

Using
Like Water for Chocolate
by Laura Esquivel

to Experience Critical Lenses

"La sangre sin fuego hierve - Blood boils without flame"



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Introduction

Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel is a beautifully written novel that offers seniors a chance to experience literature from another culture, as well as one written in a strong female voice. It is a heady introduction to Magical Realism. The book is enjoyable and easy to read, yet offers many levels of understanding that allows the 12th grade common assignment with its critical lenses to be successfully applied.

The **Enduring Understanding** that guided our lesson planning was the understanding that there are different ways of seeing. We want students to see that there is no absolute truth, that versions of “the truth” are dependent on a person’s viewpoint. Critical lenses are an excellent way of coming to this understanding.

Like Water for Chocolate is a rich text for exploring some of the essential questions that all of us face in life. **Essential Questions** we hope the students can answer through reading this novel are:

- What is essential for a person to live a meaningful life?
- What affect does our family and birth order have on us and on those around us?
- What affect do our traditions and culture have on us and on those around us?
- As people, what universal things make us the same, even if we have different foods, family structures and social rules?

We understand that this is a very ambitious project, and we encourage all teachers to adapt the schedule and task to the students they have. Knowing your own students and their strengths is the basis of all good teaching. What we have produced is a suggested layout that we hope helps you. In our calendar we have left spaces and provided sample lessons you might wish to use or adapt, according to your needs. Our diverse range of students guided our planning.

Teacher Backgrounder: Critical Lenses

The PPS High School Language Arts 12th Grade Course Guide includes a suggested topic/theme of “examining and using critical lenses” in the interpretation of literature. The present document is an attempt to lay out what that might look like in a five-week unit organized around a specific novel, Laura Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate*.

What is a “critical lens?” In simplest terms, it is a set of questions that a reader might bring to a text in order to open it up in a fruitful way. An “enduring understanding” students should take away from this unit is the insight that the same text has within it the potential for a variety of valid, significant and interesting interpretations, depending on the critical lens used to examine it.

An immediate difficulty presents itself, however, in introducing this subject. Although humans have been discussing different approaches to the interpretation of literature since Aristotle wrote the *Poetics*, there is no discipline-wide consensus about which critical theories are most important to teach, or even what to call them!

Accordingly, we begin this backgrounder for the unit with a thumbnail set of definitions. Our objective here has been to demystify this somewhat intimidating subject and to provide functional definitions of the most important critical lenses that teachers and students can use as an entrée into this fascinating subject.

For teachers looking for a more fully developed discussion of the meaning of a particular literary theory/lens, we note the following readily accessible resources. First, PPS' newly acquired 12th grade textbook, *Access Literature* (Thomson Wadsworth, 2006) has a section (Chapter 34, pp. 1479-1491) that offers well-developed definitions of twelve different critical lenses. The Thompson text also demonstrates the application of those critical approaches while variously analyzing a short story by Eudora Welty, "A Worn Path." Second, a previous PPS summer literacy project (2001) curriculum guide written by Tim Harding, Pam Hooten, Anne Jackson, Kim Patterson and Doug Winn and based on the work of Deborah Appleman, "Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents," has a conversational and easy-to-understand explication of eight of the most common critical lenses. Be forewarned, however. Even within these two sources, there are inconsistencies and unresolved differences in nomenclature.

In this teacher's guide, we have framed the explanation of each critical lens in three sections. The first is a clear and economical definition suitable for use by students; the second is a sampler of the kinds of questions that a reader using a particular critical perspective would tend to ask of a text. The third—for the teacher's benefit—is a discussion of any controversies or overlaps between our working definition and that which you might encounter in other sources.

Happy trails!

Teacher's Aid – Critical Theories Possible Definitions

FORMALIST CRITICISM (aka “New Criticism”)

Definition: “The text, the text, and nothing but the text.” The basic commitment of Formalism is to a close reading of literary texts. Formalist critics argue that in analyzing a work, the only evidence worth considering is that which is intrinsic to the text (within the work itself) and nothing extrinsic (outside the work), need be considered. Formalist critics explore questions of technique as an entrée into meaning. They seek to understand how an author or poet employs figures of speech, symbolism, narrative frames and the other literary tools at his or her disposal to achieve an artistic “unity of effect.” In sum, the Formalist says that a work of literature must stand or fall on its own merits.

Recurring Question: How do the literary elements found in a particular text work together to achieve a unified artistic effect?

FYI: There is good general agreement concerning the meaning of Formalism/New Criticism. Students will recognize that what they have been coached to do in school often amounts to seeing the work of art through the Formalist critical lens.

BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM

Definition: The biographical critic studies events in the life of the author in order to determine how they may have influenced the author's work.

Recurring Question: What real life event or personality inspired the author to create a given plot twist or character? Where does real life leave off and the imagination take over?

FYI: Sometimes (as in the above-referenced “Critical Encounters in High School English,”) this approach has been referred to as “psychological” criticism.

HISTORICAL CRITICISM

Definition: Historical critics examine the social and intellectual milieu in which the author wrote. They consider the politics and social movements prevalent during the time period of the text's creation. They do so in order to determine how the literature under examination is both the product and shaper of society.

Recurring Question: How did the text in question influence contemporary events and how did contemporary events influence the author's creative choices?

FYI: “New Historicists” like Michael Foucault take this avenue of inquiry one step further by arguing that each historical period is rife with competing versions of the truth. They maintain that a single, oracular truth is ultimately unknowable and that readers should open themselves up to a more democratic approach to literature, embracing a broader variety of texts as worthy of study.

FEMINIST CRITICISM

Definition: The primary agenda of Feminist critics is to investigate how a literary work either tends to serve or to challenge a patriarchal (male dominated) view of society. They maintain that literature should be analyzed with the goal of explaining how the text exemplifies or reveals important insights about sex roles and society's structure. They point out that the traditional “canon” – those works

long deemed to be the best that has been thought and said in human culture – tend to define females as “other,” or as an object, compared to the male’s privileged subject status. Feminist criticism focuses on social relationships, including the patterns of thought, behavior, values, enfranchisement and power between the sexes. It is “a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read...” (Judith Fetterly)

Recurring Question: How does the text mirror or question a male-dominated (phallogocentric) view of reality?

FYI: This lens is also sometimes called “Gender Criticism.” An important implication of Feminist criticism is the pressing need to open up the “canon” to include previously ignored texts by women.

MARXIST CRITICISM

Definition: This is criticism inspired by the historical, economic and sociological theory of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Its focus is on the connections between the content or form of a literary work and the economic, class, social or ideological factors that have shaped and determined it. Marxist criticism is perpetually oriented to investigating the social realities that condition works of art. Its preoccupations are with matters of class status, economic conditions, what is published and what is repressed in the literary marketplace, the preferences of the reading public, and so forth.

Recurring Question: Who has the power/money in society? Who does not? What happens as a result?

FYI: Marxist criticism resembles Feminist criticism insofar as it is “engaged” in the world; its purpose is to ferment change, especially in the cause of addressing economic injustice, by stimulating discussion and raising “consciousness.”

PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM

Definition: Criticism that analyzes literature from the position that texts express the inner workings of the human mind; this approach often focuses on the choices of humans as moral agents. Leo Tolstoy, the accomplished Russian novelist, believed that the purpose of literature was “to make humans good by choice.” Literature through the power of story has the ability to engage the individual imaginatively in other worlds and other times. It invites the reader to put him or herself in the position of other human beings; to empathize. The Psychological critic is interested in every phase of human interaction and choice as developed in the text. Literature constantly informs us about and leads us to question what it means to be a human being. The Psychological critic closely follows these revelations and takes them as a central subject for analysis.

Recurring Question: What is the text telling us about what it means to be a human being? Would you act like the main character in the same circumstances?

FYI: This literary lens has also been known as “Humanist criticism” in an earlier era. Be careful with this one, however. It is sometimes fused with Psychoanalytic Criticism (see the Thomson text), which is criticism that analyzes literature largely based on the theories of the unconscious control of the psyche of Sigmund Freud. Students often find Psychological Criticism a natural fit since it draws on their own understandings and experiences of how people treat each other.

ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM (aka Mythological Criticism)

Definition: This approach to literature stems from the notion that texts ultimately point out the universality of human experience. Built largely on the psychology of Carl Jung, Archetypal criticism contends that there are certain shared memories that exist in the collective unconscious of the human species, a storehouse of images and patterns, vestigial traces of which inhere in all human beings and which find symbolic expression in all human art, including its literature. (Think, for example, of the spontaneous associations you have while watching a sunset. They are not unique.) Practitioners such as Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell have discerned a complex and comprehensive correspondence between the basic story patterns of humans – comedy, romance, tragedy and irony – and the myths and archetypal patterns associated with the seasonal cycle of spring, summer, fall and winter. The death/rebirth theme is said to be the archetype of archetypes.

Recurring Question: What universal patterns of human experience are evidenced and are being explored in the text?

FYI: Students enjoy this form of criticism when they are helped to recognize its power in interpreting mega-hit entries from the popular culture such as “Star Wars” or “Groundhog Day.” However, it does take a fair amount of bolstering to acquaint students with some of the archetypal patterns as a point of entry.

READER RESPONSE THEORY

Definition: This theory notes that a literary text is not separate and closed-off; rather, its meaning is completed when the individual reader comes in contact with it and in the course of reading constructs a new version of what the text is saying. Reader Response theory notes that reading is ultimately a personal and idiosyncratic activity. For this very reason, this undoubtedly true “theory” does not qualify as a “critical lens” because it preeminently champions the undoubted right of each individual to his or her own opinion about a piece of writing without the need to justify or otherwise defend one’s perceptions. In school, students are invited to respond to a text subjectively all the time. This happens, for example, when teachers ask them to “make connections” between the text and their own experience and knowledge of the world. Reader response is how most people spontaneously react to literature. It is healthy, indispensable, and inherently subjective and, for that reason, not what we are trying to coach students to accomplish when writing a literary analysis paper.

Recurring Question: How did you like the book?

FYI: Notice that we have made reference to “reader response” as a theory about how people make sense of text and not as a critical lens—a term we reserve for a set of ideas used to build an objective, provable case for the interpretation of a text. Many commentators (see both the PPS and Thomson resources) do not make this distinction.

Monday	Tuesday	Block Day
<p>(1) Reading Schedule [month] shows our homework schedule. Pre-reading prompt; what effect does your birth order have on your place in the family? Intro to Magic Realism</p>	<p>(2) Lens Intro; definitions + art activity ~ conceptual drawing of lens. [January]</p>	<p>(3) Intro to Lenses using poetry, “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” by Keats (?) Discussion of Jan/ Magic Realism Homework; Character Conflict Map</p>
<p>(5) Reader Response to Gertrudis going to brothel Film Clip; Gertrudis/quail/rose petal meal Historical Info on Calendario [March]</p>	<p>(6) Discussion of News Homework Video Clips of news as necessary to get discussion going SSR/Work Day</p>	<p>(7) Forming reading groups w/lens Handout - double entry assignment In groups go back over the first three months for double-entry [April]</p>
<p>(9) Small Group discussion Preparing for Presentations [June]</p>	<p>(10) Fish Bowl Intro Activity</p>	<p>(11) Fish Bowl Presentations - Formalist Small Group discussion Art/food assignment [July]</p>
<p>(13) Finish art/food assignment Small Group discussion [September]</p>	<p>(14) Presentations – Feminist [October]</p>	<p>(15) Discussion prompt – who will Tita choose and why? Small Group discussion Intro to Analytical Essay – timeline for next week</p>
<p>(17) Essay Writing Craft Lesson – intro/thesis</p>	<p>(18) Essay Writing Craft Lesson – embedding quotes</p>	<p>(19) Essay Writing Nov/Dec Film Clips – eating the matches. Discussion on difficulties of showing magic realism on film and differences between film/book</p>

Criteria and Standards for *Like Water For Chocolate*

Criteria	Teaching Outline/ Strategies	Writing Craft Lessons	Literacy Standards
Literary Text	-Concept Map -Paralogue -Socratic Seminar -Historical background -Connect Lenses to the text		12.8.1 ID sequence of events, main ideas, details 12.9.1 ID themes conveyed through characters, actions, images in world lit. 12.9.2 Characterization 12.9.3 Infer cause and effect 12.9.4 Plot events 12.910 Critical lenses to world literature Lit. Devices' functions 12.10.1 Characteristics of genres 12.10.2 Impact of ironies 12.10.3 Stereotypical characters Story elements show place, time period, es 12.10.8 Author's attitude show tone 12.10.11 Universal themes in world literature 12.10.14 Structural elements of plot 12.10.15 Work of world literature relates to historical period
Writing	-Interior Monologue -Essay -Poetry	Embedding Quotes Body of Support Writing a Thesis	12.12.1 Ideas and content 12.12.2 Organization 12.12.3 Voice 12.12.4 Word Choice 12.12.5 Sentence Fluency 12.12.6 Conventions 12.12.6.1 spelling 12.12.6.2 grammar 12.12.6.3 punctuation 12.12.6.4 capitalization

			12.12.6.5 handwriting 12.13.2 Expository writing 12.13.5 Expository writing; response to literature 12.13.6 Narrative writing 12.13.7 Reflective writing
Speaking	-Small Group Presentations -Expanding Discussion -Class Discussion	Fish Bowl Presentations	Standard 16: Group Meetings Discussions 12.16.1 Appropriate turn-taking behaviors 12.16.2 Actively soliciting another person's opinion 12.16.3 Not dominating and giving reasons for opinions expressed 12.16.4 Respond appropriately to comments and ?s 12.16.5 Volunteer contributions 12.16.6 Clarify, illustrate or expand on a response; ask classmates for similar explanations
Reading	-Dialogue Journal -Visual Clues -Concept Map -Expanding Discussion -Silent Discussion -Socratic Seminar -Fish Bowl Discussion -Drawing into Discussion -Metaphorical Drawing -Read/Analyze poetry		Standard 1: decoding and word recognition Standard 2: Listen to and read informative, narrative and literary texts Standard 3: Vocabulary 12.3.4 Figurative expressions, comparisons and analogies 12.3.5 Denotative and connotative words Standard 7: Evaluative Comprehension: Examine content and structure 12.7.4 Writing strategies and elements of author's craft Info on same topic in several passages and articles

Goals/Standards met in *Like Water For Chocolate* Unit

Literature Standards

Standard 8 Literary Text – Literal Comprehension: demonstrating general understanding

12.8.2 ID sequence of events, main ideas, details

12.8.3 ID speaker or narrator

Standard 9 Literary text - Inference Comprehension: Developing an interpretation

12.9.5 Predict future outcomes

12.9.6 Make assertions with evidence

12.9.7 Use textual evidence to interpret world literature

12.9.8 ID themes conveyed through characters, actions, images in world lit.

12.9.9 Qualities of characters

12.9.10 Characterization

12.9.11 Infer cause and effect

12.9.12 Plot events

12.9.11 Critical lenses to world literature

Standard 10 Literary text – Examine content and structure

12.10.4 Literary Devices' functions

12.10.5 Characteristics of genres

12.10.6 Impact of ironies

12.10.7 Stereotypical characters

12.10.8 Stylistic decisions that impact world literature

12.10.9 Literary elements show mood, place, time period, cultures

12.10.10 Author's attitude show tone

12.10.12 Universal themes in world literature

12.10.13 Use of dialogue

12.10.14 Structural elements of plot

12.10.17 Work of world literature relates to historical period

12.10.18 World literature reflects author

Reading Standards

Standard 1: decoding and word recognition

Standard 2: Listen to and read informative, narrative and literary texts

Standard 3: Vocabulary

12.3.6 Figurative expressions, comparisons and analogies

12.3.7 Denotative and connotative words

Standard 7: Evaluative Comprehension: Examine content and structure

- 12.7.4 Writing strategies and elements of author's craft
- 12.7.6 Info on same topic in several passages and articles

Writing Standards

Standard 11: Use writing process across subject areas

Standard 12 Common supported ideas across subject areas

- 12.12.7 Ideas and content
- 12.12.8 Organization
- 12.12.9 Voice
- 12.12.10 Word Choice
- 12.12.11 Sentence Fluency
- 12.12.12 Conventions
 - 12.12.12.1 spelling
 - 12.12.12.2 grammar
 - 12.12.12.3 punctuation
 - 12.12.12.4 capitalization
 - 12.12.12.5 handwriting

Standard 13: Write persuasive, expository, narrative and reflective texts

- 12.13.3 Expository writing
- 12.13.8 Expository writing; response to literature
- 12.13.9 Narrative writing
- 12.13.10 Reflective writing

Dear Parent/Guardian

Date _____

Over the next several weeks the senior class will be reading *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel and viewing film clips that support this novel study. The story is a powerful work of fiction about a woman coming of age, struggling to find love in revolutionary Mexico. The main character, Tita, is a young woman bound by tradition and her family's expectations, and part of her development as an individual involves her sexual awakening.

It is a beautiful and riveting story, one which we think students will learn a great deal from and also enjoy. Many of the issues are universal yet complex; we all have personal stories about how our family, traditions and culture have affected our lives and decisions.

