Stephanie Galeana

Dr. Warner

English 112B

Unit of Study

Fall 2021

Dealing with Identity/Discrimination, Social Class and Death

**Rationale**

Not fully understanding who you are is a common theme for many young adults. High schoolers deal with pressure from their personal lives, school, and other uncontrollable factors beyond themselves. My time spent observing classrooms brought me into a new reality: Kids these days are way more different than when I was in high school. But one thing remains the same: They are all dealing with his or her own invisible struggles. The importance of allowing high schoolers to have a safe place and be able to open up about their issues is the inspiration behind my Unit of Study. My Unit of Study consists of poems and fictional texts to introduce young adult students to the themes of acceptance, finding yourself, and the power of friendship.

The reason behind why I choose this text has a lot to do with my own experiences in high school which were reflected in my visit to my old high school James Lick (East Side San Jose). The struggle with social class was very apparent with my old elementary friends who attended Piedmont Hills and had very *opinionated* views on James Lick and other ESU District schools. All these same issues were present during my visits, as James Lick no longer enforces strict rules. My old English teacher informed me of the new social media trend of vandalism, how students weren’t punished if they roamed freely around campus (since cops are not allowed on campus anymore), and the overall lack of student consequences. (In one class session I was observing, it was a quiz, and most students had their phones out and weren’t paying attention).

As described in Chapter 6 of *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story* texts about Identity and Discrimination is the focus in this Unit of Study as I prepare my students to examine stories from different perspectives across many cultures.

**Canonical Novel**

The text I will be focusing my work on is S.E Hinton’s *The Outsiders*. This novel was taught when I was in high school, and it matched the real-life accounts of many of my fellow classmates who were involved in gangs (and/or rivalry between other parts of our community). A main theme in the book deals with identity and the meaning of relationship based on your community. The rivalry between the Greasers and the Socs serves the critique of different social classes. Do the Socs have an unfair advantage because of their means to access? Are the Greasers bound to remaining Greasers forever? It’s a repeating, never-ending cycle. Since *The Outsiders* is a book that has been taught for generations, the access to several modes of presenting is abundant. The final step in reading the novel would end with watching the film. The film will provide my students the ability to connect their ideas with the novel. Seeing the novel come to life with the film will add to the experience that the events in the novel aren’t fictional, but rather can happen in real life as well.

**Launching the Unit**

I would begin the class with the introduction of the poem "Taking Stock" by Judith Selymes Ilosvay from “Stories Moving Readers from Fear and Bias to Tolerance and Acceptance.” This poem is necessary to introduce the idea that we are alike regardless of the things that try to separate us. We would read the poem out loud together as a class before turning to 10 minutes of Sustained Silent Writing in their journals where students will answer one of the following questions, taken directly from “Stories Moving Readers from Fear and Bias to Tolerance and Acceptance.”

1. “Have you ever been new to a place? A school? A neighborhood? A city or community? A gathering? How did you feel? What were your feelings about the people or the setting into which you were moving or becoming a part of?”
2. “Write about a time someone new moved into your neighborhood, community, or school. How did you feel about this person? What questions did you have about the newcomer?”
3. “How long does it take you to get to know someone? What kinds of differences do you find hardest to accept: Physical? Racial or ethnic? Linguistic? Gender? Disabilities of some kind? Personality or emotional?”

Their responses will not be shared with their peers or anyone else (but me). Their journals will be turned in to me at the end of each class period and this process will be repeated every day until the end of the unit and will serve as an extra aide for their final creative project.

The novel will be read in class, with an audio narrative as the students read along. The aim is to read a chapter (or two) ranging from 5-10 pages, with stops in-between to answer questions in their journal along the way.

The questions will differ from chapter to chapter. As I observed at James Lick, having an audio narrative as the class moved on from page to page, helped eliminate the issues with popcorn reading or reading out loud. By removing the pressure of failing or messing up in front of your peers, students can focus on the task at hand, with little to no worry about external forces.

The novel will be separated into two readings. Half of the novel will be read in class, and the half will be read as homework. The readings will be consecutively paired (Reading Chapter 1-2 in class, Chapters 3-4 will be homework). At the end of each week, the class will have a small pop quiz consisting of 5-8 multiple choice questions that are relevant to the book’s setting such as:

1. Where does the book take place?
2. How many siblings does Ponyboy have?

As the book progresses, the questions will remain the same in level. Students will show their progress with the book in their journals as they answer questions presented at the beginning of class that consist of applying the book to themselves with personal anecdotes, writing a short response to ‘What is happening in the novel?’ or answering short responses in reference to their favorite character in the novel.

**Companion Novels**

The feeling of not belonging or feeling isolated is a universal theme. These companion novels fit in with the theme and highlights the beauty behind the madness. Allowing students to find comfort with accepting that they are not fully alone, it’s a universal feeling.

*Fruit of the Drunken Tree* by Ingrid Rojas Contreras is a novel about seven-year-old Chula lives a carefree life in her gated community in Bogotá, but the threat of kidnappings, car bombs, and assassinations hover just outside her walls, where the godlike drug lord Pablo Escobar reigns, capturing the attention of the nation. (Taken from PRH) This novel pairs well with *The Outsiders* and the theme of an outside source and the strength of family and also has deals with death and references gangs/gang violence.

*The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros is a novel about Structured as a series of vignettes, it tells the story of Esperanza Cordero, a 12-year-old Chicana girl growing up in the Hispanic quarter of Chicago. Based in part on Cisneros's own experience, the novel follows Esperanza over the span of one year in her life, as she enters adolescence and begins to face the realities of life as a young woman in a poor and patriarchal community (Taken from Wikipedia). Similar to *Fruit of the Drunken Tree,* this novel also highlights the beauty of family and community.

*I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sánchez is a novel about Julia, a Chicago high school student as she navigates trials and tribulations of following her dreams of becoming a writer alongside the death of her sister, Olga—who might not have been quite as perfect as she seemed. This poignant and vibrant new work is a love story to young Chicanas who, in trying to find the truth about the people and the world around them, end up finding themselves. (Taken from Steppenwolf). This novel covers the theme of death that is a common topic in *The Outsiders,* and the idea of identity and the internal struggle of being who you want to be versus being forced to live up to everyone else’s expectation.

*We Were Here* by Matt de la Pena is a novel about the story of one boy and his journey to find himself. When it happened, Miguel was sent to Juvi. The judge gave him a year in a group home – said he had to write a journal so some counselor could try to figure out how he thinks. The judge had no idea that he actually did Miguel a favor. Ever since it happened, his mom can’t even look him in the face. Any home besides his would be a better place to live. (Taken from MDLP’s site). This novel pairs well with *The Outsiders* because of the theme of death and losing yourself.

**Ending the Unit**

The message of finding yourself, the beauty of community is demonstrated in *The Outsiders.* To close out this unit, a creative final project will be assigned. I take inspiration from my observations at James Lick. Students are given three options to the creative project:

1. Create a 10-song playlist that describes the novel. Write a 1–2-page explanation of why you choose these songs, and why they describe the novel.
2. Create a painting/drawing of a scene from the novel. Write a 1–2-page explanation of your inspiration behind the painting/drawing, and why you choose this scene.
3. Create your own prompt (Must receive my approval).

The idea behind creative projects allows students to describe and analyze their understanding of the book. The final step in the unit is presenting their project to the class. I really enjoyed observing students presenting at James Lick. Presenting in class allows me to see where the students are having trouble and where they are meeting expectations. An important aspect I want to include is integrating participation between peers by requiring 1-3 questions from students chosen by random. At the end of the unit, my goal of teaching students that they are not alone in this world and that their community is here to help will be understood with the help of analyzing texts, allowing a creative side to shine, and allowing a safe space to share feelings (Ending with the presentation of their creative projects).

Works Cited

De la Peña, Matt. *We Were Here*. Random House Inc., 2009. Print

Hinton, S. E. *The Outsiders*. Viking Press, 1967. Print

*Stories Moving Readers from Fear and Bias to ...* by Mary L. Warner, The Ohio Journal of The English Language Arts, 2002.

*Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, by Mary L. Warner, Scarecrow Press, 2006.

*I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*. Steppenwolf Theatre. Web.

Contreras, Ingrid Rojas. *Fruit of the Drunken Tree*. Penguinrandomhouse.com: Books.

PenguinRandomhouse.com, Knopf. Web.

*The House on Mango Street*, Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation. Web.