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CI 403

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Lesson Plan A – Final Draft

A Personal Connection:

Open-Ended Reader Response to Coming-of-Age Novels in Literature Circles

**TIME**

50 minutes (may spill over into second day)

**SETTING**

A Freshman English class in a local high school. The school is 50% white, 30% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 10% Asian/Pacific Islander. About half of students at the school qualify for free or reduced lunches. There are 25 students in the class. One student is an ELL who speaks Spanish at home, and two other students have disabilities (one has ADHD, and the other, dyslexia).

**THEORY INTO PRACTICE BACKGROUND**

My lesson uses Literature Circles as a method for students to engage with various Coming-of-Age novels – for example, Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese.* These texts vary in form and genre (some traditional, some graphic novels) as well as subject matter, but each is a *bildungsroman* at heart, with cultural and/or racial diversity complicating the story. Engaging this diverse class with these Coming-of-Age texts is particularly important. Recognizing differences and, even more importantly, similarities, across the diverse texts, coupled with giving students ample time to engage with their peers in their Literature Circle groups and, by journaling, reflect on the entire experience itself, will make it clear to them that their similarities, too, are stronger than their differences. Students must learn to genuinely respect those from differing backgrounds or cultures, and discussing diverse texts with their diverse peers will give them double the ways to achieve that.

My lesson plan is based on two major concepts from the reading we’ve done of Burke and Daniels. One, Burke says that students need to be given room to grapple with whichever text they’ve read on their own terms, without fear of their ideas being labeled incorrect. While a coherent “thesis” or belief about a book will eventually be important for the student to hold to in order to be part of a meaningful discussion, students need to practice how to go about *arriving* at this opinion as well. Forcing students to form and defend theses too early lets much of the depth of the book fall through their fingers. “The freedom to speculate is essential,” says Burke, “for we must, whenever possible, teach to complexity or, to put it differently, avoid the simplicity of dichotomies” (239). Reducing complex themes, symbols, or imagery in a book to a simple black-or-white explanation does our students a disservice, because this simplicity is practically nonexistent in the real world. There is great value in learning how to unravel doubt. Daniels makes this idea more specific, advocating eliciting reader response during the initial stages of discussion. According to Daniels, who is in turn quoting Rosenblatt, “students cannot effectively move to the level of analysis until they have worked through, processed, savored, shared their personal experience” (23).

These theories give insight into how students can best engage with a text, which is an essential task, one that I should always be working on tweaking and improving. They have special importance in the context of a lesson involving Literature Circles, as students will possess a lot of independence during the procedure of the day’s activities. I will encourage open-ended questions and answers during the first part of the discussion.

The second concept, that students benefit from having information in some sort of graphically-organized form, is put forward by both Burke and Daniels. Daniels encourages written or drawn notes to be an integral guide of students’ discussion within their Literature Circle groups (22). Burke maintains that “the guiding principle in graphic English is that we think differently when we transform our ideas into images and patterns than when we use words to express our thoughts” (248). In other words, to spark critical thinking, it’s advised to view information in as many different ways as possible. Graphic organizers like lists, concept maps, thought charts, and Venn diagrams helps students visualize and better understand material.

Incorporating this idea into my own lesson, students will be working with what they know about their text to complete a graphic organizer with their group (and then will be creating another type of organizer via a journal response). This will cement their understanding of how their novel progresses through its Coming-of-Age story as well as how this story connects with the experiences of each student (hearkening back to the previous concept, the value of speculation and reader response).

This lesson fits well into the overarching Coming-of-Age unit because it establishes base knowledge that the Literature Circles will repeatedly reference, as well as some sort of personal connection to the text. Laying this “groundwork” allows students to engage more deeply with the text during subsequent discussions and assignments, and also allows them to practice logical reasoning skills and working within a group. The lesson is the first in several days of work within students’ Literature Circles. With this lesson, students will become familiar with the exposition of their novel (storyline refresher as well as the events’ relation and importance to each other) and have discussed/recorded their personal reaction/relation to the text. Later, they will revisit their graphic organizers to help find themes and essential questions from their novel, focusing on the work as a Coming-of-Age text as well as considering the role of multiculturalism within it.

**OBJECTIVE/S**

Students will recall and become familiar with the exposition of their novel, in terms of summary as well as analysis (i.e. determining which plot events reveal the core plot arc[s] of their story).

(Assessed via teacher circulation during group work and informal group presentations of graphic organizers.)

Students will make some sort of personal connection and reaction to the novel, in both oral and written forms.

(Assessed via teacher circulation during initial group discussions and journal entry.)

