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ENGL 112B

8 May 2019

Dealing with Grief: How to Cope and Searching for Closure

**Rationale:**

Grief is a universal feeling that many people have experienced. Despite everyone experiencing grief, the coping process varies for each person. I wanted to explore the feelings of grief because it is such a universal feeling yet how it’s handled is complex due to various outside factors. Depending on the factors, it impacts the coping process and how to deal with grief in a positive or negative way.

In high school, I felt emotionally lost. There was a lack of guidance from the adult figures in my life because no one wanted to address grief and any other sensitive emotion synonymous to it. The courses I took were enriching and beneficial but only on an academic level. They covered broad themes and ideas but never went into the specifics of issues such as grief. I had a firm support group from my friends, having their help in dealing with grief wasn’t the same because they were just as lost as I was. It never truly provided me any clarity on facing grief and until I entered university, I treated it like it was a taboo. My high school experience made me have a narrow view of how grief is processed so creating a unit of study based on it will add more humanity to literature.

Tapping into grief within literature is important for high school students because they are attending class every day and a part of what they learn at school should be applicable to reality. There is a lot of uncertainty for students because they’re mature enough to have a firm awareness of grief but are still young and have not experienced everything in life. Exploring grief in literature and delving into the multiple ways to cope with it can help high school students connect the unit of study with their own personal lives.

*Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens is the centerpiece for the topic of grief because it shows the coping process from opposite spectrums and delves into the factors behind it. The protagonist is Pip, a poor orphan whose dream is to become a gentleman. Despite the hardships he faces and betrayal from those around him, he never loses sight of his dream and maintains his moral-based persona. On the other hand, Ms. Havisham is a contrasting character who’s crazy and constantly wearing a wedding dress. She spent the later part of her life holding a grudge against the man who left her on their wedding day and uses that hatred to condition Estella into continuing her spiteful legacy by breaking the heart of men who love her. The story shows two different characters experiencing the same emotions, yetthey process it differently.

Covering grief in a unit of study is helpful and will help high school students be able to view it as a normal feeling rather than experience what I felt in high school. The exploration of grief through understanding how to cope with it, searching for closure, and the impact from others will also help them expand on themes and ideas attached to it. Gaining clarity and being able to expand on these ideas based on grief will not only help students connect with other works of literature but will also allow them to personally connect their own feelings and experiences with it.

**Introduction to the Unit**

General Discussion

Start with a general discussion in small groups for the students first before transitioning into a class-wide discussion. Each discussion will be timed and focused on 1-2 questions asked by the teacher where each student will take turns discussing their own thoughts and opinions. After discussion within the small group is done, it will transition into a brief class discussion where students volunteer to participate. If students don’t feel comfortable with sharing their own experiences, they can also use their general assumption based off of what they know from media and books to participate. Here are a few questions for students to answer and discuss:

* What causes grief?
* How do you/people cope with grief?
* Does everyone experience grief the same way?
* What kind of impact does grief have on you/people?
* Is grief a positive or negative feeling? Both?
* What outside elements factor into grief?

The purpose of starting the unit with this discussion is to warm students up to the themes in *Great Expectations* and the YA literature pairings. Furthermore, asking these questions provides a starting point for students to develop ideas about the unit and continue to do so as class progresses.

Media

Once students have an idea about grief from the general discussion, I will show them a clip of a South Park episode that is about *Great Expectations*. It mixes both the contemporary show itself and the traditional Charles Dickens story. Showing students a modern adaptation of *Great Expectations* will help them understand the gist of the book in a format that’s more relevant to their interests without boring them. They will also be able to visually see how grief is handled and enhance the ideas they got from the discussions.

SSW

Students will spend 5-10 minutes doing quick writes about:

1. The ideas they came up with during the small group and class discussion.
   1. Were there any ideas from their classmates that sparked their interest? Why?
      1. What did you hear about in class that you didn’t thought of before?
   2. Is there anything you wanted to add to yours, or your classmates’, ideas that you didn’t get a chance to do during the discussion?
2. Based on just the South Park clip, why do you think Pip is so polite and kind despite experiencing loss and being mistreated by those around him?

The purpose of doing the SSW early on in the unit is for them to have a record of what they’re connecting and understanding so far before they read *Great Expectation*. They will go back to these quick-writes at the end of the unit to compare and contrast with what they’ve learnt.

