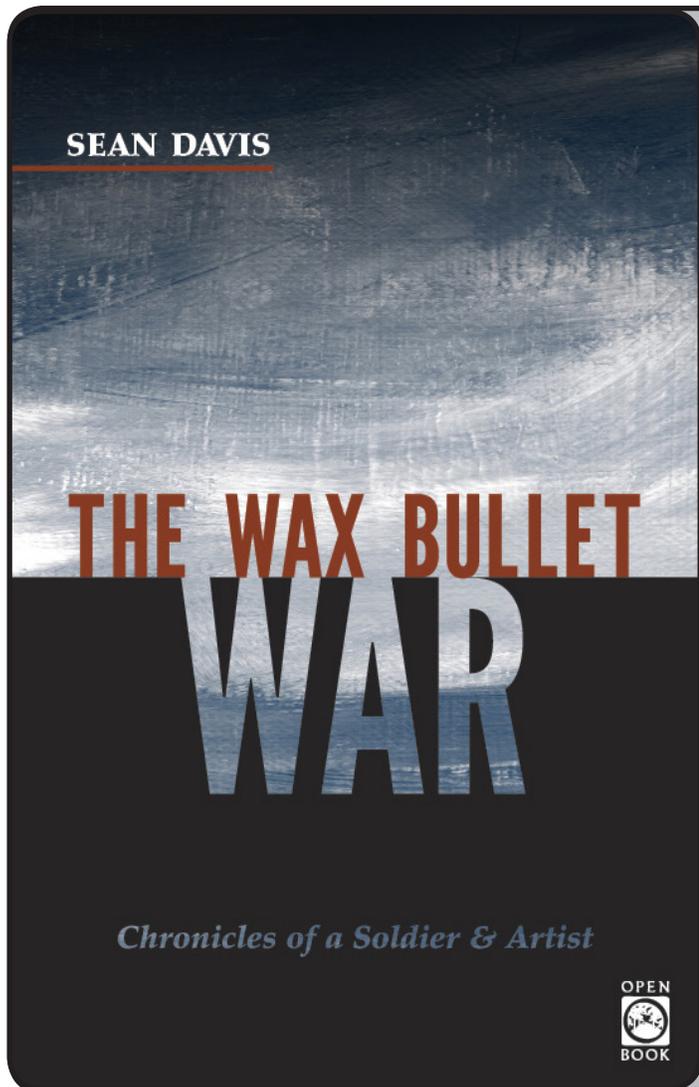




# An Ooligan Teacher's Guide

---

## *The Wax Bullet War* by Sean Davis



**Genres:** Biography: Military, Memoir, Biography: Artists

**Grade Level:** 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>

**Topics:**

- Iraq War
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- American Politics
- Overcoming Obstacles
- Friendship/Family/Relationships
- Art
- Teamwork and Cooperation
- Trust

# *The Wax Bullet War*

## by Sean Davis

### **Book Description**

On September 12, 2001, a year and a half after finishing his military service, Sean Davis strolled into the Oregon National Guard's recruiting office and reenlisted. After dropping out of art school and working a dead-end government job, the events of September 11 gave him a new sense of purpose and direction. Follow Sean Davis's life as he discovers the oddities of a pop-up America in a hostile desert wasteland; loses his best friend in a violent ambush; returns, critically wounded, to confinement in a place that's not his home; deals with the fallout of PTSD and the horror of what he experienced in that war zone; and finally, as he rediscovers art and its power to heal.

### **About the Author**

Sean Davis is a veteran of the Iraq war, a talented artist, and a gifted writer with an interesting story. He attended art school before earning his bachelor's degree in English from Portland State University and an MFA in Writing from Pacific University. He published the novel *Motivation and Toleration* under the name Ian Avi and has contributed to numerous publications including the *Portland Mercury*, *Work Magazine*, and *The Good Men Project*. He has also appeared on *60 Minutes* and is cofounder of Hubris Press in Portland.

### **Introduction**

There are many access points to this text, but a good way to engage students is by helping them connect the story to their lives. The lessons in this guide are meant to provide relevance and to help students make personal connections to the text through characters, relationships, themes, and structure. This guide is not meant to be comprehensive; it should be used to supplement classroom material already in place. Please feel free to adapt or alter the lessons to better meet the needs of your classroom, and enjoy the book!

## The Context and the Catalyst (Chapters 1–4)

Lesson Plan by Madalyn Clemens and Sarah Coleman

**Grade Level:** 10–12

**Estimated Time:** One class period (50 minutes)

**Materials Needed:**

- [History.com](#) article and paragraph handout
- [Video](#) for “In Memoriam – Remembering September 11, 2001”
- Opening and closing writing prompt

**Background Knowledge Needed:** Students should have at least a vague understanding of the events of September 11, 2001

### Curriculum Framing Questions

- Essential question: How does the language serve the story?
- Essential question: How does the culture of war affect the narrator?
- Unit question: How and why might we give a voice to those who have passed on and their experiences?
- Unit question: What does giving a voice to someone who cannot speak for herself or himself do for us?
- Lesson question: How do our reactions speak to our character and our culture?

### Goal

Provide students with a context for this young man's decision to reenlist in the army and for the war that he finds himself in thereafter.

### Prompts

- What are your reactions/impressions of the date of September 11, 2001? What comes to mind?
- Knowing that the protagonist of our story reenlisted in the army on September 12, 2001, what does this tell us about our country, the world, and the character we are about to meet?

### Overview

Students will brainstorm their impressions of this date in American history before seeing a video with the images of the day. Then they will use a new strategy for reading informational texts to read an article about

the United States' reactions to September 11. They will then do some critical thinking about these reactions through freewriting.

### Procedure

*Introduction (5 minutes):* Post on the board, “What are your reactions/impressions of the date September 11, 2001? What comes to mind?” Instruct students to take 5 minutes and freewrite their response.

*Video (8 minutes):* Show the video “In Memoriam – Remembering September 11, 2001,” which contains images from the day they just wrote about. Stop the video at 8 minutes.

*Class Discussion (4 minutes):* Ask students for their new reactions. How do they compare to those they had prior to watching the video? If they have changed, why? This should be done in discussion format.

*Paragraph Shrinking Activity (30 minutes):* Pass out a copy of the History.com article and paragraph shrinking handout. Go through the instructions on how they will be required to read the article. Suggested presentation would be to practice this strategy using “I do, we do, you do.”

*Individual Writing (Remaining Time):* Instruct students to write in response to the following prompt for the final few minutes of class: “Knowing that the protagonist of the story we will be reading reenlisted in the army on September 12, 2001, what does this tell us about our country, the world, and the character we are about to meet?” Use their before and after responses as a formative assessment of their learning.

### Oregon State Standards

11-12.RI.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.



## “Starving in the Belly of a Whale” (Chapters 5–8)

Lesson Plan by Ashley Friedman and Paula Linte

**Grade Level:** 10–12

**Estimated Time:** One class period (50 minutes)

**Materials Needed:**

- [Video](#) for “Starving in the Belly of a Whale”
- [Song lyrics](#) to “Starving in the Belly of a Whale”
- Copy of *The Wax Bullet War*

**Background Knowledge Needed:** Students should have read through chapter 8 of *The Wax Bullet War*. Some experience with figurative language, music, poetry, and deciphering themes from texts will be helpful. Students may need some contextual information about the Iraq War and the US military.

### Curriculum Framing Questions

- Essential question: How does the culture of war affect soldiers?
- Unit question: How does the culture of war affect the narrator?
- Lesson question: How is Tom Waits’s song related to Sean’s initial experience in Iraq?

### Goal

To consider the ways in which the “whale” metaphor applies to both Tom Waits’s song and Sean’s experience with the Iraq War.

