



Cruchley's Collection

Diana Cruchley is an award-winning educator and author, who has taught at elementary and secondary levels. Her workshop are practical, include detailed handouts, and are always enthusiastically received.



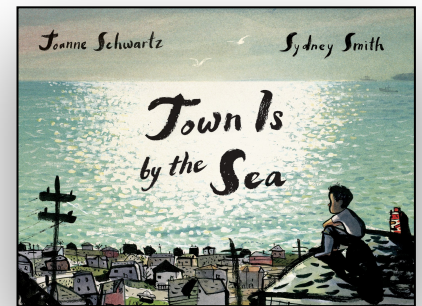
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Town Is By the Sea

Written in the first person, a boy tells of his simple day. First he describes the setting by the sea with a house, a road, a grassy cliff, the sea, and the town – and his father digging coal under the sea. Then getting up, going to the playground, having lunch, doing an errand in town, visiting his grandfather's graveyard and and going home, listening to the radio, having dinner, An ordinary day, and at every stage he thinks of his father digging coal under the sea.

Joanne Schwartz

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Teaching Ideas

A First Person Story of Your Day

Using the story as a model, students could write a simple story of what happens during a typical day in their life. They could then mark 5 places where they will place sentences, “And my mother”..... followed by “and my father.” They may need to consult with their parents to find 5 things that they typically do throughout a day. Putting these things together will show the three lives happening separately but at the same time of the day. It could be a rather powerful little piece of writing.

Mining Songs

In Canada, the song *Working Man*, sung by Rita MacNeil, is considered a classic. It is also a perfect representation of the life of the men of **Town Is By the Sea**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-EiwiAh68>

The most famous of the mining songs is *Big Bad John*. Students will enjoy singing along with the lyrics. An interesting side note is that the last line of the song was originally “One hell of a man” At the time the time, any song with swearing in it could not get air time. As a result, they quickly replaced the last words with “a big big man.”

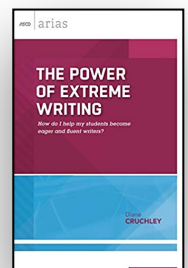
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Extreme Writing

Always present three possible topics for extreme writing so that students will have a choice. My book, *The Power of Extreme Writing*, is available from ASCD for a complete explanation of this unique approach to journaling.

1. Mining is dirty, tedious, hard work. Tell about either times you have become really dirty, or about something repetitious and hard you had to do.
2. Mining is physically difficult and dangerous. Tell about a time you could have been seriously injured.
3. This story is influenced by the sea. Tell about any water-based experiences you have had.



Town is by the Sea - The Title

As a beginning question, why is the story not called **THE** Town is By the Sea? What are some other possible titles? Is this a good title for the book, in your opinion? Why?)

The Power of Repetition

At each point in the story, our narrator repeats that his father is a miner and that he digs for coal under the sea. This is repeated 5 times. Before that statement, each time, there is a description of the state of the sea – its white tips, its sparkle, its crash, its calm quiet, the sun sinking into it, the sound as you fall asleep. Under that sea is where his father digs coal. Ask students to listen for the repetition – half of them listening for the description of what his father is doing, and half for the mention of the sea. They could make a quick note of each one, or they could just count how many times it happens.

Discuss how repetition can increase the power of the writing, making it more calm, or more scary, or more romantic as a mood enhancer. Even “Little pig, little pig, let me in,” “Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin” increases the power of the fairy tale. Ask students to take a recent draft of a piece they have written, and add a repeated line to it to see what it can do to increase the writing’s impact.

Vocabulary: Words About Coal

There are basically four types of coal...that is, ancient compressed vegetable material that can be burned as fuel. The most polluting version is peat, then lignite, then bituminous, then anthracite (the best and cleanest burning coal.) Metallurgical coal is one that can be used to make steel. It is created from bituminous coal heated in an oxygen deficient environment to reduce impurities such as phosphorus and sulphur.