**Extending *Great Expectations***

Readings:

Most of the reading for the novel will be done outside of class. Occasionally, class time will be dedicated to reading it in class. When doing in-class reading, it will be done through popcorn reading. It will encourage students to participate and benefit those who pay more attention to reading in an auditory style.

SSW:

Part 1: Students will spend 3-5 minutes writing down their thoughts about the assigned reading before class discussion begins. Any thoughts, concerns, questions, ideas, and theories are encouraged.

Part 2: During the last 5 minutes of class, students will write down what ideas interested them and any other feedback about what was discussed in class. What they’ve wrote down can be used for the next class discussion.

Class Discussion:

It will center on previous class/last night’s readings and SSW. Like the introduction of the unit, students will get into pairs or small groups and discuss *Great Expectations* amongst themselves first. The purpose of these discussions is to provide a flow of thoughts and ideas that will help students prepare for their in-class essay. After talking amongst themselves, they will come back to discuss as a class. Students can jump in to raise any questions or commentaries about the reading while taking notes from what everyone has to say. Students are required to participate at least once during each discussion in order to practice articulating their thought process.

**Outside Reading Activity**

Small Group Reading Assignment:Tumblr Book Report

1. Students will form a group of 4-5 people and make a unanimous choice from 5 YA novels to read together. They will collaborate in planning out the readings, which will be done outside of class, within their perspective groups and discuss it with each other.
   1. Implementing YA novels through small group readings will facilitate the reading process for students along with helping them get ideas off of one another during discussions.
2. While students are reading or have finished reading, they will collaboratively work together on doing a book talk through Tumblr. This is a project in which they will talk about their respective YA novel on social media.
   1. The Tumblr blog will include:
      1. Information or a biography of the author. It should be a brief paragraph about the author including 1-2 relevant points about them that connects with the students’ YA novel.
      2. A summary of the novel. Students will talk about the plot and highlight the critical parts of the book without giving away the whole story.
      3. The major themes. Students will explore three different themes within the story that connect with *Great Expectations* and explain the significance. They will use relevant quotes from their YA novel to support their claim.
      4. Character analysis. Students will pick two major characters from the story to compare and contrast the experience of grief. The chosen characters will be briefly introduced through background information. Their characterization will be expanded through quotes that highlight their personalities. Identify what their conflict is and explain. How do they cope with it? Is their approach similar or different with one another? Do they get closure?
      5. Conclude book talk with what students learned from the reading. Have them consider clarity and understanding of grief through connecting YA novels with *Great Expectations*.
3. Each group will do a brief presentation of their Tumblr book talk on the Smartboard.

YA Novel Choices

*We Were Here* by Matt de la Peña

Miguel, Mong and Rondell are adolescent boys who come from different circumstances but meet at the same place. It illustrates three different approaches to grief, how it’s dealt with, and the differentiating outcomes.

*A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving

A story about the life of two best friends, John Wheelright and Owen Meany. John faces loss and has to cope with losing multiple close people in his life while Owen gets involved with conflicts that clash with his own morale.

*History is All You Left Me* by Adam Silveira

Griffin faces the death of his best friend and ex-boyfriend, Theo. He experiences confusion and struggles to find closure as he is faced with having to confront his past.

*Looking for Alaska* by John Green

A group of high school students struggle with the reality of losing one of their friends, Alaska. They are unsure of whether it was an accident or a suicide.

*Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher

A mix-raced high schooler struggles with his identity and searches for hope through creating a swim team comprised of his school’s outcasts.

**Closing the Unit**

Assessment:

Students will have a whole class period dedicated to doing an in-class essay on to see what they’ve taken away from the unit. The prompt will center on the canonical piece and students are highly encouraged to use their YA literary pairing to help convey their claim.

Prompt: “Compare and contrast a character from *Great Expectations* and a character from your chosen YA book through the problems they face. How do they cope? Is there closure?”

Final Project:

Each student will do an individual presentation on a pop-culture piece that connects with the themes discussed in *Great Expectations* and the paired YA novels. The pop-culture piece can be a movie, a TV show, an anime, and cartoons. The purpose of concluding the unit with this project is for students to have fun and play around with the ideas they’ve developed throughout the unit and apply it towards something they’re immersed in on a daily basis. The presentation can be done on any technological or artistic medium, such as a video skit or a poster, as long as it can be connected to the board for the technological medium.

Works Cited

Southparkfan2003. “Pip (REUPLOADED).” *YouTube*, YouTube, 20 April 2019 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXgXOQV7YTk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXgXOQV7YTk).

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