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English 112b

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An Exploration of Depression in Literature and Pop Culture

In recent months, celebrities such as Cara Delevingne, Kid Cudi, and Kanye West have admitted to struggling with depression. Last week, Kanye West was hospitalized in Los Angeles, where he is still getting treatment for extreme exhaustion, paranoia, and depression after cancelling dozens of sold-out concert dates on the second leg of his tour. A few months ago, recording artist Kid Cudi posted a detailed Facebook post explaining his reasons for checking into rehab. In the post, he apologized to his fans, and expressed his feelings of shame for suffering from depression. Additionally, Pop princess Selena Gomez also checked into rehab for depression and other mental illnesses relating to her chronic struggle with Lupus and Cara Delevingne opened up about her battle with depression following her parents' divorce.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, “in 2015 an estimated 3 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the United States had at least one major depressive episode in the past year” (NIMH, 2015). Consequently, as the rates of teenage depression rises, so does the suicide rate. Most teens have felt some form of depression at some point in their lives. Because every feeling is heightened and dramatized, dealing with problems and issues is made a little more difficult at that age when everything feels like the end of the world. Personally, I grew up in a family where feelings were not acknowledged: you just had to suck it up and move on. Now that I’m an adult, I have realized the importance of expressing feelings and coping with emotions

in a healthy way. There's a stigma around mental health and it's clearly expressed in Kid Cudi's apology to his fans. The stigma is especially prevalent in teenage males because of the societal expectations of what it means to be a "man."

In this unit of study, I want to have an open discussion about not only depression, but everything that stems from it as well. Not only does talking about mental illness openly without judgment reaffirm that it's okay to be struggling, hopefully it will also show the students that they aren't alone either. Even the celebrities the students and I alike worship fall prey to mental illness, too. I want the students to know that there is no shame in seeking help and that help is always available. The lines of communication need to be open with teens and I hope that with this unit of study, students will find the comfort or help they need.

Launching the Unit:

I will begin the unit by starting a discussion about what the students think and how they feel about the recent media reports about celebrities seeking help for their mental illnesses by checking into hospitals or rehabilitation centers. With the controversy surrounding Kanye West and his rants on stage at his concert performances in San Jose and in Sacramento, I want the students to express what they thought after hearing what he was saying on stage. West was heavily criticized for his bizarre behavior and abrupt cancellation of the remaining concert dates of his tour. I'll provide the lyrics of Kanye West's "I Feel Like That" so that the students can read the lyrics to themselves, then aloud in class. I want students to hear the lyrics spoken aloud before watching the music video.

Lyrics:

[Verse 1]

Do you experience nervousness or shakiness inside, faintness and dizziness? The idea that someone else can control your thoughts. Feeling others are to blame for most of your thoughts. Trouble remembering things, feeling easily annoyed and irritated. Feeling afraid in open spaces or in public. Thoughts of ending your life. Feeling that most people could not be trusted. Poor appetite, heart, or chest pains?

[Chorus]

I feel like that
I feel like this
I feel like that
I feel like this all the time
I feel like that
I feel like that
I feel like that
I feel like that all the time

[Verse 2]

Do you feel tempered outbursts, that you cannot control? Feeling lonely, even when you are with people, feeling blocked. Feeling blue, sad, feeling disinterested in things, feeling fearful. Are your feelings easily hurt? Feeling that people are unfriendly or do you feel like people dislike you?

[Chorus]

I feel like that all the time
I feel like that
I feel like that
I feel like that
I feel like that all the time
I feel like that
I feel like that all the time

[Verse 3]

Do you have trouble falling asleep? Nausea, upset stomach, hot or cold spells? Numbness, tingling across your body, trouble catching your breath?

[Chorus]

I feel like that
I feel like that
I feel like that all the time
I feel like that
I feel like that
I feel like that all the time

Link: (start at 5:19)

<http://themuse.jezebel.com/heres-a-video-where-kanye-west-gets-tired-from-running-1760570550>

Answering the following questions will be first writing prompt in the journal for the unit of study:

1. Can you relate? Have you ever felt any of the emotions or feelings he describes?
2. What stands out to you?
3. This song was left out of West's 2016 album *The Life of Pablo*. Why do you think that West decided not to release this song on his album?
4. How does the song affect how you feel about the overall message or about depression in general?

