

Great Books: *Don Quixote*: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: Literature

Lesson Duration: One to two class periods

Program Description

The image of Don Quixote tilting at windmills – fighting a battle he cannot hope to win – is one of the most enduring in literature. Like so much of Miguel de Cervantes' complex epic, the scene is funny and poignant. Cervantes skewers the courtly romances and notions about knights-errant that were popular in his day. He also explores themes of social criticism, individualism, and idealism, and challenges our assumptions about the line between fantasy and reality.

- I. Introduction (15 min.)
 - II. An Inspirational Fool (12 min.)
 - III. Novel Within a Novel (13 min.)
 - IV. Don Quixote's Defeat (7 min.)
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Discuss the use of metaphoric writing in *Don Quixote* and various poems.
- Try their hand at portraying everyday objects as something else in poetry or prose.

Materials

- *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes
- Computer with Internet access

Procedures

1. Engage students in a discussion of Don Quixote's fantasy world – the world of chivalry, of fortunes, of heroic conflicts, and perseverance.
2. Ask students to describe and defend some of knight-errant Quixote's perceptions, such as that the windmills are an enemy force. Can they explain what in the appearance of the windmills and other objects and what in Quixote's self-image causes these errors in perception?

3. Explain that Quixote's imagination is distorted because of an illness, but that sometimes even the sanest of people intentionally view an everyday object as something else entirely. In the literary world, for example, poets often perceive and describe an object as something else.
4. Tell students that they are going to write imaginative descriptions of ordinary objects and have other students try to figure out what real-world object the writer had in mind.
5. Review with students the definition of a metaphor (a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison; a thing that is conceived as representing another; a symbol).
6. Share with students a few examples of highly metaphoric poetry. Examples include:
 - Emily Dickinson's "I Like to See It Lap the Miles," in which a train is represented as a horse;
 - Robert Francis's "The Base Stealer," in which a among other things;
 - Carl Sandburg's "Fog," in which fog takes the form of a cat; and
 - May Swenson's "Southbound on the Freeway," in which automobiles are described as living objects by a tourist from Orbitville.
7. Read these or other poems without telling students the titles. Then lead a discussion of what the poets seem to be describing and what they are really describing. Have students consider and offer explanations as to why the poets took this indirect approach to description.
8. Challenge students to think of objects that might be seen as something else—especially by someone (such as the tourist from Orbitville) who has never seen them before. The following suggestions might stimulate students' thinking.
 - Movie projected on a free-standing screen
 - Cell phone
 - Lampshade thrown out with the trash
 - Fire extinguisher
 - Television
 - Kite
9. Now have students draft a metaphoric description of their objects in prose or poetry.
10. Give students a chance to read their prose or poem to one or more students in the class. Can the listeners figure out what the reader, below the surface of the prose or poem, is describing? Do the listeners find the description apt and entertaining, or obvious and boring? Encourage classmates to offer editing advice and possible revisions to one another.
11. Lead a final discussion of the power of symbolic comparisons and writing. Ask students if they know anyone who often sees or interprets the world as they want to see it, rather than as it is, or if they know any other works of literature in which metaphors help us see with new eyes.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussions; demonstrated a clear understanding of the power and use of symbolic descriptions and writing; wrote creative and engaging descriptions of everyday objects; offered classmates valid suggestions for edits or revisions.
- **2 points:** Students participated in class discussions; demonstrated some understanding of the power and use of symbolic descriptions and writing; wrote somewhat creative and engaging descriptions of everyday objects; offered classmates some suggestions for edits or revisions.
- **1 point:** Students participated little, if at all, in class discussions; had difficulty understanding the power and use of symbolic descriptions and writing; wrote relatively unimaginative descriptions of everyday objects; made no attempt to offer classmates suggestions for edits or revisions.

Vocabulary

coping mechanism

Definition: A method by which an individual contends with difficulties and attempts to overcome them

Context: Psychiatrists would call Don Quixote's altering of reality his coping mechanism.

knight-errant

Definition: A knight traveling in search of adventures in which to exhibit military skill, prowess, and generosity

Context: Alonso Quixano steps into his literary world and becomes a knight-errant, just like those from his books of chivalry.

quixotic

Definition: Foolishly impractical, especially in the pursuit of ideals

Context: We have come to describe Don Quixote's type of vaulting ambition as quixotic – full of lofty, yet impractical, ideals.

sally

Definition: A venture or excursion, usually off the beaten path

Context: On his sallies through the landscape of La Mancha, Don Quixote encounters hundreds of characters.

tilt

Definition: To engage in combat with lances; to joust

Context: Don Quixote's tilting at windmills is one of the most enduring, if ridiculous, images in all literature.



Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts – Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

This lesson plan addresses the following NCTE standards:

- Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.



How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into four parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Introduction (15 min.)

An introduction to *Don Quixote* and the deeper significance behind the comedic novel. The journey of the book's author, Miguel de Cervantes, from military hero to disillusioned writer.

II. An Inspirational Fool (12 min.)

Out of Cervantes' disillusionment springs *Don Quixote*. A look at the Spanish Inquisition and Spanish society during Cervantes' life. In one of the book's most memorable scenes, Don Quixote battles an army of windmills.

III. Novel Within a Novel (13 min.)

Don Quixote is humiliated by cruel nobles in a tragic turning point in the sequel to *Don Quixote*. Once free from the nobles, he is defeated by the Knight of the White Moon.

IV. Don Quixote's Defeat (7 min.)

Don Quixote returns home to die after his defeat. Authors and scholars talk about the lessons that live on through *Don Quixote*. Discussion of the final years of Cervantes' life.



Curriculum Units

1. *Don Quixote*: A Quest Begins

Pre-viewing question

Q: What does quixotic mean?

A: Webster's definition: foolishly impractical, especially in the pursuit of ideals; marked by rash, lofty romantic ideas or extravagantly chivalrous action

Post-viewing question

Q: Is *Don Quixote* a parody?

A: Yes, the book pokes fun at the chivalrous antics of its hero, Don Quixote. However, to a certain degree, Cervantes allows his readers to admire Don Quixote for his strong convictions and moral code. The book can also be read on a deeper level as a tragedy.

2. A Knight-Errant

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why do we sometimes laugh at other people's pain?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What has Don Quixote's battle with the windmills come to represent?

A: Lofty idealism. Many people see Don Quixote's persistence as inspiring.

3. Don Quixote's Demise

Pre-viewing question

Q: Do you agree or disagree with the quote, "Captivity is the worst evil that can befall man."

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why are Don Quixote's defeats more painful in the second book?

A: In his sequel, Don Quixote understands that he is being written about and is concerned with his readers' image of himself. He knows people are expecting something from him and feels a sense of responsibility toward his audience.

4. Miguel de Cervantes

Pre-viewing question

Q: Towards the end of *Don Quixote*, the Knight of the White Moon tries to force Don Quixote to renounce Dulcinea but Don Quixote refuses. If Don Quixote and Miguel de Cervantes are one and the same, what could this mean about Cervantes?

A: It could mean Cervantes also refuses to give up his dreams.

Post-viewing question

Q: What does Cervantes mean when he writes at the end of the book, "Don Quixote was born for me alone, and I was born for him"?

A: Answers will vary.



5. Men from La Mancha

Pre-viewing question

Q: Is imagination a necessary component of success?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why do you think former New York governor Mario Cuomo sees Don Quixote as his hero?

A: Cuomo had to overcome impossible odds to achieve his dreams.

