



The Cover Letter

Of Chris Hazeltine



Drawing courtesy of Earl Schnitzel, 3rd period English class.

“This is how I imagine Mr. Hazeltine. While all the other teachers are out clubbing and getting tattoos, Mr. Hazeltine is creating another lesson plan that will inspire and amaze.

-- Earl Schnitzel

Our story begins on a dark and entirely non-stormy evening. **Chris Hazeltine**, a mild-mannered 8th Grade English teacher, was busily creating a literature lesson for the following morning.

As a teacher of America’s youth, Chris always wrote lessons that made his students think creatively, critically, and consistently. And, on occasion, they would applaud.

But, tonight it just wasn’t happening.

How to teach the *Tell-Tale Heart* in a way that was fresh and different, yet still tapped into the gifted strategies of learning?

Then it happened!

A voice, with the subtlety of Don Rickles at Hiram Lowenstein’s Bar Mitzvah, was heard upon the wind:

**“If you Shmoop it,
they will come.”**

Chris was gob smacked.
He was flabbergasted.
He was even flummoxed.

It was late, and in spite of the ringing of *mazel tov* in his ears, he figured he was just tired; his mind was playing tricks on him.

“Before Mr. Hazeltine’s Writer’s Boot Camp, all I could do was write more better. However, since I participated in the Writer’s Boot Camp, I now author compositions of elegant simplicity with just a smidge of Dickensian surprise!”

--Gillian Godfried Weems, 6th period

Rubbing his eyes and stretching, Chris was about to call it a night, when...

“If you Shmoop it, they will come.”

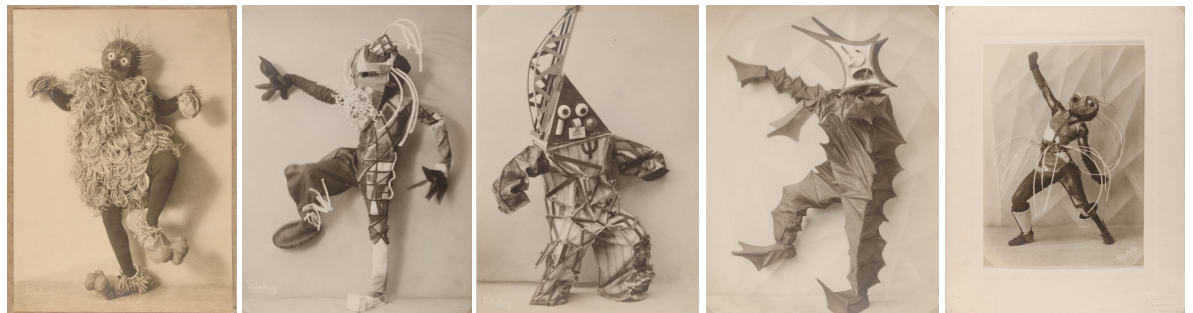
So it was real! The voice was real! And, he had no idea what a shmoop was.

Racing to his bookshelf of obscure and antiquated resources that all English teachers possess, he pulled down Volume 2 of *Siminoff’s Compendium of Encyclopedic Fripperies*. Thumbing the pages, Chris found what he was looking for:

Shmoop (adj): Often used as a signifier of creative quality and expression. In some cultures, to *shmoop* or to make something *shmooping* is to be savvy and elegant and, therefore, the envy of others.

Origins: While many ethnographers disagree, the current theory is that the word originated with the Algerian Shmoop Dancers, circa 1923. A sensation of its time, the Algerian Shmoop Dancers were known widely for their provocative gyrations and for their ability to cause men to faint, and to cause women to give out their phone numbers.

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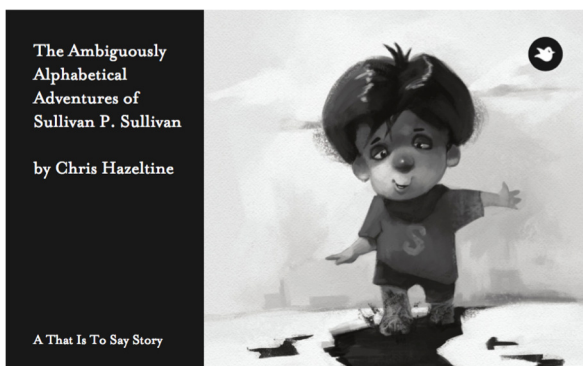
Above: Rare publicity photos of the Algerian Shmoop Dancers, during their North Dakota tour, 1931.

Much to his surprise, what seemed like just a normal way of writing lesson plans turned out to be singularly Shmoopable!

This may explain why Chris had received a Boffo rating of 5, the highest rating a lesson plan can receive from the International Consortium of Lesson-Plan Adjudicators (ICLA) - *three times* - for his lesson plans.

In particular, Henri LePlume, president of the ICLA, made special mention of Chris's work in teaching vocabulary. In his address to audience members at the annual ICLA conference in Muncie, Indiana, LePlume was quoted as saying:

"...and we would like to emphasize the creative and elegant application of writing a children's book as a means of teaching vocabulary. In the past, we have seen many methods of vocabulary instruction, but none have impressed us as much as students using vocabulary words in the writing and publishing of a delightfully illustrated children's book."



And so, as the night wore on, Chris regained a new sense of energy, and a new idea on how to teach Edgar Allan Poe.

A truly Shmoopable idea!

"What Mr. Hazeltine did with his unit on the novel Salt to the Sea and how he taught students to analyze the novel through the eyes of historical fiction writers was amazing. My son cannot stop talking about it. He's now like a thirteen-year old Ken Burns. It's so pleasing. However, the fact that my son now narrates our every waking moment as if he were Ken Burns is annoying. I wish he'd stop."

-- A Parent

And what of Chris's lesson plan for *The Tell-Tale Heart*?

Well, here's what Neadly Carmichael, of *Dramalogue*, had to say....

"Edgar Allan Poe meets Harold Prince. Not since A Muppet's Sweeney Todd, have I been so inexplicably moved by a musical. Nathan Lane's soulful ballad, I'll Keep an Eye on You, left no eye dry. And the police kick-line as Justin Timberlake rips up the floorboards...well, let me just say that I'll be whistling that jaunty tune for weeks!"

