Unit 2

Title: Old Man at the Bridge

Suggested Time: 2-3 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.4; W.9-10.1, W.9-10.2, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.7, W.9-10.9; SL.9-10.1; L.9-10.1, L.9-19.2

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

People can be defeated or made helpless by situations beyond their control.

Synopsis

War is happening in Spain and the civilians are asked to leave the war zone. At the side of the road, the narrator,

presumably a scout, meets an old man who is too tired to go any further. Because of the old man’s immobility, the scout’s “business” of crossing over the bridge to see if the enemy is getting closer is interrupted. The old man is concerned about his animals he left behind in his native San Carlos. The scout attempts to reassure him, but in spite of these reassurances and an outright request to move at the end of the story, the weary old man still does not move. The scout capitulates, recognizing that “there was nothing to do about him.”

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 Question** | **Evidence-Based Answers** |
| Who is crossing the bridge? Why are they traveling? Cite evidence from the text to support your answers. | “Carts, trucks, and men, women, and children were crossing it.” Soldiers helped push the carts “up the steep bank.” The people are getting out of harm’s way. They are traveling to escape warfare. |
| In the first paragraph of the story, why does the old man sit there “without moving”? | He is a weary traveler, “too tired to go any further.” |
| What is the narrator’s business? How did the old man’s problem affect the narrator’s “business”? | The narrator’s business is to see how far the enemy has advanced. The narrator indicates that he “did this and returned over the bridge.” The fact that the old man won’t move delays his responsibility to cross the bridge as regularly as he should While conversing with the old man, he constantly looks back to determine enemy advancement. He was also listening for noises that would suggest enemy contact. He looked and listened while engaging in conversation with the old man as opposed to crossing the bridge at this point. |
| Describe the old man’s clothing. What was the old man’s occupation in San Carlos? What is the narrator’s initial response to the man’s clothing? | The old man wore black clothes and steel rimmed glasses. The old man took care of animals. According to the narrator, “he did not look like a shepherd or a herdsman” or a person who took care of animals. |
| What was the author’s purpose in repeating “The Old man was still there” three times in the story? | This repetition builds up tension experienced by the reader and the narrator, brought on by the old man’s immobility and the narrator’s need to complete his job. The repetition also draws attention to the futility of the old man’s situation. |
| What does the author mean by “that ever mysterious event called contact”? Why does the author state, “and the old man still sat there”? | In this story “contact” means “enemy sighting or attack.” It is only a matter of time before the narrator hears the sounds that signal that the enemy has been spotted or has attacked, but even with this impending and unpredictable contact, the old man has not moved. The old man’s refusal to move suggests his sense of helplessness or the futility of moving in the face of the advancing enemy. |
| What explanation did the old man provide about why he left San Carlos? What concern does he have about some of the animals he left behind? | He was forced to leave his home because of impending attacks by artillery. The old man is concerned that the animals may not escape the artillery when he “was told to leave because of the artillery.” |
| What does the old man mean when he states, “I am without politics”? Why does the old man mention his age? | He means that he doesn’t have political ties or affiliations. He is neutral. He mentions his age because he believes he is too old to be walking as far as he has to escape war started by politics. |
| Describe the tone in the beginning of the story and at the end of the story. How does the tone shift and what causes that shift? | At the beginning of the story, the tone is one of patience and reassurance as the narrator engages the old man in conversation, assuring him that most of his animals will be fine, offering him alternative routes to leave dangerous territory, and even allowing him to rest a while. At the end of the story, however, the tone becomes urgent as the narrator tells the old man to “get up and try to walk now” because of the advancing enemy. It is even tinged with despair as we realize that the attempts made by the narrator are futile because the old man has not moved. |
| Why does the narrator note that the old man spoke “dully, but no longer to me”? | The narrator emphasizes here that the old man ceases to talk specifically to him, for the old man is tired and sees no use in it. He instead resorts to talking to himself, still trying to understand his current situation of being displaced by war in light of the fact that he was “only taking care of animals.” |
| What does the narrator mean by “There was nothing to do about him”? | The narrator meant that he could do no more to help the old man, so he gave up, and felt helpless as “the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro.” |
| Characterize the narrator’s attitude toward the old man. Cite evidence from the text to support your response. | The narrator initially has concern that the old man is not moving in light of an enemy attack. The narrator gives him a way (trucks) to an alternate destination (Barcelona). He tries to assure the old man that the doves will be fine since he unlocked the cage. He also allowed the man to rest and then urged him to move. This attitude of concern later shifts to pity as he realizes that “there was nothing to do about him.” |
| What is “all the good luck that old man would ever have”? Why might the old man need good luck? | “All of the good luck” was the fact that the sky was overcast, creating a low ceiling that prevented enemy airplanes from flying. Also, some of the animals that he cared so much about, that kept him going—the cats—could take care of themselves. He might need good luck because he has not moved and the Fascists were advancing. |

