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November 22nd, 2018

Dr. Warner

English 112B

Unit of Study:

Why Fantasy Matters for Teens

**Rationale:**

In the literary world, there is often a negative rhetoric surrounding the subgenre of fantasy and science fiction because it is thought to be lesser or lacking depth since it is not set in the real world. The argument can be made that most novels are set in fictitious places with fictitious characters and are also a form of escapism, even if not fantasy. The genre can be the furthest from our own sense of reality but the thematic takeaways are applicable to many lives, including those of our own young adult readers.

I observed a 12th grade English class at Evergreen Valley High School where students were assigned Ray Bradbury’s short story *The Veldt* which centers around the Hadley family living in a dystopian society. In this reality, technology has become so advanced that their house is capable of creating artificial realities and it is this same technology that enables the Hadley children to kills their parents. Bradbury is known for his precautionary tales that seem to warn readers about what the future of technology could entail for mankind.

In high school, I always looked forward to reading Ray Bradbury’s work because I felt the world could be headed that way in the future. Although I have a deep appreciation for technology, I feel it can stump us from becoming critical thinkers in our own right. I believe that in our heavily technology based society, it is important for our young adults to consider the benefits and consequences of their technology use. This is but one purpose of my unit of study; I also hope to push students to expand their imaginations and grow an appreciation for this genre that is commonly thought of in a negative light.

**Application of Teaching Methods:**

To begin this science fiction unit I would approach my students with a simple question: What is sci-fi to you and how do you determine what is and isn’t sci-fi? I would ask them for examples of science fiction films, movies, novels, plays, short stories, etc. and write down their answers on the board in a list format. My next question for class participation would be: do you think technology could advance so much that humanity would be threatened? I would have this be in the format of an informal in-class debate.

After this, I will pass out *The Veldt* by Ray Bradbury and give some interesting facts about the author that grab the students’ attention. A fact that struck me in high school was learning Bradbury believed he remembered everything from the moment he was born. Reading aloud is a tool I personally feel is really helpful and plan on conducting some type of ‘popcorn’ reading in which students read randomly and everyone has a chance to do so. Since this lesson plan will begin with a short story, I would like for my students to all participate in determining the dramatic structure of the piece, i.e. rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion. This is something we will do with all other medias they are given to compare with *The Veldt.* I will also have kids re-write the ending of the short story in a way that ensures the parents remain alive. I hope to push their creativity and remind them that they too, are writers.

This would be part of a week or two-week lesson plan so at our next class meeting I would have students watch a season 4 Black Mirror episode called “Metalhead” that is set in a dystopian future where mankind has been executed and all but a few humans remain living. In order to stay alive, humans must fight against robotic dogs that are difficult to kill. While they are watching I will hand out empty venn-diagrams in which they will be instructed to note differences and similarities between *The Veldt* and Black Mirror episode. This will help them in constructing their analysis essay in which they attempt to find a common theme in both pieces.

All of this work is a precursor for the larger text I plan on assigning. It would be either Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* or George Orwell’s *1984.* My hope is that all of the work we have already touched upon prior to this larger text would be that the students are already intrigued by the topic of advanced technology. It can be difficult to immerse oneself into canonical texts but I believe our short story and use of a t.v. series will help spark their interest.

As the students are assigned at-home reading and in-class reading, I will be conducting daily discussions in which I can ensure everyone is reading. We will do character analyses and also do games in which we predict how the novel will end. I am a firm believer in keeping class entertaining so that students are not bored with the work they are doing. Every day I will have a question that pushes students to consider where technology is headed. There is a concept of bad vs. good in this text that I feel is beneficial to young adults who are growing up to, or have already seen that the world is not a perfect place.

**Class Activity/Discussion Questions:**

1. Describe the setting of The Veldt. What does their home look like? What year would you predict this to be taking place in?
2. This story was written in the 1950’s, when televisions were beginning to be produced at high-rates, do you feel it is still a story applicable to our society today?
3. Describe what being a perfect parent means to you. Describe what being a perfect child would be.
4. In what ways did technology help the Hadley’s daily life? In what ways was it harmful for them?
5. Do you feel The Veldt could be about courage or survival? If so, how? Provide in-text examples.
6. What is an additional tool you wish your cellphone possessed?

**Suggestions for Paired Reading:**

**A Clockwork Orange**

by Anthony Burgess

(concepts of good vs. evil, society vs. the individual, destruction in the hands of humanity, dystopia)

**Dracula**

by Bram Stroker

(concept of good vs. evil, science advancements, consequences of defying human nature)

**Fahrenheit 451**

by Ray Bradbury

(concept of good vs. evil, the power of technology, hyperrealist world, courage, dystopia)

**Harry Potter & the Prisoner of Azkaban** (YA Lit)

by J.K. Rowling

(concept of good vs. evil, power of courage)

**1984**

by George Orwell

(power of people vs. government, technology-based monitoring of people)

**The Giver**

by Lois Lowry

(community vs. individual, dystopia)

**A Wrinkle in Time** (YA Lit)

by Madeleine L'Engle

(concept of good vs. evil, individualism, technological advances)

Works Cited

Bradbury, Ray. *The Veldt*. Dramatic Pub. Co., 1988.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*. Yearling/Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1973.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Scholastic Inc., 2018.