UNIT OF STUDY: “PURPOSE THRU PANELS: A UNIT OF STUDY OF PURPOSE THRU GRAPHIC NOVELS”

RATIONALE: Growing up in the suburbs of San Jose, I had been relatively sheltered my whole life to the social issues that plague this country. Many communities are subject to things like police brutality, politicians neglecting the common folk to the point of poverty, and unmet basic needs like clean water; as a person who had lived up in those cushy Evergreen hills, I never had to worry about that kind of stuff. Bluntly, I had no reason to question what my future would be.

It wouldn’t be till I read a small little graphic novel called “The Eternal Smile” that my first taste of existentialism really hit me. “The Eternal Smile” is a trio of short graphic novel stories that each end with their respective protagonists having their paradigm shifted, left without their original purpose. It really struck me at my core, made me question who I was in a time like the cusp of adulthood that many YA novels have us question already, and even though I never did read the novels the teachers made me read, I always found “The Eternal Smile” something of a taste of what actually reading could bring. The tantamount moment for me and this graphic novel was when I had to cite it along with a bunch of novels for some assignment I don’t remember, and how pleased I was that something I had considered a vice, and not valuable in the classroom at all, was actually worthy of citation; I had felt like I had cheesed the system, big-time.

Fast forward to now, with me possibly becoming one of those teachers, and I want to bring that little bit of cheese to my own future classroom. Not only because in retrospect I think graphic novels have a very real place in the classroom, but because the comic book medium itself is so atypical, it has very real potential to grip a student’s core without them expecting it. At the same time, students in high school have a very real burning issue of finding their purpose; these graphic novels will have them muse over that very necessary question when they need it more than ever.

I will begin each novel's timeslot in my around 8-9 week unit of study with a Socratic seminar, where I will have the class discuss roundtable-style about a certain issue. This will get their feet wet in the issue tackled in the story, priming them for their reading of the text. Even after this first “appetizer” discussion, I’d still like to hold discussions frequently, albeit around related articles, other branching topics, etc. I’m stealing this portion of my methods from my history teacher, whose debates really encouraged participation and engagement with the text.The beauty of graphic novels is that compared to the speed typical text novels are consumed, comic books go down like mac and cheese, fast and easy to digest. As such, I think it's within reason for them to have the novel finished by the end of the week.

The first novel I would have them examine would be “The Eternal Smile,” taking up about 3school weeks total for our coverage of the book. Since this book contains three separate stories, I think it would be intuitive to give each story its own period of analysis, with lessons of about 5 days, Monday thru Friday, to provide analysis about the book. Supplementary articles, such as an article listing the impact Nigerian prince scam calls have for the short story, “Urgent Request”, a story about a young woman down on her luck donating everything she has to a scammer finding a false purpose in such. Throughout this whole 3 week unit of study, I’ll have them fill out a giant three way Venn diagram representing the intersections and uniqueness of each short story, as well as a small reflection regarding their own thoughts.

The second graphic novel I want to cover would be the All Star Superman omnibus, a collection of the twelve comic issues that make up the All Star Superman storyline, a tale where Superman has a limited amount of time to live, thus trying to make the most of his time with loved ones. Discussions will be held periodically around this concept of life fleeting, such as what students themselves would do with those few days left should they have days numbered, does power, money, etc. mean anything if you’re dying, how would you want to die, what is a “right” or “good” way to die, etc etc. the big assignment overreaching this whole period would be a bucket list essay of things students want to do by the time death comes knocking, or people they’d want to meet, etc.

The third novel I want to examine would be another DC comic omnibus trade, “Flashpoint”. This story revolves around the superhero The Flash, and his journey throughout a world where he no longer exists. The titular moment in this novel is Flash sacrificing his mother’s life in order to restore the timeline and his own existence. Thus, students will analyze topics such as their purpose in this world+how their existence impacts the world, and what sacrifices have been made for your existence. The overarching assignment for this novel will be a web diagram, wth the center being the student hypothetically not existing, and the webbed connecting points being the effects it would have on their parents, school, etc.

Over the entire 9 week course, students will need to read another work, a manga series called “Mob Psycho 100”, which has a profound story about purpose and the decisions you make with your potential being yours. For example, instead of using his powers to better his life, protagonist Mob instead devotes his time to working out, working on his weaknesses instead of furthering and potentially plateauing his strengths. The final for my class would be a diary log students will keep throughout the whole unit of study, writing down what they feel about the content each day, as well as what they’ve read about Mob Psycho 100 that day.. The goal of this diary is to 1) keep the students accountable(can’t cram 8 weeks of diary entries the night before can you?) by engaging with the content at home without giving typical homework, and 2) see how the students grow with each novel/the long reaching story of Mob Psycho 100 and its overarching message of “your life is your own.’

WEEKS 1-3: “The Eternal Smile”

OVERARCHING ASSIGNMENT: 3 way venn-diagram

-students will fill out a 3 way venn diagram comparing and contrasting the three different stories, as well as a reflection on their time with the stories over all.

-WEEK 1: “Duncan’s Kingdom”

-intro Socratic Sem: “What is the most important thing to you?”

-supplementary assignments/activities: in class debate over money vs love, written reflection over story

-WEEK 2: “Gran’pa Greenbax and the Eternal Smile”

-intro Socratic Sem: “what is humanity’s goal?”

-supplementary assignments include: additional discussion prompts examples ie. “When do you stop chasing your dreams?” “when is escapism a good/bad thing”, etc,

WEEK 3: Urgent Request

-Intro Socratic Seminar: “What’s something only you view in a certain light/(ex: no one likes this food but I do)

Supplementary assignments: activity with Roshrach charts describing what they see, articles for further context of the Nigerian Prince scandals

WEEK 4-6: “All Star Superman”

OVERARCHING ASSIGNMENT: Bucket List Essay: students will write an essay listing the things they want to do before they die/who they want to grow closer to before they die, and dthir reasoning behind it.

Intro Socratic Sem: “What’s a good/bad way to die?”

Other discussion topics: “Who matters when you die?”(those listed can add to bucket list assignment) “Is life meaningful if you always die?” “What would you do if you were in Superman’s shoes?”

-Supplementary article/activity:hospice reports from Scrubs Magazine, a nursing forum,detailing nurses exp. with dying patients, college-related “where will you go?” kinds of activity to get students into the mindset of looking towards their future.

WEEK 7-9: “Flashpoint”

OVERARCHING ASSIGNMENT: Web diagram detailing the people/places/things affected if they did not exist, meant to convey the extreme impact just one person disappearing can have.

-Intro Socratic Seminar: “Why do you go to school?”

Other discussions include: “What would happen if you disappeared?” “Who will miss you when you’re gone?” “What will you sacrifice to keep living your life as is?”

-Supplementary articles/presentation:

“What Is The Multiverse; and is there any evidence it exists?” by National Geographic, correlating to Flashpoint’s main conflict revolving around an alternate reality,

Lesson about hero’s journey, serves as quick refresh to students who probably already are familiar with the concept, but also to contextualize Flash’s sacrifice as the transformation/atonement stage, specifically; many students will under go similar transformations upon adulthood.

FINAL/ALL UNIT LONG READING: MOB PSYCHO 100

Students will read the Mob Psycho 100 series created by “One”(pseudonym), a manga that was published serially from 2012 to 2017. Spanning about 16 physical novel style-volumes, students should have enough time to read the series consistently, and the manga genre is easily digestible, preventing reading fatigue to a certain extent. The main goal of the class reading this novel is to compile their developing thoughts on both the series and the class’s content as a whole into a diary. They will turn in this diary to me at the end, graded for their growth and developing of understanding of content gradually.

BEYOND THE UNIT: *The Sculptor*

Similar to *All Star Superman*, *The Sculptor* contains themes of terminal illness and actively dying. The story revolves around a broke, desperate artist down on his luck, who was given the power to sculpt any material into any shape he wants, in exchange for only being able to live for a few hundred days. The story thus revolves around the artist’s decision on what he wants his legacy to be, a la his final sculpture before he passes. Again, similar to *Superman,* the story has a great lesson to be told about what your legacy on Earth can be, or what your life is ultimately leading up to.

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