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The Hidden Adventurer Within

Rationale:

John Muir, the Yosemite founder essentially states in *The Mountains of California,* “Going to the mountains is like going home.” One has to have enough courage and will to renounce all the comforts of life and find one’s hidden passions for the outdoor life. It is certainly not an easy task to divorce oneself from the comfortability of the modern world, much less from the technologies that facilitate our daily lives; we have come to depend on virtually every man-made object, we are being robotized. In order to find our true selves, we must renounce all that detains us from exploring the world, be in tune with nature, dig deep within ourselves and sincerely ask ourselves what is stopping us from going out and venture the world beyond? For most adventurers, society seems to be an imprisonment one must break free from. Such ideologies dwell in both, fiction and nonfiction characters. According to the *LfYA*, “young people seldom have what it takes to embark on such purposeful adventures, they can nevertheless read them.” While the marrow of discovering one’s own identity lies in the physical act of going out into unknown dangers of the wild, all people can safely explore the wonders of nature within literature works, both fiction and nonfiction.

I believe it is important to draw students’ interests to nature because as population gets denser, and deforestation literally wipes out entire regions, young people who will be tomorrow’s future will depend on nature itself for health reasons, spirituality, freedom, and many other positive attributes that nature offers to us and appease our nostalgic longings in returning to our primitive nature; live free of societal conjecture. It is not impossible to draw student’s attention to nature. In fact, it is at a young age they need to be told the importance of preserving nature, respect it, defend it, and ultimately enjoy the exploration if they truly dared to. They can achieve great understanding of the world beyond by presenting them the canonical works that illustrate both, the beauty and dangers of nature and allow them to create their own arguments about the topic. By displaying the beauty and dangers of the outdoor life, I will allow them to notice the importance of preserving nature while at the same time, tap their interest in embarking on adventures or at least turn their desires to read adventurous literature works.

While young students are subconsciously interested in adventures, they are too often restrained and not inspired by anyone, thus as they grow older, they lose that desire to go out and explore. However, it is wrong to ignite the students’ interest for the outdoor adventures without allowing them to see the dangers that lie ahead on their journey. It is for that reason the students must be taught nonfiction literature that conveys the adventurers lives that have been negatively impacted by their purposeful adventures. A discussion needs to be formed where students can engage with their peers and learn what they all think of the adventurer whether they all agree the adventurer is in some aspect a hero or villain, was their purposeful adventure for a good cause or was it selfishness. By doing this activity, students will question their own desire for wanting to go out and venture. They will have the freedom to picture themselves as an adventurer with a purpose in mind, or perhaps a naïve wanderer.

While I do hope that by creating this unit and inspire the students to go out and venture, it is important that I do not romanticize nature too much to the point where they are all inspired and risk their own lives. For that reason, I am choosing *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer as my center piece. Since this text is based on a true event, they are exposed to the reality that yes, nature is a beautiful thing, but a person’s deliberate choice to cut themselves from society is also unhealthy and can lead to fatal consequences. There needs to be a balance between the two and by presenting them this text, they will become wiser and make the right decisions when they encounter similar situations.

Unit of Study:

First Steps into Nature:

-To launch this Unit, I would hand out the first chapter of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Nature” and examine what is Emerson telling us about the outdoor life. By doing this reading and discussion about it, it will allow me to see where they stand in Emerson’s idea and they have the opportunity to agree or disagree with the Transcendentalist writer. I would play an activity with them by having those who agree with Emerson’s idea (or disagree), to convince the opposing team members and win them over to their side. Whichever side has the most members after ten minutes will get extra credit points that they could use to improve any low score quizzes they have gotten.

-The next step in tapping the student’s curiosity about nature would be to read as a classroom, Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken.”

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Before launching into the poetry elements that are used in this poem, I would have the students write a personal response to this powerful poem and if they are not too shy, share with the class what they make of the poem. These two steps serve as catapult that will launch us to our central text: *Into the Wild* and dissect the protagonist’s life in terms of his own inspiration or selfishness. The students are in full judgement of Chris McCandless’ life, but they are warned from the beginning of this book that their essay will be based on what personal choices McCandless makes to lead the life he lives. They will connect Emerson’s essay, or perhaps Frost’s poem as tools of inspiration that McCandless heeded.

-As an attempt to recreate the next famous poem, I will encourage my students to take fifteen minutes to write a poem in which they reveal the core of their personal belief of nature. Similar to the essay, they have the freedom to condemn or to praise the idea of an outdoor adventure. Fifteen minutes is not enough time to write all they would have liked to express, so they can turn this writing portion as homework for the next class meeting. The students are encouraged to write in any style that works best for them such as free verses, ballad, haiku, or sonnet. The students will be given a sample for each of the styles that can serve to refresh their memories.

*Into the Wild*

I will have by this time prepared my students how to approach Jon Krakauer’s non-fiction novel. We will read as class the first chapter of the book to transition them into the tale. I would call a number of students to read to us a paragraph each and I will comment on a particular passage in terms of its historical context. They are welcomed to annotate and ask questions about whichever passage they are having difficulty understanding. They are also welcomed to circle any vocabulary words that are new to them and this they will turn in every Friday that I can use to create next week’s quiz. All the vocabulary words in the quizzes will be words they have chosen as a classroom, therefore they have full authority which words they want to learn and add into their daily speech.

*Into the Wild* is an adventure book which means the students need to be motivated and cheered up to read a true adventurer’s tale. They need to be reminded of other heroes’ journeys such as Odysseus’ desire to return home. They are now presented with another adventurer’s desire to leave civilization and lead a primitive lifestyle. From what they may remember, they will be asked to compare what similarities they see between Odysseus and McCandless’ lives or what the differences are there besides the time setting and what is a real story and fictional.

Class discussion: they will have an opportunity to reflect upon a certain time period in their own lives when they had a disagreement with their parents and relate it to McCandless’ disagreement with his parents. We will talk about what was their next decision, whether they obeyed their parents or rebelled against them and did what they wanted anyway. I believe if the teacher constantly engages the students to relate their lives to the protagonists’ life the students are more likely to like the book overall and will want to read similar books as those. In *LfTYA,* nonfiction adventures wield “an extra level of excitement because readers know that human lives are at stake” (5). Another of Krakauer’s adventure book *Into Thin Air* is recognized in *LfTYA* as a book that depicts the glorification of extreme adventures; the glory of ascending the summit and the possibility of losing one’s life is most likely.

As a class assignment, we will have our class discussion about *Into The Wild* outside of classroom at least two days. We will walk through the closest park on campus in an attempt to recreate our own version of *Dead Poets Society* and analyze McCandless’s life thoroughly as we take a glimpse into the life he chose to live. While in the park, the students will write a one page journal entry “free-write” where they are to describe their outdoor experience or pretend they are McCandless in the deep wilderness in Alaska. Free-Write will be a five to ten minutes time which the students can use to write whatever they have learnt in class that will help them understand the text better. Free-Write is a journal entry that the students will turn in every Friday and they may record the activities that engages them most with the text.

“The Student Society”

As a fun activity, the students will always be divided between those who admire McCandless’ bravery in embracing the simple life, and there will be those who criticize him for being ill prepared in his journey. As a resolution to this division, the students will settle this dispute by establishing a classroom debate where everyone participates. The debaters can tag team and pull anyone from the audience to answer the opposing team’s question in case they don’t have the right answers. This activity will help them approach the text from multiple perspectives, mainly from their peers rather than from the teacher. They will also argue important decisions the author makes in narrating McCandless’ life. At the end of the debate, students will be asked to vote for the team they believe best articulated their points of arguments and leave their bias aside. As part of this activity, students will write a page of what they would’ve added to their arguments or their peers’ arguments as a response to the opposing team. They will be asked to write at least two important argument points the opposing team articulated. Then as a conclusion, they will state whether the opposing team managed to convince them and win them over their side, or they are firm in their beliefs and why.

After we have done reading and discussing the text, we will watch the film version of the text and students will compare and contrast the two and identify what differences there are between the film and text. They will write a two-page response to this assignment and argue what they believe is a better representation of McCandless’ life. A Book to Film like assignment except that they will argue why a particular version of the story triumphs over the other. But the prompt will also ask them to consider the important aspects of the other less effective representation of the character’s life and suggest what they would have done as a writer or director to fulfill that important detail that doesn’t quite make it as effective as the other version.

Lastly, the students will write a one thousand words analytical essay using all the notes and activities as they brainstorm for ideas and argument points. The students may work in groups to gather ideas from their peers, but they will be graded individually based on their analysis of the text.

Other popular books on adventure:

*The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien

Bilbo Baggins is taken out of his comfort zone by an old wizard named Gandalf. The wizard lures Baggins to an adventure full of surprises and dangers, though their purpose remains strong. *The Hobbit* lays down the foundation for the *Lord of The Rings* trilogy which continues to explore the good and bad aspects of adventures.

*My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George

Sam, a fifteen year old boy finds himself much like Christopher McCandless in the sense that both want to cut themselves from society. Sam runs away from home to an old farm that used to be his great-grandfather’s and lives in the wilderness. He befriends a falcon who endures a snowstorm with him. Much of the book talks about Sam’s ability to survive in a hostile environment and his life within the hollowness of a tree.

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