

The Hero's Journey: Literature and Composition

Teacher Manual



Oak Meadow

Oak Meadow, Inc.

Post Office Box 615

Putney, Vermont 05346

oakmeadow.com



Introduction

This teacher manual is written to accompany Oak Meadow's coursebook for *The Hero's Journey: Literature and Composition*, which is a high school English course. The teacher manual is designed for parents, tutors, and teachers who work with students using this course either independently as a homeschooler or as part of a school using Oak Meadow's curriculum. The course is designed to make it easy for students to work successfully on their own, but supervision, guidance, and assessment by an adult is expected. We hope you find this teacher manual helpful in guiding your student throughout the year.

*A hero is no
braver than an
ordinary man, but
he is brave five
minutes longer.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Course Materials

This teacher manual contains all the assignments that students are given in their coursebook as well as answers to comprehension and critical thinking questions and tips on how to assess your student's work. The following books are included with this course:

- *The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer
- *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson
- *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank
- *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer
- *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston
- *House of Light* by Mary Oliver
- *A Pocket Style Manual* by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers
- *Write It Right: A Handbook for Student Writers* (Oak Meadow Books)
- blank journal

Each of the readings for this course has been chosen for its spirit, its sense of adventure, and the strength of the characters in each story. These books have also been chosen to help the student develop an appreciation for good literature.

It is recommended that students have a good **dictionary**. Online dictionary sources should be supplemented with a print dictionary, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*; *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*; or the *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary*, so students can compare definitions and absorb the nuances of a particular word. Since some of the projects in this course require research, access to a library and the internet are required.

Students will be keeping a reader's journal during this course that will be filled with ideas, questions, sketches, and designs that have been inspired by the readings. Reader's journal assignments are part of each lesson. If you aren't familiar with the concept of a reader's journal, you can do an internet image search for "reader's journal examples" to get an idea of the wide range of uses this book can have. Students can be encouraged to use the journal to record references to meaningful or pivotal passages, write down observations, note unfamiliar words and their definitions, draw maps and diagrams of story elements, illustrate scenes, and doodle relevant images regarding literary themes, settings, characters, and historical time periods. The reader's journal will become a record of the effort the student makes to understand the literature and become an important study tool. When assessing your student's journal, look for regular entries, a variety of uses (e.g., vocabulary words, questions, ideas, summaries, illustrations, etc.), and overall depth.

Course Orientation

In this course, there are 36 lessons divided equally into two semesters. Each lesson represents approximately five hours of work (often done over the course of one week). Here is a description of the sections students may find in each lesson:

- **Digging Deeper** gives background information that helps students interpret the literature within its historical and cultural context.
- **Along the Way** identifies core themes and concepts. The questions asked in this section are not assignments that need to be completed, but are simply ideas for reflection designed to help students understand the reading more fully.
- **What Do You Think?** gives students an opportunity to discuss literary and cultural issues with others. This section includes talking points that can help students consider alternate viewpoints, clarify their views, and practice persuasive speech and logical arguments.
- **Writing Tip** sections contain timely reminders to help students improve and refine their writing skills. These tips will refer the reader to relevant sections in *Write It Right* and *A Pocket Style Manual*, and students are expected to demonstrate these skills and knowledge in their lesson assignments.
- **Definitions** of unusual words can be found in the sidebar. Students are encouraged to review these **before** each reading assignment.
- An **Assignment Summary** is included with each lesson to show at a glance what is required. Students can be encouraged to check off assignments as they are completed, or you can use this

checklist when you are assessing your student's work. Assignments are fully explained in each lesson

- **For Enrolled Students** is found at the end of most lessons. This section provides reminders and information for students who are enrolled in Oak Meadow School and who are submitting work to their Oak Meadow teacher. Those using this course independently can disregard this section.

The **appendix** contains important material that students are expected to read and incorporate into their work throughout the year. You may want to take some time to go over this information with your student.

In this teacher manual, sections in **orange** indicate answers to the required assignments. Digging Deeper, Along the Way, and other sections and excerpts are sometimes included if they contain information that may help you understand lesson goals or facilitate a discussion with your student. If you want to see a particular lesson in full, please refer to the student's coursebook.

When assessing your student's work, you might find it helpful to refer to sections in *Write It Right* to gain a clear picture of the skills the student is expected to demonstrate. This might make it easier for you to direct your student's attention to particular skills that need further development.

Academic Expectations

The written work for this course includes comprehension and critical thinking questions, interpretive essays, a reader's journal, creative projects, and creative writing. The assignments are sequential and should be completed in order. Students are encouraged to write all responses in complete sentences, maintaining clear paragraph structure. Whenever possible, they should support their observations with examples, specific details, and direct quotations from the readings.

All students are expected to meet their work with integrity and engagement. All student work should be original and give an authentic sense of the student's thoughts and opinions rather than what they think the teacher reviewing their work wants to hear. When other sources are used, these sources should be cited accurately. Plagiarism, whether accidental or intentional, is a serious matter and students are expected to be aware of this.

It is every student's responsibility to make sure they understand the academic expectations explained in full in the appendix and abide by them.

Working with Your Student

Every student has different strengths and challenges, and every teacher brings a unique skill set to the student-teacher relationship. This course encourages students to develop a strong sense of original thought and the teacher's encouragement in this realm can be very beneficial. Whenever possible, initiate or participate in discussions about the readings, assignments, and issues. If possible, read the books at the same time as your student to make conversations more relevant and engaged. Encourage

your student to form opinions based on their experiences and knowledge, and to express those opinions with conviction and confidence. Share your own thoughts and experiences, and demonstrate a willingness to view issues from multiple perspectives.

