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English 112B

Dr. Warner

Unit of Study

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Real Life Experiences in Literature

My unit of study focuses on real life experiences that teens go through being shown in literature. Feelings of guilt, loss, and grief are all real-life experiences that teens go through. In this unit I will highlight the importance of empathy through showcasing the important topics within each novel being presented. My goal for this unit is for students to walk away with a better understanding of empathy and treating others with kindness.

**Main text: *The Pigman* by Paul Zindel**

*The Pigman* by Paul Zindel is a novel that follows John and Lorraine, two teenagers who befriend a man named Mr. Pignati through a prank call (*Goodreads*). The novel displays alternating perspectives between John and Lorraine as they navigate their feelings of guilt, loss, and grief towards the death of Mr. Pignati and highlights the importance of regarding others in the decisions that we make. *The Pigman* offers a perspective that showcases the importance of empathy for those around us and highlights the importance of treating others with kindness while centering on important topics like guilt, loss, and grief throughout the novel. Reading is one of the most powerful tools to inspire empathy—through reading *The Pigman* students will be able to see the importance of considering the feelings of others around them.

**Companion texts:**

Each companion text focuses on real life experiences—feelings of guilt, loss, and grief while also focusing on coming to terms with actions that have been made.

*We Were Here* by Matt De La Peña: Follows the story of Miguel as he goes through his experience within a juvenile group home while coping with the death of his brother. This novel relates to *The Pigman* in the sense that it deals with guilt, loss, and grief while also focusing on Miguel’s coming to terms with accidentally killing his brother.

*We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart: *We Were Liars* displays the feelings of guilt towards mistakes we cannot take back—following the story of a group of friends who are deceptive in the real outcome of the death of a friend (*Goodreads*). *We Were Liars* relates to *The Pigman* in the sense that it highlights that some decisions cannot be undone.

*The Outsiders* by S.E Hinton: *The Outsiders* is a coming of age story that focuses on two rival gangs. Centering on the story of Ponyboy and his struggle after his friend Johnny kills a “Soc” (*Goodreads*). The book relates to *The Pigman,* as it highlights that guilt, grief, and loss are universal feelings and centers on the fragility of life.

**Introducing the unit and engaging students with the text:**

I would first open the unit with a Youtube video titled, “[Teenagers and Responsible Decision Making](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahhKyEw9xUc)” which displays the importance of decisions we can control vs. hardships that are out of our control. The video offers key points that showcase the importance of treating others with kindness and sensitivity and points out the importance of responsibility in decision making. After the video I will ask students to respond to the points being made within the video and ask them to write on what empathy means to them. This exercise will be beneficial to have students reflecting on empathy as we go into the novel and advance into the unit. After this exercise I would begin reading the novel with the class as a whole.

**Through the unit:**

**Activities and resources**

Within this part of the unit, I believe activities are a good resource to keep student’s engagement with the text and encourage critical thinking. Throughout our work with the novel, I would have students keep a daily journal in which they respond to points that they believe are important within the text and allow them to write their thoughts on each point. I would also analyze “The Road Not Taken,” by Robert Frost as a whole class and ask how they believe this poem interprets decision making and how it could relate to *The Pigman*. Analyzing the poem is a fun way to have students analyze the text while also bringing other sources into the unit that are beneficial to understanding the theme of decision making. Another activity I would have during a unit on *The Pigman* is group work. I would have my students work in groups of 3 to analyze the climax points of the text and discuss overall points that lead up to these moments.

**Beyond the unit & conclusion:**

My hope is that students will walk away from this unit with a better understanding of empathy for those around them, and a reminder that there are decisions that are completely out of our control—but there are some that we do have control over and mindfulness towards how we treat those around us is something we can maintain. When the class is finished reading the novel, I will ask my students to complete a 3–5-page essay that displays critical thinking towards the text. Students will either work from an essay prompt provided or are able to write on a topic within the novel of their choosing.

Essay prompt: What is the importance of decision making within *The Pigman*? How do the decisions that John and Lorraine make ultimately shape the outcome of the story?

The goal of this unit is for students to have developed a better sense of the concept of empathy throughout the activities we have preformed in class such as the video, journaling, analyzing “The Road Not Taken,” working in groups, and completing the unit through the essay prompt.

Works Cited

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