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English 112B

Professor Warner

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Unit of Study: Coming of Age and Trauma

Rationale:

When children are born, it is common to be placed in a bubble by everyone around them. The bubble is created to shelter them from reality, but reality sooner or later will make the bubble burst. The world is filled with cruelty, ignorance, and violence which causes parents or guardians to create a bubble protecting them from all the bad in the world. There is only so much that our loved ones can do to stop children from realizing the negative parts that come with growing up. With age, growing up with trauma allows children to mature and form their own opinions about the world. As painful as trauma can be, trauma can be a vital part of someone evolving and learning more about themselves. Every coming-of-age story has its trauma, but with experience and revelation, characters are able to become the person they are destined to be.

Growing up in a household where I had to set the standard for being the oldest was traumatic on many levels. My trauma came from being the oldest daughter of two Mexican immigrants who had no idea how to speak the language of the country they were living in. As soon as I could speak English, I was thrown into the world to translate and talk for my parents. If I didn't help out my parents I was seen as an ungrateful daughter, but the amount of pressure I was under was difficult to handle at times. The worst part of all was that I was living in fear of one day having my parents stripped away because of their status in this country. At a young age, I realized how

cruel this world was, and early on I formed my own opinion on the country that I called home. There are still parts of me that live with this fear, but I wasn't fortunate enough to have a bubble protecting me at all times. In fact, I was the bubble that was protecting my parents.

Books that talk about coming of age have always brought some sort of comfort to me. Usually, these books talk about characters who have to face challenges to eventually get to where they are. These characters learn a lot about themselves and through challenges, they are able to find what they're capable of. Everyone has a different trauma or experience, but reading books about characters who have also gone through similar experiences can be comforting to anyone. Growing up, these stories were my favorite to read due to how personal they can get, making me feel like I wasn't alone. High School can be tough for many students, and through this topic, I hope that students are able to identify with the characters and understand that they're not alone.

Introduction to the Unit:

Spend a day or two introducing the unit

To begin the unit, my students will watch the film *The Breakfast Club*. This movie is a rated-R movie which means that I will need their guardians' permission to show them the film. I chose this film because it is a great example of how students in high school from different backgrounds have different issues going on in their lives. In the film, each of the characters is associated with different groups in school, but what they don't realize is that all of them are fighting different battles. I would hope this film would be able to show my students that it doesn't matter who we surround ourselves with because at the end of the day we can share similar traumas. Starting the unit with a film can help them prepare for what's to come in the class and it can also help them get a better understanding of what the unit is going to be on. It

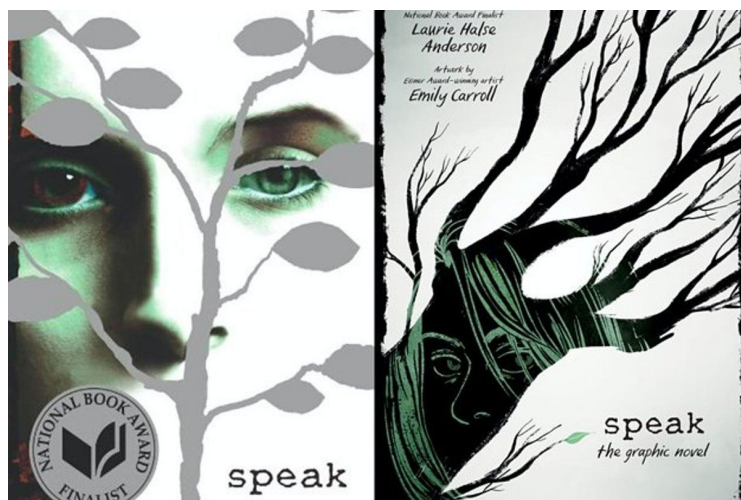
would take a day or two to finish watching the movie, but after the film ends I would put my students in groups and ask them questions regarding the film.

- What is your interpretation of the film?
- What surprised you the most about each of the characters?
- Can you relate to one of the characters?
- Have you seen the film before, if so, do you view it differently?

All of these questions will come in handy for the students because as a homework assignment, I want them to write a paper on what they thought about the movie. I want them to dive deep and think about the meaning behind this film. This paper will allow them to start thinking about themes, main ideas, etc.

Before we start reading the book, I want to start a class discussion where I ask my students their own interpretation of “coming of age.” I want them to think about what this entails, and if they have ever watched a film or read a book that showcases this. If they have read or watched a film, I want them to name them and tell me why they think that they belong in this category. If not, I will bring my own books and name the films that have to do with this topic.

Centerpiece: *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson



[Link for picture](#)

Speak is a book about a girl who was about to start her first year of high school, but everything changed the night she got raped at a party. She completely changed as a person and everyone around her stopped being her friend because of the way she was now acting, but no one bothered to ask what was wrong. I chose this novel because it is a great example of someone who is just getting the hang of life, but had to endure a traumatic event early on. Her life was now changing because of this event and she had to find a way to live with it. “This coming-of-age problem novel is about a young woman finding her own voice, speaking up, and allowing the truth to set her free” (yabookscentral).

Working with text:

The unique part of this book is that it doesn't have chapters. This can be difficult for students to get used to, and because of this, we will read the book in class together. Every student is going to have a different reaction to the book, and I want to make sure that I'm present for them to let out any commentary. As we work through the texts, students should be highlighting important quotes, events, and moments where they felt emotionally connected to the characters.

