

“The Wounded”
By Lu Xinhua

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Sophomores
World Literature
Two 90 minute blocks

Context

This lesson plan is designed for a sophomore World Literature class with mixed abilities. However, it could easily be adapted for other classes depending on the complimentary texts chosen as well as the depth of discussions. “The Wounded” fits into a unit over “choices.” Other titles in this unit include the short stories “The Ring” by Isak Dinesen, “The Guest” by Albert Camus, “Cranes” by Hwang Sun-won, the poem “Lot’s Wife” by Anna Akhmatova, and the play *A Doll’s House* by Henrik Ibsen.

In my school, there are approximately 450 students in grades nine through twelve. Classes are usually around 25 to 30 students. The largest population of the school is Caucasian of German-Russian decent. A growing population within the school and the community is Latino.

The unit in its entirety takes about five weeks on a modified block schedule (one 45 minute day, and two 90 minute days). Teaching “The Wounded” would take approximately two 90 minute blocks. More or less time could be spent depending on the ability of the group as well as other time restraints.

Summary

During the Cultural Revolution, the main character Xiaohua denounces her mother who has been labeled a traitor. Xiaohua is unable to join the Communist Youth League because of her mother’s status. After nine years of isolating herself, Xiaohua decides to reunite with her mother which happens only too late.

The Big Picture

“The Wounded” is a modern Chinese story published in 1978. It is one of many stories that reflects the penetrating influence of Mao and the Gang of Four during the Cultural Revolution. It is often considered the first text that explored the effects during this time and lead to an outpouring of “Literature of the Wounded” (Chinese Literature packet 2006).

Discussion Questions and Answers

1. Discuss the significance of the main character’s name, Xiaohua, “dawning China”?

While the noun “dawn” means first light of day, the verb “dawning” means to begin to appear or emerge. The second definition seems more applicable as China (its people and government) began to see the true effects of Mao and the Cultural Revolution. Just as Xiaohua sees the error of denouncing her mother, China also saw the complications of completely empowering youth. In relation to “Literature of the Wounded”, Lu Xinhua is the first writer to shed light on the wounded families, children, government, and country.

2. What images of mothers and daughters can you find?
- *mother/daughter pair on the train at the beginning (592)*
 - *same mother/daughter at the end (600)*
 - *the train sounds “like a mother very softly humming a lullaby” (592)*
 - *Xiaohua and her mother*
 - *the peasants who take in Xiaohua (596) – a substitute mother/daughter relationship*
 - *the little girl with the cake and her mother (601)*
3. What contrasts are set up within the text? What explanation can you give for Lu Xinhua giving the reader so many? What are the contrasts symbolic of?
- *love/hate (593)*
 - *pearl/scar (593)*
 - *mother/daughter*
 - *expected student reaction/real student reaction (595)*
 - *warm/cold*
 - *inside/outside*
 - *student/teacher*
 - *16 year old Xiaohua/ 25 year old Xiaohua*

Lu Xinhua might have wanted to show the reader how conflicted the main character really is. At first, she seems to readily accept that she needs to denounce her traitor mother. Xiaohua is eager to join the Communist Youth League, and blames her mother when she is rejected. She easily ignores her mother’s letters and packages. Yet, as the story continues, Xiaohua is more conflicted. She is lonely when everyone else goes home to celebrate the New Year (595). After nine years, she finally attempts to resolve her conflict.

4. What choices do the characters make? How can you relate to these choices?

Xiaohua makes several choices; some are influenced by the government at the time, yet others she makes willingly. She chooses to renounce her mother, to apply to the Communist Youth League, to ignore her mother’s attempts at communication, to open one letter her mother wrote, to finally visit her ailing mother, to read Xiaolin’s diary, to speak to Secretary Li about her relationship with Xiaolin.

Students’ connections to these choices will obviously vary. However, I think students will be able to relate to the conflict [from question three] of pushing their parents away, yet still being dependent upon them. Perhaps students will relate to reading something they weren’t supposed to.

5. What images of hearts (or colors, numbers, water) can you find? What might these images be symbolic of?

Hearts

wounded heart 597
 Xiaolin holding his heart 597
 heart stop pounding 597
 wild beating heart 600
 heart beat fast 601
 spoke deep within her heart 604

Red

red lights 591
 bloodshot eyes 592
 heart 592
 Red Guard 595
 face reddening 595
 red eyes [Xiaolin] 601

6. On page 596, Xiaohua quotes Mao. “There are factors derived from a person’s origins, but you cannot talk solely about a person’s origins. The emphasis should be on one’s political actions.” What is your interpretation of this? How does it apply to the story?

My interpretation leads to several clichés. “You can’t judge a book by its cover.” People are complex. It is far too easy to label people [something high school students do quite well]. As none of us want to be labeled, we need to look beyond a person’s upbringing or origin or interest to see the real person. Actions speak louder than words. However, does the apple fall far from the tree? Like father, like son? Are we are mother’s daughters? While Xiaohua denounces her mother as a traitor, is Xiaohua a traitor for reading Xiaolin’s diary?

7. What similarities do you see between Xiaohua and her mother?

Both have deteriorating health. Both are school leaders. Both feel scarred by the Revolution.

8. What is the importance of writing?

All important communication is done through writing. Xiaohua writes her mother a letter to tell her that she is leaving. She reads Xiaolin’s diary, one of her mother’s letters, and one of her mother’s diary entries. While I understand that using written communication is one way to move the plot along, I also think that writers who incorporating writing are making a statement about writing. Having grown up during the Cultural Revolution, Lu Xinhua could be commenting on the importance of writing especially at a time when most writing was strictly didactic.

