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Doctor Warner

Unit of Study Eng 112B

Romantic Era Poetry – Good vs Evil

Overall Purpose

I chose to do a Unit of Study on British romantic era poetry, specifically poems whose themes were still relevant today. Sexuality and temptation are common themes among today’s young adults so I chose two poems that I thought depicted these very well: “Christabel” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and “Goblin Market” by Christina Rosetti. Reading these poems will give young readers a chance to learn ways of coping with temptation, as well as understand the realities of the choices you make. Every decision has a consequence and each consequence affects more than just the decision-maker, which is a life-long lesson that is taught through these poems.

The objected age group for these poems is 11th grade through sophomore year of college. The language can be difficult at times, but the lessons are valuable to those in high school as well as those looking for higher education.

Both poems explore the dynamic between temptation and sexuality, as well as the fine line between good and evil. Sexuality is not as taboo now as it was when the poems were written, but there are still certain aspects of it that society considers taboo, ex. Homosexuality, porn, etc. Although good and evil are relative terms, in these poems they are clearly defined for the reader through diction and context.

Another running theme for both poems is the idea of a central ‘moral’, meaning that the poem has an ideal objective the narrator wants to eventually proclaim. Students will be able to see this moral through close reading and pairing with other texts that offer the same or similar morals.

**Launching the Unit**

Read classic fairy tales; object - morals.

1. Cinderella
2. Snow White
3. Sleeping Beauty
4. Rapunzel
5. Beauty and the Beast
6. Rumpelstiltskin
7. Little Red Riding Hood

Have the students choose their favorite fairy tale. Why is this their favorite? Does this story have good and evil characters? Is there temptation? A moral?

SSWs.

1. Ask the students what they consider to be good/evil. Why? Are there different levels?

The idea of this is to get them thinking of the theme of good versus evil and how it plays a role in the poems.

1. Is temptation always a bad thing? Discuss a time where you were tempted and you either did or did not give in. What was the outcome? Do you wish you had done the opposite?

This is to get them thinking about how temptation and innocence play a role with both Christabel and the sisters. In “Goblin Market”, one sister gives in to temptation and the other does not. What happens to the sister who gives in? The other one?

1. Is sexuality still a taboo subject? Why? What are the aspects of it that are okay to talk about and what are the aspects that are not okay to talk about? Why is it like this?

Getting them to think about controversial topics in not only the poems, but the outside world as well.

1. Do temptation and innocence go hand in hand? You can have one without the other, but do they correlate?

This has to do with the innocence and naivety of Christabel, as well as the innocence of the sister. For later: Did their innocence provoke or lead to their ultimate demise?

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**Extending the Unit**

To go deeper into the unit of poetry, I would have each student do a close reading of 10-15 lines from one of the poems. They should write between one and two pages on the close reading and how the lines are effective the poem, as well as why the lines/poem are considered to be romantic. I would then have them do quick 5-10 minute presentations on the lines that they chose, why they stuck out to them, and if they would recommend this poem to another student.

Following the close reading activity, the students would then find another poem of their choosing and do a close reading of that poem. They would choose 10-15 lines (depending on the length of the poem) and do a close reading regarding the effectiveness of the lines as well as the meaning of the lines within the context and history of that poem. The students would go into a deeper presentation with this close reading because it is a poem of their choosing. They could present using anything as long as it is informative, accurate, and attempting to sell the poem to the audience. Some ideas include:

1. A powerpoint presenting ideas from the poem
2. A modern song
3. An original song or poem based off of the chosen poem
4. A short video
5. A painting or illustration created to represent ideas from the poem

**Works to Pair With**

The Harry Potter Series: *Harry Potter* has a lot of the same themes as these poems, such as family, temptation, and good versus evil. He has to live with his hated aunt, uncle, and cousin, but must love them to an extent because they are family. The progression of the family theme is seen throughout the series, and gets more complex in books five and seven. Temptation is relevant as well, especially when Voldemort is constantly telling Harry that he would be a great Death Eater, but Harry chooses the ‘good’ side over the ‘evil’ side.

*To Kill A Mockingbird*: The themes in this novel are family, racism, rape, and justice, which tie in well with “Goblin Market” because of the rape of Laura and the justice Lizzie seeks. It could also be tied in a bit to “Christabel” in the way that love/sex between the Robinson man and the Ewell girl is condemned, so she cries rape, and love/sex between Geraldine and Christabel is condemned and evil.

The Story of Adam and Eve: Ties in well with “Goblin Market” because of the sister’s giving in to temptation is directly paralleled to Eve’s giving in to temptation and taking from the Tree of Knowledge. Both receive punishments. Also ties in with “Christabel” because of the good versus evil aspect and how Eve knew that she should not do something, and knew that it was wrong, but did it anyways. Christabel was unaware of the snake-like features of Geraldine, so she was hospitable to her. The story very descriptively depicts a snake strangling Christabel in Sir Leoline’s dream, which is a parallel to Adam and Eve. It also references snakes and snake-eyes often. The dove and the snake in “Christabel” show the two sides of morality.

*Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*: This is not your average heroine/good and evil novel, but it does depict obvious morals and temptation. Alice often makes decisions, whether good or bad, to eat something, drink something, or go somewhere that she has not done before. She also often regrets her decision, but she lives with it. She gets down on herself throughout the novels for many of her decisions, but picks herself right back up. This shows students that although you may make terrible decisions at some points, you cannot go back and change it so you must look at the bright side and keep moving forward. Although it is a fantasy novel, and very unrealistic, the morals in it are true. It relates to “Goblin Market” because Laura made decisions that she could not come back from, but she ended up recovering and living a long life with her sister. It also related to “Christabel” because Christabel makes life altering decisions, although unknowingly.

“The Raven”: “The Raven” is a classic good versus evil poem with the raven being a symbol of evil in the poem. The speaker has an internal debate about what he wants to do with his life: continue living or give up his will to be with his beloved. Although this is not the same conflict as the sisters or Christabel, it is similar in the way that he must make a choice to give in to the darkness or break from it. He does give in, as does Laura in “Goblin Market”.

*Blue is the Warmest Color*: This is a maybe, because of many reasons. The plot and details themselves make it important regarding the themes of the poems, but the explicit nudity and the fact that it is in French make it difficult for me to decide whether or not I would use it in a classroom. The movie is about a teenage girl who is exploring her sexuality. She loses her virginity to a man she does not want to nor does she love because she thinks that it is the right thing to do. She is most comfortable talking to her gay friend about it, and she knows she has feelings for a gay woman at her school. The pressure that she feels as well as the isolation from her friends is comparable to the sexuality in “Christabel” as well as in “Goblin Market”.

**Activities**

For concluding activities, I would jump back to the fairy tales. I would want the students to do a quick write/SSW on how the poems relate to fairy tales. Which classic fairy tale best relates to each poem (pick one tale for each poem) and explain why. They will be briefly talking about their choices.

Another option is to assign fairy tales to groups and have them explain/present how it relates to each poem. Examples:

LRRH: Goblin Market, Christabel

B&tB: Christabel

Sleeping Beauty: Goblin Market

Snow White: Christabel

Hansel and Gretel: Goblin Market

Little Mermaid: Christabel

Discuss the idea of good versus evil in the poem “Christabel”. Is Geraldine intentionally evil? Write a paper on it with evidence backing your side.

Quick write about how innocence and temptation go hand in hand. Incorporate naivety.

Give examples in modern writing, poetry, or movies that are influenced by the idea of innocence and temptation. Create a presentation on this; you can either use this idea or branch from it, but verify with me first.

**Works Cited**

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