We feel this unit of study has much to offer. Several key scenes, however, involve implied sexual scenes and innuendoes. Students may skip these scenes if they wish. Or, if you would prefer your child not read this novel, please sign below. We will do our best to come up with a comparable alternative.

Sincerely,

(teacher's signature)

(subject)

(date)

Please provide a comparable novel for my student, _____,

(signature of Parent/Guardian)

(Phone/email contact info)

Lesson Plan – Day One

Discovering Magical Realism

Magical Realism is defined on p. 1499 in *Access Literature*: “In fiction, the use of mythical or fantastic details side by side with utterly realistic details.” *Like Water for Chocolate* is best understood when students have a clear sense of what Magical Realism is and how it is manifested in literature. This lesson presents a clear example in its most basic form.

MAGICAL REALISM elements include the following:

- Consciousness beyond death
- Circular story pattern
- Presentation of the fantastic as real.

A discussion of this element is provided on p. 464 in *Access Literature* and observes that magical realism deal with the nonrealistic as evidenced in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings.”

Materials: Select one of the following books, or another that you prefer.

The Frog Prince Continued

The Stinky Cheese Man

Where the Wild Things Are

The Cat in the Hat

1. Read one of the books listed above aloud to class.
2. Have students sit in a semi-circle, and you are the “story person”.
3. After reading the story, list on board or overhead the **magical realism** elements students noticed.
4. In a quick write invent a mythical or fantastic character who meets you and your friends during your routine daily experience.

If you want to take this lesson further “Very Old Man With Enormous Wings” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez can be found in *Access Literature*.

1. This story moves students to ask just what is the real nature of the man with wings?
2. Is he man or beast, angel or devil or is he only a dream?

Writing assignments:

Write a letter as if you live in the village and are relating the strange events surrounding the arrival of the old man. Address your letter to someone who lives in another community.

Create a flyer or poster that advertises opportunities to “meet and greet” the old man and for an additional fee have your picture taken with him.

Write an opinion piece for the newspaper that attempts to debunk his validity.

Lesson Plan – Day Two

Literary lenses

- Purpose To offer students a way to visually explore literary lenses
- Materials Drawing paper, colored pencils, art materials, copies of art selected, student literary lens hand-out.
- Opener Talk with students about the literary lens handout. Talk about perspective and how different people see things differently, depending on the angle they are viewing it from.
- i. Organize students into pairs, handout slips of paper with a different lens written on each one to each pair.
 - ii. Let students know they are going to be visually representing a piece of art through that lens. Have them read through that lens on their handout.
 - iii. Give the students several pieces of art work to choose from; you may want to include characters from fairy tales, i.e.; Cinderella, Beauty. The Statue of Liberty might be another good example. Model the type of thinking they will need to do, if they have a feminist lens how would they view Cinderella (waiting for her prince, has to do housework, etc) The Statue Of Liberty through a formalist lens would look at the metaphor of the torch, book, sword etc.
 - iv. Get the pairs to work on their image
 - v. Students share out their work and orally explain their rationale.

Lesson Plan – Day Three

Handouts --

- Character conflict map.
- “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” by John Keats.
- Individual prompts on strips of paper for small groups to work with.
- Keats biography page handout.

Rationale: Today, we have the initial discussion of the novel. We also build on the visual introduction to the “critical lens” concept by having students work on a short text in small groups that have been given different tasks that necessitate their using different critical lenses. (We chose John Keats’ familiar “La Belle Dame sans Merci” because it connects well with Like Water for Chocolate as a similarly fanciful, romantic piece; because it tells a story in a compact, manageable way; and because it can be read profitably using a variety of critical lenses. However, the general approach outlined here would work with any poem or short story you find congenial for your class. The main point is to work with a brief text so that the emphasis is on analyzing the text with a variety of critical lenses.)

Learning goal: The main goal is to build the students’ grasp of the enduring understanding -- that the same text can be read, fruitfully, in many different ways – by having them directly experience doing so.

Activities:

1. After an initial debrief of the homework, sharing examples of magical realism found in the first chapter, the teacher turns the discussion to the main characters in the novel. What do we know about each? (Make sure students understand the narrative frame of the story – told from the point of view of the grand-niece of the main character, Tita.)
2. Character conflict map activity. Using handouts and working in small groups, students complete a “conflict map” indicating who has a beef with whom over what, as of the end of Chapter 1.
3. Hand out copies of “La Belle Dame Sans Merci.” Put up on your classroom projector a Pre-Raphaelite English painting inspired by the poem (Waterhouse, Dickasee, or Crane all have versions) and ask students to speculate on what is happening in the painting. Do the initial read of the poem in the whole class setting. Have students identify any stumbling blocks to understanding. What time of year is it? How do we know? Where does the speaker change from narrator to the knight? Who can paraphrase what happens, at the literal level, in this poem? Make sure everyone is on board with the basic story line.
4. Arrange students in 8 small groups (or any multiple of four that works for the size of your class.) Give each group one of the following four tasks to carry out with regard to the poem:
 - a) You probably noticed that the last line of each stanza is much shorter than the previous three lines. Come up with an explanation for why the poet chose to employ such an unusual metric.
 - b) The poem’s title means, “The beautiful lady without pity.” Who in contemporary story-telling entertainment – movie, tv, short story or novel – does La Belle Dame

- remind you of? Make as long and accurate a list as possible and note the points of similarity.
- c) The poem is told from the point of view of the narrator and knight. Retell it from the point of view of La Belle Dame, as you imagine her experiencing the described events.
 - d) Using the accompanying biographical material about the life of John Keats, figure out a plausible theory for how Keats's life shows up in this poem.
5. Have students present their findings to the whole class. Teacher helps students towards the following conclusions:
- a) the poetic metric lulls the reader into a dream-like state for three lines then abruptly brings the reader up short via the fourth, truncated line, effectively splashing cold water on the dream. The poem itself follows the same dramatic curve, describing an enchanted encounter between Knight and elfin lady, only to have the enchantment abruptly end and leave the Knight bereft. The movement of each stanza, in other words, imitates the movement of the whole poem.
 - b) make sure students are aware of the stock figure of the "fatal woman" from Delilah or Salome to Cruella de Ville.
 - c) Answers will vary.
 - d) Keats died of TB at an early age. He wrote about romance a good deal more than he experienced it. His real passion was an almost obsessive dedication to poetry; could La Belle Dame represent the muse of poetry?
6. After students have an opportunity to share out their theories and responses to the various prompts, have them turn back to the hand-out with definitions of critical lenses given them on Day 2 of the Unit. See if they can match the prompt to the critical lens they, of necessity, put to use in responding to the poem in small groups. (Help students understand why the "A" prompt corresponds to their having used a Formalist lens; the "B" prompt to Archetypal; "C" to the Feminist lens; and "D" to Biographical Criticism.)

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

John Keats
Spring of 1819

1

O what can ail thee, knight-at arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge* has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

2

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woebegone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

3

I see a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

4

I met a lady the meads*
Full beautiful, a fairy's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

5

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;*
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

6

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A fairy's son.

7

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew*
And sure in language strange she said –
I love thee true.

8

She took me to her elfin grot*
And there she swept, and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

9

And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dreamed – Ah! Woe betide!
The latest* dream I ever dreamed
On the cold hill's side.

10

I saw the pale king's, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death pale were they all;
They cried – “La belle dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall!”*

11

I saw their starved lips in the gloam*
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke and found me here
On the cold hill's side.

12

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

3. *sedge*: reedy plants

13. *meads*: meadowlands

18. *zone*: belt or girdle

26. *manna dew*: food that God provided the Israelites on the flight out of Egypt

29. *grot*: cave

35. *latest*: last

40. *in thrall*: in slavery

41. *gloam*: twilight

John Keats
1795-1821

**(Extracted from Elements of Literature: Sixth Course, Literature of Britain,
Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1989)**

It is surprising Keats became a poet at all, and surely a wonder that, when he died at the age of twenty-five, he had accomplished enough to become one of our major poets.

John Keats did not have most of the advantages a poet often needs to get started. His parents ran a London livery stable and both died before he was fifteen. After two years in a school where his literary interests were encouraged, he was apprenticed at the age of fifteen to learn medicine. Keats saw something of his own country as a young man, but his only foreign travel was a desperate trip to Italy when he was dying. . . . He had friends and supporters who recognized his poetic genius, but he never enjoyed a close collaborative relationship with another poet. He seems to have been always conscious of his small physical stature (barely five feet tall) and there can be no doubt he lived in close acquaintance with death and the fragile nature of human life.

We have to measure Keats's life in weeks and months not in years. He was forced to grow up quickly. Tuberculosis killed his mother in 1810, his brother Tom in 1818 and John himself in 1821. . . . In 1816, not yet twenty-one, Keats completed his medical studies at Guy's Hospital in London. Before he could be legally licensed as a surgeon and apothecary, he made the momentous decision to become a poet. The harsh reviews of his first book of poetry (1818) stung him and added to the periodic doubts that made his dedication to poetry sometimes seem an awful burden.

After Tom's death in December 1818, Keats had little more than a year to make what he could of his determination to lead a "literary life." Great passages and nearly perfect poems poured from him in that miraculous time. Already in failing health, he never knew the greatness of his achievements, which might at least have given him the consolation of literary success. He had fallen in love – her name was Fanny Brawne—but his poor health and money problems kept him from marrying. "I am three and twenty," he wrote despairingly in March 1819, "with little knowledge and middling intellect. It is true that in the height of enthusiasm I have been cheated into some fine passages, but that is nothing."

In the next eight months he wrote a series of glorious poems. Yet he lamented in a November letter to younger brother George, "Nothing could have in all its circumstances fallen out worse for me than the last year has done, or could be more damping to my poetical talent." Three months later he coughed up blood. His medical training and the nursing of Tom made the truth obvious. "That drop of blood is my death warrant." His only chance, a slim one, was to live in a warmer climate. . . . Following a long and exhausting sea journey, Keats settled in Rome in late 1820. There he died in February 1821. Before the summer was over, Shelley had written his powerful elegy for Keats, "Adonais," in which he described the Protestant cemetery in Rome where Keats was buried as "that camp of death." Shelley himself would follow in 1822.

The stark sadness of Keats's life heightens, by contrast, our awareness of the distinguishing qualities of his poems. They are not bleak, but rich in sensuous detail. They are not subdued, but exciting representations of intense emotional experiences. They are not heavy with resignation but full of what the imagination, with what Keats called "the ardor of pursuit," can seize and enjoy in life. . . .

Lesson Plan – Day 4
Watching Film Clips

Like Water for Chocolate, 1993

Directed by Alfonso Arau

Screenwriter: Laura Esquivel

Running Time: 2 hours, 24 minutes

Rating: R

Objective: The film clip provides a visual for students to better understand the traits that distinguish the genre of magical realism.

Note: students should have read chapters **January** and **February** to be prepared for today’s viewing.

Activity: Looking back on chapters **January** and **February**, students will briefly describe 2 or 3 events that are examples of magical realism in the novel. For each of these events, they will describe how they imagine that it will be filmed. Consider such things as costumes, props, music, and acting. As you watch, jot down notes on how the scene was actually filmed. What is different than the book, similar, different from your expectations?

(**Note:** See film handout for recording observations)

Viewing:	Chapter 1 -- Opening Credits:	Tita’s birth
	Chapter 2 -- Pedro Declares His Love:	Tita cries into the wedding cake batter.
	Chapter 3 --Chabelah Wedding Cake	Wedding guests begin to cry as they eat Tita’s cake.

1. **Scene:** (pp.)

How do you expect it will be filmed?	How was it filmed? Changes?

2. **Scene:** (pp.)

How do you expect it will be filmed?	How was it filmed? Changes?

3. **Scene:** (pp.)

How do you expect it will be filmed?	How was it filmed? Changes?

Lesson Plan – Day 5

*The events in **March** provide an excellent opportunity for students to witness Gertrudis' reaction to eating Tita's dish of "Quail in Rose Petal Sauce." Students will again have an opportunity to envision the filming of this scene. Before students fill out the film-viewing sheet with how they imagine the scene will be filmed, ask them to find key passages between pp. 51 – 56. Take a few minutes to read aloud the paragraphs that provide strong imagery. How would they communicate the intense heat that Gertrudis feels after eating the dish? How would they film the shower bursting into flames from her body heat? Or her leaping naked on to Juan's galloping horse?*

Viewing: **Chapter 4 – Quail in Rose Petal Sauce:** Tita's family eats her exquisite dish and experiences sensual dining.

Note: Students will use the film handout in order to record their observations.

Lesson Plan - Day 6

Viewing the News Through A Critical Lens

- Objective Students will be able to see critical lens are applicable to the “real” world
Students will able to synthesize critical lens and use them independently
- Materials Viewing the News Handout, a news clip (can be taped or streamed)
- Opener Teacher will initiate class discussion about the lens students were introduced to. They will show and tell some of the pictures they created earlier in the week showing objects through different lens.
- i) Handout worksheet explaining it is their homework to watch an entire news broadcast, local or national. They have to choose one lens and explain how they saw the news watching it through that lens.
 - ii) Watch a short news clip and brainstorm any ideas they might have on the how the same story might appear through different lens. Write the different ideas up on board, modeling for students the way you want ideas and observations to be written up
 - iii) Answer any clarifying questions or concerns
- Homework Finish assignment

Name _____ Period _____

Date, time and channel of news broadcast: _____

Basic content of news broadcast: _____

Lens used _____

Write a brief analysis of each news story through your chosen lens. Remember to think about the presenters, the language used, the story and any bias or slant you noticed. Think deeply and critically.

Lesson Plan – Day 7

Assigning Reading Groups

Rationale: At this point in the Unit, students have been introduced to the various critical lenses and have read the first quarter of the novel. Today, they will form into small groups of between 3-5 students whose assignment will be to read the rest of the novel together while adopting the perspective of one of the following four critical approaches: Formalist, Psychological, Feminist or Archetypal. The work they do as individuals and in small groups will prepare them for the capstone assignment for the unit: writing an analytical paper from the perspective of their specific critical lens (PPS’s 12th grade anchor assignment for 2007-8.)

Today’s Activities:

1. Distribute hand out sheet describing the remainder of the unit, including student responsibilities as individuals, members of their small group and Discussion Leader.
 - a) Individual responsibilities include:
 - Keeping a double-entry journal for each of the remaining chapters (“May” through “December”) of the novel. Key quotes are placed on one side of the double entry journal that relate to the critical lens the student is looking at the text through. The second column is for reacting to the selected quotes and, especially, looking for patterns in them that relate to potential themes. (Homework is due at the beginning of class for each chapter according to the reading schedule. It is critical that this work be completed on time since it serves as the starting point for the small group discussion. We recommend that teachers date-stamp the double-entry journal entries at the beginning of class to reinforce the importance of being on time with homework.)
 - Participation in discussion in the small group.
 - Writing the anchor paper at the end of the unit.
 - b) Group responsibilities include:
 - Conducting regular conversations about the book that focus on possible topics relating to the assigned critical lens. Students discuss anything that might be unclear about the reading and help each other see the text through the perspective of the critical lens.
 - Taking part in a scheduled Literary Salon, a semi-rehearsed, free-flowing, intelligent conversation about the book and the interesting ideas and insights flowing out of the group’s critical lens work. This conversation takes place in a “fish-bowl” setting, with the rest of the class listening in to the performance and making comments on what they noticed after its completion.
 - c) Discussion Leader responsibilities include:
 - Generating open-ended questions for the assigned reading segment that seek to clarify any confusion over what has been read; and that raise issues pertaining to the assigned critical lens.
 - Bringing two copies of the discussion questions to class on the “read by” date. One of these goes to the teacher at the beginning of class and the other is used by the Discussion Leader to help moderate the discussion;
 - Leading discussion on the day he or she has signed up for in his/her group;
 - Calling another member to make a back-up arrangement if he or she is sick the day of the assigned discussion segment.

2. Go over sheet and answer questions. Stress that the reading journal will serve as the raw material students will comb through and refine on their way to writing their papers. The better the work in the daily journal, the better (and easier to write) the final paper is likely to be.
3. Form groups. There are five discussion days on the reading schedule. Each student must sign up for at least one Discussion Leader opportunity. A copy of the agreed-on Discussion Leader schedule is kept by each member of the group as well as provided to the teacher.
4. Groups begin work by looking at the (already read) first four chapters of the book in terms of their respective critical lens assignments. After their initial discussion, the teacher provides targeted study questions for each of the groups and asks them to address those questions, as well.
5. Each group makes a brief (2-3 minute) presentation to the whole class concerning their initial findings and leads they are pursuing in connection with their respective critical lenses.

Like Water for Chocolate
Model Reading Calendar* for
Critical Lens Discussion Groups

Members of Group:

Name	Contact
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Reading Segments:

By	Read Through	Discussion Leader
Instructional Day 2	“January” (p. 19)	
Day 4	“February” (p. 41)	
Day 5	“March” (p. 60)	
Day 7	“April” (p. 81)	
Day 8	“May” (p. 101)	_____
Day 9	“June” (p. 118)	_____
Day 11	“July” (p. 139)	_____
Day 12	“August” (p. 159)	
Day 13	“September” (p. 181)	_____
Day 14	“October” (p. 203)	
Day 15	“November” (p. 224)	_____
Day 16	“December” (p. 246)	

*Please note: Instructional days do not equal calendar days. Students have approximately one month to read the book.

