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ABSTRACT

Three installments of "Classic of the Month," a regular feature of the National Council of Teachers of English publication, "Notes Plus," are presented in this compilation. Each installment of this feature is intended to provide teaching ideas related to a "classic" novel. The first article offers a variety of activities based on "The Red Badge of Courage" by Stephen Crane. Included are questions for class discussion and suggestions for preliminary small-group activities, library projects, writing assignments, and follow-up small-group activities. The second article describes a 12-day unit on Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea." Instructions are given for each day of the unit as well as a list of topics for student position papers based on the novel. The final article presents activities related to "Hard Times" by Charles Dickens. Questions for class discussion are given along with ideas for writing assignments, class projects, and small-group or individual projects. (DC)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills
Urbana, Illinois

CLASSIC OF THE MONTH

The Red Badge of Courage

We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise.

Emily Dickinson's words express that yearning, so strong in youth, to test oneself. *The Red Badge of Courage* speaks to that yearning, just one of the reasons for selecting this classic for study. But there are more. The novel attracts students because it dramatizes breaking away from home. It shows youth's resentment toward and need for authority. It tells how one can be alone in the company of many. It reveals human weaknesses like pride and cowardice as it shows our potential for heroism. It depicts fear of failure and yet is a success story of sorts.

Teachers too have reasons for selecting *Red Badge*. The novel provides an opportunity to examine closely certain elements of fiction, especially style, multiple themes, character development, and the relationship between mood and setting. Crane's work also serves as an introduction to the psychological novel and has, in fact, been read by many as a psychological study of fear. The book allows students to discover truths about themselves and others and about life. Finally, the book is short, and schedules sometimes preclude the consideration of longer works.

Preliminary Small Group Activities

Divide the class into groups of four or five students and assign the following tasks. Each group later reports to the class on the results of its exploration, and the class responds with questions and comments.

1. Trace the events of the novel in sequence, note the time span of the novel as a whole.
2. Trace the steps in Henry's development from youth to man. How does his changing view of war reflect this maturation?
3. Record and categorize color images.
4. Identify figures of speech (metaphor, simile, personification) and group them into such categories as nature, machine, animal, religious, and so on.
5. Jot down typical examples of language used by the narrator, by Henry, and by other characters. What conclusions can be drawn?
6. Select several passages from the novel and list the verbs, adjectives, and nouns. Examine these lists. Do patterns emerge? What observations can you make?

Class Discussion

Although class editions of *Red Badge* usually contain helpful discussion questions and teachers have lists of their own, here are a few of the questions I regularly use. Insist that students cite evidence from the text to support their answers.

General Questions

1. What is the significance of the title? What does *red* symbolize? *badge*? How is Henry's red badge ironic? What is the meaning of *courage*? Are there different kinds of courage? Are courageous actions similar to/different from *brave, heroic, intrepid* ones? Are there circumstances under which a person might be more courageous than at other times? In a war or other disaster, are those who remain at home cowardly?
2. What is the effect of Crane's use of the general rather than the specific in character and place names and in time?
3. What statement about the relationship between man and nature does the novel make? You might consider images of fog, rain, and sun as a beginning.
4. In what ways are the novel and its protagonist affected by the fact that except for chapter one no women are included? Would a writer today exclude women in a war novel?

Questions That Focus on the Protagonist

1. Why does Crane choose a fatherless youth as his protagonist?
2. What are the youth's feelings about the enemy? What are his feelings toward the officers? How do the officers feel/act toward their men?
3. Was Henry right in chapter one that "whatever he had learned of himself was here of no avail"? What does he discover about his physical self? moral self? social self? Is he disappointed or pleased with what he finds?
4. Itemize in specific terms what Henry learns from others and from each experience in battle.
5. At what times does Henry become "not a man but a member"? Can you recall times when you experienced this feeling? Did you think and act in the same way as you would have thought and acted as an individual?
6. Trace the parallels between the fighting and Henry's journey into "self." When does Henry talk banalities? When is he most pretentious? When does he seem to be rationalizing? Would Henry's maturing process have occurred so rapidly if he had remained at home?
7. Was Henry a hero or a coward?

Questions That Focus on the War

1. What factual information about this battle, this war, does the reader learn?
2. How does a civil war differ from a war against other nations?
3. Discuss Crane's image of war as "the blood-swollen god." Can you apply this idea to times other than war?
4. How does Crane differentiate between the popular view of war and the personal or private view?

Library Projects

These topics may be investigated by individuals or small groups. The results may be presented in writing, as panels and speeches, or as bulletin board displays.

1. Report on—or demonstrate—recent findings about how colors affect human beings. Can you apply these findings to Crane's use of color?
2. Build a case for *each* of the following: *The Red Badge of Courage* is an example of naturalism; realism, romanticism, impressionism, all of the above, none of the above.

3. Investigate the life of Stephen Crane and find out about some of his other works. "The Open Boat," "The Blue Hotel," and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" are good possibilities if you're interested in short stories. You might also like to look at some of the poems in the collection *War Is Kind.*
4. Analyze Lincoln's Gettysburg address. Discuss its content, form, purpose, and style in relation to *Red Badge.*
5. Find out about impressionistic painting and music. Bring in examples to share with the class. Be prepared to lead a discussion of their relationship to each other and to Crane's style.
6. Read or reread William Golding's *Lord of the Flies.* What comparisons can you make with the corpse scene at the end of chapter seven of *Red Badge*? Are there other similarities between the two novels?
7. Read another Civil War novel. Compare it to *Red Badge* and draw conclusions. Possibilities include MacKinley Kantor's *Andersonville*, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, Irene Hunt's *Across Five Aprils.*
8. Analyze war posters. Recruitment posters are an interesting possibility. Report to the class on your conclusions.

Writing Assignments

1. Recall a time you felt overpowering fear. Explain the circumstances. Analyze your reasons for fear. Describe the physical and emotional effects of that fear. What happened? Were your fears realized? Were you pleased with how you acted? Were you changed in any way by this experience?
2. Using *Red Badge* as a point of reference, consider the passage of time, how it can stand still or rush past. Include examples of this phenomenon from *Red Badge*, from other works you've read, and from personal experience. Draw a conclusion about the nature of time.
3. Describe Henry's mixed feelings in leaving home and mother. How does his mother feel? Why does she mention socks several times? Extend your observations to include similar experiences and reactions that apply to most young people and their parents.
4. Imagine that you are Henry. The battle has ended. Write a letter to your mother, a letter to a friend who stayed home, and a letter to the "dark girl."
5. Using Stephen Crane as your writing model, create a scene of your own for *Red Badge.*
6. Write a news report of the battle. Then write an editorial and a human interest story. You may add details of your own invention.
7. Adapt *one* of the preliminary small group activities, class discussion questions, or library research projects as the subject for an essay. After you have done some preliminary thinking, discuss your choice with your teacher.

Follow-up Small Group Activities

1. Prepare a reading of one or more passages from the novel. Be attentive to the sounds and rhythms of language and how these elements enhance images called forth by the words.
2. Dramatize (or pantomime) a scene from the novel. Use props and/or background music if you wish.
3. Compose and perform for the class a folk song or a dance that relates to the events of or a scene from the novel.
4. Represent the novel through a watercolor, drawing, collage, or poster.
5. Relate the novel to contemporary times through an editorial cartoon or a comic strip.
6. You are the director in charge of filming the novel. How will you cast it? How will you handle the camera? What do you have in mind for setting and sound? Will you make symbolic use of color? How?
7. Assemble a slide/tape presentation that depicts a theme from the novel. You might consider presenting that theme in contemporary terms.
8. Interview several people from different age groups who have served in wars. Think carefully about the questions you will ask. Support your findings and conclusions in writing or as a panel discussion.

