

Nathan Parker  
Holland Hall School  
Tulsa, OK

WLA/Charles Redd Center K-12 Teaching Award: Teaching Statement  
June 18, 2018

The attached unit-plan for female playwright Susan Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers"/*Trifles, everyone's favorite high-plains playwright*. It fits into a long-term goal in my teaching to develop new approaches to teaching western literatures that address 4 objectives: 1) Give students a framework in which to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century media skills in conjunction with the traditional analysis and writing skills of earlier English classrooms 2) engage students using mediums that excite them, 3) Make collaboration fundamental to learning and performance 4) *remove* the teacher from the center of discourse and learning.

Students have consistently taught me that when a single teacher's opinion and grade is the final arbiter of the value of student work, they will do just enough to hustle the "school" system we have created for them, to "play school" as many educators say. Students know many assessment tasks aren't "real" and won't have any meaningful effect on anyone. This reality disincentivizes thinking and writing that goes beyond comfort zones or "grade-safe" approaches, it discourages them from attempting truly audacious goals. Indeed, the very best students often have no incentive to excel beyond what will get them an A, which may be far below their ability ceiling. However, when students' work goes out into the world to be seen by their peers, teachers, families, even by strangers, they revise manically, thoroughly, often many times. They attempt truly creative, innovative approaches, test the boundaries of what works. The product itself takes on intrinsic value to them, they (and their teachers) forget about the grade. They truly begin to understand what Aristotle called "virtuous action." The resulting production goes FAR beyond what any reasonable teacher would ever ask. They don't *do* school; they become scholars.

As I have experimented with various project-based methods, including op-ed writing, SLAM and spoken word poetry, writing and documentary filmmaking competitions, etc., team-podcasting has emerged as my most effective choice for a variety of reasons. The required technological skills are challenging, but manageable. The medium lends itself to conversational, personal style and tone that appeals to high-school students and drives deep critical thinking. Many free hosting platforms exist for both publication and marketing of student podcasts. The production requires rigorous preparation, research, and indeed allows the teacher to sneak in a wide variety of more traditional writing tasks and styles. Podcasts can be applied to any content area in any discipline. Students are driven and inspired by the fact that their work, this new thing that they have made, goes out into the world and many people "see" it. As I said above, this final part is key.

This lesson is part of a larger course I teach in which we deeply dive into 5-6 famous American short stories over the course of the semester using collaborative podcasting, publishing, and marketing as our medium of production. It gives students the ability to develop and showcase a wide variety of analytical, writing, research, and communications skills, accessing many learning styles. Perhaps most importantly, each of them becomes a published podcaster, part of a larger conversation about literature that has been going on, in various forms, since these stories were first published. And-- we have fun in class; after 10 years of doing this, I've learned that counts, too.

-Nathan Parker, Holland Hall School  
nparker@hollandhall.org

**Western Literature Association and Charles Redd Center  
Teaching Western American Literature K-12 Teaching Prize  
Instructional Plan Submission: Nathan Parker**

**Title:** A skills-oriented, interdisciplinary, project-based approach to teaching plains-writer Susan Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers"

**Duration:** ~4 weeks (assuming five class periods per week)

**Grade level:** With modifications can be used 7-12. Ideal for 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Number of students:** This study works best when students work in even-numbered teams of between 8-12 students. Can be scaled up or down in multiples

**Materials:**

**Required:** Copies of "A Jury of Her Peers" (or "Trifles) for each student, at least 1 laptop, tablet, or smartphone per group (more is better), access to either GarageBand (included on all Apple devices) or Audacity (free download) software, access to the internet, access to Googledocs (free) or other collaborative platform, access to social media platforms

**Preferred:** Above plus: Access to a university library incl. scholarly databases, a laptop, tablet, or smartphone for each student, at least 1 high-quality external microphone per group,

