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Professor Warner

English 112B

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Analyzing Identity and Companionship through the Novel *Mice of Men*

I. Rationale:

A novel that impacted me significantly during my high school experience was *Mice of Men* by John Steinbeck. In the novel, readers meet two friends named George and Lennie. The two characters, set out in efforts to attain their American Dream of owning land and becoming successful farmers. This novel stood out to me as a high school student because of its themes of identity and companionship. My hope as a future educator is to retell this story with an emphasis on these two themes and use of other supporting texts to aid students in their development through adolescence.

By analyzing the characters of *Mice of Men* students can relate to the characters' struggle of developing identity. In the story, readers are quickly made aware of George and Lenny's goal of attaining the American dream. However, an obstacle that makes this mission all the more challenging is Lennie's mental disability. On their journey to attain the American Dream, George is faced with critical decisions that shape his identity. These instances involve integrity, compassion, and loyalty. Through the course of the novel students can pinpoint scenes when George is faced with these critical decisions and evaluate how they've shaped his character after reading the entire novel. This assignment would be in hopes of students examining the actions of the character in hopes of bettering themselves.

This novel is a great segway into conversations about good friendships. For many high school students, friendships can often spiral out of control due to immature behavior. There seems to be a decline in societal values that demonstrate to adolescents the importance of compassion and care for sustaining relationships. Therefore through the perspective of the novel, I hope to emphasize the importance of cultivating friendship. An assignment that I would set up after the novel would be to ask students to critically analyze George's actions. Is he a good friend? Why or why not? This would be a writing assignment I'd give to my students that would require them to pull out evidence from the novel supporting their stance.

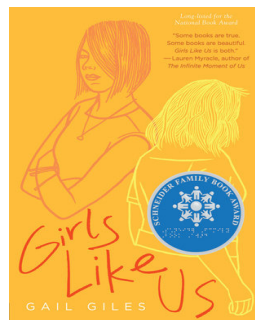
A novel that I would love to pair with this text would be *We Were Here* by Matt De La Pena. Pena's novel, similar to Steinback's, follows the journey of three troubled youths who set out for a better life. Along their journey, the characters are faced with obstacles that test their identity and friendship. I believe that this pairing of novels would work wonderfully to emphasize to students the importance of making positive life choices and friendships.

The themes found in *Mice of Men*, are universal to adolescents. Through this novel's depiction of identity and companionship, students will be able to engage with mature topics to help them develop their own identities and healthy relationships. In every adolescent's life, these factors are critical in the development of not only good readers but people. Therefore my highest goal for this unit is to leave students with an understanding and appreciation for themselves and others.

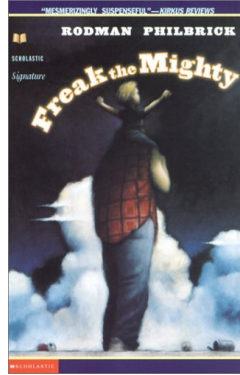
YA novels to pair alongside *Mice of Men*:



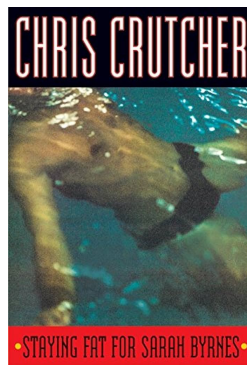
Matt De La Peña's novel *We Were Here* is a story told through the perspective of a teenage protagonist. After deciding to run away from a group home with three other boys, the novel follows the journey of these young teens in search of a better life. This novel presents themes of identity, friendship, and guilt.



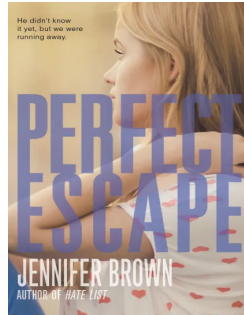
The novel *Girls Like Us* by Gail Giles is a novel based on two teenage girls with special needs who become unlikely friends. After the two graduate high school, they set out into the real world and navigate it together to the best of their abilities. The novel centers on the world's unkind nature and support of these two girls' friendship (Summary from Goodreads).



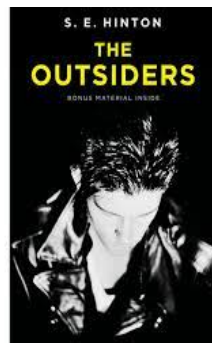
Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick is a story similar to *Mice of Men*. The story is of an unlikely friendship between two boys—one strong but slow big fellow and the other a small but smart guy. The two form an alliance to tackle life’s harsh realities together (Summary from Goodreads).



Staying Fat For Sarah Byrnes by Chris Crutcher is about two longtime friends named Sarah Brynes and Eric Calhoun. The two friends are considered social outcasts—Eric due to his weight and Sarah due to her scars. However, the story follows Eric’s undisclosed secret that tests his loyalty and friendship with Sarah (Summary from Goodreads).



Perfect Escape by Jennifer Brown follows the life of Kendra Brown. Kendra's life has been overshadowed by her older brother whose OCD demands that he abide by a strict organized schedule. To compete for attention alongside her brother, Kendra goes to great lengths to maintain her image. However, due to a vicious rumor that has caught like wildfire throughout the school, Kendra is forced to leave town. This incident ignites a new journey Kendra sets out to take on with her Brother (Summary from Goodreads).



The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton is a story told through the eyes of a young teen named Ponyboy. In Ponyboy's world people are divided between two groups, the "greasers" or "socs." Ponyboy is a soc, meaning he is affiliated with the lower social class. However, after a fatal incident between both groups, Ponyboy begins to rethink his life's choices. The story follows Ponyboy's search for identity outside of the parameters set by society (Summary from Goodreads).

Introducing the Unit:

Week 1:

Monday:

Before reading the novel, I would provide students with articles that state the historical significance of the novel's period and why it is important for students to read. For this activity, I would divide students into four groups to annotate, discuss, and present the argument or significance of the article. As a homework assignment, I would ask students based on one of these articles they had just read, to expand on the topic and consider why they think this novel is a part of the curriculum.

Working through the text:

Tuesday: I would introduce the novel once more and assign reading. I would announce to students that there will be a reading quiz based on the first three chapters of the novel, and depending on their scores as a class, that will determine whether or not we will continue with quizzes or substitute them for a game of jeopardy. Students will be given time to read the first chapter of the novel in class. Apart from this, their homework will require students to answer one of the three following questions: How does Steinbeck use descriptive natural settings well introduce the novel? Identify a passage that portrays the type of relationship between George and Lenny (parent/child, brothers, best friends, and so on) How does Steinbeck describe either George or Lennie? Each question should use a quotation as supporting evidence for their answer. This will help students to develop strong skills in their writing by knowing how to analyze and incorporate quotes.

Wednesday-Thursday: This will consist of a similar agenda that will ask students to read in class chapters two and three and respond by answering one of the questions given for the chapter.

Friday:

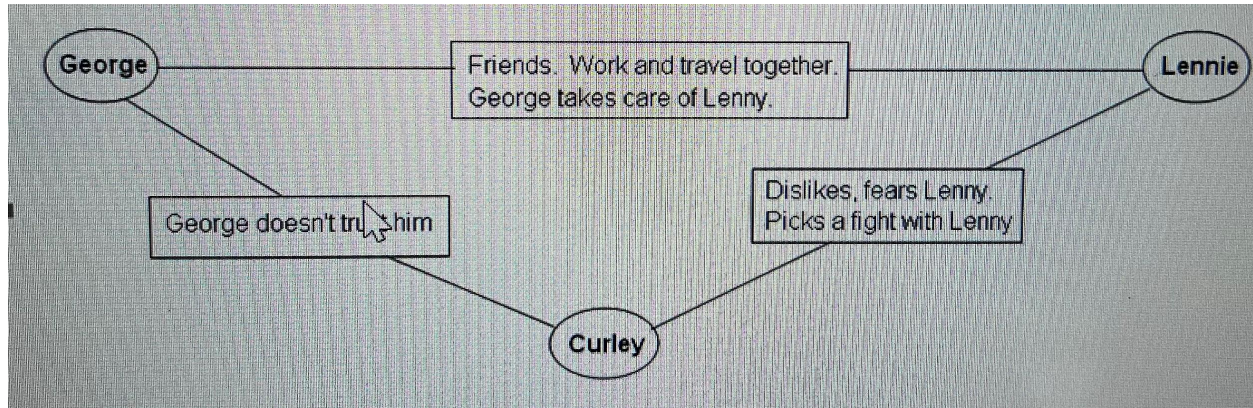
Students will participate in a fishbowl activity to discuss chapters 1-3. Students will be divided into two groups that will discuss topics through guided questions provided by the teacher. These questions will be concerning the questions students have been asked to write during their reading. This discussion will hopefully provide students with a better understanding of the plot and character analysis.

Homework over the weekend will be to review chapters 1-3 for the quiz they will take on Monday.

Week 2:

Monday: Students should enter the classroom prepared to take the quiz. The quiz will consist of ten questions consisting of multiple choice and short answers. At the end of this quiz, the teacher will determine whether the class average should entitle them to another quiz or game of Jeopardy for the remaining chapters. After students have completed their quiz, they will be asked to create a character web. The teacher should explain that this assignment demonstrates how this assignment is used to connect people around them. Students should take away the significance of each character's effects in the story.

An example should be provided for students to select a central character they'd like to focus on.



Tuesday-Wednesday

Students will be given class time to read chapters four through six in class. After each chapter is read students will again be required to answer questions in correspondence to the chapter.

Thursday:

Students will again participate in a fishbowl activity to discuss chapters 4-6. Students will be divided into two groups that will discuss topics through guided questions provided by the teacher. These questions will be about the questions students have been asked to write during their reading. This discussion will hopefully provide students with a better understanding of their interpretations of the plot.

Friday:

Based on their results on the first quiz, students will be participating in either a quiz or a Jeopardy game based on the novel. Grading for jeopardy will be based on participation and the individual's understanding of the novel. As homework, students will be asked to decide what direction they'd like to take for their essay. A list of prompts will be provided and students will have to reflect on

the novel to include three quotes that help support their topics. Students will need to have selected a prompt by the following Monday.

Week 3

Monday: Students will be instructed on how to outline their essays. A template will be provided for students on how to formulate a thesis and topic sentences. Students will be expected to produce an outline of their essay by Wednesday.

Tuesday: This day will be dedicated to outlining their essays or beginning to draft their essay. This time will also be utilized for students to discuss their ideas with their teacher.

Wednesday-Thursday: All students will be required to have a complete outline of their essay that is approved by their teacher. Once this is done, students will be given time to write a draft of their essay.

Friday: Students will need to peer review their classmate's essays to help guide each other's thoughts and levels of clarity. Students will continue to write their essays after this activity is done.

Week 4:

Monday: Students will meet with their teacher to go over the drafts of their essays. Class time will be provided to work on finalizing their papers.

Tuesday: This class time will be spent again finalizing papers and reemphasizing mla format.

Wednesday: Will be the final day to submit their papers by the end of the day.

Ending the Unit

Thursday-Friday: The class will be dedicated to watching the film adaptation of *Mice of Men*. After watching the students will be asked to write a one-page analysis on the film's strength or weakness in conveying the story.

Beyond the Text

The themes presented in *Mice of Men* are prevalent in students' lives. Through the novel's portrayal of identity, friendship, race, and so on, students can evaluate these topics through a collaborative approach with their peers. My steps after this unit would be incorporating YA novels that parallel the themes found in Steinbeck's novel. For example, I would pair *Mice of Men* with Matt De La Pena's *We Were Here* to offer students a different and contemporary perspective on the same central issues. My hope as an educator would be to cultivate students' appreciation of texts that so often relate to their own lives.

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