

Workshop 2

Political History

Introduction

This workshop session introduces the analysis of political artifacts as a tool in the literature classroom. Blake Allmendinger, literature professor at University of California, Los Angeles, uses the example of political documents to help teachers enhance their reading of American literature texts.

By looking at two intellectual products from the same culture (the political documents and the excerpt from John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*), you will better understand mid-nineteenth century California's political and cultural beliefs and values.

During the course of the session, you will learn how to search for political artifacts to help teach American literature. In the onscreen classroom, Blake discusses how he uses political artifacts to illuminate the discipline of politics* in his own classroom. He provides high school teachers with ideas about how to read two political documents; he also suggests specific lesson plans.

We then follow the onscreen teachers into the computer lab where they work with Blake, Laura Arnold (Reed College English professor), and each other to find political artifacts that supplement the themes and context of the literature they are currently teaching.

Next, we follow Angela Vahsholtz-Andersen, a teacher at Skyview High School in Vancouver, Washington, into her own high school classroom. We watch as she models a similar lesson with her students. Finally, we hear Angela's reflections on her own teaching practices.

* indicates a reference in the Glossary.

Before the Session

Before watching the “Political History” video, be sure to:

- Guide: Read the Political History Reading.
- Video: Watch the *American Passages* episode “Masculine Heroes.” (The episode can be viewed on the *American Passages* Web site at www.learner.org. Click on “Video on Demand” or go to <http://www.learner.org/resources/series164.html> and click on the VoD icon next to the appropriate program title.)
- Web: Download the *Mining Laws* document (serial #9250) from the *American Passages* archive site at http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php.
- Literature: Read excerpts from John Rollin Ridge’s *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (the introduction by Joseph Henry Jackson, pages 20–25; and pages 138–145).

As you read, consider the following close reading questions. See the Teacher Resources section in the Appendix for instructions on effective close reading.

- How does John Rollin Ridge characterize Joaquin Murieta? In turn, how does Murieta’s character describe the other men who work in the mining camps?
- Where do you see the motif of boundaries and borders in this portion of the text? How does this recurring motif help us understand the moral and social culture of California at the time the novel was written?

Synopsis of Blake Allmendinger’s Presentation

- Blake begins by discussing the study of Western American literature and the ways that scholars in his field are trying to incorporate lesser-known Western American writers, such as Yellow Bird, a.k.a. John Rollin Ridge, into the canon. He also stresses the importance of using political artifacts in relationship to literature. He explains that long before the West was part of the United States, there was a legacy in political documents, (such as treaties and exploration journals), which reveal the relationship between indigenous tribes and the conquering United States government.
- Blake moves on to describe the first artifact, the *Mining Laws* document, and gives some relevant background information on foreign tax law passed in 1850. The law effectively forced all miners of color to pay taxes, while exempting white miners. This information relates to Article 11 of the *Mining Laws* document, which states, “No foreigner shall be allowed to hold a claim in this camp, which has not previously paid his tax.” This article ostensibly precluded any Mexican, Japanese, Chinese, African American, or South American miners from holding any claims. By closely reading this document, Blake makes connections to the racism and xenophobia depicted in Ridge’s novel.
- Next, Blake looks at the second artifact—the broadside advertising the head of Joaquin Murieta. Blake and the teachers make observations about this more visual artifact and its connections to the text. Further, they are able to find contemporary correlations that may work in their own secondary-level English classes.

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts

Facilitators:

- Before this workshop session, you will need to download the *Mining Laws* document (serial #9250) from the *American Passages* archive and print out copies for all your participants. Be sure to print and copy the caption and descriptive information that accompanies the image. (For further information on how to navigate the archive, see instructions in the front matter.)
- Begin the workshop by watching program 2: "Political History" through the *American Passages* excerpted clip. Watch for approximately 11:30 minutes.
- Follow up with the discussion activity below. The discussion should take approximately 10 minutes.

Activity 1: Discussion of the Literary Movement

1. As a whole group, discuss what literature you have taught or are currently teaching from this literary movement. If you don't currently teach anything from this movement, how might you add it to your curriculum?