Lesson Plan – Day Nine
Paralogue Graphic Organizer

Complete the following graphic organizer. Be sure to use a different lens to examine each quote and **provide at least three reasons** or justifications for applying the particular lens to the quote. The lenses you should use are psychological, formalist, feminist, or archetypal. Bear in mind that each quote can be evaluated in light of more than one lens; your job is to select a single lens to evaluate each quote and provide adequate justification for your choice.

QUOTE	RETELL THE QUOTE IN YOUR OWN WORDS	EXAMINE IN LIGHT OF A LENS
<p>Life had taught her that it was not that easy; there are few prepared to fulfill their desires whatever the cost, and the right to determine the course of one’s own life would take more effort than she had imagined. (169)</p>		
<p>... Tita was literally washed into this world on a great tide of tears that spilled over the edge of the table and flooded across the kitchen floor. (7)</p>		
<p>The truth! The truth! Look, Tita, the simple truth is that the truth does not exist; it all depends on a person’s point of view. (191)</p>		
<p>Unquestionable, when it came to dividing, dismantling, dismembering, desolating, detaching, dispossessing, destroying, or dominating, Mama Elena was a pro. (97)</p>		

Lesson Plan – Day 10

The Metacognition of Small Group Discussion

Rationale: At this point in the Unit, students in their Critical Lens Groups have had two small group discussion sessions and are on the threshold of their Literary Salon performances. (The Formalist group(s) is/are scheduled to initiate this activity on Day 11; Psychological Lens group(s) goes on Day 12; Feminist Lens group on Day 14; and Archetypal Lens group on Day 16). Today’s activity is designed to heighten student awareness of what makes for a successful discussion.

Activities:

1. “Metacognitive.” Put the word on the dry-erase board. What does it mean? After fielding some attempts, give a definition: it means “thinking about thinking”; in other words, being aware of what your mind is doing as you execute a task. Explain that we have been having small group discussions for years in English class; today, we’re going to investigate the dynamics of a good discussion.
2. Students are seated in the whole class arrangement. Ask them to individually brainstorm a list of those behaviors evident around the table that support a successful small group discussion as well as a list of in-class those behaviors that undermine the group discussion. Write their lists in the in-class writing section of their English notebooks. Emphasize that you are looking for in-class behaviors. “Not doing the reading” would not be a good candidate for a negative behavior because that took place before the class started. “Not participating in the conversation” would be, because that is an observable behavior taking place around the table.
3. After students have had a chance to make their lists, have them move to their small groups. Their task is to share their findings and prioritize their “top 5” pro-discussion behaviors and “top 5” discussion killers.
4. After groups have completed this task, move the discussion to the whole class setting. Ask each group to give only their top “do” and “don’t” behavior. (If they hear their top items mentioned, simply cross it off and go to the next one when your group’s turn comes around. The teacher keeps a running summary of the two lists on the board at the front of class. Eventually, the class ends up with a revealing set of “do’s” and “don’ts.” (See the next page for a list of some of the most typically mentioned behaviors)
5. After class, copy down the class list. It makes for a useful reference when assessing the Literary Salon performances; also, it can be used as a gentle reminder in the remaining small group sessions when you see one of the negative behaviors being exhibited.

Small Group metacognitive awareness

Good stuff to do:

- build on each other’s comments
- speak up and have an opinion
- actively draw quieter members into the conversation – “what do you think?”
- have book open and frequently refer to text for support
- pay attention
- show enthusiasm
- clarify confusing issues
- acknowledge the value of other opinions
- disagree without being disagreeable; (clash is a sign of involvement)
- keep it moving in terms of introducing new, relevant ideas
- ask open-ended questions
- make analogies and connections to other experiences and texts

Behaviors to avoid:

- head on desk, slouching in seat, “I’m not here” body language
- not paying attention
- starting a side conversation
- interrupting the speaker
- one person dominating the air time
- ignoring someone’s comment
- sarcasm, put down’s, insults
- couch potato passivity
- introducing a totally unrelated topic, like who is going with whom to the prom
- going to the bathroom

Lesson Plan – Day 14

Odes: Ode to Conger Chowder
Ode to the Lemon

Objectives: Student will understand the meaning of *ode* by reading the odes of Pablo Neruda.
Students will review *simile* and *metaphor*
Students will write an ode to their favorite food, fruit or vegetable.

- *Ode* means “To sing the praises of something”. Usually odes were written to praise a person who had an impact on his/her society.
- What is Neruda praising?
- Students will read Pablo Neruda’s “Ode to Conger Chowder.”
- How does Neruda make this ordinary thing so extraordinary, so special?
- Students read his ode a second time, underlining descriptive phrases that they find memorable.
- Using the simile/metaphor organizer, ask students to identify their descriptive phrases by placing them in the appropriate column.
- Students come to some conclusions about the poem.
Neruda’s ode is to an ordinary thing that he makes extraordinary.
The poet uses simile, metaphor and vivid descriptors to achieve this.
- For additional modeling, students will read “Ode to the Lemon” and again look at Neruda’s poem for its use of simile, metaphor, and imagery. *This ode includes a Spanish translation. If a student speaks/reads Spanish, have a *duet reading* of this poem.
Students will like hearing the two languages simultaneously read!

Writing Prompt: Write an ode to your favorite food, fruit, or vegetable. Your ode should be at least 40 lines (similar in length to the models used in class) and incorporate simile, metaphor, and vivid description.

Pablo Neruda
Ode To Conger Chowder

<p>In the storm-tossed Chilean sea lives the rosy conger, giant eel of snowy flesh. and in Chilean stewpots. along the coast, was born the chowder, thick and succulent, A boon to man. You bring the conger, skinned, to the kitchen (its mottled skin slips off like a glove, leaving the grape of the sea exposed to the world), naked, the tender eel glistens, prepared to serve our appetites. Now you take garlic, first, caress that precious ivory, smell its irate fragrance, then blend the minced garlic with onion and tomato until the onion</p>	<p>is the color of gold. Meanwhile steam our regal ocean prawns, and when they are tender, when the savor is set in a sauce combining the liquors of the ocean and the clear water released from the light of the onion, then you add the eel that it may be immersed in glory, that it may steep in the oils of the pot, shrink and be saturated. Now all that remains is to drop a dollop of cream into the concoction, a heavy rose, then slowly deliver the treasure to the flame, until in the chowder armed the essences of chile, and to the table come, newly wed, the savors of land and sea, that in this dish you may know heaven.</p>
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Ode to Conger Chowder
Descriptor Columns

<i>Similes</i>	<i>Metaphors</i>
<p>French fries go into the pan like the morning swan's snowy feathers and emerge half-golden.</p>	<p>The lemon is a universe of gold. The tuna is a bullet from the ocean depths.</p>

Ode to the Lemon
Oda al limón

Pablo Neruda

<p>From those flowers loosened by the moon's light, from that smell of exasperated love, sunk in fragrance, yellow emerged from the lemon tree, from its planetarium lemons came down to the earth.</p> <p>Tender merchandise! The coasts, the markets filled up with light, with barbaric gold, and we opened two halves of a miracle, congealed acid that ran from the hemispheres of a star, and nature's most intense liqueur, unchanging, alive, irreducible, was born from the coolness of the lemon, from its fragrant house, from its acid and secret symmetry.</p>	<p>De aquellos azahares desatados por la luz de la luna, de aquel olor de amor exasperado, hundido en la fragancia, salió del limonero el Amarillo, desde su planetario bajaron a la tierra los limones.</p> <p>Tierna mercadería! Se llenaron las costas, los mercados, de luz, de oro silvestre, y abrimos dos mitades de milagro, ácido congelado que corría desde los hemisferios de una estrella, y el licor más profundo de la naturaleza, intransferible, vivo, irreductible, nació de las frescura del limón, de su casa fragante, de su ácida, secreta simetría.</p>
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Lesson Plan – Day 15

Pablo Neruda love poem

XVII—“I don’t love you as if you were the salt-rose”

Objective: Students will read Pablo Neruda’s poem about love in order to bridge discussion about love and specifically, the various representations of love in Laura Esquivel’s **Like Water For Chocolate**.

Students will list the love relationships in the novel:

Tita / Pedro
Rosaura / Pedro
Tita / John
Mama Elena / the mulatto
Gertrudis / Juan
Gertrudis / José Treviño
Tita / Roberto / Esperanza
Tita / Nacha
Tita / Chenchu
the Federales / the Revolutionaries (love of country)

Students will determine the various representations of love, based on their understanding of these relationships (i.e., physical, spiritual, maternal, fraternal, patriotic).

Students will revisit the text to support their discussion about Tita’s choice.

On Page 131, the narrator says, “Tita was beginning to wonder if the feeling of peace and security that John gave her wasn’t true love, and not the agitation and anxiety she felt when she was with Pedro.” Why does Tita choose Pedro? At times in the story, she is frustrated with Pedro. Pedro’s jealous behavior is a strong contrast to John’s exemplary (saintly) character, “I would be delighted to be your companion for the rest of your life—but you must think over very carefully whether I am the man for you or not. . .” (p. 223)

Writing Prompt: Using beginning words and phrases from Neruda’s love poem to structure your poem (See Handout), write a love poem from the point-of-view of a character from the novel (i. e. Pedro’s love poem to Tita or Tita’s to Ersperanza). Your poem should include details from the text that are indicative of the relationship.

Love Poem for _____

I don't love you as if _____

Or _____

I love you _____

I love you as _____

and _____

I love you without _____

I love you _____

I love you _____

but _____

so _____

so _____

Lesson Plan – Day 16

Essay Prompts for capstone writing project

The four essay prompts listed below for the novel *Like Water for Chocolate* correspond to the four critical lenses which students have been working with over the last few weeks. An essay written in response to any one of them would satisfy the requirements for the PPS 12th grade anchor paper for the 2007-8 academic year. Alternatively, students are welcome to choose a topic of their own device in responding to the generic PPS prompt (see following):

Write an analytical essay about a literary text, using a critical lens such as formalist, psychological, archetypal, or socio-historical (feminist, Marxist, biographical, historical/cultural, etc.). Clearly define the critical lens used and develop your interpretation with textual evidence. Examine one or two of the following literary elements in your interpretation: characterization, language, setting, conflict, or themes.

Formalist prompt:

Food and its preparation is a central organizing metaphor in *Like Water for Chocolate*. Discuss the symbolic significance of cooking as it is developed over the course of the novel and explain how the working out of this conceit reinforces the main message of the novel's conclusion.

Psychological prompt:

Tradition is an indispensable force in the functioning of any human society. Without tradition, we would have to invent a meaning for each new situation. What is the role of tradition in the interactions of the De la Garza family? In *Like Water for Chocolate* would you describe tradition as a net force for self-actualization of the individual or for repression. What is the novel's message regarding tradition?

Feminist prompt:

What is it to be a good woman? *Like Water for Chocolate* presents several models for strong, powerful or otherwise influential women in terms of its developed characters: Mama Elena, Rosaura, Gertrudis and Tita. Which of these characters is the best feminist, in your view as supported by the textual evidence? Be sure and define your terms in the course of your essay.

Archetypal prompt:

There are repeated magic incidents and dream-world or fairy tale-like descriptions of events in *Like Water for Chocolate*. How does the frequent resort to "magical realism," as this technique has been labeled, shape the reader's experience of this novel and connect it to a larger romantic pattern?

Sometimes it is just not worth re-inventing the wheel, so we have included two excellent craft lesson references developed by our colleagues.

Lesson Plan – Day 17

Craft Lesson – Developing A Working Thesis

Please refer to “Developing A Working Thesis” within the 2006 curriculum guide for *Of Mice and Men*.

Lesson Plan – Day 18

Craft Lesson – Embedding Quotes

Please refer to “Embedding Quotes” within the 2006 *Fences* Addendum curriculum guide.

Lesson Plan – Day 19

A Talk Long Overdue Begin scene a few minutes into this chapter where John and his 80-year-old aunt are riding in a carriage to Tita's house for dinner. John's aunt has come from the East Coast to meet Tita before the wedding. Continue running the film through the ending credits.

Objectives: Today's viewing gives students an opportunity to see Tita's dilemma before her wedding to John. Whom will she choose? Pedro or John? Students by now have finished the reading and they know that in the end, Tita chooses to stay with her childhood love, Pedro. What is noteworthy about this scene is its transition ahead in time. When we see the wedding preparation, (sewing the wedding dress, addressing invitations and shelling the walnuts), we assume that it is for Tita's wedding. How does the director keep the viewer unsuspecting? When do we realize that the wedding day is Alex and Esperanza's? How does the director achieve the story's time passage to 1934? What props does he include in several shots that indicate the passage of time? Compare the director's technique with the author's. At what point in **December** do students realize that the wedding day belongs to Alex and Esperanza? What clues from the text support their realization? What clues from the text reveal that the wedding is not John and Tita's? Why do you think Laura Esquivel leads the reader along to believe that the wedding is Tita's? What purpose does Esquivel serve by keeping the reader unaware of the time passage?

Like Water For Chocolate

Tita and Pedro spend their first night together, alone.

Objectives: Again, you may use the film handout to have students describe their expectations of this scene and record what they see. Have students review the imagery of this scene (pp. 243 – 246) before they describe how they would film this magical moment.

How has the director visually used the “box of matches” metaphor to conclude this love story?

Concluding Discussion Questions:

1. Does the film *skillfully* incorporate the *magical realism* that is a significant part of the author's story? Explain. Were there any events that did not successfully adapt to film? Why?
2. Did the film help you better understand the genre of magical realism? Why? Why not? Which does a better job of capturing the imagery of magical realism—the novel or the film? Explain.
3. What changes were made from book to film? Why do you think the author/screenwriter made these adaptations?

Teacher's Aid - Formalist Lens

Definition: “The text, the text, and nothing but the text.” The basic commitment of Formalism is to a close reading of literary texts. Formalist critics argue that in analyzing a work, the only evidence worth considering is that which is intrinsic to the text (within the work itself) and nothing extrinsic (outside the work), need be considered. Formalist critics explore questions of technique as an entrée into meaning. They seek to understand how an author or poet employs figures of speech, symbolism, narrative frames and the other literary tools at his or her disposal to achieve an artistic “unity of effect.” In sum, the Formalist says that a work of literature must stand or fall on its own merits.

Recurring Question: How do the literary elements found in a particular text work together to achieve a unified artistic effect?

January The story begins with a discussion about chopping onions. The narrator uses the topic of onions to draw a comparison between herself and her great-aunt Tita. A key idea in this chapter is the importance of the kitchen to Tita’s understanding of the world. Also, the concepts of *hot* and *cold* as they relate to Tita’s sexual awakening and her emotional well-being are introduced.

1. Find 3-4 phrases that the narrator cites to describe her great-aunt Tita and the importance of the kitchen to her understanding of the world:
 - Tita felt a deep love for the kitchen, where she spent most of her life from the day she was born. (6)
 - This explains the sixth sense Tita developed about everything concerning food. Her eating habits, for example, were attuned to the kitchen routine: (7)
 - Likewise for Tita the joy of living was wrapped up in the delights of food.
 - ...it was very pleasant to savor its aroma, for smells have the power to evoke the past, bringing back sounds and even other smells that have no match in the present. Tita liked to take a deep breath and let the characteristic smoke and smell transport her through the recesses of her memory. (9)
2. Phrases that illustrate the concepts of *hot* and *cold* as they represent Tita’s sexual awakening and her emotional well-being:
 - Tita could not get to sleep that night...How unfortunate that black holes in space had not yet been discovered, for then she might have understood the black hold in the center of her chest, infinite coldness flowing through it. (15)
 - She has been walking to the table carrying a tray of egg-yolk candies when she first felt his hot gaze burning her skin. She turned her head, and her eyes met Pedro’s. (16)
 - It was then she understood how dough feels when it is plunged into boiling oil. (16)
 - The heat that invaded her body was so real she was afraid she would start to bubble—her face, her stomach, her heart, her breasts—like batter, (16)
 - She realized that the hollow sensation was not hunger but an icy feeling of grief. (19)
3. Questions for the Formalist Lens:
 - How important is food to Tita? Why? What does it represent?
 - What do the kitchen and food preparation symbolize for Tita?

- What imagery of food and cooking are used to describe Tita's feelings?
- How are the concepts of *hot* and *cold* used to describe Tita?
- Find a simile or metaphor that the author uses to describe Tita's feelings.

February Tita is in charge of all the food preparation for Rosaura's wedding. A key **theme** in this chapter is the effect of Tita's tears and feelings, as she prepares the food, on those who eventually eat her food. In particular, Tita's tears in the wedding cake batter ultimately cause all the wedding guests to cry as they eat the cake and then vomit. Tita's food is an extension of her life, and in this chapter, she is grieving because she is forced to make a wedding cake for her sister who is marrying the man that Tita thought she would marry. Once again, the reader is reminded of how closely Tita's life is compared to events in the kitchen.

1. Find 3-4 phrases that illustrate the effect of Tita's tears on those who eat the wedding cake she prepared.
 - The moment they took their first bite of cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing. Even Pedro, usually so proper, was having trouble Holding back his tears. (39)
 - But the weeping was just the first symptom of strange intoxication—an acute attack of pain and frustration—that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio and the grounds and in the bathrooms, all of them wailing over lost love. (39)
 - ...she found Nacha lying dead, her eyes wide open, medicinal leaves upon her temples, a picture of her fiancé clutched in her hands. (41)
 - She was swept away in a raging rotting river for several yards; then she couldn't hold back anymore, and she spewed out great noisy mouthfuls of vomit, like an erupting volcano, right before Pedro's horrified eyes. (40)
 -

Questions for the Formalist Lens

- While they are making the wedding cake, what cooking imagery does Nacha use to let Tita know that she knows how she feels?

“Only the pan knows how the boiling soup feels, but I know how you feel, so stop crying, you're getting the meringue watery, and it won't set up properly—go now, go.” (35)

- How do Tita's tears affect the food?
- How does the author use *magical realism* to reinforce the theme that Tita's understanding of life is closely tied to her appreciation of food.

March Tita creates a dish “Quails in Rose Petal Sauce” from the bouquet of roses that Pedro gives her. The dish has strange effects on those who eat it. Each family member's eating experience becomes a metaphor for their sexual experience. Even though Mama Elena forbids Tita to keep the bouquet of roses—Tita's preparation of the exquisite dish represents her ability to transcend Mama Elena's wall of oppression and unite with Pedro through eating the dish Notice again how the author uses imagery of heat.

1. List phrases that illustrate the effect of Tita's dish on those who eat it:
 - But something strange was happening to Gertrudis. On her the food began to act as an aphrodisiac; she began to feel an intense heat pulsing through her limbs. An itch in the

center of her body kept her from sitting properly in her chair. She began to sweat, ... (51)

- ..., but Tita wasn't there, ...It was as if a strange alchemical process had dissolved her entire being in the rose petal sauce,...That was the way she entered Pedro's body, hot, voluptuous, perfumed, totally sensuous. (52)
- With that meal it seemed they had discovered a new system of communication, in which Tita was the transmitter, Pedro the receiver, and poor Gertrudis the medium, the conducting body through which the singular sexual message was passed. (52)
- Her body [Gertrudis] was giving off so much heat that the wooden walls began to split and burst into flame. Terrified, she thought she would be burnt to death, and she ran out of the little enclosure just as she was, completely naked. (54)
- The delicacy of her face, the perfection of her pure virginal body contrasted with the passion, the lust that leapt from her eyes, from her every pore. These things, and the sexual desire Juan had contained for so long...(55)
- Even to set the sun itself ablaze. What then would happen if Gertrudis looked up at a star? Surely the heat from her body, which was inflamed by love, ... (60)

2. Questions for the Formalist Lens

- What does Pedro's bouquet of roses symbolize? Tita's blood? Why do these two ingredients prove to be an "explosive combination" in this dish?
- What images does the author use to symbolize sexual desire?
- How does Tita use food to overcome her mother's oppression?
- What words or phrases characterize Tita's superior cooking skills? ("She was considered the finest exponent of the marvelous art of cooking", "It is a dish for the gods!", "the food seemed to act as an aphrodisiac", "the quail was exquisite")
- What traits of *magical realism* do you find in this chapter?

April By now students should be able to recognize the theme that Tita's love of food extends to her life and the food she prepares reflects her well-being. In this chapter, Tita prepares a mole which again reflects her skill as a cook.

1. 3-4 key phrases that reveal Tita's contentment and sexual awareness of herself:

- Tita, on her knees, was bent over the grinding stone, moving in a slow regular rhythm, grinding the almonds and sesame seeds...Under her blouse, her breasts moved freely,... (66)
- [Pedro]...stopped stock-still in the doorway, transfixed by the sight of Tita in that erotic posture.
- They stayed in this amorous ecstasy until Pedro lowered his eyes and stared steadily at Tita's breasts. She stopped grinding, straightened up, and proudly lifted her chest so Pedro could see it better. (67)

2. Questions for the Formalist Lens

- On Page 79, the narrator says, "Everyone, oddly enough, was in a euphoric mood after eating the mole; it had made them unusually cheerful." Applying your thematic understanding of the connection of Tita's feelings to their effect on the food she prepares,

what **events** have happened in this chapter that would indicate or suggest Tita's contentment?

- Has the nature of her relationship with Pedro changed? How? Compare / Contrast the "Quails in Rose Petal Sauce" encounter with Pedro to her encounter at the opening of this chapter.
- Is Tita changing? What events in the story and character actions are influencing her behavior? What does Tita value?

May Tita learns that her nephew Roberto has died. When Mama Elena orders her to continue working, Tita reacts by tearing apart the sausages they have been making and screams, "Here's what I do with your orders! I'm sick of them! I'm sick of obeying you!" (99) Her attempt to stand up to her mother's cruelty and insensitivity ends when Mama Elena smashes a wooden spoon across her face, breaking her nose. The imagery of Tita naked in the dovecot, when Dr. Brown comes to help her, is in contrast to the opening imagery of the previous chapter, in which Tita is bent over, grinding the almonds and sesame seeds.

1. A list of significant phrases:

- Ever since Pedro, Rosaura, and Roberto had gone to live in San Antonio, Tita had lost all interest in life, except for her interest in feeding worms to a helpless pigeon. (87)
- As she looked for worms, she kept wondering who was feeding Roberto and how he was eating. (93)
- The only thing she accomplished during this period was to quintuple the size of her enormous bedspread. Chenchu came to shake her out of her rueful thoughts; she gave her a few pushes to get her into the kitchen. (93)
- Mama Elena was always such a perfectionist and so careful to get all the air out of the sausage; no one could explain it when they discovered a week later that all the sausages in the cellar were swarming with worms. (99)
- Chenchu found Tita holding the pigeon. She didn't seem to realize it was dead. She was trying to feed it some more worms. (100)
- He found Tita naked, her nose broken, her whole body covered with pigeon droppings. A few feathers were clinging to her skin and hair. As soon as she saw the doctor, she ran to the corner and curled up in a fetal position. (100)
- ...the enormous bedspread...It was so large and heavy it didn't fit inside the carriage. Tita grabbed it so tightly that there was no choice but to let it drag behind the carriage like the huge train of a wedding gown that stretched for a full kilometer. (101)

2. Questions for the Formalist Lens:

- What do the pet birds represent for Tita?
- What images does the author use to portray Tita's defeated spirit?
- Contrast Tita's image at the opening of Chapter 4 "April" (66) with her image in the dovecot when Dr. Brown arrives to help her (100). Why is she defeated? What has she lost? Explain.

- Is Tita's bedspread only a representation of magical realism or is it more than that? What does the bedspread represent for Tita?
- What is your explanation for why the sausages that Mama Elena so carefully stuffed were swarming with worms, one week later?

June For the first time, Tita is removed from the domestic world of the kitchen and the De La Garza ranch. While she is under Dr. Brown's care, she has time to contemplate her desires. Key ideas are the *match* metaphor through which Tita is able to understand her own situation. The imagery of *hands* is repeated several times in this chapter.

1. A list of significant phrases:

- Afterward, John's large, loving hands, had taken off her clothes and bathed her and carefully removed the pigeon droppings from her body, leaving her clean and sweet-smelling. (108)
- Some day, when she felt like talking, she would tell John that, but now, she preferred silence. (108)
- Sometimes Tita didn't even taste her food, which was bland and didn't appeal to her. Instead of eating, she would stare at her hands for hours on end. She would regard them like a baby, marveling that they belonged to her. ..., yet she didn't know what to do with them, other than knitting. She had never taken time to stop and think about these things. At her mother's, what she had to do with her hands was strictly determined,...(109)
- She yearned with all her soul to be borne off by her hands.
- As you see, within our bodies each of us has the elements needed to produce phosphorus. And let me tell you something I've never told a soul. My grandmother had a very interesting theory, she said that each of us is born with a box of matches inside us but we can't strike them all by ourselves; (115)
- That's why it's important to keep your distance from people who have frigid breath. Just their presence can put out the most intense fire,... (116)
- "Because I don't want to." With those words Tita had taken her first step toward freedom. (118)

2. Questions for the Formalist Lens:

- How does Dr. Brown's theory--"the box of matches inside us" serve as a metaphor through which Tita can understand her own situation? Apply the metaphor to Tita's situation?
- While at Dr. Brown's, Tita realizes her own hands for the first time. What do *hands* represent for Tita?
- *Inner Fire* becomes a central image in this story. What does Tita's inner fire symbolize?
- Tita does not speak throughout this chapter. Why is she silent? What do the words she writes on the wall reveal about her inner self?

July Tita recovers her health in this chapter, thanks to Dr. Brown's care and

a bowl of ox-tail soup which Chenchu makes and brings to Tita. The soup evokes memories for Tita that remind her of Nacha, food, and old times together in the kitchen. The whiff of onion in the soup is the device for triggering Tita's cathartic cry.

1. Key phrases from this chapter:

- Soups can cure any illness, whether physical or mental—at least, that was Chenchu's firm belief, and Tita's too, although she hadn't given sufficient credit to it for quite some time. But now it would have to be accepted as the truth. (123)
- About three months ago, after tasting a spoonful of soups that Chenchu had made and brought to Dr. John Brown's house, Tita had returned to her senses. (123)
- She heard John's footsteps coming up the stairs...If only she could talk, tell him how much his presence and his conversation meant to her..., if only she could remember how to cook so much as a couple of eggs, enjoy any kind of food, if only she could...return to life. She noticed a smell that struck her...John opened the door and stood there with a tray in his hands and a bowlful of ox-tail soup! (124)
- Chenchu and Tita laughed reliving those moments, and they cried remembering the steps of the recipe. At last Tita had been able to remember a recipe, once she had remembered the first step, chopping the onion.
- ... John blessed Chenchu and her ox-tail soup for having accomplished what none of his medicines had been able to do—making Tita weep. Sorry to have interrupted, he started to leave the room. Tita's voice stopped him. That melodious voice had not spoken a word for six months. (125)
- It was if Mama Elena's spit had landed dead-center on a fire that was about to catch and had put it out. Inside she felt the effects of snuffing the flame; smoke was rising into her throat, tightening into a thick knot and clouding her eyes and making her cry. (131)
- John held her in his arms just long enough to keep her from falling. His warm embrace saved Tita from freezing. They only touched for a few seconds but it was enough to rekindle her spirit. (131)

2. Questions for the Formalist Lens:

- Why is the ox-tail soup a more powerful healer for Tita than Dr. Brown's medicines? What does the soup *connote* for Tita? Discuss the associations that Tita has with the bowl of soup, other than its literal meaning.
- Tita recalls with Chenchu, the first step of making ox-tail soup: chopping the onion. Where else in the story do you find a reference to chopping onions? What do onions represent (metaphor) in Tita's life?
- What realization does Tita make with Chenchu's visit that is essential to her well-being?
-

August. John asks for Tita's hand in marriage. Tita is hurried to make the dinner before his arrival and Pedro chooses the moment to tell Tita that marrying John is a terrible mistake. Tita is angry with Pedro's opinion and with her sister Rosaura's intent to follow family tradition by making her daughter care for her until the day she dies. As Tita prepares the dinner, simile and metaphor are used to describe her anger and frustration.

1. Key phrases in this chapter:

- The steam rising from the pan mingled with the heat given off by Tita's body. The anger she felt within her acted like yeast on bread dough. She

felt its rapid rising, flowing into every last recess of her body; like yeast in a small bowl, it spilled over to the outside, escaping in the form of steam through her ears, nose, and all her pores. (149)

- Tita was literally “like water for chocolate”—she was on the verge of boiling over. How irritable she was! Even the cooing she loved so much—the sound made by the doves...was annoying. She felt her head about to burst, like a kernel of popcorn. (151)
- As she walked past the window, she saw a strange glow coming from the dark room. Plumes of phosphorescent colors were ascending to the sky like delicate Bengal lights. (158)

2. Questions for the Formalist Lens:

- Find examples of both simile and metaphor that are used to describe Tita’s anger. For each example, identify what is being compared and explain the significance of the things being compared given your understanding of Tita’s character.
- Find the passage that describes Tita’s lovemaking. What words in this description are reminiscent of Dr. Brown’s “box of matches” theory.
- Explain Tita’s experience in terms of the *matches* metaphor.

September Tita makes hot chocolate and Three Kings' Day bread for guests. Although she has many fond memories of the holiday's celebrations throughout her childhood, her usual ability to reminisce as she cooks is thwarted by other worries. She believes she is pregnant and struggles with how she will tell John. The concept of *character foil*, ghosts, and the repetition of hot/cold imagery are key ideas in this chapter as Tita struggles toward her self-realization.

1. Key Phrases in this Chapter:

- To tell the truth, until now the Rosaura-Tita relationship had been like water in boiling oil. (170)
- She felt sure that her fatness, her flatulence, and her foul breath were driving Pedro farther away every day, ... (170)
- As Tita was putting the napkin over the container where she had set the dough to rest, a strong gust of wind banged the kitchen door wide open, causing an icy blast to invade the room. The napkin flew into the air and an icy shiver ran down Tita's spine. She turned around and was stunned to find herself face to face with Mama Elena, who was giving her a fierce look. (172)
- Gertrudis closed her eyes each time she took a sip from the cup of chocolate she had in front of her. Life would be much nicer if one could carry the smells and tastes of the maternal home wherever one pleased. (178)
- She was watching him proudly...Smoking a cigarette, Gertrudis, perfectly at her ease, was regaling them with fantastic stories of the battles she'd been in. (179)

2. Questions For the Formalist Lens:

- The author Laura Esquivel uses the literary device of **alliteration** to describe Mama Elena's destructive ways. In the following passage, **underline** the sentence that is an example of alliteration:

She made her cuts through the rind with such mathematical precision that when she was done, she could pick up the watermelon and give it a single blow against a stone, in a particular spot, and like magic the watermelon rind would open like the petals of a flower, leaving the heart intact on the table. Unquestionably, when it came to dividing, dismantling, dismembering, desolating, detaching, dispossessing, destroying, or dominating, Mama Elena was a pro.

What is **alliteration**?

On page 170, find and write a sentence that uses alliteration to describe Rosaura's medical condition:

- Discuss the role of ghosts in the novel. In this chapter, whose ghost does Tita see? What purpose does the ghost serve?
- A *character foil* is a character whose traits are in direct contrast to those of the principal character. The *foil*, therefore, highlights the traits of the protagonist. Is Gertrudis a *foil*? Why? Why not? How is she different from Tita? Similar to? Why does the author write her into this scene? Do Gertrudis' actions help us better understand Tita?

October This chapter contains a lengthy description of Gertrudis in the kitchen struggling to make her favorite family recipe of cream fritters. In the end, without Tita's help, Gertrudis and Trevino manage to make a good fritter.

1. Key Phrases for This Chapter:

- The truth! The truth! Look, Tita, the simple truth is that the truth does not exist; it all depends on a person's point-of-view. (190)
- Gertrudis needed the recipe; without it she'd be lost! Carefully, she began to read it and try to follow it:
- ..., he was refined and elegant, even in killing. he always did it with perfect dignity. After the capture of the spy, Trevino kept his reputation as a great womanizer. Which was not far from the truth; yet Gertrudis was ever the love of his life. He tried for months to conquer her--without success but never losing hope-- (195)
- They were both ecstatic. Trevino was the happiest. He brought Tita a fritter himself, carried it up to her room on orders from Gertrudis to get Tita's stamp of approval. (197)
- Tita thought of the many times she had germinated kernels or seeds of rice, beans, or alfalfa, without giving any thought to how it felt for them to grow and change form so radically (198)
- Tita took Pedro's hand again. For a moment Rosaura and Tita looked at each other challengingly. Then Rosaura understood that there was nothing for her to do here, (201)

2. Questions for the Formalist Lens:

- Gertrudis tells Tita that *truth* depends on a person's point-of-view. For each of the following characters, write 2 truths that he or she believes given your understanding of the story:

Mama Elena:
Tita:
Rosaura
Gertrudis:
Pedro:
one additional character in the story:

- Trevino and Gertrudis are "ecstatic" over their cream fritters. What might their cooking fritters represent? Consider the narrator's description of their experience in the kitchen. Is their experience an extended metaphor? What is being compared? What is the author's purpose for this extended description?
- How are the themes of *nurturing*, *growth*, and *freedom* incorporated into this chapter? Find examples from the text that support these themes.

November Tita and Rosaura confront each other. Once again, the turmoil of Tita's inner being affects what is happening in the kitchen and magical realism flourishes. Chickens fight, feathers fly and Tita is pulled into the whirlwind.

1. Key phrases in This Chapter:

- She couldn't continue her reflections because the chickens were starting to make a huge ruckus on the patio. (217)
- Tita it doesn't matter to me what you did, there are some things in life that shouldn't be given so much importance, if they don't change what is essential. What you've told me hasn't changed the way I think;..If it's no, I will be the first to congratulate Pedro and ask him to give you the respect you deserve. (223)

2. Questions for the Formalist Lens:

- Tita knows that she is making a decision that will determine her "whole future." Whom will Tita choose, John or Pedro? Why? There are many representations of love in this novel. List and briefly describe them.
- What does the chicken fight symbolize?
- Find textual evidence to support the idea that Tita's inner turmoil affects the magical power of her food.

