

Early American Captivity Narratives and Their Indian Captors

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Overview

Rationale

Objectives

Strategies

Classroom Activities

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Appendices-Standards

Overview

This three-week unit is designed for English 3 PSP (eleventh grade scholars) and will strengthen the students' understanding of the different peoples who inhabited this continent at the time of the Europeans coming to settle here in the 1600s and 1700s. Meshing with the study of Units One and Two of *The Language of Literature: American Literature*, McDougell Littell, 2002, the students will gain a further understanding of human nature and the beliefs of these early settlers through captivity narrative. The eleventh grade year is centered on the study of American literature to coincide with their social studies curriculum of American history. Students will complete a Full-Process writing assignment that can be used to fill the portfolio requirement for a narrative piece (see **Appendix A**) and can be adapted to other school districts' needs.

Rationale

This unit will explore the interactions of white European settlers with the Native Americans on the continent of North America in the sixteen and seventeen hundreds. Designed to accompany the eleventh grade American literature curriculum, this unit will further explore the inhabitants of early America through the relationships forged by Indian captors and the white (for the most part) European Puritans they held captive. Stress will be on the reading and evaluating of the "captivity narrative," a type of writing that was popular in its time. Some true stories and many fictional accounts were well received by the early American reading public. This fifteen-day unit will culminate with students writing their own original captivity narratives.

Suzannah's Story

It seemed as if we had been walking for months when it was only weeks. When had we become separated from the rest of the Deerfield party? How had it happened? "Suzannah!" I could still hear my sister's terror-stricken voice calling

me, but I could barely remember all the details. It was hard enough trying to keep warm on this march. Will I ever be warm enough again? Out here, surrounded by an early fall snow and nothing but forests and the sounds of strange animals, it seems doubtful. Everything in my life is doubtful, now. I doubt that I will survive this journey north; look how many already were massacred by these red barbarians! Poor little James, he never had a chance. He will never see his fourth month, and here I am complaining about the cold. “I am one of the lucky ones,” she said aloud to herself. Her “master” was kinder than most. Another would have sliced her slim body to pieces on the spot and never looked back.

About the fall, I can’t help it if I am ungraceful, especially in these unknown, snow-covered woods. How was it my fault that my moccasin caught between two tree roots, tripped me, and stuck fast? I couldn’t be expected to go shoe-less, now could I? The other Braves seemed to be telling Hawk of Many Colors that he should just kill me and be done with it, the burden that I was, and go on. Hawk of Many Colors indicated that I was young (barely 18), and too valuable as a cook and a beast of burden; I would fetch much when redeemed. Me, a beast of burden? That hadn’t happened yet, but he did save my life, and my shoe, what there was of it.

So he actually pulled the roots apart and gently lifted my leg out from under them. We were so close that I could feel his breath on me and inhale the strong, masculine scent of him. It was warm and scented with pine, like the trees we were trooping under. While he worked on my foot, trying to get some circulation back into it, I looked closely at the smooth, burnished skin of his face, for the first time noticing his long, almost girlish eye-lashes, concealing almost greenish-hazel eyes, speckled with amber and gold flecks. I literally found it difficult to breathe. For a split second it was hard to remember that he was the enemy and had been part of the group that murdered my friends’ children.

I had enjoyed an untroubled existence until that terrible day. My parents, both devoted, God-fearing Christians were both loving and strict with my sister Mary and me. As the elder of the two, I had been the leader, but Mary was my dearest companion and confidante, and being ripped from her side was even more wrenching than the separation from my parents. Then there was baby James—the only palpable reminder I had of my dear departed husband James. We’d been married on my seventeenth birthday but I’d know him since I turned thirteen. For three years I sneaked glances his way on the Sabbath. I tried my best not to do this during services—only satisfying my greedy eyes afterwards on the lawn during the family greeting time. “He likes you,” Mary had whispered to me more than once. At eleven, she was unafraid of contact with a young man and she moved easily to him, conversing about the weather, her newest flock of baby chicks, and his opinion on this year’s crops.

In their turn, my parents invited James to Sabbath dinner. Being a young bachelor, many Goodwives invited him to their homes on the Sabbath. As Mary drew James into conversation, I listened shyly. His eyes were so blue and his smile made me feel like I was melting inside. When he first asked me to go walking after a Sunday dinner I nearly fainted and could barely whisper, "Yes." In the kitchen I could see Mary jumping up and down, Mother trying to subdue her.

Throughout the next two years we never spent a Sunday apart. Gradually, Mother began inviting James to midweek supper before the evening prayer meeting. We were married on a sunny morning in June and soon after I was visited by the sickness that can only mean one thing: I was to be blessed with a child from God.

It seemed impossible that all of this had happened to me in my short life. James had been captured even before little James was born. At first we hoped for his redemption, but news trickled back, a little at a time, and, at last we were told he had perished. How cruel! Yet, this was but another trial for a good Christian wife to endure. My parents lovingly cared for me while I was awaiting the birth of my child. Mary was all sweetness and concern, and despite my sorrow at James' passing, I found myself hopeful.

James was born in late spring. I was delighted to see his father's blue eyes and ready smile. Life was regenerating and I, too, felt some renewal. I would dedicate my life to little James and the glorification of God.

Then, just three months later, Deerfield was attacked. My parents and sister were taken away; I saw many neighbors led away and many others killed. That's when Hawk of Many Colors saw me and kept me aside from the rest of my family. I was clutching baby James to my breast and would not put him aside despite the demands of the savages. Hawk of Many Colors came near and looked at the sweet babe. He said something to the others who grunted and turned away. Then, Hawk of Many Colors swept me and James up into his arms and carried us off. James continued to sleep peacefully and I willed myself to remain calm and not scream so as to not terrify the baby.

I kept asking for my parents and my sister, but those I asked just looked at me stonily and either kept silent or shouted at me. It was some time before I began to understand their language. The first night we camped, Hawk of Many Colors wrapped me and James in a buffalo robe and made a place for us near the fire. He sat farther off, watching us. That's when James began to cough. It was heartrending. He would turn blue from coughing until I thought he would die then he would stop and pink up again and seem fine. I was terrified the savages would take baby James and use him for target practice, but every time one of

them came near, Hawk of Many Colors would yell at him and the savage would retreat.

By the fourth day, little James never stopped coughing and would not nurse. Hawk of Many Colors gently took him from me, my eyes streaming, and tried to give him some liquid from a pouch. This medicine made the coughing stop, but James still would not suck. Eventually, I drifted into a kind of sleep, still cradling James.

I awoke with a start, suddenly aware that my arms were empty. All was silent; there was no sound of a baby coughing. I started to wail and Hawk of Many Colors was instantly by my side. He led me to where some squaws were preparing baby James for the grave. He was washed and dressed in furs and feathers with the most angelic smile on his face. He was indeed an angel now. I prayed thanks to God for relieving him from his suffering and rejoiced that he might be at God's right hand and be meeting his earthly father for the first time. The picture of my dear husband and sweet baby together in the hereafter was a painful comfort and I nearly fainted with the thought of it.

Later, Hawk of Many Colors led a burial ceremony that moved me greatly. While I prayed my Christian prayers, my captors paid respects to my lost babe in their own way as if he were one of their own. I have since learned how peculiar this was; white babies were never treated this way by the savages. It was only because of the power and respect that Hawk of Many Colors commanded that this was done for my child. At the time I had no idea how grateful I should have been.

It has been several months now since that sad time. My milk was dried up soon after one of the squaws made me drink some bitter-tasting mixture. They now treat me with some deference because of Hawk of Many Colors. I think I am lucky that he has no squaws of his own or I might have been torn to pieces by them. I think he would like for me to become his squaw. I think well of him and he is handsome, brave, and strong. But I cannot turn away from my God even though I feel that I could turn towards this powerful but gentle warrior. I pray to God daily for continued strength to keep going for however long this earthly trial demands. Glory unto God!

If all of this sounds familiar, maybe you were reading an historical romance novel by one of hundreds of authors on the market. The above is original, but is a genre used over and over again in Harlequin Romances. It is the "meat and potatoes" of captivity narratives, where all of the heroines are beautiful and puritanical and their Indian captors are handsome, with rock hard bodies, somehow have blue or greenish-gray eyes, and are kind and considerate of their captives. Then, of course, the captive; Sarah, Abigail, Marybeth, or Chastity falls in love with her Indian captor and they stand up against family, tradition and

society and make a passionate life for themselves with a marriage blessed by all.

Unfortunately, this is not how most of the captivity narratives ended. In the Deerfield incident, 18th century, here were 112 captured, 48 slain, and a total of only 140 survivors (Demos, p. 21). It took as short as two or sometimes as long as seven or eight years for captives to be returned or redeemed. Infants two and under were always slain. Children three to twelve were murdered at a somewhat slower rate. All teenagers thirteen to nineteen survived. And lastly, women were more likely than men to be captured (Demos, p. 21).

