

Kalena Zamora

English 112B

Professor Warner

October 12, 2020

## Unit of Study

### **Rationale**

Introducing the canonical novel, *Life in the Fat Lane*, by Cherie Bennett entails covering feminist critical theory. My unit of study consists of using canonical poems, nonfiction, and other novels to introduce young adult students to the patriarchy, resistance, and the value of female roles. Feminist critical theory will highlight the power structure oppressing female characters, so students can acknowledge and engage with power relations. *Life in the Fat Lane* emphasizes the harmful societal standards of a woman's body image and encourages young adults to take pride in their bodies. Thus, this unit will investigate the language, tone, and style of literary works, so students can engage with the text in a written and reading format to provide a literary analysis and enrich adolescent development through YA literature.

Young female students are starting to learn how to appreciate and accept their bodies and gender. Therefore, "Paint Me Like I Am" and "Still I Rise" are exemplary poems that introduce the empowerment of feminism. Each poem will introduce the female voice, identity, and authority. Also, "Perfect" a spoken poem by Maia Mayor and a short story, *Woman Hollering Creek*, by Sandra Cisneros will accompany these poems. Students can investigate the use of rhetoric, tone, and theme to understand the structure of the narrative. I will introduce terms such as "toxic masculinity," "sexism," and "gender bias" examples from social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram. The social media platforms illustrate society's culture and

ideology of body image. Thus it's imperative to investigate the effect of this culture. Body image also encompasses the male audience to intervene and challenge the perspective of an ideal man. Chris Crutcher's novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Brynes*, portrays the friendship of Eric and Sarah Brynes that cultivates over their "imperfect" physical features. Therefore, it leaves room for both gender parties to empathize with one another. Concluding this unit, students will write a literary analysis paper on *Life in the Fat Lane* to affirm their comprehension of structure, language, and close-reading.

The patriarchy defines the female roles, however, female narrators are profoundly deconstructing the power structures in order to be heard. These literary pieces contain the importance of self-identity and how that can either restrict or liberate certain individuals. Thus, students can identify the views of the patriarchy in *Life in the Fat Lane* and other canonical young adult literature, but also liberate themselves from a sexist view in their literary analysis paper.

### **“Into the Text”**

In *Adolescents in Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Source of Story*, “the search for identity is a primary focus” (9). Self-identity is an important theme to recognize because it establishes the voice and authority in literature. I'd introduce “Paint Me Like I Am,” a poetry collection by Nikki Giovanni, so students can read poetry written by other young adult students. This provides a gateway for students to empathize and engage in literature like they haven't before. This collection highlights the students' voices and authority. Students will search for a specific poem that best represents their self-identity and pair share with each other. They will have an opportunity to share with the class their findings. With the poems they have selected,

they will highlight and annotate the use of juxtaposition, imagery, and symbolism. Thus, students will learn to appreciate and profit from young adult literature and learn literary devices that reveal major themes. Poetry provides a shorter resemblance of prose literature, which can be interpreted distinctly by the use of these literary devices. This will foreshadow identifying other literary devices and aid students' analysis of prose literature.

Spoken poetry lends itself useful because it is a visual and auditory medium that catches the passionate voice of the speaker. I would pair "Paint Me Like I Am" with the spoken poem "Perfect" by Maia Mayor because of her passionate voice to reveal an unfortunate message: A woman has to be perfect. Mothers pass on this hideous idea that their daughters need to look and behave a certain way to appease others. For example, Mayor speaks in her mother's voice stating, "You can't be trash Maia, you have to be perfect like me" which establishes the verbal abuse to appease the patriarchal ideals of a woman. The repetition of the word "perfect" emphasizes these ideals. I would highlight the following literary devices tone, repetition, voice, and mood in this poem to guide students to the fundamental questions:

1. According to Maia Mayor's poem, what does the perfect woman look like?
2. What does "you only get one chance" mean?
3. How does speaking in the voice of her mother contribute to the poem's purpose?

At the writing checkpoint, students will answer these questions in their journals and pair share. After the pair share, students will have an opportunity to share with the class, and listen to different answers. The objective is to have students connect who is in authority and what is the master narrator/speaker's purpose through their close-reading. The pairing of the text and video demonstrates the power and purpose of the female speaker.

