

LESSON PLAN: Understanding Narrative, Personal Experience, and Caution in New Age Practices

Course: High School – College Level Humanities/Interdisciplinary Studies

Duration: 45 Minutes (15 minutes Instructor-Led, 30 minutes Student Activities)

Text Source: Excerpts from [A Tatterdemalion's Testimony](#)

I. Lesson Objectives

- Develop an understanding of why individuals pursue unconventional paths (e.g., occult, new age, energy healing)
- Recognize that every personal narrative holds meaning, challenges, and the potential for learning
- Cultivate critical thinking to assess personal testimonials and be wary of deceptive practices
- Encourage empathy and reflective discussion about personal journeys and belief systems

II. Materials Needed

- Copies of selected excerpts from A Tatterdemalion's Testimony for reference
- Whiteboard/flipchart and markers
- Printed worksheets (see “**Worksheet: Mapping Narratives & Critical Analysis**” below)
- Pens, paper, and sticky notes
- Optional: digital presentation slides with key discussion questions and activity instructions

III. Lesson Outline

Introduction & Instructor-Led Session (15 minutes)

1. Welcome and Brief Context (3 minutes)
 - Introduce the memoir A Tatterdemalion's Testimony and its central themes (personal narrative, unconventional healing practices, and the cautionary aspects of occult/new age phenomena).
 - Clarify that the day's lesson will explore why people are drawn to these practices, the impact of personal testimonies, and methods to critically evaluate such narratives.
2. Guided Discussion & Instruction (12 minutes)

- Pose the following introductory questions to the class and facilitate a brief discussion:
 - “Why do you think people turn to the occult or energy healing methods during times of stress or crisis?”
 - “What elements in a personal story make it compelling? How might personal pain or vulnerability enhance the narrative?”
 - “In what ways can personal stories, even if sincere, be used to mislead or create false hope?”
- Highlight key points from the text:
 - The lure of testimonials during economic or personal hardships
 - The transformation of personal experience into a narrative that validates unconventional practices
 - The importance of distinguishing between personal growth and potentially deceptive modalities
- Summarize with a mini-lecture on the role of narrative, trust, and critical inquiry in evaluating personal experiences and unconventional claims.

Student Activities (30 minutes)

Activity 1: Narrative Mapping and Critical Analysis (15 minutes)

Directions:

- Distribute the “Worksheet: Mapping Narratives & Critical Analysis.”
- Students will work individually or in small groups (3–4 students) to map out the key events and turning points in the memoir excerpts.
- On the worksheet, have them list:
 - The initial attraction to the metaphysical bookstore and subsequent experiences
 - Personal struggles (e.g., economic hardship, physical pain, spiritual loneliness) noted in the memoir
 - Moments of realization or transformation
- For each event, ask students to note:
 - What emotional or social factors might have influenced the author’s choices?
 - How do these factors reflect common human behaviors (e.g., seeking belonging, relief during hardship)
 - What critical questions might one ask to differentiate between genuine help and potential exploitation?

- Encourage use of sticky notes or diagrams to visualize connections between experiences and outcomes.

Activity 2: Role-Play and Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Directions:

- Form groups of 4–5 students. Each group will receive a scenario card (prepared in advance) inspired by themes in the memoir. Examples:
 - Scenario A: A person facing economic distress is presented with “miracle cures” by a charismatic healer.
 - Scenario B: An individual feeling isolated finds solace in a community that promises spiritual awakening but requires personal disclosures.
 - Scenario C: A friend encounters conflicting advice from a traditional church versus an alternative healing center.
- Task: In 10 minutes, groups will role-play a short dialogue showing a discussion between a character who is tempted by the allure of new age practices and another who applies critical inquiry and empathy.
- After the role-play, spend 5 minutes sharing key takeaways:
 - What persuasive techniques did the “healers” or proponents use?
 - How can personal vulnerability be both a strength and a risk?
 - What safeguards can individuals put in place to evaluate such claims?
 - The teacher can facilitate a brief class discussion after group presentations, reinforcing the importance of balancing open-mindedness with critical thinking.

IV. Worksheets & Handout Descriptions

“Worksheet: Mapping Narratives & Critical Analysis”

Section 1: Timeline Creation

- List 5–7 key events or turning points mentioned in the excerpt.
- Draw arrows or connections between events that seem to build upon one another (e.g., economic collapse leading to openness toward unconventional healing).

Section 2: Critical Reflection Questions

For each event on your timeline, answer:

1. What personal or social factors influenced this event?
2. What promises or claims are made by the unconventional practice?
3. What questions would you ask if you were to critically evaluate the claim being made?

Section 3: Personal Connection

- Write a short paragraph about a time when you (or someone you know) faced a challenging situation and was drawn to a seemingly “easy” solution. Reflect on the decision-making process and how you might apply critical thinking in similar situations in the future.

V. Wrap-Up and Homework (Optional)

Conclude the lesson with a reminder that every personal story is valuable, but it's essential to balance openness with skepticism when faced with persuasive claims.

Homework Assignment (Optional): Write a reflective essay (1–2 pages) on how narrative and vulnerability can be both empowering and a potential gateway to exploitation. Use examples from the memoir and your personal experience where applicable.

VI. Assessment Criteria

- Participation in guided discussion and group activities
- Completion and thoughtfulness of the Narrative Mapping & Critical Analysis worksheet
- Engagement and insight demonstrated during role-play and group discussions
- (If applicable) Quality of the reflective essay demonstrating critical thinking and personal connection to the themes discussed

End of Lesson Plan

This lesson plan can be directly copied and pasted into a Word document. Teachers are encouraged to modify timing or activities to best suit their class needs. Enjoy facilitating thoughtful discussion and critical inquiry into personal narratives and the allure of unconventional healing practices!