### Prompts

- How is Sean “starving in the belly of a whale”?
- What is “the whale” in Sean’s life?
- Do you think Sean will ever escape his whale?

### Overview

Students will be asked to consider chapters 5–8 of *The Wax Bullet War* side-by-side with Tom Waits’s song “Starving in the Belly of a Whale.” Students will compare the themes and ideas of the two works, while applying the whale metaphor to Sean’s experiences in Iraq.

### Procedure

*Introduction (5 minutes)*

Students are asked to talk to two different people in the classroom about what stood out to them about the last four chapters of *The Wax Bullet War*.

*Listening and Reading (10 minutes)*

Students then read the lyrics to “Starving in the Belly of the Whale” and listen to the song by Tom Waits. Afterward they discuss their feelings and compare the two texts together.

*Preparing for Paragraph (10 minutes)*

Ask students to underline three lines in the song that they think are particularly interesting. Let them know that they will be writing a paragraph about how one of those lines connects to *The Wax Bullet War*.

*Writing Paragraphs (20 minutes)*

Instruct students to write two chunk paragraphs about how the line from “Starving in the Belly of a Whale” relates to *The Wax Bullet War*. Instruct students to use textual evidence from both *The Wax Bullet War* and “Starving in the Belly of a Whale.”

*Closure and Discussion (5 minutes)*

Ask for student volunteers to read the paragraphs they wrote—three volunteers are sufficient—then have students turn in their paragraphs.

### Oregon State Standards

11-12.RL.2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account

11-12.RL.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

## The Influence of Culture of War (Chapters 9–12)

Lesson Plan by Andrew DeYoe and Nathan Shoutis

**Grade Level:** 10–12

**Estimated Time:** One class period (50 minutes)

**Materials Needed:**

- Copy of *The Wax Bullet War*

**Background Knowledge Needed:** Students should have read through chapter 12 of *The Wax Bullet War*. Some experience with figurative language and deciphering themes from texts will be helpful. Students may need some contextual information about the Iraq War and the US military.

### Curriculum Framing Questions

- Essential question: How does the culture of war affect soldiers?
- Unit question: How does the culture of war affect the narrator?
- Lesson question: Does the culture of war lead to a change in the narrator?

### Goal

To gauge and promote student knowledge in reference to understanding the narrator.

### Prompts

- Does the narrator's ritual morning break shed light on his thoughts about the culture of war? Analyze the following quote:  
I walked, naked to the waist, about thirty meters away from our circled trucks to piss in a three-foot ditch and wash up. Without my gear I felt weightless and cool, like maybe gravity had released me a little bit. I stood with my eyes closed and arms outstretched, feeling the morning sun on my chest, stomach, and shoulders, thinking maybe I could just float above all this mess (pg. 100–101).
- How does the narrator tell us what he is experiencing throughout the assigned reading?

- Assess the last two sentences of the chapter "The Shit Sandwich" —does the culture of war lead to a change in the narrator?

### Overview

Students will analyze the narrator in order to find out whether the culture of war has brought on a change in his personality or in his perception of the war experience.

### Procedure

*Introduction (5 minutes)*

The first prompt will be displayed on the board as students enter the classroom. They are given about five minutes to record their answers.

*Students Discuss (10 minutes)*

Students will be asked to approach the remaining prompts with suggestions for why or why not. They will discuss with their partners at first, and then the conversation will grow into a classroom discussion.

*Focus on the Narrator (30 minutes)*

The teacher will turn the students' attention to the narrator and how his narrative voice is used within the four chapters tackled during today's class period in order to shed light on how he opens up about the culture of war. Some passages that could be helpful for exploring the narrator's perspective and his mixed signals about the effect the culture of war has on him include the description of the lands (96–97, etc.), his explanation of the viking gene (106), the description of the war scene with farmers (111), making friends in River Villa (113–115), blocking out home and family (117), wanting novelty T-shirts on opposition (123), and the falling off of his war face (125). Other instances can be referred to, but because this lesson was assigned with chapters 9–12, the students should focus on what they have recently read.