When assessing your student's work, it is recommended that you focus on concrete suggestions for improvement while being specific about where the student displays strong skills. This helps the student know exactly what they are doing well and what needs improvement. You will have to gauge how much praise and how much criticism to provide, based on what motivates your student. In general, it is good to keep in mind that the student has a full course of 36 lessons in which to improve skills and develop knowledge—it is often best to focus on two or three areas that need work at a time, and let others go so that the student is not overwhelmed, especially early in the course. Other areas that need attention can be emphasized as the student progresses through the year.

Depending on your student, you might ask for their input about ways you can support the learning process. Often high school students are still developing time management and organizational skills and can use help in this area. Some students benefit from having an adult take a keen interest in their work, while others prefer to work more independently. However you support your student, your thoughtful guidance and encouraging feedback can help your student stretch and grow.

Lesson

1

Arc of the Hero's Journey

Lesson Objectives

- Study archetypal elements in literature and film.
- Examine the historical and cultural relevance of the hero's journey.
- Identify the stages of the hero's journey in familiar stories.

Assignments

Reading

Read the selection on pages 6–18, “The Arc of the Hero's Journey.”

The course begins with an overview of the archetype of the hero's journey. Students are encouraged to read through the entire lesson, including the sidebar sections and all of the assignments, before starting their work.

Reader's Journal

Students begin using their reader's journal right away by writing down the stages of the hero's journey, which they'll refer to throughout this course. They will create a title page in their journal with the title of the course and the date (or school year). They are encouraged to add decorative elements to this title page. On the next page, a table of contents will be created that will be added to when starting each new unit.

The first journal assignment is to create a visual representation of the archetypal hero's journey, as presented in “The Arc of the Hero's Journey.” Students might use colored pencils, watercolor, markers, paint, or collaged photographs and graphics to depict the stages of the hero's journey. They might make a timeline, or choose a different shape to visualize the map of the journey. They are instructed to create their own unique interpretation rather than copying what is in their coursebook.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read “The Arc of the Hero's Journey.”
- Write a three-paragraph narrative about your personal helpers and mentors.
- Complete journal assignments.

Writing

Often a student misses a part of the assignment or glances too quickly at it and misunderstands it, so encourage your student to read everything carefully before beginning.

- Write a personal narrative about the helpers and mentors you have encountered so far on your life's journey. Who have been your own helpers, guides, or teachers? Write a three-paragraph essay on how a helper or mentor has come to your aid in facing or overcoming an obstacle in your life. Make sure to include concrete examples. Be specific! What kind of help did you receive? Why did it make such a difference? If you are writing this assignment by hand, you should expect to fill up about two pages. If you are typing it on the computer, check the word count to make sure it is approximately 500 words (it doesn't have to be exact). Refer to the writing tip in this lesson for more information about essay writing, formatting, and punctuation.

Students should develop their ideas in a logical sequence over the course of the essay, and include specific examples of the help or guidance they received. This is a good opportunity to assess the student's skills in paragraphing, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. It's also a good time to check the ability to follow directions and stay on topic, and present ideas in a logical sequence. An excellent response will use correct form, provide specific details, and show a clear connection between the topic and the student's personal experience. Expect a three- to five-paragraph essay.

Writing Tip

In this lesson you are asked to write a personal narrative about the mentors in your life. Narratives tell a story, and personal narratives tell *your* story. Before you begin writing, read the following sections in *Write It Right*: "General Formatting," "Essay Writing," and "Punctuation Usage."

Reading Selection:

The Arc of the Hero's Journey

(Excerpts of the reading selection are below to give you a strong basis for the course's fundamental theme. To read the entire selection, please see the student coursebook.)

