Lesson plan for

“Schadenfreude” by melanie kokolios

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Note to the teacher

Incorporate contemporary fiction into your curriculum with some or all of these components of complete lesson plans, downloadable in customizable Word documents:

* **About the Author** provides context for the story and authors’ perspectives on contemporary literature and the art of writing it

* **Pre-Reading Activities** engage students in relevant whole-class, small-group or individual exercises
* **Post-Reading Discussion Prompts** address the categories of story/theme and craft/writing
* **Post-Reading Writing Prompts** stimulate analytical and creative thinking and writing
* **Further the Discussion** suggests literature with similar subjects or themes, as well as ways for teachers and students to connect with the author

**PLEASE NOTE**: All stories for *Carve* lesson plans are available to read free online (see link at plan’s onset*)*. However, authors hold the rights to their stories; do not photocopy or distribute without their written permission.

Feedback

We’d appreciate if you could take a moment to give us your feedback at <https://www.carvezine.com/lesson-plans-feedback>. Thank you!

“Schadenfreude” by melanie kokolios

Story Text & Audio Player

<https://www.carvezine.com/story/2011-spring-kokolios>

subjects

Death, suicide, loss, mother-son relationships, writing, metafiction, author-reader relationship

content warnings

Suicide

synopsis

“Schadenfreude” by Melanie Kokolios is a story about the power of stories. In this flash fiction piece, the author interweaves the tale of a woman’s tragic loss with compelling commentary on how we as readers experience fiction. As Irene begins to come to terms with the mysterious loss of her son Ian, the reader, through the provocative use of the second person point of view, begins to understand that one of the great and perhaps perverse pleasures of fiction is that reading feels good even as we experience the ill fortune of others. “Schadenfreude” is both flash fiction and metafiction at its best.

audio version

Approx. 6 minutes

about the author

Direct from the author:

Melanie (Kokolios) Moore has been an avid reader and writer since she was old enough to pick up a copy of *Madeline* and record herself reading it for her father when he was deployed overseas. It didn’t matter what it was – magazines in the checkout aisle at the grocery store, Shakespeare’s plays, or the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. Fantasy authors like Tolkien and Ursula K. LeGuin have had a huge influence on her writing, as has the work of magical realists like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and of dystopian writers like George Orwell, Margaret Atwood, and Aldous Huxley. All of these authors make the unreal seem real, causing readers to question their own realities and imagine alternatives to the world around them, both beautiful and terrifying.

This same blur of reality and unreality is what drew her to Stratford-Upon-Avon, where she studied how the Royal Shakespeare Company stages adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays that toy with changing setting and time period to create an almost fantastic effect. Even the poetry of Emily Dickinson, with her personification of abstract feelings and concepts, makes her think of the best fantasy authors. Although fantasy is often considered a trivial genre, she believes firmly in what it offers all authors, particularly those who are interested in postmodern fiction. All writing is ultimately magic, something that allows a writer in one place and time to send thoughts and images into the mind of a reader they may never meet, and both are changed in the transaction; it is this idea that, in part, inspired “Schadenfreude.”

She wrote her senior thesis at St. Mary’s College of Maryland, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in English and Educational Studies, on the importance of the fantasy genre as a tool for feminist writers to imagine alternate realities to the patriarchy of the past and present. As part of the project, she also wrote a draft of a feminist fantasy novel tentatively titled Empress, which she is still revising and hopes to publish. She has also received a Master’s in the Art of Teaching in Secondary English Language Arts Education from the University of Southern California. She currently lives and works in Seoul, South Korea, as an English teacher.

PRE-READING Activity

As a group or in pairs

1. Read the first two sentences of “Schadenfreude” aloud. Ask students for their immediate reaction, encouraging both questions and emotional responses.
2. Then read the fourth and part of the fifth sentence aloud. Again, ask students what they are immediately thinking, wondering, and feeling.
3. Next, read the entire first paragraph aloud and then:
   1. Briefly define *metafiction* (e.g., "fictional writing [that] self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."[[1]](#footnote-1)) and discuss the following:
      1. Compare how it feels to read the edited text vs. the complete paragraph.
      2. Explore the effects of the foregrounding of the writer’s craft
      3. Explore the effects of the author’s explicit control of the reader’s reactions

POST-READING discussion prompts

story/theme

1. What is the meaning of the term “schadenfreude”? How does the term work as a title for this story? Consider in particular the final paragraph of the story.
2. Explain the connections Irene makes between the birth and the death of her son. How do these connections affect your understanding of the story as a whole?
3. The author imagines that the reader is surprised at how calm Irene is and suspects the reader is asking, “Why doesn’t she cry or shout or curse God or search for her husband or call a friend?” Why do you think Irene is so calm?
4. What do you know about Ian’s death? What do you want to know that the author does not tell you? What are the possibilities that you are imagining that might explain Ian’s suicide?
5. Ian’s tennis shoes are mentioned a number of times in the story. Note each time they are mentioned. What do you think is the significance of the tennis shoes?

POST-READING discussion prompts, Cont’d

craft/writing

1. Ernest Hemingway is known for the “iceberg structure” of his fiction; he omits significant detail, including background information and often resolution, leaving only the immediate one-eighth of the story above water, or evident to the reader. The early minimalists, including Raymond Carver, adopted a similar approach. How is that approach evident in “Schadenfreude”? Consider, for example, what specific information you know about Irene and her family and what information you have to fill in to complete the picture.
2. In flash fiction—also known as sudden fiction, micro fiction, and postcard fiction—story length ranges from about 50 to 1500 words. With its emphasis on plot, flash fiction has grown increasingly more popular in recent years. Why might this be?
3. In a piece of flash fiction, much like in poetry, every word is precise and powerful and the story makes a strong and sometimes surprising point, often in its concluding lines. Why is flash fiction a particularly effective genre for the story Kokolios tells? What does this story’s brevity reinforce in its meaning or messages?
4. The second person point of view is used throughout the story. What effect does it have on your experience as a reader?

POST-READING writing prompts

Analytical Writing

1. Throughout this metafictional story, the author compels the reader to consider both what he or she is reading and the act of reading itself. Why and to what effect? What might the author want the reader to understand about the responsibilities of reading? What might she be asserting about how literature works?

You can use a graphic organizer like this one to develop your analysis:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Effect(s) on reader | Implications of effects |
| 1st example from text |  |  |
| 2nd example |  |  |
| Etc. |  |  |

1. Consider again this definition of metafiction: "fictional writing [that] self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."[[2]](#footnote-2) How does this story comment on the relationship between fiction and reality?
2. Research the concept of *schadenfreude* and define the term in your own words. What does this story conclude about schadenfreude and, specifically, the reader of literature?

POST-READING writing prompts, cont’d

Creative Writing

1. Write a story about a heroic or admirable character who experiences schadenfreude.
2. Imagine Ian has left a letter to his mother that she discovers after his death. Write that letter.
3. Create a piece of flash fiction in under 500 words. For inspiration, you can use an old photograph, a word picked at random from the dictionary, or a line of dialogue you have overheard.

FURTHER THE DISCUSSION

literary Connections

Tim O'Brien's Vietnam novel *The Things They Carried* is a book about the nature of war as well as the nature of storytelling. As such it too is an example of metafiction. O’Brien the writer *is* O’Brien the soldier, and throughout the novel he moves between the two voices to examine that connection between fiction (what he calls “story-truth”) and fact (“happening-truth"), and he reveals how storytelling can bridge the gap. Students can note parallels in the writing technique used in “Schadenfreude” and in the O’Brien novel as a whole, but should look specifically at two chapters “Good Form” and “The Lives of the Dead” to best understand O’Brien’s beliefs about the power and purpose of fiction.

Students can explore other examples of flash fiction. There are many online publications that offer flash fiction stories. A collection especially well-suited to adolescents is *Sudden Flash Youth – 65 Short-Short Stories*, edited by Christine Perkins-Hazuka, Tom Hazuka, and Mark Budman (New York: Persea Books, 2011).

Connect with the author

The teacher may contact this author to further the discussion. Students are also encouraged to leave comments on the story’s page online. Comments are subject to moderation.

Email: [melanie.a.moore18@gmail.com](mailto:melanie.a.moore18@gmail.com)

* Yes, author is available for Skype or phone sessions.
* Yes, students may contact directly by email with comments/questions.
* Yes, teachers may contact by email on behalf of students with comments and questions.
* Yes, teachers may snail mail letters on behalf of students. (Please contact author for mailing address.)

1. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction.* New York: Methuen, 1984. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction.* New York: Methuen, 1984. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)