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Wanderlust: A Unit of Study on Inspirational Literature

This unit of study will focus on Mitch Albom’s *The Time Keeper*, along with other pieces of literature and poetry. Although *The Time Keeper* may not be as popular as other novels and poems within the theme of inspirational literature, it still offers young adults the chance to not only understand themselves, but the world around them as well. The inspirational genre of literature focuses on confronting daily struggles, challenging professional and personal problems, overcoming physical and emotional conflicts, and finding a purpose to continue striving for the happiness that everyone is entitled to. These issues highlight the troubles that many young adults are constantly presented with, especially during their transition from trying to understand themselves as teenagers to trying to understand the world as young adults. Inspirational literature (both novels and poetry) encompasses all the good, bad, and ugly situations that life entails; however, the most important reward that inspirational literature can grant to young adults is the ability to view life through the perspectives of other people who were, or still are, in similar situations in order to allow them to find their own way during their journey for the pursuit of happiness. I believe that incorporating and implementing inspirational fiction as part of a lesson plan can give students a chance to explore their emotions and imaginations. They will not need to concentrate on trying to find the right answers to the questions that the texts may present, so they can fixate their focus toward learning about themselves, the people around them, and the reality that they live in.

**Introducing the Unit:**

I will introduce this unit by asking the students to participate in a brief free-write session (about 15-20 minutes). The prompt will ask students to write about something they want and something they need; then, I will ask them to explain if/why one is more important than the other. I will provide the students with the following questions to help them articulate their thoughts:

**Do the things you want or need have to be physical?**

**What is the difference between *wanting* something and *needing* something?**

The purpose of this free-writing session is to stimulate the students’ ideas to prepare them for the rest of the unit. After the class is done writing and satisfied with what they have written, I will ask for volunteers to share their response to the prompt. In order to lead this activity into a discussion, I will be asking them questions in regards to their responses; I will also let students know that they are free to chime in with their own comments and questions as well (as long as the discussion stays on a positive and provocative note).

When everyone is done sharing their responses, I will guide the class to the next part of this unit. To give the students a little break from writing and conversing, I will pass out copies of Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken.”

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

This poem will act as the formal introduction to the centerpiece of the unit. I will ask for volunteers to read through the poem; students will take turns reading each stanza of the poem. After the class reads through it once, I will read through it a second time. However, I will tell the class to listen carefully and take notes on aspects of the poem that they think are significant and/or intriguing. As a class, we will start discussing about the interesting things the students have noticed about the poem, what they like or dislike about the poem, and what they think the meaning of the poem may be. My goal for this activity is for it to help prepare students for similar themes, motifs, and ideas that *The Time Keeper* will present; it will give students a preview of things to come.

**The Centerpiece: *The Time Keeper***

Since the novel is fairly short and easily readable, we will read one or two chapters together in class. Students will receive worksheets at the beginning of each chapter we read. The worksheets will have chapter based questions that the students can fill out as we read; a majority of the questions will be answered in the form of short responses. The goal of these worksheets is to help students stay on track with the reading. Once we finish a chapter, students will turn in the worksheets; once they are checked off and graded, I will hand them back to the class so they can use them to study for the quizzes and tests that will come up. In addition to these study guide worksheets, I will also provide students with character charts. Students can write down notes and ideas about the characters they meet as well as each characters’ wants and needs because after we finish reading the book, students will need to turn in a one to two-page essay discussing the one of the following prompts:

**Which character do you relate to the most? Why?  
What is your definition of happiness? Can happiness be bought? Why or why not?**

**What is something that inspires or motivates you? Why is inspiration or motivation important?**

This assignment will not be an in-class writing activity; it will be a take-home mini essay, and the class will have up to a week to draft and revise their papers before they turn it in. The purpose of this writing assignment is to allow each individual student to write about a few concepts that the reality of the real world may present. Students will be able to tap into their imaginative and (possibly) philosophical side while discussing the prompt, and they might even learn a thing or two about themselves that they may have not yet realized.