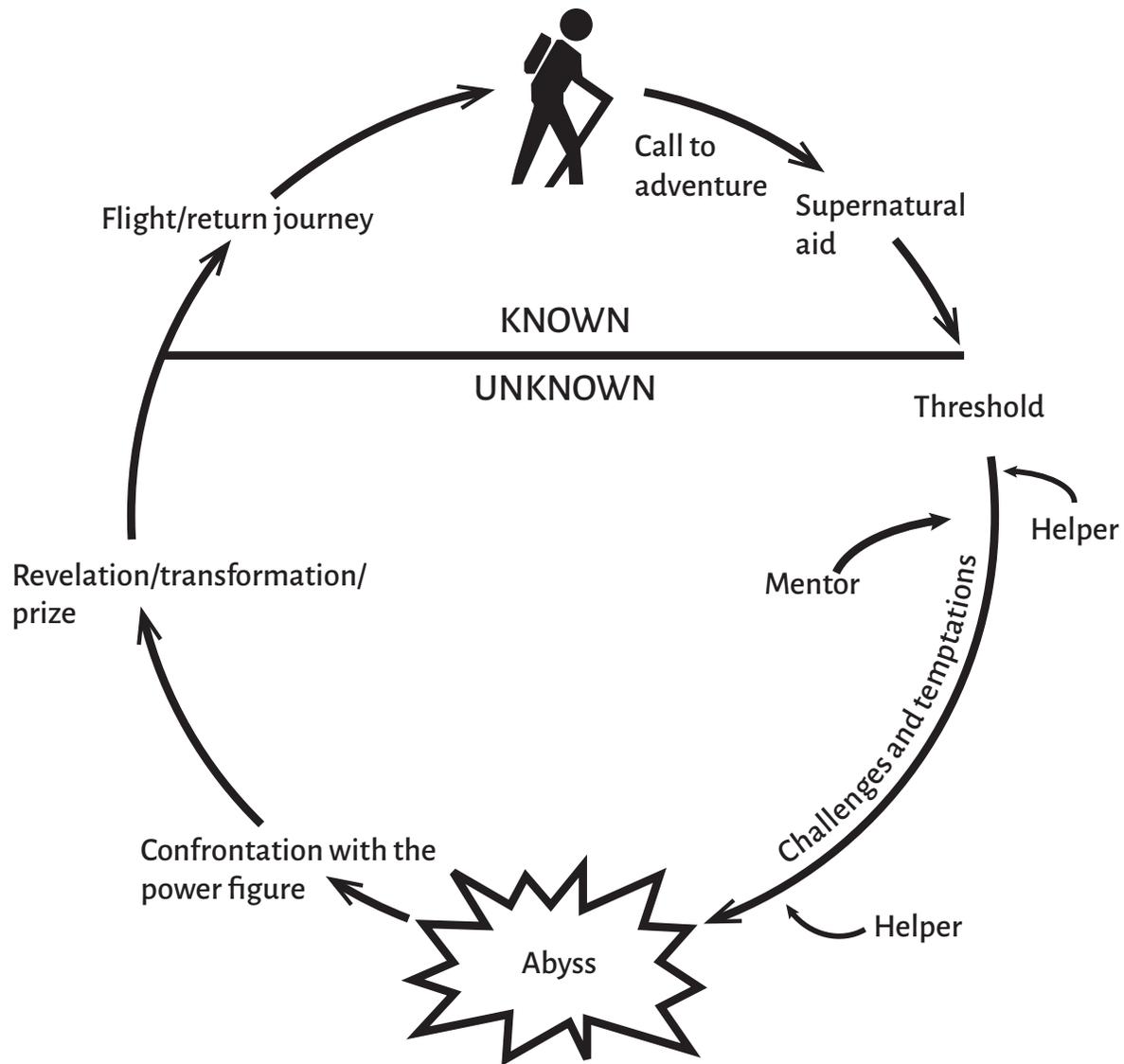
In addition to all the great literature you'll be reading this year, this course has a theme or basic idea underlying every lesson: the hero's journey. For each literature selection, you will explore how the concept of the hero's journey applies and how it can help you expand your understanding of literature and deepen your appreciation of it. Of course, each book also has its own themes, structure, and meaning, which you will explore as well. But the hero's journey is a very flexible, universal concept, and it can help to tie each book into a larger story of human struggle, adventure, and self-discovery.

The hero's journey is an *archetype*. What's an archetype? An archetype is an idea or structure that serves as a model for many individual figures, whether they are characters, objects, or stories. Take superheroes, for example. You are probably familiar with many stories about them. Even though these stories are all different, there are certain characteristics that you can recognize as being common to superheroes: the hero has special powers, fights evil, and often wears a fantastic costume (usually to disguise their true identity). These elements are all part of the superhero archetype. Superhero stories are often written using elements of the hero's journey, but superheroes are different because they have "super" powers; heroes are often ordinary people thrust into greatness by extraordinary circumstances.

The hero's journey is an archetype introduced by the teacher and philosopher Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell's idea is that the hero's journey underlies all stories—myths, folktales, novels, plays, and movies—from all cultures in all periods of human history. According to Campbell, the hero's journey involves some very basic ideas about what it means to be human, and it can illuminate anything you read as well as help you to understand yourself and your own journey.

The Hero's Journey Cycle

Now that you have a basic understanding of the concept of the hero's journey, you can look more closely at the elements it contains. Not all of these elements are present in every single story; in fact, part of the fun of this course will be to see how each of our selected works of literature contains a unique mixture of these elements to create its own version of the hero's journey. But Campbell has identified these as the basic steps in the journey, common to the vast majority of human myths and legends.



Call to adventure

In the beginning, the hero lives in the “real world.” It is familiar, safe, and mundane. It can be compared to the safety of the mother’s womb, which each human being must leave to venture into the world. The hero is often a figure of some notoriety. Perhaps their arrival has been foretold by a prophet or sage. Perhaps they appear to be a commoner but are secretly the heir of a powerful monarch, wizard, or god. Sometimes the hero has a peculiar attribute or quality that makes them stand out from the crowd. In cases like this, the hero will often seem destined to embark upon the fateful journey.

Then something happens that reveals the existence of another world—a world of magic, fantasy, or adventure that the hero was unaware of before. It can happen as a result of an accident, a random chance, or a blunder. Often the call to adventure is accompanied by the arrival of a herald, a character who appears to summon the hero to adventure. The herald introduces the hero to the unknown world and sets a task or quest that must be accomplished.

Supernatural aid, helpers, and mentors

Oftentimes, in preparation for the great journey, the hero is provided with assistance in the form of a supernatural object, magic talisman, or powerful weapon. Sometimes, protective gods bestow a gift upon the hero. The hero may be given a tool or talisman to protect them on a journey through darkness, danger, and the unknown. Other times the assistance comes from a more mundane source, such as a parent or elderly figure. According to Campbell, this assistance represents the benign, protective force of destiny. The hero's life circumstances "choose" them for this journey, but there is a reason for this: they are equal to the task, whether or not they know it. The same force of destiny that propels them into extraordinary circumstances ensures that they are not without help.

Threshold

Now that they are ready to begin the journey in earnest, the hero crosses a threshold, the boundary between the familiar world and the dark, unknown world of adventure. Perhaps the hero enters a forest or sets out to sea. Or the threshold could be a cave leading to a subterranean underworld. Perhaps the hero goes to space. The unknown world could even be something more ordinary: the other side of town or the basement or attic. In all cases, a line is crossed. The hero has stepped out of normal life and into a world of new experiences, unknown dangers, and magical rewards.

Sometimes the threshold is guarded by a sentry figure or a challenge that must be overcome before the hero can cross the border. Whether guarded by a sentry or not, the threshold represents the first obstacle the hero must overcome, and it is the beginning of the difficulties and struggles that the hero will encounter on their journey.