(Bloom’s Taxonomy verbs used in this section taken from pages 20-21 of *PBL Handbook.)*

**MATERIALS**

Coming-of-Age novel, specific to each student depending on Literature Circle

Journal

Examples of graphic organizers groups have created in past years (with different books), to be shown on overhead projector

Overhead projector and screen

Large (poster-sized) sheets of paper

Markers and/or crayons, colored pencils

Chalkboard and chalk

Pencil/pen

Notebook/notebook paper

**PREPARATION**

Each student will have read his/her novel by class time today. This is the first day of Literature Circle discussion groups for these texts (though students are familiar with the method, having used it previously). Before class, teacher arranges desks in Literature Circle groups (5 groups of 5 – students know & have used these groups before), facilitating group discussion. Teacher writes open-ended, reader-response-evoking discussion questions on board: “Does this book seem true to life?”; “How is this character/family like me?”; “If faced with this situation/choice, what would I do?” (Daniels 23)

**PROCEDURE**

Students come into class and immediately sit in their Literature Circle groups with their novels, notebooks, and journals. (2 min)

Groups discuss questions on board. Teacher circulates to each group (while taking attendance). (5 min)

Teacher explains group assignment: Groups work together to create a graphic organizer/visual representation that *best* portrays main events/timeline of novel, using poster-sized sheets of paper and markers. Examples from previous years using different texts are shown on overhead (linear timeline, timeline with multiple branches, web, Venn diagram, simple comic strip, etc.).

While groups are working, teacher writes journal prompt on board: “Choose a specific point in your novel where you saw the main character grow in some way. What obstacles was he/she facing? How could this experience be similar to your own life?” (20-25 min)

Groups present graphic organizer to class, explaining *why* the particular form was chosen as well as pointing out the largest climactic point of novel and explaining *why* it’s the most important. (10-15 min)

Students journal individually on prompt on board, finishing for homework if necessary. (10 min)

**DISCUSSION IDEAS**

To answer during beginning discussions in Literature Circles:

Does this book seem true to life?

How is this character/family like me?

If faced with this situation/choice, what would I do? (Daniels 23)

To answer for journal entry:

Choose a specific point in your novel where you saw the main character grow in some way.

What obstacles was he/she facing?

Is this experience similar to a time when you’ve grown in your own life? How was your experience different from the character’s?

**BILINGUAL/ESL AND ENGLISHES ACCOMMODATIONS**

To accommodate the bilingual/ESL Spanish students in my classroom, I will have given them beforehand a chart to organize their thoughts about their book as they read. For each chapter, the chart will give them space to record main plot points. There will also be a separate section where they identify and explain parts of the book which they related to. All responses on the chart may be written in students’ primary language. Coming into class with this organization ensures that students are already deeply familiar with plot and so will help them participate in group discussion. Additionally, the reflective work they’ve done in the chart will serve as brainstorming for their journal entry, providing main ideas to work with and therefore making the transition between languages easier.

Students should be able to participate in all activities, so my assessment tactics will be largely unchanged. However, I will grade their chart for completion (spot-checking words in a dictionary if the language used is one that I’m totally unfamiliar with), and that will play a role in their daily participation grade. If student is really struggling with English and therefore not/barely participating in group discussion, I will look harder at his/her chart to ensure comprehension of the text.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION ACCOMMODATIONS**

Working in small groups, doing a hands-on activity, and writing discussion and journal questions on the board will already help accommodate the students with cognitive disabilities in my classroom. If student(s) have difficulty reading to retain information, I will have asked students to, as homework, draw a quick picture or write a sentence summarizing each chapter. This way, as for the ELL students, they will have an easily-accessible plot outline to refer back to. If student(s) have trouble staying on task during individual activities in class like journal-writing, I will allow them to move to a desk further away from other students and/or allow them to wear headphones to block out any noise.

I will use all of my previously-mentioned ways to assess these students, but I will also take into account their plot outline/summary work – especially if they have trouble voicing their thoughts in discussion.

**ASSESSMENT**

* Students will become familiar with the exposition of their novel in terms of summary as well as critical thinking (making connections between events and their importance in creating the text).

I will review groups’ graphic organizational tool for accuracy in portraying plot events and their informal presentation in front of the class for their ability to choose the most significant/dynamic event that shapes the plot.

* Students will have some sort of personal reaction and relation to the novel, in both oral and written forms.

I will circulate during students’ small-group discussions in Literature Circles and give optimal participation grades to students who are answering questions and responding to others meaningfully, who draw examples from his/her own life and seem to be dialogically engaged.

After class, I will assess students’ journals to ensure comprehension and to judge personal investment in the topic presented.

**EXTENSION IDEAS**

* Hang graphic organizers on wall and reference them throughout the Coming-of-Age unit as plot refreshers.
* Use graphic organizers in a later journal entry: have students (individually or as a whole class) find similar plot points and write about them (i.e. why do the similarities exist?).
* Watch a film version of one of the texts, and then go back and reference the graphic organizer to see and have a discussion about what parts were same/different/played up/played down and why.
* Each student creates a Glogster glog with his/her respective text/themes/struggles at its center.

**SOURCE OF ACTIVITY**

Thanks to my CI 403 class for helping me understand how to merge theory with practical classroom application, as I needed to do here with Burke, Daniels, and *American Born Chinese.* Also, thanks to my SPED 205 instructor, Prof. Monda-Amaya, who has helped me immensely in understanding how I can successfully alleviate many of the hurdles faced by students with special needs in my classroom.

**RESOURCES AND REFERENCES**

Burke, Jim. *The English Teacher's Companion: a Complete Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession*. 3rd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2008. Print.

Daniels, Harvey. *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*. 2nd ed. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse, 2002. Print.

*Paxton-Buckley-Loda Handbook of Curriculum Development 2008-2009*. PDF.

**ILLINOIS STATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GOALS**

**1.C.4d** Summarize and make generalizations from content and relate them to the purpose of the material.

Through preparatory group discussion, groups’ creation of graphic organizers, and presentation of organizers and main climax point of story to class, students must put plot events into their own words, often having to summarize. Doing these things will also help them see more clearly the general story arc and the main purpose of the story.

**1.B.5a** Relate reading to prior knowledge and experience and make connections to related information.

Through discussion and journaling, students will relate events in text to their own lives. Through hearing other groups’ presentations, students will also begin to think about how the texts are inter-related – and also how their life experiences fit with these stories, too.

**REFLECTION**

It’s tough to reflect on a lesson without having taught it first. Previous experience tells me that I’ll likely go into the class thinking my plan is perfect, it’s accounted for absolutely everything… and then, things promptly don’t go as planned. I need the same kind of “test by fire” for this lesson (and all lessons)! Yet there are some aspects in my plan which I can clearly imagine quickly going “wrong.”

Timing has always been one of my weak spots. I always underestimate how much time it will take to do things – especially when I want to see all 25 students actively participating in discussion! I believe I’ve made things more manageable time-wise by having students do an initial, quick, brainstorming discussion session within their Literature Circles. This way, I can quickly and efficiently redirect the groups to their next task, instead of having to wait until a whole-class discussion would die down.

Also, I can foresee problems with the creation of a graphic organizer for each text. Obviously, I’m aiming for students to be creative and exercise their logic in figuring out which type of organizer would work best with their particular storyline. However, I can imagine a scenario in which many groups fall back on the basic timeline and not even consider something slightly more complicated, even if it does fit their story arc better. I do require groups to tell why they chose the type of organizer they did during their presentation, though, and I also showed a myriad of examples from previous students, so hopefully this will inspire them to truly reflect and choose one that is a perfect fit.

Overall, Burke and Daniels offer compelling arguments for why a personal connection to whatever text being read is essential before any other higher-level analysis of worth can take place. From my own experiences as a student of English, I wholeheartedly agree, and I think combining the suggested organizational practices of Burke with the introspection of Daniels – not to mention the Literature Circle format as well! – will succeed in making these important initial connections.

Rubric – Coming-of-Age Unit – Graphic Organizer Presentations

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Category | 2 | 1 | 0 | Points Awarded | |
| Appropriateness of graphic organizer to text | Graphic organizer is perfectly appropriate to text | Graphic organizer is sort of appropriate to text; a better format could have been found | Graphic organizer is very poorly chosen or not present |  |
| Accuracy in portraying plot events | Plot events are accurate & appropriate – all are directly significant to plot arc(s) | Plot events are mostly accurate & mostly appropriate | Plot events not accurate nor appropriate; events not included |  |
| Chose a single significant/dynamic event shaping the plot | Proper/important event chosen | Less proper/important event chosen – clearly, a more logical choice existed | Event not proper or important |  |
| Explain significance of dynamic event in plot | Significance fully explained | Significance somewhat explained | Significance explained poorly or not at all |  |
| Neatness & creativity | Graphic organizer is neat and visually appealing; creativity and effort are obvious | Graphic organizer is relatively neat & creative, but does not go above and beyond; a few typos here and there still | Graphic organizer is messy and uncreative; many typos |  |

COMMENTS:

Rubric – Coming-of-Age Unit – Small-Group Literature Circles Discussion

DATE (that assignment was completed): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT OBSERVED: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

PARTICIPATION GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_ / 5

COMMENTS:

Rubric – Coming-of-Age Unit – Journals

DATE (that assignment was completed): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

JOURNAL GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_\_ / 5

COMMENTS: