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Thoreau Unit

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10H English: World Literature
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Unit Framework

Purpose

I teach a 10th grade World Literature class, and have for years, but I try to include American voices as we study any literature, wherever (or whenever) it comes from. I think that, even as a World Literature teacher, I have an obligation to keep an eye to the cultural perspectives that my students come from. Perhaps even more important than this is the recognition that no great work of literature is limited to the time, place, and perspective that it was written in. Literature does not stand alone, encapsulated in units; it is part of the long conversation that mankind has been having since we learned that opposable thumbs were for more than holding clubs. I think that often, the study of literature is split into national or temporal genres to serve masters outside of our classrooms and this unnatural structural schematic does our students a disservice. Some ideas are universal, and, in understanding this, students are able to let go of genre and focus on meaning. Once they know that Thoreau, Shelley, Golding, and Shakespeare are not confined to a time and place, students start to understand that literature is one of the many ways that the past reaches out to us, whether it is to enlighten or to warn future generations. Henry David Thoreau's work is the philosophical culmination of a lifetime; the struggle of a man who wished to create, among other things, an American philosophy that people could invest themselves in which did not remove them from the world in which they lived. Although it is possible that transcendentalism did not survive its first flowering, the immortality of Thoreau's works proves the validity of the underpinnings of his philosophies. He still lives on in American culture, and perhaps deserves more than a unit alone.

Rationale

I am intentionally avoiding *Walden* in these lessons, not because I do not think that it is worthwhile literature, but because it is worthwhile literature that is the sole property of the 11th grade American Literature curriculum. It helps that Thoreau was so prolific in his truncated

lifetime; there is so much to choose from! I have designed these lessons to be directly applicable to the classes that I am assigned for next year: 10th grade World Literature class. However, I have some ideas for how I can adapt all of them for an 11th grade or AP Literature class, should the opportunity present itself in the future. The goal within my World Literature curriculum, then, is to explore the universality of Thoreau's ideas, as part of a larger, human conversation, not only to enrich my own curriculum and to give my students an American voice to anchor upon, but also to lay the ground for American Literature, when they have it in 11th grade.

Timing

These lessons are meant to be interspersed throughout the year, technically in very different units. I have included the umbrella unit that the Thoreau lesson will be a part of, the approximate time of year each will (barring snow, hurricanes, etc.) happen, and the other texts that will be taught with the Thoreau in the unit. My class learns early in the year that we never leave a text behind, once we have studied it, and so the unit markers are only there to inform my students of what they will be adding to their arsenal. As we move through the year, they become responsible for more and more texts, characters, and philosophies. Often, the students will keep a running list of texts in their notebooks, so that they will not forget what they are responsible for.

Formatting

My district does not require us to hand in daily lesson plans, once we have been awarded tenure, and I am not used to using them. The format that I am using is one of my own creation, made to be most efficiently used in my own classroom. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (e-mail is best for long responses), and I will try to clarify my intentions as much as possible.

My honors class is largely discussion-based, so the important part of any lesson plan (for me, at least) is the thematic basis of the discussion. To this end, the actual step-by-step "directions" in my lessons may seem a bit repetitive. Because they are. The ideas are the things that shift and move and then get written about in excruciating detail (with citations). Feel free to improve on my, admittedly, old-school model.

Lesson I: Field Books, Journaling, and Self-Publishing

“Much is published, but little printed.”

-Walden, p. 288

I. Unit Information: When, Where, and Why

This lesson is designed to span the entire year, as a reflection of Thoreau’s (very effective) writing process. It’s an opportunity for the students to become more aware of their world and their own reactions to it. At some point, kids learn not to experiment or to express themselves. I tell my kids every year that, at five years old, if the teacher told them to draw a purple dinosaur, not a single one of them would hesitate, let alone take the time to ask the teacher whether it was being collected, how many points it was worth, or whether they were being graded on quality because “I’m not artistic”. A classroom of five-year-olds dives for the crayons, like Indiana Jones escaping from a collapsing temple. I would like to “encourage” (by making it a requirement of my class) my students to rediscover their powers of self-expression.

To this end, the students in my classes this year will be creating their own “zines”, half-page magazines that the students design, write for, and create on a topic of their choice. While students have the option to delve into the world of fiction, they are also welcome, as Thoreau did, to write creative non-fiction. In fact, the zine offers enough room for students to experiment with both. They will gather information via field notes, refine their observations in journals, and then choose what they want to include in their own monthly zine.

My connection to Thoreau’s writing itself is two-fold. I want to put to proof Thoreau’s idea that any experience’s intrinsic value is only made clear after the actual experience has happened, and been written about. More than this, Thoreau believed that we have a duty to report what we have discovered about the world to the society that we are a part of. It is a heroic action, in its own way.

