

# Point of View to Ponder

By Gail Lindenberg

## Overview

This activity allows students to explore the unique literary voice of the narrator as a misleading persona. It would be best used after viewing (or reading) **The Ponder Heart** by Eudora Welty. The assignment is designed for all grade level reading abilities for secondary school and would work well with an English or Language Arts class at levels 7-9. Students move through and beyond the literature. This exercise may be extended to incorporate a creative writing task requiring narrative writing in the first person point of view.

## Objectives

Students will:

- View (or read) **The Ponder Heart** by Eudora Welty
- Discuss other literary pieces that include the misleading first person narrator
- Role play fictional characters from literature
- Present a short anecdote in a simulation of characterization
- Write a personal creative writing narrative

## Skills Attained

- Understanding of first person point of view with the narrator's voice as a misleading character
- Collaboration with classmates on a presentation of literary characterization
- Dramatic interpretation skills to present a character to the class
- Narrative writing

## Lesson Outline

### I. Anticipatory Set

1. After viewing the video (or reading) **The Ponder Heart** by Eudora Welty, discuss the point of view from which the story is told. Point out how the character Edna Earle Ponder rants at length in a delightful comic voice. Note how she addresses her audience in a personal manner ("My Uncle Daniel is just like your uncle . . ." as an opening line.) What does the character reveal about herself? How does she accomplish these revelations while she tells her story?

### II. The Lesson

1. Ask students to generate a list of pieces they are familiar with that utilize this unique literary point of view. A suggested list might include: Poe's "A Telltale Heart" and "Cask of Amontillado," Browning's "My Last Duchess," Harper Lee's **To Kill A Mockingbird**, Stephen King's **Dolores Claiborne**. Group the class into four or five per team.

2. Each team should tell a story to the class but each member must role play the voice of one of the narrators of the pieces of literature they have selected. For example, one might be Montessoro from "Cask of Amontillado." They should decide what the characteristics of each speaker would be and have the team relate the tale displaying aspects of each literary character's personality. They should use Miss Edna Earle as one of their storytellers.

**Example:** Montessor, the main character in Poe's "Cask of Amontillado" tells the story from his own viewpoint. As his tale unfolds, the reader sees a side of the character that his words and actions reveal that are subtly different from the character's view of himself. The author shows the character through his own words and actions and the reader forms his own opinion about the main character that is much different from the character's view. In seeking out "justice" against Fortunato for some imagined slight, the reader quickly realizes that Montessor, instead, is obsessed and demented, planning murder in a most horrible way. The student role playing Montessor would need to paraphrase Montessor's words as written by Poe. His reading should be intense and bordering on hysteria. The voice would increase in pitch and tone as the narration continues to the point where the character is walling up the drunken Fortunato, gleeful in his victory and malice.

3. As each story is told, the class decides who each of the students is attempting to portray. (They may not refer to themselves or each other by name during the simulation.)

4. After all teams have presented their stories, have each reveal the literary character they were attempting to dramatize. Generate a discussion of some strengths of the different characterizations. What were "give-away" traits? How did students know what the narrators were like as revealed by the literature? Did they include appropriate dialect and paraphrasing? Were there "red-herrings" or false trails that lead away from the reality of the scene?

5. An extension activity might include the assignment of a narrative piece that is told through the first person point of view where the narrator is a misleading character. Having these creative pieces written anonymously and read aloud makes an entertaining and challenging session for a class as they try to guess who wrote what. Another possible approach to the assignment would be to allow students to use literary pieces which are not already in first person point of view narrative style. Students could take a character and create the first person viewpoint, following the rest of the assignment after crafting the new point of view. For example, Juliet could be given a first person voice and become the storyteller.

## Assessment

A rubric of general criteria for grading should be offered to the students as part of the instructions for the activity. Since the presentation is oral rather than written, the teacher may wish to use the presented criteria as a rating sheet while viewing the performance. An example of this is shown below:

- Students will be evaluated based on the strength of: (rating 1-10, 10 being the best)
- Effective role playing of a literary character \_\_\_\_\_
- Purposeful team work with a group to present a simulation \_\_\_\_\_
- Effective and entertaining dramatic interpretation of a literary character \_\_\_\_\_
- Appropriate choice of literary character \_\_\_\_\_
- Contributions to the team effort \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Comments:

Overall grade based on ratings \_\_\_\_\_/50 points possible

## Further Discussion Questions

Eudora Welty describes herself as a writer who was sheltered by her upbringing. She does share this trait with her main character as Miss Edna Earle has not ventured very far from her Beulah motel. What other pieces of literature show this peculiarity of Southern American lifestyle? Particularly for the female in the

South? Students may wish to include discussion of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," Mitchell's, **Gone With the Wind**, and the character of Miss DuBose in Harper Lee's **To Kill a Mockingbird** as examples.

### **Other Literary Connections**

Edgar A. Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "Cask of Amontillado"

Harper Lee's **To Kill a Mockingbird**

Stephen King's **Dolores Claiborne**

William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"

Margaret Mitchell's **Gone With the Wind**

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