

Nam Le

Unit of Study

Rationale

A unit of study I would teach to young readers is the concept of “monsters”. What is a monster? Does a monster have a shape or form? Can a “monster” be an idea or concept? Monsters, villains, ghosts, ghouls, and everything in between, represent the “other side”, the opposite of what it means to be a hero. My unit of study encourages students to deconstruct what it means to be a monster and expand their understanding from being black and white to multidimensional. In young-adult literature, it is easy to point out who is the hero and who is the villain, the monster of the book. My aim for my unit of study is to engage students to find out why they believe something is “monstrous” and if we compare them to the real world, are they truly monsters.

Monsters are multi-dimensional. Monsters are villainous such as Voldemort in Harry Potter, or Andy Evans in Speak. However, the idea of a “monster” can transcend from being an identity to a concept. In Dante’s Inferno, the pilgrimage through hell, the valley of Satan, embodies the concept of being a “monster”. In the cult classic, Frankenstein, the monster was not Frankenstein but instead his creator, Victor Frankenstein. In the classic story Snow White, we would view Snow White's stepmother as the monster, but my unit of study is to push the notion of the monster even further. Snow White may be the monster but the bigger monster is society; society forces the narrative that women must be young and beautiful to be loved. Snow White's stepmother inflicted suffering because she was envious of her stepdaughter’s beauty, a problem that society places on all of womanhood. A monster transcends being just the villain for the plot line, a monster embodies the infliction of suffering.

My choice for the “Unit of Study” book of focus is “Flowers for Algernon” by Daniel Keyes. It is a story that follows the journey of Charlie Gordon, a man with an IQ of 68, and his journey to become smarter with the help of a revolutionary medical experiment. During his journey to smartness, Gordon slowly unravels the world that he thought he knew. His “friends” at his bakery job were never his friends but his bullies; they were bullies who made fun of his mental impediment. The director of the experiment who Gordon first viewed as a man of good faith, learned that he was only using Gordon for his selfish reason. Flowers for Algernon highlights how monsters are not just black and white, but can manifest themselves in many ways.

During my field observation experience, I shadowed teachers in October. October is synonymous with being the “spooky season”, a time to glorify darkness and the scaries. It was during this time that teachers introduced their classes to read Halloween-centered novels such as *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman to get the holiday spirit going, and for students to find relevance with their unit of study. My unit of study will also be introduced in October month as well. Delving into classic spooky

Introducing the Unit

01. Prior to introducing the text, I would first show my students the song [“Monster” by YouTuber Gabbie Hanna](#). This song is a canonical moment in online history, providing a sense of relevancy for new-age students and your typical Zoomers
 - a. Lyrics of relevancy would include: “What if I’m the monster that’s been here all along?”
 - b. I would ask students to listen to the song and ask them, what kind of imagery is she trying to elude the audience to when referencing “monsters”. I would also ask

students to notice how “monster” is shifted from being a character in the song, to being the artist themselves. This exercise is to highlight the notion of “monsters” as being a flexible medium.

02. Following this exercise, I would then ask students what it means to be a monster in the literary context. I would ask students to brainstorm iconic “monsters” in literature, such as Dracula or Slenderman.

- a. I would have students in groups of 3-5, tasked with creating a big poster board with their chosen monster. Students would then be tasked with listing examples and why their chosen characters embody the notion of being a “monster”

03. I would then introduce the strategies of “Costa’s Levels of Questioning”

- a. A method for questioning, students would go from asking basic questions (such as characters' names or specific plot points) to asking more in-depth questions that are more open-ended. This exercise is to help students broaden their reasoning for why they believe a monster is “a monster”.

04. Introducing the text: When it is time to introduce “Flowers for Algernon” I believe this story is best read in class as a whole.

05. Until the class is done with the reading, we will spend a minimum of 20 minutes each class period reading through the materials. After every reading session, students are given 15 minutes to reflect and journal about what they have just read; their feelings, opinions, and who they believe the monster is.

06. When the reading is over I would ask the students to make an argument about who the monster in the novel is, and how they came to that conclusion.

07. Another assignment I would introduce to the students is an art project. Students are to create a trinket to add to their “brown bag” of items that they view as important to the literature. This keeps the students engaged with the reading but also maintains interest in the unit of study.
08. Once the book has been finished the students will be tasked with writing an essay that explores the topic of what it means to be a monster. Students are tasked with picking out a monster in *Flowers for Algernon* and argue if they were always monsters or a victim, a by-product of society. This is one of three main essays that will each represent 10% of their overall grade.

Extending the Unit

1. Following the end of the class reading, I would pair the reading with other novels that engage with students' perception of what it means to be a monster. Novels I believe that pair well with *Flowers for Algernon*, include *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson and *Frankenstein* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. These novels portray monsters in many ways, allowing students to think critically about what it means to be a monster.
 - 1.1. *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson follows the story of Melinda Sordino. A freshman in high school that has undergone a sexual assault the previous summer, Melinda lives in fear of telling anyone about what had happened for fear that they wouldn't believe her. The fear and pain she suffers from in the novel opens a dialogue of what it means to be a monster.

- 1.2. Frankenstein by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley follows the story of a literal monster. However, the question this novel imposes is nature vs. nurture, asking whether we are born or made to be who we are.
2. Giving students two different books to choose from, allows for students to find relevance in their reading and allows for student engagement with the materials at hand.
 - 2.1. Providing a two-week timeline for students to complete their independent reading, students are then tasked with creating their presentation of who they perceive as monsters in their chosen book.

Concluding the Unit

- ❖ To end the unit, I would have an open discussion with the classroom. The classroom discussion would summarize *Flowers of Algernon* and the students' selection. I would then ask students to apply real-world examples of what they deem as “monsters” in the world around them. Applying real-world examples in everyday classroom settings would encourage students to perceive the world in a different light and how they play a role in it.

Work Cited

Hanna, G. (2018, October 26). *Monster / Monster (reborn) - official music video - Gabbie Hanna*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG4dGZTMDU4>

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. Square Fish, 2011.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Penguin Classics, 2012.

Keyes, Daniel. *Flowers for Algernon*. Orlando :Harcourt Inc., 1994.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic, 1999.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Ladybird, 2008.

Dante Alighieri, 1265-1321. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri : Inferno, Purgatory, Paradise*. New York :The Union Library Association, 1935.