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The Importance of Stories

Rationale:

English goes beyond just reading and writing; it helps build connections and develop critical thinking in various types of literature. Stories are a significant part of people's development. Stories give a sense of understanding and perspective onto other people's lives but also give people a space for more knowledge. Everyone comes from a different background or culture, and it provides insight into what someone else has gone through or what they might be going through. As an English teacher, I want my students to learn beyond the curriculum. By exposing different stories to students, they can explore other genres in books, articles, poetry, songs, film, etc. In my unit of study, I focused on a movie and young adult novel to explore different issues to which they can relate and connect. Students and people can feel understood and open up to vulnerability through these other stories. Having this connection with students is essential because they can acknowledge that they have their own stories to tell and are also important.

Through young adult novels and literature, they can form their ideas and go deeper into critical thinking. Having literature that connects with their life or background evokes a feeling of interest and thirst to learn more about what they are learning about. There is more of an appreciation and empathy for different stories, cultures, and world issues. Exposure to a variety of literature allows them to understand the world and communicate various messages. Showing a film to these students will give them an understanding of how stories come in different forms.

The unit of study I focused on was the significance of stories. The specific genre that I focused on had to do with historical fiction, nonfiction, and fiction. This unit would build on students' critical thinking and exposure to different authors from different cultures or

backgrounds. Some of these novels carry topics like trauma and love and how they affect oneself. Through this, students will be able to connect things in their own life while having a safe place in the classroom to share their ideas and their life. Through this lesson, I also want to include restorative justice circles where we take a few minutes in the class to talk about some of the themes in the story and get them to start being open and safe with each other.

Introduction to the Unit:

When it comes to the unit introduction, I will start the unit by getting them a journal. In this journal, they will write their responses to the prompt I will put on the board daily. These prompts will connect to different themes that we read from the text. I would also kick start the unit with prompts about how cultures relate to stories. I would also incorporate restorative justice circles where we would get in a circle after everyone is done with their prompts and sit down to share their responses. There would be a focus on the novel *I am not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sanchez to help the understanding of stories within cultures better. There would also be weekly literature circles where they will specifically focus on language, ideas, literary devices, and themes of the text. Introducing them to these kinds of terms and ideas would help them develop their critical thinking and also get them thinking about terms for their essay writing.

Toward the end of the unit, I would show them a film called *Bajo la Misma Luna*. This film talks about a single mom who leaves her young son Carlitos and has her mother take care of him so she can cross the border to give him better opportunities. His mom finds a job as a maid, but soon her mother passes away, and it shows Carlitos's struggle as he tries to join her in the U.S. This shows a story of the battle of having to come to a new country and start a new life when you want a better life not just for yourself but for your kids.

The Main Text:

The novel I would start with this unit would have to be *I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sanchez. I begin with this specific novel because, as a first-generation, first-born daughter in my family, I can relate to many of the issues raised in a Hispanic household. This young adult novel also brings up the idea of generational trauma and how it affects first-generation students. I want there to be representation for people of color and different communities within the classroom to know that they are heard and that they do belong.

As I introduce the novel and the story, I also want to give background on the author Erika Sanchez. I would navigate her website, and I would go ahead and introduce her as a Mexican American author and a daughter of immigrants and how she is also a poetry artist. As we navigate her website as a class together, I would introduce the other types of novels and poetry she has created and the differences in stories. They will understand why she wrote the stories by having a background on the author.

Activity #1:

- Start with KWL Chart:

(What I know, What I wonder, What I Learned)

Activity #2:

- The second activity I would introduce would have to be the lesson on a theme vs. thematic topic. Afterward I would also explain the different use of literary devices and give them a handout explaining in detail what they are looking for in the novel.

Activity #3:

- As we are reading through the novel, I would have them, for every chapter, write one quote that relates to any of the themes that come up throughout the book. I would give them a handout, and for every chapter, they will write down a quote, and they have to explain why it is significant and what it means. After this, I would have them discuss with their partners what quote they chose and explain why they chose it.

