

Ryan Brasuel's

# Complicating Patriotism: A Six-Week Unit for Grade 12 Literature.

## Unit Rationale

*Patriotism*, arguably Yukio Mishima's most notorious short story, both introduces and forms the foundation of this conceptual unit on the very loaded notion of patriotism. The story chronicles the last four days in the lives of a young Japanese military Lieutenant and his wife who meet their end in *seppuku*, or ritual suicide. Although these two characters are fictional, the events that engulf them really happened. The Young Officer's Revolt of February 26, 1936 is remembered in Japan, even today, simply as *nitenniroku-jiken*, or the 2-2-6 Incident. The lieutenant discovers that his subordinates took place in the revolt and that he must participate in an attack against them. Left with the impossible task of killing his comrades, he takes his own life instead and his wife follows with him.

Mishima recounts the double suicide vividly; and although it is explicitly portrayed, it is never gratuitous. Each detail serves to illuminate the heaviness of the lieutenant's decision and reveal hints to the reader who puzzles over what motivated his actions. Why, indeed, does the lieutenant experience a patriotic euphoria before his death, proud to die for his country? Answering this question and fully exploring the implications of those answers will be an ongoing process throughout this unit. The relationship between the lieutenant and his country will frame all the questions that follow: how is that relationship different for O'Brien? Or Douglass? What about each student's relationship to America?

While some might find Mishima's truly chilling depiction of suicide to be inappropriate content for twelfth graders, the story accesses the realities of any nation with a military—the reality not just of death, but of life given up in service, a reality that some students will be thrust into as little as one year after high school graduation, should they join the armed forces. Recruiters certainly have the opportunity to rouse the call to service in high school, so why should the discussion fall short of all that service entails? According to Burrelli and Feder, *No Child Left Behind* ensures that military recruiters have access to public schools: the law amends “the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by requiring high schools that receive federal funds to provide certain student contact information to military recruiters . . . and to allow recruiters to have the same access to students as employers and colleges” (Burrelli & Feder 2009). It is necessary that students take part in moral and philosophical discussions about the actions service might demand. It would be irresponsible if we allowed students access only to what recruiters and popular media use to frame the issue of fighting for one's country.

Currently, the media treatment of military death, while serious, is stripped of its reality. Citizens are desensitized to this kind of death not by an abundance of media violence but by a shortage of opportunities to empathize with the dead. Mishima provides one such opportunity in *Patriotism*. The first time I read it, I empathized with lieutenant Takeyama not only emotionally, but physically: by the time he is dead with his intestines hanging out, my own stomach was sore from being clenched while reading through the trials of his disembowelment. By the end of the story, the reader knows and *feels* how it is to die for the love of one's country. The reader was there as the lieutenant died—not in some house a million miles away as the war waged on. Will having this kind of access change students' minds about their notions of patriotism? I don't know; changing their minds one way or the other is not my intention. But it will surely enrich their understanding and add more layers to their conception of the relationship between a citizen

and her country.

This unit is designed to problematize that relationship, to complicate it. I have two reasons for wanting to accomplish this for students. The first is to aid in the education of civic-minded citizens. In John F. Kennedy's famous inaugural address, he implores that Americans should, "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." In the original context of the speech, Kennedy meant to rouse American patriotism in light of the ongoing Cold War. He used this statement as a rhetorical device posing Americans as champions of democracy in the face of communism. In that respect, he never really intended Americans to take those questions to their fullest conclusions. But what if people asked *both* questions and really thought hard about them? What can America do for me? What can I do for it? But more importantly, what *should* I do for it? What do I *expect* it to do for me? Homing in on these questions and finding answers for them personally and individually is at the heart of critical citizenship.

As one searches for answers to these questions, the philosophy behind partisan affiliation begins to develop: if a person expects her country to do little for her, and she to do little for her country, she is at her core politically conservative; if she expects her country to do a lot for her, and she, a lot in return, she is progressive. Just beginning to make these distinctions about social responsibility and the relationships between people and their nations opens up a continuing political dialogue that students can learn to be a part of.

Each text in this unit was chosen for the types of questions it will generate in the (hopefully) long and continual line of questions that started with Kennedy's. For instance, Tim O'Brien might have students wonder, what happens when our country asks us to kill and to die? And what if we don't want to? Frederic Douglass expands the context for these questions: how do these questions apply to the have-nots? What happens when governments ask things of citizens that have nothing to give? And finally, Marshall reminds us that the celebration of patriotism can potentially obscure issues of great importance.

As the students discover and answer more of these questions for themselves, they form the schema necessary to understand and contextualize politics, legislation, and global issues. As their dialogue grows, they will inevitably begin to form opinions concerning how their country ought to act (should my country tax me? Should it be able to send me to war? Should it criminalize cigarettes?); and once they hold these kinds of opinions, apathy won't be enough anymore—they will want to see change and take part in democracy. At least, that is the plan. The simple act of making these distinctions will pave the way for thinking critically about our country and, hopefully, pave the way for acting on those critical thoughts.

My second reason for wanting to complicate the idea of patriotism is that I believe the process students will go through in exploring the issues of patriotism and civic involvement will familiarize them with academic thought in a way that will make it stick. Gerald Graff writes on the rampant inaccessibility of academic culture: "the idea that, below their apparent surface, texts harbor deep meanings that cry out for interpretation, analysis, and debate is one of those assumptions that seems so normal once we are socialized into academia that we forget how counterintuitive it can be" (Graff 2003). To elaborate on Graff, students don't own intellectual or academic culture because they don't understand why academics do the things they do. School asks them to subscribe to academic culture, but provides poor context and incentive to do so. For most students (and most adults, too), academic thought is the providence of stuffy writing on literature and doesn't take place in the real world where real people can use it. Graff continues: "whenever I survey students on the question, many admit they have a problem with academia's

tendency to turn everything it touches into grist for the analytical mill, almost as if teachers were deliberately trying to spoil everybody's fun.”

I think the strength of using *Patriotism* to kick off a six-week dialogue concerning the extended definition of patriotism and citizenship is that the insights students generate will have “real world” meaning. Granted, normative judgments made about the government might be somewhat abstract, but they have concrete implications for students: these judgments concern the power relationship between students and the people that run their lives. When they approach *Patriotism* analytically, I won't be asking them to explicate the symbolism of the scroll hanging in the lieutenant's living room, nor will I ask them to explain the motif of pureness associated with the lieutenant's wife; I'll ask them, “what is *Patriotism* saying about *your* relationship to the people that *rule you*?”

Once students make the connection that texts can be a platform on which to discuss things that influence their lives, they will come to own a piece of academic culture that traditionally has been so opaque to them. I don't want their idea of academic culture to be concerned with finding meaning that matters to the teacher; I want them to find meaning that matters to them. I believe that when students learn they can own textual media in such a way, they will be more likely to see themselves in reading they will do in the future.

Despite all the gains that can be made by discussing patriotism critically with students, the topic is not without its problems. I'm aware that it's a touchy subject, especially if it appears that I am against nationalism, which I am not. I've written much about wanting to introduce students to academic culture; and part of that culture is knowing that critiquing or analyzing an idea is not the same as attacking it or rejecting it. I plan to make this point very clear.

However, as anti-war as I am, I acknowledge that I would have a difficult time if all my students were overwhelmingly pro-war and pro-America-no-matter-what. But I don't think my duty is to liberalize students; rather, I believe my job is to help them clarify their own thoughts through many strings of distinctions. For example: do you think murder is wrong? If so, what is the different between murder and war killing? Are enemy soldiers guilty of crimes against us? What constitutes guilt? How do we determine it? Can you imagine an enemy soldier who is not guilty by these terms?” Too often we are all guilty of coming to conclusions based on faulty assumptions. If one of my students wishes to hold a conclusion, it is my hope that I can help her clarify those assumptions on which it is based, no matter what conclusion it is. In my plan for the “Public Journal” activity, I've made many attempts to scaffold this kind of mental process.

In my opinion, the most regrettable aspect of this unit is its lack of female perspective. I think as students progress away from the war-centric *Patriotism* and *On the Rainy River* there are more opportunities to expand the ideas of citizen and subject to incorporate women. However, regrettably, they are marginalized by the introductory discussions that focus on soldiers and war. The only woman given specific attention in any text within the unit is Reiko, the lieutenant's wife. But her suicide is more a function of social expectations for women, rather than a function of her relationship to her government or military. Or is it? Her mother gives her the ceremonial suicide dagger as a wedding present, just in case she might need it in her role as a soldier's wife. Certainly this is an interesting distinction to make, but it is by no means would lead to any kind of comprehensive discussion regarding women and patriotism.

Regardless of my unit's marked lack of female voice, I believe the meat of my unit is accessible to both genders: all students can benefit from exploring the power relationship between them and their country. After all, every student is forced to go to school and is subject to the same laws (although the latter assertion is debatable). I hope my students will find these

matters interesting. If anything, at least they are undeniably relevant.

### Sources

- Burrelli, D. F., & Feder, J. (2009, September 22). *Military recruitment on high school and college campuses: A policy and legal analysis*. Retrieved from <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R40827.pdf>
- Graff, G. (2003). *Clueless in academe*. R.R. Donnelley and Sons

## Goals and Rubrics

Texts:

*Patriotism* – Yukio Mishima

Excerpts from *Hagakure* – Yamamoto Tsunetomo, William Scott Wilson

*On the Rainy River* – Tim O'Brien

*What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* – Frederick Douglass

*Remarks of Thurgood Marshall At The Annual Seminar of the San Francisco Patent and Trademark Law Association (The Bicentennial Speech)* – Thurgood Marshall

### Goal #1: Public Journal Entries and Responses

The Public Journal will be a small notebook in which students respond to the prompts outlined below on the second day of each week. On the fourth day of each week, each journal will be distributed randomly to another student who will comment on the journal entry of the original owner. The guidelines for these responses will be outlined below. To further expand the “public” dimension of these journals, students will be expected to use their entries and the responses to their entries as topics in class discussions (this use of the Public Journal will be included under a participation grade and will not be assessed with the entries and responses themselves). Particularly fruitful threads of inquiry might be considered for another round of journal swapping.

Learning outcomes:

- The public dimension of the Public Journal will serve to expand the context of student writing from a one on one, please-the-teacher context, to one in which students will be motivated by the attention their work might garner from their peers.
- The Prompts are set up to start general, and slowly build students toward specificity. The first three prompts contain a mix of open ended questions and questions which require specific textual citation; the last three prompts are composed solely of the later. This move toward specificity is designed to facilitate actual exegesis of the texts in whole-class discussions in addition to the free-form discussion and meaning-making that is likely to go on without the need for active scaffolding.
- Having students respond to each other should foster a dialogical mode of inquiry that will be emphasized in the whole-class discussions. These Public Journals are meant as a scaffolding activity or stumping ground for students to practice engaging each other.

### Journal Entries:

1. Each journal entry will address the prompts outlined below. Tone can range from succinct to exploratory as long as students engage the ideas in the prompts.
2. They will be a minimum of 300 words.
3. Grammar, structure, and spelling will only be noted if they are so terrible I must intervene. Even then, students will not be graded for these things.
4. Students should include specific references to the texts when prompted. Expectations for the level of specificity will increase as the unit progresses as per the section on specificity outlined in the “Purpose” section above; as scaffolding for specificity increases, so will its assessment.
5. I will sometimes ask students to ask questions in their journal responses if something is unclear or they wish to bring something up in a class discussion. Questions should be on topic.
6. I will sometimes ask students to make judgments about characters or ideas presented in the texts. This task is assigned in journal entries to confront students with their own opinions. Their secondary purpose is to let journal responders know the explicit opinions of the writer who wrote the entry they will be responding to.

### Journal Responses

1. Responses will take one of three forms:
  - A judgment or evaluation of one or more of the points in the journal owner's entry and a justification of those judgments or evaluations.
  - A connection made to the entry using either a Text to Self, Text to Text, or Text to World style of inquiry.
  - Questioning a point made in the journal owner's entry.
2. Because a length won't be specified, the responses will be evaluate based on the poignancy of the observation or inquiry made.

