Thematic Links: The American Dream in *Ragged Dick*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Death of a Salesman,* and *The Godfather*

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INTRODUCTION

A central concern in planning curriculum for my junior English classes lies in the definition of meaningful, thematic links between the various works we study. I have found that demonstrating such links to my students serves to unify a curriculum which would otherwise exist for them only as a series of isolated literary "events." Bringing to light the quality of inter-textuality, which exists among the novels, plays, and occasional films we work with, encourages students to hear the voices which speak across both genre and generation. By strategically grouping works which share common themes, it is possible to expect significantly higher levels of critical thought than one might expect if the same works were presented independently, in thematically sealed, single units of study. This curriculum unit will explore the concept of the American Dream as it is manifested in four works: Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and the film *The Godfather*. It is my hope that the grouping of these four works will afford multiple classroom opportunities for thinking critically about the ways in which the works grapple with the idea of what it means to be successful in America.

A logical first step might involve asking students to consider their own reactions to the "traditional" version of the American Dream. Ragged Dick is a good example of the standard Horatio Alger success formula. Students will read this short novel quickly, paying close attention to the values which allow Dick Hunter, formerly a homeless boot-black, to become a respectable, upwardly-mobile young esquire. The values Alger promotes in *Ragged Dick* will become a foundation upon which students will build throughout the curriculum unit.

The Great Gatsby will be the unit's first extended reading. Jay Gatsby's curious rise to fortune will form the center of our inquiry. Students will focus specifically on Gatsby's drive to create in himself the man who will successfully accomplish all that James Gatz, his original incarnation, can only dream of. I will encourage students to consider everything they learn about Gatsby; obvious facts and subtler implications seem equally important in gaining an understanding of the character. After weighing such things as Gatsby's early commitment to self-improvement, his poor man's dreams of a "universe of ineffable gaudiness," his hopeless identification of Daisy Buchannan as an ideal love, and the fundamental illegality of the business interests which make his fortune, students will discuss, then write critically on the appeal of this complex creation. Is Gatsby the American innocent often described by critics? Is he little more than a Prohibition-era criminal? Is it possible to admire the achievement of the American Dream in the life of a man whose wealth is entirely the product of illegal activity? What about Gatsby's historical significance? How does his nearly complete realization of an ideal self reflect the powerful motivation early European settlers felt to create a fully-realized, ideal society? In what obvious and more subtle ways does Gatsby's success story depart from the Alger formula? Is Gatsby a fundamentally sympathetic character? It

is my hope that these questions, and the wide range of additional questions they may prompt, will yield few clear-cut answers and much challenging, critical discussion.

The Godfather will follow *The Great Gatsby*. Having worked extensively with the idea of Gatsby's tentative realization of a sort of warped version of the American Dream, students should readily see the parallels which exist in the lives of Vito and Michael Corleone, the film's principal characters. This is where the simple fact of using film becomes very useful. While students are often reluctant to delve very deeply into the multiple meanings of a complex novel like *The Great Gatsby*, they are generally quite willing to discuss enjoyable films at great length. It is my hope that working with *The Godfather* immediately after completing a three-week study of *The Great Gatsby* will afford me the opportunity to keep the novel "alive" in students' minds, to encourage them to continue thinking about the novel as they discuss the lives of the film's central characters. I hope to present students with activities which will challenge them to understand the ways in which *The Godfather* carefully shapes the viewer's mostly favorable reactions to men whose lives are defined, at least in part, by terrible brutality. My students do not often view even their favorite films with very critical eyes, so it will be my intention to ask questions which will lead them to analyze much more than *The Godfather's* plot structure. I hope that questions regarding such things as *The Godfather's* lighting and editing will help students understand the multiple levels on which the film "works."

After approximately six class periods of viewing and working through *The Godfather*, we will turn to *Death of a Salesman*. Reactions to this play often frustrate me. Though students generally enjoy the play - especially the story of Biff's search for meaning - they tend to react to the character of Willy Loman in very simplistic ways. They wonder why Willy doesn't just get a new job, for example, or why he never simply faces his family and tells them the truth of his situation. Questions like these rob the play of its powerful, tragic soul. I believe it will be useful to refer students who misunderstand Willy's character to the reactions they had to *The Godfather*. Specifically, if students are able to sympathize with Vito and Michael Corleone - justifying their favorable reactions to these characters by suggesting that, much as the Mafia Dons would like to change the nature of their business interests, a powerful sense of inevitability prevents them from ever finally doing so - why, then, are students not able to see Willy Loman, a man in whom so many readers have found great personal meaning, as a character deserving not only of sympathy but of deep, personal reflection? Students will work with a general, comparative question such as this, then delve into the more complex ideas the play encourages us to consider: the nature of tragedy in the life of a common man; the drive to reclaim a vanished, more wholesome (and perhaps imaginary) past; the nature of American business; and the very idea of "selling" as a livelihood.

It is my hope that students will understand Ragged Dick, Jay Gatsby, Vito and Michael Corleone, and Willy Loman as characters whose lives, however dissimilar, are bound together by the slippery notion of the American Dream. Several days of comparative study should encourage students to explore this and other themes the various works hold in common. For example, *Ragged Dick*, *The Godfather* and *Death of a Salesman* share a theme of "fathers and sons," the (not necessarily) successful transmission of a viable ethos from one generation to the next. *The Great*

Gatsby and *Death of a Salesman* share the idea of pastoral purity, a concept which, interestingly, is implied in a pivotal scene in *The Godfather*, as well. A series of discussions and several written activities should help students begin to see the many interesting connections they might make between these four works.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

During the course of this curriculum unit, students will read three works: Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. They will watch three films: *The Great Gatsby* (1974), *The Godfather* (1972), and *Death of a Salesman* (1985). Students will examine all of these works intertextually. That is, they will search for the many ways in which the various works might be made to "speak" to one another, each work contributing a different way of understanding certain core issues. Central among these issues is the notion of the American Dream. Students will write extensively on their own ideas of the American Dream and on the interpretation each work presents.

Students will write critically on each of the works they study, and they will make frequent comparisons of the works. They will personally evaluate the ideas upon which each work is founded, and they will debate the relative truth of these ideas. They will participate in specifically-focused, small group discussions and in more general, full-class discussions.

Students will take no objective tests during this unit, but they will work through two take-home essay tests, one on *The Great Gatsby,* the other on *Death of a Salesman*. They will complete several brief, informal essays throughout the unit, and they will complete one lengthy, cumulative writing assignment at the unit's end.

Additional details will follow in the "Teaching Strategy" sections below. Generally put, I want this unit to be as challenging as it can be. I will very seldom ask students to work at the lower "comprehension" levels so common in high school English classes. Some of the things we discuss during the course of this unit will directly challenge ideas of hard work and success generally taken for granted in our schools. I want my students to thoroughly understand all of the ideas they encounter, and I want them to evaluate these ideas on the most personal levels. I am not concerned with our reaching any specific conclusions. I am very concerned with the intellectual process of reaching whatever conclusions students find to be most accurate.

ANALYSIS OF TEXTS AND EXPLANATION OF TEACHING STRATEGIES

Ragged Dick: Critical Summary

Ragged Dick, first published in 1868, was one of Horatio Alger's earliest successes. The novel follows what can now be called the traditional Alger formula: a young man - decent, but with no real prospects for the future - manages to use a combination of good luck, hard work, and steadfast morality to make strides toward a life of much greater social and economic standing.

The hero of Ragged Dick is a streetwise boot-black who is homeless but comfortable in his lowly position. Dick enjoys the night life of the Old Bowery, and he seems fairly content to fill his stomach with beefsteak and coffee, and to fall asleep in a doorway or an abandoned wagon every night. A chance meeting with the successful Mr. Whitney and Whitney's young nephew Frank places Dick in a most fortunate position. He is welcomed into the Whitneys' rooms at the Astor House, given the means to clean himself up, and presented an almost-new suit of clothes. He is hired as Frank's guide, and the two young men begin a day of New York City adventure.

Dick's brief involvement with the Whitneys encourages him to begin making changes in his life. No longer will Dick squander each day's revenue on plays and gambling at the Old Bowery, and no longer will he assume that book learning is forever out of his reach. From this point forward, Dick will be a frugal young man who sets his sights squarely on personal advancement. As the reader probably expects, Dick is quite successful in his campaign.

Ragged Dick places great emphasis on a number of core values. Alger wrote primarily for children, and his novels maintain a decidedly didactic tone. Dick epitomizes the virtues of humility, honesty, and clean living. His experience suggests that self-motivation and hard work can accomplish truly great things. In less than one year, Dick saves more than one hundred dollars, he becomes a competent reader and an enthusiastic student, and he encourages several other boys to follow his lead in the march toward respectability and success. Dick's belief in the importance of honest living never falters. Even before he meets the Whitneys, Dick is unwilling to steal. (He feels that doing so is "mean.") Several times in the novel, Dick is presented the opportunity to get ahead unethically; he refuses every time. Nothing, the reader senses, can prevent an honest, determined young man from succeeding.

***Ragged Dick*: Teaching Strategy**

I will introduce *Ragged Dick* by asking students to write about the ideas and associations the phrase "the American Dream" brings to mind. This will be a sort of brainstorming activity, and very informal. After five or ten minutes of writing individually, students will discuss their ideas in groups of three or four. During the course of these discussions, each group will establish a working definition of the American Dream. After a period of approximately fifteen minutes, groups will report their results to the class. I will encourage further discussion as the various definitions are put forth, asking students to compare and contrast the various groups' results.

I will assign *Ragged Dick* for homework. (When time permits, we may also read portions aloud in class). Students should easily finish the 100-page novel in three nights. When they have completed the book, students will work through a series of questions designed to probe the essential assumptions Alger makes in the novel about success and the proper way for a young American to achieve it. [Please refer to the handout "*Ragged Dick*: Basic and Critical Thinking Questions" for complete details.] A class discussion will follow. I will encourage students to offer their own evaluations of Alger's recipe for success, to critique it, and to think of situations in which his idea might not be sufficient. It is my hope that *Ragged Dick* and the very traditional ideas it promotes will prove useful points of reference throughout the curriculum unit. We will

return to this simple novel frequently - especially during our study of *The Great Gatsby* - so that we might explore the many permutations of the Alger formula found in more complex works of literature and film.

***The Great Gatsby*: Overview**

The Great Gatsby is the most complex work my junior English classes study. It is also the least popular. Many students who very happily follow the Joads through 600 pages of John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath become very frustrated with Gatsby before they reach the end of its first chapter. They are aghast when I tell them the novel is generally considered one of the very best works of modern American fiction, and they are tenacious in demanding my reasons for making the novel a central part of our curriculum. A simple explanation? More than any other novel I teach, *The Great Gatsby* requires work. Most of the book's characters are only tenuously drawn, and many of its most important scenes pass very quickly, often unnoticed by the inattentive reader. It is my hope that isolating certain key themes - specifically, the novel's treatment of the American Dream and Gatsby's driving impulse to mold his actual existence to the ideal form he imagines - will help students realize some of *The Great Gatsby's* complex meaning. By returning to these themes throughout the curriculum unit, I hope to afford students frequent opportunities to revisit Gatsby as they work with *The Godfather* and *Death of a Salesman*, ultimately rendering their understanding of each work more complete.

Jay Gatsby, the novel's central figure, is born James Gatz, the son of modest Midwesterners. As a young man, Gatz is acutely aware of his station in life and of his intense desire to transcend it. The youthful Gatz makes schedules for self improvement, focusing on physical and intellectual activity and on such things as "elocution, poise, and how to attain it" (Fitzgerald, 181). Fortune brings Gatz together with Dan Cody, a powerful tycoon whose existence approaches the ideal Gatz dreams of. It is with Cody that Gatz first uses the name Jay Gatsby, and it is from Cody that Gatsby learns the manner of the wealthy. After Cody's death, narrator Nick Carraway tells us, "the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man" (Fitzgerald, 107).

