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English 7701 – Dr. Cope
Thematic Unit Plans

9th grade literature – Prentice Hall Gold Level Textbook, 2 parallel novels

Year Theme: **Growth through Life Lessons**

Unit Theme #1: **Making Choices** (presented below)

Unit Theme #2: **Overcoming Obstacles** (presented below)

Unit Theme #3: Making Discoveries

Unit Theme #4: Clashes and Conflicts

Grade Level:

I designed this unit plan specifically for a class in 9th grade Literature/ Composition on-level (92Y Literature/ Composition) taught on block schedule – one semester of daily 90-minute classes. This college-preparatory class is the first English Language Arts class that the students will take in high school. The textbook we will use is Prentice Hall (Gold Level).

Themes:

It was difficult to think thematically since literature for ninth grade is divided by genre. When I was debating how to divide the literature I teach into themes, several groupings came to mind. I separated the four major works I teach (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Odyssey*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Animal Farm*) and grouped them with short stories and poems that seemed to fit the main point of each major work. Once I did that, I evaluated the main idea of each grouping. After much struggling and switching, I decided on four themes for my four units. I entitled the overarching theme for the course “Growth through Life Lessons”

because ninth grade is about growing into the role of a high school student, and because all of the literature we cover is about learning, growing, and life .

When I was first deciding on an appropriate theme for *Romeo and Juliet*, I thought I would focus on “dreams,” but I realized that I was not emphasizing the main point of the literature. Then I had a conversation with Linda Templeton, who suggested the idea of “choices.” That immediately struck me as the most important theme from the play and several of the short stories and poems I was planning on including in the unit. Also, one of the important non-academic lessons I stress in my class is making smart choices. Each Friday, I remind my students not to do drugs, not to drink, and to make good choices over the weekend. Many of my students joke about it, but that is the one phrase most of them remember when they come back to visit me after I taught them. Since it ties in so well with my personal theme, I thought the theme of “Making Choices” would be a good way to start off the semester.

The next unit I will teach is “Overcoming Obstacles,” which will include *The Odyssey* as the main work of literature. I chose this theme because ninth graders struggle with the challenges of high school (often brought on by their choices!). Several works of literature, including short stories, non-fiction, and poetry, fit into this theme. I believe it will do well following the unit on “Making Choices” because we can discuss the choices the characters made that either presented an obstacle, or helped them overcome an obstacle.

Since I will be teaching on block schedule, and we only have 18 weeks in the semester, I will present both of these units as my “unit plan.” The unit

“Making Choices” is 5 weeks long, and “Overcoming Obstacles” is 4 weeks long, creating 9 weeks of instruction. The other two units in the semester, “Making Discoveries,” and “Clashes and Conflicts” will comprise 7 weeks total, leaving two weeks available for introductory lessons, testing, assemblies, and final exam review. All of the units will fit into the overall theme of “Growing through Life Lessons,” and will culminate in a final personal essay on the growth students have experienced over the semester.

Literary Overview and Philosophical Organizational Structure:

Ninth literature is comprised of drama, short story fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and novels. The textbook contains many selections that vary by genre and author. For the unit “Making Choices,” I selected the following works: “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost, “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry, “The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant, “Dreams” and “Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes, “Gifts” by Shu Ting, and *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. I tried to select works that included minority authors because Applebee’s (1992) research alerted me to the severe lack of literary works by female and minority authors in English classrooms. Also, Scott’s (2002) research asserts “our reading of literature is enriched when seen in cross-cultural contexts” (p. 120). I want to include texts from different cultures that embrace the same theme so that my students can all engage in the meaning of the works. These works all relate to the theme of “Making Choices” because each one deals with decisions and the outcomes or possibilities of the choices made. In some cases, good decisions

were made with bad results (“Gift of the Magi”); sometimes bad decisions resulted in bad outcomes (“The Necklace”); and in some cases, the choices are not clearly good or bad (*Romeo and Juliet*).

Students will record their responses to the literature in response journals that they will keep in the classroom and use almost every day. Fulwiler’s (2002) research in *English Studies* promotes the use of journals to help students make connections and use critical thinking skills. I will provide prompts with each literary work (or section of a literary work) for them to think about and write about. I will grade their response journals based on attempt on a weekly basis.