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CLASSIC OF THE MONTH

The Old Man and the Sea

"This is the prose that I have been working for all my life . . ."
Ernest Hemingway, 1951

Ernest Hemingway hooked his first marlin in 1932—and generations of Americans have been hooked on the magnificent fish story he published twenty years after his catch off the coast of Havana. Deceptively simple in plot and lyric style, the novel deals with the classic verities of love and death, pride and humility. It stands as a miniature rival to *Moby Dick*, a parable complete with all the symbols, and an American artifact with a haunting thematic line. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

The work merits careful reading. It deserves at least twelve days of exploration—a probing of its form and content, of its idea and author. It also deserves instructional variety—reading and writing, teacher-and-student and student-and-student interaction, film and recording, fact and anecdote.

Suggested Schedule

Day 1-3	Introduction of the novel, including a discussion of Hemingway and the Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes, and time for in-class reading
Day 4	Explaining and assigning the position paper
Day 5	Discussing the Hemingway style and code through supplementary reading
Day 6-8	Prewriting, drafting, and anecdotal research
Day 9	Anecdote day
Day 10	Paper due with time for in-class proofreading
Day 11-12	Films: *Ernest Hemingway, Rough Diamond*/*The Old Man and the Sea*

The first three days should provide a background for the novel as well as time for reading. Remind students that *The Old Man and the Sea*, first published in *Life* magazine, won the 1953 Pulitzer Prize and was instrumental in Hemingway's winning the 1954 Nobel Prize. You may wish to refer to W. J. Stuckey's, *The Pulitzer Prize Novels*, pages 165–70, and to *American Winners of the Nobel Literary Prize*, edited by Warren G. French and Walter E. Kidd, especially pages 158–92, which include the Nobel Citation read at the ceremony in Sweden. Background information on Hemingway's Nobel Prize is also found in Carlos Baker's *Ernest Hemingway. A Life Story*, "The Bounty of Sweden," pages 525–29. These materials along with the Caedmon record/tape *Ernest Hemingway Reading*, which includes Hemingway reading his Nobel Address, will introduce the idea of awards and prizes as both delight and terror to authors. It is interesting to discuss awards at this point, since many writers both want and fear them. Fame and popularity can be time-consuming, distracting, even the kiss of death. John Steinbeck, for example, believed that little good material was written by Nobel winners after they received their awards.

Enterprising teachers will also want to make use of the genesis of the novel: "On the Blue Water" from the April 1936 issue of *Esquire*. (I have reprinted it in my *Writing Seminars in the Content Area: In Search of Hemingway, Salinger, and Steinbeck*, pages 105–108, a publication available from NCTE.)

The assignment given on Day 4 is crucial to the success of the entire project. Students are asked to begin work on a three-to-five-page typed paper in which they share their ideas about the novel with me and with each other. I call this a position paper because students are asked to limit their analysis to a single focus: This position is to be organized, supported by concrete detail, and mechanically sound. I offer the following position suggestions which students are free to accept, reject, or adapt.

1. Why was this novel so important in Hemingway's winning the Nobel Prize?
2. Is the Old Man just an old man or does he represent something else? Try to define him as a symbol.
3. What is the function of the boy Manolin?
4. Some see this novel as a parable: Review the meaning of *parable* and try to define your position in this way.
5. Take a key line, such as the last one in the book, and try to mold your position around that line.
6. Joe DiMaggio is mentioned in the novel more than once. Who was he? Could this lead to a position?
7. This novel won the Pulitzer Prize. Do some research on the prize and the historical period. Why do you think the book won the award during the Cold War?
8. Contrast or compare this novel with a Hemingway story, such as "The Big Two-Hearted River," or with the *Esquire* article "On the Blue Water."
9. Is Santiago a Code Hero? Can he be a man with "grace under pressure"?
10. Does this novel suggest a religious comparison? Is it a Christian story?
11. One critic said that the book is related to the "American Dream." Can you accept this? What does this mean?
12. Consider the ending. Is this story tragic or basically triumphant?

