*American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang (2006)

The English Department has carefully evaluated American Born Chinese as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade curriculum.

I. PLOT SUMMARY

Award-winning *American Born Chinese,* penned by Gene Luen Yang and colored by Lark Pien, is a multinarrative graphic novel about a teenage boy named Jin Wang who struggles to find and accept his cultural identity. Jin is the only Chinese American student at his new school, and all he really wants is to fit in with the rest of the kids, especially Amelia Harris, the pretty American girl with whom he falls in love. But Amelia never notices Jin, and he fades into the background. Soon, Jin is not the only Asian American student in his school—Wei-Chen arrives from Taiwan. But who wants to be friends with an FOB? After countless attempts to fit into the mainstream crowd, Jin settles for Wei-Chen’s friendship.

Intertwined with Jin’s story are those of other characters who also do not fit into their surroundings. The Monkey King has ruled for thousands of years and has mastered all the heavenly disciplines, yet he yearns to leave the monkeys behind to join the ranks of the gods. His foolish acts get him into five hundred years of trouble at the hands of Tze-Yo-Tzuh, and the Monkey King must then rely on the trust of a stranger to lead him toward redemption. In another story, Danny is a popular, athletic teenager whose life is amazing until his cousin Chin-Kee arrives from China. Chin-Kee is the epitome of Chinese stereotypes—eating cat gizzards, excelling in classes, speaking in broken English—and Danny wants to hide him away and pretend he does not exist. But Chin-Kee ends up going to school with Danny every day, ruining Danny’s reputation.

These three narratives alternate throughout the novel and arrive at a daring crossroads at the climax of the story. In the end, Jin realizes much about his perceptions of life and identity and sets off on his own path of redemption. Luckily, his best friend is there waiting.

**II.** RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*American Born Chi*neseis a 2006 National Book Award Honor Book for Young People’s literature, the 2007 winner of the Michael L. Printz Award honoring literary excellence in Young Adult literature, the winner of the 2007 Eisner Award for Best Graphic Album, and a 2007 Bank Street Best Children’s Book of the Year. In this work, Yang skillfully weaves three seemingly independent stories of Chinese folklore, a teenager’s need to fit in, and adolescents’ balancing of their Chinese American heritage. In the end, we find out how they are all related, and are left to contemplate life’s choices, cultural and self-identities, assimilation, acceptance, and friendship.

In an effort to show and tell the effects of racial stereotyping and assimilation, Yang presents one particularly egregious Chinese character, Chin-Kee, who has just arrived from China to visit his cousin Danny. Chin-Kee embraces all the negative Chinese stereotypes into one monstrous exaggerated whole. Chin-Kee’s eyes are pupil-less slits, he is drawn with a cartoon-like round face with two buck teeth. He wears traditional Chinese garments and speaks with the L/R switch (“Harro Amellica!”).

It is this rampant stereotyping that has caused objections. Ironically, it is these exaggerations that empower readers to feel the shame of racial stereotyping from all sides — those who embrace the stereotypes, those who abuse and make fun of them, and those who are stuck in the middle, uncomfortable with these actions and reactions, and often uncertain how to respond. A close examination of Yang’s use of satirical techniques will help to reveal his true intentions.

But *American Born Chinese* goes beyond just providing students an opportunity to access complex concepts surrounding stereotypes. Yang also guides the reader to examine the following motifs: tolerance and intolerance of those who are different; self-concept versus group identity; cultural definitions and boundaries; folklore and its influence in cultures, customs, and values; irony and justice; concept of “hero” and his/her personality traits versus physical characteristics; and means of achieving acceptance and redemption. *American Born Chinese* is a brilliant weaving of cultural mores, expectations and racial stereotypes all battling assimilation and inherent justice, with ones’ need to fit in. It is a testament for all readers who struggle with developing and maintaining individual identities while fitting in with their larger more diverse communities.

The format of the text—a graphic novel—is deceptively straightforward, but students will need to think critically about the way that the author uses visual as well as textual structural techniques to make meaning, particularly through satire. And because this text is a graphic novel, it will likely engage even the most reluctant readers, as well as prove more accessible to English language learners and those who learn visually.

**III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS**

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. | 6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| 9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. | 9. Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare). |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

**IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED**

Possible sensitive topics contained in *American Born Chinese*: racial and cultural stereotyping, mild profanity and sexuality. In the classroom, sensitive topics will be dealt with in a mature fashion, toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss his/her concerns.

*Encounters with the Archdruid* by John McPhee (1971)

The English Department has carefully evaluated *Flight Behavior* as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade Honors curriculum.