Frost’s poem, “The Road Not Taken,” which students will read aloud in stanzas, will be the starting point for the unit and will spur conversation about choices made in life and where that can lead. To introduce the concept of irony, we will listen to the Alanis Morissette song “Ironic” and will evaluate what irony is by giving examples similar to the ones from the song lyrics. Research on pop culture in the classroom shows incorporating media, like song lyrics, can engage students in the theme of the work of literature (Avery, Avery, & Pace, 1998). We will then read “Gift of the Magi” and “The Necklace” along with the recordings on tape. Through the two stories, we will discuss irony, and the outcomes of the decisions made by both couples. We will discuss different types of irony in a mini-lesson to prepare for the various types of irony we will eventually encounter in *Romeo and Juliet* (i.e. verbal, dramatic, etc.).

The dream-themed poems by Hughes, “Dreams” and “Dream Deferred,” will encourage discussion about dreams and choices. Students will write about what

their dreams are, what decisions they will need to make in order for their dreams to come true, and what choices they will make if their dreams do not come true. These journal responses may be used later in the unit as students select a topic on which to write an essay.

To introduce the main work of literature for the unit – *Romeo and Juliet* – we will complete an anticipation guide about topics associated with making choices, young love, etc (similar to the one used in Dr. Cope’s class). Anticipation guides have been shown to spur interest in a topic and help students relate to the theme that will be presented. Then students will watch segments from two video clips: the introductory scenes from the Luhrman version of *Romeo and Juliet* and Robbins and Wise’s *West Side Story*. Once again, the incorporation of media in the classroom can help engage students in the material (Avery, Avery, & Pace, 1998). Students will write in their journals about the two “groups” they see in the films, and will discuss the dichotomy between the two. They will also compare and contrast the two films for effectiveness and portrayal of the two “sides.”

To scaffold the reading of *Romeo and Juliet*, I will give mini-lessons on blocking, stage direction, voicing, and audience. The students will sign up each day for the roles they would like to play. Each student will be given the opportunity to perform a role before the class. Those students who do not enjoy speaking in front of the class will be required to read only one small part on one day. The students will read the entire play aloud as they act it out on the “stage” at the front of the classroom, using the staging and voicing techniques they have learned through the mini-lessons.

According to research, the physical involvement in the literary work engages students in the meaning of the text and helps them create connections (Baxter, 1999; Stibbs, 1998). I will utilize Baxter's (1999) method of "hot-seating" for the characters of *Romeo and Juliet* to encourage students to use critical thinking skills as they examine the characterization. Members of the class will bombard the character with questions about motives in order to understand the reasons behind the choices they are making. The person who plays the character will have to give responses. All students will record their reactions to the activity in their journals. We will also perform "Tableaux Vivants" as suggested in "Shakespeare Set Free" (1993). Students will freeze in a formation and briefly give the main point of the scene through word and movement. Yet another activity students will do from "Shakespeare Set Free" (1993) involves subtext. I will give a mini-lesson on subtext, voice, and body language. Students will act out various modern-day scenarios, utilizing body language and vocal intonation to stress the subtext. Other students will record their interpretations of the subtext in their journals, and then we will discuss as a class.

When we read *Romeo and Juliet*, we will focus on the characters' choices, and make judgment calls about their decisions, before and after we learn the outcomes of each choice. As suggested in the Cambridge School Teacher's Edition of *Romeo and Juliet* (1992), I will encourage students to examine the "plans" of several characters and record their interpretations of the plans. Then students will create their own plans for the characters. At the end of the play, we

will see if their choices for the characters would have had “better” results than the choices the characters made.

The last work we will read is “Gifts” by Shu Ting. Students will read this poem about the gifts the speaker wants to leave behind when she departs earth. They will write in their journals about the “legacy” that Romeo and Juliet left behind, and about the legacy they want to leave behind.

The culminating essay for the unit will have two options for students to select. They can either choose to write about who is responsible for the demise of Romeo and Juliet (who influenced their choices, etc), or they can write about the legacy they want to leave behind (their dreams for the future), and what choices they will need to make in order to leave that legacy.

The next unit, “Overcoming Obstacles,” will contain a short story, poetry, non-fiction, and an epic. We will read “The Most Dangerous Game” by Richard Connell, “I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King, Jr., “*from Rosa Parks: My Story*” by Rosa Parks, “*from In My Place*” by Charlayne Hunter-Gault, “There is a Longing” by Chief Dan George, “Slam, Dunk, and Hook” by Yusef Komunyakaa, “Casey at the Bat” by Ernest Lawrence Thayer, and *The Odyssey* by Homer. Once again, I heeded Scott’s (2002) and Applebee’s (1992) research to locate authors from different cultures whose writings dealt with the same theme. Each work presents a struggle that must be overcome. In some cases, the struggle is mental, in some it is physical. All of the works of literature in this unit deal with the importance of rising above the situation to achieve a goal.

I will start with an introduction to suspense by telling a short scary story that has a gripping plot line. We will discuss what suspense is, and then I will allow students to tell short scary stories that they have heard before. We will begin “The Most Dangerous Game” after completing an activity about predicting the outcome of the story based on words found in the text. I will place a list of words from the text (“hounds”, “Ship-Trap Island”, “revolver”, etc) on the board and have students write their predictions in their journals. Then we will listen to the story on the tape and follow along in our books. Students will add to or change their predictions as we read the story (as modeled in Dr. Cope’s class). We will discuss the element of suspense at the end of the story.

Our next three selections are non-fiction works by civil rights activists. We will discuss prior knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement through a KWL. As we read each selection, we will discuss the obstacle(s) the people had to overcome, whether they were able to obtain their goals, and how their actions made an impact on our society today. In their journals, students will record their responses, make connections to the works, and compare and contrast America today with America during the Civil Rights Movement.

Two poems (“There is a Longing” and “Slam, Dunk, and Hook”) will continue the discussion of overcoming obstacles. I will request individuals to read the poems aloud to the class. After each poem, we will discuss the importance of the struggle the speaker had to overcome. The students will record any connections they have to the speakers of the poems or to the struggles they had to overcome.

“Casey at the Bat” will lead in to the idea of heroes. Before we read, I will use Horn’s (1988) idea of asking students to record in their journals what a hero is. They will write about what qualities a hero must have, what a hero must do to be a hero, and whether they know of any real-life heroes. We will discuss modern day heroes (especially sports stars). Then I will ask for several volunteers to read each stanza of the poem aloud. The students will record their responses to the ending after we read the poem. We will discuss whether Casey was a hero or not.

To begin *The Odyssey*, I will first give the students background knowledge on *The Iliad*, using some of Horn’s (1988) suggestions from her approach with reluctant twelfth graders, including telling the story as if it were a soap opera. Then students will begin reading *The Odyssey* aloud. We will go around the room reading on some day (students only have to read one sentence at a time if they do not like to read aloud). On other days, they will do oral reading in pairs. On other days, I will read aloud to the class. As they read the story, students will respond to daily journal prompts about the obstacles that Odysseus faces. This will also give them a recorded list of the events in Odysseus’ journey.

Simultaneously, students will be completing a short research project. After learning about the various gods and goddesses from the background story to *The Odyssey*, students will select a particular god or goddess that intrigues them from a sheet I will provide. I will obtain references on the gods and goddesses, and will do mini-lessons on the research process. They will obtain information about their god or goddess, and synthesize that information into a presentation,

focusing especially on the obstacle that their god or goddess struggled with (or caused for others). As suggested in Burke's (1999) book, we will practice the art of oral presentation (speaking) by giving the presentations to each other in pairs. When students have completed their research and visual aid, and have practiced the art of speaking in front of the class, they will present their projects over a span of several days.

At the end of the reading of *The Odyssey*, we will view the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Students will record in their journals the obstacles that Everett faces and will compare those obstacles to the ones Odysseus faced. We will use Burke's (1999) "heroic cycle" to analyze the patterns in *The Odyssey* and *OBWAT* (p. 46). The comparison and contrast between the two epics will serve as the basis for an in-class essay that will be part of the test on the unit.

Towards the end of the reading of *The Odyssey*, students will use their journal responses and connections to formulate a personal narrative about an obstacle that they had to overcome. Students will relate their experiences to the literature from the unit. They can relate it to *The Odyssey* by writing it in an epic form, or they can simply use a personal narrative style. The essay will show an understanding of the obstacles that life can present and how to overcome them.

Independent Reading:

After learning about the benefits of individual choice in reading from Dr. Cope's class, I have determined independent reading will be a part of my reading instruction. Each Friday, students will have Sustained Silent Reading time for at least thirty minutes. I would like to devote more time to SSR, but it is difficult to

find the time. Students will have a weekly SSR and will present Alternative Book Reports approximately every 6 weeks. I will use Dr. Cope's online list as a reference for my students to select an ABR. Students will have their independent reading books with them at all times in case we have time to do SSR throughout the week. For instance, if a student finishes a test or quiz early, she should get out her SSR book. If the planned lesson does not take as long as I anticipated, I will give students SSR time for the remainder of class. Since modeling is important, I will also participate in SSR when my students read. I am looking forward to the opportunity to do more personal recreational reading this coming year, and encouraging my students to do the same!

New Standards: From Georgia Department of Education English / Language Arts High School Curriculum Standards (draft)

ELA9RL1 The student demonstrates comprehension by identifying evidence (e.g., diction, imagery, point of view, figurative language, symbolism, plot events) and main ideas in a variety of texts representative of different genres (e.g., poetry, prose [short story, novel, essay, editorial, biography], and drama) and using this evidence as the basis for interpretation.

- **The student identifies, analyzes, and applies knowledge of the structures and elements of fiction and provides evidence from the text to support understanding**
- **The student identifies, analyzes, and applies knowledge of the purpose, structure, and elements of nonfiction and/or informational materials and provides evidence from the text to support understanding**
- **The student identifies and responds to differences in style and subject matter in poems by a variety of contemporary and canonical poets**
- **The student identifies, analyzes, and applies knowledge of the themes, structures, and elements of dramatic literature and provides evidence from the text to support understanding**

As we read works of literature from many different authors and from many different genres, my students will keep journals of their responses to literature. They will record their critical thinking processes and personal reactions to the literature. They will also keep a running list of literary terms they learn throughout the semester, and will record examples of each literary term, as well as a

personal connection they have with the term. The critical thinking processes that the students will go through as they interpret and analyze the works we read and act out in class will help them understand the different genres and the main theme of the works.

ELA9RL2 The student identifies, analyzes, and applies knowledge of theme in literary works from various genres and provides evidence from the works to support understanding.

My students will discuss the theme of each unit in length and will record personal responses to the themes in their journals. They will highlight particular events and situations from each unit that are relevant to the theme presented and will discuss these themes in their journals, and in class discussions.

ELA9RL3 The student deepens understanding of literary works by relating them to contemporary context or historical background.

My students will keep journals of their responses to literature and will keep a running list of terms they learn throughout the semester. For each theme, we will discuss modern-day applications and also the historical context of the time. For *Romeo and Juliet*, we will discuss appropriate cultural significance for the time period, and discuss how it would be similar or different today. When we read the works by MLK, Jr. and the other civil rights activists, we will discuss the context of the works, and also discuss how civil rights has affected the world in which we live today.

ELA9RL4 The student employs a variety of writing genres to demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of significant ideas in sophisticated literary works.

My students will write in many different forms (journals, formal essays, evaluations, etc) to analyze the ideas found in the literature we cover. Their journal responses will be the basis for essays they will write, so they must synthesize their reactions in a more elevated writing form.

ELA9RL5 The student understands and acquires new vocabulary and uses it correctly in reading and writing.

As my students come across new words, they will record these words in a space in their journals. They will create a vocabulary square for each word that will help them remember the meaning of the word (Burke, 1999). Also, they will keep a running list of all terms we cover in class (mini-lessons) and will add to the definitions and examples for each.

