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CLASSICS

**Simon & Schuster Classroom Activities
for the Enriched Classic edition of
The Good Earth by Pearl S. Buck
1-4165-0018-9 • \$6.99 / \$10.50 Can.**

Activities created by Katie Gideon

Each of the three activities includes:

- NCTE standards covered
- An estimate of the time needed
- A complete list of materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions
- Questions to help you evaluate the results

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Lesson Plan #1

“China in Transition”
(A Lesson in Historical Context)

In order to connect with *The Good Earth*, it helps to have some understanding of historical concepts that form the novel’s backdrop. In this lesson, students will research one relevant topic and then share findings with the class. In addition to preparing them for the novel, this research activity demands that students critically read their information sources.

This activity takes two fifty-minute class periods and also includes homework.

NCTE Standards Covered:

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

What To Do:

1. Have each student read *The Good Earth* introductory materials (pgs. vii-xxi) for homework. As they read, they should track unfamiliar words and concepts. The goal is to come to class with questions regarding this transitional time in Chinese history.
2. The next day in class, have students share any questions raised by the timeline.
3. Pass out Handout #1, and give each student a piece of 11x17 paper. Explain that each student will use one print resource and one online resource to create a poster explaining whatever topic

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they investigate. Go over your expectations for the assignment. Review with your students what web sources will be acceptable and unacceptable for this assignment. (e.g., do they need to restrict their research to university websites only?) Their findings will create the historical context necessary for building understanding of this novel.

4. Assign two or three students each to one of the following potential topics. Students should work individually, but pairing up on topics ensures that the class receives quality information.

Possible topics for research include:

- a. Chinese Exclusion Act
- b. The Boxer Uprising
- c. Russo-Japanese War
- d. Qing dynasty
- e. Sun Yat-sen
- f. 1920s: civil war in China
- g. Chinese Nationalist Party
- h. Northern Expedition
- i. Chinese Communists
- j. Mao Zedong
- k. Foot-binding
- l. Chinese tradition religion/Chinese folk religion
- m. Early 20th century Chinese economy

5. Assist your students as they complete their research in the library. Encourage them to take accurate notes, complete with citations. Students will take their research home to create their poster, which should be brought to class the next day.

6. Start your next class with a brief meeting between students who completed research on the same topic. These students will decide the best way to present their findings to the whole class.

7. Have students take notes on each topic as the other groups present. After the presentations are done, hang the best posters on your wall so that students can reference them over the course of the unit.

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *The Good Earth* (1416500189) for each student

Copies of Handout #1

Access to a library with both print resources and Internet

11x17 paper

How Did It Go?

Based on the criteria you chose for them, were the students able to distinguish between reputable and non-reputable web sources? Could they successfully locate and use print sources? During presentations, could they successfully share information with one another? Were their posters attractive and useful? Finally, a question to revisit as you read the novel: did this historical research project build sufficient background knowledge to aid textual understanding?

Lesson Plan #2

“A Woman Such As is Not Commonly Found”
(A Lesson in Feminist Analysis)

In this lesson, students will examine the female characters introduced throughout the novel to better understand the gender expectations and power struggle at play in Buck’s novel. Through textual analysis, students will define and discuss the narrow range of female roles acceptable in early 20th century China. Finally, they will compare issues of gender and status in *The Good Earth* to what they see in their own community.

This activity assumes that students have read the first chapter. It will initially take one fifty-minute class period. The analysis will be completed as later chapters introduce new characters. Final work on the chart will continue after the whole book is completed.

NCTE Standards Covered:

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

What To Do:

1. Have students respond in journals to a prompt regarding gender constructs in their own community. Possible prompts include:
 - a. Who are some female role models in our society, and why do we look up to them?
 - b. In your culture, are there different expectations for females and males? If so, what are they?
 - c. What might a visitor to your culture find strange about the way women act, or the way women are treated?

Ask a few students to share their responses with the class.

2. Explain that students will be comparing the gender expectations of their own communities to the expectations portrayed in *The Good Earth*. Pass out the character analysis handout (Handout #2) and review what students have learned about O-lan thus far. Read aloud the description of O-lan cooking the wedding feast and refusing to serve the male guests (pgs. 24-25). Have students

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fill out the first entry on their chart with either a direct quote or a paraphrase that somehow offers insight into O-lan's character (see example on handout).

3. Direct students to note that O-lan is the main female character and therefore has two rows on the chart. Some characters, like Pear Blossom, won't appear in the first ten chapters. Obviously, students don't have to fill the column for a character that doesn't appear in those chapters.

4. As students read the book, they should fill out the chart for each of the characters listed.

5. After reading the book and filling in Handout # 2, give the students 15-20 minutes to create a graphic chart to depict visually the social rankings among the female characters, using a piece of scrap paper. They should consider the following questions as they create their charts:

- a. Who has the power to affect someone else's social status?
- b. What character traits are most appealing to others?
- c. Which are least important to others?
- d. How would a woman move up in status? Why would she move down?

Students should write a brief rationale on the back of their graphic organizer, explaining how they ranked the women. Ask a few students to share their finished product with the class. There will be differences of opinion; as long as students can explain their reasoning, this is fine.

6. Discuss the students' findings. How important are wealth and male regard in determining social success? What role do personal character traits play? What about physical traits? Last—but definitely not least—what can a work of fiction tell us about the society it portrays? What can it not tell us? Can we treat Buck as an authority on gender roles in early 20th century China?

7. For homework, have students compare *The Good Earth* social ranking to gender and status hierarchies in their school. What are the similarities? How do the codes differ? What might account for these differences? As they explain these differences, students should enumerate the traits necessary for an adolescent female to achieve respect and popularity.

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *The Good Earth* (1416500189) for each student

Copies of Handout #2

How Did It Go?

Did students learn something about gender roles in the novel? Were students able to distinguish between characters with different power? Could they perform a focused reading of the text? Could they synthesize what they learned into a coherent graphic organizer? Could they explain their reasoning in a brief, written rationale? Did they make connections to their own community?

Lesson Plan #3

“Women’s Quiet Power”
(A Lesson in Literary Analysis)

The following assessment activity is designed to develop students’ confidence and effectiveness as they write literary analysis. In this lesson, students will use close-reading, critical thinking, and revision skills to discuss the portrayal of women in Pearl Buck’s novel.

This activity takes two fifty-minute class periods to complete and may also include homework.

NCTE Standards Covered:

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What To Do:

1. Facilitate a brief class discussion regarding whether or not the women in *The Good Earth* possess power. At the end of the discussion, have each student complete one of the following two sentence stems on a scrap piece of paper.

- *The Good Earth* is a work of female power because...
- The novel *The Good Earth* encourages and affirms submissive female roles because...

The sentences that they create will be the rough draft thesis statements for the students’ essays, which they can later modify to add nuance.

2. Explain that students will be writing an analytical essay as part of their final assessment for the unit. Pass out copies of Handout #3. Explain that successful writers carefully read all of the information provided for an assignment before they commence work. Encourage students to underline key words and phrases as you read the rubric out loud.

3. Read students the prompt, which is the second discussion question on page 415. Lead students through a brief prompt analysis. What is this prompt asking students to do? Who are some of the

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characters the students might discuss in their papers? What are some key events they may want to analyze?

4. Have students look at the quotes and paraphrases they accumulated on Handout #2, from the previous lesson. Of the information that they gathered earlier in the unit, which ones—alongside their commentary—will best support their essays' thesis statement?

5. As the students write their essays, encourage them to consider whether or not their rough draft thesis statements are still adequate in light of the passages they chose and the analysis that they did. If not, students should revise them accordingly.

6. Students should turn in their final essays with Handout #3 attached. For ease of grading, they should write their names on Handout #3.

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *The Good Earth* (1416500189) for each student

Copies of Handout #3

Completed Handout #2 from Lesson #2 (each student should have his or her own)

How Did It Go?

Were students able to take a strong position on the portrayal of women in *The Good Earth*? Did they make connections between their collected passages? Could they use the skills taught in prior lessons to formulate and support a coherent argument? Could they synthesize what they learned into an organized essay? Did their essays fully address the prompt?

Handout #1

Historical Background Poster: Rubric

Poster requirements:

11x17 paper

Poster contains:

- 7 pertinent facts regarding the event/person/tradition
- At least one picture relating to the event/person/tradition
- 1-2 sentence statement created by the student which summarizes the impact this event/person/tradition had on China during the time of *The Good Earth*.

Category	Achieved	Not Achieved
Research notes	Research notes cover one print source and one reputable online source. They include bibliographic information as well as handwritten notes.	Research does not include required sources. Bibliographic information incomplete. Notes are cut-and-paste printouts from websites.
In-line citations	All graphics and information have citations attached.	In-line citations not given and/or not properly done.
Required elements	The poster includes all required elements and perhaps some additional information.	Required elements are missing.
Graphics—Relevance	All graphics are related to the topic and make it easier to understand. All borrowed graphics have a source citation.	Graphics do not relate to the topic OR several borrowed graphics do not have a source citation.
Attractiveness	The poster is attractive in terms of design, layout, and neatness.	The poster is distractingly messy or poorly constructed.

Handout #2

The Good Earth: Women

	Chapters 1 thru 10	Chapters 11-22	Chapters 23-34
O-lan			
O-lan, continued			
Wang Lung's oldest daughter, "poor fool"	When O-lan gives birth to their first daughter, she says "It is only a slave this time—not worth mentioning" (Buck 67).		
Wang Lung's Aunt			
Lotus Flower			
Cuckoo			
Pear Blossom			

Handout #3

Women in *The Good Earth*: Essay Rubric

Expectation:	Description:	Your score:
Focus and Organization	<p>Introduction contains a precise, sharply focused thesis statement.</p> <p>Thesis presents a sophisticated argument that will require significant evidence and elaboration to support</p> <p>Introduction specifically states what will be analyzed in the paper, and provides readers with a road map of the essay</p> <p>Essay does not wander – all writing relates to thesis and main ideas.</p> <p>Essay has a conclusion.</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6
Evidence	<p>Ample quotes and/or paraphrased moments are taken from the novel, fully analyzed, and cited properly. All analysis relates evidence specifically back to the thesis statement.</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6
Critical thinking	<p>Essay shows insight; ideas are original rather than shallow and/or cliché.</p> <p>Ideas are well-defended with many quotes and paraphrases (all cited). Could not be easily refuted.</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6
Word Choice	<p>The writer uses an advanced, precise vocabulary. Words are used correctly. Avoids vague words such as “stuff” or “very.” Avoids personal pronoun phrases such as “I think.”</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6
Sentence Variety	<p>The writer uses long, medium, and short sentences appropriately. There are no sentence fragments and/or run-on sentences</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6
Correct Grammar	<p>One free error, then one point off for each error in mechanics, usage, grammar, and spelling.</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6

Score: _____ / 36