1. PLOT SUMMARY

*Encounters with the Archdruid* is a very interesting and important book for anyone passionate about environmental and land-use issues. Originally articles in the *New Yorker Magazine*, the novel records the travels and arguments of Dave Brower, renowned fighter for the protection of the ecology, with three opponents: a real estate developer, a copper miner and a dam builder. By fleshing out each person so that we sympathetically see their humanity and point of view, Mr. McPhee deftly keeps the book from becoming a good versus evil while maintaining a "this versus that" examination of the issues. Students will critically analyze this text, identifying themes of tolerance and empathy.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In 2001, the University of Texas picked *Encounters with the Archdruid* as the one book that all freshmen had to read. Patty Limerick, who helped found the Center for the American West, noted that it served as a "sounding book" for creating the center, which examines dilemmas and issues faced in the Western states. For us, it serves as an exemplary example of combining the artistic storytelling flair of the narrative genre with the objective and fair portrayal of subject through journalistic non-fiction. McPhee shows us how an author can still be the objective observer while showing remarkable men who hold great differences of opinion with integrity on all sides. It helps us to understand issues of the environmental crisis, but perhaps more importantly, it shows us how to view the issues of a contentious topic through a lens of unbiased sincerity. Through McPhee’s patient observation, we see that we can’t reduce the world to simple black and white conclusions. Every side has a story, and each story deserves an ear. Through this discovery, we return to meaningful reminders about the importance of reflection, tolerance, and empathy.

III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

## IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED

Possible sensitive topics contained in *Encounters with the Archdruid:* brief profanity. In the classroom, sensitive topics will be dealt with in a mature fashion, toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss his/her concerns.

# Flight Behavior by Barbara Kingsolver (2012)

The English Department has carefully evaluated *Flight Behavior* as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade Honors curriculum.

1. PLOT SUMMARY

Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* is set in rural Appalachia. In fictional Feathertown, Tennessee, Dellarobia Turnbow – on the run from her stifling life – charges up the mountain above her husband’s family farm and stumbles onto a “valley of fire” filled with millions of monarch butterflies. She can only understand it as a cautionary miracle, but it sparks a raft of other explanations from scientists, religious leaders, and the media. The bewildering emergency draws rural farmers into unexpected acquaintance with urbane journalists, opportunists, sightseers, and a striking biologist with his own stake in the outcome. As the community lines up to judge the woman and her miracle, Dellarobia confronts her family, her church, her town, and a larger world, in a flight toward truth that could undo all she has ever believed. Students will critically analyze this complex text, identifying themes of tension in the areas of religion and science, poverty and wealth, education and instinct or faith, intolerance and acceptance.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The most important reason to teach Flight Behavior is that it presents a literary theme that resonates well with the teenage generation: question the world around you. Dellarobia soon realizes that she can no longer passively accept her assumptions about her life, her family, her neighbors, the small and large events manifesting themselves around her. Guiding this new questioning are many conflict tensions. There are the novel’s main twin strands of tension: Will the butterflies, in their precarious perch, survive to continue the species? Will Dellarobia locate the will and the means to wrest herself and her children into a habitat where they can thrive? There are other tensions, too: religion vs. science, education vs. ignorance, husband vs. wife, affluent vs. impoverished, urban vs. rural, red state vs. blue. Kingsolver gives fair exposure to each perspective allowing us to see many of the emotions, pressures, and various influences that guide people toward a spectrum of conclusions ranging from the knee-jerkingly simple to the conflicted and resoundingly complex. But through this exposure, students are reminded that every conflict deserves a deeper look before writing it off with a common judgement.

A second strength of the work is its choice of setting and character. Teenagers will be drawn to Taylor's straightforward and sometimes humorous view of life. Flight Behavior is not about large, dramatic conflicts in faraway lands or about bitter, alienated young people in New York or Chicago. It is about small town people in small towns. These are real people. There is no elevated language, no plot twists that are difficult to follow. Kingsolver is obviously interested in writing about common people and she wants to assert that their concerns and struggles matter in a world we all share.

Finally, a gift of Kingsolver’s novel is the resplendence of her prose. She takes palpable pleasure in the craft of writing, creating images that stay with the reader long after her story is done. The church choir sings a hymn, “dragging it like a plow through heavy clay”; the pastor uses “his hands to push and pull his congregants as if kneading dough and making grace rise.” Dellarobia walks under “this mess of dirty white sky like a lousy drywall job.” Her husband’s gentleness is “merely the stuff he was made of, like the fiber content of a garment.” Kingsolver provides a rich model of creative prose that captures and captivates the reader.

