

Lesson Plan: Close Reading and Critical Analysis of Nathaniel Rich's "Hermie"- A Case of Climate Change

Teacher-contributed lesson plan by Dr. Pooja Sancheti, Visiting Faculty, IISER Pune, India.

As a **high school** or **undergraduate English Literature** teacher, you can use this **climate fiction** short story to teach **literary analysis of fiction** through **narrative strategies** such as dialogue, chronology, and descriptive richness as used **in a short story**, the use of **figures of speech** such as irony and personification, and the **development** of the element of **pathos**.

In this lesson plan, you can use a video and allow for a discussion to enhance **the act of reading** and the **understanding of the story**. Further, you can use the suggested homework assignment on **creative writing** to help the students to personally connect with the story. The underlying thread of the story is **climate change** and its effects on marine biology, with the example of hermit crabs.

Thus, the use of this lesson plan allows you to integrate the teaching of a climate science topic with a core topic in **English Literature**.

Use this lesson plan to help your students to:

- critically read and analyze a short story by focusing on the minute details (such as the choice of vocabulary) as well as broad strokes (such as emotional effects), in order to build a comprehensive image.
- detect the use of irony, personification, analepsis, and pathos in an example of speculative fiction.
- analyse the primary features of dystopian literature.
- apply the use of irony and analepsis as narrative strategies for fiction
- discuss the interaction between human beings and animals in fiction
- understand the effects of climate change and human intervention on other life forms.
- use group discussions and creative writing as extensions of reading.

About the Lesson Plan

Grade Level: High School, Undergraduate

Discipline: English Literature, Humanities

Topic(s) in Discipline: literary analysis, speculative fiction, climate fiction, narratology, narrative techniques, figures of speech, dialogues, chronology, descriptive richness, irony, personification, analepsis, pathos, dystopia, climate change, hermit crabs

Climate Topic: Climate and the Anthroposphere, Climate and the Biosphere

Location: Global, North America, Europe, Asia, Thailand, Austria, USA, Florida

Access: Online, Offline

Language(s): English

Approximate Time Required: 60-80 min

1 Contents

1. Reading (10 min)

A list of literary terms for a preliminary discussion:

- a. First person narrator
- b. Irony
- c. Personification
- d. Speculative Fiction
- e. Pathos
- f. Flashback /Analepsis
- g. Dystopia

Definitions and descriptions of these literary terms can be found at:

- first-person narrator; <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/narratology/terms/firstperson.html>;
- irony: <https://literaryterms.net/irony/>;
- personification: <https://literaryterms.net/personification/>;
- speculative Fiction: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speculative_fiction;
- pathos: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pathos>;
- flashback (analepsis): <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/narratology/terms/analepsis.html>;
- dystopia: <https://www.tor.com/2011/04/11/dystopian-fiction-an-introduction/>

2. Video (~4 min)

A video that introduces the natural behavior and habitat of hermit crabs and describes an adaptation strategy used by them, in a human induced changed environment.

This video can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuwQKJCO9UQ>.

3. Reading (10-15 min)

A short story about the interactions between a human and a hermit crab as an example of speculative fiction in the genre of climate fiction (Cli-Fi).

This can be obtained at:

<https://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/Hermie.pdf>

4. Classroom Activity (30-50 min)

- A list of suggested questions and discussion points for the literary analysis of the above-mentioned story. This will involve the use of the literary terms introduced before, in the analysis of this climate fiction story.
- Optional- A suggested activity of following the timeline of the story's characters at various geographical locations on a world map, to analyse and comment on the wide-ranging movements of both characters for diverse purposes- professional demands (for the human) and the search for a home because of loss of natural habitat due to climate change (for the hermit crab).

A copy of the map of the world can be obtained at:

<https://geology.com/world/world-map.shtml>

5. Suggested questions/assignments for learning evaluation

Following the classroom activity, use these questions for a homework assignment. Instruct the students to answer each question in 150-250 words:

1. Among other things, the story highlights emotional relationships between animals and children. Comment on this feature of the story. Can you recall any such interactions from your childhood?
2. Do you think the story could have moved in a different direction after Hermie told the narrator about his current condition? If yes, what would it be? Write your version of the story.
3. What similarities and differences did you find between the BBC video on hermit crabs you watched in class and Hermie's story? In what ways does the story make the extent of climate destruction personal?

2 Step-by-step User Guide

Here is a step-by-step guide to using this lesson plan in the classroom. We have suggested these steps as a possible plan of action. You may customize the lesson plan according to your preferences and requirements.

1. Introduction of literary terms

Use the list of definitions of literary terms like irony, personification, analepsis, dystopia, and pathos to explain to the students many terms integral to the story the students will be reading subsequently. Use this discussion to set the tone for the story to follow and equip students with some literary tools to explore the narrative.

- a. First person narrator
- b. Irony
- c. Personification
- d. Speculative Fiction
- e. Pathos
- f. Flashback /Analepsis
- g. Dystopia

Definitions and descriptions of these literary terms can be found at:

- first-person narrator; <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/narratology/terms/firstperson.html>;
- irony: <https://literaryterms.net/irony/>;
- personification: <https://literaryterms.net/personification/>;
- speculative Fiction: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speculative_fiction;
- pathos: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pathos>;
- flashback (analepsis): <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/narratology/terms/analepsis.html>;
- dystopia: <https://www.tor.com/2011/04/11/dystopian-fiction-an-introduction/>

2. Through a video depicting a real-world scenario, introduce an animal character for the ensuing fictional story

The hermit crab is a character in the fictional story to be read in the next part of this lesson plan.

Use the video, '[Crafty Hermit Crab Finds a New Home in a Food Tin](#)', by BBC Earth to introduce to your students the natural habitat, behavior, and adaptation strategies of hermit crabs in a coastal region of Thailand. Emphasize on the fact that hermit crabs are dependent upon natural seashells and therefore, a balanced ecosystem, for their wellbeing. Use the video to discuss how hermit crabs must adapt to a changed environment due to human intervention in their natural habitat. Thus, use this tool to describe

to your students, a real-world scenario for hermit crabs to improve understanding of the plight of the hermit crab character in the following fictional story.

This video can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuwQKJCO9UQ>.

3. Read the Story

Give each student a copy of Nathaniel Rich's short story, '[Hermie](#)' and ask them to read it carefully. Allow them to build their impressions of the story without intervention or guidance. Permit students to individually grasp nuances in the text and formulate their emotional responses as readers. Remind the students of the literary terms discussed before, to equip them with a sub-conscious grid to describe their interpretation of the text.

This story can be accessed at:

<https://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/Hermie.pdf>

4. Discuss the story

Now, ask the students to offer their first impressions of the story in brief, and direct the discussion using the points mentioned below. Use these discussions to cover both close reading skills (for which students will refer to the text), and broad overview skills thus enabling students to glean information from text and be able to infer and interpret findings. You may need to write down certain key words on the whiteboard/blackboard to summarize the discussion.

Use the following points to enable a group discussion for the literary analysis of the story:

1. The story has several instances of irony. For example, the term 'calm blue ocean' is ironic due to the disturbed nature of existence of the ocean's creatures as described in the story. Mention other instances of irony that caught your attention.
2. What is the narrator's profession? Pick out all the instances where this is alluded to.
3. The story hints are several ways that human beings have intervened and despoiled the environment. What instances can you find in the story?
4. The story uses *analepsis* or a flashback (of memories) to present a different world to the reader. Discuss what impressions of the first-person narrator and Hermie are formed from these, and how the world has changed for them.
5. In your opinion, what is the effect of having an animal character converse with a human in this narrative?
6. Comment on the ending of the story.
7. Hermie's last ditch attempt to find a home is thwarted by the narrator, and this gives rise to pathos. Discuss.

OPTIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

This second part of the class activity requires a large [world map](#) (physical or digital). Ask the students to list all the geographical locations mentioned in the story. Use the map to locate the various places mentioned in the story, beginning with Salzburg. You can use a marker to indicate the connections between these places or thumb pins and a thread to connect these pins. Then, use this information to discuss the following:

1. how far the character of Hermie travelled, in order to find a home.
2. the extensive travels of the narrator as an academic.
3. the coastal areas mentioned in the story that are affected by human intervention and climate change.
4. how the entire world is interconnected and, therefore, what happens in one place can affect other places also.

Use this exercise to emphasize to the students that the world is not only geographically connected but is also connected by ecological disasters, human intervention and climate change.

A copy of the map of the world can be obtained at:

<https://geology.com/world/world-map.shtml>

5. Suggested questions/assignments for learning evaluation

Following the classroom activity, use the following questions for a homework assignment. They require some degree of reflection and recollection, as well as creative writing skills.

- Use the first question to ask students to summarize the human-animal relationship as outlined in the story and use the technique of flashback or analepsis to reflect on her/his own life.
- Use the second question to reflect upon the story and get a creative response to how the story could have ended. Explain to the students that they are expected to write in the style and vocabulary of the story, retaining the voice of the first-person narrator.
- Use the final question for a comparative analysis of a work of fiction and non-fiction. Allow the students to watch the video again and focus on the effects of human activity and climate change on the habitat of hermit crabs.

Instruct students to answer each question in 150-250 words:

1. Among other things, the story highlights emotional relationships between animals and children. Comment on this feature of the story. Can you recall any such interactions from your childhood?
2. Do you think the story could have moved in a different direction after Hermie told the narrator about his current condition? If yes, what would it be? Write your version of the story.
3. What similarities and differences did you find between the BBC video on hermit crabs you watched in class and Hermie's story? In what ways does the story make the extent of climate destruction personal?

3 Learning Outcomes

The tools in this lesson plan will enable students to:

- critically read and analyze a short story by focusing on the minute details (such as the choice of vocabulary) as well as broad strokes (such as emotional effects), in order to build a comprehensive image.
- detect the use of irony, personification, analepsis, and pathos in an example of speculative fiction.
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- use group discussions and creative writing as extensions of reading.

4 Additional Resources

If you or your students would like to explore the topic further, these additional resources will be useful.

1. Reading

Climate Fiction resource: An anthology titled 'I'm With the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet Paperback'. Edited by Mark Martin. Verso, 2011.

2. Reading

"Glossary of Literary Terms." Drama for Students. Retrieved March 18, 2019 from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/glossary-literary-terms>

5 Credits/Copyrights

All the teaching tools in our collated list are owned by the corresponding creators/authors/organizations as listed on their websites. Please view the individual copyright and ownership details for each tool by following the individual links provided.

We have selected and analyzed the tools that align with the overall objective of our project and have provided the corresponding links. We do not claim ownership of or responsibility/liability for any of the listed tools.

1. Literary terms

Various sources:

[College of Liberal Arts, Purdue University](#);

[literaryterms.net](#);

[Wikipedia](#);

[Cambridge Dictionary \(Cambridge University Press\)](#);

[tor.com \(Macmillan Community Network\)](#)

2. Video; 'Crafty Hermit Crab finds a New Home in a Food Tin'

Produced by [BBC Earth](#).

3. Reading; 'Hermie'

Authored by Nathaniel Rich. This story is made available by [Western Michigan University](#). This story appears in the anthology, 'I'm With the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet', edited by Mark Martin, Verso, 2011.

4. Map-activity; 'World Map: A clickable map of world countries'

Presented by [Geology.com](#)

5. Additional Resources

"Glossary of Literary Terms." [Drama for Students](#) made available by [encyclopedia.com](#)