Penniless but full of dreams, Gatsby meets a young belle, Daisy Fay, just before he leaves for service in World War One. He falls in love with her. Gatsby's heroism during the war leads to an extended stay in Europe, including a brief sojourn at Oxford. During the time Gatsby is away, Daisy meets and marries Tom Buchannan, significantly complicating Gatsby's plan for a triumphant, romantic homecoming.

Shortly after his return from Europe, Gatsby meets Meyer Wolfshiem, an influential white collar criminal involved in bootlegging, bond theft, and other illegal pursuits. Under Wolfshiem's wing, Gatsby becomes extremely wealthy. He purchases a mansion on West Egg, carefully chosen for the fact that it rests directly opposite the home of Daisy Buchannan, across the bay on East Egg. Gatsby becomes the shy host of hundreds of New York's fashionable elite. His parties - which he monitors at a safe distance, looking down on his guests from high windows and other isolated vantage points - are built on the hope that sooner or later, Daisy will find her way into Gatsby's life once again. The majority of *The Great Gatsby's* action involves the changes various characters

experience as a result of Gatsby's eventual re-connection with Daisy.

Gatsby's story is one of the willful invention of self. Born a member of the lower middle class, the teenage Gatsby focuses all his conscious energy on the preparation which will one day allow him to rise above his parents' position in life. Presented the opportunity to assist the wealthy, successful Dan Cody, Gatsby summons the "quick, extravagantly ambitious" persona he knows is required of one who would have dealings with a man of Cody's standing (Fitzgerald, 106). Given the opportunity to woo a young woman whose social position places her well out of Gatsby's reach, the determined young man wills into existence a fully-realized version of the being "filled out to the substantiality of a man" first born aboard Cody's yacht (Fitzgerald, 107).

Gatsby believes it is possible to turn back the clock of Daisy's life without him, erasing completely the fact of her marriage to Tom. He is quite sure of himself. In one of the novel's best-known passages, Nick encourages Gatsby to understand that Daisy can no longer respond to him as she once did:

> "I wouldn't ask too much of her," I ventured. "You can't repeat the past."
> "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!"
> He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand. "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly. "She'll see." He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was. (Fitzgerald, 116-17)

Gatsby believes the bond he shares with Daisy eclipses mere personal attraction. For Gatsby, Daisy is the ideal, the dream fully realized, the final reward of a lengthy struggle for the imagined, perfect self. Commenting on Daisy's marriage to Tom, Gatsby tells Nick, "In any case, it was just personal." Nick's silent response to this revealing statement is crucial: "What could you make of that, except to suspect some intensity in his conception of the affair that couldn't be measured?" (Fitzgerald, 160). Nick and the reader understand at this moment the powerful place Daisy holds in Gatsby's ideal conception of himself. When he first experiences renewed contact with Daisy, at Nick's house for an initially awkward tea one afternoon, Gatsby is utterly smitten by the power Daisy's presence exerts upon his consciousness. Nick tells us, "It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart" (Fitzgerald, 101). Gatsby imagines the triumph he will experience on completing his self-invention. Successfully reunited with Daisy, Gatsby will accomplish the ideal form which has haunted him for years.

The Great Gatsby and American History

Crucial to understanding Gatsby are Nick's final observations. With Gatsby and Wilson buried,

with “most of the big shore places closed now,” Nick achieves a powerful vision of Long Island as he believes it must have appeared to the first Europeans who beheld it:

> I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes - a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (Fitzgerald, 189)

It is here that *The Great Gatsby* makes its historical significance felt. Nick’s reference to the European explorers’ overwhelming sense of awe provides the understanding the reader needs to fathom the many dimensions of Gatsby’s character. Gatsby’s powerful desire to define his being, to make of himself exactly the man he most wants to be, mirrors the overwhelming impulse the earliest European settlers must have felt to define for themselves an entirely new society, built upon what was (for them) an entirely new continent. Gatsby’s story is one of the willful invention of self; the early European settlers’ story was one of the willful invention of everything - a new society and a new way of life. Gatsby’s dreams are dashed when he finds that Daisy does not share the totality of his obsession. Daisy’s announcement that she did, in fact, love Tom Buchannan confuses and injures Gatsby. Her words - “I can’t help what’s past. I did love him once - but I loved you too” - are simple enough, but they “bite physically into Gatsby,” destroying the perfect union he imagines (Fitzgerald, 140). Gatsby wants a Daisy wiped clean of all involvement with Tom Buchannan. He wants Tom completely removed from Daisy’s life, and, perhaps more importantly, from her psyche, as well. The strength and purity of his love, Gatsby believes, should be enough to eliminate Tom totally. When he finds that this is not true, Gatsby is devastated, if only temporarily.

To fortify the historical link between Gatsby and the earliest European colonists, it is helpful to refer to an older work, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. Describing the early settlers, Hawthorne writes, “The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison” (Hawthorne, 47). This passage calls attention to the fact that, eventually, the colonists’ dreams of a perfect society are impeded by the baser aspects of human nature. Jealousy and greed are present among even the most dedicated Puritans, and a perfect society cannot remain perfect for long. Sooner or later (and probably sooner), someone will act against the greater good, contaminating the purity of the original, collective dream. Gatsby thinks he can achieve perfection as an individual, but he attaches his dreams to one who cannot understand the ineffable quality of his quest. Daisy is a shallow, materialistic woman, and it is plain to the reader that she cannot comprehend the power of Gatsby’s devotion to her. The historical connection is essential, as it encourages the reader to understand Gatsby’s failure as part of a pattern: American idealism derailed, briefly, by the recognition that one’s individual dreams of perfection are not shared by all.

