Putting It All Together –
“The Scarlet Ibis”
Grade Nine

Skill Focus

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<td>Meaning and Effect related to parts of</td>
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Materials and Resources
• “The Scarlet Ibis” by James Hurst

Lesson Introduction
In this lesson, students work with a short story, practicing close reading skills, analyzing its rhetorical structure through intense study of its grammatical and syntactical elements, and composing a text of their own. Ideally, this type of lesson would address all of the levels of thinking. This method of analysis can be adapted to any rich, layered text.
Read the first two paragraphs from “The Scarlet Ibis” and answer the questions that follow.

It was in the clove of seasons, summer was dead but autumn had not yet been born, that the ibis lit in the bleeding tree. The flower garden was stained with rotting brown magnolia petals and ironweeds grew rank amid the purple phlox. The five o’clocks by the chimney still marked time, but the oriole nest in the elm was untenanted and rocked back and forth like an empty cradle. The last graveyard flowers were blooming, and their smell drifted across the cotton field and through every room of our house, speaking softly the names of our dead.

It’s strange that all this is still so clear to me, now that the summer has long since fled and time has had its way. A grindstone stands where the bleeding tree stood, just outside the kitchen door, and now if an oriole sings in the elm, its song seems to die up in the leaves, a silvery dust. The flower garden is prim, the house a gleaming white, and the pale fence across the yard stands straight and spruce. But sometimes (like right now), as I sit in the cool, green-draped parlor, the grindstone begins to turn, and time with all its changes is ground away – and I remember Doodle.

Paraphrase
Levels of Thinking: Remember and Understand
1. What is literally meant by the “clove of seasons”?

Diction
Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze
2. Highlight all of the words with negative connotations in yellow.

3. Circle the highlighted words that are associated with death.

4. List two inferences that can be made by studying the diction of these two paragraphs.

5. The diction creates a sense of _______________ and _______________ because ________________________________

_____________________________________________________________.
### Imagery
6. Fill in the chart with the images from the first two paragraphs. Your commentary should explain how the images contribute to tone.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<td>Sight</td>
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### Figurative Language
7. Annotate the two paragraphs for figurative language. Be sure to mark and label all examples of simile, metaphor, and personification.

8. Select one of the figures of speech and write two sentences explaining how the device contributes to tone.

Now, read the rest of the “The Scarlet Ibis” and answer the questions that follow.
Literary Analysis
Levels of Thinking: Remember and Understand

Answer the multiple choice questions to identify the literary elements, figures of speech, sound devices, literary techniques, or syntactical devices in the lines that follow.

9. _____ “We were down in Old Woman Swamp and it was spring and the sick-sweet smell of bay flowers hung everywhere like a mournful song” contains everything EXCEPT
a. simile
b. imagery
c. metaphor
d. oxymoron
e. alliteration

10. _____ The line “She said he would live because he was born in a caul and cauls were made from Jesus’ nightgown” contains an example of
a. idiom
b. allusion
c. inversion
d. repetition
e. personification

11. _____ In the line “He might not, she sobbed, even be ‘all there,’” ‘all there’ is an example of a(n)
   a. idiom
   b. allusion
c. inversion
d. repetition
e. personification

12. _____ The line “I did not know then that pride is a wonderful terrible thing, a seed that bears two vines, life and death” contains
I. metaphor
   II. oxymoron
   III. personification
a. I only
b. II only
c. III only
d. I & II
e. I, II, & III
Structure and Style
Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze
13. Quote the line that echoes the first sentence of the story. What is the significance of this line?

14. Most of the story is told as a _____________________________________________.

15. Why does the author choose not to return to the present at the end of the story?

16. List three observations about how the language of the story is different after the first two paragraphs.

17. What is the author’s purpose in including the three paragraphs that begin with the line, “That summer, the summer of 1918, was blighted.”?

Symbolism
Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze
18. For each of the colors on the chart,
   a. identify something specific in the novel that is linked to the color, and note it in the column labeled literal meaning,

   b. explain how the color of this literal object becomes symbolic.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colors</th>
<th>Literal Meaning</th>
<th>Symbolic Meaning</th>
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<td>Green</td>
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<td>Gold</td>
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<td>Red</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
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19. Explain how the ibis symbolizes Doodle. Be sure to note the significance of color.

20. Explain the symbolism of
   a. the bad weather at the end of the story
   b. the time of year and the specific year in which the story is set

Character
Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze
The narrator says,
   “There is within me (and with sadness I have watched it in others)
   a knot of cruelty borne by the stream of love, much as our blood sometimes bears
   the seed of our destruction, and at times I was mean to Doodle.”
21. Fill in the left side of the chart with three quotes that illustrate the narrator’s love for
Doodle and the right side with three quotes that illustrate his cruelty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Cruelty</th>
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22. Is the behavior of the narrator typical for siblings? Justify your answer.

Theme
Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze
23. Explain the idea conveyed in the words “pride is a wonderful terrible thing, a seed that
    bears two vines, life and death.”

24. What other line in the story reflects this idea of love and destruction?

25. Highlight the portion of the line that would make a good statement of theme for the story.

Grammar Study
What follows are two paragraphs from the short story. One describes the ibis, and one
describes Doodle. In each, the sentences are numbered for ease in reference.
The Ibis

1. At that moment the bird began to flutter, but the wings were uncoordinated, and amid much flapping and a spray of flying feathers, it tumbled down, bumping through the limbs of the bleeding tree and landing at our feet with a thud.
2. Its long, graceful neck jerked twice into an S, then straightened out, and the bird was still.
3. A white veil came over the eyes, and the long white beak unhinged.
4. Its legs were crossed and its clawlike feet were delicately curved at rest.
5. Even death did not mar its grace, for it lay on the earth like a broken vase of red flowers, and we stood around it, awed by its exotic beauty.