Second, the zines are a way for my students, who are on the long, often isolating journey to adulthood, to reach out. Like Thoreau, it is important for them to learn the difference between solitude and loneliness. Writing for an audience is a way to demonstrate to ourselves that, although we must weather the journey alone in our own heads, we are surrounded by people on a very similar journey.

II. Necessary Materials

- Many reams of printer paper
- 2-4 long-arm staplers
- staples
- scissors
- glue sticks
- a lot of copier toner
- 2 student-provided notebooks (one field journal and one formal journal)
- Rubrics for the journals and zines
- Peer review rubrics

III. Major Themes and Big Questions: Where We Are, and Where We’re Headed

- I would like to use this as a way to get the “non-English” kids interested in the writing process, and to get the kids to stop thinking of themselves in binary terms (“artist” and “non-artist”).
- What is your writing style? What do you like about it? What do you want to change? Why do you want to change it?
- What interests you? Why? What does this say about you?

- What do you know that no one else does? How can you share it to enrich the lives of others?

IV. Order of Events

- During the first week of class, the students will be introduced to the concept of keeping field notes. (I have toyed with the idea of asking one of the Biology teachers to come in and talk to the kids about how scientists use field notes). I will ask the students for a minimum amount of writing every week, which I will spot-check on Fridays. I expect resistance at first, until the students realize that this is how they will be getting the raw material for their journals and zines. This will also be a chance to speak to them about the basics of note-taking.
- Every week, the students will be given a quote, either from the target text that we are working on, or connected thematically to the text that we are working on. These quotes will be followed by questions and concepts for the students to focus on, based on the quote that they were given. They will share these quote-based journals in a small group of their peers, and will receive written feedback from that same group. I will use the first few journals to “adjust” the groups (so that I have small writing pods that work well together). Once they are finalized, these small writing groups will become the editing circles for the zines that the students will create. The students will hand in their edited journals, and receive a grade for them.
 - I grade journals quickly by printing my tiny rubric on mailing labels, and sticking them to the page. I have separate rubrics for in-class or “quick” work (where there is almost no opportunity or need for editing, and “slow” work, which absolutely requires editing).
- Starting in October, the students will begin self-publishing. There are a number of book formats out there, and I would like to give students a certain amount of autonomy in the book formats that they choose, but there will be a word count minimum for their zines. (I believe that most students will choose the half-page format). Every month, the students will create one goal-oriented zine on a subject of the student’s choice, and hand in a packet to me that includes their proof of editing (at least two edits by the group), their final copy, and a short writing assignment about their creative process.
 - Students will have the opportunity to “boost” their grades with creative touches, such as adding in bonus content, trying a new binding technique, or reaching out to another teacher for content or expertise.
 - This zine format gives the students a chance to write about what interests them the most, while still helping them to hone their writing skills in a directed way. There is a ton of cross-curricular potential here.

V. Notes and Reservations

- This is going to use a lot of toner. The beauty of zines is that they are easily reproducible on a standard copier, but they are usually heavy on the graphics, and can wear out the machine’s toner supplies pretty quickly. I am still working on getting the “ok” from my district, as I plan on using the school copiers as our printing press.
- The students can be given the opportunity to publish anonymously (to their peers), if there are kids with major social anxiety. For the students who wish to publish this way, they can turn in their final proofs to me, covered with a rubric with their name on it.

- There are a number of formats that the kids can use, including instant books, half-page pamphlets, accordion books, etc. Two fabulous books on the subject are: *Whatcha Mean, What's a Zine? The Art of Making Zines and Mini-Comics* (by Mark Todd and Esther Pearl Watson), and *How to Make Books: Fold, Cut, & Stitch Your Way to a One-of-a-Kind Book* (by: Esther K. Smith). I already make instant books for my classes about tricky points of grammar and difficult literary terms. There are a ton of materials and pictures of art books on the web, if kids are having difficulty imagining the possibilities of what their zine can be.
- This is an opportunity to talk to the students about plagiarism and how to find open-source art, photography, etc. to use with their zines. The students should probably submit their monthly final drafts with a bibliography and a signed statement that all of their material is original. I am inviting the AP Art teacher at my school to come in and talk to them about how to operate on a collage or print-based medium without plagiarizing.

VI. Possible Adaptations

- Have a member of the art department come in and do capsule lessons on print-making, design concepts, photography, digital tools. It will be free (!) and give electives teachers a chance to plug their classes. Our technology expert can also come in and talk to the kids about digital tools, scanning, etc. I think it's important that the students start seeing their teachers as experts in their fields.
- I would like to create a partnership with the library, with student periodicals available to the entire student body. Perhaps one day, we'll even have competing "presses" in other classrooms!

