

11.4.1 Lesson 9

Introduction

In this lesson, students complete their reading and analysis of "The Red Convertible" from *The Red Convertible* by Louise Erdrich. Students read pages 4-10 (from "It was at least two years before Stephan" to "going and running and going and running and running"), in which Stephan returns from the Vietnam War, and Marty describes the events leading up to the final moments of Stephan's life. Student analysis focuses on how elements in the text impact the development of the relationship between two central characters in this excerpt. Students consider the setting of the river, the dialogue and interactions between the two brothers, and how Erdrich uses the red convertible both literally and symbolically to develop and refine the relationship between the two brothers. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: Choose one or more elements of the text and explain how the element(s) impact(s) Marty and Stephan's relationship in this excerpt.

For homework, students return to the beginning of "The Red Convertible" and write a brief response to the following prompt: How has your understanding of the first paragraph changed or developed through reading and analysis of the whole text? Additionally, students continue their Accountable Independent Reading (AIR).

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Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RL.11-12.3	Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
Addressed Standard(s)	
W.11-12.9.a	<p>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p> <p>a. Apply <i>grades 11-12 Reading standards</i> to literature (e.g., "Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics").</p>
SL.11-12.1.a, c	<p>Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues</i>, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> <p>a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.</p> <p>c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence, ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.</p>
L.11-12.5	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Assessment

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Assessment(s)

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.

- Choose one or more elements of the text and explain how the element(s) impact(s) Marty and Stephan's relationship in this excerpt.

High Performance Response(s)

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A High Performance Response should:

- Choose one or more elements of the text (e.g., setting, how the action is ordered, individual character development, or the symbolic red convertible.)
- Analyze how the chosen element(s) impact(s) Marty and Stephan's relationship in the excerpt. For example:
 - How the action is ordered: The frequent and fast shifts in action in the final scene from Marty's sudden "shaking" of his brother telling him "'Wake up!'" (p. 8) to Stephan "crying ... [b]ut no, he's laughing" (p. 9), creates an unstable or unpredictable interaction between the two brothers. The fast pacing and unpredictable actions create uncertainty about what will happen next. This goes on until Stephan takes his final action and jumps in the river "all of the sudden" ending their relationship (p. 10). Marty's final action of driving the car into the river shows that he has come to the end of possible actions he can take to help his brother.
 - The setting: Marty describes the river as "at its limit, hard, swollen," which parallels Stephan's "white, hard" face and Marty's feeling of "something squeezing inside me and tightening" (p. 8). The "something" is about to "break" or spill over between the two brothers, and this impending "break" or tension is reflected in the setting of the "swollen" river (p. 8). Additionally, the final description of the river seems to imply that Marty's grief regarding his brother will go on, and on, just like the river that continues "going and running and running" (p. 10). The river becomes the final setting of the end of the brothers' relationship.
 - Marty and Stephan's individual character development: When Stephan returns from the war, it is clear that something is very wrong with him and he is hurting himself as a result of this change. Stephan no longer acts as carefree and fun-loving as he was before going to war: "now you couldn't get him to laugh, or when he did it was more the sound of a man choking" (p. 5). Ultimately, Stephan jumps into the river and dies because "[i]t's no use" (p. 8). As a witness to this post-war change in his brother, Marty transforms from a person who watched his brother have fun into a person who tries to be "better than he had been before" (p. 6). Marty finally gives up on helping his brother because Stephan gives up on his life.
 - The red convertible: Marty and Stephan's final conversation about the convertible is both about the car and about the brothers' relationship to each other. Stephan tries to get Marty to have the car "for good" and Marty does not want it (p. 9). Marty wants their carefree relationship, before Stephan left for the war. Stephan's insistence, then anger, emphasizes the car's role in their relationship and demonstrates that Stephan gives up on trying to get better because it "[was] no use" (p. 8). The red convertible, in the end, represents the ways in which the brothers try to care for one another.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- windbreaks (n.) - things (such as a fence or group of trees) that protect an area from the wind
- clinch (v.) - to hold each other closely during a fight
- fancydancer (n.) - a dancer in a fast Native American powwow dance that features jumping and twirling, with participants wearing bright colors and flying feathers and ribbons

Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)

- None.

