

10.4.1

Lesson 4

Introduction

In this lesson, students complete their reading and analysis of E. B. White’s “Death of a Pig.” Students consider the cumulative impact of words and phrases on meaning and tone in the final section of the essay (from “He died twenty-four hours later, or it might have been forty-eight” to “on flagless memorial days of our own choosing”)—in which the pig dies and is buried—analyzing differences in tone between two key paragraphs. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: How do White’s specific word choices in section 4 refine the tone of “Death of a Pig”?

For homework, students reflect on their understanding of personal narrative essays, and how White achieves beauty and meaning in this essay.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RI.9-10.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).
Addressed Standard(s)	
L.9-10.4.a	Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 9–10 reading and content</i> , choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
L.9-10.5.a	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.

Assessment

Assessment(s)
<p>Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson. Students respond to the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do White's specific word choices in section 4 refine the tone of "Death of a Pig"?
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the tone of section 4 (e.g., section 4 of "Death of a Pig" has a tragic tone). Identify specific word choices that refine that tone (e.g., White's choices to describe his own state as being one of "penitence and grief" (section 4, paragraph 6) refines the mournful tone by showing that the author feels both responsible and very sad about what happened to the pig).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dispatch (v.) – to dispose of a task rapidly or efficiently bereavement (n.) – the state of being sad because a family member or friend has recently died post mortem (n.) – an examination of a dead body to find out the cause of death; autopsy ghoul (n.) – a legendary evil being that robs graves and eats dead bodies feigning (v.) – giving false appearance of; pretending to feel something unerringly (adv.) – making no errors
Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> imminence (n.) – quality or state of happening very soon penitence (n.) – a feeling of deep sadness because you have done something wrong
Additional vocabulary to support English Language Learners (to provide directly)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> furrow (n.) – a long and narrow cut in the ground* thicket (n.) – a group of bushes or small trees that grow close together* earthworm (n.) – a long, thin animal that has a soft body with no legs or bones and that often lives in the ground* bedfellow (n.) – a person or thing that is associated or connected with another

- garnish (n.) – something (such as small pieces of fruit, herbs, etc.) that is put on food as decoration
- undertaker (n.) – a person whose job is to arrange and manage funerals
- wreath (n.) – an arrangement of leaves or flowers in the shape of a circle that is used for decoration*
- pallbearer (n.) – a person who helps to carry the coffin at a funeral*
- memorial days (n.) – national holidays honoring members of armed forces who died in wars

 *Consider providing students with visual aid to support understanding of these definitions.

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: RI.9-10.4, L.9-10.4.a, L.9-10.5.a • Text: “Death of a Pig” by E. B. White, section 4 	
Learning Sequence: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda 2. Homework Accountability 3. Reading and Discussion 4. Quick Write 5. Closing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5% 2. 10% 3. 65% 4. 15% 5. 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 10.4.1 Lesson 1)

Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
no symbol	Plain text indicates teacher action.
	Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.

	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
▶	Indicates student action(s).
💬	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
❗	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

5%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and the assessed standard for this lesson: RI.9-10.4. In this lesson, students complete their reading and analysis of “Death of a Pig” considering the cumulative impact of words and phrases on meaning and tone in the final section of the essay.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

10%

Instruct students to talk in pairs about their answers to the homework question prompts.

What is the “classic outline of the tragedy” according to E. B. White?

- 💬 According to White the “classic outline of the tragedy” is where a pig is bought, raised, and slaughtered according to “an antique pattern” in a “familiar scheme” (section 1, paragraph 2). The death of the pig is the tragedy, but it is a familiar and known tragedy.

What is the “classic outline” of tragedy in literature? Conduct a brief search into the definition and description of “tragedy” in literature.

- 💬 A “tragedy” in literature broadly refers to a sad or unfortunate story in which a series of terrible events lead to the downfall of the (tragic) hero. Tragedies often take the form of drama, but may also take the form of poetry or prose.
- ❗ Students will continue to build their understanding of “tragedy” in the following unit of this module as they read and analyze Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

Activity 3: Reading and Discussion

65%

Instruct students to form pairs to read section 4 of “Death of a Pig” (from “He died twenty-four hours later, or it might have been forty-eight” through “on flagless memorial days of our own choosing”). Post or project the following questions below for student pairs to discuss.

- ① Students have listened to a masterful reading of the full text. However, if necessary to support comprehension and fluency, consider having students listen to a masterful reading of the excerpt for the lesson.

Instruct student pairs to reread section 4, paragraphs 1 and 2 of “Death of a Pig” (from “He died twenty-four hours later, or it might have been forty-eight” through “so I ate breakfast slowly”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the following definition: *furrow* means “a long and narrow cut in the ground.”

- ▶ Students write their definition of *furrow* on their copy of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

What words and phrases does White use to describe the passage of time in section 4, paragraph 1?

- ☞ The author says that time is like a “blur,” that it could have been “twenty-four hours later, or it might have been forty-eight,” that he might have “lost or picked up a day” in his retelling of this story.

What is the cumulative effect of these words and phrases?

- ☞ The cumulative effect is one of uncertainty. The author does not know if he might have “lost or picked up a day,” and he is not sure if it was one day or two days before the pig died. The author is uncertain of exactly how much time has passed, and therefore so is the reader.

How do these descriptions of the passage of time refine your understanding of a central idea of the text?

- ☞ These descriptions reinforce the grief of the author, as well as the uncertainty and insecurity he is feeling about life. The central idea of mortality, or the contemplation of mortality, is supported by White’s manipulation of time in the essay, and his seeming inability to remember how much time has passed.

What words and phrases does White use to describe the pig’s death?

- ☞ Student responses may include:
- “he lay indoors half buried in sawdust” (section 4, paragraph 1)
 - “he lacked the strength” (section 4, paragraph 1)
 - “his face had a mild look” (section 4, paragraph 2)
 - “I think he had suffered a good deal” (section 4, paragraph 2)

What might the description of the pig’s death reveal about White?

Student responses may include:

- White describes the pig's death as a struggle. The pig "lacked the strength" (section 4, paragraph 1) to do even simple things, and drank very little water. The pig's expression at his death was not one of "deep peace nor of deep suffering" (section 4, paragraph 2), but White still thinks that the pig "suffered a good deal" (section 4, paragraph 2).
- This reveals White's own internal struggle, since there is no way to know if the pig did suffer as much as White believes that he did.

How does White connect the idea of "cry[ing] internally" (section 4, paragraph 2) to the vet's diagnosis of "deep hemorrhagic infarcts" (section 3, paragraph 9)? What is the effect of this connection?

White connects the idea back to the sickness that killed the pig—he calls the crying "deep hemorrhagic intears" (section 4, paragraph 2), which recalls the name of the sickness that repeated in section 3 "deep hemorrhagic infarcts" (section 3, paragraph 9). This reference recalls the connection that has formed between the author and the pig through this essay.

① Consider drawing students' attention to the application of L.9-10.5.a through the process of understanding word relationships in context.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to reread section 4, paragraphs 3 and 4 of "Death of a Pig" (from "It was a Saturday morning. The thicket in which I found the gravediggers" through "resting squarely on the cause of his own undoing") and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the following definitions: *dispatch* means "to dispose of a task rapidly or efficiently"; *bereavement* means "the state of being sad because a family member or friend has recently died"; and *post mortem* means "an examination of a dead body to find out the cause of death; autopsy."

- ▶ Students write the definitions for *dispatch*, *bereavement*, and *post mortem* on their copy of the text or in their vocabulary journal.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the following definitions: *thicket* means "a group of bushes or small trees that grow close together"; *earthworm* means "a long, thin animal with no legs or bones that often lives in the ground"; *bedfellow* means "a person or thing that is associated or connected with another"; *garnish* means "something (such as small pieces of fruit, herbs, etc.) that is put on food as decoration"; *undertaker* means "a person whose job is to arrange and manage funerals"; *wreath* means "an arrangement of leaves or flowers in the shape of

a circle that is used for decoration”; and *pallbearer* means “a person who helps to carry the coffin at a funeral.”

