abilities (Sullivan, 2007). The literature we encounter in schools can provide a powerful sense of identity or, conversely, alienate us profoundly if we do not see ourselves reflected there. The canon has been problematized and reimagined and the importance of including multicultural literature is now understood and largely accepted by educators, if not by politicians.

Unfortunately, however, the language arts classroom in most high schools is still often treated as placeless; it is not embedded in the local. In my experience as a student, as a high school language arts teacher, and as a researcher, I have observed that the literature to which secondary school students are exposed is often presented without regard to place. Most high school English classes, no matter how skillfully taught, could be happening anywhere in the country. This tendency towards placelessness has only been aggravated by the standardization movement of the past decade. Gruenewald (2003) wrote that “in place of actual experience with the phenomenal world, educators are handed, and largely accept, the mandates of a standardized ‘placeless’ curriculum” (p.8) and my own experience bears out his claim.

Resisting Placelessness

I argue that one method of counteracting the homogenization and placelessness of the language arts classroom is to teach the literature of our own places and that an attention to local literature should be part of language arts teacher preparation programs. This is made difficult, however, by the fact that many of us are unfamiliar with the literary history of our home places. A degree in literature, even in American literature, does not guarantee a familiarity with the writers of a particular locality. Many of us leave teacher preparation programs armed with theory, classroom management techniques and an understanding of state standards, but without any sense of the unique evolution of language and literature of the region in which we teach. The literature of the American Southwest is forged under different conditions than that of the Northeast or of the Mountain West or Midwest. The evolution of regional literatures is both *a result of* and a *contributing element to* the evolution of a place. Stories are not ancillary to a locale; they are part of its DNA.

Significance of the Project

In this vein, when I was asked by the Rural Lit R.A.L.L.Y. (RLR) Initiative to develop a model course using the rural and farm novels of the era preceding 1965, I was quite interested. This initiative describes its mission as threefold. First: "Sustaining a legacy of rural literature that embraces and illuminates local, regional, and national character" Second: "Initiating rural voices—young and old, oral and written—that both shape and are shaped by the rural experience" and third: "Building vibrant communities by joining together to celebrate literature as the lifeblood of the rural story" (Rural Lit R.A.L.L.Y.). In keeping with these goals, the participants in RLR are compiling an evolving and expanding database of rural and regional authors. I used this database as a starting point for the project.

Rural Students

This mission overlaps with my own research interests in several ways. The first is that I am profoundly interested in the experience of rural students who are often viewed from a deficit perspective (Valencia, 2010). Our education system seems to tacitly assume that all students are either urban or suburban and that "rural people lack literate skills and value literacy and education less than their urban and suburban counterparts do" (Donehower, 2007, p.38). Rural students are left with the impression that the real world happens elsewhere. They are encouraged to leave their homes in order to "make it" and those who stay struggle against a prevailing sense that they have somehow failed by staying close to home (Corbett, 2007; Howley, C.B., 2006; Howley, C.W., 2009). David Pichaske (1991) wrote that "there are, then, two great themes in rural writing: the theme of departure and the theme of return" (p.xxii) and those themes resonate with today's rural students just as they did with those of the first half of the twentieth century.

It is, then, important to encourage the inclusion of specifically rural stories in secondary school classrooms. In part, I hope to reassure rural students that the "real world" is rural as well and that "real authors" come from even the most out-of-the-way places. I certainly do not believe, however, that these rural stories are only beneficial for *rural* students. Urban and suburban students also need to see rural places reflected in their schooling (Ayalon, 2003). We have a shared rural heritage in the United States and failing to tell the stories of rural places to *all* students further marginalizes rural people and contributes to an essentialized and romanticized vision of rural life.

Garret Keizer, in his memoir of teaching in a rural Vermont community, wrote, “Despite some fond illusions about ‘life on the land,’ despite the bucolic settings of our soft-drink commercials, the American mainstream is pitifully ignorant of and indifferent to its rural population” (1988, p.5). Just as we now know of the importance of including the stories of many cultures and traditions in our Language Arts classrooms, we must make the same case for our country’s rural stories as well.

