

Multicultural Literature for Young Adults

Sydney Redigan

Dr. DeBlase

EED 6210

3 December 2013

Title: *My Family for the War*

Author: Anne C. Voorhoeve

New York: Dial. 978-0803733602

412 pages/ Grade 9 and up

Historical Fiction

Annotation:

At the beginning of World War II, Franziska, a ten-year-old living in Berlin, is sent away on the kindertransport, which took children out of Nazi territory to safety in England. With her new family, Frances (as she is now called), hesitantly accepts her new life, unsure if she'll ever see her real family again. As she grows up Frances struggles with questions of identity, family and love.

Teaching Activities/Strategies:

1. A Walk Through History: Before students begin reading, set up a History Walk in the classroom. Place images, posters, music and other items that represent the time period of World War II in Germany and England. Have students explore the images and sounds and ask them to answer some questions about the experience, such as: What do you know about the time period depicted in the classroom? What words would you use to describe this time period? What aspects of this time period would you like to know more about? Use the student responses to lead a discussion on World War II era England and Germany to prepare students for the novel.
2. What's In A Name?: Once she arrives in England, Franziska's name is changed to Frances for her own protection. Have students examine the relationship between names and identity by writing about their first, middle or last name. Students may address how their name represents their heritage or culture, how their name aligns with their identity or personality, or what they wish they had been named. Invite students to share their writing with the class and discuss this relationship between names and identity.

Title: *Habibi*

Author: Naomi Shihab Nye

New York: Aladdin Paperbacks. 978-0689825231

272 pages/Grade 7 and up

Realistic Fiction/Young Adult Fiction

Annotation:

Teenage Liyana's family moves from St. Louis, Missouri to Palestine, where her father is from. Homesick and unable to understand the language of her new home, Liyana finally feels hope when she meets Omer. But when she discovers he is Jewish and their relationship is forbidden in the tense climate of the West Bank, Liyana finds herself with even more problems.

Teaching Activities/Strategies:

1. Comic Sketch: Nye uses a lot of rich imagery and description in her novel. Have students select one scene or chapter from the novel and create a comic depicting the descriptive elements, action and dialogue that take place in the scene or chapter. Once students have completed their comic, make copies and compile all comics into a book and distribute to the class.
2. News Comparisons: The novel exposes readers to the conflict in Israel and Palestine. After reading, have students find news articles from American and foreign papers that also address the conflict. Have students compare and contrast how the conflict is represented across the news sources and in the novel. Ask students to draw some conclusions about the purpose of news writing and the purpose of fiction writing.

Title: *This Thing Called The Future*

Author: J.L. Powers

El Paso, Texas: Cinco Puntas Press. 978-1933693958

202 pages/Grade 7 and up

Realistic Fiction/Young Adult Fiction

Annotation:

14 year old Khosi lives with her grandmother and younger sister in a shantytown in South Africa while her mother lives and works in the city. When Khosi's mother begins wasting away, Khosi believes she has contracted AIDS while her grandmother believes Khosi's mother can be cured through traditional healing. Khosi struggles to get her mother to visit a modern doctor before it is too late.

Teaching Activities/Strategies:

1. Interviews About Old and New Ways: The conflict between tradition and modernity and Christianity and Zulu are major themes in the novel. Have students find a person at least two generations older than them (perhaps a grandparent) who is willing to be interviewed about tradition and change. Have student develop a set of questions that address the changing viewpoints, beliefs and traditions that the interviewee has experienced or witnessed throughout their life. After the interviews have been conducted, have students draw comparisons between their interview results and the novel.
2. Making Connections Across Cultures The novel provides a detailed look at the beliefs, fears and superstitions surrounding HIV/AIDS in South Africa. After reading, have students conduct research on the beliefs, fears and superstitions surrounding HIV/AIDS in America. Students should compare and contrast the beliefs, fears and superstitions in both cultures, drawing on evidence from the novel as well as news articles, journals and books. Finally, have students imagine how this novel would be different if it were set in America rather than South Africa in a short essay.

Title: *My Name is Number 4: A True Story from the Cultural Revolution*

Author: Ting-xing Ye

New York: St. Martin's Press. 978-0385663052

240 pages/Grade 8 and up

Memoir/Young Adult Nonfiction

Annotation:

In this memoir, Ye tells her story of growing up as an orphan in China during the Cultural Revolution. Ye was 14 in 1966, when the Revolution began. Her memoir describes her struggle against poverty and hunger and her eventual exile to a prison farm.

Teaching Activities/Strategies:

1. History Through Film: Students may not be familiar with the China's Cultural Revolution, so prior to reading, show students the documentary *Morning Sun* (2003), which uses archival footage along with interviews with Red Guard participants and victims. Have students take notes during the film and ask them to list questions or details they hope will be addressed while reading the novel. After the novel has been read, have students revisit this activity to see if these questions and details were addressed. Have students take note of any unaddressed questions and details along with any new ones they discovered while reading. Have students seek out other sources online (books, articles, etc...) that can answer these questions or address these details.
2. Exploring Sacrifice: Ye made the sacrifice to work at a prison farm so that her younger sisters could remain in Shanghai. Have students write about an experience they have had with sacrifice in which either they made a sacrifice or a sacrifice was made for them. Have students draw comparisons with the text and explore the idea of sacrifice.