It was also an Iroquois tradition to cut off the forefinger of a captive's right hand (Demos, p. 21). They did so with the Reverend John Williams when they captured him from Deerfield, along with his wife and several children. In this narrative, we learn that Mrs. Williams did not survive the march to Montreal. The three older children were all separated from their father and each other, but they did survive. The redemption of the Deerfield company was done on a piecemeal basis; "two hundred and three hundred captives were eventually repatriated" (Demos, p. 45). On November 21, 1705 another 57 were returned and happily, the Reverend John Williams was among them.

When these captives were released, Cotton Mather threw himself in the matter of receiving these captives. He prayed with them, "put books in their hand," and preached a sermon for them (Demos, p. 49). He even wrote a book, "Good Fetch'd Out of Evil (1706). This book was an instant sensation, as was the narrative published by Rev. John Williams, containing 25,000 words about the memoirs of his captivity. This book became the literary canon of "Puritanism" (Demos, p. 49).

There are other famous captives who wrote books. One is Mary Rowlandson. Her tale, *The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* begins on the tenth of February, 1675, when the Indians raided Lancaster. She begins her story with descriptions of the attacks on her neighbors. Then her own family is beset by the attackers:

At length they came and beset our own house, and quickly it was the dolefullest day that ever mine eyes saw. The house stood upon the edge of a hill; some of the Indians got behind the hill others into the barn, and others behind anything that could shelter them; from all of which places they shot against the house, so that the bullets seemed to fly like hail; and quickly they wounded one man among us, they another, and then a third. (Rowlandson, 2)

After recounting her capture, Mrs. Rowlandson outlines each portion of her nomadic existence with the Indians under headings separated by each time they moved, from “The First Remove” to the twentieth. The study of her narrative reveals not only the experiences of a white woman held captive by Indians, but shows her abilities to survive, evaluate her situation, and remain true to her beliefs.

This study illustrates how Mrs. Rowlandson’s narrative operates on three levels: the realistic captivity narrative, the moral/spiritual autobiography, and the mythic. The first of these appeals to the reading public in a sensational way, offering the horrors of capture and the cruelty with which many of the captured were tortured and killed. The second level, that of the moral tale, appeals to those of a didactic nature who need a lesson in their reading. The mythic level attracts the scholar who enjoys the parallels Mrs. Rowlandson draws between her own struggles and those of Biblical proportions. This level utilizes typology and follows many of the steps in Vladimir Propp’s morphology of the hero (Propp).

The most engaging part of Mrs. Rowlandson’s narrative for today’s readers might well be her resourcefulness and her ability to adapt to the Indians’ lifestyle (though never to their beliefs). This is reported time and again as she uses her sewing skills to gain food and other necessities throughout her captivity. Probably the least attractive aspect of her narrative for today’s readers is her religious zealotry. In today’s society, many of our young people are not strictly religious and many others would philosophically reason that they could say anything to their captors knowing in their hearts that they don’t really believe it.

The meticulous care with which Mrs. Rowlandson’s narrative is written shows the well-ordered mind of an organized person. Having to write the narrative entirely after the fact, Mrs. Rowlandson details many events and occurrences in great detail. Her story ends joyfully with her “redemption” to white society. Many other captives did not end their stories this way.

One captive in particular, Eunice Williams, chose to stay with her adopted Indian family. The daughter of the well-known and highly respected minister, John Williams, Eunice was abducted at the same time as many of her family members from Deerfield when she was only seven years old. Through many negotiations and journeys, all the rest of her surviving family members were “redeemed,” but her father still agonized over her continued captivity with the Indians. Shortly after her capture, her father was allowed to meet with her and he was relieved to learn that she could still recite her prayers. She confided to him that her captors made her say some prayers in Latin but she hoped that wouldn’t harm her.

Thirty-six years later, Eunice was reunited with her father and other family members. She had been completely immersed into the tribal ways of the Mohawks. She had been given a childhood Mohawk name, A'ongote. When she was older she received the second, or adult name of Gannenstenhawi. Living as Mohawks who were also Catholics, Eunice was also given the church name of Marguerite when she converted to Catholicism. That was a tremendous blow to the Williams family. To have one of their children persuaded to join the papists!