*Journal or Drawing (10 minutes)*

After the class has discussed the narrator for quite some time, the students will act as the narrator and will write a journal entry or draw a sketch in reference to the last two sentences of the assigned reading:

Looking down at the houses I realized that each one held a family, each one was a home, each home had children, mothers, fathers, grandparents. That wasn't something I thought about in training and now it was something I couldn't avoid thinking about (138).

**Oregon State Standards**

CCR Anchor Standard 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCR Anchor Standard 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

## Using Textual Evidence to Write Themes (Chapters 13–16)

Lesson Plan by Hannah Kingrey

**Grade Level:** 10–12

**Estimated Time:** One class period (60 minutes)

**Materials Needed:**

- Classroom copies of *The Wax Bullet War*
- [Discussion web worksheet](#)
- Carousel writing poster paper set-up
- Student writing notebooks
- [Writing rubric](#)

**Background Knowledge Needed:** Students should have read through chapter 16 of *The Wax Bullet War*. Some practice with close reading, argumentative writing, citing textual evidence, and identifying themes will be helpful.

### Curriculum Framing Questions

- Essential question: How does the culture of war affect the narrator?
- Unit question: What is the culture of war?
- Lesson question: How does the culture of war affect Sean Davis? How does Davis describe the effects of war?

### Goal

Students will use evidence to support their claims and arguments. Students will consider the idea of a culture of war and describe its effect on the narrator of *The Wax Bullet War*.

### Prompts

- Does a culture of war exist?
- What are examples of the culture of war?
- What are some examples of the culture of war in *The Wax Bullet War*?
- How does the narrator respond to the culture of war?

### Overview

Students will work in groups of to develop a discussion web about the question: Does a culture of war exist? Next, they will examine evidence from the text, *The Wax Bullet War* and create possible themes. Then, students will write independently to develop one theme that addresses the lesson question.

### Procedure

*Hook: Discussion Web (15 minutes)*

- Form groups of 3 to 5 students each and provide each with a discussion web worksheet.
- Present a focus question (Does a culture of war exist?).
- Direct students to do the following:
  - » Discuss the question with their group and come up with evidence to support both a yes and no position.
  - » Analyze the question and record information and group responses. Jot down only key words and phrases—try to use an equal number of reasons for pros and cons.
  - » Work together to come to a consensus by stating your conclusion and reasons for it.
  - » Choose a spokesperson to share your group's point of view with the entire class.

*Close Reading and Carousel Writing (30 minutes)*

Examples on next page.

### Oregon State Standards

11-12. RI.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

11-12.W.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics of texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

11-12.W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Topic	Evidence	Effect on Sean	Theme
<p><i>The Effects of the Culture of War on the Narrator</i></p>	<p>1. <i>The war went on, and the loss of the lieutenant colonel showed me that one man, even a battalion commander, didn't make much difference in a war. War is a machine designed to lose its pieces while plowing through lives, lands, and history. Hell, it could lose its engine or steering wheel and it would make no difference (p139).</i></p> <p>2. <i>We spoke about so many different things while we waited, but inevitably, the conversation would gravitate back to one subject: who would play us in the movie that Hollywood would surely make about us (p152).</i></p>	<p><i>At times, Sean Davis feels like war overwhelms the individual. The chaos of war is a destructive force. At other times, he feels like a Hollywood hero.</i></p>	<p><i>Sean Davis suggests that the culture of war values the "machine" of war over the individual.</i></p>

Students each receive poster paper with the following set-up:

<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>The Effects of War on the Narrator</i></p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Effect on Sean:</b></p>	<p><b>Theme:</b></p>
	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Effect on Sean:</b></p>	<p><b>Theme:</b></p>

*Close Reading and Carousel Writing (30 minutes)*

- *Close Reading/Scanning:* In groups of 3 to 5, students will scan chapters 13–16 and select at least four pieces of text that describe or portray the effects of war on the narrator. One student in each group will record these text excerpts. The group will choose two excerpts and write them in the EVIDENCE boxes.
- *Rotation #1:* Instruct students to leave their poster paper and rotate one group to the right. Students will read the quotes written by the last group and describe the effects on Sean in the EFFECT boxes.
- *Rotation #2:* Instruct students to rotate one group to the right. Students will write a theme using the topic, evidence, and connection to the narrator.
- *Rotation #3:* Students return to their own poster and share themes with class.

