

Literary Genres

Course Outline

Literary Genres is a high school semester course that examines a breadth of literary genres with a concentration on incorporating the literary concepts, their application and effects on the piece. This course format lends itself well to the examination of multicultural literature and diversity issues. I have compiled a list of literature and assignments that can be used as a diverse framework with a tenth grade audience in mind; when necessary, I have given both a high academic option and an option that can be substituted for lower-level learners. Also, I have suggested possible project-based learning activities (PBLA) that can be used with each piece of literature.

Poetry

House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros is book of poetic prose loosely knitted together about a young Mexican American girl growing up in a poor Chicago neighborhood. The pieces contain powerful imagery, are littered with poetic devices, and speak volumes to adolescents.

PBLA: 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15

This genre has endless possibilities of poet options from Langston Hughes to Maya Angelou to John Hershman. A quick look at Mattie Stepanek who battles MS could add an interesting dimension to your students' study: the work is powerful thematically, with an elementary style, as the author is not yet eleven.

Drama

Shakespeare's Othello is an early examination of an interracial relationship filled with passion, distrust, and betrayal. Students see the hatred spurred by racial prejudice.

PBLA: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15

Novel

Academic: Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe is the story of Okonkwo, a tribal leader of the Ibo people of Nigeria and the effects of the British colonization and the imposed Western values on the "uncivilized" tribe.

PBLA: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14

Non-academic: The Education of Little Tree by Forrest Carter is the story of Little Tree, a young Cherokee who goes to live with his grandparents after he is orphaned at the age of five. This excellent novel tackles sophisticated issues of self-identification head on and is a high-interest favorite for lower-level readers.

PBLA: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15

Autobiography

Night by Elie Wiesel is the profound account of the author's boyhood experiences during the Holocaust where he loses his mother, his sister, his faith in God and his desire to live. This first hand account eerily demonstrates the reality of the Holocaust for students whose primary understanding of this dark event has been purely academic.

PBLA: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou is the coming-of-age story of a young African American girl growing up rural Arkansas in the 1930's. Angelou's book conveys the difficulties associated with the mixture of racial and gender discrimination endured by a southern black girl. At the same time, she speaks to many other issues, such as the relationships between parents and children, child abuse, and the search for one's own path in life.

PBLA: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Essay

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" essay is the perfect springboard for many writing and self-exploration activities.

PBLA: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Mythology

I use this unit to juxtapose gods and heroes of different genders, focusing on how cultures viewed the roles of males and females within society. This, of course, creates great dialogue and examination of our own society and cultural values. Some nice combinations to explore are:

Zeus and Pallas Athene

Prometheus, Epimetheus and Pandora

Atalanta, Jason and the Golden Fleece, and Medea

PBLA: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Short Stories:

Allegory/ Parable

Satire

Folktales/Legends

There is a wide variety from which to pick for any number of these genres and many compilations available arranged by race, culture, or gender. This is a nice area to explore new diversity issues that you may not address in depth in other areas, combining or contrasting different themes, cultures and/or genres. I've had personal success with comparing a variety of Cinderella tales from all regions in the world and I'm presently searching for parallels between Hispanic, Native American and Asian folktales.

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