Alec McAuley

Professor Warner

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Under Pressure: The Positives and Negatives of Sports

Overall: Positives and Negatives of Sports
 Whether you are a fan or a player sports, have a significant role amongst society that creates a passion for winning and losing. The idea of sports to some people is a simple game with an inevitable outcome, but to others, sports is a way of life. Throughout my life, I've had a strong passion for sports and learned that in many cases being a student-athlete can have both negative and positive effects on a students life. During my time as a student-athlete, I learned how to work hard on and off the field to achieve greatness, while feeling an overbearing amount of pressure to attain various adult figures high expectations. To connect with student-athletes in a classroom environment, I think it is essential for teachers to incorporate young adult sports literature.
 The sports literature for young adults uses Exeter qualities from Exeter Universities list of criteria that describe what makes a good young adult literature book. One of the primary Exeter qualities that exemplifies an excellent young adult novel is a character that reflects experiences of the teen readers. The role of a teenage student athlete protagonist relates to the experiences high school student-athletes may face throughout their time as a player. Although non-student athletes may find it hard to connect to young adult sports literature, the Exeter quality of themes in the novel show students how to face any struggles life may throw their way. A high school student-athlete must continuously aim for perfection and dedicate many hours of their time to achieve a starting spot on the team. A student-athlete that wants to continue competing at the collegiate level will use even more time during the off-season to practice to be above average. Sports pushes students to have a hard-working mentality and young adult sports literature applies this mentality to any situation for a person wanting to achieve greatness.
Introduction to the Unit:
 To elaborate more on the importance of setting goals and dedication I will show my students the motivational video *Quiet Confidence* made by Texas Christian Universities baseball program. The video contains just what it takes to be a student-athlete at the NCAA division one level and is truly inspiring. From there I will write down the recurring themes of teamwork, dedication, and motivation within the video and ask my students to write a meaningful goal they wish to achieve by the time they graduate. From there I will ask my students to write down three ways they will make their ultimate goal. I will then ask my students to share their goals with the class by collaborating with their neighbors on ideas to further strengthen their pathway to greatness. Therefore student-athletes have a chance to speak with fellow student-athletes on their goals to further enhance themselves as a player, while non-student-athletes can further their own life goals amongst each other as well.
Launching the Unit:
 To further strengthen my argument on the positives and negatives of sports I will then show my students scenes from the Netflix Original sports drama *Amateur*, which tackles the adverse effects of corruption and greed that comes with the journey to NCAA amateur basketball. The movie tells the story of a fourteen-year-old phenom who's recruited from his small town high school in the projects to an elite prep school. The coach from Liberty prep school persuades Terron into leaving his friends and family behind to pursue a chance at stardom but soon faces the realities of competitive sports. From there Terron finds himself overwhelmed with the pressures of competitive sports and the high expectations from his coaches and father. Terron's father was a student-athlete throughout high school and junior college. His father pushes him to the limit and even receives money from Terron's coach to further his career, which is illegal. Terron soon finds himself out of touch with his education and in a fight to continue playing Basketball due to his father's selfish actions. Although Terron faces many obstacles throughout the film, he realizes just how much he loves the game of basketball and finds a way to play again. Therefore the film relates to the pressures students may face from adult figures, while warning students about how fast life can take a turn for the worst, which encourages students to press on through life's challenges to achieve their ultimate goal.
Centerpiece Work:
 The centerpiece I chose for my unit of study is the novel *Heart of a Champion* written by Carl Deuker. Deuker tells the story of two close friends Jimmy Winter and Seth Barnam. Seth can only dream of being as talented as Jimmy, but the two baseball fanatics have a friendship that should last forever. Jimmy’s father is an alcoholic throughout the novel and strives to perfect his son's craft on the baseball field. But when Jimmy is at the peak of stardom during his Varsity year of high school, he finds himself in his father’s shoes. Jimmies father was a minor league baseball player and pushed his son to the limit. As Seth began to rise to his potential on the field and in the classroom, Jimmy tragically dies in a car accident when he decides to drive home drunk. I chose this novel because Seth and Jimmy’s baseball journey is compared to my own along with many other student-athletes. The story revolves around Seth’s successions after joining the baseball team and Jimmy’s inevitable doom due to his father's selfish drunkenness. Therefore the novel focuses on the central idea that sports can be a decisive role in a teenagers life as well as a negative one while sharing relatable experiences to the students.
Extending the Unit:
 The students will read about how the differences between Jimmy and Seth’s home life results in the conclusion of their future goals. Although Seth did lose his father at a young age, his mother stepped into the role and created a loving environment for her son. While Jimmy is raised in a much different home with an alcoholic father, who dwells on his past stardom, which translates into his obsession to push Jimmy to his full potential. To elaborate more on the importance of creating a home that promotes positive values and perseverance to achieve life goals I will have my students write down what makes a positive home environment and what to do if you do not have one. We will then discuss how extracurricular activities can be an escape or necessarily a replacement for a student's broken home life. It is important to realize that students will write down similar characteristics because every child needs a right place to call home. Finally, I will assign my students to complete a one-page paper concerning the attributes of a kind home within the novel *Heart of a Champion*.

Final Assignment:
 The final assignment will be a four-page essay that contains two parts focusing on arguing themes of good qualities that help students to achieve their goals and the importance of loving home life. In the paper, the students must use the novel *Heart of a Champion* and one more outside source to support their argument, while incorporating their own opinion on the subject. I will use questions on the prompt such as are extracurricular and team-related activities a good escape for students with a rough home life? Is friendship and teamwork important for the development of a good work ethic towards your life goals? Why or why not? Explain. The essay will open the minds of every student to the deeper meaning behind Carl Deukers young adult sports novel.
I have created a list of various sports novels that further elaborate on themes relating to the pressures of sports, the importance of a healthy home, and work ethic:
*Ball Don't Lie* by Matt De La Pena: A seventeen-year-old named Sticky is a white man living on the street's and due to his superior basketball skill is accepted by his black peers. Sticky lives a rough life in a world of crime and hostility, but his gentle girlfriend Anh-thu serves as a home to his rugged lifestyle.
*Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher: A high school that privileges student-athletes and disciplines the rest of their students. In the novel, T.J. Jones is one of the many students frowned upon due to their choices not to participate in high school athletics. T.J. eventually rebels against the the negativity and creates the high school’s first swim team. He recruits a group of misfits within the high school as they attempt to create a successful team and eventually earn their letterman's jackets.
*Slam* by Nick Hornby: A fifteen-year-old skateboarding whiz named Sam hits a bump in the road when his girlfriend gets pregnant. Luckily, Sam has Tony Hawk, the wor1d's greatest skater, to talk to him from the giant poster on Sam's wall. Sam faces the obstacles of teenage pregnancy and uses his passion for skateboarding as an escape from his problems.
*Gym Candy* by Carl Deuker. Houghton Mifflin, 2007. Mick Johnson feels the overwhelming pressure of his father’s expectations. His father Mike Johnson was a player in the NFL and expects his son to continue down the same path. Soon Mick finds himself popping supplements to achieve his father's expectations and gain the strength he needs. Eventually, supplements were not enough, and he moves onto injecting himself with steroids. Due to the effects of steroids, Mick becomes moody and finds himself kicked out of most games due to his anger. In the end, Mick's mood swings take over, and he attempts to commit suicide.
*High Heat* by Carl Deuker: A high school closer Shane Hunter has a passion for the game of baseball but is soon faced with a world of struggle when his father is arrested for money laundering. Shane soon faces the struggles of poverty and a life without a father. He is forced to move forward and leave his troubles behind on the baseball field. Shane’s story revolves around themes of loss, recovery, and renewal.

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