Other authors and literature from *American Passages*' "Masculine Heroes" for potential discussion:

- **James Fenimore Cooper** (1789–1851) America's first major novelist; wrote, among other works, *The Deerslayer* and *The Last of the Mohicans*.
- **Walt Whitman** (1819–1892) American Romantic poet best known for his poems *Song of Myself* and *O Captain! My Captain*.
- **Cherokee Memorials** (1835–?) Beginning with the forced removal of Cherokee Indians, also called the Trail of Tears.
- **Catherine Maria Sedgwick** (1789–1867) Novelist and biographer whose work, such as *A New England Tale*, depicts domestic social life and values.
- **Caroline Stansbury Kirkland** (1801–1864) Novelist, author of travel books, essayist and editor; wrote *Glimpses of Western Life*, which describes life on the frontier.*
- **Louisa A.K.S. Clappe** (1819–1906) Wrote letters to her sister Shirley giving a woman's view of the gold rush; the letters later appeared in the book *The Shirley Letters*.
- **Nat Love (Deadwood Dick)** A favorite dime novel character written by Edward L. Wheeler. Love may have been based on Robert Dickey (1840–1912), a trapper and fur merchant, or Richard W. Clarke (1845–1930), an Indian fighter who took part in Deadwood, South Dakota's historical celebrations.
- **Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton** (1832–1895) The first known Mexican American writer to write two novels in English. In both *Who Would Have Thought It?* and *The Squatter and the Don*, she focuses on the historical contradictions of Mexican American identity.

For more information on these authors, visit the *American Passages* Web site at www.learner.org.

2. How did the Political History Reading change or enhance your view of John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*?

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts, cont'd.

Facilitators:

- Continue watching the video until the point where Blake Allmendinger finishes reading the first artifact (*Mining Laws*, serial #9250). Begin at the title First Artifact Reading and watch for approximately 9:30 minutes.
- Divide the session participants into groups of three and hand out the previously downloaded political document. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Activity 2: Reading the First Artifact

1. In your group, analyze the political document that your facilitator provides for you. First, make some initial observations about the artifact:

- What strikes you about this piece of legislation?
- How does it compare to pieces of legislation that you have seen in the past?
- What wording strikes you as specific to this time period?

2. Next, read the artifact more closely; use the **CAATS** acronym below, along with the Political History Reading and synopsis of Blake Allmendinger's lesson.

CAATS

Creator: Who created this artifact? What do we know about the person(s) who created it? How did it influence his/her life at the time it was created? Would the creator find relevant connections to the literature you are pairing with this artifact?

Assumptions: What do you know about the context of this artifact? What assumptions can you make based on prior information that you bring to this analysis?

Audience/User: Who was the audience for this object when it was originally created? What leads you to this assumption?

Time and Place: When and where was this artifact created?

Significance: Why is this artifact important? How does it help explain the literature you are teaching with it? Does the context of the artifact parallel the context of your literature?

Facilitators:

- After discussing the *Mining Law* document, spend five to seven minutes discussing the excerpts from John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*. Use the close reading questions from the Before the Session section as a starting point for discussion.
- Continue watching the video of the session participants reading and making connections to the second artifact. Begin at the title Second Artifact Reading and watch for approximately 8:30 minutes. Stop the video after this second artifact reading, before the title Lesson Planning.
- Then do the following activity. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts, cont'd.

Activity 3: Connecting Literature to the Artifact

1. Whole-Group Discussion Questions:

- What is the first step that Blake Allmendinger takes with the onscreen teachers to discuss the political documents and their history?
- How does he move the teachers' discussion from the artifact analysis to connecting the artifact with the literature they are reading?
- What techniques does Blake use on-screen that help you as a viewer? Could you use these techniques in your own classroom?

2. Return to small groups. Begin to draw connections between the political document and Ridge's text. Use the following guiding questions:

- How do the mining laws of 1853 affect Joaquin and some of the other characters in Ridge's text?
- How could the language in the *Mining Laws* document be seen as subversive? How is this reflected in *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*?

Facilitators:

- Watch the Lesson Planning and In the Classroom portions of the video. Begin at the title Lesson Planning and watch for approximately 34:30 minutes.
- Then do the next activity. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Activity 4: Classroom Strategies Discussion/Create Lesson Plan

1. Whole-Group Discussion Questions: You just watched Angela Vahsholtz-Andersen apply what she had learned about connecting artifacts and literature to her own classroom. Take 10–15 minutes to discuss the following questions:

- How did Angela get her students to make connections between the political document used as an artifact and the text they are reading, *Picture Bride* by Yoshiko Uchida?
- What teaching strategies are most successful in her lesson?
- What could Angela do to enhance classroom discussion in this lecture hall set-up?
- There was a period of time when Angela's students strayed from making specific connections to the book. How did Angela bring them back to the task of making textual references and connections?

2. In your same small groups, brainstorm different literary movements/pieces of literature that you could use with the political documents you have been working with today. What are some other political artifacts that would supplement the literature you are currently teaching?

Facilitators:

- Watch Angela Vahsholtz-Andersen's reflective interview. Begin at the title Reflection and watch for approximately three minutes.
- Ask session participants to comment on what Angela felt worked in her classroom. Did this parallel what they thought worked as they were watching?

Building a Lesson Plan and Teaching With Artifacts

For the detailed six-step process for artifact selection, see the Teacher Resources section in the Appendix.

Homework

1. Create a lesson plan using a political artifact with a piece of literature that you are currently teaching.

For example: If you are teaching the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, it would be helpful and interesting to use the court documents of the Scottsboro Trial of 1931. This unjust case of a false rape accusation made by two white girls against a “gang” of nine black boys is what propelled Lee to write her novel. Have the students read the transcripts of the case and look at the way the case was handled. Have them closely examine the language used by both the prosecution and the defense. Next, have students compare this trial with Tom Robinson’s trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Discuss the following:

- What similarities and differences are there between the novel and the court case?
- How did the real-life trial influence the fictional trial?
- How would either trial be different if it was set in 2003?

Share this lesson with fellow teachers at the next workshop session.

2. See next week’s Before the Session section.

Artifacts and Literature Pairings: Political Artifacts

The following political artifacts can be found in the *American Passages* archive at http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php. Enter the serial number to view a picture of the item and a detailed description.

Artifact and Serial

Lithograph depicting
women voting
(1869) (#2498)

Political Cartoon
“Happy Hooligan”
(1902) (#7397)

The Providential
Detection
(1800) (#1646)

Literary Movement and Literature

Gothic Undercurrents:
Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s
The Yellow Wall-Paper

Social Realism:
Edith Wharton’s
The House of Mirth

Spirit of Nationalism:
Thomas Jefferson’s
The Declaration of Independence

Teaching Tips

- One teaching method that Angela uses is double-entry journals, also known as dialectical notebooks. The purpose of these notebooks/journals is to teach close reading skills by having students choose a quote or passage that particularly intrigues, confuses, or surprises them. On one side of the paper the students copy the quote; on the other side they comment directly on the quote and their reaction to it. This dialectic between the student and the text encourages a richer, more complex reading.
- Another helpful close reading skill that Blake uses in the workshop portion of the class is paying close attention to the diction used in Ridge’s novel. He points out specific language usage, like the ways terms like “American” and “foreigner” are defined in Ridge’s text. This strategy reinforces the skills of close reading and reading for contextual accuracy.

Session Reading

Political History Reading

What do we mean by political artifacts?

Political artifacts might be items that relate directly to the political process, such as laws, speeches made by campaigning politicians, legislative debates, court decisions, or the voting rights and responsibilities for a given time and place. But as Blake Allmendinger notes in the video, “politics” in this sense doesn’t refer only to political parties or the formal political process. The term is used more broadly to indicate political beliefs and movements that have shaped history. In this sense, a political artifact is usually a type of historical artifact. Thinking about what we might label “political” can help us recognize the political valence of a particular artifact and broaden the scope of the historical background under consideration.

Why are they useful to bring into a literature classroom?

For many years, high school English teachers have been pairing the disciplines of history and English with great success. Bringing political artifacts into the English classroom allows students to understand the political concerns and imperatives of different eras in American history. Students can then see the actions and reactions of literary characters in the context of past political movements. They can also consider the ways in which literature itself might be political: written, published, and circulated with the intention of persuading people of the legitimacy of a particular political perspective. Students can also consider what political forces are at work today, and what sorts of artifacts future generations might look to for evidence of contemporary American political concerns.

