

American Stories

"The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe

Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is to accompany the American Stories series episode "The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe.

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.

American Stories lesson plans are based on the CALLA approach. See the end of each lesson for more information and resources on teaching with the CALLA approach.

CALLA has five lesson elements:

Prepare: Engage students in the topic and identify objectives for the lesson. Find out what students already know about it and motivate them to learn more. Teach new vocabulary.

Present: Present new information. Explain the target learning strategy for the lesson. Model what the students are asked to do. Discuss connections to students' prior knowledge.

Practice: Give students an authentic, active task that they can do in a small group or in pairs. Remind students to use the target learning strategy.

Self-Evaluate: Question students so they will reflect on their own learning. Ask students to evaluate their own learning rather than wait for the teacher to assess them. Find out if using the learning strategy helped students' understanding.

Expand: Guide students on how to apply what they learned to their own

lives. Point out other contexts where the learning strategy may help. Make connections between content and language or to the student's first language. When appropriate, request that parents contribute to learning.

Now for this week's lesson.

Prepare

Introduce the story: "Today, we will read 'The Black Cat' by Edgar Allan Poe. It is a story about a man who loves animals, but his personality changes. Do you have a pet? What was/is its name? What was/is its personality like? Describe your pet's personality. If you've never had a pet, tell the person about your favorite animal."

Allow students time to share their answers with the person sitting next to them.

Continue to explain: "When you think about an animal, you can **classify** -- you can put their actions into categories based on their behavior. Today, we're going to learn to use the strategy *classify*. First, let's learn some new vocabulary."

Teach the new vocabulary for the lesson. Use images or classroom items for visual aids.

The vocabulary is on a separate page (below) so that it can be printed and handed out to students.

uncertain - *adj.* not exactly known or decided

"in cold blood" - *expression.* without feeling or with cruel intent

wine - *n.* an alcoholic drink made from the liquid part that can be squeezed out of a small, round fruit that is green, dark red, or purplish-black in color

inn - *n.* a house usually in the country where people can eat, drink and rent a room to sleep in

cellar - *n.* the part of a building that is entirely or partly below the ground

sin - *n.* an action that is considered to be wrong according to religious or moral law

revenge - *n.* the act of doing something to hurt someone because that person did something that hurt you

pet(ted) - *v.* to touch an animal or person with your hand in a loving or friendly way

innkeeper - *n.* a person who owns or operates an inn

decay - *n.* the process or result of being slowly destroyed by natural processes

Present

Hand out the transcript of the story and the Classifications Chart.

Introduce the task to students: "As we read the story today, we will practice the strategy *classify* to help us understand the story. I'm going to begin reading and as I do, I will *classify* the narrator's actions – I'm going to put his actions into categories. I'll show you how to do this."

Play or read aloud to: "Then I took the poor animal by the neck and with one quick movement I cut out one of its fear-filled eyes."

Model the strategy: "The first part of the story describes the narrator's love for animals, and how he and his wife share this love for animals. The man seems to be a kind and gentle person. But then, his attitude and behavior begin to change. The story says that the man begins to drink a lot of wine, and that his drinking changes his actions for the worse. When we look at the actions of the narrator, we can begin to *classify* them – or separate them based on different qualities.

Make a chart on the board like the one in the first Classifications Chart. Tell students that the story provides details that help us put the narrator's actions and thoughts into categories. Doing this helps us to closely analyze the story – this helps us to see where the author wants us to notice qualities about or changes in the character.

Tell students, "For example, in the third paragraph, we read that, as a child, the narrator 'loved animals – all kind of animals.' He also says that he had a 'natural goodness.' These are clues that the narrator was a friendly and

loving child; he was a kind child. We can classify this under the heading, 'kindness.'" Write the details in the first column, as below.

Ask students, "How does loving animals demonstrate that someone is kind?" Elicit answers from one or two students. Then, write down their answers in the second column, as below. Do the same for the column about the narrator lacking trust and the narrator feeling guilty or remorseful. Note that you can choose different categories if you prefer. Notice that the categories in the filled-in charts for sections one, two, and three are slightly different. Note also that these filled-in charts are simply guides for the teacher.)

Tell students, "I am going to give you blank charts so you can classify details from the story and describe how those details are evidence of the narrator's behavior."

Classifications Chart – Section ONE

| Details that show the narrator as a <u>kind person</u> | How this is evidence of <u>kindness</u> | Details that show the narrator <u>lacks trust</u> | How this is evidence of <u>mistrust</u> | Details that suggest the narrator feels <u>guilty or remorseful</u> | How this is evidence of him <u>feeling guilty or remorseful</u> |
|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| <p>"When I was a child I had a natural goodness of soul which led me to love animals – all kinds of animals"</p> | <p>Because he describes his younger as "naturally" good," he truly believes that he was a good person</p> <p>People who love animals are usually kind and giving people</p> | <p>He says love from pets "speak directly to the heart of man" unlike humans, whose love is "uncertain and changeable"</p> | <p>He does not believe that love from humans can be loyal and predictable. He trusts animals. He does not trust humans.</p> | <p>"I want to tell the world what happened and thus perhaps free my soul from the horrible weight which lies upon it"</p> | <p>Feeling a weight on one's spirit, or a feeling that one's spirit/soul is not free, is a common sign of feeling guilty, remorseful, or regretful. It means you are not at peace about something that happened or something that you did.</p> |

| Details that show the narrator as a kind person | How this is evidence of <u>kindness</u> | Details that show the narrator lacks trust | How this is evidence of <u>mistrust</u> | Details that suggest the narrator feels guilty or remorseful | How this is evidence of <u>him feeling guilty or remorseful</u> |
|--|--|---|---|--|--|
| <p>"You will understand the joy I felt to find that my wife shared with me my love for animals</p> | <p>This shows that he appreciates his wife and enjoys the things they have in common</p> | <p>"As I entered I saw – or thought I saw – that Pluto, the cat, was trying to stay out of my way, to avoid me. This action, by an animal which I had thought still loved me, made me angry beyond reason."</p> | <p>He used to trust animals, but now he suspects that his favorite animal – Pluto – does not want to be around him.</p> | <p>"As the days passed I became less loving in manner; I became quick to anger; I forgot how to smile and laugh. My wife – yes, and my pets, too, all except the cat – were made to feel the change in my character."</p> <p>He refers to Pluto as "the poor animal"</p> | <p>At the beginning of the story, the narrator says he is "naturally good." He however <i>recognizes</i> a change in his character -- for the worse. He seems to dislike who he has become but not know how to change it.</p> <p>His word choice – "poor animal" suggests that he feels badly about what he did.</p> |

Prepare students for the next part: "Now it's your turn. Let's listen to some more of the story. As we listen, think about how to classify the actions and thoughts of the narrator. Use the information you learn by reading or listening. Write down your classifications, and describe how they show the narrator's thoughts or behavior, in the Classifications Chart."

Play or read aloud to: "Wherever I went, it always went there. At night, I dreamed of it. And I began to hate that cat!"

Have students sit with a classmate to share their notes and classifications. Tell them to share with their classmate what they think will happen next. Point out that it doesn't matter whether your classifications are the same as mine or as your neighbor's. What's important is thinking about what the author might want us to know about the characters in a story. It helps us to understand the story better – to find a deeper meaning than just what appears on the surface."

Give students time to discuss their classifications.

Ask students to share and write classifications on the board or screen as on the following chart.

Classifications Chart – Section TWO

| Details that show the narrator has <u>no self-control</u> | How this is evidence of <u>lack of self-control</u> | Details that show the narrator feels <u>guilty or remorseful</u> | How this is evidence of him feeling <u>guilty or remorseful</u> |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p>"Who has not, a hundred times, found himself doing wrong, doing some evil thing for no other reason than because he knows he should not?"</p> | <p>Here, the narrator shows that he knows what he did is obviously wrong. He even calls it "evil." Yet, he seems driven by some unknown force to continue this behavior – a force he cannot control.</p> | <p>"As expected, however, [Pluto] ran from me in fear whenever I came near. Why should it not run?"</p> | <p>The narrator seems to be sympathizing with the cat's new fear of him. This sympathy suggests he feels remorse for his behavior.</p> |
| <p>"I hung [Pluto] there with tears in my eyes, I hung it because I knew it had loved me, because I felt it had given me no reason to hurt it...." (sentence continues"</p> | <p>He loves his cat and he cries as he kills his cat. He believes that this action will "place [his] soul forever outside the reach of the love of God" but knowing this does not stop him from killing the cat.</p> | <p>"It seems almost that the cat had in some mysterious way caused the house to burn so that it could make me pay for my evil act..." "Months went by, and I could not drive the thought of the cat out of my mind"</p> | <p>His belief that the cat's soul had caused the fire as revenge suggests that he feels haunted by what he did. He cannot stop thinking about the cat, even after months. When we feel haunted by our bad actions, it is typically because of a guilty feeling. We do not feel at peace and often cannot get the bad thing out of our minds.</p> |
| <p>We know that the narrator still goes to the inn ("As I left the inn, it followed me, and I allowed it to do so.")</p> | <p>He drinks at the bar at the inn. His drinking problems seem to continue, even though this part of the story doesn't directly state this.</p> | <p>"I discovered that this cat, like Pluto, had only one eye. How was it possible that I had not noticed this the night before?"</p> | <p>We know that the narrator has anger problems and drinks a lot. The second cat may not really have one eye. Maybe the narrator is hallucinating – he believes this cat looks like Pluto simply because he feels haunted by what he did to Pluto.</p> |

Ask students to listen again. "As we read the next part of the story, think about what will happen next."

Play or read aloud to the end of the story.

Ask students to classify the narrator's actions and share them with their classmate. Continue to write on a chart as shown on the next slide.

Classifications Chart – Section THREE

| Details that show the narrator has no <u>self-control</u> | How this is evidence of lack of <u>self-control</u> | Details that show the narrator <u>NO LONGER feels guilty or remorseful</u> | How this is evidence of <u>NOT feeling guilty or remorseful</u> |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p>"In sudden anger, I took a knife and struck wildly at the cat."</p> | <p>His anger is out of control. The cat followed him and almost cause him to fall. This small act caused him to try to stab the cat!</p> | <p>"I was pleased to see that it was quite impossible for anyone to know that a single stone had been moved."</p> | <p>He feels happy that no one will know where he hid his wife's body. In the previous sections, he probably would have felt sad.</p> |
| <p>"I turned and put the knife's point deep into her heart! She fell to the floor and died without a sound."</p> | <p>He kills his own wife – the same woman he described so joyfully in the beginning! He has lost all self-control.</p> | <p>"A few people came and asked about my wife; but I answered them easily."</p> | <p>"Easily" is the key word here. The fact that he lies "easily" now about his horrific act suggests he no longer feels remorse.</p> |
| <p>"I felt myself driven by some unknown inner force to let [the police] know, to make them know, that I had won the battle."</p> | <p>The narrator feels "driven" by some force larger than himself to think and act in terrible ways. This is a clue that he has no self-control – something else is controlling him.</p> | <p>"Certain that they could find nothing, I asked them in and went with them as they searched." "I struck my stick that very place in the wall behind which was the body of my wife."</p> | <p>He has stopped caring about murdering his wife. His desire to prove to himself that he can outsmart the police shows that his priorities have changed. He shows now remorse here.</p> |

Self-Evaluate

Explain that "In order to understand an author's deeper meaning in a story, you can think about the actions and thoughts of the characters and how to classify – or categorize them. We know that, by the end of the story, the narrator has become a dangerous person. His thoughts suggest that he lacks remorse for his wrongdoings"

Ask students, "What do you think Edgar Allan Poe wants us to feel at the end of the story? What do you think about a person who destroys the things that they love the most? What do you think about a person who does bad things but, then, feels very badly about his/her actions?"

Point out to students that the first two paragraphs of the story suggest that, even though he seems to have become progressively less remorseful, the first part of the story is how he feels *now*.

Give the students time to talk about the end of the story.

Ask, "What do you think about using the strategy *classify* when you read? Did it help you understand the themes of the story? Write a few sentences on your paper to turn in about how classifying helped you today."

Expand

Ask students, "Are there other times when you can classify things based on what you know?"

Listen to students' responses.

Continue, "This strategy is helpful in both reading and listening. *Classifying* helps you to think more deeply about how the author sees the characters of the story. *Classifying* can also help you remember what you read – in this class and in other school subjects, too. It can help you when you are studying other subjects, such as for a history class or a science class. It enables you to put things into categories based on themes and ideas. This strategy helps you organize what you are learning. Try using this strategy tonight when you do your homework, or in your next class. Let me know how it goes!"

The Black Cat **By Edgar Allan Poe**

Tomorrow I die. Tomorrow I die, and today I want to tell the world what happened and thus perhaps free my soul from the horrible weight which lies upon it.

But listen! Listen, and you shall hear how I have been destroyed.

When I was a child I had a natural goodness of soul which led me to love animals — all kinds of animals, but especially those animals we call pets, animals which have learned to live with men and share their homes with them. There is something in the love of these animals which speaks directly to the heart of the man who has learned from experience how uncertain and changeable is the love of other men.

I was quite young when I married. You will understand the joy I felt to find that my wife shared with me my love for animals. Quickly she got for us several pets of the most likeable kind. We had birds, some goldfish, a fine dog, and a cat.

The cat was a beautiful animal, of unusually large size, and entirely black. I named the cat Pluto, and it was the pet I liked best. I alone fed it, and it followed me all around the house. It was even with difficulty that I stopped it from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which, however, my own character became greatly changed. I began to drink too much wine and other strong drinks. As the days passed I became less loving in my manner; I became quick to anger; I forgot how to smile and laugh. My wife — yes, and my pets, too, all except the cat — were made to feel the change in my character.

One night I came home quite late from the inn, where I now spent more and more time drinking. Walking with uncertain step, I made my way with effort into the house. As I entered I saw — or thought I saw — that Pluto, the cat, was trying to stay out of my way, to avoid me. This action, by an animal which I had thought still loved me, made me angry beyond reason. My soul seemed to fly from my body. I took a small knife out of my coat and opened it. Then I took the poor animal by the neck and with one quick movement I cut out one of its fear-filled eyes!

Slowly the cat got well. The hole where its eye had been was not a pretty thing to look at, it is true; but the cat no longer appeared to suffer any pain. As might be expected, however, it ran from me in fear whenever I came near. Why should it not run? Yet this did not fail to anger me. I felt growing inside myself a new feeling. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself doing wrong, doing some evil thing for no other reason than because he knows he should not? Are not we humans at all times pushed, ever driven in some unknown way to break the law just because we understand it to be the law?

One day, in cold blood, I tied a strong rope around the cat's neck, and taking it down into the cellar under the house I hung it from one of the wood beams above my head. I hung it there until it was dead. I hung it there with tears in my eyes, I hung it because I knew it had loved me, because I felt it had given me no reason to hurt it, because I knew that my doing so was a wrong so great, a sin so deadly that it would place my soul forever outside the reach of the love of God!

That same night, as I lay sleeping, I heard through my open window the cries of our neighbors. I jumped from my bed and found that the entire house was filled with fire. It was only with great difficulty that my wife and I escaped. And when we were out of the house, all we could do was stand and

watch it burn to the ground. I thought of the cat as I watched it burn, the cat whose dead body I had left hanging in the cellar. It seemed almost that the cat had in some mysterious way caused the house to burn so that it could make me pay for my evil act, so that it could take revenge upon me.

Months went by, and I could not drive the thought of the cat out of my mind. One night I sat in the inn, drinking, as usual. In the corner I saw a dark object that I had not seen before. I went over to see what it could be. It was a cat, a cat almost exactly like Pluto. I touched it with my hand and petted it, passing my hand softly along its back. The cat rose and pushed its back against my hand.

Suddenly I realized that I wanted the cat. I offered to buy it from the innkeeper, but he claimed he had never seen the animal before. As I left the inn, it followed me, and I allowed it to do so. It soon became a pet of both my wife and myself. The morning after I brought it home, however, I discovered that this cat, like Pluto, had only one eye. How was it possible that I had not noticed this the night before? This fact only made my wife love the cat more. But I, myself, found a feeling of dislike growing in me. My growing dislike of the animal only seemed to increase its love for me. It followed me, followed me everywhere, always. When I sat, it lay down under my chair. When I stood up it got between my feet and nearly made me fall. Wherever I went, it was always there. At night I dreamed of it. And I began to hate that cat!

One day my wife called to me from the cellar of the old building where we were now forced to live. As I went down the stairs, the cat, following me as always, ran under my feet and nearly threw me down.

