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### Unit of Study: Identity in Fantasy

#### **Introduction to the Unit – “Why teach Fantasy literature and identity to young adults?”**

Who am I? Where do I belong? What is the point of living? What is my purpose? These are the questions young adults constantly ask themselves and try to figure out beginning at adolescence and onward. I remember being in high school and I would ask myself what does math and science do for me? Will it help me understand myself? What's the point? Fantasy literature is an essential part of learning because it teaches people the psychological part of life and gives insight to what is meaningful. Finding a sense of self is what every person strives to figure out in his or her lives. It is an essential part of learning and a reoccurring theme in the Fantasy genre, which is why Fantasy literature should be taught. Humans are curious and they want to know about the unknown, not what is already known. Fantasy novels take a person to a completely different world with struggles that any person can face in real life. The struggle to discover who a person is and his or her purpose is seen in everyone because nobody knows his or her future. Young adults have a need to establish their identity because this ultimately gives them power over the self and their decisions. Having firm knowledge of a student's identity will help build confidence and strength because he will understand more about his self and develop his own purpose and meaning for life. The Fantasy genre focuses on maturity and coming of age, which is why it is a top selling genre and should be the focus of high school teaching curriculums. To top it off it's a blast to read!

## **Explaining the Unit – Introducing Elements of Fantasy**

Before I launch the unit, I want to make sure my students understand what Fantasy is and discuss why Fantasy is important to read. According to Allen Nilsen and Kenneth Donelson's *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, one of the largest elements in Fantasy literature is the hero. I will discuss the idea of the hero, why heroes are needed and what are their purposes in the novel. I will also introduce magic and the fantasy settings. Most Fantasy novels have different worlds, creatures, people, plants, and sometimes technology. I will also introduce the range of themes and "major ambiguities and dualities of life" in chapter seven of *LFTYA*, which include good and evil, innocence and guilt, heroism and cowardice, order and anarchy, and etc. (Nilsen). The theme of identity will be the greatest focus throughout the unit, and I want my students to look for how the dualities affect the quest of identity. The introduction will continue with the history of Fantasy and how it all started. Myths, legends, and folklore are Fantasy in its earliest times and we will look at some of these and possibly some epic poems that incorporate Fantasy elements of magical creatures. The last thing I will introduce is the archetypes in Fantasy from chapter ten of *LFTYA*. Some of the archetypes include the innocent embarking on a journey, the caregiver, the sage, the friend, the lover, the hero, the villain, and etc. (Nilsen). I will discuss with the students each of these archetypes and talk about their roles. Essentially we will be looking for these archetypes and watch for how consistent the character follows the archetype and what the character does differently. When learning about identity in Fantasy, I am placing a huge emphasis on analyzing characters and having the students really focus on character development.

## **Launching the Unit – Hans Andersen's "The Little Mermaid"**

To launch the unit, I want to take baby steps by having the class read Fantasy in children fairytales. I really want to keep the class engaged because part of the reason I am teaching identity in Fantasy is because I want the students to also learn something about themselves during the unit. I want them to actively engage by expressing themselves through their opinions and beliefs. I will begin the unit reading Hans Anderson's "The Little Mermaid" because it contains some of the archetypes and it is also a story where the protagonist ironically loses her identity in order to establish herself one. The little mermaid in the story gives up her identity as a mermaid and her voice to become human and not only win the heart of the man she loves, but also to gain a soul! This will bring out an interesting discussion among my students whether the soul embodies one's identity. The little mermaid is also unable to speak and convey who she is to the prince. In this aspect she loses her identity because he does not remember she saved him in her first trip to the surface of the sea and she is unable to tell him who she is. She struggles to win the prince's heart and gain a soul because she does not want to dissolve into foam. She wants a soul because it is her identity being preserved in a spiritual form. The class will discuss the identity theme as well as talk about some of the archetypes in "The Little Mermaid," such as the lover, the magician, and the villain. Is the little mermaid the innocent embarking on a journey, the archetypal seeker, or even both? Why does she strive to attain a soul? The questions will become deeper and heavier when I ask why people need to establish an identity; does it give them power?

The **assignment** I have come up with to engage my students is a small creative writing project where everyone will create their own fairy tale. I will leave it very open ended, where my only requirement is that somewhere in the fairy tale there must be a theme of identity, whether someone is losing one identity or struggling to figure his or herself out. The students will read

their fairy tales to the class and just like all fairytales they must have some kind of moral. The second assignment is ongoing throughout the entire unit. The students will keep a journal and every day in the beginning of class I want my students to write for the first five minutes of class. These will be personal and private.

### **My “Center Piece” Work – D.J. MacHale’s *Pendragon: The Merchant of Death***

My center piece or canonical work for unit is *Pendragon: The Merchant of Death* by D.J. MacHale because it not only incorporates the identities of the archetypes well but because the novel centers on the struggle all young adults face, which is figuring out who a person is and his or her purpose in life. The novel opens up with the Bobby Pendragon, the most popular basketball player, who has just won a game and is about to score the girl of his dreams, Courtney Chetwynde. His uncle, Press Tilton, interrupts Bobby and Courtney kissing and Bobby’s entire life changes when he listens to Press and follows him to another world. Bobby is chosen by his uncle as the lead Traveler. Every world has a Traveler who is designated to keep the peace of that territory and travel to other worlds if the situation demands it. The series follows Bobby as he joins together with other Travelers to stop Saint Dane from corrupting the other territories.

This is a long series and I have read all the novels. It is filled with Bobby trying to learn what it means to be a Traveler. He is no longer Bobby Pendragon the most talented basketball player on the team, but he becomes Bobby Pendragon the Traveler who no longer exists in his world known as “Second Earth.” Bobby represents the innocent embarking on a journey and must accept his duty as the lead Traveler. He sacrifices his life with his family, his lover, and his best friend, Mark Diamond, to journey to other worlds and save “Halla,” or the universe. One of the identity struggles in the first novel is when Bobby begins to develop feelings for another

Traveler he meets in a territory called Denduron. In other books of the series, He understands that “basketball player Bobby” would have lived a life with Courtney if none of the Traveler worlds and ideas existed, but “Traveler Bobby” is meant to be with Loor. The readers see this in the perspective of Mark and Courtney. The novel switches perspectives from Mark, Courtney, and Bobby because Bobby is sending them journals of his adventures in other worlds. Bobby does not understand why he must write these journals of his life, but Press insists it is crucial and later on he will understand. Later in the last book *The Soldiers of Halla*, the readers discover that Bobby needs to write these journals because he is establishing his identity and his existence in the world. He forgets his adventures because the novel goes back to the beginning. He reads the journals to learn about himself as a Traveler. The adventure is not meaningless, and it provides him power over his self.

The identity struggle continues when Bobby returns home in the middle of *The Merchant of Death* and he discovers that his family and his existence are completely wiped out. Throughout the entire series he wants to understand why his house disappears and his family is gone. In the ninth book *Raven Rise*, Saint Dane tells him the Travelers are “illusions.” Bobby cannot comprehend this and refuses to accept it. He wants to establish himself in the world, and just like the little mermaid he doesn’t want to dissolve into nothingness. The idea of not existing is too much for him to grasp. He struggles uncovering what a Traveler is and who he is. Just like all heroes, he slowly grows and comes to understand his purpose, which gives him power of his self and enables him to destroy Saint Dane. He deals with issues all adolescence face and that is the worry of having a meaningless existence. Bobby establishes his identity, just like how everyone in the world strives to establish their own identity. It gives an individual power, not over others, but over themselves. Discovering the self is a hard journey, but it is worth it because

it allows a person to mature. My students will analyze this novel and look for the good and evil themes along with identity struggles. D.J. MacHale's novel is chosen as my canonical work because it contains the Fantasy archetypes, the duality of good and evil and appearance and reality, and the prominent theme of discovering the self.

My **assignment** for this work will be a group project where each group will be given a character and must decide which archetype their character fits and then they must analyze the identity of the character based on the information given in the text. For example, Courtney Chetwynde is the lover archetype. But the group must read and write down traits to describe Courtney and ultimately come up with why MacHale created her character and what her purpose is in the novel. I want them to dig deep and engage with each other. I want them to demonstrate these characters are three dimensional and demonstrate insight through their character analysis.

### **Expanding the Unit**

After the first *Pendragon* novel, I plan to expand the unit by demonstrating other novels that have similar identity struggles to *Pendragon: The Merchant of Death* and "The Little Mermaid." All the novels I have chosen contain Fantasy elements through setting and/or characters, as well as incorporate most of the Fantasy archetypes.

One of the novels we will read is *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini. This is a story about a young farm boy who finds one of the three dragon eggs left in the world, and becomes one of the first Dragon Riders to exist in ages. Eragon provides hope for the people and must take on a new identity and responsibility as a Dragon Rider. He must bring peace and fight a war to stop the evil King Galbatorix. Christopher Paolini's novel is filled with identity struggles throughout the entire series. Eragon discovers the name of his origin, he meets a fortune teller who tells his

future, and must cope with his family lineage. He not only stresses about killing the evil king, but stresses to understand who he is and what it means to be a Dragon Rider. He is the first rider in ages, so he carries a lot of weight and influences a lot of people. Everything he does has significant effects on others. Eragon must grow stronger internally and physically in order to defeat Galbatorix. This novel also deals with inheritance and how family plays a part in a person's identity. This is something everyone can easily comprehend.

The next novel I will teach is *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* by J.K. Rowling. Harry is a wizard in Hogwarts School and this novel takes place during his fifth year when the Ministry of Magic, or the government, is heavily involved in the school. Harry discovers he is linked with Voldemort to a point where he sees Voldemort's perspective as if he *is* practically Voldemort. There is a scene where Harry sees through the eyes Voldemort's snake, Nagini, which almost kills Arthur Weasley. This leaves Harry with an identity struggle because he thinks he is the one who almost killed Arthur. The fact that he and Voldemort are linked scares Harry because he is afraid he will become like Voldemort. Harry must come to terms with the self and realize he is not Voldemort even though they are linked.

One of the most popular dystopian novels is Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. I have not read this novel but based on *The Hunger Games* film directed by Gary Ross I have learned it is a story about Katniss Everdeen, who volunteers in her sister's place to participate in the survival games. She and her partner, Peeta, must struggle to survive and by doing this Katniss must lose herself in order to attract sponsors and gain popularity in the games. Peeta has feelings for Katniss and this puts pressure on Katniss faking her love for Peeta. The audience loves it and Katniss and Peeta must keep the act for further support to ensure their survival. Not being able to love who a person wants to love and being forced to act a certain way is definitely

identity suppression. Katniss is unable to be herself and must hide under a mask. She cares about Peeta but does not essentially love him the way he loves her. But their lives depend on their fake “star-crossed lovers” act and they spur a lot of hope among the districts, so they must continue their act.

Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* is another Fantasy novel with the theme of identity. I have not read this novel either but based on the film directed by Neil Burger the plot follows Tris when she is sixteen years old and must take a serum-based test where the computer figures out which faction she belongs in. The factions are based off personality traits which include Abnegation (selfless), Dauntless (brave), Amity (peaceful), Candor (honest), and Erudite (intelligent). Tris takes the test but discovers her results are “inconclusive” and she is “divergent.” Tris is different and ultimately represents humanity because she is not able to conform to one specific trait. The fact her results are inconclusive demonstrates that she has a little of every trait. Nobody wants to be known as just smart, or just brave. People are human and have many different personality traits that make up their identity. This is one of the essential points Roth is trying to make.

The final work that I will use to end the unit will be a play that has fantasy elements, which is William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The plot centers around four people who are victims of the love serum created by the fairies. Hermia and Lysander are in love, while Helena is suffering unrequited love for Demetrius who is in love with Hermia. The fairies use the serum on Lysander and Demetrius causing them to fall in love with Helena. Helena thinks this is a joke, while Hermia is upset at Helena for taking her lover. The identity theme arises between forced love and natural love similar to *The Hunger Games*. Lysander loves Hermia but the serum forces him to pursue Helena, and he ultimately loses his identity with the love spell. Only when the love spell fades are the true identities revealed through the characters



feelings. Lysander returns loving Hermia, and Demetrius continues to love Helena.

Shakespeare's novel establishes the notion that peoples' true identities are revealed when they are not acting but expressing themselves. How people express their feelings and what those feelings are help shape identity. Identity is a very complex idea, with many different definitions and parts that make it up. The novels I have chosen not only demonstrate identity struggles but also how many features establish identity. Identity involves the physical, the emotional, the mental, and the personal state. It has many different levels with so much complexity causing it to be the most difficult thing a person can learn. The journey to uncover one's identity is one of the greatest struggles everyone faces throughout their lives. This is exactly why I believe schools should focus teaching young adults books with this theme because it is critical for the learning experience. This topic is something students will care about and be engaged in because it involves the self.

One of the last **assignments** my students will conduct at the end of the unit is a large project where they will create their own outline of a Fantasy. I want them to use most of the archetypes and pretty much create a plot summary of the novel, create a description for the setting and characters, and they must have the theme of identity somewhere in the novel. They may have a different focus theme for the entire novel, but one of the themes should be a type of an identity struggle. This is a nice fun project and I do require them to present it to the class. The other assignment is similar to the "brown bag" we have been doing the entire semester in my own class. I expect my students to have learned at least one new thing about themselves from the unit or to have identified with any characters from the novels we have read. I will have the students pick three things that describe them and then have them draw some kind of symbol or image to represent them. The last assignment is mostly a discussion where I let my students

discuss what defines identity for an individual? This is where the levels of identity come in like the physical aspect, emotional, ethnic, and etc. The discussion will grow deeper allowing my students to apply everything they have learned when I ask them why does a person need to establish an identity or have a sense of self?

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# Identity in Fantasy Unit

By: Mariah Faris

# Introduction to the Presentation

Mulan

# Fantasy and Identity

## ● Why teach Fantasy?

- > Complex themes and ideas found in realistic fiction
- > Real world issues
- > Psychological
- > Ignites creativity and inspiration
- > Unites the past, present, and future
- > Makes reading enjoyable!

## ● Why teach identity?

- > Discusses the meaning of life
  - Discovering the self
  - Finding a purpose
  - Establishing an existence
- > Topic young adults care about

# Introducing Fantasy Genre

## ➤ What is fantasy?

### ☐ Elements

- Setting
- Plot
- Life
- Archetypes

### ☐ Themes

- Identity – central focus
- Dualities of life

### ☐ History

- Myths, legends, folklore, storytelling

## ➤ Who is a hero?



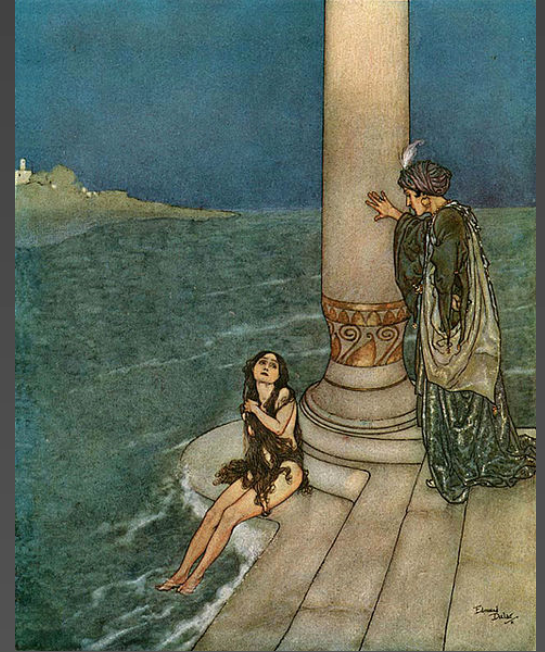
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# Launching the Unit

## Fairy Tales

- “The Little Mermaid” by Hans Christian Anderson
  - Setting
  - Magic
- Character Analysis
  - Archetypal seeker or innocent embarking on a journey?
- Identity & Discussions
  - Why the need to establish identity? For Power? Ownership?
  - Soul : Identity
  - Losing vs. finding one's self
- Symbolism
  - “Dissolving into foam”
  - Voice loss

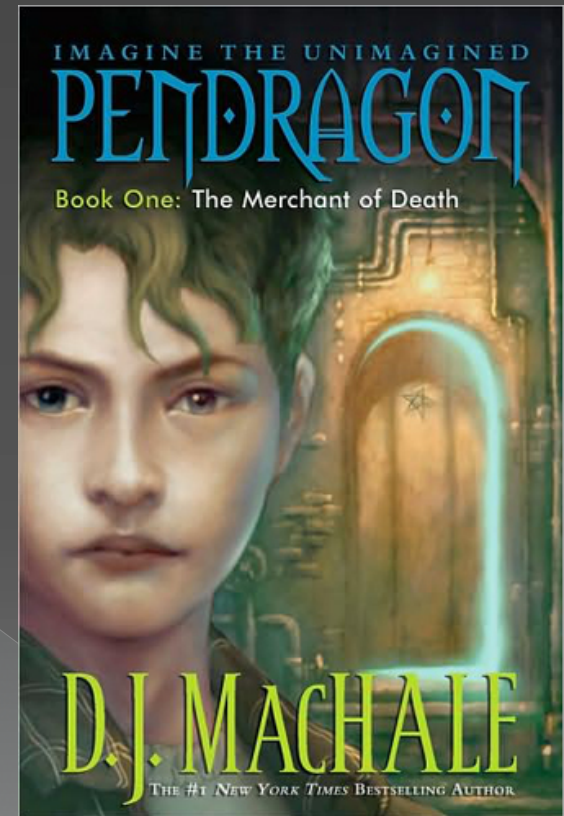


<http://en.wikipedia.org/>

# The Center Piece

## Pendragon: The Merchant of Death

- ◉ D.J. MacHale
- ◉ Character Analysis
  - Archetypes: Hero vs Villain
- ◉ Critical Themes
  - Good vs Evil
    - Humanity - there is good and bad in all
  - Order vs Anarchy
    - Power & Control
  - Appearance vs Reality
    - Trust – How do you know who *they* are?
  - Fate vs Free-will
    - “That is the way it was meant to be.”
- ◉ Identity Symbolism & Discussions
  - Journal writing
  - Wiped existence
  - Relationships



<http://en.wikipedia.org>

# Expanding the Unit: Identity

- *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini
- *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*  
by J.K. Rowling
- *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins
- *Divergent* by Veronica Roth
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare

# Assignments

## ❖ Continuous

- Journal

## ❖ “The Little Mermaid”

- Create your own fairy tale
- Include theme of identity
- Present

## ❖ *Pendragon: The Merchant of Death*

- Character analysis of one character per group

## ❖ End of Unit

- Choose 3 things that represent you
- Project: create an outline of your own fantasy



# Discussions

- What makes up a person's identity?
  - Levels
    - Physical (Traits)
    - Emotional (Feelings)
    - Mental (Personality)
    - Personal (Experiences)
    - Cultural (Morals)
    - Any others?

Learn about yourself and have fun!