Shannon American Lit. - 11 Course Rationales 21-22

***The Crucible* by Arthur Miller (1952)**

*With Film Adaptation (1996)*

The English department has carefully evaluated *The Crucible* and deemed it worthy for the 11th grade curriculum. The film adaptation is rated PG-13 for intense depiction of the Salem witch trials. To further understand the drama, the student will compare the text of the play with the performance.

**I. Plot Summary**

Miller's play tracks a New England community as it comes undone in the wake of a child's accusation of witchcraft. To cover after she is caught dancing naked in the woods, Abigail Parris accuses Tituba of witchcraft. This terrifies the townspeople, and soon many more are accused of alliances with the Devil. At the heart of these accusations lie petty grievances, old grudges, and jealousies. The consequences of these false charges drive the town to a reckoning, but not before recrimination and executions tear the community apart. The play loosely follows the events of the Salem witch trials of the late 1600s, but Miller exercises artistic liberty as he uses the events of the trial to comment on the McCarthy hearings of the 1950s.

**II. Rationale and Learning Objectives**

Miller's allegory presents an opportunity for students to encounter two critical moments in American history as they negotiate the source documents relevant to the trial and Miller's dramatization of those events. They must grapple with the nature of truth and justice, the need for facts and the desire for political expediency, and the complexities of human relationships. Students naturally respond to Abigail's desire to hide her delinquencies and see the need for truth in a court of law. Questions of proof and personal responsibility echo throughout the American literary tradition and this critical analysis sets the stage for the remainder of our work together in the course. As students begin their study of American literature, it is essential that they experience some of the earliest documents of this canon. At the same time, the study of Miller's allegory emphasizes the recursive and referential nature of literary works. Finally, Miller's work is a valuable resource for students as they encounter American literature in the classroom and American politics in their lives.

**III. Addressing Sensitive Subjects**

***Possible sensitive subjects in The Crucible: brief nudity, reference to adultery and sexuality, witchcraft, executions.***

The consequence of Abigail's misdeeds and lies is death, and discussion of this topic may be concerning to some readers and parents. This aspect of the drama is foundational to the study of American literature, as many of the texts in the canon explore the need for truth and justice in American society. By raising the importance of these needs, the play provides students with an opportunity to establish their own ideas about personal responsibility and community participation.

The universality of the themes within Miller’s work can provide a space for students to consider the importance of integrity in their own lives. Of the work, Miller said, “It is rare for people to be asked the question which puts them squarely in front of themselves.” In the study of this seminal work about American life, students will have just this kind of opportunity.

***To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (1960)***

*With Film Adaptation (1962)*

The English Department has carefully evaluated *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a whole and deemed it worthy for the 11th grade English curriculum. The film adaptation is unrated, but parents are advised that the recommended rating is PG-13 for thematic material, some language, and references to rape. To further understanding of narrative devices the student will compare the novel with the performance.

**I. Plot Summary**

Lee’s novel is narrated by Scout Finch and follows her family as they struggle against the entrenched racism of 1930s Alabama. Scout’s father Atticus is a local public defender, called to confront bigotry and discrimination directly as the attorney for a black man named Tom Robinson. Tom has been falsely accused of rape and because the narration is provided from the perspective of a child, the crime in question is bewildering on many levels.

**II. Rationale and Learning Objectives**

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is vital to any study of literature. The novel, its characters, and Lee herself are frequently alluded to in popular culture and academia. But the value of the novel is not limited to its existence as a touchstone, the framework provided by Lee’s work is ideal for the study of literary elements and story archetypes. Theme, motif, and allusion are particularly evident and easily accessible for students. The motif of childhood that infuses the first portion of the narrative makes the novel particularly appealing to high school students. Readers naturally sympathize with Scout’s escapades and the accessibility of Lee’s prose makes the complexities of the novel manageable for students.

**III. Addressing Sensitive Subjects**

Possible sensitive topics contained in *To Kill a Mockingbird:* profanity or vulgar language, reference to rape, and violence. 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. Bigotry can be a sensitive issue in the classroom, and the undercurrent of violence that pervades the novel adds additional complexity. While the racism and injustice that feature in the narrative may seemingly have receded out of the public consciousness, certainly these issues remain relevant for students. Harper Lee has remained steadfastly silent on the book and its influence, but she once noted, “The book to read is not the one which thinks for you, but the one which makes you think.” To the extent the students will have an opportunity to think about crucial issues and conduct difficult literary analysis, this is the book to read.

***The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925)***

*With Film Adaptation (2013)*

*The film is rated PG-13 for some violent images, sexual content, smoking, partying and brief language.*

***I. Plot Summary***

*Fitzgerald’s classic novel brings to life the exuberance and vitality of the Jazz Age, with its elaborate parties, sparkling personalities, and careless people. Nick Caraway narrates as the mystery of Gatsby unfolds, and the novel captures the nostalgia, narcissism, corruption, social climbing, hedonism and hope tied up in the era. Gatsby’s American dream is the engine that drives it all, but the crushing impact of WWI and the hollow heart of The Lost Generation prove inescapable.*

***II. Rationale and Learning Objectives***

*The novel is occupied with quintessentially American themes related to meritocracy and regret. Students will have an opportunity to explore the impact of past action and future intentions on the lives and motivations of Fitzgerald’s characters. A short story and poetry exploration will provide students with a look at the way different texts address a similar theme. The student will consider symbol, foreshadowing, irony, paradox, and theme as they compose their analytical essays.*

***Addressing Sensitive Subjects***

*Possible sensitive topics contained in The Great Gatsby: violence, sexuality, alcohol, murder, suicide.*

*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 and film adaptation 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.*

***Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi (2016)***

*The English department has carefully evaluated Homegoing and deemed it worthy for the 11th grade curriculum.*

***I. Plot Summary***

*Gyasi’s debut novel is a fictional telling of the multi-generational struggles of colonization, prejudice, discrimination, and violence. The story traces the lineage of two half-sisters Effia and Esi, born of the same mother in different villages. Effia struggles with being married to a wealthy Englishman who is a known slave trader, while her half-sister is sold into the slave trade. The rest of the novel follows Effia and Esi’s family lineage as one side struggles to find identity in Ghana as a person of mixed ethnicity while the others try to survive harsh realities of American history.*

***II. Rationale and Learning Objectives***

*Homegoing introduces the classroom to be curious on where individuals come from and how history impacts every persons’ lives. The novel allows students to study the details of storytelling as Gyasi is very detailed in their writing connecting her characters together through multiple time periods and historical events. As students read through this text, there will be non-fictional readings and supplementing discussions about Africa, while primarily focusing on western Africa and the long term effects that enslavement of the people have in today’s world. In short, this novel will help students focus on the idea and theme of Identity and what that means to them.*

***III. Addressing Sensitive Subjects***

*Possible sensitive topics contained in Homegoing: violence, drug use, sexual assault/rape, racism, sexism, and suicide.*

*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.*

“And in my village we have a saying about separated sisters. They are like a woman and her reflection, doomed to stay on opposite sides of the pond.”

* Abronoma, Page 39

***There There by Tommy Orange (2018)***

*The English department has carefully evaluated There There and deemed it worthy for the 11th grade curriculum.*

***I. Plot Summary***

*The novel There There follows an array of twelve Native Americans who are headed to the Oakland Powwow. Each individual attends for their own personal reasons: Jacquie Red Feather is attempting to make amends with their family who she left due to addiction. While others attend to honor their recently passed uncle or show support for their nephew who is dancing publicly for their first time at the Powwow. The novel showcases a harmonious relationship between sacred traditions and a modernized urban Native American culture.*

***II. Rationale and Learning Objectives***

*There There is described as “a voice we have never heard - a voice full of poetry and rage, exploding onto the page with stunning urgency and force” (BookBrowse). The novel celebrates the different cultures and identities of its twelve speakers. The importance of this story allows the reader to better understand to not generalize or make assumptions about a race, culture, gender, etc. but sheds light that there are unique differences between everyone. With NPA being just miles away from the largest Native American reservation in the United States, it is of the utmost importance that students begin to understand and appreciate the beautiful cultures and people that founded North America.*

***III. Addressing Sensitive Subjects***

*Possible sensitive topics contained in There There: Abuse, Alcoholism, Depression, Gun Violence, Institutionalized Racism, Rape, and Suicice.*

*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.*