

Language Art Division March Enews

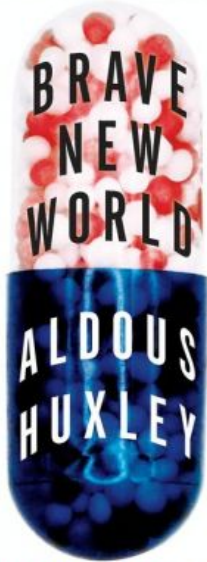
On Friday March 2nd, more than five hundred English teachers from DuPage County converged on Wheaton North High School for annual County-Wide Institute Day activities. Wildcat English teachers participated in a variety of workshops presented by colleagues from local public and private high schools. Two Wego language arts faculty members, **Shannon McMullen** and **Nicole Osborne**, presented on “**Setting the Tone: Using Visual Art to Understand and Embrace Setting in Literary Texts.**”

English 1 Honors and senior British World Literature teacher Shannon McMullen shared a procedure for teaching setting through visual art:

- 1) **Activate students’ background knowledge of the significance of setting.**
- 2) **Use analysis of artwork as a gateway to literary analysis.**
- 3) **Generalize knowledge of setting by asking students to reflect on their visual analysis.**
- 4) **Provide repeated opportunities for students to apply their newly-acquired “rules of notice” about setting to literary works.** (See Rabinowitz & Smith 1997).



FOREWORD BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS



INCLUDING BRAVE NEW WORLD REVISITED
HarperCollins Publishers Copyrighted Material

McMullen designed this activity to enable students to analyze Aldous Huxley’s dystopian novel, *Brave New World*. Students examined the essential question, “**How can we respond to challenges to individuality?**” The gateway activity, a lesson that provides students with key background knowledge and hooks or engages them in the topic, utilized images that paralleled myriad settings in the text including the “Central London Hatchery.” This sequence of lessons enabled students to evaluate the impact of setting on characterization and theme, and this procedure can be applied to a variety of short stories, poems, and novels in which setting dominates.

Professors Michael Smith and Jeff Wilhelm highlight the significance of teaching about setting in their book, *Fresh Takes on Teaching Literary Elements*: “Every setting will imply certain rules for behavior. How people follow, adapt, or violate these rules says a lot about their character and their relationships to the social settings in which they are operating” (210).

The gateway activity informed students, “We often dismiss setting--in texts and in our own lives--as the simple backdrop of time and place. But in real life as much as in literature, setting is more significant than we acknowledge. A wealth of psychological research reveals that a particular setting often determines a person’s behavior, and this was also proved true in our discussion of various environments at the beginning of class today. Today we will draw conclusions about the impact of setting on a literary work, and determine what readers should notice about a novel’s setting.”

Students analyzed the image below using these prompts: **Describe the setting in the image. Where do you think this place is? What is its purpose? What might be happening inside? What kind of**

atmosphere do you predict is inside this building? How might a person's mood or behavior be impacted by this space?



After viewing the second picture below, students answered these questions: *What are some of its defining characteristics? How would you describe the people in the space and their moods? How would inhabiting this space make you feel and why?*

Students then synthesized their analysis of a total of four photos by discussing these prompts: *Do any of these spaces allow for people to behave as individuals? Why or why not? What are some important aspects of setting to notice in general, and why? In other words, what should readers pay attention to and why do these elements matter?*

Analyzing and discussing these visuals provided students with background knowledge about the initial setting in the novel, so when they read the opening pages of chapter one, students identified the parallels between the photos and the text, which enabled them to begin to consider the impact of setting.

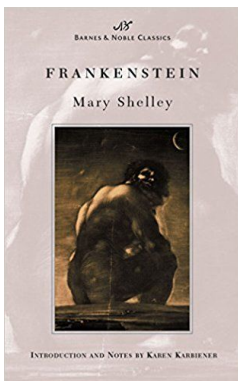
Brave New World Chapter 1

A squat, grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY. The enormous room on the ground floor faced towards the north. Cold for all the summer beyond the panes, for all the tropical heat of the room itself, a harsh thin light glared through the windows, hungrily seeking some draped lay figure, some pallid shape of academic goose-flesh, but finding only the glass and nickel and bleakly shining porcelain of a laboratory. Wintriness responded to wintriness. The overalls of the workers were white, their hands gloved with a pale corpse-coloured rubber. The light was frozen, dead, a ghost. Only from the yellow barrels of the microscopes did it borrow a certain rich and living substance, lying along the polished tubes like butter, streak after luscious streak in long recession down the work tables.