Challenges and temptations

As the hero progresses on their journey, they will encounter several challenges and temptations. These are tests of the hero's courage, resolve, and confidence. The hero may come up against monsters, traps, or puzzles. These are all obstacles that must be overcome in order to proceed on the journey.

Abyss

The unknown world of adventure through which the hero travels can come in many different forms. This could be a true underworld, a sort of hell, below the surface of the Earth. Or it could be a dark forest, a magical fantasyland, or even the belly of a whale. In every case, the underworld represents the land of the unknown through which the hero must travel to attain the ultimate wisdom.

Confrontation with the power figure

The climax of the hero's journey comes when all the trials, ordeals, and barriers have been overcome. The hero reaches the heart of the underworld and confronts the chief villain of the story, which could be represented by a fearsome monster, an angry god, or some other mysterious figure. In almost all cases, this figure represents the father, the all-powerful authority figure. Whatever form the father

figure takes, it represents the crucial point of the journey. The hero must stand their ground, overcome this powerful figure, and then reconcile with him in order to achieve the ultimate prize.

Revelation/transformation/prize

And what is the ultimate prize? Sometimes it is a treasure or an object of great power. It could be a charm, a weapon, or a medicine. It could be the saving of the world from some global catastrophe or the attainment of inner peace or true love. No matter what the symbol is, it represents wisdom and revelation. By overcoming all their trials, the hero has proven themselves strong, confident, and worthy, and is rewarded with self-knowledge and the freedom to forge their own life. Campbell calls this prize the ultimate boon. (If you're not familiar with the word *boon*, look it up!)

Flight/return journey

After being granted the ultimate boon, the hero must leave the underworld and return to the "normal" world. This is not always easy: Sometimes the hero must steal the boon and flee back to the normal world, chased by monsters and guardians. Sometimes the hero encounters more trials and obstacles on the return journey. Sometimes they choose not to return at all. In any case, there is another threshold where the hero will cross from the underworld back into the world of light, and there is often another guardian that must be overcome to cross this second threshold.

Return

Once the hero overcomes the return threshold, they have mastered both worlds and often earn the right to come and go between them at will. Carrying the prize earned in the confrontation with the power figure, the hero makes the triumphant return to the familiar world of family and friends. The journey is complete, and they have been transformed in the process. The challenge here is to keep the wisdom gained and incorporate it into normal life.

The hero's journey is really a journey of self-discovery. We must all leave the familiar, comfortable world of our birth and explore strange, and sometimes dangerous, places in order to gain the ultimate prize: knowledge of ourselves. As the old saying goes, *you've got to go there to come back*. In this sense, we are all the hero of our own lives.

The Hero's Journey in This Course

Of course, there is a big difference between a myth and a movie. Myths come from folklore, storytelling, history, and dreams. They are not "written" by any particular person, and investigating them is often more an act of archaeology than of literary criticism. By contrast, movies like the Harry Potter series are made by large modern corporations and written by people who are often very familiar with Campbell's ideas and the hero's journey in general. This means that an artist can choose to utilize the structure and symbols of the hero's journey, consciously. Or, the artist can just as easily *reject* those symbols, deliberately creating a story that does *not* easily match the hero's journey. Amazingly,

though, the hero's journey will still apply since, as explained above, elements of it are present in *all* stories from *all* time periods.

In this course, you will be applying the hero's journey concept where it naturally fits. For each literature selection, you will look for a few of the archetypal symbols and elements, but also be thinking about each story on its own terms, from its own perspective, and in its own tradition.

You'll be reading many different types of literature in this course, including poetry, nonfiction, and drama (plays). But even in the stories based on true events, the basic movement is there. In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless leaves home and travels all around the United States, heading for the great unknown. Anne Frank, in *The Diary of a Young Girl*, enters an underworld of sorts when she and her family go into hiding in Amsterdam. In *Pygmalion*, Eliza Doolittle undergoes a profound transformation and gains the ultimate prize: a sense of her own self-worth.

In addition to looking for elements of the hero's journey in these stories, you will be analyzing symbols, characters, and settings that are unique to those stories. You will also be discussing writing style, tone, dialogue, and the other basic literary elements.

The hero's journey is an additional prism through which we are looking at literature. It is our hope that it will deepen and enrich your appreciation of literature while also allowing each book's own brilliance to shine.

Lesson

2

House of Light

Lesson Objectives

- Analyze a poem.
- Understand figurative language.
- Explore literary terms: metaphor, personification, imagery.

Assignments

Reading

Read “The Buddha’s Last Instruction” in Mary Oliver’s *House of Light* (4) according to the guidelines below.

Guidelines for Reading Poetry

Billy Collins, an American poet who served as the Poet Laureate of the United States from 2001–2003, has this to say about poetry:

The way poetry is taught is with great emphasis on the interpretation. So we have this thing, the poem, and we want to create this other thing called the interpretation of the poem, which then almost begins to compete with the poem, and in the worst cases, replaces the poem. So once we have the interpretation we can actually discard the poem. . . . The question, what does a poem mean, is a deadening question. . . . A better question, I think, than what does a poem mean, is how does a poem get where it’s going. So instead of seeing it as something to be reduced to some other text, to see a poem as a journey . . . to notice where it turns, and how it expands or contracts, or becomes funny or serious, how it moves around through itself . . . (“How have your teachers shaped you?” *Big Think*).

Poems are like dreams; you put into them what you don’t know you know.

Adrienne Rich

There is no one right way to approach a poem, but if you are new to poetry, these guidelines may be helpful.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read “The Buddha’s Last Instruction” in *House of Light*.
- Answer questions in complete sentences.
- Write one to two pages on the phrase “make of yourself a light.”
- Complete journal assignments.

