This set of lesson plans for an advanced placement high school literature class focuses on how American writers, such as James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Willa Cather, and Mark Twain, have incorporated frontier themes into their works. Students are assigned to read one or more works and then prompted to analyze scholarly articles about each work. Guided questions and class discussions provide the assessment pieces.

Scholarly Articles Elaborating the Idea of the Frontier in Four American Novels

Neal K. Nelson AMERICAN FRONTIERS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE NEH Summer 2012 Institute

These lesson plans may be used as summative, collaborative group research assignments after reading one or more of the following American novels: *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (Willa Cather), *The Last of the Mohicans* (James Fenimore Cooper), *Huckleberry Finn* (Mark Twain), and *The Scarlet Letter* (Nathaniel Hawthorne).

The class could be divided into four groups (four articles are cited for each novel). Each group would closely read one of the frontier-oriented articles accessible via JSTOR and answer the related questions below (page references are provided) in order to present their team findings to the entire class. The teacher may choose to modify these questions, to use fewer than four articles, or to supplement with other articles or content. The teacher could strategically place certain students in specified groups to study particular articles to better meet the needs of the class. In combination with other relevant material from this NEH Institute on the American Frontier in Global Perspective, these lessons are designed to cause students to examine literary criticism, to collaborate and publicly reflect on how the idea of the frontier illuminates our understanding of these novels, and to note the impact that the frontier has on American literature, American character, and American identity.

Other titles that may lend themselves to this type of exercise include

- *O Pioneers* (Willa Cather)
- *My Antonia* (Willa Cather)
- *Love Medicine* (Louise Erdrich)
- *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Steinbeck)
- *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (Sarah Orne Jewett)
- *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (Dee Brown)
- *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Harriet Beecher Stowe)
- *Light in August* (William Faulkner)
- *Giants in the Earth* (Ole Rolvaag)
- *Main-Traveled Roads* (Hamlin Garland)
- *Those Days* (Richard Critchfield—family chronicle of North Dakota settlement)
- Short stories by Bret Hart, Jack London
Article 1 Title: “The Genesis of Death Comes for the Archbishop”
Authors: Edward A. Bloom; Lillian D. Bloom
Source: American Literature, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Jan., 1955), pp. 479-506
Publisher: Duke University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2921853

(480) Where was Cather’s novel written?
(483) How many trips did Cather make to New Mexico?
(484) What was the genesis of Eusabio’s character?
(486) Provide four real-life Cather experiences in NM that become scenes in the novel.
(493) Explain how Latour, Vaillant, Martinez Chavez are each representative pioneer types.
(488) Which William Howlett work was Cather’s primary source for the two main characters?
(494) Give four specific examples for each Latour and Vaillant of situations/psychological details borrowed directly from Howlett—and also four other borrowings for minor characters.

Article 2 Title: “In Search of the Archbishop”
Author: Paul Horgan
Publisher: Catholic University of America Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25016750

(413) What were Horgan’s difficulties/obstacles to researching the historical archbishop?
(417) What is the hundred year rule?  How does a historian negotiate such an obstacle?
(419) Where and with whom does Horgan find unexpected assistance?
(421) In what multiple ways does Horgan try to get into the life of frontier Archbishop Lamy?
Article 3 Title: “The Southwest in Literature and Culture: A New Horizon for the English Class”

Author: Kenneth L. Donelson


Publisher: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/813470

(193) Why should we study the literature of the Southwest?

(194) Who were the progenitors of western literature?

(195) The Turner thesis prompted intellectual attention to Southwestern literature. What did Turner say about American intellect and character?

(198) From what factors does the romance of the Southwest arise?

(201) How is ecology important?

(202) Why does Donelson declare this novel to be one of the Southwest “books that defy classification?” Consider his classifications.

(203) What films are set in the Southwest and assist with understanding this setting? What were the top twelve films based on the votes of 250 critics?