### Public Journal Prompt 1

Mishima's *Patriotism* presents a puzzle; and the feelings, loyalties, and motivations of Takeyama and his wife are the pieces. Before they commit ritual suicide, why do they experience “intense happiness... [in] every fiber in their bodies?” In our culture and our time, many would see the couple's reaction to death as completely alien. The whole act leaves us with many questions.

This will be a two part journal entry.

1. In Part 1 of your journal, you can either:
  - Ask any general questions you have about the story.
  - Make some judgments regarding the characters, their actions, or Mishima's writing.

If you are comfortable sharing them, you should pose them to the class in our class discussion.

2. As you read *Patriotism* in class, I asked you to mark or underline words or sentences you found interesting or noteworthy. Copy one or two of them in Part 2.

### Public Journal Prompt 2

In *Hagakure*, Yamamoto sets out to establish the tenants of *bushido*, or, “the way of the warrior.”

He makes several references to the “old days” in which violence was much more a part of Japanese society. We get the distinct impression that Yamamoto is writing to warriors who find themselves in a more peaceful, modern Japan. Mishima's Lieutenant Takeyama kills himself some 200 years after Hagakure. Was it because he adopted “the way of the warrior?”

This will be a two part journal entry.

1. In Part 1 of your journal entry, address the following statement made by a reviewer of the 2002 English translation of *Hagakure*: “This book may be the product of another time, but it provides lessons and guidelines that can enrich and improve the life of anyone alive today.” You may include specific judgments of the tenants of *bushido* if they inform your exploration.
2. In Part 2 of your journal entry, choose a specific idea from *Hagakure* and apply it to the actions of the lieutenant or his wife. How successfully do they live up to the ideals of *bushido*?

### Public Journal Prompt 3

In *On the Rainy River*, Tim O'Brien really lays his feelings and motivations out for everyone to see: “Intellect had come up against emotion. My conscience told me to run, but some irrational and powerful force was resisting, like a weight pushing me toward the war. What it came down to, stupidly, was a sense of shame. Hot, stupid shame. I did not want people to think badly of me.... I was Ashamed of my conscience, ashamed to be doing the right thing.”

This will be a two part journal entry. For Part 2, you will be using media center computers to assist in your entry.

1. Part 1 of your journal entry will be open ended; answer any way you like. Do you think O'Brien was the coward he thought himself to be? Include specific judgments of his character if they inform your response.
2. In the second paragraph of *On the Rainy River*, O'Brien says the “very facts [of the Vietnam War] were shrouded in uncertainty” and then enumerates the many questions he has about these facts. In part 2 of your journal entry, you will use internet resources to examine the topics O'Brien calls into question:
  - Was it a Civil War?
  - A war of national liberation or simple aggression?
  - Who started it, and when, and why?
  - What really happened to the *USS Maddox* on that dark night in the Gulf of Tonkin?
  - Was Ho Chi Minh a Communist stooge, or a nationalist savior, or both or neither?
  - What about the Geneva Accords?
  - What about SEATO?
  - And the Cold War?
  - What about dominoes?

You will each form groups of 3-4 to tackle one topic specifically. After you research, you will have until next class to prepare a brief 5 minute presentation to inform the class of your findings.

### Public Journal Prompt 4

“Although O'Brien and Lieutenant Takeyama are something like opposites, they're two sides of

the same coin—both willing to die for fights they never started.” Do you agree?

1. In the beginning of this prompt, I said that both O'Brien and the Lieutenant were “willing to die.” Although we can say this with utmost certainty about the Lieutenant, calling O'Brien “willing” is complicated. In your entry, explore this complication. Is he willing, unwilling, or somewhere in between? Explore two specific instances in the text that you feel illustrate his degree of willingness and explain your reasoning.

### Public Journal Prompt 5

Up until this point, we've talked about patriotism and patriotic acts as they might fall on a spectrum between the Lieutenant and his wife and Tim O'Brien. All three of these people gave up something to their countries. Frederick Douglass believes that the United States has taken something from him and his race that was not theirs to take. How, possibly, can a Black slave love his country when such a non-consensual transaction is taking place?

This will be a two part journal entry.

1. Are drafts a form of slavery or are they not? How different is it to be made to go to war, and to be made to work without freedom? Is there more to it than that? In your exploration of this question, mention examples from *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July* and *On the Rainy River* that support your claim. On another note, do you think it's offensive to compare being drafted to slavery?
2. Frederick Douglass begins his speech with a praising, patriotic tone that slowly deepens into scathing criticism of various American institutions. In what specific ways did these institutions justify slavery, according to Douglass? Provide examples of at least one institution criticized by Douglass.

### Grading Scale (Adapted from Bob Fecho)

Each component of the rubric counts as an equal fraction of the total grade for that project and will be assessed on a 4-0 scale as follows:

4 = Superior Evidence Shown. The work shows clear evidence that the writer went beyond the expectation of competent effort by taking the care and effort to distinguish the work as an original, complex, and vigorous example of that criterion. It fulfills its potential given the limits of production and has impact.

3 = Useful Evidence Shown. The work is useful and clearly reflects an ethos of care and concern in terms of fulfilling the needs of the criterion, but doesn't necessarily distinguish itself beyond the expectations of a competently crafted piece. It shows good intention and effort, but lacks impact.

2 = Adequate Evidence Shown. The work fulfills minimum quality standards for the criterion, but shows little enthusiasm or intention to do more. It promises more than it delivers.

1 = Little Evidence Shown. The work does little to fulfill minimum quality standards for the criterion.

0 = No Evidence Shown. The work shows no evidence of any effort to fulfill the criterion

### Rubric for Goal #1 Journal Entries

P	Criteria	%
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<p><b>Engagement With the Prompt</b> Includes the depth with which writers explore the ideas of the prompt. This score will not be based on answering every question nor addressing every comment within the prompt. Rather, I'm looking for quality in exploration and inquiry.</p>	20
<p><b>Specificity and Relevance of Examples</b> Examples should be specific enough that any responder to writers' entries will know to what part of the text the writers are referring to. Also included in in this score is how relevant the examples are to the exploration of the prompt.</p>	20
<p><b>Frequency and Relevance of Questioning</b> A question's specificity is not always paramount; it is entirely appropriate to ask general questions, especially when it is your first time engaging a text. Therefore this score will reflect the amount of questions asked, but also their relevance. Although questions are meant to fuel discussion and not necessarily be fully explored in the journals, a score of 4 will be awarded to students who attempt to engage their own questions.</p>	20
<p><b>Specificity of Judgments</b> The aim of employing specific judgments in journal entries is so that the writers responding to the entries are aware of how you feel about the subject with which you are engaging. This score will measure the ease with which your judgments convey your opinion to potential journal responders.</p>	20
<p><b>Conventions</b> This score will reflect how the writers met the assigned volume of writing: 300 words or approximately 2-3 hand written journal pages. Although grammar and spelling will not be scored, the arrangement and style should be clear enough that a potential responder can understand what writers write.</p>	20

### **Rubric for Goal #1 Journal Responses**

Journal Responses will be awarded a score from 0-4 based on the quality and relevance of each type of response as outlined above.

A score of 4 will be awarded to responses that 1) address specific points made in entries or 2) ask meaningful questions about those points and attempt to explore those questions or 3) make relevant connections using the Text to Self, Text to Text, Text to World style of response.

A score of 3 will be awarded to responses that approach the requirements of a 4 response but do not further elaborate on their own points nor explore their own questions.

A score of 2 will be awarded to responses that only attempt to agree or disagree with the journal entry and that give minimal explanation for such a stance.

A score of 1 will be awarded to responses that minimally engage the entry. Examples of such responses include “me-too” responses or responses that claim to disagree with points made in entries but give no compelling reasons to explain.



A score of 0 will be awarded to incoherent or missing responses.

## **Goal #2: Small Group Activities**

In this Unit, there will be three small group activities that I will use to scaffold some skills and concepts necessary for the completion of the Final Unit Essay. The three activities are as follows:

“The criteria for an ideal samurai retainer: an introduction to the use of criteria to make inferences about authorial intent.” (A small group writing project).

“Generating criteria for courage: the first step to creating an extended definition.” (Small group presentation).

“Research-based presentation on the historical background of the Vietnam War.” (Small group presentation).

For a more in depth description of the processes involved in each activity and a discussion of the goals I have for student learning in each activity, see the whole-unit lesson plan.

### **Grading Goal #2**

The small group activities will be based on a scale of 0-4 Points.

A score of 4 points will be awarded to group products that engage each activity in a way that is both thorough and appropriate to each reading. Such a group product will have roughly equal levels of participation from each group member.

## **Goal #3: Final Unit Essay: An Extended Definition of Patriotism** (Adapted from Smagorinski et al.)

The unit's final assignment will be an essay exploring the different facets of patriotism. To what extent are certain actions, beliefs, and philosophies patriotic?

In your essay I ask you to establish for yourself a definition of patriotism that goes beyond its dictionary definition: “love for, or devotion to one's country.” Amend this definition, disagree with it, or change it altogether. We have seen that “patriotism” is too large and too loaded a word for its dictionary definition to adequately capture its meaning. It holds almost entirely positive connotations when thought of in the context of every day life—things like loving your culture, saying the Pledge of Allegiance in school, and respecting veterans evoke the idea of patriotism. The way it's loaded also leads us to think of patriotism in narrow ways.

The texts we've explored in these last weeks offer new ways to know patriotism, through the experiences of those who have seen it differently. Use this essay to explain one way that *you* see it. Feel free to reuse or expand upon any ideas from the journals, activities, and class discussions. If you choose, your essay may explore your definition of a patriotic person instead of patriotism itself.

To support your definition, you should take three or more patriotic acts listed in the first day's

“patriotic spectrum” activity and relate them to text, self, or world, in order to explain your definition to the reader.

The essays will be posted to my classroom blog, so write to the potential readers of the blog. I will be distributing the link to the blog at the next parent teacher conference. I encourage you all to read your classmates' works as well. (Note: if you do not want me to post the essay to the blog, please tell me in a short note at the end of your essay.)

For this essay, you may use the following structure, but don't feel obligated to follow it if you don't think you want to. You may use part of this structure or a completely different structure if you wish.

- Introduction:
  - Introduce your definition of patriotism or your criteria for a patriotic person. You can accomplish this in many ways. Here are a few options:
    - Make connections between the three examples you chose from the spectrum activity. Did they all come together to form your definition of patriotism?
    - Explain how you came to your definition of patriotism. What readings, discussions, or ideas influenced your choice of what to include in your definition.
    - Write about a certain time in your life that relates to your definition of patriotism or a patriotic individual.
  - Provide your definition of patriotism or the criteria of a patriotic individual. This will be your thesis statement.
- Body paragraph one
  - introduce or explain your first example of a patriotic act as chosen from the spectrum activity or provide it right off the bat.
  - Relate that example to a text we've read (or any other text, song, movie, comic, etc); or relate it to a personal experience or an experience you've heard about; or relate it to something that's happened in real life (not necessarily to you). Use the text to text, text to self, text to world format as your guide.
  - Tell us how this example relates to your definition of patriotism or criteria for a patriotic person.
- Body paragraph two: same as the body paragraph one, except with a different example from the spectrum activity.
- Body paragraph three: same, except with a different example. A note: not all three paragraphs must follow the same format or trend. You can do different things with all of them if you want.
- Conclusion: the conclusion can be based on the responses given to you by one of the people you have swapped your paper with. How did they respond to your ideas? What judgments did they make about your essay? What sort of connections did they make to it? You may quote these responses in your conclusion as a way to wrap up your essay. But, as always, you do not have to conclude your essay in this way if you do not want to.

