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English 112B

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Unit of Study: Overcoming Obstacles

Young adults face many personal problems today such as bullying, dealing with dysfunctional parents, and trying to get accepted socially. However, many of those problems are hardly addressed either with friends, at school, or the workplace. Young adults find themselves facing their difficulties on their own, and this can sometimes be destructive. Without seeking help, the problems build up. When the issue becomes unbearable, young adults may take their frustrations out on either themselves or others. To help them face their problems, students must build up inner strength and courage. To build up strength and courage, one must first be able to acknowledge and recognize their problems. This is what the unit will cover: acknowledging personal problems and gathering up the strength and courage to overcome them. Students will get a chance to open up and discuss common personal problems that are hardly ever talked about. Discussions of personal problems fulfill the initial step of acknowledgment and recognition while discussions of solutions to those problems can build up strength and courage.

To start the unit off, I will play a song by Tupac Shakur called “Keep Ya Head Up”. The song talks of poor black females and how they must cope with various types of problems. Introducing the unit with this song allows students to open their minds to problems of people of different races, genders, and economic statuses. After the song has played, students will begin an initial discussion of the song and personal problems in general. After this initial discussion, I will introduce a poem called “If” by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling’s poem talks of inner strength

and courage to overcome personal problems. The students will then do a pair share and discuss both personal problems addressed in “Keep Ya Head Up” and courage addressed in “If”.

Students can also further the discussion by commenting on common personal problems that are faced in their communities and how those problems can be solved. This type of discussion allows students to open up their minds to universal issues that we all face and it gives these young adults a chance to talk of topics that we are too ashamed to speak of.

I will then introduce the novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. This book tells the story of an African American woman named Celie who deals with poverty, rape, separation from her family, and physical abuse, let alone the problems that come with being an African American woman in the early 1900s. The book is written in the form of a sequence of “letters to God”. The narrator, Celie, writes these letters because she feels that she has no one else to talk to about her personal problems. These “letters to God” allow her to vent and acknowledge the problems she faces and, at the same time, allows her to try to find a solution. By reading *The Color Purple*, students may read about various different problems people may face and how to find the inner strength and courage to overcome those problems. While reading the book, I will ask students to write their own personal “letter to God,” sharing anything they want. There aren’t any guidelines to this assignment; it will be a free-write. This will be anonymous and will only be collected and read out loud if the student desires.

To end the unit, I will show the movie version of *The Color Purple* because the performances are very powerful. My goal is that by the end of the unit the students can see that some problems are common, and by relating to the characters, the students can come up with solutions. I also hope that the students implement lessons learned from *The Color Purple* into their own lives.

Unit of Study

Overcoming obstacles

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intro

- A unit on overcoming obstacles gives students a chance to reflect on their own issues. Often students don't know how to deal with problems, and they keep silent.
- I want students to start by being able to acknowledge their problems.
- By the end of this unit I hope the students find ways to build up the courage they need to confront their problems.

Launching the unit



- Show “Keep ya head up” by Tupac Shakur
- Have students discuss as a class common personal problems. For example, bullies, dealing with a divorce, a death in the family, etc.
- Show “If” by Rudyard Kipling



“If” Rudyard Kipling

- If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt
you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

“If” Rudyard Kipling

continued...



If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;

If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;

If you can meet with triumph and disaster

And treat those two imposters just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken

Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,

**Or watch the things you gave your life to,
broken,**

And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

“If” Rudyard Kipling continued...

- If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and
sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";

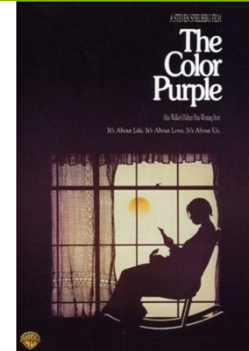
“If” Rudyard Kipling continued...

- If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man my son!

Activity

- Discuss the poem in class
- Pair Share- With a partner discuss both personal problems addressed in “Keep Ya Head Up” and courage addressed in “If”. Students can also further the discussion by commenting on common personal problems that are faced in their communities and how those problems can be solved.

The Color Purple



- A novel by Alice Walker that won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction
- At the age of 14, Celie is abused, raped, and impregnated by her step- father.
- She deals with her predicament by writing “letters to God”
- Celie is forced to marry an older man who continues abusing her.

If she can survive, so can you!

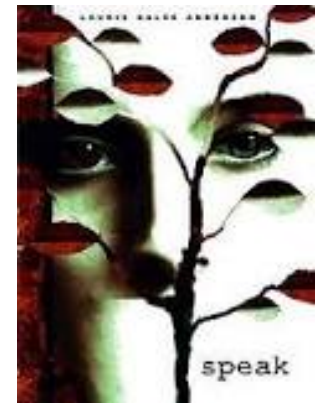
- Celie finds her strength from meeting other women.
- She meets Sofia who fights back against her husband, and even the Mayor.
- Nettie, Celie's sister, manages to escape to Africa.
- Shug, a singer, helps Celie discover her sexual desires.

Activity

- Write a “Letter to God” saying anything you want to say.
- These letters will be private, and will only be shared if the student desires.

Extending the Unit

- *The Color Purple*. Dir. Steven Spielberg.
- *Speak*, Laurie H. Anderson
- *Sold* Patricia McCormick



Works Cited

- Anderson, Laurie H. Speak. New York: The Penguin Group, 1999. Print.
- McCormick, Patricia. Sold. New York: Hyperion, 2006. Print.
- *The Color Purple*. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Whoopi Goldberg, Danny Glover, and Oprah Winfrey. Warner Bros. pictures. 1985. Film.
- Walker, Alice. The Color Purple. California: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1982. Print.