Contextualizing political artifacts and literary texts: The case of John Rollin Ridge’s *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit*

The title of Ridge’s novel might conjure up a tale that is simply entertaining escapism. But through the introduction of political artifacts, students can begin to appreciate the political protest Ridge articulated. Nineteenth-century readers would have been familiar with the idea that a work of fiction might champion a political cause or publicize the plight of an oppressed group. Before the advent of broadcast media, fictional stories published in newspapers, magazines, or books offered important means to engage the sympathy of large numbers of people. Abolition, temperance, Native American rights, women’s rights—such topics were frequently addressed in fiction. The most famous (and effective) example is Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, published in 1852—just two years before *Joaquin Murieta*. Less well-known today but extremely popular at the time, Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1884 novel *Ramona* depicted the plight of Indians displaced by Anglo-American migration into California. Stowe, Jackson, and Ridge all based their novels on historical figures and events in order to craft effective polemics.

While temporally close to Stowe’s novel and topically close to Jackson’s, Ridge’s book diverges from Stowe’s domesticity or Jackson’s focus on a romantic courtship plot. Instead, Ridge’s depiction of the outlaw Joaquin locates his novel in the literature of the frontier. Some of this literature celebrated the “conquering” of the frontier, expounding a belief in the Manifest Destiny* that ordained Western settlement as the inevitable providence of the United States. Other texts, such as James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*, voiced ambivalence or even outright critiques of Anglo-American westward expansion. These critiques often focused on the displacement of

* indicates a reference in the Glossary.

Political History Reading, cont'd.

peoples who previously resided in Western territories, the destruction of nature engendered by settlement, or the violence associated with the West. By constructing a hero who engages in criminal violence, Ridge invokes a familiar trope about masculinity in the age of Western settlement. However, in showing the reader that anti-Mexican prejudice causes Joaquin's turn to illegal behavior, the novel critiques the legal structures of the day.

While other types of artifacts could also be usefully paired with the novel, Blake Allmendinger's presentation shows how political artifacts help contemporary readers understand the politically contentious aspects of the novel and the era. Ridge's own family was deeply involved in the political upheaval surrounding the Cherokee removal from Georgia to what is now Oklahoma. Hence, political artifacts concerning that policy—such as the 1830 Indian Removal Act* passed by Congress; the Supreme Court cases *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* and *Worcester v. Georgia*; and the Treaty of New Echota, signed by John Rollin Ridge's father—might also be relevant. While these artifacts are not directly related to the events depicted in *Joaquin Murieta*, they can facilitate a consideration of whether Ridge's novel is a reflection of his own experience as a Cherokee, or whether his lionizing of the outlaw Murieta stands in contrast to the more assimilationist stance his father took in signing the treaty.

Contextualizing political artifacts and literary texts: The case of Yoshiko Uchida's *Picture Bride*

After participating in the workshop on Ridge's novel, teacher Angela Vahsholtz-Andersen creates a similar lesson plan focusing on Yoshiko Uchida's *Picture Bride*. As her lesson demonstrates, political artifacts are useful in the study of a wide range of literary texts. In this 1987 novel, Uchida offers the story of one woman's experiences immigrating to the United States. The story illustrates the wide-ranging prejudices faced by Japanese Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. Immigrant literature has been an important literary form in the U.S. for generations. In some cases, such as Mary Antin's 1912 autobiography *The Promised Land* or Jade Snow Wong's 1950 autobiography *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, immigrant authors drew on their own experiences to provide models of ethnic assimilation that might promote greater acceptance of immigrants by the majority U.S. culture. Other immigrant writers, such as Anzia Yezierska, Michael Gold, or Hisaye Yamamoto, were more critical of America's treatment of immigrants, and their fiction and nonfiction works challenge the idea of the American melting pot.

Because she is representing events that are historically distant, Uchida is not attempting to incite political reform in the way Ridge, Stowe, Jackson, or these earlier immigrant authors did. Instead, writing in a moment when multiculturalism is more widely embraced, Uchida enables contemporary young adult readers to confront political injustices that were common in the past. The most obvious of these injustices is the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, events Uchida addresses in several of her novels. But Angela's lesson takes the important step of focusing on anti-Japanese discrimination that predates—and in many ways causes—the later internment. In using a newspaper announcement documenting a meeting of the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League, Angela shows students how to find the “political” element of what may at first not seem to be a political artifact. This artifact helps students appreciate the political climate in which the fictional story is set, giving them a better understanding of the characters in the story.

Works Cited and Referenced

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Notes