The Novels

The second appeal of this project was the novels themselves. The first half of the twentieth century was an enormously prolific time in American letters. We may imagine that they were lone geniuses in the wilderness, but Steinbeck, Faulkner and Cather did not spring fully formed out of literary backwaters. They were part of a wider movement of regional and rural literature that is rarely studied today. "Variously called 'farm novels', 'regional novels', or 'local color fiction', these works portray farm life perceptively and in great depth. To lose them is to lose a piece of our collective history; a piece of who we are, as a people and as a nation" (Rural Lit R.A.L.L.Y.). If we only teach the “big names”; if Cather and Steinbeck become the only voices of rural America represented in a high school curriculum, then we risk what Nigerian novelist Chimimanda Adichie (2009) called “the danger of a single story”. The modern canon tells only fragments of the rural story and turning to lesser-known works may allow us to gain a deeper and broader understanding of both our literary heritage and our history.

Many of these books have gone out of print and while not all are forgotten gems, they are certainly important to American literature as a whole. One surprising thing that I encountered was the fact that the RLR database is densely populated by women authors whose names were unfamiliar to me. While authors such as Mildred Walker, Alice Brown, Maristan Chapman, Josephine Donovan, Lorna Doone Beers, Elizabeth Madox Roberts and even Edna Ferber may not be household (or classroom) names, their work can tell us a great deal about the lives of rural women and families during the times in which they wrote. Reading their work can also provide us with insight into what rural Americans were interested in reading during the first half of the century. Despite the disdain heaped upon such novels by such luminaries as Sinclair Lewis (Casey, 2009) these novels were, in their day, quite popular.

Much of this work is now out of print and nearly forgotten, however. Casey (2009) argued that this lapse into obscurity may have been due to both the rise of an urban modernist aesthetic and an association of rural writing with female sentimentality. She described “our lingering tendency to associate the modern with urbanity” (p.86) and claimed that “rurality was linked to womanliness through the medium of a feminized popular culture” (p.92). Influenced by both geographic and sexual chauvinism, many critics were doubly unwilling to consider these novels as serious work. Despite modernism's embrace of the city as the site of all things new, vibrant and intellectually worthwhile, these authors remind us that skillful, compelling storytelling is not the sole purview of urbanites, or, for that matter, of men.

Historical Importance

Asking high school students to focus on literature written long before they or (in some cases their parents) were even born might seem, at first, counterintuitive. If we wish to resist the “rhetorics of lack, lag and the rosy past” (Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007, p.1) then why ask students to give their attention to literature of the past? Would it not be better to encourage them to read stories of rural life as it is *today*? I argue that we cannot understand the present realities of rural life without historical (and I include artistic history in this definition) context. We cannot resist the essentialization of rural places and rural literacies, if we participate in that essentialization by narrowing our understanding of the rural past to a few literary voices whose prominence was, in some part, due to their popularity with urban publishers and readers (Casey, 2009).

Finally, having also been a teacher of American history, I feel strongly that the era encompassed by this project is foundational for understanding where we find ourselves today. The economic, social and technological changes that have taken place since 1965 have their roots much earlier. The half-century that encompassed two world wars, the Great Depression, and the rise of the United States as a global superpower, is clearly of great historical importance. It also saw the evolution of the United States from a primarily agrarian society into a much more industrial and urbanized one that sought to forget its rural roots. These novels are deeply embedded in the transitions, evolutions and growing pains of that era and can provide (as literature often does) a more personal connection to the past. Local communities owe much of their contemporary character to forces that swept through the first half of the twentieth-century.

If we wish to create the opportunities for affiliation that place-based educators seek, then we must attend to the historical and cultural contexts that molded the present.

High school students are certainly capable of sophisticated comparisons between modern portrayals of rural places and those written before 1965. The realities of rural life have changed a great deal in the past half-century and young adults can consider how portrayals of rural people may have evolved as well. I certainly do not argue for a language arts classroom that *only* teaches rural literature that is over fifty years old! However, I believe that from both a literary and historical standpoint, such works are important enough to be included in the secondary language arts curriculum and this course is designed to provide teachers with the tools to do so.