Some words from the coal industry that are worth students knowing include: *carbon, berm, coal bed or seam, geologist, fissure, slag, reclamation, pyrite, noxious, hopper, pneumoconiosis (black lung), methane, carbon monoxide.*

Also, the expression “*canary in a coal mine*”, to mean an advance warning of danger. Miners even into the 20th century, would carry caged canary into the mine. It would die from methane or carbon monoxide before the gas would reach lethal levels for humans. Other “sentinel species” are described in a Wikipedia article with that title.

Some Background on Nova Scotia Mining

I’ve included this, so you don’t have to look it up yourself. I have shortened it somewhat. This is taken from the website <http://www.minersmuseum.com/history-of-mining/>

Mining in the Region

Coal mining on Cape Breton began over 250 years ago. In the early 1700’s, coal was needed in Louisbourg for the French to construct its Fortress. Coal was extracted from exposed seams along the cliffs and in 1720 the first coal mine was officially opened at Cow Bay (now Morien). In the 1800’s, rows of company houses could be found at Morien, along with hundreds of miners. In 1826, Frederick, Duke of York, was granted sole right by the Crown to all coal resources of Nova Scotia. The Duke subleased these rights to a syndicate of British investors called the General Mining Association who then sunk shafts mainly at Sydney Mines. In 1856, the General Mining Association surrendered its mining rights and the province invited independent operators to apply for leases and subleases. From 1858 to 1893, more than 30 coal mines were opened in the province, producing 700,000 tonnes in the last year.

In 1873, there were eight coal companies operating in Cape Breton. The miners were paid from 80 cents to a \$1.50 per day and boys were paid 65 cents. The first large mine, the Hub Shaft of Glace Bay opened in 1861 and several other mines in Glace Bay and Sydney Mines opened within the next few years. In total, Glace Bay had 12 coal mines. In 1894, the government gave exclusive mining rights to an American syndicate, the Dominion Coal Company. By 1903, the Dominion Coal Company was producing 3,250,000 tonnes per year. By 1912, the company had 16 collieries in full operation and its production accounted for 40% of Canada’s total output. Francis Gray, an English mining engineer who had immigrated to Cape Breton, expressed it best by commenting “Take away the steel industry from Nova Scotia and what other manufacturing activity has the province to show as a reflex of the production of 7,000,000 tons of coal annually?”

The coal mined in Nova Scotia, has for generations, gone to provide the driving power for the industries of Quebec and Ontario. For almost a century, Nova Scotia exported the raw material that lay at the base of all modern industry. The Sydney Coal Field contains the only metallurgical coal east of Alberta, and is part of a large carboniferous basin stretching from Cape Breton Island some 100 kilometres north-east. Its leasehold is a small portion of the total coal field which extends eight kilometres off-shore. Currently there are no large coal mines in operation.

Time Period Analysis

This is a good chance to show the images of the book while you read it. If you don't have a document projector, one of the easiest ways to see the images might be to show the trailer for the book. As they listen and watch the images have the students identify the time period, and the evidence they have for it. For example, there are telephone lines in the town, so it has to be somewhere in the 1900's. They are listening to the radio so they don't have a TV; that would put it in the late 40's, or 50's, depending on how isolated this town is. In 1952 there were only 150,000 TV's in Canada – by 5 years later there were over 2 million. There is no microwave in the kitchen so it needs to be before 1965 as the microwave was not introduced until 1967. There is no mention of a war, so it is probably after 1945 – between 1945 and 1955, most likely, by slowly narrowing it down.

Queen Anne's Lace - Invasive Species

In one line of the story, our character says, “*And along the road, lupines and Queen Anne's lace rustle in the wind.*” Queen Anne's lace is an invasive species, thought to have originated in Afghanistan, spread through Europe and arriving in North America. It was already a “nuisance” in the US in 1881. It's actually related to the carrot, but the long taproot is woody and tough. It is said to have been named after Queen Anne, the wife of James I of England, who held a contest to make a lace in its pattern.