From the start, students will be given a journal to write about everything that is grasping their attention in the book. Every day before reading a section in the book, I want my students to write about what they think will happen next. Also, I want them to write about what they think so far about the book and if they have any questions about it. This will let me know if they are paying attention to the book, and this will also help them write down what they're feeling. Before the end of each class, I will pull up a quote from the section we read, and their ticket out the door will be their own interpretation of the quote. Some of the quotes will be more detailed than

others, but as a teacher, I want to make sure that my students are getting an idea of what they're reading.

- "I want to confess everything, to hand over the guilt and mistake and anger to someone else."
- "I see a few friends - people I used to think were my friends - but they look away."
- "We fall into clans: Jocks, Country Clubbers, Idiot Savants, Cheerleaders, Human Waste, Eurotrash, Future Fascists of America, Big Hair Chix, the Marthas, Suffering Artists, Thespians, Goths, Shredders. I am clanless."
- "It wasn't my fault. He hurt me. It wasn't my fault. And I'm not going to let it kill me. I can grow."

(examples of quotes that will be their ticket out the door)

Finishing the unit:

To close up the unit, I want my students to focus on a project. Their project will be based on the film we watched in class or the book we read together. If they decide to do their project on the film, I want them to either write a letter to someone who has once misjudged them or write a letter to someone they have misjudged. At the end of the film, Brian leaves a letter to Mr. Vernon explaining how a label doesn't define them. I want my students to reflect on this because everyone has a struggle going on in their life, but a label can get in the way of noticing this. They will have the option to either record a video or write a letter!

If students choose to do their project on *Speak*, I want them to create their own version of how they think the book should have ended. The book ends with Melinda telling Mr. Freeman about what happened to her, but I want my students to dive into their creative thinking skills and write what they think should have happened instead. I'm leaving it up to the students what they want

to write about, but it would be interesting to read about what they would have liked to see at the end of the book.

Outside Readings:

The Distance Between Us (Novel by Reyna Grande)

This autobiography talks about Grande and her two older siblings having to adapt to life in Mexico without their parents. Her parents decided to come to the United States to chase after the American dream, causing them to be away from their families for years. After years of being away from their parents and being treated unfairly by the people around them, Grande and her siblings decided to join their father in the United States. I think students would enjoy reading this book because there are students who might be able to relate to Grande. The main character goes through a lot of changes as she learns to live in a new country, landing the novel in the coming-of-age genre.

The Fault in Our Stars (Novel by John Green)

In this novel, readers follow the life of Hazel Grace. Hazel is a 16-year-old who is struggling with thyroid cancer, but later on, meets a boy named Augustus Waters who is also battling some type of cancer. The readers follow her journey from the beginning and can see the change she goes through throughout her battle with cancer. I think students would be intrigued by this novel because the ending of the book is different from what we think is going to happen. “This novel fits in the coming-of-age genre because it follows the lives of two teenagers from childhood to adulthood” (LitCharts). Their life isn’t the same as regular 16-year-olds, and that is what can grasp students' attention.

We Were Here (Novel by Matt de la Peña)

This novel begins with Miguel talking about the juvenile facility where he was sentenced for a crime he committed. Miguel commits a lot of impulsive decisions throughout his journey, but as readers, we get to follow him on every mistake he makes. As Miguel's journey continues, he starts to become aware of his surroundings and is more aware of the decisions that he has been making. This book is a perfect example of the coming-of-age genre because, throughout Miguel's journey, his attitude toward life starts to change. He pays more attention to the little things and starts embracing the life he is living. I believe that students would enjoy this book because there are students who might share similar situations as the characters that are mentioned. It can teach students that one mistake doesn't have the power to define who we are.

Wonder (R. J. Palacio)

August Pullman was born with a facial difference that, up until now, has prevented him from going to a mainstream school. Starting 5th grade at Beecher Prep, he wants nothing more than to be treated as an ordinary kid—but his new classmates can't get past Auggie's extraordinary face. *Wonder* begins from Auggie's point of view but soon switches to include his classmates, his sister, her boyfriend, and others (Goodreads). This book would be a good coming-of-age story for students to read because it follows the life of August. His trauma is always being bullied by his classmates, but as the book progresses, he learns how to love himself. High school students can benefit from this book because they're at an age where self-esteem is the most important thing for them.

Coming-of-Age films

1. *Lady Bird* (2017) Directed by Greta Gerwing

If I had to recommend a film that ties perfectly to the coming-of-age genre, it would be this film. This film tells the story of Christine “Lady Bird” who is a senior in high school attending an all-girls catholic school. Her relationship with her mother is complicated because they are more alike than they think, but her mother doesn’t notice that Christine is trying her best to be the person her family wants her to be. This film fits perfectly with this genre because it's about a girl who’s trying to figure out what is next in her life. Her journey isn’t easy, but she realizes that her mom wasn’t crazy after all.

2. *Descendants* (2015) Directed by Kenny Ortega

This film is one of my all-time favorites. Many would consider this film to be childish, but there is much more to this film than singing and dancing. I would consider this film a perfect coming to age film because of the growth we see within the characters. This film follows 4 kids who are the product of evil villains. Their whole life they have been training to be like their parents, but that was because they didn’t know anything outside of evil. Once they got the opportunity to go to the land of the good, they realized that they didn’t have to be like their parents. Their mindset began to change and the growth each one of them shows is why I believe this fits in perfectly with the coming-of-age genre.

3. *A Walk to Remember* (2002) Directed by Adam Shankman

As sad as this film can be, this film fits great in the coming-of-age genre. Landon Carter was a boy who didn’t care about school or anything around him. This was until he met Jamie, the girl who had no friends and was considered weird by many. As Jamie and Landon are getting

closer, he starts viewing the world and himself differently. Landon shows tremendous growth, and because of Jamie, he realizes that he doesn't want to be the person he used to be.

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