*Individual Writing (10 minutes)*

Direct students back to the lesson question:

*How does the culture of war affect Sean Davis?*

Students will choose one of the themes created in the carousel writing activity. Have students develop paragraphs that use at least two pieces of evidence and describe the effect on the narrator, Sean Davis.

*Peer-Assessment with Rubric (10 minutes)*

Have students make pairs and score one another with a writing rubric. Each partner should circle the lowest scoring area and make recommendations for strengthening it.

## Examining Narrative Point of View (Chapters 17–20)

Lesson Plan by Alejandra Nava-R

**Grade Level:** 10–12

**Estimated Time:** Two class periods (90 minutes)

**Materials Needed:**

- Copies of *The Wax Bullet War*
- Passages from *The Wax Bullet War*
- Cornell Notes
- “Questions for Chapters 17–20” handout

**Background Knowledge Needed:** Students should have read through chapter 20 of *The Wax Bullet War*. A general understanding of literary elements (plot, character, setting, etc.) will be helpful.

### Curriculum Framing Questions

- Essential question: How does language serve the effect of a story?
- Unit question: How does the culture of war affect the narrator?
- Lesson question: How does changing the narrative point of view change a story?

### Goal

Introduce students to narrative point of view and demonstrate how a change in narrative POV affects the telling of a story.

### Learning Objectives

- Identify three narrative point of view perspectives (1<sup>st</sup> person, 3<sup>rd</sup> person limited, 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient).
- Articulate and describe the changes that take place in the story when the narrative point of view is changed.

### Procedure

*Chapter Review Activity (15 minutes)*

Students take several minutes to answer the questions for chapters 17–20 in *The Wax Bullet War*. After students have completed the questions, a discussion is opened up to the whole class, volunteers report their answers,

and other students have a chance to respond.

*Vocabulary Activity on Narrative POV (20 minutes)*

Teacher transitions students to thinking about narrative point of view by focusing on question #5 of the opening question sheet. This question asks students to pay attention to the pronouns the author uses in the novel. From here the teacher reveals that this novel is written in first person narrative point of view and uses this as a launch into defining three terms used to describe narrative point of view; first person, third person limited, and third person omniscient.

Teacher leads students through the use the vocabulary activity, Foursquare, to record and think about the definitions for the three terms for narrative point of view. For this activity, students draw four squares on a blank sheet of paper. In the top left box they write the vocab word. In the top right box students write the definition. In the bottom left they write a personal association and in the bottom right they write the opposite. Repeat for each of the terms: first person, third person omniscient, third person limited.

*Narrative Point of View Activity (30 minutes)*

Teacher passes out the Passages sheet from *The Wax Bullet War*. Teacher picks one passage from the sheet to demonstrate to the class how a change in the pronouns used can change the narrative point of view perspective. Teacher demonstrates one sentence of the passage chosen and changes the pronouns from first person to reflect a third person perspective. Teacher then invites student volunteers to help her do the same for one or two more sentences in the same passage. Next, teacher asks students to pick one passage and convert the entire section into third person narrative perspective on a blank piece of paper.

*Discussion (15 minutes)*

Teacher calls students back as a group to discuss

student findings on the effect of narrative perspective on the way the story appears to the reader. Possible prompts for questions could be:

- How is the distance between the reader and the narration affected by the change in narrative perspective?
- What are some storytelling limits of third person narration? For first person?
- What are some opportunities for storytelling that are opened with the change in narrative point of view?

