

11.4.1 Lesson 2

Introduction

In this lesson, students continue to read and analyze “On the Rainy River” from *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien, pages 44-55 (from “I drove north. It’s a blur now” to “a two-word note that said EMERGENCY FUND. The man knew”). In this excerpt students are introduced to the Tip Top Lodge, where the narrator goes to contemplate leaving the United States to escape the draft. This excerpt also introduces students to a pivotal character in the story, Elroy Berdahl, the proprietor of the Tip Top Lodge. Students pay particular attention to the way interrelated elements contribute to plot development in this excerpt. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: How do two interrelated elements in this excerpt contribute to the development of the plot?

For homework, students read and annotate pages 52-58 of “On The Rainy River.” Students also identify and define unfamiliar vocabulary, as well as respond in writing to two questions about the reading.

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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>
L. 11-12.4.a	<p>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 11-12 reading and content</i>, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <p>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.</p>

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:

- How do two interrelated elements in this excerpt contribute to the development of the plot?

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Determine two interrelated elements in this excerpt (e.g., the setting of the Tip Top Lodge on the Rainy River and the character Elroy).
- Analyze how the interrelated elements contribute to the development of the plot (e.g., The setting of the Tip Top Lodge on the Rainy River relates to the character of Elroy, because together they represent the solitude the narrator needs in order to deal with the turmoil in his mind. Elroy and the setting of the lodge give the narrator the emotional and physical space he needs to make his decision about whether or not he should flee to Canada. O'Brien describes the wilderness, where the lodge is located, as "withdraw[n] into a great permanent stillness" (pp. 46-47), and Elroy as having a "willful, almost ferocious silence" (p. 47). Elroy "offer[s] exactly what [the narrator] needed, without questions, without any words at all" (p. 46), just as the Rainy River, on the edge of Canada, offers him the opportunity to make the choice that will determine "one life from another" (p. 45).).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- cryptic (adj.) - mysterious in meaning; puzzling; ambiguous
- grotesque (adj.) - extremely different from what is expected or usual

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

- reticence (n.) - the state of being reserved, especially with regard to speaking freely; restraint

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

- adrenaline (n.) - a substance that is released in the body of a person who is feeling a strong emotion (such as excitement, fear, or anger) and that causes the heart to beat faster and gives the person more energy
- giddy (adj.) - feeling or showing great happiness and joy
- flimsy (adj.) - easily broken, torn, etc.; not strong or solid
- critical (adj.) - extremely important
- gesture (n.) - something said or done to show a particular feeling or attitude
- ferocious (adj.) - very great or extreme
- hick (n.) - an uneducated person from a small town or the country
- psychic (adj.) - of or relating to the mind
- hauling (v.) - pulling or dragging
- denials (n.) - statements saying that something is not true or real
- insufficient (adj.) - not having or providing enough of what is needed
- pros and cons (n.) - the various arguments in favor of or against a course of action
- irrational (adj.) - not thinking clearly; not able to use good reason or good judgment
- crisis (n.) - a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention
- confronted (v.) - directly questioned the action or authority
- fussed with (v.) - moved or handled something in a nervous or uncertain way
- sermon (n.) - a speech about a moral or religious subject that is usually given by a religious leader
- recitation (n.) - the act of saying or repeating something out loud for an audience
- butchery (n.) - the job of preparing meat for sale
- aroma (n.) - a noticeable and usually pleasant smell
- fond of (adj.) - having a liking for or love of (someone or something)
- crud (n.) - a dirty or greasy substance

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RL.11-12.3, W.11-12.9.a, L.11-12.4.a Text: “On the Rainy River” from <i>The Things They Carried</i> by Tim O’Brien, pages 44-51 	
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 Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 11.4.1 Lesson 1)

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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 assessed standard for this lesson: RL.11-12.3. In this lesson, students are introduced to a pivotal character in the story, Elroy Berdahl. They are also introduced to the Tip Top Lodge, the setting where the narrator goes to contemplate leaving the United States. Students pay particular attention to the way interrelated elements of the story contribute to the development of the plot.

- Students look at the agenda.

Explain to students that the assessment for this lesson focuses on RL.11-12.3, which pertains to an author's choices about the elements of a story and the impact of these choices. Remind students that the elements of a story include plot, character, structure, conflict, setting, and point of view.

- Students were introduced to RL.11-12.3 in 11.1.1 Lesson 2.
- Consider posting the list of elements for future reference in the module, as students will encounter additional RL.11-12.3 assessment prompts in subsequent lessons.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

15%

Instruct students to take out their responses to the previous lesson's homework assignment. (Read and annotate pages 44-51 of "On the Rainy River" (from "I drove north. It's a blur now,

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as it was then” to “a two-word note that said EMERGENCY FUND. The man knew”)). Instruct students to form pairs to discuss their responses.

