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Unit of Study: Social Justice for Young Adults

Introduction and Rationale:

All texts emphasize the importance of social justice and accountability. Social justice's history molded our society into what it is today. Criminal justice should be taught in the classroom. Much criminal justice literature centers on reform, rehabilitation, new forms of policy and practice, sex--specifically as a form of a hate crime--solitary confinement, and politics within and outside of the institution. Social justice became more common as technology and social interactions advanced, which has allowed us to view social issues across the globe. News outlets changed from physical print and delivery to being distributed into the handheld devices of people across the world; additionally, people began to record and capture real-time events that they distributed across the internet, which lead to a recent event with the Black Lives Matter movement following the death of George Floyd. U.S. history tracts a long period of oppression, discrimination, and racism toward people of color.

The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander was published in 2011 and identifies the incarceration systems' malpractices. Incarceration leads to fewer opportunities within the community. African Americans were discriminated against through the Jim Crow laws "separate but equal." In contrast, people who were formerly incarcerated are denied access to housing,

vocational, and educational opportunities like African Americans in the Jim Crow era. The new Jim Crow can be understood as racism adapting and persevering into the new world.

I choose this topic because of my personal experience in the Juvenile Justice system. I lost many opportunities while navigating through probation, but the lived experience allows me to support others that find themselves in the tarpit called Juvenile justice. We can better understand alternatives to incarceration by analyzing social justice literature. Understanding this provides the foundation from which students can conceive the messages formerly incarcerated people are conveying to society and why certain policies and practices are regarded as harmful and retraumatizing. The stories about Social Justice can also lead students to question and challenge societal fears, especially when they are based on implicit bias, such as the fear of a person's need to survive. The topic humanizes the individuals that are labeled criminals by exploring their reasoning, which is essential for students to understand themselves and their communities. Social justice has many accompanying names like critical race theory, and political officials are either left or right-winged in allowing the curriculum to be taught in the classroom. Students will understand the mixture of the judicial and educational system that occurs now even by exposing them to social justice.

Social justice connects with YA in several ways. Do you ever wonder why there are police officers on campus? The logical answer would be to keep children safe, but the police officer on campus inevitably arrests students. The criminalization of students puts them in an unsafe environment within the school, and the student may experience interrogations, search, and seizure without any representation. The experiences of injustice are locked away behind steel

bars and concrete walls, and only once in a while, a voice from the forgotten people escapes the institution to speak about the injustice they experienced.

2. Texts in Use

Adult: *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander

The novel identifies the new policies and practices that segregate and incarcerate people of color, which come from the Jim Crow era.

Young Adult: *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas

Focuses on the militarization of police, and the fatal shootings of people of color by police officers.

3. Introducing the Unit

I would the students to write a short 5-minute response about the judicial system's Juvenile Justice. I would then read them Tupac Shakur's "The Rose that Grew from Concrete" and we would analyze the poem together:

Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete? Proving nature's laws wrong, it learned how to walk without having feet. Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams, it learned to breath fresh air. Long live the rose that grew from concrete when no one else even cared.

I would ask students how they understand the poem after the writing assignment and going over the poem's language.

I would showcase the dispositional options of the juvenile justice system and explicate the historical context. Specifically, the Department of Juvenile Justice where youth who've committed serious felonies were formerly incarcerated. I would prompt the students to identify alternatives to intensive incarceration practices and policies.

I would then do the puzzle activity similar to the one I observed at The F.L.Y. office and South County. Each student would have to complete a puzzle with their eyes closed. I would instruct them if they need help to raise their hand. If a student raised their hand, I would quietly approach and instruct them to open their eyes, and that they have completed the exercise because the point is to ask for help. I would allow for 5 minutes to complete the activity.

I would present the students with illustrations and art about social justice. The graphic novel *Malcolm Little: The Boy Who Grew Up to Become Malcolm X*. I would have the students go through the images, and I would inquire about what they saw.

4. Working Through the Text

To fortify *The New Jim Crow*, I would teach it with YA literature *The Hate You Give*. We would discuss both books' themes and ideas in class. I would emphasize how both books reflect social injustice within our communities and rehabilitation facilities. As they read, I would ask students to reflect on how the two books portray the environment the characters live in and what those portrayals convey about social injustice and fears surrounding rehabilitation.

I would have students write letters to juvenile cases that end up at Juvenile hall or James Ranch. The activity will help students familiarize themselves with the process families go through to

write their children if they even try to make the effort. I would also ask students to write reflections on what it's like to receive a letter, and I would reflect on the reality that they might not receive a letter at all.

As an activity, I would have students find the main ideas within the texts so that they can develop their ideas in response; In addition, I would have students form groups to discuss possible solutions based on the evidence within the books.

5. Working Beyond the Text

I would provide students with a list of social justice YA literature and different organizations/movements that focus on social justice and ask students to summarize either the organization/movement's description or summarize a YA book.

The YA social justice books:

The Hate You Give by Angie Thomas

Which Side are You on by Ryan Lee Wong

Five Little Indians by Michelle Good

Until Someone Listens: A Story About Borders, Family, and One Girl's Mission

by Estela Juarez, Teresa Martínez (Illustrations), Lissette Norman (Goodreads Author)
(Coauthor), Cecilia Molinari (Translator)

The organizations/movements that promote social justice:

Debug

Fresh Lifelines for Youth

Young Women's Freedom Center

Youth Led Participatory Research

Youth Liberation Movement

Kid in Common

For the summaries, I would ask students to present what they found and how it pertains to social justice. I would ask students to compare and contrast their findings with the themes and ideas within *The New Jim Crow*. I would ask the students to identify the social issues, and as a class, we would collect all our findings.

6. Concluding the Unit

I would assign a group project that will allow the student to work in collaboration with other groups. I would give students four options and have them choose one to do. The three options I would give are:

1. Depict the school to prison pipeline as you understand it.
2. Research the history of a historical figure impacted by injustice.
3. Write about a form of media be it podcast, journalism, blogging, etc, and how your group would advocate for social justice.

Works Cited

Wong, Ryan Lee. *Which Side Are You On?* Catapult, 2022.

Good, Michelle. *Book Club Set*. Harper Perennial, 2020.

Juarez, Estela, et al. *Until Someone Listens: A Story about Borders, Family, and One Girl's Mission*. Roaring Brook Press, 2022.