



***Two Eggs, Please* by Sarah Weeks**

Illustrated by Betsy Lewin

Questions for Socratic Discussion by Jill Andrews

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Contents

Introduction	2
Questions about Structure: Setting	4
Questions about Structure: Characters	5
Questions about Structure: Conflict and Plot	7
Story Charts	9
Questions about Structure: Theme	11
Questions about Style	12
Questions about Context	13
Writing Assignments	14

Introduction

This teacher guide is intended to assist the teacher or parent in conducting meaningful discussions of literature in the classroom or home school. Questions and answers follow the pattern presented in *Teaching the Classics*, the Center for Literary Education's two day literature seminar. Though the concepts underlying this approach to literary analysis are explained in detail in that seminar, the following brief summary presents the basic principles upon which this guide is based.

The *Teaching the Classics* approach to literary analysis and interpretation is built around **three unique ideas** which, when combined, produce a powerful instrument for understanding and teaching literature:

First: All works of fiction share the same basic elements — Context, Structure, and Style. A literature lesson that helps the student identify these elements in a story prepares him for meaningful discussion of the story's themes.

Context encompasses all of the details of time and place surrounding the writing of a story, including the personal life of the author as well as historical events that shaped the author's world.

Structure includes the essential building blocks that make up a story, and that all stories have in common: Conflict, Plot (which includes *exposition*, *rising action*, *climax*, *denouement*, and *conclusion*), Setting, Characters and Theme.

Style refers to the literary devices used by authors to create the mood and atmosphere of their stories. Recognition of some basic literary devices (alliteration, simile, personification, metaphor, etc) enables a reader not only to understand the author's themes more readily, but also to appreciate his craftsmanship more fully.

Second: Because it is approachable and engaging, Children's Literature is the best genre to employ in teaching the foundational principles of literary analysis. Children's books present these building blocks in clear, memorable language, and are thus treasure mines of opportunities for the astute teacher — allowing him to present Context, Structure and Style with ease to children and adults alike. Having learned to recognize these basic elements in the simple text of a classic children's story, a student is well prepared to analyze complex works suitable for his own age and level of intellectual development.

Third: The best classroom technique for teaching literary analysis and interpretation is the Socratic Method. Named after the ancient gadfly who first popularized this style of teaching, the Socratic method employs the art of questioning, rather than lecturing, to accomplish education. Based upon the conviction that the process of discovery constitutes the better part of learning, our program uses well placed questions to teach students how to think, rather than dictating to them what to think.

The *Teaching the Classics* seminar syllabus supplies a thorough list of Socratic questions for teachers to use in class discussion. The questions are general enough to be used with any book, but focused enough to lead the student into meaningful contemplation of the themes of even the

most difficult stories. Questions on the list are arranged in order of difficulty: from grammar level questions which ask for the mere fact of a story, to rhetoric level questions which require discussion of ideologies and transcendent themes. Properly employed, this list can help teachers engage their classes in important discussions of ideas, and can also provide a rich resource for essay and other writing assignments! Used in conjunction with a good writing program, *Teaching the Classics* produces **deep thinkers** at any age.

The questions used in this guide have been taken directly from the Socratic list, and will therefore be familiar to the seminar alumnus.

More information about *Teaching the Classics* may be found at www.centerforlit.com.

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Two Eggs, Please

by Sarah Weeks

This little picture story is an interesting example of how a very simple book contains all the necessary elements of a well told story on the most basic level. This makes it a great book for teaching any age group the principles of literary analysis. With a vocabulary of around 65 words (a fourth of them describing how to cook an egg!), you and your students can grasp the story in seconds and then proceed to learn about literary analysis. This will be much easier than beginning with a complicated story and having two jobs—comprehending the story and analyzing it correctly. So, while the book is obviously written for very young children, as a tool for learning how to analyze literature, it is appropriate and recommended for all ages. We predict that it will be a delightful exercise.

Questions about Structure: Setting

Note: Reference numbers in parentheses refer to the complete Socratic List, which is included in the course syllabus of the Center for Literary Education’s flagship seminar, *Teaching the Classics: A Socratic Method for Literary Education*.

1. Where does this story happen? Is it in the country or the city? (1b.)

This story takes place in the city in an all night diner. You might ask your students why this is necessary to the story. For example, where else could you gather a group of such disparate people together in one place so readily in the middle of the night...except for a mother and a baby? It would be interesting to discuss what brought each of the characters there on this night.

