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Unit of Study

 こんにちわ、みんあさん。Ang pangalan ko po ay Mary. Yo hablo muchos idiomas. Et, aujourd’hui, j'explique le raisonnement pour mon unité d’étude. 시작할까요? De primo. Some may have understood all of that in one read and some may have only understood one or two of those. Simply translated all I said was, “Hello, everyone. My name is Mary. I speak many languages. And, today, I will explain my rationale for my unit of study. Shall we start? Let’s begin.” My introduction is a direct reflection of the world we live in today. There is an increase in the number of people who live their lives with mixed identities and/or with knowledge of multiple languages. Each and every single year, more and more students enter classrooms being multilingual or multicultural and have yet to be properly recognized in the canon. This is the genesis of the rationale of my unit of study. I want my students to be aware of their identities and their origins, of racial tensions, colonization and the marginalization of the minority. I want them to question their origins to be able to have a fuller and more complete sense of themselves and their culture. With this, they will begin to have a clearer sense of the world around them and be educated of the world itself.

My unit of study will be focused on the poetry of Maya Angelou. I chose her to be my canon text because of the exceptional life she led. She was a poster child for the civil rights movement and was close friends with Malcom X and Dr. Martin Luther King. Jr. Needless to say, Maya Angelou was unequivocally vocal in her poetry, memoirs, and as a civil rights activist. She has written about being a woman, being African-American and the injustices and discriminations that she has gone through, and many other topics. The specific poems that I want to highlight are “On the Pulse of Morning,” “Phenomenal Woman,” “Still I Rise,” and “Caged Bird.” I chose these because they all share the same themes of racial tension, reactions to discrimination and racism, and, in effect, identity. These poems hold numerous possibilities for students to learn how to dissect poetry and to derive meaning from it. Additionally, these poems hold an ostensibly large aptitude for expressing the frustrations of the voice that yells, but is not heard.

With these poems, I plan to pair them with these particular young adult (YA) sources: Aimee Suzara’s poetry book “Souvenir,” Nicola Yoon’s *The Sun is Also a Star*, Jon McGoran’s *Spliced*, Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely’s *All American Boys*, and Jacqueline Woodson’s *Brown Girl Dreaming*. However, in order to introduce these poems by Maya Angelou, I will start by picking contemporary songs that speak about the particular themes that go along with this unit. For example, I would like to play Ruby Ibarra’s “Us” or “Someday” in class to introduce, respectively, the frustrations of Filipinas who stood up for their country when it needed them most or to bring home the struggles immigrants witness. Perhaps, I might also play Beyonce’s song “Brown Skin Girl” or Childish Gambino’s “This is America.” This is to ease the students into the topics of identity, racism, discrimination, and, in a deeper vein, colonization/marginalization of a minority. At this point, this would potentially allow a moment for the students to be interested in the topic because I have shown to them musicians that they might already listen to. In an extension of this portion, I would like my students to join in and recommend songs that follow this same vein of topics, so to play during class while I switch to the next activity.

The next activity would be to have these students break off into smaller groups and simply chat about what they already know about these themes. I will have guiding questions on the board ready for them so that they can look at it as they discuss. Some of these questions might be whether or not they know what it feels like to immigrate or if they know anyone who has and to explain how it feels, or maybe to look upon whether or not they still see displays of racism and discrimination and talk about its importance in this era of time. My next move in this unit would be to introduce the four Maya Angelou poems and the young adult counterpart, Aimee Suzara. I will read each poem out loud for the students, both Maya Angelou and Aimee Suzara at different times. Then, I will have them silently read both poets' poems, starting with Maya Angelou and then Aimee Suzara, to themselves and have them underline or highlight what strikes them, regardless of whether or not it is a phrase or a single word. Then, on the back of the page, I will have them write why the particular phrase or word struck them. I will then call their attention to me and we will deconstruct one of the poems from each poet together to lead them into their small group work. I will separate them into small groups and have them start to dissect the poetry line by line. I will assign a poem from each poet to each group and, once the activity is complete or time is up, each group will share points that they came up within their group. The point of this activity is to recognize the differences and similarities between the experiences of both poets. From here, they can explain to me the difference in structure or how the metaphors and similes help accelerate the poem’s meaning.

Continuing on from here, the next section of this unit will be to delve deeper into history. I will have a lecture on colonialist theory. In this lecture, I will go through a brief introduction of what colonialism is, where it was and how it spread, and how to find it in literature. Directly following this, I will have them write two poems or journal entries: one in the perspective of someone back in the day when their country was being colonized or, perhaps, being forcibly taken from one’s own country and the second would be to write in their own voice about the how it feels to be multicultural or multilingual. If this is not the case, then to write their view of current events and how it affects them and what they have learned.

This will be when I present the students the choice of choosing between two books: *Spliced* by Jon McGoran or Nicola Yoon’s *The Sun is Also a Star*. I group these two books together because of a shared similarity: immigration or the idea of not belonging in the only place one might know. In *Spliced*, chimeras were marked as threats and were stripped of their rights as humans, even if they were human before they split their genes with animal ones. In *The Sun is Also a Star*, Natasha faces the terrible reality of an immigrant and the culturally-mixed Daniel who struggles with wondering what percentage of him is Korean and the other American. This is the parallel between these two YA novels. I give my students a choice because I plan to split them into groups, yet again, so that they may work together on a project. This project is to have reenact scenes from these novels. I want them to live through the injustices the chimeras face and to feel the frustration and desperation Natasha feels when she knows that her family is about to be deported. This is to engrain in their bodies how it feels to be in the shoes of an immigrant, minority, or colonized.

After this, I would like them to read Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely’s *All American Boys*. This is to bring the conflict closer to home. This book talks about racial tension in a community which is easier for many more students to relate to since they are able to experience it a little more closely. Afterwards, I would also like them to read Jacqueline Woodson’s *Brown Girl Dreaming*. During each chapter for each novel, I would like them to complete a worksheet of guiding questions to prove to me that they have read the chapters assigned. It will be a packet of assignments due weekly that essentially outlines what happened during the assigned chapters. Furthermore, each day I will have a quick pop quiz to ensure that they read the chapter assigned. In effect, I give them no choice, but to read the selections. But, it is not for naught. At the end of this unit, I will ask my students to group up to their own choosing. It is at this point that I give them a project to close up the unit. I will have them make 3-minute long videos to showcase to the class what they have learned in this unit. In the videos, they can pose as news anchors, create a music video, or act out a scene. On the viewing of these videos, I would like to ask my students whether or not they would be willing to have a little celebration. This celebration would be to highlight our cultural differences, so I would have them come to class in their traditional cultural clothing and bring in food or objects that they would like to share to the class. Preferably, I would like if they brought in food to share, but a good Chinese finger trap would be fun to have the class try out. I would like them to develop a desire to understand those around them despite their differences, that we are all uniquely human.

To conclude this unit, I will ask my students to write a reflection. Rather than an essay, I would like them to write a reflection simply because this is a topic that should be reflected on instead of writing a paper of its importance. I find that it is better for students to connect to others around them when they are not the subject of a formal piece of writing like an essay. This reflection will be a minimum of 1 page. They will answer these questions: what did you learn in this unit? What was the most significant piece of knowledge that you have gleaned from this? What did you learn about your peers? What did you learn about yourself throughout this unit? I formatted it this way, so that they understand that this is something to take with them for the rest of their lives. I want my students to understand that differences are to be celebrated, not used as weapons for social nuclear war. It is a way for my students to understand the rift in our country, so that they might feel compelled and confident to do something about it in the future. This is the legacy I want my students to create in their lives.s