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Grade 10 Honors English/American Literature

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Title/Short Abstract: Black Lives Matter: The theme of social injustice in Pat Conroy's *The Water is Wide*

This unit will focus on the issue of racial inequality in America today using a seminal work by South Carolina's own Pat Conroy. In fact, Conroy was an English teacher at this very high school in the late 1960s before accepting a teaching position in a one-room school house on near-by Daufuskie Island in 1969. His year on the racially segregated, isolated island and his battle against systemic racism is the backdrop for this book that launched the career of this important writer. This book also launched the career of many teachers who were required to read Conroy's powerful memoir in education classes throughout the United States in the 1970s.

Students will read the novel, reflect on key passages in their journals, interview those who knew and worked with Pat Conroy, visit the places in Beaufort County that are essential to developing a better understanding of the connection between place and learning. Students will also have the opportunity to listen to several speakers who directly experienced racial inequality while growing up in South Carolina during the Civil Rights movement. In addition to *The Water is Wide*, students will read Thoreau's "On Civil Disobedience," and an excerpt from his essay "A plea for Captain John Brown."

South Carolina ELA standards require Disciplinary Literary (DL). Students are encouraged to excel in "reading, writing, communicating, thinking critically, and performing in meaningful, relevant ways within and across disciplines are essential practices for accessing and deeply understanding content." In this unit, students will address the theme of racial inequality in a significant literary work while experiencing the place and participants in the narrative in which the novel is set —the very place in which the students live as well.

Teacher Note: I am aware of the challenges facing a white, male teacher talking to his students about issues of race from a perspective of privilege. Beaufort High School contains an even split of white and black students together making up 96% of the entire student body. I know that I will bring my own personal biases into discussions that may complicate the matter. However, with that being said, I know that it is better to address the issue of systemic racism than to shy away from it. I also know that it is essential to bring others (teachers, parents, students, community members) into the discussion with the intent of giving them a voice in this important discussion in a region of the country that played such a prominent part in narrative.

Teacher Note: Slavery, of course, was an abdominal institution to Thoreau who denigrated its existence until his death in 1862. And now, 154 years later, in August of 2016, I watch a CNN news report about 40 activist groups in the United States demanding slave reparations for

descendants of slaves living in America today. The struggle continues. The theme of systemic racism and social and economic injustice is still current and will be explored in this unit.

South Carolina State Standards: <https://ed.sc.gov/scdoe/assets/file/programs-services/59/documents/ELA2015SCCCRStandards.pdf>

Duration and Objectives: My English Honors sophomores will begin this course in August and take their final exam in December. The class will meet for 90 minutes each day, and I anticipate this unit will take 3 weeks to complete, just in time for the Pat Conroy Literary Festival held in Beaufort for four days beginning on October 20. The purpose of this festival is to celebrate his writing and the people and the natural beauty of the lowcountry that permeates the entire canon of Pat Conroy. Pat Conroy died in March of this year, and his funeral was attended by many Beaufort High School students, two of whom served as altar boys.

Already in the small town of Beaufort, there are posters and conversations about this upcoming event. Students will no doubt have a great opportunity to learn more about this former teacher who was fired by the Beaufort School District for his ideas that were perceived as radical and for his unorthodox teaching methods.

Students taking this class during second semester may be at a slight disadvantage since the Conroy Literary Festival will have ended several months earlier. However, I do foresee inviting several first semester students to visit the class to talk about their visit to the festival and to share what they learned about Conroy and especially the theme of social injustice which often is the focus of his work.

I plan on taking students each semester on a field trip in to visit Daufaskie Island with Pat Conroy's friend and photographer Billy Keyserling who photographed Conroy, his students, the natural beauty of the island, and the troubling poverty in which the students lived.

During this unit students will have the opportunity to

- Explore their own reaction to racial and social inequality.
- Respond in their journals and class discussion to historical and local events relevant to Conroy's text.
- Converse with individuals who experienced or witnessed the social injustice of racial inequality.
- Converse with individuals who lived during the historical events important to the novel such as the death of MLK, Robert Kennedy Jr., segregated schools, and the Vietnam War.
- Interview individuals who knew Pat Conroy and others who were the basis for characters in *The Water is Wide*.
- Connect Conroy's memoir thematically with Thoreau's treatise against injustice of all kinds in "On Civil Disobedience."
- Discuss whether or not violence is alternative to passive resistance in a world that reveres pacifists such as Gandhi and MLK.
- Explore the use and meaning of terms and phrases used today to discuss race in American such as colorblind, white privilege, gentrification, and post-racial age.

- Write an extended response exploring one or more of the ideas or terms that students encountered during this Unit.

Part I of Unit: Pre-Reading Activities

Teacher Note: *Students will have read this book outside of class before Day 1 of this unit begins. For homework each night, they will be required to reread the chapters that will be the subject of the daily class discussions.* The terms in Appendix A will be assigned several days before the unit begins as well.

Day 1 Sharing in pairs and Journaling

- With a partner, try to define the term racism using your own words (In other words, I don't want you to sound like a dictionary.)
- Discuss what you think the term "systemic racism" means.
- Individually, respond to the following prompt/Journal Entry #1

The situation—*We hear almost every day in the news someone claiming that "Black Lives Matter." Quite often this claim is followed by another claim: "All Lives Matter." You probably know what happens next. A heated discussion breaks out. All too often these words are followed by acts of violence. Both sides seem unable to understand their opponents' point of view.*

Consider—*What is implied in the statement that "Black Lives Matter." What is implied in the statement "All lives matter." Does the race of the speaker change the meaning of the statement in any way? How do you respond when you hear either or both of these statements? Do you have a personal experience related to either or both of these statements? Discuss.*
- Full class discussion of journal entries and sharing with partners.
- Begin 1 minute identifications of terms assigned the previous week (see Appendix A).

Day 2 Journaling and continuation of mini-presentations on *The Water is Wide* to establish historical, geographical, and local setting of the memoir.

- Journal Entry #2: Consider *the conversation yesterday with your partner about Systemic Racism. How would you define this term in simple terms? How is it different from just "plain old racism?" If you pay close attention to the news, you will often hear the term "systemic racism" quite frequently. Have you ever heard the term before? Can you think of a situation (personal or not) that you feel qualifies as systemic racism? Discuss.*

- Share responses with the class.
- Complete 1 minute identification of terms assigned to give us important background material on the reading of *The Water is Wide*.

Day 3 Begin discussion of Chapters 1 and 2 of the novel. The Essential Questions: What is Americanism and how is the concept of this word important to Chapter 1? Should we help others in distant lands when there is great need close to home? Does the skin color of teacher have play any part in whether or not he or she is an effective teacher? Does it matter to you?

- Journal Entry #3: Situation—*Recently presidential hopeful Donald Trump starting talking about the importance of Americanism. He never defined the term, but many of his supporters seem to know and believe in this concept. Consider: What do you think Americanism means? What exactly is an American? Is it simply someone who was born in the United States? Or is it more than that? What do you think are some of the advantages/disadvantages of Americanism. Would you ever consider going abroad in the Peace Corps? Do you have any interest in becoming a VISTA volunteer? Discuss.*
- Share responses to prompt.
- Begin class discussions of Chapters 1 and 2. Use the following questions to enter into the text. Ultimately, the discussion should arrive at core questions such as: What evidence from the text suggests that systemic racism exists in the Beaufort School District in 1960s? What evidence from the text suggests that other Constitutional rights were being bypassed by school officials at this time in history?
- **CHAPTER 1**
 - What is Conroy's attitude toward Dr. Henry Piedmont? What details from the text can you use to support your claim?
 - Why does Dr. Piedmont think that Conroy should accept a teaching position on Yamacraw Island?
 - What is Conroy's attitude toward the natural setting of Yamacraw Island?
 - Based upon Conroy's DICTION, what kind of person or narrator do you think he is? Someone you like? Trust? Don't like? Don't understand? Discuss.
 - How do students react to the important current events that are taking place around them in the late 1960s at Beaufort High School?
- **CHAPTER 2**
 - What is the effect of the description of the deputy superintendent Ezra Bennington at the beginning of the chapter?
 - What does the students' prior knowledge about geography suggest about the quality of their education?

- Why do you suppose that Conroy often resorts to humor and hyperbolic language in his narration?
- Does this use of exaggeration detract or enhance the power of the narrative?

Day 4 Journaling and Collaborative Learning activity. Focus discussion on Chapters 3-5 of *The Water is Wide*. Students will then review the Interview Handout (Appendix B)

- Journal Entry #4 *Consider: If we were to go to any church in Beaufort County this weekend, it would, more than likely, contain a predominantly homogenous grouping of people. For example, the church would mostly contain black or white or Hispanic worshipers. Why do you think this tends to be the case? Do you personally attend a church in which people of different races attend? If not, why do you think people seem to be more comfortable worshipping with “their own kind?”*

- Begin small group activity in which students will collaborate in groups of 3 to discuss the significance of each of the following passages:

Chapter 3: “Give them books and they shall read. . . . If a black had entered his church, church would have closed down automatically.”

Chapter 4: “At the back of the house was a very large tattered Confederate flag . . . and I was only passing by.”

Chapter 5: “White guilt, that nasty little creature . . . because I saw in them a reflection of myself.”

- **Homework:** Students will review passages containing references to Bernie Schein. Students will write 5 open-ended questions they would like to ask Mr. Schein during the class interview with him tomorrow. (See Appendix C).

Day 5 Students will interview Bernie Schein, a close friend of Pat Conroy and character in *The Water is Wide*. If time permits, students will respond to the interview in their journals.

Day 6 Journaling and Collaborative Learning activity. Focus on Chapters 6-7. Introduce Interview Assignment.

- Journal Entry #6. *Consider: Let’s get right down to it. The Confederate Flag. Flying the Confederate flag. Publically displaying the flag? Is it a symbol of hatred? Is it a symbol of one’s heritage? Is it both? Neither? What say ye?*

- *Begin small group activity in which students will collaborate in groups of 3 to locate a key passage that reflects a major theme, idea, or conflict in the novel:*

Chapter 6: Students will select a key passage.

Chapter 7: Students will select key passage.

- Group sharing of responses with the class.
- Introduce Interview Assignment (Appendix C)

Day 7 Journaling and focused discussion on Chapters 8-10 of TWIW.

- Journal Entry #7 *Revisit your journal entry from yesterday. Now, consider the prompt from the perspective of someone of a different race? Does your point of view change? If so, do you think it's a good thing that your perspective has changed? If our perspective has changed, what, if anything, should you learn from the fact that our opinions change sometimes when we change our perspective? Are there just some basic truths that transcend issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion?*
- Focus on the description in the passage "The boat ride to Yamacraw [fictional name of Daufaskie Island] . . . majestic flight in search of more private feeding grounds."
- Students will take a walk to nearby Crystal Lake to read this passage aloud (and others) that focus on the natural beauty of the Sea Islands of SC. After reading aloud we will spend some time identifying some of the birds (i.e. herons, egrets) that Conroy focuses on in this passage. Students will then walk to the Beaufort River for a period of silent observation.

Day 8 Focus on Chapters 11-12 of *The Water is Wide*.

- Journal Entry #8 Situation: Pat Conroy was paid to be a teacher for the Beaufort County School. He blatantly refused to follow District policies regarding his teaching practices with the segregated children on Yamacraw and ultimately, he was fired. Consider: If he truly cared about his students, shouldn't he have been more compliant to the expectations his superiors at the school district? Isn't it true that by standing for what he believed in, he was hurting his students in a long run by only being their teacher for one year? Is it possible that doing the "right thing" sometimes requires compromising one's values? How do you know when to stick to your values and when to compromise them? Discuss?

Day 9 Introduce essay and begin discussion of "On Civil Disobedience"

- Journal Entry #9: Consider: Would this book have had the same impact on you if the teacher were a black man? A black woman? Does the race of the teacher even matter to

the story? [Yes I am aware that this book is autobiographical in nature, but still I want you to think about what I am asking.] How do you respond to critics who say this book is just another example of the “superior white male” coming to rescue of the black community out of a sense of guilt or for some other misguided reason? Wouldn’t the students have been better off with a skilled teacher who did not provoke others into firing him? Wouldn’t they have been better off with a teacher who would have been their teacher for more than just one year? What say ye?

Day 10 Students will observe a panel discussion with a group of local individuals connected to the novel, Pat Conroy, and to the historical setting of the novel. I anticipate one or more of the following individuals will be able to attend: Mr. Herb Glaze, current administrator at BHS who grew up in a local, segregated school; Mrs. Sallie Ann Robinson who was a student of Pat Conroy’s on Daufuskie Island. Michael Glaze, a former student at Battery Creek High School (nephew of Herb Glaze) who remembers dreading integration; Mrs. Kirkland, a former classmate of Pat Conroy’s; Coach Clifford from BHS whose brother became the basis for a major character in Conroy’s *The Lords of Discipline*; Assistant Principal Jennifer Woods who was greatly influenced by Gene Norris, Conroy’s high school English teacher at BHS in the early 1960s. Billie Keyserling, friend of Conroy and photographer who took many of the iconic photos of Mr. “Patroy” with his students on Daufuskie Island.

Homework: Read Thoreau’s “On Civil Disobedience.” Write down a passage that you would like to share with the class because you strongly agree or disagree with it. Don’t be afraid to write down a passage that you just can’t make any sense of. It just might become one of your favorites.

Day 11 Begin class discussion of Thoreau’s “On Civil Disobedience.” Introduce essay topic.

- Journal Entry #9 Consider: Is conformity a good thing, or bad? Neither? Do you tend to conform to the expectations of others or do you tend to follow the “beat of your own drum” as Henry David Thoreau said? Do you think our history books are filled with conformists or nonconformists? What do you do when you find yourself in a situation in which everyone around you is doing the same thing and you feel compelled to go in a different direction? How do you make decisions when you experience inner turmoil to make the “right decision?”
- Students will work in pairs to respond to a selected passage (such as the one below) that reflects an essential in the text. Encourage students not to use the passage they selected for homework. Next, they need to summarize the passage in 1-2 simple sentences. Next, they should give one societal advantage and then one disadvantage if Thoreau’s words were to be put into action. After completing the activity for the passage below, they need to select one passage of their own to summarize and respond to.

Sample Passage

Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy is worse than the evil. It makes it worse. Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority?

Day 12 Complete discussion of “On Civil Disobedience” and contrast with the conflicts within *The Water is Wide*.

- Journal Entry #10 Freewrite on what you think you will take-away from this unit on the writings of Thoreau and Conroy. Did any of your views change after this unit? Do you now have a better understanding of what you believe with regard to issues of social injustice and societal expectations? Did this unit make you feel angry or uncomfortable in any way? I hope you will honestly reflect on any aspect of this class or unit over the past several weeks.
- Continue sharing of responses from previous class.

Homework: Read selected passages from “A Plea for John Brown.” Also, students will be given a handout containing the background information that lead to Brown’s arrest at Harper’s Ferry, WV.

Day 13 Wrap up and Final Thoughts on Unit

- Compare “On Civil Disobedience” with “A plea for John Brown” Essential Question: Is Violence a desirable alternative when passive resistance fails? Does Thoreau deserve the inclination we have to juxtapose him with Gandhi and MLK?
- Introduce the Unit Essay Topic (Appendix 3)

Teacher Note: If time permits, I plan to add MLK’s essay “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” into this unit followed by a trip to the Penn Center on nearby St. Helena Island where Dr. King would spend part of his summers. It was at the Penn Center that MLK wrote his “I Have a Dream Speech.” It would seem quite appropriate to introduce students to MLK’s belief that only moral laws should be obeyed.

Possible Field Trips

A trip to Daufuskie Island with Billie Keyserling, a friend of Pat Conroy and photographer who took photos of Conroy at the school.

Attend the Pat Conroy Literary Festival in October 2016 at the USC Beaufort Campus.

Grading of Unit Assessments:

- 10 Journal Entries/10 pts each: **100 pts**
- End of Unit Essay: **100 pts**
- Personal Interview Assignment **100 pts**
- 60 Second IDs and Class Participation: **30 pts**

Required Daily Materials

- School issued tablet with reading selections saved on desktop
- School or personal copy of Pat Conroy's *The Water is Wide*
- Student Journal

Additional Resources

Seltzer, Catherine. *Understanding Pat Conroy*. Columbia: U of South Carolina, 2015. Print. *Understanding Contemporary Literature*.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/racism-commentary-obama-trump/481329/> (excellent discussion of the language used today to discuss race in America)

<http://uncpressblog.com/2012/10/26/video-sallie-ann-robinson-on-being-pat-conroys-student-on-daufuskie-island/--> (interview with Sallie Robinson, student of Pat Conroy's on Daufuskie)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuUeVCc06SY> (beautiful book trailer with photos taken by Beaufort mayor, Billie Keyserling and interviews with Sallie Robinson and Pat Conroy)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjY69hO0fxk> (Pat Conroy introduces a documentary about the Corridor of Shame—the underperforming schools along the I-95 corridor in SC.)

<http://projects.aljazeera.com/2014/south-carolina-schools/> (a detailed account of the Corridor of Shame)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSjS5PVe8EQ> (powerful photo essay contrasting schools/students of privilege with impoverished ones. It's heavy handed, but still will generate great discussion.)

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20110419/PC1602/304199932> (article about student from the corridor of shame who wrote to President Obama about the condition of her school. She received a new one. . . a school that is.)

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-obama-school-girlfeb25-story.html> (another news story about Ty'Sheoma Bethea, who wrote a letter to the president about her school.)

Appendix A

60 second IDs

Students have exactly 60 seconds to identify one of the following terms/people/allusion found in *The Water is Wide*. Through these identifications, students will be better able to experience a more in depth reading of the novel. If you want to really impress me (and go for a knock-my-socks-off A) be prepared to connect your ID with the novel in some way.

For example—If you had to ID Copernicus, you would say something like: Nicolaus Copernicus 1473-1543. He is responsible for promoting the theory that the earth and the other planets in our solar system revolve around the sun (an 8/10 response). For a 10/10 response you would need to say something like: When Conroy arrives on Yamacraw Island he is shocked about his students complete lack of knowledge including 18 students who agreed with the “pre-Copernian” view of the university.

You have not only have impressed me, but you have a better understanding of the depth of Conroy’s shock at his students’ ability level.

Therefore, you will receive one of the following grades for this activity: 10/10, 8/10, or 0/10. You will draw your assigned term out of a hat and have at least a night to prepare to enlighten us. You may use an index card if absolutely

necessary, but I would prefer that you do not read to us.

Appomattox	Peace Corps
Bernie Schein	Pete Seeger
Brown vs. The Board of Education	Sidney Poitier
Bull Connor	South Carolina’s Corridor of Shame
Dachau	Power of Positive Thinking (book)
Emancipation Proclamation	VISTA
Eugene McCarthy	April 4, 1968
Gene Norris	Wilt Chamberlin
Greensboro Sit In	Willie Mays
Horatio Alger	
James Brown	
Patois	

Appendix B

Personal Interview Assignment

Interview a member of your family (or community) that you think might have a lot to say about any the issues we have discussed or journaled about in this unit on *The Water Is Wide*.

All papers must be typed and follow MLA format.

