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The Power of Decision Making and the Privilege of Choice

**Rationale:**

We are taught at a young age how to make good and bad choices. As we grow older, we are often left on our own to start making hard choices by ourselves. Just as a child needs guidance and support, adults need them from time to time too. Sometimes teenagers/young adults do not have the adequate resources to be able to make difficult or big decisions in their lives. Many young adults may not have guidance or reassurance about the options that are available to them as well. Although this topic is very broad, the choices that they will encounter will be over time at points in their lives; whether that be choosing what college to go to, deciding whether or not to go to college, what they want to pursue in their career, or maybe even wondering if they will even like what they choose. Choices can be present in friendships and relationships, etc. Not every choice may be the right choice, but there are good and bad ways to cope with the decisions we have to make with the choices that are dealt with. This is to help shed some light on the reality of the possibilities about making decisions as students develop into adults.The notion of making a choice can be seen throughout many genres of texts, fiction or nonfiction, which ultimately means there is at least one book out there for every student to relate to. Most of the time, we make decisions based on impulse and not even really thinking about why we are making the choices we make, but by introducing this concept to young adults, they can be informed on maybe why we are compelled to make the decisions we make, even if we do   
not have the time to think about things. Through a variety of texts widely taught, characters can be seen making decisions based on their circumstance. By digging deeper into analysis of quotes and characters in a text, young adults can come to understand the complexity of critically thinking amidst making healthy and well informed decisions or why one may not be able to make those kinds of decisions. The unit I’m proposing will allow students to recognize the reality of making difficult decisions in their lifetime. This unit will shed light on a realistic part of life through works of literature. This unit will not only encourage students to think critically about the decisions of fictional or nonfictional characters, but to also reflect on their own lives.

The centerpiece of this unit will be *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. Although this book can be read starting in middle school, with this particular unit I would teach to 10th and 11th grade. As they are towards the end of their high school careers, they are in a headspace where they are going to make some hard decisions while they are in high school, college and beyond. This is where they will be prompted to think deeply for themselves in times of stress or need.

* Students will analyze the characters of the story
* Students will focus on the decisions the characters have made, and where they are now
* Students will analyze the different choices that have leading up to where the characters are in the story

**Introducing the Unit:**

To begin, I will give the students five minutes to brainstorm a time in their life where they had to make a decision – any decision (it can be as simple as deciding what to eat for breakfast).

These questions will be provided for them:

Was it an easy decision? Was it a hard decision? Was there anyone to help you? Were there any positive or negative consequences to your decision? → This will be a free write that won’t be shared or collected, but as a simple introduction to get them thinking at a surface level about the different choices that can be made.

After the students are done with their free writing, I will share a personal time in my life where I had to make a decision to be able to relate to the students who will most likely at some point in their lives might go through this themselves. → I decided that I wanted to be a teacher in my junior year of high school, when I was a sophomore in college, I started to work part time and I gained a little bit more work experience. I worked as a wedding server and eventually made my way up to a wedding coordinator, and because I loved this job so much, I contemplated if teaching was still the right path for me, and I considered changing my major. Eventually I decided and realized that there can be more than 1 thing that you are good at and that you don’t necessarily have to be strict on enjoying more than 1 career possibility. It is okay to be passionate about multiple things, and if a successful career can come out of that, that’s just a plus.

Next, there will be another five minute brainstorm about movies or television shows they have seen where characters had to make a choice. This time some students will share with the class, so we can get a representation of the array of choices that the students are thinking about. They can also choose to share their personal experience.

To dig deeper into this topic, we will discuss making difficult decisions while not knowing what choice to necessarily make, and if it is the right choice.

* Not everyone may have to make the same choices that you make. Every person’s reality is different and therefore, other people may not relate to your specific situation, and they might not know the significance of why making these decisions are hard/important to you; the reality is that sometimes the decisions and choices we make affect other people, whether that be in a positive or negative way. What’s important is that we make decisions that we feel are within our best interests, to whatever capacity that may be.

To start having the students interact with each other, they will be sitting in groups of 4-5, each group will be handed a white board to do some group brainstorming to the following questions.