Additional vocabulary to support English Language Learners (to provide directly)

- tip-top (adj.) - excellent or great
- did a number (idiom) - damaged or harmed someone or something
- whacked (v.) - struck with a smart, resounding blow or blows
- ran the piss right out (idiom) - treated something so badly or used something so much that you destroyed it
- A-1 (adj.) - good or excellent
- down in the dumps (idiom) - feeling very sad
- loner (n.) - a person who is or prefers to be alone, especially one who avoids the company of others
- top (n.) - something that covers the upper part or opening of something (e.g., a convertible); a child's toy that can be made to spin very quickly
- emphasize (v.) - to give special attention to something
- bowls me over (phrasal v.) - hits and pushes down (someone or something) while quickly moving past
- grouse (n.) - a small bird that is often hunted
- whoopee (n.) - merrymaking; boisterous fun
- clutch (n.) - a pedal that is pressed to change gears in a vehicle

Lesson Agenda/Overview

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Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RL.11-12.3, W.11-12.9.a, SL.11-12.1.a, c, L.11-12.5 Text: “The Red Convertible” from <i>The Red Convertible</i> by Louise Erdrich, pages 4-10 	
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. 15% 3. 60% 4. 15% 5. 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the 11.4 Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist (refer to 11.4.1 Lesson 3)
- Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 11.4.1 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%

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Begin by reviewing the agenda and the assessed standard for this lesson: RL.11-12.3. In this lesson, students complete their reading and analysis of “The Red Convertible” with a focus on how elements in the text impact the relationship between the central characters Marty and Stephan.

- Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

15%

Instruct students to take out their responses to the previous lesson’s homework assignment. (Read and annotate pages 4-10 of “The Red Convertible” (from “It was at least two years before Stephan came home again” to “the sound of it going and running and going and running and running”).) Instruct students to form pairs to discuss their responses.

- Student pairs discuss their annotations from the previous lesson’s homework.
- Student annotation may include:
 - Star near:
 - “Stephan was jumpy and mean” (p. 5) and “He ate more slowly and didn’t jump up and down” (p. 6) because these phrases demonstrate Stephan’s evolving behavior and development as a character in the story.
 - The use of parallel structure “‘I know it,’ he says. ‘I know it. I can’t help it’” (p. 8) and repetition in dialogue “‘Ha! Ha!’ he says. ‘Ha! Ha!’” and “I says, ‘Okay no problem! Ha! Ha!’” (p. 9), since it creates a frantic tone in the interaction between the two brothers.
 - “And then there’s only the water, the sound of it going and running and going and running and running,” since this final sentence creates the sense that the emotions of the final scene continue even after the story ends (p. 10).
 - Question mark near:
 - “[M]y mother was afraid if we brought him to a regular hospital they would keep him” (pp. 5-6) since it is unclear what, exactly, is medically happening with Stephan.
 - “‘Whoo I’m on the lovepath! I’m out for loving!’” since it is unclear what, exactly, Stephan means by saying this (p. 9).
 - Exclamation point near:

- “[U]ntil he was eating his own blood mixed in with the food” because this phrase creates the sense that Stephan is eating himself alive, a disturbing and evocative image in the story (p. 5).
 - ““My boots are filling,’ he says” because this phrase connects back to the first paragraph of the story, and implies Stephan’s death by drowning (p. 10).
- This annotation supports students’ engagement with W.11-12.9.a, which addresses the use of textual evidence in writing.
-

Instruct student pairs to discuss their responses to the questions from the previous lesson’s homework assignment. (Respond briefly in writing to the following questions: How does the scene on pages 4-5 impact the character development of Marty and Stephan? How does “that picture” further develop Stephan and Marty’s relationship?)

How does the scene on pages 4-5 impact the character development of Marty and Stephan?

- Student responses should include:
 - This scene impacts the character development of Stephan by showing something is deeply wrong with him now that he is home from the war. He is “eating his own blood” and he does not allow his brother to interrupt his tense and uncomfortable television watching (p. 5). For example, he “rushe[s] from his chair and shove[s] [Marty] out of the way” when Marty tries to intervene (p. 5).
 - This scene impacts the character development of Marty by showing his inability to intervene with what is happening to his brother. He cannot “smash that tube to pieces” because Stephan intervenes (p. 5). Marty watches over his brother, seeing everything that is happening, but he cannot do anything to change Stephan’s new behavior.

How does “that picture” further develop Stephan and Marty’s relationship?

- The picture demonstrates their relationship’s complexity. The picture has some hold on Marty, it “tugs at [him]” but also makes him feel “close to [Stephan]” (p. 7). Marty demonstrates his conflict with the photo, as he “put[s] the picture way back in a closet” but it still appears in his imagination (p. 7). The picture seems to represent “that day” that Stephan jumped into the river, which ends their relationship and does not give Marty any closure (p. 7).

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Activity 3: Reading and Discussion

60%

Instruct students to form small groups. As student groups discuss the final section of “The Red Convertible” (pp. 4-10), students should consider the possibility of multiple responses, listen to diverse perspectives, and respond to their peers’ observations. Instruct students to use the relevant portions of the 11.4 Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist to guide their discussion.

- This discussion is structured with four main discussion prompts. In small groups, students discuss each question in-depth, presenting a variety of text evidence and analysis. The structure of this lesson is meant to increase student independence in text analysis by scaffolding their understanding through collaborative discussion.
- Consider reminding students of their previous work with SL.11-12.1.a, as this discussion requires that students have come to class having read the material and asks them to explicitly draw on evidence from the text to support their discussion.
- Consider reminding students of their previous work with SL.11-12.1.c, as this discussion requires that students pose and respond to questions, and qualify or justify their own points of agreement and disagreement with other students.
- Students may bring up the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder when discussing Stephan’s behavior. If necessary, consider instructing students to research this term to engage in an informed discussion about Stephan’s actions.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posting or projecting the following guiding question to support students in their reading throughout this lesson:

How does Stephan’s behavior after he returns from the war compare to his behavior before he left for the war? What happens to Stephan and Marty’s relationship in the final excerpt of “The Red Convertible”?

Post or project the questions below for students to discuss. Instruct students to continue to annotate the text as they read and discuss.

Instruct student groups to read pages 4-10 of “The Red Convertible” (from “It was at least two years before Stephan” to “going and running and going and running and running”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the following definitions: *windbreaks* means “things (such as a fence or group of trees) that protect an area from the wind,” *clinch* means “to hold each other closely during a fight,” and *fancydancer* means “a dancer in a fast Native American powwow dance that features jumping and twirling, with participants wearing bright colors and flying feathers and ribbons.”

- Students write the definitions of *windbreaks*, *clinch* and *fancydancer* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

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- Students may be familiar with some of these words. Consider asking students to volunteer definitions before providing them to the class.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the following definitions: *tip-top* means “excellent or great,” *did a number* is a phrase that means “damaged or harmed someone or something,” *whacked* means “struck with a smart, resounding blow or blows,” *ran the piss right out* means “treated something so badly or used something so much that you destroyed it,” *A-1* means “good or excellent,” *down in the dumps* is a phrase that means “feeling very sad,” *loner* means “a person who is or prefers to be alone, especially one who avoids the company of others,” *top* means “something that covers the upper part or opening of something (e.g., a convertible)” the first time it appears and “a child’s toy that can be made to spin very quickly” the second time, *emphasize* means “to give special attention to,” *bowls me over* means “hits and pushes down (someone or something) while quickly moving past,” *grouse* means “a small bird that is often hunted,” *whoopie* means “merrymaking; boisterous fun,” and *clutch* means “a pedal that is pressed to change gears in a vehicle.”
 - Students write the definitions of *tip-top*, *did a number*, *whacked*, *ran the piss right out*, *A-1*, *down in the dumps*, *loner*, *top*, *emphasize*, *bowls*, *grouse*, *whoopie*, and *clutch* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider informing students that *tailpipe*, *muffler*, and *carburetor* are all parts of a car, but that their specific functions are not necessary to understand the events of the story.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider instructing students to complete the following annotation before they begin their discussion:

Annotate the text for phrases that describe Stephan’s actions after “[he] came home again” (p. 4).

- Student annotations may include:
 - “Stephan was very different, and I’ll say this, the change was no good” (p. 4)
 - “he was quiet, so quiet, and never comfortable sitting still” (pp. 4-5)
 - “now you couldn’t get him to laugh” (p. 5)
 - “Stephan was jumpy and mean” (p. 5)
 - “it was the kind of stillness that you see in a rabbit when it freezes and before it will bolt” (p. 5)
 - “if he let go at all he would rocket forward and maybe crash right through the set” (p. 5)

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What words and phrases demonstrate Marty's opinion of Stephan's "change" (p. 4)?

- Students responses may include:
 - Marty understands that Stephan has changed because of the war: "You could hardly expect him to change for the better" (p. 4). Marty compares his brother's old behavior like how "he'd always had a joke then" to his current behavior of "now you couldn't get him to laugh" and is concerned with the change in his brother (p. 5). Marty describes Stephan in terms of "a man choking" and "a rabbit when it freezes and before it will bolt"; both are descriptions of discomfort and danger that suggest Marty's concern for his brother (p. 5).
 - Marty feels "sorry [he'd] ever bought" the television set, because of the way that Stephan behaves when he is watching the television (p. 5). Stephan shows he is "not comfortable" and seems to be on the edge of losing control (p. 5). "High speed," "rocket forward," and "crash right through" are all phrases use to describe Stephan's behavior in front of the television (p. 5).
 - In the scene at the river Marty thinks he understands and feels exactly what his brother feels: "I felt something squeezing inside me ... I knew I was not just feeling it myself, I knew I was feeling what Stephan was going through" (p. 8).
 - Marty believes he knows what his brother needs to "wake up," which is to have a car to fix (p. 8). However, "it was obvious" (p. 9) to Stephan what Marty was up to, and it was "no use" (p. 8). Nothing Marty does gets through to Stephan. Marty rejects Stephan's offer to keep the car "for good" because he sees a change in Stephan after fixing the car (p. 9). Marty wants his brother to continue to change for the better, to "wake up" (p. 8).
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider asking the following extension question to further analysis:

How does Marty's use of the direct address "you" impact the meaning and tone of the final scene (p. 9)?

- Student responses may include:
 - The use of direct address "you" asks the reader to be a witness to these events and act as an audience with whom Marty can share and confess what has happened (p. 9). Marty wants the reader to "understand" his actions (p. 9). By using "you," Marty asks the reader to share the burden of his story, which creates a somber or melancholy tone, and demonstrates Marty's loneliness.
 - Marty watches over his brother, seeing everything that is happening, but he cannot do anything to change it. At the end of the text, Marty has developed into a

character full of desperation. Marty's helplessness remains frustrating for him as he strives for "you" the reader, to understand what he is going through (p. 9).

How does the setting of this excerpt relate to the action?

- Student responses may include:
 - The final scene of the excerpt is set at the banks of a river. The trip to reach the river is "beautiful" but the river, by contrast, is "high and full of winter trash" with "dirty snow" on the ground (p. 8). The air is "colder by the river" despite the presence of the sun, and it is described as being "like an old gray scar" (p. 8). The river seems to set the stage for the tragic actions that are about to take place.
 - Marty describes the river as "at its limit, hard, swollen," which parallels Stephan's "white, hard" face and Marty's feeling of something "squeezing inside me and tightening" (p. 8). This action in the story demonstrates a turning point; the action between the two brothers is about to "break" or spill over, and this impending "break" or tension is reflected in the setting of the "swollen" river (p. 8).
 - The final description of the river seems to imply that Marty's grief will go on and on, just like the river that continues "going and running and running" (p. 10).

What is the impact of Marty and Stephan's actions and dialogue in the final scene (pp. 8-10) on the text's meaning?

- Student responses may include:
 - The frequent and fast shifts in action in the final scene from Marty's sudden "shaking" of his brother telling him "'Wake up!'" (p. 8) to Stephan "crying ... [b]ut no, he's laughing" (p. 9), creates an unstable or unpredictable interaction between the two brothers. The fast pacing and unpredictable actions create uncertainty about what will happen next between the two brothers, until Stephan takes his final action and jumps in the river "all of a sudden" (p. 10), ending their relationship. It is unclear exactly what prompts Stephan to suddenly jump into the river, or to start dancing, or to start fighting or laughing or crying. What is clear is that Stephan has experienced a deep change since he returned from the war, as evidenced through his actions and decisions in the text. Stephan's inner pain has been building throughout the text, and culminates in this final scene "like stones [that] break all of the sudden when water boils up inside them" (p. 8). The lack of clarity makes Marty's struggles to get Stephan to "'wake up'" and let go of the inner pain all the more tragic (p. 8).
 - Marty's final action of driving the convertible into the river is the last possible action that he can take. Marty demonstrates through this action that there is nothing left he can do to help his brother. Even though he tried to jump in and

save Stephan (p. 10) and even though he banged up the car to try to get his brother to “wake up” (p. 8), he is ultimately unable to save Stephan.

- Stephan’s decision to jump in the river demonstrates a complicated and surprising turn of events in the story, not only because “he shouts all of a sudden,” but because the delivery of Stephan’s final dialogue is almost casual or light-hearted (p. 10). Marty says that Stephan spoke in “a normal voice” (p. 10) when he says “My boots are filling” (p. 10); Stephan’s delivery of this line of dialogue demonstrates the seriousness of the action he has just taken.

What is the role of the convertible in the development of Marty and Stephan’s relationship?

- Student responses may include:
 - The convertible serves as a way for Marty and Stephan to communicate; their actions and conversation about the convertible represent what they want to say to each other. Marty does not know “what was going to happen to [Stephan]” (p. 5) and he cannot “get him [to the hospital],” (p. 6) but he can take action against the car to help his brother. The description of Marty’s destruction of the car is violent and active; he “whacked,” “bent,” “ripped,” and “threw dirt” at the car (p. 6). These actions “just about hurt” Marty, and show his willingness to take action to help his brother (p. 6).
 - After Marty takes action through the convertible, Stephan communicates with Marty through the convertible as well. Stephan throws himself into repairing the car; he was “out there all day and at night” (p. 6). The repair work also alters Stephan’s behavior, as he is “better than he had been before, but that’s still not saying much” (p. 6). He also “ate more slowly and didn’t jump up and down” and he stops watching so much television (p. 6). Fixing the convertible changes Stephan, though the change is slow, and he is still not as he was before the war when Stephan and Marty were always together.
 - The convertible provides a reason for the brothers to spend time together. Marty “jump[s] at the chance” to spend time with his brother when Stephan suggests that they go “for a spin” (p. 7). It seems for a moment to be a way for the two brothers to return to their former relationship from the past summer.
 - Marty and Stephan’s final conversation about the convertible is about both the car and the brothers’ relationship to each other. Stephan tries to get Marty to keep the car “for good” and Marty does not want it (p. 9). Marty wants the carefree relationship they had before Stephan left for the war. Stephan’s insistence, then anger, emphasizes the car’s role in their relationship and demonstrates that Stephan is giving up on trying to get better because it “[was] no use” for Marty to

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try to help him (p. 8). The red convertible, in the end, represents the ways the brothers try to care for one another.

- Consider drawing students' attention to the application of L.11-12.5 through their analysis of figurative language and symbolism in the text.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Activity 4: Quick Write

15%

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

Choose one or more elements of the text and explain how the element(s) impact(s) Marty and Stephan's relationship in this excerpt.

Instruct students to look at their annotations to find evidence. Instruct 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.
- 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%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to return to the first paragraph of "The Red Convertible" and respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

How has your understanding of the first paragraph changed or developed through reading and analysis of the whole text?

Additionally, instruct students to continue to read their AIR texts through the lens of a focus standard of their choice and prepare for a 3-5 minute discussion of their texts based on that standard.

- Students follow along.

Homework

Return to the first paragraph of “The Red Convertible” and respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

How has your understanding of the first paragraph changed or developed through reading and analysis of the whole text?

Also, continue to read your Accountable Independent Reading through the lens of a focus standard of your choice and prepare for a 3-5 minute discussion of your text based on that standard.

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