

Units 25 – 28: The Personal Essay

Out of the Silent Planet

by C.S. Lewis

Literature for Units 25 – 28

Units 25-28 will focus on *Out of the Silent Planet* by C.S. Lewis. The story revolves around Dr. Ransom, who, while on holiday in England, runs into an old school chum of his and ends up being kidnapped and taken via spaceship to the planet Malacandra. Here Ransom must choose between a life he's always known and a new interpretation of his home planet. This is the first of the C.S. Lewis Space Trilogy, and marks Lewis' venture from fantasy into science fiction.

Out of the Silent Planet, like Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* series, presents readers with an allegory. The origin of mankind, the nature of sin, and the promise of redemption are shown through the exploration of far off planets, majestic alien species, and one man's journey to an open heart.

Lewis, famous for his allegorical children's stories, wrote this science fiction trilogy as a reaction to the limited amount of decent fiction on the shelves. He wanted to create an alternative that captured the attention of readers but also caused them to question their society and look towards God for the answers. This curriculum only covers the first book in the trilogy, but students are strongly encouraged to read the other two books in the series in order to have a strong perspective of the scope of Lewis' storytelling.

While studying this novel, students will be asked to write personal reflections on the story, and the ending project will be the composition of a personal essay.

Optional Additional Assignment: One of the most compelling elements of this story is the imagery Lewis brings to the page. As a response to the story, students should create a piece of visual art (photograph, video, painting, etc.) that reflects a theme of the story, or that shows their favorite scene in the story.

Author Spotlight

Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1898. He lost his mother when he was only 10 years old, but was very close with his older brother Warren. Lewis graduated from Oxford University with a focus in two areas: literature and philosophy. He served in WWI, but was sent home after being wounded. After the war, he became a professor and joined a group of writers known as the Inklings. These men and women would meet and discuss literature, philosophy, and religion. It was through the influence of this group, particularly his friend

J.R.R. Tolkien, that Lewis became a Christian, and devoted his life to writing apologetic texts in favor of Christianity. Lewis married once, but his wife passed away due to cancer after only four years of marriage. He continued to teach, write, and grow in faith until 1963 when he passed away just before his sixty-fifth birthday. His literary works continue to inspire faith and creativity to this day.

- For more information on C.S. Lewis, please visit:
<http://www.cslewis.org/resource/chronocsl/>

Unit 25 – Assignments

- Read Unit 25 – Assignment Background.
- Write an author profile on C.S. Lewis.
- Read Chapters 1-9 in *Out of the Silent Planet*.
- In your reading journal, answer these questions. Remember to use complete sentences
 1. Who is the Pedestrian at the beginning of the story? What do you know about him from the first page alone?
 2. What are the motives of Devine and Watson? What does each man want from their journey?
 3. Why are Devine and Watson dulled to the beauty and mystery of Malacandra?
 4. How does Ransom escape?
 5. Who are the *hross*? Describe them.
- Choose a scene from the story and re-write it as if you were the main character. Explain how you feel, what you see, what you smell, taste, hear, etc. Try to engage all five senses in this exercise. Do not simply copy the emotions that Lewis wrote down, but try to imagine yourself in that scene and journal about that. You could write from the perspective of a human, or you could choose to write from the perspective of one of the natives of Malacandra.

Unit 25 – Assignment Background

C.S. Lewis, although famous for his fiction, was also well known for his nonfiction. He wrote many books on theology, the nature of love, and the pain of grief. Many of these non-fictional works were quite personal for Lewis. He was vulnerable with the reader and through his writing, worked through many difficult ideas and times in his life. Even his fiction contains an element of the realistic. Many of the nonfiction essays can be classified as personal essays. A personal essay is a chance for the writer to tell their own story in a structured way. It is helpful for the writer and the reader to be able to see a personal journey written out clearly.

The Personal Essay

A personal essay has a specific structure that we will go through in the coming weeks.

- The first thing you need to know is the format. Let's review the structure of a "five paragraph essay" form that includes a thesis, supporting points, and a conclusion.

- Paragraph One: Introduction – gives an overview of what a reader can expect to find in the essay. This paragraph ends with a thesis statement.
- Paragraphs Two-Four: Body Paragraphs – give support for the thesis statement. The essay should flow smoothly from one paragraph to the next through the use of transitions.
- Paragraph Five: Conclusion – brings the essay back to the main point and wraps up the support the author has given.
- The second thing would be to choose a topic and work on a main idea or “thesis.”

Remember – the thesis statement comes at the end of the introductory paragraph, so it must tie together the entire paper in just one sentence.

A good way to construct a strong thesis would be to use the “three part” method. In order to construct a three part thesis, you must first have a topic, and then you need to come up with three points to support your topic. (This is often called the “how, what, and why” of the thesis.)

▪ *Examples:*

“Participating in the fine arts can be helpful for a student’s emotional development.”

This is a good statement, but it has nothing to back it up. A good thesis needs support. If we add the three part thesis method:

“Participating in the fine arts can be helpful for a student’s emotional development because it promotes teamwork, supports communication, and encourages the use of imagination.”

Now we’re talking! We have a thesis which is supported by three points. These three points will serve as the basis for our body paragraphs, and will give the essay a strong foundation.

Please note: The structure of a personal essay will contain a bit more fluidity than a research essay. Your paper will probably have more than five paragraphs, and you are allowed to use the pronoun “I.”

Unit 26 – Assignments

- Read Chapters 10-17 in *Out of the Silent Planet*.
- Read Unit 26 – Assignment Background

Activity While Reading: Answer the discussion questions below in your reading journal. Be sure to use complete sentences and check for correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

- **Discussion Questions**
 1. How does Ransom begin to communicate with the *hross*? Why does he spend so much time learning their culture? What does this say about his character?
 2. What are the *eldil*? What do they look like?
 3. Ransom was summoned to Oyarsa, but did not go at first. What was the consequence of that decision?
 4. Who brings Ransom to Oyarsa? Why is this significant?
 5. Who is Oyarsa? Why is this character important to the story?
- Choose a topic for your personal essay and begin the drafting process. This topic should be focused on a time in your life when you have overcome a challenge, God has shown you a new facet of Himself, or when you faced a problem.

Unit 26 – Assignment Background

The Drafting Process:

The structure of an essay is straightforward, but it is only a structure, a guide. Yes, you need a strong thesis and yes, you need to support your thoughts, but you also need to engage with the material in order to draw in your reader.

Personal essays can be one of the most beautiful types of essay writing, or they can be sloppy, over-emotional, and vague.

A personal essay has two parts: what the essay says, and what the essay is about.

- What the essay says:

This refers to the words on the page. An essay could explore a time when a person learns a new skill such as riding a bike, rock climbing, baking, or any host of activities. The words on the page detail the event and how the writer felt at the time of the event.

- What the essay is about:

This refers to the subtext, or what is not on the page. This is the second layer of the personal essay and the touch that will make the essay stand out.

Let's say, for example, that someone was writing an essay about how they learned to ride a bike. Maybe they were younger, or maybe they learned as an adult. What's on the page is the experience they had with bike riding, but what's not on the page - what could be put in as subtext - is how that individual was able to conquer a fear, or how the experience of learning that new skill helped them to explore other new skills. It is usually up to the writer how much subtext will go into the essay, but there should be some to give the essay that "layered" feel. As you think of topics, think about what subtext can be woven into the essay.

Unit 27 – Assignments

- Read Chapter 19 - Postscript in *Out of the Silent Planet*.

Activity While Reading: Answer the discussion questions below in your reading journal. Be sure to use complete sentences and check for correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Oyarsa say that Weston is loyal only to the "seed" of mankind?
 2. Why does Oyarsa have mercy on the humans?
 3. What does it mean to be "bent" in this story?
 4. Why is earth referred to as the "silent planet"?
 5. Does Ransom return to earth? Why or why not?
 6. This story is allegorical. Choose at least two different elements of the story and explain how they make up an allegory.
- Using the rubric found at www.ArtiosHCS.com website, compose a rough draft of your personal essay.

Unit 28 – Assignments

- Be sure you have completed reading *Out of the Silent Planet*.
- Using the rubric found on the [Artios Home Companion](#) website, check your rough draft and make sure you have met all the requirements, then edit and turn in the final copy of your personal essay.

