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English 112B

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Unit of Study: The Reality behind Fantasy

“Fantasy is the safe zone, but not to escape from the problems of the world, rather to explore them in a safer context. It’s a zone where the young reader can engage with big problems — sometimes scary — that they are a part of anyway, like it or not.”

-Matthew Cody, young-adult fantasy author

**Rational**:

# I chose to focus to my unit of study on fantasy, specifically how fantasy can teach students about reality. The first words that come to a reader’s mind when they hear fantasy are stories of magic, wizards, unicorns, dragons, etc. Readers assume that fantasy cannot possibly reflect reality because fantasy illustrates stories of make-believe places, events, and people. While that latter is true, the beginning is not. Fantasy certainly mirrors reality. The authors of *Literature for Today's Young Adults* put it best, saying “Reality may not be fantasy, but fantasy is reality (106). Fantasy teaches students about real people, real life lessons, and how to approach and solve real problems.

# The text that I chose as my centerpiece is *The Golden Compass* by Philip Pullman. *The Golden Compass* is about a 12 year-old girl named Lyra who embarks on quest to search for her missing friend and to rescue her uncle. Lyra matures in the sense that she gains self-confidence through the many obstacles she has to face through her journey in the Artic. *The Golden Compass* is a perfect example of a fantasy novel that teaches students the reality of the world through the characters and themes of the story.

**Launching the Unit**:

1. First, I would begin by assigning an in-class writing exercise. I would tell the students to identify the term fantasy. Then I would ask them if they have ever read any fantasy fiction that has taught them anything about reality and if yes, how so? I would also ask them if they believe that fantasy can teach students about reality. If yes, explain. If no, why not? I would then lead an open class discussion so that students can share their thoughts, feelings, and understandings of the questions. The reason I want to start with this writing exercise is because I want to get the students to begin thinking critically. This is a great way for the students to begin building ideas or an argument that could be useful for a future essay on how fantasy can teach students about reality.
2. Next, I would tell the students to get into groups of four and then hand each group a printed sheet of synopses of various fantasy novels. I would ask the groups to read each summary and write down as they identify real issues or situations that are stated in the summary. I would also ask them to answer, how can students relate to those situations and issues? Furthermore, how can those real problems and situations teach students about reality? I would then have each group present what they wrote. I think this assignment will further show the students that real life problems and situations are reflected in fantasy novels. This might even change the mind of students who did not believe that fantasy novels could teach students about reality.
3. Finally, I would hand out the lyrics to the song “Fantasy Is Reality”, by Parliament, which we will read as a class.

Whoa whoa whoa  
Ummmm ummmmm  
Whoa whoa whoa  
Yeah  
Ummmm ummmmm  
Whoa whoa whoa  
  
Fantasy is reality in the world today  
I'll keep hanging in there that's the only way  
Recollections of what Grandaddy used to say  
Keeps me hanging in there that's the only way  
  
My mind is mine and mine my mind will always stay  
No way of life no man made law is gonna take it away  
I see the light and taste the blood of your song  
It tells me to carry on and it tells me to come on home  
  
Ummmm ummmmm  
Whoa whoa whoa  
Recollections of what Grandaddy used to say  
Keeps me hanging in there that's the only way  
  
My mind is mine and mine my mind will always stay  
No way of life no man made law is gonna take it away  
I see the light and taste the blood of your song  
It tells me to carry on and it tells me to come on home

Fantasy is reality in the world today  
I'll keep hanging in there that's the only way  
Recollections of what Grandaddy used to say  
Keeps me hanging in there that's the only way  
  
Fantasy is reality in the world today  
I'll keep hanging in there that's the only way  
Recollections of what Grandaddy used to say  
Keeps me hanging in there that's the only way  
  
[Instrument riff]  
  
I see the light and taste the blood of your song  
It tells me to carry on and it tells me to come on home  
  
