**K-6 Lessons :: America Street 6th Grade Unit**

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**Genre Lesson: Short Story**

Learning Goal

Examine the depth and breadth of a short story.

Duration

Approximately 2 Days (40 minutes for each class)

Necessary Materials

*Provided*: Short Story 1: “Captain Dang Tames the Alhambra Beast”, Examining a Short Story Example Chart 1, Short Story 2: “The Future is Ours”, Examining a Short Story Worksheet (Student Packet, page 2)   
*Not Provided*: Chart paper, markers, *America Street* edited by Anne Mazer

Lesson Plan

* **ACTIVATION & MOTIVATION**

Engage your students in a comparison and contrast discussion. Ask, "How are movies and television shows different?*"* (Their answers should include that a movie is long and a TV show is usually short.) Next, ask students what movies and TV shows have in common. For example, both have characters, a setting, a plot conflict, and a resolution. Recap that a sitcom only has time to show a slice of life, while a movie takes a deeper, longer look. Both, however, have the essential story elements—characters, setting, and plot.

* **TEACHER MODELING**

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will explain to students that just like a story can be told on screen in either a half hour television show or in a full-length blockbuster movie, the fiction that we read comes in different lengths as well. I will define a short story as a brief, fictional story that can usually be read in one or two sittings. It typically follows only one or two characters and focuses on one plot problem that is resolved by the end of the story. The setting of a short story is very focused. It will only take place in one or two locations. The purpose of a short story is to give the reader a glimpse of a few characters’ lives as they confront a problem.

A novel, on the other hand, is a long work of fiction in which a character typically changes or grows in several ways. There are often more than one plot problem in a novel, and sometimes even plot twists and surprises. There is also often more than one important character. In a novel, we learn a lot about many places in a story, characters’ backgrounds, and what happened before the story begins. The difference between a short story and a novel, then, is that a short story shows a slice of life, whereas a novel or book will give a longer, deeper look. Short stories differ from longer fiction in the amount of detail they offer to readers. A good reader will want to examine how a short story includes the most essential details (the story elements), but leaves many of the other details to our imagination.

I will identify the essential story elements in fiction—characters, setting, and plot (problem and solution) in a short story called “Captain Dang Tames the Alhambra Beast.”Then, I will ask questions about details that the author chose to leave out to focus the short story. First I will identify the characters mentioned in “Captain Dang.” For example, Henry talks about his mother in the story, so I will write her name on the chart. I will continue identifying characters in the story, including those mentioned by the main character, Henry. *Note*: Additional examples can be found on the Examining a Short Story Example Chart 1.

Next, I will identify the setting in “Captain Dang” and record the details on the chart. I know from details in the story that the action takes place in Southern California in a place called Alhambra. I also know that Henry is Vietnamese or Vietnamese American, and he mentions Vietnam in his comic book, which means he has a connection to that place as well.

Finally, I will identify the plot problem and solution and record the details on the chart. The story opens with the problem—Henry is teased for being quiet and nerdy by the other students at Alhambra, especially Craig Nale. I can tell that Henry feels lonely because he sits alone in the cafeteria and lets the other students tease him. The solution is that Craig and Henry bond over their love of comic books, and Craig calls Henry by his real name, rather than the nickname that he usually teases him with.

Now that I’ve identified the characters, setting, and plot problem and solution, I will think about what the author decided not to include in this story. To do this, I will ask questions about memories or background information, descriptions about multiple places in a given setting, or additional details in the plot. I will ask questions about these unknown “backstory” details on my chart . For example, I will ask questions about the mom’s backstory that the author chose not to include. Why is Henry’s mother sick? What is wrong with her? Is she still alive? *Note*: Additional examples can be found on the Examining a Short Story Example Chart 1.

* **Think Check**

Ask: "How can I examine the depth and breadth of a short story?" Students should answer that you should identify the story elements in a short story by looking for textual details about the characters, setting, plot problem, and resolution. Then, you think about what “backstory” information is not included in the story and ask questions about the story elements you identified.

* **GUIDED PRACTICE**

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will read “The Future is Ours” and identify story elements (character, setting, and plot) in the story. As we read, we will record the main story elements for character, plot, and setting on chart paper. One setting detail, for example, is that the story takes place in Queens, NY near the site for the World’s Fair. Another is that the story takes place during the late 1930s. The characters in the story include Vanessa and her mother.

Next, we will think about what information is not included in the story, and we will record questions about the “backstory” information on chart paper. For example, we never find out who stole the pennies. We will write, “What is the identity of the thief?” We will discuss why this information isn’t essential to the short story because it wasn’t about catching a thief, it was about getting to the World’s Fair. We will continue looking at the story elements we identified and asking questions about what information the author chose not to include in the story on our chart. *Note*: See Examining a Short Story Example Chart 2 for additional details and information.

Finally, we will discuss why the author chose not to include some backstory details in this short story. How are the details that are included important to the story?

* **INDEPENDENT PRACTICE**

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will read “The Wrong Lunch Line” from *America Street*. You will record details about the story elements—the story’s character, plot (problem and solution), and setting in the circles in the center of the page. Then, you will think about what information has not been included in the story, and you will ask questions about that information on the Examining a Short Story Worksheet. (See page 2 in the Student Packet.) You will write those questions on your worksheet surrounding the appropriate story elements.

* **REFLECTIVE PRACTICE**

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will share the story elements that we have identified, and we will discuss the information that is not included in the story. Ask: "What do you notice about what was included in a short story? How was this short story a slice of life? What might be beyond the text, and why did the author not include those details?"  We will also discuss why an author might write a short story rather than a long novel.