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Your Stories Matter Too

When it comes to English classrooms, reading books is one of the most vital elements. Most of the books that classes require students to read are there because they’re considered “classics” and have this legendary status surrounding them. These are great books, but through my recent experience with YA literature, I want to teach students that although others may not treat their favorite stories as seriously because they don’t have that label of “classic” on them, their favorite stories are just as important, and can still stand strong in an academic setting.

Writing is such an important tool in life that often goes underappreciated. There’s this idea that writing is only important to authors and English teachers which is simply not true. Writing is used in so many different professions, and having a basic understanding of how to put together an essay or letter is very important to get by in life. Yet with tools like AI, kids are shying away from developing those skills, and so I believe teachers have to reel them in by getting them to love literature.

For this outline, I want to draw a lot of my rationale from this class. I always thought that although books like *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* were wonderful and enjoyable, they couldn’t be considered real books in terms of belonging in an academic setting. Yet after taking this class, I’ve come to understand and appreciate YA literature as a legitimate teaching tool and source of knowledge in a classroom setting. Personally it feels very exciting to share your thoughts on something you have an interest in. I can’t say I was always thrilled to engage in texts like *The Great Gatsby*, and so I’d discuss the quotes a little half-heartedly. It definitely can’t compare to the excitement I feel when raising my hand to share about the important themes around the patronus charm, or about how much side characters such as Rondell and Chris Coughlin contribute to the overall story. Learning about YA literature through a more academic lens using tools such as the exeter qualities has been very eye opening, and analyzing fun stories that I grew up with such as the *Harry Potter* series helps me understand that underneath the negative stigma around “childrens’ books”, there is deep meaning to be found in the power of story.

To start the unit, students will learn about and analyze the exeter qualities. These will be a foundation and one of the focal points of the unit, because they help us understand stories from a more analytical view. Then we will focus on the book for the unit, which will be *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. I feel this is a very appropriate book for the task I’m trying to complete. I want to show students that through tools like the exeter qualities, these stories deserve to be taken as seriously as any other piece of classical literature. So even though this story takes place in a fantastical world full of magic and strange creatures, through the exeter qualities we can understand how these relatable characters experience larger than life situations that contain parallels to our own world.

Some other books I could look at are,

*We Were Here*

Miguel, while reading and recalling what he learns in stories, ends up on the run from juvie and creates a story of his own that measures up to the ones he’s read.

*A Monster Calls*

Conor, while dealing with the eventual passing of his mother, must listen to three stories and then tell one of his own, in a novel that shows us that our own individual stories are just as important.

*Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*

Similarly to *Harry Potter*, this story follows a relatable young teenager placed into supernatural situations and must overcome many struggles.

After analyzing *Harry Potter* and perhaps some of the other stories, students should have a very good grasp on how to use exeter qualities. So the big assignment for the unit is for students to choose one of their favorite stories and identify 3-5 exeter qualities in them, and write about how they contribute to the story and to the experience of the audience. It can be a book, movie, show, video game, or other form of story. The goal is that through this assignment, students can learn and understand that their own favorite stories have a lot of academic importance to them. The author’s last name doesn’t have to be Twain or Fitzgerald in order for their stories to have real meaning. There are so many stories in the world that we can find meaning, but perhaps aren’t taken as seriously because they don’t exist within the pages of a hundred year old book. So I want students to understand that it’s all important, and that tools such as the exeter qualities can prove it.

Another activity that would complement this assignment nicely is the brown bag activity. What I enjoy about the brown bag activity is that it leaves so much freedom up to the writer. It’s an invitation for them to talk about their favorite part of the story and why it’s important to them. One of my worries in teaching is the prevalence of AI writing. How will I be able to get students to write if there’s such an easy shortcut? Well it is my hope that, specifically with this unit, students will see this not only as an exercise in writing, but as a chance to share what they love about their stories. What I enjoy about this class is the chance to share to everyone about what I love regarding the stories we read.

By the end of the unit, I would hope students will be able to find new appreciation and understanding for their favorite stories, and any other stories they may read in the future. I don’t want them to learn exeter qualities and other academic tools because I want to force them to look at everything they consume under a microscope of literary analysis, I just want to reinforce the idea that their favorite stories have just as much power and credibility as any of the other big classic books that are required readings in their classrooms.