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English 112B

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Annotated Bibliography: Social Awareness through Literature

Social issues transcend from generation to generation. Though social movements fighting for civil rights, women's liberation/equality, and L.G.B.T. rights have made drastic steps towards a more inclusive community, much still needs to be done in order to bring about a more unity and tolerance. Growing up issues of race and gender inequalities were always present, but the discussions of these issues always seemed limited to one perspective or ruled by the notions of what is appropriate and inappropriate to address. While I was creating the reading list for my annotated bibliography, I decided to incorporate works of literature that throw you deep into social issues and allow you to explore the effects that they had during their respective time periods and how echoes of these issues are still present.

In an attempt to bring social awareness and understanding to future generations I believe that it is vital to expose students to works of literature that bring to light various social issues, while still engaging them in the literature and encouraging them to reflect on how those issue are still present today. While I was compiling my ideal reading list that I would teach to my future high school students, I found myself leaning towards more traditional or canonical works of literature that I felt had a great impact on my sense of social awareness as a young adult. While these book can seem "dated" to today's reader I feel that the themes and issues that they bring forth are still very relevant. Through this reading list I hope to highlight how literature is able to overcome the boundaries of generations and present different lenses to various social issues. I strongly believe that if the content of a work of literature is strong enough, the reader will be able

to overlook the fact of when it was written or the time period in which it takes place and focus on the underlying meaning/s.

I choose *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker as the center piece work for my annotated bibliography, because I believe it is an ideal example of a work of literature that deals with a variety of social issues head on and that has been able to stand the test of time. Having been written over 30 years ago the content of Walker's work still reignites today. In addition to social issues, *The Color Purple* also deals with issues outside of the social spectrum, making it a very flexible and versatile text to work with inside of a classroom setting.

Assigned Reading list:

The Color Purple by Alice Walker

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple: A Novel*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982. Print.

Celie is a poor black woman whose letters tell the story of 20 years of her life, beginning at age 14 when she is being abused and raped by her father and attempting to protect her sister from the same fate, and continuing over the course of her marriage to "Mister," a brutal man who terrorizes her. Celie eventually learns that her abusive husband has been keeping her sister's letters from her and the rage she feels, combined with an example of love and independence provided by her close friend Shug, pushes her finally toward an awakening of her creative and loving self.

(<http://www.amazon.com/The-Color-Purple-Alice-Walker/dp/0156031825>)

The Color Purple is a book that exposes its readers to various social issues. Within the novel issues about race, gender, and equality are brought forth through Celie's captivating letters. I choose this text as my centerpiece work because of its adaptability and because of the way that it transcends the theme of social issues and dives into various other themes while still captivating its audience.

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960. Print.

Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning masterwork of honor and injustice in the deep South—and the heroism of one man in the face of blind and violent hatred

One of the best-loved stories of all time, **To Kill a Mockingbird** has been translated into more than forty languages, sold more than forty million copies worldwide, served as the basis for an enormously popular motion picture, and was voted one of the best novels of the twentieth century by librarians across the country. A gripping, heart-wrenching, and wholly remarkable tale of coming-of-age in a South poisoned by virulent prejudice, it views a world of great beauty and savage inequities through the eyes of a young girl, as her father—a crusading local lawyer—risks everything to defend a black man unjustly accused of a terrible crime.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain

Twain, Mark, and Emory Elliott. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

Revered by all of the town's children and dreaded by all of its mothers, Huckleberry Finn is indisputably the most appealing child-hero in American literature.

Unlike the tall-tale, idyllic world of *Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is firmly grounded in early reality. From the abusive drunkard who serves as Huckleberry's father, to Huck's first tentative grappling with issues of personal liberty and the unknown, *Huckleberry Finn* endeavors to delve quite a bit deeper into the complexities—both joyful and tragic—of life.

The adventures of a boy and a runaway slave as they travel down the Mississippi River on a raft.

(<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn-mark-twain/1116665681?ean=9780099572978>)

The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd

Kidd, Sue Monk. *The Secret Life of Bees*. New York: Viking, 2002. Print.

Set in South Carolina in 1964, *The Secret Life of Bees* tells the story of Lily Owens, whose life has been shaped around the blurred memory of the afternoon her mother was killed. When Lily's fierce-hearted black "stand-in mother," Rosaleen, insults three of the deepest racists in town, Lily decides to spring them both free. They escape to Tiburon, South Carolina—a town that holds the secret to her mother's past. Taken in by an eccentric trio of black beekeeping sisters, Lily is introduced to their mesmerizing world of bees and honey, and the Black Madonna. This is a remarkable novel about divine female power, a story women will share and pass on to their daughters for years to come.

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37435.The_Secret_Life_of_Bees)

Native Son by Richard Wright

Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1940. Print.

Right from the start, Bigger Thomas had been headed for jail. It could have been for assault or petty larceny; by chance, it was for murder and rape. **Native Son** tells the story of this young black man caught in a downward spiral after he kills a young white woman in a brief moment of panic. Set in Chicago in the 1930s, Wright's powerful novel is an unsparing reflection on the poverty and feelings of hopelessness experienced by people in inner cities across the country and of what it means to be black in America.

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/15622.Native_Son?from_search=true&search_version=service)

The Sun Also Rises

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, 1996. Print.

The quintessential novel of the Lost Generation, *The Sun Also Rises* is one of Ernest Hemingway's masterpieces and a classic example of his spare but powerful writing style. A poignant look at the disillusionment and angst of the post-World War I generation, the novel introduces two of Hemingway's most unforgettable characters: Jake Barnes and Lady Brett Ashley. The story follows the flamboyant Brett and the hapless Jake as they journey from the wild nightlife of 1920s Paris to the brutal bullfighting rings of Spain with a motley group of expatriates. It is an age of moral bankruptcy, spiritual dissolution, unrealized love, and vanishing illusions. First published in 1926, *The Sun Also Rises* helped to establish Hemingway as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century.

(<http://www.amazon.com/The-Also-Rises-Ernest-Hemingway/dp/0743297334>)

Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck

Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1992. Print.

First published in 1939, Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize-winning epic of the Great Depression chronicles the Dust Bowl migration of the 1930s and tells the story of one Oklahoma farm family, the Joads—driven from their homestead and forced to travel west to the promised land of California. Out of their trials and their repeated collisions against the hard realities of an America divided into Haves and Have-Nots evolves a drama that is intensely human yet majestic in its scale and moral vision, elemental yet plainspoken, tragic but ultimately stirring in its human dignity. A portrait of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, of one man's fierce reaction to injustice, and of one woman's stoical strength, the novel captures the horrors of the Great Depression and probes into the very nature of equality and justice in America. At once a naturalistic epic, captivity narrative, road novel, and transcendental gospel, Steinbeck's powerful landmark novel is perhaps the most American of American Classics.

(<http://www.amazon.com/The-Grapes-Wrath-John-Steinbeck/dp/0143039431>)

Outside reading recommendations/young adult novels that further the theme of social awareness through literature:

Butterfly Boy by Rodrigo Gonzalez

Gonzalez, Rigoberto. *Butterfly Boy* Memories of a Chicano Mariposa. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 2006. Print.

Heartbreaking, poetic, and intensely personal, *Butterfly Boy* is a unique coming out and coming-of-age story of a first-generation Chicano who trades one life for another, only to discover that history and memory are not exchangeable or forgettable.

Growing up among poor migrant Mexican farmworkers, Rigoberto González also faces the pressure of coming-of-age as a gay man in a culture that prizes machismo. Losing his mother when he is twelve, González must then confront his father's abandonment and an abiding sense of cultural estrangement, both from his adopted home in the United States and from a Mexican birthright. His only sense of connection gets forged in a violent relationship with an older man. By finding his calling as a writer, and by revisiting the relationship with his father during a trip to Mexico, González finally claims his identity at the intersection of race, class, and sexuality. The result is a leap of faith that every reader who ever felt like an outsider will immediately recognize.

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/574298.Butterfly_Boy)

This novel provides an introduction to a very common social issues not fully addressed within the assigned reading list. I feel that by providing a quick snippet of novel for students and listing it as a recommended outside reading will allow students to explore the issues of sexuality and cultural pressure.

Zoot Suit by Luis Valdez

Valdez, Luis. *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1992. Print.

The landmark Chicano play is available for the first time in Spanish.

This bilingual edition combines the original English-language version with the first-ever Spanish translation of the critically acclaimed play by Luis Valdez, a work that cracked open the depiction of Chicanos on the stage, challenging viewers to revisit a troubled moment in our nation's history. From the moment the myth-infused character El Pachuco, burst onto the stage, literally, cutting his way through the drop curtain with a switchblade, Luis Valdez spurred a revolution in Chicano theater.

Focusing on the events surrounding the Sleepy Lagoon Murder Trial of 1942 and the ensuing Zoot Soot Riots that turned Los Angeles into a bloody war zone, this is a gritty and vivid depiction of the horrifying violence and racism suffered by young Mexican Americans on the home front during World War II. Valdez's cadre of young urban characters struggle with the stereotypes and generalizations of America's dominant culture, the questions of assimilation and patriotism, and a desire to rebel against the mainstream pressures that threaten to wipe them out.

Experimenting with brash forms of narration, pop culture of the war era, and complex characterizations, this quintessential exploration of the Mexican-American experience in the United States during the 1940's was the first, and only, Chicano play to open on Broadway.

(http://books.google.com/books/about/Zoot_Suit.html?id=20AZu5wj2xoC)

Zoot Suit is a well-known play throughout the Latino and Chicano community. By providing students with an inside perspective about a subculture that usually carries negative connotations it will allow them to make assessments regarding the situations and trials that the characters encounter, while providing them insight into the historical time frame of the play.

Macho! by Victor Villasenor

Villasenor, Victor. *¡macho!Houston, Tex: Arte Publico Press, 2007. Print.* Trans. Alfonso González. N.p., n.d. Print.

MACHO details seventeen-year-old Roberto Garcia's journey from the state of Michoacán, Mexico, to his illegal entry into the United States. His backbreaking work in the vegetable fields of California and the workers' divided sentiments over César Chavez's efforts to unionize the workers are chronicled in a style that many critics have compared to John Steinbeck. MACHO is a novel of the conflict of spiritual, social and economic values during the coming of age of a young Mexican.

(<http://victorvillasenor.com/portfolio/macho/>)

Macho! provides students with insight about a very crucial timeframe in California history. In addition, since many critics have compared Villasenor's work with that of Steinbeck it will provide students with the opportunity to compare and contrast the work in terms of style and the social issues and themes presented within the two novels.

Drown by Junot Diaz

Díaz, Junot. *Drown*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996. Print.

"This stunning collection of stories offers an unsentimental glimpse of life among the immigrants from the Dominican Republic—and other front-line reports on the ambivalent promise of the American dream—by an eloquent and original writer who describes more than physical dislocation in conveying the price that is paid for leaving culture and homeland behind." —San Francisco Chronicle.

Junot Diaz's stories are as vibrant, tough, unexotic, and beautiful as their settings - Santa Domingo, Dominican Neuva York, the immigrant neighborhoods of industrial New Jersey with their gorgeously polluted skylines. Places and voices new to our literature yet classically American: coming-of-age stories full of wild humor, intelligence, rage, and piercing tenderness. And this is just the beginning. Diaz is going to be a giant of American prose. —Francisco Goldman

Ever since Diaz began publishing short stories in venues as prestigious as *The New Yorker*, he has been touted as a major new talent, and his debut collection affirms this claim. Born and

raised in Santo Domingo, Diaz uses the contrast between his island homeland and life in New York City and New Jersey as a fulcrum for his trenchant tales. His young male narrators are teetering into precarious adolescence. For these sons of harsh or absent fathers and bone-weary, stoic mothers, life is an unrelenting hustle. In Santo Domingo, they are sent to stay with relatives when the food runs out at home; in the States, shoplifting and drug dealing supply material necessities and a bit of a thrill in an otherwise exhausting and frustrating existence. There is little affection, sex is destructive, conversation strained, and even the brilliant beauty of a sunset is tainted, its colors the product of pollutants. Keep your eye on Diaz; his first novel is on the way.
—Booklist

(<http://www.booksamillion.com/p/Drown/Junot-Diaz/Q9034395?id=5450452411255#overview>)

Junot Diaz's *Drown* explores the lives of immigrants, through their stories the struggles of realizing the "American dream" are revealed. Through these vibrant stories issues of race and the price of leaving ones homeland are revealed.

Applying the text within the classroom/classroom activities:

(These activities can be applied to any of the works of literature on the assigned reading list or the recommended reading list.)

Newspaper project:

After reading the assigned text students will be asked to create a newspaper from the event within the novel. While creating this newspaper it will be up to them to incorporate intriguing and captivating headlines for their stories and think about the importance of the events within the work of literature.

Questions such as the following will have to be thought about and validated during their in class presentation of their newspaper:

-What event within the text is going to be the front page story?

-What and who is in your obituary section? If no characters within the stories have physically died, are there other things such as ideals, dreams, or preconceived notions that have "died"? Why are these physical and metaphorical deaths important, and what change do they bring about?

Objectives:

-explore the social issues within the text and connect them to the themes

-present students with a creative way of analyzing a dated text

Current events:

While the students are reading the assigned text, they will be asked to keep an eye on the local news, current events, and the world new (Sources may be compiled from social media, television broadcasts of the news, newspapers, and radio broadcasts). As their reading continues they will

be asked to keep a log of stories they felt were relevant to the event taking place within the novel. As class discussions of the novel continue we will hold in class discussions that compare and contrast the events that the students noted and the event of the novel.

Questions to consider during the in-class compare and contrast discussion:

-Which social issue does the even within the novel present? How does the social issue differ from the event you noted? Has the issue being presented in both been ameliorated since the time of the novel, or has it become worse?

-Is oppression present? Who is the oppressor and who is being oppressed?

-Compare and contrast how the issue/s are presented within the work of literature and within the source you chose. Is there a main force or person who is addressing the issue? Is anyone pushing for change? If so, how are they treated?

Objectives:

-explore the ways in which social issues have transcended throughout generations

-allow the students to think about social issues on a more personal level by having them think about the events that are occurring around them and around the world

-learn about the differences between valid and invalid sources

In Class Writing “SSW”

During class students will be required to have a separate notebook for in class writing assignments. The in class writhing assignments will occur three times a week for a duration of 15-20 minutes. During this time students will be asked to write a response to a prompt or address the assigned text in a free write style. If it is a free write day, students will not be allowed to simply provide a plot summary, but rather they will be required to comment on themes, motifs, the author’s writing style, etc. that they noticed within the text.

Objectives:

-make sure students are keeping up with the reading assignments

-provide students with the opportunity to explore their own ideas about the text before they are required to write about them in a formal essay

-provide the students with practice/brainstorming time