

A Guide to the Romantic Planning Framework

1. Identifying “heroic” qualities

What heroic human qualities are central to the topic? What emotional images do they evoke? What within the topic can best evoke wonder?

In order to help students connect emotionally to the material, teachers need to first identify their own emotional attachment to it. What heroic human quality or emotion—courage, compassion, tenacity, fear, hope, loathing, delight, etc.—can we identify in the topic? These human qualities help us—and our students—see the world in human terms and give human meaning to events and ideas in all disciplines. We “humanize” each topic not to falsify it but to infuse the world with human meaning. Again, this first task is the most difficult part of planning the lesson or unit. We are asked to feel about the topic as well as to think about it; indeed, we are asked to “perfink” (David Kresch’s term for perceiving, feeling, and thinking together) about it. Remember, the heroic quality you identify will be a shaping force to the narrative or story you create for this unit or lesson so identify heroic qualities that most effectively convey the content of the topic.

Identifying heroic qualities:

1. Main heroic quality:
2. Alternative(s):

Images that capture the heroic quality:

2. Shaping the lesson or unit

Teaching shares some features with news reporting. Just as the reporter’s aim is to select and shape events to bring out clearly their meaning and emotional importance for readers or listeners, so your aim as a teacher is to present your topic in a way that engages the emotions and imaginations of your students. As you do so, consider which of the following dimensions of your students’

emotional and imaginative lives can be used to shape your lesson or unit—all related to the skills the good reporter works with:

2.1. Finding the story or narrative:

What’s “the story” on the topic? How can the narrative illustrate the heroic qualities of the topic?

If you imagine for a moment that you are a news reporter, you will think about events/information in terms of human interest and engagement. Remember, everything is potentially wonderful. In order to be a good reporter, one needs to think this way about whatever it is one has been sent to report on. That is, the reporter writes about or talks about an incident in a way that is interesting, or that somehow engages the reader’s/listener’s imagination and emotions. And so too the teacher. Ask yourself what the “story” is on your topic; identify what is wonderful or interesting or engaging about it and how you can discuss it in a way that reflects this. Keep in mind that the main heroic quality you identify in this step will drive the drama and conflict in the story.

Sketch the overall structure of the lesson/unit:

2.2. Finding extremes and limits:

What aspects of the topic expose extremes of experience or limits of reality? What is most exotic, bizarre or strange about the topic?

As you think about your topic in terms of its heroic qualities and how you will share these with students in an emotionally and imaginatively engaging way, you’ll want to consider what is extreme, exotic, or bizarre about your topic. Your students’ imaginations are engaged by the extremes of experience and limits of reality. As they try to make sense of reality, and their place within it, their imaginations are drawn to what is the most extreme, bizarre, and generally wacky, features of human experience. They revel in the stuff of the Guinness Book of World Records. Identify features of your topic that are extreme, that express limits of human experience. This is the stuff of the superlative tense - - the longest, fastest, shortest, hairiest, most, least (and so on) aspects of your topic.

Exotic/extreme content that best embodies the heroic quality:

2.3. Finding connections to human hopes, fears, and passions: *To what human hopes, fears, and passions does the topic connect? What ideals and/or challenges to conventions are evident in the content? Through what human emotions can students access the topic?*

Think of how a good movie or novel makes aspects of the world engaging. Obstacles to the hero are humanized in one form or another, almost given motives; they are seen in human terms. To do this, we don't need to falsify anything, but rather we highlight a particular way of seeing it—because this is precisely the way students' imaginations are engaged by knowledge.

What content can be best shown in terms of hopes, fears, intentions or other emotions?

2.4. Employing additional cognitive tools of Romantic understanding: *What kinds of activities might you design to deploy other tools in your students' cognitive toolkits?*

Our students have many cognitive tools with which they make sense of the world. It would be wise to employ as many as possible in one's teaching if one wants to make learning meaningful for students. While we are not suggesting that everything you do in your classroom must include all of the following tools, it would be useful to consider how to include as many as you can in teaching. Whether as part of your direct instruction or through student-directed activities, there are many tools that can engage students' emotions and imaginations with what you are teaching. Consider how to teach in a way that includes the following

or think about some activities students might do that engage these cognitive tools:

- **Collections and hobbies:** *What parts of the topic can students explore in exhaustive detail? What activity might engage students in learning everything they can about some aspect of the topic?*

Teaching strategy:

Student activity:

- **Change of context:** *What kinds of activities could change the context in the classroom? How might drama or role-play be employed or how might students engage the body's senses in learning?*

Teaching strategy:

Student activity:

- **The literate eye:** *How could graphs, lists, flowcharts or other visual formats be employed in learning about the topic?*

Teaching strategy:

Student activity:

- **The sense of wonder:** *What kind of activity might evoke students' sense of wonder? How could you use that sense of wonder to draw students forward in thinking about further dimensions of the topic?*

Teaching strategy:

Student activity:

Embryonic tools of philosophic understanding: *Consider how to frame the topic in terms of a general idea or theory. How can students begin to move from the particular aspects of what they have been learning to a more general explanation? How can students' sense of agency be engaged?*

Teaching strategy:

Student activity:

2.5. Drawing on tools of previous kinds of understanding:
Somatic understanding – *How might students use some of the toolkit of Somatic Understanding in learning the topic? How might their senses, emotions, humor, musicality, and so on, be deployed?*

Teaching strategy:

Student activity:

Mythic understanding – *How might students use some of the toolkit of Mythic Understanding in learning the topic? How might abstract and affective binary oppositions, metaphor, vivid mental imagery, puzzles and sense of mystery, and so on, be deployed?*

Teaching strategy:

Student activity:

3. Resources

What resources can you use to learn more about the topic and to shape your story? What resources are useful in creating activities?

List of resources:

4. Conclusion

How does the narrative end? How can one best bring the topic to a satisfactory closure and how can students feel this satisfaction? Alternatively, what new questions can draw students to think more deeply about the topic? How can you extend students' sense of wonder?

One wants to end a topic in an “heroic” way, which can have two forms. The first form is to re-examine the images we started from and review the content through the lenses of other heroic qualities, including some that might give an opposite or conflicting image to that of our earlier choice. The second form is to show how the romantic association the students have formed can help them understand other topics in a new way. Or one can use both, of course. In concluding we will also want to reflect back on the topic bringing out why we should feel wonder or awe about it.

Concluding activities:

5. Evaluation

How can one know that the content has been learned and understood and has engaged and stimulated students' imaginations?

Any of the traditional forms of evaluation can be used, but in addition, teachers might want to get some measure of how far students' imaginations have been engaged by the topic, how far they have successfully made an imaginative engagement with the material. In addition, the concluding exercises (above) are also evaluative in nature. Students could be asked to identify heroic qualities in stories in other disciplines to examine both their imaginative use of narrative and their understanding of the content. Heroic qualities can also be examined on moral/ethical terms.

Forms of evaluation to be used: