Id, Ego, and Superego in Dr. Seuss's *Cat in the Hat*

December 14-Janurary 12
Powerpoint Notes over Psychic Self-Defense

Overview

In this lesson, *The Cat in the Hat* is used as a primer to teach students how to analyze a literary work using the literary tools of plot, theme, characterization, and psychoanalytical criticism. In part one, students use a plot handout to identify the elements of plot and theme for *The Cat in the Hat*. Part two introduces psychoanalytic criticism as students classify the characters from the story, using the Id, Ego, and Superego. Students then develop an argument stating the psychological personality for each character. In part three, students gather evidence supporting their arguments by identifying examples of indirect characterization in the text. In part four, students refine their analysis and develop an analytical essay.

From Theory to Practice

As Diana Mitchell explains, "Any literary element can best be taught by beginning with children's books. The purpose, of course, in teaching about these elements is so students can use them as another way to get into the literature and talk about it" (94). Following that advice, this lesson taps Dr. Seuss' *Cat in the Hat* to explore complex characterization and analytical criticism. Mitchell argues, "Aside from ways it can build literacy skills, children's books can bring excitement. They are fun to use, and students will read them eagerly (94). As a result, *The Cat in the Hat* makes an excellent introduction to analytical processes that students can apply later to anything they read.

Further Reading
Mitchell, Diana. "Using Children's Literature to Spark Learning." *English Journal* 87.2 (February 1998): 94–97.

Student Objectives

Students will

- identify the literary elements of plot, theme, and character in a work.
- use indirect characterization and psychoanalytic criticism to analyze a character in a work and explain how the character contributes to plot and theme.
- structure an analytical essay based on their analysis.

Instructional Plan

Resources

- *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss (Random House Books for Young Readers, 1957)
- Plot of *The Cat in the Hat* Handout
- Plot Graphic Organizer or Plot Diagram Tool
- Literary Element of Theme Handout
- An Introduction to Psychoanalytical Criticism Handout
- *Cat in the Hat* Psychoanalysis Chart
- Venn Diagram Student Interactive or Venn Diagram Reproducible
- Defining Characterization Handout
- Examples of Indirect Characterization from *The Cat in the Hat*
- Indirect Characterization Worksheets
- Refining the Analysis Handout
- *The Cat in the Hat* Projects (essay topics)

- [Revision Questions for Analytical Essay](#)

Preparation

- Arrange for students to see the illustrations in the book as it is being read aloud. Because the images figure in their analysis of the book, seeing the illustrations is vital. If possible, check out multiple copies of the text from your local public library and have small groups share the book as you read it. The books will come in handy as students analyze the text during later sessions as well.
- Make appropriate copies of the handouts for the students.
- If desired, make overheads of the handouts in order to model for the students.
- Test the [Venn Diagram](#) and [Plot Diagram Tool](#) on your computers to familiarize yourself with the tools and ensure that you have the Flash plug-in installed. You can download the plug-in from the [technical support page.](#)

Instruction and Activities

Session One: Read Aloud and Identifying Plot and Theme

1. Begin the session by telling students that they will be listening to a familiar children's book, *The Cat in the Hat*. Elicit their memories and responses to the story.
2. Pass out copies of the book for students to refer to as you read.
3. Distribute the handout [Plot Graphic Organizer](#) to the students and ask students to listen closely to the story because after the story is read they will identify the elements of the story's plot. Alternately, students can complete the [Plot Diagram Tool](#).
4. Read *The Cat in the Hat* aloud. Be sure that students can see the illustrations as you share the story.
5. After reading the story, divide the class into small groups (each with a copy of the book to refer to as they work).
6. Ask groups to think about the elements of the story: setting, plot, character, and conflict.
7. Gather students as a class and invite discussion of the groups' findings.
8. After the students have discussed the story, ask them to complete the [Plot Graphic Organizer](#) or the [Plot Diagram Tool](#).
9. While the students are working, you can use [Plot of The Cat in the Hat Handout](#) as a reference.
10. When the students have completed their work, ask them to share their information in small groups. Monitor the conversations as an informal assessment to make sure that the students are on track.
11. Using photocopies, an overhead or an LCD projector, review with students the definition for theme and the five steps using the [Literary Element of Theme handout](#).
12. After the students have worked with the concept of theme, ask them to identify the theme of *The Cat in the Hat*.
13. Ask students to share their responses in pairs or small groups. Monitor the conversations as an informal assessment to make sure that the students have an understanding of theme.

Session Two: Identifying the Id, Ego and Superego in a Literary Character

1. Invite students to share their definitions of plot and theme and how the elements relate to *The Cat in the Hat*.
2. When the discussions and sharing conclude, distribute the [An Introduction to Psychoanalytic Criticism of Literature handout](#).
3. Ask the students to read the document. Provide time for them to ask any necessary questions about the content of the handout. Invite the students to mark-up the handout.
4. If desired, explain that the id and superego are like a devil and an angel, whispering into someone's ears telling the person what to do. The devil figure, representing the id, argues, "Think only about yourself!" and encourages the character to base decisions on the degree of

self-satisfaction they will provide. On the opposite shoulder is an angel figure, representing the superego. This figure argues, "Think about society!" and encourages the character to base decisions on how well they satisfy society. In the center is the character, representing the ego, which must strike a balance between the id and superego.

5. Identify the presence of the id, ego, and superego in literary characters previously studied by the class. Some texts that can be used as examples are *Hamlet, Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *The Scarlet Letter, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Lord of the Flies, Wuthering Heights,* or *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen.
6. Using their new knowledge of psychoanalytic criticism, ask students to identify what each of the main characters *The Cat in the Hat* represents in terms of the id, ego, and superego.
7. Distribute the *Cat in the Hat* Psychoanalysis Chart.
8. Explain that this chart will provide preparation for an online activity for the following session.
9. Orally lead students through a discussion that helps them use the id, ego, and superego to determine each character's psychological personality.

Session Three: Visual Interpretation

1. Using the *Cat in the Hat* Psychoanalysis Chart as a springboard, open discussion about the characters and the id, ego, and superego.
2. When discussion is complete, provide the students with the needed instructions for using the Venn Diagram Student Interactive or the Venn Diagram Reproducible.
3. Label one circle of the Venn Diagram for each of the areas of personality (id, ego, and superego).
4. Remind students to use the *Cat in the Hat* Psychoanalysis Chart for textual reference as they add notes to the student interactive. From there, the students will drag their notes to appropriate place on the Venn Diagram.
5. When the diagram is complete, remind students to print out the diagram.
6. Using the printed diagram, draw some conclusions about the characters from the story. Some probable conclusions include the following:

   o The cat: Dominated by his id at the beginning but moves more to a balance between the superego and id at the end.
   o Fish: Dominated by his superego throughout the story.
   o Sally and the narrator: Fluctuate between the id and superego until the end when they allow the superego to take over.
   o Mother: Represents the superego through the moral and ethical restraints placed on us by caregivers.

7. Ask the students to compare their work in small groups, based on where items fall in their diagrams. For example, the Fish and the Mother are both found only in the superego area of the Venn Diagram. Are there similarities between these two characters? Differences?
8. Use the end of this session to answer any questions.

Session Four: Gather Support

1. Distribute the Defining Characterization handout.
2. Review definitions and Examples of Indirect Characterization, and answer any questions.
3. Encourage students to return to the book for a second look and consider both the text and the accompanying illustrations for evidence as they work.
4. Distribute the Indirect Characterization Worksheets with the subtitle "The Cat."
5. As a class, identify and record the information needed to complete the handout. Sample responses to this part are included.
6. Ask students to repeat this activity for The Fish and the Narrator, using the remaining Worksheets.
7. Conclude this session by answering any questions or concerns from the students. Or, ask them to examine characterization in some of the other texts read in class.

Session Five: Refine the Analysis

1. Share and discuss the Refine the Analysis handout. The first part of the handout requires the student to complete the three questions below for the Cat, Fish, and Narrator. These questions help the student understand the character in relation to the overall meaning of the story.

   o How do specific examples of characterization establish the psychological personality of the character?
   o How does the character's personality contribute to the main conflict and climax of the story's plot?
   o How does the character's personality contribute to the theme?

2. Explain how a character from *The Cat in the Hat* contributes to the plot and theme of the story.
3. Allow students time to work on the first part of the Refine the Analysis handout. If desired, the students could work in pairs.
4. Once students have worked through the first part of the handout, introduce the *The Cat in the Hat* Projects (essay topics) to the students.
5. Explain the "ASE" method for structuring an essay:

   o **A**rgument: A statement of the main point or argument.
   o **S**upport: Evidence that supports the main argument.
   o **E**xplanation: An explanation of the support and how it supports the argument.

6. Once students understand the "ASE" method, ask them to use their notes on the book to structure an argument about the role that one of the characters plays in the story.
7. Allow time at the end of the session for students to share any of their thoughts or insight into the process or the story.

Session Six to Eight: Analytical Essay Projects

1. Allow ample work time for the students, during and outside of class.
2. If desired, ask students to use the Revision Questions for Analytical Essay to review and strengthen their work before submitting their final drafts.

Extensions

- As a class, view the movie *The Cat in the Hat*. Analyze the movie and look for any similarities and differences between the representation of the id, ego, and superego in the characters of the movie and book. Refer to the *Get The Reel Scoop* lesson plan for ideas on comparing the two.

- Invite the students to research the lives of Sigmund Freud and Dr. Seuss. They can document their findings using the Timeline Tool or the Graphic Map.

- The students may also want to learn more about other Freudian terms and see if they can find examples in other pieces of literature.

Web Resources
Seussville
http://www.seussville.com/
    Brightly animated and highly interactive, Seussville entertains children as they complete word puzzles, matching games, and other activities based on the books of Dr. Seuss. Kids can also write a story and bring it to life with fanciful characters, music, and scenery.

Conflict, Freud & Culture

http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/freud/
This online exhibit highlights Freud's works and theories and their influence on twentieth-century culture.

The Political Dr. Seuss
http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/politicaldrseuss/dr.html
Explore Dr. Seuss's political cartoons at this PBS site.

Student Assessment/Reflections

- Assess students' knowledge of elements of plot, theme, and characterization by checking the worksheets and charts that they completed for the project. Look in particular for details from the text and illustrations that support students' understanding.

- Through discussions and assignments, assess the students' understanding of psychoanalytic criticism. Observe the way in which students analyze characters in a work, and then explain how the character contributes to the plot and theme.

- Use the Venn Diagram Student Interactive or Venn Diagram Reproducible as an assessment of the students' knowledge of the Id, Ego, and Superego.

- Use the Revision Questions for Analytical Essay to guide feedback on students' final essay.