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Professor Warner

ENGL 112B

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Unit of Study: Racial Injustice and Discrimination

Rationale:

My Unit of Study focuses on racial injustice and discrimination, spefically towards people of color and the Black community and the struggles they face. This theme is closely related to *Adolescents in the Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story,* Chapter 4 “Books about Real Life-Experiences” and Chapter 6 “Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions”. The themes of racial injustice and discrimnation are relevant as students may know first hand or know someone within their inner circle who has been racially discriminated against. It’s important to let students know they are protected against racial discriminations and that their lives have value, regardless of the color of their skin. Allowing students to have a discussion of these topics allows for an open conversation of what different racial groups go through, specifically Black Americans, following their history of slavery to current racism in America. It’s important to give these types of topics to themes because they will learn more about Black Americans and the way they have been and continue to be persecuted. This will give students a better understanding and background knowledge about the racism that exists and what other students can do to support their Black peers. Unfortunately, racism is very much alive today and it’s important to educate students to be more inclusive and keep fighting to put an end to racism as a whole.

The canonical text for this Unit of Study is *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Lee’s novel is from the perspective of a young girl, Scout Finch. Her father, Atticus Finch, is a lawyer who agrees to defend Tom Robinson, a black man accused of raping a white woman. Throughout the novel Scout witnesses the racism and prejudice acts that occur in Maycomb. When the trial begins the whole Finch family is a target. Through the trial, Scout learns what it is to be empathetic towards others and to avoid people’s prejudiced opinions.

Introduction to the Unit:

Introducing the unit to high school students I would start with a music video by Childish Gambino called “This is America”. This video touches many different topics, specifically how America treats Black people. Using music to attract students and the visuals of the music video is a great way to draw students in and start a conversation. After the video everyone will be given a couple of minutes to write down what they thought of the video, what they noticed, and the message that Childish Gambino is trying to convey. I’ll also include some questions so that they can also answer on their piece of paper such as, “Have you or someone you know ever been discriminated against?”, “If so, how did that make you feel?”. After the time is up, I will have students partner up with someone nearby and discuss what they each wrote down and then create a whole class discussion. I’ll have students form a circle with their chairs, that way everyone feels included and no one is left out, and have students volunteer to share their thoughts and comments. As part of the brief introduction I would also like to spend time going over different words and definitions such as; racism, stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination. It’s important to have general knowledge of these words although they are closely related they all hold different meanings.

Once the discussion is wrapped up then I’ll introduce *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Considering there are thirty one chapters I’d divide the workload two to three chapters to finish around two weeks. Within those two weeks I will have students come in and turn in a single page of three quotes that stuck out to them from the chapters and why, to ensure that they are being held accountable of the readings. Along with class discussions, at the end of the unit there will be an essay to showcase their knowledge of the readings and their analysis.

Additional Resources:

Along with the reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* there will another reading of *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. This is another great book that follows similar issues as the centerpiece novel. *The Hate U Give* is about a girl named Starr who is stuck between her poor neighborhood and predominantly white prep school she attends. In one night everything changes when she witnesses the killing of her childhood best friend, Khalil, at the hands of the police. Starr faces the pressure from all sides of the community, those who say Khalil is innocent and those who believe he is guilty. Starr uses her voice to stand up for what is right in hopes to make a difference. Using this book can also bring awareness to current events such as, Black Lives Matter Movement and police brutality against Black people. This book also takes place in contemporary times which students might find closely relatable. After the reading students would watch the film adaptation. While watching the movie students will take notes and it will be useful for their Book to Film assignment.

In addition to the unit, I would recommend students to watch “Fruitvale Station” on Netflix. This part of the assignment is not required but is a great fit since Oscar Grant’s story inspired Angie Thomas to write *The Hate U Give.* This is a great story that hits close to home especially since the incident took place in Oakland, California at the Fruitvale BART station. Oscar Grant was a Black man who was wrongfully killed when the policeman shot him with a gun instead of tasing him as instructed. His story has become one that is widely known for the police’s abuse of power.

Another source to add on to the unit is a poem by Langston Hughes, “I, Too”. This poem conveys a great message of being Black in America. This can also apply to students of color who have ever felt “othered”. This is a great poem to create a discussion reminding students to be respectful of their peers. I’d ask students, “What are some ways we can support Black lives?”. Another question beingWe’d analyze the poem as a class and talk about its literary elements. I’d then ask each student to write a 500 word analysis on the poem and its significance and meaning using literary elements to support their claim, which would be due at the end of class.

To add on and the last source I would incorporate is the inventions that are made by Black people. It’s important to value and be grateful for what Black people have done that not many are aware of. To think that these are things that people use in their daily lives and not knowing this would not exist if it were not for a Black person such as; security alarm system, the mailbox, three-signal traffic light, and much more. I’d show different articles and links of things Black people have invented, for example; [https://cw33.com/watercooler/30-inventions-you-can-thank-a-black-person-for/https://cw33.com/watercooler/30-inventions-you-can-thank-a-black-person-for](https://cw33.com/watercooler/30-inventions-you-can-thank-a-black-person-for/) .

I’d then ask the students to do their own research, on their phones, to write down three things they found interesting that a Black person invented and to write how different our lives would be without that item or thing. Students will then be able to volunteer and share what they found.

Closing the Unit:

To bring the unit to an end I would like to have students do a final project. This can be in the form of an essay, powerpoint, video or any other ideas the students may have, with my approval, and they will give an oral presentation to the class. The purpose of the presentation is to showcase what they learned from the unit and what their favorite part about it was. I want students to get creative with their projects and open their eyes to real situations that occur closer than we think. At the end of their projects, I would want them to write about someone who lost their life to a racial injustice, as a way to spread more awareness and a way to pay tribute to their life.

Work Cited

Hughes, Langston. “I, Too by Langston Hughes.” *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47558/i-too.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. J.B Lippincott & Co, 1960.

Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. Balzer + Bray, 2017.

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