Day 5 is a time for reading aloud, for discovering and discussing Hemingway's style and for defining his world view (the Hemingway code). Instead of reading from *Old Man and the Sea*, I select one of the following stories to read aloud: "Ten Indians," "My Old Man," "A Clean Well-Lighted Place," or "The End of Something." Through discussion we piece together the Hemingway who believed in "grace under pressure," in the code of living with reality in a world of pain, of good and bad luck. Ask students, "If you had to write a paper on this story, what would be your position?" We go on to consider how we might document and organize that position based on the story we just read.

By Day 6 students have completed the novel, and we spend some time talking over how we write, how we get ideas. (What is the first thing you do when you write? Describe a successful paper that you once wrote, what made it successful?) Students also share the positions they are developing in their papers.

Since Hemingway was a highly autobiographical author—and a charismatic human being, I ask students to do some simple research about the man behind the book. For this purpose I assemble in the classroom as much Hemingway material as I can from public, school, and personal libraries, from friends and colleagues and students, from old textbooks—original works, biographical and critical pieces, posters, newspaper and magazine clippings, recordings, picture files. Each student is asked to find an anecdote, a good story, to share with the class. On Day 9 students tell their stories about Hemingway's life as boxer, fisherman, hunter, bullfighting expert, expatriate; about his accidents, his wives, his children, his suicide, his parents, his high school years, his reaction to his prizes.

On Day 10, with time granted for in-class proofreading, the position papers are collected.

On Days 11 and 12 I sometimes show the 1958 Warner Brothers production of *The Old Man and the Sea*, starring Spencer Tracy (Hemingway watched the filmmaking and later called it a waste of time) or the 1978 Centron film *Ernest Hemingway: Rough Diamond*, although I have also run *Rough Diamond* earlier in the schedule, about Day 3.

After I have graded the papers I choose three or four to share with the class. I ask the writer to read the paper aloud and then ask the other students to state the position of the paper. We take the class's formulation back to the author and ask if we have discovered the position. The author then has an opportunity to describe how he or she perceives the organization and support of the position. Now the paper is open for both positive comments and concerns about clarity and support.

After a dozen days, *The Old Man and the Sea* has been given its due: introduced, read, examined in terms of its author and his code, and explored through discussion, reflection, and writing. Students have heard it and seen it and felt it. (Sometimes I even offer students a chance to parody it.) In less than three weeks, everyone has found a friend—or maybe an enemy, the risk of all classics.

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CLASSIC OF THE MONTH

Hard Times

Why choose *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens for class study? Foremost among the reasons, the novel helps young readers discover that relationships between adults and young people of another time, another place, have likenesses to as well as differences from such relationships today. Students also identify with the problems of Louisa and Tom Gradgrind in their efforts to become independent adults. In Dickens' satire of the ills of society, students see the beginnings of concern over the environmental, social, and personal effects of industrialization, observations that are particularly interesting at a time when we are witnessing what may be the death of industrialization. Finally, *Hard Times* provides an opportunity to acquaint students with the work of an author who is widely acclaimed. This particular book, his most "single-minded social novel," can be read in a unit along with other books of social criticism and will stimulate discussions about character and caricature.

Class Discussion

Although teachers have their own favorite questions for introducing and analyzing the novel, here are a few that I regularly use.

1. Discuss the title. In what ways can the word *hard* be used? The word *times*? How are we—as a group, as a nation, as individuals—having hard times today? What's different about our hard times and those of Dickens' day?
2. In chapter two of Book One, the narrator uses physical description to show the stark contrasts between the dark-eyed, dark-haired Sissy and her fellow student Bitzer whose skin was "unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge." What does this passage reveal about the narrator's attitude toward Sissy and Bitzer? What does it foreshadow about Bitzer's actions?
3. What is Mr McChokumchild's theory of education? What is Dickens' attitude toward this theory? Evaluate the theory in terms of today's students.
4. How do you account for the fact that the facts-only system had different effects on Bitzer, Louisa, Sissy, and young Tom?
5. Why is Sissy omitted from Book Two? Why is Jane included as a character in the novel?
6. How are the children of Coketown treated by adults?
7. How does Dickens depict motherhood in this novel? Why does he depart from the "ideal"?
8. How does Dickens show the process and effects of depersonalization? Were his fears about still further dehumanization by industry warranted? In what ways does society today dehumanize? Are there conditions in this school that dehumanize? What science fiction stories depict the fear of dehumanization? What steps are being taken that extend or soften or halt the dehumanizing aspects of our world?
9. What does the circus symbolize? Compare the circus people to the Proles in Orwell's *1984*. Can you think of other comparisons in literature, films, and real life?
10. Bitzer reminds Mr. Gradgrind late in the novel that he (Bitzer) was brought up in the catechism that the "whole social system is a question of self-interest." How is that catechism dramatized in the novel? Does that belief prevail today?

