



The man. The myth. The writer revealed.

HEMINGWAY

A FILM BY KEN BURNS AND LYNN NOVICK

EDUCATOR GUIDE



A Note to Teachers from a Teacher:

In watching this documentary, I first wondered what anyone could reveal about Hemingway that hasn't been told already. One of the most striking facts about Hemingway, given he was such a prolific writer, and his works are so well-known, is that many of us in the United States are already familiar with his contributions, even if we haven't read that much of it. And while his place in the literary canon seems secure, even with debates about what constitutes a canon, many of us realize we know very little about Hemingway the man or what he brought to his art.

It isn't uncommon for educators teaching about Hemingway to separate what they know of the man from the artist, predominantly because of what is most well-known about Hemingway's personal life. Much of it seems problematic, all the more so today.

In watching this documentary and reading Hemingway's works with your classes, you are embarking on a fascinating journey. Throughout his life, Hemingway traveled far to better understand himself and some of the most important events of his time. Today, some of those events seem remote. But we must travel with Hemingway to fully engage in his writing and explore how his life was so thoroughly integrated and invested in his writing. I think you'll come away with a new appreciation for Hemingway the artist and a greater understanding of some of the twentieth century's most important events. Many conversations about the established literary canon have emerged toward the latter half of the

twentieth century. Some of these conversations hold onto older pedagogical approaches that raise artists like Hemingway up into "untouchable" status, to the detriment of many young people looking to see their own identities and experiences reflected in literature. Others expand the canon to include newer and more diverse voices that Hemingway may have influenced but regardless stand on their own as powerful examples of the art and activism many of today's modern writers embody.

This guide intends to support classroom discussion about the documentary, Hemingway the artist, Hemingway the man, as well as support modern audiences looking to attain some understanding of the world in which he lived. In contrast to the ways instruction has often looked in the past, many educators today incorporate instructional methods that encourage young people to integrate writing styles they love from writers they read. Students are then able to use these examples as creative ways to tell their own stories.

Readers Note: This guide includes three parts that build on each other, corresponding to the documentary's three parts. Each part of the guide introduces themes from the documentary, and the themes build on each other as the documentary progresses. Timecodes marked throughout the guide indicate key moments in the documentary to build understanding and inform classroom conversations. For additional media-rich resources about Hemingway's life and writing, visit [Ken Burns in the Classroom](https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/kenburns) on PBS LearningMedia.

Educators, consider collaborating with your students to create classroom guidelines for discussing the sensitive topics addressed in *Hemingway* and throughout this guide. [These tips](#) from the Office for Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association may be included in letters to parents sharing the sensitive topics for conversations included here.

Additional Resources:

[Exploring Trauma-Informed Practice in the Language Arts Classroom](#)

['Those Kids:' Understanding Trauma-Informed Education](#) (Opinion)

[Suicide Prevention Hotline](#)

About the Author



JULIA E. TORRES is a veteran language arts teacher and librarian in Denver Public schools. As a teacher/activist committed to education as a practice of freedom, her practice is grounded in the work of empowering students to use Language Arts to fuel resistance and positive social transformation. Julia has been awarded the 2020 NCTE Colorado Affiliate Teacher of Excellence award chosen as a 2020 Library Journal Mover and Shaker, and serves educators as a member of the ALAN (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE) Board of Directors. Julia facilitates workshops and professional conversations about anti-bias/anti-racist education, social justice, and culturally sustaining pedagogies in Language Arts, as well as digital literacy and librarianship. Her work has been featured in several publications including NCTE's Council Chronicle, NPR, AlJazeera's The Stream, PBS Education, KQED's MindShift, NY Times Learning Network, The Chicago Tribune, ASCD's Education Update, Rethinking Schools, School Library Journal, and many more.

Part I: "If it's all beautiful, you can't believe it."

The art of capturing all that is beautiful and beastly in the human experience. Fiction helps us communicate truths about darker elements of life in a way that non-fiction cannot.

Themes:

Death - Consider death and dying as reoccurring themes in Hemingway's literature and the documentary. How might Hemingway's early experiences with death and killing have shaped him and his perspectives on life? Why did he continue to seek out experiences that brought him close to death and dying throughout his career?