- Student pairs discuss their annotations from the previous lesson’s homework.
 - Student annotations may include:
 - Star near:
 - “Even after two decades I can close my eyes” because this statement is a repetition of the narrator’s earlier statements about this story being a memory from his past (p. 46).
 - “[B]ut before I could stop myself I was talking about the blood clots and the water gun and how the smell had soaked into my skin” because this is a point in the story where the narrator demonstrates some transparency or reveals some of his vulnerability to Elroy (p. 51).
 - Exclamation point near:
 - “[T]he man saved me” because this is the introduction of a new pivotal character in the story (p. 46).
 - “He took my presence for granted” because while this phrase would normally be seen as negative, it seems in this context that this is comforting to the narrator (p. 47).
 - “The man knew” because this gives the impression that Elroy has been tactical about his treatment of the narrator, both in his sparse conversation and in his actions at the lodge (p. 51).
 - Question mark near “The man’s self-control was amazing. He never pried.” (p. 49)
Does the narrator want Elroy to pry?
 - This annotation supports students’ engagement with W.11-12.9.a, which addresses the use of textual evidence in writing.
-

Instruct student pairs to share and discuss the vocabulary words they identified and defined in the previous lesson’s homework.

- Students may identify the following words: *cryptic, grotesque*.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Students may also identify the following words: *adrenaline, giddy, flimsy, critical, gesture, ferocious, hick, psychic, hauling, denials*,

insufficient, pros and cons, irrational, crisis, confronted, fussed with, sermon, recitation, butchery, aroma, fond of, crud.

- Definitions are provided in the Vocabulary box in this lesson.

Instruct students to talk in pairs about how they applied a focus standard to their Accountable Independent Reading (AIR) texts. Select several students (or student pairs) to explain how they applied a focus standard to their AIR texts.

- Students (or student pairs) discuss and share how they applied a focus standard to their AIR texts from the previous lesson's homework.

Activity 3: Reading and Discussion

60%

Instruct students to stay in their pairs from the previous activity. Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss. Instruct students to continue to annotate the text as they read and discuss.

- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posting or projecting the following guiding question to support students in their reading throughout the lesson:

How do the setting of the Tip Top Lodge and the character of Elroy contribute to the development of the story's plot?

Instruct student pairs to reread pages 44-48 of "On the Rainy River" (from "I drove north. It's a blur now" to "it seemed so grotesque and terrible and sad") and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

How does the description of the "dr[i]ve north" (p. 44) further develop the narrator's character?

- Student responses may include:
 - The description of the "dr[i]ve north" suggests the narrator is unstable or confused during this time in his life (p. 44). The narrator describes the drive as a "blur" and only "remember[s] ... velocity and the feel of a steering wheel in [his] hands" (p. 44). "[R]iding on adrenaline," he feels "giddy" and excited, yet aware that he would not have a "happy conclusion" to his adventure (p. 44).
 - During the narrator's "dr[i]ve north" (p. 44), he has "no plan" (p. 45) and acknowledges his actions are "mindless" (p. 44) but drives because "it was all [he] could think of to do" (p. 44). This description further portrays the narrator as

having an impulsive and irrational response to the fear about his “moral split” (p. 42).

How does the description of the Tip Top Lodge and its surroundings further develop the plot of the story?

- The description of the Tip Top Lodge and its surroundings signal a shift in the story. The lodge sits “on a peninsula that jutted northward into the Rainy River,” which “separated one life from another” (p. 45). This setting is a place where the narrator can actually see both sides of his “moral split” (p. 42): decide whether he will flee to Canada and face the judgment of his community and family, or go to a war with which he morally disagrees and “hate[s]” (p. 38).
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing the following question to support student understanding in the previous question sequence.

How does the Rainy River “separate[] one life from another” (p. 45) for the narrator?

- The Rainy River “separates Minnesota from Canada,” which is another way of saying that the Rainy River separates the narrator’s real life from his imagined life (p. 45). The narrator’s real life in Minnesota requires his participation in the Vietnam War, whereas his potential or imagined life in Canada does not.

How is Elroy introduced? What does the way Elroy is introduced suggest about his role in the story?

- Student responses should include:
 - The narrator introduces Elroy as “[t]he man who opened the door” of the Tip Top Lodge, and “the hero of [the narrator’s] life” (p. 45).
 - This introduction signals to the reader that this character will play a pivotal role in the story.

How does the setting of the Tip Top Lodge compare with the narrator’s hometown?

