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EDU 6361-Gritter
Rationale and Bibliography

The Art of Questioning

Starting from a young age we ask our parents and guardians “why?” This comes from our curious minds’ psychological wants/need to learn. We ask “why” so we can begin to understand an action, rule, or idea that we are asked to perform, follow, or believe. Without asking “why” we can never fully develop our own personal opinions and beliefs, which can lead us down dangerous paths. After a time we begin to know our world around us and begin to learn what is necessary as the information comes. And, as some of us begin to age the yearning for discovery starts to slip and asking “why” questions become just an annoyance. I have found that in early high school years the desire teens have to ask questions in class (and outside school life) is hidden behind the want to fit in, not stand out, and the act of already possessing infinite knowledge. This is the reason I have designed a five week unit on questioning, entitled: defiance—the act of acting-out.

In this five week Spring unit of my students’ tenth grade English class we will be reading and discussing novels, acting out short plays, and watching a movie on what it looks like to question the “way things are” and what happens when you do. The main texts that we will be focusing on are M.T. (Matthew Tobin) Anderson’s novel, *Feed*, along with a couple other supporting texts/plays and a movie. While reading our text I will be asking students to question, as a form of thinking critically and analytically, the protagonists, antagonists, author’s meaning, and how it fits with our own individual worlds today. By stepping back and questioning,

students will be able to explore their own beliefs and opinions on technology, conforming to new fads, and ability to question authority/government. John Medina states in his book entitled *Brain Rules* that “We are powerful and natural explorers...[but] children learn that education mean an A. They begin to understand that they can acquire knowledge not because it is interesting, but because it can get them something. Fascination can become secondary to ‘What do I need to know to get the grade?’ But I also believe that the curiosity instinct is so powerful that some people overcome society’s message to go to sleep intellectually, and they flourish anyway.” (Medina 273) The point I take from Medina is that teachers need to get students’ into novels that are compelling, interesting, and relatable to them in their daily lives and spark their ‘curiosity instinct.’ I want to do just that so my students can explore, ask the “why,” and learn about themselves in our world.

This unit’s theme fits well with two reading EARLS for our tenth grade class. EARL 2.3—*Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text*—and Reading EARL 2.4—*Think critically and analyze author’s use of language, style, purpose, and perspective in literary and informational text*. Posing the ‘why’ starts discussion, found in these novels, on current social problems they face every day (sex, drugs, violence, fads, government, control), and this will in-turn help these youth in their development into informed citizens.

We will spend the most of our time reading the novel, *Feed*, where we will be asking “why” to technology and see what happens to the main character, Violet, as she questions her worlds’ authority, *The Feed* (which is a smart-phone wired and implanted into the users brain). It is unusual to see youth and adults without smart-phones, mp3 players, laptops, video games,

which are extensions to most bodies. So, as an educator, why not tap into what students' already know? While reading *Feed*, students will get to explore the world where technology is the brain source of ninety-nine percent of the population, and what happens to one girl who is defiant against the fad and The Feed. Students will get to explore the cons of a technologically advanced future. Through reading and discussion, students will gain a deeper understanding of how technology can help and hinder society and how to handle the topic in their own lives. Students will stretch their ideas of fictional writing, and creative aspects (new languages, worlds, technologies) while reading and creating their own ideas and writings with this novel.

During this unit we will also be reading a play and watching a movie to break up the novel and provide other perspectives on "the act of acting-out." *The Night Thoreau Was in Jail* is the play we will be spending time during this unit discussing. Students will get to know Henry David Thoreau (poet, philosopher, naturalist) while he sits in a jail cell, hiding in the background of each scene. We will explore what civil disobedience means in our lives while seeing a prominent figure in our nation's history thrown in jail for not paying taxes to support the government's engagement in the Mexican War, which he did not believe in. The famous Thoreau quote we will wrap our heads around is when he states, "If the law is of such a nature that it requires you to be an agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law." (Lawrence).

Another supporting material to our unit will be the movie entitled, *The Truman Show*. In this film we will watch Jim Carry's character—Truman—live a life that where he is happy but it is protected, controlled, and ultimately turns out to be a set of a show. This will provide the students will another perspective of the same subject: is ignorance bliss? And would Truman

have been happier if he acted out and asked more “why” questions while living his life in, what seems to be, a bubble?

This unit is a case sensitive topic to some people. The act of acting-out against authority is the issue. This unit is not designed and does not include encouraging students to act out against their parents, their government, the school, or any other authority figure or industry. What it does ask is that students look at literature, both classic and modern, and the characters and study why they acted out and what the significance is behind the action. I want students to spend time listening to their gut instinct, like Violet, Thoreau, Truman, did when they are pushed to do something that does not feel right; I want them to stop and be able to ask the “why?” I think this is important for early high school students to learn because peer pressure, bullying, fads, etc. are in their everyday peripheral. As Thoreau states, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured, or far away.” (Lawrence)

Another issue that some parents and administrators might have is to the rating I would give Anderson’s novel: PG-13. Although many might not have apprehensions about the idea of teaching students to questions authority, but there might be an issue with the written language and some of the ideas due to references of sex, drugs, violence, and language. The places in the novel where some might find objectionable are first found in the beginning of the novel. Right off the bat, characters allude to having sex when they discussion “hooking up” with one another (Anderson 12). Later in the novel there is another section where the characters try to get alcohol, but when they can’t they go into “mal”, which is like overdosing their brains to

make them feel like they are on drugs (Anderson 33). Besides the mention of sex, the use of alcohol, and the “Feed world’s” version of everyday drugs, there could be objections to the characters blindly following fads. The newest fad that some of the main characters indulge in is having lesions professionally put all over their bodies. Also, throughout the novel there can be crude language.

My thought about this subject is that these are topics that tenth graders hear and see every day and it is our civic duty to address them while making the most out of the situation. Making the most out of the situation is having a safe, open discussion classroom where students feel comfortable to share and mull over their thoughts and feelings on the topic while directing their references toward the characters and not themselves. I feel that these texts provide more to offer intellectually on the written and idealistic nature than the rating it is under. Also, the redeeming qualities of *Feed* are its accomplishments. This dystopian text was nominated for the 2005-2006 Green Mountain Book Award, was a finalist for the 2002 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, and was the winner of both the 2003 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Fiction and the 2003 Golden Duck Awards Hal Clement Award for Young Adults. These texts and this unit will not only be engaging as it directly pertains to tenth grade students' everyday live, and practical as it is high-quality literature, it will help them start developing corner-stone to their decision making in the future.

Bibliography

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-The Truman Show