*Closure: Cornell Notes Review (10 minutes)*

After the discussion, teacher guides student attention to take notes on teacher debrief of narrative point of view and discussion. The last five minutes of class students write a summary on their Cornell Notes about narrative point of view and its effects on storytelling.

### **Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning**

Student summaries will be assessed and evaluated based on whether or not students were able to articulate the differences between different narrative points of view, as well as the effects the change has on the way the story is revealed.

#### **Oregon State Standards**

CCR Anchor Standard 5: Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCR Anchor Standard 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

# Questions for Ch. 17–20 in *The Wax Bullet War*

1. What key events happened to the main character in these chapters?

2. Where is our main character at the end of chapter 20?

3. Circle all that apply.

The main character is feeling/has felt mostly:

*angry*

*sad*

*confused*

*frightened*

*grateful*

*excited*

*hopeful*

*optimistic*

*excited*

*hopeful*

*defeated*

4. Pick one emotion from above. In your own words, describe one scene where the narrator is experiencing this emotion.

5. Circle the set of pronouns that appears most often to describe the main character's experience.

a. I, me, we

b. He, she, they

## Passages from *The Wax Bullet War* Ch. 17–20

(p. 169) Tears came and I hated myself for crying. I tried to hold it back, but I couldn't. The whole situation seemed so stupid, and there was really no reason for me to bawl like a baby, but I had this flash of anger with no way to do anything about it. Hours before, I was planning and executing combat missions; I'd led men, I'd had the power over life and death, and now I couldn't even shit by myself.

(p. 168) Time stretched and bunched, flowed and stalled, to the unpredictable rhythm of a morphine drip. I woke again, not knowing how long I had been out. A single thought shook me. My eyes shot open and I looked down. I was relieved to find all four fingers and a thumb sticking out of the cast on my right forearm. They were discolored and swollen to the size of sausages, but all of them were there. Wires, tubes, and shiny metal rods stuck out of the bleached-white sheets on my bed. Machines surrounded me, beeping, humming. There was the low, muffled sound of air being released. The room was beige, with chipped paint in the corners, but other than that it was a hospital room like any I'd seen anywhere else. Small, no windows, white tiled floor.

(p. 173) The first explosion sent the hanging fluorescent lights swinging, making the shadows run all around the room. A black female lieutenant came in and yelled for all of the staff to run to the bunkers, God bless her. Reluctantly, all her soldiers filed out, leaving the bed-ridden patients. They had to. The lieutenant turned to leave, too, but as she hung in the doorway she saw me smiling at her. She paused, and looked so worried. I waved her to leave.

"It's okay. It's okay," I whispered.

Another explosion set the shadows running again, and she jumped like a spider had landed on her back. She was ready to go, but before she did she found a flak vest and ran over to me. She set it lightly on my chest, like I was a child and she was tucking me in.

"Thank you," I said, and I loved her for the sadness I saw in her face, for her remorse at leaving me.

(p. 178) I stared at the small spots of blood that had soaked through the bandages on my right arm. "I'm fine. I broke a couple bones and got knocked around, but I'm going to be fine." I should have stopped talking right there in order to make her feel okay about the whole thing, but the words wouldn't stop coming, "One of my good friends was killed and another was hurt bad. Simon was only two feet behind me when the bomb went off. I saw him, Mom. I saw him dead back there, and I can't get it out of my head."

She kept apologizing to me like it was all her fault. She said she was so sorry, over and over again. Then neither one of us said anything for a long time. "I'm sorry, Mom. I'm fine. I'll be back in the States soon. I just wanted to let you know that I'm okay."

(p. 179-180) A homely middle-aged woman with tired, puffy eyes came from inside the hospital and said I was scheduled to fly out the next day. She also said that the hospital was almost full so I would have to share a room, but it wasn't that big of a deal because the other man in the room was comatose. I didn't know what he suffered from, but I figured from all the machines and noises coming from his side of the room that he wasn't coming back from it. A nurse kept coming by throughout the night, asking me to rate my pain level between zero and ten. I was a steady seven before the pills. After the pills, when the pain was a high two or a low three, I drifted off, but my sleep cycle was still outside the wire and I woke up every couple of hours. I spent most of the night listening to the dying man's phlegmatic breathing and the beeps of his machines.

## The Effect of PTSD on Veterans (Chapters 25–28)

Lesson Plan by Emmett Pearson

**Grade Level:** 10–12

**Estimated Time:** Two class periods (90 minutes)

**Materials Needed:**

- Copies of *The Wax Bullet War*
- Student journals
- [Video](#) for “Vet: We all had our own war”
- [Video](#) for “Veterans and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)”
- Sticky notes (Day 2 activity)

**Background Knowledge Needed:** Students should have read through chapter 28 of *The Wax Bullet War* and have familiarity with previous lessons and related assignments.

### Curriculum Framing Questions

- Essential question: How does the culture of war affect the narrator?
- Lesson question (Day 1): What does the interview with Sean tell us about his feelings toward war?
- Lesson question (Day 2): What events could be leading to Sean’s downfall?

### Goal

Students will compare Sean’s war experience with the experiences of other veterans. They will use examples from the text to discuss Sean’s post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Procedure

*Day One*

*Introduction (2 minutes)*

Play YouTube video: “Vet: We all had our own war.”

*Writing Prompt (5 minutes)*

Draw a T-chart on your paper. On one side write “similarities” and on the other “differences.” After watching the clip, write down the similarities and differences between this interview and Sean’s *60 Minutes* interview

in chapter 25. Once you have written down a few things, write a paragraph about why you think they are similar or different, or a little of both. Cite the text.

*Pair Discussion (5 minutes)*

Turn to a partner and discuss your writing. Answer these questions in preparation for a whole class discussion:

- What did you write that was similar?
- What did you write that was different?
- Does the author’s account of the interview seem realistic to you? Why or why not?

*Class Discussion (5 minutes)*

Cold call on students to discuss their answers. How many students wrote similar responses? What were the major differences? Ask students to build on each other’s responses.

*Text Analysis/Group Work (30 minutes)*

In groups of four, have students discuss the following questions about chapters 25 and 26:

- The interviewer asks Sean the same question several times. How does Sean’s reaction to the questioning affect the interviewer? How does the outcome of the interview affect Sean?
- What is happening with Sean’s relationship with Jaime? What does his veteran status have to do with the success or failure of their relationship?
- Sean escapes by falling into a “partying” lifestyle. How does this new lifestyle affect his art?
- How did the war affect Sean’s ego? How do we know this?

Student groups should each share their responses for 2 to 3 minutes.

*Day Two*

*Introduction (2 minutes)*

Make a list of words you associate with PTSD or a list of things you know (or don’t know) about PTSD.

*Video (2 minutes)*

Play YouTube video: "Veterans and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)."

*Writing Prompt (5 minutes)*

What does this clip have to do with chapters 27 and 28? How does this relate to Sean's state of mind?

*Class Discussion (5 minutes)*

Students share their responses to both prompts. Ask for volunteers as well as cold call, and ask students to build upon each other's responses.

*Group Analysis (20 minutes)*

In groups of four, students will use the text to brainstorm responses to the following question:

*What actions, events or decisions could be leading to Sean's downfall?*

After group members have found a number of examples from chapters 25–28, the group will use a numbered list to rank Sean's problems from most harmful/most affecting to least harmful/least affecting. (Example: drinking heavily every day could be listed as more harmful than smoking too many cigarettes.)

*Discussion (5 minutes)*

Ask each group to talk a little about what they came up with and how they rationalized their answers.

*Journal Questions (remaining time)*

Ask students to write thoughtful answers to the following questions in their journals:

- What happens to Sean's enthusiasm for his "masterpiece" and why?
- Explain how Sean's conversation with Jaime changes him.
- Sean expects someone to confront him for acting out at the hospital but no one comes. Why do you think that is the case?