Process

I set out to create a template of sorts that could be used in teacher education programs wishing to encourage a place-specific attention to literature. Initially, I imagined creating "region-specific" suggested reading lists and building the course around them. I quickly discovered, however, how little I really knew about many of these authors and the project soon began to run on two parallel tracks.

As I tried to build the skeleton of a course that would be flexible enough for an instructor to use in many contexts, I was simultaneously reading as many of the authors on the RLR database as I could find. Some of the books were available for purchase, some languished in far-flung libraries and some had been scanned and were available online through such resources as Project Gutenberg. It felt like a treasure hunt and each new discovery thrilled me a little more. I came to the conclusion that it would be counterproductive if I denied that sense of discovery to students who might take the course I was designing. If I were to build reading lists, then I would be creating (albeit in a small way) a canon of regional writers that I happened to enjoy; the very thing I wished to avoid.

Ultimately, I built a template that is both constructivist in approach and grounded in a rationale emerging from place-based education. Students are asked to investigate authors of their region and to discover which (if any) are being taught in local schools. They also build a body of resources for their classmates and colleagues and the course culminates with students designing a place-specific teaching unit of their own. My hope is that anyone wishing to teach such a course will experience the sense of discovery that excited me as I prepared the course. I hope that

classroom teachers can collect their own treasure troves of regional writers and begin to imagine how they might make use of their own region's literary heritage.

“Place matters” (Theobald, 2012, p.242). In the post NCLB era and as we move toward implementation of the Common Core Standards in many schools, it is vital that we resist homogenization. The forces of globalization encourage placelessness in the service of economic forces, but “to be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place” (Casey, E., 2009, p.xv). To be concerned with place is to be concerned with the local, with the close-at-hand. As educators that most-local place is the classroom. The secondary Language Arts classroom is an ideal venue for exploring both the rural literary heritage of the United States and how local stories intertwine with history and the present.

Course Template

What follows are the course template and suggested assignments for the course. I wish to acknowledge the help of Dr. Paul Theobald and Cynthia Anthony of Buffalo State College, Dr. David Pichaske of Southwest Minnesota State University, Angela Arvidson, Dr. Gregory Smith of Lewis and Clark College, Dr. Judi Franzak of New Mexico State University (my doctoral committee chair) and the blind reviewer who, at short notice, was willing to give me very helpful and supportive suggestions for improving this paper. I appreciate their guidance and patience during this project. Anyone who wishes may reproduce, adapt, rework, and amend any portion of these assignments, but please attribute the original course and project design to Jesse Moon Longhurst.

Course Outline: Regional and Rural American Literature (pre-1965) in the Secondary School Classroom

Rationale and intended audience: This course is intended for pre-service or current secondary Language Arts and Social Studies teachers. The literature concerning place-based education shows that a connection to place is a vital element in promoting student success and community agency. The literature concerning rural education shows that Rural America is often absent from current curricular reforms. Given both of those concerns, this course is designed to prepare secondary school English, Language Arts and Social Studies teachers to include regional and

rural literature in their own classrooms and curricula both to study its literary, sociological and historical importance, but also to counter overly romanticized notions of the rural experience.

Secondary school students (whether rural, suburban or urban) can benefit from an attention to the rural history of the United States and the rich vein of rural literature that often goes unread in high school curricula. The Rural Lit. R.A.L.L.Y. project seeks to renew interest in rural literature as a whole, with particular focus on the period prior to 1965. This course focuses on rural literature preceding 1965 for two reasons. One, it forms a backdrop for the enormous historical, economic and social change that the 20th century brought to the United States. Two, it attempts to revive interest in works of rural American literature that, unfortunately, have all but disappeared from the consciousness of many Americans. Rural literature from 1965 to the present is far more readily available, is often still in print and is preserved electronically for posterity, but the older works are disappearing.