When Eunice finally visited her original family members all those years later she was accompanied by her Indian husband Francois Xavier Arosen. They had been married when she was about sixteen and he was about twenty-two. The meeting between the estranged siblings was difficult since she had long forgotten how to speak English. She treated the Williams family like distant cousins. She and her husband went to visit her brother Stephen, a respected minister, but instead of staying with his family in the house, the couple camped in the orchard. Stephen would speak to his sister in English and someone would translate and then there would be the awkward embrace.

Marguerite A'ongote (as she was known in adulthood) had at least three children, two daughters of which lived to adulthood. They were given double names also, one Catholic and one Mohawk.

Who can say which of these outcomes was the better? Both Mary Rowlandson and Eunice Williams led ultimately happy lives. The Puritans felt that Eunice Williams' soul was lost as well as the personality she had as a child. Her descendants lived on and merged with both Mohawk and colonial American societies. As the Indians said, "Your blood with my blood." John Demos responded to this with, "Was there not a kind of redemption here as well?" (Demos, p. 252)

These two examples show the experiences of two women and how differently their lives turned out. Besides these, many other compelling narratives survive today. The bibliography provides other sources from which to choose, including that of Olaudah Equiano, of African descent, who wrote a "slave narrative." An excerpt of this is included in the McDougell Littell textbook.

Stories like these have led to many fictional retellings of similar situations including a number of popular films such as *The Searchers* and *Dances with Wolves*. If America is the great melting pot that we've all been taught since childhood, here is the beginning of the intermingling with the Europeans and the natives of North America.

Objectives

- 1 Students will become acquainted with the genre of the “captivity narrative.”
- 2 Following the curriculum for American literature, students will be enriched by the additional study of another form of history through reading the narratives.
- 3 Students will learn to evaluate the writing of these early Americans.
- 4 Students will make moral and ethical judgments about the actions of those about whom they are reading.
- 5 Students will gain confidence in their own writing abilities through the original composition of their own captivity narrative.
- 6 Oral presentation skills will be practiced with the reading aloud of their original narratives.

Strategies

The prereading lecture will serve to awaken the students’ interest in the captives and their predicaments. Reading the Rowlandson narrative should spur them to examine it for the three levels on which it operates. Following this thinking, the students will then have questions and comments for class discussion and be ready to embark on their own original narratives. By creating a full-process piece, students will be forced to think about what they are writing and how, and will serve as peer editors to their classmates. Ultimately, students will gain facility in oral presentation with the reading of their narratives to the class at the end of the unit (see **Appendix D**).

Classroom Activities

The first week of the unit will include a teacher lecture about the material and will serve as prereading. This will include information from the above narrative and may be supplemented with other information from the text and from the bibliography. Students will then read excerpts from Mary Rowlandson’s account and John Demos’ *The Unredeemed Captive* (Eunice Williams’ story) interspersed with discussions of what was read.

The second week will concentrate on the full-process writing of the students’ original captivity narratives. (see **Appendix A**) Students will follow the format and take up to five days to complete the assignment using class time and conference with the teacher and a peer responder. Any work not completed in class will be homework. At the end of the second week, the students’ papers will be returned for final draft revisions and there will be time for individual conferencing with students as needed.

The third week will finish the project with final drafts of the original stories due on Monday. The remainder of the week will be spent in oral

presentations of the students' work and the creation of a wall display with the completed narratives. If the unit is taught just prior to Thanksgiving, a fitting ending to the project would be a traditional Thanksgiving dinner.

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Teachers' Bibliography

Carretta, Vincent, ed., *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, London and New York: Penguin, 2003. Reprints the 9th edition (London: 1794) along with a number of Olaudah Equiano's letters and newspaper articles. Scholarly, with a wealth of detailed notes and introduction by Carretta, this is also by far the most accessible edition.

Demos, John, *The Unredeemed Captive*, Vintage, 1995. This tells the story of Eunice Williams's captivity as viewed by her family and friends.

Mather, Cotton, *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances (1697)*: Hannah Swarton's and Hannah Dustan's narratives preached then.

Mather, Cotton, *Good Fetch'd Out of Evil (1706)*: John Williams and another Puritan captive, Mary French.

Propp, Vladimir, *Morphology of the Folktale*. rev. and ed. By Louis A. Wagner. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968. An examination of the chain of events common to all folktales.

Rowlandson, Mary, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together, with the Faithfulness of his Promises Displayed Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (1682)* An account of the events preceding and throughout the captivity of a Puritan wife and mother.

Seaver, James Everett, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison (1824)*: Willing captivity as dictated to Seaver by Jemison.