Article 4 Title: “Willa Cather’s Novels of the Frontier: A Study in Thematic Symbolism”

Authors: Edward A. Bloom; Lillian D. Bloom

Source: American Literature, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Mar., 1949), pp. 71-93

Publisher: Duke University Press

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2921219

(74) What is the “allegory of the individual’s quest?”

(74) How are the “moral” and the “aesthetic” united?

(75-77) If her characters are on a “spiritual odyssey,” then how is a frontier setting more appropriate?

(81) What is Coleridge’s view of symbolism—and how is it fitting for Cather (especially land)?

(88-89) How can “historical ideal” be a symbol for the frontier spirit?

(93) What is the significance of the degeneracy of a single frontier such as that of the West?
THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS -James Fenimore Cooper (1826)

Article 1 Title: “Savage and Scott-ish Masculinity in The Last of the Mohicans and The Prairie: James Fenimore Cooper and the Diasporic Origins of American Identity”

Author: Juliet Shields

Source: Nineteenth-Century Literature, Vol. 64, No. 2 (September 2009), pp. 137-162

Publisher: University of California Press

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncl.2009.64.2.137

Abstract: This essay reassesses James Fenimore Cooper's literary relationship to Walter Scott by examining the depiction of Scots in The Last of the Mohicans (1826) and The Prairie (1827). Read as companion texts, these novels represent the imperial migrations of Scots as a cause of Native Americans' unfortunate, but for Cooper seemingly inevitable, eradication. They also trace the development of an American identity that incorporates feudal chivalry and savage fortitude and that is formed through cultural appropriation rather than racial mixing. The Last of the Mohicans' Scottish protagonist, Duncan Heyward, learns to survive in the northeastern wilderness by adopting the Mohicans' savage self-control as a complement to his own feudal chivalry; in turn, The Prairie's Paul Hover equips himself for the challenges of westward expansion by adopting both the remnants of this chivalry and the exilic adaptability and colonial striving that Cooper accords to Scots. I suggest that the cultural appropriation through which Heyward and Hover achieve an American identity that incorporates Scottish chivalry and savage self-command offers a model for the literary relationship between Cooper's and Scott's historical romances. The Leatherstocking Tales borrow selectively from the Waverely Novels, rejecting their valorization of feudal chivalry while incorporating their representation of cultural appropriation as a mechanism of teleological social development.

(139) Rather than through racial mixing, how is the American identity formed?

(140) Shields argues that while Scots and Indians are different stages—what are the stages that she identifies for each group?

(140) Using Institute Reading 14 (Gail Bederman), connect the quotation “brutish masculinity to overcivilized effeminacy” to Teddy Roosevelt’s idea that attainment of long term goals can be better served by adopting savagery and abandoning civilized behavior.

(140) How does Shields argue that the Mohican Uncas and his double Scotsman/Southern Duncan Heyward are the best amalgamation of cultural appropriation?
(141) On the American frontier, why have the exiled Scots more opportunity to assimilate into American society than exiled/alienated Native Americans?

(144) A mongrel of mixed blood, Magua is the representative of unrefined savagery; however, Uncas has the capacity for sympathy necessary for what?

(147) For example, Magua uses which women as revenge tools against Munro?

(148) Which character is the representative of overcivilized effeminacy?

(151) Why is Uncas unsuccessful when his double Duncan is successful at evolving an American identity that unites Scottish chivalry with savage Indian prudence?

(153) How do Cooper and Roosevelt feel about miscegenation?

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Article 2 Title: “Ethnocentric Manifestations in Cooper's Pioneers and The Last of the Mohicans”

Author: Chester H. Mills


Publisher(s): Sage Publications, Inc.

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784199

(437) What is the author’s argument about race, stereotyping, and a youthful readership?

(438) Rather than innocent adventure stories, what insidious themes does Mills see in the Leatherstocking Tales?

(439-441) What examples are provided of racism through the character descriptions?

(443) In which setting can the Indian find equality?

(443) Why/how do Chingachgook and Natty Bumppo find equality in this setting?

(447) What fate is determined for Cora due to racial stereotyping? Explain.