2. When does this story happen? What time of day? How long a period of time does it cover? (2a.b.)

This story takes place in the middle of the night. There is a clue in one of the pictures that shows a clock so you have the exact time. Let the students find it. The action covers the events of a few hours during one night.

3. What is the mood or atmosphere of the place? (1d.)

It is at night so it is dark outside, but inside it is warm and cozy with the promise of good food and hot coffee with a friendly waitress to serve. This is an atmosphere which will be conducive to working out the conflict of the story. It is welcoming, safe and a place to feel comfortable.

4. *Is the setting appealing or repelling to you? Why? (1f.)*

Most will find the setting appealing, probably. Talk about why it is such a good atmosphere for bringing people of different kinds together. It is a place of refuge and safety, protection from the dark, and experience of companionship. There is the idea here of light dispelling darkness both physically and metaphorically.

5. *Among what kinds of people is the story set? (1h.)*

This story concerns a wide variety of people. Many levels of the professional, economic and social strata are represented here. This diversity is a great setting in which to find conflict since we all feel most comfortable relating to those most like us. The specific details about the characters are discussed below.

Questions about Structure: Character

1. *Who is the story about? Are the characters men or animals? (3a.)*

All the characters in this story are animals. Each animal represents a specific kind of work which various people do in life. It adds to the interest for children, who like stories about animals. Using animals instead of people also eliminates some problems associated with using people, such as the necessity of including the proper mix of physical appearance, sex and race.

2. *Who is the protagonist in the story? Who is the Antagonist? (3,4a.)*

This story is a bit unusual in that it has several characters that are equal in importance. Many stories have one main character and one opposing character, but here we have a group of characters who are, from different points of view, protagonists or antagonists. We will discuss this further as we look at Conflict and Plot.

3. *What do the characters look like? What do they do for a living? (3d./3h.)*

There are twelve animals as characters in this story: Your students will have fun discovering which animal is doing what for a living.

The fox—a waitress

The bear—a cook

The rhino—a taxi driver

The mouse—a musician

The stork—a doctor

Two dogs—the policemen
Two gorillas—the mother and her baby
The ram—a construction worker
The alligator—a panhandler
The snake—a pet

4. Make a list of the adjectives that describe the characters. What made you choose the adjectives (3f.)

This is a great topic for discussion. Let your students make up this list and tell why they are choosing each adjective. It will be revealing to discover the generally agreed upon ideas that our society assigns to both the animal and the profession he represents, and how the choice of animal to represent that profession is related. In other words, there are no words to describe the characters, so the animal and its attributes are chosen to depict the profession.

Here are some ideas:

The waitress is, well, “foxy”! She is cute, friendly, and non-judgmental. She doesn’t join in on thinking everyone is different and reacts only to the crying baby and the snake. (Look at the pictures!)

The cook is not part of the group but “hibernates” in the kitchen serving them. He is a loner, like a bear and a thinker. He sees the main idea of the story while cooking.

The taxi driver is a rhino, known for being big, burly and dumb.

The musician is comic because his instrument is big and he is little. He is a stereotype of the musician as slight, not macho like the ram.

The doctor is represented by the stork - perhaps because he brings babies?

The policemen are dogs that are sometimes aggressive and “manly”.

The mother and baby are gorillas. Do you think this is because many people accept the idea that humans come from the apes?

The construction worker is a ram. He is “manly,” strong, aggressive and very physical; he can climb mountains.

The panhandler is an alligator—not trustworthy, even dangerous, scary looking

The snake—everyone reacts negatively to snakes—a fitting pet for an alligator, don’t you think?

Questions about Structure: Conflict and Plot

1. What does the protagonist want? Why can't he have it? (5a./6c.)

Since each of the characters is the protagonist from his own point of view, each one wants to be self-confident and secure. That is why he came into the diner in the first place. It was warm and light and inviting. He wanted to get a couple of eggs and a cup of coffee and feel no pressures. He finds there, however, as the night progresses and others keep coming in, that he is among other characters who are each different enough from him to make him feel uncomfortable and insecure and he would be happier if they were not there. From another point of view, each of the characters becomes the antagonist who is causing the conflict in the other by being different and invading his space.

2. What do the characters think about each other? (3k.)

Each of the characters thinks the others are “different.” Each looks with suspicion on the others because of this difference and feels uncomfortable with the unknown. Each character expresses these feelings without words by ignoring others, rolling eyes, looking away, looking down or looking at the others furtively. All the characters avoid looking each other in the eye and being friendly.

3. Is this conflict external or internal? (5e.)

It is mostly an internal conflict expressed externally only with the eyes and body language. It has to do with the fears, prejudices and stereotypes they have that affect how the characters feel about others.

4. How do the personalities of the characters reflect the values of society or of the author? (3o.)

Each of the animals reacts to the others with suspicion and discomfort. This is very common to man. An ongoing and seemingly insurmountable problem of society is how to live together harmoniously with people who are of a different race, nationality, sex or religion. The choice of animal to represent each profession also reflects our common ideas or stereotypes about people, for example, a waitress is cute and not very perceptive; the construction-worker is big, strong and dumb; the musician is not macho.

5. *What event forms the climax of the story? (9d.)*

The climax of the story takes place when the cook takes two eggs, one brown and one white “different”—then cracks them and finds that they are just alike inside—“the same.” It is a picture of the situation in the diner, where all the different animals are the same inside. The climax is the realization that, although the characters’ outsides look so different, inside there is no difference at all. Really, in their essence, they are just alike and there is no reason for being threatened and uncomfortable. Now they can relax and get what they came in for—a couple of eggs and a cup of coffee in a place of inviting comfort.

6. *Do the characters’ priorities change over the course of the story? What causes the change? (3n.)*

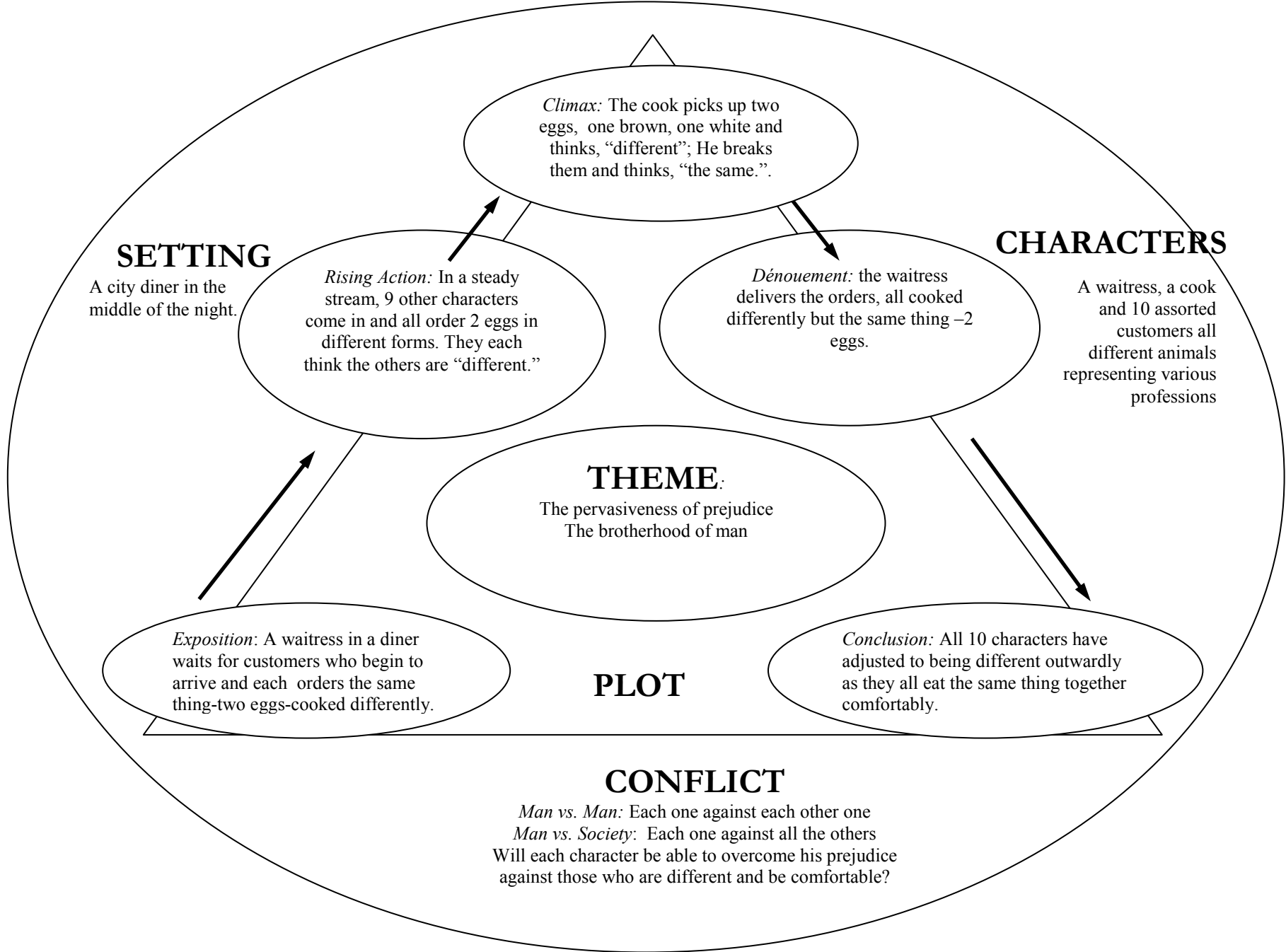
Each character came into the diner for food and comfort. As the others came in, each character became more uncomfortable. However, as time passed and each of them ordered the exact same thing and nothing threatening happened, they became more comfortable until, finally, they are all eating their two eggs—all fixed in different ways—in a relaxed manner. You might say their priorities didn’t change, but they arrived at them through a change of attitude.

The Story Chart

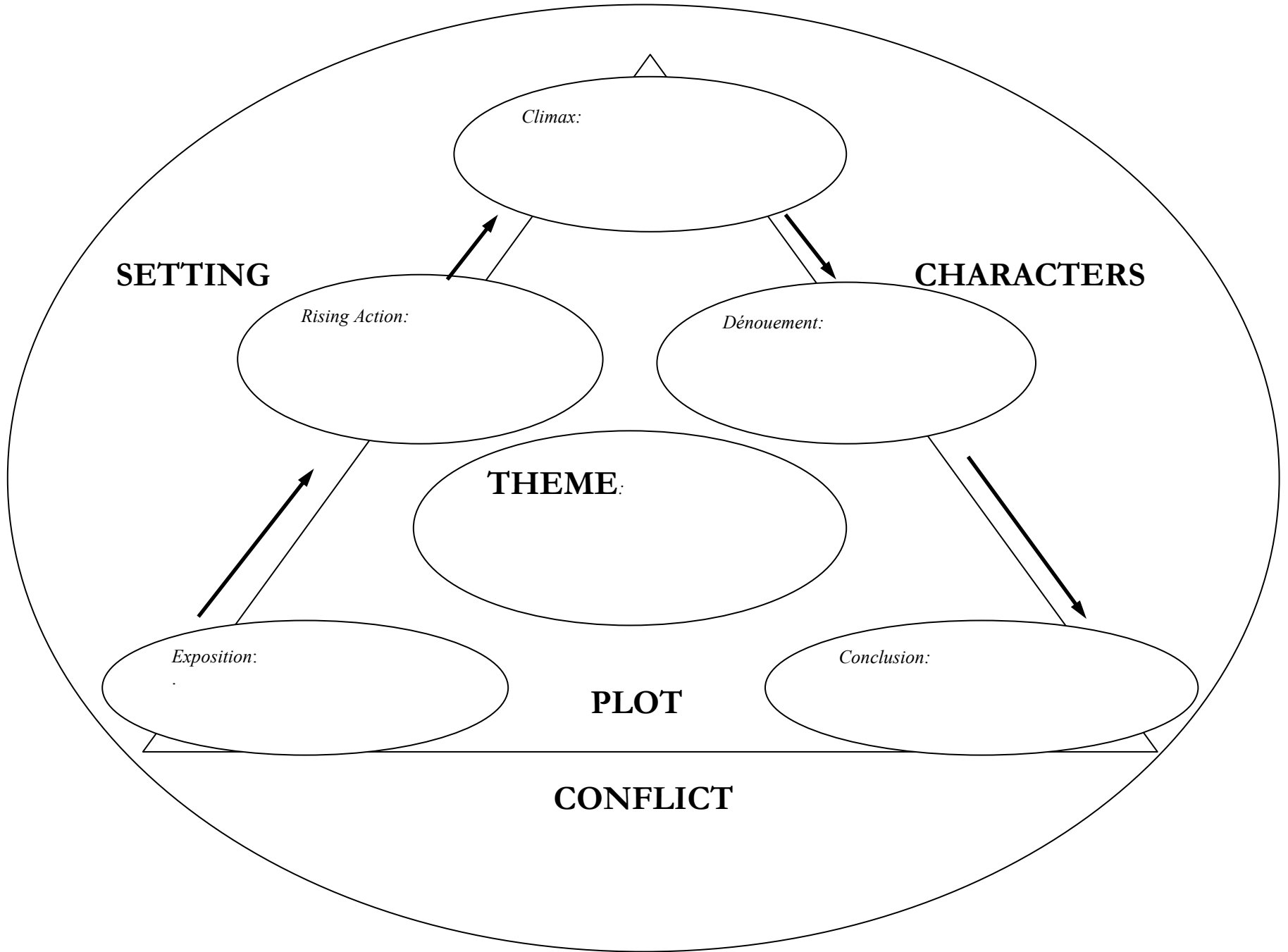
The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader’s decision as to the ***climax*** and central ***themes*** of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story’s central ***conflict***. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected – even encouraged!

For the teacher’s information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

Two Eggs, Please By Sarah Weeks: Story Chart



***Two Eggs, Please* by Sarah Weeks: Story Chart**



Questions About Structure: Theme

1. Does the story deal with a universal theme? (13a.)

The story deals with the universal theme of the brotherhood of man. Each of us as a human being is unique in his appearance. We are of different races, nationalities, and languages. We have different life-styles, manners, and dress codes. These things can be the cause of conflict if we do not remember that we also have a great deal in common. Most importantly, we are human beings and are just exactly the same in many ways. This, too, is a good discussion topic!

2. What aspect of the human condition is brought to light? (13c.)

This story deals with the human tendency to be suspicious of and have prejudice against anyone who is different from us. Differences tend to make us feel uncomfortable and threatened, so we focus on these differences and sometimes act on this feeling. It takes thought, care and restraint to remember that there are also things we have in common and to consider these things before speaking or acting.

3. Do the characters in this story change and act differently? (11a./11b.)

Yes, the characters begin as suspicious of and uncomfortable with each other, casting furtive glances, rolling eyes or ignoring one another. Then, as they all order the exact same thing, only cooked differently, they begin to be more comfortable and in the end are eating their two eggs all together and are noticeable relaxed. They like the same food, eat it the same way and nothing threatening happens so they can finally be comfortable.

Questions About Style: Literary Devices

1. Does the author use any objects to represent an idea in the story? (17.l.)

The author uses two eggs to represent the idea of “different”—one white and one brown—and also “the same”—when they are cracked they are not different at all. This is the same as people, who can be very different on the outside but are exactly the same inside. You might ask the students if they can see anything significant in the number of characters in the story. For example, twelve characters is a good representation of kinds of people in society like a dozen eggs is a full complement of eggs.

2. Does the author use imagery to create ideas in the mind of the reader? (16.a.)

Imagery is usually a function of the words in the story. However, in this book there are very few words, so the author works in conjunction with the illustrator to develop the characters and the story line. Let your students find all the clues themselves with the suggestions below to help you guide them.

- You know the rhino is a taxicab driver because there is a picture of him getting out of one at the beginning of the book and getting into one at the end.
- You know it is 2:00 am because there is a picture of a clock on the wall.
- You know the alligator is a panhandler because there is a picture of him getting money from a disgruntled pig father whose son is enthralled with the pet snake.
- Each animal is dressed according to his or her profession with appropriate props.
- Facial expressions communicate without words, as we have discussed before—the rolling of eyes and furtive looks, which turn to just looking down without furrowed brows that is in evidence when they have relaxed at the end.

Questions About Structure: Context

1. Who is the author? (18)

Sarah Weeks wrote the book and Betsy Lewin illustrated it. They are each award-winning members of their professions and have written and illustrated, many books. Lewin won a Caldecott Honor award for *Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type*, another delightful book about animals.

2. When did the author live? In what particular era? (20/2.d.)

Both the author and the illustrator are products of the late 20th century in America. It was a time of great social change and upheaval.

3. What ideas were prevalent in society when this story was written? (2.f.)

There is a great emphasis in American culture today on doing away with all prejudice and fostering racial and social equality. *Two Eggs, Please* emphasizes this theme in a simple and straightforward way. It makes a point that most people would agree with—that all people, however different outwardly, are mostly the same inside and certainly not to be feared.

Suggestions for Writing Assignments

- 1. Write a paragraph summarizing the five elements of the story's plot: exposition, rising action, climax, denouement and conclusion.*
- 2. Write a page describing the illustrator's use of visual imagery to convey the story line.*
- 3. Discuss the theme of this story and tell how it is conveyed to the reader.*
- 4. Write a paragraph examining how we are all the same/or different as human beings.*
- 5. Answer the question: Could this story have been written in the time of the Civil War?*