

Instructor: Travis Trombley
 Date: 14 Feb. 2014
 Class: 10-12 English Writing

Title of the lesson:	The Critical Point
I. Preliminary Planning	
Objective(s) of the lesson:	Students will be exposed to the idea of a critical point in literature and understand how to look for and analyze one.
GLCE/CEs/Common Core Standards best served: (no more than 2 or 3)	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text</p>
Focus question:	How can I find a point in a story that will help me analyze and interpret the text's meaning.
Key vocabulary/concepts:	<p>Critical Point: an analytical term that describes a crucial point in a literary text that can define how the reader interprets the text in general and subsequently develops a thesis.</p> <p>***it should be stressed that this is just one tool of analysis, and that it may not apply to all literature***</p>
Time required:	<p>20-30 minutes at home</p> <p>50 minutes in class</p>
Materials needed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to YouTube or a DVD player for the viewing of the video lecture (for students) • Access to short stories (for students) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" http://www.online-literature.com/poe/158/ ➤ Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil" http://www.eldritchpress.org/nh/mbv.html ➤ Jack London's "To Build a Fire" http://www.jacklondon.net/buildafire.html ➤ Washington Irving's "Sleepy Hollow" http://www.bartleby.com/310/2/2.html ➤ Edgar Allen Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher" http://www.bartleby.com/195/10.html <p>***this list may be supplemented or augmented as needed***</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard or digital copy of "Cask of Amontillado" (students) • "Cask of Amontillado" example essay (TT) (students)

II. The Lesson Itself*	
Lesson launch (aka <i>the hook</i> or <i>accessing prior knowledge</i>):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ask students to write down the definition of a critical point (from the lecture that should have been seen prior to coming to class) and to write down a critical point for a story of their choosing. ➤ Discuss for a few moments.
How the lesson's objective(s) will be shared with the students:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be expected to do the assigned reading of a short story, Edgar Allen Poe's "Cask of Amontillado," and watch the corresponding lesson via YouTube or, if necessary, DVD. 2. Do Now (see above) 3. In class, students will be put into groups and will, with the teacher's help, spend the class period looking for a critical point in various short stories and developing appropriate thesis statements as a group. 4. If time, the groups will present their stories and theses to the class
Learning activities (step-by-step):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be put into groups of 4 or 5 2. Each group will be given a short story 3. Each group will be tasked with reading the short story and identifying a critical point within that story and developing an appropriate thesis statement for a literary analysis.
Checking for understanding: (formative assessment)	The teacher will be working with each group throughout this process, making students justify their choices and helping them see the implications thereof. This scaffolding will be the check for understanding.
Guided practice/extension:	Students will be asked to identify and defend a critical point from a favorite narrative of theirs, be it film, novel, or short story.
<u>At the end of the lesson</u> , how will what was learned be summarized for the class?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class presentations. • Instructor-directed recap (verbal)
<u>Post-lesson</u> reflections and ideas for next steps:	TBA

EXAMPLE ESSAY

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ENG 203

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Looking for Revenge in all the Wrong Casks

The great revenge stories make the audience sympathize with the protagonist; we like to feel the rage. In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, we want to see Dantes wreak vengeance on Mondego because the jealous villain had Dantes locked in prison, told his family that Dantes was dead, and then married Dantes' fiancé. Similarly, in *The Punisher*, the crime lord Howard Saint massacres Frank Castle's entire family after Castle reluctantly killed Saint's criminal son in self-defense. Because of Saint's atrocity, we feel no qualms about watching Castle destroy Saint's life piece by piece in sweet vengeance. This feeling is decidedly absent in Edgar Allen Poe's revenge story, *The Cask of Amontilado*.

Believing that Fortunato has wronged him, Montresor, the narrator, tempts Fortunato, a lover of fine wine, into the Montresor catacombs with the promise of a cask of Amontilado so that he may exact his revenge. Montresor continues to offer Fortunato chances to turn back, but Fortunato insists on going on, thus making him a willing participant in his own demise and increasing Montresor's pleasure. They eventually come to the catacombs' end where Montresor chains Fortunato to a wall and seals the entrance with brick, leaving Fortunato to rot undisturbed for fifty years. But a closer reading of the story reveals that it is missing a crucial component.

What separates this tale from other revenge sagas is a lack of relatable motivation for seeking vengeance, which makes readers question the justness (if revenge can ever be just) of Montresor's actions. The first sentence of the tale is Montresor's declaration for vengeance: "The

thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge” (332). But this sentence and the remainder of the tale are missing a crucial element: evidence or description of Fortunato’s “insult” against Montresor. By the end of the story, the reader questions what Fortunato did to deserve such a cruel death. If anything, his insult cannot have been anything too severe as Fortunato seems rather cordial when speaking to Montresor; one would expect there to be more tension between two people if one had done the other a harm meritorious of murder. Even at his end, Fortunato does not plea with apology; instead, he tries to act like (or convince himself) it’s all a joke: “Ha! ha! ha!—he! he!—a very good joke indeed—an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo” (338). Without proper explanation of the insult, the audience cannot sympathize with Montresor’s bloody vendetta.

Later in this supposed revenge story, Poe paints an ambiguous scene involving Montresor’s family crest, which illustrates for readers the possible relationship between Montresor and his victim. Montresor describes the crest to Fortunato as “[a] huge human foot d’or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are embedded in the heel” (335). The motto accompanying the crest reads “*Nemo me impune lacessit*,” meaning no one attacks me with impunity (335). But, just as Poe does not enlighten the audience about the nature of Fortunato’s offense, he also fails to identify the “me” of the motto as the snake or the foot, as both may be fatally injured. One can liken the image of the crest to the conundrum of the chicken and the egg: did the snake bite the foot and merit the foot’s wrath, or did the foot (perhaps unwittingly) step upon the viper, which struck its fangs into the foot in response. The latter interpretation fits with the lack of motive for revenge described above. In this model, Montresor is the avenging viper and Fortunato is the foot. Fortunato may very well have offended

Montresor, perhaps accidentally, but one gets the idea that he does not deserve the morbid entombment that awaits him at the end of the story.

Perhaps by leaving the audience free of the burden that would be proper motivation for revenge, Poe is commenting on the folly of revenge. He notes that this event occurs “during the supreme madness of the carnival season” (332). While this denotatively refers to the revelry consuming the town, it also hints at the possible insanity of Montresor’s plan.

Though the execution and morbidity of the revenge are twisted enough to be an enjoyable Poe story, there is more to the darkness here than simple revenge. By not offering evidence of the “insult” for which Montresor seeks vengeance, Poe crafts a morally ambiguous protagonist—one who may possibly be a criminal. It is a warning for those who may feel the need to repay an evil for an evil: revenge is a slippery slope to madness.

Works Cited

Poe, Edgar Allen. “The Cask of Amontillado.” *Masterpieces of Mystery by Edgar Allen Poe*.

New York: Books Inc, 1936. 332-38. Print.