December Tita and Pedro spend their first night alone.

1. Key Phrases for This Chapter.

- That afternoon when Tita was trying to light the oven, she couldn't find any matches anywhere. John, always gallant, had quickly offered to help her. But that wasn't all! After lighting the fire, he had presented Tita with the box of matches,... (231)
- He didn't care at all for the idea of going to the wedding and having to endure seeing Tita together with John. (231)

- I couldn't sleep that night thinking about asking for your hand right then. I didn't know that it would take twenty-two years before I would ask you to be my wife. (236)
- Tita couldn't answer Pedro. A lump in her throat prevented it. The tears slowly rolled down her cheeks. Her first tears of joy (237).
- When Esperanza told Tita that when she felt Alex's eyes on her body, she felt like dough being plunged in boiling oil, Tita knew that Alex and Esperanza would be bound together forever.
- Toda, instead of feeling a terrible longing and frustration, they felt quite different, tasting these chiles in walnut sauce; they all experienced a sensation like the one Gertrudis had when she ate the quails in rose sauce. (241)
- They were so filled with pleasure that they didn't notice that in a corner of the room Nacha lit the last candle, raised her finger to her lips as if asking for silence, and faded away. (243)
- She remembered then the words that John had once spoken to her: "If a strong emotion suddenly lights all the candles we carry inside ourselves, it creates a brightness that shines far beyond our normal vision and then a splendid tunnel appear..." (244)
- She pulled from her bureau drawer the box of candles that John had given her. She needed to have plenty of fuel in her body...Little by little her vision began to brighten until the tunnel again appeared before her eyes. There at its entrance was the luminous figure of Pedro waiting for her. (245)
- At that moment the fiery bodies of Pedro and Tita began to throw off glowing sparks. They set on fire the bedspread, which ignited the entire ranch. (245)

2. Questions for the Formalist Lens:

- Use your formalist lens to analyze the closing chapter. Consider metaphor, imagery, symbolism, theme and genre, as they relate to Tita's inner journey of self-realization. Use textual evidence to support your analysis.
- **Note:** the film viewing of this scene (Day 19) will address the author's literary technique for fast forwarding the story 22 years, to Alex and Esperanza's wedding day.

Teacher's Aid: The Psychological Lens

PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM

Definition: Criticism that analyzes literature from the position that texts express the inner workings of the human mind; this approach often focuses on the choices of humans as moral agents. Leo Tolstoy, the accomplished Russian novelist, believed that the purpose of literature was “to make humans good by choice.” Literature through the power of story has the ability to engage the individual imaginatively in other worlds and other times. It invites the reader to put him or herself in the position of other human beings; to empathize. The Psychological critic is interested in every phase of human interaction and choice as developed in the text. Literature constantly informs us about and leads us to question what it means to be a human being. The Psychological critic closely follows these revelations and takes them as a central subject for analysis.

Recurring Question: What is the text telling us about what it means to be a human being? Would you act like the main character in the same circumstances?

Essential Questions:

What psychological factors make the character behaves the way they do?

What is the right behavior in the various characters? What is wrong? Why do you feel this?

Do you feel John or Pedro should have ended up with Tita? Explain your reason.

What psychological control did Mama Elena have on her family? To what extends should parents have control?

What was Tita's greatest achievement? Psychologically, how did she overcome?

Chapter 1: January

We are introduced to the lead characters; Tita (the protagonist) and her mother, Mama Elena (the antagonist). We also meet the other sisters Gertrudis and Rosaura. The importance of the kitchen and domestic life is underscored, and the story's lead plot line of the love triangle between Tita – Pedro – Rosaura and Mama Elena's insistence on keeping a live the tradition of the younger daughter never marrying, so as to assure long-term care for the mother.

1. What traditions can you find in Chapter 1? (Tears, sausage, marriage, taking care of mother, love, Christmas rolls)
2. What is a ritual? Pg 9
3. What questions did Tita have about the tradition of the youngest child not marrying and taking care of the aged mother? Pg 11
4. What foods bring about psychological transmission of memories? Pg 9
5. What are some of the fears that Tita had about her mother? What psychological effects did this have upon her thinking? Pg 12
6. On page 15 Pedro declared his never ending love to Tita. What was Pedro thinking when he told his father that he was going to marry Tita's sister? Pg 15 Why did he do it?
7. Why did Tita feel cold and nausea? What did the bedspread have to do with how she felt? Pg 9

Possible writing assignments

1. Just as Tita had questions about the traditions of her family, your family has traditions. Give and example of a family tradition you have and questions that you have about it.
2. Why do you think the author uses food as the basis of his novel? What emotional effects does food have upon us?
3. On pg 12, Mama says, “the lazy man and the stingy man end up walking the same road twice.” What well quoted “sayings” do you hear at home? How do you feel about them?

4. What is never ending love? Give examples from the book of it from Tita's point of view and from Pedro's. Was it the same?

Chapter 2: February

Rosaura and Pedro are married. Tita cries into the wedding cake batter and her tears poison the cake and ruin the wedding. We learn Rosaura and Pedro's sexual relationship is conducted through a "marriage sheet." The love between Tita and Pedro is kept at boiling point. The maid, Nacha, dies.

1. Why does the egg beating have a negative effect on Tita? Explain why it is psychological? pg 26.
2. What does Mama demand of Tita for Rosaura's wedding? Pg 27 Is this reasonable behavior?
3. What psychological effect does the castration of the chicken have on Tita? Why? pg 27
4. What was Tita feeling while she beat the eggs for the wedding cake? Psychologically, why did she think she heard a baby chicken? What did it represent in her mind?
5. How did Nacha feel about Tita during this time? Pg 30 What do you think Nacha represented to Tita?
6. Why do you think that Tita's tears affected the outcome of the cake? Pg 35 Give examples of how her tears psychologically affected the guests? Pg 36-39
7. What was symbolically/psychologically happening to Tita when she saw the white ghosts? Pg 33-34
8. What significance did the waltz have on Tita and Pedro?
9. What psychological effect did Rosaura's vomiting have on the newly married couple?
10. What psychological effect did the wedding have on Nacha? Pg 41

Possible writing assignments:

1. Have you ever been in a difficult situation where your actions had to be contradictory to what you were feeling? Explain.
2. Give an example of a gift that you gave that affected others.
3. Have you ever been blamed for something that you did not intentionally do? Did it cause someone else to suffer? Pg 41

Chapter 3: March

Tita receives the roses from Pedro and uses them in a recipe that causes everyone to be sexually aroused. Gertrudis is so enflamed she runs away naked with a general in the army, to promptly leave him and work at a brothel to satiate her desires. Gertrudis is disowned by Mama Elena. Tita continues to knit her gigantic bedspread.

1. Why did Pedro give roses to Tita? Pg 48 What did they mean to Tita? Mama?
2. What psychological effects did the death of Nacha have on Tita and the family? Pg 48 and 49
3. How did killing the dove affect Tita? Pg 49-50
4. What additional psychological effects do you find that Tita's mother had on her in this chapter? Pg 49
5. What rivalry went on in the kitchen between Tita and Rosaura? What was it a symbol of? Pg 50
6. How did Pedro and Tita learn to communicate within the house? Pg 52
7. What psychological effect did the food have upon Gertrudis? Pg 54-55

Possible writing assignments:

1. Is there anyone that you communicate with in a non-verbal way? Give examples.
2. How does the need for your parent's approval influence you on a daily basis?

3. Have you ever had a member of your extended family die? How did it affect the different members of your family?

Chapter 4: April

Pedro and Rosaura's son, Roberto, is born and baptized. Tita plays a key role in his birth and survival, as she breast-feeds him when Rosaura falls ill. This keeps the love between Pedro and Tita alive. Tita shows her love for Pedro through creating wonderful dishes to eat, Mama Elena suspect this and stops Pedro from complimenting Tita's food. Mama Elena decides to stop all contact between the two lovers and send Pedro and his family away to Texas.

1. What feelings did Tita think she would have about Pedro's son? How did she end up feeling? pg 66
2. How did Pedro feel about Tita's love of his child? Pg 66
3. Why did Chenchu tell the stories that she did in the kitchen? Pg 68
4. What happened to Rosaura during this time period? Pg 69
5. What did Tita do to try to cover her loneliness? 69
6. Who was with Rosaura when the baby came? What did Tita think about this? Pg 71 Why did she think about Nacha at this time?
7. How did Dr. John feel about Tita? Pg 78
8. Why could Tita feed the baby when Rosaura couldn't? Pg 77-78 Who tries to hide what Tita is doing from the public's view? Why would he do this?
9. How does the family feel about having men around? Pg 80

Possible writing assignments

1. Have you ever thought you would feel a certain way when something happened and then been surprised by the emotion that you actually felt? Describe that experience.
2. Have you ever tried to talk someone out of getting into a bad situation and have them ignore you completely? Describe that time.
3. Have you ever "covered" for someone in an uncomfortable situation? Why did you do it?

Chapter 5: May

Tita loses all interest in life after Rosaura, Pedro, and Roberto leave for San Antonio. Tita is very forgetful in many of the duties for her mother. Mama Elena shows her bravery after a troop of revolutionaries come to the ranch in search of food. Mama Elena allows them to take anything on the ranch except inside the house. When they realize there is not much left outdoors, a sergeant wants to go inside. Mama Elena stops him with her shot gun, and instead of letting him shoot her, the captain admires her bravery and orders the troops to leave taking the last of the doves for meat. Later that day, Tita find out that Roberto has died, and this begins a rash of disobedience to her mother. She blames her for the death and tells her "I'm sick of obeying you."

Tita has a mental break down and goes to the dove cove. Because Tita refuse to leave the dove cove, Mama Elena orders Dr. Brown to take her away to an insane asylum. Instead of following her orders, he takes her to his house.

1. Who was the captain of the Revolutionaries that approached Mama? Pg 91
2. What did the loss of the birds mean to Tita? Pg 92
3. What did Tita unconsciously wish for her mother? Pg 92
4. In her mind, what did she do as a substitute feeding of the baby? pg 93
5. What was the ritual Tita did to prepare the bath for her mother?
How did Tita feel about it? Pg 93-94

6. In the Spanish culture a person wears black to mourn a death of a love one (deluto). Mama could still be mourning the death of her husband after all these years. Why did she think that she was washing the baby's' diapers? Pg 96
7. What happened to Tita when she finds out that Roberto is dead? Pg 99
8. Why does Tita accuse her mother of killing Roberto? How does Chenchu react?
9. Why does Chenchu throw the bedspread on Tita while she was leaving in the carriage? What did the bedspread represent to Tita?

Possible writing assignment:

1. Is there anything that you do, or have, that represents something significant to you? Describe it and how you feel about it.

Chapter 6: June

Tita remain at Dr Brown's and learns how to make matches. Esquivel reflects on the nature of hot/cold, light/dark in our lives, and this novel. Tita "sees" the Kikapu Indian woman, who turns out to be Brown's long-dead grandmother, experimenting with medicinal leaves and herbs. Tita realizes she cannot be near her mother if she is to ever re-ignite her soul.

1. What psychological effect did arriving at the Doctors have on Tita? How did she feel about John? Pg 108
2. What effect did not having to do what her mother commanded all day long have upon her hands? Pg 109
3. Why would she see Nacha again?
4. Why would Johns have his grandmother come and stay with Tita and then gradually take her place? How would this help in Tita's recovery? Pg 113
5. What does the story about the matches that Grandmother tells have to do with Tita? Pg 115
6. What did John ask Tita to write on the wall with the Phosphorus?
7. How did John make her feel?

Possible writing assignments:

1. Think about the story grandmother told on page 115 and give an example of a time when a match was lighted in your life...also an example of when one went out? What does it mean to "Keep your distance from people who have frigid breath?"

Chapter 7: July

This is the chapter that Tita comes back to life. Her old maid, Chenchu, from the ranch brings a pot of ox-tail soap and before you know, they are talk and crying and everything comes back. Tita wants Chenchu to tell her mother that she will never return to the ranch. She accepts the marriage proposal of John Brown. Fortunately, Chenchu does not deliver that message when she returns because bandits rob the ranch; rape Chenchu and Mama Elena is left paralyzed from the waist down. Out of duty Tita returns to wait on her mother. She faithfully prepares meals of which the mother refuses to eat. She thinks they are poisoned so Tita can marry John.

1. What did Chenchu bring with her when she came to visit Tita? What psychological effect does it have on Tita? What did the tears do for Tita? Pg 125
2. What story has Chenchu made up to tell Mama about why Tita does not want to return to the ranch? What is her reason for telling the story (picarez)? Pg 127
3. What made Tita feel like she had to return? How did she feel about it after she did return?
4. Why did Mama think that Tita was trying to poison her?

5. What does Tita find in a box that her mother had hidden? How does this effect Tita? Pg 137
6. Who does Tita think her true love is now? Why does she want to cause Pedro pain?

Possible writing assignments

1. Read the quote on pg 127... “Anything could be true or false depending on whether one believes it”....describe a situation that could be true and false both depending on how you see it.
2. After Tita returned home, John came and Tita felt safe again. Is there anyone you feel safe with? Why do they make you feel safe?
3. Have you ever found out a secret about someone that you loved? How did you react?
4. Write about a time that you saw an old love with a new person?

Chapter 8: August

Tita reflects on cooking, and cuts herself with a knife. Tita chose the name Esperanza (Hope) for Pedro and Rosaura’s daughter as she has hope that this child will break Mama Elena’s ridiculous tradition. Esperanza spends a lot of her day in the kitchen, as Rosaura is ill again. Patterns are being repeated. P 151 gives us the title of the book. Chenchu returns to the home, after being raped by the soldiers, and is now married. Pedro watches Tita in the shower and Dr Brown comes to ask for her hand in marriage. She is torn between the two men. After brown leaves Pedro and Tita consummate their relationship and resulting sparks and flame are blamed on Mama Elena’s ghost.

1. What effect does Pedro’s wanting to name the child by Tita’s name have on Tita and on the child? Pg 147
2. Pedro again confesses his love to Tita. How does she react to it this time? Pg 149
3. What tradition did Rosaura plan on having Esperanza carry out for her? What effect did this have on Tita? pg 151 ... like chocolate for water...
4. How did Tita feel about Chenchu coming back? Pg 152
5. What happens while Tita is getting ready? Pg 154
6. Who has to okay the marriage between Tita and John? Pg 156
7. What problem did postponing the wedding cause for Tita? Pg 156
8. What did the gleam on the ring remind Tita of? Pg 156
9. What magical words were given?
10. Where did Pedro and Tita finally get together? Pg 158

Possible writing assignments:

1. Has the words “dinner ready” ever saved you from an argument with anyone? How did the food influence the mood?

Chapter 9: September

Tita finds out she is pregnant. Mama Elena appears as a ghost and warns Tita to stay away from Pedro. Gertrudis returns home as a general in the revolutionary war and is married. Tita confides in her and tells all about the baby and her dilemma. Gertrudis tells her to follow her heart and find a way to be with Pedro. A furious mother returns as a ghost again, but this time Tita rids her forever telling her “that she hates her.” With that being said, the spirit of the mother fades away. This brings on a change in Tita and she is no longer pregnant. Outside Pedro is drunk and sings love songs to Tita. The lights spin and Pedro is burned from the oil. Tita rushes to tend to Pedro’s burns, causing jealousy with Rosaura and John. Rosaura locks herself in her room for a week.

1. What did Tita worry about when she thought she was pregnant? Pg 167

2. How did she feel about the Magi gifts? What role did the smells and food have on her memories?
3. What did Tita find out about the right to control her own life? What were her fears? Pg 168
4. Why does she continue to cook through all of this? Pg 168
5. What effect was Rosaura's fat having on her marriage? Pg 169-170
6. How did Tita feel about what she had done and facing John? Pg 172
7. What tradition was Tita experiencing at this time and what does it mean to her now? Pg 175
8. What effect do Chenchá's words have on Tita? What saves her from the answer?
9. What did Gertrudis want for her mother to see?
10. Why did Tita tell Juan about her mother's secret?

Possible writing assignments

1. Do you think Rosaura's weight gain is because she knows about Tita and Pedro's relationship? Once she knows she locks herself in her room and loses it all in a week. Does eating and weight gain or loss occur according to people's moods? Discuss this and give examples.
2. Has anyone that you are doing wrong to ever come to ask you for help? How did you react?
3. On page 175 Tita is wishing her life had been different. Gertrudis broke free and found happiness. Have different members of your family looked for happiness in different lifestyles than the norm in your family? How are they looked upon by family members? By yourself?
4. Tita is the only one of the family who knows how to make the family recipes. "When Tita dies her family's past will die with it." Pg 179 Is there anything that you do for your family that might die if you don't pass it on to your children or family members?