“Variously called 'farm novels', 'regional novels', or 'local color fiction', these works portray farm life perceptively and in great depth. To lose them is to lose a piece of our collective history; a piece of who we are, as a people and as a nation" (Rural Lit. R.A.L.L.Y). Understanding the history of one's particular region is a core tenet of place-based education and the literature embedded in a particular era and place can provide students with a visceral and rich experience of that history.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Gain an understanding of the genre of the rural novel or "farm novel" up to 1965
- Understand where less prominent authors such as Lois Phillips Hudson, Herbert Krause, Mari Sandoz and Sophus Keith Winther fit into this tradition with and against such authors as Willa Cather and John Steinbeck
- Gain a familiarity with rural authors of their own regions of the country
- Discover which (if any) regional authors are being taught in local school districts
- Gain an initial familiarity with place-based education as a theoretical rationale for teaching rural literature in the secondary classroom
- Address practical and technological barriers to studying these works
- Incorporate place-based education and rural authors into their classrooms while attending to Common Core Standards and state requirements

- Build a curricular unit plan that implements the above

Topical outline

Place-based education

Rural literature as a genre

Prominent authors of the genre

Lesser known and region-specific authors of the genre

Incorporating rural literature in the classroom: technical/logistical challenges

Incorporating rural literature in the classroom: conceptual/curricular challenges

Potential texts: (I have indicated the chapters that I feel would be most useful)

Brooke, R. (2003). *Rural voices: Place-conscious education and the teaching of writing*. New York: Teachers College Press. (Chapter 2: Ross)

Donehower, Kim, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen Schell E. (2007). *Rural Literacies*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. (Preface, Chapters 1 & 2)

Donehower, Kim, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen Schell E. (2012). *Reclaiming the Rural: Essays on Literacy, Rhetoric, and Pedagogy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. (Chapter 6)

Gruenewald, D. A., & Smith, G. A. (2008). *Place-based education in the global age*. New York: L. Erlbaum. (Chapter 14: Dubel & Sobel)

Meyer, Roy W. (1965). *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska. (Chapters 1 & 2)

Schafft, K. A., & Jackson, A. Y. (2010). *Rural education for the twenty-first century: Identity, place, and community in a globalizing world*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. (Chapter 1: Theobald & Wood; Chapter 6: Corbett)

Smith, Gregory A., and David Sobel (2010). *Place-and community based education in schools: Sociocultural, Political, and Historical Studies in Education*. New York, NY: Routledge. (Preface; Chapters 2, 3 & 5)

Theobald, P. (1997). *Teaching the Commons: Place, pride, and the renewal of community*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (Chapter 9)

Various rural and regional authors: This will vary according to instructor's preferences and region. After some consideration, I decided that the very intent of such a course is to embed it in place. Consequently, it seemed presumptuous to design a reading list of these titles. The rural/regional authors that students read during this course should be informed by the context in which the course is taught. As such, I have not included specific author suggestions by region, but the Rural Lit R.A.L.L.Y. project provides a rich resource for assembling a region-specific reading list.

Suggested course schedule

Week One

Day One: Introduction to course, syllabus and purpose of the course

Day Two: Lecture topic: Introduction to Place-based Education

Week Two

Day One: Place-based education continued

Lecture topic: Identity, Literacy and Place

Day Two: Lecture topic: Exploring Rurality and Literacy

Week Three

Day One: Lecture topic: Introduction to the Rural, Farm Novel as a Genre
Activity: Introduction to using the Rural Lit. R.A.L.L.Y. database

Day Two: Introduction to the "Big Names" (Cather, Faulkner etc.)
Activity: Looking at current secondary school anthologies from big publishers: Who is represented?

Week Four

Day One: Lecture topic: Multi-media and Web resources for "Big Name" Authors
Assignment One Assigned

Day Two: Lecture Topic: Addressing Stereotypes and Caricatures in Literature
Discussion: How to address those in your classroom?