- ▶ Students write the definitions of *thicket*, *earthworm*, *bedfellow*, *garnish*, *undertaker*, *wreath*, and *pallbearer* on their copy of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

How does White’s description of the “last scene” in paragraph 3 help you to make meaning of *dismal* and *imminence*?

- 💬 The word *imminence* is being used to describe the likelihood that it is going to rain—the author describes the weather as being “dismal,” and “the sky overcast.” It seems like it is going to rain on the day White is describing, therefore “imminence” must be a way to describe something that is going to happen very soon.

① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L.9-10.4.a through the process of using context to make meaning of a word.

In what ways is the pig’s burial “overwritten”?

- 💬 Student responses may include:
 - The pig’s burial is “overwritten” because it is overly dramatic and overly symbolic. Each detail in the scene symbolizes or reflects an idea the author has developed throughout the essay.
 - The details of the “dismal sky, the shabby woods, the imminence of rain” (section 4, paragraph 3) reflect the sadness White has felt over the loss of the pig and his failure to raise it.
 - The detail of “the worm (legendary bedfellow of the dead)” (section 4, paragraph 3) reflects the idea of mortality and White’s reflections on death.
 - The detail of “the apple (conventional garnish of a pig)” (section 4, paragraph 3) reminds the reader and White that he failed to raise the pig for food.

How does White’s description of the pig’s burial as “overwritten” (section 4, paragraph 3) develop the tone of this section?

- 💬 Student responses may include:
 - The negative adjectives—*lonelier*, *dismal*, *shabby*—develop the mournful tone of this section. They reflect the sadness White is feeling at his loss and failure.
 - The “overwritten” pig’s burial also develops White’s humorous tone. Although White is sad, he is also poking fun at his sadness by showing how overdone, overly dramatic the scene is and he is for noticing it all. The apple that falls into the grave is particularly funny because

an apple is traditionally what people put into a pig's mouth after they roast it. The apple as decoration for the grave is too perfect, too 'over the top', and therefore tragically funny.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with a list of synonyms for *overwritten* to scaffold to this understanding. Synonyms include *exaggerated, too much, overworked, etc.*

What is the cumulative effect of the list that ends section 4, paragraph 3?

- 💬 The cumulative effect of the list is to emphasize the tragedy of the pig's death. All the things in the list are described earlier in this paragraph, and they are all connected with death or dying—an "apple" in a dead pig's mouth, a "worm" that will eat the pig's body after it is buried, the bad weather, and "shabby woods" all combine to create a sad or tragic effect.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students a visual to support their understanding of the reference White makes to a pig with an apple in its mouth.

How does the tone of section 4, paragraph 3 compare to the tone of section 4, paragraph 4?

- 💬 Section 4, paragraph 3 is more poetic and tragic—"overwritten"—the rain looms overhead, an apple falls into the grave, the author feels terrible. Section 4, paragraph 4 is more "businesslike" and things happen "swiftly" with a "directness" that is not present in the previous paragraph.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to reread section 4, paragraphs 5 and 6 of "Death of a Pig" (from "I threw in the first shovelful, and then we worked rapidly" to "on flagless memorial days of our own choosing") and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the following definitions: *ghoul* means "a legendary evil being that robs graves and eats dead bodies"; *feigning* means "giving false appearance of; pretending to feel something"; and *unerringly* means "making no errors."

- ▶ Students write the definitions of *ghoul*, *feigning*, and *unerringly* on their copy of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the following definition: *memorial days* means "national holidays honoring members of armed forces who died in wars."
- ▶ Students write the definition of *memorial days* on their copy of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

What comparison does White make between Fred and the pig? How might this comparison refine the tone of this section?

💬 Student responses may include:

- Fred is “harder to drag” (section 4, paragraph 5) than the pig was, even though he “weighed far less” (section 4, paragraph 5), because Fred is alive and the pig is dead. This highlights the difference between the dog and the pig.
- This description further develops both the tone of tragedy (through the recollection of the pig) and the tone of humor (through the humorous description of the dog who is “feigning unusual stiffness” upon being carried away because he wants to go back to the grave.

How do the phrases “in grief,” “a man who failed to raise his pig,” and “my deviation” (section 4, paragraph 6) help make meaning of *penitence* in this context?

💬 The phrases “in grief,” “a man who failed to raise his pig,” and “my deviation” reveal that *penitence* is referring to some kind of personal responsibility the author feels terrible about, therefore *penitence* must mean some kind of sorrow for doing something wrong or badly.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle to make meaning of *penitence* consider instructing them to return to section 2, paragraph 1 in which White refers to “personal failure.”
- ① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L.9-10.4.a through the process of using context to make meaning of a word.

What words and phrases develop the tone of the final paragraph of “Death of a Pig”?

💬 Student responses may include:

- The tone of the final paragraph is one of grief or mourning: “expressions of sympathy,” “premature expiration of a pig,” “a sorrow,” “in penitence and in grief,” “the mourner,” “in seasons of ... despair” all develop a grieving tone.
- The tone is also reflective, as the author looks back over these events: “I have written this account in penitence,” “I know he and I shall often revisit it,” “in seasons of reflection” develop a reflective tone.
- The tone of this final paragraph has a small amount of the humor that has been developed throughout the essay, since the author references Fred, the dog, as being the guide that can show visitors where the pig’s grave is located.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** It may be helpful for students to annotate for words and phrases that develop the tone.

How does the tone at the end of the essay refine your understanding of a central idea of the text?

💬 Student responses may include:

- Since the closing tone of the essay is reflective, it refines the central idea of imbalance or disorder. The author specifically refers to himself as “a man who failed to raise his pig”—he has “deviat[ed]” from the normal way things are supposed to go, and his reflections on these events serve to underscore the imbalance and uncertainty the author feels about what happened.
- The mournful tone also refines the idea of the relationship between man and nature—expanding from the relationship between one man to the pig to include the whole community “a sorrow in which [the community] feels fully involved,” White has felt this grief throughout the essay, and the final mournful tone expands this idea out into the entire community.

① It may be helpful for students to reference the chart paper from 10.4.1, Lessons 2 and 3 on which they recorded central ideas, evidence, and textual details that shaped and refined those central ideas.

Activity 4: Quick Write**15%**

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

How do White's specific word choices in section 4 refine the tone of "Death of a Pig"?

Instruct students to look at their annotations to find evidence. Ask students to use this lesson's vocabulary wherever possible in their written responses. Remind students to use the Short Response Rubric and Checklist to guide their written responses.

- ▶ Students listen and read the Quick Write prompt.

① Display the prompt for students to see, or provide the prompt in hard copy.

Transition to the independent Quick Write.

- ▶ Students independently answer the prompt using evidence from the text.

💬 See the High Performance Response at the beginning of this lesson.

Activity 5: Closing

5%

Ask students to recall the characteristics and components of a personal narrative essay as discussed in 10.4.1 Lesson 1.

☞ Student responses may include:

- usually autobiographical
- tells a story (usually has the components of a plot: rising action, conflict, resolution, etc.)
- often includes characters, dialogue, and description
- usually focuses on a small moment of great importance in the author's life

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, students should respond briefly in writing to the following questions:

What characteristics and components of a personal essay are present in White's "Death of a Pig"?

How does White achieve beauty and meaning in the context of this personal narrative?

Ask students to use this unit's vocabulary wherever possible in their written responses.

- ▶ Students follow along.

Homework

Respond briefly in writing to the following prompts, in the context of your understanding of a personal narrative essay:

What characteristics and components of a personal essay are present in White's "Death of a Pig"?

How does White achieve beauty and meaning in the context of this personal narrative?

Use this unit's vocabulary wherever possible in your written responses.