* 1. I will ask the question: After hearing my personal story with choice, and thinking about your own, and examples from tv and movies, what are some examples of difficult real life difficult decisions that individuals need to make?
     1. Each group will discuss for 2-3 minutes to come up with one example (as specific as can be)
     2. After time is up, they will hold up their board with their example.
     3. I will pick 3 different examples from the class and we will discuss each one and the different factors that can be the reason for it being a hard decisions
  2. We will talk about some of the following factors:
     1. Social/societal pressures
     2. Family/generational pressure
     3. Financial reasons
     4. Personal beliefs
     5. Consequences
     6. Fear of the unknown/failure
     7. Emotional stressors
     8. Choices that illicit change make us uncomfortable
     9. We don’t want to face our responsibilities
     10. Being over stimulated

After that discussion, I will show this 4 minute clip elaborating on decision making and why it can be hard. This goes into more of a psychological explanation, which we won't go too deep into, but it’s important/helpful to have this perspective to explore this side.

[https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/problem-solving-and-decision-making/why-is-it-so-hard-to-make-decisions/1/#](https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/problem-solving-and-decision-making/why-is-it-so-hard-to-make-decisions/1/)

We will then continue with our discussion as I propose the question: Now why is this important to you? (the student) and explain the significance of this time in their lives of all the choices that you will have to make after high school → The goal is to bring this back to the students and ask them why we are learning this and how it is significant in their lives? I will also bring up the privilege in making choices. As seen above, there are different factors that can lead an individual to make a choice. Is the concept of “having a choice” a privilege? Why or not not? (Think about the circumstances of Ponyboy and his brothers and what *allows*  them to make decisions.) I will emphasize the importance of making healthy decisions and being able to weigh out the right choices when possible.

* The questions and discussions above are designed to encourage the students to think critically about “choice”. Although it seems like a simple concept, these discussion prompts will show a deeper meaning to a universal act.

**Working Through the Text:**

Along with reading the text at home for homework, they will complete a character log individually to record their findings. Their character chart will look as followed:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Character: | Chapter & Page # | Quote or scene that demonstrates a decision they have made or what they’re choices are/could have been?  Questions to think about:   * Were their choices limited? Did they think before they made that choice? Are there consequences to this choice? Was there any reasoning behind it? * Dig deeper: What is the significance of this decision? * Is there privilege present in these choices? Why or why not? |
| Ex: Ponyboy | Ch 1, pg. 4 | Ponyboy talks about the dangers of walking out by himself after coming home from a movie. He expresses how he could have waited for one of his brothers to make sure he had company. |

Once they come back to class, they will share in their groups to share what they found, and to see if other students are recognizing the same decisions/choices they are. By reporting back to their classmates, this will show the different mindsets of students and how aware they are of the different choices they have made. This character chart will prepare the students for a character analysis assignment where they will focus on two characters and write 1-2 pages per character.

**Beyond the text:**

Working beyond this text, I want to emphasize to students that “decision making” and “choice” is present in every text. There will always be someone making a choice for the betterment of themselves or others. By taking a deeper look at the impact of these decisions and choices, it can prompt students to identify these moments in their lives. To live life, is to constantly be presented with choices and having decisions to be made. It is important to not only recognize this in fiction, but also in autobiographies and memoirs. Although these are texts of different genres, they all include the voice of a teenager.

YA:

* *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson: This story of a high school student named Melinda keeps a deep dark secret. She tries to make choices that are in her best interest, but ultimately, she finds herself struggling with not knowing how to express her needs as she grapples with decisions on how to go about this.
* *We Were Here* by Matt de la Peña: This is a story of a boy named Miguel who gets sent to a group home after a devastating event. In his journey, he makes the decision to run away with two other boys from the group home. Along the way, Miguel is faced with difficult decisions that force him to grow up to protect himself and his friends.
* *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Askaban* by J.K. Rowling: This third book is a continuation of the story of the boy that lives, as Harry Potter embarks on a new journey accompanied by a hurdle of decisions while adapting to being a teenager.
* *Stay True* by Hua Hsu: This memoir recounts the life of Hua Hsu growing up with immigrant parents in the United States. He remembers his childhood and the decisions his parents had made, and how that affected his life and future. He writes about the tragedy that struck in college, and how that significant point in his life started a chain of events that prompted certain decisions to learn how to move forward.

**Ending the Unit:**

They will provide 1 or 2 quotes for each character as well as analyzing the quote and connecting it back to the questions that were introduced at the beginning of the unit. After this, each student will be assigned one of the characters they wrote about and will present their character and quote findings to the class. In addition to their findings, they will each add a creative component, by finding a song that their character would relate to and they will explain how specific lyrics relate to this character. In light of what can sometimes be a heavy topic, adding this element of a lighthearted, easy and creative component will make the task enjoyable.