Curriculum Rationales: English 7

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***The Giver*** by Lois Lowry

1. Plot Summary

Life in the community where Jonas lives is idyllic. Designated birthmothers produce newchildren, who are assigned to appropriate family units. Citizens are assigned their partners and their jobs. No one thinks to ask questions. Everyone obeys. Everyone is the same. Except Jonas.

Not until he is given his life assignment as the Receiver of Memory does he begin to understand the dark, complex secrets behind his fragile community. Gradually Jonas learns that power lies in feelings. But when his own power is put to the test—when he must try to save someone he loves—he may not be ready. Is it too soon? Or too late?

*The Giver* has become one of the most influential novels of our time. Don't miss the powerful companion novels in Lois Lowry's Giver Quartet: *Gathering Blue, Messenger,* and *Son*.

1. Rationale and Learning Objectives

A common book often taught in middle school, *The Giver* introduces students to the concept of dystopias and allows them to engage with ideas of community and societal organization and construction. It encourages them to think about systems, how they are implemented, and what the effects are both on an individual and communal scale. We will use this as an opportunity to analyze different societies and give the students an opportunity to design their own community. In addition to the book, the students will watch and analyze the film *The Giver* (2014). The purpose of viewing the film is for students to compare the novel to the visual representation, examining the use of lighting, stage direction, dialogue, costume, music, and actor choice and its effectiveness in conveying the story.

1. Common Core Standards

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| 7.RL.2 | Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 7.RL.3 | Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot). |
| 7.RL.4 | Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama. |
| 7.RI.2 | Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| 7.RI.3 | Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events). |
| 7.RI.7 | Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium’s portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words). |
| 7.RL.9 | Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history. |

1. Addressing Sensitive Subjects

As this text centers around the idea of dystopia, there are several sensitive subjects, both that influenced the creation of the society in *The Giver*, as well as Jonas’s and others’ responses to the society. This is typically discussed in an askance or vague way, but these topics include euthanasia, suicide, emotional trauma, vague sexuality, and government-mandated conformity. Many of these topics are intended to demonstrate flaws in the system and are intended to suggest empathy, kindness, and open-mindedness to the students.

***The Outsiders*** by S. E. Hinton

1. Plot Summary

*The Outsiders* is about two weeks in the life of a 14-year-old boy. The novel tells the story of Ponyboy Curtis and his struggles with right and wrong in a society in which he believes that he is an outsider. According to Ponyboy, there are two kinds of people in the world: greasers and socs. A soc (short for "social") has money, can get away with just about anything, and has an attitude longer than a limousine. A greaser, on the other hand, always lives on the outside and needs to watch his back. Ponyboy is a greaser, and he's always been proud of it, even willing to rumble against a gang of socs for the sake of his fellow greasers--until one terrible night when his friend Johnny kills a soc. The murder gets under Ponyboy's skin, causing his bifurcated world to crumble and teaching him that pain feels the same whether a soc or a greaser.

1. Rationale and Learning Objectives

Reading this book, students will engage with themes of communalism, privilege, and stereotyping. Ultimately hopeful, this book depicts young people who feel like they have a lack of choices and eventually presents the idea that there are more options than originally thought. Themes of family, both blood and found, are interwoven throughout. The literary learning objectives include recognition of character development as an important part of plot development, as well as the different types of conflict and how that impacts the story. Students will also practice identifying plot development, i.e.: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. In addition to reading the novel by S. E. Hinton, students will view the film version: *The Outsiders*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (1983). The purpose of viewing the film is for students to compare the novel to the visual representation, examining the use of lighting, stage direction, dialogue, costume, music, and actor choice and its effectiveness in conveying the story.

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1. Addressing Sensitive Subjects

This book deals with topics such as homicide and violence, arson, parental death, abuse, and the foster care system. We will approach these topics with care, empathy, and understanding. It is entirely possible with all books that there are students who have had close experiences with these subjects, and as such it is important to treat everyone with respect and dignity. We will also be discussing themes of powerlessness and class. This novel is important because it will bring up issues of classism and we will be able to interrogate the systems of privilege from a different perspective.

***The Pearl*** by John Steinbeck

1. Plot Summary

Like his father and grandfather before him, Kino is a poor diver, gathering pearls from the gulf beds that once brought great wealth to the kings of Spain and now provide Kino, Juana, and their infant son with meager subsistence. Then, on a day like any other, Kino emerges from the sea with a pearl as large as a sea gull’s egg, as “perfect as the moon.” With the pearl comes hope, the promise of comfort and of security…

A story of classic simplicity, based on a Mexican folk tale, *The Pearl* explores the secrets of man’s nature, greed, the darkest depths of evil, and the luminous possibilities of love.

1. Rationale and Learning Objectives

In addition to benefiting from reading a wide variety of authors, *The Pearl* presents an opportunity to elevate students’ vocabulary and experience a more archaic, complex style of writing. The story, being based on a Mexican folktale, allows for comparison to other folktales, fables, and fairy tales, which we will return to and compare against the hero’s journey story of *Beowulf* at the end of the year. It also allows the students to learn about and engage with a culture different than the ones presented yet in the year, as well as characters of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds. We will discuss the impact of class on the plotline as well as the role colonization has had on the setting and culture.

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| 7.RL.5 | Analyze the structure of a text, including how a drama or poem’s form or structure contributes to its meaning. |
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1. Addressing Sensitive Subjects

There is a major character death in this novel. We will be discussing that event with respect and empathy, giving the students the space to reflect on the event and ask questions regarding fate and fairness. We will also be discussing classism and colonization because the main characters are poverty-stricken indigenous Mexicans. While we will not go into much depth, the effect of poverty on the choices and options of the characters, as well as the impact of colonialism on the setting and cultural practices, will be touched on and explained sufficiently for the understanding of the story.

***Beowulf*** by Anonymous (Grinnel edition)

1. Plot Summary

*Beowulf* is a major epic of Anglo-Saxon literature, probably composed between the first half of the seventh century and the end of the first millennium. The poem was inspired by Germanic and Anglo-Saxon oral tradition recounting the exploits of Beowulf, the hero who gave his name to the poem. Beowulf exemplifies Viking and Anglo-Saxon ideals of leadership and heroism, including defeating enemies, being honest and fair, and responding appropriately to the situation at hand.

1. Rationale and Learning Objectives

*Beowulf* allows for the teaching of the hero’s journey, an archetype story typical in most, if not all, cultures. We can use this story to draw parallels with others from various cultures and media formats. This story also allows for the exploration of different varieties of literary devices and the opportunity to see how they are used in a different context and how they have changed over the years.

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1. Addressing Sensitive Subjects

There is death in this story. There is human and monster death because of the battles. The monster death in this story (Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the dragon) may become sensitive for students because of the analysis which humanizes them. There are mild descriptions of violence. Should anything unforeseen arise, the class will always do their best to be open-minded, empathetic, and respectful.

***Note:*** Throughout the school year, we will be addressing these reading standards as they write literary analysis essays in response to their reading:

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