Writing Assignments

During the time needed for reading the novel, I ask students to write briefly at the beginning of class a couple of times a week. Typical assignments: write summary statements for each chapter in the reading assignment; translate into straightforward prose a short passage from the novel; write a personal response to an incident in the novel, such as Sissy's embarrassment at school (students might describe a time when they or a peer experienced humiliation from a teacher or fellow student and draw a conclusion from the incident); write an "insert" for the novel, such as a letter of advice to Rachel and Stephen or to Louisa and James.

In addition to these relatively informal writing assignments, students choose topics from among the following. Several of the discussion questions listed earlier can also be adapted for writing assignments.

1. Two assignments about fathers. a) Write a letter to Thomas Gradgrind telling him how he rates as a father. You might first establish criteria for a good father. b) Was Signor Jupe a "good" or "poor" father? Cite examples and comparisons (with Thomas Gradgrind or other fathers, real or fictional). Can you make use of observations made by other characters in the novel?
2. When Louisa tells her father that she will accept Mr. Bounderby's proposal, she states more than once, "What does it matter?" How does this attitude give her strength? How does it undo her? Interpret her meaning in light of the marriage proposal itself and of the entire novel.
3. Louisa tells her father, "You have been so careful of me that I never had a child's heart." Consider the difference between having a "child's heart" and being "childish." Observe the effects of choking the child's heart in *Hard Times*. Should children behave like adults? Should adults behave like children? How can adults allow the "child" inside them space to breathe?
4. Archibald MacLeish once wrote: "It is the work of art that creates the human perspective in which information turns to truth." How would Mr. Bounderby respond to this statement? Thomas Gradgrind? Current educators? How do you respond? Find examples that speak to MacLeish's statement.
5. In chapter four of Book Two, the fourth paragraph describes the group as opposed to the individual. A few pages later the narrator comments, "Private feeling must yield to the common cause." Explore this concept, describing times when it is best to "yield to the common cause" and when the individual should prevail.
6. Examine the character of James Harthouse. Why does Dickens include him in his cast of characters? Why doesn't

he make him the true hero who rescues the fair maiden? Alternate assignment: write a scene between Louisa and Harthouse that will turn this man with a hollow heart into a genuine hero.

7. In the final chapter Dickens makes quick work of stating that Louisa is destined never to become a loving wife and mother. Why can this never be, according to Dickens? If you were the author, would you have Louisa's life turn out differently? Support Dickens' ending or write a summary describing how you would change it.
8. Someone has commented of Dickens' style that he "describes a *smile*, and a *whole man* is recognized by that smile." Explain how Dickens accomplishes such a feat by selecting examples from the novel and showing how details reveal character.

Class Projects

In addition to talking and writing about a novel, students enjoy "doing something" with it. The projects described below add a third dimension to the study of *Hard Times*—and result in some interesting class sessions.

