

An Integrated Skills Lesson Plan for “For Life’s Sake” by Linda Hogan

In “For Life’s Sake,” author Linda Hogan provides the reader with an intimate view of the influences that have made her into the poet, essayist, and storyteller she is today. She describes how her ancestors and the beliefs she inherited as a Native American have inspired her choice of topics and shaped her writing into its unique style. Hogan’s essay gives students a chance to understand and appreciate the life of a writer from another America.

Description:

This lesson plan is designed for EFL instructors who teach high intermediate to advanced English language learners. It is based on an authentic, contemporary essay by an accomplished American writer. The lesson plan includes various tasks and activities designed to assist you, the instructor, in developing your students’ English language skills as well as increasing their understanding of American culture. Students will study Hogan’s essay, complete tasks both individually and in pairs or groups, and participate in activities that develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The lesson is divided into five steps: Preparing to Read, Reading the Text, Understanding the Text, Making Connections Beyond the Text, and Integrating Language Skills.

You can choose the parts of the lesson that you find most appropriate and useful for your class. Approximate times for each part of the lesson are included, but these times may vary, depending on the individual class or teaching situation.

Step 1: Preparing to Read “For Life’s Sake” (15 minutes)

In order to prepare your students to read Hogan’s essay, follow the suggested steps below.

A. Introduce the Subject: Native Americans.

Explain to your students that they will read an essay called “For Life’s Sake” written by Linda Hogan, an American poet, essayist, and novelist, who is a Native American. Explain that Hogan is from the Chickasaw nation which originally inhabited the states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee and that many Chickasaw Indians now live in the state of Oklahoma to which they were moved in the early 1800s. If you have a map of the United States, ask your students to locate the four states. Tell your students that North America has been home to many indigenous peoples, known as Native Americans or American Indians. Explain that these peoples have cultural practices and traditions that have been passed from one generation to the next. Then ask your students questions such as the following:

1. What do you know about Native Americans?
2. Where did you learn about Native Americans (books, films, etc.)?

3. Can you describe any Native American customs or artifacts?
4. Can you name any famous Native Americans?

B. Introduce the Lesson

Explain to your students that that they will first read Hogan's essay completely through. Tell them that they might not fully understand this essay the first time they read it, but after reading it again and analyzing the essay, they will gain a better understanding of the writer's message and will experience opportunities to communicate in English and improve their language skills.

Step 2: Reading the Text (30-40 minutes depending on students' abilities)

Give your students photocopies of the essay (and Glossary) from this issue of the *Forum*. You can also have students access the essay online at: <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/writers/>. Note: the online version does not have the numbered paragraphs and Glossary mentioned in some exercises below.

- A. Review with your students the during-reading tasks below. Then ask them to complete the tasks as they read the essay silently.
 1. Circle unfamiliar words or expressions.
 2. Underline ideas they do not understand.
 3. Make notes in the margins about sections of the essay they would like to discuss or ask about.
- B. Ask your students to read the definitions of their circled words in the Glossary provided or to look up the unfamiliar words in a dictionary. If they have access to the Internet, students can use one of the following on-line dictionary sites.
 - The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: www.bartleby.com/61
 - Merriam-Webster On-line-The Language Center: www.m-w.com/
- C. Ask your students to carefully read the essay a second time for better understanding.

Step 3: Understanding the Text

You may assign the following questions for class or group discussion, as journal or essay topics to be written in class, or for homework. To prepare your students for oral discussion, follow the steps listed below.

1. Arrange your students into pairs or groups of three to four students.
 - a. Ask each pair or group to choose one student to read the questions aloud.
 - b. Ask each pair or group to choose one student to record the answers.
 - c. Ask each group to choose other members to present the answers to the class.
2. Give your students a fixed time period to discuss the questions and complete the tasks in Step 3 before presenting their responses to the class.
3. Call on each group to present their responses to the class.

A. Comprehension Questions (15–20 minutes)

1. What adjectives does Linda Hogan use to describe her personality as a child in Oklahoma?
2. Does Hogan believe that she is a traditionally-minded Native woman?
3. In paragraph 8, does Hogan state that she thinks the view of the constellations is the same for the Western world as it is in the American Indian tradition?
4. After rereading paragraph 9, name the three types of writing Hogan says she does.
5. In paragraph 12, what are the two choices for Hogan's main character in her novel *Power*? What is the main character's name?
6. What endangered animal did a Seminole man kill in the controversial case that Hogan researched for an article she was writing?
7. What animal does Hogan write about in her poem "Affinity: Mustang?" What words describe the animal?
8. In the final paragraph, according to Hogan, why does she write? What is her motivation for writing?

B. Vocabulary and Idioms (15 minutes)

Explain to your students that scanning is a reading skill that is useful for quickly finding specific information such as new vocabulary words or idiomatic expressions. To scan, students should read through a text quickly as they search for specific words, expressions, names, or numbers. Ask your students to practice the skill of scanning as they complete the tasks in this section.

1. Scan paragraph 8 to find the word *cosmos*. Read the sentences surrounding this word. Try to guess the meaning of *cosmos* from these sentences. Then check the Glossary to find out if you guessed correctly.
2. In paragraph 12, locate the excerpt from Hogan's novel titled *Power* and find the word *imploding*. Use the context, the sentences surrounding the unfamiliar word, to help you guess the meaning of *imploding*. What word is an antonym—a word that is opposite in meaning—of *imploding*?
3. In paragraph 15, find a two-word verb which means "to bring together." Hogan uses this word again in the same paragraph, but she changes its form. What is the new form of this word, and what part of speech is it?

C. Dictionary Practice (15 minutes)

Tell your students that they will practice using the dictionary as they complete the tasks in this section. They may use the on-line dictionary sites listed under Step 2.

