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November 28, 2022

English 112B

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Criminal Justice in The Outsiders

 **Rationale:** Even though it is obvious to most people that murdering is a horrible thing to do, there are some incidents where this is a gray area such as self defense and accidental killing. A person can be taken to court for killing another human being but can be justified if it was self defense as living is a human right. Another time when it can be excused is when a person kills someone to prevent them from murdering another human being as this can be viewed as self defense against others. However, a person can still be convicted. Some states may not count it as self defense since the person taking a life was not the one who was about to get killed. One example of killing someone to protect another person is in *The Outsiders*. The book is about a group of friends who are greasers or rather misfits. Two of the guys in the group, Ponyboy and Johnny, are alone in a park where a gang called the Socs nearly drown Ponyboy to death until Johnny saves him by stabbing one Soc member and the rest of them fleeing the park. After this, Johnny and Ponyboy have to go into hiding.

**Introducing The Canonical Novel:**

I would introduce them to *The Outsiders* by having the class take turns reading a paragraph of a chapter for each day. I would use time in class to give some historical background on terms in the book such as greasers and socs. After class, I would have them write a summary of the chapter, so I can see if they understand it. I would give two points extra credit for those who analyze quotes from Ponyboy. I would also offer five extra points for students who analyzed the poem *Nothing Gold Can Stay* and how it connects to the text. After the class has finished the book, I would play the film version in class. Since classes are on average 55 minutes-1 hours and 10 minutes. I would play half of the movie in class and the other half of the movie for the next class session.

**Concluding The Text/Unit:** Towards the end of the book, Johnny and Ponyboy save a group of children from a burning church. Ponyboy was fine, but Johnny got his back burned. His last words before he died were “Stay Gold Ponyboy” (177). I would ask my students what Johnny means by that. I would have students share their interpretations on what Johnny meant and if they agree on Ponyboy staying golden. I would share my interpretation on why I think Johnny is the one who is “gold” such as him sacrificing his own life to save a bunch of children he does not know and taking a another person’s life to save Ponyboy from getting murdered. I would end the unit with an essay. Some essay topic ideas I have are Who is the main hero in this story, Ponyboy or Johnny or a different character in the text? Why? Is Johnny killing a Soc justifiable? Why or why not? Does Johnny saving a bunch of children make up for killing a Soc? Why or why not?

**Other Text:** Another novel I would like to teach to either middle or high schoolers is We Were Here by Matt de la Peña. It is about a boy, Miguel who has to spend a year in a group home for accidentally killing his brother. I would give a lesson on terms for the different types of murder. Miguel’s incident would be referred to as involuntary manslaughter. This book is essential to teach to either middle or high school students during the criminal justice unit because it is common for adolescents to commit involuntary manslaughter. When I was in middle school, a student at my school was killed in a fight from being punched in the head. She got a concussion and fell asleep. I would also choose this book on the unit of criminal justice because the subject of Miguel connects to the unit. The novel is a great lesson for students to know to be careful as once a person’s life is taken away from them, it can never be undone. One example of this is when Miguel conveys, “I realized I was crying now for real. Tears streaming down my cheeks and in my mouth and I didn’t even try to stop ‘em… Somehow it was a relief to just say it, over and over…” (337) Miguel can never forgive himself since he is responsible for his brother Diego's death even if it is unintentional.

Work Cited

Hinton, S. E. (2021). *The outsiders*. Viking.

Pena, M. de la. (2009). *We were here*. Random House Children's Books.