Chapter 10: October

Gertrudis has returned and discovers that Tita thinks she is pregnant and stage-manages Pedro finding out too. We learn Gertrudis is a better general than cook. Pregnancy is compared to the flowering of seeds. Mama Elena's ghost comes before Tita who finally tells her she hates her mother, which is what it takes to destroy Mama Elena's power over her daughter. This confrontation also starts Tita's period and she realizes she was never pregnant at all. Mama Elena's image becomes a firecracker that sets Pedro alight and Tita nurses him back to health. The chapter closes with the arrival of Dr Brown for their wedding.

1. Why was Tita worried about telling her sister that she might be pregnant? Pg 188
2. How did Gertrudis react? Why do you think the author used food in this situation? Pg 189
3. What does Gertrudis tell Tita that truth is? Pg 190
4. Why does Gertrudis have Tita continue to prepare the syrup? Pg 190
5. What does Gertrudis say about reality? Pg 191
6. What relationship does Trevino have to Gertrudis? Pg 197
7. What was the rule that Tita broke? How does she face Mama Elena this time? Pg 199
8. How does Tita feel when she finds out she is not pregnant? Pg 200
9. What happens to Pedro on pg 201? What does this do to all of the family?

Possible writing assignment:

1. "The simple truth, Tita, is that truth does not exist." pg 190 Discuss this statement and give an example from your life that supports the statement.
2. Have you ever had to face up to someone and tell them that you disagree with them? Did you do this in anger or calmly? Why?
3. Gertrudis leaves and "carries her childhood beside her in the cream fritter that she enclosed in a jar in her saddlebag" pg 203 Is there any food that you wish you could carry with you to remind you of your childhood?

Chapter 11: November

John has returned to Tita with his aunt. Tita has prepared a meal. Pedro is acting as a monster doubting her love for him. That same morning Rosaura emerges from her room having lost 65 lbs. and warns Tita not to make a fool of her in public with her husband. Certain compromises are made. That afternoon John comes over with his Aunt Mary. She confesses losing her virginity with Pedro and that she cannot go through with the marriage. John is very noble with it all and still professes his love for her. He still wants to marry her, but she must choose.

1. Why does Pedro start accusing Tita of wanting to go off with John?
2. What psychological effect did fixing the meal for John's Aunt Mary have on Tita? Pg 211
3. Tita and her sister, Rosaura, have a talk on page 212. What effect did a week in Rosaura's room have on her?
4. What were Rosaura's truths? What did Tita feel the truth was? What did tradition have to do with their views? Pg 213-214
5. What agreement did they come to? Why? Pg 214
6. How did taking Esperanza away from Tita affect her mind? What bothered her the most? Pg 215
7. What did Tita decide that she needed to do? Pg 217
8. Why did Tita decide to sing to the beans? What did she sing? What flooded her mind? What did this do in Tita's mind? Did it work? Pg 219

Possible writing assignments:

1. Tita decided to leave because "she had no claim, it wasn't her family, just as one tosses away a stone when one cleaned a pot of beans." Have you ever felt this way? Give an example and tell how you dealt with this emotion. Pg 217
2. On page 219, Tita sings to her beans and in the process clears her mind and finds peace. What do you do to achieve this mental state when you are facing a decision?

Chapter 12: December

Tita and Chenchu prepare for the wedding. Matches and fire's importance are re-iterated. Rosaura has died of an unspecified illness. A good way into the chapter we learn it is actually Alex, Brown's son, and Esperanza who are getting married and their relationship mirrors that of Tita and Pedro's – with yeast/dough analogies. We learn Tita, Pedro and Rosaura have had a pact for 20 years that allowed them all to exist together. The dish that had been prepared sends everyone off to make love, including Pedro and Tita. Pedro does in the act and Tita decides to follow him, eating all the matches and thinking hot thoughts until she and the ranch go up in all-consuming flames. As an after word we learn that the book we have just read was all that survived the flames and is now owned by Esperanza, who has carried the cooking traditions on.

1. Why was John hanging around and helping her out when he already knew how Tita felt about Pedro? Pg 231
2. Why does John hold Tita's hand and do sweet things in front of Pedro? Pg 231
3. On page 232 we find out the Rosaura died in a strange way about a year ago. How does this affect the storyline?
4. Who attended the wedding?
5. Who made the invitations in the traditional way? Pg 235
6. Who previously used the ink? Pg 235
7. What did the "eyes of the youth" waltz mean to Pedro and Tita?
8. How did they feel about each other even now? pg 236
9. What was Rosaura and Tita's agreement terms? Pg 237-238
10. What part of the agreement did Tita not keep?

11. What happens to Esperanza and what did she tell Tita that convinced her that Esperanza was truly in love? Pg 238
12. Is there anything that might lead the reader to believe that Rosaura's death was not natural in this chapter? Pg 238-239
13. What did Tita teach Esperanza and what did Esperanza teach Tita?
14. What was Tita's greatest accomplishment?
15. What happens to Tita and Pedro at the end of the story?
16. What traditions does the person telling the story continue in her family and what traditions did she not carry on?

Possible writing assignments

1. Give a description of Never Ending Love and then use 3 examples from the book to prove that Tita and Pedro's love was never ending, or that it wasn't.

Teacher's Aid: Archetypal Lens

ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM (aka Mythological Criticism)

Definition: This approach to literature stems from the notion that texts ultimately point out the universality of human experience. Built largely on the psychology of Carl Jung, Archetypal criticism contends that there are certain shared memories that exist in the collective unconscious of the human species, a storehouse of images and patterns, vestigial traces of which inhere in all human beings and which find symbolic expression in all human art, including its literature. (Think, for example, of the spontaneous associations you have while watching a sunset. They are not unique.) Practitioners such as Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell have discerned a complex and comprehensive correspondence between the basic story patterns of humans – comedy, romance, tragedy and irony – and the myths and archetypal patterns associated with the seasonal cycle of spring, summer, fall and winter. The death/rebirth theme is said to be the archetype of archetypes.

Recurring Question: What universal patterns of human experience are evidenced and are being explored in the text?

Essential Questions:

Does romantic thinking shape the directions of characters?

Is Tita's life shaped by a destiny that controls the journey she chooses to follow?

Does Tita love Pedro because he is the only person capable of fitting her ideal of romantic love?

Chapter 5: May

Tita loses all interest in life after Rosaura, Pedro, and Roberto leave for San Antonio. Tita is very forgetful in many of the duties for her mother. Mama Elena shows her bravery after a troop of revolutionaries come to the ranch in search of food. Mama Elena allows them to take anything on the ranch except inside the house. When they realize there is not much left outdoors, a sergeant wants to go inside. Mama Elena stops him with her shot gun, and instead of letting him shoot her, the captain admires her bravery and orders the troops to leave taking the last of the doves for meat. Later that day, Tita find out that Roberto has died, and this begins a rash of disobedience to her mother. She blames her for the death and tells her "I'm sick of obeying you."

Tita has a mental break down and goes to the dove cove. Because Tita refuse to leave the dove cove, Mama Elena orders Dr. Brown to take her away to an insane asylum. Instead of following her orders, he takes her to his house.

1. What caused Tita's reactions to Mama Elena after learning of the death of her nephew?
2. What animal did Tita substitute for Roberto? Why?
3. What was Mama Elena's one fear in life?
4. What was Doctor Brown's reaction to finding Tita in the dovecote? -Describe her condition.
5. Why did Mama Elena instruct Dr. Brown to take Tita to the asylum?
6. Why did Dr. Brown decide to take the actions he did with Tita?

Key Quotes:

"...When it came to dividing, dismantling, dismembering, desolating, detaching, dispossessing, destroying or dominating, Mama Elena was a pro."(97)

"Chencha, weeping, was running alongside the carriage as she left and barely managed to toss onto Tita's shoulders the enormous bedspread she had knit during her endless nights of insomnia." (191)

Possible Writing Assignments:

1. Write an internal monologue revealing Tita's innermost thoughts when she learned about the death of her nephew.
2. Why do you think that Tita's escape into the dovecote was necessary to allow her to escape the ranch?
3. What evidence do we have that Tita may actually be "crazy" as her mother alleges.
- 4.

Chapter 6: June

Tita remain at Dr Brown's and learns how to make matches. Esquivel reflects on the nature of hot/cold, light/dark in our lives, and this novel. Tita "sees" the Kikapu Indian women, who turns out to be Brown's long-dead grandmother, experimenting with medicinal leaves and herbs. Tita realizes she cannot be near her mother if she is to ever re-ignite her soul.

1. Describe Tita's reactions when she became aware of her hands for the first time.
2. How do Dr. Brown's phosphorus experiment contribute to Tita's journey?
3. The author tells us that when Tita writes in phosphorescent letters "Because I don't want to" (p 118) that this is the first step toward freedom. Discuss the significance of these five words in Tita's quest for love.

Key Quotes:

"Because I don't want to." With those words Tita had taken her first step toward freedom."(118)

"She yearned with all her soul to be borne off by her hands...Tita thought the miracle was actually occurring when she saw her fingers turning into a tin cloud rising to the sky." (109)

Possible Writing assignments:

1. How do you respond when others try to force you to do what you do not want?
2. If you could be granted your most extreme wish what would you ask for and why?

Chapter 7: July

This is the chapter that Tita comes back to life. Her old maid, Chenchu, from the ranch brings a pot of ox-tail soap and before you know, they are talking and crying and everything comes back. Tita wants Chenchu to tell her mother that she will never return to the ranch. She accepts the marriage proposal of John Brown. Fortunately, Chenchu does not deliver that message when she returns because bandits rob the ranch, rape Chenchu and Mama Elena is left paralyzed from the waist down. Out of duty Tita returns to wait on her mother. She faithfully prepares meals of which the mother refuses to eat. She thinks they are poisoned so Tita can marry John.

1. How does Chenchu assist in Tita's quest.
2. How does Tita's return to her senses reestablish her journey.
3. How are Tita's feelings and life journey influenced by Mama Elena's death?
4. Did Tita poison her mother?

Key Quotes:

"With the first sip, Nacha appeared there at her side, stroking her hair as she ate, as she had done when she was little and was sick, kissing her forehead over and over." (124)

"... she swore in front of Mama Elena's tomb that come what may, she would never renounce love." (138)

Possible writing assignments:

1. Describe your response if you looked up and someone you knew was dead was suddenly combing your hair.
2. What is the one goal in your life that you will never give up? Explain your reasons.

Chapter 9: September

Gertrudis has returned and discovers that Tita thinks she is pregnant and stage-manages Pedro finding out too. We learn Gertrudis is a better general than cook. Pregnancy is compared to the flowering of seeds. Mama Elena's ghost comes before Tita who finally tells her she hates her mother, which is what it takes to destroy Mama Elena's power over her daughter. This confrontation also starts Tita's period and she realizes she was never pregnant at all. Mama Elena's image becomes a firecracker that sets Pedro alight and Tita nurses him back to health. The chapter closes with the arrival of Dr Brown for their wedding

1. How does Tita's "pregnancy" propel her toward Pedro?
2. How is Tita's life driven by what she imagines to be desirable as opposed to what is logical or reasonable?
3. What is implied in the statement "throwing himself upon her?" (P.158)

Key Quotes

"Life had taught her that it was not that easy; there are few prepared to fulfill their desires whatever the cost, and the right to determine the course of one's own life would take more effort than she had imagined."(168)

"...she was thinking how easy it was to wish for things as a child....Growing up, one realizes how many things one cannot wish for, the things that are forbidden...." (175)

Possible writing assignments:

1. What are you willing to give up to achieve your goals and what would you never abandon?
2. What things are you forbidden to pursue in life and why?

Chapter 11: November

John has returned to Tita with his aunt. Tita has prepared a meal. Pedro is acting as a monster doubting her love for him. That same morning Rosaura merges from her room having lost 65 lbs. and warns Tita not to make a fool of her in public with her husband. Certain compromises are made. That afternoon John comes over with his Aunt Mary. She confesses losing her virginity with Pedro and that she cannot go through with the marriage. John is very noble with it all and still professes his love for her. He still wants to marry her, but she must choose.

1. What is the basis for Tita's decision to tell John "No" to marriage?
2. How does Tita's decision to reject John influence her quest for love?
3. How did Tita influence her life Journey when she lost the ability to release Pedro once he decided to marry Rosita?
4. How does Tita's moving toward Pedro's offer of love actually move her back toward the beginning of her life?

KEY QUOTES:

“Perhaps his head was full of the smoke his body had given off when it burned and just as burnt toast changes the way the whole house smells, making it unpleasant, so his smoky brain was producing these black thoughts....”(211)

“I would be delighted to be your companion for the rest of your life--but you must think over very carefully whether I am the man for you or not.”(223)

Possible writing assignments:

1. What was causing Pedro’s “black thoughts”? Did he want to escape Tita at this time or was his anger directed at himself or some other source?
2. Why is Dr. Brown being such a gentlemen about possibly giving up Tita? Is it possible that he only likes her but does not love her?

Teacher Aid - The Feminist Lens

FEMINIST CRITICISM

Definition: The primary agenda of Feminist critics is to investigate how a literary work either tends to serve or to challenge a patriarchal (male dominated) view of society. They maintain that literature should be analyzed with the goal of explaining how the text exemplifies or reveals important insights about sex roles and society's structure. They point out that the traditional "canon" – those works long deemed to be the best that has been thought and said in human culture – tend to define females as "other," or as an object, compared to the male's privileged subject status. Feminist criticism focuses on social relationships, including the patterns of thought, behavior, values, enfranchisement and power between the sexes. It is "a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read..." (Judith Fetterly)

Recurring Question: How does the text mirror or question a male-dominated (phallogocentric) view of reality?

This book lends itself wonderfully to a feminist reading. The strong female protagonists, the domestic setting, the structure and plot elements all provide good practice for students to test out their feminist lens as a way of seeing. You want to alert the Reading Group who will be using the feminist lens that they need to answer these Essential Questions as they read *Like Water for Chocolate*.

1. How would this book be different if a man wrote it?
2. What patriarchal structures can you see in the novel; jobs, marriages, war etc.
3. Feminist symbolism; sausages, eggs, guns, knives, locks and keys, etc
4. What is the position of the female characters in the book?

Month-by-Month Reading Questions

January

We are introduced to the lead characters; Tita (the protagonist) and her mother, Mama Elena (the antagonist). We also meet the other sisters Gertrudis and Rosaura. The importance of the kitchen and domestic life is underscored, and the story's lead plot line of the love triangle between Tita – Pedro – Rosaura and Mama Elena's insistence on keeping alive the tradition of the younger daughter never marrying, so as to assure long-term care for the mother.

Questions

1. What adjectives would you use to describe the 4 women in the family; Mama Elena, Tita, Gertrudis and Rosaura?
2. What realm do the women live in?
3. Where are the men in this family?

February

Rosaura and Pedro are married. Tita cries into the wedding cake batter and her tears poison the cake and ruin the wedding. We learn Rosaura and Pedro's sexual relationship is conducted through a "marriage sheet." The love between Tita and Pedro is kept at boiling point. The maid, Nancha, dies.

Questions

1. How would a feminist critic explain what is happening to the chickens. How does it fit in with a larger understanding of the novel?
2. How would a feminist describe the wedding/relationship of Pedro and Rosaura?

March

Tita receives the roses from Pedro and uses them in a recipe that causes everyone to be sexually aroused. Gertrudis is so enflamed she runs away naked with a general in the army, to promptly leave him and work at a brothel to satiate her desires. Gertrudis is disowned by Mama Elena. Tita continues to knit her gigantic bedspread.

1. In what ways does Mama Elena not seem like a woman/mother?
2. How is Gertrudis' first sexual experience feminist, rather than patriarchal?
3. How can we understand Gertrudis's behavior in this chapter as Feminist?

April

Pedro and Rosaura's son, Roberto, is born and baptized. Tita plays a key role in his birth and survival, as she breast-feeds him when Rosaura falls ill. This keeps the love between Pedro and Tita alive. Tita shows her love for Pedro through creating wonderful dishes to eat, Mama Elena suspects this and stops Pedro from complimenting Tita's food. Mama Elena decides to stop all contact between the two lovers and send Pedro and his family away to Texas.

What jobs are women traditionally assigned and unpaid for that are essential to the well being of the world. How are they shown in this chapter?

May

Tita loses all interest in life after Rosaura, Pedro, and Roberto leave for San Antonio. Tita is very forgetful in many of the duties for her mother. Mama Elena shows her bravery after a troop of revolutionaries come to the ranch in search of food. Mama Elena allows them to take anything on the ranch except inside the house. When they realize there is not much left outdoors, a sergeant wants to go inside. Mama Elena stops him with her shotgun, and instead of shooting him, the captain admires her bravery and orders the troops to leave taking the last of the doves for meat. Later that day, Tita find out that Roberto has died, and this begins a rash of disobedience to her mother. She blames her for the death and tells her "I'm sick of obeying you."

Tita has a mental break down and goes to the dovecote. Because Tita refuse to leave the dove cove, Mama Elena orders Dr. Brown to take her away to an insane asylum. Instead of following her orders, he takes her to his house.

1. How can you tie the bedcover to a feminist reading of the book?
2. What could be a feminist explanation of the breast-feeding?

