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ENGL 112B: Dr. Mary Warner

Unit of Study Presentation: Supernatural Genre

December 4, 2012

Introduction to the Unit

I believe that the supernatural is a creative way to show a different side of humanity. In other words, the supernatural allows fictional creatures like werewolves and vampires to be placed in real world situations. Sometimes it is better to look at a problem through a different perspective or lens in order to fully grasp meaning and come to a solution. The level of fantasy is included not only for the sole purpose to entertain, but to interpret daily life in a way that can be easily processed. *True Blood* does a great job in showing the deep dislike, almost racist attitude, towards “supes” or supernatural beings. They are considered dangerous and unpredictable which makes them unmanageable uncontrollable. Fear stems from the inability to understand and although vampires and werewolves do not exist, their problems are not so far from what humans deal with everyday.

The supernatural has gotten extremely popular over the past twenty years with the network premier of shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed*, and *Angel*. In the last decade, the one book to bring back the fun of the supernatural, especially the genre of vampires, is *Twilight*. With its success, many shows have come to light like *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Most of these shows are aimed at teens, while some hope to garner the attention of adults over 18 although *True Blood* was created with these adults in mind. However, the extreme phenomenon of the widespread love for the supernatural got me thinking that the genre does not necessarily need to be hogged only by the silver screen or the small screen. Most books are

written in the supernatural genre, especially in the Young Adult category. *The Vampire Diaries* Series is based on four books that were written twenty one years ago. Literature is what comes first, then movies and/or television shows get produced. My respects go to all these shows and their wonderful scripts, but I think that it is time to put some limelight on the books and/or epic poems that started it all.

The supernatural text that I will be using for this unit of study is *Beowulf*. For this genre, it is really hard to find any books that will fall under it, especially for high school students. I was fortunate enough to find *Beowulf* and its YA counterpart, *Beowulf* the graphic novel by Gareth Hinds. The graphic novel allows students to see the characters they are reading about in the text since they otherwise would not be able to do so because the epic poem does not include any illustrations. It makes the text easier to get through as well because the graphic novel not only has pictures, but summarizes the major plot points in *Beowulf*. The graphic novel allows for the student to be entertained while also keeping track of the supernatural creatures they will later analyze.

Since I am dealing with the supernatural genre I decided to focus on Grendel, Grendel's mom and the dragon. I have come to realize that these characters are more than just the proverbial "bad guy." They are representative of the people that they terrorize. Grendel is a character that feels envy towards humans. The questions becomes, why would he? Grendel is alienated because he is a descendant of Cain. Automatically, Grendel is judged by his ancestry and shunned by the people that are aware of who he is. His mother tries to avenge him after he is killed by Beowulf. Although it is difficult to see a mother avenging her murdering son, can some understanding still blossom within the audience for a mother that is hurting? The dragon sits on top of a pile of gold and when someone steals some of it, the dragon goes after them, but kills

many in the process. Justice is desired after a thief takes what is not his. Human characteristics embody these creatures and it really makes me wonder whether they were created solely for the purpose of entertainment or to symbolize humanity itself.

Launching the Unit

1. On 1 sheet of paper answer each question in 3-4 sentences. (5-7 minutes)
 - a. What is the supernatural?
 - i. There are two words that make up one word: super and natural.
 - ii. If you do not already know what the word means, use these clues to help formulate a definition.
2. Before going to #3, tell the class that they will be writing down all the answers that are shared in the class.
 - a. Bullet points are fine
 - b. Does not need to be in complete sentences
3. Once the class has written down their answers, ask them to share their answers by raising their hand. You will write the students' answers on the whiteboard. (8-10 minutes)
4. Once you have a hefty list, introduce the *Beowulf* movie trailer. (10-12 minutes)
 - a. The clip they are watching is a scene from the 2007 CG movie, *Beowulf*, directed by Robert Zemeckis.
 - i. Introduce key characters in the scene.
 - ii. Introduce the setting.
5. As the class is watching the clip, have them do the following on the same sheet of paper:
 - a. All these answers will derive from the class' definition of the supernatural and hero. Make sure they use the answers they wrote down to help them.
6. Once the clip is done, have the class share their answers and compare to what they have written and discussed.

Unit Discussion

With the launching of the unit, students give their own definitions and/or experiences with the supernatural. Most of what they know is from what they see on T.V., and they never really give a second thought as to where all these creatures come from and for what purpose. Before students start reading the text itself, this definition of the supernatural will be presented to them:

1. It shows us our own lives from a different perspective.
 - a. Fears (physical and/or emotional)
 - b. Insecurities (physical and/or psychological)
 - c. Physical Abnormalities
 - d. Power
 - i. Monetary
 - ii. Political

This view of the genre will cover the text and the Gareth Hinds graphic novel. This list will also help guide the students in answering the three essential questions to be answered as they read:

1. Grendel is jealous of the Geats and their great hall. *Why would he be?*
2. Grendel's mom seeks revenge against those who killed her son. *Grendel is a monster that kills hundreds, so is Grendel's mom right in seeking revenge?*
3. A dragon guards a hoard of precious treasure and when some of its hoard is stolen, it hunts down those responsible. *Is this dragon representative of man's greediness?*

Concluding the Unit

For the final assessment, there will be no written work. Instead, the students will create their own graphic novel using supernatural creatures. The directions for this project are as follows:

1. Create your own graphic novel using supernatural elements:
 - a. Must have supernatural creatures like the following (you are not limited to these examples):
 - i. Werewolves
 - ii. Vampires
 - iii. Dragons
 - iv. Fairies
 - v. Witches
 - vi. Zombies
 - b. Your graphic novel must have a story that is parallel to a real life situation:
 - i. A zombie and a human girl fall in love but are torn apart by her father because he is not “alive” and eats humans for breakfast (which he doesn’t anymore).
 - *Your dad will not let you date a guy you are really into because he looks like a criminal and lives in a bad part of town.*
 - ii. A young witch is shunned by all her peers in her village because she descends from powerful witches and warlocks that have the reputation for cursing those they do not like.
 - *The girl who dresses funny and is typically quiet is given a wide berth at her high school because everyone thinks her father killed 3 people, that her mother is in the loony bin and that her older brother went to juvie at age 10 for “god knows what.”*

The length of the graphic novel can vary, but a reasonable estimate would be between 10-20 pages. This will give students enough freedom to expand as much as possible with their creativity. The goal is to have students connect the supernatural to the real world and see the parallels that are encountered in movies like *Twilight* and shows like *The Vampire Diaries*.

Expanding the Unit through YA Literature

The following books are all under the supernatural genre with one exception that overlaps with science fiction. All of these books have heroes or heroines living in a world where goblins and fairies are the norm or come from other planes to earth to try to mingle with humanity. I picked the books that are most relevant to the discussion questions that are asked in the unit. Instead of writing a summary for each book that I have listed in the works cited page, I picked the two that are most intriguing in plot and characters. This is not to say that the others are irrelevant, but that these two books are worth reading and maybe even use as a YA literature pair with a canonical text.

Poison Princess: The Arcana Chronical Series Book 1

Summary: #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Kresley Cole introduces The Arcana Chronicles, post-apocalyptic tales filled with riveting action, the dark mysticism of Tarot cards, and breathtaking romance.

She could save the world—or destroy it.

Sixteen year old Evangeline “Evie” Greene leads a charmed life, until she begins experiencing horrifying hallucinations. When an apocalyptic event decimates her Louisiana hometown, Evie realizes her hallucinations were actually visions of the future—and they’re still happening.

Fighting for her life and desperate for answers, she must turn to her wrong-side-of-the-bayou classmate: Jack Deveaux. But she can’t do either alone. With his mile-long rap sheet, wicked grin, and bad attitude, Jack is like no boy Evie has ever known. Even though he once scorned her and everything she represented, he agrees to protect Evie on her quest. She knows she can’t totally depend on Jack. If he ever cast that wicked grin her way, could she possibly resist him? Who can Evie trust? As Jack and Evie race to find the source of her visions, they meet others who have gotten the same call. An ancient prophecy is being played out, and Evie is not the only one with special powers. A group of twenty-two teens has been chosen to reenact the ultimate battle between good and evil. But it’s not always clear who is on which side....

(barnesandnoble.com)

Blood and Chocolate

Summary: Vivian Gandillon relishes the change, the sweet, fierce ache that carries her from girl to wolf. At sixteen, she is beautiful and strong, and all the young wolves are on her tail. But Vivian still grieves for her dead father; her pack remains leaderless and in disarray, and she feels lost in the suburbs of Maryland. She longs for a normal life. But what is normal for a werewolf? Then Vivian falls in love with a human, a meat-boy. Aiden is kind and gentle, a welcome relief from the squabbling pack. He's fascinated by magic, and Vivian longs to reveal herself to him. Surely he would understand her and delight in the wonder of her dual nature, not fear her as an ordinary human would. Vivian's divided loyalties are strained further when a brutal murder threatens to expose the pack. Moving between two worlds, she does not seem to belong in either. What is she really--human or beast? Which tastes sweeter--blood or chocolate?

(barnesandnoble.com)

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Unit of Study: The Supernatural

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Why the Supernatural?

- It shows us our own lives from a different perspective.
 - Fears
 - Insecurities
 - Physical Abnormalities
 - Power
 - Monetary
 - Political

Canonical Work

- Canonical work: *Beowulf*, translated by Seamus Heaney
 - Grendel
 - Grendel's mom
 - Dragon

Introduction to Unit

- On 1 sheet of paper answer the following question in 2-3 sentences. (3-4 minutes)
 - What is the supernatural?
 - Two separate words make up one whole word: *super* and *natural*.
 - If you do not already know what the word means, use these clues to help formulate a definition.
- Write student responses on the whiteboard and have them write down what they do not already have on their paper. (5-8 minutes)

Intro Cont'd

- Introduce the *Beowulf* movie trailer (10-12 minutes)
 - On the same sheet of paper, students are to write in 4-5 bullet points on the supernatural elements that they see in the trailer.
 - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9qpqyO_dmU
 - Discuss as a class
 - Does what they see in the trailer match what they wrote down and discussed?

Pair Reading with *Beowulf*

- Read Gareth Hinds YA graphic novel, *Beowulf*, alongside the original text:
 - Text is rich with word details and no pictures, GN has less text and more pictures.
 - Text has notes to explain relevant historical background and character information to supplement what is left out of the graphic novel.
 - Grendel's mom is not in Hinds' version of *Beowulf*.

Unit Discussion: Supernatural creatures with Human characteristics

- Grendel is jealous of the Geats and their great hall. *Why would he be?*
- Grendel's mom seeks revenge against those who killed her son. *Grendel is a monster that killed hundreds, so is she right in seeking revenge?*
- A dragon guards a horde of precious treasure and when some of its horde is stolen, it hunts down those responsible. *Is this dragon representative of man's greediness?*

Concluding the Unit

- Create your own graphic novel using supernatural elements:
 - Must have supernatural creatures like the following (you are not limited to these examples):
 - Werewolves
 - Vampires
 - Dragons
 - Fairies
 - Witches
 - Zombies

Concluding Unit Cont'd

- Your graphic novel must have a story that is parallel to a real life situation:
 - A zombie and a human girl fall in love but are torn apart by her father because he is not “alive” and eats humans for breakfast (which he doesn’t anymore).
 - Your dad will not let you date a guy you are really into because he looks like a criminal and lives in a bad part of town.
 - A young witch is shunned by all her peers in school because she descends from powerful witches and warlocks that have the reputation for cursing those they do not like.
 - The girl who dresses funny and is typically quiet is given a wide berth at her high school because everyone thinks her father killed 3 people, that her mother is in the loony bin and that her older brother went to juvie at age 10 for “god knows what.”

Expanding the Unit through other YA Lit