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9th Grade Literature and Composition, College Prep
 Year Long Theme: Growing Through Life Lessons
 Unit Themes: Making Choices and Overcoming Obstacles
 Unit Techniques: irony, plot, dramatization, characterization, theme

<p>Unit: Making Choices “The Road Not Taken” – Robert Frost -writing about choices -introduction to literary elements (plot, character) through a children’s book</p>	<p>-review literary elements -introduction to irony with <i>Ironic</i> by Alanis Morissette -“Gift of the Magi” – O. Henry -writing: choices and irony</p>	<p>“The Necklace” – Guy de Maupassant -compare and contrast with Gift of the Magi -discuss irony, character, plot -writing: choices and irony</p>	<p>“Dreams” – Hughes -discuss dreams of characters in Gift and Necklace, and choices they made to pursue their dreams -“Dream Deferred” -writing: what choices to make when dreams don’t come true</p>	<p>-background on <i>Romeo & Juliet</i> -Anticipation guide -mini-lesson on dramatic terms, stage blocking -clips from opening of movies- new R&J, West Side Story – discuss initial response to imagery of two sides -SSR</p>
<p><i>Romeo & Juliet</i> Act I Sc i-ii act w/ staging, voicing, etc.</p>	<p>R & J Act I Sc iii (hw: mask)</p>	<p>R & J Act I Sc iv, dream writing (hw: mask)</p>	<p>R & J Act I Sc v – dance, masks</p>	<p>R & J Act II SSR View Act I Begin Act II sc i</p>
<p>R & J Act II Act I Quiz Sc ii-iii -begin Prompt Book</p>	<p>R & J Act II Sc iii- iv Work on prompt books</p>	<p>R & J Act II Sc v-vi Work on prompt books</p>	<p>View Act II, discuss -prompt book due, present R & J Act III sc i, begin tableaux</p>	<p>Act II Quiz R & J Act III -practice tableaux -sc ii SSR</p>
<p>R & J Act III -practice tableaux -sc iii-iv</p>	<p>R & J Act III -present tableaux -writing: “for your benefit” -sc v</p>	<p>View Act III R & J Act IV -You’re Late subtext activity -sc I – discuss subtext, friar’s choices (plan) ABR’s</p>	<p>Act III Quiz R & J Act IV -sc ii, iii, iv -fear writing, what choices Juliet had ABR’s</p>	<p>R & J Act IV -sc v -writing: Juliet’s “death” - who is responsible for her choices? ABR’s</p>
<p>View Act IV Act V Sc i -Write: What is fate? Discuss, quotations</p>	<p>Act IV Quiz Act V -sc ii, iii -writing – who is responsible for the deaths of R & J? Begin viewing</p>	<p>View Act V -timelines – group project -present timelines -extend writing – who is responsible?</p>	<p>Act V quiz -video critique (old & new movies of death scene) -writing continued</p>	<p>-“Gifts” -Ting -wrap up writing on legacy, choices, how you want to be remembered, what gifts you want to leave SSR</p>

In-Class Writing Workshop: 2 choices – who is responsible for the outcome in R&J –OR- Your legacy, what you want to leave behind you, how you want to live life – turn in essay at end of class	Unit Test Introduction to new literary elements – suspense, plot, through telling of scary stories	Unit: <u>Overcoming Obstacles</u> “The Most Dangerous Game” – Connell	TMDG -writing: what obstacles did the main character have to overcome? “Rosa Parks” nonfiction SSR	“I have a Dream” – MLK “In My Place” -writing: what obstacles did these people overcome? Racial discrimination – discuss and write personal connections
“There is a longing” “Slam, Dunk, & Hook” “Casey at the Bat” Intro to heroes -writing: what is a hero? Heroic qualities? Intro to myth project	Mythology research time – mini-lesson on research techniques Background on the Odyssey – story of Helen, Paris, Odysseus’ involvement, etc.	Mythology research time – mini-lesson on research techniques Background, continued	Mythology research time – mini-lesson on research techniques Part I	Mythology research synthesis Part I SSR
Part I Mythology presentations (5)	Part I Mythology presentations (5) Begin personal narrative on obstacles	Part I Quiz Part II Mythology presentations (5) Work on narrative	Part II Mythology presentations (5) Work on narrative	Part II Mythology presentations (5) Work on narrative SSR
Part II Mythology presentations (5) Work on narrative	Part II Quiz Writing Workshop: finish personal narrative on overcoming obstacles	View O, Brother Where Art Thou? -Group Work: Map of Odysseus’ obstacles <i>Personal Narrative Due</i>	OBWAT viewing Compare / Contrast obstacles of the two epics	Unit Test, Short essay on OBWAT / Odyssey comparison SSR