Lesson II: Transcendentalism and Existentialism

“Prove it. Prove it was no dream... You are your life, and nothing else.”
-Sartre, “No Exit”

I. Unit Information: When, Where, and Why

This will happen in the gap between the *Frankenstein* Unit and the “No Exit” Unit. Ideally, it will fall at the end of November. At this point, the students will have already studied *Lord of the Flies*, “The Psychology of Power and Evil” (and the Stanford Prison Experiment), an excerpt from *Coral Island*, “The Dark Knight”, Jungian Archetypes, *Frankenstein*, Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, Joseph Campbell’s essay “The Mythology of Love”, and the film “Serenity”. Before we move into the “No Exit” Unit, the students will be given a brief introduction to Existentialism as a philosophy (in the form of a teacher-made zine). This process usually takes about five days, but I try to leave room for it to expand/contract as it needs to. To Thoreau, the decision of who to be is actualized through not only intention (I want to be a good person, therefore I am), but through actions: daily proofs. What he intended to be, he acted to be. He did not believe in the diffuse scattering of a few large, noble actions, but in the potency of constant personal virtuous actions within the community. He believed, too, that action comes with deliberation and sacrifice. To Thoreau, knowledge is responsibility; if you know that something is wrong, you are responsible to work wholly towards a resolution. His anguish in “The Plea for John Brown” is in the knowledge that he has *not* done what John Brown has done; Thoreau knew what was wrong in society, and did not have the strength to make the dire choice. He recognizes his own complicity in accepting the comfort of living. In his “Plea”, Thoreau tries to clarify the source and remedy (if any) his own discontent with the choices he has and has not made.

In this way, Thoreau’s Transcendentalism bears a strong resemblance to Existentialism, and especially Sartre’s spin on it in “No Exit”. To Sartre, “you are your life, and nothing else.” There is a brutality to the statement that seems almost inhuman in the line that it draws, but it is the view that Thoreau, in his own way, takes with his assessment of his own life. Both philosophies, as well, make room for a life time of choices, and a type of redemption. In his plea, Thoreau chastises himself and his audience, but with the intention of creating change and, with the change, action. It opens the door for a world of choice for those who seemed wretched and damned when he started.

II. Necessary Materials

- “A Tiny Guide To Existentialism” (available upon request...I only have hard copies, locked in my classroom)
- “The Myth of Sisyphus” (by: Albert Camus)
- *No Exit* (by: Jean-Paul Sartre)
- “The Plea for John Brown” (by: Henry David Thoreau)
- Student Journal Rubric
- Existentialism and Transcendentalism Essay Prompt
- Analytical Essay Rubric

III. Major Themes and Big Questions: Where We Are, and Where We’re Headed

- Do you know what you want from life? Do you know why you want it?

- How much of how you define yourself is based on other people (be it their actions, or their presence in your life)? How much of who you are have you created for yourself? How much do you owe to other people?
- How much do the choices that you make matter? How do you know?
- Does idealism leave room for redemption? Is it resilient enough to survive human folly?
- How is the American philosophy of Transcendentalism different from Existentialism (which began, as a distinct philosophy, in Europe)? Specifically, what cultural and national differences do you see in these philosophies? Do you see these differences in your own life?
- Is forgiveness important? Is it the same as forgetting? What are the psychological and philosophical implications of both?

IV. Order of Events

- Starting in the week that the Frankenstein Unit ends, and continuing into the end of the existentialism lesson, all of the quote-based journals will be from “The Plea for John Brown”, focusing on exploring the first three Big Questions on my list.
- The existentialism lesson begins with the students reading an instant book that I made for them (“A Tiny Guide To Existentialism”), which was made to explore the five major pillars of existentialist thought. Once they’ve read through it (this usually takes five minutes to do), the students split into small groups to discuss what they’ve read. I encourage the students to come up with examples/scenarios that explain each of the five major tenants of existentialism, as a way of kick starting discussion, and generally helping them to wrap their heads around the concepts. We then get back together as a large group, and we work through existentialism together. All of this takes about two class periods (1.5 hours) to do.
- I will ask one of the 11th grade teachers to come in and do a guest lecture (one period) on transcendentalism, as a way of preparing the students for Thoreau. During this guest lecture, the students will be encouraged to write down questions, use graphic organizers, etc. The day after the guest lecture, I’ll begin the class discussion by answering student questions about the two philosophies. We’ll spend some time looking for these philosophical patterns in works that we’ve already studied during the year.
- That evening, the students will read “The Myth of Sisyphus” (by Albert Camus) and “The Plea for John Brown” (by Henry David Thoreau). We will spend the next 2-3 class periods in class discussion, dissecting both texts, looking for significant themes, and re-applying ourselves to the Big Questions that we have been trying to answer, both within this lesson, and from previous texts. Most of the time, discussions in my class start with a “bell ringer” question that I generate, and then flows organically from follow up questions that students have, in-text passages, etc. I encourage students to take notes by randomly making tests and quizzes open note.
- To wrap up the lesson, I will give the students an analytical essay to write, asking the students to create a 3-page analytical comparison of existentialism and transcendentalism, with a focus on the cultural/geographical lens. (For some classes, this is all that I need to give them, and they are comfortable formulating their own, more specific theses from this general instruction. For other classes, I will need to narrow this down for them in class, or devote a period to deconstructing the prompt). Students will be encouraged to use texts that we’ve studied this year, in addition to their two base texts (“The Myth of Sisyphus” and “The Plea for John Brown”) as sources to help them prove their point.