Week Five

Day One: Lecture Topic: Lesser-Known and Out-of-Print Authors
(Authors here TBD by instructor preference)
Introduction to finding out-of-print texts

Day Two: Assignment One Due
Assignment Two Assigned

Week Six

Day One Work on presentations
Lecture Topic: Problematizing "The Canon"

Day Two: Discussion: "The Canon" and your classroom

Week Seven

Day One: Assignment Two Presentations begin

Day Two: Assignment Two Presentations finish

Week Eight

Day One: Begin region-specific author research
Discuss authors specific to the region in which your institution is located
Assignment Three Assigned

Day Two: Survey Drafts Due to instructor. Send query e-mails or make phone calls asking for permission to conduct survey. As soon as you get permission (and contact information), send survey.

Week Nine

Day One: Lecture Topic: The Local Novel as a Teaching Text
Assignment Four assigned

Day Two: Library time to begin research.

Week Ten

Day One: Continue regional authors discussion: the art of drawing connections to both local history *and* current issues
Continue working on group projects
Check in on survey responses
Assignment Five assigned

Day Two: Assignment Five Due: Story Time! Divide in to small groups and, in turn, read your chosen passages. Each small group should have ONE representative from each research group. Each person is responsible for reading to the small group the chosen passage and for answering questions.

Week Eleven

- Day One: Assignment Four Due: Regional authors presentations begin
Check on survey responses: Begin compiling your data
- Day Two: Assignment Four Due: Regional authors presentations finish
Assignment Six (Final Project) assigned

Week Twelve

- Day One: Library time to research final projects
Survey results discussion
- Day Two: Individual meetings with instructor to finalize your plan
Assignment Three (Survey results) due! A typed summary of your findings is due in class today

Week Thirteen

- Day One: Check in about projects
Lecture Topic: Challenges: Standardization, Testing and Common Core Standards
- Day Two: Lecture Topic: Challenges: Relevance and Interest to Your Students

Week Fourteen

- Day One: Discussion: Returning to the idea of place
Lecture Topic: Challenges: Technical and Logistic: Strategizing and sharing discoveries
- Day Two: Lecture Topic: Cross-curricular and integrated use of rural/farm/regional literature

Week Fifteen

- Day One: Assignment Six Due: Poster Sessions of final projects
- Day Two: Assignment Six Due: Poster Sessions of final projects

Course Outline: American Rural and Regional Literature Pre-1965

Assignment one—Individual Assignment: Research two of the "big name" rural authors (Steinbeck, Cather etc.) from the database. Create a document (to be shared with your classmates) that lists and describes at least five available multi-media resources dealing with that author's work. These resources might be films, texts that were inspired by the author's work or web-based resources. They should be both accessible and interesting to secondary school students.

These must be presented in Word documents with hyperlinks included to any web resources and both bibliographic and access information for other resources (films etc.). We will then compile these into a master list that you may find useful in your classroom.

There will, of course, be some overlap in your findings. However, you are encouraged to think creatively and try to find resources that take more than a quick Google search to find!

Assignment two—Group Assignment: Pick one lesser-known author from the database and (after instructor approval of your choice) research him/her and his/her work. Create a presentation and some sort of "take home" material for your classmates that provides an introduction to the author, his or her major works and his or her significance in the context of this course. Include information on access to the work (i.e. Project Gutenberg, print sources etc.) and some excerpts that strike you as interesting or typical. Your presentation and "take home" auxiliary material will be evaluated by the following criteria:

1. Comprehensiveness and relevance of biographical and bibliographical material.

However, you must avoid turning this project into merely a biography or a book report!

2. Comprehensiveness and thoughtfulness of discussion of major works. It should be clear to your instructor and your classmates that you have read enough of this work and to discuss it knowledgeably.
3. Practical considerations of access to the texts. Have you provided your classmates with a clear path to finding this author's work?
4. Rationale for including this work in a high school course. Have you made a case for how this author's work fits in to a high school class and why it is relevant to both place-based and literary concerns?

Assignment three—Work in Pairs: Create a SHORT (15 questions or fewer is ideal) survey to submit to teachers at a local secondary school. Please see me about which school you plan to survey. I want to avoid overlap.

