

Literature and Film:
Preparing Students for a Media-centric Future

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
Chapter 3: Narrative	28
Chapter 4: Summary	57

Abstract

This project addresses the issue of preparing 21st century students to be critical thinkers and media-literate individuals in the consistently evolving world. This project first examines the changing nature of our media-centered society and current uses of film in the English Language Arts classroom as an effective instructional tool. Afterwards, a curriculum for an elective class that integrates film study alongside literature analysis is then presented as a resource for teachers. This class specifically uses young-adult films for film study as a way to enhance instruction and develop the skills needed to effectively read, analyze, and discuss literature.

Chapter One

Introduction

Films have had a presence in secondary classrooms and in the education community at large since classroom projectors and pull-down screens became readily available and inexpensive enough for schools to purchase. Over time, technology has developed and the access has changed through the use of videocassettes, DVD's, and now digital copies of films. Although in different mediums throughout the years, teachers have used feature films for a variety of reasons. The essential reason is to appeal to students. Regardless of the subject, films and other types of viewable media have been utilized in classrooms to garner student interest and engagement in order to enhance the classroom experience. However, teachers' opinions are so divided in regards to the validity and educational purposes of using films that some teachers neglect or refuse to find ways to sufficiently and appropriately incorporate films into their curriculums.

One specific group of teachers that lie in this classroom conundrum is English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. Numerous studies have been conducted and research published on the critical-thinking and general literacy enhancements that can be achieved through incorporating film study into an ELA classroom, as well as how a teacher can implement and teach film efficiently. However, since teachers are so divided on the use of film in the classroom, the answer may not be to ask ELA teachers to go against their teaching practices and beliefs to incorporate film study into their classroom. An alternative answer could be to develop a specialized elective course that heavily incorporates film study as a companion to literary analysis. Specifically, a course that

would not only look at film *and* literature, but a course that also looks at film *as* literature.

Problem Statement

This thesis project seeks to displace the negative connotations related to, and the misuse of, film in the English Language Arts classroom. Hobbs (2012), co-founder of the Alliance for a Media Literate America, adequately summates the very problem this thesis project seeks to solve in her statement, “Many teachers use video and mass media in superficial and routine ways without much explicit reflection on their educational aims and goals” (p. 1). Authors, teachers, and researchers have examined the negative connotations and misuse of feature films in the ELA classroom, and have provided an array of solutions to debunk these beliefs and practices. One such solution, developing a course that heavily incorporates the use of film for analysis and critical thinking alongside print texts, would be greatly beneficial for developing students’ literacy skills in a media dominated society.

Significance of the Problem

The significance of this is problem is great considering the implications of the changing nature of media in society. In Schmidt’s (2012) study, he provides the statistics that the average American spends, “11.8 hours in information seeking activities and digests a staggering 34 gigabytes of data” (p. 53). To add on to that information, the same American spends only, “5% of their information gathering time reading print media, meaning that the remaining 11.2 hours of media exposure is with some form of visual,

audio, or digital media” (p. 53). As we continue further into the 21st century, students will need more experience in analyzing multimodal media such as film. If we do not provide experiences for students to develop their literacy skills, we are setting them up to fail in a media-inclined world. This change in society presents the need for educators to keep up with the times in not only their teaching techniques, but also the materials they use and teach in their classrooms. While it is necessary to maintain the use of print materials in a curriculum, it is also imperative to incorporate various forms of media in the classroom as well in order to prepare the students for the future. The utilization of film in the classroom for analysis in comparison to print texts will enable teachers to help students enhance their critical thinking abilities and their analysis skills.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to produce recommendations for ELA teachers to utilize in their classrooms as they help develop the critical thinking and analytical skills of their students through film alongside print texts. In order to do that, one must find ways to effectively incorporate this type of media into their classroom. For this project, the author seeks to incorporate the use of film into the ELA classroom alongside print texts in order to develop these aforementioned skills. However, simply utilizing film is not the answer.

Although heavily incorporating film into a curriculum may create an attraction for the general student, it is not enough. In order to hook students into the concept of analyzing film as a piece of literature, there must be interest in the films used in the classroom. To achieve this, the author proposes to utilize young-adult films that can be

connected to the print texts included in the course. By including films that are connected to, or thematically related to, specific print texts, students will be able to analyze similar concepts and themes through two different mediums for critical analysis and discussion.

Incorporating young-adult films into the curriculum may help students develop their critical thinking and analytical skills, but it is not the sole answer for the larger issue. When it comes down to the future of each and every student, they need to have well-developed media literacy skills in order to be successful. Like the use of young-adult films in this specific project, other schools and educators can develop a similar curriculum with focus on other genres of films, or even other forms of media to help enhance the media literacy skills of their students.

Rationale

In theory, heavily implementing the analysis of film alongside literature should create a spark in helping develop media literacy and critical thinking skills in students. The goal of this project is to help better prepare students for the media-centric world they will encounter outside of the classroom, as well as to influence teachers to rethink their approach to teaching in order to include more media-related studies in their curriculums, especially ELA teachers. Once it is established what a powerful teaching tool film can be, teachers can then find ways to incorporate film to help enhance student learning in the classroom. The concept of including film into the curriculum is a base to work from, it is then up to the ELA teacher to take into account student interest, curriculum topics, and grade level in order to figure out how to effectively and adequately incorporate film into their classroom.

Aside from the author's personal attitude towards, and experience with, film study in the ELA classroom, several studies and anecdotal evidence from researchers, professors, and secondary teachers have contributed to the decision to create an elective course that analyzes film alongside literature. Aguadad, Fantos, and Goncalves (2011) point out that the use of film in the classroom could be used, "to motivate the students increasingly interested and living in a world of technology and virtual situations (p. 9). Garland (2012) interviewed secondary ELA teachers with experience using popular culture in the classroom to enhance student learning. One specific teacher she spoke to agrees with the notion, "if students can view and analyze popular film with facility, then perhaps honing these skills will help them read and analyze traditional texts" (p. 104). These notions regarding the impact of film study in the classroom are what spawned the idea to create this course.

The concept of a class that is built off of the analysis of film is not brand new. Many universities and colleges, as well as some high schools, have classes that are dedicated solely to film studies. This course differs in that it takes film study and utilizes it in a more complex manner. Students will be asked to analyze film alongside literature, ultimately seeking to develop their media literacy skills, as well as their general literacy skills, in order to provide the greatest opportunity for success in the evolving world that is focused on media.

Definition of Terms

Critical Thinking - Disciplined thinking that is clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence.

Curriculum - The subjects comprising a course of study.

Elective - Optional course that students can choose to take

Film Study - The academic discipline that deals with various theoretical, historical, and critical approaches to film.

Media Literacy - The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages

Summary

Simply put, students need to be prepared in order to be successful in a media-centric world. If teachers continue to place the majority of the emphasis in the ELA classroom on print texts, students will not be adequately prepared to succeed in the future. Various alterations and modifications must occur in an ELA classroom, as well as other classrooms, in order to best serve the needs for success of today's students after high school. One such solution that incorporates the necessary alterations and modifications is to create a course that maintains the tradition of analyzing print texts, but also equally incorporates film study to develop media literacy and critical thinking skills.

The literature on the subject of the use of film in the ELA classroom suggests a variety of approaches and theories to better suit the students of today for the world of tomorrow. Each of these approaches and theories ultimately share the same common belief, analyzing film in the classroom will not only enable students to develop their critical thinking and media literacy skills, but it will also help students develop their overall literacy skills in order to be successful in their other classes. A class that heavily incorporates film into its study of literature has the ability to capture student interest, capitalize on student strengths, and catapult students into success; and that is why it is needed in modern secondary schools

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Chapter Two

Literature Review

A class heavily incorporating the use of young-adult film alongside literature serves as more than just a class that simply enables students to watch films on a regular basis. For many high school students, connecting to the material used in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms can be rather difficult. Utilizing films that work alongside pieces of literature creates an interest factor that can benefit student motivation and learning in the classroom. Due to the changing nature of media and society, students have been placed in a position where they have grown up surrounded by film and various other types of media. This presents the question, why aren't more ELA teachers incorporating film studies as a part of their curriculum, or even designing a class of this nature? With this in mind, it is imperative to analyze the ample literature available on the issue of the inclusion of film studies into an ELA curriculum, and ultimately the benefits and reasons why it should be included.

