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ENGL112B- Dr Warner

Annotated Bib Rationale

Due 5/5/2015

I'm me, who are you? In Drama

The reason for this unit is threefold: first, there is the opportunity to see how different a play is from a script to a stage (or screen). Second, drama highlights art in many forms for students. Finally, and perhaps most important, a study in drama gives students the opportunity to imagine what's going on inside the characters' heads, reinforcing the overall theme of looking past the exterior to find the truth of someone or of a situation.

This unit would show students plays in many forms. In the case of *The Odyssey* or *Witness*, the works are not scripts, rather they are works better read aloud. For those that are scripts, they range from older to newer, and from elaborate productions, such as Shakespeare's works, to very simple productions such as the one proposed for *Yellow Face*, where actors are to sit in folding chairs onstage. Particularly with the idea of showing *Romeo + Juliet* while reading the Shakespearean original, there is opportunity to see what changes can be made and to what effect.

Along with seeing how much things can change between script and production there is an opportunity to see the different art involved in creating such a work. Students can learn to appreciate what goes into creating a play, from actors to costumes to light and direction, and perhaps see an avenue worth pursuing individually. With art fading from school, this would be a nice way to bring it back or at least to present options to research for students to create art. Also,

by presenting *Hamlet* with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the creative writing aspect is revealed as well, giving students who may not see themselves in the other art forms a different way to share their voices as script or storywriters.

This unit is foremost meant to highlight that what a person sees of another isn't always the whole story of what that other person is. By using drama, students can analyze what a particular character is motivated by and step into the character's shoes to try out different personalities and back stories. By showing works that reveal the truth of the situation is often far from what is expected, this unit would cement the idea of trying to understand other people, rather than just judging by what is seen. This unit touches on many subjects which may be offensive to parents such as suicide, homosexuality, racism and violence, but the unit does so in such a way that each time it is a light touch and would apply to each student individually and inoffensively.

Drama allows for so many interpretations it would be hard to imagine every student getting the exact same thing out of this unit. However, the one overreaching thing each student would ideally get is the ability to see how another person's situation is different and unfathomable to someone who isn't actively living that situation, and to try and be more understanding of the struggles of others.

Ideal presentation order: *The Odyssey*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *Witness*, *What I Did Last Summer*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Hamlet*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Romeo and Juliet* (with movie version), *Pippin*, *Yellow Face*

Albee, Edward. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: A Play*. New York: New American Library, 2006. Print.

George and Martha have invited a younger couple home after a party at the university where George works. As the play progresses, George and Martha's perfect image fades away as the younger couple sees George and Martha fighting.

This play challenges the ideas of cultural expectations as well as highlighting the concept that what one sees is not always the truest depiction of what's going on. Paired with *Yellow Face*, it would highlight the concept that one person can't judge another simply by what the other appears as.

Gurney, Albert R. *What I Did Last Summer*. New York City: Dramatists Play Service, 1998. Print.

As World War II ends, Charlie takes on work in a small town. Though he is of the "upper crust" in between time at an exclusive boarding school, he takes odd jobs and mixes with a bohemian teacher as well as The Pig Woman who tells him the family unit is dying. (Ridley)

This work shows that historically, as well as today, times were always getting worse. The family was crumbling, the upper crust was "too good" to work at handyman type jobs and so on. This would allow for a discussion of if Charlie will be better for his experiences as well as opening a discussion about WWII and what it was like in the US

while others were fighting and dying overseas. Further, since Charlie's dad is fighting, the connection to other military families could be highlighted and a discussion of if things are better or worse for them.

Hesse, Karen. *Witness*. S.l.: Scholastic, 2004. Print.

What happens when the Klan moves to town? This work shows how different people are affected differently by the KKK in Vermont. From the eyes of a Constable perhaps too old for his job all the way to a six year old hopefully too young to understand the hate all around her, Hesse shows different reactions to the hate that invariably comes with the Klan.

This work would, for me, come before *Yellow Face*. It sets up a discussion of racism and belonging, insiders vs. outsiders, and the possibility of change in a more modern setting. It shows that just because someone looks one way doesn't mean it was always going to be that way, like when Sara contemplates how she may have joined the ladies' Klan if not for the Hirsch family. Also, it highlights the idea of a reader's theatre more than a structured play, giving way to the idea of creativity in play presentation or sources.

Homer and Robert Fagles. *The Odyssey*. New York: Penguin, 1997. Print.

After the events of the Trojan War, Odysseus must head home. He faces a crew that borders on mutiny, mythical creatures such as Cyclops, nymphs, and finally, challengers to his position at home.

This work would work to show, like *Witness*, the play aspects of something that isn't necessarily a play. Since Greek life and myth put such an emphasis on storytelling, this work also lends easily to becoming a reader's theatre and is broken into scenes, allowing for easy selections of pertinent scenes. The scenes with Circe and the Sirens in particular highlight this unit's particular focus on what is seen isn't always the truth and digging deeper to find what is actually real.

Hwang, David Henry. *Yellow Face*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2008. Print.

This is Hwang's semi- autobiographical look at what it is to be an Asian Male in entertainment. With all the roles for men out there, why do none seem to be "strong Asian male leads", Hwang and his friends wonder. This compels Hwang the character to write a play. However, once they go to stage the play, the actor cast as Hwang's strong Asian Male is not, in fact, Asian.

This play hits on the concept of racism and perception in a humorous way. Hwang wonders why black face is not ok, but "yellow face" such as taping eyes or yellowing of skin is. The story also allows for a discussion of what it is to be a certain race, and what

implications there are associated with that. Also, once they find out about their actor's lack of Asian genetics, there is a question of whether to tell or not.

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman: Play in Two Acts*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1980. Print.

Willie Loman's life is crumbling around him: his profession is fading, his children aren't as perfect as he hoped, and he seems to be a washed up failure. As the play goes on, he tries to deal with and fix those situations before realizing that his philosophy that being well liked is the most important thing may have missed the mark.

This play highlights again the concept that everything falls apart and the family is dying isn't new. It also allows for further discussion of cultural norms, then and now, as well as a conversation about suicide and suicidal thoughts. Is Willie really that hopeless? Did he make the right choice? If this were presented after *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, there is also a creative space where students could tell Happy, Biff, or Linda's story as well.

Romeo + Juliet. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. Perf. Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes. 20th Century Fox, 1996. DVD.

The plot is exactly as Shakespeare wrote it, just with an updated setting—the action takes place with modern day weapons in modern day clothes. The dialogue, however, is still in Shakespearean style.

This would be a helpful way to get students through reading *Romeo and Juliet*. The iambic pentameter and writing may be confusing, but when presented with such clear images, students would have no trouble inferring what is happening. Also, with the young and attractive cast, this particular film shows both how young most of the characters are, and would help those students who may drift off to focus.

Schwartz, Stephen. *Pippin*. New York City: Avon Bard, 1977. Print.

Pippin needs to find himself in the world: Is he to be a great king like his father (a fictionalized Charlemagne)? A warrior like his brother? A fun loving playboy as his grandmother encourages? As he tries to figure out what path he's on, he meets a young widow and also tries to fit in to her day to day life around her farm and helping with her child.

For high school students, this play shows the alienation they can feel as they try and find their individual paths. When things don't go right for Pippin, he has a hard time reaching out, because he often appears to be doing well, even if only because of his elevated and noble stature. Like Pippin, students are trying to figure out what works in their lives, what they want to be, and who they are. They could easily see how Pippin is

pulled left and right by influences of all ages and genders before he finally comes to an ultimate decision which is his and only his to make.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Hamlet: Prince of Denmark: With New and Updated Critical Essays and a Revised Bibliography*. New York: Signet Classic, 1998. Print.

The Prince of Denmark is dealing with his father's death, as well as the fact that his mother happily and readily married Hamlet's uncle quickly after. He sees visions of his deceased father, plots, puzzles out Claudius' scheme, and finally goes for revenge.

With all the teen angst in this play, it's not hard to understand why it is frequently taught to high school students. However, if certain passages were highlighted more clearly, such as the "to be or not to be" soliloquy and Hamlet's intercourse with the ghost of his father, the more difficult issues teens face could be tackled head on, in these cases suicide or dealing with the death of a loved one. The theme of what things look like isn't always what they are is highlighted in this work by the marriage of Hamlet's mother to Claudius as Hamlet must dig deeper to find the truth of their relationship and Claudius' intentions.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011. Print.

Before Romeo and Juliet realize their families are locked in a decades-long feud, they meet at a party and fall in love. The two must then deal with arranged marriages, murder, exile, and (of course) their families on their quest to reunite after the party and then their hasty marriage.

This is another look at what cultural values can do. Who is right in this play? The families who insist the lovers cannot be together? The priest who marries them, thinking this may solve the family feud between their families? Is anyone a hero? Just as many of the other works ask students to look past what's simply on the page and question what's there, this work also presents no clear cut hero as well as a troubling look at what was culturally acceptable at the time it was written which still applies in some ways today.\

Stoppard, Tom. *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. New York: Grove, 1967. Print.

Taking up the story of Hamlet's boyhood friends, this work shows what happened to the pair when they left Denmark. Though they are carrying Claudius' order to kill Hamlet to the king of England, Hamlet discovers their plot, and in the end, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern end up dead.

This work highlights one final time the concept of not judging the proverbial book by its cover. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Hamlet's childhood friends, yet they are happy to betray him. Since they are Hamlet's friends, he doesn't initially think of them as nefarious, but once he looks closer, Hamlet sees what they are up to and takes action to

save himself and get rid of them. Beyond reinforcing this theme, the work also highlights the idea of taking an established work and expanding the smaller characters in it, which could invite a similar project for *Death of a Salesman* especially.

Work Cited:

(for plot points of *What I Did Last Summer*)

Ridley, Clifford A. "'What I Did Last Summer' Is A.R. Gurney's Flashback To '45." *Philly-archives*. Philly.com, 25 July 1992. Web. 16 Apr. 2015.