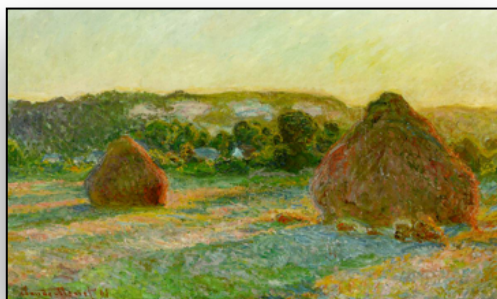


Students can be asked to watch for them in their own neighbourhoods. This could be a leap-off to an inquiry into the origins, spread, and troubles caused by invasive species. I have a pinterest page (Diana Cruchley pinterest) that provides images of 40 different (and interesting) invasive species. Who wants to inquire into the wood spurge? –it is much more interesting to inquire into the poisonous cane toad of Australia.

Impressionism

Joanne Schwartz shows us the sea in her illustrations at various times of the day – quiet, sparkling, white tipped waves, etc. It reminds one of the impressionist Monet, who would set up a half dozen canvasses, and paint the light that came in on the same scene throughout the day. One of his most famous sequences is Haystacks. Show the images of the sea from the book, and the images of Monet's haystacks to have students appreciate the influence of light on what we see.

If you have time, students could even try to create two different “impressions” of the same thing.



What My Dad (Or Mom) Did

Our character's father and grandfather both worked in the mines. It seems to be the only industry in the town, and our character is thinking that one day, it is inevitable, that he too will enter the mines. Students may be interested in tracking what their father and grandfather, or mother and grandmother did. Is there a family tradition involved in their own family's work history? There may be a family business as well.

Coal Accidents - An Inquiry

Coal mining is a dangerous business – principally from collapses, explosions, and gas. In addition, there is “coal miner's lung” – caused by breathing in the dust of mining for years.

Start with a provocation - this book and Rita MacNeil's song perhaps, moving from there to a study of mining disasters, which could be a rather quick inquiry, starting with the questions students generate. Don't forget that “*how, why, and is there a pattern?*” are important inquiry questions. There seems to be a Wikipedia entry individually for each of the accidents. What caused the various mining disasters of recent history? This list does not reflect the proportion of accidents or their relative size – I made a deliberate effort to concentrate on Canada first, then American and British (20 in all). In addition, there are probably enormously more catastrophic accidents in developing countries that might be researched as well, but the causes might be less well documented. Return to the questions the students originally answered for a discussion. This can also lead to a fruitful discussion of fossil-based industries and their future.

By gathering images for each disaster, a truly effective collective powerpoint could be created to accompany the students' oral presentations.

Nova Scotia

- Westville Pictou County, Nova Scotia, May 134, 1873
- Stellarton, Pictou County, Nova Scotia, January 23, 1918
- New Waterford, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, July 25, 1917
- Sidney Mines, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, December 6, 1938
- Glace Bay, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, February 24, 1979.
- Springhill Nova Scotia – 3 disasters, 1891, 1956, 1958
- Westray, Nova Scotia, May 9, 1992

Western Canada

- Hillcrest, Alberta, June 19, 1914
- Crowsnest Pass, Fernia, BC, May 22, 1902
- Nanaimo, BC, May 3, 1887

USA

- Monagah, West Virginia, December 6, 1907
- Cherry, Illinois, November 13, 1909
- Stag Canyon, New Mexico, October 22, 1913
- Granite Mountain, Montana, June 8, 1917

Britain

- Blantyre, Scotland, October 22, 1877
- Gresford, North Wales, September 22, 1934
- Abercairn, Wales, September 11, 1878
- Pretoria Pit Disaster, NW England, December 21, 1910.
- The Oaks, Yorkshire, England, December 12, 1866.
- Senghenydd, S. Wales, October 14, 1913