June

Tita remain at Dr Brown's and learns how to make matches. Esquivel reflects on the nature of hot/cold, light/dark in our lives, and this novel. Tita "sees" the Kikapu Indian woman, who turns out to be Brown's long-dead grandmother, experimenting with medicinal leaves and herbs. Tita realizes she cannot be near her mother if she is to ever re-ignite her soul.

Insanity has often been seen as a female problem. In Victorian times women weren't allowed to leave the house and then blamed when they became depressed. Do you believe Esquivel thinks Tita's breakdown is a sign of weakness? How can you read Tita's breakdown as a rational experience?

1. How is Dr Brown shown as symbolic part of the male world? How are he and his surroundings masculine?

July

This is the chapter that Tita comes back to life. Her old maid, Chenchu, from the ranch brings a pot of ox-tail soap and before you know, they are talking and crying and everything comes back. Tita wants Chenchu to tell her mother that she will never return to the ranch. She accepts the marriage proposal of John Brown. Fortunately, Chenchu does not deliver that message when she returns because bandits rob the ranch, rape Chenchu and Mama Elena is left paralyzed from the waist down. Out of duty Tita returns to wait on her mother. She faithfully prepares meals of which the mother refuses to eat. She thinks they are poisoned so Tita can marry John.

1. How does the bandit's attack re-introduce the masculine/patriarchal world?
2. What do we learn of Tita's father at the end of July?

August

Tita reflects on cooking, and cuts herself with a knife. Tita chose the name Esperanza (Hope) for Pedro and Rosaura's daughter as she has hope that this child will break Mama Elena's ridiculous tradition. Esperanza spends a lot of her day in the kitchen, as Rosaura is ill again. Patterns are being repeated. P.151 gives us the title of the book. Chenchu returns to the home, after being raped by the soldiers, and is now married. Pedro watches Tita in the shower and Dr Brown comes to ask for her hand in marriage. She is torn between the two men. After Brown leaves Pedro and Tita consummate their relationship and resulting sparks and flame are blamed on Mama Elena's ghost.

1. What are John and Pedro talking about? How does it emphasize their maleness?
2. What is different about what the men talk about to what the women talk about?

September

Tita finds out she is pregnant. Mama Elena appears as a ghost and warns Tita to stay away from Pedro. Gertrudis returns home as a general in the revolutionary war and is married. Tita confides in her and tells all about the baby and her dilemma. Gertrudis tells her to follow her heart and find a way to be with Pedro. A furious mother returns as a ghost again, but this time Tita rids her forever telling her "that she hates her." With that being said, the spirit of the mother fades away. This brings on a change in Tita and she is no longer pregnant. Outside Pedro is drunk and sings love songs to Tita. The light spins and Pedro is burned from the oil. Tita rushes to tend to Pedro's burns, causing jealousy with Rosaura and John. Rosaura locks herself in her room for a week.

What is the novel's opinion of pregnancy? What different pregnancies are related to us in the novel? How do they differ in their outcomes? What are possible feminist readings of these pregnancies?

How is Gertrudis portrayed in this chapter? Do you think she is an admirable character? Explain your opinion

October

Gertrudis has returned and discovers that Tita thinks she is pregnant and stage-manages Pedro finding out too. We learn Gertrudis is a better general than cook. Pregnancy is compared to the flowering of seeds. Mama Elena's ghost comes before Tita who finally tells her she hates her mother, which is what it takes

to destroy Mama Elena's power over her daughter. This confrontation also starts Tita's period and she realizes she was never pregnant at all. Mama Elena's image becomes a firecracker that sets Pedro alight and Tita nurses him back to health. The chapter closes with the arrival of Dr Brown for their wedding

1. What is a possible feminist interpretation of pregnancy in this chapter?
2. How do we "read" Mama Elena through a feminist lens?
3. What, in effect, has Gertrudis become?

November

John has returned to Tita with his aunt. Tita has prepared a meal. Pedro is acting as a monster doubting her love for him. That same morning Rosaura emerges from her room having lost 65 lbs. and warns Tita not to make a fool of her in public with her husband. Certain compromises are made. That afternoon John comes over with his Aunt Mary. She confesses losing her virginity with Pedro and that she cannot go through with the marriage. John is very noble with it all and still professes his love for her. He still wants to marry her, but she must choose.

Questions

1. Why is it important to the novel that Roberto, a boy, died whilst Esperanza, a girl lived?
2. If Tita was a good feminist which suitor do you think she should choose, Pedro or Dr. Brown? Why?

December

Tita and Chenchu prepare for the wedding. Matches and fire's importance are re-iterated. Rosaura has died of an unspecified illness. A good way into the chapter we learn it is actually Alex, Brown's son, and Esperanza who are getting married and their relationship mirrors that of Tita and Pedro's – with yeast/dough analogies. We learn Tita, Pedro and Rosaura have had a pact for 20 years that allowed them all to exist together. The dish that had been prepared sends everyone off to make love, including Pedro and Tita. Pedro dies in the act and Tita decides to follow him, eating all the matches and thinking hot thoughts until she and the ranch go up in all-consuming flames. As an after word we learn that the book we have just read was all that survived the flames and is now owned by Esperanza's daughter, who has carried on the cooking traditions.

Questions

1. How would you explain the battle between John and Pedro for Tita's love? What say does she have in the situation?
2. How would you describe Gertrudis by the end of the novel? Is she more like society's idea of a woman or a man?
3. If Esperanza and her daughter have taken on the cooking traditions of the family how much of a feminist are they?

Literary Lens Definitions (Student Copy)

FORMALIST CRITICISM (aka “New Criticism”)

Definition: “The text, the text, and nothing but the text.” The basic commitment of Formalism is to a close reading of literary texts. Formalist critics argue that in analyzing a work, the only evidence worth considering is that which is intrinsic to the text (within the work itself) and nothing extrinsic (outside the work), need be considered. Formalist critics explore questions of technique as an entrée into meaning. They seek to understand how an author or poet employs figures of speech, symbolism, narrative frames and the other literary tools at his or her disposal to achieve an artistic “unity of effect.” In sum, the Formalist says that a work of literature must stand or fall on its own merits.

Recurring Question: How do the literary elements found in a particular text work together to achieve a unified artistic effect?

BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM

Definition: The biographical critic studies events in the life of the author in order to determine how they may have influenced the author’s work.

Recurring Question: What real life event or personality inspired the author to create a given plot twist or character? Where does real life leave off and the imagination take over?

HISTORICAL CRITICISM

Definition: Historical critics examine the social and intellectual milieu in which the author wrote. They consider the politics and social movements prevalent during the time period of the text’s creation. They do so in order to determine how the literature under examination is both the product and shaper of society.

Recurring Question: How did the text in question influence contemporary events and how did contemporary events influence the author’s creative choices?

FEMINIST CRITICISM

Definition: The primary agenda of Feminist critics is to investigate how a literary work either tends to serve or to challenge a patriarchal (male dominated) view of society. They maintain that literature should be analyzed with the goal of explaining how the text exemplifies or reveals important insights about sex roles and society’s structure. They point out that the traditional “canon” – those works long deemed to be the best that has been thought and said in human culture – tend to define females as “other,” or as an object, compared to the male’s privileged subject status. Feminist criticism focuses on social relationships, including the patterns of thought, behavior, values, enfranchisement and power between the sexes. It is “a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read...” (Judith Fetterly)

Recurring Question: How does the text mirror or question a male-dominated (phallogocentric) view of reality?

MARXIST CRITICISM

Definition: This is criticism inspired by the historical, economic and sociological theory of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Its focus is on the connections between the content or form of a literary work and the economic, class, social or ideological factors that have shaped and determined it. Marxist criticism is perpetually oriented to investigating the social realities that condition works of art. Its preoccupations are with matters of class status, economic conditions, what is published and what is repressed in the literary marketplace, the preferences of the reading public, and so forth.

Recurring Question: Who has the power/money in society? Who does not? What happens as a result?

PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM

Definition: Criticism that analyzes literature from the position that texts express the inner workings of the human mind; this approach often focuses on the choices of humans as moral agents. Leo Tolstoy, the accomplished Russian novelist, believed that the purpose of literature was “to make humans good by choice.” Literature through the power of story has the ability to engage the individual imaginatively in other worlds and other times. It invites the reader to put him or herself in the position of other human beings; to empathize. The Psychological critic is interested in every phase of human interaction and choice as developed in the text. Literature constantly informs us about and leads us to question what it means to be a human being. The Psychological critic closely follows these revelations and takes them as a central subject for analysis.

Recurring Question: What is the text telling us about what it means to be a human being? Would you act like the main character in the same circumstances?

ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM (aka Mythological Criticism)

Definition: This approach to literature stems from the notion that texts ultimately point out the universality of human experience. Built largely on the psychology of Carl Jung, Archetypal criticism contends that there are certain shared memories that exist in the collective unconscious of the human species, a storehouse of images and patterns, vestigial traces of which inhere in all human beings and which find symbolic expression in all human art, including its literature. (Think, for example, of the spontaneous associations you have while watching a sunset. They are not unique.) Practitioners such as Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell have discerned a complex and comprehensive correspondence between the basic story patterns of humans – comedy, romance, tragedy and irony – and the myths and archetypal patterns associated with the seasonal cycle of spring, summer, fall and winter. The death/rebirth theme is said to be the archetype of archetypes.

Recurring Question: What universal patterns of human experience are evidenced and are being explored in the text?

READER RESPONSE THEORY

Definition: This theory notes that a literary text is not separate and closed-off; rather, its meaning is completed when the individual reader comes in contact with it and in the course of reading constructs a new version of what the text is saying. Reader Response theory notes that reading is ultimately a personal

and idiosyncratic activity. For this very reason, this undoubtedly true “theory” does not qualify as a “critical lens” because it preeminently champions the undoubted right of each individual to his or her own opinion about a piece of writing without the need to justify or otherwise defend one’s perceptions. In school, students are invited to respond to a text subjectively all the time. This happens, for example, when teachers ask them to “make connections” between the text and their own experience and knowledge of the world. Reader response is how most people spontaneously react to literature. It is healthy, indispensable, and inherently subjective and, for that reason, not what we are trying to coach students to accomplish when writing a literary analysis paper.

Recurring Question: How did you like the book?

Literal Level Questions, by Chapter
(Pop Quiz ammunition)
Like Water for Chocolate

January

1. Name an unusual aspect of Great Grandmother Tita's birth. (p. 6)
2. Rosaura burns herself on the griddle. Describe the circumstances of this accident. (p. 8)
3. Why does Mama Elena forbid Tita to marry Pedro Muzquine? (p. 10)
4. What rule does Tita break in her sewing? (p. 12)
5. What does Mama Elena counter-propose instead of Pedro marrying Tita? (p. 13)
6. What nickname for her mother does Tita use when she wants to soften her up? (p. 12)
7. When Chenchu says, "You can't just switch tacos and enchiladas like that," what do the girls understand she is really saying? What is the meaning of her special code?
8. Why does Pedro agree to marry Rosaura, so he says? (p. 15)
9. What is inconsistent about the idea that Nacha overheard the conversation between Pedro and his father? (p. 15)
10. When did Pedro first profess his love for Tita? (p. 18)

Answers:

1. pounds of salt left from the flood of tears she was shedding at birth.
2. Timid Rosaura is refusing to play the water-spot on the hot griddle game that delights Tita, who is at home in the kitchen. When Tita tries to "help" her, Rosaura resists and her hand slams into the griddle.
3. Because she is the youngest and must care for her mother in perpetuity.
4. She fails to baste the material before sewing the pattern.
5. That she marry Rosaura instead.
6. Mami.
7. Swapping foods is Chenchu's way of expressing what she has overheard Mama Elena propose, namely, the switching of Tita for Rosaura as Pedro's wife.
8. It is the only way he can be near Tita.
9. She is practically deaf.
10. At the Christmas party when their hands accidentally touched in the kitchen.

February

1. Why does Mama Elena place Tita in charge of the wedding preparations? (p. 27)
2. Why wouldn't the batter of Rosaura's cake thicken? (p. 30)
3. What causes a temporary blindness in Tita? (p. 33)
4. What prevented Nacha from marrying when she was a young woman? (p. 36)
5. How does Tita manage to keep a pleasant expression on her face during the wedding of Rosaura and Pedro? (p. 37)
6. What does Pedro tell Tita when he hugs her after the wedding? (p. 38)
7. What immediate effect does eating the cake have on the wedding guests? (p. 39)
8. What happens to Rosaura's wedding dress at the end of the chapter? (p. 41)
9. Why did Mama Elena beat Tita the most severely in her life after Rosaura's wedding? (p. 41)
10. Why can't Nacha testify to Tita's innocence – that she had not put poison in the cake? (p. 41)

Answers:

1. To quash any sense of rebellion on Tita's part and to exact absolute obedience from her.
2. Because Tita has cried in it.
3. Seeing Rosaura's white wedding sheet.

4. The mama of Mama Elena had forbidden Nacha to marry her fiancé.
5. She thinks of times she has outperformed boys in feats of derring-do.
6. That he really loves her (Tita) and only married Rosaura to be near her.
7. The guests are immediately flooded by a great wave of longing over lost loves.
8. It is covered in vomit from sick guests.
9. Mama Elena thinks Tita deliberately added an emetic into the cake.
10. Nacha is dead.

March

1. On what occasion does Pedro give Tita a bouquet of pink roses? (p. 48)
2. How does Tita get rid of the roses from Pedro, as she has been ordered to do by Mama Elena? (p. 48)
3. What makes the pink roses that Pedro gave Tita turn red? (p. 48)
4. What lesson does Tita extract from the case of the injured quail? P. 49
5. What impact does Tita's dish of roast quail and rose petal have on Gertrudis? (p. 51)
6. What prevents Gertrudis from enjoying a nice refreshing shower after she fills the water tank? (p. 54)
7. How is Juan, the rebel captain, alerted to Gertrudis's presence at the ranch since he is in town, fighting a battle? (p. 55)
8. Describe the moment when Pedro could have changed the course of his and Tita's history? (p. 56)
9. "One last chile in walnut sauce left on the platter" Who is it? Explain the metaphor. (p. 57)
10. What is Mama Elena's reaction when she learns that Gertrudis has begun working in a brothel on the border. (p. 58-9)

Answers:

1. On her first anniversary as cook for the ranch.
2. She works the rose petals into a recipe.
3. Tita's blood – she has hugged the roses to her chest and is pricked by the thorns.
4. You can't be weak when it comes to killing.
5. It acts on her as an uncontrollable aphrodisiac.
6. The water from the shower evaporates before it hits her, such is the heat thrown off by her passionate body.
7. He smells the scent of her passion in the steam that wafts into town.
8. When Gertrudis runs away with Juan, Pedro is tempted to ask Tita to do the same. He starts to do so but is interrupted by Mama Elena.
9. Tita is the forlorn chile that nobody wants to eat.
10. She disowns her and burns up her certificate and pictures and orders that her name never be mentioned in the household again.

April

1. What are Tita's feelings towards her nephew, Roberto, the product of Pedro and Rosaura's marriage? (p. 66, 78)
2. Why does Pedro stop praising Tita's cooking? (p. 69)
3. What prevents Pedro from bringing back the doctor when Rosaura goes into labor? (p. 71)
4. How did Tita know what to do to take care of Rosaura after the birth of Roberto? (p. 73)
5. Dr. John Brown is attracted to Tita. What has prevented him from looking at a woman for a long time, prior to meeting her? (p. 74)
6. Why does Roberto need a wet nurse? (p. 75)
7. What impact does eating the mole have on the crowd at the baptism? (p. 79)

8. What is Mama Elena's plan for Roberto, Pedro and Rosaura that she confides to Father Ignacio and that upsets Tita when she overhears it? (p. 81)
9. What work does Mama Elena foresee for Pedro in San Antonio? (p. 81)
10. How does Mama Elena manage to ruin the baptism party for Tita? (p. 81)

Answers:

1. She loves him like her own child.
2. Because Mama Elena orders him to do so because it makes Rosaura jealous.
3. He is captured by the federales and summarily detained.
4. From the instructions (dead) Nacha whispered in her ear. (p. 73)
5. He is mourning from his wife's death in labor.
6. Rosaura has no milk.
7. It puts everyone is in a euphoric mood.
8. They are to move to San Antonio.
9. An accountant
10. The plan to take Roberto, the child, away from her ruins the party that she previously had been enjoying.

May

1. Why is Tita interested in collecting worms. What use does she have for them? (p. 87)
2. What happens when the sergeant of the rebel forces starts to enter Mama Elena's house against her express command? (p. 90)
3. What weekly event that Tita performs for Mama Elena does the narrator compare to a religious ceremony because of its complicated 'liturgy'? p. 94
4. What is unique about the way Mama Elena cuts up a watermelon? (p. 94)
5. After what event does Mama Elena speed up the plans for the departure of Pedro, Rosaura and Roberto? P. 98
6. What happens to Roberto when the family moves to San Antonio? P. 98
7. What order of Mama Elena finally causes Tita to defy her and go a little crazy? (p. 99)
8. What was odd about the sausage that Mama Elena and Chenchu finished stuffing after Tita goes up into the dovecote? 99
9. How did the pigeon die that Tita had been taking care of as a substitute for Roberto?
10. Who takes away Tita after she goes crazy? P. 100

Answers:

1. as food for a helpless pigeon she has adopted.
2. She shoots a chicken out of the hands of the sergeant and makes him back down.
3. Her bath.
4. She precisely slices the rind, drops it so it opens like a flower that leaves the heart intact on the table...
5. Pedro and Tita's first, fervent sexual encounter...
6. He dies from disagreeable food.
7. She orders Tita not to cry over Roberto's death.
8. Within a week they are swarming with worms.
9. It dies from being fed too much by Tita.
10. Dr. John Brown.

June

1. What nickname did John Brown's "proud, intensely Yankee" family give his grandmother, Morning Light, the common law wife of his grandfather? (p. 111)

2. When did John's great grandfather, Peter, gain respect for his daughter-in-law's Indian knowledge? P. 112
3. What is Morning Light's theory of human relations? P. 115
4. What is John Brown's main research objective as a scientist and doctor? P. 117
5. Who is the old woman that Tita befriends at John Brown's house? (p. 117)
6. What is the reason that Tita won't talk when she goes to John Brown's house? (She writes it on the wall with invisible, phosphorescent paint.) p. 117

Answers:

1. The Kikapu.
2. When she cures him of a life-threatening lung disease using herbs.
3. Each of us is born with a box of matches inside us; but we can't strike them without a partner. Each of us must discover what will set off the match/explosions to nourish our soul. The soul longs to return to the divine origins from which it came.
4. To find the scientific basis for his grandmother's miracle cures. (p. 114)
5. John's dead grandmother, the Kikapu.
6. Because she does not want to.

July

1. What causes Tita to remember how to cook and speak? (p. 124)
2. Why does Gertrudis finally leave the brothel? P. 126
3. What prevents Chenchu from telling Mama Elena the lie she was planning to tell regarding her encounter with Tita? (p. 129)
4. What injury does Mama Elena suffer and who inflicts it on her? P. 131
5. What reaction does Mama Elena have to Tita's cooking when she does not know Tita has cooked the food? P. 134
6. What is in the little, heart-shaped locket that Mama Elena wore around her neck? P. 136
7. What is the big surprise in the packet of letters that Tita discovers after Mama Elena's death? P. 137
8. What prevented Mama Elena from running away with the love of her life? P. 137
9. What causes Juan de Garza, Tita's father, to die of a heart attack? P. 138
10. Why does Tita hold John Brown's arm on the way back to the ranch? P. 139

Answers:

1. Chenchu's visit, with her gift of ox-tail soup.
2. The fire inside her finally has been extinguished.
3. Bandits attack the ranch before she is called to account by Mama Elena.
4. The bandits break her spine.
5. It tastes bitter to her, although everyone else likes it.
6. A key to a secret box inside Mama Elena's wardrobe.
7. News that Mama had a secret lover named Jose Trevino who "had Negro blood in his veins" and whom she had not been allowed to marry by her parents.
8. Her parents force her to marry Juan De La Garza, Tita's father.
9. The news that Gertrudis was not his child, told him by a 'venomous tongue' at a bar where he had gone to celebrate Tita's birth.
10. To make Pedro jealous.

August

1. What are two ways in which Esperanza's birth/infancy resemble Tita's? p. 146-7
2. What advice does Tita give Pedro after he tells her he should have run away with her rather than marry Rosaura? P. 149
3. What explains Chenchu's recovery from her depression after she returns to the ranch? P. 151-2

4. What warms the water up to scalding as Tita takes a cooling shower prior to John Browns' arrival for the engagement party? P. 153
5. Why does John need a delay before the wedding day? P. 155
6. What unfortunate event happens when Rosaura proposes a toast to the happiness of the newly engaged couple, John and Tita? 156
7. What outward sign marks the consummation of Tita and Pedro's attraction to one another? P. 158
8. What does Chenchu think causes the plumes of phosphorescent color coming from the dark room? P. 158
9. What knowledge would have caused Mama Elena to die another 1000 times? P. 159
10. What is especially profane about Tita and Pedro's lovemaking? P. 159

Answers:

1. Both are fed with gruels and tea, not mother's milk; both are the youngest daughter, charged with caring for their mother for life; both feel at home in the kitchen.
2. Next time you fall in the love, don't be such a coward.
3. A happy marriage.
4. Pedro's lustily staring at Tita through the gaps in the outdoor shower stall.
5. To bring his Aunt to the ceremony.
6. Pedro clinks his glass together with the other three so violently that he breaks their champagne glasses.
7. Plumes of phosphorescent color
8. The return of the ghost of Mama Elena.
9. The knowledge that Pedro and Tita have finally become a romantic item.
10. The place – Mama's Elena's former favorite "secret hide-out"

September

1. Why does Rosaura decide to sleep in a separate bedroom from Pedro? P. 169
2. What most bothers Rosaura about the possibility that Pedro might leave her? P. 171
3. Why does Rosaura finally confide in Tita about her fears about her failing marriage? P. 170
4. What is hidden in the Three Kings Day Bread? 174
5. What does finding the doll in the 3 Kings Bread entitle the finder to?
6. What is Gertrudis's reason for returning to the ranch on Three Kings Day? 177
7. What is Gertrudis's social position/job at the time of her return?
8. How does Tita save Gertrudis and Juan from divorce? P. 180
9. What about Gertrudis's behavior at the party puzzles Rosaura? P. 180
10. Why is Chenchu furious at Gertrudis and hopeful she will soon leave? P. 181

Answers:

1. She is passing gas prodigiously.
2. The public humiliation... what will people say?
3. She knows Tita is about to marry Dr. Brown and trusts her as no longer a rival.
4. A doll.
5. Three wishes.
6. She knows her favorite food will be prepared and served on that day.
7. General of the rebel army and married.
8. She tells Gertrudis of her African heritage, thus explaining the appearance of her and Juan's child, who the latter had suspected as a bastard.
9. She dances well.
10. Because she is tired out from feeding all of Gertrudis's troops.

October

1. What is Gertrudis's attitude toward the truth? P. 190
2. How does Pedro learn that Tita is pregnant? P. 190
3. Why won't Chenchu help Gertrudis cook the syrup for the Cream Fritters? P. 192
4. How does Sergeant Trevino find the man with the red mole shaped like a spider between his legs? P. 194
5. Why does Sergeant Trevino brutally kill this man when he finds him? P. 195
6. What are the magic words that make Mama Elena disappear forever? P. 199
7. How is Pedro set on fire? P. 200
8. What event causes Rosaura to go into her room and lock the door behind her – she doesn't reappear for a week? P. 201
9. What does Gertrudis carry away with her as she rides away? P. 203
10. What does John bring for Tita when he returns to claim his bride at the end of the chapter? P. 203

Answers:

1. that it does not exist; it all depends on a person's point of view.
2. He overhears Gertrudis saying so – she deliberately makes sure he does.
3. She is too tired from cooking for all the soldiers.
4. He asks all the prostitutes in town to keep a lookout for him.
5. Because the man had raped his mother and his sister years ago.
6. I hate you; I've always hated you.
7. Mama Elena's exiting whirlwind shatters a gas lantern he is holding, setting him ablaze.
8. Pedro asks for Tita's presence when he is injured, not Rosaura's...
9. Cream fritters
10. A huge bouquet of flowers.

November

1. Why does Tita prepare such a simple meal for her purported fiancé, John Brown, and his honored guest, Aunt Mary? P. 210
2. When does Pedro learn that Tita is not pregnant, as he previously thought? P. 211
3. How does Rosaura look when she comes out of her room after the week? P. 212
4. Rosaura cuts a deal with Tita prior to John Brown's arrival for the party; what is it? P. 214
5. What leverage does Rosaura have over Tita in striking a bargain about how they will live together? P. 215
6. The beans for the dinner resist soaking until Tita does what? P. 219
7. Jovita, Tita's childhood teacher, went out of her mind at the end of her life. What was the main symptom of her madness? P. 220-21
8. What is blamed as the root cause of Jovita's madness? P. 220
9. Why is it possible for Tita and John to discuss their break-up in front of Aunt Mary without undue embarrassment? P. 222
10. What is John Brown's reaction to the news that his fiancée has had relations with another man while he was gone and thinks the marriage should be called off? P. 223

Answers:

1. Beans are all the food left in the household; the soldiers have eaten everything else.
2. Tita tells him in the middle of an argument.
3. She has lost a lot of weight; she is thin.
4. Tita and Pedro can be a couple but they must keep this fact a secret from the neighbors.
5. Rosaura owns the ranch; also, she can deprive Tita of the pleasure of helping raise Esperanza.
6. She thinks happy thoughts, like of her first meeting with Pedro, to make the beans cook.
7. She sweeps the streets of Pedro Negras
8. She never married.

9. Aunt Mary is deaf.
10. He still wants to marry Tita.

December

1. What gift by John to Tita irritates Pedro to the point that he contemplates “smashing his face in.” p. 231
2. Why is Rosaura’s funeral extremely poorly attended? P. 233
3. On what occasion does Tita shed her first tears of joy? P. 237
4. What aspect of the treaty between Tita and Rosaura was least successful? P. 237
5. Who arranges the dark room as a wedding bower for Tita and Pedro on the night of Alex and Esperanza’s marriage? P. 243
6. How does Pedro die? P. 244
7. How big was the bedspread Tita runs to for warmth after Pedro’s death? P. 245
8. What is the only object to survive the conflagration of the De La Garza ranch? P. 245
9. What makes the ranch the most fertile in the region? P. 245
10. In what sense will Tita never die, according to the story pattern? P. 245

Answers:

1. a box of matches
2. her corpse stinks
3. when Pedro proposes to her
4. Esperanza’s education takes place, which Rosaura had tried to prevent
5. The ghost of Nacha
6. He has a heart attack while making love to Tita
7. Big enough to cover the entire ranch, three hectares....
8. The family cookbook
9. Several feet of ashes from the conflagration of the entire previous generation’s works, including the bodies of Tita and Pedro...
10. As long as there is someone to cook the family recipes (in this case, Esperanza) the family history will live on.

Teacher and Student Aid: Cultural and Historical Background Notes

Rationale: Many cultural and historical references to Mexico emerge while reading the text, Like Water for Chocolate. Unless the teacher has extensive background of Mexican history and culture, much of these references will be meaningless. To help aid the teacher and student, a number of questions have been devised as “quick references” for the teacher to give explanations for the various topics as referred from the following text.

Page 32: “The revolution made it possible to travel in safety...”

What is the Mexican Revolution?

The Mexican Revolution (1910-1921) was a period in Mexico of political, social and military conflict. It was fought with intent of putting the land back in the hands of the common people (agrarian reform).

Note: one should not be confused with the Mexican civil war fought in 1850’s under the Benito Juarez leadership. Technically, the Revolution was a civil war, but almost always the war was referred in Spanish as **la revolución mexicana**, in order to distinguish for the previous Reform War. Important figures were Francisco Madero, Emilio Zapata, Pancho Villa, and Venustiano Carranza. Although it did not achieve the intended land reform or change, in essence, was a power struggle among the elite. This Revolutionary period was the back drop of a variety of cultural settings represented in art, literature, drama, and film.

Page 35: “to offer white flowers to the Virgin”

Who is the Virgin?

The virgin refers to the Virgin of Guadalupe associated with the Catholic Church and is a very important religious symbol and cultural image of Mexico. It is believed that she appeared to Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin on December 12, 1531 on a hill of Tepeyac near Mexico City. She is a 16th century Mexican icon of the Virgin Mary. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is a symbol important to Mexican identity and consider her as “Empress of the Americas”

Page 51: “... imagining her on horseback with his arms clasped around one of Pancho Villa’s men...” (Other references pp.58, 68, 88-89)

Who is Pancho Villa? A very famous general, Francisco “Pancho” Villa that fought in the Mexican Revolution. He was very brave general and led a troop of soldiers from the north. He was assassinated in 1923. Other important generals were Emilio Zapata and Venustiano Carranza.

Page 54: “...where the rebel forces and the federal troops were engaged in fierce battle.” (Other references pp. 58, 71, 73)

Who are the federal troops? The Federal troops are those fighting against the rebel revolutionists. This is a term used for all Government troops from 1910 to 1920, but usually associated particularly with Huerta’s Federal Army. Huerta being President from February 1913 to July 1914.

Page 95: “...and this difficult job was added to her job of washing the black clothes her mother wore.”

Why did her mother wear black clothes?

When a person dies in Spanish culture there is a period of grieving. Typically that person would wear black, especially a widow in mourning. There is a term used in Spanish “esta de luto.” Long ago, women would mourn for long period of time, perhaps their whole life. So the next time you see a person in black....

Page 167: “Her greatest worry then was that the the Magi never brought what she asked for...” (Other references pp. 166, 168, 172,174)Page 174: “Traditionally, on the night of the sixth of January, the bread is sliced...”

What does the Magi referred to and why is January 6th so special? (also words such as Three Kings, Nativity scene)Christmas in Mexico during the time period of this book, Like Water for Chocolate started

on December 16, celebrating “Las posadas”, a representation of Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem. In the evening they would sing religious Christmas songs (villancicos), and go from house to house finding entrance. Christmas Eve (misa del Gallo) was a time for family and spent gather for a Christmas meal (Something Tita could do very well!). Gifts were not opened till January 6th and Santa did not bring the gifts but, the Three Kings or Magi (Reyes Magos).

Page 68: “Since she wasn’t a girl to be frightened by stories of La Llorona...:

What is the story of “La Llorona”?

La llorona (which means in Spanish: the Cryer) is a story told in the mid 16th century of a woman who drowned her children in the canal outside of Mexico City. The story goes that she is remorseful of her deed and sobs and cries “Where is my children?” She appears as a woman in a white robe without a face and only her skull is visible. Tradition has it, when the wind blows, the Llorona is looking for her children; so beware.

Page 177: “ ...the person in charge of that troop was none other than his sister Gretrudis.” (Other references pp. 178, 192-194, 195, 196-197)

Did women really participate in the Revolutionary War of Mexico?

Women during the Revolutionary War were known as “soldaderas, Adelitas, or coronelas”. These brave women performed every niche of life in the war: nurses, cooks, the intellectual, female soldiers, victims, spies, go between, and messengers. There were even those that were leaders of the troops. La Coronela was one of the few that received a pension after the war as a veteran of the Mexican Revolutionary. Sadly, many did not get the credit deserved in such a male dominated age.

Where does the idea of the text, Like Water for Chocolate come from?

In Mexico during the 19th century, there was a ladies magazine printed monthly called “calendars for young ladies” (Calendarios Para las Señoritas Mexicanas). This might be considered the men’s version to the Farmer’s Almanac.

This ladies’ magazine often included items such as: recipes, fashions or dressing making ideas, short poetry, home remedies and the like. From these magazines, one can document the styles of the day, various life patterns and other Mexican female culture. This magazine was somewhat the rave of the day, and by the turn of the century every literate woman was expected to draw great interests because of the authentic language seeking special audience for the young ladies.

Further Resources

Barbara Bernard and David F Winn. *AccessLiterature*. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006

Some well-known authors of magical realism and their works:

- [Allende, Isabel](#) - [The House of Spirits](#) (*La casa de los espíritus*)
- [Asturias, Miguel Ángel](#) - [Men of Maize](#) (*Hombres de maíz*)
- [Calvino, Italo](#) - [Invisible Cities](#) (*Le città invisibili*)
- [Carey, Peter](#) - [Illywhacker](#)
- [Carpentier, Alejo](#) - [The Kingdom of this World](#) (*El reino de este mundo*)
- [Donoso, José](#) - [The Obscene Bird of the Night](#) (*El obsceno pájaro de la noche*)
- [Fuentes, Carlos](#) - [The Death of Artemio Cruz](#) (*La muerte de Artemio Cruz*)
- [García Márquez, Gabriel](#) - [One Hundred Years of Solitude](#) (*Cien años de soledad*)
- [Grass, Günter](#) - [The Tin Drum](#) (*Die Blechtrommel*)
- [Malaparte, Curzio](#) - [Woman Like Me](#) (*Donna Come Me*)
- [Morrison, Toni](#) - [Song of Solomon](#)
- [Murakami, Haruki](#) - [Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World](#)
- [Okri, Ben](#) - [The Famished Road](#)
- [Rushdie, Salman](#) - [Midnight's Children](#)
- [Süskind, Patrick](#) - [Perfume \(novel\)](#) (*Das Parfum*)
- [Winterson, Jeanette](#) – [The Passion](#)

Food Writing

Barbara Kingsolver – *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*

Nigel Slater – *Kitchen Diaries*

M.F.K. Fisher – *The Gastronomical Me*

Diana Abu-Jaber - *The Language of Baklava*

Madhur Jaffrey - *Climbing the Mango Tree*

Anthony Bourdain – *Kitchen Confidential*

John Haney – *Fair Shares For All*

Susan Branch – *The Summer Book from the Heart of the Home*

Websites

<http://www.urbandreams.ousd.k12.ca.us/lessonplans/chocolate/teacher.html>

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1144234> a piece on food memoirs