Unit 1

Title: Three Skeleton Key

Suggested Time: 4-5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.6; W.7.2, W.7.3, W.7.4, W.7.9; SL.7.1; L.7.1, L.7.2

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

One’s outlook and approaches to challenges often determine the outcome.

Synopsis

(From textbook) This horror story begins when three lighthouse keepers realize that a derelict ship heading for their tiny island is filled with thousands of giant rats. The ship runs aground and sinks; the famished rats scramble onto the island, and, in time, they break into the lighthouse. The besieged men struggle to stay alive. To draw the attention of people on the mainland, they do not light their lamp. Rescue ships come but are at first driven away by the human-eating rats. Later, the rescuers devise another plan. They load a barge with meat and tow it near the island. The rats swim out to the barge, the barge is set on fire, and the rats are burned or eaten by sharks. The three keepers are rescued, but one goes insane, the second dies from his infected wounds, and only the narrator is left alive to resume his service on the island of Three Skeleton Key.

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| What are Le Gleo’s and Itchoua’s reactions to the mysterious ship? What do their reactions tell you about the men? | Le Gleo becomes excited and frightened and easily jumps to conclusions, asking, “What’s wrong with her crew? Are they all drunk or insane?” and later jumps straight to the possibility that it’s the ghost ship, The Flying Dutchman. Itchoua remains cool and logical, as noted when he laughed at Le Gleo’s absurdity and said that he just meant that she was a derelict. This shows us that Itchoua remains more cool headed while Le Gleo is more excitable and is quick to jump to conclusions.  |
| Early in the story, the narrator explained how Three Skeleton Key got its name. How does this information about the setting shape how the plot develops throughout the text? | The deaths of the three escaped convicts show the difficulty of surviving on the isolated island; The setting helps shape the plot as it relates to the difficulty of surviving on the island. The author describes the island as, “a small rock twenty miles or so from the mainland,” “a small, bare piece of stone, about one hundred fifty feet long, perhaps forty wide,” and “the waters about our island swarmed with huge sharks”. This foreshadows what happens later.  |
| How does the author convey the scene of the rats swarming the lighthouse? What effect does the description have on the reader? | The author includes a description of the scene including language utilizing the four of the five senses. Sight – swarmed, covered, filling, piling, gleaming, beady eyes, sharp claws and teeth, horde. Sound – scraped, grated. Smell – poisoned our lungs, rasped our nostrils, pestilential, nauseating smell. Touch – furry mantle, sharp claws and teeth, sealed alive. The effect is that it creates a sense of horror and dread for the reader.  |
| What would cause the island’s name to be changed to Six Skeleton Key, as suggested by Itchoua? | The island was named Three Skeleton Key because three escaped prisoners died there. Three more people (the keepers) could die because of their new situation with the rats. |
| What did Itchoua’s actions reveal about his character? Include evidence from the text to support your analysis.  | Even when wounded, he thinks to use the light to send a signal in Morse code. This shows that he is quick-thinking and remains calm in difficult situations.  |
| At what point within the text does the reader know that the narrator will survive the rat attack? How does this evidence clue in the reader about the narrator’s survival? Use evidence to support your response. | Possible responses: The reader might know once the rescue ship arrived and the crew realized the men were trapped; the reader knew once the barge filled with meat was on the scene because it would draw the rats away and the men would be safe; the reader knew once the barge was drenched with gasoline because the rats would not survive the fire; the reader knew at the very beginning when the narrator is recalling this event that occurred because dead men don’t tell tales.  |
| How did Le Gleo’s initial reaction to the derelict ship begin to build the reader’s impression of his character? How did future events continue to contribute to his characterization?  | His reaction showed that he is easily frightened. He is prone to jump to conclusions and become emotional rather than remain rational. The text describes Le Gleo as throwing his head back and howling, a trickle of saliva running from the corners of his mouth. This shows that he’s not thinking clearly and beginning to fall into insanity, which matches his earlier emotional response when we was easily frightened. |
| How does Le Gleo’s character impact his outcome in the story? Provide evidence from the text to support.  | He starts out as easily frightened, prone to jump to conclusions, and emotional. He therefore can’t think clearly and continues to act irrationally, such as when he sits on the floor, babbling about skeletons, leading to him to become insane and having to be locked up in an asylum. |
| What type of person is the narrator? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.  | The narrator is reliable, not easily influenced, thinks rationally, and is dependable and responsible. He wants to save up money before marriage. He didn’t give warnings of “old-timers” a second thought. He was reliable and committed to people he was with, such as when he problem-solved and rescued Itchuoa from the rats. |
| How did the narrator’s character make it more likely that he would survive and even return to work in the Lights? | His ability to think rationally helped with problem-solving and keeping his mind intact. His reliability and responsibility (and lack of being easily influenced by stories or events) leads him to go back to work to fulfill his duty to his family and to himself. |
| What is a theme of this story? Use evidence to support your response.  | A possible theme is that one’s outlook and approach to challenges determines the outcome. The paragraphs describing the three outcomes ties back to the theme because their attitudes and behavior led to those different outcomes (even Itchuoa, who thought more for others than himself and was older, may have contributed to his own demise). Responses may vary.  |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**(They are concrete or describe an object/event/process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**(They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | monotonous, provisions, treacherously maritime, hordesfathomtusslesraving mad  | sufficeincendiary |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | recedingfetidmorose, maniacalwrithedshrapnel, fumigated | *(WP indicates a word selected for morphology)*unceasingly WP; derelictriveted, clannish, uncannyravening, innumerable WP, rasped, pestilentialincessantly WPderisive, predominating WP |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt

*Each of the characters in the story responds differently to the rat attack. Select one character from the story and explain how his outlook and approaches to challenges led to his particular outcome. Using details from the story, compose an essay that is roughly one page in length. Provide details from the story, including direct quotes and page numbers, which support your response.*

* Teacher Instructions
1. Students should have a clear grasp of the theme and how the characters caused the outcomes for themselves.
2. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
3. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should remind students to use any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions.

*Sample evidence and responses are based upon the narrator as the selected character, but students may also choose Itchoua or Le Gleo.*

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| ***Evidence******Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “The pay was high, so in order to reach the sum I had set out to save before I married, I volunteered for service in the new light.” | This quote supports the argument that the narrator is determined. The reader first sees that the narrator has a goal and wants to achieve that goal. Later, the reader will see that this quality influenced the narrator’s outcome because he would not give up and was determined to help protect him and others from the rat attack.  |
| “…there were many such stories and I did not give the warnings of the old-timers…a second thought.” | Again, this quote highlights the narrator’s determinedness. Despite the stories that the narrator had heard about the lighthouse, the narrator had a financial goal that he wanted to meet before he got married and was determined to meet that goal. This quote also supports the idea that the narrator is not easily scared and willing to face a challenge head on. |
| “…I saw the wooden framework of my window, eaten away from the outside, sagging inwards. I called my comrades and the three of us fastened a sheet of tin in the opening, sealing it tightly.” | The narrator is responsive when faced with a challenge which directly influences his outcome because had he not been responsive, he would not have survived the rat attack.  |
| As Le Gleo was howling with his head thrown back, the narrator smacks Le Gleo across his face to shut him up.  | Though the narrator had been bitten multiple times by the rats, he recognizes that Le Gleo’s reaction is making the situation worse and one must remain calm when faced with a challenge. The narrator’s ability to remain calm contributes to survival being his outcome.  |
| “I resumed my service there [the lighthouse]…no reason why such an incident should keep me from finishing out my service there, is there?” | The narrator is reliable and responsible as supported by this quote. When he commits to something, he is going to see it through. He is also committed to meeting his financial goal and since this island post pays well, he believes it’s worth returning to. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (analytical) and think about the evidence they found. (It is recommended that teachers review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.
* Sample Answer

If one’s outlook and approach to challenges determines their outcome, then one can easily understand why the narrator in the story Three Skeleton Key survived the rat attack despite the multiple barriers he encountered. His determinedness, ability to remain calm and responsive, as well as being reliable and responsible all contribute to why the narrator survived the attack.

The reader first gets a glimpse of the narrator’s determinedness. “The pay was high, so in order to reach the sum I had set out to save before I married, I volunteered for service in the new light.” Initially, the narrator’s determinedness is fueled by his financial goal. He has a particular goal in mind and is determined to meet it. Later, the reader will see that this quality influenced the narrator’s outcome because he would not give up and was determined to help protect himself and others from the rat attack. Additionally, one could argue that this quote supports the idea that the narrator is reliable and responsible because he is planning ahead to ensure that his wife and the life they build together are financially taken care of.

