Exploring Satire in Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”

Objectives:
- SWBAT comprehend satire, its uses in literature and society, and its connections to their daily lives
  
- SWBAT evaluate and differentiate satiric devices in a piece of literature (Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”)
  
- SWBAT analyze “A Modest Proposal” through a guided-reading of the essay

CCSS: ELA Literacy
RI: 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.4, 12.5, 12.6, 12.7

Rationale:
Students are about to begin their second quarter and start reading George Orwell’s 1984, a highly satirical novel that attempts to warn society of its potential future. In order to understand this concept, students must comprehend satire, satiric devices, and be able to see the many ways that satire is used in our lives today (TV shows, radio, movies, cartoons, advertisements, books, figures of speech, etc.). Therefore, students will read Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal,” analyzing it through a satiric devices handout and guided-reading questions in order to better understand the ways in which satire is used in literature, the devices used to accomplish a satiric message, and the purpose or “end goal” of satiric messages.

Materials:
- PowerPoint
- Satiric Devices Handout
- Guided-Reading Questions Handout
- Copies of “A Modest Proposal”

Procedures:
DAY 1:
  1) Attendance, announcements, handouts, etc. (6 minutes)
     a. Handout out Satiric Devices Worksheet
  2) PowerPoint Introduction to Satire (25 minutes)
     a. Students need to take notes on definitions and examples in the PowerPoint
     b. Make sure to ask students for examples
        i. Expressions, TV shows, movies, etc.
     c. Discuss the two comic strips and have students figure out what they are a satire of and what type of satire they are (Juvenalian or Horatian)
     d. Commonly Used Satiric Devices Worksheet
        i. Have students give personal examples and fill them in on the handout
           1. Call on students to share the examples they have found
        ii. Explain examples from PowerPoint
     e. Background information (see if any students have heard of Swift before)
i. Give only enough information to make sure students know context (time period, location, political situation)
ii. Don’t mention “eating babies”
   1. Surprise them and engage them in reading; it is essential that they come to the understanding that this is the satiric element of the essay

3) Give students their assignment (6 minutes)
   a. Work in groups of three
   b. Read the essay and highlight parts with satire and satiric devices
   c. Answer the guided-reading questions and fill in the satiric devices handout with examples from Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”

4) Students work on assignment until end of hour (17 minutes)
   a. Guided-reading questions will be due on Friday

5) Remind students to bring their Senior Service Project Form and their SSR books (2 minutes)

DAY 2:

1) Announcements, attendance (6 minutes)
   a. Students hand in their Senior Service Project Form

2) Watch the trailer for Thank You for Smoking (10 minutes)
   a. Discuss how this movie is a satire about the smoking industry
   b. Based on the trailer, does the movie rely more on Horatian or Juvenalian satire?

3) Students get back into groups and continue to work on “A Modest Proposal” (40 minutes)
   a. Distribute highlighters for guided-reading/highlighting
   b. Students hand in their guided-reading questions as they finish
   c. Hand out 1984 while students read their SSR books

Assessment:
- Assessment of students comprehension of satire, it’s devices, and it’s purpose will come through walking around when groups read through and analyze the text. This can also be seen on day way through formative assessment
  ♦ Were students able to come up with their own examples of satiric devices?
  ♦ Were students able to identify the type of satire used in the comic strips and figure out what the comics are satirizing?

- Collect students’ guided-reading questions to check that they understood the main points of the text
  ♦ Each student in a group must fill out the questions so no one is slacking

- Ask students for examples of satiric devices they found in Swift’s piece to see if they can differentiate the devices and their purposes
Guided Reading of “A Modest Proposal”

Reading Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”
Answer these questions on a separate sheet of loose-leaf. I have put the page numbers where you can find answers to the questions next to the headings if you are very lost.

Pre-reading:
- What does the title suggest to you? From the title, what do you expect this essay to be about?

Introduction and definition of the problem (1-2)
1) What is the problem, and to what extent is it a problem? What information leads you to your conclusion?

Proposed Solution (2)
2) What is the proposed solution? In what ways does it appear serious? In what ways is it preposterous?

Implementation (2-3)
3) Briefly, what would be involved in implementing the proposal?

Endorsements (3-4)
4) Who are the persons who appear to endorse the proposal?
5) In what ways do their endorsements help or hurt the proposal? How do you know?

Advantages (4-5)
6) What are some of the principal advantages of the proposal?

Possible objections, concession, and refutation (5-top of 6)
7) What are the possible objections to the proposal?
8) In what ways does Swift concede some of the objections?
9) In what ways does Swift refute some of the objections?

Closing (6)
10) What means does Swift use to reiterate his apparent sincerity?

Post-reading
11) Now that you’ve finished your initial reading of the essay, in what ways were your initial expectations confirmed?
12) In what ways were they contradicted?
13) Describe how the various sections of Swift’s essay work together.
14) How would you characterize Swift’s overall tone in the essay?
15) What means does Swift use to develop his tone?
16) Whom does Swift criticize in this piece?
17) What changes does he hope to bring about?