Unit 1

Title: “The Scarlet Ibis”[[1]](#footnote-1)

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

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.4; W.9-10.2, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.9; SL.9-10.1; L.9-10.1, L.9-10.2, L.9-10.5, L.9-10.6

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

The text explores the conflicts between love and pride, and draws attention to the effects of familial and societal expectations and stigma of those who are mentally and/or physically handicapped. It also explores the consequences of human selfishness, regret and guilt.

Synopsis

"The Scarlet Ibis" is a troubling tale of two brothers. One brother, called Doodle, has physical disabilities and serious health problems. The other brother, known only as Brother, is desperate to turn Doodle into a "normal" kid in time to face the harsh world of school.

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** |
| Using the narrator’s descriptions of the seasons in the first sentence, make an inference in regards to what possible month the story may be set in? Cite specific textual evidence that helps you to infer this. | The narrator’s descriptions makes one believe that this text began in the month of August or September. It is stated, “…summer was dead but autumn had not been born…” |
| Diction refers to the author’s choice of words. Hurst begins the story by saying “…summer was dead, but autumn had not yet been born…” Consider Hurst’s word choices throughout the first paragraph; what tone does this establish for the reader? Support your response with specific textual evidence. | The tone that Hurst establishes is grave and mournful. He speaks of summer being “dead, and he describes “rotten brown magnolia petals” and “untenanted oriole nests.” He also suggested that “grave yard flowers are speaking softly the names of our dead.” All of these words and images contribute to the overall tone of the piece as somber and serious. |
| How does the work to frame the story the narrator will tell? Cite textual evidence that supports your reasoning. | The reader learns the narrator is living in his childhood home and is recalling events from long ago. Even though the home, the garden, and the fence remain relatively the same, change is evident in the “grindstone where the bleeding tree stood” and the “oriole song dying up in the tree.” The grindstone in the front yard reminds him of his brother, Doodle. |
| The narrator points out differences between the brothers. What can we infer about how the brother feels about Doodle’s condition? | He is six years older than Doodle. He states “he was six when I was born.” It also states, “…a disappointment. He seemed all head, with a tiny body which was red and shriveled like an old man’s.” This sentence helps the reader understand that Doodle was different than other kids, specifically his brother. This is a source of embarrassment and disappointment for the brother. |
| The narrator says, “They named him William Armstrong, which was like tying a big tail on a small kite.” Explain what the narrator means by this? What does this reveal about the narrator’s character? | The name is too strong for a weakling like Doodle, a small kite with a big tail would not fly well and would look really unusual. This reveals that the narrator has a sense of humor, but he is also judgmental and critical of Doodle. |
| What differences between the narrator and his brother can you infer? Cite specific evidence from the text that helps you make this inference. | The narrator is healthy and strong; Doodle is not. The texts states that the narrator can do things like “holding my breath, running, jumping or climbing the vines.” The text also states that “but even if Doodle lives, cries Mama, he will never do those things.” The narrator is also smart and Doodle, according to the mother, “…might not… be all there….” This evidence helps the reader see the distinct differences between the two boys. |
| What are the narrator’s feelings about Doodle? Cite specific textual evidence that supports your answer. | The narrator is embarrassed and frustrated. It is very clear in the text when the narrator mentions that, “ It was bad enough having an invalid brother, but having one who possibly was not all there was unbearable, so I began to make plans to kill him by smothering him with a pillow.” |
| In what ways is the relationship of the narrator and Doodle typical of brothers or siblings? | The narrator is burdened by Doodle. He says “a long list of don’ts went with him.” He also says he ignored most of them, away from his mother- that is typical of older siblings. He eventually gives in and accepts that Doodle “will cling to him forever.” He takes him to the Old Woman Swamp to show him “the only beauty I know”- he does care for Doodle, despite his frustrations-also typical of siblings. He is also mean to Doodle at times, forcing him to touch his casket. |
| The narrator says “There is within me (and with sadness I have watched it in others) a knot of cruelty  borne by the stream of love…” What does the narrator mean by this? How have the events of this story affected the narrator’s life? What possible theme might be revealed by this statement? | The narrator means that even though we love someone, we can still be cruel to them. Sometimes we are most cruel to the people we love the most. When the narrator says he has “watched it in others with sadness” it shows that he still has regret for the way he treated Doodle. This regret has affected his life. Sometimes our regrets change or deeply impact our lives. |
| How are the brothers alike at this moment? Cite specific textual evidence that reveals this. | They are both happy that Doodle has learned to walk. “‘Yes, yes,’ I cried, and he cried it too, and the grass beneath us was soft and the smell of the swamp was sweet.” They both no longer have to rely on hope alone, as their dreams have come to fruition. “Hope no longer hid in the dark palmetto… but perched like cardinal…brilliantly visible.” This shows how proud they both are of their accomplishments |
| Why is the narrator crying? Why did he really teach Doodle to walk? What possible theme is emerging (or being reinforced) here? | He feels guilty. He only taught Doodle to walk for selfish reasons, “I was ashamed of having a crippled brother.” Again the text is reinforcing the thoughts of regret and how it has stayed with him throughout his life. |
| When the narrator says “Once I had succeeded in teaching Doodle to walk, I began to believe in my own infallibility...” What does this reveal about his character? Cite textual evidence that supports your assumption. | It shows he is naïve and unrealistic. He thinks he can do anything and completely “fix” Doodle. He begins to “develop a program for Doodle- to teach him to run, swim, and climb trees and fight.” This would be typical of a young child. |
| What do Doodle’s reactions reveal about him? In what way might this serve as foreshadowing, or clues about what will happen next? | It is the first time Doodle takes initiative. “ I’m going to bury him.” He feels a connection to the bird. He is kind and concerned; The text states that he “clasps his hands around his throat” and the narrator “had never seen him stand still so long.”  The Ibis is so delicate that he could not survive a fall, this might hint at something horrible happening to Doodle because of his delicate condition. |
| In what ways is the Ibis symbolic, or representative of something other than its literal meaning? Cite textual evidence that supports your idea. | The ibis is symbolic of Doodle. “I lay there crying, sheltering my fallen scarlet ibis...” The narrator is referring back to the bird that fell from the tree, the one that Doodle buried.  The ibis has a long, slender vermillion neck, legs bent at the knees, and seems weak and fragile. That is how the narrator describes Doodle: “… making his vermillion neck appear unusually long and slim. His little legs bent sharply at the knee…so fragile, so thin.” |
| The author uses color descriptions all through the text, from the very first paragraph to the very last. How does this enhance the tone of the text? How might the tone further enhance the theme of the text? Provide specific examples from the text. | The color red is constantly referenced from the “bleeding tree” to the “broken vase of red flowers” to “his vermilion neck”, the “scarlet ibis” and finally to the “bleeding from the mouth” of Doodle. The constant red descriptions might lead the reader to think of blood, pain, and death. Overall, it gives the text a sorrowful tone. This sorrow enhances the overarching theme of regret and how it impacts a life. |

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** | outset  careen\*  loll  barring  serene\*  unfurled  mar  precariously\*  reiterate\*  solder\*  naught\*  armada | licked  sullenly  imminent  blighted\*  doggedness  heresy\*  evanesced\* |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | untenanted  invalid  scowling  gilded  \* = These definitions are provided in the text. | infallibility  spite |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt

*“The Scarlet Ibis” is a reflective story. It is told from a first-person point-of-view with the narrator looking back into his past. The narrator says, “But all of us must have something or someone to be proud of, and Doodle had become mine. I did not know then that pride is a wonderful, terrible thing, a seed that bears two vines, life and death.” What is meant by this statement, and how has the narrator’s life been impacted by what happens to Doodle? How does this reinforce the overarching theme? Using textual evidence, write a well-developed, complex paragraph in response to these questions.*

* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. 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.

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “He was a burden in many ways. ….A long list of don’ts went with him, all of which I ignored once we got out of the house. To discourage his coming with me, I’d run with him across the ends of the cotton rows and careen him around corners on two wheels...”  “A long list of don’ts went with him, all of which I ignored once we got out of the house.” | The narrator feels burdened by Doodle. He says “a long list of don’ts went with him.” The narrator also says he ignored most of them, away from his mother.  The narrator is also embarrassed by Doodle and tries many things to make Doodle not want to follow him and hang out with him. The narrator’s pride is what causes him to be embarrassed and also what motivates him to treat Doodle so poorly.  He remembers the events very vividly, suggesting they have had a real impact on his life. |
| “It was bad enough having an invalid as a brother, but having one who possible was not all there was unbearable.” | The narrator’s pride causes him to be embarrassed of Doodle’s physical condition, and the prospect of his brother being mentally disabled is unbearable. This no doubt contributes to his treatment of Doodle and his desire to “fix” him. |
| “Once I had succeeded in teaching Doodle to walk, I began to believe in my own infallibility…”  “I would teach him to run, to swim, to climb trees…” | The narrator feels a sense of pride in teaching Doodle to walk. He begins to establish an unattainable “program” for Doodle. This no doubt contributes to Doodle’s demise and is a source of regret for the narrator. He realizes, now, how naïve he was to think that Doodle could do these things. Even though he had taught Doodle to walk, he was still disabled and weak; the narrator seems to be oblivious to this. |
| “We never spoke (What are the words that can solder cracked pride?)…” | The narrator has realized that he will never be able to teach Doodle all of the great things. Here, the narrators pride is a source of cruelty because he purposefully runs far ahead of Doodle. The reader gets the impression the narrator feels a profound sense of guilt about this particular moment, and it has had a great impact on his life. |
| “For a long time, it seemed forever, I lay there crying, sheltering my fallen scarlet ibis…” | This is the most powerful instance of regret and guilt in the story. It solidifies the narrator’s feelings about what happened to Doodle and even creates a sense of regret and despair in the reader. It was the narrator’s pride that brought him, and the reader, to this moment- a tragic and regrettable end. |