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** | spokes  bank  plodded  slope, overcast  dully | staggered  steep  ground up  spectacles  contact  unquiet  blankly  forks  contact  swayed  ceiling |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** |  |  |

Culminating Writing Task

*Write an informative essay that identifies the circumstances and attitude of the narrator and the old man, and explain how these characters contribute to the theme that people can be made helpless by situations beyond their control.*

* 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 guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging!

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| Carts, trucks, and peasants are crossing the bridge “but the old man sat there without moving. He was too tired to go any further.” | This is the first time the narrator provides the reader information into the situation of the old man. Here the old man’s immobility is shown in contrast to the mobility of the “peasants,” “carts,” and “trucks” that were crossing the bridge. He is a weary traveler, and his immobility is mentioned at least two other times throughout the story. |
| The narrator gives us information about the nature of his job and how quickly people were clearing out and comments that “the old man was still there.” | Here we see the old man’s immobility as an impediment to the narrator’s “business” and as opposed to others moving quickly to get out of reach of the advancing enemy. |
| The narrator engages the old man in conversation while watching the bridge for the approaching enemy and “listening all the while for the first noises that would signal that ever mysterious event called contact,” and comments again that “the old man still sat there.” | The narrator becomes increasingly concerned about the old man’s immobility. The reader gets the sense that time has elapsed, and it seems to be just a matter of time before the enemy attacks or is sighted. |
| “I was taking care of the animals.”  "I had to leave them." | The old man offers information about his occupation without being asked. This is one of the first instances in which we see the old man’s preoccupation with his animals that he  “had to leave.” We also see it throughout his conversations with the narrator. To some degree, this was the old man’s “business”. The war, unfortunately, has interrupted his “business” of taking care of the animals in that he was forced to leave them. He was given no choice. |
| “’This is not a good place to stop,’" I said. "If you can make it, there are trucks up the road where it forks for Tortosa.’” | The narrator offers the old man alternatives to get out of harm’s way but to no avail. The old man is too tired to move. Prior to this, he indicates that he is 76 years old, has walked 12 kilometers and does not believe he can push himself any further. |
| Did you leave the dove cage unlocked?" I asked.  "Yes."  "Then they'll fly."  But the others. It's better not to think about the others," he said. | This is the narrator’s attempt to resolve the old man’s concerns about his animals, although the situation with the goats remains unresolved. The old man’s situation—to some degree—resembles that of the goat. Much like the goat, he, too, has no natural way of getting through this impending war. |
| At the end of the story, as the narrator urges the old man to move, the old man gets up and sits back down and comments, "I was taking care of animals," he said dully, but no longer to me. "I was only taking care of animals." | This is the old man’s resignation. Even the strong urgency of the narrator cannot propel the old man to move forward. Nature has taken its course and the old man has gone as far as he could go. |
| “There was nothing to do about him. It was Easter Sunday and the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro. It was a gray overcast day with a low ceiling so their planes were not up. That and the fact that cats know how to look after themselves was all the good luck that old man would ever have.” | The narrator has reached a state of resignation. The will he had to help the old man has given way to luck. The old man, at this point, only has luck on his side. This luck is the fact the overcast day prevented enemy planes from flying and the cats knowing how to take care of themselves. |

3.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.

4. 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).

5. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

We like to believe that we are in control of our lives. In reality, however, we often find ourselves in situations in which we are helpless to steer the course of our lives. In “Old Man at the Bridge,” two characters are faced with the reality that they are powerless. The old man is both too physically weak to save his own life by fleeing an approaching enemy and too emotionally distraught to continue on for having to leave his family. The scout is powerless to save the life of the old man.

The old man is 76 years old, has already come 12 kilometers, and can go no further. He sits in the dust on the side of the road while townspeople who are fleeing the enemy go right past him. The old man said that he was "without politics" yet he is affected by circumstances of politics and war beyond his control. He is forced to leave the life he knows. He is immobile in his thoughts as he can't stop thinking about the animals that he was forced to abandon, and he is immobile because he physically cannot move away from the approaching enemy. The repetition of "I was taking care of animals" shows that mentally he cannot adapt to his new circumstances. He is trapped, in the past, along with the animals that he had to abandon. That he was the "last one to leave San Carlos" is another indicator of his immobility to adapt.

The narrator, through questioning the old man, becomes aware that he is powerless to save the old man. By repeating the phrase "the old man still sat there", we see that the scout becomes increasingly impatient with the old man. The scout also continued throughout the story to watch and listen for the approaching enemy. He knew that time was running out and the old man must move to save himself. The dwindling number of peasants crossing the bridge also indicates that time is running out. As the old man said, for the last time, "I was only taking care of the animals" when he stood, swayed, and sat back down, the scout resigned himself to the fact that he could not save the old man. He realized that it was Easter Sunday and sometimes sacrifices must be made. The old man resigned to his fate as a casualty of war. The narrator says nothing can be done for him and is death seems certain. Easter Sunday is used by the author as an ironic contrast as the day of the celebration of the resurrection will be the day another innocent victim is crucified and has made a sacrifice.

It is important to see that the old man took care of three kinds of animals: the pigeons, the cat, and the goat. The peasants who are fleeing are like the birds who were given the opportunity to fly away to safety when the cage was unlocked, the scout is like the cat "who knows how to take care of himself", and the old man is like the other animals, the helpless ones left behind, and as the old man said himself, "it's better not to think about the others". It is as if the old man is releasing the scout from his responsibility to act as the hero and same him.

Both the old man and the scout were faced with circumstances that they could not control. The old man was stuck in the past and was neither physically nor mentally able to move on. This was through no fault of his own; the circumstances of his age and the war thrust him into this predicament. The scout was unable to change the circumstances of the old man but was able to save himself, realizing at the end that he had to take care of himself and leave the old man to probably die by the bridge.

Additional Tasks

* Innocent people are often casualties of war. Research and read about the Spanish Civil War and fascism and write an argumentative essay explaining whether the old man is an innocent casualty of war. Use evidence from the story and the research to support your argument.

Note to Teacher

* Teacher may note to students that a pontoon is usually a temporary bridge often used by the military. Other Tier III words to address are: fascist and artillery.

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**Old Man at the Bridge**

1. Who is crossing the bridge? Why are they traveling? Cite evidence from the text to support your answers.
2. In the first paragraph of the story, why does the old man sit there “without moving”?
3. What is the narrator’s business? How did the old man’s problem affect the narrator’s “business”?
4. Describe the old man’s clothing. What was the old man’s occupation in San Carlos? What is the narrator’s initial response to the man’s clothing?
5. What was the author’s purpose in repeating “The Old man was still there” three times in the story?
6. What does the author mean by “that ever mysterious event called contact”? Why does the author state, “and the old man still sat there”?
7. What explanation did the old man provide about why he left San Carlos? What concern does he have about some of the animals he left behind?
8. What does the old man mean when he states, “I am without politics”? Why does the old man mention his age?
9. Describe the tone in the beginning of the story and at the end of the story. How does the tone shift and what causes that shift?

Why does the narrator note that the old man spoke “dully, but no longer to me”?

1. What does the narrator mean by “There was nothing to do about him”?
2. Characterize the narrator’s attitude toward the old man. Cite evidence from the text to support your response.
3. What is “all the good luck that old man would ever have”? Why might the old man need good luck?