III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

## IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED

Possible sensitive topics contained in *Flight Behavior*: sexual language and profanity. Readers who bristle at politics made personal may be turned off by the strength of Kingsolver’s convictions around climate change and other issues, but she never reduces her characters to mouthpieces, giving equal weight to climate science and human need, to forces both biological and biblical. Her concept of family encompasses all living beings, however ephemeral, and *Flight Behavior* gracefully, urgently contributes to the dialogue of survival on this swiftly tilting planet. In the classroom, sensitive topics will be dealt with in a mature fashion, toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss his/her concerns.

# Catch-22 by Joseph Heller (1961)

The English Department has carefully evaluated Catch-22 as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade Honors curriculum.

## I. PLOT SUMMARY

Set in World War II, Heller introduces the reader to Yossarian, a bomber pilot who will do anything to get out of fighting the war, including claiming to be insane. Utilizing literary devices of allusion and archetypes and satire, Heller challenges the reader’s concept of right and wrong allowing for the student to delve into a deeper critical analysis as he/she navigate a more complex text.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Set during World war II, on Pianosa, a mythical island eight miles south of Rome, *Catch-22* is wildly satirical, comic, and dark. It posits a central question: How does an individual survive in an insane situation? Consider the lives of slaves before America’s Civil War, the plight of teachers in Cambodia during the heyday of the Khmer Rouge, and the rules for black South Africans under apartheid. Consider being an Untouchable in India. Consider the life of an Afghan woman under Taliban rule.

Critics sometimes challenge Joseph Heller’s sensitivity; most consider World War II to be a righteous war. The men and women who fought are often called American’s greatest generation. The Jews of Europe faced the most insane situation possible. Yet Heller chooses to set his satire during World War II.

In spite of its irreverence, *Catch-22* works because Heller bases his satirical exaggerations and absurdities on experience. As a bombardier during World War II’s Italian campaign, Heller, like his protagonist, experiences an epiphanal moment during a mission over Avignon. And war, any war, contains in its mix governments focused inhumanely on politics, people who care only about power and profit, and inane systemic situations from which there is no escape.

However, teaching *Catch-22* as an antiwar novel limits its power. *Catch-22* is about morality, philosophy, and human nature. In spite of a time-bound setting, its themes are timeless. Always, thoughtful people question the nature of authority and the moral avenues they choose as societies and individuals. Published in 1955, *Catch-22* speaks meaningfully to today’s readers.

## III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. | 6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. | 7. Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| 9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. | 9. Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare). |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

## IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED

Possible sensitive topics contained in Catch-22: prostitution, graphic violence related to war, and profanity. In the classroom, sensitive topics will be dealt with in a mature fashion, toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss his/her concerns.

# Life of Pi by Yann Martel

The English Department has carefully evaluated Life of Pi as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade Honors curriculum.

## I. PLOT SUMMARY

In an Author’s Note, an anonymous author figure explains that he traveled from his home in Canada to India because he was feeling restless. There, while sipping coffee in a café in the town of Pondicherry, he met an elderly man named Francis Adirubasamy who offered to tell him a story fantastic enough to give him faith in God. This story is that of Pi Patel. The author then shifts into the story itself, but not before telling his reader that the account will come across more naturally if he tells it in Pi’s own voice.

Part One is narrated in the first person by Pi. Pi narrates from an advanced age, looking back at his earlier life as a high school and college student in Toronto, then even further back to his boyhood in Pondicherry. He explains that he has suffered intensely and found solace in religion and zoology. He describes how Francis Adirubasamy, a close business associate of his father’s and a competitive swimming champion, taught him to swim and bestowed upon him his unusual name. Pi is named after the Piscine Molitor, a Parisian swimming club with two pools that Adirubasamy used to frequent. We learn that Pi’s father once ran the Pondicherry Zoo, teaching Pi and his brother, Ravi, about the dangerous nature of animals by feeding a live goat to a tiger before their young eyes. Pi, brought up as a Hindu, discovers Christianity, then Islam, choosing to practice all three religions simultaneously. Motivated by India’s political strife, Pi’s parents decide to move the family to Canada; on June 21, 1977, they set sail in a cargo ship, along with a crew and many cages full of zoo creatures.

At the beginning of Part Two, the ship is beginning to sink. Pi clings to a lifeboat and encourages a tiger, Richard Parker, to join him. Then, realizing his mistake in bringing a wild animal aboard, Pi leaps into the ocean. The narrative jumps back in time as Pi describes the explosive noise and chaos of the sinking: crewmembers throw him into a lifeboat, where he soon finds himself alone with a zebra, an orangutan, and a hyena, all seemingly in shock. His family is gone. The storm subsides and Pi contemplates his difficult situation. The hyena kills the zebra and the orangutan, and then—to Pi’s intense surprise—Richard Parker reveals himself: the tiger has been in the bottom of the lifeboat all along. Soon the tiger kills the hyena, and Pi and Richard Parker are alone together at sea. Pi subsists on canned water and filtered seawater, emergency rations, and freshly caught sea life. He also provides for the tiger, whom he masters and trains.

