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English 112B

Dr. Warner

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To Teach A Mockingbird

In this unit of study, students will be learning about and understanding racism in the South and how it is important to reflect on our history to see where people began and where they are currently in regards to racism. My “centerpiece” for the unit of study presentation is the novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* written by Harper Lee. Racism has been an ongoing problem and to resolve it, the world needs to be educated on it. I would hope that my students would come out of this unit and see how racism was during the early 1900s in comparison to now and become encouraged to work towards the continuous improvement of society when it comes to racism.

To introduce the work I would use a variety of resources to allow the students to have a better understanding of certain terms, themes, and ideas of what is yet to come. I would want my students to be very knowledgeable on the topic before throwing them into the main work so that they can get everything they possibly can out of the novel. The main work is *To Kill A Mockingbird* written by Harper Lee, but I would also introduce them to songs such as “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday and “Freedom” by Beyonce. By allowing these students to listen to these songs I would ask them a series of questions so that they can really analyze the message and importance of the works. These songs focus on racism and attempt to bring awareness to those willing to listen. Billie Holiday's song was released in 1939 and Beyonce's song was released in

2016. I would want students to see these two songs, released in very different periods, and compare them to see how they have or have not changed. Along with these songs, I would also show them a TedTalk that the teacher I observed presented them with titled “What Beyonce Taught Me About Race” as well as a video on Jim Crow laws, a video on understanding what derogatory language is, and the documentary titled “Hey, Boo: Harper Lee & To Kill a Mockingbird” that explores the life of Harper Lee and her novel.

Ultimately using many sources that are similar to the subject of the text would allow the students to get a better understanding of the novel before actually reading it. By having the students read this novel, they will be able to explore the history of racism due to it being an easy-to-understand novel that connects to young adults through plot and relationships that are similar to theirs.

Introducing the Unit

This process would take about 5 class sessions

(at the beginning of each day they would do a journal entry on a question provided each day. For example “what is racism?” “has racism changed from the early 1900s till now, if so explain?” etc.)

On the first day, the class will be played the two songs “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday and “Freedom” by Beyonce. I will play each song twice and ask the students that for the second time around, to highlight words they saw as important. They will have a printed-out version of the lyrics in order to do so. After doing this, we will have to discuss everyone's responses on the one

word that they found to be most important out of all of their highlighted words and explain why they thought so. Through this, they will be analyzing the importance of diction to a work as well as it being a check-in to see if they are understanding the meaning of the song. We will then discuss together the true meaning of the songs as well as compare the two. The two songs are from very different times in the U.S., however, they still connect through the same message and the fact that there is still racism even with such a time difference.

On the second day, I would show them the TedTalk titled “What Beyonce Taught Me About Race” by Britany Barron as well as a video on Jim Crow laws. These two videos will allow the students to grasp a better understanding of what type of racism was actually going on. Students hear racism and they think of the basics like slavery and whatnot. These videos will show more of an emotional explanation of racism as well as give students real laws that are so ridiculous that they will make them think. For the TedTalk, students will fill out a worksheet to analyze and understand oppression. There will be boxes titled ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized that we will fill out together and will write down the definition and give examples we heard about in the video and/or that we can come up with on our own. For the video on the Jim Crow laws, the students will watch it and then take a comprehension quiz asking them to name at least 4 laws that were input and what they were. They will then discuss with their tables the laws they found the most interesting and the laws that they see as still being subtly continued.

“What Beyonce Taught Me About Race” by Britany Barron:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDzj9vRw5yM>

Jim Crow Laws Video:

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/jim-crow-laws-significance-facts-timeline.html>

and have a discussion on what derogatory language is

On the third day, I will provide the students with a broadcast video that discusses derogatory language called “the History of the N-word” (We would get parent signature in order to show the students). The video is very long so it would take up a lot of class time, but there is a poem towards the middle of the video and the activity I would do would be with analyzing it. I would ask them to: Choose a max of three lines from the poem that resonates with them and why, what did the poet do that stood out to them and how did it make them feel? what does the poem suggest about the impact of racist and dehumanizing language on those who are targeted by it? Use lines from the poem to support your response, what message did she want to send and what can we learn to form it? and what if any impact did the video as a whole have on your views of derogatory and racist language? This will allow the students to be aware of the language and how strong its effects are on people (whether or not it is a racist term or a derogatory term in general).

