



LESSON PLAN: THE GILDED CAGE

TITLE: Girls Growing in the Garden

GRADES: 9-10

MEDIUM: Short stories, questionnaires, journal entries

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CLASS TIME REQUIRED: 3 periods (3 days)

SAMPLE RESULTS: Student Story



Rose, always being gregarious in a somewhat gaudy way, decides to hold a slumber party in The Garden. She invites Sunflower, Daisy, Lily, and Lotus. Sometime during the night's festivities and philosophical arguments/ conversations, they decide to each tell a tale about where they came from/ what their lives were like outside of The Garden (representing the Gilded Cage) and how they came to be in The Garden. Most importantly, their individual tales illustrate how beautiful they are. The one whose tale convinces all of the others that she is the most beautiful flower in The Garden wins (reminiscent of The Canterbury Tales). During each tale, of course, we learn about each of the flower's individual personalities, beauty source, and origin. Before the next day arrives, the last tale has yet to be finished, and the Sun refuses to come out. The Garden is still gripped by Night, a sort of mystical eclipse, and all of the flowers in The Garden are in a panic. It is the final realization that all of the flowers are beautiful in their own ways that releases the spell of Night, and encourages the Sun to come out of hiding.

OVERVIEW: The lesson plan uses the metaphor of the Garden, the analogy of well-loved flowers, a short story, and some creative writing to help students learn to recognize the importance of every personality type and learn that the characteristics that allow us to stand out are the same characteristics that unify us as a community

OBJECTIVES: This exercise is meant as an interactive and reflective experience by which a student can examine their own unique personality, drawing from the figurative characteristics of some well-loved flowers. It is hoped that the students learn to appreciate their uniqueness while understanding and appreciating their interactive role in society, This is a fun way for girls to look not only at themselves and their relationship to their own beauty and style, but also to other girls and how they interact. These community-building and life-skills exercises are aimed particularly at teenagers, while they are still figuring out "who they are" and becoming comfortable in their own skin.

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MATERIALS:

Paper, pen, questionnaire copies, a name tag label, flower descriptions, flower story, journals (optional), real or silk potted flowers of each flower, a coming-of-age story that emphasizes a strong and/or unique character, such as "The Bass, the River, and Sheila Mant" by W.D. Wetherell.

TEACHER PREPARATION:

- Please note that "Girls Growing in the Garden" is a practical lesson plan when male and female students have been divided into separate groups for the questionnaire and gender-relevant activities. It is suggested that while the girls are involved in this part of the lesson, the boys are involved in a similar activity about self-understanding: e.g. a male version of the questionnaire.
- Randomly assign each student a flower, and evenly distribute each type of flower. Instruct students to bring in either a real or silk potted (not cut) flower for their assigned flower.

PROCEDURES:

- 5-Minute Warm-up: Have students write either in their journals/writer's notebooks or a separate sheet of paper: one-two paragraphs that describe their personality. Tell them to underline the qualities that they believe they share with other people they know (they have seen or heard of it) and to **box** the qualities that they believe make them unique (they have not seen or heard of it in others).
- Ask students to switch their papers/ journals with a partner. Each student reads his or her partner's description and stars the qualities that they like.
- Ask for volunteers to share their descriptions with the class.
- Choose a coming-of-age short story that emphasizes the unique and/or important qualities of a very strong character. Read and discuss. Example: "The Bass, the River, and Sheila Mant" by W.D. Wetherell. (This part of the lesson plan may take an entire period or less, depending upon the teacher and the class)
- Hand out Questionnaires. Ask students to circle their answers honestly and determine which flower their results indicate.
- Read and discuss each flower personality. Ask students to write down one real-life example they know personally of each flower, and one famous corresponding example that they do not know—such as a celebrity, a historical figure, or a literary figure (they cannot choose the celebrity examples already listed).
- students can write their own creative story about the Garden, spotlighting each flower and showing the characteristics that make them beautiful and interesting.
- Read and discuss the flower story.
- Have students each bring up the flowers that they had brought from home. Create a space in the middle of the room where all of the flowers gather into a garden.
- Give each student a name tag label, and tell students to write their names on the name tag.
- Instruct students to find the flower that they identified with from the questionnaire results, and to stick their name tag to that flower. The "Garden" of flowers should now have all of the students' names on the pots.

Questionnaire: What Flower are You?

Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can in order to achieve the most accurate and insightful results about yourself.

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1. At a party, you usually:
 - a. Scan the room to find your friends and head straight to the comfort of your circle
 - b. People watch, and reflect on what you think they're thinking
 - c. Have your friends close by but cheerfully talk to anyone who happens to be within range
 - d. Are the one dancing on tables and laughing as the crowd cheers you on
 - e. Move through the crowd, running into many people you know, many people you don't know, but always have a great time talking with all of them

2. When you get ready to go out, you usually:
 - a. Put together something unique and pretty that is SO you. Your outfit may or may not follow current trends.
 - b. Choose something that is beautiful and noticeable but romantic and a bit dark.
 - c. Choose something that is practical, classic, and feminine without being over the top.
 - d. Put together an outfit that is gorgeous and a bit "out there." Whatever makes you happy!
 - e. Find something that is trendy and flashy, yet feminine and shows off your lovely curves. If you've got it, flaunt it, right?

