



Lesson 2

The resource is being field-tested and is subject to revision.

Pulp and the True Confession

Synopsis

Students will work with a basic convention of pulp writing – verisimilitude, or the façade of the ‘true story’. A model for analyzing pulp primary texts for literary and cultural elements will be presented as a basis for further group and individual investigation. Six stories from the January 1946 issue of *Sensational Crime Confessions* and/or “Les aventures amoureuses d’un ‘lumberjack’” from *Drames de l’amour* will be the focus of textual study.

Specific Expectations

Students will:

- Apply an analytical model to the critical reading of popular pulp writing
- Explore dimensions of the literary device of verisimilitude in pulp writing: the façade of the ‘true account from real files’, the goal of vicarious participation, entering into the workings of the criminal mind and its effects, moralism (ie. teaching a ‘lesson’), and popular fiction as an escape from major social / political issues
- Examine the ‘true confession’ in contemporary popular writing and in internet culture
- Write an account using the ‘true confession’ pulp genre conventions based on a current news story involving crime

Preparation

1. Availability of a copy of Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo’s *True Crime, True North: The Golden Age of Canadian Pulp Magazines* (Raincoast Books, 2004) and/or *Li-que-Fasc. Litterature québécoise en fascicules* <http://membres.lycos.fr/liquefasc> (in French only) would provide additional background information on popular pulp crime writing such as that presented in this lesson, and on authors like Philip Godsell, Thomas P. Kelley and Charles Gamelin. The book is amply illustrated with cover art and illustrations from Canadian pulp magazines of the 1940s.
2. Other useful background resources include “Montreal’s ‘press jaune.’”
Culture of Cities: Montreal, Dublin, Toronto, Berlin. McGill Research Team.
www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/AHCS/cultureofcities/Gallery2/front.html
“Quebec’s romans en fascicules.”
Culture of Cities: Montreal, Dublin, Toronto, Berlin. McGill Research Team
www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/AHCS/cultureofcities/Gallery3/front.html
“Culture of Cities: Print Culture and Urban Visuality.” – by Will Straw
Culture of Cities: Montreal, Dublin, Toronto, Berlin. McGill Research Team
www.arts.mcgill.ca/ahcs/cultureofcities/Print%20Culture.html
3. Prepare an overhead of “A model for the literary and cultural study of pulp fiction” ([Handout 2.1](#)).

4. Have copies of the evaluation rubric for a 'true confessions' story ([Handout 2.2](#)).
5. Have available texts of the following stories from the *Tales From the Vault* Website www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1900-e.html :
 - a. "Passion Drove Me To Kill" (*Sensational Crime Confessions*, January 1946, p.10) <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1906.11-e.html>
 - b. "I Was the Moll of a Hot Car Mob" (*Sensational Crime Confessions*, January 1946, p.32) <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1906.32-e.html>
 - c. "A Monster Murdered My Wife" (*Sensational Crime Confessions*, January 1946, p.20) <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1906.21-e.html>
 - d. "Doomed to Die" (*Sensational Crime Confessions*, January 1946, p. 16) <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1906.17-e.html>
 - e. "I Was a Gambling Girl" (*Sensational Crime Confessions*, January 1946, p.4) <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1906.05-e.html>
 - f. "Will they Execute my Son?" (*Sensational Crime Confessions*, January 1946, p.26) <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1906.27-e.html>
 - g. "Les aventures amoureuses d'un 'lumberjack'" (*Les Drames de l'amour*, p.3) <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1901.02-e.html>

Have the overhead or Website image of the covers of these publications ready to show students, and help them to make appropriate inferences.

Time

75-100 minutes (plus student reading time)

Process

Introduction (20 minutes)

Present the idea of the 'true confession' as a literary genre or device. Brainstorm with students what elements an effective 'true confession' should contain. The idea of realistic sensational detail will emerge, giving an opportunity for discussion of the use of verisimilitude for reader impact.

Have a current edition of *True Confessions* or a similar magazine in English or French on hand and choose a story to read to the class. Have students listen for ways the writer enhances the effect of the story and write down these things in point form as the story is read. Students should also be asked to write down questions that arise for them concerning the story itself (ie. realism, effect of sensational detail).

Body of Lesson (60 minutes)

Present the model for the literary and cultural study of pulp fiction. ([Handout 2.1](#)). Explain that the class will be engaging in some critical examination of a number of stories from the Canadian publication, *Sensational Crime Confessions*, January 1946 issue, or of the chapters of "Les aventures amoureuses d'un 'lumberjack'". Using the literary and cultural elements that make up the model, they will produce a critical analysis of a story in smaller groups, and present findings to the class. Part of the presentation will be to render an informed judgment on the effectiveness of the story, rating it on a scale of 1-10 if desired.

Assign the six stories or the *quatre chapitres*, one per student group, providing some reading time. Students should be encouraged to use appropriate active reading strategies, reading for specific elements included in the analysis model and noting what for them are key point and

questions arising from the text. They might write a response after their initial individual reading of the story then share the response and the key points and questions they generated with other members of the study group (see Tovani, "Using Double-Entry Diaries", pp. 30ff).

Student groups should present their analysis and conclusions about story effectiveness to the class. This activity provides opportunity to reinforce and summarize the conventions / features of pulp 'confession' writing that students are discovering.

Extension (20 minutes)

To create a contemporary context, explore the pop culture versions of the 'true confession' that exist in literary and internet interaction. If Internet is available in the classroom, have a look at a couple of anonymous online confession sites such as "Group Hug". A quick google search will turn up sites. Students might also enjoy knowing about contemporary 'true confession' pieces such as *Waiting: The True Confessions of a Waitress* (2001), *Handsome Harry: Or the Gangster's True Confessions* (Blake – 2004) or *A Perfect Gentleman: The True Confessions of a Cold-Blooded Killer* (1999). Students may have read the Young Adult novels *True Confessions* (Martha Brooks, 2002) and *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* (1992).

Assessment

Present students with an opportunity to write their own sensational crime true confession piece using the elements and conventions they have been working with in the primary text sources.

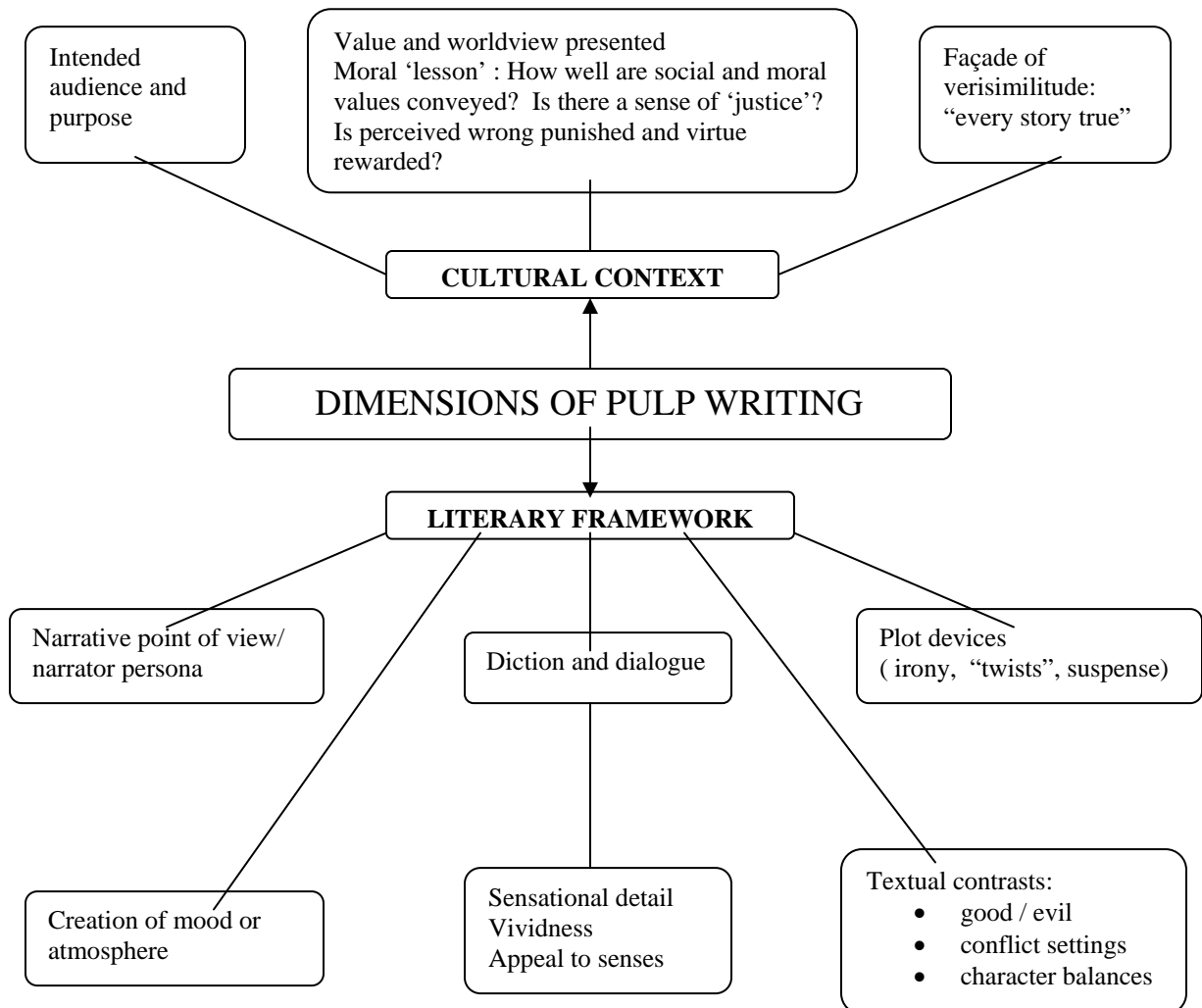
Ask them to choose a contemporary crime story from the newspaper or television news and turn it into a first person sensational 'confession' narration. They may wish to capture the diction and dialogue styles they observe in the stories of the 1940s they have been looking at. See Handout 2.2 for a suggested evaluation rubric.

Note: This lesson could be used in conjunction with *the Ontario, curriculum for English, Grades 11 and 12* lesson material "Comparing Crime Dramas", "Scripting a Crime Drama", "Viewing a Crime Drama", and "Crime in the News".

A Canadian adventure with the pulps

Handout 2.1

A Model for the Literacy and Cultural Study of Pulp Fiction



Critical questions:

- How effective is the attempt at sensational detail?
- how well are good and evil delineated?
- is verisimilitude (realism) maintained effectively?
- is the meting out of justice satisfying? Is 'wrong' (ie. adultery, etc) adequately punished?
- are plot twists, suspense and irony well handled?

Handout 2.2

Evaluation Rubric for a Pulp True Confession Story

Categories	Level 1 (50-59%)	Level 2 (60-69%)	Level 3 (70-79%)	Level 4 (80-100%)
Narrator and narrative point of view	Weak or inconsistent	Shows some character delineation	Attempt to create an interesting character	Well developed and interesting narrator
Dialogue and sensational detail	Absent or limited	Minimal use of effective detail and dialogue	Dialogue and sensational detail add to story effectiveness	Skillful use of detail and dialogue create an effective "pulp story"
Plot dynamics	Plot lacks structure	Plot reflects a minimum use of key elements such as irony, suspense and "twists"	Good attempt to create an effective conflict and resolution	Skillful handling of plot elements create an effective "true confession"
Mechanics of writing	Little evidence of effective proofreading	Adequate handling of writing conventions	Good handling of writing conventions	Reflects a high level of written communication skills

Comments:
