EDSITEment!

THE BEST OF THE HUMANITIES ON THE WEB

Worksheet 1. Focus on "The Book of the Grotesque" (teacher version)

The opening section serves as a kind of introduction to *Winesburg, Ohio*. What does it suggest about what is to come in the rest of the story cycle?

1. What people are mentioned? What do we learn about them?

The narrator speaks primarily about an old man who wrote, but never published, a book about grotesque people. There is also a narrator who somehow knows what the elderly writer did, as well as a carpenter who adjusted the old man's bed.

2. Use the following graphic organizer to unlock the meaning of the word *grotesque*.

part of speech	often used as an adjective, but also functions as a noun for anything that can be described as grotesque
synonyms	distorted, twisted, exaggerated, ugly, bizarre, freakish, deformed
antonyms	harmonious, normal, pleasant, ordinary
word origins	late 16th or early 17th century (Italy, France); a word derived from the "grotto"(Italian) and applied to Roman art discovered underground, it was later used to identify art characterized by exaggeration and the merging of disparate images
example in art	gargoyles, caricatures
example in life	a two-headed calf, blobfish
original sentence	The Halloween mask was so grotesque that it frightened the children.

3. What does the text say about people and truth?

    Passage from "The Book of the Grotesque":

    > That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.

    > The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his book. I will not try to tell you of all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carelessness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful.

    > And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them.

    > It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.

    Truth is multi-faceted; however, people tend to focus on just one aspect of it. This can cause them to lose truth altogether and to become grotesque.

4. Write a paragraph in which you discuss the extent to which things that are grotesque are not necessarily ugly or repulsive.

    Answers will vary.