What is depression?

From the National Institute of Mental Health:

Signs and Symptoms

If you have been experiencing some of the following signs and symptoms most of the day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks, you may be suffering from depression:

- ▶ Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- ▶ Feelings of hopelessness, or pessimism
- ▶ Irritability
- ▶ Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- ▶ Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- ▶ Decreased energy or fatigue
- ▶ Moving or talking more slowly
- ▶ Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- ▶ Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- ▶ Appetite and/or weight changes
- ▶ Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- ▶ Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment

Treatment: medication and/or psychotherapy

- Don’t isolate yourself
- Try to get outside and be active. Even a quick walk outside or sunshine could help clear your mind. Keep your mind and body healthy!
- Pet therapy works wonders!
- Volunteer
- Talk to a trusted adult or friend
- Ask for help if you’re feeling stressed or overwhelmed
- Call the TeenLine at 800-852-8336. It’s free, confidential, and available from 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM, Pacific Time, seven days a week
- For help with suicidal thoughts call 1-800-273-TALK

Centerpiece: *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger

Students must read *The Catcher in the Rye* independently according the set schedule. Every class will begin with a half-page journal summary of the previous night's reading of the novel.

Additionally students will pick a brown bag item and write a half-page response. It is up to the student to decide what to write about in their journal. The brown bag items are suggestions in case students have trouble thinking of topic to write about. Writing will be followed by a short class discussion. They must be prepared to share and contribute what they wrote with the class.

Brown bag items to write about:

1. Overall themes
 - a. Depression
 - b. Suicide
 - c. Isolation
2. "Life is a game that one plays according to the rules."
3. "The trouble was, I just didn't want to do it. I felt more depressed than sexy, if you want to know the truth. *She* was depressing. Her green dress hanging in the closet and all. And besides, I don't think I could *ever* do it with somebody that sits in a stupid movie all day long. I really don't think I could."
4. "It took me quite a while to get to sleep—I wasn't even tired—but finally I did. What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide. I felt like jumping out the window. I probably would've done it, too, if I'd been sure somebody'd cover me up as soon as I landed. I didn't want a bunch of stupid rubbernecks looking at me when I was all gory."
5. "If a body catch a body coming through the rye."

6. phony
7. “Invisible rules” or expectations
8. The catcher in the rye
9. Holden’s red hunting hat
10. Allie’s baseball mitt
11. The ducks in the lagoon in Central Park
12. The Museum of Natural History
13. Phoebe
14. Holden’s parents
15. Mr. Antolini
16. Sally Hayes

End of Unit:

Before starting the novel, I will hand out instructions and a grading rubric for the cumulative project due at the end of the unit. Each option will require a 2-3 page reflection paper to be submitted online by the due date. Students will have 3 options:

1. Design your own Game of Life!
 - a. “Life is a game that one plays according to the rules.”
 - b. Create your own board game that maps out your life or Holden’s life from the novel. You must include game pieces and a your reflection on how your game

mirrors major themes, conflicts, and/or ideas that Holden struggles with.

2. Character Podcasts

- a. Create a series of podcasts (5) from the perspective of Holden Caulfield. The podcasts can be formatted as ‘open letters’ to Phoebe, any of the other characters from the novel, to society in general, or even to himself (diary entries). Email the audio files or submit the link to your podcasts online with your reflection paper.
- b. Write a 2-3 page reflection paper on the themes or themes you discussed. Reflect on Holden’s relationships with each of the characters in the novel.

3. Character Blogs

- a. Create a series of 5 blog posts (250 words each) on the lives of any of the characters with supporting quotes from the novel. Keep in mind the themes, conflicts, and ideas we have discussed in class and include them in your character blogs. Essentially, each blog is a character analysis. Each blog can be on a different character. Print out a hard copy or submit a link to your blogs.
- b. Write a 2-3 page reflection paper using the quotes you found and discuss the themes, conflicts, or ideas discussed. How did the characters change throughout or did they stay the same? Do you think the end is fitting?

Students will present their projects to the class.

