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**Rationale**

**Adolescents and Being** ***The Other***

Our country is made up of all types of different people who have traveled great lengths to be in a better living situation. Even though our country is based off of immigration, immigrants and migrants are often treated as if they do not belong and are seen as *the other*. *The other* regards people that are seen as different, and often treated as lesser.  Pieces of literature that describe the experiences of *the other* in terms of migration and immigration are helpful for minority adolescents to identify with a reality similar to their own. By reading pieces of literature that they see themselves in, adolescents are able to obtain a greater understanding of situations they may face. Adolescents that cannot identify themselves in these works of literature will gain a different point of view, thus obtaining a familiarity with a reality unlike their own. There is literature about many types of different ethnic backgrounds that discuss migration and immigration, and most share the same experience of the characters being treated as lesser due to the fact that they are considered foreign to the people that surround them.

My unit of study is based on the reality of a migrant’s/immigrant’s situation as being seen as *the other*. This unit will help students understand the point of view of migrants and immigrants by combining outside works with John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. YA literature addresses the same issues as canonical works in a more relatable fashion; therefore, YA literature is a resourceful tool for bridging the gap between students and canonical literature. This unit uses the perspective of the immigrant/migrant in order to discuss the themes of *the other* in *The Grapes of Wrath.*

The topic of *the other* is important to teach because society still does not tolerate people who are different. People are still treated poorly for being different and this means that many adolescents in this country must know what it feels like to be *the other.* Our country is made up of many different people, and our literature reflects that. Adolescents can relate to being *the other* in many ways, small and large, such as being treated differently by cops, teachers, and company owners, or as little as not being able to sit anywhere at lunch. Through this unit students should gain the ability to think critically about how people are treated around them.

**Introducing The Text**

“California Dreamin’” by The Mamas & The Papas

<https://youtu.be/N-aK6JnyFmk>

“California Dreamin’” describes the desire to be in a better place much like what the centerpiece is about. This sets the tone for the rest of the unit as we talk about migrating somewhere and what the mindset is for the characters of the book. Appropriately the song talks about dreaming of being in California and the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath* also seek out California for better living.

After talking about this song, the students can read “Those Terrible Dust Bowl Days”  by Marilyn Lott in order to get an understanding of what the dust bowl is and how it affected people. This poem gives context as to why the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* want to leave their homes in pursuit of a better place.

**Centerpiece Work**

The centerpiece for this unit of study is *The* *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. This is a novel that people read in high school English class or see its title on a recommended reading list. It is a book about migrating to a new place and being seen as *the other*. It involves a journey during the great depression in order to seek survival for their families, but ends in poor treatment due to their different cultures.

I would give context as to whom John Steinbeck is and the impact that this novel has. The things talked about in this novel are hardly talked about during the dust bowl, because the way these farmers are treated is horrible. John Steinbeck, living through the great depression, gives a point of view of the entire thing that most cannot give today. John Steinbeck is able to give a voice to the migrants of this era and in doing so gives a voice to migrants and immigrants of all eras. This gives adolescents an insight into how connected the author was to the subject. Though Steinbeck does not give the experience of every migration/immigration story, his story has similarities to many of them because he shows the aspect of migrants/immigrants being *the other.* This similarity to other pieces of literature connects the students to the idea of being *the other* in terms outside of this novel and sets students up with the idea of comparing Steinbeck’s story to other works of literature.

**Working Through The Text**

While reading the text, the students will read other works in order to help keep an understanding of the centerpiece text. A poem that the students will read during this text is “Things We Carry On The Sea” by Wang Ping. “Things We Carry On The Sea” describes the baggage that is carried when people immigrate to a new home. This gives an idea of what the mindset of people immigrating is. People that leave a home behind carry many things with them; this poem shows how hard it is to leave home and how serious the reason for leaving must be. This can be paired well when the Joads are choosing to leave home in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Then questions will be asked such as, “what are some of the things the Joad take with them?”, and “why do the Joad choose to leave their home behind?” in order to get students to dig deeper into the characters of the text from the beginning of the novel.

Bruce Springsteen wrote a song that is directly tied to *The Grapes of Wrath* and it makes a great pairing with the novel. “The Ghost of Tom Joad” by Bruce Springsteen will give students more of an understanding of Tom Joad by emphasizing Tom’s speech. This song and Tom’s speech in the text shows the injustice of being treated like *the other* and having the song playing will emphasize the theme of *the other*. Along with the song, I would provide a description of what Tom Joad stands for to give more clarity to what this part of the text means.

**Working Beyond The Text**

Reading YA novels that relate to the text helps students apply the themes of the centerpiece with other literature. One novel that pairs well with *The Grapes of* Wrath is *The Distance Between Us* by Reyna Grande. Grande talks about her journey into the U.S. from Mexico and how it was supposed to be a better place for her to live. She finds out that America is far from perfect once she gets there, just like the Joads find out about California. Students can move beyond the text by reading something like *The Distance Between Us*, but also be able to relate themes to what they have seen in the canonical text. During discussions of the book I will have the students relate parts from *The Distance Between Us* to *The Grapes of Wrath.* Relating the two texts will give students an understanding of how one theme is seen in many different pieces of literature.

Another text that can be used to move beyond *The Grapes of Wrath* with similar themes is *In Order To Live* by Yeonmi Park. This novel explains the hardships that Yeonmi Park had to make when escaping North Korea. The way her family was viewed when she arrived outside of North Korea was less than human because they were treated more as goods than people trying to survive. Park's experience shows the reality of being seen as *the other* which is tied into a similar mistreatment shown in *The Grapes of Wrath.* Having students pull similarities between both novels will allow students to show how they relate the canonical work with Yeonmi Park’s *In Order To Live.*

To further go beyond the text, I would have the class do an activity that encouraged self reflection on the theme. I would ask the class to anonymously write down on a notecard a time that they felt like *the other.* Afterwards, I would collect the notecards and redistribute them out randomly while asking students to write a reflection about the notecard in front of them and how it relates to the novel we read as a class. This exercise will help students connect the theme of the novel with everyday experiences. By connecting the theme with real life experiences, students will have a deeper understanding of the novel.

Works Cited

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