The days pass slowly and the lifeboat’s passengers coexist warily. During a bout of temporary blindness brought on by dehydration, Pi has a run-in with another blind castaway. The two discuss food and tether their boats to one another. When the blind man attacks Pi, intending to eat him, Richard Parker kills him. Not long after, the boat pulls up to a strange island of trees that grow directly out of vegetation, without any soil. Pi and Richard Parker stay here for a time, sleeping in their boat and exploring the island during the day. Pi discovers a huge colony of meerkats who sleep in the trees and freshwater ponds. One day, Pi finds human teeth in a tree’s fruit and comes to the conclusion that the island eats people. He and Richard Parker head back out to sea, finally washing ashore on a Mexican beach. Richard Parker runs off, and villagers take Pi to a hospital.

In Part Three, two officials from the Japanese Ministry of Transport interview Pi about his time at sea, hoping to shed light on the fate of the doomed ship. Pi tells the story as above, but it does not fully satisfy the skeptical men. So he tells it again, this time replacing the animals with humans: a ravenous cook instead of a hyena, a sailor instead of a zebra, and his mother instead of the orangutan. The officials note that the two stories match and that the second is far likelier. In their final report, they commend Pi for living so long with an adult tiger.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

*Life of Pi* is a novel that gives itself over very nicely to the required of the Common Core. It is rich in new vocabulary, confronts many subtle issues for discussion, and is a combination of a fiction and an informational text. The novel is not an easy book to read, but it is not so difficult that students will give up trying to read it. This novel has a strong cultural setting, strong character development, many didactical themes that can be analyzed and argued against, and provides a large base for student inquiry projects.

**III.**LEARNING OBJECTIVES BASED ON COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. | 6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. | 7. Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

## IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED

*Life of Pi* contains some mild profanity and graphic violence. Some readers might find uncomfortable the tension between reason, logic, and argument, on one hand, and simple religious faith and the desire to love God, on the other hand, which lies at the novel’s core. The human capacity for reason is contrasted to religious faith repeatedly. The novel also explores another meaning of faith—the human capacity to believe what is unbelievable. Pi’s story challenges readers with plot twists that sound impossible.

# Film. Vertigo, Alfred Hitchcock, 1958.

The English Department has carefully evaluated Vertigo as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade curriculum.

I. PLOT SUMMARY

*Vertigo* portrays the story of a detective who falls in love with the woman he has been hired to follow. True to Hitchcock form, suspense and drama are presented throughout the film. The student will examine the language of film and question whether or not film can be considered literature. Through this process, the student will examine purpose through language and literary terms, identifying supporting evidence for the claim. The student will also compare themes evaluated in other texts, focusing on American Dream, discrimination, identity, role of family, and conformity.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Critically viewing *Vertigo* allows the class to adequately consider the question “ What constitutes literature?” Students are asked to confront societies assumptions of what defines literature, including genre, and to develop and defend a definition of their own. The film returns to many themes already considered throughout the year (American Dream, identity, conformity, etc.) and pushes the student to consider them through another lens. The film offers an excellent opportunity for the study of comparative literature (thus pushing the student further in their ideas of literature) as well as providing an important segue into the critical analysis of media in society. Is purpose and credibility affected by choice of genre, by the language of popular media? The unit further pushes the student in the questioning of the role and power of genre, and how the tools of each can be harnessed to further message and purpose. *Vertigo*, in particular through its themes, examines the issue of manipulation and control of other genders, of our concept of success, and of audience.

III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED

# Possible sensitive topics contained in Vertigo: some physical violence. In the classroom, sensitive topics are dealt with in a mature fashion toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss their concerns.Film. Rebel Without a Cause, Nicholas Ray, 1955.

The English Department has carefully evaluated Rebel Without a Cause as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade curriculum.

I.PLOT SUMMARY

The film tells the story of a teenager struggling with identity and acceptance. The viewer will be presented with a middle class teenage world that includes peer pressure, teenage romance, and tragic consequences. The student will examine the language of film and question whether or not film can be considered literature. Through this process, the student will examine purpose through language and literary terms, identifying supporting evidence for the claim. The student will also compare themes evaluated in other texts, focusing on American Dream, discrimination, identity, role of family, and conformity.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Critically viewing *Rebel without a Cause* allows the class to adequately consider the question “ What constitutes literature?” Students are asked to confront societies assumptions of what defines literature, including genre, and to develop and defend a definition of their own. The film returns to many themes already considered throughout the year (American Dream, identity, conformity, etc.) and pushes the student to consider them through another lens. The film offers an excellent opportunity for the study of comparative literature (thus pushing the student further in their ideas of literature) as well as providing an important segue into the critical analysis of media in society. Is purpose and credibility affected by choice of genre, by the language of popular media? The unit further pushes the student in the questioning of the role and power of genre, and how the tools of each can be harnessed to further message and purpose. *Rebel without a Cause*, in particular through its themes, examines the issue of manipulation of youth, family, and audience.

III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. | 7. Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED

Possible sensitive topics contained in Rebel Without a Cause: some mild violence. In the classroom, sensitive topics are dealt with in a mature fashion toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss their concerns.

# The Circle by Dave Eggers

The English Department has carefully evaluated The Circle as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade Honors curriculum.

**I. PLOT SUMMARY**

Mae Holland has landed a job at the Circle, “the most influential company in the world,” with help from her college friend Annie. The Circle, created by three "Wise Men," combines all of one's online interactions (social media and other business and personal communication, medical information, everything) into a single online identity called a TruYou, and has been growing to contain virtually all the other information that exists across the world. The company uses technological innovation to create what it claims is a more efficient and accountable society, especially by increasing transparency in government, business, and even personal lives. Cameras are everywhere, biological functions are monitored wirelessly, and the Circle adds more and more to its network. Mae begins work in Customer Experience and initially is concerned about her privacy, but she quickly rises in the ranks, gaining access to more screens of information (some of which she wears) and getting sucked into the arguments for full transparency, while her parents and ex-boyfriend Mercer grow increasingly horrified by the new rejection of private spaces and off-the-grid anonymity. She also becomes romantically involved with two men, an awkward coworker named Francis and a mysterious man who calls himself "Kalden." Kalden warns her of the dangers of "completing" the Circle, that is, making everything known to everyone so superficially and with so little respect for the individual. After Mae is caught illegally kayaking at night, she goes through a session of public shaming in front of the whole company and thus accepts a role as the primary "transparent" face of the Circle. She becomes world-famous, rejects Kalden's concerns, loses her identity, and essentially becomes a cyborg. Meanwhile, government officials and then more and more people are pressured to give up their privacy to go transparent so that the rest of the world can keep tabs on their morals.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

*The Circle* is in part a novel of ideas - ideas about the social construction and deconstruction of privacy, and about the increasing corporate ownership of privacy, and about the effects such ownership may have on the nature of Western democracy. Dissemination of information is power, as the old yellow-journalism newspaper proprietors knew so well. What is withheld can be as potent as what is disclosed, and who can lie publicly and get away with it is determined by gatekeepers: thus, in the Internet age, code-owners have the keys to the kingdom.

This, then, is the world to which Eggers holds up the mirror of art in order to show us ourselves and the perils that surround us. But *The Circle* is neither a tract nor an analysis but a novel, and novels always tell the stories of individuals. In genre, this novel partakes of the Menippean satire—distinct from social satire in viewing moral defects less as flaws of character than as intellectual perversions. It also incorporates passages of symposium-like Socratic dialogue by which the central character is manipulated, through rational-sounding questions and answers, into performing the increasingly outrageous acts that logic demands of her. There is plenty of fodder here for students to question and ponder in the use of logic and argument to control and manipulate.

Some will call *The Circle* a “dystopia,” but there’s no sadistic slave-whipping tyranny on view in this imaginary America: indeed, much energy is expended on world betterment by its earnest denizens. Plagues are not raging, nor is the planet blowing up or even warming noticeably. Instead we are in the green and pleasant land of a satirical utopia for our times, where recycling and organics abound, people keep saying how much they like each another, and the brave new world of virtual sharing and caring breeds monsters. What better prompt could be given to nudge students to look beyond the glossy digital sheen of the world around in order to see the deeper workings and intentions of the image makers?

Eggers treats his material with admirable inventiveness and gusto. The plot capers along, the trap doors open underfoot, the language ripples and morphs. But don’t look to *The Circle* for Chekhovian nuance or thoroughly rounded characters with many-layered inwardness: it isn’t “literary fiction” of that kind. It’s an entertainment, but a challenging one: it demands that the reader think its positions through in the same way that the characters must. Some of its incidents are funny, some of them are appalling, and some of them are both at once, like a nightmare in which you find yourself making a speech with no clothes on.

But apart from the moments of almost farcical discovery—among them the discovery by the characters themselves that there is indeed such a thing as TMI, or Too Much Information—Eggers has a serious purpose, or several. One of them is to remind us that we can be led down the primrose path much more blindly by our good intentions than by our bad ones. A second may be to examine the nature of looking and being looked at. All of this serves as a masterful tool to help the student look more deeply, at themselves and the world they live in.

**III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS**

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. | 6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

**IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED**

Possible sensitive topics contained in The Circle: sexual intimacy and language, brief self-inflicted violence, and profanity. In the classroom, sensitive topics will be dealt with in a mature fashion, toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss his/her concerns.

# The Good Thief by Hannah Tinti (2008)

The English Department has carefully evaluated The Good Thief as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade Honors curriculum.

**I. PLOT SUMMARY**

*The Good Thief* tells the mesmerizing story of a child named Ren, whose past is a mystery and whose future lies in the hands of a skilled con artist. Abandoned as an infant at St. Anthony’s Orphanage, Ren was steeped in Catholic ritual and admonitions against sin. By the time he is twelve years old, several of the other boys have been adopted, but prospects are slim for Ren; he is missing his left hand, an injury experienced early on, even before he arrived at St. Anthony’s. When Benjamin Nab arrives, claiming to be Ren’s long-lost brother, he transforms this mark of misfortune into a lucrative scam, whisking Ren into the world of scenic New England farmland and towns populated by trusting villagers: a prime location for a gritty underbelly of grave robbing and other dark trades. But as their hardscrabble adventures unfold, Ren begins to suspect that this fast-talking charlatan holds the key to one important truth: who Ren really is, and whether he can be reunited with the loving mother he has always dreamed of. The text confronts many important themes such as the definition of family, perception of truth, and the power of story.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

*The Good Thief* serves as a powerful introduction to a concept that guides the entire Honors Humanities curriculum: the power of stories. Many students question the relevance of stories and literature in a world inundated with a media that reduces many stories to base entertainment. Hannah Tinti’s novel serves as a poignant model of how literature can teach us powerful lessons of empathy, tolerance, and what it means to be human. The young protagonist connects well with a young high school audience that might struggle with issues of inadequacy, trust, and contradicting perceptions of morality. He teaches us that even in a world of confusing contradictions and ugly surfaces, one needs to have a critical and empathetic mind in order to avoid dangers and find truth of oneself and the world.

**III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS**

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. | 7. Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

**IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED**

Possible sensitive topics contained in The Good Thief: violence and brief sexuality. In the classroom, sensitive topics will be dealt with in a mature fashion, toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss his/her concerns.

*The Shipping News* by Annie Proulx

The English Department has carefully evaluated The Shipping News as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade Honors curriculum.

**I. PLOT SUMMARY**

The main character, known throughout the work by his last name, Quoyle, is depicted as the hapless son of cruel and unloving parents. After his tortuously unhappy marriage ends with his wife’s death, Quoyle, accompanied by his aunt, takes his two young daughters to the remains of the family home in Newfoundland, Canada. Here he is bombarded with a family history largely unknown to him and unrelentingly unpleasant. Having nowhere else to go, Quoyle attempts to find his place in the town his distant relatives once called home. With the help of his aunt, Quoyle manages to find a job and to make the run-down ancestral home habitable. Despite Quoyle’s sense of isolation, through his work at the local paper he begins to create a new version of himself, discovering that he has abilities he was previously unaware of, and that he has the capacity to foster new relationships, and even to fall in love again.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Winner of the 1993 National Book Award for Fiction and the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, Annie Proulx’s novel *The Shipping News* is a stylistically distinct work that explores one man’s search for a sense of identity, family, and home. Proulx explores the dynamics of Quoyle’s relationships with a unique cast of characters and creates a distinct sense of place through the use of unconventional prose. Her language is poetic, her imagery startling, and her syntax unique. In the study of language to create setting and tone alone, the novel offers a wealth of teaching opportunities. But the novel also serves as a poignant model of how literature can teach us powerful lessons of empathy, tolerance, and what it means to be human. The stumbling protagonist connects well with a young high school audience that might struggle with issues of inadequacy, trust, and a search for identity. He teaches us that even in a world of confusing contradictions and ugly surfaces, one needs to have a critical and empathetic mind in order to avoid dangers and find truth of oneself and the world.

**III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS**

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. | 6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

**IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED**

Possible sensitive topics contained in The Shipping News: sexual intimacy and language, references to sexual abuse, and profanity. In the classroom, sensitive topics will be dealt with in a mature fashion, toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss his/her concerns.

*The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros *(1984)*

The English Department has carefully evaluated The House on Mango Street as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 9th grade curriculum.

**I. PLOT SUMMARY**

*The House on Mango Street* can be read as a series of short stories or as one story with multiple chapters. There is no chronological order to the stories presented; however, the story progresses through the personal growth of the main character, Esperanza. Esperanza, a young girl of about 7, struggles with establishing her identity as a Mexican American female, while battling feelings of loneliness, confusion, and adolescence.

Esperanza and her family—Papa, Mama, Carlos, Kiki, and Nenny—have recently moved into a house on Mango Street, a house that is owned by them instead of a landlord. Although Esperanza has dreamed of moving into a house, *The House On Mango Street* is smaller and less elaborate than the one in her dreams. She is ashamed of the house her parents have chosen. As a result, Esperanza continues to hold on to her dream.

The new house is not the only source of embarrassment for Esperanza, as her image is also something she struggles with. She begins describing her distaste for her image with her want for a new name. She is named after her great-grandmother, who was supposedly captured by her great-grandfather and forced to marry him because he was able to take her away from her family. However, Esperanza wants a name that fits her personality more, a personality she describes as being hidden from everyone else. When her only friend, Cathy, moves away, Esperanza's low self-esteem increases. In order to create friendships, Esperanza pays two girls, Rachel and Lucy, five dollars in order to help them buy a bike. She realizes that if she gives them the money they need, they will, in return, be her friends. Her physical image is another point of concern to her. As she sees Marin and Sally with make-up on and feminine attire, she looks up to their style and longs for the attention they get. When given a pair of high-heel shoes, Rachel, Lucy, and Esperanza roam the streets, flaunting their new shoes. They receive the attention that Esperanza craves, but soon after, a homeless man asks Rachel for a kiss in exchange for a dollar. She ponders for a moment, until Lucy pulls her away. This is Esperanza's first taste of sexual exchange and another point of struggle in her life.

At her cousin's baptism, a man asks Esperanza to dance. Although she says no to him, she reluctantly dances with her uncle. While she and her uncle are dancing, the man who asked her to dance watches her very intently. Soon after, the reader learns that Esperanza is growing into a woman because she is beginning to develop hips. She and her friends discuss why women have hips, but Esperanza is the only one who refers to their importance from a biological perspective because of her time with Alicia, a girl Esperanza looks up to because Alicia is determined to lead a better life. Esperanza's next encounter with sexuality is when a man at her new photo printing job aggressively kisses her, after asking her for a kiss on the cheek sine it is his birthday. Although she has experienced some unpleasant encounters with older men, Esperanza begins to long for a relationship of her own after she sees Sire and Lois—a couple her age—interact; this furthers her sense of loneliness.

Esperanza decides to attend a carnival with Sally because she likes the way Sally laughs and moves her head when she is on the rides. However, when Sally leaves with a boy, Esperanza is left alone waiting for Sally's return. In the meantime, some boys approach her and take her into a dark place, where at least one of them sexually molests her. She is disgusted and angry—primarily at Sally for leaving her alone and partly at the media for lying about the pleasures of sex.

As she grows, Esperanza begins to experience feelings of confusion with regard to relationships. This begins when she learns about the lifestyle of Sally, the girl she once envied. Sally comes from a strict and abusive home, where her father reacts to her speaking to boys by hitting her. Nonetheless, when some boys playfully take Sally's keys and each asks for a kiss in return for the keys, Sally willingly succumbs. This upsets Esperanza because she feels like she needs to help Sally; however, when Esperanza goes to tell one of the boy's mother about the situation, the mother finds nothing wrong with the exchange. Hurriedly, Esperanza goes back to Sally, only to be told by Sally and the boys to leave them alone. Feeling embarrassed, Esperanza hides in a corner, wishing to die. After becoming aware of Sally's dependence on boys and learning about Rafaela, a woman whose husband locks her in their home because of her immense beauty, Esperanza further realizes that the life on Mango Street is not the life she wishes for.

When she encounters three sisters with magical powers, they ask her to make a wish. Silently, she wishes to leave Mango Street. Although she does not verbally reveal her wish, the sisters tell her that she will be able to leave, but she will have to come back because Mango Street is where her roots lie. In a conversation with Alicia, who has come to Mango Street to visit, Esperanza learns that although she aches to leave, much like Alicia did, she will eventually come back for her friends and family, just as Alicia did.

.

**II. RATIONALE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

*The House on Mango Street* is a powerful text that explores the struggles of Mexican American children trying to develop a sense of identity and overcome the struggles of growing up. The perspective of a young girl helps to illustrate the realities that children of a minority group face when raised in America. These struggles are depicted in Esperanza's longing for a new name, her need of being accepted by her peers, and her hopes of one day having more than what her family has. What she experiences is common to those who are trying to assimilate into a new culture, whether it is a new racial culture or a new social culture. The text provides a haven for immigrant children who are trying to find a balance between having a background belonging to one culture and being raised in another. It helps children who are trying to assimilate realize that their struggles are not unique, but, rather, are normal and expected.

One of the great assets of the text is the introduction. Here, Cisneros comments on her experiences of growing up in a society where she learned about the culture of the majority group, but was not given the opportunity to study material that focused on her background. Specifically, she talks about the changing moment in her life when she moved to a place where she felt like she did not belong. This moment was her inspiration for writing about the difficulties of growing up as child belonging to a minority group. Although her book is told from the perspective of a young Mexican American girl, the feelings described by the narrator can be identified in most children who find themselves in a place where they are different from those around them. Therefore, the text gives all young readers, regardless of ethnicity and origin, a comforting feeling, and helps them realize that they are not alone in their feelings.

Such experiences can also be related to children belonging to the preadolescent and adolescent age groups, regardless of race and culture. The realities of dealing with trying to find a group to belong to, while trying to escape the pressures of family are commonly found in children of these ages. The text brings forth topics that are often shied away from when discussing matters of concern with pre-teens. However, as noted in the book through the thoughts and actions of the characters, there are certain realities that most children deal with that cannot be ignored and must be confronted in order to help children transition through the various stages of adolescence. Once again the book provides comfort in that it gives preadolescent and adolescent children the assurance that they are not alone in their experiences.

As the primary character, Esperanza's inner growth through the text is of importance. Although she initially questions the culture and lifestyle of Mango Street in relation to herself, this questioning occurs on a superficial level. She craves a life and home that she sees in her dreams, but is too immature to realize that there is more to her lifestyle than a small home. However, as her story continues and as she matures, she begins to understand that Mango Street will always be of importance because it is where her family and friends are. Therein lies a deep connection between Esperanza and her cultural roots. Although it may appear that she is trying to push away the Mexican elements in her life, she ultimately realizes that her heart is with these very elements. As a result, the text teaches that a person cannot part with what is inherently within them. Rather, a person must learn to acknowledge and appreciate such qualities. Esperanza's maturity teaches readers to cherish and appreciate the parts of themselves that separate them from the rest.

Alicia is a strong woman who overcomes the hardship of Mango Street; thus, she becomes a role model for Esperanza and a character of great strength and ambition. Although her mother passed away, leaving her with no female figure to turn to, and her father abuses her, Alicia continues to educate herself in order to escape the life that most feel is destined for the women of Mango Street. Although there is no mention of Alicia attending any formal schooling institution, her ability to teach Esperanza about the biology of the body shows that she had successfully educated herself. Furthermore, Esperanza and Alicia have created a strong relationship and friendship. Esperanza seeks advice and guidance from Alicia because Esperanza realizes that Alicia has accomplished that which Esperanza hopes to accomplish; this being the ability to leave Mango Street. Through the text, Esperanza comes across as a lost girl searching for a place to belong. The only time when she feels like she finds answers is when she is with Alicia. This first happens when Esperanza credits Alicia for teaching about hips, and then at the end of the text when Alicia helps Esperanza realize that Mango Street will always be her home. It is Alicia who provides Esperanza with the inspiration needed to conquer the pattern of young girls getting married that is frequent on Mango Street, and to help Esperanza realize that no matter how much she might want to leave Mango Street, it will always be her home.

.

**III. COMMON CORE STANDARDS**

Reading Standards for Literature

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Ideas and Details | Grades 9-10 |
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| Craft and Structure | Grades 9-10 |
| 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. | 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. | 5. Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. | 6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Grades 9-10 |
| 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. | 7. Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus |
| 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | 8. (Not applicable to literature) |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Grades 9-10 |
| 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.  By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

**IV. SENSITIVE SUBJECTS IN THE TEXT AND HOW POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS WILL BE HANDLED**

Possible sensitive topics contained in The House on Mango Street: stereotypes, abuse, and sexual content. In the classroom, sensitive topics will be dealt with in a mature fashion, toward an understanding of why this material is included in the novel. The English department feels that the literary merit of this novel more than compensates for the inclusion of this sensitive subject matter. The student is encouraged to feel comfortable expressing his/her beliefs and views openly within the classroom environment. If the student is uncomfortable at any time, the student should meet with the teacher to discuss his/her concerns.