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ENGL 112B-01

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Multiculturalism: Teaching it as the “New Normal”

My unit of study revolves around the central theme of cultural identity, with the side-focus of the struggles of multiculturalism within a family. The world is changing and multiculturalism is becoming more and more common in the US. Especially in a time of such cultural and ethnic diversity, high schoolers need exposure to works of literature that relate to their lives on a cultural scale, have those same struggles and are by authors who grew up like them. To teach and explore these ideas, I turned to Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, which perfectly describes the relationship struggles of four mother-daughter pairs as they frequently misunderstand each other due to cultural differences and opinions.

I think that while studying multiculturalism is important as a whole, having each student celebrate their individual cultures is crucial for students to consciously recognize a part of who they are, and recognizing that there might be struggles because they might do things a more “American” way than their parents and/or grandparents. Even for White students who might not have multiple ethnic cultures, there are still struggles of clashing beliefs of one generation with another, and they have an immigration story to explore and honor, even if it might have occurred hundreds of years ago. I also want to facilitate an environment where students can learn to be culturally literate and knowledgeable of each other’s cultures, to learn mutual respect and appreciation for their differences, so that it prepares them to thrive in a global village from now till adulthood. Therefore, an important part of this unit will involve students sharing to their

classmates and to the whole class their ideas in response to prompts and any questions they are asked.

The core of this unit is designed in a way that lets students think about and do research about themselves in a way where I'm facilitating this learning but not impeding anything ideological on them. While we will study Tan's novel carefully, I will also take the ideas, struggles and motifs in her work to ask the students to reflect this upon their own home cultures as to not purely constrain the unit to Chinese culture. This will be wonderful because it will teach students that although everyone has different cultures and struggles, many of them can relate to one another because it all deals with finding a balance between multiple cultures and/or generational ideals. I have added YA resources for them to explore and are varied in genre, but all have to deal with the struggles of being a Westernized teen learning to find balance with their home cultures, just as the protagonists of *The Joy Luck Club* eventually do. My goal is for this unit to be an interesting self-exploration and opportunity for students to gain mutual appreciation for not only classmates but also for themselves; to cement that their struggles are not weird- that they're the "new normal" now.

Introduction to the Unit

Spend 2-3 days introducing this unit.

Students will watch Disney's "Bao," a short film depicting the conflict between a mother and son that stem from the son choosing to not follow his mother's Chinese teachings. After a class discussion dissecting this film, and emphasizing how there was a disconnect between mother and son largely because of cultural values, students are going to do a writing piece based on this and personal experience...

- Do you think your parents/household are “traditional?” How/why?
- What traditional and cultural things did your parents teach you? (cooking, arts, manners, language, religion, etc.)

Students will be able to share out responses. Afterwards, we will use “Bao” to stem off into a discussion defining what “cultural identity” and “multiculturalism” is to set the foundation for this unit.

For homework that night, students will be fill this chart out:

Statements	Agree/Strongly Agree OR Disagree/Strongly Disagree?	Why? Connect the novel theme to your experience and knowledge : Include <u>at least three sentences</u> for each, providing specific evidence from in-class or out-of-class readings, history, current events, pop culture, personal anecdotes, etc. We will be using these responses in a “Four Corners” class discussion where every student will be expected to share their opinions, so be thoughtful.
1. Learning to adapt in a new culture does not mean abandoning the cultural heritage.		
2. Parents should allow children to create their own dreams, interests, expectations and not impose them on their children.		
3. Children do not always appreciate the value of their parents' wisdom and advice.		
4. Holding family secrets can be harmful if kept inside and not shared with at least one person.		
5. It is never acceptable for a parent to abandon a child.		
6. Frequent, undue criticism of parents to their children leads to an unhealthy, destructive environment.		
7. There are some experiences that we have at a young age that affect the rest of our lives.		

This JLC Anticipation Guide is from Ms. Sylvia Liu, who uses it to let students get a taste of the themes that are found in JLC. The next day, students will play “4 Corners” based

off of these questions they did and are able to share their responses. This helps them both understand the story better and solidify their own initial opinions towards the things they see in the novel.

The Main Text: *The Joy Luck Club*

Setting the Scene

Before reading, students spend one class period watching a 25-minute interview with Amy Tan talking about JLC to better understand 1.) what the novel's about, 2.) why Amy Tan wrote the novel and 3.) how much she draws from her own life experiences as the daughter of immigrants. This is important to do so that students can understand that this novel comes from the lives of real people from the world, and is not just some fictitious writing. We will discuss the mentioned-above points as a class after the video is over.

The link to the interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84YLz3c4VI8>

Readings

The novel comprises 4 sections, each with 4 chapters. Students will be given a story packet to be filled out while reading (a packet that has questions for each chapter of the novel) so that...