The last two days will be taken up by a documentary called “Hey, Boo: Harper Lee & To Kill a Mockingbird” which explores the life of Harper Lee and her novel. This will be the final introduction to the novel to really wrap up the past few days working to understand the background and get the students “into” the novel. This documentary will take up a class period to watch and the next class period would be the discussion of the film. The students will get into a circle with their desks (like a Socratic seminar) and be assigned the night before to come up with at least 3 thought-provoking questions for their peers and thus be led into an open-ended

discussion. The idea is to get them to connect things we have learned from previous days to what they heard/saw in the documentary. Coming up with their own questions will make them focus on the video and think outside of the box to grasp a deeper level of understanding. They will have the whole class period to discuss and must be able to continue conversations fluently throughout their time in the circle.

Link to the journalist Dame Ellah Wakatama Allfrey's BBC Radio broadcast:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b0474xdk>

The Main Text

This process would take about 10 class sessions (They will also continue the journal entries before the reading begins answering questions regarding a theme that will be discussed in the chapter of the day)

The reading would be done in class over the course of about 10 class sessions and it would be done through an audiobook that will be played. Throughout reading the novel, the audiobook will be paused periodically and I will ask a plot-based clarifying question to check in and make sure everyone is following along. I will also periodically pause the book to make statements on certain moments to highlight their importance and also explain ideas that could be found confusing. The hope to get out of the students from reading this novel would be for them to have a greater understanding of the history behind racism, motivate them to work towards change in the world when it comes to racism, and be able to analyze a novel/write an essay on this in a literary analysis paper.

Concluding the Unit

Once the reading is over there will be two final assignments for the students. One assignment will be a 30-question exam (multiple choice) on the plot of the novel. I want to assess how much the students paid attention to the novel and will provide extra credit questions to potentially boost their grades and see if they can answer more in-depth questions. The second assignment will be an essay. I will have the students write a literary analysis of the novel. There will be no set prompt they have to follow, however, they will have a certain date they have to run their thesis statements by me so I can approve them and they can get started. They will be graded on the completion of journal entries, worksheets, participation, and the two assignments (exam/essay).

The day after the final exam and paper are submitted we will have a movie day where I will provide popcorn/snacks and the students can watch the film version of the novel.

Working Beyond the text

1.) *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas

This novel is a modern-day take on police brutality when it comes to racism. In the novel, a girl loses one of her friends to police brutality and thus has a spark of rebellion to stand up for what she believes in. This novel would be perfect to be in relation to *To Kill A Mockingbird* because they both address the topic of racism in different ways due to their different time periods but both leave their audience moved. The characters are primarily teenagers in high school, thus a connection to young adult

readers can be easily made. There is also a film version of this book that was released and students can do a book-to-film assignment with both novels.

2.) *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

This novel is about an African American family that all live together in a low-income neighborhood due to them also being a low-income household. The story touches on many difficult topics, one of which is the racist society in which they live. This novel can relate to young adults in many ways due to familial relations, financial difficulties, racism, etc. that it touches on. This novel would be a great one to have when facilitating a unit on racism and connecting thoughts and ideas to *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

3.) *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

This novel is a piece that has been read by so many. Having such a familiar book that is known by almost all is a great one to provide to young adults. Classics are very important in keeping many connected through literature. This novel touches on topics of racism due to it being about the protagonist's adventurous journey down the Mississippi River with the runaway slave Jim. This novel would provide students insight into a story of the search for freedom and the struggles along the way.

Works Cited

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