**Oregon State Standards**

11-12.RL.2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

11-12.RL.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

11-12.W.1b: Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.

## The Art of *The Wax Bullet War* (Chapters 32–36)

Lesson Plan by Karen Walasek

**Grade Level:** 10–12

**Estimated Time:** One class period (50 minutes)

**Materials Needed:**

- Copies of *The Wax Bullet War*
- Ability (via the internet or library) to explore/research/discuss art

**Background Knowledge Needed:** Students should have completed reading *The Wax Bullet War*.

### Curriculum Framing Questions

- Essential question: Do the arts help us to be more humane?
- Unit question: How did art influence the decisions that Sean made in *The Wax Bullet War*?
- Lesson question: Can we better understand the author's experiences in *The Wax Bullet War* by studying art and, specifically, the referenced artists and their techniques?

### Overview

Students will be asked to respond to different aspects of art as it relates to the essential questions of the book. Teachers may have students respond to the prompts via discussion, research, or multimedia projects such as the production of their own artistic response to the prompts.

### Prompts

- In what ways are Van Gogh's café terrace paintings like the scene in the book? How does this suggestion influence the mood the author is portraying? (38)
- The author references numerous artists throughout the text: Chuck Close, Roy Lichtenstein, Franz Kline (6), Vincent Van Gogh (38, 177), Francisco de Goya, Pablo Picasso, Leon Golub, Davis (193), Salvador Dalí, Edvard Munch (229), Gustave Doré, Paul Cézanne (177), and even Matt Groening's (115).

- » Pick an artist to explore and explain why this person's art is relevant to the story.
- How might the author's cultural bias have influenced his affinity to certain various artists?
  - » How might this story have been different if it was written from a woman's point of view?
  - » A Native American's? Someone from different culture than the authors?
  - » What artists might have been chosen instead?
- In what ways do art and culture help us to understand and humanize others?
- The author seems to suggest that his roles as a soldier and an artist may have been mutually exclusive sometimes but, cooperative in others. "Being a good leader of men in combat left no room for anything artistic in my life" (52). "I realized I had split myself in two, the artist and the soldier, and the soldier didn't like the artist" (106). "With one ugly little puppy surrounded by daisies, the artist did something the soldier couldn't" (115).
  - » Do you believe artistic experience could make a person a better leader in war? Why or why not?
  - » What place does an understanding of art have in conflict?
  - » Do you believe an education in the arts can shape how a person responds to conflict or help them to avoid conflict altogether? Why or why not?
- What is the significance of color in the story?
- Research Gustave Doré's illustration of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.
  - » What is the significance of this piece in the scene on page 111?
  - » How does seeing the artwork shape your understanding of the author's point of view?

- “The thought of painting my own masterpiece protesting the war, protesting war in general, popped into my head. Goya, Picasso, Golub, Davis. The canvas would be three stories tall and painted like an American flag, and in the foreground I would put a very dignified-looking goat with a subtle smile, staring with a deep satisfaction at all who gazed upon it, while a determined yet compassionate Uncle Sam in top hat, tie, and patriotic jacket mounted it from behind with his pants around his ankles” (193).
  - » What is the connection between any one of these artists and the painting that the author is describing?
  
- Given the other artists that the author references, which “Davis” do you believe he is alluding to on page 193: American modernist artist Stuart Davis, Irish artist William Davis, or some other Davis altogether? Explain.
  
- On page 56 the author admits to being color-blind.
  - » In your opinion, does this undermine or strengthen the authority of the author as an artist? As a descriptive author? Does this admission matter to the story at all?
  
- The author states: “Art and words saved me” (288). Do you agree? Why or why not?
  
- Research art therapy and post-traumatic stress. How do these relate to the story?

#### **Oregon State Standards**

11-12.W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

CCR Anchor Standard 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCR Anchor Standard 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.