Fantasy is reality in the world today  
I'll keep hanging in there that's the only way  
Recollections of what Grandaddy used to say  
Keeps me hanging in there that's the only way  
  
Ummmm ummmmm  
Whoa whoa whoa  
  
Fantasy is reality in the world today  
I'll keep hanging in there that's the only way  
Recollections of what Grandaddy used to say  
Keeps me hanging in there that's the only way

[spoken]  
Fantasy is reality in the world today  
  
Whoa whoa whoa  
  
Fantasy is reality in the world today  
I'll keep hanging in there that's the only way  
Recollections of what Grandaddy used to say  
Keeps me hanging in there that's the only way  
  
[Fade out]  
Fantasy is reality in the world today  
I'll keep hanging in there that's the only way  
Recollections of what Grandaddy used to say

As a take home assignment, I would ask the students to listen to the song and then write a 1-page analysis of the meaning of the song. They should consider: what is the main idea the songwriter is trying to communicate? The reason why I chose to introduce a song as part of launching the unit, is because I wanted to step back from literature for a moment. The song offers a different way of learning and understanding while still focusing on the topic. I chose for this assignment to be taken home because since it is an analysis, I would want each student to be able to analyze the song by listening to it as many times as they wish. A collaborative analysis of the song would be planned for the next class meeting.

**The Centerpiece Work:**

I would have students read *A Golden Compass* for homework and during each class meeting there will be time for an open discussion on the chapters read on the previous days. To prepare for our open discussions students will be required to bring their English notebook with them every class day. In those notebooks, students should be taking notes during their reading time. To make sure students are reading, each day I will randomly select students to either lead the discussion or to answer questions on the chapters that should have already been read. Since my focus is how fantasy can teach students about reality, my discussion questions will be based off of that. I would ask students:

1. What characters in *A Golden Compass* portray actions and emotions that

of people in the real world?

2. What themes in *A Golden Compass* reflect reality?

3. What quotes in *A Golden Compass* are examples of characters in the novel

dealing with real life problems/situations?

Aside from the open discussions and note taking, there will be weekly vocabulary tests on the vocabulary of my choosing from *A Golden Compass*. Also, there will be oral quizzes that will be integrated into the class discussions of *A Golden Compass*.

Once the students finish reading *A Golden Compass*, the students will have to complete one major assignment on *A Golden Compass*.

Assignment: Based of your reading notes from your English notebook, pick two significant scenes from *A Golden Compass* and write an essay on how those scenes show how fantasy can teach students about reality.

**Extending the Unit**

*The Lightning Thief (Percy Jackson)* by Rick Riordan

This novel pairs well with *A Golden Compass* in the sense that both protagonists embark on a quest. “Percy sets out on a quest across the United States to reach the gates of the Underworld (located in a recording studio in Hollywood) and prevent a catastrophic war between the gods” (The Lightning Thief (Percy Jackson and the Olympians #1).

*Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke

This book is similar to *A Golden Compass* because both of the protagonists are 12-year-old girls who both search for loved in a story. “Twelve-year-old Meggie learns that her father, who repairs and binds books for a living, can "read" fictional characters… At the same time, Meggie's mother disappeared into the story” (Inkheart (Inkworld #1)).

*Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs

This book pairs well with *A Golden Compass* because like the children in this novel, Lyra is also an orphan. The orphans live on an eerie island and Lyra journeys through a mysterious island. “A mysterious island. An abandoned orphanage. A strange collection of curious photographs” ((Miss Peregrine’s Peculiar Children #1)).

*Cinder (The Lunar Chronicles)* by Marissa Meyer

This novel is similar to *A Golden Compass* in the way the both protagonists are female and both faces struggles of self-identity. “she suddenly finds herself at the center of an intergalactic struggle, and a forbidden attraction. Caught between duty and freedom, loyalty and betrayal, she must uncover secrets about her past in order to protect her world’s future” ((The Lunar Chronicles #1))

Works Cited

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