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Unit of Study on Adventures

This unit of study will focus on Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and other adventure stories. *Around the World in Eighty Days* is often read in middle schools for multiple reasons. Stories within the adventure genre are generally exciting and griping reads, which encourages students to actually read the text. As with many adventure novels, *Around the World in Eighty Days* focuses on a journey, on friendship, on overcoming internal and external obstacles, and on the idea of home. Middle school is a transitional time, where students question their own identity, values, and place in the world. Books which allow students to explore their own identities, and step outside of their perspective and into someone else’s, are crucial. *Literature for Today’s Young Adults* emphasizes that while students may be drawn to the fast paced plot of an adventure story, they will benefit from engaging with someone’s journey of self-discovery. The key elements that *Literature for Today’s Young Adults* outlines for the adventure genre, “a likeable protagonist”, “efficient characterization” and “an interesting setting that enhances the plot”, are all present in Verne’s epic tale (Nilson).

Written during a period of progress, change, and development, *Around the World in Eighty Days* explores the question of home and belonging. Three of the main characters in the novel come from different parts of the world, England, India, and France, and yet they form a close friendship. As these characters journey around the world, they encounter various cultures and peoples which alter the way that they view themselves and others. The story ends exactly where it began, yet so much has changed. Like the journey of Fogg and his companions, middle school is a journey. It is a new place, and a time of change, where the students will encounter new people and ideas. By examining this text, the class will be able to discuss their own views, and continue to shape their identity as an individual and as a community. As the students explore the world through the novel and other sources, they will hopefully gain a deep desire to explore cultures other than their own, and gain a new appreciation for the elements that comprise their “home”.

Many modern young adult novels also explore the topic of home and identity and how these two are shaped. Matt De La Pena’s *We Were Here* is a wonderful example of this, although since this unit of study is designed for a middle school class, this novel will not be directly included in this study. However, other examples include Brian Selznick’s *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, and Gloria Whelan’s *Small Acts of Amazing Courage***.** The archetype of the “hero’s journey” is dependent upon the hero transforming in some way, and yet returning home. By reading adventure novels, readers may vicariously travel from their home, grow and explore, and still come home in time for dinner.

**Introducing the Unit**

As an introduction to this unit I will play the official lyric video for Gabrielle Aplin’s song “Home”. I will provide the students with a printed copy of the lyrics, after the song has been played. This song, which begins with two strong images, explores the idea of home and identity. The song depicts a desire to travel and explore, combined with a longing to be home. After playing this video for the class, I will have them write down one image or line from the song that they feel represents the idea of home. While the students share their responses to the song, the class will begin a discussion on the connection between home and identity. To continue the discussion, I will ask questions like: How would you define “home”? Is it possible to have more than one home? Is home a particular place, or can it be anywhere that you feel safe and comfortable? Do you feel a desire to leave home and explore? After these questions, I will have the students create a poster that represents their idea of home. Using only images, they will draw a depiction of the elements that make up their “home”. When these creations are complete, I will then ask the students to write a poem using the images on their poster. An alternative actitivity to this one would be to have the students write an “I am” poem, or a “home” poem inspired by George Ella Lyon’s poem “Where I’m From”. Students can then share their poems, or posters, and learn more about each other as individual members of one class community.

Home by Gabrielle Aplin

“I'm a phoenix in the water  
A fish that's learned to fly  
And I've always been a daughter  
But feathers are meant for the sky  
And so I'm wishing, wishing further,  
For the excitement to arrive  
It's just I'd rather be causing the chaos  
Than laying at the sharp end of this knife  
With every small disaster  
I'll let the waters still  
Take me away to some place real  
'Cause they say home is where your heart is set in stone  
Is where you go when you're alone  
Is where you go to rest your bones  
It's not just where you lay your head  
It's not just where you make your bed  
As long as we're together, does it matter where we go?  
Home x4   
So when I'm ready to be bolder,  
And my cuts have healed with time  
Comfort will rest on my shoulder  
And I'll bury my future behind  
I'll always keep you with me  
You'll be always on my mind  
But there's a shining in the shadows  
I'll never know unless I try  
With every small disaster  
I'll let the waters still  
Take me away to some place real  
'Cause they say home is where your heart is set in stone  
Is where you go when you're alone  
Is where you go to rest your bones  
It's not just where you lay your head  
It's not just where you make your bed  
As long as we're together, does it matter where we go?  
Home   
'Cause they say home is where your heart is set in stone  
Is where you go when you're alone  
Is where you go to rest your bones  
It's not just where you lay your head  
It's not just where you make your bed  
As long as we're together, does it matter where we go?  
Home.

