



Unit Overview

Some would say the writers in this unit—D. H. Lawrence, Federico García Lorca, Emily Dickinson, Edgar Allan Poe—are too difficult for middle school. Their language is poetic, literary, and complex. They use vocabulary and syntax from earlier eras.

We were careful, however, to choose texts by these authors that—once you start making sense of them—are quite visceral and concrete. We particularly sought out texts that are highly visual in the following two senses:

1. They describe vivid, visual images that students will be able to “see.”
2. “Seeing” the imagery will open the door to a more comprehensive understanding of the text.

The practice we will keep returning to in this unit is a set of visualization techniques that we call “Reading Like a Movie Director.” When movie directors make a movie out of text, they have to read it carefully. They have to make something out of their reading—something that captures the essence and key details of the original work, but also makes it new. Since moviemaking is an art form that includes images and sound, moviemakers have to pay particular attention to the images the writer is evoking and the sounds the text describes. It also brings matters of character, setting, and perspective to the fore—where will it be filmed? From whose perspective will this scene be seen? How will we convey the characters through their actions rather than through textual descriptions?

Here are a few steps we will go through repeatedly in this unit:

Step 1: Forming a mental image. We’ll use a D. H. Lawrence, a Federico García Lorca, and an Emily Dickinson poem to teach students this approach to close reading: If you don’t understand the whole, make a mental image of the things you do understand. Then flesh out the details of that visual image, and it may start to reveal the meaning of the whole. Have students make word pictures, sketch on paper, and use any drawing tools available to try to capture what they “see” in the text.

Step 2: Making storyboards. Beginning with their reading of “The Tell-Tale Heart,” students begin to make their mental images from step 1 concrete in exactly the way movie directors do—with storyboards. Students use an app—Tell-Tale Art—to create storyboards that render their understanding of the text.

Step 3: Directing. Students begin conceiving their own approach to perspective, characters, settings, sounds/soundtracks, and mood. These are all great close reading practices.

Step 4: Comparing movies and written stories. Your students will have access to two thoughtful, animated adaptations of the Poe texts they study in this unit, “The Raven” and “The Cask of Amontillado,” created by the Academy Award-winning animation studio, Moonbot Studios. They watch these movies only after they have created their own mental visualizations. And then, rather than simply watching what they have read, they will carefully analyze the choices made by the filmmakers and critique whether they would have made the same or different choices.

Don’t hesitate to tell students that the readings in this unit are difficult, that they might make little sense at first, and that they may not make sense even after several readings. But assure them that you and the class will stay with each text until it makes sense to everyone. It will be important for students to struggle with the difficulty, and to see the kind



of hard work that making sense of a text requires. These texts will reward the effort—the sense that emerges will be vivid and precise even if it started out blurry and incomplete. And the confidence that comes when students learn that they can make sense of complex 19th-century texts is a powerful force for their future as readers.

Texts

- “The White Horse” by D. H. Lawrence
- “The Silence” by Federico García Lorca
- “A narrow fellow in the grass” by Emily Dickinson
- “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe
- M’Naghten Rule, from *Queen v. M’Naghten*
- “The Cask of Amontillado” by Edgar Allan Poe
- “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe
- EXTRA: “Chicago” by Carl Sandburg
- EXTRA: Excerpt from “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- EXTRA: “The Charge of the Light Brigade” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
- EXTRA: “A Poison Tree” by William Blake

Skills and Content

Topic & Theme: Reading like a movie director

Reading: Evaluate the reliability of a fictional narrator

Writing: Compare and contrast characters’ perspectives on a narrative

Activity Highlights: Use a storyboarding app, debate narrator’s sanity, compare film adaptations

Text Features: American poetry and gothic literature with unreliable narrators

Sensitive Content

Some of the texts in this unit focus on Edgar Allan Poe’s mastery in fictional tales of gothic horror. Some students may be sensitive to the graphic nature of Poe’s content and images that deal with the subjects of murder, insanity, and revenge.

Grammar Instruction

The Amplify Grammar Pacing Guide provides a sequence of recommended grammar topics for each grade level and identifies both whole class and self-guided lessons to cover each topic. Use this guide to plan grammar instruction for each Amplify Flex Day.



After you have provided some grammar instruction, assess whether students are applying what they've learned to their own writing during Amplify's 12-minute writing activities. If they need support to integrate and apply a new skill, consider assigning one of the grammar revision assignments (found in the Materials section of each Flex Day) to complete at the end of the next 4 writing prompts.

Resources for grammar instruction:

- Flex Days: The Flex Days provide an opportunity for students to receive regular instruction on needed grammar skills.
- Amplify Grammar Unit: The Grammar unit covers key grammar topics for the middle grades, both grade-level topics and areas where students often need review. Topic Pairings:
 - Sub-units 1 and 2: Sentences
 - Sub-units 3 and 4: Pronouns
 - Sub-units 5 and 6: Verb Tenses
- *Mastering Conventions* PDFs:
 - *Mastering Conventions 1, 2, and 3* contain student exercises and teacher instruction to cover grades 3–8 grammar skills.
 - *Mastering Conventions 4* focuses on spelling, including assessment recommendations, student worksheets, teacher instruction, and word lists.
- The Quill™ program. Amplify has partnered with Quill to provide teachers and students use of Quill's extensive writing and grammar lessons and activities. Use the global navigation to access Quill.