Brandon Luu

Dr. Warner

ENG 112B

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Freedom, Forgetfulness, and Fantasy:

Learning to Question the World

Opening Question: What would you give up to remember something important?

Literary Centerpiece: *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ishiguro

Grade Level: 10th grade to 12th grade

Overview:

The purpose of this Unit of Study is to introduce students to the idea of questioning the framework of the world around them through the lens of a fantasy novel. In addition to this main idea, the novel contains several other themes such as freedom, sacrifice, love, trust, revenge, and war, accommodated by language that is simple and straightforward. The novel does not feature many young protagonists and is not fast-paced, nor is it a bildungsroman. In fact, the novel's main protagonists are an elderly couple trying to find their son. To make up for this, the novel fulfills many other Exeter qualities, such as varied characters that go beyond typical experiences, complex, well-structured plots, language that is comprehensive and not too dense or simplistic, themes that address broad, difficult truths about the world, and themes that allow for emotional and intellectual growth through personal reflection. Though the novel does have many of the conventions of classic fantasy, such as the story of the quest narrative and cataclysmic responsibilities, it also has many unconventional aspects to it in regards to its complex and imaginative plot and its connection to British history, regarding the war between the Britons and the Saxons. Concerning the fear that the novel may be too far removed for younger readers to understand, there are many familiar literary archetypes that populate the story, such as "The Innocent Embarking on a Journey," "The Archetypal Seeker," The Junex versus the Senex," "The Orphan," and "The Sage." Overall, the novel has many things to offer for young readers, regardless of their backgrounds. The goal of the unit of study would be for the students to be able to identify the different themes of the novel and show understanding and empathy for the characters and plot.

Lesson Plan:

* Before introducing the novel, pose the question to the students: What would you give up to remember something important? Have the students expand on this by asking them to write down their thoughts in a notebook or on a sheet of paper. This will mark the start of the journal they will keep as they read the novel. The purpose of this question is to provide the students with a frame that they can approach the novel from while also personalizing it to their own thoughts and feelings.
* Due to the novel's length (317 pages), it is necessary to assign portions of the novel for the students to read at home. To accommodate their reading, ask the students to do two things: first, have them write down any words they come across that they are not familiar with, or at the very least, ten words that they believe would make good vocabulary terms for themselves, and second, when they are done with their reading, have them record their thoughts about what they have read in their journals. The purpose of the journals is to ensure that they are reading and thinking about the story, which means that the journals will be collected for completion grading. As a result, the students will not have short reading quizzes in class.
* For every set of ten vocabulary terms that the students have come up with for themselves, have the students use each of their vocabulary words in a sentence to demonstrate their understanding of the words. Encourage them to be creative with suggestions such as creating a unifying theme for the sentences or even writing a paragraph or short story using the words.
* Set aside a day of the week to have an in-class reading session. As the teacher, be the first reader to give the students an example of reading-out-loud. After reaching a predetermined part of the in-class reading, ask the class if anyone would like to read and allow volunteers to read to certain point of your choosing. This will give students experience in both reading and listening to literature rather than have the text cooped up in their minds.
* Every week, give the students an in-class creative writing prompt. Have the students write a short piece of fiction based on a theme or topic from the reading of the teacher's choosing. Allow the students at least 30 minutes of writing. When time is up, give the students the option of taking it home to write further, turning it in tomorrow, or turning it in at that moment. The minimum amount of writing is at least one and a half pages. Grading is for completion rather than writing mechanics, but mark the papers for errors regardless so that the students are aware and can build on their mistakes.
* Have a worksheet assignment requesting the students to do historical research on certain aspects of the book taken from reality. This short scavenger hunt assignment will contextualize the students' reading and allow them to connect parts of their reading to their research, presenting them with the notion of using research in their own writing.
* Give the students a creative in-class project: character dissection. Get the students into groups of your choosing and provide them with butcher paper and crayons for them to draw, color, and write their ideas on. Assign each group a different character to work on. When they are done, have the groups present their work. It is recommended to post their works on the wall as it allows them to view their work and keep them thinking about the novel.
* When the class has finished reading the novel, have a movie day. The movie: *Howl's Moving Castle* by Hayao Miyazaki. The reason for this is that the movie has many parallels to the novel in addition to being a popular film among younger audiences.
* The final project for the Unit of Study will be a formal essay. Each students will choose their own thesis based on what they feel most strongly about. Prompt the students to look back on their journal entries for inspiration. Give the students example essays and theses, instruct them on how to form a thesis and structure an essay, and advise them personally by checking on each student's progress. Allow the students 2-3 weeks to work on the essay, making checkpoints on the calendar for rough drafts. Grading will be based on a formal rubric provided to the students.
* To close the unit, once again ask the students the question: What would you give up to remember something important? Have the students take note of whether their answers have changed since the beginning of the unit and have them reason why that might be.

Closing Thoughts:

Through their assignments and journal entries, there should be a clear course of progression in the students' learning, specifically in the reflection of the reading and their own personal feelings along with the ability to empathize and expand to their thinking to broader themes about the world, questioning the framework of their lives and becoming aware of global issues such as war and racial prejudice. In addition, the assignments should improve the quality of the students writing and creative processes due in part to their introspective thinking and class exercises.

Supplementary Books for Consideration:

*Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones

*Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher* by Bruce Coville

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* by J.K. Rowling

*The BFG* by Roald Dahl

*Inkspell* by Cornelia Funke

*Jinx On The Divide* by Elizabeth Kay