The word “briefly” is the real key. Just as Hawthorne’s Puritans did not abandon their hopes

for a more perfect society simply because of their needs for a cemetery and a jail, Gatsby does not abandon his dream of a perfect union with Daisy even after she tells him she once loved Tom. Following the tragic drive home from Manhattan, Gatsby positions himself outside Daisy's home, intending to protect her from Tom in the event Tom turns his anger upon her. Gatsby's sense of things is quite mistaken. Nick, after failing to convince Gatsby that Tom "won't touch her," walks around the house and spies Tom and Daisy "sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table with a plate of cold fried chicken between them and two bottles of ale" (Fitzgerald, 152). Nick's further observation proves Gatsby's undying hope futile, "They [Tom and Daisy] weren't happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale - and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together" (Fitzgerald, 152-153). Hawthorne's Puritan colonists persist in their desire to forge a perfect society in spite of clear evidence that their idea of "perfect" might not be possible. Gatsby persists in his quest for a perfect union with Daisy in spite of the fact that their involvement, following the revelations at the Plaza and the death of Myrtle Wilson, is essentially over. This persistence is captured in the novel's powerful closing lines:

> Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter - tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther....And one fine morning- So we beat on against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past (Fitzgerald, 189).

Gatsby, like the early settlers he shares so much with, searches for a purity that will always remain just out of reach. So driven is Gatsby to achieve this perfect state, he fails to realize that the minor setbacks he recognizes are, without question, indications of impossibility. Nevertheless, the search continues.

The Great Gatsby* and *Ragged Dick

Structurally, the experiences of Jay Gatsby and Ragged Dick have some similarities. Both young men begin with very little. Both live without parents: Gatsby chooses to have no contact with his parents, as their lives do not bear any resemblance to the life he wants to make for himself; Ragged Dick has no parents in his life at all, as his mother is dead and his father has long been absent. Both characters are given their beginnings on the path to success by a benefactor; Dan Cody, recognizing a special spark, helps mold the inexperienced Gatsby into a man whose very essence is that of the very rich. Mr. Whitney, observing Ragged Dick's honesty and quick wit, gives the boy the good advice which will start him on the path to independence and success.

But the connection between the lives of Jay Gatsby and Ragged Dick goes no further than these structural similarities. In fact, their differences are far more interesting. Gatsby, unlike Dick, is intensely self conscious. Gatsby, we learn, was never satisfied with the life he would have inherited from his parents; even his earliest actions (the schedules for self-improvement, for example) were part of a comprehensive effort to rise above his parents' station. When we first meet Ragged Dick, the homeless boot-black seems perfectly satisfied with his lot in life. He not only accepts his station, he embraces it, enjoying evenings at the Old Bowery, looking forward to a

hearty breakfast, using his sharp wits to attract customers. Gatsby accomplishes a great deal, but because he is ultimately unable to win Daisy away from Tom, he is never satisfied. Dick is delighted with every small improvement in his life. Gatsby's attainments are meaningless because he cannot be with the woman he loves. Dick lives in the moment, excited about the twists and turns his life is sure to take as time unfolds. Gatsby is disinterested, a host uninvolved with his party guests, a businessman concerned only with the fact that wealth is required in the quest for Daisy's heart.

Not to be overlooked is the fact that Gatsby's business interests are all illegal ones. Gatsby has experience in the illegal sale of alcohol, in the world of bookmaking, and, perhaps most importantly, in the theft of bonds. Ragged Dick, in sharp contrast, is a law-abiding young man, and, again, one who is happy with what little good happens to come his way. Gatsby needs money. Material wealth is an integral part of the "self" Gatsby creates, and he takes follows the course of least resistance - an illegal course, as it happens - to obtain it. Dick recognizes the value of money, but is content to earn it honestly, slow as this may be. The reader is pleased when Ragged Dick's passbook savings account passes the one hundred dollar mark, as this seems like a truly meaningful accomplishment. Gatsby's incredible opulence, on the other hand, seems somehow contaminated, void of positive meaning.

It is possible, of course, to justify Gatsby's involvement in illegal activities. In spite of his various negative qualities, Gatsby is a man in pursuit of a dream, and this, at certain times in the novel, is a beautiful thing. Gatsby's drive to accomplish - in its most pristine form - the perfection he has imagined allows us to understand his willingness to participate in unlawful business ventures. Gatsby needs money, and he is unwilling to wait for it. Selling alcohol during Prohibition, stealing bonds on the rapidly-expanding securities market - these are means to an end. Gatsby is no diabolical schemer, and his illegal involvement is in no way evil. But, one might argue, the wealth Gatsby has won outside the law is ultimately not the sort of wealth Daisy can fall in love with. Tom boldly pronounces Gatsby's criminality at the height of the powerful confrontation scene. Accusations of bootlegging do not affect Gatsby much, but Tom's more ominous allegation, that "[Gatsby has] something on now that Walter [an informant] is afraid to tell me about," causes Gatsby great concern. Gatsby's reaction to this revelation is one of panic:

> He began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly toward that lost voice across the room (Fitzgerald, 142).

Tom shrewdly observes that the truth of Gatsby's wealth has brought the dreamer's "presumptuous little flirtation" with Daisy to an end.

A useful evaluation of Gatsby and Ragged Dick must go far beyond any simple "good/bad," "legal/illegal" formula. To make this link meaningful for students, it will be necessary to first examine the ways in which Gatsby's enterprise differs from Dick's, then to thoroughly analyze the

implications of Gatsby's criminal involvement. Because The Godfather, the curriculum unit's next major work, is also concerned with the life of a hero/criminal, it will be most helpful for students to work through all the various ways of understanding this unusual construction before leaving Jay Gatsby (temporarily) behind and turning their focus to the lives of the Corleone crime family.

***The Great Gatsby*: Teaching Strategy**

The Great Gatsby is a subtle novel; as such, I believe it requires a closer reading than many other works I use with my junior English classes. My students will spend approximately three weeks with Gatsby. During this time, a brief introduction and a series of thorough study guides should help students stay focused on the themes which are of particular interest to this curriculum unit. Regular discussions will allow students the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings for the book, and to ask questions about material they do not understand. Frequent references to the plot and characters of Alger's *Ragged Dick* should help to immediately establish the benefits of critical, intertextual reading; encouraging students to think comparatively about the various ideas they will experience during the course of this unit is a key objective.