V. Notes and Reservations

- This is the students' first big leap into philosophy, and it throws a few for a loop, so I have a few different formats that I use for discussion, depending on how "wobbly" the students come out on the pre-discussion assessment. Most of the time, putting them in small groups for 10-15 minutes before class discussion (with their graded pre-discussion assessments in front of them) helps them to feel a little steadier before the class dives in. If it's a class that's been having a lot of trouble, I'll set up an optional pre-discussion salon after school for the students to come to and bounce questions off of each other (and me). I think that it's important that honors students not be given too much of a chance to absorb the thoughts and conclusions of others too much, however. They get the idea that there's one "right" answer for everything.
- It's all a bit heavy for teenagers, I know. For me, the purpose of teaching existentialism is to drive home to my students the importance of making informed choices, taking responsibility for them, and understanding their own responsibility to their society. What I end up doing is very much an overview of a complicated philosophy, and I expect that Transcendentalism will get a very similar treatment. However, when the kids get to *Walden* in 11th grade, they'll have a foundation to build on, and they'll have a good reason to keep thinking about existentialism.

VI. Possible Adaptations

- The assessment portion of this unit bridge doesn't have to be a full-sized essay. Sometimes, if I want a piece of analytical writing from the students, but everyone is overwhelmed as it is, I'll assign a mini essay, a one-paragraph, compact response (with quotes). This is also a great time (if there is time) to introduce the class to the editorial format of writing that Thoreau was using in his "Plea".
- If you have the time, and this is a bit too much talking, teach "The Imaginariam of Doctor Parnassus" in chunks in between discussions. It's a wonderful film by Terry Gilliam that very much deals with choice and personal responsibility.

Lesson III: Thoreau and the *Bhagavad-Gita*

“But if you will not fight this righteous battle, then you will have abandoned your own duty and your fame, and you will incur sin. All beings, too, will tell of your everlasting infamy; and to one who has been honoured, infamy is (a) greater (evil) than death.”

-*The Bhagavad-Gita* (trans. Kâshinâth Trimbak Telang)

I. Unit Information: When, Where, and Why

This lesson will fall at the end of the *Iliad* Unit, which usually begins in March and runs through to the middle of April. The unit itself begins with an introduction to the Greek pantheon, and selected myths (those directly applicable to the backstories of the major players in the text). The students then read the first half of an abridged copy of *The Iliad*, called *The Essential Homer* (translated by Stanley Lombardo, who is delightful). Once they get halfway through the book, we pause for 2-3 school days and discuss a modern poem based on *The Iliad*, called “All Day Permanent Red”, by Christopher Logue. The students then finish reading *The Iliad*, and we transition into the first three teachings of *The Bhagavad-Gita*.

The purpose of teaching *The Bhagavad-Gita*, at least for me, is not so much to examine the literature of war, but to open the door for discussion on what to do when life offers you no good choices. We spend a little over half of the year discussing the psychological nature of evil (evil action, influence peddlers, the necessity for self-awareness), and it is with *The Iliad* that we begin to shift over to social virtue, and why it is so difficult to achieve. When is it right (and righteous) to fight for ourselves and others? Is it ever?

I am returning to Thoreau’s “Plea for John Brown” in this lesson, because it is not only a generally powerful piece of writing where Thoreau asks questions very similar to the ones that Arjuna asks Krishna, but because I think that there is also an inherent value in asking students to return to a text, with a different perspective, and a different set of questions. Great literature changes for us the more we learn. Thoreau himself was constantly adapting his approach to the world (sometimes appearing to contradict himself) in an effort to make meaning. I’d wager that the *Iliad* that he read when he was 18 was a very different book to him when he was 30. As the class shifts their focus from evil action (and the tragic hero) to social virtue (and the epic hero), will they see a different piece of literature from the one they began the year with?