3. A girlfriend calls you up to tell you she broke up with her boyfriend. You:
 - a. Immediately cancel all previous plans and drive over to see her with a tub of her favorite ice cream and mud masks. Together, you laugh, cry, and analyze what happened in the relationship.
 - b. She is your closest friend in the world, perhaps your only friend, so you write her a poem and the two of you analyze the poem and her emotions together.
 - c. Gather together a group of your girlfriends and take her out for a nice walk in the park. There is nothing more healing than being outside in the sunshine, surrounded by cheerful conversations!
 - d. Take her to a Cirque de Soleil show, followed by a night of dancing so that she can forget about the loser and pick up a new, hotter man!
 - e. Take her to out for a spa day: mud baths, mani and pedis, and shopping for a new dress. While she babbles on about her relationship, you're taking mental notes about what NOT to do in a relationship.

RESULTS:

Check your answers to see what flower your personality is identified by, and refer to the Flower Girl Descriptions below.

If your answers are mostly a's: You are a **Daisy:**

Daisy's fresh and innocent beauty radiates through her sparkling eyes and wide, laughing smile. Everything about her seems to move with an almost child-like eagerness and cheerfulness. She is bright, caring, and extremely loyal, particularly to the cluster of friends who have won her heart over. Daisy's cheerfulness sometimes lead the other Flowers to believe that she might be very social; however, she definitely likes to remain within the warmth and comfort of her personal cluster of friends, rarely moving outside of this circle. She is surprisingly artistic, meticulous, dreamy, and always polite.

Examples: Kiera Knightly, Goldie Hawn, Kate Hudson

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If your answers are mostly b's: You are a **Lotus:**

Introspective and somewhat melodramatic, Lotus is mysterious, striking and exotic in her beauty, and quiet. The polar opposite of Rose, Lotus's center stage is not the social scene of the Garden, but, rather, the mental scene of her own reflections. She is a loner and somewhat lonely, occasionally resentful, and sees the Garden through poetic spectacles. She tends to stay out of the gossip and socialization of the Garden. Lotus thinks carefully about every action and reaction, and feels every emotion powerfully. She falls in love *with friends and ideas easily, and can be sometimes overlooked due to her quiet, but burns in the memories of those who know her.*

Examples: Winona Ryder, Christina Ricci, Helen Bonham-Carter

If your answers are mostly c's: You are a **Sunflower:**

The practical gal of the Garden, Sunflower is the peacekeeper and the organizer. She is effortlessly and thoughtlessly beautiful, standing tall above the other flowers, reaching for the warmth of the sun and the endless possibilities of the wide open sky. It is impossible to dislike Sunflower, for she is friends with everyone. She is a leader without being a queen, and brilliant without being showy. Sunflower glows from the inside out, is graceful and eco-conscious, and the model by which so many others strive to be, and be with.

Examples: Jackie Kennedy-Onassis, Cate Blanchett, Meryl Streep

If your answers are mostly d's: You are a **Lily:**

Like Rose, Lily is gorgeous and showy but a touch more wild and edgy-- at least, on the outside. Although Lily imagines herself to be less egocentric, her social openness and liveliness commands just as much attention as Rose does. Having led a somewhat less privileged life, Lily makes up for her past with a determination and powerful talent that earns her respect and her place in the Garden. She is energetic, quick to make decisions, always up for a party, loves to try on new "looks" and new identities, and is somewhat stuck in her past issues.

Examples of Lily: Angelina Jolie, Madonna

If your answers are mostly e's: You are a **Rose:**

Rose thrives as the center stage of the Garden. Her beauty is like a thunderous musical: she is loud, gregarious, all-encompassing, and undeniably gorgeous. She loves to talk about herself, and sometimes forgets to listen in the middle of a conversation. She is an entrepreneur, a leader, a singer, and an adventurer. Despite her self-proclaimed importance and stage-like beauty, she is exceedingly generous and can sometimes surprise herself and others with her willingness to work hard and make all kinds of sacrifices for her loved ones.

Examples: Oprah Winfrey, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Taylor Swift

TEACHERS TIPS:

- Because there will not likely be an even distribution of every "flower personality" represented, it is a good idea to have extra "back-up" flower pots that you could bring in yourself. For example, from your understanding/knowledge of your own students, you might anticipate that there are a lot more Daisy and Sunflower personalities than Lily or Lotus. Hence, you could bring in ten extra Daisy and Sunflower pots to make sure that every student gets represented during the interactive activity of labeling their names on the pots of the Garden.

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- If you find that things have moved too quickly, a great way to extend the lesson plan is to share and discuss the students' creative stories: read-alouds, workshop-style critiques, etc. Also, you could have students create their own personality questionnaire and exchange with a partner or group.

VARIATIONS:

- Check your grade level Literature textbook for short stories that focus on character, and follow the exercises recommended in your teacher edition.
- Have students read aloud their creative stories and allow the rest of the group to "guess" at which flower personality the reader is. Discuss different personality possibilities, and where/why personality overlap may exist in character.

CA CONTENT STANDARDS:

English Language Arts, Grades Nine and Ten

- 3.4 Determine characters' traits by what the characters say about themselves in narration, dialogue, dramatic monologue, and soliloquy
- 2.1 Write biographical or autobiographical narratives or short stories:
 - c. Describe with concrete sensory details the sights, sounds, and smells of a scene and the specific actions, movements, gestures, and feelings of the characters; use interior monologue to depict the characters' feelings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY/WEBOGRAPHY:

"The Bass, the River, and Sheila Mant" by W.D. Wetherell

A good resource for tips on creative story writing is: <http://www.webenglishteacher.com/creative.html>

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