

Run Your Own Boarding House

By Denise Marovich-Sampson

Overview

After reading Dan and Emily Sander's article, "The House of Edna Earle," this "Into" lesson plan will introduce students to the historical and sociological aspects of the boarding house phenomenon in America, notably the South of Eudora Welty's **The Ponder Heart**. Although several themes are woven throughout this article, the main ones seem to be embracing the differences in people and appreciating one's environment. This introductory lesson will give the students the opportunity to work in groups, do research, and create a project. This lesson is designed for high school juniors and seniors.

Objectives

Students will:

- Read the article and answer comprehension questions within a cooperative learning group
- Create their own boarding house setting through the use of descriptive writing
- Create several character sketches of people who will live in their own boarding house
- Create a three-meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner) menu for their own boarding house by using location as a catalyst
- Understand the functions of setting and characterization in literature
- Practice their writing skills through setting descriptions, character sketches, etc.
- Show strong use of research in creating a fictional setting and characters

Skills Attained

- Research
- Cooperative learning
- Composition
- Oral communication
- Descriptive writing
- Organization

Lesson Outline

I. Reading/Understanding (2 days)

1. Read Dan and Emily Sander's boarding house article, "[The House of Edna Earle](#)," aloud with the class. It would also be helpful for students to read the essay, "[Edna Earle Ponder: Belle of the South](#)."
2. Have students get into groups of three to five. Hand out the list of comprehension questions to each student.
3. Students will share their answers with the teacher and fellow classmates before turning in the assignment.

II. Creating a Boarding House and Its Tenants Project (4 days--including homework)

Students will create a project/presentation in their groups. It will include three parts:

- A. A descriptive setting of their own, original boarding house complete with an original name.
- B. Five character sketches describing four tenants and the boarding house owner.
- C. A menu for a typical day at the boarding house comprised of breakfast, lunch, dinner. The food should reflect the region of the United States in which the boarding house is set.

A. The Boarding House Setting

1. In their groups, students will use the function of setting to create their own boarding house complete with an original name. Descriptive writing will play a significant role in this area of the project. Students must keep in mind that the setting they create will be very important in the creation of their character sketches for part two of this project. Remember, setting can reveal a character by showing us how he responds to his environment, where he makes his home, or what his culture is.

2. Prewriting will be quite helpful in creating the setting. The group should create answers for the following: What is the setting? Historical period? Locale? Weather? Sights? Sounds? Tastes? Smells? Other details that establish a sense of place? Color? Number of rooms? Focus on the main areas of people gathering like the porch or dining room.

3. Students will write a descriptive essay about their boarding house. They must use vivid adjectives to describe what they want their teacher and fellow classmates to see. Students will pass the finished essay around to each group member so revisions can be made. Please type and double-space the final essay.

4. One of the more artistic group members will create a piece of artwork that depicts the boarding house. The artist should use the descriptive essay to create a masterpiece through any art medium he or she chooses.

B. The Character Sketches

Eudora Welty once said "Characters in the plot connect us with the vastness of our secret life, which is endlessly explorable." Character is what a good story is all about, and Welty's characters were created with great description, humanness, and a southern flavor. There are **five methods** to creating a character:

- a. **Speech** - What does the character reveal through words?
- b. **Appearance** - What does the character look like? Charles Dickens writes "the cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice..." when describing Scrooge of **A Christmas Carol**.
- c. **Thoughts** - What is the character thinking?
- d. **Indirect characterization** - How do other characters feel about the main character? Some characters may feel the main character is a truly selfish man, but one character may know him to be generous in some way.
- e. **Action** - What do you see the character doing? Do actions really speak louder than words?

Using the information above, students will create a character sketch for the owner of the boarding house and four tenants. Each sketch should be about one-half to one page long (typed and double-spaced). Students should include an original name, background information, and perhaps an unusual quotation that particular character is known for. Students must create an artistic sketch of each character through any art medium. Students may create one character from several actual people they have known over the years. Let them know this is just fine, and this is what most authors do; but avoid anything that may be litigious.

C. The Boarding House Menu

As stated in the boarding house article by Dan and Emily Sanders, "In a competitive business, the food was the landlady's secret weapon." Students will create their own breakfast, lunch, and dinner menu for one day in their boarding house. Depending on where the locale of their boarding house is, students will create a menu that represents the food of that area. For example, a former boarding house resident describes his house's southern cuisine as "lots of vegetables, homemade bread, homemade pies and cakes, beef and pork roasts...It was hearty."

Students will research the types of food known to a particular area of the United States. The library and, particularly the Internet, will have wonderful sources for this. A tremendous number of restaurants throughout our country have websites with their menus on them. For example, if students choose to place their boarding house in the southwestern region, their menu may consist of the typical Tex-Mex style of cooking. The menu should be decorative, with use of art and, if possible, computer-generated graphics. If you want this part of the project to be particularly "tasty," students may create a recipe from their menu and share it with the class.

III. Presenting the Project to the Class

Students may present this project in a variety of ways:

- A. Group members may simply show classmates their three sections of the project while explaining it
- B. Group members may become the characters they've created while presenting
- C. Group members may all sit at a table while eating a boarding house meal and conversing, etc.

The beautiful thing about our students is that they will come up with ideas we've never even heard of before and the ideas will work and impress.

Assessment

The boarding house setting essay, the character sketches, the menu, and all artwork should be neatly and artistically bound in a folder or notebook. This should really illustrate the creative and organizational skills of the cooperative learning group.

Teachers should create their own rubrics to grade the reading comprehension assignment and the boarding house group project. Students should be graded on:

- Group cooperation
- Oral presentation of project
- Written presentation of project
- Artistic presentation of project
- Understanding of setting and characterization
- Writing skills
- Overall effort as a group and individually
- Organizational skills

To help the teacher out, students may self-assess their own work. Have them answer questions like:

- What were your group's strengths? Give examples.
- What were your group's weaknesses? Give examples.
- What did you learn from this assignment?
- Do you have any suggestions to improve the implementation of this assignment for future classes?
- What was your main contribution to your group's project?

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Group Reading Comprehension Questions

"The House of Edna Earle: Boarding Houses in Welty's South"

Directions: Choose the student in your group with the best penmanship. Make sure the names of all group members are written in the upper right-hand corner of your paper. As a group, decide what is the best answer for each question. Answers must be written in complete sentences or paragraphs. Remember, teamwork will get you through this. Good Luck!!!

1. Who is Eudora Welty?
2. Who is Edna Earle Ponder?
3. What was a "very essential part of southern life"?
4. If a boarding house was well run, what two things could a boarder look forward to?
5. What were boarding houses "landing pads" for?
6. Who typically ran a boarding house and why?
7. "Running a boarding house meant long, hard hours." What did this include?
8. What did the "good, typical southern cooking" of a southern boarding house include?
9. Describe the purpose(s) of a boarding house porch.

10. Early in **The Ponder Heart**, Edna Earle says "It's true that often the people that come in off the road and demand a room right this minute, or ask you ahead what you have for dinner, are not the people you'd care to spend the rest of your life with at all." What do you believe she means by this?