Expanding the Unit:

Hamlet by William Shakespeare

1. Analyze each of Hamlet's soliloquies from Acts I, II, and III. How do they reveal his true feelings? Do they represent an evolution or progression of his thought process?
2. Both Hamlet and Ophelia are severely depressed. Examine both characters.
 - a. How is depression depicted through each character?
 - b. Suicide is a major theme in *Hamlet*. How does the play treat the topic of suicide?
How about the way the characters treat suicide?

Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson

1. Compare and contrast the characters of Holden and Melinda. How do they exhibit signs or symptoms of depression? How do they deal with their problems? How are their lives and relationships with others affected? Are their endings fitting to their personalities?
2. Key quotes to discuss/write about:
 - a. "She says suicide is for cowards. This is an ugly nasty [*sic*] Momside. She bought a book about it. Tough love. Sour sugar. Barbed velvet. Silent talk. She leaves the book on the back of the toilet to educate me. She has figured out that I don't say too much. It bugs her" (Anderson, 88).
 - b. "I put the gown back. There is nothing wrong with me. These are really sick people, sick that you can see. I head for the elevator. The bus is on its way" (Anderson, 113).

- c. “My head is killing me, my throat is killing me, my stomach bubbles with toxic waste. I just want to sleep. A coma would be nice. Or amnesia. Anything, just to get rid of this, these thoughts, whispers in my mind” (Anderson, 165).

The Turning Hour by Shelley Fraser Mickle

Following a failed suicide attempt, 16-year old Bergin begins her journey to find her way back to her normal, happy life. Written like a detective novel, Bergin’s life story is revealed through counseling: her mother Leslie and father Doug’s divorce and subsequent marriages, Bergin’s alcoholic grandmother, and ultimately the effects of all the people in her life which led to her attempt at ending her life.

Additional novels:

The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides

The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath

Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky

Freewill by Chris Lynch

Damage by A.M. Jenkins

All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven

Wintergirls by Laurie Halse Anderson

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[Verse 1]

Do you experience nervousness or shakiness inside, faintness and dizziness? The idea that someone else can control your thoughts. Feeling others are to blame for most of your thoughts. Trouble remembering things, feeling easily annoyed and irritated. Feeling afraid in open spaces or in public. Thoughts of ending your life. Feeling that most people could not be trusted. Poor appetite, heart, or chest pains?

[Chorus]

I feel like that
I feel like this
I feel like that
I feel like this all the time
I feel like that
I feel like that
I feel like that
I feel like that all the time

“I Feel Like That” by Kanye West

[Verse 2]

Do you feel tempered outbursts, that you cannot control? Feeling lonely, even when you are with people, feeling blocked. Feeling blue, sad, feeling disinterested in things, feeling fearful. Are your feelings easily hurt? Feeling that people are unfriendly or do you feel like people dislike you?

[Chorus]

[Verse 3]

Do you have trouble falling asleep? Nausea, upset stomach, hot or cold spells? Numbness, tingling across your body, trouble catchin' your breath?

[Chorus]

“I Feel Like That” Reflection

Link to music video:

[Kanye West "I Feel Like That"](#)

(start at 5:19, end at 6:50)

1. Can you relate? Have you ever felt any of the emotions or feelings he describes?
2. What stands out to you?
3. This song was left out of West's 2016 album *The Life of Pablo*. Why do you think that West decided not to release this song on his album?
4. How does the song affect how you feel about the overall message or about depression in general?

A silhouette of a person slumped over in a hunched position, surrounded by a dense word cloud of negative adjectives. The words are in various shades of blue and white, creating a stark contrast with the black silhouette. The overall composition conveys a sense of despair and self-loathing.



