A LESSON IN LITERACY
based on the Ray Bradbury short story "A Sound of Thunder"
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OBJECTIVES

- To relate the text to student knowledge and experience;
- To expand student vocabulary and make students more comfortable reading short creative fiction;
- To develop critical thinking (see Post-Reading Activities--The Butterfly Effect).

ESTIMATED TIME

2+ classes of 80 minutes

MATERIALS

- The short story.

"A Sound of Thunder" is very widely available, and an illustrated version can be found at http://www.scaryforkids.com/a-sound-of-thunder/. The visual element of the story may help students who feel uncomfortable tackling fiction--especially science fiction--in English.

- Guided Writing evaluation handout in the form of a checklist or rubric created by the teacher (see Post-Reading Activities)

- Large white circles of paper, pre-cut; 11 or 12 should be enough (see Post-Reading Activities).

Optional: "A Sound of Thunder" DVD. There was a movie adaptation of the story released a couple of years ago. Although it's very different from the story, teachers who have the inclination and the resources to do so may want to show a short clip from the film--the time travel sequences, perhaps--to help engage visually-oriented students.

PRE-READING

1. *Group Brainstorming/Discussion/Concept Introduction*
The teacher writes "Science Fiction" on the board or provides students with a definition. The teacher then asks students to provide a list of movies or books they are familiar with that would fit the definition. Based on those titles, and the title of the story they are about to read, the teacher then asks the students to guess what the story might be about.

2. *Time Travel/Graphic Organizers*
The teacher makes sure all of the students have a piece of paper ready, then explains that the story they are about to read is science fiction and deals with a company that lets people time travel. After making sure everyone understands the concept of time travel, the students write

down on their paper a list of rules that they think such a company would follow. Obvious ones commonly come up (Don't kill anyone; Don't leave anything behind), but less obvious ones may pop up too (No cheques, just cash and credit). After everyone has had a chance to write down their rules, the class creates an overall list on the board. The teacher then explains that the story deals specifically with the rules that the time-travel business follows. (After reading the story, as a post-reading activity, students can come back and compare their list of rules to the ones that appear in the story. Differences, expectations and surprises can be discussed as a group.)

READING

The teacher hands out, or makes available "A Sound of Thunder" to the class. Students are given time to read it individually.(Because of the level students are assumed to be at, this may be during the second half of a class, or it may be assigned as homework. If teachers are using hard copies of the story, they may do the former. If they are providing students with a link to the story on the internet, they may do the latter. Of course, it is possible to do both.)

The reading process should be broken into two steps (more than one class):
   1. *Independent reading*
Students receive the story, and have the opportunity to skim it on their own. This can also give the students time to highlight or look up words with which they are not familiar, begin to grapple with the key concepts in the story, and develop questions that they can bring to the next class.

   2. *Group/Class reading*
The second class focuses on reading the story as a group and discussing it. Here the students and teacher take turns reading. The students should circle any key vocabulary words that they do not understand during the reading of the story. Readers should be volunteers and not tackle more than a paragraph or two at a time. If the teacher has the proper equipment, he or she may want to record the reading and let the students review it later, to make note of their pronunciation skills and how they engage with the text.

   After reading the story, there are activities the class can do before moving on to the post-reading activities. For instance, the teacher can ask students who listened, but did not read, to try and summarize the story in their own words. Here, discussion of the story comes naturally, and the teacher should facilitate to make sure that all students have an accurate summary of the story that they can understand. The teacher could make a game of it, for example, "Summarize the story in ten sentences", "Summarize the story in nine sentences…eight sentences," etc., with each summary getting progressively harder.

   Another option during reading is to pause and focus on language use and vocabulary development. Each student (depending on the size of the class) lists one or two key vocabulary words that they did not understand or had difficulty with while reading the story. The class makes a list of these vocabulary words, and then students try to fill in the definitions, completing a class glossary for the story throughout the week.

POST-READING ACTIVITIES
(Choose one or both, depending on time. If the class is having difficulty with the material, the teacher may want to avoid these.)

1. *The Butterfly Effect/Chain of Events*

The teacher places the circles of paper on the board and has the students take turns coming up and writing down events that take place in the story, in order. There should be 11 or 12. For instance, "Eckels goes back in time", "Eckels sees the dinosaur", "Eckels is scared and runs off the path", "Eckels goes back for the bullets". Then, 4-5 students come up and remove some of the paper circles, turn them over, and write something different. For instance, "Eckels stays on the path." After they write down their own version of events, the circles are put back up and the teacher asks the class to reflect on how each change would affect the overall narrative or chain of events. For each change, the students should come up with an alternate version of what happens next, i.e. "Eckels stays in the future, Eckels takes home the dinosaur skeleton and lives happily ever after", etc. Once the students have done this 4-5 times and there is a short list of alternate versions, the teacher asks them to reflect on how each variation in the story would alter the story's message or theme. Why do they think the writer made the choices that he did in telling this story? What was he trying to say? Which of the elements have to be in the story for it to work, and which could be removed or changed?

2. *Guided Writing*

In Ray Bradbury's short story "A Sound of Thunder" the character Eckels goes on a 'Time Safari' sixty million years into the past because he wants to hunt and kill a dinosaur. We know that time travel does not exist, but imagine that it did. Where and when in time would you want to go? Would you want to hunt and kill an animal, like Eckels, or would you rather see how people in the past lived?