Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan

Text: “The Seven Ages of Man” (As You Like It) by Shakespeare

Grade/Subect: MS / ELA

Ideas, Values: Age, Definition, Human, Progress, Time

Pre-Seminar Content

Launch Activity:
For a week prior to the seminar, display in your classroom the four paintings by Thomas Cole from the “Voyage of Life.” Discuss what they reveal about the nature of human experience in youth, adulthood, maturity, and old age. How does one “age” lead to another?
Distribute the text and note that it is from a play by Shakespeare (As You Like it). Explain that it is a description of the various stages in human life. Ask students what they expect to learn from such a text. Ask students what “genre” this is: i.e. poetry or prose, fiction or non-fiction, etc. Have students number the lines (1-28), noting every five lines in the margin (5, 10, 15, 20, etc.).

Read the entire passage aloud slowly, pausing at the end of the introduction (line 5) and at the end of each “age.” Have students identify any unfamiliar word or phrase while a volunteer writes them on the (interactive) whiteboard.

Share as appropriate: William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

As You Like It is a pastoral comedy by William Shakespeare believed to have been written in 1599 or early 1600. The play features one of Shakespeare’s most famous and oft-quoted speeches, "All the world's a stage."

Be sure to include the following on the list of unfamiliar words: mewling (line 6), woeful ballad (10), pard (12), capon (16), saws, instances (both 18), pantaloon (20), shank (23), treble (24), oblivion (27), and sans (repeated in 28). Provide the following definitions for archaic words:

- **pard**: leopard or panther
- **capon**: a rooster raised specifically to eat
- **saw**: a maxim or proverb
- **pantaloon**: a foolish old man
- **shank**: lower leg
- **sans**: from the French “sans,” without

And then work with the students to define other unfamiliar words by context or dictionary.
Divide the class at random into seven equal groups. Then assign each group one of the following seven “ages” to analyze:

The infant (lines 5-6)
The school-boy (lines 7-9)
The lover (lines 9-11)
The soldier (lines 11-15)
The justice (lines 15-19)
The pantaloon (lines 19-25)
The last stage (lines 25-28)

Have the groups meet together and go over their lines carefully and discuss their meaning. Then direct that one member of each group serve as the narrator (who will read the appropriate lines aloud) while all the other members of the group will act out in mime the actions of the “age”—then freeze in a tableau. Go through the entire passage (teacher reads the first five lines), while each group's narrator and mimes read / act out the seven ages. Run through the monologue several times while several members of each group get to serve as the audience so that all students can see the production in its entirety.
Seminar Questions

Opening (Identify main ideas from the text.):

- Which of these seven stages do you find most surprising? (vote by show of hands)
- What surprises you about that stage? (spontaneous discussion)

Core (Analyze textual details.):

- What do you think Shakespeare means by the first two lines of this famous speech: “All the world's a stage,/And all the men and women merely players”? Why does he describe men and women as “merely players”?
- Which of the seven ages do you think is most significant in an individual’s life? Why?
- How do the elements of one stage contribute to or cause the elements of another? Do you see any cause-and-effect relationships?
- In line 26, Shakespeare sums up the ages of man by calling it a “strange, eventful history.” Why strange? Why eventful?

Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas.):

- How would you dramatize each of the seven stages today? How have the ages of man changed?
Revisit the (core) question of how one of Shakespeare’s ages might contribute to or cause another. Have students write lists of everything they heard, said, or thought during the seminar that has to do with this question.

**Writing Task:**

How does one stage of Shakespeare’s “seven ages of man” lead to another? After reading and discussing “The Seven Ages of Man” from As You Like It, on the parts of a man’s life, write an essay in which you argue the how the elements of one age lead to those of another. Support your discussion with evidence from the text. (Argumentation/Cause-Effect)

**Brainstorm:**

Invite participants to talk in pairs for two minutes to share thoughts about what the writing task is asking and how they might respond.
Structure the Writing:

Allow a few minutes for all to create designs for their essays using at least two of the seven ages of man. Discuss possible templates that work well for a cause-and-effect essay (and provide written templates for students to fill in if necessary). Have students draft their designs on paper and use them to refine their thinking.

First Draft:

Challenge all to draft their cause-and-effect essays by writing the paragraphs defined by their outlines. Refer to the original ages of man in detail in order to illustrate key points.

Collaborative Revision:

Have participants work in pairs to read their first drafts aloud to each other with emphasis on reader as creator and editor. Listener says back one point heard clearly and asks one question for clarification. Switch roles. Give time for full revisions resulting in a second draft.

Edit:

Once the second draft is complete, have participants work in groups of three-four and this time take turns reading each other’s second drafts slowly and silently, marking any spelling or grammar errors they find. (Have dictionaries and grammar handbooks available for reference.) Take this opportunity to clarify/reteach any specific grammar strategies you have identified your students needing. Give time for full revisions resulting in a third and final draft.

Publish:

Collect the final drafts of the student essays into a collection to be published on the classroom web site and in paper form to be used as exemplars by future classes. Invite the Shakespeare scholar and/or theater director from a local college or university to serve as guest reader(s) for these essays. Invite their general feedback on the entire collection (not individual essays) to be shared with your students.

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"The Seven Ages of Man"
William Shakespeare

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
Then, the whining school-boy with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then, a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then, the justice,
In fair round belly, with a good capon lined,
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws, and modern instances,
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

(Source - from Act II, Scene 7, As You Like It)