II. Necessary Materials

- *The Iliad*
- Books 1-3 of *The Bhagavad-Gita*
- “A Plea for John Brown”
- Large pieces of paper
- *The Iliad* Unit Test

III. Major Themes and Big Questions: Where We Are, and Where We’re Headed

- What is essential in life? What makes existence worthwhile?
- What are our obligations to ourselves? What are our obligations to society?
- How do we maintain a balance between our own, personal needs and the needs of the society that we’re a part of?

- What is the purpose of sacrifice? What does sacrifice look like? When is it harmful? How can you tell the difference?
- What do you do when none of the choices that you have are good? How do you maintain your own self when society demands that you do bad or harmful things?
- Is there such a thing as necessary violence?
- What is social virtue?

IV. Order of Events

- On the week that the students finish reading *The Iliad*, I will begin pulling the quotes for their quote-based journals from either *The Bhagavad-Gita* or from “A Plea for John Brown”. As with all of the quote-based journals, I will be laying the groundwork for the Big Questions for the unit.
- The students will have one evening to read the first three lessons in *The Bhagavad-Gita*. While they are reading, in class, the students will be split into their groups and asked to read “A Plea for John Brown” again, but this time, with a different set of questions (the Big Questions above). When the students are split into small discussion groups like this, they are encouraged to make connections to other texts we’ve studied this year, as a way of explaining their understanding of the answers they have come up with to the class. I provide large sheets of paper for this (Ikea sells a good-sized roll of paper in their kids’ section) so that the students can create an idea web, graph, etc. to better explain the connections to and movement of their ideas.
- Once everyone has read *The Bhagavad-Gita*, the groups will be given 15 minutes together to “patch in” the new text to their responses. The groups will be given an opportunity to sign up to respond to a specific question. When the 15 minutes are up, the groups report out to the class what their answers are to the question that they signed up for. (I tend to award extra points to the groups that take the responses of other groups into consideration...when I do this, I give the first group a chance to amend their original response.) Before they leave, the groups hand me at least two questions of their own devising; I choose one from each group for class discussion.
- The next 2-3 class days will be a whole-class discussion, a comparison of “A Plea for John Brown” with *The Bhagavad Gita* and *The Iliad*. I will use the student-generated discussion questions either as the bell-ringer, or when discussion flags and needs a pick-me-up.
- Since this is the final section of the *Iliad* Unit, much of the formal assessment for this section will be on the test. My tests have a regular two-part format: the first section consists of three one-paragraph responses to analytical cross-textual questions that combine material from the entire year, with a bias towards the material from this unit; the second section is a three-paragraph essay where the students compare a quote (I usually offer three to choose from) from one of the ancillary texts in the unit with the main text, based on a theme of their own choosing. I chose this format for my classes because it gives me plenty of opportunity to combine the unit at hand with previous material from the year.

V. Notes and Reservations

- I don't want to attach my test to this lesson, for fear that it will end up on the internet, and I'll have to start from scratch. However, if you would like to see last year's edition of the test, I'd be happy to send it to you, with the understanding that it is not going to end up on the web, or be given to students to keep.

VI. Possible Adaptations

- Joseph Campbell wrote an essay called, "The Literature of War", which is a bit heavy, but fits in well with a lot of the themes that all of these authors bring up. What does a person who is trying to walk a virtuous path do when none of the choices are good?
- I can see "Civil Disobedience" working very well in this unit. I tend to plan more than I actually have time to teach, so I appreciate having plans that are flexible like this.
- There is a wealth of material for this lesson in *Walden*, especially in Thoreau's treatment of his neighbors who are not "awake", or self-aware. In deference to my colleagues who teach *Walden* in 11th grade, I'm not going to veer in that direction, but it might be worth having the students make a quick return to their notes on transcendentalism before we move on to the next unit.

Lesson IV: “Walking” and The Hero’s Journey

“We should go forth on the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return,—prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only as relics to our desolate kingdoms.”

—“Walking”, p. 558

I. Unit Information: When, Where, and Why

This lesson will take place in the bridge between the *Macbeth* Unit, and The *Iliad* Unit, when I introduce Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey (which is, if I’m lucky, around February). I’ve spent a lot of time refining the materials for the Hero’s Journey, but all of the research (and credit) is Joseph Campbell’s from his masterpiece, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, which is (I think) an incredible masterwork that I will not inflict directly on my students. It’s dense. Super dense. It’s one of the few times that I have balked at giving my students the source material. Instead, I pulled material off of the internet and out of the book and boiled it down into a pamphlet, which the kids read and then ask me 1,000 questions about.

The purpose of the hero (so says Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell) is to benefit the society that they come from, regardless of whether that society actually deserves it. The journey is undertaken as a way of training the hero to be worthy of (and able to survive) the quest. Jung argues that the purpose of these stories is to reflect and bring meaning to the struggles that everyone faces in their own lives. The persona of the hero becomes the self that we identify as “I”, or visa versa. After all, aren’t we all the hero of our own story?

Thoreau uses this template of leaving to go on the journey to bring back something (a quest item, knowledge, etc.) that will improve the society that the hero has come from as a vehicle to deliver revelation in a number of his works. He uses the image of pilgrimage (the journey to “Walden”, the concept of sauntering), and includes an element of obligation to his reader; once you have found the truth, you are obligated to return and share it with mankind. This is the sacrifice to benefit society which is passed on to the reader. For this, Thoreau creates a persona in his writing that is free of the absolute truth of real life: a character. Like many mythological heroes, this persona lives in two diametric worlds: the comfortable world of home (the post office, Concord), and the wilderness (the land where the adventure/quest) happens. Like all epic heroes, he needs to leave home (the comfortable civilization where his brother died) in order to write, his vehicle for transformation. Central to Thoreau’s writings is the element of social obligation and sacrifice. The hero (Thoreau’s walker-saint) becomes a figure outside of society, sacrificing the comforts of conformity within society for heightened self-knowledge and the opportunity to serve the society that he comes from and, by extension (either through apotheosis, redemption, or enlightenment) become greater than what he was before. The hero becomes an idea, the only function of which is to serve. (In Thoreau’s model, it leaves the hero himself to return to his writing-desk in peace while society wrestles outside with the ideal). Within the journey, he consistently employs regular, universal symbols of life and death, knowledge and ignorance, and, of course, sacrifice, which is the onus and the privilege of the hero.

II. Necessary Materials

- “Cape Cod” (excerpts)
- “Walking”
- “The Psychology of Power and Evil” (Zimbardo)
- Hero’s Journey pamphlet and PowerPoint

III. Major Themes and Big Questions: Where We Are, and Where We're Headed

- What is the purpose of the hero persona according to Jung? How does this connect to Campbell's theories about the structure and purpose of hero stories?
- Does it matter that Thoreau is not telling the absolute truth about himself, in creating the heroic persona? If the icon who changes lives is not the man himself, does this invalidate his message?
- How does what we've learned about the psychological nature of evil fit into the hero story? How does Thoreau deal with this concept in his own writing?
- What is the purpose of the hero? What does the journey accomplish?
- What is the difference between a tragic hero and an epic hero? How do these archetypes translate into everyday human life?
- What does Thoreau's creation of a semi-fictional persona say about his beliefs about the bridge between fiction and non-fiction?

IV. Order of Events

- I begin introducing the Hero's Journey by handing out a pamphlet I put together with condensed explanations of what the Hero's Journey is, and what each step is representative of. I usually hand this out to the students the minute they hand in their *Macbeth* test, and I give them the evening to read and process the information.
- The next day, I answer any questions that the students have, and then walk them through the entire Hero's Journey with a PowerPoint. The PowerPoint itself is mostly pictures from books and movies that most, if not all, of the students will recognize. I encourage the students to write down at least one example for each step of the Hero's Journey in their notes. This usually ends up taking two class periods, as the students have more questions during the PowerPoint than before it.
- The class is then split into small groups of no more than four, and are each given a children's book (most of which are fairy tales). In their groups, the students read the book to each other, and then dissect the story, defining the Hero's Journey, and also identifying at least five Jungian archetypes (they study archetypes in October). As they identify the steps, the group must explain each choice that they make. I usually collect these and grade them, assessing their reasoning more than their accuracy (although I do correct groups that misstep in their identification).
- While the students are working in groups in class, at home, they will have Thoreau's essay "Walking" and selections from his "Cape Cod" to read. When I hand the readings out to the students, I will not only give them the Big Questions for this lesson, but also generally instruct them to keep Jung and Campbell in the back of their minds while they read the essays. The period after the class finishes with the children's books, the students will have 15 minutes in their groups to confer with each other before we meet for general class discussion. I expect this discussion to last about two class periods (1.5 hours). As always, the discussion will be structured loosely around the Big Questions that I give to the students before they begin reading.
- As an assessment, the students will be given a choice of one of two mini essay prompts (mini essays are one paragraph analytical responses, with textual support). One prompt will ask the student to explore the evolution of the Thoreau persona throughout one of the readings (making specific reference to Joseph Campbell). The other prompt will ask the

student to focus on one of the steps on the Thoreau persona's journey, and explore the larger purpose of the writer Thoreau's choice.

V. Notes and Reservations

- I've found that it's important to differentiate for the students between the "necessary" and "unnecessary" steps in the Hero's Journey for the class: for example, Joseph Campbell allows for three different possible endings for a hero. If you don't warn them ahead of time, they'll try to apply every single option to every hero, and they'll get lost and frustrated.

VI. Possible Adaptations

- If the class is having problems grasping the Hero's Journey, I add an extra step between the presentation of the concepts (pamphlet and PowerPoint) and the children's books. I wrote a very simple story, called "Bucket the Bunny Saves the Kingdom", put it on an instant book, and asked a student to illustrate it. The students read the story to each other in groups, take ten minutes to fill out a Hero's Journey graphic organizer made specifically for the story, and then the class goes over it together. It gives the kids a solid, simple example to work from when they're struggling.
- Sometimes, I make the children's book segment into a presentation-based project, where the group has to take all of their information and present it concisely to the class in 10 minutes or less. If I do it this year, I will encourage the students to use iMovie to do this, instead of PowerPoint, which is their go-to.

Lesson V: Civics and Civility

“If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself.”

-“Civil Disobedience”, p. 79

I. Unit Information: When, Where, and Why

This will be part of the final unit, called the Etiquette Unit, which usually begins mid-May. This is comprised of excerpts from famous treatises on the details of specific actions that lead to and define civic virtue. By looking at 3-5 texts (depending on the class composition, amount of time left in the year, and how much energy the kids have), the students are asked to examine human behavior and develop a universal code of virtuous action that they can follow (or try to follow) in their own lives. The students will have just finished *The Odyssey*, and watched “Spirited Away”, charting out the Hero’s Journey in both texts. After they finish “Spirited Away”, we resurrect Joseph Campbell’s essay, “The Mythology of Love” (which is most valuable to me for the terminology that Campbell provides, and for his insistence on sacrifice being at the root of the kind of love that makes civic, or heroic action possible). Once the students have been strongly urged to re-visit the essay, we move into the Etiquette Unit.

I love this unit, because these authors write not only about the great big, sweeping sacrifices that the Great Heroes make, but also the smaller, more mundane heroic actions that we think of as merely “polite”. At this point in the year, the kids have the literary chops to start making connections between Philip Zimbardo’s work on anonymity and deindividuation from the Stanford Prison Experiment, and the message that neglecting to hold the door open for a stranger sends. Virtue requires sacrifice, even if it is the sacrifice of our time or our little effort. There is an immensurable, viral effect that virtuous actions have, even the tiny ones. The entire year builds to this message: human beings know, on some basic level, what is right and what is not, and that knowledge bestows on us a great responsibility to each other. Literature is the reflection of our own psyches, reaching out to each other, and telling the same stories over and over again, of the man who creates his own downfall by trying to forget his responsibilities, and the man who faces them, and becomes more than himself. Civic virtue is more difficult than evil action, and requires us to make good choices, often for little or no reward, on behalf of a society that (at least on the face of it) does not deserve it. And that is the sacrifice that we must all be heroic enough to take upon ourselves; Joseph Campbell calls it a kind of love.

I believe that Thoreau understood, and appreciated, the importance of sacrifice on behalf of the community and, oddly enough, his essay, “Civil Disobedience” ends up being more about unity than division. For Thoreau, the danger in civilization is the apparent safety that elected government appears to offer the individual; people stop thinking if there is someone who promises to do it for them. (William Golding writes quite a bit about this dynamic in *Lord of the Flies*). He recognizes that, when people stop thinking, they get mean, and small, and they forget every potential of greatness that they had. “Civil Disobedience” is an interesting addition to the Etiquette Unit not only because it has been such an influential text to so many great men and women, but because, in it, Thoreau makes a point of differentiating between the society of mankind and the government that we have created. Not only does it create an interesting juxtaposition (although not necessarily a contradiction) with Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, but Thoreau ends up being mirrored by Dr. Philip Zimbardo in his published findings after the

conclusion of the Stanford Prison Experiment: the individual is always responsible for helping to monitor the influences around him and, if they are unjust, to rise up against them.

II. Necessary Materials

- *The Prince* (excerpts)
- “Civil Disobedience”
- *Etiquette* (excerpts)
- *The Tao Te Ching* (excerpts)

III. Major Themes and Big Questions: Where We Are, and Where We’re Headed

- What is citizenship?
- Civilization vs. savagery vs. wildness vs. civility: What is the difference between these concepts, and how do they fit into the concepts of evil action and social virtue?
- What is the purpose of sacrifice? What does sacrifice look like? Why is it an important component of social virtue?
- What are our obligations to ourselves? What are our obligations to society?
- Why is self-awareness so important to these philosophies? What does it add from a psychological standpoint?
- What do these social philosophies say about balance? What are they referring to and why is it so important?
- What is social virtue? How is it different from evil action? Why is social virtue so difficult to achieve?