I would introduce the poem “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou to emphasize the point of view of the speaker. The narrator speaks in the second person, so the rhetoric is directed towards the reader. The objective is to identify the purpose of the speaker’s point of view and similes. I’d implement a lesson strategy I learned in my field experience to engage students with the dramatics of poetry. I would assign lines to each student, and have them walk around the class reading their lines. Then, I’d ask them to pick someone next to them, shake their hands, and read their lines as if they were angry. In the next rotation, I’d advise students to read their lines as if they were scared. Students will circle into a group and read their lines chronologically. I will then provide slides that highlight specific words in their lines. The highlighted words will emphasize the use of anaphora, rhythm, simile, and symbolism. I’d also redirect their attention to “little words” in the poem that impact the narrative such as “twisted lies,” and “black ocean”. Students will be assigned specific similes from the poem, and discuss the purpose of comparison. This assessment will confirm students’ comprehension of the literary device and connect it with the speaker’s point of view.

As students reflect on the structure of the narrative, I’d provide students a writing checkpoint. The prompt will consist of 3 options:

1. How does the point of view strengthen the speaker’s argument?
2. What does the repetition of “still I rise” emphasize?
3. Pick a line that captures the essence of the poem. Explain why this is important to acknowledge and close-read.

Students will finish their writing checkpoints, and will conclude their class session. I would continue this unit of study with a pairing of this poem. Sandra Cisneros’s short story *Woman Hollering Creek* can help students analyze elements of prose such as characterization,

point of view, and metaphor. Students will be introduced to terms such as “womanhood,” “patriarchy,” “essentialism,” and “toxic masculinity”. I will select a short passage for the whole class to close-read. I will create a map on the whiteboard and ask students to participate and select the terms that stand out for me to write down. I will guide their attention to questions such as:

1. Does the narrator include women’s thoughts? Why?
2. What are some common characteristics these women share?
3. How are the women described?
4. Do men include the women in discussion or exclude?

This will provide a visual demonstration of how to make observations, find patterns, and analyze. The collective terms will then be grouped into categories. For example, words can be grouped into “abuse,” “women,” and “childhood”. These groups will indicate a pattern in the narrative. Thus, students will understand the effects of culture, ideology, and power through a feminist lens and the use of literary devices. In order to assess students, they will conduct a short presentation of their observations, patterns, and analysis in a google slide. Students will keep this google slide to look back on for their future literary analysis paper.

In order to discuss toxic masculinity and gender bias, I would introduce social media platforms that use language and visuals to oppress women. Tiktok, Twitter, and Instagram thrive on the self-esteem of young adult students by using degrading images and language . In order to prepare students of this reality, I’d provide an introduction to misogyny, discrimination, and sexual harrassment so students can better understand how these images and languages are degrading and dehumanizing to women. Also, I’d review a list of community rules so students can remain respectful towards one another, even if they disagree. In *Adolescents in Search for*

*Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Source of Story*, it states, “some of what has been learned from male offenders relates to loss of meaning or inability to feel accepted” (38). Unfortunately, young male adolescents do not engage with literature as much as the young female audience, thus it is difficult to reach them through empathy. So, the objective is to use ads from social media platforms and question how the text is presenting the information. Students will analyze the ads in groups of 3’s and present their theories on what the ad is promoting, how, and why. This short activity will get students engaged with the cultural ideology on body image and it’s powerful influence on the young adult generation.

I would then provide a “Taking a Stand” activity, so students can stand comfortably within their opinion of agreement, disagreement, or neutrality. Male students will be challenged to think about the ideal male body image. Students will be provided examples from each platform of negative examples and positive examples of body image. I will provide an image or text from the social platforms and ask students to line up with their thoughts. Then, I will call on students and ask guiding questions such as:

1. Does the example illustrate language of toxic masculinity?
2. How does the example define what it means to be a woman?
3. Is the language explicit or implicit?
4. Do these images influence your idea of your body image?

This activity keeps students engaged and invited to the discussion on body image, while keeping students at a distance from reacting to each other’s responses. In this concluding class session, students will have a writing checkpoint, so they can respond to each other’s point of view. Students must explain why they agree or disagree with another student and provide one example from the social media platform we used that day.

The dynamics between female and male relations and the difference in expectations of body images would provide an opportunity to introduce Chris Crutcher's novel *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*. I'd select a few passages to assign to the groups of students. Since students will not be reading the entire novel and have no idea what it is about, I would provide comic strip templates so they can write specific phrases and draw images that can be used to contextualize the passage's theme. Students can pick any comic template they want, but must come to a consensus with their group. The group will need to figure out how they will use the comic strip to illustrate the progression of the text. Then, students will individually work on their own comic strips. The comic strips provide a medium for students to simplify the text and emphasize the main concepts. In order to assess, I would go around to each group and provide guiding questions such as:

1. Is there a gender bias in the text? Or a feminist point of view?
2. What does the author do to organize the story? Why?
3. How does the text oppress Sara? How does the text oppress Eric?

Students will then use laptops to organize an introduction including the significance of their claims, an emphasis on the syntax used, and establish an argumentative analysis. They must provide at least two quotes from the text in a paragraph. The maximum word length is 500 words, so students can ideally focus on articulating their ideas concisely. This will be their writing checkpoint and will lead into the canonical text *Life in the Fat Lane*.

### **Canonical Novel**

This unit of study has prepared students to interpret and analyze poems, spoken poetry, nonfiction, and other novels while participating in hands-on activities. Now for getting into the

canonical text, students will have 15 minutes of sustained silent reading. Students will present a summary of *Life in the Fat Lane* from their initial observations. Then they will participate in analytical activities to prepare for the literary analysis paper.

*Life in the Fat Lane* presents a young female student, Lara, that gradually gains weight due to a disease which unravels her life. Her family pressures her into looking thin again with diet and exercise, meanwhile her boyfriend acts differently around her as if he's walking on eggshells. In her journey of self-identity, she discovers the true meaning of friendship and relationships. Not only does she discover her independence, beauty, and courage, but she realizes the values needed to be happy within herself. *Literature for Today's Young Adults* conveys the diverse archetypes of characters that help students understand how literature and culture work together and create a collective ideology. This collective ideology results in power and authority, which students will determine who holds. This YA literature will give students an opportunity to identify with the archetypes of characters and engage with the novel at a deeper level. In order to introduce the archetypes, I would ask students to read over specific passages in the chapter.

Then, students will identify a character and I will ask:

1. What words or phrases best describes the character?
2. What is the character doing? How do they feel?
3. Can you relate to this character?

These guided questions will jump start the class discussion. After investigating the character's roles, students will draw the character and provide one quote that best represents their archetype identity. I want students to become devoted to understanding these characters, since it relates to self-identity. For example, Lara and Carol's mother daughter relationship, can be identified with the Junex versus the Senex archetype. The tension begins to rise when Lara



gradually gains weight, and Carol pressures her into eating better and working out. Since their relationship holds an age gap it challenges their identity and intentions. Does Carol want to protect her daughter or does she want to protect herself? This question goes back to the video the students watched, “Perfect,” by Maia Mayor because it involves the mother daughter dynamic, in order for students to discover what is the purpose of the mother’s role.

Therefore, the evaluation of the individual characters leads students to also evaluate the interaction with other characters. Students will evaluate the progression of each character with a character chart sheet throughout the study of this canonical novel. The sheet will consist of questions and students will be asked to provide a citation of their answers:

1. Where is the character?
2. How is the character introduced?
3. What is the character doing?
4. What is the purpose of this character’s role?

These questions will highlight the structure of the narrative and progress into an analysis of the character’s identity. The preparation of the literary analysis paper will continue with group discussions. Students will analyze how the text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events. For example, Lara and Jett are in a romantic relationship, but when her weight brings tension into their relationship there is nothing left but a bittersweet end. As an individual assessment, students will write their observations on the character chart sheets. With a Venn Diagram, the groups will compare and contrast two characters in the chapter. The diagram represents the relationship dynamic and how it evolves. This will lead students to make a clear connection with how the narrative begins to shift with the involvement of other characters, ideas, or events. Once groups have finished their diagrams, they will present

it with the rest of the class and we will close with a writing checkpoint. This writing checkpoint will consist of 3 options:

1. Does Lara speak up for herself? Why or why not?
2. Should Lara stay in relationship with Jett, even if she feels uncomfortable?
3. Does the text propose that thin is ultimately the most beautiful quality of a woman?
4. Is the disease a representation of physical, mental, or emotional pressures from society's ideals?

