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Unit of Study

Unit of Study: The Power of Support

Rationale:

My Unit of Study will dive into the work, *Adolescents in the Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story,* specifically from Chapter Five, “Books About Facing Death and Loss”. The theme of death is a powerful theme which can occur for many in their real life experiences. Facing and comprehending death on an educational level is beneficial for students, since young adults can experience death and being prepared through Literature can help them cope and learn how to support the people around them who need love and support. I will be responding to the question which asks, “Why give this book to teens?”, in order to prove the valuable lessons which can be found in books about death, specifically suicide, to prepare teens for struggles that come in life and help them deal with those struggle in a positive, healthy manor (Ch. 5). This question will be answered through the canonical work, Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare, as we closely read and analyze the actions of the play in order to understand the importance of preserving life despite lustful desires. In high school, a girl I went to school with attempted to commit suicide, after her boyfriend cheated on her and broke up with her. Had I read more books to become aware of the reality of suicide, I may have been better prepared to help her cope so she didnt feel alone and isolated to the point where she wanted to end her own life. This connection to real life experiences sparked my interest in this Unit of Study, because suicide can be closer than teens may realize and it is important to build connections that make teens strive for a long, fulfilling life.

Hook Lesson/Resource:

We will begin the unit by watching the spoken word poetry video by Doc Luben called, “14 Lines from Love Letters or Suicide Notes”. This spoken work performance highlights the intertwined nature of love and suicide. This creates a transition into the centerpiece novel we will read and analyze in order to better understand the actions of the characters to see how they were led to suicide. Sometimes, suicide and love can be the same thing, when one loves someone else more than they are willing to love themself, they can get lost in a tragic reality. This poem ties into Shakespear’s, *Romeo and Juliet,* as they fall into lust which ultimately leads to their demise. It is important to look for signs in people who are not able to value themselves more than the desire for love, so we can identify the signs of those who need guidance and support. After watching the video, we will write a short letter to a friend in need, or an imaginary friend, to uplift and let them know that they have support during the trying times that can come in life.

Centerpiece Novel:

Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is the centerpiece work we will be analyzing. Romeo and Juliet came before the time of Novels, and is poetry written to be performed as a play. This canonical work encounters death on many scales, and is a great work to begin to look at loss and death and the damaging affect of suicide. This work connects to Chapter 5, “Books About Facing Death and Loss” as it reveals death in the form of murder and death by tragic suicide. The play is a romantic tragedy that involves many themes of death which can emphasize the importance of valuing life beyond love for others, by making the focus about personal ways to grow and develop. Seeking guidance during times of crisis is a valid way to ensure that death does not become a result of tragic love which inevitably leads to tragedy. Teens can learn from the mistakes of Romeo and Juliet in order to prevent tragic death. This work can also serve to help teens support those who are struggling in their own relationships, so they don’t feel alone and develop the desire to end their own life. We will analyze the actions of the characters in order to help teens learn for themselves how detrimental each choice we make can be, to help support and guide them in their life choices.

Companion Novel:

The novel we will pair with the unit is, *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven. The books serves to explore mental illness and how it can lead to suicide. The book follows a high school senior, Theodore Finch, and his friend who he literally meets on the edge of their school's bell tower, Violet Markey. Theodore is able to prevent Violet from her suicide attempt, and support her through his freindship with her where they share their expereinces and comfort eachother during their learning in school. Theodore is not able to save himself, but his strength led to saving Violet, who in turn learns to live with death and grieving. The theme of coping with death is seen throughout the novel, along with the concept of secrets and the damage that comes from hiding emotions and feelings. This theme ties into *Romeo and Juliet*, as they find lustful love through their secretive nature which ultimately leads to their death bu suicide. Secrets serve as a damaging theme which hurts the characters of both the play and the novel.

The novel fits with *Adolescents in the Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story,* specifically from Chapter Five, “Books About Facing Death and Loss” as the characters are faced with death and forced to learn how to cope. This idea of coping with loss will serve to help teens see how love and loss can become intertwined, as we lose people that we love and care for and learn to deal with the emotions that come with loss.

Additional Resources:

In addition to reading Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet,* we will watch a portion of the film by Baz Luhrman. We will watch the film and discuss the ways in which Luhrman enhances the ideas we analyzed in the play write, such as suicide, death, and secrets. Once we watch the film, as a class we will draw comparisons and make contrasts to the written version to the film version, in order to understand how the themes are experienced in the film adaptation of the play. We will also watch a brief clip from the film version of *All the Bright Places*, directed by Brett Haley, and as a class we will draw comparisons and contrasts just as we did for the film version of *Romeo and Juliet.* This will serve to help further understand and analyze the themes of each work which intertwine and serve to help teens understand the power of their choices throughout life.

Bringing the Unit to a Close:

The unit will come to a close as we form a critical analysis essay based on either the themes discussed in *Romeo and Juliet*, or in *All the Bright Places.* Students will have the freedom to choose which work they would like to further analyze in their essay. Students will be able to choose a theme they would like to follow in one of the works, in order to form an argument that will serve to provide evidence of the theme they have chosen to follow. As a class, we will formulate thesis statements together in order to help students who are having a harder time understanding the themes we have analyzed. Students can use the thesis statements we created as a class, or feel free to create their own for their analysis essay.

For the outcome of this unit, our goal is to be able to understand how death affects others in order to better cope in real life experiences with death. Death can come in many forms, but death by suicide can e preventable, as long as students are aware of the value of supporting those around them. Teens can experience many different experiences which can contribute to the desire to commit suicide, forming networks of friends can help teens deal with their emotions in a safe space.

In the final lesson of our unit, we will go back to the short letter they wrote to a friend in need or their imaginary friend and we will have each student write another letter adding what they learned from the centerpiece novel or the paired novel. This letter will serve to help students support those around them that need love and support to help them on their journey through life and all its unexpected turns.

Works Cited:

Niven, Jennifer. *All the Bright Places*. Thorndike Press, a Part of Gale, a Cengage Company, 2020.

Warner, Mary L. *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*. Scarecrow Press, 2006.

Shakespeare, William, and Kenneth Deighton. *Romeo and Juliet: by Shakespeare*. Macmillan, 1935.

Luben, Doc. “ ‘14 Lines from Love Letters or Suicide Notes.’” *YouTube*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/.