IV. Order of Events

- On the day before the *Odyssey* test, the students are given all of the readings, in separate packets. I stagger the reading due dates so that a new packet is due every third day.
- As the works come due, the students will have 15 minutes at the beginning of class in their groups to confer with each other before we meet for general class discussion. The class has about 2.5 class periods to discuss each new philosophical work. As always, the discussion will be structured loosely around the Big Questions that I give to the students before they begin reading, but with these discussions, it is vital that the students make as many connections to works that they’ve studied during the year as possible. This process reinforces the universality of the texts that they have studied, and gives the students some examples that they are familiar with to explain complex social philosophy.
- As we add new texts, I encourage the students to start comparative work on the four *Etiquette* texts. Many students use a graphic organizer or thought web- I leave it up to them to use a system that makes sense to them.
- When we reach the last day of discussion on the last text, I hand out their final project. They are asked to, using at least three of the texts from the *Etiquette* Unit and as many other texts from the year as they wish, identify a universal code of ethics and create a philosophical manifesto of some kind to clearly present their findings. I leave the vehicle of this up to them, but I remind them that the rules of behavior must be clearly stated, be rules that they themselves would and could follow, and veer away from ending up as a dystopia. Some options include making a zine, a children’s book, dropping an album, etc.

V. Notes and Reservations

- I encourage the students to return to a few past works in this unit, specifically “The Psychology of Power and Evil” (Philip Zimbardo), and *The Bhagavad-Gita*, to help bring the class full-circle, and to give the students a perspective on the true scope of the balance that the *Tao Te Ching*, especially, is urging.
- There are so many real-life examples around the kids that they don’t see, and that’s part of the beauty of this unit. I encourage the students to examine the small, social behaviors that society expects them to take part in and to think about the psychological implications of them. I’ve had students bring me notices from their workplace, the ballet, and other books.
- This is a great opportunity to teach the students e-mail etiquette. Purdue OWL’s website has a PowerPoint on the subject.

VI. Possible Adaptations

- This unit is fairly malleable. It is fairly simple to substitute or add the writings of another social commentary: Gandhi, Tolstoy, King, or selections from the Quran.

Bibliography

Curriculum Texts: In Order of Appearance

- Guest Lecture: Plagiarism and Open-Source Art, Print-Making
- *Lord of the Flies* (William Golding)
- “The Psychology of Power and Evil” (Philip Zimbardo)
- The Stanford Prison Experiment
- excerpts from *Coral Island* (R. M. Ballantyne)
- Guest Lecture: British Imperialism
- “The Dark Knight” (dir. Christopher Nolan)
- Jungian Archetypes
- *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley)
- Guest Lecture: Bioethics
- “The Metamorphosis” (Franz Kafka, trans. Mauro Nervi)
- *Paradise Lost: Book 1* (John Milton)
- “The Mythology of Love” (Joseph Campbell)
- Guest Lecture: Diana Baumrind’s Parenting Styles
- “Serenity” (dir. Joss Whedon)
- “The Myth of Sisyphus” (Albert Camus, trans. Justin O'Brien)
- “The Plea for John Brown” (Henry David Thoreau)
- “No Exit” (Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Stuart Gilbert)
- Guest Lecture: Translation and the Importance of Word Choice
- “The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus” (dir. Terry Gilliam)
- *Macbeth* (William Shakespeare)
- “Button, Button” (Richard Matheson)
- “Freud on the Macbeths” (Sigmund Freud)
- “The Booth at the End” (dir. Christopher E. Kubasik)
- excerpts from “Cape Cod” (Henry David Thoreau)
- “Walking” (Henry David Thoreau)
- Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey
- *The Iliad* (Homer, trans. Stanley Lombardo)
- “All Day Permanent Red” (Christopher Logue)
- excerpts from *The Bhagavad-Gita* (trans. Barbara Stoler Miller)
- “Spirited Away” (dir. Hayao Miyazaki)
- *The Odyssey* (Homer, trans. Stanley Lombardo)
- excerpts from *The Tao Te Ching* (Lao Tzu, trans. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English)
- excerpts from *Etiquette* (Emily Post)
- excerpts from *The Prince* (Nicolo Machiavelli, trans. W. K. Marriott)
- “Civil Disobedience” (Henry David Thoreau)
- “The Dark Knight Rises” (dir. Christopher Nolan)

Teacher Resources

- *The Portable Thoreau* (Henry David Thoreau, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer)
- *How To Make Books; Fold, Cut, & Stitch Your Way to a One-of-a-Kind Book* (Esther K. Smith)
- *Whatcha Mean, Whats' a Zine? The Art of Making Zines and Mini-Comics* (Mark Todd and Esther Pearl Watson)
- *Magic Books & Paper Toys* (Esther K. Smith)

Pennsylvania State Standards: <https://www.pdesas.org/Standard/View#>

My Website (Which Needs Work): <http://rboydgal.wixsite.com/home>