**Rubric for Goal #3** (Adapted from Bob Fecho)

P	Criteria	%
	<b>Detail of Thought and Expression</b> Includes the specificity with which arguments are supported and the use of details in ways that are apt and help the reader to more clearly see the author’s perspective. We’re looking for work that brings out the individual nature of the work through vivid use of detail as well as connects that work to other works.	20
	<b>Organization of Thought &amp; Expression</b> Includes the logical flow of the language and ideas, as well as the sequencing of details. The detail is organized in such a way that it deepens the grasp of the subject matter and delves beneath the surface. We’re looking for work that feels cohesive in construction.	20
	<b>Originality of Thought and Expression</b> Includes deft and interesting use of language, deft and interesting insight into matters discussed, deft and interesting connections, and deft and interesting patterns of thought. We’re looking for work that feels original in thought and execution.	20
	<b>Synthesis of Ideas</b> Includes the way the ideas in the text come together as a whole, the way the text includes and rethinks the work of the class, and the way the text includes and rethinks the readings, assigned and otherwise, of the class. We’re looking for writing that takes the ideas of the class and makes new meaning rather than merely rehashing.	25
	<b>Conventions</b> Includes spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, usage, writing conventions such as title pages and page numbers, physical presentation, pronunciation, presence, correctness of detail, completion of all tasks, and use of APA formatting where applicable.	15

## **Six Week Unit Lesson Plan:**

Designed for 90 minute block scheduling. There will be 15 classes.

### **Day 01: Introductory Activity**

#### Phase One: Explanation and Action Listing. (15 Minutes)

This activity is designed to get students thinking about actions in terms of patriotism—a necessity for the framing of this unit. I begin by drawing a long, horizontal line across the length of the board. At the left end, I write “Completely Unpatriotic;” at the right end, “The Peak of Patriotism.” I then tell the students they will be thinking of actions that could be placed on this spectrum between patriotic and anti-patriotic. I tell them we'll write them on the board first and order them on the spectrum later (in phase two). I then start taking suggestions from students and writing them on the board as they come. If the volume becomes too great (I can only hope), I'll recruit the aide of one or two students to

help me write.

Note: in Phase One, I am hesitant to give them an example of the kinds of actions I'm looking for. If, for instance, I gave them the example of “throwing yourself on a grenade to save a room full of your fellow soldiers” I would run the risk of putting an unnecessary emphasis on *military-related* actions. I already suspect that because patriotic rhetoric in America is inherently related to war efforts, there will be an over-representation of war in their examples. Perhaps an example like “assassinating the president” would be good because it is easy to situate on the spectrum and is divorced from the military-centric conceptions of patriotism. A non-violent option for this first example could be “voting for a president candidate” instead.

Phase Two, Part A: Whole-class discussion regarding the placement of examples on the spectrum. (20 Minutes)

As stated in the heading, we discuss as a class where each action should be placed on the spectrum. I will pose questions or play devil's advocate in situations where I believe students could continue with more examination. Occasionally I may add actions of my own that could be problematic or controversial to help fuel discussion. I will make it clear that this exercise has no wrong answers and that I am not looking for them to guess how *I* think these examples should be placed. I will tell them I want to know where *they* think each example goes.

Photographs of the Spectrum will be taken for documentation as the examples students generate here will be used later in the unit.

Phase Two, Part B: Expanding conceptions of patriotic actions. (15 Minutes).

It is my prediction that students will volunteer examples that are primarily shaped by the American rhetoric surrounding patriotism. These include ideas that gravitate around war, democracy, freedom, fighting, anti-terrorism, and xenophobia. What about other topics that don't seem polarized one way or the other? What about things like shopping at Walmart or going to church? Economic and spiritual actions occasionally are engulfed within patriotic rhetoric. And what about things that aren't actions at all—like wishing to emigrate to Canada, or thinking the President is an idiot? And what about general modes of conduct? Is following orders an act of patriotism? I will open discussion to these topics when Part A seems to be winding down.

Through this continuation of the original matter of ranking patriotic actions, I hope to get students thinking about how the definition of patriotism may entail more than they originally had thought. With the next phase, I hope students will make personal connections with the ideas just discussed.

Phase Three: Individual Writing. (20 Minutes)

Students will be given the choice to write two paragraphs on one of the following two

prompts. They will also be told that what they write will be used in a small group activity in the following class.

- Describe a situation from your life in which you've encountered acts considered patriotic or unpatriotic. What did you think about them?
- Did you encounter any interesting ideas in the discussions we've just had? Perhaps you disagreed with something the class seemed to reach a consensus on, or maybe a classmate changed your mind about something. Describe such an occurrence here.

I will tell students that if they feel these prompts are lacking, they can raise their hands and talk with me privately about an alternate writing topic.

### Unit Introduction (10 Minutes)

For the remainder of class, I will introduce the texts we will be reading for the next six weeks. Afterwards, I will go over the unit goals and assignments briefly, giving them a time line for when things are due. A more in-depth explanation of the goals and assignments will happen closer to their due-dates.

## **Day 02: Explain Routines, Begin Reading *Patriotism*.**

### Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

### Concept Introduction: Loaded Language (10 Minutes)

This topic will include loaded language and loaded questions, as they go hand-in-hand. We will start with a few examples taken from popular media and everyday life (see “Loaded Language” in the materials section). Next, we will move on to having students generate a definition for loaded language. If their definition is lacking, I will provide examples that portray different aspects of loaded language so the necessity of revising their definition will become apparent. Once the class has settled on a satisfyingly multifaceted definition, we'll move on.

Note: this is a good opportunity to ask students some potentially hilarious loaded questions.

### “Patriotism,” A loaded word. (10 Minutes).

I will now posit to students that “patriotism” is a loaded word. I'll start by reading a few definitions of “patriotism” from multiple sources (online dictionary, print dictionary, Wikipedia), and ask students if all the examples generated by the Introductory Activity were encompassed in the aforementioned definitions.

If this discussion needs more fuel, or a reboot altogether, I'll ask students if the patriotic or unpatriotic actions they wrote about in the previous class's Individual Writing Exercise fell under the book definition of “patriotism” or was part of the umbrella term that encompasses the loaded notion of “patriotism.” To clarify the difference between “patriotism” as a loaded concept and a word with a definition, I'll prompt students to

think about how you might talk about patriotism differently with a World War 2 veteran than with a friend. (Although this might be a presumptuous and problematic example, at least it will be a starting point to jump-start a floundering discussion.)

Reading Yukio Mishima's *Patriotism* Part 1, with a brief introduction. (45 minutes with a 5 minute intermission).

I'll briefly introduce Yukio Mishima to the class, discussing his death (which students will find out was a complete reenactment of Lieutenant Takeyama's death in *Patriotism*). Since some of the most interesting things about him are inappropriate for classroom discussion, I'll encourage students to research the author on their own time.

In the introduction, I will also tell students that the military coup described by Mishima in the beginning of his short story actually happened. I will also briefly explain its lasting cultural significance in Japan today.

From here, students will be asked to read the first half of *Patriotism* and will be given a five minute break in the middle of this 50-minute reading session.

As they read *Patriotism* in class, I'll ask them to mark or underline words or sentences they found interesting or noteworthy. They can use any criteria for qualifying the terms interesting and noteworthy. I'll inform them that that they'll be using these words and quotes for a later discussion and writing assignment.

### **Day 03: Finish Reading *Patriotism*, Whole Class Discussion.**

Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

A short discussion of *Patriotism* part 1. (5 Minutes)

As the last class left off with reading the first half of *Patriotism*, I don't want to leave the students hanging. I'll open the floor to discussing first impressions, but won't get too deep as more discussion will take place after reading the second half.

Reading Yukio Mishima's *Patriotism* part 2 (50 minutes with a 5 minute intermission).

Just as the heading says, students will finish reading the short story with a short break in the middle to alleviate the squirmers.

As with the previous day's reading, I'll ask them to mark or underline words or sentences they found interesting, noteworthy, strange, upsetting, or amusing.

Class discussion following the completion of the reading (25 Minutes).

**A note on the portrayal of class discussions in this unit:** In this Conceptual Unit lesson plan, there will usually be whole-class discussions following the completion of each major reading. My strategy for presenting these discussions to you, the reader, will

generally follow the form of a narrative in which I describe things I might say in class or describe some directions I imagine the discussion will take. I do this so that you will get a better sense of my approach to the topics and literature. I want you to know *what* I'm having take place in the classroom as well as *why* I think it matters. To further clarify my intentions, I'll preface each discussion section with a brief description of some goals I hope to meet by the discussion's end.

**Discussion Goals:** While my overall goal for whole-class discussions is to have my students engage the literature in a public, discursive way, I also have smaller sub-goals that I try to build in to the talk. Since this will be the first literature-based discussion of the unit, I'll try to use this discussion to scaffold a method for talking about literature. I believe the first step to get students talking is to focus on **reader response**, to ask them, "what were your reactions?" The goal of this discussion, then, is to give students the sense that I'm interested in their responses, even if they might not seem pertinent to an academic discussion of literature. My second sub-goal is to get students comfortable with **asking essential questions**, even if they seem basic. Articulating reader response and asking questions, I believe, are the first skills students must get comfortable with if they are to talk about literature. These skills will ultimately lead to what is arguably the most valuable outcome that can arise from thinking about literature: learning to apply the perspectives gleaned from literature to one's life and the world.

**Discussion:** I would like to jump right into a discussion about why Mishima would title such a piece "Patriotism." After all, the lieutenant doesn't even die fighting an enemy of Japan; he simply kills himself. What's so patriotic about that? But these students will have just read a short story *in school* about a man who has sex with his wife and then they kill themselves. It will probably be the most explicitly gruesome thing an adult has ever made them read (although the sex is artfully euphemistic). They'll probably want to talk about that for a while.

This will be good practice in voicing opinions in the mode of reader response. I'll ask them what they thought of reading something like this. Was it uncomfortable? Surprising? Interesting? Puzzling?

I would also like to lead a discussion about the rhetorical effectiveness of recounting something with such explicit gruesomeness. This new thread will tie in to the sub-goal of scaffolding reader response. I feel that the explicit violence of the piece is its most apparent and salient feature and the thing most students will react to first. What is the effect of the explicitness on the reader? How does it make you feel? How does it affect the message? More specifically, how does the gruesomeness affect the portrayal of patriotism? Does it make the argument that the end result of patriotism can be disgusting?

(Note: The first time I read *Patriotism* it was obvious and clear to me that Mishima meant to tell the story of a man and his wife who had both been tragically brainwashed by imperial culture. I thought it was a cautionary tale against the inhumanity of war culture. I later found out that Mishima actually intended the opposite; he meant to revere the

Lieutenant and his wife as exemplary patriots—a model for all Japanese. These insights fall under discussions regarding “authorial intent.” It is my belief that having students try to discuss and ascertain authorial intent before they are comfortable with reader response-based discussions and literary inquiry will backfire. Ascertaining authorial intent is a higher order inquiry technique and will be addressed later).

Aside from the reader response and rhetorical analysis discussions, the rest of these matters will be discussed under the umbrella topic of “why the story is called Patriotism.” We will attempt to tease out the degrees of patriotism in the Lieutenant's actions, just as we did in the Introductory Activity. Is it patriotism or something else? Is he insane? I intend only to pose these questions when the discussion dies down or goes off topic.

**Additional Mechanics:** If time permits, I will do a follow up on how I asked students to underline or mark certain words, phrases, or ideas presented in the text. I will explain that these marks will serve as indicators of things students will either bring up in class discussions or save for public journal responses. To drive the point home, I will randomly select students (or take volunteers) to share one example from the text that they marked. I will ask them why they marked it. Was it interesting? Puzzling? Did it remind the student of something? I will go over the many reasons to underline something in the book. If students seem to need further incentive to underline, I will offer an extra credit assignment in which students can cite three examples they marked and their reasons for doing so. It is my hope that after two public journals and class discussions, they will underline in their texts without the need for extrinsic motivation. (A note: all readings will be on photocopy since none of them are very long.)

As class ends, I'll inform students that tomorrow, we'll discuss the public journal, do the first public journal activity, and then continue with a post-activity discussion.

## **Day 04: Public Journal Activity for Patriotism.**

Housekeeping (5 minutes)

Explanation of Public Journal (10 Minutes)

Now that students have read their first text and discussed it in class, I will introduce to them the Public Journal activity. Although this activity might be suited just as well preceding the class discussion, I will frame this activity as an opportunity for the less vocal in the class to share ideas with their classmates.

I will provide students with a handout that describes this periodic writing activity in full, including the rubric and grading scales for both the journal portions and the response portions. For a full description of the Public Journal Activity, see the Goals and Rubrics section of this conceptual unit.

I will then field any questions students might have about the activity.



Public Journal Entry Prompt 01: *Patriotism*. (30 Minutes)

Students will be presented with the following prompt:

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Mishima's *Patriotism* presents a puzzle; and the feelings, loyalties, and motivations of Takeyama and his wife are the pieces. Before they commit ritual suicide, why do they experience “intense happiness... [in] every fiber in their bodies?” In our culture and our time, many would see the couple's reaction to death as completely alien. The whole act leaves us with many questions.

This will be a two part journal entry.

2. In Part 1 of your journal:
  1. Ask two or more general questions you have about the story.
  2. Make two or more judgments regarding the characters, their actions, or Mishima's writing.

If you are comfortable sharing them, you should pose them to the class in our class discussion.

3. As you read *Patriotism* in class, I asked you to mark or underline words or sentences you found interesting or noteworthy. Copy two or more of them in Part 2.

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I will remind students of how we discussed asking questions in the previous class discussion and how asking questions in part 1 of the journal prompt will follow the same general procedure: simply write down any question you had during reading or whole-class discussion.

**Judgments**, however, have not been discussed. I will explain to students that when they make judgments in these journal activities, they will essentially have two parts. First, judgments will convey an opinion about a specific occurrence in the story or about a specific part of the narration. Second, students will give a brief explanation of the expressed opinion.

Examples:

2. Specific occurrence: [The Lieutenant to his wife, Reiko after she expresses her desire to follow him in death] “Good. We'll go together. But I want you as a witness, first, for my own suicide. Agreed?”
  1. Opinion: The Lieutenant must not truly love his wife. He's a bad husband.
  2. Brief explanation: No loving husband would encourage his wife to commit suicide. He should want her to live if he really loves her. He shouldn't even be killing himself and leaving her in the first place.
3. Specific occurrence: The lieutenant and Reiko experienced “intense happiness... [in] every fiber in their bodies.”
  1. Opinion: The couple must be crazy.
  2. Brief explanation: would normal people be so happy about dying?

Note that these examples are extremely debatable. I will tell students that they don't have

to worry about making “correct” judgments. They need only explain their own opinions. In fact, the more debatable the judgments, the better. If students have any more questions or seem to require more examples, they will be addressed before moving on to the Public Journal Activity.

#### Break (5 Minutes)

A five minute break will be observed to allow students to either finish their journal entries or to stand up and move around.

#### Public Journal Activity 01 Part 2: Journal swapping (30 Minutes).

I will remind students about the process involved in the journal swapping portion of the activity that will be next.

One of the things I ask students to do in the journal swapping activity is make connections to their partner's journal entry in the style of “Text to Self, Text to Text, Text to World.” I will distribute a handout explaining this format for making connections. I will lead a short discussion in which I will field questions students might have regarding the handout and explain what each part means, providing more examples if necessary.

Students will then spend the remainder of the activity responding to their partner's journals.

#### Post-Journal Swap Discussion (10 Minutes)

I will use this discussion to ask students about their experience with the Public Journal Activity. Did it make sense? Were the expectations clear? Was there any trouble in responding to their partner's journal entry? The goal here is to assess the problems students might be having with this new writing format.

### **Day 05: Introduction to *Hagakure*, Reading, and Public Journal**

#### Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

#### Introduction to *Hagakure* (5 Minutes)

*Hagakure*, also known as “The Book of the Samurai” is a sort of samurai bible. It contains the commentaries of Tsunetomo Yamamoto, a samurai, as transcribed by one of his followers, Tsuramoto Tashiro, over a seven year period from 1709 to 1716. The commentaries often tell stories or provide rules that Yamamoto believed exemplified the way all samurai should live.

Even though Mishima lived 200 years after the *Hagakure* was written, he felt that many of its teachings should still hold for modern Japanese—so much so that he wrote a book about how *bushido*, or, the way of the samurai, could be applied to modern times.

The commentaries in *Hagakure* portray samurai as men resolved to die in service to their master. Tsunetomo seems not only resolved to death, but obsessed with it—a fascination he and Mishima have in common. As you read *Hagakure*, keep in mind that Mishima modeled part of his personal philosophy after *Hagakure*, which is represented in Lieutenant Takeyama as well.

Reading Excerpts from *Hagakure* (45 Minutes)

Students will read the excerpts from *Hagakure*, having a 5 minute break at the midway point.

Public Journal Prompt 02: *Hagakure* (30 Minutes).

Students will be presented with the following prompt:

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In *Hagakure*, Yamamoto sets out to establish the tenants of *bushido*, or, “the way of the warrior.” He makes several references to the “old days” in which violence was much more a part of Japanese society. We get the distinct impression that Yamamoto is writing to warriors who find themselves in a more peaceful, modern Japan. Mishima's Lieutenant Takeyama kills himself some 200 years after *Hagakure*. Was it because he adopted “the way of the warrior?”

This will be a two part journal entry.

- In Part 1 of your journal entry, address the following statement made by a reviewer of the 2002 English translation of *Hagakure*: “This book may be the product of another time, but it provides lessons and guidelines that can enrich and improve the life of anyone alive today.” You may include specific judgments of the tenants of *bushido* if they inform your exploration.
- In Part 2 of your journal entry, choose a specific idea from *Hagakure* and apply it to the actions of the lieutenant or his wife. How successfully do they live up to the ideals of *bushido*?

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Students will be reminded that the first section of the prompt is mainly to set the tone. Addressing the questions in the prompt introduction is optional. After opening the floor to questions and addressing any concerns students might have regarding the prompt, they will begin writing.

Since there will not be enough time for the journal swap portion of the Public Journal activity, it will have to wait until next class.

**Day 06: Finishing the Public Journal Responses, Breaking Rules, and Small Group Activity.**

Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

### Brief Recap of Public Journal activity from the previous class (5 Minutes)

Since there was a weekend in between parts one and two of the Public Journal activity, I'll be taking two or three volunteers to share what they wrote in their journals the previous Thursday and open them up to brief class discussion to get everyone back in the *Hagakure* groove.

### Journal Writing Rules Activity (15 Minutes)

More than likely, after having read my students' first and second journal entries, I will notice the familiar rigidity that usually tends to show up when inexperienced writers try to write for their teachers. This is the opposite of what I want from my students' journaling; they should be writing for each other in uninhibited ways that truly capture the essence of reader response. This activity's goal is to get students to loosen up with their journal writing.

A Note: It might be the case that when I read my first two rounds of journal entries, they will already be at the level of familiarity that I am looking for. That would be great. However, I'm including this activity here because I anticipate that they won't. But even if the journals are where they should be, this exercise might still be a fun and useful one to employ.

I'll begin by posing the following question to the class: "What rules have your past teachers given you about writing?" As students answer, I'll write them down on the board. If it seems appropriate, I will ask them to clarify what they say and to give examples.

Here are some rules that I anticipate the class will talk about: don't write in the first person; don't use exclamation marks; don't use contractions; don't use slang; every paragraph should begin with a topic sentence; use correct spelling; don't end sentences with prepositions; don't use foul language. I'm sure there will be many more, (and probably a few that come way out of left field).

The idea here is to figure out which rules matter only in writing situations that call for professional or academic presentation and which rules matter for making writing readable and engaging. I will divide the list in two groups: rules that matter in formal writing, and rules that should be followed if anyone will read what you write. I imagine that the list of formality rules will be much longer

At this point, I will open the floor to questions about the two lists or any item on the lists until students are satisfied with each list. After the discussion has ended, I will tell them that I would like for them to not break the rules on the readability/engagement list in their journal entries and responses. However, I would like for them to break at least two rules from the formality list in their next journal swapping activity. I will remind them that the point isn't to be as ridiculous as possible, but to write in ways that you actually think.

### Finish Public Journal Prompt 2: *Hagakure* Journal Swap (20 Minutes)

No special instructions here; students will simply proceed in the same fashion as the previous journal swap activity.

### Break (5 Minutes)

### Small Group Activity: Introduction to Authorial Intent and Practice with Criteria (40 Minutes)

In his book *Clueless In Academe*, Gerald Graff discusses the problem students traditionally have when literature teachers ask them to infer how the author might think or react in a certain hypothetical situation. Students see this as an exercise in divination: Graff writes, “when I asked [Jay] if she thought Shakespeare shared the preference she had expressed for Caliban over Prospero: 'I wouldn't know,' she replied. 'I never met the man’” (Graff 49). Graff continues: “As these students see it, either a text's intention is obvious on the face of it or it isn't. If it isn't, we can phone the author and ask what his or her intention was, but if the author is dead or otherwise unavailable, there is nothing much to be done.”

#### **Activity Goals:**

There are two goals in this activity. The first deals with introducing students to the idea that it is possible to infer what authors think or intend. This activity is designed to teach students a way to make inferences about authorial intent using specific examples from texts—in this case, *Patriotism* and *Hagakure*. I made reference to this literary inquiry skill in a note in my description of day 3's discussion on *Patriotism*. I wrote that the first time I read the short story, I thought Mishima intended for his portrayal of the Lieutenant to be a cautionary tail against war culture and fascist propaganda. Later I read that Mishima meant to portray the Lieutenant as a hero to be revered as the embodiment of a perfect patriot. (At the time, I thought, “wow, I knew Mishima was a bit crazy—but I didn't know he was that crazy!”) To me, this is one of the most interesting things about the short story. But if students feel like Jay, and think it's useless and pointless to guess what the author thinks, how will they ever have access to this insight?

The second goal of this activity is to get students comfortable with the idea of using, finding, and generating criteria. Teaching this ability is part of the scaffolding leading up to writing an extended definition of patriotism.

First, I will pose to the class: “what do you think Mishima thought of the Lieutenant?” I actually have no good guess as to how students will respond to this question. But whatever they say, I will ask their reasons for their opinion, (after all, making judgments in journal entries and responses should prepare them to back up an opinion with a reason). If they don't know, or there is otherwise a range of opinions, I will tell them that there's a way to make a pretty good guess.

I will explain that since we know that Mishima's personal philosophy is quite similar to *bushido*, the philosophy that Yamamoto sets out in *Hagakure*, we can see if he agrees or disagrees with the Lieutenant's actions by seeing if the Lieutenant follows *bushido*.

Students will get into groups of three and use the excerpts from *Hagakure* to generate a list of *bushido* commandments—what students believe Yamamoto would call the criteria for being the perfect samurai retainer for one's master. There will likely be one to three criteria per excerpt, and some will overlap.

After students have made their criteria lists, I will tell them they will be using the criteria to judge if whether or not the Lieutenant's actions are consistent with Yamamoto's *bushido* teachings. As a group, they will produce a writing assignment that compares three criteria for the ideal samurai to Lieutenant Takeyama. Students will be given three options:

3. The Lieutenant meets all three criteria for *bushido* and is therefore an ideal retainer.
4. The Lieutenant meets none of the criteria for *bushido* and is therefore not an ideal retainer.
5. The Lieutenant meets one or two criteria but not all three.

Students will be asked to give reasons for their decisions by citing examples from *Patriotism*.

Once students have produced these pieces, I will then explain that since we know Mishima regarded the *Hagakure* as somewhat of a manual for the ideal patriot, we can deduce if he approved of the Lieutenant's actions or did not. If students found that the Lieutenant followed the philosophy of *Hagakure*, then they could safely make the assumption that Mishima approved of the Lieutenant.

## **Day 07: Wrap-up for *Hagakure*, Introductory Activity for *On the Rainy River*, and Reading.**

Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

Wrap-up discussion for *Hagakure* (10 Minutes).

Mishima's master-tier writing and the fact that his story introduces my unit so well made *Patriotism* an easy piece to include. (Well, not too easy; the content will always be objectionable for younger audiences). But there was another reason I chose to include the *Patriotism/Hagakure* combo: together, they painted a philosophy of devotion so radical that students can't help but criticize and object to it. Yamamoto's philosophy might seem quaint and irrelevant when it describes how a retainer should serve his feudal master, but when brought into the fairly modern context of a soldier serving his country, the perversion of loyalty the code depicts becomes magnified and extremely objectionable. My hope is that when students have the experience of criticizing military- and war-related patriotic acts in Japan, it will scaffold or pave the way for being critical of these kinds of patriotic acts here at home in the US. It prepares them for taking a critical stance when examining the Vietnam War in *On the Rainy River*.

I will begin the wrap-up discussion by asking students what they think of the Lieutenant's patriotism. Once the responses to this question die down, I will try to connect the story's message to the modern US military: I will ask them, "do you think, if you joined the military, that the US government would ask the same level of devotion of you as the Japanese government asked of the Lieutenant?" And although students might not see it, the answer is yes: the government doesn't *want* you to die, but if you are put in a war zone, even today, they know and expect that some of you will. And they are okay with this—if they weren'tt okay with it, we wouldn't be at war. Part of this unit's goal is to get students to think about their relationship to their government: what does the government ask you to do? What does it make you do? How fair are these requests? And what happens if you object to the requests? This situation is exactly what O'Brien faces in the next story.

#### Introductory Activity for *On the Rainy River* (20 Minutes)

I will provide students with a list of all the examples they put on the patriotism spectrum in the first class introductory activity and ask them to pick eight patriotic acts they feel requires courage to do. (The eight acts will depend on what the students come up with on Day 1, so they won't be listed here. However, "defending your country in war" should definitely be on the list. It will be the only one I require them to include).

In groups of five students will come up with two to four different kinds of courage that are encompassed in the examples. For example, even though all the acts will entail courage, they might not be the type of courage that entails the risk of physical harm. Some may require other kinds of courage.

Each group will very briefly present their findings to the class.

I will ask students to keep this list for the discussion that will follow the reading of *On the Rainy River*.

#### Reading *On the Rainy River* (45 Minutes)

Reading will commence with a 5 minute break halfway through as per classroom tradition.

#### Brief Class Discussion (10 Minutes)

I will ask the students, "do you think O'Brien showed courage or cowardice in going to war? And if you think he was courageous, based on the types of courage you came up with before you read, what kind of courage do you think he displayed?"

### **Day 08: Public Journal Activity, Computer Lab Research, and Discussion.**

#### Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

Public Journal Prompt 3: *On the Rainy River*, Journal Entry Part One. (20 Minutes).

Part One of this journal entry will take place in the classroom, then for Part Two, students will go to the computer lab to research the questions O'Brien lists in his story.

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Public Journal Prompt 3

In *On the Rainy River*, Tim O'Brien really lays his feelings and motivations out for everyone to see: "Intellect had come up against emotion. My conscience told me to run, but some irrational and powerful force was resisting, like a weight pushing me toward the war. What it came down to, stupidly, was a sense of shame. Hot, stupid shame. I did not want people to think badly of me.... I was Ashamed of my conscience, ashamed to be doing the right thing."

This will be a two part journal entry. For Part 2, you will be using media center computers to assist in your entry.

3. Part 1 of your journal entry will be open ended; answer any way you like. Do you think O'Brien was the coward he thought himself to be? Include specific judgments of his character if they inform your response.
4. In the second paragraph of *On the Rainy River*, O'Brien says the "very facts [of the Vietnam War] were shrouded in uncertainty" and then enumerates the many questions he has about these facts. In part 2 of your journal entry, you will use internet resources to examine the topics O'Brien calls into question:
  - Was it a Civil War?
  - A war of national liberation or simple aggression?
  - Who started it, and when, and why?
  - What really happened to the *USS Maddox* on that dark night in the Gulf of Tonkin?
  - Was Ho Chi Minh a Communist stooge, or a nationalist savior, or both or neither?
  - What about the Geneva Accords?
  - What about SEATO?
  - And the Cold War?
  - What about dominoes?

You will each form groups of 3-4 to tackle one topic specifically. After you research, you will have until next class to prepare a brief 5 minute presentation to inform the class of your findings.

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Public Journal Prompt 3: *On the Rainy River*, Journal Entry Part Two – Computer Lab Research (65 Minutes).

**Research Goal:** One of the main points of discussing *On the Rainy River* is to have students address the fact that sometimes, people think acts of war are unjustified. In these cases, there's this conflict I hope students will pick up on: sometimes patriotic acts (which



are generally considered good), have morally questionable outcomes. When O'Brien lists the questions that run through his mind as he is contemplating dodging the draft, he does so because he has a feeling the war was unjustified. And even if it was justified, he still had a moral objection to killing.

The research I am having students do is meant to flesh out their background knowledge on the Vietnam War and the question of its justification. The secondary goal of the research is to get students in the head space of O'Brien: all these questions were left unanswered for him and contributed to the stress he felt about going to war.

I will tell students that the presentations will be relatively informal. They should:

3. Briefly introduce the topic.
4. Explain its relevance to the Vietnam War
5. Explain any possible relevance to O'Brien's decision.

## **Day 09: Research Presentations, Discussion.**

### Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

### Research Presentations (60 Minutes)

There will be nine presentations, each lasting about five minutes. The extra time is allocated for the time it will take for questions, clarification, and group set-up. If the presentations go longer, concluding discussion can either be shortened (if the discussion is deemed unnecessary) or pushed to the next class day.

### Whole-Class Discussion (20 Minutes)

The goal of the class discussion will remain consistent with the research goals I presented in the lesson plan for Day 8: I want students to examine the issue of justification in the Vietnam War.

I will ask students, "does this information change the way

## **Day 10: Journal Swap, Public Journal Activity, Mishima/O'Brien Wrap-up Discussion.**

### Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

### Journal Swap, Prompt 3 (25 Minutes)

I had a reason for placing so many activities between the journal entry for prompt 3 and its journal swap response. Prompt 3 asked students to evaluate O'Brien's decision in terms of cowardice and courage; I felt that the research and discussions students did since responding to that original prompt will have changed their perspective on O'Brien's courage and patriotism. Having the journal swap response take place after all this new

information has been introduced allows students to see if the new info made any difference.

Students will also be encouraged to continue with the rule breaking of the previous journal entries and responses.

### Break (5 Minutes)

I will give students a short break since we'll be jumping right into another Journal entry

### Public Journal Prompt 4: O'Brien and Mishima (30 Minutes)

I will explain to students that we'll be jumping right into another Public Journal entry but it will be shorter than the others since it will only have one part to respond to. The swap will also be postponed until the next class.

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### Public Journal Prompt Week 4

“Although O'Brien and Lieutenant Takeyama are something like opposites, they're two sides of the same coin—both willing to die for fights they never started.” Do you agree?

2. In the beginning of this prompt, I said that both O'Brien and the Lieutenant were “willing to die.” Although we can say this with utmost certainty about the Lieutenant, calling O'Brien “willing” is complicated. In your entry, explore this complication. Is he willing, unwilling, or somewhere in between? Explore two specific instances in the text that you feel illustrate his degree of willingness and explain your reasoning.

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### Public Journal 4 Discussion (25 Minutes).

**Discussion Goal:** The goal of this discussion is threefold: to put a cap on O'Brien, relate O'Brien to Mishima, and prepare students to enter into discussion for *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*

The forth public journal prompt gets at the idea that both O'Brien's and the Lieutenant's governments both expected these two to kill and to die. Or rather, it asked them to maybe kill, and maybe die. Is this an appropriate thing for a government to ask its citizens? Governments ask their citizens to do all manner of things: go to school, go to war, have car insurance, not kill anyone (unless you're a soldier), and pay taxes (unless you're the mega-rich owner of a company); the list goes on.

The point here is to get students to think about what their government—or any authority, for that matter—asks them to do, and to think about how fair, appropriate, or reasonable these things are. This type of inquiry is critical to critical citizenship. Moreover, this type of inquiry has been obscured by the type of pre-packaged patriotism that finds its way into the collective consciousness of American citizens: why would we ask if being expected to kill in war is reasonable if we already know it's what any patriotic American should do. Even if you believe in war, the inquiry can be applied to any other topic.

Having the question of O'Brien and the Lieutenant's actions framed in this way prepares students for *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* In this speech, Frederick Douglass criticizes the US government for expecting slaves to be slaves—all in the context of a Fourth of July celebration that expects every American to be happy for American independence.

**Discussion:**

First of all, I will ask students how they responded to the journal prompts. After leading the class through a discussion on the responses a few students opt to share, I will pose the idea that O'Brien and the Lieutenant's governments *required* them to be in danger of dying. I will then ask students if they think this is an alright thing for a government to ask its citizens. Whether they answer yes or no, I will ask them clarify the answer. If yes, I will ask if there are any conditions under which it would not be alright. If no, I will ask if there are any conditions under which it would be alright.

Once discussion on the above matter dies down, I will ask students to think about some things they are required by the government to do, and by extension, some things they are required by their school to do. (For the sake of avoiding confusion or complication, I will address the former before the latter). For each requirement students give, I will ask if they think it is a reasonable requirement.

**Day 11: Journal Swap Activity; Introduce and Read *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?***

Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

Journal Swap Activity for Prompt 4 (20 Minutes).

The swap activity will commence as usual with no new additions.

Introduce *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*(10 Minutes)

I will begin by explaining to students the context of Douglas' speech, as well as give a brief overview on the life of Frederick Douglass. As knowledge of the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act are crucial to understanding where Douglass' critique is coming from, I will give students an overview of these things as well.

Read Part One of *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* (45 Minutes)

Students will be given a five minute break midway through as usual.

Brief Discussion of *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* (10 Minutes)

Since this piece is rather difficult due to its somewhat antiquated use of language and reference to politics and institutions of the past, I will use this brief discussion to answer

questions that students might have about the piece.

## **Day 12: Finish Reading *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*, Begin Public Journal Activity.**

Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

Finish Reading *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*(40 Minutes)

Public Journal Prompt 5: *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* (30 Minutes)

Public Journal Prompt 5

Up until this point, we've talked about patriotism and patriotic acts as they might fall on a spectrum between the Lieutenant and his wife and Tim O'Brien. All three of these people gave up something to their countries. Frederick Douglass believes that the United States has taken something from him and his race that was not theirs to take. How, possibly, can a Black slave love his country when such a non-consensual transaction is taking place?

This will be a two part journal entry.

3. Are drafts a form of slavery or are they not? How different is it to be made to go to war, and to be made to work without freedom? Is there more to it than that? In your exploration of this question, mention examples from *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July* and *On the Rainy River* that support your claim. On another note, do you think it's offensive to compare being drafted to slavery?
4. Frederick Douglass begins his speech with a praising, patriotic tone that slowly deepens into scathing criticism of various American institutions. In what specific ways did these institutions justify slavery, according to Douglass? Provide examples of at least one institution criticized by Douglass and summarize his criticism.

Journal Swap Activity (15 Minutes)

## **Day 13: Discussion on *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*, Introduction to the Final Unit Essay, Read Thurgood Marshal's Bicentennial Speech.**

Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

Discussion Wrap-up: *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* (30 Minutes).

In this discussion, students will be asked to share their insights regarding the institutions Douglass criticized in his speech. Students will be invited to make Text to World connections between the institutions Douglass criticizes and their modern counterparts. The importance of addressing criticisms of institutions is that, like we have seen with the

government in Mishima's and O'Brien's works, many social and cultural institutions do things in the name of patriotism but have ulterior motives. By asking students to make Text to World connections to Douglass' speech, students will give each other examples of the kinds of criticisms they need to be making as informed citizens. While modern American institutions don't do things to actively subjugate Black people (a debatable claim), they continue to be worthy of critical inspection.

If this thread of discussion dies down or proves otherwise ineffective, students will be asked to respond to the speech in general. Frederick Douglass' oratory was absolutely incredible and should offer numerous opportunities for reader response.

#### Introduction and Background on Thurgood Marshall's Bicentennial Speech (5 Minutes)

I will provide a brief talk on the historical background of Thurgood Marshall and his topic of criticism.

#### Read Thurgood Marshall's Bicentennial Speech (25 Minutes)

As this is a relatively short piece, there will be no break.

#### Brief Discussion Thurgood Marshall's Bicentennial Speech (15 Minutes)

This discussion will take the place of any journal writing activity since the final unit essay will be handled in a public journal format style. The main point I want to drive home regarding Thurgood Marshall's speech is that even well intentioned commemoration of our history sometimes obscures the complexity of that history. I want to open students to the idea that every time something is remembered—be it the Constitution or Independence Day or anything—something is left out as well.

Since there will be very apparent similarities between the Marshall and Douglass pieces, I will ask students to draw these conclusions. By now, talking about each piece in the context of patriotism and the relationship of citizens to their government should be implicit. The discussion will be based on this topic.

#### Introduce Final Unit Essay. (10 Minutes)

Students will be given a handout detailing the Final Unit Essay. Over the weekend, I will ask them to think about what topics they will write on and what examples from the introductory activity they will use to frame the main points of their essays.

The prompt will be as follows:

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#### **Final Unit Essay:**

The unit's final assignment will be an essay exploring the different facets of patriotism. To what extent are certain actions, beliefs, and philosophies patriotic?

In your essay I ask you to establish for yourself a definition of patriotism that goes beyond its dictionary definition: “love for, or devotion to one's country.” Amend this definition, disagree with it, or change it altogether. We have seen that “patriotism” is too large and too loaded a word for its dictionary definition to adequately capture its meaning. It holds almost entirely positive connotations when thought of in the context of every day life—things like loving your culture, saying the Pledge of Allegiance in school, and respecting veterans evoke the idea of patriotism. The way it's loaded also leads us to think of patriotism in narrow ways.

The texts we've explored in these last weeks offer new ways to know patriotism, through the experiences of those who have seen it differently. Use this essay to explain one way that *you* see it. Feel free to reuse or expand upon any ideas from the journals, activities, and class discussions. If you choose, your essay may explore your definition of a patriotic person instead of patriotism itself.

To support your definition, you should take three or more patriotic acts listed in the first day's “patriotic spectrum” activity and relate them to text, self, or world, in order to explain your definition to the reader.

The essays will be posted to my classroom blog, so write to the potential readers of the blog. I will be distributing the link to the blog at the next parent teacher conference. I encourage you all to read your classmates' works as well. (Note: if you do not want me to post the essay to the blog, please tell me in a short note at the end of your essay.)

For this essay, you may use the following structure, but don't feel obligated to follow it if you don't think you want to. You may use part of this structure or a completely different structure if you wish.

- Introduction:
  - Introduce your definition of patriotism or your criteria for a patriotic person. You can accomplish this in many ways. Here are a few options:
    - Make connections between the three examples you chose from the spectrum activity. Did they all come together to form your definition of patriotism?
    - Explain how you came to your definition of patriotism. What readings, discussions, or ideas influenced your choice of what to include in your definition.
    - Write about a certain time in your life that relates to your definition of patriotism or a patriotic individual.
  - Provide your definition of patriotism or the criteria of a patriotic individual. This will be your thesis statement.
- Body paragraph one
  - introduce or explain your first example of a patriotic act as chosen from the spectrum activity or provide it right off the bat.
  - Relate that example to a text we've read (or any other text, song, movie, comic, etc); or relate it to a personal experience or an experience you've heard about; or relate it to

- something that's happened in real life (not necessarily to you). Use the text to text, text to self, text to world format as your guide.
- Tell us how this example relates to your definition of patriotism or criteria for a patriotic person.
  - Body paragraph two: same as the body paragraph one, except with a different example from the spectrum activity.
  - Body paragraph three: same, except with a different example. A note: not all three paragraphs must follow the same format or trend. You can do different things with all of them if you want.
    - Conclusion: the conclusion can be based on the responses given to you by one of the people you have swapped your paper with. How did they respond to your ideas? What judgments did they make about your essay? What sort of connections did they make to it? You may quote these responses in your conclusion as a way to wrap up your essay. But, as always, you do not have to conclude your essay in this way if you do not want to.

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I will give students a few minutes to look over the prompt and field any questions they may have about the assignment. I will inform them that next week's class will be a writing period so they should come prepared with the appropriate materials.

## **Day 14: Final Unit Essay Writing Period.**

Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

Writing Time (85 Minutes)

Students will form groups of 3 and be encouraged to quietly ask for help from their group mates should they encounter any problems. I will make it clear that although I ask them to help each other in small groups, they should not hesitate to come to me with any questions at all. Throughout the class, I will walk from group to group or engage students that appear to be struggling. If any student has a particularly interesting or useful question, I'll pose it to the class.

I will tell students that in the next class, they will be trading their essays with two different classmates, like two journal swaps in a row, so they should come prepared with a complete draft.

## **Day 15: Final Unit Essay Swapping**

Housekeeping (5 Minutes)

First Essay Swap (20 Minutes)

Students will swap essays in pairs and respond to them in the same fashion as with the Public Journal entries.

### Second Essay Swap (20 Minutes)

The same.

### Writing Period (30 Minutes)

Since students were given the option to include the peer responses to their essays as the main topic of their their conclusions, I will give them time to do so here. Given the likely variable degrees of response usefulness, I will tell students that they are not required to use their classmates responses in their conclusions. But if they choose to do so, I ask that they quote their classmates appropriately.

My reason for using this activity was to give students a gateway to conclusion writing. Since conclusions are for the most part stylized choices with content highly dependent on the piece being concluded, I figured giving students one specific, dialogical method for writing a conclusion was better than a vague, bullet-pointed list of conclusion possibilities. Worse yet would be the standard go-to conclusion explanation commonly heard regarding conclusions for five-paragraph themes: summarize your main points and restate your thesis. My method contains the added bonus of having students know how two people responded to their essay.

I will inform students that their essay will be due the following Monday. The rest of this writing period can be used to refine the draft if students get done with their conclusions.

### Unit Wrap-up Discussion (15 Minutes)

My goal with the unit wrap-up is to get feedback from students regarding their feelings about the unit. This discussion will be fairly open ended as I do not wish to drive home any more points. I plan to keep this discussion as student-led as possible.

I will also use this wrap-up to tell students about the next conceptual unit we will be entering.

## **Materials**

### **Texts:**

Although I will be providing students with photocopies of each text as I will be requiring them to write on these copies for the Public Journal activity, I will provide links to the texts and whole electronic texts when possible

- *Patriotism* – Yukio Mishima - <http://www.mutantfrog.com/patriotism-by-yukio-mishima/>
- Excerpts from *Hagakure* – Yamamoto Tsunetomo, William Scott Wilson – URL and electronic text are unavailable.
- *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* – Frederick Douglass - <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=162>



- *Remarks of Thurgood Marshall At The Annual Seminar of the San Francisco Patent and Trademark Law Association (The Bicentennial Speech)* – Thurgood Marshall - [http://www.thurgoodmarshall.com/speeches/constitutional\\_speech.htm](http://www.thurgoodmarshall.com/speeches/constitutional_speech.htm)
- *On the Rainy River* – Tim O'Brien – The full text can be found at the end of the Materials section of this unit.

### **Handouts:**

Handouts are adapted from the following sources. If resources are available, I will display these websites with an overhead projector in lieu of using printouts:

- “Loaded Language” - [http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Loaded\\_language](http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Loaded_language)
- “Text to Self, Text to Text, Text to World” - <https://sites.google.com/a/alaska.edu/diane-kardash/Home/making-connections>

### **On the Rainy River**

This is one story I've never told before. Not to anyone. Not to my parents, not to my brother or sister, not even to my wife. To go into it, I've always thought, would only cause embarrassment for all of us, a sudden need to be elsewhere, which is the natural response to a confession. Even now, I'll admit, the story makes me squirm. For more than twenty years I've had to live with it, feeling the shame, trying to push it away, and so by this act of remembrance, by putting the facts down on paper, I'm hoping to relieve at least some of the pressure on my dreams. Still, it's a hard story to tell. All of us, I suppose, like to believe that in a moral emergency we will behave like the heroes of our youth, bravely and forthrightly, without thought of personal loss or discredit. Certainly that was my conviction back in the summer of 1968. Tim O'Brien: a secret hero. The Lone Ranger. If the stakes ever became high enough—if the evil were evil enough, if the good were good enough—I would simply tap a secret reservoir of courage that had been accumulating inside me over the years. Courage, I seemed to think, comes to us in finite quantities, like an inheritance, and by being frugal and stashing it away and letting it earn interest, we steadily increase our moral capital in preparation for that day when the account must be drawn down. It was a comforting theory. It dispensed with all those bothersome little acts of daily courage; it offered hope and grace to the repetitive coward; it justified the past while amortizing the future.

In June of 1968, a month after graduating from Macalester College, I was drafted to fight a war I hated. I was twenty-one years old. Young, yes, and politically naive, but even so the American war in Vietnam seemed to me wrong. Certain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons. I saw no unity of purpose, no consensus on matters of philosophy or history or law. The very facts were shrouded in uncertainty: Was it a civil war? A war of national liberation or simple aggression? Who started it, and when, and why? What really happened to the *USS Maddox* on that dark night in the Gulf of Tonkin? Was Ho Chi Minh a Communist stooge, or a nationalist savior, or both, or neither? What about the Geneva Accords? What about SEATO and the Cold War? What about dominoes? America was divided on these and a thousand other issues, and the debate had spilled out across the floor of the United States Senate and into the streets, and smart men in pinstripes could not agree on even the most fundamental matters of public policy. The only certainty that summer was moral confusion. It was my view then, and still is, that you don't make war without knowing why. Knowledge, of course, is always imperfect, but it seemed to me

that when a nation goes to war it must have reasonable confidence in the justice and imperative of its cause. You can't fix your mistakes. Once people are dead, you can't make them undead.

In any case those were my convictions, and back in college I had taken a modest stand against the war. Nothing radical, no hothead stuff, just ringing a few doorbells for Gene McCarthy, composing a few tedious, uninspired editorials for the campus newspaper. Oddly, though, it was almost entirely an intellectual activity. I brought some energy to it, of course, but it was the energy that accompanies almost any abstract endeavor; I felt no personal danger; I felt no sense of an impending crisis in my life. Stupidly, with a kind of smug removal that I can't begin to fathom, I assumed that the problems of killing and dying did not fall within my special province.

The draft notice arrived on June 17, 1968. It was a humid afternoon, I remember, cloudy and very quiet, and I'd just come in from a round of golf. My mother and father were having lunch out in the kitchen. I remember opening up the letter, scanning the first few lines, feeling the blood go thick behind my eyes. I remember a sound in my head. It wasn't thinking, just a silent howl. A million things all at once—I was too *good* for this war. Too smart, too compassionate, too everything. It couldn't happen. I was above it. I had the world dicked—Phi Beta Kappa and summa cum laude and president of the student body and a full-ride scholarship for grad studies at Harvard. A mistake, maybe—a foul-up in the paperwork. I was no soldier. I hated Boy Scouts. I hated camping out. I hated dirt and tents and mosquitoes. The sight of blood made me queasy, and I couldn't tolerate authority, and I didn't know a rifle from a slingshot. I was a *liberal*, for Christ sake: If they needed fresh bodies, why not draft some back-to-the-stone-age hawk? Or some dumb jingo in his hard hat and Bomb Hanoi button, or one of LBJ's pretty daughters, or Westmoreland's whole handsome family—nephews and nieces and baby grandson. There should be a law, I thought. If you support a war, if you think it's worth the price, that's fine, but you have to put your own precious fluids on the line. You have to head for the front and hook up with an infantry unit and help spill the blood. And you have to bring along your wife, or your kids, or your lover. A *law*, I thought.

I remember the rage in my stomach. Later it burned down to a smoldering self-pity, then to numbness. At dinner that night my father asked what my plans were. "Nothing," I said. "Wait."

I spent the summer of 1968 working in an Armour meatpacking plant in my hometown of Worthington, Minnesota. The plant specialized in pork products, and for eight hours a day I stood on a quarter-mile assembly line—more properly, a disassembly line—removing blood clots from the necks of dead pigs. My job title, I believe, was Declotter. After slaughter, the hogs were decapitated, split down the length of the belly, pried open, eviscerated, and strung up by the hind hocks on a high conveyer belt. Then gravity took over. By the time a carcass reached my spot on the line, the fluids had mostly drained out, everything except for thick clots of blood in the neck and upper chest cavity. To remove the stuff, I used a kind of water gun. The machine was heavy, maybe eighty pounds, and was suspended from the ceiling by a heavy rubber cord. There was some bounce to it, an elastic up-and-down give, and the trick was to maneuver the gun with your whole body, not lifting with the arms, just letting the rubber cord do the work for you. At one end was a trigger; at the muzzle end was a small nozzle and a steel roller brush. As a carcass passed by, you'd lean forward and swing the gun up against the clots and squeeze the trigger, all in one motion, and the brush would whirl and water would come shooting out and you'd hear a quick splattering sound as the clots dissolved into a fine red mist. It was not pleasant work. Goggles were a necessity, and a rubber apron, but even so it was like standing for eight hours a day under a lukewarm blood-shower. At night I'd go home smelling of pig. It wouldn't go

away. Even after a hot bath, scrubbing hard, the stink was always there—like old bacon, or sausage, a dense greasy pig-stink that soaked deep into my skin and hair. Among other things, I remember, it was tough getting dates that summer. I felt isolated; I spent a lot of time alone. And there was also that draft notice tucked away in my wallet.

In the evenings I'd sometimes borrow my father's car and drive aimlessly around town, feeling sorry for myself, thinking about the war and the pig factory and how my life seemed to be collapsing toward slaughter. I felt paralyzed. All around me the options seemed to be narrowing, as if I were hurtling down a huge black funnel, the whole world squeezing in tight. There was no happy way out. The government had ended most graduate school deferments; the waiting lists for the National Guard and Reserves were impossibly long; my health was solid; I didn't qualify for CO status—no religious grounds, no history as a pacifist. Moreover, I could not claim to be opposed to war as a matter of general principle. There were occasions, I believed, when a nation was justified in using military force to achieve its ends, to stop a Hitler or some comparable evil, and I told myself that in such circumstances I would've willingly marched off to the battle. The problem, though, was that a draft board did not let you choose your war.

Beyond all this, or at the very center, was the raw fact of terror. I did not want to die. Not ever. But certainly not then, not there, not in a wrong war. Driving up Main Street, past the courthouse and the Ben Franklin store, I sometimes felt the fear spreading inside me like weeds. I imagined myself dead. I imagined myself doing things I could not do—charging an enemy position, taking aim at another human being.

At some point in mid-July I began thinking seriously about Canada. The border lay a few hundred miles north, an eight-hour drive. Both my conscience and my instincts were telling me to make a break for it, just take off and run like hell and never stop. In the beginning the idea seemed purely abstract, the word Canada printing itself out in my head; but after a time I could see particular shapes and images, the sorry details of my own future—a hotel room in Winnipeg, a battered old suitcase, my father's eyes as I tried to explain myself over the telephone. I could almost hear his voice, and my mother's. Run, I'd think. Then I'd think, Impossible. Then a second later I'd think, *Run*.

It was a kind of schizophrenia. A moral split. I couldn't make up my mind. I feared the war, yes, but I also feared exile. I was afraid of walking away from my own life, my friends and my family, my whole history, everything that mattered to me. I feared losing the respect of my parents. I feared the law. I feared ridicule and censure. My hometown was a conservative little spot on the prairie, a place where tradition counted, and it was easy to imagine people sitting around a table down at the old Gobbler Cafe on Main Street, coffee cups poised, the conversation slowly zeroing in on the young O'Brien kid, how the damned sissy had taken off for Canada. At night, when I couldn't sleep, I'd sometimes carry on fierce arguments with those people. I'd be screaming at them, telling them how much I detested their blind, thoughtless, automatic acquiescence to it all, their simpleminded patriotism, their prideful ignorance, their love-it-or-leave-it platitudes, how they were sending me off to fight a war they didn't understand and didn't want to understand. I held them responsible. By God, yes, I *did*. All of them—I held them personally and individually responsible—the polyestered Kiwanis boys, the merchants and farmers, the pious churchgoers, the chatty housewives, the PTA and the Lions club and the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the fine upstanding gentry out at the country club. They didn't know Bao Dai from the man in the moon. They didn't know history. They didn't know the first thing about Diem's tyranny, or the nature of Vietnamese nationalism, or the long colonialism of

the French—this was all too damned complicated, it required some reading—but no matter, it was a war to stop the Communists, plain and simple, which was how they liked things, and you were a treasonous pussy if you had second thoughts about killing or dying for plain and simple reasons.

I was bitter, sure. But it was so much more than that.

The emotions went from outrage to terror to bewilderment to guilt to sorrow and then back again to outrage. I felt a sickness inside me. Real disease.

Most of this I've told before, or at least hinted at, but what I have never told is the full truth. How I cracked. How at work one morning, standing on the pig line, I felt something break open in my chest. I don't know what it was. I'll never know. But it was real, I know that much, it was a physical rupture—a cracking-leaking-popping feeling. I remember dropping my water gun. Quickly, almost without thought, I took off my apron and walked out of the plant and drove home. It was midmorning, I remember, and the house was empty. Down in my chest there was still that leaking sensation, something very warm and precious spilling out, and I was covered with blood and hog-stink, and for a long while I just concentrated on holding myself together. I remember taking a hot shower. I remember packing a suitcase and carrying it out to the kitchen, standing very still for a few minutes, looking carefully at the familiar objects all around me. The old chrome toaster, the telephone, the pink and white Formica on the kitchen counters. The room was full of bright sunshine. Everything sparkled. My house, I thought. My life. I'm not sure how long I stood there, but later I scribbled out a short note to my parents.

What it said, exactly, I don't recall now. Something vague. Taking off, will call, love Tim.

I drove north.

It's a blur now, as it was then, and all I remember is a sense of high velocity and the feel of the steering wheel in my hands. I was riding on adrenaline. A giddy feeling, in a way, except there was the dreamy edge of impossibility to it—like running a dead-end maze—no way out—it couldn't come to a happy conclusion and yet I was doing it anyway because it was all I could think of to do. It was pure flight, fast and mindless. I had no plan. Just hit the border at high speed and crash through and keep on running. Near dusk I passed through Bemidji, then turned northeast toward International Falls. I spent the night in the car behind a closed-down gas station a half mile from the border. In the morning, after gassing up, I headed straight west along the Rainy River, which separates Minnesota from Canada, and which for me separated one life from another. The land was mostly wilderness. Here and there I passed a motel or bait shop, but otherwise the country unfolded in great sweeps of pine and birch and sumac. Though it was still August, the air already had the smell of October, football season, piles of yellow-red leaves, everything crisp and clean. I remember a huge blue sky. Off to my right was the Rainy River, wide as a lake in places, and beyond the Rainy River was Canada.

For a while I just drove, not aiming at anything, then in the late morning I began looking for a place to lie low for a day or two. I was exhausted, and scared sick, and around noon I pulled into an old fishing resort called the Tip Top Lodge. Actually it was not a lodge at all, just eight or nine tiny yellow cabins clustered on a peninsula that jutted northward into the Rainy River. The place was in sorry shape. There was a dangerous wooden dock, an old minnow tank, a flimsy tar paper boathouse along the shore.

The main building, which stood in a cluster of pines on high ground, seemed to lean heavily to one side, like a cripple, the roof sagging toward Canada. Briefly, I thought about turning around, just giving up, but then I got out of the car and walked up to the front porch.

The man who opened the door that day is the hero of my life. How do I say this without sounding sappy? Blurt it out—the man saved me. He offered exactly what I needed, without questions, without any words at all. He took me in. He was there at the critical time—a silent, watchful presence. Six days later, when it ended, I was unable to find a proper way to thank him, and I never have, and so, if nothing else, this story represents a small gesture of gratitude twenty years overdue.

Even after two decades I can close my eyes and return to that porch at the Tip Top Lodge. I can see the old guy staring at me. Elroy Berdahl: eighty-one years old, skinny and shrunken and mostly bald. He wore a flannel shirt and brown work pants. In one hand, I remember, he carried a green apple, a small paring knife in the other. His eyes had the bluish gray color of a razor blade, the same polished shine, and as he peered up at me I felt a strange sharpness, almost painful, a cutting sensation, as if his gaze were somehow slicing me open. In part, no doubt, it was my own sense of guilt, but even so I'm absolutely certain that the old man took one look and went right to the heart of things—a kid in trouble. When I asked for a room, Elroy made a little clicking sound with his tongue. He nodded, led me out to one of the cabins, and dropped a key in my hand. I remember smiling at him. I also remember wishing I hadn't. The old man shook his head as if to tell me it wasn't worth the bother.

"Dinner at five-thirty," he said. "You eat fish?"

"Anything," I said.

Elroy grunted and said, "I'll bet."

We spent six days together at the Tip Top Lodge. Just the two of us. Tourist season was over, and there were no boats on the river, and the wilderness seemed to withdraw into a great permanent stillness. Over those six days Elroy Berdahl and I took most of our meals together. In the mornings we sometimes went out on long hikes into the woods, and at night we played Scrabble or listened to records or sat reading in front of his big stone fireplace. At times I felt the awkwardness of an intruder, but Elroy accepted me into his quiet routine without fuss or ceremony. He took my presence for granted, the same way he might've sheltered a stray cat—no wasted sighs or pity—and there was never any talk about it. Just the opposite. What I remember more than anything is the man's willful, almost ferocious silence. In all that time together, all those hours, he never asked the obvious questions: Why was I there? Why alone? Why so preoccupied? If Elroy was curious about any of this, he was careful never to put it into words.

My hunch, though, is that he already knew. At least the basics. After all, it was 1968, and guys were burning draft cards, and Canada was just a boat ride away. Elroy Berdahl was no hick. His bedroom, I remember, was cluttered with books and newspapers. He killed me at the Scrabble board, barely concentrating, and on those occasions when speech was necessary he had a way of compressing large thoughts into small, cryptic packets of language. One evening, just at sunset, he pointed up at an owl circling over the violet-lighted forest to the west. "Hey, O'Brien," he said. "There's Jesus." The man was sharp—he didn't miss much. Those razor eyes. Now and then he'd catch me staring out at the river, at the far shore, and I could almost hear the tumblers clicking in his head. Maybe I'm wrong, but I doubt it.

One thing for certain, he knew I was in desperate trouble. And he knew I couldn't talk about it. The wrong word—or even the right word—and I would've disappeared. I was wired and jittery. My skin felt too tight. After supper one evening I vomited and went back to my cabin and lay down for a few moments and then vomited again; another time, in the middle of the afternoon, I began sweating and couldn't shut it off. I went through whole days feeling dizzy with sorrow. I couldn't sleep; I couldn't lie still. At night I'd toss around in bed, half awake, half dreaming, imagining how I'd sneak down to the beach and quietly push one of the old man's boats out into the river and start paddling my way toward Canada. There were times when I thought I'd gone off the psychic edge. I couldn't tell up from down, I was just falling, and late in the night I'd lie there watching weird pictures spin through my head. Getting chased by the Border Patrol—helicopters and searchlights and barking dogs—I'd be crashing through the woods, I'd be down on my hands and knees—people shouting out my name—the law closing in on all sides—my hometown draft board and the FBI and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It all seemed crazy and impossible. Twenty-one years old, an ordinary kid with all the ordinary dreams and ambitions, and all I wanted was to live the life I was born to—a mainstream life—I loved baseball and hamburgers and cherry Cokes—and now I was off on the margins of exile, leaving my country forever, and it seemed so impossible and terrible and sad.

I'm not sure how I made it through those six days. Most of it I can't remember. On two or three afternoons, to pass some time, I helped Elroy get the place ready for winter, sweeping down the cabins and hauling in the boats, little chores that kept my body moving. The days were cool and bright. The nights were very dark. One morning the old man showed me how to split and stack firewood, and for several hours we just worked in silence out behind his house. At one point, I remember, Elroy put down his maul and looked at me for a long time, his lips drawn as if framing a difficult question, but then he shook his head and went back to work. The man's self-control was amazing. He never pried. He never put me in a position that required lies or denials. To an extent, I suppose, his reticence was typical of that part of Minnesota, where privacy still held value, and even if I'd been walking around with some horrible deformity—four arms and three heads—I'm sure the old man would've talked about everything except those extra arms and heads. Simple politeness was part of it. But even more than that, I think, the man understood that words were insufficient. The problem had gone beyond discussion. During that long summer I'd been over and over the various arguments, all the pros and cons, and it was no longer a question that could be decided by an act of pure reason. Intellect had come up against emotion. My conscience told me to run, but some irrational and powerful force was resisting, like a weight pushing me toward the war. What it came down to, stupidly, was a sense of shame. Hot, stupid shame. I did not want people to think badly of me. Not my parents, not my brother and sister, not even the folks down at the Gobbler Cafe. I was ashamed to be there at the Tip Top Lodge. I was ashamed of my conscience, ashamed to be doing the right thing.

Some of this Elroy must've understood. Not the details, of course, but the plain fact of crisis.

Although the old man never confronted me about it, there was one occasion when he came close to forcing the whole thing out into the open. It was early evening, and we'd just finished supper, and over coffee and dessert I asked him about my bill, how much I owed so far. For a long while the old man squinted down at the tablecloth.

"Well, the basic rate," he said, "is fifty bucks a night. Not counting meals. This makes four nights, right?"

I nodded. I had three hundred and twelve dollars in my wallet.

Elroy kept his eyes on the tablecloth. "Now that's an on-season price. To be fair, I suppose we should knock it down a peg or two." He leaned back in his chair. "What's a reasonable number, you figure?"

"I don't know," I said. "Forty?"

"Forty's good. Forty a night. Then we tack on food— say another hundred? Two hundred sixty total?"

"I guess."

He raised his eyebrows. "Too much?"

"No, that's fair. It's fine. Tomorrow, though ... I think I'd better take off tomorrow."

Elroy shrugged and began clearing the table. For a time he fussed with the dishes, whistling to himself as if the subject had been settled. After a second he slapped his hands together.

"You know what we forgot?" he said. "We forgot wages. Those odd jobs you done. What we have to do, we have to figure out what your time's worth. Your last job— how much did you pull in an hour?"

"Not enough," I said.

"A bad one?"

"Yes. Pretty bad."

Slowly then, without intending any long sermon, I told him about my days at the pig plant. It began as a straight recitation of the facts, but before I could stop myself I was talking about the blood clots and the water gun and how the smell had soaked into my skin and how I couldn't wash it away. I went on for a long time. I told him about wild hogs squealing in my dreams, the sounds of butchery, slaughterhouse sounds, and how I'd sometimes wake up with that greasy pig-stink in my throat.

When I was finished, Elroy nodded at me.

"Well, to be honest," he said, "when you first showed up here, I wondered about all that. The aroma, I mean. Smelled like you was awful damned fond of pork chops." The old man almost smiled. He made a snuffling sound, then sat down with a pencil and a piece of paper. "So widths crud job pay? Ten bucks an hour? Fifteen?"

"Less."

Elroy shook his head. "Let's make it fifteen. You put in twenty-five hours here, easy. That's three hundred seventy-five bucks total wages. We subtract the two hundred sixty for food and lodging, I still owe you a hundred and fifteen."

He took four fifties out of his shirt pocket and laid them on the table.

"Call it even," he said.

"No."

"Pick it up. Get yourself a haircut."

The money lay on the table for the rest of the evening. It was still there when I went back to my cabin. In the morning, though, I found an envelope tacked to my door. Inside were the four fifties and a two-word note that said

EMERGENCY FUND.

The man knew.

Looking back after twenty years, I sometimes wonder if the events of that summer didn't happen in some other dimension, a place where your life exists before you've lived it, and where it goes afterward. None of it ever seemed real. During my time at the Tip Top Lodge I had the feeling that I'd slipped out of my own skin, hovering a few feet away while some poor yo-yo with my name and face tried to make his way toward a future he didn't understand and didn't want. Even now I can see myself as I was then. It's like watching an old home movie: I'm young and tan and fit. I've got hair—lots of it. I don't smoke or drink. I'm wearing faded blue jeans and a white polo shirt. I can see myself sitting on Elroy Berdahl's dock near dusk one evening, the sky a bright shimmering pink, and I'm finishing up a letter to my parents that tells what I'm about to do and why I'm doing it and how sorry I am that I'd never found the courage to talk to them about it. I ask them not to be angry. I try to explain some of my feelings, but there aren't enough words, and so I just say that it's a thing that has to be done. At the end of the letter I talk about the vacations we used to take up in this north country, at a place called Whitefish Lake, and how the scenery here reminds me of those good times. I tell them I'm fine. I tell them I'll write again from Winnipeg or Montreal or wherever I end up.

On my last full day, the sixth day, the old man took me out fishing on the Rainy River. The afternoon was sunny and cold. A stiff breeze came in from the north, and I remember how the little fourteen-foot boat made sharp rocking motions as we pushed off from the dock. The current was fast. All around us, I remember, there was a vastness to the world, an unpeopled rawness, just the trees and the sky and the water reaching out toward nowhere. The air had the brittle scent of October.

For ten or fifteen minutes Elroy held a course upstream, the river choppy and silver-gray, then he turned straight north and put the engine on full throttle. I felt the bow lift beneath me. I remember the wind in my ears, the sound of the old outboard Evinrude. For a time I didn't pay attention to anything, just feeling the cold spray against my face, but then it occurred to me that at some point we must've passed into Canadian waters, across that dotted line between two different worlds, and I remember a sudden tightness in my chest as I looked up and watched the far shore come at me. This wasn't a daydream. It was tangible and real. As we came in toward land, Elroy cut the engine, letting the boat fishtail lightly about twenty yards off shore. The old man didn't look at me or speak. Bending down, he opened up his tackle box and busied himself with a bobber and a piece of wire leader, humming to himself, his eyes down.

It struck me then that he must've planned it. I'll never be certain, of course, but I think he meant to bring me up against the realities, to guide me across the river and to take me to the edge and to stand a kind of vigil as I chose a life for myself.

I remember staring at the old man, then at my hands, then at Canada. The shoreline was dense with brush and timber. I could see tiny red berries on the bushes. I could see a squirrel up in one of the birch trees, a big crow looking at me from a boulder along the river. That close—twenty yards—and I could see the delicate latticework of the leaves, the texture of the soil, the browned



needles beneath the pines, the configurations of geology and human history. Twenty yards. I could've done it. I could've jumped and started swimming for my life. Inside me, in my chest, I felt a terrible squeezing pressure. Even now, as I write this, I can still feel that tightness. And I want you to feel it—the wind coming off the river, the waves, the silence, the wooded frontier. You're at the bow of a boat on the Rainy River. You're twenty-one years old, you're scared, and there's a hard squeezing pressure in your chest.

What would you do?

Would you jump? Would you feel pity for yourself? Would you think about your family and your childhood and your dreams and all you're leaving behind? Would it hurt? Would it feel like dying? Would you cry, as I did?

I tried to swallow it back. I tried to smile, except I was crying.

Now, perhaps, you can understand why I've never told this story before. It's not just the embarrassment of tears. That's part of it, no doubt, but what embarrasses me much more, and always will, is the paralysis that took my heart. A moral freeze: I couldn't decide, I couldn't act, I couldn't comport myself with even a pretense of modest human dignity.

All I could do was cry. Quietly, not bawling, just the chest-chokes.

At the rear of the boat Elroy Berdahl pretended not to notice. He held a fishing rod in his hands, his head bowed to hide his eyes. He kept humming a soft, monotonous little tune. Everywhere, it seemed, in the trees and water and sky, a great worldwide sadness came pressing down on me, a crushing sorrow, sorrow like I had never known it before. And what was so sad, I realized, was that Canada had become a pitiful fantasy. Silly and hopeless. It was no longer a possibility. Right then, with the shore so close, I understood that I would not do what I should do. I would not swim away from my hometown and my country and my life. I would not be brave. That old image of myself as a hero, as a man of conscience and courage, all that was just a threadbare pipe dream. Bobbing there on the Rainy River, looking back at the Minnesota shore, I felt a sudden swell of helplessness come over me, a drowning sensation, as if I had toppled overboard and was being swept away by the silver waves. Chunks of my own history flashed by. I saw a seven-year-old boy in a white cowboy hat and a Lone Ranger mask and a pair of holstered six-shooters; I saw a twelve-year-old Little League shortstop pivoting to turn a double play; I saw a sixteen-year-old kid decked out for his first prom, looking spiffy in a white tux and a black bow tie, his hair cut short and flat, his shoes freshly polished. My whole life seemed to spill out into the river, swirling away from me, everything I had ever been or ever wanted to be. I couldn't get my breath; I couldn't stay afloat; I couldn't tell which way to swim. A hallucination, I suppose, but it was as real as anything I would ever feel. I saw my parents calling to me from the far shoreline. I saw my brother and sister, all the townsfolk, the mayor and the entire Chamber of Commerce and all my old teachers and girlfriends and high school buddies. Like some weird sporting event: everybody screaming from the sidelines, rooting me on—a loud stadium roar. Hotdogs and popcorn—stadium smells, stadium heat. A squad of cheerleaders did cartwheels along the banks of the Rainy River; they had megaphones and pompoms and smooth brown thighs. The crowd swayed left and right. A marching band played fight songs. All my aunts and uncles were there, and Abraham Lincoln, and Saint George, and a nine-year-old girl named Linda who had died of a brain tumor back in fifth grade, and several members of the United States Senate, and a blind poet scribbling notes, and LBJ, and Huck Finn, and Abbie Hoffman, and all the dead soldiers back from the grave, and the many thousands who were later to die—

villagers with terrible burns, little kids without arms or legs—yes, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were there, and a couple of popes, and a first lieutenant named Jimmy Cross, and the last surviving veteran of the American Civil War, and Jane Fonda dressed up as Barbarella, and an old man sprawled beside a pigpen, and my grandfather, and Gary Cooper, and a kind-faced woman carrying an umbrella and a copy of Plato's *Republic*, and a million ferocious citizens waving flags of all shapes and colors—people in hard hats, people in headbands—they were all whooping and chanting and urging me toward one shore or the other. I saw faces from my distant past and distant future. My wife was there. My unborn daughter waved at me, and my two sons hopped up and down, and a drill sergeant named Blyton sneered and shot up a finger and shook his head. There was a choir in bright purple robes. There was a cabbie from the Bronx. There was a slim young man I would one day kill with a hand grenade along a red clay trail outside the village of My Khe.

The little aluminum boat rocked softly beneath me. There was the wind and the sky.

I tried to will myself overboard.

I gripped the edge of the boat and leaned forward and thought, *Now*.

I did try. It just wasn't possible.

All those eyes on me—the town, the whole universe— and I couldn't risk the embarrassment. It was as if there were an audience to my life, that swirl of faces along the river, and in my head I could hear people screaming at me. Traitor! they yelled. Turncoat! Pussy! I felt myself blush. I couldn't tolerate it. I couldn't endure the mockery, or the disgrace, or the patriotic ridicule. Even in my imagination, the shore just twenty yards away, I couldn't make myself be brave. It had nothing to do with morality. Embarrassment, that's all it was.

And right then I submitted.

I would go to the war—I would kill and maybe die— because I was embarrassed not to.

That was the sad thing. And so I sat in the bow of the boat and cried.

It was loud now. Loud, hard crying.

Elroy Berdahl remained quiet. He kept fishing. He worked his line with the tips of his fingers, patiently, squinting out at his red and white bobber on the Rainy River. His eyes were flat and impassive. He didn't speak. He was simply there, like the river and the late-summer sun. And yet by his presence, his mute watchfulness, he made it real. He was the true audience. He was a witness, like God, or like the gods, who look on in absolute silence as we live our lives, as we make our choices or fail to make them.

"Ain't biting," he said.

Then after a time the old man pulled in his line and turned the boat back toward Minnesota.

I don't remember saying goodbye. That last night we had dinner together, and I went to bed early, and in the morning Elroy fixed breakfast for me. When I told him I'd be leaving, the old man nodded as if he already knew. He looked down at the table and smiled.

At some point later in the morning it's possible that we shook hands—I just don't remember—but I do know that by the time I'd finished packing the old man had disappeared. Around noon, when I took my suitcase out to the car, I noticed that his old black pickup truck was no longer parked

in front of the house. I went inside and waited for a while, but I felt a bone certainty that he wouldn't be back. In a way, I thought, it was appropriate. I washed up the breakfast dishes, left his two hundred dollars on the kitchen counter, got into the car, and drove south toward home.

The day was cloudy. I passed through towns with familiar names, through the pine forests and down to the prairie, and then to Vietnam, where I was a soldier, and then home again. I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war.