

Learning English

American Stories

The Boarded Window

by Ambrose Bierce

Lesson Plan
by Jill Robbins, Ph.D.

Introduction

This lesson plan is to accompany the American Stories series episode, *The Boarded Window* 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

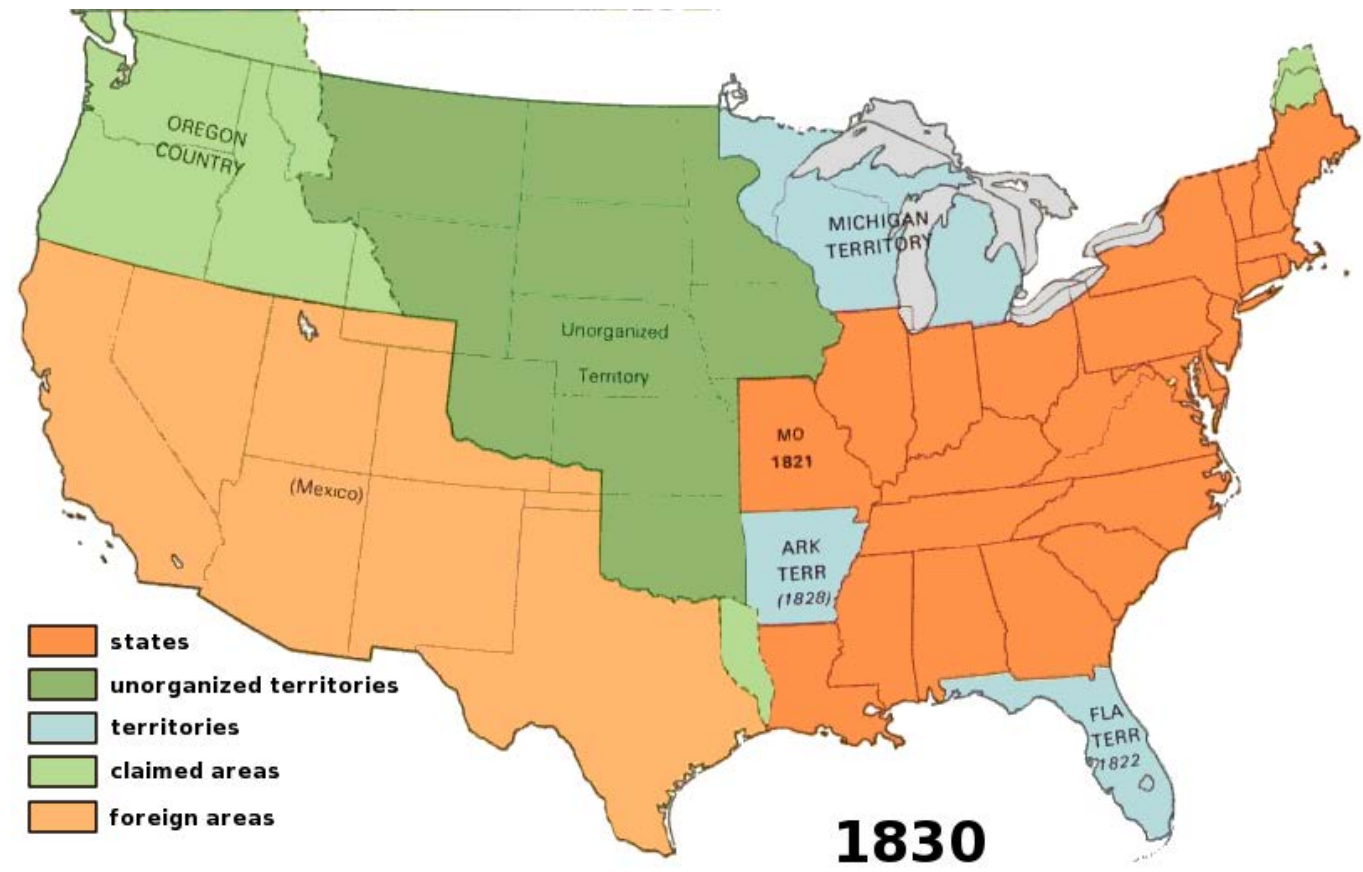
Prepare

Introduce the story. “Today we will read *The Boarded Window*, by Ambrose Bierce. It is a story about a man who lived on the frontier around 1830. What do you know about the American frontier in 1830?”

Listen to students’ answers. Explain that the settlers in early America started in the East, and gradually moved to the West. Show the map on the following slide to demonstrate the frontier, or edge, or the settlement by Europeans.

Explain the new words.

United States in 1830



Vocabulary

frontier – *n.* a border between two countries

doorstep – *n.* a step or series of steps leading up to one of the doors that is used to enter or leave a building

lifeless – *adj.* Having no life

rifle – *n.* A gun that has a long barrel and that is held against your shoulder when you shoot it

unconscious – *adj.* not awake especially because of an injury, drug, etc.

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 “I ran away to avoid the ghost which every well-informed boy in the area knew haunted the spot.”

Model the strategy: “The first part of the story introduces a settler named Murlock. The narrator tells us that Murlock lived alone in a cabin with a window that is covered up. He looked older than he really was. When I stop to read between the lines, I think, ‘Hey, this is sounding like a mystery. There is something strange going on. Then the narrator mentions a ghost. Can I believe there is really a ghost?’”

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
He seemed a part of the darkness and silence of the forest	He is not cheerful.
And no one knew why it had been closed.	The window is a mystery. The story is going to tell us about it.
Something other than years had been the cause of his aging. ... He was tall and thin with drooping shoulders—like someone with many problems.	The man has had a bad experience. I expect the story to tell me more about it.
She had died so many years before him that local tradition noted very little of her existence.	The man's wife died when she was young.
I ran away to avoid the ghost which every well-informed boy in the area knew haunted the spot.	The narrator is telling us there is a ghost in the cabin. Now I know I am reading a horror story.

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 “We may believe Murlock to have been affected that way.”

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
They loved each other and were happy.	Murlock and his wife did not have any problems.
But at the end of the third day she fell into unconsciousness and died.	Murlock's wife died suddenly. This might be the reason he was sad.
...we may try to imagine some of the details of the story told by my grandfather.	The narrator is saying what his grandfather said but imagining some of it.
He did certain things wrong. And others which he did correctly were done over and over again.... Things cannot be as bad as they seem."	He is making the body ready for burying. What is he doing over and over again? Is he starting to lose his mind? Why does he think things are not as bad as they seem?
Deep sadness is an artist of powers that affects people in different ways.	Murlock was probably losing control of his mind because he was so sad.

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? What does ‘And between the teeth was a piece of the animal's ear’ mean?”

Give students time to talk about the story’s ending. Suggest that they are not alone if they doubt the wife was really dead. There are hints in the story that it might not all be factual. Note that the story was passed down by the narrator’s grandfather. So the narrator does not have direct experience of the story.”

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 "The Boarded Window." It was written by Ambrose Bierce. Here is Shep O'Neal with the story.

In 1830, only a few miles away from what is now the great city of Cincinnati, Ohio, lay a huge and almost endless forest.

The area had a few settlements established by people of the **frontier**. Many of them had already left the area for settlements further to the west. But among those remaining was a man who had been one of the first people to arrive there.

He lived alone in a house of logs surrounded on all sides by the great forest. He seemed a part of the darkness and silence of the forest, for no one had ever known him to smile or speak an unnecessary word. His simple needs were supplied by selling or trading the skins of wild animals in the town.

His little log house had a single door. Directly opposite was a window. The window was boarded up. No one could remember a time when it was not. And no one knew why it had been closed. It surely was not because of the man's dislike of light and air. Sometimes, he could be seen lying in the sun on his **doorstep**. I imagine there are few people living today who ever knew the secret of that window. But I am one, as you shall see.

The man's name was said to be Murlock. He appeared to be seventy years old, but he was really fifty. Something other than years had been the cause of his aging.

His hair and long, full beard were white. His gray, **lifeless** eyes were sunken. His face was wrinkled. He was tall and thin with drooping shoulders—like someone with many problems.

I never saw him. These details I learned from my grandfather. He told me the man's story when I was a boy. He had known him when living nearby in that early day.

One day Murlock was found in his cabin, dead. It was not a time and place for medical examiners and newspapers. I suppose it was agreed that he had died from natural causes or I should have been told, and should remember.

I know only that the body was buried near the cabin, next to the burial place of

his wife. She had died so many years before him that local tradition noted very little of her existence.

That closes the final part of this true story, except for the incident that followed many years later. With a fearless spirit I went to the place and got close enough to the ruined cabin to throw a stone against it. I ran away to avoid the ghost which every well-informed boy in the area knew haunted the spot.

But there is an earlier part to this story supplied by my grandfather.

When Murlock built his cabin he was young, strong and full of hope. He began the hard work of creating a farm. He kept a gun--a **rifle**—for hunting to support himself.

He had married a young woman, in all ways worthy of his honest love and loyalty. She shared the dangers of life with a willing spirit and a light heart. There is no known record of her name or details about her. They loved each other and were happy.

One day Murlock returned from hunting in a deep part of the forest. He found his wife sick with fever and confusion. There was no doctor or neighbor within miles. She was in no condition to be left alone while he went to find help. So Murlock tried to take care of his wife and return her to good health. But at the end of the third day she fell into **unconsciousness** and died.

From what we know about a man like Murlock, we may try to imagine some of the details of the story told by my grandfather.

When he was sure she was dead, Murlock had sense enough to remember that the dead must be prepared for burial. He made a mistake now and again while performing this special duty. He did certain things wrong. And others which he did correctly were done over and over again.

He was surprised that he did not cry — surprised and a little ashamed. Surely it is unkind not to cry for the dead.

"Tomorrow," he said out loud, "I shall have to make the coffin and dig the grave; and then I shall miss her, when she is no longer in sight. But now -- she is dead, of course, but it is all right — it must be all right, somehow. Things cannot be as bad

as they seem."

He stood over the body of his wife in the disappearing light. He fixed the hair and made finishing touches to the rest. He did all of this without thinking but with care. And still through his mind ran a feeling that all was right -- that he should have her again as before, and everything would be explained.

Murlock had no experience in deep sadness. His heart could not contain it all. His imagination could not understand it. He did not know he was so hard struck. That knowledge would come later and never leave.

Deep sadness is an artist of powers that affects people in different ways. To one it comes like the stroke of an arrow, shocking all the emotions to a sharper life. To another, it comes as the blow of a crushing strike. We may believe Murlock to have been affected that way.

Soon after he had finished his work he sank into a chair by the side of the table upon which the body lay. He noted how white his wife's face looked in the deepening darkness. He laid his arms upon the table's edge and dropped his face into them, tearless and very sleepy.

At that moment a long, screaming sound came in through the open window. It was like the cry of a lost child in the far deep of the darkening forest! But the man did not move. He heard that unearthly cry upon his failing sense, again and nearer than before. Maybe it was a wild animal or maybe it was a dream. For Murlock was asleep.

Some hours later, he awoke, lifted his head from his arms and listened closely. He knew not why. There in the black darkness by the side of the body, he remembered everything without a shock. He strained his eyes to see -- he knew not what.

His senses were all alert. His breath was suspended. His blood was still as if to assist the silence. Who — what had awakened him and where was it!

Suddenly the table shook under his arms. At the same time he heard, or imagined he heard, a light, soft step and then another. The sounds were as bare feet walking upon the floor!

He was afraid beyond the power to cry out or move. He waited—waited there in the darkness through what seemed like centuries of such fear. Fear as one may know, but yet live to tell. He tried but failed to speak the dead woman's name. He tried but failed to stretch his hand across the table to learn if she was there. His throat was powerless. His arms and hands were like lead.

Then something most frightful happened. It seemed as if a heavy body was thrown against the table with a force that pushed against his chest. At the same time he heard and felt the fall of something upon the floor. It was so violent a crash that the whole house shook. A fight followed and a confusion of sounds impossible to describe.

Murlock had risen to his feet. Extreme fear had caused him to lose control of his senses. He threw his hands upon the table. Nothing was there!

There is a point at which fear may turn to insanity; and insanity incites to action. With no definite plan and acting like a madman, Murlock ran quickly to the wall. He seized his loaded rifle and without aim fired it.

The flash from the rifle lit the room with a clear brightness. He saw a huge fierce panther dragging the dead woman toward the window. The wild animal's teeth were fixed on her throat! Then there was darkness blacker than before, and silence.

When he returned to consciousness the sun was high and the forest was filled with the sounds of singing birds. The body lay near the window, where the animal had left it when frightened away by the light and sound of the rifle.

The clothing was ruined. The long hair was in disorder. The arms and legs lay in a careless way. And a pool of blood flowed from the horribly torn throat. The ribbon he had used to tie the wrists was broken. The hands were tightly closed.

And between the teeth was a piece of the animal's ear.

“The Boarded Window” was written by Ambrose Bierce. It was adapted by Lawan Davis who was also the producer. The storyteller was Shep O’Neal.

Words in This Story

frontier – *n.* a border between two countries

doorstep – *n.* a step or series of steps leading up to one of the doors that is used to enter or leave a building

lifeless – *adj.* Having no life

rifle – *n.* A gun that has a long barrel and that is held against your shoulder when you shoot it

unconscious – *adj.* not awake especially because of an injury, drug, etc.

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.

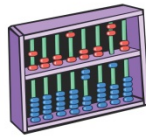
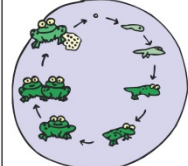
Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
		
Use Background Knowledge	 I know.	<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	 Use Clues	<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	 Crystal Ball	<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	 Me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relate new concepts to your own life, to your experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.


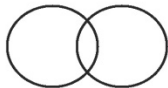


Task-Based Strategies

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.