

Yale 2017 PIER Summer Institute: Africa and the World

Tram 83: A New Critical and Post-Colonial / Neo-Colonial Approach

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School: Engineering and Science University Magnet School

Subject Area(s): AP Literature and Composition

Grade Level(s): 12

Time Allotment: 5 90-minutes class periods

Unit Description: *Include- why is this important for students to know?*

This unit will explore Fiston Mwanza Mujila's novel *Tram 83*, balancing two approaches that exist in a state of tension: looking at the work art with form and content that work together in interesting ways to speak to a meaningful human experience, and considering the work as an artifact of African literature that can teach us about dynamics of power in a post-colonial and neo-colonial world. Students will learn to appreciate reading a text for multiple forms of value and applying a variety of readings, evaluating them for usefulness in creating worthwhile interpretations. By the end of the unit, students will have learned something about the beauty of Mujila's novel as well as the power dynamics of the novel's context.

Learning Context: *How does this lesson/unit fit within the context of the larger unit or other units?*

In AP Lit students read a variety of works from many different contexts, but not many from Africa. This is the students' first novel written by an African author since reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in earlier grades. This unit both adds to their familiarity with African texts while speaking against the universal conclusions about African culture and literature students tend to draw after reading Achebe's work.

Compelling Question(s): *What question(s) will guide student inquiry during the lesson/unit?*

What is the aesthetic object or goal of *Tram 83*?

Which point of view has a stronger claim on this text: post-colonialism or neo-colonialism?

Content Standards: *What standards are addressed through the teaching of this lesson/unit?*

From the "AP Literature and Composition Course Description:"

- The pieces chosen invite and reward rereading and do not, like ephemeral works in such popular genres as detective or romance fiction, yield all (or nearly all) of their pleasures of thought and feeling the first time through.
- In the course, they read deliberately and thoroughly, taking time to understand a work's

complexity, to absorb its richness of meaning, and to analyze how that meaning is embodied in literary form.

- Students reflect on the social and historical values it reflects and embodies. Careful attention to both textual detail and historical context provides a foundation for interpretation, whatever critical perspectives are brought to bear on the literary works studied.
- Close reading [that] involves the following elements: the experience of literature, the interpretation of literature and the evaluation of literature.
- The writing that students produce in the course reinforces their reading. Since reading and writing stimulate and support one another, they are taught together in order to underscore both their common and their distinctive elements.
- The development of interpretive skills as students learn to write and read with increasing complexity and sophistication.

Unit Objectives/Learning Intentions:

Students will learn how to read a text with an eye both for aesthetic value and cultural analysis. Students will apply principles of narrative analysis to discover how a novel is constructed, how it develops, and how it works together as an aesthetic whole. Students will practice observing and suspending their mythological preconceptions about Africa while at the same time drawing inferences about and appreciating the culture of Lubumbashi through their reading.

Unit Vocabulary:

Content Vocabulary	Skill/Process Vocabulary
Narrative Novel Exposition Conflict Protagonist Climax Resolution Point of View	Analyze Interpret Close Reading Recursive Revision Feedback Aesthetics Indicate Suggest

Supporting Questions: *These questions are intended to contribute knowledge and insights to the inquiry behind the compelling question. These questions should provide students with the opportunity to explore content essential to advance the inquiry. Supporting questions should also serve to support development of formative assessment tasks (progress monitoring) and teacher or student selection of resources/teaching materials.*

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
What does it mean to say <i>Tram 83</i> is an “African” novel?	What preconceptions about “Africa” do we bring to this text as we read it?	Can we appreciate a text’s aesthetics without engaging in a political reading? And likewise,

		does a political reading destroy or prohibit an appreciation of the text as a work of art?
Formative Assessment	Formative Assessment	Formative Assessment
Reflective writing with subsequent discussion: What does the word “Africa” mean to you?”	List African texts read; Discuss ideas and myths they hold or have observed about Africa as a continent.	Discussion on critical lenses; practice multiple readings of a political poem or photograph.
Materials/Resources	Materials/Resources	Materials/Resources
The novel text; Reflective writing journal, where students consider this question repeatedly as they read	Collect famous photographs of life in Africa to review during discussion	Variety of professional reviews of <i>Tram 83</i> , and collect political poems, songs, and rap

Summative Assessment/Performance Task:

Students will write a critical review of *Tram 83*. This review will situate the novel in its cultural and historical context, but the majority of the writing should explain how the novel works and what it aims to accomplish as a work of art. This paper will be submitted at the end of the unit, but beforehand students will workshop their work with an aim both to improve their writing and to see other perspectives of the text. Ideally, students synthesize their ideas with those of them to create a comprehensive review of the novel’s value.

Lesson Activities:

- Opening Activity: Narrative Elements
 - Discuss the question, “What is a story?”
 - Supplemental questions are, “What makes a story a story?” “Can stories be non-stories?”
 - Take a concrete focus, and show that a story can be defined by its parts: “A story is a text that has setting, character, conflict, plot, and a story-teller.”
 - List the elements on the board, and ask students to define them
 - When they define “conflict,” watch for them to use “vs.” This is easy but reductive. Ask them to consider conflict as the interaction of opposing forces. Ask them how they find conflict in the story – it’s often “look for the problem,” or “find the protagonist and the antagonist.” Again, these are both reductive.
 - Narrative Practice:
 - Tell students that they can always find the conflict in a story by finding the protagonist (main character), figuring out what motivates them, and then discovering where there is resistance to this motivation.
 - Place the students in groups of 3-4. Give them the task of constructing a short, but complete story. It must have all the elements discussed. Most importantly, it must have a protagonist who wants something and is having trouble getting it. Otherwise, it can be about anything as long as it isn’t joking about people in the room.

- Groups exchange stories, and they must make a succinct statement on the story's conflict. *Even though we just discussed it, they will still most likely use "vs" or make a statement of a problem or condition.* When students share their conflict answers, insist that they state them in terms of protagonist-motivation-resistance. For instance:
 - Student: "The conflict is a bum beating up a guy."
 - Teacher: "No, that's an event. What's the conflict?"
 - Student: "Uh. Man versus Man?"
 - Teacher: "That's reductive. It's more than that! Who's the main character?"
 - Student: "The bum?"
 - Teacher: "What does the bum want? In this story or life in general?"
 - Student: "Respect?"
 - Teacher: "OK! What's keeping the bum from getting respect?"
 - Student: "This guy in a suit spits on him after giving him \$100."
 - Teacher: "Right! Can you say all of that in a sentence?"
 - Student: "The conflict is a bum wants to have respect but a rich guy humiliates him."
- This is the sense of conflict students should have before reading *Tram 83*. Within the first few pages they will get a sense of Requiem and Lucien and look for what's interfering in their lives. After this exercise students should begin reading and indicate when the conflict begins and what they think the conflict is.
- Plot, after this, is simply how the conflict plays out. Now they understand this element in terms of conflict and that will give them a firm backbone around which to understand the story.
- Note: Climax is understood now not as the most intense part of the story, but as the point where the protagonist faces the source of their resistance and the conflict will be decided either for or against the protagonist. How the conflict is decided, for better or worse, is understood as the resolution.
- Typical Discussion
 - At any point in the novel, it is good to allow students to discuss their interpretations openly.
 - For the discussion arrange the desks in a complete circle. Ideally, if desks separate from chairs, stack the desks to the side so there are only chairs in the circle. The teacher should not sit in their accustomed place but instead randomly around the circle with the students.
 - Give the students an open, easy question to begin, to gain access to the conversation. For instance, "What was chapter 4 about?" "What does Lucien do in chapter 18?" "So, how are you liking the book?" When they answer, be careful not to answer back, but pause and let another student address the class. If the teacher responds to every student, then the teacher asserts themselves as the dominant figure in the conversation: students will speak looking for approval, others won't speak for fear of not getting approval, and students will listen to the teacher more than each other.
 - Listen to the students, and ask questions that complicate their ideas. Point out contradiction and make the students deal with them. Ask helping questions of students when they struggle to articulate their ideas. Be attentive and make room for quiet students to talk when other louder voices are dominant. Give helpful background knowledge if necessary. Ultimately, help the students discover something new together, as much on their own as possible. Take notes on what they say.

- At the end of the discussion, synthesize their ideas and tell them what you noticed that was interesting or important. This is the time to press issues and become the focal point again. This is also a good time to provide space for reflective writing: shy students will have something to say about the discussion and they want to be heard, so giving them an opportunity to write their ideas to the teacher is valuable to them.
- Workshop
 - Students must bring in 3 copies of a draft of their critical review.
 - Place the students into groups of 4. Students unprepared with 3 copies of a draft cannot participate and should work on writing while the others workshop.
 - Each student gets a copy of the others' work. The workshop process begins where for each paper students:
 - Read the paper silently
 - Taking the perspective of a reader (NOT a teacher – it should be stressed that the students are excellent at reading but do not have the qualification of a teacher to correct papers), make notes on the paper where they were confused, where they saw something important and excellent, where they saw something interesting and would like to know more, or where a subject ended abruptly.
 - If a draft is unfinished, the students should focus on what things the writer could address to fill out or complete the paper.
 - The students, once complete, then ask the writer to explain what they were trying to do and how they think it went. Then the students share what they noticed with that in mind. The writer takes notes on the feedback and then collects the papers and the next paper is reviewed. For accountability, it may be advisable to collect these drafts along with the final copy to review evidence of revision (and preparedness for the workshop).
 - It's often a benefit to the students to have two workshop days close together to help in the writing process. If so the groups should be kept consistent so the readers can follow the changes the writer makes.