**Key Vocab/Concepts:** Language Arts: mystery genre, plot-structure, en media res, historical fiction,

literary symbolism, new-historicism

Social Studies: 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century plains culture, womens suffrage, retributive justice,

western feminism, proportional representation, cold case

Multi-media: Storyboard, fade-in/out, cut-in, dramatization, audience

analysis/awareness, audio interview, post-production editing, fair-use

**Enduring Understanding:** This instructional plan intends to frame the mythic "American West" as a transgressive space from which many of our most deeply held rebellions stem (for good AND ill), to give students understanding that there are modern contexts and extensions for "old" stories, that essays are not the only way to think about and communicate about literature (or anything else), that the modern arguments about feminism are older than they think, and that the relevant contexts of western, transgressive, border and frontier literature extent into 21<sup>st</sup> century American problems and beyond.

**Essential Questions:** 1. To what extent did the frontier world of the high-plains change women's roles and social capital? 2. To what extent did western values of rugged individualism, independence, and escape from society influence feminist thinking and women's rights in the west during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries? 3. What styles and forms best entice modern audiences of classic literature? 4. What role can canonical literature play in the contemporary media/entertainment landscape? 5. What do modern progressive movements have to gain by returning to the work of earlier generations of activists? 6. What role does regional/western cultural context play in the fame/canonization of certain short stories?

**Learning Objectives:** Students will be able to: 1) Perform new-historicist analysis of a short story 2) Write concise summaries 3) Write in memo-format 4) Perform scholarly research including utilizing academic databases 5) Write and perform voice-acted literary dramatizations 6) Craft interview questions 7) Record and edit various kinds of audio 8) Delegate a series of tasks and synthesize the products of those tasks 9) Use social media for marketing and audience engagement

**Standards:** Common Core ELA Anchor Reading standards 1-8, 10 and Common Core ELA Anchor Writing Standards 2-10. Special emphasis places on Reading Standards 3, 7, 8 and Writing Standards 3, 6, 7

**Background:** Part of the beauty of this teaching methodology is that students learn alongside their teachers. In fact, many times students end up teaching their teacher. However, it is best if the teacher has a basic understanding of podcast format, basic audio editing skills, knowledge of the women's suffrage movement, early 20<sup>th</sup> century progressivism, and the basics of the John Hossack cold case, and a college-level understanding of literary analysis and academic research methods.

**Procedure/Lesson Plan: (see attached)**

**Evaluations/Assessment (rubrics attached):** 1) Short research briefs/memo format 2) Reading quiz 3) Edited audio interview with expert incl./ written questions 4) Dramatization script 5) Dramatization edited audio 6) Podcast storyboard 7) Podcast script 8) Final edited podcast production 9) Social media marketing plan 10) Social media marketing efficacy report 11) Personal reflection

**Extension:** This methodology is the basis for a whole course I teach on the western American short story. We use team-based podcasting as the mechanism for teaching real-world media skills, management skills, audio journalism, business writing, marketing skills, historical thinking, as well as critical thinking and literary analysis.

The method can be applied to nearly any type of literature or historical period (as evidenced by its inspiration being the historical *Uncivil* podcast published by Gimlet Media), but works best with short stories and/or poetry in a literary setting. However, it can easily be modified as a methodology for teaching history.

This curriculum can also be modified to use visual media, such as the short op-docs popularized by the New York Times website, instead of podcasting as its medium of delivery.

The types of writing tasks practiced in this assignment—interview questions, research abstract/summary, script, storyboard, etc. can be extended into other types of literary and language study. Likewise, the audio editing and voice recording skills developed in this process have myriad application for speech and public speaking classes as well as technology and journalism curriculum, while the social media marketing strategies can be applied to both business and political science coursework. It truly is a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching literature.

**Resources:**

Abel, Jessica and Ira Glass. *Radio: An Illustrated Guide*. This American Life, 1999. Pdf.

Ben-Zvi, Linda. “‘Murder, She Wrote’: The Genesis of Susan Glaspell's ‘Trifles.’” *Theatre Journal*, vol. 44, no. 2, May 1992, pp. 141–162. *American Scenes*.