To establish how effective film studies can be in an ELA classroom, and the reasoning behind its necessary inclusion into an ELA curriculum, one must first look at the other side of the spectrum. In doing so, one will be figure out why teachers may not be effectively including it already, and why they may not be designing a class like the one proposed through this project. Aside from personal teacher preferences, there may be other factors in play when making the decision to incorporate film effectively into a classroom.

Hobbs (2006) addresses the use of film in her article, “Non-Optimal Uses of Video in the Classroom.” The article describes a study she conducted with 130 middle school and high school teachers to gauge how teachers utilize films in their classrooms. She points out that some of the blame on why teachers are not effectively incorporating film into the classrooms can be attributed to the developed routines of teachers. Hobbs states, “the practice of using videotape as a substitute teacher or time-filler are so common that they have become normalized by routine practice and are considered ordinary and appropriate” (p. 35). This presents the notion that some teachers may not be trying to effectively utilize film in the classroom because they are so used to considering it as something other than an educational tool. Utilizing film as a reward, or simply to have as back-up to fill time for when a substitute comes in, disables the teacher from looking at the use of film with clearly identified instructional purposes.

The misuse of film in the classroom is also mentioned in Marcus and Stoddard’s (2007) article, “Tinsel Town as Teacher: Hollywood Film in the High School Classroom.” The article primarily focuses on the use of film in History courses and how and why these teachers use film in their classes. Although the article does not directly discuss the use of film in ELA classes, it provides insight on why teachers may not be effectively incorporating film into their classes. The authors claim that some “teachers appear to use film and television as a way to solve some of their own problems of classroom management or lack of planning” (p. 306). These types of teachers see film as a way to distract students from the learning process in order to get their own personal work done. In essence, some teachers utilize film in the

classroom as a classroom management strategy, not as an educational tool that opens up the opportunity for critical thought and analysis.

Another reason why teachers may not be effectively using film in their classroom is that they simply do not know how to teach this type of media adequately. In their article, “Why Do Teachers Need to Use Technology in Their Classrooms? Issues, Problems, and Solutions,” Wang and Reeves (2003) focus on how the incorporation of technology and media into the classroom has always been a concern in the education community. Looking back into the past, Wang and Reeves provide simple reasoning on why many teachers have not moved forward into incorporating film successfully for educational purposes in the classroom. They state, teachers lack “training to know how to use films to their maximum advantage in their classrooms” (p. 56). If teachers are not properly trained or have no experience in effectively incorporating film into the classroom, it may deter them from even attempting to incorporate it. Without training or previous experience, they may not know how to support their curriculum, teach students how to interact with the material, or even know what types of films to pick to garner student interest and deliver appropriate instruction. With these various concerns weighing on the minds of teacher, it is easy to see why some teachers are so reluctant to find ways to incorporate film into their classrooms.

Before one can properly discuss the benefits and reasoning behind incorporating film into the ELA curriculum, they must first look into literature regarding the changing nature of media in society. At this current time, media is everywhere. It is in what we read, watch, and listen to; media has become a natural part of our lives. Students are exposed to various types of media on a daily basis. However, do they *really* understand

the messages and meanings these various forms of media present? The changing nature of media in modern society presents the need for ELA classes to incorporate different forms of media and the information they deliver. This presents a greater need for ELA teachers to better prepare their students with multiple literacies as they head out into the digital age of the 21st century. There are numerous forms of media that can be used in the ELA classroom to ultimately enhance instruction directed toward media literacy. Some examples are images, advertisements, music, radio broadcasts, commercials, films, Internet, and a variety of multimodal media that is rapidly growing in society.

Considine, Horton, and Moorman (2009) look at the effects of media and technology on the education system, and what can be done to improve the relationship in their article, “Teaching and Reading the Millennial Generation Through Media Literacy.” In the article, they note how technology and media are ingrained in students’ lives, and how teachers are placed in a position where they can take advantage of this notion to improve learning in their classrooms. The authors argue that due to the vast availability and interest of media and technology, “today’s teenagers bring to school a rich and different set of literary practices and background that is often unacknowledged or underused by educators” (p. 471). With this thought as the basis of improving and enhancing current teaching practices, it is the responsibility of teachers to develop a connection between student knowledge and interests with what they need to learn in order to be successful.

Due to media and technology having such a large impact on the youth of today, students need to not only be taught how to analyze and evaluate media text, but also to become aware that they are both consumers and creators in the media world as well. The

authors claim, “media literacy recognizes the pleasure [students] derive from media texts beyond the classroom and values their exposure to popular culture texts as an important part of who they are as individuals” (Considine, Horton, and Moorman 475). By developing student literacy through media, teachers better prepare students to utilize words, music, photographs, and videos to express themselves in the modern world.

In Rogow’s (2011) article, “Ask, Don’t Tell: Pedagogy for Media Literacy Education in the Next Decade,” she takes a look into the notion of teaching media literacy and how we as educators can better prepare them for the ever-changing world. Rogow presents the idea, “media literacy education is about teaching students to ask – and find answers to – important questions” (p. 17). This outlook on media literacy education places heavy emphasis on the need to analyze and ask questions to develop higher level thinking skills for greater comprehension. The questions Rogow presents are in regards to each piece of media’s authorship, purpose, impact, response, content, techniques, context, credibility, and interpretation (p. 18). By asking students in-depth questions regarding each of these aspects of a piece of media, a teacher is doing more than simply teaching the students about media literacy. They are actually teaching them to be literate in this media dominated world.

Another article that supports the concept that media and film can be essential elements in the classroom is, “Developing a Mindful Practice Around Moving Images in the K-12 Classroom” by Goble (2010). In the article, Goble sets up his argument by presenting and discarding previous notions held about utilizing film in the classroom. He mentions how films are commonly used as time fillers in the classroom rather than for essential instructional purposes. These, “poorly developed practices that use film as a

reward or reinforcement tool cultivates a suspicious attitude toward “fluffy” uses of moving images” (p. 29). These poor practices could be eliminated if teachers are able to find ways to develop effective instruction around films. As teachers, we have to approach our curriculums in a manner that will enhance student literacy consistently as they progress through the school year. Goble states, “When we think about literacy as listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing, it is possible to differentiate our literacy around a wide range of multi-modal texts” (p. 28). Teachers must enter their classroom with this mindset in order to improve their own instruction for the modern student. The modern student needs to be exposed to, and learn how to analyze, modern multi-modal texts such as film in order to be successful in the world today. The opportunity is there, the materials are available, and it is then left to the teachers to evolve their teaching practices to meet the needs and interests of their students.

Film and visual messages are not only appealing to the media-consumed students of today, but they can also serve as useful tools in helping develop general student literacy. Vetrici’s (2004) article, “Using Film to Increase Literacy Skills” takes an in-depth look at the benefits of utilizing film to enhance student literacy. Before Vetrici looks into the benefits of incorporating film into an ELA curriculum, he takes into account the criticism and common misuse of bringing film into the classroom. He mentions, “There are modern educators who believe that film does not belong in any educational curriculum... Students should be reading in the language arts classroom, not watching films” (p. 40). This negative view on the use of feature-film in the classroom is a more traditional and classical mindset. Teachers that share this sentiment view the use

of feature-film in class in the same manner as the teachers who show films at the end of units or before holiday breaks, they see no real positive use and benefits from incorporating them into their curriculum.

There is no question; students enjoy viewing films and other types of media that are available to them today. This is a trend that has developed since the start of the technology boom in the 1980's and 1990's and continues with the millennial-generation students currently in schools today. Vetrici insists, "The wise educator does not ignore the popularity of film and instead learns how to use it" (p. 40). Films can be utilized to help develop literacy skills if teachers themselves can learn to teach films as pieces of literature. By turning film study into simple literary analysis, teachers are able to view and work with films as a specific language art rather than simple entertainment. Vetrici took this approach in his own classroom and found, "that the use of film for... students far surpasses literature as facilitation for increasing the literacy and critical-thinking skills of my students, and that includes ...their reading and writing skills" (p. 42). Vetrici discovered that the use of film in his classroom enabled him to transfer the student interest of the films they watched into a springboard to help them develop their overall literacy skills.

In Considine's (2011) article, "Exploring Media & Meaning In Middle School," he presents several ideas of how he has incorporated various forms of media into his ELA curriculum. One specific example that stands out is his use of film. Considine uses the film *My Dog Skip* to provide an opportunity to enhance students' reading and critical thinking skills. The film provides a great example of the use of narrative in film, much like its use in literature. Also, it is a modern film that students can relate to, and therefore

can become more engaged with. His goal through showing students segments of the film is also to, “develop critical listening skills, teach about film language and techniques, and build empathy between students and characters” for a greater understanding of the film and its story (p. 15). He utilizes the film to have the students connect their lives to the story that is being told to them, and asks them why it relates to them, and how the connection was developed. In doing so, he uses the film to teach students the components of the film; the purpose, impact, response, techniques, context, and interpretation of why the film delivered information in the manner that it did. Each of these aspects of the film is analyzed as if it is a piece of text, ultimately helping contribute to the development of his student’s literacy.

Smilanich and Lafreniere (2010) also provide insight into the benefits of incorporating film studies into an ELA curriculum in their article, “Reel Teaching = Real Learning: Motivating Reluctant Students Through Film Studies.” The authors discuss how the use of film can motivate students and make language arts concepts more accessible to students. The authors state that, “film offers an immediacy and accessibility that the printed text frequently does not. Students who are intimidated by, or impeded from, accessing print text are able to discuss film with acuity and insight” (p. 604). In other words, the authors contend that through using film, teachers can help students comprehend not only the literal and concrete meanings in texts, but also the figurative and metaphoric meanings. As students progress through the education system, they are expected to develop into critical thinkers who can comprehend higher-level thinking texts. The fact of the matter is, some students are unable to develop into these types of students relying solely on print texts.

Smilanich and Lafreniere aren't suggesting to simply replace print texts with films to help students develop into higher-level thinkers, but that film study should be incorporated into the ELA curriculum in order to help support and reinforce concepts already established in an English classroom. Students analyzing and critiquing film opens up the possibilities of helping students learn and how to master analysis and the critiquing of print texts. It is suggested, "by understanding how filmmakers choose to compose a shot, students seem better able to understand that authors of print text choose certain words or images that have connotative meaning" (p. 605). With this strategy, students will view films as a piece of literature in order to help develop and hone their skills through a medium that they already find accessible. Once students have enhanced their skills utilizing film, they will then be able to approach the analysis of print texts with more comfort and with fine-tuned skills. Smilanich and Lafreniere conclude their article with an assertion that reiterates the very goal of this project. They state that film offers students the opportunity to, "try out their thoughts, engage in discussion with others, to ask questions that may lead to further questions, and, ultimately, internalized comprehension and implicit understanding" (p. 606). As previously mentioned, utilizing film opens up a variety of strategies and opportunities to help students develop into higher-level critical thinkers.

Golden (2007) supports the concept of utilizing film in an ELA classroom to enhance overall student literacy, as well as develop their analysis and critical thinking skills regarding print texts in, "Literature into Film (and Back Again): Another Look at an Old Dog." The focus of Golden's article primarily deals with the use of film that has been translated from literature to the big screen. He also suggests certain texts, film

scenes, as well as a few classroom activities that he has found successful from his own experiences.

Golden's article presents the idea that since film and literature are two distinctively different mediums, "literal translation would be foolish" (p. 24). Although adaptations of film and literature share quite similar components and can be analyzed in a similar manner, they must be looked at as two different entities. The authors and directors have taken creative liberties that must be taken into account when looking at each piece of work as a whole. Literature utilizes literary elements to convey messages and meaning, whereas directors use cinematic and theatrical elements to convey those literary elements, messages, and meanings.

While looking at film adaptations and literary texts, Golden introduces two terms that will enhance student understanding of the cinematic and theatrical elements in relation to a text's literary elements. The first term is "directly filmable," which he defines as, "words and phrases than can be readily translated to film with little inference from the director or adaption" (p. 26). The other term is "indirectly filmable," which he defines as, "aspects of a print text where a director needs to rely on a variety of cinematic and theatrical elements to translate the print text to screen" (p. 26). By looking at these terms in literary texts, compared to their film adaptations, a student can better understand the strengths and limitations of both literature and film. They are also able to see how the translation from one medium to the other can change or improve the meaning or messages delivered by both texts. Golden states at the end of his article, "When students are looking so closely at the print texts to compare, adapt, or translate, they have to employ analytical skills" (p. 30). Through looking at what can be considered the same

story through two different meanings, students are given the opportunity to employ their own analysis on the changes they have seen and conceive a better understanding of the artistic liberties both creators have taken in their respective works. This not only helps students learn to develop connections and analyze two different forms of text, but they also learn to develop their critical thinking and analysis skills.

Muller (2006) discusses in her article, “Film as Film: Using Movies to Help Students Visualize Literary Theory,” how incorporating film into an ELA curriculum can help struggling students better understand literary theories and develop critical thinking skills. She opens the article by addressing a common belief shared by many of the authors in this literature review, “Regardless of English teachers’ efforts, students will likely be exposed – and drawn to- movies more often than books” (p. 32). This is an important concept to build around because students will continue viewing more and more film and television throughout their lives, so developing the skills to properly view and think about this particular medium is crucial. With this in mind, the use of film is set up as an intrinsic motivator to help engage students and differentiate instruction through the use of film in an ELA classroom.

However, Muller proposes to view film as more than literature. When discussing the common practice of comparing the differences between film and print texts, she claims, “While useful, these methods of film as literature ignore film as a unique and moving medium able to present texts in ways literature cannot” (p. 33). Rather than just viewing film as a piece of literature, Muller encourages teachers to also teach film as its own unique product developed through cinematic techniques. This strategy opens up the opportunity to develop higher-level thinking skills and critical techniques through multi-

modal mediums. Muller explains, “The important thing to note when analyzing film as film is that the students must not get lost in the story, as films tend to encourage. The narrative must never become transparent. Rather, students must take note of the ways directors use the cinematic tools available to them” (p. 34). Analyzing film in this manner can also be helpful with engaging low-motivated and disinterested students. These students are typically low-motivated and disinterested because either they feel they don’t understand the material, or that they are lacking in the skills that their fellow classmates are displaying through discussion and analysis of texts. Since students are most likely inexperienced with film analysis, they would start on a level playing field in terms of their skills in analyzing film. Using film provides an opportunity for these types of students to excel because they are generally, “more willing to think, talk, and write about film than books” (p. 33). If all students are enthusiastic about the materials they are analyzing and critiquing, the classroom environment will be one that greatly supports the learning of each individual student. In essence, film can be used as a tool to help bridge student interest with the essential literacy and critical-thinking skills that are fostered and developed in an ELA classroom.

Hamel (2012) introduces a terrific strategy for introducing film analysis to students in his article, “Teaching with Trailers: The Pedagogical Value of Previews for Introducing Film Analysis.” Although the strategy he discusses was developed for an introductory college film studies course, it can easily be applied to a secondary setting. He begins by explaining that it is necessary to begin an introduction to film analysis with analysis of “parts” of films. The most manageable way to do this is to employ, “the traditional pedagogical approach of using frames, stills, and multiple viewing to teach the

elements of film” (p. 38). Teaching students through specific clips and stills of films enables them to build a foundation of the criteria they will be analyzing in films such as cinematography, editing, and sound. After building a foundation of film techniques that directors employ, some teachers jump straight into analyzing full-feature films. However, as Hamel notes, this can potentially lead to issues in terms of student understanding and analysis.

The idea of jumping straight from analyzing small parts of films to whole films might stunt student growth in understanding and prove to be overwhelming at first, which can be harmful to the learning process. Hamel states this would not be a beneficial strategy because, “the practice of constantly stopping a feature film under analysis in order to discuss the meaning of elements... is likely to distract their critical involvement with the work” (p. 38). In order to avoid this situation, Hamel developed a strategy to be placed between analyzing the parts of films and analyzing whole films. This strategy was to utilize film trailers as a way to scaffold instruction and have students gradually analyze films from short sequences to full-length films.

This strategy is a perfect step to place between analyzing film techniques in short clips and analyzing film techniques in full-length films. For this lesson, Hamel utilizes the two-minute and thirty-second trailer of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *The Phantom of the Opera*. To start the lesson, Hamel plays the film trailer once for the class in order for them to experience an initial viewing. This enables the students to watch for the narrative qualities of the trailer and gain a general understanding of what it is about. Afterwards, he shows the trailer in thirty-second portions. After each viewing of a portion, he stops for specific analysis of the trailer. Watching a trailer in this manner “combined the analysis

of an entire work and its amalgamation of elements with a running time that allowed for repeated viewings and subsequent discussions in one class period” (p. 38). By teaching film analysis with trailers, a teacher is able to scaffold the analysis from short clips to full-length films. This presents an adequate step-by-step process that better prepares students for analysis of whole films as they progress through a curriculum involving film study.

Sargent (2006) provides insight on how the use of film can also enable students in both secondary and post-secondary levels to become better readers and writers of poetry in his article, “Not How You Are Used To Thinking: Reaching for Poetry Through Film.” He credits the instruction of poetry’s intimidation on students to “inadequate reading skills” coming into the topic of poetry (p. 67). Sargent doesn’t imply students are lacking in their education and skills, but encourages to “acknowledge that every genre... presents its own habits and nuances of thought, meaning, and reading (i.e. an engagement with the material) which one must, at some point, learn” (p. 67). Sargent implies that teachers must educate their students on how to think about, read, and approach the writing of poetry in a manner that can alleviate the intimidation and engage students.

In order to complete this task, Sargent found the need to connect student interest and prior knowledge to the teaching of poetry, and he proposed to do this through media. He found that with film “lies the potential threshold into the world of poem. Film is simply concretized musicality, image, and emotion” (p. 68). In the article, Sargent presents three teaching strategies to help present and teach students the poetic ideas of, *phanopoeia* (the dance of the image), *logopoeia* (the dance of the mind), and *melopoeia* (the dance of the emotions and musicality) through the use of various films. Sargent’s

strategies and success with his students enables critics to see that, “film can provide the scaffolding upon which students can begin to form an understanding of the writing process- which after all, is a microcosm of the creative process itself” (Sargent 68). Sargent concludes his article with the reiteration that film can open up the possibilities of teaching difficult concepts and topics. Students are comfortable with films, and this comfort can help deter intimidation and reluctance to participate and engage in classroom activities.

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Chapter Three

Narrative

Like any other curriculum that is created, I have broken this class down into units. With the exception of the introductory analysis unit, the remaining units are broken down into common thematic units that are usually taught at the higher secondary grade levels. These units include self-exploration, dystopia, and transcendentalism. Each of these units displays effective use of films alongside literature to develop and enhance student literacy and critical thinking skills. Although I have sequenced the units in a manner that fits with the specific course I have designed, each unit could essentially be used as a stand-alone unit in any type of ELA course, or be used as supplement material to an existing unit.

Each unit presented in this project is designed to last five to seven weeks, depending on school district designations of the length of class time and the number of times a week this type of course meets. Like any other unit taught in an ELA classroom, essential questions are designed to structure that specific unit and the materials that will be addressed. In the created units, there are five main components that are incorporated in each to structure student learning. These five key components are the films that will be viewed, the texts that will be read, the language arts lessons to enhance understanding of the films and texts, formative assessments, and summative assessments. Each of these components are selected and designed to assist students in being able to answer the essential questions of each unit, as well as to develop and enhance their literacy and critical thinking skills.

The first unit is simply titled, "Introduction to Film Analysis." This initial unit is straightforward, as it seeks to introduce students to the basics and essentials of film study. Concurrently, it introduces students to the concepts of analyzing films in a similar manner that they analyze print texts in regards to plot, theme, and characters. The three essential questions addressed in this unit are: How do the film techniques used to tell a story differ from the literary techniques used in literature? How do film techniques influence our understanding of characters, mood, plot, or theme? And lastly, how do themes of films/literature connect to your life, the world, and other texts? With the successful completion of this unit and the answering of these essential questions, students will then be prepared to be successful in the latter units focusing primarily on texts and related films.

The viewings of the unit will begin with a compilation of stills, clips, and scenes from various films of the teacher's choice. Each still, clip, and scene will be used to teach various cinematic and visual techniques used by directors in films to develop the intended effects, stories, and themes they seek to convey. These cinematic and visual techniques will also be referred to as "film study vocabulary" throughout each unit. It is imperative that students develop an understanding of each of the cinematic and visual terms they will be taught, as they will consistently be utilizing them in discussion and in writing throughout each unit.

The next viewings will be the theatrical trailers of *Spider-Man* (2002) directed by Sam Raimi, and *Les Miserables* (2012) directed by Tom Hooper. This will be the start of the transition of analysis from clips and scenes to full-feature films. This sort of scaffolding will enable students to analyze the trailers in a similar

manner that they will analyze full films, but it will not be overwhelming at first.

Since these film trailers run between two and three minutes in length, it will enable to the teacher to provide multiple viewings of each trailer for viewing, analysis, and instruction.

The first full-feature film that students will analyze for meaning and connect all of their film vocabulary to is *The Sandlot* (1993) directed by David M. Evans. The film tells the story of a group of young boys who spend much of their time playing baseball in the summer of 1962. The film was chosen because of its familiarity to students, popularity, and because the film encompasses nearly all of the film vocabulary that will be addressed in the class. Since most of the students will have previously seen the film, this will enable students to mainly focus on the cinematic and visual techniques to analyze meaning rather than the storyline.

The last film that will be viewed in the unit is *Stand by Me* (1986) directed by Rob Reiner. The film is a direct adaptation of Stephen King's novella entitled, "The Body." In preparation for what the other units will ask students do with texts and films, the students will be asked to view this film and analyze its cinematic and visual techniques in order to make connections to the text, and to consider how these techniques were utilized to generate a similar theme to the short story.

As previously mentioned, the main text that will be analyzed in the introductory unit is Stephen King's novella, "The Body." The short story tells the story of a group of adolescent boys who set out to search for a dead body they heard was located near their town in 1960. During the course of the journey, the group of friends comes to grips with the harsh truths of growing up. This text was selected

because it easily accessible for students at the targeted secondary grade levels, and it is a text that students can genuinely relate to. It is important that the students learn the skills needed to analyze texts in comparison to similar films because that is what they will be asked to do throughout the remainder of the course. It is imperative that the students find success early on and can build off of those skills. Utilizing this novella alongside its film adaptation sets students up to be successful in the long run of the course.

A complimentary text that will be included in this unit is a film review of *Stand by Me* written by Carrie Rickey, a veteran film critic for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The piece is rather short, and simply reviews *Stand by Me* as an entertainment experience. This film review is intended to help students identify the difference between a film review and film analysis, so they will be able to better comprehend what is expected of them when writing their analyses of the films in this course.

In terms of language arts lessons for this unit, these specific lessons will serve as a foundation for students to build off of in later units. The first language arts lesson that will be addressed is a basic review of literary terms. Since this elective class is designed for higher grade-levels, students should already have plenty of experience with literary terms and devices. However, in order to ensure that students will know specific vocabulary such as allusion, foreshadowing, figurative language, etc., time will be dedicated to review these terms in preparation for reading texts.

There will be a lesson dedicated to characterization in film and texts. The class will utilize both “The Body” text and *Stand by Me* and see how both the author and director developed the characters in their respected works, and what is the impact of these characters on the general story and plot of both works. By dedicating time to this early on, students will be able to readily discuss characterization in future films and texts.

With the viewing of stills, clips, and scenes, students will be introduced to film study vocabulary. This vocabulary will be weighed heavily upon during the introductory unit due to the necessity to know these terms as the students move forward throughout the units. Alongside simply learning the film vocabulary terms and what they mean, time will also be spent on being able to identify these vocabulary terms within the films watched in class.

There will be a lesson dedicated to the review of story plot diagramming. Since story plot diagramming can be applied to both film and text, the class will utilize both in reviewing with students the components that make up a story plot diagram. By being able to identify setting, conflict, exposition, climax, denouement, and resolution, students will be able to apply these terms to enhance their own analysis of the films and texts in this class.

Another language arts lesson that will be included in the introductory unit is exploring the connections between texts to self, film to self, and text to film. The lesson is included in the first unit because it is a skill that students will need as they read and view texts and films in the course and begin to analyze through these two mediums. Rather than focusing on a specific lesson to teach this skill, it is something

that will be reiterated again and again as the class looks at the various films and texts.

The final language arts lesson that will be incorporated is a lesson focusing on the difference between a film review and a film analysis. A lesson of this nature is important because it is imperative that students realize that they are going to be asked to analyze films rather than give the film a basic review. This lesson will provide the opportunity for students to look at a film review and the type of content it consists of. Also, students will then be walked through how to construct a film analysis and its components that are necessary in order for it to be effective.

Many of the formative assessments that are introduced in the first unit will be incorporated into the other units, as they are applicable to all films and texts that will be utilized in the class. Also, they will serve as a framework for the expectations of student work throughout the course. The first kind of formative assessment that will be utilized is guided reading notes. These notes will be combined with the main piece of text in each student. Since there will be an ample amount of material needed to be covered in each class, students will be expected to complete much of the reading outside of class independently. The notes will consist of questions for each text that check for understanding, ask students to make inferences, think about the themes and issues, and to analyze character development. These notes will also help to guide discussion of the texts within class to ensure student comprehension of the material.

Another formative assessment that will be incorporated into each unit is a film analysis journal. This journal will serve to films much like what the guided

reading notes and questions serve to texts in the course. Since an ample amount of time will be spent viewing the films in the class, it is necessary for students to be constantly thinking about what they are viewing. While the teacher will stop films during viewing to discuss important shots, moments, and scenes, students will be expected to take note of other cinematic and visual techniques they notice in each film and include them in their journals. These journals will be collected and checked at the end of each film to ensure that students are participating and keeping up with the material in the course.

Like in every other class, discussion will be utilized frequently to assess student learning. Discussion will be based upon the films and texts utilized in the class, as well as build off of the concepts presented in the language arts lessons and other formative assessments. The teacher will ask questions to check not only for student understanding of the material, but to also encourage and push students to use their critical thinking skills.

An additional formative assessment will be a plot diagram quiz. This will be a basic quiz to check if students understand the literary terms utilized to create a plot such as exposition, climax, denouement, etc. This assessment will determine whether or not the teacher has to spend more time reviewing plot structure and its terms before they progress forward through the course.

The last type of formative assessment that will be included in each unit of this course is quick writes. These quick writes will be basic writing exercises given at random points throughout the unit. They may be basic questions to check for understanding of certain material, prompts asking them to elaborate of specific

ideas or concepts, or asking questions that may or may not have been addressed in class.

One of the three major summative assessments for the introductory unit will be a test on the film study vocabulary presented at the start of the unit and reiterated throughout with the various viewings. This test will be broken down into two parts. First, it will ask students to define or describe various film vocabulary terms that they have learned in the unit. For the second portion, the teacher will present the class a random film scene and ask the students to independently identify and describe the cinematic and visual techniques used by the director in the scene.

The second summative assessment will be in the form a film review. Students will be asked to write a film review of *The Sandlot*. This assessment will ask students to take what they have learned in their lesson regarding the difference between a film review and an analysis, and apply it to this film. The students will be asked to provide their input on the plot of the film, as well as their own personal opinions of the film.

The third summative assessment will be in the form of a film analysis. The students will be asked to present an analysis on *Stand by Me*. Again, they will be asked to take what they learned from the lesson regarding film review and analysis, as well as the cinematic and visual techniques they have studied throughout the course of the unit, and apply it to this specific film. Students will be asked to identify, describe, and comment on at least five cinematic and visual techniques they noticed

in the film. This will be the first of several film analyses the students will be asked to write in this course.

The second unit in the course is titled, "Who Am I? Self-Exploration and Coming of Age." This unit will deal specifically with texts and films that revolve around teens facing reality and coming to terms with who they are as individuals. The three essential questions in this unit are: How do we learn to navigate and identify which social norms we are expected to uphold? What is empowering about self-reflection? Lastly, how does film and literature address and/or reflect reality? This unit was designed to utilize the connections that students will make with the selected materials and to not only better understand those connections from an analytical perspective, but to also critically reflect on their own individuality as a teenager. Students will take the skills and concepts they learned in the introductory unit and apply them to this new set of films and texts to achieve a greater understanding of them.

Unlike the viewings in the introductory unit of the course, each of the viewings in this unit will be a full-length film. The first film viewing in the unit will be a direct adaptation of the main text that will also be read, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012) directed by Stephen Chbosky. The film tells the story of an introverted high school freshman, Charlie, who struggles to fit in and find himself amongst the backdrop of 1990's Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Throughout the course of the film, Charlie meets people and finds himself in situations that make him reflect on the identity that has been created for him, as well as the person that he wants to be.

The second viewing in the unit will be *The Breakfast Club* (1985) directed by John Hughes. The story follows five teenagers who are each a member of a different high school clique, and who spend a Saturday in detention together. The students that represent the different high school cliques are a jock, a criminal, a geek, a basket case, and a yuppie. Throughout the course of the film, the students interact and talk about similar situations they find themselves in, and similar feelings that each of them endures as a teenager. The students begin to consider that they are not all that different from each other, and realize that they are all more than their respective stereotypes.

The third viewing in the unit will be *Almost Famous* (2000) directed by Cameron Crowe. The film tells the story of a teenage-outcast journalist, William, writing for *Rolling Stone* magazine while covering a rock band named Stillwater as they journey through their American rock tour in 1973. William accompanies the band and witnesses firsthand the struggles of those very same people that he idolizes. While on tour with Stillwater, William's experiences begin to shape him as an individual and he finally begins to feel a sense of purpose and belonging. The film is semi-autobiographical, as Crowe himself had been a teenage writer for *Rolling Stone* when he was a young teen, and this adds a sense of realism and accessibility to the film.

The main text that will be covered in the unit is *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, who also directed the film adaptation that the students will watch. As previously mentioned, the story is about an introverted student who navigates his way through freshman year in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

in the 1990's. However, the text differs slightly from the film in the manner of delivering the story. A troubled teenager who goes by the alias of "Charlie" narrates the story. He describes various life experiences through a series of letters to an anonymous stranger. As the students progress through the text, they will see the interconnectedness between the letters and see the transformation of the narrator.

Another text that will be covered in this unit is "The Allman Brothers" by Cameron Crowe. This article will serve as a background reading to the viewing of *Almost Famous*. This is an actual article written by Crowe in the 1970's when he followed The Allman Brothers Band on tour for *Rolling Stone*, much like William does in the film for Stillwater. In the reading of the article, it is clear that Crowe is finding his own voice while at the same time writing about a band that is coming to grips with reality in the face of their newly fame-ridden identity. The piece will introduce the students to the 1970's rock era, and provide them the context in which William is writing from in the film.

The next text that will be included is entitled "Sylvia Plath at Seventeen" by Sylvia Plath. This text is a journal entry taken directly from Plath's personal journal when she was seventeen years old. The journal entry addresses the fears, joys, and pressures that Plath feels at this age, as well as her concerns of growing up and changing. This text fits nicely with the unit, as it provides a glimpse into the mind of a teenager, and Plath has the poetic writing style to effectively express what many teenagers experience as they come to grips with who they are as a person and how they feel about the many questions life still has to offer.

The final text that will be included in this unit is the poem “What Things Want” by Robert Bly. The poem is quick and short, but supports the themes of self-exploration and identity presented in the unit. Although this poem could fit anywhere in the unit, analyzing this poem can serve as a nice introductory piece to the unit and create discussion answering the question in the poem, “Who deserves what?” From there, the class can develop their thoughts and ideas, and possibly answer this question again at the conclusion of the unit.

The first language arts lesson to be addressed in this unit will be a review and reiteration of tone and mood. Both texts and films utilize tone and mood to help set up the style in which they wish to deliver a story, and they also help deliver the message and meaning of the creator. Each of the texts and films utilize tone and mood in different manners, so time will be spent on each one analyzing the authors’ or the directors’ use of tone and mood.

Another lesson that will be incorporated into this unit will be the study of allusions. In all of the films, as well as the main text, characters reference other works of literature, music, and films. Time will be spent in analyzing these allusions in the films and texts we cover in the unit. Also, the class will take a look at the important role they play in developing the characters and the story at large.

Much like the introductory unit, there will be reoccurring lessons of identifying film study vocabulary in the films covered in this unit. Each of the films employs different cinematic and visual techniques to help portray a story. The teacher will select various stills, shots, and scenes to analyze during instruction, but

the students will be expected to look for and take note of other uses of these techniques in the films.

Several of the films and the texts in this unit touch upon the notion of expectations versus reality. Many of the characters have their minds set upon certain expectations of their lives, and they are forced to reconcile with the realities that each of them face. Time will be dedicated into analyzing this concept and how it affects the characters and drives the story line.

The last major language arts lesson that will be incorporated in this unit will be exploring the thematic connection between the films and texts that are analyzed in this unit. Each of the films and texts address finding one's self, understanding who they are as an individual, as well as embracing reality and their place in society. With this in mind, it is imperative to take a look at how each character in the films and texts go through this process or transformation. Also, it will be necessary to look at how the authors and directors utilize techniques to help develop these themes in each film or text.

The formative assessments presented in the first unit will also be utilized in this unit. These formative assessments include a film study vocabulary quiz, guided reading notes, a film analysis journal, discussion, and quick writes. The students will have a familiarity with each of these assessments, and they will be asked to maintain the high expectations in each of them in each unit throughout the course.

The first major summative assessment will be an analysis paper that will appear in some variation throughout the remaining units. For this analysis essay, students will be asked to select two of the films viewed in this unit, as well as The

Perks of Being a Wallflower text. After students make their selection, they will be asked to discuss how the directors and Stephen Chbosky utilize cinematic and literary techniques to address similar themes in their respective works.

The second major summative assessment will be in project form, allowing the students some freedom in displaying that they have an understanding of the concepts, essential questions, and material presented in the unit. The prompt that students will be asked to work with is to define and describe who you are as individual through a creative medium. The options that will be provided to address this prompt are to create at least three poems, create a journal with at least five entries, create an audio recording of a monologue, create a mix tape with at least five songs and explanations, or to deliver a presentation to the whole class.

The third unit in the course is titled, "I Want to Break Free." This unit deals specifically with films and texts about individuals that are stuck in dystopian societies, and what they do to cope with it or fight it. The three essential questions in the unit the students will be asked to consider are: How do we decide what is right and wrong, and what are the conditions? How do people in a society represent themselves, and how do their actions show societal values? Lastly, what is my role in society? Through analyzing the various films and texts, the students will be able to formulate their own opinions and decide these answers for themselves.

The first viewing of this unit is *The Hunger Games* (2012) directed by Gary Ross. This film is a direct adaptation of the main text selected for this unit, and will anchor the dystopian films selected. The film tells the story of a dystopian future where boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 18 must take part in the Hunger

Games, a televised annual event in which the "tributes" are required to fight to the death until there is one remaining who will be crowned the victor. The story follows Katniss Everdeen as she volunteers to take her sister's place as a tribute in the games. This film is widely popular among teens and adolescents, and most have already seen the film. This will enable students to focus more closely on the visual and cinematic techniques due to their wide familiarity with the story.

The second viewing in this unit is *V for Vendetta* (2005) directed by James McTeigue. The film tells the story of V, a freedom fighter who enlists the help of Evey, a young woman, to ignite a revolution against the fascist regime in a near-future dystopian England. This film was selected because it shows two types of individuals, a vigilante and a common woman, and their views on how to survive in a dystopian society. It will help students consider their roles in society, and what they could do to make necessary changes to better the life of those around them.

The third viewing in this unit will be *In Time* (2012) directed by Andrew Niccol. The film tells the story of a poor, young man named Will that is accused of murder in a futuristic society where individuals do not get older past the age of twenty-five, and time is used as currency. The society that Will lives in is overrun by the ruling few who have infinite amount of time, while the overwhelming majority survives on a day by day basis. This film was selected because it is not widely known, but it addresses the dystopian theme that this unit is based on in an interesting manner. Also, like the other two films that have been selected, it provides an interesting take on the hero's journey, which will also be addressed in this unit.

This unit includes a variety of different readings incorporated into instruction. As previously mentioned, the main text that will be analyzed is The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins. This is the text that the film adaptation is based on, and shares almost nearly the exact same plot. This is a lower-lexile text for the students, but it adequately presents the dystopian theme that the unit is aiming for, and provides ample discussion opportunities for the actions and roles of individuals in society.

The second text in the unit will be an article titled, “What Makes Us Moral” by Jeffrey Kluger. This article looks at morality from the perspective of human reasoning. Part of the article looks at the scientific reasons of why humans are moral, and how this is the only thing that separates us from animals. The second half of the article looks at mans’ reasons for why we choose to do things morally wrong. This is important to look into because many of the dystopian societies that will be looked at in the films and texts of this unit do things that are morally wrong, but for what they think are good reasons. This will make students think about the actions of the characters in the films and texts, as well as their own actions and how they contribute to society.

Another text included in this unit is “The Real Effects of Reality TV” by Mickie Fahner. This text addresses the effects of reality television on individuals, and how young people can be especially influenced by it. This article will help students to think more critically in regards to reality television and its effects in the materials presented in this unit. Each of the films, as well as the main text that will be analyzed, touch base on reality television and its influences on the dystopian societies at large, as

well as the protagonists in each story. This will also open up discussion for students to discuss how reality television may affect their own lives.

A different aspect that will be introduced in this unit is also analyzing music lyrics as a text. The first set of lyrics that will be looked at and analyzed is “Wont Get Fooled Again” by The Who. The song ties greatly into the concepts presented by the dystopian films and texts in the unit. The song is about a revolution taking place in an oppressive society, a sentiment that occurs throughout each of the films and texts in some way or another in this unit. The students will analyze this piece in the same manner that they will analyze poems for meaning.

Another set of lyrics that will be analyzed in this unit will be, “Another Brick in the Wall Pt. 2” by Pink Floyd. The song is a bit more complex and difficult to analyze than The Who’s song, but it deals with a similar issue in a different manner. Rather than addressing a revolution in an oppressive society, Pink Floyd tackles this conflict on a smaller scale; the lyrics detail students protesting against their oppressive teachers. Aside from the students in this course connecting to the piece based off of the content of the song alone, it also serves as a connection between their own lives to the lives of the characters they will encounter in this unit that rise against the dystopian societies they find themselves in.

To begin the language arts lessons in this unit, there will be a lesson regarding dystopia and utopia, and what they may entail. These will be terms that will be referenced throughout the unit in comparison to each other, so it is important that student have an overall understanding of what they mean and what implications they carry when applied to certain characters, stories, and texts. With this lesson, students should be able to

provide their own interpretations for each term, and be able to apply them accordingly to the films and texts that are covered.

A lesson that presents and details the hero's journey will be included as part of this unit as well. Since each of the protagonists in the films and texts are heroes in their own respective nature, it will be beneficial to look at the hero's journey as a concept and how each of the characters follow it. This will enable students to compare the protagonists in each of the stories to see how they compare and contrast with each other while going through the same steps and stages of the hero's journey.

There will be a lesson that focuses on reviewing and reinforcing the analysis of symbols in this unit. Symbolism should have been covered in students' previous ELA courses throughout their education, so this concept should be relatively easy to refresh in their minds. Each film and text in this unit includes symbolism. So time will be dedicated in recognizing symbols, and analyzing them to see their importance and how they contribute to the overall themes of the films or texts.

As mentioned in the earlier units, there will be reoccurring lessons of identifying film study vocabulary in the films covered in this unit. Each of the films employs different cinematic and visual techniques to help portray a story. The teacher will select various stills, shots, and scenes to analyze during instruction, but the students will be expected to look for and take note of other uses of these techniques in the films.

Once again, in this unit, students will be asked to explore the thematic connections between the films and texts that are covered in this unit. Each of the texts and films in this unit look at themes related to one's role in society, and what

they can do to make a change in their society. The concept of dystopia serves as an umbrella term to bring together each of these texts and films as they look to explore these themes in their own ways. Also, it will be necessary to look at how the authors and directors utilize techniques to help develop these themes in each of their works.

The formative assessments presented in the previous units will also be utilized in this unit. These formative assessments include a film study vocabulary quiz, guided reading notes, a film analysis journal, discussion, and quick writes. The students will have a familiarity with each of these assessments, and they will be asked to maintain the high expectations in each of them in each unit throughout the course.

Like in the other units of the course, the first summative assessment of the unit will be an analytical paper. One again, the analysis paper will address the thematic concepts that are shared in each of the films and texts. The writing prompt that will be provided to the students is, write a paper choosing two films along the with The Hunger Games text. How do the directors and Suzanne Collins utilize cinematic and literary techniques to help develop dystopian concepts in the films and text in order to establish similar themes?

The second summative assessment for this unit will come in the form of a persuasive speech. Since the essential questions and themes of the unit relate to an individual's place in society and their specific roles, the speech will closely relate to these issues. The assignment prompt for this will be: Identify a change in society you wish to create. Do you have the ability to enact that change? What obstacles do you anticipate? Is this a local or global change? Why should people believe in you? The students will be

expected to write this speech for submission, as well as deliver this speech to the whole class.

The fourth unit of this course is entitled, “The World is Yours.” This unit deals with texts and films that connect to the themes and concepts related to transcendentalism. In each of the selected materials, characters are presented that are dealing with their relationship between themselves and society or the world at large. For this unit, there are four essential questions that students will be asked to consider through the duration: What are the main elements of transcendentalism? What is the relationship between self and society? What is the connection between identity and nature (existence)? Lastly, do we each have a path in life or specific expectations to fulfill? Each of the materials and activities in this unit will help students formulate opinions and find their own answers to these questions.

The first viewing of this unit will be *Into the Wild* (2007) directed by Sean Penn. This film is a direct adaptation of the main text that will also be analyzed in this unit. The film tells the story of a recent college graduate, Christopher McCandless, who decides to reject the conventional life of an average American. He gives up all of his money and most of his possessions as he decides to travel across North America and eventually live in the Alaskan wilderness in the early 1990’s. In the film, Christopher’s character closely personifies the concepts related to transcendentalism as he decides to become more in touch with nature and his own being rather than society at large.

The second viewing of this unit will be *Dead Poets Society* (1989) directed by Peter Weir. The film tells the story of a charismatic and free-spirited teacher, John Keating, who inspires his students through his teaching of poetry at a conservative and

aristocratic private school in the 1950's. The film was selected because it makes the concepts of transcendentalism very accessible for students, as the film deals with students their own age learning about and exemplifying the ideas of transcendentalism in their own fashion.

The third viewing of this unit will be *Good Will Hunting* (1998) directed by Gus Van Zant. The film tells the story of a young, unrecognized genius named Will Hunting who is forced to meet with a therapist to avoid jail time. Through his meetings and developing friendship with his therapist, Will is forced to analyze his relationships with society and those around him as he struggles to grasp with plans for his life. This film is a more abstract approach to transcendentalism, as the concepts are not directly presented to the viewer, but the protagonist experiences many of the same emotions and beliefs as those of the transcendentalist writers who will be covered in the unit.

As previously mentioned, the main text that will be analyzed in this unit is Into the Wild by John Krakauer. Slightly different than the main texts in the earlier units, this is a non-fiction text. After learning of the events that occurred, Krakauer investigates the real-life story of Christopher McCandless. He interviews the individuals McCandless encountered on his journey and retraces his path that led to McCandless' eventual death. Although it is non-fiction, the text addresses the very same transcendentalist concepts that are presented in the film and creates a centerpiece to build this unit around.

The second text that will be covered in the unit is "Resistance to Civil Government (Civil Disobedience)" by Henry David Thoreau. This essay serves as one of the most commonly accepted transcendentalist texts in literature, as Thoreau himself was a pioneer in the movement. The essay argues that individuals should think for themselves

and not blindly follow what government or society has in mind for them. Thoreau stresses the notion that individuals have the civil duty to prevent their governments from shaping who they are as individuals and imposing on individual beliefs. Although the text is short, ample time will be needed to adequately analyze and discuss the ideas and concepts presented in the essay

Another text by Henry David Thoreau that will be analyzed is “Walden.” Since this text is so long and dense, specific excerpts will be selected and put together to form a condensed text to be read and analyzed in the unit. This text details Thoreau’s experience living in a remote cabin near Walden Pond in Massachusetts in 1854. The text addresses Walden’s goal of understanding society through personal introspection, simple living, and self-sufficiency. This text outlines many of the general ideas and aspects of transcendentalism and will be integral in helping students develop a better understanding of transcendentalism, as well as the other texts and films covered in the unit.

The last text that will be read and analyzed is ‘Self-Reliance’ by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Like the other essays presented in this unit, this text is widely recognized as a key text to transcendentalist philosophy. The essay addresses Emerson’s own belief that individuals need to avoid conformity and routines in their lives, and that individuals need to follow their own ideas and beliefs in order to lead a fulfilling life. This text supports the concepts and beliefs related to transcendentalism and will further enhance student understanding of the themes discussed in the unit.

There will be several language arts lessons to help develop and enhance students’ understanding of transcendentalism. The first lesson that will be included is a general introduction to transcendentalism. This lesson will introduce students to the concepts and

themes that will be discussed throughout the unit. Thoreau's "Walden" will be instrumental in ensuring that this lesson will be successful. If students are able to comprehend the ideas and concepts presented in the lesson, they are placed in a position to develop them and be successful throughout the rest of the unit.

Given the nature of the essays that will be covered, there will be a lesson dedicated to the review of figurative language. Each of these texts heavily includes different types of figurative language to get their message across to the reader. This review will seek to refresh students' knowledge of these various types of figurative language so they will be able to better seek and comprehend them in the texts.

There will be a lesson regarding the connection between American identity and transcendentalism. American writers and thinkers mostly pioneer the transcendental philosophy and movement, so it is necessary to look into the movement and its impact on developing the nation's identity. This lesson will look into how these very same concepts and ideas helped shape the American identity, and how it still impacts the nation's identity today.

Another language arts lesson that will be included is a lesson looking into contrast and contradictions as a reading and viewing technique. This lesson will help teach students how to use the reading technique while they are reading or viewing the materials in this unit. This specific reading strategy has students look at individuals or characters that contradict the beliefs or sayings they express in texts, and why they may be doing that. This notion of contradiction occurs several times throughout each film and text covered, so learning this technique will not only open up discussion, but will also help students develop a better understanding of the materials.

The last main language arts lesson that will be included is a lesson looking into diction and motif in the texts. Each of the writers that will be looked at in this unit relies heavily on the development of diction and motif in their works to help convey transcendental ideas and themes. This lesson will seek to help students identify the uses in the texts, as well as to be able to utilize these techniques in their own writing.

The formative assessments presented in the previous unit will also be utilized in this unit. These formative assessments include a film study vocabulary quiz, guided reading notes, a film analysis journal, discussion, and quick writes. The students will have a familiarity with each of these assessments, and they will be asked to maintain the high expectations in each of them in each unit throughout the course.

Like in the other units of the course, the first summative assessment of the unit will be an analysis paper. This analysis paper will ask students to analyze the transcendental themes and concepts presented in the unit. The writing prompt that the students will be given is; write an analytical paper choosing two films along the with the John Krakauer film. How do the directors and the author utilize cinematic and literary techniques to help develop and present transcendental concepts and ideas?

The second summative assessment will be a creative writing piece. The writing prompt that students will be given is: From the perspective of one of the characters in the films and the Into the Wild text, describe a place of comfort, location, or setting that best suits the character according to their provided characterization. Include details of landscaping and the surroundings, as well as the emotions and thoughts it may invoke in

the selected character. What does this described place say about their political, moral, and social values?

Unit 1: Back to the Basics: Introduction to Film Analysis

Essential Questions:

1. How do film techniques used to tell a story differ from those used in literature?
2. How do film techniques influence our understanding of characters, mood, plot, or theme?
3. How do themes of films/literature connect to your life, the world, and other texts?

Viewings

1. Compilation of a variety of film clips addressing the specific film vocabulary that will be covered in the course
2. Trailer of Spider-Man (2002)
3. Trailer of Les Miserables (2012)
4. The Sandlot (1993)
5. Stand by Me (1986)

Readings

1. The Body by Stephen King
2. Stand by Me Film Review by Carrie Rickey

Language Arts Lessons

- Literary term review
- Film study vocabulary
- Identifying film study vocabulary within film
- Characterization in film/text
- Story plot diagramming review
- Exploring connections between film/texts and self, other texts, and the world
- Difference between film review and analysis

Formative Assessments

- Guided reading notes
- Film analysis journal
- Discussion
- Plot diagram quiz
- Quick writes

Summative Assessments

- Test on film study vocabulary
- Write a review of The Sandlot
- Write an analysis of Stand by Me

Unit Two: Who Am I? Self-exploration and Coming of Age

Essential Questions:

1. How do we learn to navigate and identify which social norms we're expected to uphold?
2. What is empowering about self-reflection?
3. How does film and literature address and/or reflect reality?

Viewings

1. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (2012)
2. The Breakfast Club (1985)
3. Almost Famous (2000)

Readings

1. The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky
2. "The Allman Brothers" by Cameron Crowe
3. "Sylvia Plath at Seventeen" by Sylvia Plate
4. "What Things Want" by Robert Bly

Language Arts Lessons

- Tone and Mood
- Allusions
- Identify film study vocabulary in films
- Expectations vs. Reality
- Explore thematic connections between films and texts

Formative Assessments

- Film study vocabulary quiz
- Guided reading notes
- Film analysis journal
- Discussion
- Quick writes

Summative Assessments

- Write a well-developed essay choosing two of the films alongside The Perks of Being a Wallflower text and discuss how the directors and Stephen Chbosky utilize cinematic and literary techniques to address similar themes
- Who Are You? Project (Creative writing)
 - o Define and describe who you are as an individual through one of the following mediums
 - 3 poems
 - Journal (5 entries)
 - Audio recording (5 minute speech)
 - Mix tape (5 songs)
 - Presentation

Unit 3: I Want to Break Free: Dystopia

Essential Questions:

1. How do we decide what is right and wrong? What are the conditions? Is everything situational?
2. How do people in a society represent themselves? How do their actions show societal values?
3. What is my role in society?

Viewings:

1. The Hunger Games (2012)
2. V for Vendetta (2005)
3. In Time (2011)

Readings:

1. The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins
2. “What Makes Us Moral” by Jeffrey Kluger
3. “Another Brick in the Wall Pt. 2” lyrics by Pink Floyd
4. “Won’t Get Fooled Again” lyrics by The Who
5. “The Real Effects of Reality TV” by Micki Fahner

Language Arts Lessons

- Dystopia vs. Utopia
- Hero’s Journey
- Symbolism
- Identify film study vocabulary in the films
- Explore thematic connections between the films and texts

Formative Assessments

- Film Vocabulary quiz on films
- Guided Notes
- Film Analysis Journal
- Discussion
- Quick writes

Summative Assessments

- Write a paper choosing two films along with The Hunger Games text. How do the directors and the author utilize cinematic and literary techniques to help develop dystopian concepts in the films and text in order to establish similar themes?
- Speech
 - o Identify a change in society you wish to create. Do you have the ability to enact that change? What obstacles do you anticipate? Is this a local or global change? Why should people believe in you?

Unit 4: The World is Yours: Transcendentalism

Essential Questions:

1. What are the main elements of transcendentalism?

2. What is the relationship between self and society?
3. What is the connection between identity and nature (existence)?
4. Do we each have a path in life or specific expectations to fulfill?

Viewings:

1. Into the Wild (2007)
2. Dead Poets Society (1989)
3. Good Will Hunting (1998)

Readings:

1. Into the wild by John Krakauer
2. "Resistance to Civil Government" by Henry David Thoreau
3. Self-Reliance by Ralph Waldo Emerson
4. Excerpts from Walden by Henry David Thoreau

Language Arts Lessons

- Introduction to Transcendentalism
- Figurative language review
- American Identity
- Contrast and contradictions
- Diction and Motif

Formative Assessments

- Film vocabulary quiz based on films
- Guided notes
- Film analysis journal
- Discussion
- Quick writes

Summative Assessments

- Write a paper choosing two films along with the Into the Wild text. How do the directors and the author utilize cinematic and literary techniques to help develop and present transcendental concepts and ideas?
- From the perspective of one of the characters in the films and the Into the Wild text, describe a place of comfort, location, or setting that best suits the character according to their provided characterization. Include details of landscaping and the surroundings, as well as the emotions and thoughts it may invoke in the selected character. What does this described place say about their political, moral, and social values?

Chapter 4

Summary

Modern society is constantly evolving, and so are the students in ELA classrooms. The students of today need to be prepared in order to be successful in the future, so they need well-developed critical thinking and literacy skills that span across various mediums. Most students, boys and girls, already have interest in viewing films that center on adolescents and young adult-aged characters, so why not take advantage of this already existing interest to benefit their learning?

The comparative studies course of literature and young adult films that I have created seeks to provide resources to help students develop and enhance their critical thinking and multimodal literacy skills that will be necessary to be successful as the move past the post-secondary classroom. This class would be specifically geared towards students who struggle to succeed when focusing solely on print texts in their ELA classes. This class utilizes films that students can make connections to in order to help develop literacy and analysis skills that students can then transfer to their understanding of print texts. In essence, this class will be utilizing materials that students already have built-in connections to in order develop their literacy skills and become more advanced critical thinkers.

As a young teacher, I'm well aware of the modern changes in society that are heavily influenced by media, especially viewable media. These days, students can watch clips or films on their phones, tablets, laptops, and televisions. These modern changes were occurring when I was in high school a decade ago, and they are even more evident today as media and technology make consistent advancements. With

this notion in mind, it is imperative that we prepare students to develop and enhance their analytical skills of viewable media texts such as films. Students are so consumed in information gathering and media viewing in their lives outside of school, so this class looks to take their personal interests and gear the materials and instruction towards them.

Even though this would be considered an elective course, this proposed class will contain all aspects of a regular Language Arts class. It encapsulates and addresses many of the standards addressed by the Common Core Standards, which can make it easy to implement in any secondary school as the standards are the same in nearly all of the United States. The units were created based on my own experiences and preferences with young adult films and texts, but they are not the end-all-be-all of ideas for a course of this nature. Teachers can select certain texts that they want to teach, and build a course around them by incorporating the necessary films and lessons that will enhance meaning and analysis. Also, teachers can simply select certain themes or concepts they want to address in a unit and gather texts and films that connect to those themes. Although courses and ideas of this nature are a step in the right direction of developing instruction to fit the needs of modern students, teachers are put in a position where it is up to them to help make the necessary changes in modern education.

Education in America is at a delicate stage. Governments and school districts are imposing new standards, requirements, tests, and evaluation practices every few years. It's understandable how some teachers prefer to stick with the things they know, the things they believe works best. But that is not helping the students

currently in secondary ELA classrooms. English teachers need to develop and modernize their teaching practices and materials in order to reach and better prepare this generation that is so enveloped in the media that they see on a daily basis. That is what this specific class seeks to do. It doesn't address every issue or problem that ELA teachers are facing, but it provides a stepping-stone to build from. If a class of this nature can become successful in secondary schools, it has the ability to open the doors for other classes that may seek to incorporate other types of films, and even other types of media to be created and implemented in secondary schools. Students have been evolving through the years, and will continue to do so. We as teachers need to make sure that we evolve with the times as well.

Suggestions for Future Research and Study

Research into education has been going on for decades, and it will continue to go on as long as education is around. As years go on, more data comes in, more studies are conducted, and more theories are developed. Personally, as a young teacher, I am just realizing how much of an impact data and new research has on school districts and what they ask of their teachers and students. Some will see data and research as helpful to their own practices, but some will also see it all as confusing and distracting from the task of bringing out the best in our students. It seems that every researcher, policymaker, administrator, and teacher has their own ideas for curricula, units, and content that will work well in the classrooms to meet standards and reach goals.

Research on developing general literacy and critical thinking skills falls into the same category as everything else related to education; everyone has an opinion.

Although some may differ due to personal beliefs and opinions, it is generally acknowledged that teachers need to modernize instruction and materials to fit the needs of modern students. There is not one solution that will work for every classroom and every type of student, but that is the beauty of teaching. Each classroom is its own animal, instruction and the materials used need to be differentiated to meet the needs of different groups of students.

There is little concrete data indicating that a class of this nature will improve the critical thinking and general literacy skills of students, but that is because the concept of this course is still relatively new to teachers and the education community at large. However, anecdotal evidence from teachers exists indicating that courses of this nature can enhance overall understanding and develop analytical skills needed to be successful. A longitudinal study that follows students in a class such as this for several years throughout secondary school could possibly give an answer to how effective a curriculum such as this may be.

Research into developing the best practices to enhance students' critical thinking and literacy skills is vastly different. There are different opinions and experiences that can shape one's opinion of what works best. With further research and practice, it may be possible to measure how the different types of instruction and practices affect student learning and achievement on tests. It is evident that only time will tell, but that also gives us teachers more time to perfect our craft in order to provide students the greatest opportunity to succeed as we prepare them for the future.