

Using Literature to Help Teens Cope With Social Issues

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WHO I TEACH

Not all children are taught in classrooms. I have spent much of my professional life working with homebound teenagers. This unit is aimed at that population: one that is comprised of, but not limited to, the physically and or mentally challenged child, the abused child, the homeless child, the hopeless child, the frightened child, the hungry child, the confused child, and children with bright minds trapped by some injustice of society. The Appraisal Review Dismissal Committee of Community Services High School places these students on Homebound for a period of at least four weeks depending upon the medical request. Youngsters with medical conditions who meet the eligibility codes outlined by the Texas Education Agency are serviced, one-on-one, in homes. My student population is fluid. They enter and withdraw throughout the year. Accordingly, this unit is driven by time, district objectives, and the unique nature of the students. This unit will cover six weeks and may be taught as part of English classes in grades nine through twelve. Each student will be required to read two books during the last four weeks of this unit. The literature selected may be adapted to specific grade levels.

The students' home school counselors plan their class schedules. For example, a typical eleventh grade student may be scheduled to take English 3, Algebra 2, Chemistry, United States History, and several electives. I teach the courses, one-on-one to the students in their homes. At the end of the semester or at the time of withdrawal, I submit the students' grades to their home schools. These students come to the homebound program with various degrees of readiness for learning. I have discovered in my many years of teaching an educational axiom categorizing our student population: *There are students to teach and there are teachable students.*

Students to Teach

The "students to teach" group is that block of students known as the general or regular population. They make up the larger percent of the student body. These students are like a "mixed salad" or a "box of chocolate." As Forrest Gump would say, "You never know what you are going to get until you open it." The teacher never knows what abilities the students have until she or he begins interacting with them. Most of these students come to the classroom unprepared and unwilling to take their education seriously. These "students to teach" types are the most challenging. Failure runs rampant amongst them; failure of self, of family, of achievement. I am not saying that these students cannot be taught successfully, but I am saying that it requires an alarming amount of creativity on the teacher's part to cultivate these students. Many of them read below grade level, and their skills in mathematics are lacking. The seeds for critical thinking and problem

solving must be planted and nurtured in these students. Because of the weight of social ills, circumstances of life, and family deterioration, the successful germination of these seeds is often uncertain. Public school classrooms are largely filled today with “students to teach,” that is, students who are unprepared to master the concepts of their subjects.

Teachable Students

In contrast to the “students to teach” are the “teachable students.” These are the students who are ready to learn. They do not need a lot of re-teaching or pushing. They are willing to learn, chart new paths, formulate new ideas, and accept new challenges. I am not saying that these “teachable students” are ideal in behavior or superior in intelligence, but they are ready to learn if the educational system is ready to teach them.

My Students

I am going to describe my student population through brief snapshots of the lives of some of the students I have taught. All names in the unit are fictitious in order to protect the identity of the students. By knowing from where the students have come and the nature of their inner selves, I can better write individual educational plans. The more I understand how a student thinks and functions, the more I am capable of creating lesson plans unique to that student. These lesson plans will be inquiry-based and will lead, guide, shape minds, and change attitudes.

My student population offers me opportunities to be *up front and personal* with many issues in their lives. Often, I am the first person with whom the students feel comfortable sharing troubling secrets and feelings of isolation, alienation, and confusion. They fear the future, and because of critical illnesses of relatives or themselves, they fear dying. Many of my students have good cognitive abilities but are plagued with depression and other symptoms of emotional disturbances that interfere with their educational growth. For example, I often teach students that are afraid to go outside or to let the outside in. It is an accomplishment just to get them to open the blinds to allow the entry of a few rays of sunlight. Bitter divorces of parents and other family problems have sent many students scurrying for cover. I mean cover literally. These students just give up and stay in bed most of the time, and just lie there wasting away. Many of these students have brilliant minds that are asleep and need to be awakened. I am going to use this curriculum unit as “healing balm” to help students analyze how other people cope with similar issues in their own lives.

UNIT’S GOALS

I hope to change attitudes and raise the self-esteem of my students through literature. Homebound teaching provides an excellent opportunity for this approach. The student remains focused and on task. Because of our close proximity, the student and I are usually positioned eyeball-to-eyeball, mind-to-mind, and for a glimpse of time, soul-to-

soul. A sort of bonding takes place. This is the time maximum learning can take place. The proof is in the pudding. It is in the joy and the outbursts of “I got it.” It is in the tears of understanding and empathizing with some character in a novel or a story.

In Lois Lowry’s novel, *The Giver*, every child was expected to master the educational plans designated for his or her age group as planned by the educational committee of elders. Each moved robotically through an ideal society. They wore uniforms, apologized for breaking any rules, and accepted any punishment or reprimand for any infractions without complaining or making excuses. Everything was age appropriate in this utopia. All girls wore ribbons up to a certain age. Each child received a bicycle at age nine. They volunteered in some useful activity, job, or profession, and at age twelve, each child was given his or her life assignment. In this ideal world, everything was geared toward sameness. Individuality, as we know it, did not exist. In this utopia, problematic children, as well as adults, were released from the community. The word “release” in *The Giver* has a different meaning from the everyday use of the word. In *The Giver*, when one speaks of “release,” they are referring to euthanasia. Release was final. In a perfect society, such as existed in *The Giver*, there was no tolerance for imperfections, inabilities or infractions. But in our world, children are not released from our communities because of fragilities, discipline problems, inabilities, or incompleteness. We have to teach all children regardless of their learning capability. I will not leave any of my students behind without exhausting all efforts to reach them. To reach this goal, I will have to get the “students to teach” to become “teachable students.” In *Fallen Angels*, Perry says that if you can change a person’s way of thinking, you can change his attitude. I will use literature to help my students think about life from a different perspective.

For example, Lelia (a real person, a fictitious name) and I compared and contrasted *The Giver* by Lois Lowry and *In The Shadow of The Pali* by Lisa Cindrich. We discussed the social issues in each of the books. The more we talked together and read together, the more we bonded. We discussed utopian societies—their good points and bad points. We explored issues such as abandonment, kidnapping, euthanasia, sexual abuse, and alienation. We shared feelings. We became characters in the novels. We wrestled with “good” and “evil.” We talked about feelings. We bonded, we agreed, and we disagreed. My student thought Liliha from *In the Shadow of The Pali* was worse off living in a leper colony with all its inhumane conditions. I thought the children living in *The Giver* were in a worse situation because I felt they were robbed of free will, sunshine, color and feelings.

After staying overtime, I stood up to go. Lelia stood up under the weight of jaws as big as balloons that shadowed her face in sort of a lopsided cumulous cloud formation. With eyes peering out as lovingly as a kitten looking unsure at an unfamiliar visitor, she said, “I am glad that Jason made it to Elsewhere.” I said, “I am glad that color, sunshine, and feelings were now available to Jason and the community he left behind.” “Yes, I am glad, too. Feelings are good to have, but sometimes they can be so *painful*.”

I looked at her. I looked at the visible burns over her arms, her face. I looked at the skin stretched out of proportion over her neck and jaws by medical extensions, skin that would eventually replace the scars over her face. This reflection only took a moment, but a moment was all that was needed to understand her assessment of feelings. Nodding my head in affirmation, “You are right, feelings can be painful. See you tomorrow.” She smiled. I walked out, feeling her eyes following me to my car where I crawled inside, buckled my seatbelt, started the car, and began to cry.

This curriculum unit hopes to elicit similar participation from my students. I want them to feel that they are a part of the books we read, the stories we tell, and the characters we play. In this unit, students will have the opportunity to rewrite beginnings and endings of some of the literary works studied. They will be able to share their own stories and their lives, as they perceive them in some chosen genres.

The purpose of this teaching unit is twofold: to encourage the enjoyment of reading, and to show how others cope with situations. Students should want to read, but distracters such as television viewing, electronic game playing, and radio blasting must be minimized. Reading is no fun if it is laborious, redundant, and disconnected from a child’s experience or comprehension. I will discuss with the students a list of things to look for when selecting a good book. This list will be kept in the Student Writing Journal for later use. I will teach them how to analyze what book reviewers are saying about a book and how this information may be useful in determining if the book is a good choice for her or him. I will direct them to the excerpts on the inside and outside covers of the book. I will share information on age appropriate books.

During this curriculum unit, each student will read two books. Various reading strategies will be used to help develop student’s reading skills. For example, reading aloud will be one of the strategies utilized. James Trelease, the author of *Jim Trelease Video: Reading Aloud*, recommends highly the art of reading aloud to all children regardless of age. Reading aloud will help us become a nation of readers. He further indicates that children from homes with the most print score higher in reading and other courses. He recommends that we establish print-rich schools. He shares an outcome of a case that took place in Lombardy, Massachusetts. The principal (Thomas O’Neil) instituted a reading initiative program at one of the secondary schools. The school was closed down daily for ten minutes. Every staff and child had to read during this period. In a four-year period, the reading scores soared. Trelease urges the educational system to pay now or pay later. He also shares in the video that the fourth grade is one that is most frequently read to by teachers. He recommends that reading aloud both by teachers and students should be done on all grade levels. Children can hear and understand several grade levels above their reading levels. Trelease recommends placing books in children’s pathways. For example, books could be placed in book boxes on tables in waiting rooms and, in my situation, teachers’ cars. One of my students asked me one day if I had any more books in my car that she may read. I joyfully retrieved an armful of books for her

choosing. Since then, I have created within a box a miniature library of books, magazines, cassette tapes, and videos.

I will designate some class sessions as “read-aloud” sessions. On these days, I will read a chapter and the student will read the following one. This process will be repeated throughout the class. We will discuss the chapters during these reading sessions. Adjustments will be made for students who are reading challenged. For example, I will read aloud more of the text, allowing the student to read the quotes or easier sections of the chapter. In addition, I will use an audible form of the book periodically to encourage reluctant readers. Some of my students have a difficult time seeing small-print text. I will provide large print copies of the book for the visually impaired students. I will plan field trips, extracurricular activities, and virtual tours throughout this six-week unit. In addition, I will provide students with opportunities to e-mail authors and to hear guest speakers. Motivational speakers will be scheduled after the completion of *The Ugly Duckling* and “Bernice Bobs Her Hair.”

In summary, this unit will teach students alternate methods of managing problems in their lives. They will learn that they are not alone and that their thoughts and feelings are not unique. They will gain a better understanding of self. They will discover that it takes time and patience to discover the beauty within. They will grow from learning how others “beat the odds,” like Ben Carson in *Gifted Hands*. They will learn how to select good books, art, and music as ways of dealing with problems—*real or perceived*.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Student activities will draw from both the affective and the cognitive domains. Selected readings from books, short stories, poetry, and essays will be referenced. The students will compile a list of ten social issues relating to teenagers. Using this approach allows me to see critical issues that are unique and important to each of them. This list will be placed in their writing journals to be revisited later. The student will read *The Ugly Duckling* and create, as a class project, a “Chicken Soup” type story. Homebound students are taught one-on-one while homebound. However, for this curriculum unit, all of my English students will comprise a virtual class. They will communicate through e-mail, by telephone, and with the assistance of the teacher. Therefore, whenever “class” is used in this curriculum unit, it will refer to this virtual class. The class will choose a title for the book. I believe in encouraging the students to become involved in the decision making process for learning whenever possible. Some articles will be submitted to the Chicken Soup Committee for consideration for publication.

Next, the students will research and compile a documented list of the top ten social issues plaguing teenagers worldwide using the Internet and two other sources. A copy will be kept in his or her writing journal, and a copy will be submitted to the teacher for use in designing the top five issues survey. The students will discuss with the teacher any emerging issues and/or trends. They will also discuss if the issues appear more

problematic to society today than in past years. The students will reach a consensus on the top five teenage issues. Students working at their individual homes will communicate with each other via e-mail, telephone, or through the teacher. I will compile a list of the top ten social issues discovered by the students. This list will be given to each student. They will then rank their top five choices. The social issues with the greatest number of votes will determine the consensus of the group. Each student will receive a final copy of the result. Then, students will select and critique one of the issues, showing how it compares or contrasts to issues in his or her life. Each student will contribute a literary piece to be shared with the class. This piece can be a poem, an essay, a piece of art, or a song. He/she will have the option of using a “pen” name to protect his/her identity. All individual work will be kept in his or her journal.

This curriculum unit is designed to show how people cope with issues in their lives. Teenagers are no different from adults when it comes to dealing with personal and social issues. Some are able to use various coping techniques to produce positive outcomes, whereas others fail to recognize that there are problems, and aimlessly flounder through life. Others resort to negative tactics such as denial, aggression, and withdrawal to handle the pressures of life. These are the ones who perpetrate hurt upon themselves and society. No one wins in this situation. Still others choose to stay in a child-like stage or to live in a fantasy world. At this junction of the curriculum unit, the use of literature will focus on how other people cope with social and personal issues in their lives. I will use *Peter Pan* to demonstrate how some people use fantasy as a coping mechanism. The strategy of using this story is to show students that many people do not handle problems in their lives appropriately. In this case, the coping mechanism is fantasy. The student and I will discuss fantasy and I will read aloud the story of *Peter Pan*. I will engage the student in a discussion on the character, Peter Pan. Do you think this story is modeled after a real person? Why or why not? Why did Peter not want to grow up? Is it ever okay to want to remain a child? What safety is offered in fantasy? Are there people today who appear or who are considered successful but never grow up? I will allow the student to suggest people in popular society and have them compare and contrast those peoples’ lives with that of Peter Pan. The students’ arguments must be supported reasonably. I will caution the student against slander. The students will keep their responses in the Student Writing Journal. Caricatures will be encouraged.

This is a good time to introduce students to art and drama. I will encourage students to attend plays and school-related activities whenever possible. Local museums and theaters offer opportunities for homebound students to engage in cultural exposure and self-enhancement. Each student will keep a log of extracurricular activities attended. A fine arts certificate of attendance will be given to students who attend any creditable event. Some of the students will be unable to attend activities for various reasons. I will attempt to expose these students to similar activities.

I will ask guests such as authors, poets, singers, and athletes to speak to students on critical teenage issues, and, at times, on the lighter side of life. Joan Nixon is a local

award-winning murder mystery author who has written over a hundred books. She lives in the Houston area and welcomes e-mail from young readers. My students will become familiar with her background and novels. They will be encouraged to e-mail her on writing techniques and issues from her books. Such interactions might enhance the students' self-worth. For example, Kenny Houston, a member of the National Football Hall of Fame, visited one of my male students just before the Christmas holidays. The dialogue was beautiful between the two of them.

Student: "Would you like to see my football?"

Kenny: "Yes." Student brings the football to Kenny.

Kenny takes and handles the ball as gingerly as a father handling his own son.

"Do you have a pen?"

Student passes Kenny the pen. Kenny autographs the ball. While maintaining eye contact, Kenny passes the ball back to the student.

At that moment, the student's mind became less shackled, his school fears diminished, and his desire to return to his home school became a reality. A success story was written by a student who gained better insight of who he is because Kenny had stopped by *his* house.

For the next two weeks, each student is required to read a chapter book from a pre-selected group of books chosen by the teacher. These books offer opportunities for students to see how people (real or fictional) handled social and personal issues in their lives. Were the decisions or actions made by the characters age appropriate? Did they minimize or maximize their situations?

Pre-Selected Book List

Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse

Fallen Angels by Walter Dean Myers

The Giver by Lois Lowry

Gifted Hands by Ben Carson, M.D.

In the Shadow of the Pali by Lisa Cindrich

Throughout these books, loss, grief, hopelessness, and determination are predominant themes. In *Out of the Dust*, the major themes are loss and forgiveness. These thematic messages convey the power of human nature to endure pain and suffering that follow life's tragedies. Billie Jo and her father suffer many hurts and losses throughout the novel. Billie Jo's best friend moves to California. Billie Jo loses her mother and unborn brother in a fire accident. She misses her mother very much. People blame her for her mother's death. She loses her father to silence. Then there is the dust—the endless dust. To stretch her fingers, which were badly scarred during the fire accident, becomes impossible. She loses her ability to play the piano, which was her ticket out of the Dust Bowl. Billy Jo decides to run away from the dust and from the pain. After an encounter

with a transient, who is hitchhiking on the same train, she decides to return home. Students choosing this book will assess Billie Jo's feelings. Why was she angry? What are natural reactions to a loss? Were the claims against her legitimate? Billie Jo is very angry. State some quotes that validate her anger. Did her father act responsibly after the accident? The student will support his or her response. Some ways to contend with grief are to accept the grief and to forgive. The student will show ways Billie Jo used acceptance and forgiveness as healing balm. How have you dealt with loss?

Some students may choose to read *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers. This novel is especially appealing to young male students. It is about a young character named Perry who enlists in the army to escape the harshness of the streets and to provide a better life for his younger brother and alcoholic mother. Perry soon becomes as skilled a soldier as he is a writer. He wins the respect of both his peers and commanding officers. He is a good listener—a trait that helps him settle conflicts among his buddies. Perry has a gift for writing. He writes such vivid details of the Vietnam War that someone reading his letters can feel the heat of the M-60 as it bellows rounds of bullets into the advancing enemy army. This novel is one of action, violence, panic and fear. Perry writes letters for his commanders to the families of fallen baby angels, who were teenagers or very young adults who lost their lives in the war. Perry is wounded in battle and is finally sent back home. Upon returning home, he faces the same economic deprivation that was a part of his life before going to service. The same street life is still in place. Jobs are hard to find. Educational opportunities are limited. The students will be asked to compare and contrast the life of Perry with that of a soldier of the Iraq-American War. The students will answer a series of questions. What are reasons young men go to war? Are wars still fought today as they were during Vietnam? Which weapons do you think you would choose if given the same offer as Perry? How do you feel about war? Does it mature young men and women? Explain your answer.

The students that are concerned about society and humanity may opt to read *The Giver*. Those that have high moral or religious values may sense a spiritual connection with this novel by the sheer nature of its title. Lowry demonstrates the concept of tradeoff when Jonas's society chooses Sameness rather than individuality. She shows what danger may exist when to a set of rules is conformed to without question. There is no perfect society. Certain groups' freedom will always be at risk when unexamined security is accepted by society. Somewhere in the distant past, the ancestors of Jonas' community attempted to create a utopia—a perfect society. The foundation of this utopia was based upon protecting the people from making wrong choices by having no choices. The idea was that if everything were the same, the community would be safe. Eventually, something went wrong. People became controlled and manipulated by societal rules made by a few chosen elders of the community and through the use of precise language. These elders dictated the very essence of the people's souls. Rules were set for everything and everybody. Announcements made over public address systems reminded the community of its oppressive state. The citizens were always under surveillance. Children were afraid to lie, to use unorthodox language, to question.

Adults had become passive and, over time, insensitive to atrocities such as the killing of innocent babies and older citizens. Jonas, who was chosen the new Receiver of Memory, risks his life in order to save people he loves. Jonas is now able to feel pain allowing him to value people as individuals. He questioned the euthanasia of the twin baby. Why did the baby have to die because he weighed a few ounces less than his brother? He questioned the policy of “release.” Jonas changes drastically as he receives the Giver’s memories and wisdom. Jonas’s behavior becomes more complex. He battles with inner conflicts because he can no longer return to his old way of life, including relationships with friends and family. He has lost his innocence. He knows of joy, color, and love. The Giver prepares Jonas for the task of freeing the people from Sameness. He and Jonas develop a plan to eradicate Sameness in the community. The Giver agrees to help the people deal with their newly found memories. Jonas must make it to Elsewhere before the people can be freed. During the discussion of *The Giver*, social ills such as euthanasia, forced adoption and voluntarism, and oppression will be discussed. We will discuss the characters in the story. The student will answer the “Questions for Discussion” found at the end of the novel. Each student will answer the question: did Jonas make it to Elsewhere? The student will support his or her answer by writing a *precise* ending to the novel.

In *Gifted Hands*, students will study the life of a young man who is a living testimony of how one can “beat the odds.” The Ben Carson Story is a true and moving one. It tells of a surgeon’s long and determined odyssey from the streets of Detroit, as a knife-wielding fighter, to a famed master of the scalpel. Ben Carson was a young black youth growing up in inner city Detroit. His father and idol left the family when he was only eight. His parents’ divorce was Ben’s first loss. All of his begging and pleading for his daddy not to leave was of no avail. He finally accepted the fact that his daddy was never coming home to live with them again. As Ben grew, he became more hostile. His grades at school were very poor and oral responses to class discussion were often irrational. As a seventh grader, his friend Jerry teased him about a “stupid” answer Ben had given to an English question. Ben became furious at this teasing. In a heated moment of passion with combination lock in hand, he swung at Jerry’s forehead with all the strength his muscles could produce. Jerry buckled to the floor, with blood gushing from the gash created by the Carson blow. Ben felt convicted because Christians aren’t supposed to harm people. He apologized profusely. Ben pushed his temper issue inwardly. After all, he was a good guy who did not go around splitting open heads.

Shortly after this incident, Ben had an encounter with his mother. She had bought him some pants. He became furious with her because they were not the type that the “in-crowd” at school was wearing. In a fit of rage, he tried to hit her and only failed because the older brother Curtis wrestled him away from his mother. The mother tried to reason with him. She could not take the pants back. She empathically told him to wear them because he would not always get everything he wanted in life. He responded that he would and for her to watch and see. Ben was becoming more defiant. His temper peaked when he was fourteen and in the ninth grade. He tried to knife his best friend Bob. They

had an altercation over which kind of music to listen to. Bob turned the radio dial causing Ben to become enraged. In an instant, Ben grabbed his camping knife, popped it open, and thrust it toward Bob's belly with such force that when the knife's blade made contact, it struck the heavy belt buckle of Bob's ROTC uniform: it snapped and fell to the floor. Ben realized that he could have killed or severely wounded his best friend. He knew he had to get in control of his temper if he were to fulfill his dream of becoming a doctor.

He turned to his biblical training, the Bible and God. His faith grew as he made great strides towards controlling his temper. He was able to cope with the teasing and taunting from his peers, the indifference of many of his teachers, and the harshness of being black in a predominantly white society. Ben believes God changed him. From age fourteen, he began to focus on his future. He made good grades in school, won many ROTC awards, and graduated third in his class. He attended and graduated from Yale University and was accepted to medical school at the University of Michigan. He became head of the department of Neurosurgery at John Hopkins Hospital at age 33. Ben is a role model for all young people today. He is in great demand as a speaker. He tries to encourage young people whenever he can. He tells them to always "think big." He recognizes that unless teens get support from family and community they will not implement the changes in their lives necessary for success. Ben and his wife have started a national scholarship to assist young people who have talent but no financial resources.

Some issues from this novel will center around Ben's early childhood. What loss caused him to become so hostile? How did he show his grief? Was he treated more like the Ugly Duckling or the swan? Explain. Compare and contrast his relationship with his mother during his growing up years? What were factors that caused Carson to deal with anger and grief positively? How was he rewarded for this change of behavior? Carson discovered at Yale that he had not learned "to study" in high school. Do you identify with this statement? Explain. What are some of Carson's greatest achievements? What one question would you ask Carson if you were to meet him?

Illness often alienates young people from their family and friends. They often feel neglected, forgotten, and alone. Reading the novel, *In the Shadow of the Pali*, students will feel a sense of acceptance and belonging. In this novel, we find that twelve-year-old Liliha has just been told she has leprosy—a death sentence during the late 1800's. At the time, there was no medicine, no cure. Lepers could not live in the community with other people. They were condemned to live on an isolated island. Liliha is shipped to Molakai to live in a leper colony for the rest of her life. She is devastated at what she sees there. Liliha grieves the loss of her health. She shows extreme anger, which proves an asset in her survival. She had learned earlier from her uncle Malietoa's harsh words and hard slaps how to cope with cruel and inhumane conditions without crying. She blames him for her leprosy. In desperation, Liliha wants to hide the leprosy by covering up her body and wearing shoes—something she never wore. She equates the leper colony to a prison, since people are forced to live there against their own will, without adequate food,

clothing, and supervision. The lepers were living in a lawless society. Liliha feels betrayed and alienated. She has been taken from her family and community to live amongst strangers who are desperately trying to survive on insufficient rations and little or no shelter. Liliha meets Hana, a Christian woman, who teaches her about love and forgiveness. Liliha accepts her fate. She begins to build relationships with other lepers, especially with Manukekua, a boy her own age.

This is an extraordinary story that brings hope to the hopeless and peace to the downtrodden. There are social issues that emerge in this novel. Questions for this book will focus on society's responsibility for its citizens. Should every citizen be provided equal access to medical care? Is it humane to force a group of people to live in isolation as the lepers did? What is leprosy? Are there similar diseases today that may cause public concern? Is leprosy still an issue today? How could things have been better for Liliha? How may things be better today for young people with critical illnesses?

The student will begin the reading of his or her selected book. Reading notes, including conflicts and resolutions, will be kept in the Writing Journal as the book is being read. On alternate days, the student will discuss the portion of the book read independently. The teacher and student will read aloud on the following days. The student will use the Internet to research the author's background. The student will create a character map as a cumulative product. All character maps will be displayed at Community Services High School during a school activity such as Thanksgiving, Black History Month or *Cinco de Mayo*.

For the remainder of the two weeks in this teaching unit, the student will read a book of his or her choice using emerging skills for selecting good books. These books may be obtained from the Houston Public Library, the teacher's mini-library, or other available sources. I will use a rubric to assess the student on choosing a good book. He or she will give a book review, which will be tape-recorded and shared with other homebound students.

CONCLUSION

After completing this unit, students will feel their importance to society and will strive to complete their formal education. Some will read more, write and become published authors. Some will join teenage clubs and other school activities. They will use new tactics and strategies in coping with school, social, and medical problems that confront them daily.

I will assess this unit's effectiveness. Cumulative notes, student observations, assessments, and finished products will be used to evaluate the unit. I will seek to answer such questions as follows: What went well in the unit? What did not work as planned? Should the list of books be expanded? Should the length of the unit be changed? How

did the students feel about the unit? I would love to hear from anyone who may have used or viewed this unit. All suggestions are welcomed.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson I: Every Day Teenage Problems

Overview

Teenagers face many problems in their lives throughout the course of growing up. However, many of these young people deal with additional issues that are often harsh, unmerited and debilitating. Their self-esteem is compromised. They feel alienated and often have difficulty coping with home and school environments. Many of them exhibit behaviors such as aggressiveness, withdrawal, apathy, lack of concentration, and use of foul language.

Objective

To list ten problems common to teenagers today.

Materials

Student Writing Journal, Pen, Computer

Terms

Problems, Issues, Teenagers

Procedures

The student will develop a working definition of each term and record them in the *Vocabulary Bibliography of the Student Writing Journal*. The student will make a list of ten problems or issues facing teenagers today without the aid of references or teacher input. The student will keep this list of issues in his/her Student Writing Journal. This list will be used as part of a future lesson.

The student will give a brief oral summary of his list of social issues to the teacher. As an independent assignment, the student will discuss, in essay form, what or who he/she feels is responsible for the prevailing teenage social ills.

Activity 1

Define terms and place in your Vocabulary Bibliography.

Activity 2

Make a list of ten issues you feel are facing teenagers today.

Activity 3

Write an essay explaining the major causes of these teenage problems. What can be done to help correct or change the problems.

Lesson II: *The Ugly Duckling*

Overview

Many students feel devalued and ugly. This lesson will attempt to show them that values are not determined by looks, but by character. However, to the young person, acceptance is important. They will reflect on how much they are willing to sacrifice to become part of the “in” crowd.

Objectives

To analyze the dynamics of a community. To evaluate the complexity of behaviors. To make inferences.

Materials

The Ugly Duckling, a copy of the short story “Bernice Bobs Her Hair”, Student Writing Journal, Pen, Computer, the Duckling Envelope

Terms

Beauty, Ugly, Ugliness, Duckling, Swan, Despised, Persecuted, Fearsome, Gawky, Moat, Ostracize, Chivied, Runaway

Procedure

Discuss the following questions as a pre-reading activity.

1. What is beauty?
2. Is beauty an inner or an external quality?
3. How is it perceived?
4. Who determines beauty?
5. Does everyone possess some degree of beauty?
6. To what extent does beauty play in charting the course of one’s life?

Read aloud the picture book *The Ugly Duckling*. Show pictures to the students as the story is being read. Ask if the story is believable. Have the student elaborate on his or her response.

Activity 1

Create a story map chronicling the life of the Ugly Duckling.

Activity 2

Enumerate social ills perpetrated against the Duckling. If the Duckling were to go to court, would he have legal grounds for any of the injustices? Explain.

Activity 3

Which character in the story reflects you? Explain.

Activity 4

Have you or someone you know ever been treated like the Ugly Duckling? Have you ever felt like the Ugly Duckling? Talk about feelings and resolutions.

Activity 5

Separate the pictures in the Duckling Envelope into two categories—Beautiful and Not so Beautiful. List character traits you used to categorize the pictures. Discuss with teacher.

Lesson III: “Bernice Bobs Her Hair”

Overview

This lesson is a continuation of the Ugly Duckling Lesson. In this lesson a group of young adults cope with peer pressure. Decisions must be made. The result is the typical alignment with the “in” crowd.

Procedure

Give a copy of the story “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” a day before class. Discuss the story with the student using the questions as a guide. Have the student place answers to questions in his/her Writing Journal.

Activity 1

1. Compare and contrast “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” and *The Ugly Duckling*.
2. Who is the Ugly Duckling in this story? Support your answers with facts from the story.
3. Are you basically a member of the “in” crowd at school? Explain.
4. Would you change anything about how you are accepted at school by your peers? Elaborate.
5. Teenagers submit to peer pressure partly because of a fear of being different, just as Bernice submitted to Marjorie’s demands. List five fears that cause teens to yield to peer pressure. Rank them in order from 1 to 5 with 1 being the most influential and 5 being the least influential.
6. What would you have said to Bernice when she climbed into the barber’s chair?
7. In your opinion, what kind of person was Marjorie?
8. What do teenagers do today that is sociologically similar to bobbing the hair?”
9. Do you feel what Bernice did was justified? Explain.
10. Revenge was sweet in this case, but was it morally right? Explain.
11. How do you think Marjorie reacted when she discovered her hair had been bobbed?

Lesson IV: The “Chicken Soup” Story Book—An Evaluation

Procedure

Have each student select a story from the Chicken Soup Book. Let him/her read it aloud. Discuss the story. Include the characters, theme, conflict, and resolution during

discussion. Have the student write a first draft of an essay telling of some social issues in his/her life. Guidelines established by the Chicken Soup Foundation should be followed. Have the student submit the essay to the teacher for editing and revise the essay as outlined by the teacher. Have the student submit the essay again for further editing, then correct the paper and submit a final copy to the teacher. Essays from all students will be compiled as a unit called a storybook. The storybook will be named according to a title voted on by all participating students. The teacher will coordinate the activity for naming the storybook. Each student should consider submitting his story for publication to the Chicken Soup for Teenagers Foundation.

Lesson V: Top Five Teenage Issues—A Documentary

Overview

There are so many problems in our society today. They are growing exponentially. Looking at the most critical ones may give some feeling of relief to a field of hopelessness.

Objectives

To reach a consensus on the top five issues troubling teens today. To create a Communication Network for alienated homebound students assigned to the teacher.

Materials

Computer, Internet Services, Telephone, Social Issues Ranking Survey, Student Writing Journal.

Procedure

Give each student a Social Issues Ranking Chart. Have them follow the directions on the chart. The student should return the chart to the teacher for compilation. A final copy of the result should be given to each student.

Activity 1

Critique one of the five issues, showing how it compares or contrasts to issues in your life.

Activity 2

Create a piece of work to be displayed at the Homebound Office. You may consider a poem, a piece of art, a song, a video, or a Power Point presentation. Consult with the teacher for approval of your project choice.

Lesson VI

Overview

The unit culminates with this lesson, which involves both reading and writing. So far, the students have evaluated issues involving fighting wars, liberating a people, surviving in a

leper colony and in the Dust Bowl. They have seen how others have dealt with issues of loss, grief, and humiliation. This activity provides the student with an opportunity to produce a tangible product summarizing his or her relationship to the characters he/she has come to love or hate, or with whom he/she can identify.

Objectives

To improve vocabulary. To improve reading skill by reading aloud. To research an author's background. To share research.

Materials

A book from the pre-selected book list, Writing Journal, Pen, Computer.

Terms

The student will select or define two terms from each chapter and place them in the student journal.

Procedure

The student will select one of the books from the teacher's list. The student will read the book within the next two weeks. Some classes will be set aside for "read-aloud" sessions, and others for independent reading. The book will be discussed daily during class. Reading notes covering character issues, conflicts, and resolutions or action taken to address them should be written in the Writing Journal. The student should offer enough evidence to support his or her contentions.

Activity 1

The student will create a character map about the book he or she read.

Lesson VII

Overview

To become a nation of readers, our children need to read as much as possible. This assignment promotes reading. Students who read more perform better in all subject areas. The student will choose a book that interests him or her and depicts resolutions to some personal or social issue.

Objectives

To select good books for reading. To give book reviews. To communicate clearly.

Materials

The student's choice of a good book, Tape recorder, Writing Journal, Pen, Computer.

Procedure

The student will select a book of his or her choice and explain why it was his or her choice. The teacher will complete the Rubric on Selecting a Good Book on each student.

The student will place a copy of the completed Rubric in his or her Writing Journal. The book will be read independently. Within this two-week period, the student will research the author's background. All research and terms are to be kept in the Writing Journal. The student will study guidelines for giving a book review in preparation for his or her oral presentation. After the book is read, the student will tape-record his or her book review. The review may be enriched by the use of props, for example, music, art, and drama.

Activity 1

Select a "good book" for reading.

Activity 2

Give a tape-recorded book review on the selected book.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Andersen, Hans Christian. *The Ugly Duckling*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.

This version of the classic tale was translated from the book published in Odense, Denmark. The duckling identified with ugliness because everyone said he was ugly. He lost all self-esteem until he discovered his true self and beauty. He turned out to be a swan, and a beautiful one at that.

Barrie, J.M., *Peter Pan*. Morris Plains, NJ: The Unicorn Publishing House, 1990.

This book, illustrated by Greg Hilderbrandt, tells the classic story whose theme is that all children grow up except one—Peter Pan. It is a beautiful story of make-believe that has captivated both the young and the young at heart. It is a story that reminds each of us as grown-ups of how we once played on those major shores as children but can no longer return to them. We grew up.

Canfield, Jack, Hansen, Mark Victor, Kirberger, Kimberly. *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1997.

This is a book containing 101 stories of life, love and learning. This is an excellent source for teenagers. These stories tell how young teens cope with social concerns in their lives.

Carson, Ben M.D., *The Gifted Hands. The Ben Carson Story*. Michigan: Zondervan, 1996.

The Gifted Hands is a true story of Ben Carson's saga from an angry street fighter growing up in inner city Detroit to a master neurosurgeon giving children a second chance at life. His skilled hands separated the famous Binder Siamese twins who were joined at their heads. He is a role model for anyone who is fighting the odds.

Cindrich, Lisa. *In The Shadow Of The Pali*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2002.

This is a story of a Hawaiian leper colony. Liliha, a twelve-year-old girl, acquires leprosy while caring for a sick relative. She is forced to live with other lepers on an isolated island, which is more like a prison except there are no laws or supervision, and there is inadequate food and shelter. This novel captures a journey that teaches a young girl about love in spite of a heart that was bitter and angry.

Gordone, Charles. *No Place To Be Somebody, A Black Cowboy in Three Acts*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1969.

This three act play deals with some of the harsh realities of black-white and black-black relationships.

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. New York: Random House, Inc. 1993.

In *The Giver*, a utopian world exists in which everyone works for the common good of the community. Everything is controlled. There is no color, no sunshine. There are no feelings. At age twelve, every child is given an assignment for life. Jonas is given the assignment of “receiver in training.” He is to become the keeper of memories or The Giver.

The Mood of American Youth 1996. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, Inc., 1996.

This is a survey polling teenagers about their attitudes on issues affecting them.

Myers, Walter D. *Fallen Angels*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1988.

This is an easy to read book about the Vietnam War. It has great appeal for the young male audience because of the action, vivid scenes, and male dominant language. Rickie Perry is the protagonist in this story. As a seventeen-year-old recently graduated from high school, he enlists in the army to escape the streets, poverty, and to a degree, a dysfunctional family. Rickie soon becomes disillusioned with the war as he experiences so much loss.

Nixon, Joan Lowery. *On the Other Side of Dark*. New York: Random House., 1992.

Joan Lowery Nixon has given the young adults another easy to read murder mystery book. Young fans of Nixon will not be disappointed with this short novel as they grapple with who injured Stacy and murdered her mother. What will the murderer do now that Stacy has come out of a four-year-long coma?

Paterson, Katherine. *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1972.

This book is about a powerful friendship between two young fifth graders, Jess and Leslie. The friendship between Jess and Leslie grows as he shares with her the ways of county life, and Leslie introduces him to a world of magic and ceremony called Terabithia. An unforeseen tragedy leaves Jess alone and sad.

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History Of Multicultural America*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1993.

This novel examines our nation’s past from the perspective of the diverse minority groups that shaped America, as we know it today. Takaki used the rich mosaic culture created by these early settlers to examine the ultimate question of what it means to be an American.

Thompson, Constance, Rimmer-Mayorga, Debra. “Grief At School, A Guide for Caregivers.” Houston Independent School District, Counseling and Guidance Department. Houston, 1999-2000.

This guide is an excellent resource in helping children grieve the death of a loved one and cope with death-related crises at school. It outlines a school climate that is sensitive to the number of children experiencing loss regularly including family separation and change. This guide encourages the caregiver to trust that what he or she does is part of the bigger picture and everything is exactly as it needs to be.

Walter, Mildred Pitts. *Because We Are*. New York: Lothrop, Lee Shepard, 1983.
Young adults will relate to this novel quite well. It tells of a gifted young African American high school student who is struggling to survive in a largely white school. After a confrontation with a white teacher, Emma is forced to enroll in a mostly black school.

Filmography

Teacher-Parent Video. Jim Trelease and Reading Tree Productions, 1999. (97 minutes)
This version contains the entire film of Jim Trelease's standard lecture, including information for both parents and classroom teachers.

Internet Sites

Index of all Curriculum Units, 1978-2002. 2003. Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute.
2003. March 2003. <<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/indexes>>.

Trelease on Reading. June 2003. <<http://www.Trelease-on-reading.com>>.