

Learning English

American Stories

A Horseman in the Sky

by Ambrose Bierce

Lesson Plan

by Jill Robbins, Ph.D.

Introduction

This lesson plan is to accompany the American Stories series episode, *A Horseman in the Sky* by Ambrose Bierce.

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

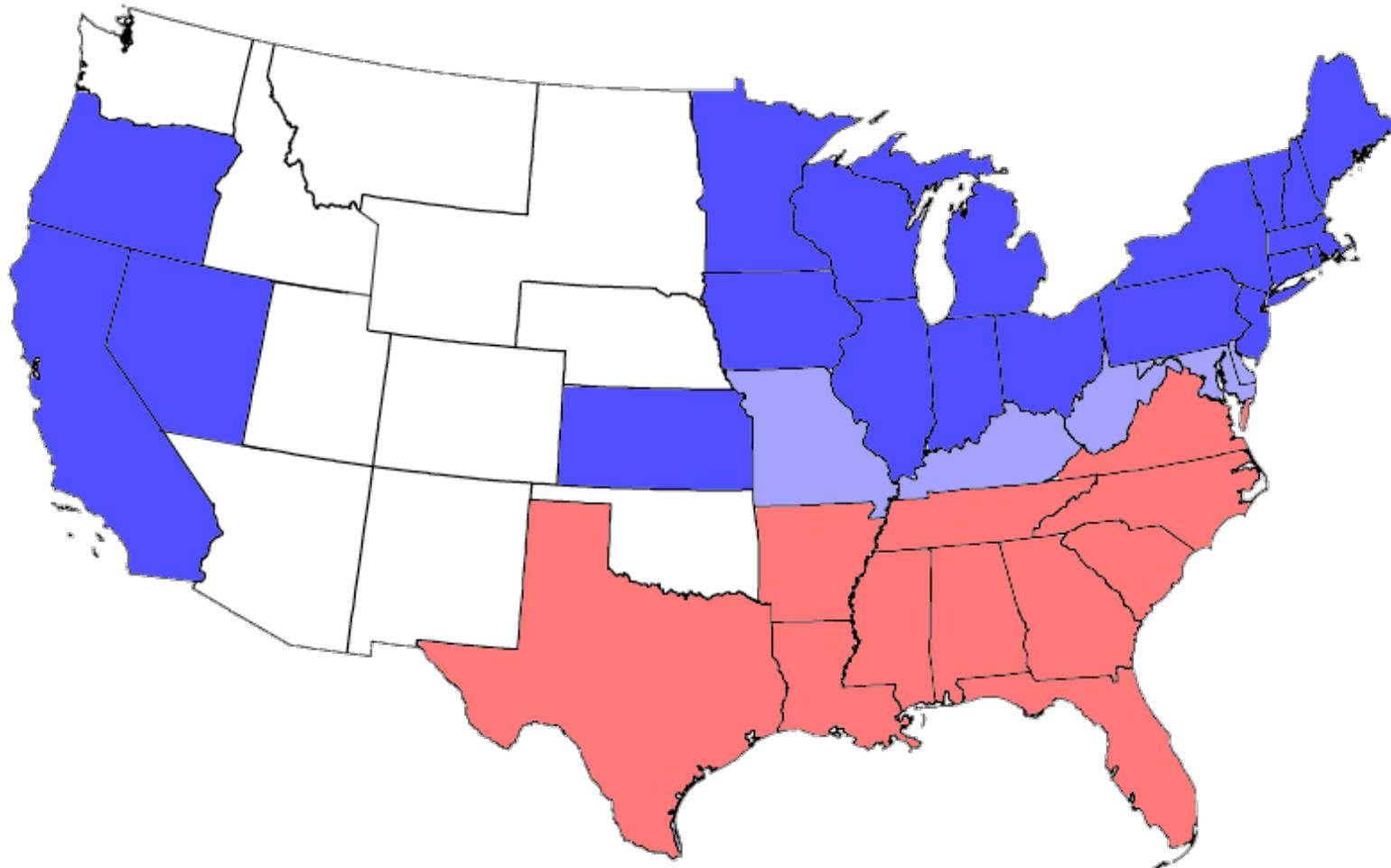
Prepare

Introduce the story. “Today we will read *A Horseman in the Sky*, by Ambrose Bierce. It is a story about a man who lived in Virginia at the time of the Civil War. What do you know about the American Civil War?”

Listen to students’ answers. Explain that during the civil war, America was divided. Southern states tried to separate. They were called the Confederacy. The northern states were called the Union. Relatives might have fought on opposite sides of the war, because they lived in different states. On the border states, like Maryland, people may have chosen sides based on the principles they believed in. Show the map on the following slide. Light blue states are border states.

Explain the new words.

United States in US Civil War



Red= Confederate states; Dark Blue= Union; Light blue= border states

Vocabulary

gigantic - *adj.* extremely large

trigger - *n.* a lever on a gun that you pull to fire the gun

fantasy - *n.* something that is produced by the imagination : an idea about doing something that is far removed from normal reality

ambush - *n.* an act of hiding, waiting for others to appear, and then suddenly attacking them : a surprise attack

dizzy - *adj.* feeling that you are turning around in circles and are going to fall even though you are standing still

reins - *n.* a strap that is fastened to a device (called a bridle) placed on the head of an animal (such as a horse) and that is used to guide and control the animal - usually plural

Present

Introduce the task to students: “As we read the story today, we will practice the strategy *read between the lines* to help us understand the story. I’ll show you how to do this. As I read, I’m going to think about what the writer is saying indirectly through the story.”

Play or read aloud to “That was why Carter Druse had been sent to guard the road.

Model the strategy: “The first part of the story introduces the character of Carter Druse. The narrator tells us Druse is joining the army of the north, even though he lives in the south. I asked myself “why?” when I read this. The story tells us he loved his country, too. He did not want the country to split apart, I think. His father is not happy about it.”

Make a chart on the board or show on a screen as on the next slide.

Explain, “I’m going to make a chart, and write what the story says on the left side. On the right side I’m going to write what I think – which is what *reading between the lines* means. I’m thinking about the message the writer wants me to take away from the words on the page.”

Read the sentences aloud on the chart as you write.

Explain, “By reading between the lines, I can have a richer experience from the story. I am also focused more on details as I read it.”

Read Between the Lines

What the story says	What I infer – by reading between the lines
<p>... when the United States was divided by a terrible civil war, Carter Druse, a southerner, decided to join the Union Army of the north.</p>	<p>He is very brave or has very strong principles.</p>
<p>The older man looked at his only son for a moment, too shocked to speak. Then he said, "As of this moment you are a traitor to the south.</p>	<p>His father will probably never speak to him again.</p>
<p>Both Carter Druse and his father left the table that morning with broken hearts. And Carter soon left his home, and everyone he loved to wear the blue uniform of the Union soldier.</p>	<p>The father and son love each other. Carter will not be able to come home again.</p>
<p>The road Carter Druse had been sent to guard was only a few miles from his father's house.</p>	<p>Something is going to happen related to his family.</p>

Practice

Prepare students for the next part, “Now it’s your turn. Get together with a classmate. Make a chart like the one I made. Let’s listen to some more of the story. As we listen, *read between the lines* you see in the story. Think about *how* the narrator is telling the story.”

Play or read aloud to “Carter Druse was calm as he pulled the trigger of his gun.”

Have students sit with a classmate and write their thoughts on a chart after listening to the story. Ask several students to share what they thought and write it on a shared chart. The next slide shows possible thoughts on this section.

Read Between the Lines

What the story says	What I infer – by reading between the lines
the man's gray uniform blended with the blue sky and the white clouds behind him.	Gray is the color of the Confederate, or southern army.
A small squeeze of the trigger, and Carter Druse would have done his duty.	Carter is hesitating to fire his gun
His mind began to race, and in his fantasy, the horse and rider became black figures, rising and falling in slow circles against a fiery red sky.	This image is Carter imagining what would happen if he shot the horseman
Is it so terrible to kill an enemy who might kill you and your friends? Carter knew that this man must be shot from ambush -- without warning.	Carter is questioning whether he can kill someone whom he might know.

Have students return to work with a partner as you complete the story. Ask them to continue reading between the lines.

Play or read aloud to the end of the story.

Ask students to stay with their partner and talk about the end of the story: “Were you surprised at the ending? Do you think Carter Druse killed his father?”

Give students time to talk about the story’s ending.

Self-Evaluate

Ask, “Now I’d like to ask – what do you think about using this strategy, *read between the lines*, when you read? Did it help you understand the events of the story? Write a sentence or two on your paper to turn in about how *reading between the lines* helped you today.”

Expand

Ask students, “Are there other times when you can *read between the lines*?”

Listen to students’ responses.

Continue, “This strategy is helpful in both reading and listening. When we *read between the lines* we use what we know to infer, or guess, about the true meaning or the hidden message. In our daily lives, people often do not say directly what they mean. We sometimes have to guess at what they are trying to tell us. In academic reading, we sometimes have to think about *who* is giving us information. Can we take what they write at face value? Or should we read between the lines?”

Our story today is called, "A Horseman in the Sky." It was written by Ambrose Bierce.

Carter Druse was born in Virginia. He loved his parents, his home and the south. But he loved his country, too. And in the autumn of eighteen sixty-one, when the United States was divided by a terrible civil war, Carter Druse, a southerner, decided to join the Union Army of the north.

He told his father about his decision one morning at breakfast.

The older man looked at his only son for a moment, too shocked to speak. Then he said, "As of this moment you are a traitor to the south. Please don't tell your mother about your decision. She is sick, and we both know she has only a few weeks to live."

Carter's father paused, again looking deep into his son's eyes. "Carter," he said, "No matter what happens -- be sure you always do what you think is your duty."

Both Carter Druse and his father left the table that morning with broken hearts. And Carter soon left his home, and everyone he loved to wear the blue uniform of the Union soldier.

One sunny afternoon, a few weeks later, Carter Druse lay with his face in the dirt by the side of a road. He was on his stomach, his arms still holding his gun. Carter would not receive a medal for his actions. In fact, if his commanding officer were to see him, he would order Carter shot immediately.

For Carter was not dead or wounded. He was sleeping while on duty. Fortunately, no one could see him. He was hidden by some bushes, growing by the side of the road.

The road Carter Druse had been sent to guard was only a few miles from his father's house.

It began in a forest, down in the valley, and climbed up the side of a huge rock. Anyone standing on the top of this high rock would be able to see down into the valley. And that person would feel very dizzy, looking down. If he dropped a stone from the edge of this cliff, it would fall for six hundred meters before disappearing into the forest in the valley below.

Giant cliffs, like the one Carter lay on, surrounded the valley.

Hidden in the valley's forest were five union regiments -- thousands of Carter's fellow soldiers. They had marched for thirty-six hours. Now they were resting. But at midnight they would climb that road up the rocky cliff.

Their plan was to attack by surprise an army of southerners, camped on the other side of the cliff. But if their enemy learned about the Union Army hiding in the forest, the soldiers would find themselves in a trap with no escape. That was why Carter Druse had been sent to guard the road.

It was his duty to be sure that no enemy soldier, dressed in gray, spied on the valley, where the union army was hiding.

But Carter Druse had fallen asleep. Suddenly, as if a messenger of fate came to touch him on the shoulder, the young man opened his eyes. As he lifted his head, he saw a man on horseback standing on the huge rocky cliff that looked down into the valley.

The rider and his horse stood so still that they seemed made of stone. The man's gray uniform blended with the blue sky and the white clouds behind him. He held a gun in his right hand, and the horse's reins in the other.

Carter could not see the man's face, because the rider was looking down into the valley. But the man and his horse seemed to be of heroic, almost **gigantic** size, standing there motionless against the sky. Carter discovered he was very much afraid, even though he knew the enemy soldier could not see him hiding in the bushes.

Suddenly the horse moved, pulling back its head from the edge of the cliff. Carter was completely awake now. He raised his gun, pushing its barrel through the bushes. And he aimed for the horseman's heart. A small squeeze of the **trigger**, and Carter Druse would have done his duty.

At that instant, the horseman turned his head and looked in Carter's direction. He seemed to look at Carter's face, into his eyes, and deep into his brave, generous heart.

Carter's face became very white. His entire body began shaking. His mind began to race, and in his **fantasy**, the horse and rider became black figures, rising and falling in slow circles against a fiery red sky.

Carter did not pull the trigger. Instead, he let go of his gun and slowly dropped his face until it rested again in the dirt.

Brave and strong as he was, Carter almost fainted from the shock of what he had seen.

Is it so terrible to kill an enemy who might kill you and your friends? Carter knew that this man must be shot from **ambush** -- without warning. This man must die without a moment to prepare his soul; without even the chance to say a silent prayer.

Slowly, a hope began to form in Carter Druse's mind. Perhaps the southern soldier had not seen the northern troops.

Perhaps he was only admiring the view. Perhaps he would now turn and ride carelessly away.

Then Carter looked down into the valley so far below. He saw a line of men in blue uniforms and their horses, slowly leaving the protection of the forest. A foolish Union officer had

permitted his soldiers to bring their horses to drink at a small stream near the forest. And there they were -- in plain sight!

Carter Druse looked back to the man and horse standing there against the sky. Again he took aim. But this time he pointed his gun at the horse. Words rang in his head -- the last words his father ever spoke to him: "No matter what happens, be sure you always do what you think is your duty."

Carter Druse was calm as he pulled the trigger of his gun.

At that moment, a Union officer happened to look up from his hiding place near the edge of the forest. His eyes climbed to the top of the cliff that looked over the valley. Just looking at the top of the gigantic rock, so far above him, made the soldier feel **dizzy**.

And then the officer saw something that filled his heart with horror. A man on a horse was riding down into the valley through the air!

The rider sat straight in his saddle. His hair streamed back, waving in the wind. His left hand held his horse's **reins** while his right hand was hidden in the cloud of the horse's mane. The horse looked as if it were galloping across the earth. Its body was proud and noble.

As the frightened Union officer watched this horseman in the sky, he almost believed he was witnessing a messenger from heaven. A messenger who had come to announce the end of the world. The officer's legs grew weak, and he fell. At almost the same instant, he heard a crashing sound in the trees. The sound died without an echo. And all was silent.

The officer got to his feet, still shaking. He went back to his camp. But he didn't tell anyone what he had seen. He knew no one would ever believe him.

Soon after firing his gun, Carter Druse was joined by a Union sergeant. Carter did not turn his head as the sergeant kneeled beside him.

"Did you fire?" The sergeant whispered.

"Yes."

"At what?"

"A horse. It was on that rock. It's not there now. It went over the cliff." Carter's face was white. But he showed no other sign of emotion. The sergeant did not understand.

"See here, Druse," he said, after a moment's silence. "Why are you making this into a mystery. I order you to report. Was there anyone on the horse?"

"Yes."

"Who? "

"My father."

"A Horseman in the Sky" was written by Ambrose Bierce, and adapted by Dona de Sanctis.

Words in This Story

gigantic - *adj.* extremely large

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Now it's your turn. Have you ever made a decision against the will of the group you were with? What was the result? Write to us in the comments section.

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.

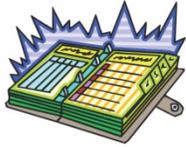
CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies for academic tasks.

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	 Planner	Before beginning a task: -Set goals. -Plan the task or content sequence. -Plan how to accomplish the task (choose strategies). -Preview a text.
Monitor / Identify Problems	 Check	While working on a task: -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	 I did it!	After completing a task: -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	 Pace Yourself	-Determine how you learn best. -Arrange conditions that help you learn. -Seek opportunities for practice. -Focus your attention on the task.

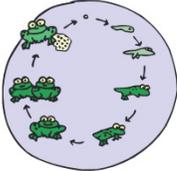
Task-Based Strategies

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.

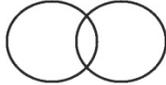
Task-Based Strategies

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.