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Unit of Study: Using Fiction and Fantasy For A Better Reality

**Rationale**:

Many people brush off fiction and fantasy because they deem it as childish and a waste of time. Fiction lets us be creative and it is under-appreciated in the world of study. These fictitious stories and characters can lead to events that nobody has ever thought of before. These stories also teach very valuable lessons along the way. The way that students learn and connect with these characters is very important. Younger students are sometimes not very interested in history or other types of literature. However, fiction and fantasy is a genre that they really gravitate to. They find it fun because they want to escape reality without realizing it. The stories told can also have a very deep emotional impact on some people. There may be a character that they can relate to that is going through the exact same struggles as they are. Putting this character and having the student project themselves onto the character makes the information and lessons more digestible by placing it in an out of this world story. They see it as a dream but still take away the information and text presented to them. Some students may be more apprehensive learning about certain darker subjects but placing it in a fantasy world makes it a bit more tolerable to them. I believe they will be able to digest the information better because of this. There is a chance they get really uncomfortable while reading about a certain subject knowing it happened but be more interested in that same subject in a fantasy setting. To them it may seem as just part of that world and they will be more comfortable learning. They will then take what they learned and implement it into their lives.

**Focus text**:

For this unit of study, the focus will be the *Harry Potter* franchise, specifically *Prisoner of Azkaban* by J.K. Rowling. *Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban* is the third book in the series. It focuses on a boy who struggles to live with his only relatives as they despise him and wish he was never born. They treat him very poorly and are emotionally and verbally abusive to him. His only real joy in life is when he gets to go back and live at his school for wizards. He has his friends but he has also dealt with bullying. I feel like many kids will be able to relate to Harry in some of these instances. Children with emotionally abusive parents might see what Harry is going through and they'll see that they’re not alone and they see how over time things get better for Harry and the student will have some hope for the future. They can replace some of the fantasy aspects with things from real life. Hogwarts could remind them of a friends or relatives house where they feel safe from home. They will see that things can get better. There is also some blatant racism in these stories that the students will see. I think it is important to expose them to this and why it is bad. Malfoy calls Hermione an offensive term because she is not a full wizard. This can be taken to the slurs people of color are called in real life and the students can see how bad it is to do this. We see Hermione struggle with grief and anger over the single that Malfoy called her. The single word that had such a hard impact and meaning. The concept of a house-elf and the way they are treated is also very important to show them.

**Intro To the Unit**:

When introducing this to my students, I would like to do a bit of poetry beforehand. I want them to be able to find hidden meanings in text that aren't always obvious. I want them to be able to locate hidden meanings and identify body language and dialogue so they can tell when a character is uncomfortable even when the book doesn't tell them. The poetry I would use is from Kate lutzner and her book of poems from *Invitation to a Rescue*. Her book of poems are a bit mature but I do think the students would benefit from it. I believe it is important to expose young adults to more mature topics so that when the day comes for them to face it themselves, they will have already familiarized themselves with what's happening and make better decisions because of it. I will have them read a couple chapters of *Prisoner of Azkaban* a week and then write a short paragraph about what they thought about what they read and if they enjoyed it. I will then have them split into groups and discuss if they were able to relate to the characters or parts of the story, such as relationships, family dynamics, etc. the reason I want them into small groups is so that everyone has a chance to share and we get many different viewpoints. After that I will have them tell me what lessons they learned in this fictitious fantasy story and how they can use those lessons in life.

**Through The Text**:

Depending on how well they grasp the concepts and their ability to deconstruct sentences and stories, we may do a poetry dissection at the beginning of each class so they can have supervised practice and ask me any questions they have. I would also have us read through a few chapters as a group and question them after each one. If no students were able to pick up on certain details that I wanted them to then I will playfully hint towards them to make them feel comfortable as if we were just talking rather than have them scared of getting points taken. I will mphasize parts I think are very important to the class and ask them their thoughts and if they were already aware of what I had said, or ask what deductions they made that were different from mine. At the end of the year I will have a paper due on what exactly they had learned from the story. I would make it a little fun for them by asking some questions like “how would you rate the book out of 10?”, “what was your favorite part?” etc. the main topic of the essay would be “what in this story were you able to take and incorporate into your daily lives? What lessons did you learn that you didn't know before? What parts of this fantasy were you able to use in your reality? Did this story help you with a real problem you had?” it is incredible how much a story can affect a person's life and I think people very quickly dismiss it. Not one student will have a paper that is identical. This assignment makes the student look deeper into themselves and take a hard look at their morals, the morals of those around them, and the way they live. I believe that the students will love this assignment.

Works Cited

Rowling, J. K. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.

Lutzner, Kate. Invitation to a rescue,