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I like to teach short stories for so many reasons. They are brief enough to complete a reading assignment in class or in a single night. They appeal to all types of readers. They can be less complex and, therefore, more accessible than novels while still possessing many of the same literary elements. They center around a limited number of characters, whose actions reveal their motivations. And short stories often have a narrow time frame and focus on a single incident.

Gary Soto's *Hey 13!* is a collection of 13 short stories that explore the complexities of growing up. "Twin Stars" defines true friendship through Teri and Luz, inseparable best friends known as Glitz Girls de Southeast Fresno. Saul, the main character in "A Simple Plan," cannot bring himself to abandon his dog, though his abusive father insists that the dog must go. In "Musical Lives," Joel has been playing the trumpet for nine years, but he realizes that he will never be any good. When he encounters bullies from the basketball team, he makes the decision to never play in the band at any of their games. Searching for a first kiss is the focus of "A Very Short Romance," and learning the true meaning of religion is the theme of "Finding Religion." Teenage mall culture is revealed in "Celebrities," and the daughter of classic hoarders craves personal space in "Whose Bedroom Is This?" Ashlee is gorgeous but self-centered in "It's Not Nice to Stare," and Freddie, the main character in "Two Girls, Best Friends, and a Frog," loses his intuition and doesn't choose the right girlfriend. In "Altar Boys," Little Ray embarks on a Sunday escapade and then must face his mother's wrath. Monica, the main character in "Romancing the Diary," is brooding over a boy and throws her cherished diary into a creek. Things look up when a cute 15-year-old boy from the other side of town rescues the book. "Dirty Talk," the final story, introduces Tiffany Tafolla, who rethinks the power of profanity when she hears a young niece of her best friend repeat the language she overhears.

Each of the stories in this collection has powerful teaching lessons, but it's the first story that is the focus of this article. "The Campus Tour" follows Emma Fuentes, who tours a college campus with her middle-school honors class. She thought

that she had some idea about college life until she gets to the campus and finds that everything is very different than what she pictured. She witnesses demonstrations, visits a tai chi class, encounters an art professor who resembles a hippie and lives in a school bus, and meets a student political activist whose cause is global warming. At the end of the visit, Emma ponders her narrow world and learns how she can make a difference, even at 13.

Teaching "The Campus Tour"

Before you ask students to read "The Campus Tour," make sure that they have an understanding of the following literary elements: setting, character, plot structure, theme, point of view, tone, and use of language.

Once students have read the story, divide the class into small groups and ask them to discuss the following:

- Why does the narrator make the repeated point that the kids on the tour are honor students?
- How are the characters typical middle-school students?
- What is Emma's attitude toward the country?
- How do her parents influence her ideas?
- What is Emma's idea of college before the visit?
- What social issues are exposed on Emma's tour of the college campus?
- How does the college tour change Emma?

Follow the group work with a class discussion about the following:

- Who is the narrator?
- How is Emma revealed?
- What is the conflict?
- Is there a resolution?
- Analyze the secondary characters—Robin, Mrs. Mendel, the art professor, and the environmental activist. Do they influence Emma's growth as a character?
- What is the tone of the story? For example, what is the attitude of the narrator toward Emma?
- What is the implied theme?
- Define the term cliché. Explain what the college student means when he tells Emma, "We can make a change. It's a matter of lifestyle." How is this a cliché? What is the college student's attitude toward politicians?

Follow the discussions above with the following activities, which can be completed in class or as homework. All of these activities will help you implement the Common Core State Standards with "The Campus Tour." You can find more information about the standards at www.corestandards.org.

Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
LET'S READ SHORT SHORTS
BY PAT SCALES

In the Classroom:

Ask students to attempt to define unfamiliar words in the story by taking clues from the text. Then have them use a dictionary to define the words and identify their parts of speech. Finally, have students use a thesaurus to identify an appropriate synonym for each word.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

In the Classroom:

The honor students tour the music building and hear a cacophony of sound coming from an assortment of instruments. Ask students to think about the sound and tone of different musical instruments. Instruct them to write an essay that draws a relationship between Emma and a particular instrument. For example, is she a violin, flute, or trumpet?

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.1–W.7.1.** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3–W.7.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

In the Classroom:

Point out similes in the story and ask students to write a simile that reflects the change in Emma at the end of the story.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.6.5–L.7.5.** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

In the Classroom:

Emma is exposed to various political and social issues while on the campus tour. Offer students examples of political cartoons and then ask them to create a political cartoon about one of the issues in the story. Display the students' cartoons in class.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.4–W.7.4.** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3.)

In the Classroom:

Have students read a different story in *Hey, 13!* and write a brief essay that compares the theme to that of “The Campus Tour.”

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2.** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.7.** Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).

In the Classroom:

Ask students to write a fourteenth story for the collection and make themselves the main character. Instruct them to create a theme for their story that parallels the overall theme of the collection.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3–W.7.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

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Short Story Collections

The discussion questions and Common Core–linked activities included in this article can be easily adapted to selections from the following short story collections, all of which make excellent additions to the literature curriculum.