Title: *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

Author: Sherman Alexie

New York: Grove Press. 978-0802121998

304 pages/Grade 6 and up

Fiction/Short Story Collection

Annotation:

In this collection of interconnected short stories, Alexie writes of the lives and troubles of American Indians living on a reservation in Spokane, Washington. Told with dark humor, the stories depict conflicts between American Indians and whites, reservation American Indians and urban American Indians, and modern day American Indians and their ancestors.

Teaching Activities/Strategies:

1. Interrogating Stereotypes: This collection of short stories may be the first piece of writing by an American Indian about modern day American Indians that students have encountered. Prior to reading, have students view some images of American Indians from film and television and other forms of media. Have student brainstorm the stereotypes and assumptions these images represent and how they align with their own stereotypes and assumptions of this group. After reading the short stories, have students revisit this activity and discuss how their initial perceptions may have been challenged or changed.
2. Literature Into Film: Alexie's short story collection was made into a film called *Smoke Signals* in 1998. Have students view the film after reading and respond with an essay that discusses how the film portrays some of the main themes of the stories, such as tradition, resilience, storytelling, or spirituality.

Title: *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

Author: Edwidge Danticat

New York: Vintage Books. 978-0375705045

234 pages/Grade 10 and up

Realistic Fiction

Annotation:

At 12 years old, Sophie Caco is sent from her poor village in Haiti to live with her birth mother in New York City. She learns painful secrets about her past and her mother. As she becomes an adult with a daughter of her own Sophie, learns forgiveness and how to heal.

Teaching Activities/Strategies:

1. Exploring Haiti: Students may not be familiar with Haitian history or culture and this may cause some confusion when reading *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Prior to reading, have students take part in a web quest in which they investigate the political, cultural and religious history of Haiti and learn about recent events that have taken place there.
2. The Meaning of Color: Danticat uses color symbolically throughout the novel. Have students choose one of the colors (such as red or yellow) that Danticat uses and note how the color is used and what it signifies. Break students into groups or pairs and have them share what they discovered about their color.
3. Death Across Cultures: Some of the Haitian characters in this novel refer to death as a journey. Have students write a short essay about the different views of death and the dead in Haitian culture and American culture.

(Activities 2 and 3 adapted from discussion questions from Oprah's Book Club on Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*:

<http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/About-Breath-Eyes-Memory-by-Edwidge-Danticat>)

Title: *A Step from Heaven*

Author: An Na

New York: Speak. 978-0142500279

160 pages/Grade 7 and up

Young Adult Fiction/Realistic Fiction

Annotation:

Young Ju's family leaves their small fishing village in Korea for the United States when she is 4 years old. The novel follows Young from age 4 to 16 as she tries to succeed in America while still holding on to the Korean values her father insists she have. Her father eventually returns to Korea, leaving Young and the rest of her family to assimilate.

Teaching Activities/Strategies:

1. Conflicting Values: Young's father tries to instill very different values in Young than the ones she is taught in school and by the media. Have students come up with some conflicting sets of values that they have with their parents or grandparents. Have students choose one of these conflicting sets of values and write a personal essay about it.
2. Letters to Myself: Na changes the voice of Young throughout the novel to reflect her growing maturity and grasp of the English language. Young's outlook on the world also becomes less hopeful and more cynical as she grows up. Have students write a pair of letters: one from their 4 year old self to their present self and a response letter from their present self to their 4 year old self. Students can address their hopes, aspirations and outlook on the world in the letters. Like Na, students should alter their writing voice in the 4 year old letter so that it sounds age appropriate.

Title: *Caramelo*

Author: Sandra Cisneros

New York: Vintage Books. 978-0679742586

464 pages/Grade 9 and up

Fiction/Historical Fiction

Annotation:

Lala Reyes, a Mexican-American teen living in Chicago, takes her annual family vacation to visit her grandparents in Mexico City with her extended family. While there, she tells the story of three generations of her family and their journey from Mexico City to the United States and back.

Teaching Activities/Strategies:

1. Spanish Lesson: Cisneros uses a great amount of Spanish words and phrases in her novel. Have students keep a journal of unfamiliar Spanish words and phrases as they are reading and look up the English translations through an online or print dictionary.
2. Family Storytelling: The character of Lala tells her family's history as it has been told to her, oftentimes resulting in an exaggerated or not completely true version. Have students write about a story or legend from their own family that has been passed down this way and share with the class.
3. Picture It: Cisneros uses colorful language and imagery in her writing. Have students select a scene from the book that features this language and imagery and have them illustrate the scene using markers, crayons, paint, etc...