Masculinity - According to the documentary, in what ways is Hemingway considered an "alpha male"? How does he embody stereotypes about masculinity from the times in which he lived? (4:45) Are there any ways in which he challenged the standards of masculinity in his day? Did his portrayals of masculinity change at all through the years?

Nature - Nature plays a significant part in Hemingway's personal life and his relationship to nature is a recurring theme in his literature. Nature appears as both a stabilizing force and a catalyst that initiates his characters' spiritual philosophical musings. (13:01-14:00) Consider Hemingway's relationship with nature in comparison to our own. Hemingway loved nature and he also loved to hunt. Is there a contradiction here? In what ways do we enjoy nature while dominating it, even if less directly? Consider the ecological effects of things like air travel, eating unsustainable foods, and using single-use plastics.

War - War and its relationship to countries and individuals in which there is ongoing warfare is a theme that Hemingway comes back to repeatedly, both as observer and participant. Consider how the documentary sheds light on his perceptions about war as seen through the letters he wrote to those back home, his journalistic coverage of war, and the fictional stories he created.

Family - Hemingway's relationship to his family was complicated and often fraught with conflict and other difficulties. Consider Hemingway's relationships with each of his family members, particularly his relationship with his mother (33:00, 35:24) and his father (13:01) and how these relationships may complicate your understanding of how "conventional" families operated during this time and in our own time. Further, consider Hemingway's relationship with his own sons.

Travel - If it is true that "everything is heightened when you're a stranger in a strange land" (48:00) then one has to appreciate how many heightened experiences Hemingway had, given the fact that he spent a large portion of his life outside of the U.S. He deliberately sought out experiences that would force him to get out of his comfort zone. At the same time, given his position as an American citizen traveling abroad, he could shape outside

environments to his liking and create favorable conditions for his comfort and survival. He was also always able to both criticize and claim his American identity, which others who did not share his social class or economic privileges were not. Consider also Hemingway's impact on tourism. Hemingway made the places he visited, such as Pamplona, tourist destinations. Do you think Hemingway would enjoy these places now that so many more people can visit them? What did he value about traveling?

Heroism and Courage - Hemingway was known for making bold, courageous moves on the page and in life. As a returned "war hero," he was given a persona by the public and those in his community that he fostered at some times (through his own exaggerations), and fought at others. Consider the role of courage and heroism in

his personal life and in his literary experiences. Consider how both acted as directives for the artist and the man.

Loss of Innocence - Many of the characters in Hemingway's novels and short stories either experience loss of innocence or cause another character to lose their innocence. There is a correlation between this and the loss of innocence that Hemingway himself experienced as a young man sent off to war. Consider Hemingway as a protagonist in the story of his own life, and consider how he may have caused those around him to experience loss of innocence as a result of their connection to him and the way he "was sometimes cruel and vengeful to those who helped him, but also compassionate to those who needed help." (5:44) (1:20:29)

Essential Questions:

1. What parts of the human experience during wartime are often amplified? Which parts are we reluctant to discuss? Why might a veteran feel uncomfortable being celebrated for heroism?
2. How are the public personas of artists or other social icons different from their real-life identities? Does the general public ever really know the difference between fact and fiction? What benefit could there be in crafting a narrative (about who someone is) for public consumption? (27:00)
3. How does *privilege* contribute to a person's ability to live as a full-time writer and creator? (47:32) Does privilege affect who we perceive to be "great American writers"? Explain your reasoning, anchoring your answer in examples.

Note: Privilege is *unearned* social power granted by the formal and informal institutions of society to ALL members of a dominant group (e.g., white privilege, male privilege, etc.). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we're taught not to see it, but it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it. Source: *Colours of Resistance Archive*, "Privilege" (accessed 28 June 2013).

4. How can fiction help readers explore darker elements of life (e.g., war, death, mental health, etc.) in a way that non-fiction cannot?
5. How might direct experience with trauma move individuals from innocence toward experience? Is it ever possible to return to innocence after trauma?

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways can we understand that Hemingway was privileged (consider: race, socioeconomic status, education)? What aspects of power and privilege did Hemingway experience growing up as a white male in the United States' Midwest? *Consider opportunities he may have had and worries or concerns that he did not have that others without his privileged identity may have endured.* (9:30)
2. How might war be considered to be "state-sanctioned murder"? What are some of the consequences for combat soldiers and loved ones they leave behind? (18:17-22:19).
3. How was Hemingway's depiction of war in *A Farewell to Arms* different from depictions that can come before this, according to Tobias Wolff? (1:43:52-1:46:23)

Extension: Consider anchoring questions 2 and 3 in a reading of Hemingway's "Soldier's Home".

4. Today there is a common misconception that there is a difference between [narcissistic personality disorder](#) and individuals having [narcissistic traits](#). According to the documentary (36:00), what elements of Hemingway's life and attitudes align with our modern-day descriptions of narcissism? How might this have contributed to the world's view of him as one of his time's greatest living writers? (43:21)
5. How did his work in journalism contribute to Hemingway's career as a creative writer? (49:47)
6. Hemingway returned to journalism throughout his career. How did his journalism change? What remained consistent?
7. Hemingway enjoyed the controversial sport of bullfighting. Why did he enjoy bullfights? For him, what lessons did bullfighting impart? In what way(s) did bullfighting "give him the feeling of life and death" that he was trying to remember from wartime? (52:40) (1:15:34)
8. Hemingway often drew from experiences he had in his life when writing fiction—as many writers do. What elements of Hemingway's autobiography do you recognize in his writing?
9. What societal attitudes were changing after WWI that created an environment in which Hemingway's writing—which in another time might have been considered degraded or salacious—could be accepted? (1:52:31)
10. What modern celebrities can you name who have been destroyed by the characters the public made of them? (6:33)
11. How did trauma and traumatic experiences shape Hemingway's life and writing? Cite specific knowledge from the documentary.

Activities:

1. Read about PTSD in the following article, research two more, and record your findings in the following graphic organizer.

[What Is PTSD?](#) (For students)

[Edutopia: Understanding Trauma Informed Education](#) (For educators)

[Trauma Informed Teaching and Leading in Action](#) (For educators)

	K (what I already knew)	W (what I want to know, questions I have)	L (what I've learned)
Source 1			
Source 2			
Source 3			

Create an informational presentation for your peers about PTSD and events from Hemingway's life that may have affected him. As you create your presentations, consider his experiences with war and associated physiological changes he might have endured (18:00) (20:00) (46:00) (1:40:31).

2. Read "Up in Michigan" and consider how it was a departure for Hemingway from the understood and widely accepted literary rules of his time that often dictated who could write what type of story. What risks did Hemingway take to write this story? What assumptions did he make about the subject matter in creating these characters? What is the overall impact of these choices on the reader? (49:42) (59:49).

Extension: Consider how "Up in Michigan" could be read as particularly modern in its treatment of sex and consent and as a story that anticipated, by decades, contemporary societal politics and our own #metoo movement.

Read and reflect on the following conversation about #ownvoices stories.

[Q & A with Corinne Duyvis](#)

Journal Prompt: What risks do writers take when they attempt to write from the perspective of a character who is fundamentally unlike them (e.g., a different race, gender, etc.)? What steps should writers take to avoid cultural appropriation or the ethical implications of re-creating oppressive systems such as marginalization and erasure? Is it possible to write successfully from a perspective that is not your own? If so, should you?

Expansion: Read and discuss - [Opinion | Just How White Is the Book Industry?](#)

(1:02:08) Consider intentional departures Hemingway made from other writing published in his time, specifically concerning content and style, then write your own short story from a perspective that is not your own. Explain in an author's memo why you made specific voice and style choices.

3. In "Hills Like White Elephants," Hemingway characteristically uses simple language to talk about a complex topic without naming it directly (1:19:19, 1:38:43). The word "please" becomes weaponized and the end is inconclusive. Read the short story and consider this question: What can short stories do that novels cannot? How so?

Hemingway was known for "[stet](#)" (1:43:04) in which writers often intentionally break the rules for dramatic or emotional effect. After reading "Hills Like White Elephants," take note of style moves Hemingway makes that you would like to imitate, like perhaps, repetition (1:43:50). Recall that for the final ending of *A Farewell to Arms*, he drafted 47 different versions (1:47:10).

Create a story that is one scene, breaks the rules of grammar or paragraph structure—with intention. Then, write a few different versions of the story or a scene in the story, with small changes to each version. In an author's memo, explain the rule you chose to break and why.

Part II: "Why mythologize? To woo people and keep them at a distance..."

The art of creating a real-life character to hide behind and for public consumption. We begin to distinguish the man from the myth.

Themes:

Domination: Many of Hemingway's activities in his personal life afforded him the opportunity to exercise control over the natural world and some aspects of his life. Consider this desire for domination in relation to how he could not control the public or critical reception of his work and persona.

Addiction: Hemingway, like many creative people past and present, had addictions, fixations and obsessions. Alcohol's imprint on his life is well-documented. Not all of his addictions were unhealthy, though. Some allowed him to develop specific knowledge and depth of exposure in a particular area that one can only acquire through personal experience.

Loneliness/isolation: Hemingway often traveled to seek out other people, cultures, and experiences, but he also often traveled to leave what he knew and venture into the unknown world to discover other parts of himself. Another recurring theme in his works is the communion between individuals and the natural world. While

Hemingway sought out connections with others, those connections were far and few between and he was often alone, even in a crowd. Hemingway's admission, "I would rather have one honest enemy than most of the friends I have known." (41:39) Viewers learn about his feelings of isolation and loneliness, even amid tremendous popularity as a public figure—a stark contrast.

Duality: In many ways, Hemingway's existence was that of multiple dualities. He was one of the most popular writers of his day, but he also experienced bouts of inconceivable loneliness. He was capable of great love but callously dismissed or cut off those who did not please him or cater to his whims. He loved to write creatively, but he also made a career as a war correspondent and journalist, a fact that isn't quite as well known. He was an artist, therefore a creator (of worlds and stories), whose subject matter was often marked by great destruction.

Essential Questions:

1. How does an experience like travel impact creativity? Generally speaking, how does adversity impact creativity?
2. Is it possible for a writer to write about a foreign society or culture from a place of full understanding? What are the advantages and disadvantages of writing about a place from the position of “outsider”?
3. How can creativity also ultimately lead to destruction? Conversely, how can great destruction often lead to creativity? What are the connections between creation and destruction?
4. How does creating a cult of personality both draw people in and keep them at bay?

Discussion Questions:

1. What types of avatars do we hide behind in everyday society? How does modern-day social media force individuals to create depictions of themselves that may or may not be who they are in real life? (4:00) How do these experiences affect our sense of our identity?
2. What routines did Hemingway establish as a writer that helped him remain productive? (8:04) What writing habits or rituals help you meet your goals?
3. How is bullfighting like a [classical](#) tragedy? What information do viewers of the documentary learn about Hemingway as a person consumed with such an activity? (11:30)
4. Compare Hemingway’s trip to Africa to his experiences during World War I (17:49-19:27). How was each experience an attempt to moralize the act of killing?
5. What does the documentary reveal about Hemingway’s attitude toward family life or traditional nuclear family structure? (32:10)
6. What effect did The Great Depression have on Hemingway’s writing? How did the public respond to this shift? (42:39)
7. How did Hemingway’s relationship with Martha Gellhorn (54:00) differ from his relationships with Hadley and Pauline? (Part I 37:09 and 1:26:42) (1:30:49-1:32:25) Consider the characteristics Martha Gellhorn had that were different from Hadley and

Pauline and the effect their relationship must have had on Hemingway. Consider the ways Gellhorn may have been equal parts inspiration and rival and the impact this may have had on the work Hemingway produced at this time. (1:32:25)

8. In his new life with Martha Gellhorn, how does Hemingway attempt to re-create conditions that spurred creativity from earlier in his life? (Part I - 1:14:42) What other famous historical figures are involved? Who else have you heard of who produced creative writing during this time? What factors do you think led to Hemingway becoming more renowned than the others? (56:55)

Note to educators: Guide students to think about authors publishing in the 1930s and 1940s (e.g., Langston Hughes, F. Scott Fitzgerald, etc.).

9. Do you think Hemingway ever felt trapped in the persona he created? Explain your reasoning.

Activities:

1. Much of Hemingway's life involved travel in the pursuit of adventure or circumstances that would result in enhanced creativity—sometimes to escape his own family and the banality of domestic life. How was his life in Cuba different from his life in Florida, the American Midwest, or Paris? (1:06:58)

Describe the place you live with as much specificity as you can. Consider your street, neighborhood, town, city, and state. Then, research a place you have always wanted to go. How might your life be different if you lived there? If you have lived in another place different from where you live now, you may choose to write about that place. Describe your life and what it was, or might be, using as much detail as possible. Your description can be written, an annotated image, a video, or any other multimedia you can think of.

Compare and contrast your life now with your real or imagined life in another place. How will *you* be different as a result of living in a different location?

2. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* Hemingway added information from his time living in Cuba. Watch from 1:08:06 in the documentary and read more about [Hemingway's Cuba](#) to record observations about the home and Hemingway's life in Cuba.
3. Consider the portrayal of war in fiction vs. the portrayal of war in journalism from actual war correspondents like Hemingway and Gellhorn.

Read the following piece by Martha Gellhorn:

[Reporting America at War . The Reporters . Martha Gellhorn](#)

Compare Gellhorn's writing to modern reporting we have from areas that are experiencing war or civil unrest. What shared characteristics do you note? What differences do you notice? What do you wonder? You may even choose to find reporting from the current socio-political climate in the U.S. Cite your sources and remember to consult the [Interactive Media Bias Chart](#).

Create your own journalism piece covering a topic of interest to you, then write a short fictionalized account of the same topic, event, or issue.

Part III: "By the time you get the prize to the shore, it's in tatters, and so are you."

As Hemingway's own life comes to a close, his writing and reflections on life take on a more meditative form and tone. We consider all that has been won and lost, as well as what remains unattainable, what has permanence and what passes when life ends.

Themes:

Mental Health: Although the documentary points out that Hemingway struggled with mental health throughout his life, the intensity and length of his periods of distress increased toward the end of his life. His struggles were exacerbated perhaps by genetics (four of his family members died by suicide) and by the limited understanding of the brain and mental health issues at the time.

Loss: As Hemingway came to the end of his life, he described himself as feeling like "The old elephant in the zoo", and [an] "old horse...neither happy, excited, or interested." (Part II - 1:39:40) He lost his hold on romantic relationships, family relationships, mental stability, and finally, his public image, career, and his ability to create in those final years. His end was one exactly like the father he so candidly described as "cowardly." Many of his later works reflect an unease and weariness with all of the things that previously fueled him, things that now he could no longer enjoy.

Essential Questions:

1. What might critics mean with the statement, "All writers are liars"? (36:40) Is the ability to lie in one's personal life an essential characteristic of those who know how to create a believable fictionalized account?
2. What forces—natural or artificially created—inspire people to come out of times of depression or other mental illness?
3. For a writer, what are some of the psychological consequences of [lionization](#) or extreme social elevation, like winning a Nobel Prize? (1:13:30)
4. What are some of the consequences of elevating creators like Hemingway (who lived such an extraordinary and exceptional life compared to average working-class individuals of his time) to iconic and canonical status? (1:39:05)

Discussion Questions:

1. How is “Over & Back” a reflection on the rivalry between Gellhorn and Hemingway? (8:09)
2. As Hemingway matured, what evidence of hard-living, addictions, and other influences begin to show? (15:00)
3. How did Hemingway recreate the old feelings of festivity and admiration he once experienced in France and Spain? Where did he go? (19:35)
4. What experiences did Hemingway have in WWII that may have exacerbated his mental health issues? How was he changed when he came back from WWII? How did he cope? (21:34)
5. Hemingway spent a lifetime exploring gendered identities in his writing. What do we learn about his view of androgyny and switching gender roles? Do you see his interest in sexual and gender play as a form of rebellion against his hyper-masculine public persona and the socially prescribed roles for men and women of his time? Or is it something altogether different? (24:22)
6. As Hemingway got older, how did his life change concerning his children and family? Describe some of the secrets the family held. (29:18)
7. How was the image Hemingway portrayed of being a loving and tender family man both consistent with and in contrast with what his family members reported experiencing? (31:54)(26:35)(15:00)
8. Do you believe that the semi-autobiographical nature of his works are indicative of a type of narcissism? (34:00)
9. How did Hemingway approach locals and his hunting experiences differently on his second visit to Africa? (1:03:48)
10. What were Hemingway’s views on the Cuban Revolution? (1:25:14) Compare this with his views about the Spanish Civil War. How did the end of his life in Cuba affect him? (1:32:37)
11. What parallels exist between the end of his father’s life and his own? How is this connected to the loss of everything, including his ability to create? (1:36:37)

Activities:

1. Read an excerpt from *The Old Man and the Sea*, or read the entire work. Consider the experience of chasing something one perceives to be unattainable and how that could both give someone inspiration and altogether consume them.

What is something you've always wanted? This can be anything: a physical object, a state of being, or a journey to an unknown place. Write a [vignette](#) about what it feels like to pursue what you have not yet attained. End the vignette having achieved your goal. As an optional extension, trade with a partner, have them read and then finish your story.

2. Identify writing or Instagram posts written by travel writers. What patterns do you notice? How is travel writing a form of persuasive writing? Create a post or piece of writing that would persuade a person to visit somewhere you have been and loved. If you haven't traveled outside of your hometown, how would you convince someone to visit, and what elements might you include? How might you convince them to visit more than once?
3. Read the text of Hemingway's [Nobel Prize acceptance speech](#) and use a [tone wheel](#) to analyze the difference between what the public may have expected him to feel and what his speech suggests he felt. Which specific words or phrases reveal changes in his mental state and general approach toward life?
4. Read any four of Hemingway's letters from different time periods in his life accessible at: [The Letters of Ernest Hemingway at Cambridge Core](#). Take note of any patterns you see relating to diction, salutations, syntax, or tone. What do you notice? What do you wonder? Write a letter in Hemingway's style capturing a specific time in your life, or that of a fictional character you have read about and liked, e.g., Star from *The Hate U Give*. How is letter-writing yet another genre in which Hemingway distinguished himself?

Young Adult Literature Connections to *Hemingway* Themes:

1. **Activity (Duration: one to two weeks):** Choose one or more of the following YA books that could be paired thematically with a novel by Hemingway. Create a presentation for peers detailing common themes, motifs, character archetypes, imagery, setting or anything else of significance.

Addiction: *There, There* by Tommy Orange, *Rani Patel in Full Effect* by Sonia Patel

Toxic Masculinity: *Tradition* by Brendan Kiely, *Grown* by Tiffany D. Jackson, *Not So Pure and Simple* by Lamar Giles

War: *Patron Saints of Nothing* by Randy Ribay, *The Fountains of Silence* by Ruta Sepetys, *Refugee* by Alan Gratz

Nature: *Zen and Gone* by Emily France, *Wildfire* by Carrie Mac, *Be Not Far from Me* by Wendy McGinnis

Family: *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga, *The Surprising Power of a Good Dumpling* by Wai Chim

Loss of Innocence: *Punching the Air* by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam, *Shout* by Laurie Halse Anderson

Heroism: *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram, *Stand up, Yumi Chung!* by Jessica Kim, *We Are Not From Here* by Jenny Torres-Sanchez

Death, Loss, Grief: *The Boy in the Black Suit* by Jason Reynolds, *The Astonishing Color of After* by Emily X. R. Pan

Mental Illness: *Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett J. Krosoczka, *The Place Between Breaths* by An Na

Romance: *Permanent Record* by Mary H. K. Choi, *With the Fire on High* by Elizabeth Acevedo, *The Stars and the Blackness Between Them* by Junauda Petrus, *The Lover's Dictionary* by David Levithan

2. **Activity (one 50-minute class period):** Create a reading list for a young reader modeled after this list by Hemingway.

[Ernest Hemingway Creates a Reading List for a Young Writer, 1934](#)

What books would you consider necessary and important reading for a young person growing up today to be considered well-read and knowledgeable? Who are some of the authors you most enjoy reading? What genres have evolved that expand reading beyond what we have seen historically? (e.g., audiobooks, manga, or graphic novels)

Do some research on the books that Hemingway recommended. Based on summaries or other information you can find online, which from the list do you agree with and which would you replace?