"And this," said the Director opening the door, "is the Fertilizing Room."

Bent over their instruments, three hundred Fertilizers were plunged, as the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning entered the room, in the scarcely breathing silence, the absent-minded, soliloquizing hum or whistle, of absorbed concentration.

-
Wego AP Language and Composition and AP Literature and Composition teacher, **Nicole Osborne**, also teaches students about the integral role of setting particularly in Enlightenment and Romantic literature written between 1750-1850. Seniors in AP Literature examine setting beyond time and place to include the "natural, manufactured, political, cultural, and temporal environment including everything the characters know or own."



Through their study of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, students discover the impact of three types of setting, private homes, public buildings, and possessions; outdoor places; and cultural and historical circumstances; study of *the beautiful*, *the picturesque*, and *the sublime* demonstrates that setting evokes mood and creates atmosphere, crafts a "social environment that frames characters," imbues character's actions with figurative meaning, and can "fulfill or disrupt a reader's expectations."

Students read excerpts from Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* as a primary source and apply Burke's theory to a variety of paintings as a gateway to the unit. Burke explains, **"Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime."**

Caspar David Friedrich's 1818 oil "Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog," a vertical landscape, evokes Burke's notion of the sublime through the painting's foregrounding of the subject

with his back toward the viewer. The wanderer views the powerful, endless sea, which conveys an uncertainty in this masterpiece of Romanticism. Analysis of paintings such as this prepare students to identify the sublime in literature including this excerpt from Chapter 10 of *Frankenstein*: “**Nature was broken only by the brawling of waves, or the fall of some vast fragment, the thunder sound of the avalanche, or the crackling reverberated along the mountains accumulated with ice...these sublime and magnificent scenes**” (90). “**I arrived at the top of the ascent...a mist covered the cloud and I descended upon the glacier**” (92).

“The Picturesque: An Overview” by literary and garden historian Mavis Batey describes the characteristics of the picturesque as “visual qualities of nature suitable for painting.” While the website “Sister Arts: Gardening, Painting and Poetry” describe the picturesque as “**a late eighteenth-century aesthetic movement that shares many of the concerns and styles of Romanticism. In Picturesque designs, the material is composed ‘as if for a picture.’ In fact, one hallmark of the picturesque is the construction of frames that define what viewers are intended to see and appreciate. Picturesque imagery included colorful rural people and customs, exotic settings and costumes, classical architecture in ruins, and nature in an imperfect state such as fallen trees, craggy rocks or cliffs, or winding streams. ‘Shaggy’ and ‘serpentine’ are qualities sought by the Picturesque artist.**”



“Woman Knitting” by Françoise Duparc elicits the picturesque cottagers, the De Laceys, in *Frankenstein*, as well as the geography: “Trees like broken and strewed on the ground; some entirely destroyed, others bent, leaning upon the jutting rocks of the mountain” (91). The students’ analysis of this image provides AP Literature Seniors with the paradigm and language to analyze the setting of the text and infer how it creates and complicates the characterization and theme of the novel.

For more information from Shannon McMullen or Nicole Osborne contact them via email at smcmullen@d94.org and nosborne@d94.org or access the materials from the presentation with this QR Code:



McMullen and Osborne’s Works Cited

Batey, M. (1994). The Picturesque: An Overview. *Garden History*, 22(2), 121-132. doi:10.2307/1587022.

Burke, E. *On the sublime and beautiful*. Vol. XXIV, Part 2. The Harvard Classics. New York: P.F.

Collier & Son, 1909–14; Bartleby.com. (2001). Retrieved from www.bartleby.com/24/2/.

Harris, I. "Edmund Burke" *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2012 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/burke/>.

Rabinowitz, P., & Smith, M.W. (1997). *Authorizing readers: resistance and respect in the teaching of Literature*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Smith, M.W., & Wilhelm, J. (2010). *Fresh takes on teaching literary elements: how to teach what really matters about character, setting, point of view, and theme*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.