These guided questions give students a chance to dig a little deeper in their response by using a feminist lens.

### **Extending the Unit**

At the end of the unit, students will use these activities, worksheets, and writing checkpoints to their advantage for providing a concise analysis in this feminist unit of study. To jump start into their literary analysis paper, I will have students make brainstorming maps in groups. Each group will have a main concept, and students will write at least one textual evidence from the novel. Then, the rotation of brainstorming maps begin. The students will work on this for about 15 minutes. The maps will be placed on the whiteboard for the whole class to see. The class will review these thoughts and as a collective will come up with the purpose of these concepts. This review will provide a meaningful discussion with their peers.

So I would take this opportunity to go into debate teams. The class will be separated into two groups and will have to work together to form an argument with the evidence already presented on the maps. They will have 15 minutes to organize their argument and evidence. I will pick 4 students from each side to provide an opening statement, conjecture,

cross-examining, and closing arguments. Another 4 students will be picked to be characters from the novel. Then the remaining students will be jury members, the judge, or reporters. This is a fun and engaging activity for students to compete in a friendly match of debate. The jury members, judge, and reporters are allowed to conduct notes during the trial to stay on task. The debate will take about 15 minutes to 20 minutes to conclude. These arguments and notes will help students engage with their closing ideas of the novel.

Therefore, the students will write these closing thoughts for their literary analysis paper. Students will use laptops to create a google document and begin writing. An in-class assessment, will be conducted at the 15 minute mark to see where they are at with forming a concise analysis on this feminist canonical young adult literature. The purpose of this closing activity is to show students how this young adult literature relates to society's ideologies on body image, women, and the patriarchy.

### **Importance of Feminist Literature**

Feminist literature is important to teach because it emphasizes the struggles young adults face. They will be challenged to acknowledge their privileges and restrictions that coincide with their identity. Self-identity is important for young adults, and this canonical novel and literary works reveals the importance of finding happiness within one's self. Instead of focusing on what society defines as beautiful and acceptable, students will discover the power they have as young adults. *Life in the Fat Lane* shows real-life situations of body image, peer pressure, and relationships. These literary works emphasize the oppression women face, but also how to empower and regain authority in the narrative.

Works Cited

Angelou, Maya, et al. *Still I Rise*. Random House, 2001.

“Books about Identity, Discrimination, Struggle with Decisions.” *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, by Mary L. Warner, Scarecrow Press, 2006.

Bennett, Cherie. *Life in the Fat Lane*. Ember, 2011.

“Books about Real Life Experiences.” *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, by Mary L. Warner, Scarecrow Press, 2006.

Cisneros, Sandra. *Woman Hollering Creek: and Other Stories*. Vintage Books, 1992.

Crutcher, Chris. *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*. Greenwillow Books, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2018.

Donelson, Kenneth L., and Alleen Pace Nilsen. *Literature for Today’s Young Adults*. Scott, Foresman, 1980.

“Evaluating, Promoting, and Using YA Books.” *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, by Alleen Pace Nilsen et al., Pearson, 2014.

Giovanni, Nikki. *Paint Me Like I Am Teen Poems from Writerscorps*. Paw Prints, 2009.

“Making Drama with Poetry .” *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, by Alleen Pace Nilsen et al., Pearson, 2014.

“Making Drama with Poetry .” *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, by Alleen Pace Nilsen et al., Pearson, 2014.

“Nonfiction.” *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, by Alleen Pace Nilsen et al., Pearson, 2014.

“Students Share Their Perspectives.” *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, by Mary L. Warner, Scarecrow Press, 2006.

“Young Adult Authors Describe Their Commitment to Adolescents.” *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, by Mary L. Warner, Scarecrow Press, 2006.

“Young Adults Sharing Reading Choices.” *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, by Mary L. Warner, Scarecrow Press, 2006.