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ENGL 112B

Dr. Warner

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Unit of Study: Mental Illness and Trauma (Awareness)

Rationale:

As the years go on, mental illness and trauma has become more prominent within teens lives and has been talked about more now so than ever before. There’s great importance in spreading knowledge and awareness about mental illness and trauma to younger generations because of the large number of teens and pre-teens who have suffered from mental illness or trauma in some way or another. Although teachers can only do so much about what goes on in our students lives, we can create a safe and accepting place in the classroom and school to allow students to feel comfortable and know they are not alone. Providing a place for students to feel loved and protected is a major part of being a teacher and it allows our students to open up to us in many different ways as well as educate students on mental illness and trauma so they can help their peers if needed.

This unit will incorporate a few different novels about mental illness and trauma but will center around the novel *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Although this is an older conical text, this novel displays the trauma Hester Prynne went through for getting pregnant without being married and was shamed by the whole town. This novel emphasizes on the trauma women specifically go through for being shamed by others for “poor” decisions they have made. This is common within teens because not just the girls but also the boys suffer from being shamed or talked badly about when in school. Students often run into a situation where they are being picked on by others or lied about by others. This center piece novel for the unit will help jump start the unit of the importance of being kind and how to help someone who has suffered through traumas or mental illness.

Unit Introduction:

This unit will start with students having a “write into the day” for about 5 minutes every time they get into class. I will give them a prompt on the first day of this unit asking them about a time they have been picked on or felt shamed for something. I will then ask them about how it made them feel. After writing about this topic for 5 minutes, they will be asked to share their personal stories if they feel comfortable. This will allow the students to get into the right mindset of being able to understand Hester’s point of view when we read this novel as a class.

After talking about what they wrote, we will discuss as a class what they know and think about mental illness and trauma and why it’s important to spread awareness about it. Then I will provide them with an article to allow them to understand the content of the book before we read it as a class. This article will allow the students to understand the effects shaming and cyberbullying have on others and will allow them to relate to Hester in a way before reading the novel because this article focuses more on their generation. Putting the context into a way they can relate will allow them to understand the novel much easier. The article is called “Online ‘Shaming’ a New Level of Cyberbullying for Girl” by Radio Segment <https://www.npr.org/2013/01/07/168812354/online-shaming-a-new-level-of-cyberbullying-for-girls>

After discussing the article as a class, I will give the students a handout full of questions they are expected to answer by the end of the reading. They can finish it for homework by the next day, but the questions need to be answered before we move on the next day to the next section of the novel. These questions will also allow for students to identify the themes and imagery within the novel and the plot development as well. This worksheet will be split into sections and allow the students to analyze the text in a critical way to understand the context. This will also prove they have been paying attention in class while we read. Then we will start reading *The Scarlet Letter* as a class.

Link to novel: *The Scarlet Letter*

<https://www.amazon.com/Scarlet-Letter-Nathaniel-Hawthorne/dp/1512090565>

I learned in my observations this semester that reading in class with the students helps them understand the material better and creates a place where everyone will understand the story. It is proven that expecting students to read at home for homework does not always work because our students have lives and things come up with work, extracurricular activities, other classes, etc. So, in order to allow a comfortable and enjoyable space for students to follow along in class, I will give students the opportunity to sit wherever they please so they can get comfortable and making reading a relaxing activity for them without sitting in their uncomfortable chairs. I want to do this because it hopefully can remind students that reading does not always have to be boring or “busy work”. As an English teacher, I want reading for my students to be something they look forward to doing in class and on their own. This also relates to chapter 1 in the textbook *Literature for Today’s Young Adults* by Mary Warner. “If children put forth the intellectual energy required in learning to read, they need to be convinced that it is worthwhile—that pleasure awaits them—or that there are concrete benefits to be gained.” (Para. 6)

Second Main Piece:

After reading *The Scarlet Letter* as a class, I will provide students with another handout like the one given before, but this handout will be focused on the film *Speak* directed by Jessica Sharzer and based on the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. *Speak* is about a young High School girl who was raped at a party and was too afraid to tell anyone. Her friends picked on her and she didn’t have anyone to talk to or tell the truth to. The main character Melinda held in her secret until she finally built up the courage to tell her ex best friend about the danger, she might be in by dating the guy who had raped her. We will watch this film together as a class and the students will be able to fill out their worksheet to understand the meaning of the film and to display, they were paying attention.

After watching this film, students will be asked to go into groups of 3 or 4 and will be asked to create a Venn Diagram comparing the novel *The Scarlet Letter* to the film *Speak*. Students will be able to share their ideas and compare the differences and similarities of both pieces. Students will also be expected to include quotes and page numbers from the novel and to describe the scene in the film in their analysis. After groups are finished, we will put them up all around the room and discuss as a class about each groups diagram and why they put certain parts of the novel/film in the sections they did. We will discuss as a class the importance of awareness of mental illness and trauma and the different ways it can affect people and why it is important to always talk to someone when you are feeling unlike yourself or going through things you aren’t sure how to deal with.

End of Unit:

To end this unit, students will be given the option of either writing a letter to Hester from *The Scarlet Letter* or to Melinda from the film *Speak* telling them whatever they want to about the novel or film. Students can ask the character questions or tell them their personal stories and how the character helped them get through it or not feel alone. The second option is students can have the opportunity to write an essay comparing the novel and the film and the ways mental illness and trauma play into both pieces and what it is important/what they have learned from each piece. BOTH LETTER OR ESSAY NEED TO INCLUDE SPECIFIC QUOTES FROM THE NOVEL OR SCENES FROM THE FILM TO PROVIDE KNOWLEDGE OF EACH WORK.

Beyond the Text:

If students want to read more YA novels about mental illness and trauma and the effects of it and the importance of awareness, then students can also read:

-*Winter Girls* by Laurie Halse Anderson

This novel is about a young girl named Lia who suffers from an eating disorder. Her condition continues to get worse when her best friend Cassie, who was bulimic passes away in a hotel room after she had called Lia 33 times for help and never answered the phone. Lia starts to feel at fault for her best friend Cassie’s death and then spirals out of control.

-The novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson

Although the student shave already seen the film in class, the written novel is even more interesting and allows the students to dive deeper into the character Melinda’s story. Melinda suffers from not being able to tell the people she is closest to that she had been raped. She replays that horrific night in her head over and over until she finally stands up for herself and doesn’t like her abuser win.

-*Losers Bracket* by Chris Crutcher (my book talk)

This novel is more focused on trauma. Annie Boots was in and out of foster care due to an unfit drug and alcoholic mother and a father that was never around. Annie was put into a good home but couldn’t stop thinking about how badly she wanted to see her mother and sister even though she knew she’d get her feelings hurt and let down again. This novel can help students who have suffered from trauma of foster care or addict parents to relate and not feel like the only one.

Works Cited

1. Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999
2. Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter.* Ticknor, Reed & Fields, 1850
3. Crutcher, Chris. *Losers Bracket.* GreenWillow, 2018.
4. Anderson, Laurie Halse. *WinterGirls*. Viking, 2009.
5. Fagbenle, Temitayo. “Online 'Shaming' A New Level Of Cyberbullying For Girls.” *NPR*, NPR, 7 Jan. 2013,

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1. Nilsen, Alleen Pace, Donelson, Kenneth L. *Literature for Today’s Young Adults.* 2008.