I am not a strong believer in giving lengthy introductions to the works I teach. My general practice is to introduce a novel or play by simply announcing its title and asking my students to "jump right in." Doing so with *The Great Gatsby* would be ineffective. A meaningful introduction to Gatsby will acquaint students with a few historical trends: the exuberance felt by many Americans following victory in World War One; the fact of Prohibition and the many ways it was circumvented; the rise of the jazz culture; and the presence of "new money" among the nation's more traditionally wealthy. It will make mention of the novel's setting, referring students to Fitzgerald's map of Manhattan, East Egg, and West Egg. And most importantly, it will present to students a framework for understanding the novel's major themes: the drive to totally define the reality of one's existence; the nature of the American Dream and the ways in which it is (or isn't) achieved; and the desire to change and/or re-create the past. I expect that a review of this written introduction and a brief question-and-answer session will take approximately one 54-minute class period.

I enjoy reading aloud to my students, and I usually set aside two class period per week for doing so. For a less experienced reader, a complex novel like Gatsby can be much more comprehensible (and certainly more enjoyable) read aloud. I will alternate reading aloud in class with giving at-home reading assignments. A chapter per day should work well. After every second chapter, students will, working individually or in small groups, complete a study guide designed to help them understand key scenes and identify important themes as those themes slowly unfold. Chapter Seven will receive its own study guide, as it is an especially long chapter and is densely packed with important information. I hope that each study guide will produce a helpful discussion and encourage students to ask questions about anything they do not understand.

After students complete *The Great Gatsby*, they will participate in a full-length, graded discussion of the novel. They will complete a sort of take-home written exam asking them to think critically about the various issues they have worked with during their time with the book. Finally,

students will complete an in-class activity comparing the experiences of Ragged Dick to those of Jay Gatsby, examining the pronounced differences which exist between the ways in which the two characters are developed. [Please see the handout "*The Great Gatsby*: Comparisons with Alger's *Ragged Dick*."]

The Godfather: Understanding Vito and Michael Corleone

Using *The Godfather* can provide teachers an opportunity to encourage critical, reflective thinking about the initial, typically superficial reactions which often constitute the casual moviegoer's entire reaction to what he or she sees on screen. Specifically, teachers might prompt students who view *The Godfather* to think critically about their feelings for the film's two central characters, Vito and Michael Corleone.

The Godfather has often been criticized for romanticizing the lives of men who are responsible for unthinkable brutality. While such criticism is debatable, it seems clear that most viewers find Vito and Michael Corleone essentially sympathetic characters. The key to a successful classroom experience lies in prompting students to reflect on the reasons they are drawn to these characters. With some guidance, the lesson might instill in students the motivation to think a bit more critically about the movies they see. In addition, a careful assessment of the very attractive qualities Vito and Michael Corleone possess might reveal to students interesting truths about their own systems of ethics and priorities.

Vito Corleone, the "Godfather" for whom the film is named, is an aging Don who recognizes that his ways of doing business are quickly fading. The Don's general manner is very attractive. He is quietly reserved, the very antithesis of Santino, his explosive, eldest son. Nothing matters more to the Don than the well-being of his family; his caring is evident throughout the film. The Don is decisive, involved, and driven by a clearly-defined ethos. All of these are qualities students seem to admire in the character, so such qualities seem a likely starting place for a lesson which has as its goal a sort of deconstruction of the generally positive reaction viewers have to the film's central figures.

Crucial to fully understanding how we can so easily view a brutal criminal as a sympathetic character is the film's use of omission. *The Godfather* contains no example of Vito Corleone's personally committing a violent act. In addition, we never hear him give a direct order specifically calling for violence. Such orders are implied - most notably in the Don's assurance that he will make Woltz, the studio executive, "an offer he can't refuse" - but specifics are ever-elusive. Similarly, we never come into contact with the deepest effects of the crime organization Corleone heads. Viewers are generally relieved when the Don refuses to take part in what promises to be a very lucrative new enterprise: the sale of heroin in New York City. But we are only able to forgive Vito's significant involvement in more "traditional" vices - gambling and prostitution - because we never see any victims of these crimes on screen. We must ask ourselves how our feelings for the Don would change if the film included scenes involving such victims: women destroyed by the subjugation of prostitution, men ruined by gambling addiction, and so on.

Michael Corleone, the Don's youngest son, is first introduced as the Corleone who refuses to participate in the family business. Michael is a war hero, an intelligent man who cares for his family but is guarded in his involvement with them. As the film progresses, though, Michael becomes heavily involved in the family business, eventually assuming full control when his father enters a period of semi-retirement. Unlike Vito Corleone, Michael personally commits acts of violence on screen and he orders others to carry out similar acts. Yet at the end of The Godfather, Michael remains an essentially sympathetic character. Why is this so?

I believe Michael's transformation begins the moment he sees the headline proclaiming his father has been shot. Soon after this, having thwarted a second attempt on his father's life, Michael looks into the older man's eyes and says, "I'm with you now, Pop." The Don smiles, understanding the significance of what his youngest son is telling him. The viewer reacts to this declaration of allegiance not by crying "No, Michael, don't do it!" but by accepting the necessity of Michael's decision and by supporting the fact that he does not hesitate in making it. We do not sense that Michael joins the family business because he is greedy or because he is thirsty for blood. We sense - and the movie reinforces this quite often - that Michael's path is one of inevitability: he joins his father only when he feels that his father will die if he remains uninvolved.

Similar arguments can easily be made for all of Michael's various criminal actions and decisions. Michael volunteers to murder the drug importer Sollozzo and the crooked Captain McCluskey not because he is desperate - as his brother Sonny is - for vengeance. He commits these murders in the interest of "business," and to help ensure the safety of his father. Later in the film, Michael, driven, we suspect, by his genuine desire to legitimize the Corleone business, orders the murder of every man standing in the way of this move to legitimacy. Though some viewers might question the strategy of ordering assassinations to achieve legality, these "hits" make perfect sense in the context the film presents us. Even the murder of Carlo Rizzi, the abusive husband of Connie Corleone, does not alter Michael's status as a sympathetic character. Carlo is an accessory to the murder of Sonny Corleone, and his brutal abuse of Connie is one of the film's most wrenching moments. Because the film is so convincing in its creation of an internally consistent world, the viewer can readily explain the utter necessity of each of Michael's crimes. Indeed, the viewer's willingness to adopt the film's general ethos suggests that Michael's lying to Kay, his wife, in the film's final scene, is a transgression far more grave than any of the terrible murders he commits.

Interestingly, the one murder that might not fit this pattern of inevitability and clear justification for violence was cut from the final version of the film. The scene, which would have occurred near the end of the film, involves Michael discovering that Fabrizio, the Sicilian who betrays Michael's trust and assists in the murder of Michael's Sicilian wife, Apollonia, has immigrated to New York and is working in a Manhattan pizza parlor. After the murders of Carlo Rizzi, Mo Greene, and the heads of the other New York families, Michael and enforcer Al Neri visit Fabrizio's place of work and Michael kills the Sicilian in a particularly bloody scene. This murder, unlike all the others Michael is responsible for, seems based entirely on personal vengeance. It is no surprise that the scene was deleted during the editing process, as its inclusion might have significantly altered the viewer's feelings for Michael at the film's conclusion. It might be interesting to summarize this lost scene for students and ask for their responses. Would they feel

differently about Michael if the scene had been left intact? If so, why? If not, how exactly would they distinguish this murder from all the others for which Michael is responsible?

***The Godfather*: Teaching Strategy**

Viewing *The Godfather* should take four of our 54-minute class periods. A Monday-through-Thursday period will work perfectly. I think it will be very helpful for a teacher who decides to show *The Godfather* to preview the film, timing segments and finding appropriate stopping places, then writing prose summaries of each day's viewing for those students who are absent. This should solve a number of frustrating problems before they develop.

Having shown the film, and having provided prose summaries to any student who misses a day, I believe it will be most useful to begin an analysis of student reactions to Vito and Michael Corleone with an activity designed to solidify students' understanding of the film's plot and characters. Too often, we teachers become very excited about the intricacies of a work we love, only to find (gasp!) that many of our students are struggling simply to understand what actually happens in the work. I believe a prose summary of the film's plot, with key names and details left blank for students to recall and fill in, will be an effective way to refresh students' memories. I have found that high school juniors work well in groups of three or four, discussing the assignment collectively, then each recording answers on his or her own paper. Giving students a printed "cast of characters," composed in a sort of hierarchical fashion, listing characters in order of importance, will facilitate the activity and help students with the ever-frustrating problem of spelling. A single 54-minute class period (Friday, if the film is shown Monday through Thursday) should give students adequate time to complete this activity.

When students have achieved the necessary familiarity with the film's plot and characters, it will be possible to proceed with activities that call for critical, analytical thinking about Vito and Michael Corleone and the ways viewers traditionally react to them. As I have written, most viewers seem to think of both Vito and Michael Corleone as sympathetic characters. I think it will be best to first deal with each character separately, then to identify the common traits they share.

To begin, students, again sitting in groups of three or four, will individually respond to the following prompt: "Write the five adjectives or descriptive phrases you think best describe Vito Corleone's character." [Please refer to the handout "The Godfather: Understanding Vito Corleone" for the a complete accounting of all questions mentioned in this section.] After a few moments, we will share answers, attempting to find common responses and making note of any we are able to identify. A similar activity conducted during the fall semester, 1998, yielded a wide range of useful responses: "powerful," "cares for his family," "quiet," "dangerous," and "caring," among others. Clearly, the objective here will not be to discourage any particular answer, but to draw attention to those frequently-mentioned answers which will allow students to penetrate the Don's character most effectively.

After this brainstorming activity, students will work in groups to answer questions which deal with the Don's on-screen manner, his ideas about family and business, and his interaction with

other characters. This will lead to a summative question prompting students to draw conclusions about the Don based on the answers they gave in the preceding section. When groups have completed all questions, the class as a whole will share responses to selected items, paying special attention to answers to the summative question. These activities should easily fill a 54-minute class period.

The following day, students will focus their attention on the character of Michael Corleone in much the same way they examined Vito Corleone. For this lesson, questions will focus on the development of Michael's character, his transformation from non-participant to new Godfather, and the justification audience members construct for each of his violent actions.

To conclude this segment of the curriculum unit, students will answer a series of questions on the illegality of both the Corleones' and Jay Gatsby's business interests. They will evaluate the different reasons these characters have for operating outside the law, and they will consider their willingness to become wealthy illegally in light of *Ragged Dick's* eventual dedication to a consummate morality.

***Death of a Salesman*: Overview**

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is the final work students will study during the course of the curriculum unit. This play presents a number of valuable opportunities for students to revisit all three of the previous works, and to apply the various ideas of the American Dream they examined earlier in the term to the troubled life of Willy Loman, the play's central character.

Willy Loman is a man in terminal crisis. He is the disappointed father of two misguided sons, the guilt-ridden husband of a fiercely devoted woman (who never suspects he once kept a mistress), and the newly-fired salesman who has absolutely nothing to show for a career that spanned decades. The play is a fusion of the idealized past, the painful present, and the ever-hopeful future. The reader experiences Willy's frequent movement between different realities as a moving stream of consciousness. The play is filled with a sense of impending doom. It never seems realistic to think that Willy will conquer his demons, face the truth of his existence, and simply be whole. Willy's story is, in Miller's words, a "tragedy of the common man," a drama that forces the reader to apply all the workings of high tragedy to the life of a very ordinary person.

Willy Loman believes utterly the very tired clichés most often associated with Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People. One of Willy's signature phrases is "well liked." People who are well liked, Willy believes, will ultimately meet with success in every endeavor. During an extended flashback early in the play, Willy finds ample support for this belief in his elder son, Biff. Biff is a football star, a god among his high school chums. In this scene, Willy dismisses the very serious warnings Biff's classmate Bernard makes concerning Biff's potentially failing math:

> Willy: Bernard is not well liked, is he?
> Biff: He's liked, but he's not well liked.

> Willy: That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him...Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want (Miller, 33).

This certainly applies to Biff the starting quarterback, who has friends waiting eagerly in the Loman basement for the popular young man to order them about. But even in this rosy vision of times gone by, the reader suspects that all is not well. Willy remembers the very brief visit of his older brother, Ben, a powerful man who makes his fortune in the African jungles. During Ben's stopover, it becomes clear that Biff is stealing lumber from a nearby construction site. Willy is anxious to impress his older brother, and for this reason he seems happy that Ben regards Biff's stealing as a sign of initiative. But deep inside, Willy is very concerned about Biff's illegal actions. He angrily shouts at Bernard, "Shut up! He's not stealing anything!" then snaps sharply at a worried Linda, "There's nothing wrong. What's the matter with you?" (Miller, 51) Willy's angry denial hints at his profound insecurity. He seems to know - if only on a deep, subconscious level - that his hollow aphorisms are ultimately not enough, that real success cannot simply be the product of popularity.

Charley, Willy's neighbor and Bernard's father, recognizes this and tries to make it clear to Willy: "Why must everybody like you? Who liked J.P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked" (Miller, 97). Charley understands that popularity is not a prerequisite for success. Willy, who makes no money even before he is fired, depends on Charley for weekly loans. But he cannot see the truth of Charley's words. Frustrated with Willy's self-pity and his unwillingness to accept a generous job offer, Charley asks, "Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything?" (Miller, 97) The reader understands that the answer to this question can only be "never."

Willy Loman among Ragged Dick, Jay Gatsby, and the Corleones

I believe Willy Loman can be most meaningfully understood when he is considered in the light shed by the curriculum unit's other principal characters. Willy and Ragged Dick share a certain naive trust in the general "rightness" of things. But ultimately, Willy's quietly determined neighbor Charley has much more in common with the young boot-black. Willy boasts of imagined accomplishments. Charley, like Ragged Dick, is pleased with his humble success, but he certainly feels no need to flaunt it. Awestruck by the news that bookish Bernard will argue a case before the Supreme Court, Willy wonders why "he didn't even mention it." Charley's reply is telling: "He don't have to - he's gonna do it" (Miller, 95). Ragged Dick feels no desire to boast of his newfound success to other boot-blacks. Rather, he helps them, in the same unassuming manner which defines the generosity Charley shows Willy.

Jay Gatsby and the Corleones are everything Willy Loman is not. Willy is lost in a fog of meaningless platitudes. He is unable to find his way out of this confusion, to face the awful condition his family is in, and to do something about it. Gatsby and the Corleones, in contrast, are

very able to do “whatever it takes” to accomplish their goals. These characters are willing to conduct business outside the law. Gatsby acts illegally so that he might earn the wealth he needs to make of himself the ideal figure he imagines. Gatsby realizes, too, that he must amass a substantial fortune to successfully win Daisy away from Tom. Vito and Michael Corleone persist in illegal enterprises so they might guarantee the long-term safety of their family. (Having a beautiful, heavily-fortified mansion on Long Island doesn’t hurt, either.) Willy Loman would like to be successful, he would like to have sons who genuinely respect him, but he simply cannot make these things happen.

Interestingly, Willy’s brother, Ben, bears a very strong resemblance to Gatsby and the Corleones. Unlike Willy, Ben seizes opportunity and makes the most of it. Ben is fond of describing his experience in Africa: “William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich!” (Miller, 52). Ben makes his fortune in colonial Africa. (Neatly avoiding, we might assume, the legal difficulties Gatsby and the Corleones face while still doing business in an exploitative manner.) He is a bold man who seems to follow in the footsteps of his pioneer father. He is Willy’s foil, and his presence forces Willy to take stock of his own situation:

> Willy: He’s got a proposition for me in Alaska...
> Linda: You’re doing well enough, Willy!
> Ben: Enough for what, my dear?
> Linda: Don’t say those things to him! Enough to be happy right here, right now...
> Willy: I am building something with this firm, Ben, and if a man is building something he must be on the right track, mustn’t he?
> Ben: What are you building? Lay your hand on it. Where is it?
> Willy: He’s right, Linda, there’s nothing (Miller, 85-86).

This exchange demonstrates Willy’s profound confusion, and it emphasizes the many differences that exist between the two Lomans. Linda fears the unknown, and she worries that Willy, an ineffective, deluded husband, will make an enormous mistake if he chooses to accompany Ben to Alaska. The reader knows, of course, that Linda has nothing to worry about. Willy, in spite of his dreams of greatness, lacks the cut-throat motivation Ben, Gatsby, and the Corleones possess. He imagines himself content and successful, even capable of greatness, but he knows - again, if only on a subconscious level - that he is not.

***Death of a Salesman*: Teaching Strategy**

Death of a Salesman is a very engaging work to read aloud. Students will, therefore, spend a considerable amount of class time simply reading the play. I will introduce Miller and the play only briefly, making mention of the fact that students must pay careful attention to the constant overlapping of past and present. Students will read each of the play’s two acts in two or three days. After reading each act, students will complete a detailed study guide and participate in a full-period discussion of what they have read.

I have found it useful to show the 1985 film before continuing with additional written work. Even the most attentive students have some difficulty visualizing the play's time shifts, and the film helps clarify any lingering confusion. After viewing this wonderful film, students will complete a final writing assignment. This assignment will ask students to consider all the various incarnations of the American dream they have encountered, then respond to the idea of the American dream in a very personal way.

APPENDIX: SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

The Great Gatsby: Comparisons with Alger's Ragged Dick

1. In what way are Dan Cody and Meyer Wolfshiem (The Great Gatsby) related to Mr. Whitney and Frank(Ragged Dick)?
2. Given the values he instills in characters such as Ragged Dick, how do you think Horatio Alger might react to the character of Jay Gatsby? Why?
3. Gatsby's rise to wealth and popularity can seem tainted, even dirty when compared to Ragged Dick's rise to respectability. Why is this so?
4. How might you compare the goals Gatsby and Dick have? Do the two characters share any goals? How do their goals differ?
5. Which success story is more believable to you? Why?

The Godfather: Understanding Vito Corleone

I. Brainstorming activity
In the space below, please write the five adjectives or descriptive phrases you think best describe Don Vito Corleone's character.

II. Discussion questions
Groups should discuss each question, then each member should write his or her answers independently. Please write on notebook paper.

A. Interaction with family members and others

1. How would you characterize the general feelings the Don exhibits for his family during the film? If you can, mention scenes which seem especially important in understanding the Don's feelings for his family.

2. How does the Don react when he learns Sonny has been murdered? How might we describe this reaction as a very surprising one?

3. Why does the Don seem somewhat disappointed during the scene with Michael in the garden? (The answer lies in remembering the hopes the Don said he once had for Michael.)

4. What does the term “Godfather” mean in the context of the film? What might people who call the Don “Godfather” expect from him? What might the Don expect from them? How does this relationship compare the family relationships you have already described?

5. What does Tom Hagen’s status as a member of the family tell the viewer about the Don?

6. Describe the Don’s manner (his behavior, the way in which he speaks) at the meeting of the heads of the five families. What admirable qualities does the Don demonstrate during this scene?

B. Livelihood

1. Why does the Don initially refuse to participate in the drug trade?
2. What do you think is the intended audience response to the Don’s initial refusal to participate in the drug trade?

3. What ultimately causes the Don to agree to participate in the drug trade?

4. In which “vice”-type activities does the Don willingly conduct business?

5. In refusing Sollozzo’s offer, the Don says that most people consider gambling and prostitution “harmless.” How might we argue that the opposite is true, that gambling and prostitution can, in fact, be very harmful?

6. How might our general opinion of the Don change if significant screen time were given to the victims of such “harmless” activities as gambling and prostitution?

7. Which acts of violence the Don personally commits on screen?

8. Which acts of violence does the Don specifically order on screen?

9. How does the fact that the Don neither commits an act of violence nor specifically orders such an act on screen influence our opinion of his character?

10. Consider the following dialogue, found in scenes not present in the film’s final version. For each example, explain how the dialogue might have influenced the viewer’s opinion of the Don.

    a. (an earlier version of the scene featuring the Don and Michael in the garden) “...Michael, in five years the Corleone family can be completely legitimate. Very difficult things have to happen to make that possible. I can’t do them anymore, but you can, if you choose to.”

b. (a conversation between the Don and Michael - before Michael has any involvement in the family business - later deleted from the film) Vito Corleone: Just a minute, Michael, I wanna talk to you. Now what are your plans when you get out [of the military]? Michael: Finish school. Vito Corleone: That's fine. I approve of that. Michael, you never come to me as a son should, you know that, don't you? When you finish school, I want you to come and talk to me, because I have plans for you, you understand? Michael (Not convinced, mumbles as he turns away) We'll see.

III. Summative question

Using the understanding you have gained in answering the questions above, write a paragraph explaining the conception of Don Vito Corleone *The Godfather's* creators seem to intend. How do the film's creators manage to establish a man who has surely committed acts of perverse brutality as a fundamentally sympathetic character? For you as an individual viewer, does the Don's criminal involvement lessen the sympathy you feel for his character? Is he, in your mind, the film's "good guy"? Explain your answers fully.

Final Writing Assignment

During the past several weeks, you have worked with various works of literature and film that deal with the American dream. Each work treated the subject differently, and each work allowed us to understand the works which preceded with greater clarity. Bearing in mind all we have discussed during this lengthy unit, you will now write an essay which gives your thoughts on the American dream.

* Explain whether or not you believe the Horatio Alger version of the American dream is valuable to you, and why.
* Examine your feelings for those who get ahead by doing illegal or immoral things. (Especially if those things have no direct impact on you. Does it matter, for example, that toy company executives may enjoy enormous bonuses while those who actually make toys live as wage-slaves?)
* Explain as clearly as you can what your idea of success is. What things do you feel you need to accomplish in order to feel successful? Is money a part of your formula for success? Popularity? Fame? Being well-liked? Please give honest answers here. I am not looking for any specific answers. I am, however, looking for your honest, clearly-defined thoughts.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY/FILMOGRAPHY

Alger, Horatio. *Ragged Dick*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.
The most commonly available of Alger's dozens of novels. This Penguin edition also contains "Struggling Upward," a shorter piece which shares some of Ragged Dick's essential themes.

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. Edited by Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1988.
Several essays contained in this scholarly volume address the play's treatment of the American dream. Bloom's introduction to the play raises an interesting idea: that the play, as a play, has many weaknesses; but as a challenging manifestation of a pervasive social and economic construct, the play has very deep resonance.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Major Literary Characters: Gatsby*. New York: Chelsea House, 1991.
This volume presents a very diverse selection of essays and excerpts of longer works on Fitzgerald's novel. Reviews of the novel's first publication can be very useful in class, as can the many different opinions of Gatsby as a character, an American institution, etc.

Death of a Salesman (film).
Dustin Hoffman and John Malkovich star in this very useful version of Miller's play. Students who have trouble visualizing the play's many shifts in time and place have a much easier time with the film.

De Koster, Kathy, ed. *Readings on The Great Gatsby*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1988.
This book presents Gatsby in context, and, as such, is valuable in helping students understand the novel's historical setting.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925.
Fitzgerald's greatest and most famous novel.

The Great Gatsby (film).
Useful in the classroom because it strays from Fitzgerald's text very little.

The Godfather, The Godfather Part II, and *The Godfather Part III* (films)
Viewed as a whole, the three Godfather films present a legacy of ambition, struggle, betrayal, corruption, and–possibly–redemption. Though only the first film is used in the present curriculum unit, it would be very helpful for the teacher to be familiar with the entire trilogy.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. New York: Bantam Books, 1986.
The author's best-known work, useful in this unit for its description of the Massachusetts Puritans' desire to create something new on the American continent.

Lebo, Harold. *The Godfather Legacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
A book written for popular consumption, but very useful in its presentation of scenes cut from the film's final print. Period reviews are also helpful.

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. New York: Viking Press, 1966.
Miller's best-known play. Like most of his other works, *Salesman* challenges commonly-held American beliefs and forces its audience to confront very difficult issues.