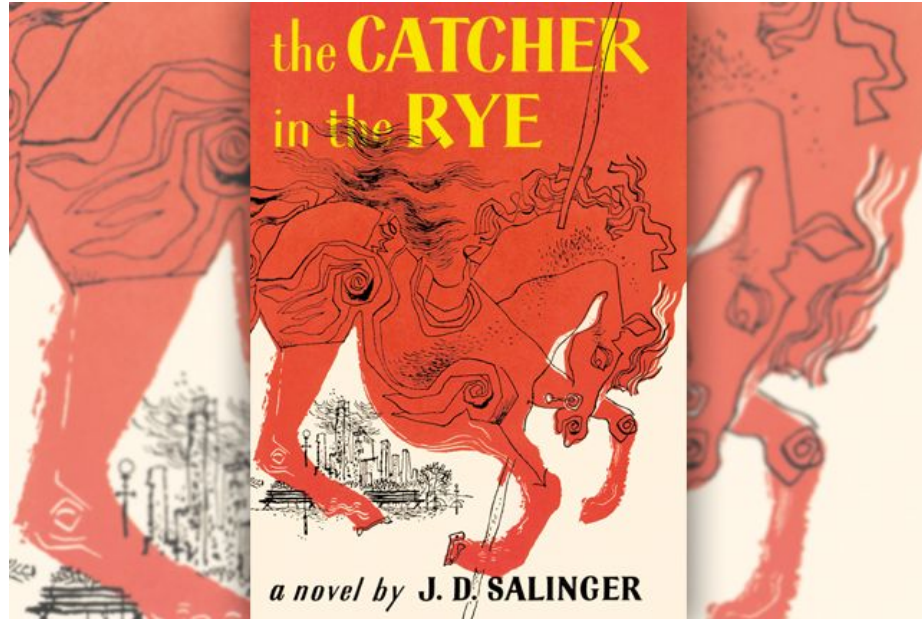
Centerpiece: *The Catcher in the Rye*

1. Daily SSW entries
 - a. Half-page summary of previous night's reading
 - b. Half-page response to brown bag item
2. Daily class discussion

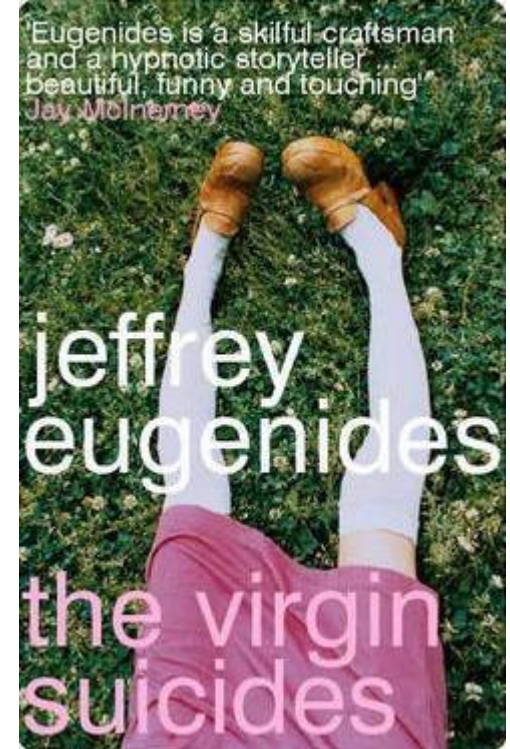
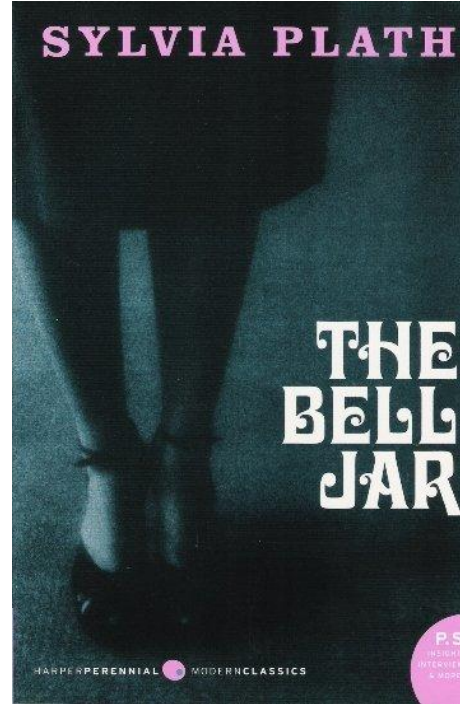
Cumulative Project + a 2-3 page reflection paper

1. Design your own Life game board
2. Character podcasts
3. Character blog posts

Presentation of Projects



Expanding the Unit - Companion Novels



Companion novels (continued...)

- *Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
- *Freewill* by Chris Lynch
- *Damage* by A.M. Jenkins
- *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven
- *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson

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