(448) What “decent human rapport between the members of the races” does Mills imply?
Article 3 Title: “American Usage of the Word ‘Frontier’ from Colonial Times to Frederick Jackson Turner”

Author: John T. Juricek


Publisher: American Philosophical Society

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/985999

(10) What is Turner’s definition?

(11) What are some obsolete definitions?

(14) What was the “American” meaning of the word “frontier” until the early nineteenth century?

(18) What is problematic about Turner’s definition of “frontier?”

(23) Which “rare” definitions of “frontier” does the author argue that Cooper uses in the novel?

(23) Provide another example of the transitional usage of “frontier” term circa 1830.

(33) How much did Turner understand early American interpretations of the term?

(33) How does (doesn’t) Turner as nationalist historian give an “exceptional” view of the American frontier?

Article 4 Title: “Fenimore Cooper's Frontier Comforts”

Author: Robert LAWSON-PEEBLES


Publisher: Editions Belin

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20872196

(247-249, 256) How is ecology involved when the article author borrows a definition of “history” to argue that Cooper has a dialog with the present?

(250) How does Cooper show the frontier confrontation between culture and nature?

(254) What threats to domesticity are found in the frontier?

(255) How is the frontier conducive to war?

(256) How does the frontier nature relay and relate to human morality and an American character?
Abstract: The contemporary American city is often represented as a frontier. From the vast literature on the imaginal place, the frontier, three themes are addressed that reveal the power of the imaginal in making and subverting places. First, the frontier was invented rather than discovered, and second, it is the landscape for sanctioned violence. The third theme is the reminder that the space on which the frontier is enacted, whether the wild West or urban America, is and always has been someone's home. It is this masked aspect, frontier as home, that offers a standpoint of resistance and hope for our cities.

(210) What does the author argue about the frontier as invented versus discovered?

(211) Ironically, who created or imagined the frontier?

(212) How can “city” be viewed as frontier?

(213) What national purposes are served by the traditions of the frontier?

(214) What constitutes a frontier hero?

(214) When does Huck Finn argue that it is time to “light out for the territory?”

(214) What did Frederick Jackson Turner claim was the center of American history? Explain.

(215-216) How/why does violence get sanctioned on the frontier?

(222) How does Schneekloth argue that the frontier in HUCKLEBERRY FINN is adolescent and violent?
Article 2 Title: “Frontier Humor in Huckleberry Finn and Carvalho's O Coronel e o Lobisomem”

Author: Bobby J. Chamberlain

Source: Comparative Literature Studies, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer, 1984), pp. 201-216

Publisher: Penn State University Press

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40246458

(201) What is frontier humor?

(203) Give examples via dialect.

(204) Give examples via deception.

(205-206) Give examples via naivete and superstition.

(206) Provide trickster examples.

(207) What are examples of bawdy frontier humor?

Article 3 Title: “Getting Uncivilised: Huckleberry Finn as Moral Experience”

Author: A. Robert Lee

Source: Atlantis, Vol. 6, No. 1/2 (junio-noviembre 1984), pp. 29-43

Publisher: AEDEAN: Asociación española de estudios anglo-americanos

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41054501

(29) Lee argues this novel is on the literary frontier between which movements?

Name authors from each literary movement.

(30) What values are acquired during the river journey?

(31) How is “civilization” portrayed? Contrast with “frontier”/“territory.”

(32) What separates civilized from uncivilized?

(33) Who constructs the moral frontier values—and how?

(37) How are conscience and morality facilitated by Huck’s remote viewing of “civilization?”

(39) How can a moral theme be relayed while keeping the “rhetoric free of intrusive moralizing?”

(43) Explain how Huck’s “uncivilized inward space of his own Self” can simultaneously be his civilization—the morality lying within.
(67) How does Zolbrod define and date “multiculturalism?”

(68-72) Explain how W. Matthews is a “frontier historian” of multiculturalism.

(74) Provide five literary parallels to the Mountain Chant narrative studied by Matthews—and be specific with HUCKLEBERRY FINN.

(75-76) How do the meters of each of the following reflect the frontier experiences within each?

THE ODYSSEY, BEOWULF, SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT, PARADISE LOST

(78-80) On what literary frontier did W. Matthews stand?
THE SCARLET LETTER — Nathaniel Hawthorne (1850)

Article 1 Title: “Scarlet A Minus”

Author: Frederic I. Carpenter

Source: The English Journal, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Jan., 1944), pp. 7-14

Publisher: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/807218

(7) What was the 19th century American “frontier” answer—and to what eternal problem?

(8) How does the archetypal sin in SL symbolize the failure of the American Dream?

(10) Where do the Romantics find the evil and tragedy in this frontier work?

(11) What is the Transcendentalist view?

(11-12) How do these different understandings and experiences of morality preclude Dimmedale’s fleeing to the western frontier with Hester Prynne?

Article 2 Title: “The Decay of the Provinces: A Study of Nationalism and Sectionalism in American Literature”

Author: Jay B. Hubbell


Publisher: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/27534210

(473) What have been the three historical forces or influences on American literature?

(474) How has the “frontier” idea figured into these forces?

(474) How did European critics respond (perhaps ironically)?

(475) What interdependence of European and American literature is noted, especially as affects SL?
(476) Why does Frederick Jackson Turner argue in 1926 for a sectional approach to American literature?

(476) What forces made for sectionalism? Especially, how does the growth of the frontier create a new type of sectionalism?

(477-478) Why does Hubbell find New England a better representative of sectionalism than Southern?

(480-481) Which New England writers does Hubbell find most “national”—and how does “frontier” fit his claim?

(481) What are the three main sources of the national characteristics of American literature?

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Article 3 Title: “Inalienable Rights: Fictions of Political Identity in ‘Hobomok’ and ‘The Scarlet Letter’”

Author: Deborah Gussman

Source: College Literature, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Jun., 1995), pp. 58-80

Publisher: College Literature

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25112187

(58) What is the “Good Indian’s Dilemma?”

(59) How were women and Indians excluded from citizenship?

(60) What Supreme Court decisions were made regarding Indians (Cherokee)—and the implications?

(63) While women and Indians are alien rather than citizen (authentic/authoritative) in antebellum America, how is Hawthorne able to create an authentic/authoritative persona for himself through THE CUSTOM HOUSE?

(69) Tocqueville says that an American woman loses her independence via marriage. Gussman argues that Hester effectively married her letter and freely yokes her freedom. If frontier is associated with freedom, why can’t Hester divest herself of the scarlet letter in the woods (Chapter 19)?

(72) Compare and contrast the position of women and Indians in the novel and in the early nineteenth century.

(73) How is Pearl an Indian? How does her position differ from that of an Indian?
*Article 4 Title: “Nature and Frontier in ‘Roger Malvin's Burial’”

Author: James McIntosh (Univ. of Michigan)

Source: American Literature, Vol. 60, No. 2 (May, 1988), pp. 188-204

Publisher: Duke University Press

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2927204

*This fourth article would perhaps be suitable for a more advanced and/or industrious group as it necessitates the reading of Hawthorne’s short story “Roger Malvin’s Burial” which could be used for comparative purposes with the novel.

(189) How does Hawthorne use frontier psychology in this short story, “Young Goodman Brown,” and THE SCARLET LETTER?

(189) What is the benefit of giving frontier (Nature) a developing buth “unknowable character?”

(191-192) Why does Hawthorne make frontiersmen and Indians morally equivalent in the first paragraph?

(193) Why call the frontiersmen “pilgrims” venturing into the “untrodden forest?” What are the connotations of a “pilgrimage?”

(195) How does Hawthorne use the frontier setting to illuminate his characters?

(197) Why is there a changing perspective toward the wilderness throughout the narrative?

(200) How does the character of the wilderness evolve?

(202-204) What are the roles and functions of the landscape in this short story?