- First, read the poem once before you continue on to the instructions below. Read it aloud, just experiencing the sound and rhythm of the words as a kind of music. (Stop here, and read the poem before going on.)
- Next, read the poem aloud several more times, speaking slowly. This helps you attend to each carefully chosen word. Use a natural tone of voice—no need to give a dramatic reading like an actor on stage. Let the words “speak” for themselves. Pause only when punctuation dictates, not at the end of each line break (which can interrupt the flow of the words).
- Now read the poem again, this time paying attention to how the line breaks encourage you to phrase things or pause. You don't have to pause at the end of each line; instead, pause when you feel it fits or emphasizes the meaning of the words. Remember to read slowly. Notice whether reading according to line breaks gives the poem a different feel or changes your understanding.
- Number each line for easy reference. Read the poem again, with a pencil in hand, and identify and define any words you do not know.
- Read the poem one more time. These techniques allow you to gain a strong sense of the poem as a whole before you continue studying, analyzing, or interpreting it.

As you work with Mary Oliver's poetry throughout this course, we'll provide more tips and techniques for understanding poetry. You'll find the full guidelines in *Write It Right*.

Reader's Journal

Students are asked to illustrate an image from the poem that resonates with them and to write a descriptive caption beneath it.

Writing

Students are asked to keep in mind that the most important part of the writing process is rewriting. Encourage your student to read over all work carefully and critically, revise to improve clarity and depth, and then proofread for spelling errors, grammar mistakes, and awkward phrasing.

1. Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Some questions have multiple parts and require several responses. In this course, you will often be asked to “support” your thoughts or answer—this means to explain yourself by using information and specific details (usually from the reading assignment) to justify your response and show the logic or reasoning behind it.
 - a. What is the Buddha's last instruction? How might the Buddha's last instruction be a call to adventure?

In this poem, the Buddha's last instruction is “Make of yourself a light.” Students may see this as an encouragement for people to do something with their lives to light the way or lead others. Students may compare it, as Oliver does, to the light of a new day and the new beginning it signifies.

- b. Explore the literal and figurative meaning of the word light. Write down the multiple meanings. Which definition of light do you think fits the poem best? Why?

Students may list words like *strong, role model, moral, and universal good* as figurative meanings of light. Students will give individual opinions about how literal and figurative meanings fit the poem, and why.

- c. Examine the imagery in lines 4–10. See if you can identify an instance of personification in these lines. Give examples.

Examples of personification are found in the phrases “tear off its many clouds of darkness” and “send up the first signal” to describe the coming of dawn. These actions are attributed to “the east” as though this quadrant of the sky was a being capable of tearing and sending signals.

- d. See if you can identify in which line the poem takes a turn and shifts from an exposé of the scene to something more introspective. Support your thoughts with examples and details.

Shifts in tone are felt in line 21 (“I am touched everywhere by its yellow waves”) and then again in line 28 (“clearly I’m not needed, yet I feel myself turning into something of inexplicable value”) as the focus of the poem turns inward.

- e. Who is/are the hero/es of the poem? The Buddha? The narrator? The members of the crowd? Support your answer.

This question asks students to choose the poem’s more influential character. Answers will vary and should include a clear explanation of how this person influences the poem or leaves an impression on the reader.

- f. In lines 28–29, the narrator states, “Clearly I’m not needed, yet I feel myself turning into something of inexplicable value.” Why might the narrator say this? How might this connect to the unique yet universal birth of the hero archetype?

This line points to the experience of rebirth felt by the narrator, influenced by the combination of the Buddha’s words and the beauty of the dawn sky. A strong response will draw a clear parallel between this sense of rebirth or newness and the concept of birth as a universal experience and as part of the archetypal hero’s journey.

- g. In the last line, why are the members of the crowd frightened? What might this be a metaphor about?

The “frightened crowd” may refer to the lost souls looking to the Buddha for guidance, or may refer to the fear and uncertainty the listeners feel when charged by the Buddha to “Make of yourself a light.” Students may have a different impression of this sense of fear, perhaps seeing it as a metaphor for self-doubt, death and rebirth, or the struggle between good and evil within us.

2. Write one to two pages on how you would live your life if your goal was to “make of yourself a light.” What does that mean to you? What would it look like? What would you do? There are no right or wrong answers here. Your goal is to explain your ideas in a thoughtful, organized way. You will be assessed on the care you take in crafting your answer. See the writing tip for ideas on how to get started.

Students are encouraged to write a personal reflection that incorporates the poem’s theme in a relevant way. It may be helpful to have your student discuss ideas before writing. You might suggest looking at future goals or possibilities within the larger context of the kind of person they would like to become. A strong response will emphasize specific correlations between the figurative meaning of the phrase “make of yourself a light” and the ethical, social, or spiritual aspects of future possibilities. Evidence that students completed the prewriting exercises as directed may include a well-organized essay and a logical connection between ideas.

Writing Tip

You have a challenging writing exercise in assignment 2 of this lesson. A prewriting exercise can help you organize your thoughts before you begin. Freewriting, clustering, outlining, and using the journalistic method are prewriting techniques that you can experiment with. See “Prewriting Exercises” in *Write It Right* for guidelines on how to use these techniques to get your writing project off to a good start.

Lesson

3

The House of the Scorpion Youth: 0 to 6

In *The House of the Scorpion*, author Nancy Farmer leads us across the threshold of humanity by exploring the subject of human cloning. *The House of the Scorpion* is a dystopian novel that describes a futuristic world where human life is created and destroyed at the whim of the wealthy and powerful. The opposite of utopian—which usually refers to an ideal society—dystopian novels often present a grim view of what might happen if power goes unchecked.

Lesson Objectives

- Use vocabulary words in context.
- Recall explicit story details.
- Investigate character motivation.

What Do You Think?

In literature, it is often the flaws in people that make them most interesting. Maria is a complex character because she's not all good and she's not all bad—she's like most of us: a little of both. That makes her seem realistic. For instance, Maria sticks up for Matt and is friendly to him, which makes her easy to like, but she also treats Matt like a pet in some ways, such as feeding him food by hand and reminding him not to bite. Do her actions make you indignant on Matt's behalf? Is she really a good friend to Matt, or is he just a “pet project” to her? What do you think? Consider how you feel about Maria's behavior, and discuss it with a parent, relative, or friend. Give them a brief story summary first so they can put Maria's behavior into context.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read chapters 1–5 in *The House of the Scorpion*.
- Use vocabulary words to describe a setting.
- Answer comprehension questions.
- Write two to three paragraphs about the price of Matt's freedom.
- Write a letter warning Maria to stay away from Matt.
- Complete journal assignments.

Assignments

Reading

Read chapters 1–5 in Nancy Farmer's *The House of the Scorpion* (2–49).

Read "Some Questions You Might Ask" in Mary Oliver's *House of Light* (1).

Reader's Journal

Students will be doing three journal assignments for this unit:

1. Copy Mary Oliver's "Some Questions You Might Ask," and illustrate the poem in the style of an illuminated manuscript, using images from nature that are offered in the lines.
2. Compile a list of the questions about life and identity that are being asked by Matt, by the narrator, or by other characters throughout *The House of the Scorpion*. Along with these questions, students are asked to include some of their own questions about the story.
3. Matt is compared to many things in the book, both by others and himself. Compile a list of these various animals and things.

The list of questions and the list of animals and things to which Matt is compared are all to be added to over the course of the next few lessons, and will be used in the final written essay for this story.

Writing

1. Define each vocabulary word in your own words—noting the part of speech—and then use these words to describe a setting. Next to each vocabulary word listed below you will find the page number where the word is first found in the novel so you can easily see how the word was used in context. You can use all of these words to describe a single setting (using them all in one short, descriptive paragraph), or you can describe a series of different settings. Feel free to include characters and dialogue to help convey the setting, as well (it doesn't just have to be narrative writing). See the writing tip for information on writing vocabulary definitions and sentences. Underline each word as you use it in a sentence. Here's an example:

In literature, it is often the flaws in people that make them most interesting.

When the girl entered, the room was empty and dim, and the window was so filthy that the little bit of daylight that fought its way inside only served to emphasize the desolation she felt at being left behind and forgotten.

desolation (9) **n: complete emptiness; misery or loneliness.**

voluminous (13) **adj: large or ample.**

sodden (35) **adj: saturated with liquid; soaking wet.**

disconsolately (38) **adj: desperately sad; inconsolable.**

sullen (41) **adj: sulky, moody; bad-tempered.**

trundled (42) **v: to move in a slow or uneven manner.**

cache (44) **n: a hiding place; a concealed storage.**

Look for students to vary the types of sentences used in their responses and to include descriptive words to add tone and texture to their settings.

2. Using one or two well-crafted, informative sentences for each, answer the following comprehension questions. Comprehension questions encourage careful attention to specific details in the story. By answering them, you can check your understanding of the plot and characters and the connections between them.

a. Who is the most influential person in Matt's life so far, and why?

Celia has taken care of Matt his whole life, and he considers her to be his mother, although he understands she is not. Celia has always treated Matt like her own son.

b. How is Matt seen by everyone other than Celia and Maria, and why?

Since he is a clone, others treat Matt like an animal to be feared and hated. They feel dirtied by any contact with him and look upon him with revulsion.

c. What are Matt's "entertainments" and "kingdom of hidden delights" while he is confined?

During his captivity, Matt finds entertainment in watching the insects, bees, birds, and other creatures he entices into his room. His "hidden delights" are bones, food, gristle, and a feather, which he hides in different places in the sawdust.

3. Write two to three paragraphs about the price of Matt's freedom. Why did he want to escape the comfort and safety of Celia's house? Was his freedom worth it? Discuss the pros and cons of what Matt's life would have been like if he had stayed hidden at Celia's. Organize your essay carefully to present all sides of the topic in a logical sequence. Refer to the writing tip for help crafting varied sentences and strong paragraphs. Remember, after you have finished a draft of your work, make revisions to improve clarity and depth, and then proofread it for any additional errors.

Matt was kept indoors at Celia's house. He was loved, but he was left alone all day, not allowed to go outside, and had no friends. For these reasons, Matt wanted his freedom. However, as soon as it was discovered that he was a clone, he was locked away and mistreated. Although he gained his freedom for a few hours, went outside, and met children, this freedom ultimately led to a much worse situation for Matt. Students may feel that price was too high, or may feel that despite the outcome, it was worth it for Matt to experience freedom for a short while.

4. Write a letter to Maria warning her to stay away from Matt. Maria wants to help Matt, despite all that she has been taught about the inferiority of clones. How do you think her actions will affect her life? Do you think she will experience any repercussions from it? Pretend you are Maria's best

friend, and you want to warn her of the dangers of befriending Matt. Be specific! You can speak informally in your letter, but remember to use complete sentences and proper punctuation.

This assignment asks for the student's prediction of what might happen to Maria, so answers will vary. Based on the way the other characters feel about Matt and clones in general, students are likely to predict that Maria will either be ostracized or punished for her kindness to Matt. In this assignment, students are encouraged to write to Maria in a personal way, as though she were a friend.

Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.

Anton Chekhov

Writing Tip

Vocabulary word definitions and sentences should be crafted to highlight the word's meaning. When writing sentences, vary the sentence type and structure. Make sure your paragraphs include a topic sentence, followed by several sentences with supporting details, and a concluding sentence. To learn more about how to create powerful and expressive sentences and paragraphs, read "Provide sentence variety" in *A Pocket Style Manual* (Hacker and Sommers 13).

When writing sentences, vary the sentence type and structure.

Lesson

4

The House of the Scorpion Middle: 7 to 11

Lesson Objectives

- Consider the role of narrative perspective.
- Write a comparative essay.
- Explore divergent perspectives.

What Do You Think?

Consider the story's point of view. Who is the narrator? While Matt is not narrating the story directly (first-person voice), you see the story through his eyes. The author uses a third-person, limited narration. This means you only know Matt's thoughts and only see things he experiences. What if the story were told from El Patron's perspective? What if the story had been written in an omniscient point of view? Do you think that being exposed to the thoughts and feelings of others would make you feel differently about Matt?

The narrative perspective plays a vital role in how the reader will feel about the characters. Find someone to talk with about this aspect of literature. Find a story you are both familiar with, and discuss whether you'd feel differently about the main character if the story had been told from the point of the view of the antagonist rather than the protagonist.

Assignments

Reading

Read chapters 6–14 in *The House of the Scorpion* (52–143).

Reader's Journal

Students will add to their lists of important questions that the characters ask in *The House of the Scorpion* and the animals and things to which Matt is compared.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read chapters 6–14 in *The House of the Scorpion*.
- Use vocabulary words in as few sentences as possible.
- Answer questions with direct text references.
- Write a four- or five-paragraph comparative essay.
- Complete journal assignments.

Writing

1. Use the following vocabulary words in as few sentences as possible. See if you can fit them all into a single sentence (it has to make sense!). Underline each vocabulary word. You'll have to look up the words before you can use them properly, but you don't need to define the words for this assignment.

delusions (56) **n: a firmly held belief that goes against logic or reason.**

lout (63) **n: an uncouth, rowdy, or aggressive male.**

guileless (66) **adj: unsophisticated; innocent and trusting; without deception.**

theoretically (70) **adv: hypothetically; according to theory rather than practice or experience.**

pustule (81) **n: a small pimple or boil filled with pus.**

fervor (86) **n: passionate; zealous; vehement.**

harangued (98) **v: lectured in a critical or aggressive manner.**

stagnant (132) **adj: sluggish; not moving.**

Students don't have to provide definitions (they are given here to help you determine if each word is used correctly in a sentence). They can use other forms of the word (for instance, *delusional* instead of *delusions*). Look for students to use the vocabulary words correctly while combining them in economical sentences.

2. Using complete sentences, answer each of the following questions by referencing specific passages in the book (cite each passage using quotation marks and page numbers). The first question is answered here as an example (you can answer the second question for assignment #2a):

What is an eejit? At first, Matt thinks *eejit* is just "Maria's worst insult" (74) but later Tam Lin explains, "An eejit is a person or animal with an implant in its head," (81) and he says, "Eejits can only do simple things" (82).

- a. What is an eejit? What are some of the dangers for an eejit like the Farm Workers or the Safe Horse?

Eejits are humans who have had an implant in their brain that reduces their mental faculties to one skill, such as working in the fields or housekeeping. They do not think for themselves and only do what they are told. If they are not told to drink or stop working, they will die of thirst or work themselves to death.

- b. What does Matt discover in the music room?

Matt discovers a network of secret passages behind the walls of the house.

c. What talent does Matt display, and why is this surprising?

Matt becomes a talented musician, which surprises everyone since El Patron is not musical at all. As a clone, Matt is expected to be exactly like El Patron.

d. What does Tom want to show Maria and Matt in the hospital? What unexpected conclusion does Matt draw from what he sees?

Tom tricks Matt and Maria into seeing the clone of MacGregor, who was chemically altered at birth, rendering him animalistic. The surprising part is that Matt realizes the clone looks just like Tom. From this, he finds out that Tom is MacGregor's son, not Mr. Alacran's.

e. Why is Tam Lin most disappointed in Matt when Furball is discovered in the garden?

Tam Lin says, "a human doesn't run and hide in dark places, because he's something more. Lying is the most personal act of cowardice." (134) Matt realizes how significant this is afterward: Tam Lin considers Matt a human and holds him to the same standards as anyone else.

3. Write a comparative essay about the roles Tom and El Patron play in Matt's life. Do you think they are both equally dangerous to Matt? Why does Tam Lin refer to Tom as "an unnatural little weevil" (67) and El Patron as "the old vulture" (69)? Discuss your thoughts in a four- or five-paragraph comparative essay. (See the writing tip for information on writing a comparative essay.)

Tom is cunning and able to hide his wrongdoing. Since most people think he is charming, Matt considers Tom very dangerous because it seems only Matt knows of Tom's mean-spirited actions. It seems like Tom won't stop at anything to hurt Matt. On the other hand, El Patron loves Matt, and Matt doesn't understand why Tam Lin calls him an "old vulture." Matt doesn't want to hear anything bad about El Patron, but Tam Lin and Celia both see how El Patron keeps everyone under his control. Since El Patron is ultimately the master of them all, he is more dangerous than anyone, but he doesn't want anything bad to happen to Matt. The student may note this dichotomy, as well as recognizing that Tom has the ability to frame Matt for wrongdoings and get away with it. Look for the student to use either the block or alternating form for this comparative essay, and note the student's use of commas to ascertain whether more guidance is needed in this area.

