Unit 2/ Week 5

Title: The White Umbrella

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.3, RL.8.4, RL.8.10; W.8.2, W.8.4, W.8.9; SL.8.1, L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.4, L.8.5

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Comparing ourselves to others can make us question who and what we are, creating embarrassment for those aspects of our lives in which we feel different and inferior. These feelings can make us try to remake ourselves into people we are not.

Synopsis

The narrator of *The White Umbrella* is a Chinese American girl who struggles with feelings of embarrassment and longing to be like others. This includes embarrassment over her own immigrant mother. When her piano teacher gives her a beautiful white umbrella, she wishes her teacher were her mother. After a minor car accident, she realizes how much she loves her mother. She frees herself from guilt by throwing away the umbrella that had come to represent her misdirected feelings.

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Teach/reengage the idea of short story, science fiction, character, setting, conflict, resolution, etc. with your students.
2. Students read the entire selection independently; give them a guide or something to look for: difficult vocabulary, identifying images, or sensory detail, etc.
3. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other.
4. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| In paragraph one, while the narrator’s parents discuss the Lee family, the narrator states, “I remembered how sorry my parents had felt for Mrs. Lee.” Why are they sorry for the Lees? | Her parents felt sorry for the Lees because they needed Mrs. Lee to go to work. They needed a second income to make ends meet. |
| When the narrator’s mother went back to work, she didn’t tell either of her daughters. What was the purpose in her trying to hide her job from her daughters? | Their mother wanted to keep her job a secret because she was doing something that was untraditional for Chinese families. Traditionally Chinese mothers stayed home with their children; she didn’t want to feel like she was being a bad mother by neglecting them. |
| The narrator lies to her piano teacher about getting wet driving in her family’s convertible instead of the truth that she had to walk in the rain. What did the convertible represent to the narrator? | To the narrator, the convertible symbolizes that her family could afford a convertible and that their mother was available to drive them instead of being unavailable because of her job. |
| Why did the author include the details regarding Eugenie’s auburn hair and blue eyes? What do these details help the reader understand? | This is important because it shows that the narrator is comparing herself to Eugenie’s Caucasian looks. This helps the reader understand that the narrator envies Eugenie and feels insecure around her. |
| The narrator declares that “Watching the way Eugenie carried herself, I sat up, and concentrated so hard on sucking in my stomach…” What is the narrator trying to do? What is the significance of this statement? | This is significant because it shows that the narrator is trying to imitate Eugenie, to be more “American.” This shows that the narrator is feeling insecure about her Chinese family. By copying Eugenie’s behavior, the narrator hopes to overcome her own culture to be more acceptable. |
| The narrator describes the white umbrella: “The umbrella glowed like a scepter.” What does this simile mean? What does this description show about her feelings? | The narrator describes the umbrella as if it were a something carried by royalty. She is so enamored of everything about Eugenie that she feels like Eugenie really was royalty. The umbrella represents all the “American-ness” and wealth that the narrator doesn’t have for her. |
| The narrator imagines what she would do if she had a white umbrella. She pictures taking it to school, and offering to take it to Eugenie. What do her daydreams tell the reader about how the narrator views the white umbrella? | Her daydreams show the reader that she views the umbrella as a beautiful luxury item, worthy of envy. She sees it as something the American girls use that she is not allowed because she is Chinese. |
| During her daydreams, the narrator imagines asking her mother for an umbrella for Christmas. She knows that her mother would declare, “Things…All you want is things, just like an American.” What does the narrator think the white umbrella would symbolize to her mother? | The narrator thinks that to her mother the umbrella would symbolize what she considers the wasteful extravagance of average Americans. She thinks such objects are not necessary, and perhaps that her own Chinese ways are better. |
| After playing piano for her teacher, the narrator states, “See, I told her with my fingers. You don’t have to feel sorry for me.” Why does the narrator believe Miss Crosman feels sorry for her? | The narrator thinks Miss Crosman feels sorry for them because they had to walk to the piano lesson in the rain without their mother. Unlike Eugenie, their mother is not available to listen to them play. |
| After playing for her teacher, the narrator says, “An entire constellation rose in my heart” What does this metaphor show the reader about her feelings? | The narrator is reacting to the praise of Miss Crosman. By using this metaphor, the narrator shows the reader just how strong her need is for praise and acceptance. |
| After the piano lesson, the narrator and her sister wait outside for their mother. Why is their mother late coming to pick them up? | Their mother is late because she is at work. |
| Even though it is raining, the narrator insists that she and her sister wait outside. Although her sister wants to back go into their teacher’s house, the narrator refuses. Why does the narrator resist going back inside? | The narrator is embarrassed that her mother has not arrived. She doesn’t want Miss Crosman to know that her mother is late because she is working. The narrator is embarrassed by the fact that her mother needs to work. |
| The narrator describes the umbrella in this way: “sprang up by itself as if it were alive, as if that were what it wanted to do – as if it belonged in my hands” What does this show about her feelings regarding the umbrella? | This shows that the narrator feels the umbrella is more than just a useful object. To her the umbrella symbolizes that she is like Eugenie. When Miss Crosman gives it to her, it becomes a symbol that her teacher likes her as much or more than Eugenie. |
| After thanking Miss Crosman for giving her the umbrella, the narrator tells her, “I wish you were my mother.” What are some possible reasons the narrator would say such a thing? | After Miss Crosman admitted that she couldn’t have children, the narrator felt that saying this was what her teacher wanted to hear. She is probably not sincere in making this statement, but wanted to make her teacher feel special just as her teacher has made her feel special when she praised the narrator and gave her the white umbrella. |
| When the narrator’s mother arrives to take the girls home, the narrator tries to hide the umbrella from her. Why does she make the decision to do that? | The narrator knows that her mother would not approve of the umbrella; she would probably dismiss it is an extravagance and she is a foolish girl for wanting it. Her mother might also feel bad that she accepted the gift because it implies that she could not afford to buy an umbrella for her children. |
| When the sisters were arguing about the hidden umbrella, their mother backs into another car. What is the importance of this event to the story? | Because of the car accident, the narrator has a brief fear that her mother has died. She realizes then how much she loves her mother and that love is more than an object can give her. |
| After the car accident, the narrator secretly throws the white umbrella down the sewer. Why does she do that? What does this show about how her feelings have changed? | The narrator realizes that hiding the white umbrella was one cause of the accident. She regrets what she said to Miss Crosman about being her mother. Because of this, the umbrella has come to represent her guilt about her mother. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | Discreet  Lilt  Credibility  Rendition  Eke out  Consideration  Seized  Constellation  Stupendous  Illuminate  Diverted  Intently | Scepter  Bolt of sympathy  Revelation |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt

*In The White Umbrella, the narrator initially feels embarrassment over her Chinese mother. This causes her to do and say things that she comes to regret. Using evidence from the text, write a 3-paragraph essay describing how the character’s feelings influenced her actions and the changes she experiences at the end of the story. In your essay, make sure to analyze the importance of the white umbrella to the character and what it symbolizes. In your writing, also be sure to include proper punctuation, grammar, and capitalization.*

* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students will complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially if this process is new.

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| When I was twelve, my mother went to work without telling me or my little sister. | This shows that their mother is not very happy about having to go to work. She may be embarrassed by it. |
| We just couldn’t get the roof of our car to close, that’s all. | This is the lie the narrator tells Miss Crosman about why she and her sister are wet from the rain. |
| Watching the way Eugenie carried herself, I sat up, and concentrated so hard on sucking in my stomach | This demonstrates that the narrator not only envies Eugenie but that she wishes she could be more like her. |
| The umbrella glowed like a scepter. | Because she thinks the umbrella belongs to Eugenie, it has become an object to covet. |
| See, I told her with my fingers. You don’t have to feel sorry for me. | The narrator believes Miss Crosman thinks the girls are neglected or poor, causing her to pity them. |
| An entire constellation rose in my heart | When Miss Crosman praises her, the narrator feels happy and special like Eugenie. |
| Things…All you want is things, just like an American | The narrator knows that if she asked for a white umbrella, her mother would think she was being extravagant and “un-Chinese”. |
| …sprang up by itself as if it were alive, as if that were what it wanted to do – as if it belonged in my hands. | Miss Crosman gave her the umbrella. The gift represents everything the narrator wants: to be like Eugenie, to be American, to be special to Miss Crosman. |
| I wish you were my mother. | When the narrator says this she is trying to make Miss Crosman feel special. She also regrets saying it as if she had betrayed her mother. |
| I thought you were dead. | The narrator fears that her actions have caused her mother’s death. |
| While everyone else was inspecting the damage we’d done, I threw the umbrella down the sewer. | The umbrella has come to represent everything the narrator feels guilty about. She realizes she loves her mother and that her actions over the umbrella were partly to blame for the accident. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade/reading level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

In “The White Umbrella” the twelve-year old narrator is embarrassed by her mother and their culture. Her mother has gone back to work while trying to keep it a secret from her two daughters. The girls find out anyway which causes the elder sister, the narrator of the story, to become embarrassed that her mother is not able to stay at home. This grows even more difficult for the narrator when the two girls go to their piano lessons. Because their mother couldn’t drive them, they have had to walk in the rain. When their teacher, Miss Crosman, asks them about their wet clothes, the narrator lies about having a convertible saying, “We just couldn’t get the roof of our car to close, that’s all.” Making matters worse, the narrator sees Eugenie, a white girl who seems privileged because her mother is able to come to the lesson, unlike the narrator’s mother. Wanting to imitate Eugenie, the narrator says, “Watching the way Eugenie carried herself, I sat up, and concentrated so hard on sucking in my stomach…” Then the narrator spies Eugenie’s white umbrella. She begins to covet it. “The umbrella glowed like scepter.” To the narrator this umbrella becomes a symbol of everything Eugenie has that she does not. The narrator begins to imagine what it would be like to take the umbrella to school with her. She wonders if she could ask for a similar umbrella for Christmas, but knows her mother wouldn’t want to give it to her because it would seem an unnecessary extravagance. She can picture her mother saying, “Things…All you want is things, just like an American.” That is exactly what this girl wants: to be like an American. Knowing that her mother doesn’t understand this desire makes her desire the umbrella even more.

At the same time, the narrator also wants Miss Crosman to like her as much or more than she does Eugenie. So she tries to impress her with playing very well. “See, I told her with my fingers. You don’t have to feel sorry for me.” When Miss Crosman praises her, she felt that “an entire constellation rose in my heart” because she now feels equal to Eugenie. She feels that she has changed her teacher’s feelings for her, causing pride to swell in her. This desire for her teacher’s approval causes the narrator to even more extreme behavior. When the lessons are over, she refuses to tell her teacher that her mother is working. Instead she forces her sister to wait outside in the rain, pretending that her mother is on her way to pick them up. As she grows wetter and wetter, Miss Crosman comes outside and hands the narrator the white umbrella while she says “…sprang up by itself as if it were alive, as if that wee what it wanted to do – as if it belonged in my hands.” Now she has gotten what she wanted: the umbrella that makes her feel she can achieve the status she so desires.

The newly owned umbrella causes her to go even further. Still seeking a close relationship with Miss Crosman, when the she thanks her teacher, the narrator tells her, “I wish you were my mother.” Immediately she regrets her words, feeling that she had betrayed her own mother. This guilt causes her to hide the white umbrella so her mother can’t see it when she finally arrives to pick up her daughters. In the car, the narrator tries very hard to keep the umbrella away from her sister Mona, but this doesn’t work. When Mona tells their mother that the narrator has something under her skirt, her mother becomes distracted and causes a car accident. As her mother leans back with her eyes closed, the narrator cries, “I thought you were dead.” Still wracked with remorse for her earlier betrayal of her mother, she feels that her desire for the umbrella and all that it represents to her is responsible for the car accident. Now the umbrella becomes a symbol of the narrator’s wrong feelings: insecurity over Eugenie, her excessive need for her teacher’s approval, her desire that her mother was someone different, her wish that her family was different. It is no longer an object to cherish. “While everyone else was inspecting the damage we’d done, [she] threw the umbrella down the sewer.” Having realized the damage her feelings could cause, the umbrella has become something she can’t bear to see and rids herself of it.

Additional Tasks

* Read the following articles and research how Chinese-Americans view families. Find out what values are common in this cultural group. Write an essay about these values and what they reveal about this culture.

1. Chinese Family Structure and Values Hard to Shake: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90782/8112762.html>
2. Chinese Family Values: <http://family.lovetoknow.com/chinese-family-values>
3. Chinese American Families: <http://www.evelynlee-mentalhealth.org/assessment_chinese_american_families.asp>
4. Introduction to Basic Asian Values: <http://www.asianweek.com/2012/04/28/introduction-to-basic-asian-values/>

* Sample response
  + Family has long been considered the very cornerstone of Chinese society. This has held true for Chinese who immigrated to the United States. Although an American lifestyle may be adopted, the traditional family structures and values are still revered. This family structure is a hierarchy with parents and grandparents acting as rulers and guides of younger generations.