Heckel, Sally, and Susan Glaspell. *A Jury of Her Peers*. New York: Susan Heckel, 1980.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, Allen W. Wood, and H. B. Nisbet. 1991. *Elements of the philosophy of right*.

Kumanyika, Chenjerai and Hitt, Jack. Audio blog series. Uncivil. Gimlet, 2017.

Lewis, Daniel J., David Jackson and Ray Ortega. “How to Grow Your Podcast from 100s to 1000s.” Audio blog post. Podcaster’s Roundtable, 9 Jan 2014.

Muncy, Robyn. *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Open Collections Program: Working Women, 1800-1930. Harvard University Library.

**Procedure: This procedure takes roughly 4 weeks. Depending on class size, student age, student skill level, length of class period, etc. each of these steps can take longer.**

**Day 1:** Introduce new-historicism as a method for understanding literature. Go over key literary ideas like 19<sup>th</sup> century plains culture (esp. re: women), symbolism, first-wave feminism, plot structure, etc. If time, practice principles on a commonly-known text like a Disney movie or current popular film.

**Days 2-3:** Use Harkness/Roundtable Method to discuss themes and problems in “A Jury of Her Peers.” Encourage students to focus specifically on problems that are unique to the context and society of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century west in general, and it’s women in particular. Include discussion of symbolism and a basic understanding of the western historical context of the story. Include discussion of how sympathy circulates in the text. Let students find where their interest lies in this text by generating their own discussion questions as much as possible. If time permits, ask students in pairs to develop 1 discussion question they would like to address together as a class.

**Day 4:** Explain the assignment. This study will involve creating a 15-20 minute podcast episode that unpacks the historical and cultural relevance of a single iconic short story, blending the discussion/analysis of literature with cultural/historical thinking, new journalism, research, and creative storytelling. One pair of students will oversee the episode as hosts and executive producers. They decide what aspects of the short story to track down (author biography, political context, critical reception, readership data, etc.), whether to include dramatizations and which ones, and how to use context/s to frame the narration of their episode to tell a unique “story about the story.” The rest of the students on the team serve as research and production teams for the current “Executive Team.” For example, if there are 10 students on the team, 2 might be the “Executive team” for a story by Susan Glaspell. The other 8 might be divided as follows: 2 students researching and summarizing Glaspell’s biography as it relates to the story and collecting reader and critic receptions of the work, 2 researching the historical/political events of the late suffrage movement and summarizing/excerpting as it relates to the themes of the story, 2 writing and recording dramatic scene interpretations of the story for the podcast, and 2 more lining up an interview with a modern critic/scholar and producing recorded interview segments for the podcast. Each team will then provide research briefs in the form of formal memos *or* recorded segment/s to the executive team, who will script, record narration, choose music/sound effects, and rough mix the segments. Students will then divide labor of final mixing, publishing, and marketing the podcast episode. Students will have roughly 2.5 weeks to accomplish these tasks.

**Day 5-6:** Discuss the episodes of Gimlet’s *Uncivil* podcast entitled “The Spin” and “The Song.” Focus discussion particularly around the form of the podcasts by having students collaborative fill out a “plot diagram” for each of the two episodes as though the podcast were a fictional story. Relate this discussion back to the concept of new historicism we discussed on Day 1. Students identify the elements of analysis in the podcast by citing specific points the hosts make. Students make a list of the different elements they identify in the podcast (mood music, interviews, cut ins, dramatizations, cold-opens, plot summary, historical info, etc.). Discuss which ones they found particularly compelling or engaging, and why.

**Day 7:** Students individually audio-record a 3-5 minute podcast summary/analysis of a short story (of their choosing) they read the night before. They will then add background music/sound to their short podcast and submit it for a grade. This exercise is designed purely to get students used to the software and should be graded accordingly. In other words, if a good-faith effort is made to create an interesting analysis that includes outside sound effects, the students should receive full credit. This task can also be done in pairs if you have a shy class.

**Day 8:** Return to Glaspell’s short story. Devise research questions that arise from the text. These might include author biography, historical/political/economic context questions. Make a list of the most interesting scenes from the story, etc. Have the executive pair decide which of these elements they want to pursue in the episode. The executives will then give assignments to the rest of the team. Executive team must then write the “thesis” of the podcast, or the fresh take or big point they want their listener to come away with. Emphasize it should take into account historical context *AND* a modern takeaway. This will ideally be based on ideas that surfaced during the first few days of discussion and be fleshed out as the research process unfolds.

**Day 9:** Instructor spends 15 minutes with each team, giving them a crash course in the core skill their task requires— memo writing, interview skills, crafting dramatizations, etc. Groups doing research will spend **days 10-11** working with school librarians on academic research.

**Days 9-13:** Executive team scripts/storyboards podcast, chooses music, etc. If these tasks get finished early, the executive team will assist the other teams in whatever way they need. If no assistance is needed, the executive team will listen to other professionally produced podcasts to identify new strategies for organizing their episode. Other teams write interview questions, conduct research, write/record dramatizations, and write memos/summaries. All material is due to the executive team (and the instructor) by day 12. Students will self-assign homework during this period as needed based on a written schedule each team will create on day 7. Instructor will serve as a consultant, sounding board, motivator, assistant, etc. during this time, and teach any skill deficits that arise in a small group or 1-on-1 format. The timing and duration of this period can be tweaked to address specific teaching goals, student skill-levels, class-time available, etc.

**Day 14:** Executive team records narration. Other teams write personal reflection essays about the experience of working on their part of the podcast and submit to the instructor.

**Day 15-16:** Executive team rough mixes podcast. Instructor or special guest lecturer gives short lesson on principles of social media marketing. Non-executive teams work together to brainstorm and write a social media marketing plan, then decide who will execute the marketing strategy and who will final edit/publish the podcast.

**Day 17:** Executive pair hands podcast off to final cut team who must finish editing by day 18 of class. Executive pair then join social media team.

**Day 18:** Podcast is published on sound cloud. Whole team begins aggressively marketing episode and tracking listenership (this part will continue for the two weeks following the project. As a class, you'll check in with your podcast listener data every day and periodically send out blurbs according to the social media marketing plan, modifying as needed). I offer extra-credit performance incentives if teams hit a certain target numbers of unique downloads.

**Day 19:** Debrief experience in a roundtable-style discussion. Instructor begins grading various submitted pieces.

**Supplemental Rubrics:** *(note—categories are purposely left blank to allow teachers to tailor expectations to their own students’ skill levels and their teaching objectives)*

**Podcast Research Team Memo**

	Needs Work 1	Acceptable 2	Above Average 3	Excellent 4
Format				
Writing Mechanics				
Source Quality				
Research Detail/ Thoroughness				

Podcast: Recorded Segment Rubric

	Needs Work 1	Acceptable 2	Above Average 3	Excellent 4
Editing Quality				
Content				
Creativity/ Style				



Podcast: Interview Qs Rubric

	Needs Work 1	Acceptable 2	Above Average 3	Excellent 4
Specificity				
Thoroughness				
Professionalism				

Podcast: Storyboard/Script Rubric

	Needs Work 1	Acceptable 2	Above Average 3	Excellent 4
Specificity/ Detail				
Creativity				
Narrative Arc				

Podcast: Final Cut Rubric

	Needs Work 1	Acceptable 2	Above Average 3	Excellent 4
Editing/ Production				
Content				
Music				
Narrative Arc				
Tone				

Podcast: Marketing Rubric

	Needs Work 1	Acceptable 2	Above Average 3	Excellent 4
Platform Saturation				
Content				
Stylistic Plan				
Statistical Effectiveness				

Podcast: Personal Reflection Rubric

	Needs Work 1	Acceptable 2	Above Average 3	Excellent 4
Personal Content				
Research Content				
Writing Mechanics				
Written Voice				