1. Charles Dickens was a journalist and an editor. Divide the class into groups and produce a newspaper with stories, photos, cartoons, ads, lovelorn column, and so on. Use the text of *Hard Times* as your source.
2. Ask each student to develop a set of factual questions, listing the page number for each answer. A student committee then categorizes the questions and arranges them by level of difficulty. These questions become the raw material for a "television" quiz show. Allow students to work out the format of the show—it'll be more original and entertaining than one you might devise. Videotape the production if possible.
3. Each student makes a chart of the major characters as they appear at the beginning of the novel, arranging them from 1 to 10 on a line labeled "fact" at one end and "fancy" at the other. The student then draws additional lines in a second color to indicate where each character falls on this scale at the end of the novel. Display the charts and develop the following discussion. Which characters moved? Which didn't? Why? Are the characters round or flat, neither, both, or something else? Does it matter?
4. Divide the class into groups. Each group examines the text closely for one of the following items and reports back in a manner that will draw response from the entire class.
   a. Note examples of different "voices" used in this novel. Comment on their function.
   b. Collect and categorize examples of satire and irony (or examples of figures of speech). Are there generalizations to be drawn?
   c. Summarize what each book of the novel is about, commenting on each title. How do the book titles relate to the novel's title? Select several chapter titles to comment on. Finally, make a general observation about Dickens' use of titles.
   d. List names and nicknames of characters and comment on how these names reflect personality. Do they have other functions?
   e. Note descriptions of settings in the country and in the city as well as those on the city's edge. What observations can you make?
   f. List all the social criticisms your group can find. Categorize them as part of your presentation.
   g. List literary and historical allusions. Do they burden or enrich the novel?
5. Divide the class into several panels, each of which organizes a discussion or "Meeting of the Minds" program on a topic suggested by the novel. The names below are merely illustrative; many others will serve, including local names. Each character role must be maintained throughout the panel discussion, and each participant submits a biographical sketch to the moderators in advance. For example, the topic *labor unions*, with appearances by Clarence Darrow, John D. Rockefeller, John L. Lewis, Andrew Carnegie, Walter Reuther, (Slackbridge, Stephen Blackpool, Josiah Bounderby, James Harthouse); or *schools* with Thomas Jefferson, John Dewey, Cotton Mather, Jerome Brunner, John Holt, Horace Mann, Booker T. Washington, members of the local school board (Mr. McChoakumchild, Mr. Bounderby, Mr. Sleary, Rachel). Other topics for which you can provide names from a variety of historical periods and from the novel include women's roles, child rights, environment and industry, social classes, censorship in the schools.

Small Group or Individual Projects

The projects outlined below allow you to experiment with a range of formats. Some are risky for a class assignment but ideal for a given individual. All in all, they encourage students to have good times with *Hard Times*.

1. Select scenes for dramatization, oral reading, or mime. You might choose a scene and do a modern counterpart of it or do both the "then" and the "now."
2. Interview people of different ages concerning their experiences with and attitudes toward education (and/or work and leisure). Publish your findings in a pamphlet or present them in a wall chart.
3. Draw or write caricatures of people selected from representative groups in society today—national, state, local, or school. Assign Dickensian names to your characters.
4. Read about the life of Charles Dickens. Present your findings in one of the following ways. a) Deliver a lecture that describes factors in Dickens' life that may have influenced particular ideas, attitudes, characters, and scenes in *Hard Times*. b) Imagine that you are Charles Dickens. Describe in a Dickensian fashion an event of your youth that had lasting impact on your life.
5. Read Studs Terkel's *Hard Times*. How have Dickens and Terkel made the same title relate in different and similar ways to their writings? Consider the major difference between the two works: one is fiction, the other is nonfiction.
6. Read one or more other novels depicting the inequity of treatment of social classes (for example, S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, George Orwell's *1984* or *Animal Farm*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*). Prepare an oral report or an essay in which you make comparisons and draw conclusions.
7. Find examples of poems and/or song lyrics that have dehumanization as their subject. Prepare copies for the class. Lead a discussion of this material, emphasizing similarities and differences between the poems and *Hard Times*.
8. Investigate the art, music, literature, fashion, sports, or architecture of Dickens' time. In what ways do these reflect the times? Do they reinforce what Dickens was commenting on?
9. Recent studies reveal interesting insights in how people are named and how their names affect them. Some change their names. Some women choose to retain their maiden names when they marry. Some investigators argue that names can predict success or failure as well as the type of personality one becomes. Research this topic. Combine what you learn with personal observations and with the way Dickens uses names. Report your most interesting findings to the class. If you like, conduct your own study, using class members as subjects.

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