Title: “The Wreck of the Hesperus” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.3, RL.8.4, RL.8.6; W.8.2, W.8.4, W.8.4, W.8.9; SL.8.1, SL.8.4; L.8.1, L.8.2, L8.4, L.8.5, L.8.6

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Human flaws can lead to dire and tragic consequences.

Essential Question

How do the choices we make affect others?

Synopsis

“The Wreck of the Hesperus” is a narrative poem about an arrogant ship captain (skipper) who takes his daughter on an ill-fated voyage across a wintry sea. The stubborn captain does not heed the hurricane warning of an experienced sailor. When the storm arrives, he ties his daughter to the mast to save her from being thrown overboard. The ship crashes into the reef of Norman’s Woe, and the crew and the captain all perish. The following morning, a fisherman finds the corpse of the captain’s daughter washed ashore and still tied to the mast. The last lines are a plea that no one may suffer a fate as those on the Hesperus were dealt when the captain refused to respect the power of nature.

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| What do the first five stanzas of the poem reveal to the reader? | The first five stanzas of the poem reveal the main characters and the setting of the narrative poem. The main characters are the skipper and his “little daughter” whom he takes with him “to bear him company” during his voyage. We learn that the poem is set on a schooner or ship called Hesperus, which set sail during a moonless night (“And to-night no moon we see!”) during the winter time (“that sailed the wintry sea”).  The treacherous setting of the poem sets the plot in motion, puts the skipper and his daughter in the middle of the storm, and sets up the stage for the tragedy that is about to occur. |
| We learn that the skipper laughed “a scornful laugh” in reaction to the sailor’s advice. *Scornful* means feeling or expressing contempt, or mocking toward a person or object considered despicable or unworthy. What can readers infer from the skipper’s response? Use evidence from the text to support your response. | We learn that the skipper is very arrogant and stubborn. He does not listen to the storm warning of an old sailor, who speaks up and says, “I pray thee, put into yonder port, For I fear a hurricane” and “Last night, the moon had a golden ring, And to-night no moon we see!” In response, the skipper not only laughs, but does so scornfully (“And a scornful laugh laughed he”). This reaction shows the skipper’s arrogance and refusal to take heed of someone else’s warning and refusal to respect the power of nature. |
| What do readers learn about the daughter based on the figurative language the author uses, i.e. similes, imagery? Cite evidence to support your response. | The author uses similes and imagery to show the beauty and purity of the skipper’s daughter, and to help establish her as a sympathetic character. References to flowers that bloom in the springtime are used by the author to depict her beauty and innocence (“Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax” and “her bosom as white as the hawthorn buds/That ope in the month of May”). Longfellow also uses the vivid colors of the “dawn of the day” to describe the daughter’s rosy cheeks, and he uses the “dawn” to establish her youthfulness. The author’s use of figurative language to describe the daughter highlights the tragedy, as she is beautiful, young, and innocent. |
| In stanza 6 and 7 the author uses personification, similes, and imagery to describe what is happening in the sea. How does this description set up the tragedy that is about to happen? | The violence and ugliness of the storm contrast the peacefulness and beauty of the daughter. “Colder and louder blew the wind” shows the harshness of the sea in contrast to the beauty of the daughter: “blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax.”  “Down came the storm, and smote amain, The vessel in its strength/…Some ship in distress that cannot live In such an angry sea…” shows the reader the human qualities of anger and force attributed to the sea and storm. The sea is “angry,” while the storm strikes the vessel with a horrid blow. This description of the torrential storm shows the destructive power of nature, and helps the readers see the skipper’s foolishness as he navigates his ship through the middle of the storm. |
| What does the dialogue between the skipper and his daughter (in stanzas 8-12) reveal about his character and his relationship to her? | In the dialogue between the two characters, the daughter repeatedly asks her father what is happening, and this shows her evident fear and distress. She repeats three times, “O father! …. Oh say, what may it be?” This repetition of lines shows the reader that the daughter is afraid and is constantly looking to her father for comfort and reassurance.  In stanza 8, the foolish skipper tells his daughter “Do not tremble so” in an effort to soothe and ease her fears about what she hears and sees in the gale. He tries to reassure her when he says, “For I can weather the roughest gale that ever wind did blow.” In a desperate move to save his daughter and in an undeniable act of love, the skipper binds his daughter to the mast to prevent her from going overboard. Their exchange captures the fear and confusion of the situation until the skipper no longer answers his daughter. |
| What are the father’s responses to each of his daughter’s three questions? How do his responses demonstrate his tragic flaw? | The daughter asks, “I hear the church-bells ring, Oh say, what may it be?” To the first question, the skipper foolishly turns to the “open sea.” She then asks, “I hear the sound of guns, Oh say, what may it be?” To the second question, he responds that some other ship isn’t going to make it. We can infer that he assumes *his* shipwill make it. Lastly, she sees a “gleaming light,” and asks, “Oh say, what may it be? “ Unfortunately, he does not respond because his pride results in his death. |
| After the skipper’s daughter prays for the storm to calm, the ship moves ever closer toward the reef of Norman’s Woe. How does the language in this section of the poem affect the mood of the piece? | Longfellow’s word choice captures the ferocity of the storm, so readers can imagine the dangers of the situation. The night was “dark and drear,” and paired with harsh weather conditions (“through the whistling sleet and snow and fitful gusts”). Longfellow compares the vessel to a “sheeted ghost,” which contributes to the poem’s eerie mood. The poet’s choice of words indicates to the reader that there is no more hope for the doomed ship. |
| In the Bible, there is an account of Christ calming a storm and the waters while he and his disciples were aboard a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. Why does the daughter think of Jesus Christ now? Cite evidence to support your response. | In stanza 14, the daughter “clasped her hands and prayed/That savéd might she be.” Then, she thinks of “Christ, who stilled the wave/On the Lake of Galilee.” Her mention or prayer to Christ refers to her desperate plea for help or a miracle, which is what is needed to save her and the ship. This brings the reader’s attention to the tragic situation that her father has forced her into. |
| In stanza 18, to whom or what does the pronoun “she” refer? What was the author’s purpose in using this feminine pronoun? | Stanza 18 is especially representative of Longfellow’s careful word choice. According to the text, “she struck…but the cruel rocks, they gored her side.” Longfellow uses the feminine pronouns *she* and *her* to refer to both the skipper’s daughter and the ship in this poem. With the young girl now literally tied to the ship the two figures are even more closely associated, their fates are one. Readers may infer that the author was purposely being vague in uniting the ship with the daughter.  The personification of the rocks conveys the tragic and gory death of both the girl and the vessel. The simile of the “horns of an angry bull,” in comparison to the treacherous rocks, helps the reader visualize the cruel death of both the girl and the ship. |
| What do the final three stanzas of the poem reveal about the consequences of the skipper’s tragic flaw of pride and foolishness? What did the fisherman see in the morning? | The young girl’s father, in his pride, “bound her to the mast,” in order to protect her. Instead, this very act dooms her to a tragic death. The final stanzas show us that foolish pride will have horrible consequences. The following morning after the storm, “A fisherman stood aghast/To see the form of a maiden fair/Lashed close to the drifting mast.” The daughter might have had a chance to survive, had she not been tied down. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | Port  Hurricane  Whiff  Gale  Brine  Vessel  Hither  Steered | Distress  Lashed to the helm |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | Schooner  Skipper  Dawn of day  Bosom  Fairy-flax  Ope  Hawthorn  Helm  Spake  Yonder  Billows  Frothed  Cable’s length  Smote  Amain  Frighted steed  Spar  Mast  Fog-bell | Veering flaw  Scornful laugh  Weather the roughest gale  Gleaming/gleamed  Stiff and stark  Lake of Galilee |

Culminating Writing Task

* *Sometimes human flaws lead to dire and tragic consequences. In “The Wreck of the Hesperus,” how does Henry Wadsworth Longfellow illustrate this central theme? Use evidence from the text to show the tragedy of the situation that plays out as a result of the captain’s arrogance. Write a 5-paragraph analytical essay that explains the central theme of the poem. Cite specific textual evidence to support your analysis.*
* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging!

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “…little daughter…Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax…Her cheeks like the dawn of day, And her bosom white as the Hawthorn buds, That ope the month of May…” | The poem opens with a lovely description of the daughter, who is portrayed as lovely and innocent, a child that needs protecting. This is in direct contract to the fact that the skipper does not protect her. |
| “I pray thee, put into yonder port, For I fear a hurricane” | The captain is warned and he chooses to ignore the warning from the old sailor. |
| “…scornful laugh…” | The captain’s response is a simple scornful laugh when he should in fact have taken heed and cancelled the trip. |
| “Down came the storm, and smote amain, The vessel in its strength/…Some ship in distress that cannot live In such an angry sea…” | Shows the reader the human qualities of anger and force attributed to the sea and storm. The sea is “angry,” while the storm strikes the vessel with a horrid blow. |
| “Bound her to the mast…The salt was frozen on her breast, The salt tears in her eye; And he saw her hair, like brown sea-weed, On the billows fall and rise…” | Instead, this very act to save her, dooms her to a tragic death. Foolish pride will have horrible consequences. The last line shows the fisherman has found the lovely maiden tied to the mast of the ship and has succumbed to the angry sea from which her father did not protect her. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

In Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s ballad poem, “The Wreck of the Hesperus,” the theme is how arrogance and foolish human pride can lead to tragic and devastating consequences. This poem follows a sea captain’s fatal decision to sail his ship in the wake of a devastating storm. He fails to respect nature’s wrath or power, and in doing so, his arrogance costs him the lives of himself, his daughter, and his entire crew. The tragedy of the Hesperus plays out in the poem through the author’s portrait of the captain’s arrogance and tragic flaws. Additionally, Longfellow uses figurative language to highlight the captains’ arrogance and foolishness.

The first stanza opens the scene with a vivid visual description of the captain’s daughter, whom the author describes as his “…little daughter…Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax…Her cheeks like the dawn of day, And her bosom white as the Hawthorn buds, That ope the month of May…”. Here, Longfellow paints a glowing description of the captain’s daughter. Her innocence is in direct contrast to the captain’s lack of care for assuming the responsibility he bears to protect his child. Longfellow’s reference to flowers blooming in May and Hawthorn buds, shows her innocence, her youth, the newness and hope that all children bring. She is the promise of spring, the promise of life. She is but a “bud” not yet bloomed, a young child whose life is ahead of her, a life not yet lived. It is heart-wrenching later to read of her untimely demise, yet the author takes time to describe her here, perhaps to show contrast to the lack of regard on the part of the skipper for the innocence of his child. He fails to protect her by choosing to sail in spite of the warning from the old sailor, “I pray thee, put into yonder port, For I fear a hurricane”. This warning from the sailor goes unheeded by the foolish captain, whose retort is a simple, “…scornful laugh…”. His decision to sail this day proves fatal for him, his daughter and his entire crew. Longfellow then proceeds to weave the tale of the sad trip for the schooner, through the use of figurative language, which further explains the captain’s tragic flaw.

“The Wreck of the Hesperus” includes various points that show the reader the arrogance of the skipper. Additionally, Longfellow uses figurative language to further advance the plot and emphasize the theme, such as similes and personification. “She shuddered and paused, like a frighted steed, Then leaped her cable’s length”. Here, the author uses a simile to compare the ship to a “frighted steed.” He describes the ship as a frightened horse, whose reference calls to mind a rider trying to sooth a mount that has been spooked by something. In this way, the ship is made out to the reader like a frightened horse, jumping, bucking, pulling back from the ravaging sea and brutal storm. In stanza 7, Longfellow describes the storm as having human qualities strong enough to strike the ship: “Down came the storm, and smote amain, The vessel in its strength”. In stanza 11, the author describes the sea as an “angry sea” where no ship can live. These comparisons help the reader realize the force of nature that the storm embodies. It further aligns to the theme, which shows that the captain failed to respect these forces of nature. His arrogance in thinking he could defy nature proves tragic for all those on board the vessel. Furthermore, Longfellow’s use of literary devices impacts the poem’s sad tale.

Throughout the ballad poem, the author’s rich use of literary devices such as irony and foreshadowing, creates a powerful effect on the reader; they demonstrate yet again, the captain’s conceit, overconfidence, and poor judgment. His use of irony is underscored when he says of the young daughter, “He cut a rope from a broken spar, And bound her to the mast…”. Then later, when she is found dead, “The salt was frozen on her breast, The salt tears in her eye; And he saw her hair, like brown sea-weed, On the billows fall and rise…”. It is the ultimate irony that the captain should tie his daughter down to the ship to prevent her from being thrown overboard during the torrential storm, yet it is this very tying down that dooms her in the end when she is found dead and still tied down. Perhaps, had she not been tied down, she may have somehow survived. Longfellow shows the devastating effects of arrogance in the captain’s vain attempt to save his daughter. His efforts to save her may very well have doomed her. His disregard for the power of the storm wrecks the ship and renders devastating effects for all on board. Longfellow also uses foreshadowing. “O father! I hear the church-bells ring, O say, what may it be?”. This example may allude to the church bells at a funeral, a foreshadowing of doom and death for the crew of the Hesperus.

Longfellow weaves a woeful ballad in “The Wreck of the Hesperus.” His tale tells of a foolish and arrogant skipper, who takes no heed of an impending storm and dooms himself, his innocent daughter, and crew to a tragic death. The captain’s pride and overconfidence is highlighted throughout the poem with the use of rich imagery, figurative language and literary devices. These call attention to the poem’s theme of how such arrogance and lack of respect for the power of nature can lead to tragic consequences.

Additional Tasks

1. Examining Author’s Craft
   * + **What does the word “wreck” refer to in the poem’s title? Does it have a deeper meaning beyond the ship being wrecked by the storm?**
       - Sample Response: The literal meaning of “wreck” is the shipwreck or the ship is lost at sea due to the powerful storm. The deeper meaning would refer to the tragedy that occurs to the ship, crew, the skipper’s daughter, along with the tragic flaw in the skipper’s character that led to the devastating events.
     + **What is the narrative poem’s rhyme scheme?**
       - Sample Response: The rhyme scheme is ABCB. Every second and fourth line of the each stanza rhyme For example, lines 2 and 4, with the use of the end words “sea” in line 2 and “company” in line 4, are rhyming words.
     + **Identify examples of figurative language in the poem. What is the significance of the author’s use of figurative language in the poem?** 
       - Sample Response: The author uses similes, personification, and imagery throughout the poem. Similes such as “Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax” and “Her cheeks like the dawn of day” are used to establish the daughter’s beauty and youthful innocence. On the other hand, Longfellow uses similes, personification, and imagery to convey the destructive power of the nature. “Down came the storm, and smote amain…Some ship in distress that cannot live in such an angry sea” shows the human qualities of anger attributed to the sea and storm. In stanza 18, the ship “struck…but the cruel rocks, they gored her side.” The personification of the rocks conveys the tragic and gory death of both the girl and the vessel. The simile of the “horns of an angry bull,” in comparison to the rocks, helps the reader visualize the cruel death of both the girl and the ship.
     + **Revisit stanzas 9 and 20 to explain the irony in this poem. Cite textual evidence to support your answer.** 
       - Sample Response: The irony in this poem is the very essence of the tragedy. The tragic part of the poem is the irony that occurs, when the captain ties his daughter to save her from falling off the ship during the storm, however it is very act that dooms her. The skipper “bound her to the mast” during the storm to protect her from going overboard, but instead doomed her with the ship when it sank. The following morning after the storm, “a fisherman stood aghast/To see the form of a maiden fair/Lashed close to the drifting mast.” The daughter might have a chance to survive, had she not been tied down.
2. Write a brief news report of the tragic shipwreck of the Hesperus. Use precise language to write a headline, an effective lead to hook the reader, and descriptive details of the disaster. You may include eyewitness accounts (based on the details from the poem), visual images or graphics with captions to draw the reader’s attention. Remember that newspaper articles are strictly factual, and do not include the reporter’s opinions.

Sample Response:

* + Headline: “Twenty-Five Lost in Wreck of Hesperus”
  + The schooner *Hesperus* was lost at sea after last night’s powerful blizzard. Twenty-five souls, including the skipper and his young daughter, perished and their bodies have not yet been recovered, with the exception of one. A local fisherman found the body of the skipper’s blonde daughter, presumed to be 12 or 13 years old, tied to the ship’s mast, as it drifted to the shore at 5 o’clock this morning. According to eyewitnesses who were aboard nearby ships, *Hesperus* crashed against Norman’s Woe, a rocky reef off the coast of Gloucester, Massachusetts, before sinking to the bottom. A memorial service for the victims of the shipwreck will be held on Sunday, December 8, at the Calvary Chapel Baptist Church, in Gloucester.

1. Rewrite the narrative poem through the skipper’s daughter’s point of view. You may choose to write another poem (either free verse or using the same rhyme scheme as Longfellow’s) or write a short story version. Be sure to use precise language, imagery, and figurative language to convey the emotions of the skipper’s daughter during the storm. You may also choose to rewrite the ending of the poem or modernize the setting of the poem. Be creative, follow the Longfellow’s story structure, and remember to use the first person point of view.

Sample Response: The rewritten version, whether it’s a poem or short story, should:

* + Follow the poem’s basic plot structure, with the exposition that sets up the setting, characters, and conflict; rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.
  + Be written in the first person point of view.
  + Clearly provides detailed descriptions of the skipper’s daughter’s emotions of fear and distress.
  + Include examples of imagery, figurative language, and other poetic devices.

Note to Teacher

* Norman’s Woe is an actual rock reef off the coast of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and it has been the site of many shipwrecks. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s inspiration for the poem comes from the Blizzard of 1839, which devastated the northeast coast of the United States, destroyed 20 ships, and claimed 40 lives. Longfellow must have drawn inspiration from the wreck of the *Favorite*, a schooner from Maine; twenty bodies were washed ashore, among them that of an older woman who was tied to a piece of the ship.