

Step It Out, Nancy:

How a ballad illustrates “story grammar” to show students how to read, discuss, analyze, and write about narrative fiction.

a lesson plan by Pamela Bostelmann for LitTunes.com

*Pretty Nancy cried in anguish,
she wept and tore her hair,
She slipped into her father's room
and found a pistol lying there.
On the Sunday came the wedding,
the town folks gathered at noon,
They saw Nancy pull the pistol
and shoot down that wealthy groom.*

Background and rationale:

People worldwide, young and old, enjoy stories. “Story grammar” — the literary terms of plot, climax, resolution, etc. — provides a way for students of all ages and cultures to understand, discuss, analyze, evaluate, and even create narratives, using all four language modalities with ample opportunity to expand instruction into culture, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. The song “Step It Out, Nancy,” with its strong aural and oral dimensions, explicitly demonstrates each element of story grammar.

“**Step It Out, Nancy**” helps my USA students learn and remember the literary elements of character, setting, theme, and plot, including conflict, complications, turning point, and resolution. These are important “comprehension checks” as well as tools for students to use when they discuss and respond to any fiction. When I taught Chinese middle school teachers of English, “Step It Out, Nancy” served several instructional objectives: one in illustrating a particular aspect of American culture, another in discussing literary elements, and a third in demonstrate pre-listening, while-listening, and after-listening methodology.



EDITOR'S NOTE: Although this lesson is especially useful for students of English as a second language (ESL), it can be adapted to fit almost any instructional setting. Students with limited English proficiency (LEP) will benefit from the concepts and activities covered in the lesson. Creative teachers can also find opportunities that will challenge students in English language arts classes at all grade levels.

Approximate time:

From one or two 45-minute class periods to several, depending in part on whether the teacher extends this lesson into reading a short prose narrative. The timing also varies

considerably according to the students' literacy level, specifically how much fiction they have read and discussed. This plan is based on three class periods.

Grades:

I have used the lesson successfully with seventh graders, both English language learners and "regular" students, and also with pre-service and in-service teachers.

Overview:

Students review and learn "story grammar" and literary elements — plot, climax, theme, etc.— by listening to and discussing a ballad and using a plot map to diagram the events.

Student objectives:

Students will learn and use "technical" literary analysis vocabulary to deepen their comprehension, appreciation, and analysis, both written and spoken, of narrative fiction.

Materials:

- overhead projector
- whiteboard or chalkboard
- CD player or iPod with speakers
- handouts including vocabulary, lyrics, questions for "Step It Out, Nancy," and story map.



EDITOR'S NOTE: Links to printer friendly handouts mentioned in this lesson plan are displayed at the bottom of the page.

Preparation and setup:

Ensure the CD player works well, that the volume is adequate, and that you, the teacher, feel confident with the model of player. Have an adequate supply of handouts.

Procedure for instruction, activities:

Day 1 Schema activator

10-30 minutes

- ★ Teacher displays overhead transparency listing various literary terms: character, setting, plot, conflict, complications, turning point, climax, resolution, theme, rising action, falling action.
- ★ Teacher distributes "Story Grammar and Background to the Text" (vocabulary) handout for think, write, pair, share activity designed to evaluate students' prior knowledge of these terms. The activity culminates in a whole class discussion about the meaning of the terms and vocabulary.

Direct Instruction

10-30 minutes, depending on students' background knowledge of USA cultural references

- ★ Preteach and/or brainstorm elements of USA culture as necessary for students' comprehension of the lyrics to "Step It Out, Nancy." Examples: show proximity of Wyoming and Colorado on a USA map, explain "12 good men," etc.
- ★ Teacher then declaims song lyrics with exaggerated prosody to help students catch the rhythm. Students listen.
- ★ Teacher then distributes lyrics and reads them again, with students following along. Students may ask questions, and teacher clarifies any barriers to understanding the story.

Guided practice

10-15 minutes

- ★ Teacher distributes the handout "Comprehension Check Questions." Students write answers to questions, alone, in pairs, or in small groups, as appropriate to the student population and the classroom culture. Teacher circulates, answering questions and clarifying as needed.
- ★ After about 10 minutes, play the song! Again, students are encouraged to join in, either singing or chanting. Continue clarifying as appropriate. Play the song more than once, time permitting, and depending on the students' level of enjoyment.



EDITOR'S NOTE: For classroom listening, teacher Bostelmann recommends the version of the ballad recorded by [Holly Near](#) for her album *Early Warnings*. A rendition of the ballad by the folk group Whistle Stop was available on YouTube when this lesson plan was published.

Day 2 Schema activator and review

10-25 minutes

- ★ Whole class: Review story grammar terms, review lyrics, clarify any questions.
- ★ Use think-write-pair-share to debrief answers to questions.
- ★ Listen to song again to verify answers.

Direct instruction

15-25 minutes

Teacher distributes individual double-sided copies of "Story Map." Using overhead

transparency, teacher builds on prior knowledge by eliciting from students where each story grammar term fits on the map. Students label these terms on their own copy.

Independent practice

10-20 minutes

Students use backside copy of story map handout to map the events in “Step It Out, Nancy:” complications/exposition, rising action, climax, resolution.

Assessment

Whole group debriefing of story map for "Step It Out, Nancy."

Day 3 Schema activator/review

Review story map of “Step It Out, Nancy.” Clarify sequence of incidents/events, which are signaled by words in the text that indicate change of time, of place, of participants, etc.

Extension:

The teacher may choose to end the lesson here, assuming that students now have a stronger grasp of “story grammar.” Alternatively, the teacher may **follow up** or **extend** with a prose narrative text, preferably one with a very clear sequence of events. “Seventh Grade” by Gary Soto, “The Circuit” by Francisco Jimenez, or “The All-American Slurp” by Lensey Namioka have all worked well for reinforcing story grammar and literary elements of a narrative.

Here is an abbreviated lesson plan format for teaching a short story:

Before reading: Pre-teach selected vocabulary, idioms, and cultural references as appropriate to the text and the students. Review literary terms. Distribute new plot map.

During reading: Students mark on their copy of the story where one incident ends and another begins. Students may also highlight signal words that indicate the change from one event to the next.

After reading: Think-write-pair-share to (1) name characters and setting, (2) identify problem/conflict, (3) debrief sequence of events, (4) determine climax/turning point, (5) complete story map of new story. Additional activities, especially writing, may be developed/assigned as appropriate.

Enrichment:

Students engaged in independent reading of a full-length narrative — a novel! — may be given a story map to track the main events of their book.

P.B.

10 / 19 / 09

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Pamela Bostelmann currently teaches English to seventh grade “low-end test scorers” at Helms Middle School, West Contra Costa Unified School District, in San Pablo, California. She has also taught ESL at various Bay Area community colleges; in the Ministry of Justice, Asmara, Eritrea; the University of Burundi, Bujumbura, Burundi; and a summer stint training Chinese English teachers in Nanjing, China. She is currently working at being a kid-whisperer to achieve cooperative and on-task behavior from her seventh graders, all of which may or may not yield higher test scores. To contact Pamela, please e-mail her at evencalmer2@yahoo.com

www.littunes.com

http://www.corndancer.com/tunes/tunes_lp019/lp09_stepout.html