

Workshop 7

Ritual Artifacts

Introduction

This workshop session introduces the analysis of ritual artifacts as a tool in the literature classroom. David Watters, literature professor at the University of New Hampshire, uses the example of Puritan gravestones to help teachers enhance their reading of American literature texts.

By looking at two intellectual products from the same culture—the Puritan gravestones and a captivity narrative* titled *The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*—you will better understand how the religious beliefs of the Puritans shaped their understanding of death.

During the course of the session, you will learn how to search for ritual artifacts to help teach American literature. In the onscreen classroom, David discusses how he uses ritual artifacts to illuminate the discipline of religion in his own classroom. He provides high school teachers with ideas about how to read two ritual objects; he also suggests specific lesson plans.

We then follow the onscreen teachers into the computer lab where they work with David, Laura Arnold Leibman (Reed College English professor), and each other to find artifacts that supplement the themes and context of the literature they are currently teaching.

Next, we follow Paul Warner—a teacher at Evergreen High School in Vancouver, Washington—into his own high school classroom. We watch as he models a similar lesson with his students. Finally we hear Paul’s reflections on his own teaching practices.

* indicates a reference in the Glossary.

Before the Session

Before watching the “Ritual Artifacts” video, be sure to:

- Guide: Read the Ritual Artifacts Reading.
- Video: Watch the *American Passages* episode “Utopian Promise.” (The episode can be viewed on the *American Passages* Web site at www.learner.org. Click on “Video on Demand” or go to <http://www.learner.org/resources/series164.html> and click on the VoD icon next to the appropriate program title.)
- Web: Download *The Mary Carr Stone* (serial #4427) from the *American Passages* archive site at http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php.
- Literature: Read *The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*.

As you read, consider the following close reading questions. See the Teacher Resources section in the Appendix for instructions on effective close reading.

- Look at the language that Mary Rowlandson uses when she talks about her Native American captors. What words does she use to describe them?
- What typological* implications of the Puritan Covenant* can be found in Rowlandson’s captivity narrative? Mark specific passages.

Synopsis of David Watters’s Presentation

- David begins by explaining the two categories of ritual artifacts: the spiritual and the social, both of which provide a sense of order. He uses the example of the gravestones as religious and spiritual artifacts that mark the boundaries of life and death. For social ritual artifacts, he uses the examples of homes, furniture, and clothing; these daily-used artifacts provide a certain order to family life and the larger society.
- David then looks specifically at the two Puritan gravestones, *The Mary Carr Stone* and *The William Dickson Stone*, as ritual artifacts. He models a close reading of the first stone for the teachers and then makes some connections with Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative. The teachers do the second stone’s close reading and connecting, with David’s guidance along the way.
- Ultimately, David and the teachers discuss practical ways to use Rowlandson’s narrative in the high school classroom. How should the teachers address questions that arise when reading this story? They go on to discuss pairing other ritual artifacts with other works of literature.

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts

Facilitators:

- Before this workshop session, you will need to download the photograph that David used (*The Mary Carr Stone*, serial #4427) from the *American Passages* archive and print out copies for all your participants. Be sure to print and copy the descriptive information that accompanies the image. (For further information on how to navigate the archive, see instructions in the front matter.)
- Begin the workshop by watching program 7: "Ritual Artifacts" through the *American Passages* excerpted clip. Watch for approximately 11:30 minutes.
- Follow up with the discussion activity below. The discussion should take approximately 10 minutes.

Activity 1: Discussion of the Literary Movement

1. As a whole group, discuss what literature you have taught or are currently teaching from this literary movement. If you don't currently teach anything from this movement, how might you add it to your curriculum?

Other authors from *American Passages*' "Utopian Promise" for potential discussion:

- **John Winthrop** (1588–1649) Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony; best known for his sermon "A Model of Christian Charity."
- **William Penn** (1644–1718) Founder of Pennsylvania; known for his "Account of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians."
- **Anne Bradstreet** (1612–1672) Puritan poet; known as one of the first poets to write English verse in the American Colonies.
- **Jonathan Edwards** (1703–1758) Considered leader of The Great Awakening in New England; wrote the Puritan sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."
- **Edward Taylor** (1642–1729) Known as the best writer of Puritan times; Taylor's poetry captures the attitude of second-generation Puritans.
- **Samson Occom** (1723–1792) Wrote one of the earliest autobiographies written by a Native American, *A Short Narrative*; his writing denies that he was a Mohawk Indian and instead focuses on his conversion to Christianity.
- **William Bradford** (1590–1657) One of the leaders of Colonial America; wrote *History of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*.
- **Thomas Morton** (1579–1647) Author of *New English Canaan; Or, New Canaan...* published in 1637.
- **John Woolman** (1720–1772) Quaker author; sought to achieve fair treatment of Indians and vitalize Quaker pacifism.
- **Sarah Kemble Knight** (1666–1727) Wrote a literary diary of her 1704–1705 trip from Boston to New York entitled *The Journal of Madam Knight*.

For more information on these authors, visit the *American Passages* Web site at www.learner.org.

2. How did the Ritual Artifacts Reading change or enhance your view of Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative?

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts, cont'd.

Facilitators:

- Continue watching the video until the point where David Watters finishes reading the first artifact (*The Mary Carr Stone*, serial #4427). Begin at the title First Artifact Reading and watch for approximately 9:30 minutes.
- Divide the session participants into groups of three and hand out the previously downloaded ritual artifact. Each group should have the same gravestone to analyze. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Activity 2: Reading the First Artifact

1. In your group, analyze the gravestone image that your facilitator provides for you. First, make some initial observations about the artifact:

- What do you initially notice about this image?
- How does it compare to gravestones you have seen in the past?
- What details in the image seem overtly "Puritan" and why?

2. Next, read the artifact more closely; use the CAATS acronym below, along with the Ritual Artifacts Reading and synopsis of David Watters's lesson.

CAATS

Creator: Who created this artifact? What do we know about the person(s) who created it? How did it influence his/her life at the time it was created? Would the creator find relevant connections to the literature you are pairing with this artifact?

Assumptions: What do you know about the context of this artifact? What assumptions can you make based on prior information that you bring to this analysis?

Audience/User: Who was the audience for this object when it was originally created? What leads you to this assumption?

Time and Place: When and where was this artifact created?

Significance: Why is this artifact important? How does it help explain the literature you are teaching with it? Does the context of the artifact parallel the context of your literature?

Facilitators:

- After discussing the first artifact, *The Mary Carr Stone*, spend five to seven minutes discussing *The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. Use the close reading questions from the Before the Session section as a starting point for discussion.
- Continue watching the video of the session participants reading and making connections to the second artifact. Begin at the title Second Artifact Reading and watch for approximately 8:30 minutes. Stop the video after this second artifact reading, before the title Lesson Planning.
- Then do the following activity. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts, cont'd.

Activity 3: Connecting Literature to the Artifact

1. Whole-Group Discussion Questions:

- What is the first step that David Watters takes with the onscreen teachers to discuss the gravestones and their history?
- How does he move the teachers' discussion from the artifact analysis to connecting the artifact with the literature they are reading?
- What techniques does David use on-screen that help you as a viewer? Could you use these techniques in your own classroom?

2. Return to small groups. Begin to draw connections between the gravestone and the captivity narrative. Use the following guiding questions:

- What important cultural metaphors do the language in the text and the images on the gravestone provide for the Puritans?
- How do the gravestone images help to highlight the biblical allusions in Rowlandson's text?

Facilitators:

- Watch the Lesson Planning and In the Classroom portions of the video. Begin at the title Lesson Planning and watch for approximately 34:30 minutes.
- Then do the next activity. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Activity 4: Classroom Strategies Discussion/Create Lesson Plan

1. Whole-Group Discussion Question: You just watched Paul Warner apply what he had learned about connecting artifacts and literature to his own classroom. Take 10–15 minutes to discuss the following question:

- Paul used Puritan artifacts with a contemporary text. How did he help his students make the contextual connection given that the artifact and the literature were created more than 300 years apart?

2. In your same small groups, brainstorm different literary movements/pieces of literature that you could use with *The Mary Carr Stone*. What are some other ritual artifacts (churches, meeting houses, clothing, homes, bibles) that would supplement the literature you are using?

Facilitators:

- Watch Paul Warner's reflective interview. Begin at the title Reflection and watch for approximately three minutes.
- Ask session participants to comment on what Paul felt worked in his classroom. Did this parallel what they thought worked as they were watching?

Building a Lesson Plan and Teaching With Artifacts

For the detailed six-step process for artifact selection, see the Teacher Resources section in the Appendix.

Homework

1. Create a lesson plan using a ritual artifact with a piece of literature you are currently teaching.

For example: If you are teaching *The Binding Chair* by Kathryn Harrison or Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, pair the novel with the ritual act of Chinese foot binding—an integral part of traditional Chinese culture. Have students research the origination and execution of the ritual. Then have them relate this practice to the characters in the novel they are currently reading.

Share this lesson with fellow teachers at the next workshop session.

2. See next week's Before the Session section.

Artifacts and Literature Pairings: Ritual Artifacts

The following ritual artifacts can be found in the *American Passages* archive at http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php. Enter the serial number to view a picture of the item and a detailed description.

Artifact and Serial

Image of Spiritualism
and the Occult
(1901) (#7053)

Rosary Beads
(#9303)

George Washington's
personal copy of the
Declaration of
Independence
(1776) (#1433)

Literary Movement and Literature

Gothic Undercurrents:
Edgar Allan Poe's
The Raven

Regional Realism:
Kate Chopin's
The Story of an Hour

Spirit of Nationalism:
Benjamin Franklin's
Autobiography

Teaching Tip

- Paul uses the same gravestone images that David Watters used to discuss Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, but he uses these seventeenth-century artifacts with a twentieth-century text. Paul makes this pairing successful by clarifying the cultural time difference between the two and then highlighting the Puritan themes in both.

Session Reading

Ritual Artifacts Reading

What do we mean by ritual artifacts?

People perform rituals to create a sense of order or meaning in their lives. Just as a religious ritual artifact—such as a Catholic rosary or a Jewish prayer shawl—might be used to express and enforce an individual's religious beliefs, a social ritual artifact can express and enforce the social beliefs that permeate and organize the secular world. The program for a municipality's annual Fourth of July parade and fireworks display, for example, may reveal a ritual emphasizing how patriotism, civic pride, and community involvement provide meaning and order for residents.

Why are they useful to bring into a literature classroom?

Rituals may be so integral to the experience and expression of secular or religious beliefs that they are difficult to distinguish. Working with ritual artifacts helps students understand how rituals create a sense of order or meaning, and what particular beliefs are common to a specific social group at a specific time. This understanding provides more sophisticated contextual background for literature, enabling students to appreciate the beliefs, assumptions, and concerns of literary characters—and perhaps of the author, as well.

Contextualizing ritual artifacts and literary texts: The case of Mary Rowlandson's *The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*

The seventeenth-century Puritan settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony perceived New England as a place where they could establish a theocracy, a religiously governed society. Although the definition of "ritual artifacts" differentiates between religious and secular rituals, no such distinction would be necessary or desirable for the Puritans. The ordering of the Puritan social world was by definition a sacred ordering, governed by a strict code of religious beliefs and practices. This ordering was deeply tied to Puritan understandings of "typology," in which events in the Hebrew Bible were seen as "antitypes," or precedents (*anti-* meaning *before*), for events in the New Testament. Events in the Puritans' own lives were viewed in terms of their similarity to New Testament types. For example, the Hebrews' wandering in the desert for 40 years following their liberation from slavery in Egypt was an antitype to the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness, a time of testing and temptations. The Puritans saw in both the antitype and the type parallels to their own foray into the wilderness of New England. Typology was an important way for Puritans to articulate how religious beliefs permeated their lives.

Mary Rowlandson's *The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* exemplifies how religious beliefs and rituals shaped Puritan ideas about events that in other societies might be deemed purely secular. Rowlandson was taken as a hostage by Narragansett Indians who attacked her village during an ongoing conflict between Puritan and Native inhabitants of the area. While we might think of being taken prisoner in war as a political event, the narrative reveals that for Rowlandson, this was primarily a religious experience. She infuses her narrative with Biblical passages, asserting direct analogies to Biblical types and antitypes. As a whole, her text is a testament of faith, evidencing that her belief in God did not waver. The religious allusions may also have functioned as means to fend off her Puritan neighbors' suspicion about the correctness of Rowlandson's behavior while she lived among the Indians.

Ritual Artifacts Reading, cont'd.

The practice of referencing Biblical passages and grappling with what it meant to adhere to Puritan religious beliefs in a world of hardships and temptations permeates the literature of the period, be it sermons, private journals and letters, poetry (David Watters mentions one example, Edward Taylor's *A Fig for Thee, Oh Death*, believed to have been written in 1720 or 1721), or published narratives such as Rowlandson's. Thus, ritual artifacts such as Puritan gravestones can be used with a range of texts to help students appreciate how Puritans experienced and articulated complex worldview. As Watters and the high school teachers discuss in the video, both the gravestones and Rowlandson's narrative reveal Puritan ideas about gender and women's roles, along with Puritan attitudes toward Native Americans. These social beliefs are deeply inflected by Puritan religion, even if they might not seem to have much direct relevance to ideas about God and worship. Other ritual artifacts that would be useful to understanding this literature might include depictions of Puritan clothing or churches, which reveal a shunning of worldly desires. By contrast, one might use later gravestones to denote a shift away from Puritan ideology. One could explore how these objects reflect different ways of ordering the world, such as civic pride or emphasis on individual wealth.

Contextualizing ritual artifacts and literary texts: The case of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

After participating in the workshop on Rowlandson's narrative, teacher Paul Warner creates a similar lesson plan focusing on Arthur Miller's 1953 drama *The Crucible*. Although he uses ritual artifacts similar to those Watters selected, Warner's lesson plan is different in that the ritual artifacts serve to teach students about the period in which the literature is set but not the period in which it was created. Notably, Warner pairs the gravestones with Jonathan Edwards's sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," allowing students to make connections between the attitudes expressed in the gravestones, the sermon, and the characters in Miller's play.

It is useful to consider how texts themselves may be ritual artifacts. Edwards's sermon was delivered at a specific time and place (Enfield, Connecticut, July 8, 1741), intended to induce a particular effect on the churchgoers who heard it. Teachers should ask students to consider how elements of the original ritual performance of the sermon (setting, audience, speaker, etc.) might have enhanced the ideas expressed in the text. As Warner's students recognize in relating the headstones to the sermon, the creators of these ritual artifacts had a direct intent to instruct their audiences about the worldview that ordered their society.

Drama, too, is a form of ritual. Western drama is usually traced to Greek ritual performances performed in the 5th century BCE, in which ideas governing the social order—such as the relationship between humans and the gods, or the origin and nature of suffering—were explored and explained. Just as Greek dramatists turned to familiar myths as the subject matter for their plays, Miller turned to early American history. But Miller's play is as much a commentary on the mid-twentieth-century United States, especially McCarthyism, as it is an attempt to recount earlier events. (Indeed, his play is not entirely historically accurate.) In pairing ritual artifacts with the play, a teacher can help students think about the nature of ritual itself, leading to a consideration of what ritual function drama fulfilled during the period in which Miller wrote.

Works Cited and Referenced

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Notes