Parts of Speech
Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Create
Sentence #1:
Five words end in -ing and look like verbs but function as other parts of speech.
1. Label these words as participles (verb forms used as adjectives) or gerunds (verb forms used as nouns).

2. Rewrite the last half of the sentence, substituting your participles in the blanks.
   It tumbled down, _________________ through the limbs of the _________________ tree and _________________ at our feet with a thud.

Sentence #2:
3. Write the compound verb in the first independent clause.
4. How do these verbs give the reader a sense of what is happening to the ibis?

Sentence #3:
5. The adjective “white” is used twice in this sentence. Write a sentence explaining the effect of this repetition, paying particular attention to the symbolism of “a white veil.”

Sentence #4:
6. Write the two verb phrases.
7. What sound device is Hurst using in repeating the initial letter of both verbs?
8. Write another sentence about the ibis in death, using two different verbs that begin with the same letter.

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate
Sentence #5:
9. This sentence is composed of three independent clauses connected by coordinating conjunctions. Write the subjects (one noun and two pronouns) of these independent clauses.
10. Which is the most powerful subject?

11. Why does this subject seem to control this whole sentence?

**Phrases**

**Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, Create**

Sentence #5:
12. The simile is composed of two prepositional phrases. Underline them.

13. Write your own simile describing the ibis, using two different prepositional phrases.

14. The past participial phrase “Awed by its exotic beauty” could be written as a separate sentence. Write it as a sentence; you will have to add some words.

**Clauses and Sentences**

**Levels of Thinking: Remember and Understand**

Sentence #1:
15. Count the independent clauses in this sentence.

16. Circle the coordinating conjunctions.

17. Does the sentence contain any dependent clauses?

Dependent, or subordinate, clauses commonly begin with subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns:

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<th>when</th>
<th>as</th>
<th>because</th>
<th>until</th>
<th>where</th>
<th>although</th>
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<td>what</td>
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18. What type of sentence in structure is this? (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex)

**Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze**

19. Sentence #1 is called *loose* or *cumulative* because it begins with the independent clauses and adds on modifiers after those clauses. If the sentence had begun with the participial phrases (“bumping through the limbs of the bleeding tree and landing at our feet with a thud”), how would the rhetorical effect of the sentence change?
Sentences #2, 3, 4, and 5:
20. What type of sentences are these in structure? (They are all the same.)
   You will notice that none of the sentences in this paragraph contain dependent clauses. All the sentences are compound, composed of independent clauses joined together. The rhetorical effect is of equal clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions without the complexity of added dependent clauses.

21. Write a sentence in which you explain how this kind of sentence creates precisely the effect that Hurst is after.

Parts of Speech
Levels of Thinking: Remember and Understand
Doodle
1. “Doodle! Doodle!” I cried, shaking him, but there was no answer but the ropy rain.
2. He lay very awkwardly, with his head thrown far back, making his vermillion neck appear unusually long and slim.
3. His little legs, bent sharply at the knees, had never before seemed so fragile, so thin.

Sentence #1:
22. The sentence is composed of two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction. Circle the coordinating conjunction.

23. Write the word that functions as the verb of the first independent clause.

24. The first independent clause ends with “shaking him.” “Shaking” looks like a verb but isn’t functioning as one in this sentence. It is modifying “I,” so it is a participle, functioning as an adjective. Write a sentence using the word “shaking” as the verb in the sentence.

25. In the sentences below, label “shaking” as either the verb of the sentence or a participle.
   a. He was shaking the pecan tree to gather the nuts.
   b. Shaking with fear, the little boy hid in the closet.
   c. The shaking child cried out with fear.

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply
Sentence #2:
26. Write the subject and verb of the independent clause.

27. Is “making” the verb of the sentence or a participle?

28. Write a sentence using “making” as the verb of the sentence.

29. This sentence contains two adverbs that end in -ly. Substitute two adverbs of your own in the sentence.
30. The sentence ends with two adjectives. Substitute two adjectives of your own.

Sentence #3:
31. This sentence has a divided subject and verb. The subject is separated from the verb by a participial phrase. Write the subject and the verb of the sentence.

32. If “bent” is not the verb of the sentence, what part of speech is “bent”? If “bent” is functioning as this part of speech, what is it called?

33. Write a sentence using “bent” as the verb of the sentence.

34. “Fragile” and “thin” are modifying which word in the sentence?

35. Substitute two other words for “fragile” and “thin.”

Clauses and Sentences
Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze
36. What type of sentence in structure is sentence #1? (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex)

37. What type of sentence structure exists in sentence #2?

38. What type of sentence structure exists in sentence #3?

39. What conclusion can you come to about the kind of sentences Hurst seems to write?

Writing Activities
Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate
1. Explain why you agree or disagree with the author’s insights about life (the theme or themes). How convincingly does the author present the theme or themes?

2. Write a paragraph explaining how the symbolism reinforces the theme.

3. Write a paragraph explaining how the actions of the narrator reinforce the theme.

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Create
Read the following excerpt from “The Scarlet Ibis.”

“There is within me (and with sadness I have watched it in others) a knot of cruelty borne by the stream of love, much as our blood sometimes bears the seed of our destruction…”

4. In a carefully reasoned essay, analyze the narrator’s assertion, and defend or challenge the statement. Use evidence from your observations, experience, or reading to develop your position.