**The Center Work**

Students will be assigned a couple chapters of *Around the World in Eighty Days* to readeach week. We will discuss the novel in class, and students will be given handouts containing questions and short paragraph writing prompts to fill out. As a class we will mark on a world map the progression of the character’s journey around the world, and discuss briefly the various places that the character’s journey to. To lessen the student’s homework load, a bit of the reading and question discussion will occur in class. As well as addressing the plot of the novel, the questions will center on the character’s identity, perceptions of the people that they meet, and changing views. *Around the World in Eighty Days* is unique because one character, Fogg, seems to remain static throughout the text, yet at the end of the novel, his life is deeply altered by the journey. As a class we can explore the various character’s reactions to the new cultures that they encounter and examine how we would respond in a similar situation. Some questions for this aspect of the unit would be: Is it good to have a strong sense of self and home? What are the benefits of traveling? What are the cons? Is it possible to travel somewhere new and not be changed? What do you think makes the character’s respond the way that they do to various obstacles? What are some obstacles in your life that you have had to overcome? What helped you overcome them? How we have responded to change in your own life?

**Expanding the Unit**

To expand the unit further, students will also engage with Herge’s *The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn*. We will watch the short animated episode that depicts this comic book and discuss the multiplicity of ideas around home and identity that are presented in this adventure. As an in class activity, following the viewing of the film, students will write a journalistic report of Tintin’s adventure from his perspective. An additional in class activity could include students writing a letter “home” from the perspective of one of the characters in *Around the World in Eighty Days*, describing one of the places depicted in the book. After this, the class will conduct a book pass with the books referenced below. For the final project, students may choose from one of the books listed to read on their own. They will then write a series of four letters from two of the characters in their book. These letters should include a brief description of the setting and the plot of the novel, and also reveal the character’s struggle with either home, identity, or belonging. Students will be required to present their letters by reading them aloud to the class. This form of response to a book replaces the traditional “book report” and is an idea from *Teaching Writing Grades 7-12 in an Era of Assessment.*

**Suggested Reading List and Summaries**

The books listed below span a wide variety of genres, yet all exhibit the qualities necessary to be included in the adventure genre. These novels all explore the themes of home, identity, and belonging. Each novel take place in different countries and lands, and provides a unique perspective for students to discover the world through.

***Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep**

“Moon Shadow was eight when he sailed from China to join his father Windrider in America. Windrider lived in San Francisco's Chinatown and worked in a laundry. Moon Shadow had never seen him. But he soon loved and respected this father, a man of genius, a man with a fabulous dream. And with Moon Shadow's help, Windrider was willing to endure the mockery of the other Chinese, the poverty, and the longing for his wife and his own country to make his dream come true. Inspired by the account of a Chinese immigrant who made a flying machine in 1909, Laurence Yep's historical novel beautifully portrays the rich traditions of the Chinese community as it made its way in a hostile new world.”

(https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/876034.Dragonwings?from\_search=true)

***Small Acts of Amazing Courage* by Gloria Whelan**

“It is 1918, six months after the end of World War I, and Rosalind awaits the return of her father from the war. While it is common practice for British children in India to be packed off to boarding school at the age of 6, Rosalind is unusual because she lives and is schooled in India because her mother insists. The heart of this penetrating story is Rosalind's coming of age set against the hardship of life for the Indian people, Rosalind's daily life in India, the rise of Ghandi and Rosalind's coming to make her own decisions and become her own person.”

(<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8439785-small-acts-of-amazingcouragefrom_search>=)

***The Hobbit* by JRR Tolkien**

“Written for J.R.R. Tolkien’s own children, The Hobbit met with instant critical acclaim when it was first published in 1937. Now recognized as a timeless classic, this introduction to the hobbit Bilbo Baggins, the wizard Gandalf, Gollum, and the spectacular world of Middle-earth recounts of the adventures of a reluctant hero, a powerful and dangerous ring, and the cruel dragon Smaug the Magnificent”

(https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/5907.The\_Hobbit?from\_search=true)

***The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick**

“Orphan, clock keeper, and thief, Hugo lives in the walls of a busy Paris train station, where his survival depends on secrets and anonymity. But when his world suddenly interlocks with an eccentric, bookish girl and a bitter old man who runs a toy booth in the station, Hugo's undercover life, and his most precious secret, are put in jeopardy. A cryptic drawing, a treasured notebook, a stolen key, a mechanical man, and a hidden message from Hugo's dead father form the backbone of this intricate, tender, and spellbinding mystery”

(https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/9673436-the-invention-of-hugo-cabret?ac=1&from\_search=true)

***Treasure Island* by Robert L. Stevenson**

“The most popular pirate story ever written in English, featuring one of literature’s most beloved “bad guys,” *Treasure Island* has been happily devoured by several generations of boys—and girls—and grownups. Its unforgettable characters include: young Jim Hawkins, who finds himself owner of a map to Treasure Island, where the fabled pirate booty is buried; honest Captain Smollett, heroic Dr. Livesey, and the good-hearted but obtuse Squire Trelawney, who help Jim on his quest for the treasure; the frightening Blind Pew, double-dealing Israel Hands, and seemingly mad Ben Gunn, buccaneers of varying shades of menace; and, of course, garrulous, affable, ambiguous Long John Silver, who is one moment a friendly, laughing, one-legged sea-cook . . .and the next a dangerous pirate leader!”

(https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/295.Treasure\_Island?from\_search=true)

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