Activity #4:

- Another activity I would do for this novel would have to be a literary analysis essay. I would have them first go through a process called KCS. This is a kind of drafting process where they can build their essay one step at a time before finalizing their final draft.

Concluding the Unit:

I would show them the film *Bajo la Misma Luna to conclude the unit*. The reason for this film would have to be because although they are different stories, there are similar themes and ideas when it comes to immigrant parents looking for a better opportunity in the U.S. for education and job wise. This film also demonstrates how stories are experiences from people and how they can help build perspective and empathy. The last activity I would do with the class for this unit would have to be having them take notes as they watch the film so they can write a reflection paper about stories and their power.

Working Beyond the Text:

As the unit concludes, I will introduce other texts about personal stories. I would also bring up different shows so that they can see that stories go beyond just writing and are transformed into music, media, film, etc. By understanding that stories are powerful, they can pinpoint different themes and experiences. They will be able to connect and reflect on their own life to know that they belong and that their voice is essential because it might help someone else.

George Lopez (TV show)

George Lopez is a show that revolves around a Hispanic family. It demonstrates the different issues with raising a healthy family and providing a better life for his family so they don't have to go through the same thing George went through. This show tackles different issues that happen in the Latinx community.

All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven:

All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven encompasses the journey of healing from trauma and the importance of mental illness. At the novel's beginning, Theodore Finch starts by saying how he thinks of death daily and how he struggles with his mental illness and trauma. Theodore Finch meets Violette Markey on the ledge of their high school bell tower, where she is trying to take her own life. Finch convinces her not to and saves her, but the school assumes that Violet was the one that saved Finch. Violet also struggles coping with her sister's death from the car accident and depression. Theodore and Violet have to work together on a project for geology class which makes them closer, and they slowly fall in love. Violet and Finch spend more time with each other, but Finch's mental health only continues to decline as time goes by. Violet, in this relationship, is learning to cope and heal from her sister's death, and in comparison, Theodore's depression and bipolar disorder get worse as time passes. In the end, Theodore ends up drowning himself. As Violet is grieving and healing, she, at the end of the novel, ends up swimming in the Blue Hole, where Finch drowned himself. She learns that what happened is not her fault and realizes that she needs to live her life and that things happen for a reason. In this last scene, she is at peace, and Finch reminds her to keep going because that is what he would have wanted.

We Were Here by Matt de la Peña:

From the streets of Stockton to the beaches of Venice, all the way down to the Mexican border, *We Were Here* follows a journey of self-discovery by a boy who is trying to forgive himself in an unforgiving world (Matt de la Peña Website).

After the First Death by Robert Cormier:

After the First Death is a novel by award-winning writer Robert Cormier. In this novel, Miro, a Middle Eastern teenager, and a small group of his fellow countrymen hijack a bus filled with five-year-old children on their way to summer day camp. These hijackers believe they are fighting for their homeland, a country they have never seen. Kate, the teenage bus driver, finds herself drawn into a drama with a bunch of kids she barely knows. Ben Marchand, another teen, finds himself drawn into the drama as well, destined to experience events that will color the rest of his life and his relationship with his father. *After the First Death* is a complicated story that shows how violence changes and ruins all lives touched by it, even those who perpetrate it (Summary from Book Rags).

Witness by Karen Hesse:

Witness tells the story of the Klan's attempt to recruit members in a small town in Vermont in 1924. Leanora Sutter, a young black girl, feels isolated by racial prejudice and her mother's recent death (Scholastic Summary)

The Glass Castle by Jeanette Walls:

The Glass Castle is a remarkable memoir of resilience and redemption and a revelatory look into a family at once deeply dysfunctional and uniquely vibrant. When sober, Jeannette's brilliant and charismatic father captured his children's imagination, teaching them physics, geology, and how to embrace life fearlessly (Simon and Schuster Summary).