Williams, John, *The Redeemed Captive (1704)*. Narrative account of the recovery of a captive.

Students' Bibliography

Carretta, Vincent, ed., *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, London and New York: Penguin, 2003. (optional reading)

Demos, John, *The Unredeemed Captive*, Vintage, 1995

Rowlandson, Mary, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together, with the Faithfulness of his Promises Displayed Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682)

Seaver, James Everett, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824)
(optional reading)

Appendices

Appendix A--Full process writing assignment

Narrative

DIRECTIONS: Now that we have read the excerpts from Mrs. Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative you will write your own captivity narrative. Keep in mind the goals of 1) realism, 2) morality, and 3) mythic quality that we discussed prior to reading. Follow the Full-Process format and time frame given below.

1. Prewriting—complete in class today.
2. Rough Draft—Write in class tomorrow and finish for homework.
3. Peer Response—When you are ready to have another student read your Rough Draft, the Peer Response forms will be available on my desk.
4. Second Draft—After you read your peer responder's remarks, write your second draft, making corrections. Then hand in all four pieces of the assignment.
5. Final Draft—When I have finished commenting on your Second Draft I will return all four pieces to you to assemble and turn in with your Final Draft.

Appendix B

FULL-PROCESS WRITING

Prewriting—Brainstorming, taking notes, mapping

1st Draft—Rough essay based on above

Peer Response—see form on separate page

2nd Draft—correction of Rough or 1st Draft based on Peer Response

Teacher Response—comments by the teacher written on your 2nd Draft

Final Draft—You final corrected essay on top of all the other papers, stapled or paper-clipped

Appendix C

PEER RESPONSE FORM FOR FULL-PROCESS WRITING

Peer Responder _____ Writer

DIRECTIONS: Circle the appropriate number preceding each statement based on your reading and understanding of the paper.

On the following scale, how well does this paper fulfill the requirements?

0—not at all 1—a little 2—low average 3—average 4—high average 5—excellent

0 1 2 3 4 5 This paper has a clear introductory statement and a strong opening paragraph.

0 1 2 3 4 5 The theme of this paper is developed in the second paragraph

0 1 2 3 4 5 The writer explains his/her ideas well.

0 1 2 3 4 5 The final paragraph makes a strong conclusion.

0 1 2 3 4 5 The paper is free of spelling errors.

0 1 2 3 4 5 The paper is free of grammatical and punctuation errors.

0 1 2 3 4 5 The paper is free of run-on sentences and sentence fragments.

Write a short answer to the following items:

I would give this paper an overall rating of 0 1 2 3 4 5 because

_____.

The most important revision the writer should make is

_____.

Additional comments (optional):

Appendix D

NAME _____ DATE _____

Speaking Accomplishment: Information

A Speech of Information is one in which the writer provides knowledge to the audience about a particular topic. This type of speaking requires careful planning and a thorough understanding of the topic.

Attach evidence that shows your ability to present a speech to inform. Evidence may include planning notes, an outline, speech notes, or an audio or videotape. Also, you must include teacher, peer and self-evaluation. Be sure to attach your assignment sheet and the rubric or criteria sheet you used to guide your work.

Please check off all of the following that you did that demonstrated your ability to deliver a Speech of Information.

Delivery

I have

- _____ made appropriate eye contact.
- _____ maintained appropriate posture.
- _____ used language and gestures expressively and persuasively.
- _____ adjusted my speech to the reaction of my audience.
- _____ used effectively such devices as pace, volume, stress, enunciation, and pronunciation.
- _____ spoken audibly.
- _____ exhibited enthusiasm in my delivery.

Content

I have

- _____ chosen a unique topic that was interesting and appropriate for my audience.
- _____ set a clear purpose for the speech in my introduction.
- _____ demonstrated evidence of extensive research.
- _____ used an attention-getting introduction.
- _____ arranged content in logical order.
- _____ provided excellent supporting details.
- _____ used an effective conclusion.
- _____ defined all unfamiliar terminology.
- _____ made no (or few) mechanical or usage errors.
- _____ used effective audio-visual aids. (optional)

Describe the assignment that prompted this work.
(Leave more space here when you print this.)

Tell how your audience reacted to your speech.
(Leave more space here when you print this.)

Standards

Pennsylvania Content Standards for Communications: Reading, Writing, Listening, And Speaking

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including narrate, inform, and persuade, in all subject areas.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify the purpose, structure and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.
9. All students communicate appropriately in business, work and other applied situations.