

Learning English

The Outcasts of Poker Flat by Bret Harte

Lesson Plan
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Introduction

This lesson plan is to accompany the American Stories series episode, *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* by Bret Harte.

A transcript of the story is included at the end of this lesson to print so students can read as they listen. Teachers who cannot play the audio from the website can read the story aloud or have students read it.

This lesson plan is based on the CALLA Approach. See the end of the lesson for more information and resources on teaching with the CALLA approach. The following slide shows the five parts of this lesson plan.

Lesson Elements

Prepare

Present

Practice

Self-Evaluate

Expand

Prepare

Introduce the story. “Today we will read *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* by Bret Harte. This story is about a town that decides to get rid of some of the people who live there. It takes place in California during the Gold Rush, which was from 1848 – 1855. The story tells us the year is 1850. Most of the towns that began at this time were connected to the Gold Rush. They grew quickly, providing supplies and entertainment gold miners. They were wild, lawless places. What else do you know about the Gold Rush?”

Listen to students’ responses. Teach the vocabulary for the story.

Vocabulary

gambler - *n.* a person who risks money or other possessions when playing a game

prison – *n.* a place where a person is kept as punishment for a crime

cruel - *adj.* causing or helping to cause suffering; terrible and unfair

outcast - *n.* someone who is not accepted by other people

snowshoe - *n.* a light, wide frame that is attached to your shoe to make it easier to walk on soft snow without sinking

Present

Introduce the task to students: “Today we will learn how to read between the lines. Usually you read for the details the author tells you directly. But there are times you have to read and then think, ‘What is the writer really saying?’ This is one of those stories. Let’s listen to the first part of the story. I’ll show you how to read between the lines.”

Play or read aloud to “The “outcasts” were told that if they ever came back, they would be killed.”

Tell students, “This part introduces the characters. There are four people the town’s leaders force to leave. Two men and two women. I’m going to ask myself, ‘Why do the town leaders dislike these people?’”

Write notes as you list facts and inferences on a screen or the board.

“ I know the town was like many in the Gold Rush days. People gambled and drank heavily. They had ‘low morals.’ They came to California because they wanted to get rich quickly. Reading between the lines, I *infer* that the people of the town were not perfect themselves. They just wanted to get rid of some people they disliked.”

Read between the lines

Character	What we read	What we infer
John Oakhurst	A gambler at cards	People did not like losing money to him
Duchess	Women of low morals	They were working in the town
Mother Shipton		
Uncle Billy	Drinks too much, may have stolen gold	People do not like him

Practice

Tell students, “Now it’s your turn. Find a partner. Take out a sheet of paper. As we read the next section, read between the lines. What do you think the writer, Bret Harte, wants to tell us about the outcasts?”

Play or read aloud to ‘She turned quietly to the wall of the log house, and died.’

“Now, sit with your partner and write on your paper. What do we learn about the outcasts in this part of the story?”

Give students time to write. Then ask them to tell their partner what they got from reading between the lines. Ask several students to share with the class.

Read Between the Lines

Character	What we read	What we infer
John Oakhurst	He gambled with Tom Simson. He gave his money back after winning it.	He is sometimes generous and kind.
Uncle Billy	He stole the horses.	He actually is a bad person.
Mother Shipton	She saved her food for the younger people and starved.	She is generous and kind.

Instruct students to listen again. “With your partner, listen to the next part of the story. Remember to read between the lines. In this part of the story, we learn what the towns people think.”

Play or read aloud to the end of the story.

Ask students to work with their partners and write what they read between the lines on their paper. When they have finished, have some share what they have written.

Read Between the Lines

Character	What we read	What we infer
The Duchess and Piney Woods	They are too weak to add wood to the fire.	The women are not self-sufficient. They need other people.
The townspeople	They did not expect the outcasts to die in the cold.	They did not think about the result of their actions. They are cruel.
John Oakhurst	He was found dead by a tree with a bullet wound. The gun was nearby.	He shot himself. He was not brave.

Self-Evaluate

Ask, “Now I’d like to ask – what do you think about using this strategy, *reading between the lines*, when you read? Did it help you understand the story?”

Give students time to discuss their reaction to using the strategy. How do they think the writer felt about the “outcasts?” Were they really the most evil people in the town?

Expand

Ask students, “Are there other times when you can *read between the lines* in your school work or outside of school?”

Listen to students’ responses.

Continue, “This strategy is helpful in both reading and listening. Think carefully about what a writer or speaker is telling you. It will help you understand their message.”

“Try using this strategy tonight when you do your homework, or in your next class. Let me know how it goes!”

We present “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” by Bret Harte. Here is Jim Tedder.

John Oakhurst was a **gambler**. He had lived in the small western town of Poker Flat for only a short time. He had defeated many people at cards. He had also won a lot of their money. For that reason alone, he was not well liked.



A picture of men at a bar used with one of Bret Harte's stories in Harper's magazine in 1902.

On the morning of November twenty-third, eighteen fifty, he saw some men talking as he walked down the main street of town. As he came near, they got quiet. He said to himself, “Hmmm, I guess they are talking about me. And that can't be good.” Oakhurst was right. Some of the town's leaders had met secretly and decided to force some people to leave. They thought Poker Flat would be a better place to live if those people were gone.

Besides Oakhurst, two women of low morals were led to the edge of town. They were the “Duchess” as she was called, and “Mother Shipton.” A man called “Uncle Billy” was added to the group. He was known to drink too much. Some people thought that he had also stolen some gold. They had no proof. But that did not matter. Uncle Billy was just no good, and he had to go. The “outcasts” were told that if they ever came back, they would be killed.

So, the four of them slowly rode out of town. The “Duchess” cried and said she would probably die on the road. Mother Shipton and Uncle Billy cursed. “Mother” said she would like to “cut the heart out” of the people who done this to them. But John Oakhurst rode in silence. He thought all of life was a gamble. He had just run into some bad luck. That was all.

The outcasts were headed for Sandy Bar, a camp not too far away. But it was high up in the cold Sierra Mountains, and the path was anything but smooth. Around noon, Mother Shipton became so tired she fell off her horse. She said that was as far as she was going today. Oakhurst tried to make them move on because they had no food or fuel. But the three would not listen. Instead they began to drink alcohol that Uncle Billy had hidden. Soon they were quiet and asleep.

Oakhurst did not drink. He stood nearby and watched them. He began to think about his life and about how lonely he was. Yet he was stronger than his three companions. He could have left them there and set off alone. But he did not.

Then, he heard someone call “John Oakhurst.” A young man named Tom Simson came riding up. The gambler knew Tom. They had once played cards and Oakhurst had won. But after the game, he told young Tom that he was too easy to beat. And he gave him back his money. Tom said Oakhurst would be his friend for life.

Tom was not alone. From behind a tree came his new wife, a girl named Piney Woods. Her father had not wanted her to marry Tom. So they had run away. Tom told Oakhurst that he had a little food. He also showed him an old log house just off the path. Years of harsh weather had nearly ruined it. But it was all they had, and it would have to do. The women could spend the night in there. The men would make a fire and sleep on the ground by the door.

The night seemed to pass quickly. But the weather became colder. The wind increased, and it began to snow. Oakhurst had a bad feeling. He turned to where Uncle Billy had slept, and found him gone. He had left the others and even taken their horses. Oakhurst said Uncle Billy had probably gone for help. But he knew better. The group of five decided to wait for the snow to stop before traveling farther. They no longer had horses. From here on, they would be on foot.

By the third day out from Poker Flat, the snow had gotten deep. They could no longer see the path. Food was running low. Everything around them was white and cold. One week later they still had not moved. The snow had continued to fall and was deeper than ever. And it continued to fall. It formed a **prison** they could not escape. Still, they could see smoke rising from the warm fires in the houses down below in Poker Flat. The site seemed especially **cruel**.

But the little group of **outcasts** tried to keep up their spirits. They tried to stay as warm as they could. They sat together by their own open-air fire. And Tom Simson pulled a small accordion from his pack. Piney Woods played the instrument. They all sang songs. The music took on a defiant quality, a quality of resistance. But the outcasts had to listen to the sad cries of their mostly empty stomachs. The hunger got worse with each passing day.

At midnight on the tenth day, Mother Shipton called Oakhurst to her side. She said, “Give this to the young ones.” In a bag was all her food. She had not eaten for days. She had saved the food for the others. She turned quietly to the wall of the log house, and died.

John Oakhurst began to think that none of them would live out the storm. He gave Tom Simson a pair of **snowshoes** and asked him to try to walk back to Poker Flat for help. He guessed it would take Tom at least two days, if not more, to get there. Tom kissed his new bride and left on foot. Soon he was out of sight. The Duchess and Piney were surprised, and frightened, when Oakhurst also turned to leave. “You’re not going, too,” they cried. He said, “Only a little way. I need to find us some help.”

At that time of year, daylight did not last long. When night came, Oakhurst had not returned. The two women were too hungry, weak, and cold to even add more wood to the fire. They passed the stormy night holding each other close. And that is the way they were found the next morning when help arrived from Poker Flat. They had frozen to death during the night.

The rescuers from town said that they had been right to force the outcasts to leave Poker Flat. But they never thought the punishment would end up like this. Justice was one thing, but freezing people to death was not their aim. And then they thought of the gambler. Where was he? What had happened to him? They searched as best they could. And then, they found him.

Under a tall tree a playing card was stuck into the wood by a knife. On the card was written: “Beneath this tree lies the body of John Oakhurst, who had some bad luck starting the twenty-third of November, eighteen fifty. He handed in his cards on the seventh of December, the same year.”

Oakhurst sat there, cold and still. They said he looked peaceful. A single bullet from a small hand gun nearby had ended his life. John Oakhurst had been both the strongest, and the weakest, of the outcasts of Poker Flat.

“The Outcasts of Poker Flat” by Bret Harte was adapted and read by Jim Tedder.

Words in This Story

gambler - *n.* a person who risks money or other possessions when playing a game

prison - *n.* a place where a person is kept as punishment for a crime

cruel - *adj.* causing or helping to cause suffering; terrible and unfair

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About the CALLA Approach

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) is an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research.





CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies for academic tasks.

The goals of CALLA are for students to learn essential academic content and language and to become independent and self-regulated learners through their increasing command over a variety of strategies for learning in school. CALLA can be used in ESL, EFL, bilingual, foreign language, and general education classrooms.






CALLA was developed by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O'Malley, and is being implemented in approximately 30 school districts in the United States as well as in several other countries.

See a list of language learning strategies below.






Metacognitive Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES		
Plan / Organize	 <p>Planner</p>	<p>Before beginning a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Set goals. -Plan the task or content sequence. -Plan how to accomplish the task (choose strategies). -Preview a text.
Monitor / Identify Problems	 <p>Check</p>	<p>While working on a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Check your progress on the task. -Check your comprehension as you use the language. Do you understand? If not, what is the problem? -Check your production as you use the language. Are you making sense? If not, what is the problem?
Evaluate	 <p>I did it!</p>	<p>After completing a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Assess how well you have accomplished the learning task. -Assess how well you have used learning strategies. -Decide how effective the strategies were. -Identify changes you will make the next time you have a similar task to do.
Manage Your Own Learning	 <p>Pace Yourself</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Determine how you learn best. -Arrange conditions that help you learn. -Seek opportunities for practice. -Focus your attention on the task.



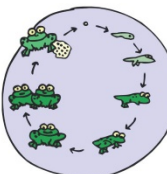
Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
 <p style="text-align: center;">USE WHAT YOU KNOW</p>		
Use Background Knowledge	 <p style="text-align: center;">I know.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Think about and use what you already know to help you do the task. - Make associations between new information and your prior knowledge. -Use new information to clarify or modify your prior knowledge.
Make Inferences	 <p style="text-align: center;">Use Clues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use context and what you know to figure out meaning. -Read and listen between the lines. -Go beyond the text to understand its meaning.
Make Predictions	 <p style="text-align: center;">Crystal Ball</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Anticipate information to come. -Make logical guesses about what will happen in a written or oral text. -Make an estimate (math). -Make a hypothesis (science).
Personalize	 <p style="text-align: center;">Me</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relate new concepts to your own life, to your experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.


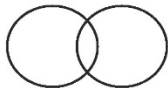


Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
Transfer / Use Cognates	 Coffee/Café	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Apply your linguistic knowledge of other languages (including your native language) to the target language. -Recognize cognates.
Substitute / Paraphrase	 Make it work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use a synonym or descriptive phrase for unknown words or expressions.
 USE YOUR SENSES		
Use Images	 See it in your mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use or create an actual or mental image to understand and/or represent information. -Use or draw a picture or diagram.
Use Sounds	 Sound Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Say or read aloud a word, sentence, or paragraph to help your understanding. -Sound out/vocalize. - Use your "mental tape recorder" to remember sounds, words, phrases, and/or conversations.






Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
Use Your Kinesthetic Sense		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Act out a role, for example, in Readers' Theater, or imagine yourself in different roles in the target language. -Use real objects to help you remember words, sentences, or content information.
  USE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS		
Find/Apply Patterns	 abacus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Apply a rule. -Make a rule. -Recognize and apply letter/sound, grammar, discourse, or register rules. -Identify patterns in literature (genre). -Identify patterns in math, science, and social studies.
Classify/Sequence	 Life cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Categorize words or ideas according to attributes. -Classify living things; identify natural cycles. -Identify order and sequences in math, science, and social studies. -Sequence events in history.

Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
Take Notes	 <p>PDA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Write down important words and ideas while listening or reading. -List ideas or words to include in speaking or writing..
Use Graphic Organizers	 <p>A Venn diagram</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, time lines, webs, and charts) of important relationships between concepts.
Summarize	 <p>Main Idea</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create a mental, oral, or written summary of information.
Use Selective Attention	 <p>Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Focus on specific information, structures, key words, phrases, or ideas.

Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
 		
USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES		
Access Information Sources	 <p>Look it up!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use the dictionary, the internet, and other reference materials. -Seek out and use sources of information. -Follow a model -Ask questions
Cooperate	 <p>Together</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Work with others to complete tasks, build confidence, and give and receive feedback.
Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)	 <p>I can do it!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use your inner resources. Reduce your anxiety by reminding yourself of your progress, the resources you have available, and your goals.