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Reactions of Psychological Trauma

Rationale

The reason as to why I have chosen this topic is because mental illnesses can be just as harmful as a physical illness. It can make one do things they normally would not do if they were in the correct headspace and can lead to more serious issues if it is not treated properly. Over time, it can lead to affecting one's physical health and even leading to death.

What influenced me to choose this topic is the fact that I have personally dealt with a lot of trauma and recently I have dealt with the death of a little girl who drowned at my job. The thing with trauma is that you are never ready for it. I have been a lifeguard for five years and have never been through this at all. The lifeguards who responded first are only seventeen and when I see them, they are not the same people before 12:30 pm on October 23rd. When I was in high school, I lost my best friend old, saw a video of my own cousin shot 25 times by the police, a former teammate committed suicide in the pool during swim season, a classmate committed suicide and all at the same time dealing with my parents' bitter divorce. Many people see children as durable and that they have it easy but life is not perfect at all. Children experience trauma too and I cannot even begin to imagine what the little girl's friends are going through at the age of six, knowing that their friend drowned at a birthday party they were attending. When they get older and they are able to comprehend what has happened, they have to cope with it somehow.

A book I have chosen as my centerpiece is *The Catcher in The Rye* by J.D. Salinger since the main character, Holden Caulfield has shown signs of different mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post traumatic stress disorder. Throughout the novel, Holden is filled with angst and pessimism but as the reading goes on, his pessimism and angst are not without reason. His brother died of leukemia and he had a schoolmate commit suicide. Holden tends to be quite self destructive causing his mental illnesses to affect him physically. Through this reading, students may be able to possibly recognize the different signs of mental illness in their peers or maybe themselves and to seek help. Not only will this unit of study help students recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness but also how to heal.

How does this connect to YA Literature sources?

According to “Mental Health and Healing Through the Novels of A.S. King” by Bird Cramer, assigning students to read novels that “distill[s] the essence of trauma and mental illness, de-stigmatizes it surrealistically , then reintroduces them as being an acceptable, albeit painful, part of the human condition” is needed now more than ever since teen suicide rates have been increasing and that “we, as educators and administrators, can help through providing social support and listening” (Cramer). Cramer then goes on to recommend many young adult novels written by A.S. King for being able to honestly portray mental health without stigmatizing it.

In *The Alan Review Volume 46 Issue 1*, the issue focuses on the psychology of young adult literature. It talks about different types of trauma but the articles I would recommend are “Living Well, Dying Well: Engaging Students in Mindful Inquiry through *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*” where the cultural views of grief are explored and the fact that death is something universal. They recommended for educators to include multiple poems to “provide

students another way to consider death and to make connections to the anchor text and unit theme” (71).

Timeline

Ideally, this unit of study would take about four weeks. I would have students keep a journal to write on a daily basis about how they are feeling at that very moment and how life is going for them; they will write this in the first five minutes of class. However, I will only require the first and last journal entry to discuss their beliefs about death and how they should grieve. The other journal entries will have to be turned in but students have to put on the top of the page on whether or not they would like for me to read it. I will also notify them that I am mandated reporter and that I have a legal obligation to let the authorities know if I become aware of something that indicates that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being, abused.

Since the anchor text is *The Catcher in the Rye* they will read this within the week since it is only 277 pages. Ideally since they have seven days and the book is 26 chapters, they will read four chapters a day. They will have time to read this out loud during class in alphabetical order. They will also have a short reflection of their thoughts and questions of what they have read; they will be given questions to respond to if they do not know what to write. However, for the chapters they are supposed to have read over the weekend, they will have a quiz at the beginning of class on monday. The main focus of in class discussions will be on Holden’s mentality

Timeline for the first week in a 56 minute class

- Introduce the unit and why we are reading this: read behind the formaldehyde curtain- Fifteen minutes
- Journal entry- Five minutes
- Read out loud- fifteen minutes

- Short reflection- five minutes
- Group discussion of brown bag items - five minutes
- Open discussion with the class on what they have chosen. - ten minutes

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Ch 1-4	Ch 5-8	Ch 9-12	Ch 13-16	Ch 17-20	Ch 21-24	Ch 25-26

Second week they will have an essay to work on about 3-5 pages and the prompt will be the students writing a psychological report where they will diagnose Holden with a possible mental illness he may have and a treatment plan. It must include evidence and 2-4 quotes. The students will also be assigned partners to look at their first and second drafts before turning in their final drafts to me.

The third week they would have to do a creative project of anything they want of their brown bag item. This can be a drawing, a poem, video, etc. The possibilities are endless. They are free to add other media to their creative project.

During the fourth week, students do a presentation on the topic of how death and mental health is viewed in their country/ religion of origin and how it has affected them. They are free to be in groups of four maximum to work on this. They will look at “Soneto de la Noche” by Pablo Neruda and I would have them listen to “Ghost” by Justin Bieber since “Soneto de la Noche” speaks from the perspective of the dead and “Ghost” speaks from the perspective of the living left behind.

For extra credit, students are free to do a book talk, a presentation of a song, poem, any form of media and relate it to how they view death and possibly how the media of their choosing helps them cope/ understand death more or how it may misrepresent trauma. That or they can do a

presentation of a time when they were the happiest in their lives and a time when they were the saddest in their lives.

Suggested Readings

- “Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain” by Jessica Mitford
 - -Explanation of the emotional process of the possibility that a dead body looks different from the last time one saw the deceased.
- *Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd - Death of April and May
 - May lost her twin, April, at a young age from suicide and has suffered from depression and occasionally goes into a trance. May has trouble coping with the loss of her sister and is very sensitive to the sadness in the world. Eventually in the novel, she reaches her limit and also commits suicide. The ritual of her funeral allows for the novel to explain the concept of rebirth and that sometimes out of death, good things can come such as June’s marriage.
- *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson - Death of Leslie
 - Jess reacts to the death of Leslie by being in denial, angry, heartbroken and feeling it was his fault she died. He goes back to Terabithia to grieve and creates a memorial for her. He slowly comes to terms with her death knowing that even though she is gone, traces of her still live on through the people who love and remember her.
- *We Were Here* by Matt De La Peña - Death of Diego
 - Miguel goes through the stages of grief of accidentally killing his brother, Diego. He tries to forgive himself in an unforgiving world. The trauma has made him

depressed and unsociable. Eventually he learns to not run away from his problems and to not give up on life.

- “Sonetto de la Noche” by Pablo Neruda
 - Wishes from the deceased that they want their loved ones to live life to the fullest.

Suggested Visual Media

- *Young Justice* season 2 finale- death of Wally West
- *Young Justice* season 4 episode 4 - death of Conner Kent
 - For *Young Justice*, after the death of Wally West and Conner Kent, many of the characters go into a deep depression. Each character grieves differently and so this would be interesting for students to look at since the characters feel the same sadness but react differently
- *Big Hero 6*- Death of Tadashi
 - After his brother’s death, Hiro fell into depression but was able to overcome it thanks to Tadashi's friends and Baymax. With the help of Tadashi’s friends and Baymax, Hiro decides to honor his brother by following Tadashi's dream to help everyone in need by creating a superhero team.

Suggested songs

- “Ghost” by Justin Bieber
 - Bieber states that he wrote the song “Ghost” to "make people feel like there is hope and that the trauma and the hurt that you feel isn't gonna last forever”
- “Helena” by My Chemical Romance

- Written after the death of Gerard and Mikey Way’s grandmother. The expression of anger and hurt is displayed but there is nothing they can do since their grandmother is gone.

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