Writing Tip

There are two main styles for formatting a comparative essay: block format or alternating format. Block format discusses each element in turn before comparing them, while the alternating format goes back and forth between elements. Both of these techniques lend themselves well to a four- or five-paragraph essay. See details and examples in “Comparative Essay,” in *Write It Right*. Also, please review comma usage in *A Pocket Style Manual* (Hacker and Sommers 55). Many students put commas where they don't belong and neglect to put them where they do belong—taking the time to review comma usage now will help you develop good habits.

Lesson

5

The House of the Scorpion Old Age: 12 to 14

Lesson Objectives

- Explore synonyms for vocabulary words.
- Write in first person from the perspective of the main character.
- Continue compiling information for long-term unit project.

What Do You Think?

When Matt realizes that Celia has to pretend to be an eejit in the stables in order to stay alive, he wonders, “Wasn’t acting like a zombie as bad as being one if you had to do it for years?” (250) What do you think? Do you agree or disagree with Matt? Discuss your feelings about this with someone, and find out their opinion as well.

Assignments

Reading

Read chapters 15–22 in *The House of the Scorpion* (146–227).

Reader’s Journal

Students will continue adding to their list of questions and list of names and comparisons to which Matt is subjected.

Writing

1. For the following vocabulary words, list as many synonyms (or synonymous phrases) as possible. It’s okay to use a little creative license and include words with similar connotations (the words don’t have to share the exact same meaning). Try to come up with some synonyms of your own before checking the thesaurus. The first one is done for you as an example.

muted (146): **soft, quiet, muffled, hard to hear, toned down, hushed, subdued**

officiate (152): **preside, manage, oversee**

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read chapters 15–22 in *The House of the Scorpion*.
- List synonyms for vocabulary words.
- Answer questions as though you were Matt.
- Choose a project to complete.
- Complete journal assignments.

wraith (164): **ghost, spirit, apparition**

hoard (183): **store, cache, stockpile**

aghast (184): **horrified, shocked, astounded**

lilt (185): **inflection, tone, pleasing cadence**

despot (197): **tyrant, oppressor, authoritarian**

2. Answer the following questions as though you were Matt. Answer with words and explanations he would use. Feel free to include his feelings and unique perceptions. The goal is to write in first person, from another's perspective.

Writing in the first-person voice from the main character's point of view, students are free to include their own interpretation of the character's feelings as well as his understanding of the following information.

- a. What did you find at the oasis? What was inside? (Hint: Writing in Matt's point of view, you might begin with "In the little valley, I was surprised to find . . .")

Matt finds a metal box with supplies and a note inside from Tam Lin. The supplies include food, books, maps, pots, and blankets. Matt soon realizes these supplies are meant to help him if he ever needs to escape to Aztlan. Matt is particularly moved by the closing of Tam Lin's note: "Yor frend" (149).

- b. Why was the priest so angry to see you at El Viejo's funeral?

The priest calls Matt the "unbaptized limb of Satan" (154). Later, Maria explains to Matt that the priest believes that clones have no souls, so they are unable to go to heaven or hell. Maria says she's not sure if that's true, and Matt says he doesn't care.

- c. Why did Maria decide to forgive you?

Maria decides to forgive Matt after reading about Saint Francis who preached to the animals and considered all animals his brothers and sisters. Like Saint Francis, Maria believes that animals have souls, so she figures clones must be the same since they are so much like animals in her eyes.

- d. Why did you throw your book, *The History of Opium*, into the water? Why did you fish it out again?

Matt throws the book in the water because he is angry that it criticizes El Patron. He quickly pulls it out of the water and carefully dries it because it was a gift from Tam Lin. Matt figures Tam Lin must have had a very good reason for giving it to him.

3. Choose one of the following projects:

- a. The eejit pens are the epitome of the grim atmosphere of this dystopian society. However, the way the eejit pens are seen from the eejits' point of view and from the point of view of the

others on the estate might be very different. Describe the pens as seen from two different perspectives: first, from the perspective of the eejits, who have to live there but have their brains altered so they are relatively unaware; and second, from the perspective of an overseer, a visitor, Matt, or another character (your choice). Obviously, the second perspective will be a much clearer and more accurate one. You can draw these two different images in a graphic-novel style, make a poster showing the differences between the two, or create a video or multimedia presentation. See the writing tip for more information.

The description of the eejit pens is brief (172) since Matt doesn't get very close to them before being overcome by the fumes. However, the reader can easily imagine the horrific conditions.

- b. Draw a scene showing the eejits in the pens, at work, or with their handlers. Your scene should emphasize the dehumanizing treatment of the eejits. Draw the scene in your reader's journal (enrolled students can copy or scan it to send to their teacher).

Students who choose to draw or write about the pens are free to describe the sickening conditions in any way they like. The goal is for the student to hone in on the ways in which the eejits are treated like machines or disposable animals rather than human beings.

- c. Comparisons can be drawn between the eejit pens and the Nazi concentration camps (which you will learn more about when you read Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*). Write a one-page comparative essay discussing the similarities and differences between the fictional enslavement in this story and the real enslavement that occurred during the Holocaust of World War II. Keep track of your sources as you conduct research, and cite the sources at the end of your paper. (A good place to start is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website: ushmm.org.)

Comparisons between the eejit pens and the Nazi camps are many and focus on the inhumane conditions and lack of concern for the residents. The main difference is that eejits have been surgically altered to be unaware of their surroundings while those locked up in the concentration camps were fully and painfully aware of the situation.

Writing Tip

Multimedia presentations are a popular communication tool. Because they engage multiple senses in your reader/viewer, they can be very effective at getting your message across. A common mistake students make is to use too many different elements in a multimedia presentation, effectively overshadowing the message and confusing the reader. For a list of dos and don'ts, see "Multimedia Presentations" in *Write It Right*.