**“The Parable of the Old Man and the Young” Discovery Stations**

**Follow the instructions below:**

1. **Read “Abraham and Isaac” and answer the following questions.**
2. **Read the introductory material about Wilfred Owen, the author of the poem, and answer the questions.**
3. **Read the definitions of Biblical allusion and allegory. Answer the corresponding questions.**
4. **Read the background information on the name changes of Abraham and Sarah and answer the questions.**
5. **Read Wilfred Owen’s poem “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young” and answer the questions.**
6. **Be prepared to have an in-depth class discussion.**

**Abraham and Isaac**

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**King James Bible**

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.

And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son,

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

~Genesis 22:1-18

1. Based on the story, what behaviors or values were most important in Hebrew culture?
2. What is the purpose of this story? How does the text achieve author’s purpose? Highlight and annotate specific passages or lines that prove your answer.

**Taken From:** [**http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/owena.htm**](http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/owena.htm)

**Introduction to Wilfred Owen**

Few would challenge the claim that Wilfred Owen is the greatest writer of war poetry in the English language. He wrote out of his intense personal experience as a soldier and wrote with unrivalled power of the physical, moral and psychological trauma of the First World War. All of his great war poems on which his reputation rests were written in a mere fifteen months.

From the age of nineteen Wilfred Owen wanted to become a poet and immersed himself in poetry, being especially impressed by Keats and Shelley.

He was working in France, close to the Pyrenees, as a private tutor when the First World War broke out. At this time he was remote from the war and felt completely disconnected from it too. Even when he visited the local hospital with a doctor friend and examined, at close quarters, the nature of the wounds of soldiers who were arriving from the Western Front, the war still appeared to him as someone else's story.

Eventually he began to feel guilty of his inactivity as he read copies of *The Daily Mail* which his mother sent him from England. He returned to England, and volunteered to fight on 21 October 1915. He trained in England for over a year and enjoyed the impression he made on people as he walked about in public wearing his soldier's uniform.

He was sent to France on the last day of 1916, and within days was enduring the horrors of the front line.

[**SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF WILFRED OWEN**](http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/owena.htm#short-biog_owen)

**Wilfred Edward Salter Owen, 1893 - 1918**

Born Oswestry, Shropshire. Educated at Birkenhead Institute and Shrewsbury Technical College.

From the age of nineteen Owen wanted to be a poet and immersed himself in poetry, being especially impressed by Keats and Shelley. He wrote almost no poetry of importance until he saw action in France in 1917.

He was deeply attached to his mother to whom most of his 664 letters are addressed. (She saved every one.) He was a committed Christian and became lay assistant to the vicar of Dunsden near Reading 1911-1913 – teaching Bible classes and leading prayer meetings – as well as visiting parishioners and helping in other ways.

From 1913 to 1915 he worked as a language tutor in France.

He felt pressured by the propaganda to become a soldier and volunteered on 21st October 1915. He spent the last day of 1916 in a tent in France joining the Second Manchesters. He was full of boyish high spirits at being a soldier.

Within a week he had been transported to the front line in a cattle wagon and was "sleeping" 70 or 80 yards from a heavy gun which fired every minute or so. He was soon wading miles along trenches two feet deep in water. Within a few days he was experiencing gas attacks and was horrified by the stench of the rotting dead; his sentry was blinded, his company then slept out in deep snow and intense frost till the end of January. That month was a profound shock for him: he now understood the meaning of war. "The people of England needn't hope. They must agitate," he wrote home. (See his poems **The Sentry** and **Exposure**.)

He escaped bullets until the last week of the war, but he saw a good deal of front-line action: he was blown up, concussed and suffered shell-shock. At Craiglockhart, the psychiatric hospital in Edinburgh, he met Siegfried Sassoon who inspired him to develop his war poetry.

He was sent back to the trenches in September, 1918 and in October won the Military Cross by seizing a German machine-gun and using it to kill a number of Germans.

On 4th November he was shot and killed near the village of Ors. The news of his death reached his parents home as the Armistice bells were ringing on 11 November.

[**WILFRED OWEN, THE SHOCK OF WAR**](http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/owena.htm#Shock_of_war)

**Wilfred Owen's First Encounter with the Reality of War**

On 30th of December 1916 Wilfred Owen, having completed his military training,  sailed for France.

No knowledge, imagination or training fully prepared Owen for the shock and suffering of front line experience. Within twelve days of arriving in France the easy-going chatter of his letters turned to a cry of anguish. By the 9th of January, 1917 he had joined the 2nd Manchesters on the Somme – at Bertrancourt near Amien. Here he took command of number 3 platoon, "A" Company.

He wrote home to his mother, "I can see no excuse for deceiving you about these last four days. I have suffered seventh hell. – I have not been at the front. – I have been in front of it. – I held an advanced post, that is, a "dug-out" in the middle of No Man's Land.We had a march of three miles over shelled road, then nearly three along a flooded trench. After that we came to where the trenches had been blown flat out and had to go over the top. It was of course dark, too dark, and the ground was not mud, not sloppy mud, but an octopus of sucking clay, three, four, and five feet deep, relieved only by craters full of water . . ."

The above is a brief extract from ***Out in the Dark*.** Owen's letter goes on to tell the story of how one of his sentries was blinded, an experience which is the basis of his poem *The Sentry*. There is much more about Wilfred Owen in **O*ut in the Dark****,* and more still in ***Minds at War***. See main index for more information about these books.

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Extract from Wilfred Owen's letter ©  Oxford University Press 1967.

Questions to Answer:

1. Based on the historical information, what can you infer Wilfred Owen’s poem, “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young,” will be about?
2. What would be the most significant information to know before analyzing a Wilfred Owen poem? Highlight and annotate specific statements in the text.

**Definitions**

**Biblical Allusion:** An allusion is a casual reference to something. A biblical allusion is to use an image or reference from the Bible in everyday language that has nothing to do with the original use of the image or reference.   
  
For instance, to say a supposedly powerful person has "feet of clay" is to refer to the vision of a mighty statue in the second chapter of Daniel that collapsed because its feet were made partly of clay, rather than of the finer materials that composed the rest of the statue. Common language is full of biblical allusions, from someone having the "patience of Job" or the "wisdom of Solomon" to the desire for "forbidden fruit" to weather like that of "Noah's flood."  
  
**Allegory** – An expressive style that uses fictional characters and events to describe some subject by supportive resemblance: an extended metaphor.

A **parable** is a brief narrative that teaches a moral, a lesson about life. Parables rely on the use of **allegory**—a story in which the characters, settings, and events stand for, or symbolize, abstract or moral concepts. Allegories can be read on one level for their literal meaning and on another for their symbolic meaning. Since symbols can suggest numerous meanings, even a brief, seemingly simple parable can be interpreted in several ways. *Parable* comes from a Greek word meaning “comparison,” indicating that the surface details in these brief stories can be compared to underlying abstract concepts.

Answer the following questions:

1. How could these two devices be used together in literature?
2. Identify examples of biblical allusions or allegories in texts you have read or movies you have seen. Explain how the device is used and the significance of it.

**Name Changes**

**Read the following passage about Abram’s name change and then answer the questions below.**

GOD CALLS ABRAM ABRAHAM

Genesis 16-17 Lesson 8   
Key Verse: 17:5

"No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be   
Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations."

When God called Abram, he promised that he would make him into a   
great nation (12:2) and that to his offspring would be given the land   
of Canaan (12:7). In chapter 13, after Lot left, God promised him that   
his offspring would be so many that no one could count them--like the   
dust of the earth. Then, when he had been depressed after his great   
victory over the kings (14), and sat in his tent, thinking that his   
servant would be his heir, God promised him that a son from his own   
body would be his heir (15:4). Now, 10 years had passed since he had   
heard God's call and obeyed him. Still, Abram had no son.

Researched excerpts taken from <http://learn.jtsa.edu/Documents/pagedocs/JANES/2001%2028/Fleishman28.pdf>

On the Significance of a Name Change and Circumcision in Genesis 17

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Genesis 16 relates the sixth episode concerning Abram: the birth of Ishmael, Abram’s first son. In chap. 17, the seventh episode, God informs Abram that Ishmael, son of Hagar, will not be his spiritual heir (17:19); rather, a son named Isaac to whom Sarah will give birth, will be his heir. Just beforehand, God had appeared to Abram and made him other promises. In addition to the promises in chap. 17, God changes Abram’s name to Abraham, and his wife’s name from Sarai to Sarah, and commands Abraham to circumcise all the males belonging to his household.

1. God appears to Abram with a new name, “(I am) El Shaddai,” (Gen. 17:2). Though the etymology of this name is still a matter of dispute,3 it is nevertheless quite clear that only now does God reveal to Abram a new aspect of divinity. This name is the preferred name of God in the patriarchal narratives.4

In the second speech (vv. 3–8), after God has promised Abram that he will become “the father of a multitude of nations,” he changes his name from Abram to Abraham by adding the letter *he* (aooh), “for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (v. 5c).8 In the fourth speech (vv. 15–16) God changes Sarai’s name to Sarah, by changing the last letter to *he* (aooh). Although no explanation is offered for this change of name, God promises “For I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of people shall issue from her” (v. 16b).9 In the third speech (vv. 9–14), as in the first one, the emphasis is placed on God’s demands from Abraham.

In the Bible and in ancient Near Eastern cultures a name served not only as a means of personal identification, but also as a cultural and religious marker, creating a link between the bearer of the name and associations linked to that name. Thus the giving of a name or changing it had great significance.11

The etymology of the name Abram is a matter of dispute.12 However, despite the lack of certainty concerning the original meaning of the name, the reader assumes that since Abram was given his name by Terah, the name established a connection between Abram and Terah’s culture.13 Thus it is significant that 25 years after leaving Mesopotamia in accordance with God’s command, Abram still bore the name that maintained a link to his former culture and belief.

The new name, Abraham, is interpreted as “father of a multitude of nations”(17:4–5). This is neither the literal nor the etymological meaning, but phonemically it is similar “to*’ab hamon* attested to in the repetition *’ab*and *ham* in both the name and the explanation.”14 The letter *resh* (cooyr) does not appear in the explanation. It is a flexible “literary” etymology, which takes no account of linguistic differences between the name and the proposed explanation.15 Abram might create a direct link to God’s promise in Gen. 12:2: “I will make your name great.”16

Scholars maintain that the names of Abram and Sarai were changed in order to mark the promise of many descendants.17

The Author suggests a different reasoning for the name change and you can read about it at: <http://learn.jtsa.edu/Documents/pagedocs/JANES/2001%2028/Fleishman28.pdf>

However, for the purpose of this assignment, use the above material to answer the following questions:

**Questions to answer**

1. **Why does God change Abram’s name to Abraham?**
2. **How are names important in Genesis?**
3. **For what reasons would God change someone’s name?**
4. **What does Abraham’s name change reveal about what Hebrew culture values most?**
5. **In what ways can a name change be perceived as a gift in this culture? In other cultures that we have studied, what sorts of gifts have deities bestowed on men? Contrast those gifts with Abraham’s name change.**

**Parable of the Old Man and the Young**

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,

And took the fire with him, and a knife.

And as they sojourned both of them together,

Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,

Behold the preparations, fire and iron,

But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?

Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,

and builded parapets and trenches there,

And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.

When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,

Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,

Neither do anything to him. Behold,

A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;

Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,

And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

*Wilfred Owen*

***Use all of the background information given to help you answer the following questions based on the poem.***

1. **At what point in the poem does Owen begin to depart from the original Abraham and Isaac story? Highlight and annotate textual evidence within the poem.**
2. **How does this poem function as an allegory?**
   1. **Whom does Abram represent in the poem?**
   2. **Whom does Isaac represent in the poem?**
   3. **What does the “Ram of Pride” represent?**
   4. **Based on A through C, what situation does the story of Abraham and Isaac allegorically represent?**
3. **What is the theme of the poem? How does the allegory help to develop it?**
4. **What is the significance of Wilfred Owen using the name Abram in the poem when in the Genesis story his name has already been changed to Abraham?**
5. **How did knowledge of Wilfred Owen’s background impact your understanding of this poem and its theme?**
6. **What is Wilfred Owen’s purpose in writing this poem?**
7. **How does Wilfred Owen’s use of shock value help to achieve his purpose in writing this poem?**