

**Writing Creatively Through the SOL's:
When *Things Fall Apart* “3 Doors Down.”**

by
Fara Wiles

[Teacher's note: This lesson plan is in response to a lesson described in the last NCTE bulletin, Volume 54, No.2: “The Lyrical Found Poem.” I think Kelly Sage's lesson would be in great harmony with the ideas presented in this lesson I presented to my 10th grade class last fall. I thought the two lessons could be introduced simultaneously or used as building blocks. Both lessons address ways to incorporate the SOLs related to analysis of poetry (SOL 10.5) and to generating ideas for writing (10.7). What I also love about this lesson is that it fulfills one of our high school's portfolio goals: the assignment creates a theme comparison between different authors. The kids love the assignment because they get to choose which composers they compare (SOL enabler 10.8.4).]

In this lesson, students will create a comparison essay between the two different genres, novel and song. After reading Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, students will find a song with lyrics that reflect the themes or characters in the novel listed above. The song *must provide key phrases and direct lyric lines* that depict the characters' own thoughts or ideas about life. Students must be able to explain their choices in their essay. Finding their own parallels provides an opportunity for creativity, interpretation, and further insight into the plot of the novel. The lesson also pulls themes forward, away from the Mbaino and Mbanta regions and 1890 time period, and shows how universal ideas can be (SOL enabler 10.7.6).

Activities

Prewriting: Students will listen to Three Doors Down's song, “Away from the Sun,” and free-write for five to seven minutes about how this song compares to the novel *Things Fall Apart*. They will find parallels between the lyrics and the novel's content (via plot, characterization, tone, or theme). And they will listen for words or phrases that show a connection to the story of Okonkwo.

Brainstorming: The teacher will lead a discussion, using the student responses as a springboard for ideas and being sure to make all possible connections between the lyrics and the story. Okonkwo is not the only one who might feel “away from the sun.”

The teacher will then provide a copy of the lyrics in written form to offer further reflection. Students will be given five minutes to highlight any key phrases on the copy that specifically relate to someone or something in the novel. The teacher will create a list of these phrases on the board or overhead projector to affirm responses and shape ideas, being sure to use quotation marks as he/she lists examples, thus modeling the format students will need to use for their essays.

Writing: After discussion, students will be given the choice of using other songs they know for their comparison essay. Whatever song they choose must reflect a similar theme to the novel. Students should focus on three to four specific phrases in their supporting paragraphs.

Materials: Three Doors Down *Away from the Sun* CD, CD player, copy of lyrics, highlighters.

Assessment: The teacher will formally assess completed essays through the use of a rubric entitled the Chocolate Chip Cookie rubric. This simple rubric, designed specifically for the SOL's, awards a 4-3-2-1, depending upon content; (see rubric at the end of this teaching idea). Essays will run through the entire writing process: prewriting, writing, revising, editing and publishing. Students must have three direct examples in their essays and language that shows how those examples relate to a character or theme in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*.

[Teacher's note: I used this rubric to introduce the SOL writing rubric components. I brought in several examples of cookies. The students sampled and rated them, according to the rubric we created for cookies. They made immediate connections between cookie and essay components. All year we have referred to this rubric for essays composed in class. It provides a light-hearted and creative approach to capturing the students' attentions to SOL "fine print" guidelines. I crafted this rubric from a 3rd grade lesson plan and made adaptations to suit a 10th grade classroom. Kids are never too old for this type of approach to learning.]

Chocolate Chip Cookie Rubric
(There are some things we should never outgrow)

RATING	COOKIE DESCRIPTION	SOL COMPOSING RUBRIC
4	Best cookie out there! An abundance of gooey and rich chocolate chips, good consistency, fresh out of the oven, chewy, jumbo-sized, containing other sweet delectable candies; such as M&M's or toffee bits (i.e. Grandma's homemade, Pillsbury, or Mrs. Field's)	Writer demonstrates consistency in presenting a dominant and unified idea. Central idea is supported with key examples, illustrations, reasons, events, or details. Layers of elaboration are present. In all types of writing, a strong organizational plan is apparent. Appropriate transitions maintain careful logic. Consistent point of view with a strong lead and a strong closure.
3	Good cookie. Many chocolate chips, not gooey but still fresh, milk chocolate pieces, sweet and tasty, regular size (i.e. Sam's Club, Chips-a-Hoy or Pepperidge Farms)	Writer demonstrates reasonable, but not consistent control of composing central idea. The central idea is elaborated with examples and illustrations, and details, but occasionally, some thinness or unevenness in elaboration may occur. Organization is apparent with some lapses in cohesiveness. Few digressions in point of views and transition-ns are usually appropriate. The opening and closing show skill but lack the strength and sophistication of a 4 performance.
2	OK. Few chocolate chips, tasty with white or milk chocolate chips, mini-size fresh, crispy, dry, flavor is hard to taste, needs to be eaten with a big glass of milk (i.e. grocery brand)	Writer demonstrates inconsistent control of several features, indicating significant weakness in the details. No one idea emerges as central. Lacks focus because of little or no elaboration. The paper may be a list of underdeveloped statements or the skeleton of a narrative. Writer offers brief details, moving on too quickly to irrelevant material. Not much organization is present. An opening and closing may be included, but development prevents unity.
1	Needs help. Cold and crumbly, expired or stale, fake or dry chocolate chips, little flavor (i.e. stale or expired cookies from any oven!)	Writer demonstrates little or no control over composing a central idea. The focus and central idea is lacking. The piece is so sparse that the presence of a clear focus is insufficient to score high. Writing jumps from point to point, without a unifying central idea. No organizational strategy is apparent, with haphazard sentences. Bare statement is the norm and no purposeful elaboration is present.