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 (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to 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

“The Scarlet Ibis” by James Hurst is a powerful story about the consequences of pride and the effect regret has on a life. When the narrator says that “pride is… a seed that bears to vines, life and death,” he means that pride can be source of great accomplishment and a source of regret, which reinforces the overarching theme of the impact of regret and guilt on people’s lives. From the beginning of the story, the narrator’s pride drives his actions. The narrator states that “He was a burden in many ways. ….A long list of don’ts went with him…” The narrator is burdened by Doodle, his disabled younger brother, and is embarrassed by him. His pride is what drives him to want get away from Doodle. The narrator says he tries to “run with him across the ends of the cotton rows and careen him around corners on two wheels...” The narrator treats Doodle cruelly so that he will not follow the narrator around. Additionally, the narrator’s pride causes him to want to “fix” Doodle. The narrator tries to teach Doodle to be a normal child. It states “It was bad enough having an invalid as a brother, but having one who possible was not all there was unbearable.” The narrator cannot bear the thought of having an invalid, incompetent brother, so he sets out to teach him to walk, which he eventually succeeds in doing. It says, “Once I had succeeded in teaching Doodle to walk, I began to believe in my own infallibility…” and “I would teach him to run, to swim, to climb trees…” The narrator feels a sense of accomplishment at teaching Doodle to walk, but it causes him to believe he can make unrealistic progress with Doodle. This, no doubt, contributes to Doodles eventual demise and the narrator’s deep sense of regret. When the narrator’s attempts to teach Doodle fail, his pride is damaged and it causes him to cruelly run from Doodle. The narrator says, “…What words can solder cracked pride?” The narrator angrily leaves Doodle in a brutal storm, only to return to find him dead. This is the biggest source of the narrator’s regret and the most powerful moment of the story. The narrator’s final words reveal and enhance the overarching theme of the effects of guilt and regret: “For a long time, it seemed forever, I lay there crying, sheltering my fallen scarlet ibis…”. The narrator’s pride causes both success and regret in the story; in that sense it is “a seed that bears to vines, life and death.”

Additional Tasks

* *How do the narrator’s thoughts and actions reveal the perception of the mentally and physically handicapped at the time of the text? Provide specific evidence from the text to support your ideas in one or two well-developed paragraphs.*

Answer: The narrator’s thoughts and actions show the reader that mentally and physically handicapped were stigmatized and devalued at the time of the text. The family does not bother to name Doodle until he is several months old, showing what little value the place with him. The narrators says, “It was bad enough having an invalid as a brother, but having one who possible was not all there was unbearable.” This evidence shows how embarrassed the narrator is to have a handicapped brother. Obviously, there is a stigma associated with Doodle’s condition in order to provoke such a strong reaction from the narrator. The text also details the mother crying about Doodle not being “all there.” This deeply upsets the mother and causes the reader to assume that if the family is devastated to have a mentally handicapped child. It is clear from the strong reactions of the characters that the mentally and physically handicapped were stigmatized and devalued at the time of the text.

Note to Teacher

* Some questions are scaffolded to be accessible to a variety of learners. Therefore, teachers should consider their students’ needs and ability levels when deciding on what questions to use and in what order. For struggling students, some leading questions and tasks may be necessary to guide them through the actual TDQ.

1. *This story is a “duplicate.” (It is found in other anthologies, as well.) This particular revision was completed by a teacher who uses a different anthology than you, so the page numbers have been removed. This may require you to make some adjustments/add page numbers to some of the questions.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)