In sudden anger, I took a knife and struck wildly at the cat. Quickly my wife put out her hand and stopped my arm. This only increased my anger and,

without thinking, I turned and put the knife's point deep into her heart! She fell to the floor and died without a sound.

I spent a few moments looking for the cat, but it was gone. And I had other things to do, for I knew I must do something with the body, and quickly. Suddenly I noted a place in the wall of the cellar where stones had been added to the wall to cover an old fireplace which was no longer wanted. The walls were not very strongly built, and I found I could easily take down those stones. Behind them there was, as I knew there must be, a hole just big enough to hold the body. With much effort I put the body in and carefully put the stones back in their place. I was pleased to see that it was quite impossible for anyone to know that a single stone had been moved.

Days passed. Still there was no cat. A few people came and asked about my wife; but I answered them easily. Then one day several officers of the police came. Certain that they could find nothing, I asked them in and went with them as they searched.

Finally they searched the cellar from end to end. I watched them quietly, and, as I expected, they noticed nothing. But as they started up the stairs again, I felt myself driven by some unknown inner force to let them know, to make them know, that I had won the battle.

"The walls of this building," I said, "are very strongly built; it is a fine old house." And as I spoke I struck with my stick that very place in the wall behind which was the body of my wife. Immediately I felt a cold feeling up and down my back as we heard coming out of the wall itself a horrible cry.

For one short moment the officers stood looking at each other. Then quickly they began to pick at the stones, and in a short time they saw before them the body of my wife, black with dried blood and smelling of decay. On the body's head, its one eye filled with fire, its wide open mouth the color of blood, sat the cat, crying out its revenge!

Classifications Chart – Section ONE

| Details that show the narrator as a <u>kind person</u> | How this is evidence of <u>kindness</u> | Details that show the narrator <u>lacks trust</u> | How this is evidence of <u>mistrust</u> | Details that suggest the narrator feels <u>guilty or remorseful</u> | How this is evidence of him <u>feeling guilty or remorseful</u> |
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Classifications Chart – Section TWO

| Details that show the narrator has <u>no self-control</u> | How this is evidence of <u>lack of self-control</u> | Details that show the narrator <u>feels guilty or remorseful</u> | How this is evidence of him <u>feeling guilty or remorseful</u> |
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Classifications Chart – Section THREE

| Details that show the narrator has no <u>self-control</u> | How this is evidence of lack of <u>self-control</u> | Details that show the narrator NO LONGER feels <u>guilty or remorseful</u> | How this is evidence of <u>NOT feeling guilty or remorseful</u> |
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About the CALLA Approach

This lesson is based on 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.

A list of CALLA learning strategies follows. These strategies were researched by J. Michael O'Malley and Anna Uhl Chamot.

See a list of language learning strategies below.

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Plan / Organize

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

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

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

Determine how you learn best.

Arrange conditions that help you learn.

Look for Ways to Practice.

Focus your attention on the task.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES - USE WHAT YOU KNOW

Use Background Knowledge

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

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

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

Relate new concepts to your own life, to your experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.

Transfer / Use Cognates

Apply your linguistic knowledge of other languages (including your native language) to the target language.
Recognize cognates.

Substitute / Paraphrase

Use a synonym or descriptive phrase for unknown words or expressions.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES - USE YOUR SENSES

Use Images

Use or create an actual or mental image to understand and/or represent information.
Use or draw a picture or diagram.

Use Sounds

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.

Use Your Kinesthetic Sense

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.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES - USE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

Find/Apply Patterns

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

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.

Take Notes

Write down important words and ideas while listening or reading.

List ideas or words to include in speaking or writing.

Use Graphic Organizers

Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, time lines, webs, and charts) of important relationships between concepts.

Summarize

Create a mental, oral, or written summary of information.

Use Selective Attention

Focus on specific information, structures, key words, phrases, or ideas.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES - USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES

Access Information Sources

Use the dictionary, the internet, and other reference materials.

Seek out and use sources of information.

Follow a model

Ask questions

Cooperate

Work with others to complete tasks, build confidence, and give and receive feedback.

Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)

Use your inner resources. Reduce your anxiety by reminding yourself of your progress, the resources you have available, and your goals.