9. Who inflicted more pain on the mother – the Gang of Four or her daughter?

This is an opinion question. While there certainly is evidence from the text that would support either answer, my guess is that most students will say her daughter. However, incorporating a non-fiction excerpt about the Gang of Four could create a lively debate.

10. Who is “The Wounded”?

*Xiaohua? her mother? Xiaolin? Lu Xinhua? the Chinese people? all of China?
Another opinion question which the text offers quotes to support multiple answers.*

Activities

Prior to reading “The Wounded” students will have already read a couple of pieces that focus on choices that characters make and the consequences of those choices. They will also have discussed some of the daily choices (clothing, food, homework) that they make as well as the consequences of those choices. From these choices, students will have written about a personal choice with more substantial consequences.

Students will first complete an anticipation guide to help them delve into some of the themes brought about in “The Wounded” [See Appendix A]. The students’ responses from the guide will help lead a large group discussion, and hopefully, students will begin to make connections to previous texts and their personal choices. Students will spend the rest of the class period reading.

To gain a better sense of the historical connection, students will be assigned I-Searches from the following provided topics. Once students have researched their topic, they should be prepared to present in small groups. Groups should be comprised of students who researched different topics in jigsaw fashion (suggested topics: Gang of Four, the Communist Youth League, Chairman Mao, Lin Biao, and Chairman Hua, Red Guards).

As a culminating activity for the entire choices unit, the class will participate in Chalk Talk. [See Appendix B]. This will be used as a way to review and see the interconnectedness of the texts.

As with any literature, vocabulary can always be incorporated. Appendix C provides a list of potentially unfamiliar words to be integrated.

Connections to other literary works

“The Wounded” connects to several other World Literature texts in regard to analyzing choices that characters make: “The Ring” Isak Dinesen, “Lot’s Wife” Anna Akhmatova, “The Guest” Albert Camus, “Cranes” Hwang Sun-won, and *A Doll’s House* Henrik Ibsen.

Additionally, “The Wounded” can be used as a historical text in conjunction with nonfiction pieces. For example, nonfiction pieces (perhaps articles from *britannica.com* or *Time*) about the Gang of Four, the Communist Youth League, Chairman Mao, Lin Biao, and Chairman Hua would all provide excellent historical context for the story.

Finally, there are two films that also connect. *To Live* by Zhang Yimou traces one family’s journey from the 1940’s through the 1960’s during the Cultural Revolution. This movie is available from Netflix. Within the text, Dai Yü’s *A Song of Youth* is mentioned. I did a quick search online and found the following movie title *Song of Youth* with Zhao Lian as Dai Yü. I’m guessing it is related, but I’m not sure of the availability.

Resources

Boyce, Cecilia. Curriculum Ideas. "Two Whole Group Discussion Techniques: Chalk Talk, Inner Circle--- Outer Circle." Bloomington: Indiana University: 2006.

Lu Xinhua. "The Wounded." Dernberger, Robert F., et al. *The Chinese: Adapting the Past, Building the Future*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1986. 591-604.

Song of Youth. Dr. Cui Wei and Chen Huai'ai. Perf. Xie Fang and Kang Tai. 1959.
<http://www.prcmovie.com/library/song.html> August 8, 2006

To Live. Dir. Zhang Yimou. Perf. Ge You and Li Gong. 1994.

Appendix A

Anticipation Guide

Discussion Topics

Anticipation Guide

Answer the following questions.

1. Parents always know what is best for their children. True/False
2. The government knows what is best for its people. True/False
3. Teenagers always make the wrong choice. True/False
4. Choices are easy to make. True/False
5. It is okay to read something that doesn't belong to you. True/False
6. Family is more important than anything else. True/False
7. Physical pain is worse than emotional pain. True/False
8. Consequences are easy to live with. True/False
9. The government should keep some secrets. True/False

Appendix B

Chalk Talk

Chalk Talk

1. The teacher explains that this is a totally silent discussion; all comments or questions are made in writing on the board or butcher paper.
2. The teacher begins by putting a quote, a character name, a literary technique, a question –anything—in the center of the board or paper.
3. The students write their thoughts, drawing a line from their words to the words that inspired their idea – either the teacher’s initial inscription or a fellow student’s comment.
4. It is helpful to have several writing instruments in use at once but also to have rules for how many students can be up at one time.
5. The teacher may either stand back and watch the discussion unfold or she may circle interesting ideas, write additional questions, add her own reflections, or draw lines connecting related student comments.
6. This activity often works best if it simply ceases; that is, give everyone enough time to read what has been written but then move on to another, perhaps related, activity.

Boyce, Cecilia. Curriculum Ideas. “Two Whole Group Discussion Techniques: Chalk Talk, Inner Circle--- Outer Circle.” Bloomington: Indiana University: 2006.

Appendix C

Possible Vocabulary

Possible Vocabulary Words

1. ambivalent 592
2. obliged 593
3. petit-bourgeois 593
4. indignation 593
5. fervor 593
6. willowy 593
7. muster 594
8. ginkgo nut 594
9. communal 595
10. province 595
11. zeal 595
12. pungent 595
13. desolate 596
14. rebuffed 596
15. candor 596
16. naiveté 596
17. arduous 596
18. cadres 596
19. exasperation 596
20. derived 596
21. dubiously 597
22. ruddy 597
23. vitality 597
24. commune 597
25. prefecture 597
26. propaganda 597
27. stupor 598
28. morose 598
29. laconic 598
30. lobular hyperplasia 598
31. frugal 598
32. melancholy 599
33. cohorts 599
34. utmost 599
35. bund 603
36. absolved 603
37. stead 603