Larry Jarocki, Visalia Unified School District, Visalia, California

This set of lessons is designed for Advancement Placement literature students. It uses four novels—*The Virginian, My Antonia, The Scarlet Letter, Huckleberry Finn*—to study three major elements of the frontier experience—the belief in Manifest Destiny, the developing mythology of the Frontier, the experiences of women and minorities. The goal is to teach students to read both critically and reflectively by carefully considering the impact these old themes and still have on contemporary attitudes and beliefs.
Exploring the American Frontier through Fiction and Non-Fiction Texts from the 19th Century

By Larry Jarocki

Summer Seminar @ Calvin, 2012
Objectives:
1. Explore images and ideas of the American Frontier through novels, paintings, political cartoons, and expository text
2. Improve students’ ability to handle the complex language and syntax of 19th-century text

Major Themes:
1. Manifest Destiny/Imperialism
2. The mythology of the Western Frontier
3. The role of women and minorities
Materials:

1. Novels: *The Virginian, My Antonia, The Scarlet Letter, Huckleberry Finn*
2. Written Texts: Various 19th-century examples of description, exemplification, definition, narration, argument, process, and compare/contrast, including *The Shirley Diaries*, Roosevelt’s cheerleading for expansion and the vanishing West, and inaugural and party platform speeches from the late 1800’s
3. Visual texts: Period political cartoons and the paintings of Remington and Russell
an (finding the meaning/intention behind words and pictures) and
Objectives:

1. Explore existing stereotypes
2. Apply a reading and writing strategy (SOAPSTone) to visual and verbal texts
3. Mimic the structure and tone of a poem while including personally important information
In your group, brainstorm ten adjectives that can be used to describe American Indians.
What's going on in the following picture?

*Ridden Down* by Frederic S. Remington, 1905–6
SOAPSTone – Subject

What is the subject of the piece? How do you know this? How has the subject been selected and presented by the author?
Occasion

What prompted the author to write this piece?
What event led to its publication or development?
Audience

Does the speaker identify an audience? What assumptions can you make about the audience? Think about race, gender, social class, political views.

Are there any words or phrases that are unusual or different? Does the speaker use language that is specific for a unique audience? Where do the author’s allusions come from? Why is the speaker using this type of language?
Purpose

What is the speaker’s purpose?
Why did they write/paint/sing this?
What is the reaction that they want to inspire in the audience?
How do you know?
Speaker

Is there someone identified as the speaker? Can you make some assumptions about this person? How do they represent themselves? How do they want you to feel about them?
Tone

What is the author’s tone?
What is the author’s mood?
What is the author’s point of view?
If they were reading this, what would it sound like?
Let’s SOAPSTone the Remington picture:

Subject
Occasion
Audience
Purpose
Speaker
Tone
How do you do?  
No, I am not Chinese.  
No, not Spanish.  
No, I am American Indian, Native American.

No, not from India.  
No, not Apache  
No, not Navajo.  
No, not Sioux.  
No, we are not extinct.  
Yes, Indian.

Oh?  
So that's where you got those high cheekbones.  
Your great grandmother, huh?  
An Indian Princess, huh?  
Hair down to there?  
Let me guess. Cherokee?

Oh, so you've had an Indian friend?  
That close?

Oh, so you've had an Indian lover?  
That tight?

Oh, so you've had an Indian servant?  
That much?

Yeah, it was awful what you guys did to us.  
It's real decent of you to apologize.  
No, I don't know where you can get peyote.  
No, I don't know where you can get Navajo rugs real cheap.  
No, I didn't make this. I bought it at Bloomingdales.

Thank you. I like your hair too.  
I don't know if anyone knows whether or not Cher is really Indian.  
No, I didn't make it rain tonight.


No, I didn't major in archery.  
Yeah, a lot of us drink too much.  
Some of us can't drink enough.

This ain't no stoic look.  
This is my face.

Sure You Can Ask Me A Personal Question by Diane Burns, 1989
Homework

Think about a particular race/gender/social class/organization to which you belong. What are some of the typical stereotypes associated with that group? How do they make you feel?

Write a poem in a style similar to Burns’, one page minimum, due at the start of our next session.