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### The Choice is Yours: How to Move Forward From Death & Loss

#### **I. Rationale:**

The idea of death is unexpected, difficult, and hard to approach. It tends to leave an impact that most people take to their graves. In the case of young adults, seeing or hearing about death is especially haunting because it forces them to experience such grief at such a young age, an age in which young adults are prone to fall into a dark state of mind at a faster rate. Most often, death is associated with negative connotations that promote emptiness and eternal isolation. With many young adults feeling hopeless in these cases, it is crucial to introduce choices that guide them forward from death and loss. My unit of study will focus on the actions that take place after one has felt the pain and grief of a loss, and provide ideas, both physical, and spiritual, that could help move a young adult's mindset from a negative situation into a positive one. My purpose and goal is to not only teach this canonical work that focuses on pain, but also teach works that inspire the idea of “moving forward” and keeping a more positive perspective.

In this unit of study, my canonical piece will center around Matthew Kelly's *The Rocking Chair Prophet* which is a story that centers around forgiveness and acceptance of loss. This Christian literature work was published in 2023 and highlights the loss of a whole family, as well as the emotional strains that Daniel, the main character, deals with after such a traumatic time. It involves a journey that allows for self reflection, acceptance, and guidance with “moving forward” while also reinforcing a more positive outlook in life after death. One of the most

essential scenes that I want to focus on is when the policemen are talking to Daniel about the accident that his wife and kids were in, and how it happened when they were heading home. Daniel proceeds to blame himself for the death of his family, even though he was not with them, and that's when the policeman tells Daniel to not think that way because "that is a dangerous path to start down." (Kelly, 6). Throughout *The Rocking Chair Prophet*, Kelly tries to address just how easy it is for someone to fall into a dark state of mind, and it is Daniel's way of thinking that reinforces the negative connotations of death. In turn, The policeman's advice is Kelly's way of offering a choice and a different perspective. This story embodies the importance of moving forward after death and loss, and it is shown through Daniels perspective.

I find *The Rocking Chair Prophet* powerful and simple because it captivates the essence of Aspirational Fiction while also being a Christian literature work. From the first reading, this book does not introduce religious themes from the get go. Instead, this book uses religion as an answer, once all other cultural forms of wisdom have been used.

With this said, I would like to add an important quote found In volume 48 of *The Alan Review*. Sheila Benson, while working on the journal article "Leaning into Religious Complexity" states that "Religious roots run deep in cultural identity, even uniting characters who do not claim a religious affiliation." (62). This heavily ties in with the theme of *The Rocking Chair Prophet*, because it displays how one's self help also takes influence from religious roots, or an idea of faith. Overall, the study of *The Rocking Chair Prophet* is amazing but controversial due to the fact that it is a Christian literature work. To combat these issues, I will share modern examples that will allow students from all kinds of cultural backgrounds to engage in this unit of cultural work without feeling any sort of discrimination or bias. In addition, I will present some

strategies that will reinforce the idea of “moving forward” and keeping a positive perspective after a loss and only providing religious resources that the text recommends.

## **II. “Into” the Text**

To showcase the emotions one should feel at first when reading the text, I will introduce a song that expresses grief and sadness from a romantic perspective. Using this song will set the tone of the unit and help students feel the emotions of losing a loved one.

The song “Paper Hearts” by Tori Kelly is the song I will use as an example because it conveys a similar significance to Daniel's emotions following the loss of his wife and daughters.

The lyrics are the following:

**Pictures I'm living through for now**

**Trying to remember all the good times**

**Our life was cutting through so loud**

**Memories are playing in my dull mind**

**I hate this part, paper hearts**

**And I'll hold a piece of yours**

**Don't think I would just forget about it**

**Hoping that you won't forget**

**I live through pictures**

**As if I was right there by your side**

**But you'll be good without me**

**And if I could just give it some time**

**I'll be alright**

The feeling of these lyrics can be used to relate to Daniel's emotions during the funeral ceremony. In the funeral ceremony, Daniel mentions how his girls "reminded" him of "what matters most" and how he wishes he had "listened more." He ends his emotional heart to heart conversation by stating "Now I am the one who must let you go, and I fear I am not man enough." (Kelly, 12). These sentiments ultimately align with the lyrics from Tori Kelly in a way that both represent healing and the idea of moving on with time. After students familiarize themselves with the lyrics, I will ask if anyone is willing to volunteer an experience that is similar to the message that the lyrics convey.

As the story progresses, I will add examples that showcase the beginning of Daniel's acceptance of loss. A great example of this comes from Ludwig Von Bewusstseins poem titled "Overencumbered Vessel". This poem describes the feeling of change by visualizing how "A wholesome being" must first go through the struggle of life before they can "stay afloat". This poem can be used when addressing section 45 of *The Rocking Chair Prophet* titled, "The Meaning of Life." (Kelly, 106).

Another example that I would showcase throughout the final chapters of *The Rocking Chair Prophet* would be Christina Rossetti's "Up-Hill" poem. This poem expresses how death might be inevitable but being able to forgive oneself and moving on towards a more positive perspective will allow you to rest once you are fully ready for it. This is a modern take on one's faith or respective feelings guiding them through the rocky path that is life.

### III. “Through” the Text

As we work “through” the text and see how Daniel's Perspective towards life after loss changes, I will ask students to volunteer a song that is always shown as an outro that is full of positivity and joy. Once they have provided that, I will ask them to explain the reason behind a happy outro ? What goes on in a show or movie that mostly entails a happy ending?

Next, I will implement the idea of a visual text essay which incorporates a centerpiece and allows students to describe that centerpiece with imagery and their own perspective of the text. This essay format not only allows for a clear concise centerpiece but also gives students the freedom to elaborate without any restrictions. Some writing prompts that can be provided as a sort of guidance for the students who feel lost are:

- A. How did this story feel, were the themes depressing ?**
- B. What range of emotions did you feel when reading this work?**
- C. Can you relate with the main character or his ideas?**
- D. What do you feel about the character's personality?**
- E. What would you do if you were placed in the main character's situation?**
- F. What do you think about the value of life?**

These questions, while vague, do allow for more freedom in regards to students writing about their understanding of the text. Using the method of the “Brown Book Bag Item” can also help students obtain a catalyst or an archetype that can enhance their chosen centerpiece.

### IV. “Beyond” the Text

If students feel that *The Rocking Chair Prophet* did not fully express a meaningful and relatable message to them, I will make sure to redirect their attention to another story that also focuses on the idea of “moving on” towards a more positive perspective and the journey of

self-redemption, that hopefully does appeal to them more. The story *We Were Here* by Matt de la Pena, is meant to be used for a more modern audience and young adults have mentioned their appreciation towards this story and its themes, topics, and dilemmas. This story was one that I truly did enjoy in my English 112B course and I am sure that a younger and more modern audience will enjoy it as well.

In the end, it is crucial to introduce choices and resources to young adults that guide them away from death and loss, and motivate them to pursue forgiveness and acceptance of loss. I feel like my unit of study does focus on the actions that take place after one has felt the pain and grief of a loss, and provides ideas, both physical, and spiritual, that may help move a young adult's mindset from a negative situation into a positive one.

Works Cited

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