This survey should concern the use of regional authors in their classrooms. You should tailor the survey to language arts, English, writing, social studies or history teachers. Please contact the school principal, curriculum director or department head for permission to conduct the survey. Ask whether it would be preferable to conduct the survey through e-mail (using

either e-mailed surveys or a web-based application such as SurveyMonkey) or whether the school would prefer you to conduct the survey using paper surveys. Plan accordingly. Please keep your survey language neutral, respectful and specific.

When you have collected the survey results (see the course calendar for timing), you and your partner will prepare a Word document (to be shared with your classmates as well as your instructor) detailing your results. This document should be narrative in form and contain your conclusions as to the "why" of your results.

You will be evaluated on the following:

1. Your survey design: Is it respectful? Is it comprehensive? Is it brief? Is it specific with regards to regional authors?
2. Your survey results report: Is it comprehensive? Does it contain both information and analysis of that information?

Assignment four—Group Project: Regional Author Research: In a group, and using the Rural Lit RALLY database as a starting point, research the authors of a particular geographic region. You may choose to research the region that you currently live in, where you are originally from, where you hope to teach or just somewhere that interests you as a group. Remember that these authors should have been writing primarily in the first half of the twentieth century. Instructor will approve the regional choices so as to avoid too much overlap.

You and your group will create a 20-25 minute classroom presentation as well as a web-based document (such as a wiki) that gives a well-researched overview into the rural authors of your chosen region. Your audience is made up of teachers and students who may be looking for a place to begin their research into local authors.

You should consider the following when crafting your regional authors presentation:

- What makes these authors rural?
- How did the era affect their writing?
- How did their geographic region affect their writing?
- What effect have they had on regional authors since?
- What effect have they had on American letters in general?
- Which their works are most relevant and accessible to high school readers?

You will be evaluated on the following:

1. Comprehensive nature of the presentation
2. Comprehensive nature of the web document
3. Technical elements of the web document
4. Quality of the in-class presentation itself
5. General utility of the web-document

This, like most of the assignments in this class, is designed to be used beyond the scope of the course itself. It is my hope that you will use each other's work in the future. If all goes well, we will compile these and send them to any teacher who indicates in the survey that they might wish to include more regional authors in their classes. This document should be professional, error free and authoritative.

Assignment five—Group assignment: This is to be completed with the same group from Assignment 4.

Choose a significant, striking or representative passage from one of your authors and bring copies for your classmates. Be prepared to read one of these out-loud to a small group. During the next class session, we will have Story Time! You will divide in to small groups and, in turn, read your chosen passages. Each small group should have ONE representative from each research group. Each person is responsible for reading the chosen passage to the small group and for answering questions about the text, the author and the literature of the region.

Assignment six (final project)—Individual Assignment: You will create a unit plan that incorporates the author database and would be appropriate to teach in your discipline and at your grade-level. Be creative and think beyond a straightforward literature unit. Strive for a cross-curricular and integrated approach. Pay attention to relevancy of these works to the lives of students today...rural, suburban and urban.

This should include:

- rationale for the unit
- a comprehensive calendar outlining your plan
- daily lesson plans
- assessment plans
- materials lists

- reading lists
- explicit alignment of your unit plan with Common Core standards
- self-reflection opportunities for both students and teacher
- methodology for integrating the literature of the past with concerns of YOUR present-day students
- strategies and resources for accessing materials that may be out of print

Imagine that you are publishing this unit plan for use by other teachers (as you are for your classmates and perhaps your colleagues). It needs to be presented in such a way that it is comprehensive, clear and well-organized.

You will be evaluated on the following:

1. Comprehensive nature of the unit
2. Unit contains all of the elements above
3. Thematic cohesiveness
4. Sophistication of the unit
5. Developmental appropriateness of the unit
6. Technical elements of the unit
7. Sophistication and practicality of the rationale for the unit
8. Inclusion of relevant elements of the Common Core standards in the unit
9. General utility of unit

This, like most of the assignments in this course, is designed to be used beyond the scope of the course itself. It is my hope that you will be able to use this in your classroom in the future and that you will share these with each other. This document should be professional, error free and authoritative.

Our course will end with each of you creating a poster that describes your project and we will have two poster sessions during which you will present your project and view those of your classmates.

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