- The Tip Top Lodge stands unoccupied, except for the narrator and Elroy. “Tourist season was over” the narrator explains, “and there were no boats on the river” (p. 46). The narrator depicts a sense of quiet associated with the Tip Top Lodge when he states, “the wilderness seemed to withdraw into a great permanent stillness” (pp. 46-47). These descriptions offer a quiet contrast to the gore of the meat-packing plant and the disapproval the narrator perceives in his hometown. The setting of the Tip Top Lodge offers a quiet physical and mental space for the narrator to confront his decision.

- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider sharing with students that the phrase “tourist season” refers to a time of year when tourists (or people) are numerous and frequent in a given location.

How does Elroy’s behavior over the “six days” affect the narrator?

- Student responses may include:
 - The narrator describes Elroy’s “willful, almost ferocious silence,” and that Elroy “had a way of compressing large thoughts into small, cryptic packets of language” (p. 47). Elroy’s behavior provides the narrator with the neutral environment he needs to think about the decision before him, and ensures that he does not say the “wrong” or “right word” to cause the “wired and jittery” narrator to “disappear[]” (pp. 47-48).
 - Elroy “knew [the narrator] couldn’t talk about it” (p. 47) and offers the narrator “exactly what [he] needed” (p. 46), “never ask[ing]” (p. 47) the questions that most people would ask in a similar situation.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to reread pages 48-51 of “On the Rainy River” (from “I’m not sure how I made it through those six days” to “a two-word note that said EMERGENCY FUND. The man knew”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

What relationship develops between Elroy and the narrator?

- Elroy acts as a neutral, non-judgmental witness or adult figure observing the narrator’s turmoil or despair during the “six days” (p. 48). Elroy does not shame him and does not spark “lies or denials” (p. 49), unlike the “people sitting around a table down at the old Gobbler Café on Main Street” (p. 43) with whom the narrator might interact with back home.

Based on the narrator’s description of Elroy on page 49, what might the word “reticence” mean?

- The narrator describes Elroy as having “amazing” “self-control” in not “pr[ying]” about the narrator’s problem, and that his choice in not asking any questions relates to his living in a part of the country where “privacy still held value” (p. 49). Based on these explanations, “reticence” could have to do with a person being reserved and not speaking freely.

- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle to define *reticence*, consider providing the following definition: *reticence* means “the state of being reserved, especially with regard to speaking freely; restraint.”
 - Students write the definition of *reticence* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L.11-12.4.a through the process of using context to make meaning of a word.

How does the phrase “[i]ntellect had come up against emotion” (p. 49) relate to the narrator’s conflict?

- This phrase demonstrates the “moral split” (p. 42) the narrator experiences between his convictions, or his intellect, and shame, or his emotion. His “conscience [tells him] to run,” but “[h]ot, stupid shame” and the fear of “people ... think[ing] badly of [him]” make him stay. In considering his flight to Canada, he further states he is “ashamed to be doing the right thing” (p. 49).

How does the interaction on pages 50-51 between Elroy and the narrator further develop Elroy’s character?

- The interaction develops Elroy’s character because it shows that Elroy cares about the narrator and his situation. Elroy demonstrates his determination to help the narrator when he states “[w]e forgot wages,” and insists on paying the narrator generously for his work around the Tip Top Lodge (p. 50). And when the narrator refuses the money, Elroy leaves it with a note that reads “EMERGENCY FUND” (p. 51). With this action, Elroy acknowledges the narrator faces “crisis” and wants to help him without confrontation or opinions (p. 49).

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:

How do two interrelated elements in this excerpt contribute to the development of the plot?

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.

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- Display the prompt for students to see, or provide the prompt in hard copy.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider reminding students to reference the posted list of story elements.

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 read and annotate pages 52-58 of “On the Rainy River” (from “Looking back after twenty years, I sometimes wonder” to “I was a coward. I went to the war”). Direct students to box any unfamiliar words from pages 52-58 and look up their definitions. Instruct them to choose the definition that makes the most sense in context, and write a brief definition above or near the word in the text. Additionally, after completing reading and annotation, instruct students to respond briefly in writing to 2 of the 3 following prompts of their choice:

What is the effect of the narrator addressing the reader in this excerpt?

Why has the narrator never shared his story before?

What is Elroy’s role in this excerpt?

- Students follow along.

Homework

Read and annotate pages 52-58 of “On the Rainy River” (from “Looking back after twenty years, I sometimes wonder” to “I was a coward. I went to the war”). Box any unfamiliar words from pages 52-58 and look up their definitions. Choose the definition that makes the most sense in context, and write a brief definition above or near the word in the text.

After completing reading and annotation, respond briefly in writing to 2 of the 3 following prompts of your choice:

What is the effect of the narrator addressing the reader in this excerpt?

Why has the narrator never shared his story before?

What is Elroy’s role in this excerpt?

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