



## Shadows and Reflections in *Under the Volcano*

A 35 + minute classroom activity

Grades 7 & up

By Lisa Notman

Northwest Academy / Portland State University

**Lesson Overview:** This lesson looks at the use of shadows and reflection in *Under the Volcano* by George Johanson. The lesson begins with a “close looking” of the painting. Afterwards, students will discuss how artists choose what they show to their audiences and move on to a discussion on unreliable narrators or ambiguous texts.

### Suggested Posters:

- George Johanson, *Under the Volcano*, 1984

### Materials:

- Poster
- Copies of the text to be analyzed

### Before the Lesson:

1. An optional “pre-homework” for this lesson would be to assign students the task of photographing shadows or reflections they encounter during their day. Students should photograph the shadow/reflection as well as what is creating it. (Recommended - teacher provides a few examples first). Students can email those pictures to the teacher or add those pictures to a shared Google Presentation so that the entire class can view the images.
  - a. Variation: This activity could also be done as a warm-up in the classroom depending on your cell phone policy
  - b. The instructor could collect their own pictures of shadows and instruct students to draw a picture of the thing they believe is making that shadow.

### Lesson Steps:

1. (2 minutes ) Begin by assigning students to one half of the painting. Instruct them to look for examples of shadows and reflections and think about what is causing the shadow or reflection. Two whole minutes of just looking at a painting will feel like a long time but encourage them to keep looking for details.
2. (8 minutes ) Have students pair or group up with students who looked at a different section of the painting and share what they noticed. Potential questions to answer: What is in your section? Are there any reflections or shadows? Are there any spaces where there should be a reflection or shadow but aren't? Where is the light source in your section? Do the shadows make sense with that light source?



## Shadows and Reflections in *Under the Volcano*

A 35 + minute classroom activity

Grades 7 & up

By Lisa Notman

Northwest Academy / Portland State University

3. (8 minutes ) Look back at the entire poster as an entire class and review which sections stood out to the most groups. Discuss what sort of feelings the painting brings up and how the shadows and reflections change the painting for us. Lead discussion to why they think the artist chose to show some shadows/reflections accurately and some inaccurately. Segue into how other artists choose the way characters and scenes are represented in their texts.
4. (15 minutes - Short version) Apply this technique to a story or novel the class has already read. Select a section and discuss what the author has chosen to show to the audience. What has the author hidden from the audience or left open to interpretation?

(30 + minutes - Long version) read a short story or selection from a text that has an unreliable narrator or an ambiguous ending. Select a section and discuss what the author has chosen to show to the audience. What has the author hidden from the audience or left open to interpretation?

### Variant themes:

Writing - Reliable supporting evidence in argumentative and research essays

History/Social studies- News sources or history texts as fallible sources. Who's version of the story is being presented and why? Discuss the surface level "facts" being presented and what underlying values/ideas/ideologies are being reflected.

Mathematics/Science - False correlations and misrepresentation in data and statistics (purposeful and accidental)

Art - Have students do their own project with shadow or reflection. Do they want to produce something accurate or distorted? Have them defend their decision.