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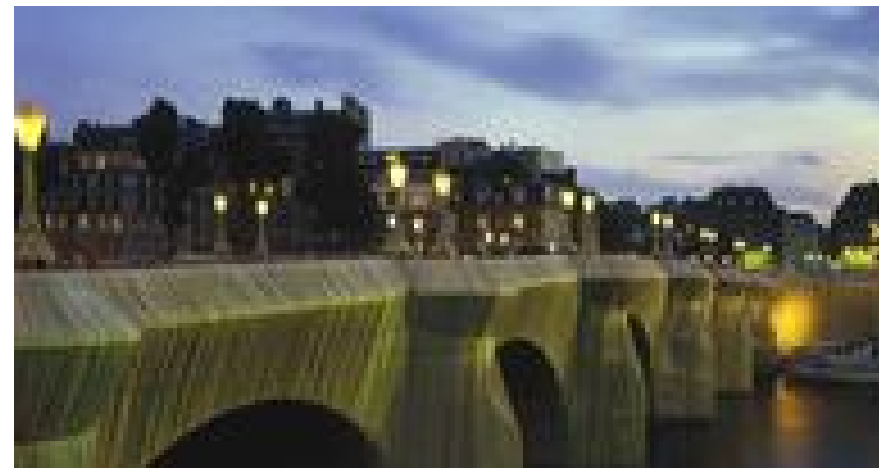
Inspiration +

Nature Journals for the English Classroom

Emile Zola's Light

Contemplations

Emile Zola sets the mood for his tragic love story, *Therese Raquin*, by describing images of shadow and light in the alleys of Pont Neuf in Paris. Indeed, observing light and shadows can be quite different at night than in the daytime. For this week's nature journal, try to observe the play on light you find while you are outside at night. Perhaps you can take a flashlight or a lantern with you and discover the way the reflected light interplays with your surroundings.



“The beginnings and ends of shadow lie between the light and darkness and may be infinitely diminished and infinitely increased. Shadow is the means by which bodies display their form. The forms of bodies could not be understood in detail but for shadow.”

—Leonardo Da Vinci



Literary Connection

The arcade is lit at night by three gas burners, enclosed in heavy square lanterns. These jets of gas, hanging from the glazed roof whereon they cast spots of fawn-coloured light, shed around them circles of pale glimmer that seem at moments to disappear. The arcade now assumes the aspect of a regular cut-throat alley. Great shadows stretch along the tiles, damp puffs of air enter from the street. Anyone might take the place for a subterranean gallery indistinctly lit-up by three funeral lamps. The tradespeople for all light are contented with the faint rays which the gas burners throw upon their windows. Inside their shops, they merely have a lamp with a shade, which they place at the corner of their counter, and the passer-by can then distinguish what the depths of these holes sheltering night in the daytime, contain. On this blackish line of shop fronts, the windows of a cardboard-box maker are flaming: two schist-lamps pierce the shadow with a couple of yellow flames. And, on the other side of the arcade a candle, stuck in the middle of an argand lamp glass, casts glistening stars into the box of imitation jewelry. The dealer is dozing in her cupboard, with her hands hidden under her shawl.

Emile Zola, *Therese Raquin*, Chapter 1



Setting—the time and place a story takes place—can be anywhere from mere “background” (“Once upon a time in a land far away,” as in fairy tales) to being highly actant, as in Zola’s description of a Paris street. Think about how the writers use setting. Does the setting serve to develop characterization? Is the setting symbolic as in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*? Is the setting sympathetic, in other words, if the protagonist is having a bad day, is it raining and dreary opposed to happy days that are sunny and bright? Pay close attention to the complex roles of setting in your readings, not merely the time and place.

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