13: Thirteen Stories That Capture the Agony and Ecstasy of Being Thirteen. Ed. by James Howe. 2003. 288p. Atheneum, \$17.99 (9780689828638); paper, \$7.99 (9781416926849). Gr. 6–9.

Both humorous and poignant, this collection deals with the awkwardness of being 13, as told by well-known writers Ann M. Martin, Bruce Coville, Todd Strasser, Rachel Vail, Stephen Roos, Ron Koertge, and others.

Baseball Crazy: Ten Short Stories That Cover All the Bases. Ed. by Nancy E. Mercado. 2008. 192p. Dial, \$16.99 (9780803731622); paper, \$6.99 (9780142413715); e-book, \$6.99 (9781440630019). Gr. 6–9.

Among the writers in this collection are Jerry Spinelli, Joseph Bruchac, and Sue Corbett, and they delve into themes that go far beyond sports, such as family and peer relationships.

Baseball in April and Other Stories. By Gary Soto. 2000. 128p. Sandpiper, paper, \$6.99 (9780152025670). Gr. 5–9.

Set in poor areas of California, these 11 stories deal with typical problems of young adolescents.

Because of Shoe and Other Dog Stories. Ed. by Ann M. Martin. Illus. by Aleksey Ivanov and Olga Ivanov. 2012. 272p. Holt, \$15.99 (9780805093148); paper, \$6.99 (9781250027283); e-book, \$9.99 (9781429954983). Gr. 3–6.

The relationship between dogs and their owners is the theme of these short stories by Ann M. Martin, Jon J. Muth, Mark Teague, Margarita Engle, Thacher Hurd, Valerie Hobbs, Matt de la Peña, Pam Muñoz Ryan, and Wendy Orr.

Best Shorts: Favorite Stories for Sharing. Ed. by Avi. Illus. by Chris Raschka. 2006. 342p. Houghton, o.p. Gr. 4–up.

This collection of 24 stories includes ones by Richard Peck, Natalie Babbitt, Lloyd Alexander, and Katherine Paterson and deals with cultural diversity, animals as heroes, time machines, and superheroes.

The Chronicles of Harris Burdick: Fourteen Amazing Authors Tell the Tales. By Chris Van Allsburg and others. Illus. by Chris Van Allsburg. 2011. 208p. Houghton, \$24.99 (9780547548104); e-book, \$18.99 (9780547677606). Gr. 3–7.

Lois Lowry, Stephen King, Sherman Alexie, and Kate DiCamillo are among the writers of these 14 short stories based on the illustrations of Van Allsburg's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (1984). The stories range from humorous to spine-chilling to touching.

Guys Read: Funny Business. Ed. by Jon Scieszka. Illus. by Adam Rex. 2010. 288p. HarperCollins/Walden Pond, \$16.99 (9780061963742); paper, \$6.99 (9780061963735); e-book, \$5.99 (9780062017635). Gr. 4–7.

There is humor that is gross and humor that is absurd. Part of the Guys Read Library, this collection of 10 stories—by writers including Mac Barnett, Adam Rex, David Yoo, Paul Feig, Christopher Paul Curtis, Eoin Colfer, Jack Gantos, Jeff Kinney, David Lubar, and Jon Scieszka—offer both types of humor.

Past Perfect, Present Tense. By Richard Peck. 2006. 192p. Puffin, paper, \$6.99 (9780142405376). Gr. 5–12.

This collection of Peck's previously published short fiction and a couple of new entries includes humorous and tragic historical and contemporary stories.

Shelf Life: Stories by the Book. Ed. by Gary Paulsen. 2003. 192p. Simon & Schuster, \$17.99 (9780689841804). Gr. 4–7.

The focus of these 10 original stories by well-known authors is how books change lives. Note: sales of this book benefit the organization ProLiteracy Worldwide.

The SOS File. By Betsy Byars and others. Illus. by Arthur Howard. 2004. 80p. Holt, \$16.95 (9780805068887). Gr. 4–6.

These 12 first-person stories by students in Mr. Magro's class represent a "fun and extra-credit" assignment where each student writes about a time he or she needed to call for help.

Survivors: True Stories of Children in the Holocaust. By Allan Zullo and Mara Bovsun. 2005. 208p. Scholastic, paper, \$4.99 (9780439669962). 940.53. Gr. 4–8.

In these stories of hope and survival, nine Jewish girls and boys relate true accounts of fear and danger while living in Europe during the Holocaust.

Tales from Outer Suburbia. By Shaun Tan. Illus. by the author. 2009. 96p. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine, \$19.99 (9780545055871). Gr. 7–12.

These 15 illustrated short stories take readers on a journey from a mundane suburban life to a more magical place filled with wonder, and along the way, they are challenged to pause and think about the important ideas and messages.

Twelve Impossible Things before Breakfast. By Jane Yolen. 1997. 192p. Sandpiper, paper, \$6.99 (9780152164447); e-book, \$6.99 (9780547996158). Gr. 6–9.

These scary, gross, and magical stories about a sea monster, fairies, and aliens reveal the breadth of the fantasy genre. The collection also includes modernizations and retellings of old favorites *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" (retitled "The Bridge's Complaint").