The narrator’s determinedness is also highlighted “…there were many such stories and I did not give the warnings of the old-timers…a second thought.” Again, the reader is provided insight into the narrator’s motivation for working at this particular post and how determined he is to meet his financial goal despite the stories he has heard from others. The reader also sees that the narrator is not easily scared and willing to face a challenge head on. These qualities lead to the narrator’s ability to be responsive and remain calm. Had the narrator been easily frightened and/or shied away from the challenge, the likelihood of him having the outcome he did and surviving the attack is slim.

The narrator continues to show his responsiveness “…I saw the wooden framework of my window, eaten away from the outside, sagging inwards. I called my comrades and the three of us fastened a sheet of tin in the opening, sealing it tightly.” The narrator responds quickly to the potential threat of the rats getting through the wooden framework and was able to problem solve efficiently.

Likewise, the narrator’s ability to remain calm and see the importance of being calm in a challenging situation is highlighted on page 47 when he smacks Le Gleo across the face to stop him from howling with his head thrown back as if Le Gleo was going crazy despite the narrator having multiple rat bites and he and Itchoua bleeding significantly from their wounds.

Lastly, the reader is again reminded of the narrator’s ability to be reliable and responsible towards the end of the story. It reads, “I resumed my service there [the lighthouse]…no reason why such an incident should keep me from finishing out my service there, is there?” It is evident that when the narrator commits to something, he is going to see it through. There may be challenges ahead but he is willing to face those challenges in order to fulfill his duty. This quote also demonstrates the narrator’s commitment to meeting his financial goal and the life that he and his future bride are about to embark on.

Everyone approaches a challenge differently based on their abilities and that approach is what determines their outcome. The narrator’s natural ability to remain calm, be responsive, determined, and reliable are the reason why he survived the rat attack. Had the narrator chosen to give up or not demonstrate these qualities, his outcome would not have been the same.

Additional Tasks

* *In a personal narrative, discuss a time where your actions and/or character created an outcome that you didn’t expect.*

*(Optional: have students then create a Venn Diagram or Thinking Map comparing their scenario to that of a character in the story.)*

Answers will vary. See rubric for narrative expectations.



* *George T. Toudouze used rich vocabulary and imagery to paint vivid images in the reader’s mind. Select a number of such words and phrases to create a “found poem” (*[*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Found\_poetry*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Found_poetry)*). The topic of the found poem does not need to relate to the original story, but the mood and tone should be similar to what the reader gets from the entire passage.*

Sample answer:

One must be careful

One misstep

And down you would fall

Falling

Like a ripe fruit from a tree

Weeping softly, like a child

Eyes of jungle beasts

Mad with hunger

Guardians

The gloom, our prison

Swarmed with huge sharks

An eternal patrol

One must be careful

Down you fall

Cut down with one blow

Of some gigantic sickle

When my time came

I almost wept

Note to Teacher

* The lighthouse tenders repeatedly refer to the derelict ship in the feminine (she, her beauty, etc.). You may wish to discuss how this is a standard bit of personification when referring to ships (and also cars or other vehicles).
* Other words that may need to be addressed depending on students’ background knowledge: swarmed, eternal, immense, successively, peculiarities, swarming, devoured, maneuver, diminution, and writhed.
* The estimated time may be expanded to discuss topics such as thesis statements and good organization. Additionally, depending on student skills and responsibly, the culminating task may be written in class or at home.
* Students tend to enjoy this text because of its gruesome nature. You may want to encourage them to find other texts within this genre to build that love of literature. Consider Stephen King, Clive Barker, Edgar Allan Poe, “The Monkey’s Paw,” or the *Cirque du Freak* series.
* Regarding the final question in the text-dependent questions: Though our students should be able to determine theme, we know sometimes they have room for growth. Because theme is so important to the culminating task, the last question may be scaffolded students’ understanding of the theme.

**Three Skeleton Key Personal Narrative Rubric (Additional Task)**

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| Engage and orient the reader by establishing the context of a time in which actions and/or character created an unexpected outcome. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |