

# Instructional Lesson Plan EXCERPT

## English Language Arts

**Grade:** 8

**Unit Title:** War of Words

**Length:** 2 Days

### Lesson Overview

“Little Things Are Big”, by Jesus Colon, a newspaper column written in the 1950’s is a concise, one day introduction to the concepts of conflict in literature.

**Essential Question:** How do the perceptions we have of ourselves and of others create conflicts?

### Lesson Procedure

#### DAY ONE

##### Before Reading:

- Quickwrite: Students will consider the ways in which we identify people with whom we have had no personal contact. Provide the example of a stranger in the mall or in an airport. Students will make a list of at least five things they use as “markers” which form their opinions about people they don’t know. In this lesson, ‘markers’ refers to obvious physical characteristics.
  - Discuss as a group
  - Create a class summary, noting most common identifiers
- Using the class list, discuss how outward appearance can create conflicts between individuals and groups.
- Check for prior knowledge of setting (urban, NYC, subway station) Show painting and discuss <http://www.oilpaintingdvd.com/paintingvideos/index.php/Nocturne-Paintings/NYC-Subway-10x8-in-Oil-on-canvas>
- Quickly review the definition of literary conflict (Glencoe 2009, Course 3, p R2)
  - The central struggle between opposing forces in a story or drama
  - External Conflict: when a character struggles against some outside force, e.g. nature, fate, society, or another person (recently, technology has been added to the list)
  - Internal Conflict: exists within the mind of a character torn between opposing feelings or goals.

**First Reading:** Students will read the text of “Little Things Are Big” in its entirety. (Note that the video provided at <http://www.choosingtoparticipate.org/explore/exhibit/stories/littlethings> is verbatim.)

##### Close Reading:

- Students will work in pairs or small groups to re-read text for deeper comprehension.
  - Instruct students to underline examples of physical descriptions of people in the text.
  - Instruct students to circle descriptions of the setting in the text. (auditory, visual)
  - Instruct students to place an exclamation mark next to areas of conflict in the essay.

##### After Reading:

- Class discussion questions:
  - From whose point of view do we see this story? Why is this important?
  - Do we know how the woman perceived the narrator? Why is this?
  - What conflict does the narrator face?
  - What type of conflict is this? What are the reasons for his conflict?
  - How does the setting affect the conflict? Would the conflict have occurred if the meeting had taken place during the daytime?
  - What effect does the physical/outward appearance of the characters have on the conflict?
  - How does the repetition of the word “white” demonstrate the narrator’s concerns? What reasons would he have for these concerns? Were his concerns valid? Why? (Discussion of cultural standards of the 1950’s and of today)
  - What could have changed the resolution of the conflict? (possible ideas: the woman asked for help, the woman was in danger, the narrator was a woman instead of a man)
  - How did the narrator’s perceptions of the woman and of society form what he chose to do?

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Exit slip: List three “markers” Jesus Colon used in making his decision about what to do.

**DAY TWO**

**Written Response:**

**Constructed Response:**

Students will respond to the following questions in paragraph format. (Teacher may select as appropriate for the class)

1. Did Jesus Colon make the right decision? Why or why not?
2. How was the conflict in “Little Things Are Big” influenced by outward (physical) identifiers? Would the story have changed if the identifiers were different? Explain your answer.
3. How might the story have ended if Colon decided to approach the woman and offered to help? How might she have responded to him? Based on that response, what effect would this have had on him?

Using a rubric of teacher’s choice, students will work in pairs to review and revise constructive response before handing them in.

**Selected Response:**

1. What is the primary conflict in the essay, “Little Things Are Big”?
  - a. Internal (man against self)
  - b. External (man against man)
  - c. External (man against society)
  - d. External (man against nature)
2. Which of the following quotes best demonstrates the conflict you chose in Question 1?
  - a. “It was going to be a problem for her to get off; two small children, a baby in her arm, and a suitcase in her hand.”
  - b. “I’m a Negro and a Puerto Rican. Suppose I approach this white lady in this deserted subway station late at night? ...Should I offer my help?”
  - c. “I ran up the steps of that long concrete stairs in twos and when I reached the street, the cold air slapped my warm face.”
  - d. “...if I am ever faced with an occasion like that again, I am going to offer my help regardless of how the offer is going to be received. Then I will have my courtesy with me again.”