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 Finding the little things in American Gothic: An Analysis on Literature

 My unit of study will focus the breakdown of literature through annotation. There are a lot of different types of genres that could get the job done, but none as entertaining as American Gothic. The major characteristic of American gothic is rational versus the irrational, ghosts, mutated humans, monsters, and guilt. All these points could lead to a lot of out of the box thinking and analysis, which could be fun classroom activities. Through annotation I want my students to find things that are significant to them in literature.

 My students should feel confident in what they are reading, so that they can understand it for themselves. Some of the difficulty students find in annotation is that they think they need to find the right answer when annotation is just for yourself. I decided to go with Edgar Allen Poe, “The Black Cat”, “The Cask of Amontillado”, and “The Raven” and for my example of American Gothic. Edgar Allen Poe is an icon for his writing of gothic literature, so using him for this unit would make the most sense. Each story deals with the mysteries of the mind.

Using all Edgar Allen Poe’s writing offers a chance for students to explore different outlets of annotation. Annotation will be the map into guiding through American gothic. Each story has different hidden secrets or meanings that need to be discovered. They will be able to identify key characteristic of American gothic through annotation.

**Introduction to the Unit**

*Spend a day or two introducing the unit*

 Music and imagery set the tone for what comes to follow. American gothic being this uncomfortable and unsettling feeling I want the students to observe a clip from “Betty Boop’s Snow White”. The clip is of a clown transforming into a ghost as he is singing behind Snow Whites glass casket. The class will have a chance to write down their thoughts about what made them the most uncomfortable while watching the clip before they get into groups. As they discuss their thoughts, I will ask what stood out most to them and create a list of characteristics. This list of characteristics will connect to the characteristics of American gothic. Then they can create a comic in their groups of what those characteristics would look like and present them.

 Link to “Koko the Clown Sings ‘St.James Infirmary Blues’ in Betty Boop’s Snow White”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDATXtewPrg&ab_channel=rahree>

**The Main Text: “The Black Cat and Other Stories”**

 I would first make a presentation on who Edgar Allen Poe was and what importance he held to American Gothic literature. I would go into detail about his life and why he had so many twisted ideas for the stories he wrote. Then we would watch a video of why you should read Edgar Allen Poe.

Three main questions and goal for the unit will be:

* Find the main characteristics of American Gothic.
* Analyze and interpret each story using different annotation methods.
* Write a short essay based on annotations.

Link to “Why should you read Edgar Allen Poe?”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lgg-pVjOok&ab_channel=TED-Ed>

First Activity:

 I first want to go through the steps of annotation. This will be that start of using CATCH annotation. CATCH annotation is: **C**apture the theme, **A**cknowledge confusion, **T**alk to text, **C**ircle unfamiliar words, and **H**ighlight important details. The students will receive a work sheet of Edgar Allen Poe’s poem “The Raven.”This is just to start before we get into the other story stories so my students can understand what work we will be dealing with. I will guide them in highlighting and annotation, while asking questions to see what they think is important. This activity will stay with them as we continue so they can go back to it if needed.

Second Activity:

 Using CATCH annotation, we will break down the story of “The Black Cat.” I will read aloud the story for them to have a clean read, this will be the moment for them to just listen to the story instead of feeling rushed to write something down. Then I will have each student take their time to annotate what the though was important or interesting to them. When they are finished, they will be in groups to share aloud each other’s thoughts; this will help them see other perspectives. Then we will come back together as a class and fill out the CATCH annotation worksheet.

Third Activity:

 Using their CATCH annotation worksheet, where they will have all their annotations in one place, it will help them start to write a short paragraph. This paragraph should include what they thought was important when finding characteristics of American Gothic. It will include at least one quote they found interesting and analysis on that quote. We will do this each time we read a short story so that they will have accumulated enough evidence to write about a characteristic about American Gothic literature.

Fourth Activity:

Once we have gone through a least three of the short stories and a few poems, the students will take the paragraphs they made and turn it into a short essay. All the CATCH annotations they have used will become a bigger essay that will highlight the main characteristic they found in American Gothic literature.

**Concluding the Unit:**

 Finishing up our unit on American Gothic Literature I would end it on editing their essays and turning in final drafts. Based on the stories I will be using in the lesson this unit relates a lot to chapter four and six in *Literature for Today’s Young Adults*. Chapter six seems to be more related to American Gothic because it deals a lot with the supernatural and questions a lot about the human mind. Chapter four is sprinkled in because it’s quite dramatic how each story plays out. The essays should show how the students accumulated the knowledge of finding characteristics of American Gothic through their own interpretations of annotation.

First Option:

* Make a panting of iconic American gothic settings. Using the characteristic, they annotated in the stories.

Second Option:

* Have a PowerPoint of each story they enjoyed in class and break down the meanings they saw in that scene.

Third Option:

* A short original gothic film that they can make in a group. With a major American Gothic feature.

**Working Beyond the Text**

*Sleepy Hollow* (Short story/ Movie)

 Not only is “Sleepy Hollow” a well-known short story by Washington Irving it is also a beloved Halloween movie. I would be hoping I will be teaching this unit during the Halloween season and this film would be the most perfect part for it. Tim Burton brought the town of *Sleepy Hollow* to life using his creative imagination for bringing the macabre alive. It is a classic American Gothic story dealing with trauma, ghost, and the insane. Students could compare the movie and the short story to see what Tim Burton decided to highlight from key characteristics of American Gothic. It would be a good reference to make when students are writing about the creepy things that went on in America at the time.

*Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (Netflix Series)

 The new Netflix series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* has become a very popular show that involves the macabre and magic. It is set in America and has a lot of mysteries that need to be solved through other means. Sabrina and her friends fight ghosts, monsters, and other ab-human to save themselves and their friends. I just thought it would be fun to watch some of the episodes in class and finds characteristics of American gothic in the episodes.

*American Gothic* by Grant Wood (Painting)

 This painting is so iconic that I think it would be a shame to not show them it. The painting was made in the 1930’s but it still holds that uncanny resemblance to American gothic. The painting has that eerie feeling as if the eyes are following you around. The image is so iconic that people all over the world use different characters as the man and woman. So as an activity I would ask them to create the same image but with other characters they like as the woman and the man holding the pitchfork .

Work Cited

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