

The Eudora Welty Ephemera Prize

The Optimist's Daughter Lesson Plan

Preparation:

Read (excerpts from) Eudora Welty's novel *The Optimist's Daughter*

Have students write a one-paragraph free response to the story before discussing together.

Some Questions for Discussion:

Welty presents the confluence where the Ohio and Mississippi rivers flow together.

How does this image of the river relate to events in the narrator's life when she sees it?

How does she describe the waters and the surrounding landscape, including the train?

Why do you think she remembers that moment when she tells about it in the novel?

Is the image of confluence symbolic of harmony or of turbulence and uncertainty?

How does this passage make you feel about the future for the character or yourself?

Assignment:

Write a 1-3 page personal essay, poem, or story about a time you, someone you know, or a fictional character came together with someone else, a family, or a group for a momentous experience, whether that was joyous or sad. Find an image, like Welty's of the rivers, that exemplifies your feelings about this experience. Use the image to paint a picture of those feelings and comment on the experience.

Alternate assignment:

Write a 1-3 page personal essay, poem, or story in response to *The Optimist's Daughter*.

You might take on one of the characters and tell the story from their perspective or you might rewrite the story in a more modern setting allowing for different choices or a different ending.

Activity:

Hold a class contest: Let all the students read each other's work and decide together which pieces are the most compelling or give each other suggestions. Encourage students to revise their work and submit it to the contest. All students are welcome to submit, even if the class didn't pick their work. Our judges might find value that your class overlooked, so encourage everyone to revise and submit! Holding a class contest might help some students get past the hurdle of submitting to the main contest.

Have your students submit their poems, stories, or essays to ephemera@muw.edu by Sept. 15, 2021. See the prize announcement for full details.