Parts of this assignment

1. **(25 pts)** A one-page, typed page profile of the person being interviewed. This should explain why you interviewed this person and what experience (s) has made this person feel strongly about the topic. The profile will contain some of the facts, dates, and details that you will want to know before you actually complete the formal interview.
2. **(10 pts)** A photo (or original illustration) of this person (approx. a 5 x 7 photo)
3. **(40 pts)** 10 questions (all open-ended). Ask open ended questions to generate the most thought-provoking responses. For example: *What impact did being the first to attend an integrated school have on you? Compare that question with: Did you like going to an integrated school?* It is very important to ask appropriate follow-up questions to your planned questions. Sometimes your follow-up questions might simply require a yes-no response or simple point of clarification. **Quite often, an interview might take you in a new direction than you had originally planned. Don't be afraid to see where it takes you.** (50 pts)
4. **(25 pts)** Use Question/Answer format. Questions underlined. Skip a Space. Responses in italics. Focus on mechanics, grammar, and spelling, MLA format

*** If you decide to record the interview, be sure to ask for permission. Sometimes people will not feel as open to respond if they feel they are being recorded.

Appendix C

Unit Essay Assignment and Grading Rubric

Essay Topics

1. To what extent have we moved beyond the racism and segregation of the 1960s, in society and in our schools? How far do we still have to go? Or do you think we are "there" already?
2. Choose one of the terms you wrote about in your journal and explore it in more detail in an extended essay. For example, how would you define the phrase "racially colorblind."
3. In what way, if any, does systemic racism exist today? Have you ever experienced or witnessed it?
4. How would you explain to critics of Black Lives Matter that it is insulting to supporters of the movement when someone says "All lives matter?"
5. If you were a judge in the case of the Beaufort School District vs. Pat Conroy, would you have upheld his firing by the school district? Or would you have overruled the School District and allowed Pat Conroy to keep his job? Write a closing argument either for the firing of Pat Conroy or for his being allowed to keep his teaching job. You have to be persuasive. This means that you need to point out the strength of your opponent's argument before you demonstrate the flaw in his or her argument. You must remain respectful while demonstrating that you are very familiar with the details of the case (all found in the text by the way.)
6. Topic of your choice. Please put your topic in writing and plan to sit down with me for a few minutes to go over it. Be prepared: I'm going to ask you to discuss your PURPOSE and AUDIENCE.

Length: My first response to this question is "Whatever it takes to do a great job!" The longer the paper does not necessarily equate with a better paper. If you need a more specific response to this question, then I'll give you one: 3 pages following MLA format.

Does it have to be a FIVE PARAGRAPH ESSAY? No, it does not. You will find that when you go to college, you will learn not to ask this question. If you need the structure of the 5 paragraph essay at this point in your life, then do it. You probably used training wheels at one point in your life as well. I have read some excellent 5 paragraph essays. I have read more of them that put form above content. Take heed. I'm looking for evidence that proves to me that you have truly put some thought into your topic. Grammar, spelling, mechanics---They are important. However, I get most excited when I catch a student who dares to attempt critical thinking.

Appendix D

Beaufort High School English Department

Unit Final: Essay on The *Mr. Joseph Taylor* Water is Wide

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1214 International Studies

English 2 Honors • Fall 2016

Criteria	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Score
<i>THESIS and CONTENT</i> The essay has a thesis—a single, central point that is interesting, original, striking and substantial.					/20
<i>ORGANIZATION</i> The essay is organized and well structured (there is a beginning, a body, and a conclusion). The essay exhibits a clear strategy for persuasion and pattern of development (chronological order, spatial order, comparison/contrast, etc.).					/20
<i>PARAGRAPHS</i> Paragraphs are organized, unified and coherent. Each supporting paragraph has a controlling idea (which may be expressed in a topic sentence).					/20
<i>STYLE</i> Sentences are mature and parallel. Writer avoids modifier problems. Sentences show variety of pattern and are rhetorically effective. The essay is written in a style and tone appropriate to the audience, topic and purpose.					/20
<i>GRAMMAR, SPELLING</i> Subtract points for errors in grammar (comma splices, fragments, fused sentences, agreement, etc.) spelling, and mechanics (margins, format, etc.)					/20
<i>DEMONSTRATION OF CRITICAL THINKING</i> <i>You will be rewarded for showing that you have put real</i>		Possible 10 Extra PTS			/0

<i>thought into your writing (beyond the usual sound thinking that goes into quality writing.)</i>					TOTAL /100
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