1. Find the expression *elemental attention* in the passage excerpted from "Walking" in paragraph 8. Look up the word *elemental* in the dictionary. What does it mean? What part of speech is it? Find the noun form of *elemental*. What is the definition for this noun that is closest in meaning to the use of *elemental* in Hogan's essay? What do you think Hogan means by *elemental attention* in this paragraph?

2. Find the word *sentient* in paragraph 8. What part of speech is *sentient*? What is the noun form of this word? Look up the definitions for *sentient* and its noun form in the dictionary. Then rewrite the following sentence from paragraph 8 in your own words: “[My work] is an acknowledgment that we live in a sentient world.”
3. Scan paragraph 10 to find the word *aboriginal*. Look up the meaning in the dictionary. What synonyms—words that have similar or related meanings—can you think of for *aboriginal*? What synonym does Hogan use to identify these peoples in her essay? How is *aboriginal* pronounced? Use the dictionary’s pronunciation guide for help if you need it.

D. Discussion Questions (15 minutes)

For instructions on how to present these questions for oral discussion, refer to the steps provided above for part A, *Comprehension Questions*.

1. In paragraph 2, Hogan writes about how coming from “another America” has “...been the root of [her] writing.” What does she mean by “another America,” and how has this background inspired her to become a writer?
2. In her poem “Affinity: Mustang,” Hogan describes the closeness she feels to a mustang, a type of wild horse that used to roam the plains of North America. What does she say about her affinity with the mustang? What role do you think horses used to play in the lives of Native Americans?
3. Hogan ends her essay by stating that her writing “helps to put the world, the lives of humans and non-humans back together, to make them whole again.” What does she mean by non-humans? What is she implying about the relationship between humans and non-humans in our world today?

Step 4: Making Connections Beyond the Text (15–20 minutes)

You may assign questions for class or group discussion, as journal or essay topics to be written in class, or for homework.

1. Hogan’s writing often acknowledges traditional Native American values such as respecting the intelligence of the elders. What are some other traditional values she writes about? What are some of the traditional values you hold? Are your values similar to or different from the traditional values that Hogan cherishes?
2. Hogan discusses her views on the understanding of the cosmos and how the constellations have a meaning for her that is different from the traditional Western meaning. What might be some reasons for these different meanings? Do the skies and their constellations have any meaning to you or to any other people you know? If so, discuss this meaning and explain its importance.
3. Hogan’s novel *Power* describes a character who must choose between two ways of life: the American world and the culture of her elders who live in their own community with their own traditions. Have you or someone you know ever had to make a choice between two worlds, two ways of thinking,



WEBSITES OF INTEREST

Linda Hogan

<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/newsite/authors/HOGANlinda.htm>

This website provides biographical information about Linda Hogan and a bibliography of her literary works.

Chickasaw Nation History

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~itchicka/>

Information about the early history of the Chickasaw nation is presented here, along with links to the Chickasaw Nation Official Homepage and many other American Indian resources.

The Endangered Species Program

<http://endangered.fws.gov/>

This informative site presents information about the Endangered Species Act and the program developed to identify and protect the species of animal and plant life that are at risk of becoming extinct.

Meridel LeSueur

http://college.hmco.com/english/lauter/heath/4e/students/author_pages/modern/lesueur_me.html

This is a biographical site about Meridel LeSueur, an American political journalist and short story writer who was well-known in the 1930s. Learn about her life and the circumstances that influenced her writing.

Native American Indians

<http://www.nativeculture.com/lisamitten/nations.html>

Links on this site connect you to home pages of the Apache, Cherokee, Kiowa, Seminole, and many other Indian nations of North America.

The Trail of Tears

<http://www.cherokee.org/Culture/History-Page.asp?ID=2>

Read a brief history of the Trail of Tears, a name given to the trail the Cherokee and other Native Americans followed when they were forcibly removed from their original homes and resettled in Indian Territory.

or two ways of conducting your life? Discuss the difficulties in making such a decision and the consequences of the choice you made.

4. In the first several paragraphs of her essay, Hogan writes about how she grew, as a tree grows, into “a traditionally-minded Native woman” and a writer. What experiences helped her grow? In what ways have you connected with your identity? What people and experiences have influenced you?

Step 5: Integrating Language Skills

You may assign your students one of the following projects or ask them to choose a project to complete individually or in a group of three or four students. Ask your students to complete their projects as written reports or to prepare oral presentations.

1. For Hogan, nature—trees, birds, animals and even insects—inspires her thoughts and her writing. Do you have a special connection with nature or an object you treasure (perhaps a gift from someone important to you) that brings special thoughts or feelings to mind? Compose a poem or a short writing that reveals those thoughts and feelings. In your poem, describe with specific details how an element of nature (for Hogan it was the mustang) or your possession looks, feels, or smells. (Reread Hogan’s poem to see how carefully she describes the appearance of the mustang.)
2. Hogan writes about the traditional values, ancestral knowledge, and the history of Native Americans as a way to remember and respect these cultures. Think about the traditional values your family holds, the customs and knowledge your ancestors have passed down to you, and your family’s history. Make a list of your family’s values and customs. Using your list, create a poster or write an essay about your family’s history. Include any traditional values or customs you observe, special knowledge or talents your family has passed on to you or other members of your family, and any events that have been important to your family.
3. Find another poem by Linda Hogan through the Internet or in a library. Prepare a presentation for your classmates in which you read the poem and discuss its meaning.
4. Use the Internet or library resources to find more information about one of the subjects below. Then write a report or prepare a presentation of your findings for your classmates.
 - Linda Hogan
 - Chickasaw Nation
 - The Endangered Species Act
 - Other American Indian nations, such as the Seminole or Kiowa
 - The Trail of Tears

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