



Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan



Text:

Ad Seipsum, by Petrarch

Grade/Subject

MS / ELA



Ideas, Values:

Life and Death, Cause and Effect, Interdependence, History



Pre-Seminar Content



Launch Activity:

Have students do a quick-write on the following question: What would it feel like to live in the Middle Ages during the Plague?



Inspectional Read:

Distribute the text, and ask students what type of text they think it is, and what it will be like to read. Number the paragraphs 1-6. Read the text slowly and aloud with students, and have them mark vocabulary with which they are unfamiliar.



Background Information:

Petrarch (1304-1374) was a poet and scholar from Tuscany, whose humanist philosophy set the stage for the Renaissance. He is also considered one of the fathers

of the modern Italian language. Boccaccio transcribed this letter and it is now thought that Petrarch was writing in response to the Black Death of 1348.

Vocabulary:

Elicit words that students marked as unfamiliar, and provide meanings (or together gauge their meaning from context.) These may include: *headlong, fleeting, throngs, biers, imminent, hallowed*. Have students annotate their copies of the text with vocabulary meanings for ready access when reading.

Analytical Read:

Ask students to read the text again silently, and post the following instructions on the board:

- Give a title to each paragraph
- Mark the text by putting a question mark by a part that you don't understand
- Mark with a star the three parts that you react to most strongly
- Underline one phrase that is the best word picture of the Plague



Pre-Seminar Process

-  Define and state purpose for Paideia Seminar.
-  Describe the responsibilities of facilitator and participants.
-  Have participants set a Personal Goal.
-  Agree on a Group Goal.



Seminar Questions

Opening (Identify main ideas from the text.):

- ❖ Which phrase did you mark as being an accurate word picture of the Plague? (round-robin response)
- ❖ Why did you choose the phrase you chose? (spontaneous discussion)

Core (Analyze textual details.):

- ❖ What are two section titles you created? Why did you title them as you did?
- ❖ How does any one of the sections connect to any other?
- ❖ What is the mood of this text? What evidence is there as to the author's feelings about life and death?
- ❖ In paragraph 3, what does the author describe as the cause of the Plague?
- ❖ What do you think of the analogies of the sinking ships and burning house? What do these suggest about people's dependence on each other?
- ❖ Look in paragraph 6, "Headstrong desire draws me and I am bound ever more tightly by deadly knots. That is the state I am in." What does the author mean by this?

Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas.):

- ❖ How would you react if you were faced with a lethal epidemic in your own community today? What would your thoughts and emotions be?

Post-Seminar Process

- ★ Have participants do a written self-assessment of their personal participation goal.
- ★ Do a group assessment of the social and intellectual goals of seminar.
- ★ Note reminders for next seminar.



Post-Seminar Content

★ Transition to Writing:

Provide a few minutes for students to make notes about the most important things they heard, said or thought during the seminar discussion about the following big ideas and values:

Life & Death	Cause & Effect
Health/Medicine	Interdependence

 **Writing Task:**

After reading Petrarch's *Ad Seipsum* and our seminar discussion, write a journal entry similar to Petrarch's from the point of view of a modern person during the Ebola outbreak. Be sure to address your emotions, the environment around you, and your understanding of why it is happening. Include an analogy of what it is like to live during this outbreak.

 **Brainstorm:**

Have participants work in pairs discuss the requirements of the writing task, and what it is asking them to do.

 **Structure the Writing:**

Allow a few minutes for all to list the points they will make, and how they will organize their journal entry. Provide a template as needed.

 **First Draft:**

Provide 20 minutes for writers to draft their thoughts into sentences.

 **Collaborative Revision:**

Have participants work in pairs to read through their first drafts, with emphasis on the reader as creator and editor. The listener says back one point heard clearly, and makes one suggestion. Switch roles. Give time for full revisions resulting in a second draft.

 **Edit:**

Once the second draft is complete, support participants as they work with their own writing, marking any spelling or grammar errors they find. (Have dictionaries and grammar handbooks available for reference.) Take this opportunity to clarify/reteach any specific grammar strategies you have identified as a need. Give time for full revisions resulting in a third and final draft.



Display the writing prominently along with a copy of Petrarch's piece, and then collect the writing as a volume to be placed in the school's media center, or as exemplars for next year's class.

This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:

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Ad Seipsum (To Himself)

by Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch)

Epistola Metrica I, 14: lines 1-55

Translated by Jonathan Usher, Univ. of Edinburgh

O what has come over me? Where are the violent fates pushing me back to? I see passing by, in headlong flight, time which makes the world a fleeting place. I observe about me dying throngs of both young and old, and nowhere is there a refuge. No haven beckons in any part of the globe, nor can any hope of longed for salvation be seen. Wherever I turn my frightened eyes, their gaze is troubled by continual funerals: the churches groan encumbered with biers, and, without last respects, the corpses of the noble and the commoner lie in confusion alongside each other.

The last hour of life comes to mind, and, obliged to recollect my misfortunes, I recall the flocks of dear ones who have departed, and the conversations of friends, the sweet faces which suddenly vanished, and the hallowed ground now insufficient for repeated burials. This is what the people of Italy bemoan, weakened by so many deaths; this is what France laments, exhausted and stripped of inhabitants; the same goes for other peoples, under whatever skies they reside.

Either it is the wrath of God, for certainly I would think that our misdeeds deserve it, or it is just the harsh assault of the stars in their perpetually changing conjunctions. This plague-bearing year has borne down on humankind and threatens a tearful slaughter, and the highly charged air encourages death. From his diseased heavenly pole, cruel Jupiter looks down, and from there he rains upon the earth diseases and grievous mortality. The merciless Fates rush to sever the threads of life all at once, if they can: seeing so many ashen faces of the wretched common people, and so many seeking gloomy Tartarus, I fear that from on high they may have been granted what they wish.

Just thinking of these things, I confess I am frightened and I see before me the snares of imminent death. For where could I hide my head, when neither the sea nor the land nor the rocks full of dark caves show themselves to the one who flees, because death, rushing impetuously into even safe hiding-places, overcomes all

things. Thus, like the mariner caught in a dangerous storm, before whose eyes cruel Neptune has sucked down the other ships in the convoy, who hears the fragile keel cracking in the belly of his ship and the splintering of the oars as they are dashed against the reefs, and sees the rudder carried away amongst the terrifying waves, I hesitate uncertain as to what to do, though certain of the peril.

No differently, where unnoticed a deadly fire has taken hold of ancient timbers and greedy flame licks resin-rich floorboards, the household, aroused by the commotion, suddenly gets out of bed, and the father, before anyone else, rushes up to the top of the roof, gazing about him, and grasping his trembling son seeks to save him first from the dangerous fire, and works out in his mind how to escape with this burden through the opposing flames. Often in fear clasping to myself my helpless soul I too wonder whether there is an escape-route to carry it out from the conflagration and I am minded to extinguish the bodily flames with the water of tears. But the world holds me back.

Headstrong desire draws me and I am bound ever more tightly by deadly knots. That is the state I am in. Dense shadows have covered me with fear. For whosoever thinks they can recall death and look upon the moment of their passing with fearless face is either mistaken or mad, or, if he is fully aware, then he is very courageous.

Source:

http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/plague/perspectives/petrarca2.php