- 1.) they don't get confused which character is doing what (there's 8 protagonists to keep up with!)
- 2.) writing the answers helps them retain the story
- 3.) if they forget something, they can always refer back to the packet

Reading will be done both at home and in class. Each chapter is roughly 20 pages, so we will always start a chapter in class and the kids can finish the rest at home. Reading quizzes will always be given at the beginning of each class just for the sake of making sure they read. They

will be scored lightly. Each reading quiz, if they score above a threshold, they get a few bonus points on the next exam or big project.

Each chapter has cultural symbolism as named in the title. There are chances for the students to explore their own identities that relate. Each time we start a new chapter, there will be an in-class writing prompt that is designed to be personal and reflective. Students will share their responses to their peers and to the class.

- Example chapter: YING-YING ST. CLAIR: Waiting Between the Trees
 - This chapter title refers to the strength that YingYing expected herself to carry because of her birth year, as destined by the Chinese zodiac. Her name means “Clear Reflection” as to mean that her name and life will be honorable like a beautiful pond that she can stare into and see herself, unlike the symbolic murky rivers that women of shame reside in.
 - Student prompt: what is the meaning of your name? Are there expectations you are assigned because of the name given to you? How do you feel about that? Many students are named after religious figures such as Mother Mary, or named after people that their parents really appreciated, such as other family members or even celebrities.
- Example chapter: WAVERLY JONG: Rules of the Game
 - This chapter refers to the conflict Waverly and Lindo have because Waverly doesn't like the way her mother flaunts her chess victories to people, and ends up rebelling against her mother's rules. Lindo takes this personally and thinks it is because Waverly thinks her mother is a disgrace, while all Waverly wants is her mom to stop helicopter parenting and bragging about her.

- Student prompt: Sometimes we want one thing but our parents/guardians understand our desires differently. Talk about one example where your parent/guardian took something the wrong way, from you or your siblings. Why do you think that our parents/guardians sometimes interpret our actions and words differently than what we actually mean? Is it intentional?

Projects on the novel:

Symbolism and imagery are huge to understanding the novel and its meanings. A few multimodal projects will be used to understand these things, such as art posters. There are 4 times to do this: Pick one mother-daughter set and choose 2 pieces of significant imagery to portray, one told by the mother and one told by the daughter. The goal is to understand their perspectives of each other. Here is a wonderful example from Ms. Liu's class:



Working Beyond the Text

Mexican WhiteBoy

- This novel depicts the journey of two half-Mexican boys who struggle to find their identity, and go through a summer adventure together learning more about their pasts, discovering what they want to do in the future and what their passions are. I haven't read this book, but know that it is very similar to JLC in the sense that cultural disconnect is a huge part of this book that makes characters lack decision-making skills, a sense of belonging and a sense of peace. Much like JLC's frequent usage of "Chinglish," this novel uses a ton of "Spanglish." This work would be wonderful to read as the overarching theme of cultural identity is applied to teenagers who live in a very real-world setting with very teenager-ish problems. Additionally, it's important to have works from this unit be from multiple cultures, not just Chinese.

Fiddler on the Roof

- The 1971 musical of Fiddler on the Roof depicts the life of Tevye, a Jewish milkman, who has to deal with not only the political unrest that creeps up on his little town but also the coming-of-age of his teenage daughters, who want to defy social norms and choose their own husbands. The topic of old-versus-new in terms of cultural tradition is explored here, much like how the girls in JLC also have conflict with their parents because of their choosing to do things the untraditional way. Although this isn't a story that's told from the perspective of a youth, it's important to use this resource because within a family, it's also important to also see these conflicts from a parent's perspective.

I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter

- This novel is almost the definition of breaking free and finding balance with traditional familial and cultural expectations. Like JLC, this novel also explores cultural identity in a

way that causes the protagonists to go find their roots and their families' histories, causing them to add onto their identity and mature.

Turning Red (expected 2022)

- Disney's "Turning Red" is a movie of a Chinese-Canadian teen who starts turning into a giant Red Panda whenever she gets too emotional (representative of puberty). She has to learn to get used to her new self and learn how to control her own emotions, all the while discovering that there are things that she wants to do with her school friends that her very traditional Chinese parents disagree with. It's a story of navigating how to balance one's own growing desires, sense of self and opinions with that of those who love us but have different standards.

Concluding the Unit

To conclude this unit on cultural identity, I want students to write a reflective final essay.

- **Part 1 (body paragraphs 1-2):** In the ideal world, the mothers wanted to raise daughters that were American in circumstance but Chinese in character. Given that these girls went to school in America and were taught ideals of individuality and choice, they turned out mostly American in character as a result. What are the most important factors that influence a person's cultural identity?
- **Part 2 (body paragraphs 3-4):** Answer the following questions in essay format: what are some influences that shape your cultural identity? How much are you shaped by your family's culture and how much are you shaped by other influences of another culture?

Works Cited

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