

CLASS OF THE PAST
Lesson Plan
Chris Prater

SUBJECT: English Grammar

SECONDARY SUBJECT:

History - Copies of papers discovered at Fourth Ward School included for your interest:

- ◇ Report card
- ◇ Personal letter
- ◇ Sections of newspapers, etc.

SUGGESTION: Teach this lesson in costume; it is amazing how the students of the 21st century react to a lesson from our history's past. It is both fun for all and a remarkable learning experience.

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***Introduction:***

The thrust of this teaching unit aims to teach grammar in context. I have decided to focus on the parts of speech and their dependence upon syntax. The backdrop is a classroom at Virginia High (the Fourth Ward School) in the late 1870s and the subject is grammar, the class is parsing, and the topic is the Gettysburg Address – a truly inspirational piece of writing.

At this time, the late 70's, English was not yet a subject and would not become one until the early part of the twentieth century. Rather, what we know as English was divided into several subjects:

- parsing
- grammar
- literature, and
- penmanship.

These subjects were highly valued, for this was an extremely literate society. The town had several excellent libraries and newspapers. The people actually read for fun, as well as knowledge!



Now, turn your thoughts to the classroom and imagine the students at their desks diligently writing, the teacher pacing quietly between the rows of students. The stamp mills down the canyon are continuously pounding out their booming rhythms, one of the Virginia and Truckee trains rumbles and rattles through town, the brisk clipping and clopping of horses pound up and down the dusty streets, the wagons creak and the drivers shout out curses and halloo to their friends.

But, inside this classroom, all is quiet except for the scratching of pens on paper, the tapping of the teacher's shoes, a softly spoken comment or word of encouragement, and all the while columns of dust and dirt silently settle on the books, the desks, the students, and the teacher.

**TEACHING UNIT:** Grammar in Context: The Eight Parts of Speech and their Dependence Upon Syntax

**Lesson #1 – The Eight Parts of Speech: Definitions and Examples**

**Lesson #2 – Parsing, or the Identification of the Eight Parts of Speech**

**Lesson #3 – Syntax, the Definition**

**Lesson #4 – Parsing within the Constraints of English Syntax: Word Order Means Everything in Lewis Carol’s *Jabberwocky!* (1872)**

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Lesson #1 – The Eight Parts of Speech: Definitions and Examples

Objectives: Identify the parts of speech as they appear in our language and speech patterns

Preparation: Pencils, paper, clean and flat surfaces on which to write

Anticipatory Set: Students will see examples of each part of speech. These will be used in context.

Instruction: The teacher will write or have the parts of speech written on the board:

Noun – person, place, thing, or concept (house, love, school, book)

Pronoun – replaces a noun (he, she, it, they)

Verb – provides the action in the sentence (run, pout, whine, is)

Adjective – modifies or describes a noun (red, short, angry)

Adverb – modifies or describes a noun, an adjective, an advert, or a verb (usually, greatly, fine, well)

Preposition – words that provide direction for the sentence (to, about, over, under)

Conjunction – words that combine thoughts (and, or, but)

Interjection – words that interrupt the flow of thought (yes! No!, Ouch!)

Guided Practice: Students will use each work in a sentence (silly sentences! Grumbly gremlins gyrated throughout their humble huts). Do this in groups – assign a part of speech for each group: once sentence per group

Closure: Share the sentences with the teacher making sure that the sentences are correctly written.

Independent Practice: Students will create their own sentences.

Evaluation: Teacher will read their work and correct if necessary

Lesson #2 – Parsing, or the Identification of the Eight Parts of Speech

Objectives: Identify the parts of speech in the Gettysburg Address (one paragraph or the whole document – (See <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=36> - National Archives.)

Citation: Abraham Lincoln, Draft of the Gettysburg Address: Nicolay Copy, November 1863; Series 3, General Correspondence, 1837-1897; The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (Washington, D. C.: American Memory Project, [2000-02]), <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alhome.html>.

Preparation: Pencils (not pens!), paper, clean and flat surfaces on which to write

Anticipatory Set: Students will experience a lesson in parsing as it was taught in the late 19th century. The Gettysburg Address, a perennial favorite of English teachers, is the subject because of its clarity, simplicity, and historical timeliness. This section of the unit can be tedious for the students, so do not insist that they parse the whole speech ... a paragraph is fine. This lesson can be done successfully in an individual setting, but it is more fun if students do this in groups.

Instruction: The students will have demonstrated their comfort and acceptable mastery of the parts of speech. They will, preferably in groups, identify how each word is used in assigned sections of Lincoln’s speech. Each student will have to make a copy of the group’s assigned section. (*No teacher at this time in history every passed up a chance to practice ciphering!*)

Make sure that the students leave two blank lines between each line of writing. That is so that they can easily write in the parts of speech above each word in the sentence.

Guided Practice: The teacher will have the first sentence of the speech nicely written on the black/white board. Parse the first few words and then ask for help from the students. They will catch on quickly.

Closure: Be sure to walk among the students and check their group work. Correct errors, if necessary, because when the students share their work with other groups, it will be important that they experience success and the self-esteem that accompanies it.

Independent Practice: Students will parse the last sentence of the speech on their own.

Evaluation: The teacher will check the work



FWS – Graduation Class – *citation 48A*

Lesson #3 – Syntax, the Definition

Objectives: Students will learn the definition of syntax and be able to arrange words in their proper order.

Preparation: Write definition on the board. Put simple to more complex sentences on the board. Put sentences with gaps on the board.

Anticipatory Set: Using the sentences that the students have created, show them how syntax is a tool which we learn when learning to speak our language; it is almost inherent. We can easily fill in the blanks, because we know the arrangement of our words. What is difficult is poetry, because that literary form plays with syntax. Be sure to provide examples – See Shakespeare.

Instruction and Guided Practice: Syntax is the arrangement of words in sentences. English is a language that demands the subject first, the verb next, and the object last – *Jeff smacked the ball*. What if we said that the ball smacked Jeff? The subject must be first; otherwise, our intent is changed. Because our syntax is so rigid, the parts of speech are easy to identify.

(Fill in the gaps for the following example as a class:

Abigail, _____ cat, hopped _____ the _____, _____ proceeded to whine _____ for her _____.

Here are a few syntax rules:

- *Articles (the, an, a) always come before the noun.*
- *Adjectives come before the noun.*
- *Adverbs come after verbs.*
- *Subjects come before the action.*
- *Objects come after the action.*
- *Prepositions usually come after the object or verb.*

(There are a lot more rules! These are just a few.)

Closure: This lesson now segues into the next.

Lesson #4 – Parsing within the Constraints of English Syntax: Word Order Means Everything in Lewis Carol’s *Jabberwocky!* (1872)

*'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.*

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Objectives: Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the parts of speech and syntax by parsing *Jabberwocky*.

Preparation: Have several copies of *Jabberwocky* – triple spaced. Divide students into groups of three.

Anticipatory Set: Students will parse certain sections of the poem in their groups. Teacher will assign short sections.

Instruction and Guided Practice: Parse the first sentence with the students, showing them how to do this. Then, have the students parse their sentences within their groups. When they are finished, be sure to share the work and be sure to correct when necessary. Point out to the students that even though most of the poem is written in gibberish, we can make sense of it because of our syntax. We know which words are verbs and which words are adjectives because of their placement in the sentences.

Independent Practice: Students will complete the parsing of the last stanza on their own.

Evaluation: Teacher will read students’ works and congratulate them on their exceptional knowledge of the parts of speech and syntax!

(NOTE: Please check the following URLs for copies of *Jabberwocky*)
online as of October 2003

<http://www.jabberwocky.com/carroll/jabber/>

<http://www.ruthannzaroff.com/wonderland/jabberwocky.htm>

<http://www.poets.org/poems/poems.cfm?prmID=1457>

<http://eserver.org/poetry/jabberwocky.html>

OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

I think that it would also be fun for a class interesting in the 1870s to research Lincoln, Carroll, women in education, and education itself.

In addition, I would like to note that I have taught this lesson in costume at the historic Fourth Ward School in Virginia City, and it was truly a wonderful experience for me. (See Nevada Appeal article “Kids learn from the old school – May 4, 2001. – Available as of October 2003) (<http://nevadaappeal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/artikkel?SearchID=73150816103894&Avis=NA&Dato=20010504&Kategori=NEWS&Lopenr=105048121&Ref=AR>)



I was quite prim and proper with my hair in a tight bun, all corseted and ramrod straight, a long black taffeta skirt, which swished briskly, a high-necked and lacy white blouse pinned with a cameo at my neck, topped by a demure plaid jacket, nicely fitted at the waist. I wore shoes that were replicas of the time (very uncomfortable!), and carried a cane that I used as a pointer. It was truly amazing how those children sat up and took notice when I walked into the classroom and introduced myself. They immediately became quiet, sat up straight, and paid close attention. It was probably the most attentive class of student that I have ever taught.

At the end of the lesson, when I stepped out of character, they all breathed a collective sigh of relief, and as they filed out of the room, still in an orderly manner, I received many compliments and thank you's. They remarked that they had truly learned something.

I still feel good when I remember the experience. I hope that you will, too.

RULES FOR A TEACHER AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

1. You will not marry during the term of your contract.
2. You are not to keep company with men.
3. You must be home between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless attending a school function.
4. Your dresses must not be any shorter than 2 inches above the ankle.
5. You may not travel beyond the city limits unless you have the permission of the chairman of the school board.
6. You may not ride in a carriage or automobile with any man unless he is your father or brother.
7. You may not dress in bright colors.
8. You may under no circumstances dye your hair.
9. You must wear at least two petticoats.
10. You may not loiter downtown in ice cream stores.