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ENGL 112B

**Unit Of Study: How Loss Shapes Identity in Young Adults**

In the life of every young adult they will experience some type of loss. The loss of a best friend, or even the death of somebody close to them. Young adults will at some point be forced to understand what it is like to grieve the death of a loved one and understand how that shapes them in the future. There are many ways that people learn to grieve, and they learn how to overcome grief. Through literature they can be better prepared to overcome the loss that will eventually be enter their life.

It is very important for young people to be able to handle loss and not completely loss themselves. They need to find not loss their identity and hide behind their grief. One key example is to help students overcome loss is by reading and seeing fictional characters overcome similar experiments. Students can look to characters in novels to help them learn to deal with the similar experiences that they are experiencing and maybe not the same mistakes that they read about in the novels. As Chris Crutcher said as soon as we are born we start losing.

The centerpiece for this unit will be the novel, *Ordinary People* by Judith Guest*.* The novel is about the Jarrett Family’s recovery from their eldest son’s death. The younger brother who lives, Conrad, deals with survivors guilt and attempts suicide. The novel has many heavy themes that students can relate to but may not be comfortable discussing. It can be a vehicle to show them that no matter how hard the times get, they can get through the adversity that they face in their life. The novel also shows hoe death and loss of a child affects the parents and how they have handled the loss of their son. The novel also dives into the parent and child relationship and how things between them can be challenging but they are able to work through it and become closer.

**Introduction to the Novel:**

To introduce the novel I will show the movie trailer for ’s movie version of *Ordinary People* directed by Robert Redford*.* This will allow for the students to understand the context of the novel that they are going to be reading. It also will give insights into what knowledge that they have about the book or the movie. I will have them then read the poem *Eulogy,* by Kevin Young. I choose this poem because it is a good introduction to death and loss and it is short. It will keep the students engaged and starting to think about what the novel will be about. I will then have a class discussion regarding the poem asking the students questions about the poem. I would have them discuss some of the following questions:

* How might you react to being in a situation from the movie trailer?
* What stuck out in the poem in relation to loss?
* What does the poem say about dealing with death? Who might the speaker be? Who might they be talking to?

After class discussion about the movie trailer and poem. I would put the classroom into small groups and have them discuss the poem and the literary devices that are in the poem. Kevin Young uses an unconventional style and format in his poem that adds meaning to his poem. After I would have the students create their own poem or shorty story about loss. I would not require that they share their work because that can be very personal for some students. I would also have the students make predictions about the novel based on the movie trailer, at the end of the novel I would have them go back and see if they were able to guess the correct ending.

**Through the Unit:**

I would start every new day with a short write into the day about a topic that relates to what the class read in the chapters for that section of the novel. The write into the day would not necessarily be associated with the novel but rather to get the students thinking about what they read the night before. These write into the day assignments would take approximately the first 5 minutes of class. Some examples of potential questions would be:

- Pick a moment in your life you would redo.

- What was a major theme in the reading?

- What character do you relate to?

To keep the students engaged in the novel and ensure that they are reading the novel I would assign short reading quizzes for the designated at home reading. Ideally, the majority of reading would be done in class in small groups or as a large class. This would give students the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the reading with other students. Another way to have the students stay focused on the novel is to track one of the parents in the novel. They could write from their perspective and give insight into what they think that character would be saying about the portion of the novel.

At the conclusion of the novel I would assign a one page epilogue. This would give the students the freedom to be creative and also to show that they understood what happened in the novel. They use any form of media that they choose, the epilogue would not have to be written but could be delivered in a PowerPoint, comic strip, or other form of media. I want the students to be creative. I would watch the movie in class and have them do a book to film paper like in English 112B. This is just another way for them to be creative and stay engaged in what they are learning from the novel.

**Beyond the Text:**

Obviously, I would include the movie version of *Ordinary People* in this unit but I would also look to pair other texts that involve death, loss, grief, and searching for identity post grief. However, I would look for texts that involve other forms of death and loss.

* *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven

The novel is about two teens who are struggling to fit in. Theodore and Violet are both looking to leaver their small town and come together for a school project. They both have grief that they must overcome and they handle their problems in much different ways.

* *History is All You Left Me* by Adam Silvera

The novel is about Griffin who is heartbroken over the death of his ex-boyfriend Theo. Griffin looks for ways to overcome his grief and connects with Theo’s new boyfriend Jackson. Both boys are left grieving after the death of somebody that they loved.

* *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika L. Sanchez

The novel is about Julia who is left with her mother and father after the death of her sister, Olga. Julia is forced to grieve the death of her sister and is also struggling with her parents also grieving the death of Olga. Julia feels partly responsible for the death of Olga on top of already feeling sad that she died.

* *Kissing in America* by Margo Rabb

The novel is about Eva who is dealing with the death of her father. She meets Will who changes her life but Will and Eva are not meant to be together because Will leaves Eva when he moves. Eva looks to reconnect with Will when she is given the opportunity to go find Will in California.

* *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

The book is about a girl with cancer and how she and her family cope with her needs in everyday life. She falls in love with a boy who has overcome cancer and they become romantically involved. When the boy, Augustus, becomes ill with cancer the two are forced to handle his impending death.

**Concluding the Unit:**

The final assignment for this unit would be for the students to pick from the group of novels that I listed above and have them look into a character and how they handled death and loss in that novel. I would have them compare and contrast from one of the characters in *Ordinary People* and argue which character handled the death and loss the best. The essay would be in class and I would allow them to get their thesis preapproved, this is a technique that I got watching Ms. Dixon at Evergreen Valley High School. The goal would be to set them up for success and allow them a day or two of class time to prepare for the essay.

**Works Cited**

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