**Extending the Unit: EDEN – “rock + roll”**

To extend the unit, I will put on the official music video of EDEN’s ["rock + roll."](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geZ_5Ri7ANg) The song conveys inspirational tones and messages about EDEN’s outlook on life, how he wants to spend his days, and his own definition of happiness. Since this is still a fairly new song, students may or may not be familiar with it, and that is the best part of this activity. Students will be able to connect this song and reflect on their own inspirations. “rock + roll” can tie in very well with “The Road Not Taken” and *The Time Keeper* because all three works share similar themes and messages*.* While the video is being prepared, I will hand out a sheet of lyrics that the students can use to follow along. The lyrics are as follows:

[Verse 1]

So tell me this is who you are  
They tell me I've got something more  
And, oh, you could be loved  
But I don't want the lights to find me when I'm dark and lost  
But never on my own  
[Chorus]  
'Cause I just wanna swing like Sinatra  
Singing like I can't stop  
'Cause I could never rock like a rolling stone  
I just wanna live like the ones before  
And maybe I could play guitar like Hendrix  
Or save the world or end it  
And then maybe they'll remember me when I'm gone  
That's all I could ever want  
That's all I want

[Verse 2]  
So I got ten minutes to be all or nothing to  
Whoever wants to hear  
And I got ten weeks of talking bullshit on repeat till I'm burnt out and disappear  
But I owe you nothing  
And I own my luck  
Oh, they said you'll never be alone again  
But I don't think you understand me or what I fear  
But you could be loved  
But I don't want to lie to tell myself  
I'm more than all the mistakes I've out run

[Verse 3]  
'Cause I'm only here for a minute  
And I don't care what you say 'cause I know  
You're only here 'cause I'm winning  
But I can be my own kind of rock and roll like  
I don't really care if you say you don't fuck with me  
And I can say what the fuck I want 'cause it's down to me  
And I got love for you even if you are doubting me  
Like, oh, my God I just can't stop

[Chorus]  
'Cause I just wanna sing like Sinatra  
With ethanol my soundtrack  
'Cause I could never rock like a rolling stone  
I wonder how it feels to burn out young  
'Cause I just wanna die before my heart fails  
From heartbreak or cocktails and  
Then maybe you'll cry once you know I'm gone  
That's all I could ever want  
Oh, that's all I want

[Bridge]  
'Cause I ain't scared of living

(Does it get easier?)

(No… yes, it gets easier)

No, I ain't scared of living

(Oh yeah?)

No, I ain't scared of living

[Outro]  
'Cause it's all we've got  
What are we breathing for if we ain't living  
And I don't want your love  
I just want to feel like I'm still living  
And if there is no God  
I'll know the day I die I lived through heaven  
And that I gave it hell  
And if it hurt, oh, well at least that's living

That's all I want  
  
Sex drugs and rock and roll that's all I want  
What's under the words you know that's all I want  
Something more than superficial is all I want  
Sex drugs and rock and roll that's all I want

The song will act as a formal extension to the centerpiece of this unit. The goal for this activity is to show that literature can come in any form. By now, the class will have been introduced to literature in the form of poetry, literature in the form of a novel, and literature in the form of music. Students will first listen to the song and follow along with the lyrics (without watching the video). Then, they will write down their first impressions about the song. After writing down their thoughts, the class will listen to it again, but they will watch the music video. Another brief writing sessions about what they think of the lyrics will commence detailing their thoughts about the song, lyrics, and video. They will also write about what they like or dislike about the song and/or video; this activity will then proceed with a discussion about what they have written so far as well as the similarities they have noticed among “The Road Not Taken,” *The Time Keeper,* and ”rock + roll.” The final portion of this activity will require students to write a response (half a page to one page) describing which part of the unit they enjoyed most, why they enjoyed that particular portion of the unit, and the most valuable or significant moral, lesson, or idea they have taken from this unit as a whole.

Works Cited

EDEN. “EDEN - Rock + Roll (Official Video).” *YouTube*, YouTube, 4 Oct. 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=geZ\_5Ri7ANg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geZ_5Ri7ANg).

“EDEN – ​rock roll.” *Genius*, Genius, 19 Aug. 2016, <https://genius.com/Eden-rock-roll-lyrics>

Frost, Robert. “The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost.” *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken).