

American Stories

“The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe

Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is to accompany the American Stories series episode “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Part Two, 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 Part Two of 'The Fall of the House of Usher' by Edgar Allan Poe. It is a story about a man whose childhood friend is sick and has demanded a visit after not seeing the narrator for many years."

Ask students, "Did your mother or father use to tell you stories before bedtime when you were little? Do you remember your favorite story? Think about the details for a moment. If you like, you can write down notes to help you remember. Now, describe details from the story to the person sitting next to you. Be sure to give detailed descriptions so that your partner can get a mental picture."

Give students a few minutes to share their stories.

Say, "As you got older, did you ever read a book that was later made into a film? What was the book/film? When you read the book, you probably had a mental image of the scenes. And, your mental image was probably very different from the film scenes that the movie director made. This is natural, as our minds create unique mental images when we read the details from a story."

Creating a mental image from the things we read helps us to translate the information we are reading into something that our minds can picture. Our brains connect the mental pictures and words to build stronger memories, and a deeper understanding of the story we are reading.

Say, "Today, we're going to learn to apply the strategy *Create a mental image*. First, let's learn some new vocabulary."

Teach the new vocabulary for the lesson (below). Use images or items for visual aids. The vocabulary also appears on a separate page at the end of the lesson for printing and handing out to students.

grave – n. a hole in the ground for burying a dead body

doubtful – adj. uncertain or unsure about something

tremble – v. to shake slightly because you are afraid, nervous, or excited

ghastly – adj. very shocking or horrible

palace – n. the official home of a king, queen, president, or other official

ghost – n. the soul of a dead person thought of as living in an unseen world or as appearing to living people

church – n. a building that is used for Christian religious services

vault – n. a locked room where money or valuable things are kept

graveyard – n. a place where people are buried; cemetery

horror – n. a very strong feeling of fear, dread, and shock

Present

Hand out the transcript of the story.

Introduce the task to students: "As we hear the story today, we will practice the strategy *Create a Mental Image* to help us understand the details we are reading. Our minds naturally create mental pictures of the information we receive. By focusing on the images that arise in our minds as we read, we can examine the ways we are understanding the details of the story."

Continue, "As we listen to the first part of the story, think about the details that the narrator describes about what is happening. Try to visualize the details. Keep those visual images in your mind."

(If you like, you can ask students to close their eyes as the story is played/read so that they can better visualize what they are hearing.)

Play the first section of the story up to, "I learned that my one sight of her would probably be the last I would have – that the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me or no more."

Model the strategy: "In the first two paragraphs of the story, the narrator describes his friend's house and how his friend, Roderick Usher, appears when he arrives his house."

Continue, "I underlined the words describing the strangeness surrounding the lake and the old, stone house. In my mind, I visualize something scary – that there is fog around the house, and maybe fog is rising from the lake. My mental image of the house is that is very large, and looks dirty and lopsided, with cracks in it. And, the narrator describes his friend as 'appearing not like a human being, but like a spirit that had come back from beyond the grave.' I underline this, and I imagine that Roderick Usher looks weak and ghastly, or almost see-through, like a ghost. His eyes look crazy yet his voice sounds low and weak. He looks to me like something from another world."

Practice

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 the narrator describes the imagery around him and the details of the story. Underline words, phrases, or sentences that catch your attention or cause you to have a mental image. Do not take any notes. Instead, spend a little time thinking about the details of your mental images from the story. What do the images look, smell, and sound like in your mind?"

Have students sit with a classmate to discuss their mental images from the story details. Then, have the partners compare and contrast them. How are they alike? How are they different? Ask students to take a few short notes on the similarities and differences.

Point out to students that they will likely have unique mental pictures and that sharing them is a way of expressing how our minds translates written or spoken details into pictures.

Give students time to discuss their mental pictures and take notes.

Ask one person from a few of the pairs to tell the whole class about one line or detail from the story that they either pictured differently or imagined similarly. If you like, you can make a simple chart on the board to list some of the details from students' mental pictures:

Details from the story	The mental picture it gave you
Usher "appeared not like a human being but like a spirit...from beyond the grave"	His skin looks see-through and he appears weak and ghastly. His eyes look crazy or insane.
"I felt something strange and fearful about the great old stone house, [and] about the lake in front of it."	I imagine there is fog coming from the lake. There is fog surrounding the house. The house is large and lopsided and looks dirty and dusty from the outside.

Now, have students sit in groups of three. Ask them to listen again.

Play or read aloud to "He believed that the gray stones of his house, and the small plants growing on the stones, and the decaying trees, had a power over him that made him what he was."

In their groups, have students to discuss their mental images from the story, based on details the narrator gives. Then, have them compare and contrast them. How are they alike? How are they different? Ask students to take a few short notes on the similarities and differences.

Give students time to discuss their mental pictures and take notes.

Ask each group to tell the whole class about one line or detail from the story that they either pictured differently or imagined similarly.

If there is a willing student, have a student volunteer write on the chart on the board as students from the groups feed them the details from their mental pictures.

Now, have the groups of three change partners so that they are each sitting with two new people. Ask them to listen now to the last section of the story.

Play or read aloud to the end of the story.

In their new groups, have students to discuss their mental images from the story details. Then, have them compare and contrast them. How are they alike? How are they different? Ask students to take a few short notes on the similarities and differences.

Give students time to discuss their mental pictures and take notes.

If you find another willing student, have a student volunteer write on the chart on the board as the students from the groups feed them the details from their mental pictures.

Ask each group to tell the whole class about one line or detail from the story that they either pictured differently or imagined similarly.

Self-Evaluate

Explain that "Creating a mental image enables us to make sense of the descriptions we read about characters and scenes in stories. When we connect words with mental pictures, we remember the details of a story better and are more engaged and excited about what we are reading.

Ask students, "What do you think that Edgar Allan Poe wants us to understand about the narrator's experience at his friend's house? Does understanding that help us to be better readers? What's more, does it make you want to read more of this story?"

Give the students time to discuss this.

Ask, "What do you think about using the strategy *Create a Mental Image* when you read? Did it help you understand and remember the story better? Did you learn anything about how different our mental images are from those of other people? Write a few sentences on your paper to turn in about how making associations helped you today."

Expand

Ask students, "Are there other times when you can Create a Mental Image about things based on what you know?"

Listen to students' responses.

Continue, "This strategy is helpful in both reading and listening. For example, when you listen to a teacher, or even a friend, telling you a story, you can remember the details from the story better when you create a mental image. The strategy can also be useful in academic subjects like history and science. For example, when you read about a historic event, you can imagine the scenes and actions. This can help you remember important details and the order of the events. In science, visualizing a series of scientific processes can help you fully understand them, and recall them

later. This strategy is even useful in non-academic subjects, like music. When you make a mental image of song lyrics, for example, you can remember the words easier and can appreciate the story that the musician is trying to tell. Try using this strategy tonight when you do your homework, or in your next class, or even when you listen to music. Let me know how it goes!"

"The Fall of the House of Usher," Part Two

By Edgar Allan Poe

Roderick Usher, whom I had known as a boy, was now ill and had asked me to come to help him. When I arrived I felt something strange and fearful about the great old stone house, about the lake in front of it, and about Usher himself. He appeared not like a human being, but like a spirit that had come back from beyond the grave. It was an illness, he said, from which he would surely die. He called his sickness fear. "I have," he said, "no fear of pain, but only the fear of its result — of terror. I feel that the time will soon arrive when I must lose my life, and my mind, and my soul, together, in some last battle with that horrible enemy: fear!"

I learned also, but slowly, and through broken words with doubtful meaning, another strange fact about the condition of Usher's mind. He had certain sick fears about the house in which he lived, and he had not stepped out of it for many years. He felt that the house, with its gray walls and the quiet lake around it, had somehow through the long years gotten a strong hold on his spirit.

He said, however, that much of the gloom which lay so heavily on him was probably caused by something more plainly to be seen — by the long-continued illness — indeed, the coming death — of a dearly loved sister — his only company for many years. Except for himself, she was the last member of his family on earth. "When she dies," he said, with a sadness which I can never forget, "when she dies, I will be the last of the old, old family — the House of Usher."

While he spoke, the lady Madeline (for so she was called) passed slowly through a distant part of the room, and without seeing that I was there, went on. I looked at her with a complete and wondering surprise and

with some fear — and yet I found I could not explain to myself such feelings. My eyes followed her. When she came to a door and it closed behind her, my eyes turned to the face of her brother — but he had put his face in his hands, and I could see only that the thin fingers through which his tears were flowing were whiter than ever before.

The illness of the lady Madeline had long been beyond the help of her doctors. She seemed to care about nothing. Slowly her body had grown thin and weak, and often for a short period she would fall into a sleep like the sleep of the dead. So far she had not been forced to stay in bed; but by the evening of the day I arrived at the house, the power of her destroyer (as her brother told me that night) was too strong for her. I learned that my one sight of her would probably be the last I would have — that the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me no more.

For several days following, her name was not spoken by either Usher or myself; and during this period I was busy with efforts to lift my friend out of his sadness and gloom. We painted and read together; or listened, as if in a dream, to the wild music he played. And so, as a warmer and more loving friendship grew between us, I saw more clearly the uselessness of all attempts to bring happiness to a mind from which only darkness came, spreading upon all objects in the world its never-ending gloom.

I shall always remember the hours I spent with the master of the House of Usher. Yet I would fail in any attempt to give an idea of the true character of the things we did together. There was a strange light over everything. The paintings which he made me tremble, though I know not why. To tell of them is beyond the power of written words. If ever a man painted an idea, that man was Roderick Usher. For me at least there came out of his pictures a sense of fear and wonder.

One of these pictures may be told, although weakly, in words. It showed the inside of a room where the dead might be placed, with low walls, white and plain. It seemed to be very deep under the earth. There was no door, no window; and no light or fire burned; yet a river of light flowed through it, filling it with a horrible, ghastly brightness.

I have spoken of that sickly condition of the senses, which made most music painful for Usher to hear. The notes he could listen to with pleasure were very few. It was this fact, perhaps, that made the music he played so different from most music. But the wild beauty of his playing could not be explained.

The words of one of his songs, called "The Haunted Palace," I have easily remembered. In it I thought I saw, and for the first time, that Usher knew very well that his mind was weakening. This song told of a great house where a king lived — a palace — in a green valley, where all was light and color and beauty, and the air was sweet. In the palace were two bright windows through which people in that happy valley could hear music and could see smiling ghosts — spirits — moving around the king. The palace door was of the richest materials, in red and white; through it came other spirits whose only duty was to sing in their beautiful voices about how wise their king was.

But a dark change came, the song continued, and now those who enter the valley see through the windows, in a red light, shapes that move to broken music; while through the door, now colorless, a ghastly river of ghosts, laughing but no longer smiling, rushes out forever.

Our talk of this song led to another strange idea in Usher's mind. He believed that plants could feel and think, and not only plants, but rocks and water as well. He believed that the gray stones of his house, and the small

plants growing on the stones, and the decaying trees, had a power over him that made him what he was.

Our books — the books which, for years, had fed the sick man's mind — were, as might be supposed, of this same wild character. Some of these books Usher sat and studied for hours. His chief delight was found in reading one very old book, written for some forgotten church, telling of the Watch over the Dead.

At last, one evening he told me that the lady Madeline was alive no more. He said he was going to keep her body for a time in one of the many vaults inside the walls of the building. The worldly reason he gave for this was one with which I felt I had to agree. He had decided to do this because of the nature of her illness, because of the strange interest and questions of her doctors, and because of the great distance to the graveyard where members of his family were placed in the earth.

We two carried her body to its resting place. The vault in which we placed it was small and dark, and in ages past it must have seen strange and bloody scenes. It lay deep below that part of the building where I myself slept. The thick door was of iron, and because of its great weight made a loud, hard sound when it was opened and closed. As we placed the lady Madeline in this room of horror I saw for the first time the great likeness between brother and sister, and Usher told me then that they were twins — they had been born on the same day. For that reason the understanding between them had always been great, and the tie that held them together very strong.

We looked down at the dead face one last time, and I was filled with wonder. As she lay there, the lady Madeline looked not dead but asleep — still soft and warm — though to the touch cold as the stones around us.

New Words

grave - n. a hole in the ground for burying a dead body

doubtful - adj. uncertain or unsure about something

tremble - v. to shake slightly because you are afraid, nervous, or excited

ghastly - adj. very shocking or horrible

palace - n. the official home of a king, queen, president, or other official

ghost - n. the soul of a dead person thought of as living in an unseen world or as appearing to living people

church - n. a building that is used for Christian religious services

vault - n. a locked room where money or valuable things are kept

graveyard - n. a place where people are buried; cemetery

horror - n. a very strong feeling of fear, dread, and shock

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.