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CI 5465

Unit Name: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mass Incarceration, and Student Activism

Name: Hannah Masterton

Class: English 9

Time: 85 minutes/Class Period

UNIT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Essential questions:

- **Week 1: Introduce *To Kill a Mockingbird***
 - What are the social purposes behind writing a novel focused on racism? How does the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* demonstrate injustice and connect to our society today?
- **Week 2: Introduce my social justice issue, Mass Incarceration in the United States**
 - In what ways can literature inspire social justice action? How can literature connect to activism in our lives?
- **Week 3: Themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird***
 - What does *To Kill a Mockingbird* express about compassion for others? How can we, as activists, continue to have compassion while striving to make change? Is it even possible to remain compassionate when it comes to issues that are important to us?
 - How does the novel critique racism, judgment, and injustice? How are these issues still prevalent in our society today?
- **Week 4: Personal Exploration**
 - What does it mean to be human? How do we express our humanity?
 - How can we express our humanity in ways that benefit others and the world we live in?
 - What does it mean to have a voice? How can we use our voice to make change?
- **Week 5: Personal Activism**
 - What issues are we passionate about as human beings?
 - How will we *choose* to express our humanity and make change in the world?

Enduring Understandings:

- **Week 1:**
 - Students will discuss the complexities of racism and how it is portrayed in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They will make connections to the racism and injustice in the novel to our world today. Students will have empathy for the perspectives and experiences of different people.
 - Students will begin to understand the purpose and themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, including family, compassion, injustice and inequality, and “coming to age.”
- **Week 2:**
 - Students will examine mass incarceration in the United States, looking at statistics and data from various sources. They will connect the real world injustice of wrongful incarceration to *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
 - As students read, they will continue to make connections to the real world. They will consider and discuss how literature (even literature from the past) mirrors real world issues and injustices.
- **Week 3:**

- Students will analyze one of the main themes in the novel: Compassion. Students will both analyze and potentially critique this idea while making connections to current issues. While there is no “right” or “wrong” answer, students will think about how compassion connects to social justice issues and activism of today, and if there is always a place for compassion.
- Students will continue to look at real world accounts of racism, discrimination, and injustice. They will learn more about issues they may have not considered (due to privilege, social status, and/or upbringing).
- **Week 4:**
 - Students will explore themselves and their own identities. Students will consider the many ways people can make change and become a part of activism for the better good.
 - Students will consider their place in society and the potential privilege they do or do not have. Students will connect this privilege to the idea of “voice” - that many people are not allowed to voice, express, and make change in the ways that many of us are.
 - Students will begin to think of ways to make change in their communities or to spread awareness about a cause.
- **Week 5:**
 - Students will choose a cause/issue in our community that is important to them. They will make a plan of activism to address this issue.
 - Students will explore concrete ways to make change and fight against injustice.

Standards/Daily Objectives:

- **Standard 9.5.1.1:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **Standard 9.5.2.2:** Determine a central idea of the text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **Standard 9.5.6.6:** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.
- **Standard 9.7.3.3:** Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
 - Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of events.
 - Use literary and narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, rhythm, repetition, rhyme, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
 - Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
 - Use precise words and phrases, telling details, figurative and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experience, events, setting, and/or characters.
 - Provide a conclusion (when appropriate to the genre) that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative or creative text.
- **Standard 9.7.4.4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **Standard 9.9.1.1:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on *grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues*, including those by and about Minnesota American Indians, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:

What should student know *before* beginning this unit? What have we already covered in previous units?

- Students have completed research on selected individual topics.
 - Students understand how to find academic and multimodal resources, and incorporate these resources into their assignments (in the form of essays, research papers, and presentations).
- Students have participated in several discussion formats in the classroom, and understand the norms associated with them:
 - Socratic Seminar
 - Shared Inquiry Discussion
 - Small Groups
 - “Traditional” Whole Class Discussion
 - Writing and Revising Groups
- Students have been introduced to the topic of injustice through different works of literature and examples from current media resources.

PROCEDURES (Student Learning Activities, Time Allotment, Teacher Instruction and Action During Learning, Transitions between Activities, Purpose for Each Activity)

Week 1: Introduce *To Kill a Mockingbird*

- **Day 1:** I will introduce the background of the novel: time period, social and political climate of the time. For instance, one question we will discuss is the following: What is the significance of the novel taking place in the 1930s? What important events were happening during this time in the United States?
 - This day will be discussion-based. I will have slides on the board, but students will discuss about the significance of the novel's background. My hope is that students will be able to build upon discussion skills they have already acquired in class (through exercises such as Shared Inquiry Discussion). With this in mind, it is my goal for students to lead the discussion.
 - During this discussion, I will also bring up the racially discriminatory language in the novel. The fact that the N-word is used frequently in the novel is a topic of much debate. I believe it's important to be transparent with students about these issues.
 - As an educator, it's my job to think of all students in the room, so I will tell students that when we read the novel aloud, we will not say the actual slur. Students can replace it with N-word. With this rule in mind, I hope to create a safe, respectful space.
 - I will let students know that if they have any issues with what I said, or the rule I placed, that they can speak with me after class.
 - After discussing the background of the novel, we will read the first two chapters of the novel aloud in class. I will start by reading the first few pages and will ask for volunteers to read sections as we go. Nobody is required to read aloud. If there is an especially long silence without volunteers, I will start reading again.
 - After reading, I will ask the following: "What were your initial reactions to the novel? What do you think of the characters so far? What do you think is going on?"
 - I hope to get students to just talk about the novel and express what they think it going on, or what is important.
 - **Homework:**
 - For homework, I will pass out a "reading bookmark." This "bookmark" has room for students to write important quotations, important ideas, page numbers, and thoughts about what they're reading. Essentially, this is to help students to annotate and take notes as they read.
 - Students should be used to these bookmarks from previous units in this course. These bookmarks are not to be graded, but to help students remember important points to bring up during discussions in class.
 - Using these bookmarks, students will read the next two chapters of the novel (chapter 3 and 4). This should be read before class tomorrow.
 - **Day 2-5:** The remainder of the week will be spent discussing the novel. Each day students will read at least one chapter during class and two chapters for homework. By the end of this week, students will have finished Part One of the novel (through page 112), and discussed the major themes.
 - On the second day of this unit, I will have big posters around the room with different names and phrases on them. The posters will include (at least) the following:
 - Scout, Jem, Atticus, Calpurnia, Boo Radley.
 - Family, Women/Girls, Race, Education, Youth, Fear.
 - As we move forward with the unit, I will add new posters to the walls as new ideas arise in the novel.
 - At the beginning of each class, students will walk around the room with markers and add ideas or opinions to each poster. For example, on the Scout poster, students might write words to describe her, what she looks like, what she acts like, what they think of her character; or they can write things that she did or said. The idea is to encourage students to think about these characters and themes deeply. By having the posters around the room everyday, it will hopefully remind students about the most important elements of the novel.

Week 2: Introduce my Social Justice Issue: Mass Incarceration in the United States

- **Day 1:** Since we paid close attention to the injustices in the novel last week, this week will be focused on concrete examples of injustices in the real world today. My chosen justice - Mass Incarceration - will be discussed through research done in and about the United States. Because of this, my research and presentation will only be an example of an important social justice topic. Students themselves may decide to choose a topic more relevant to them living in Venezuela.
 - Opening Statistic: While the United States represents only 4.4% of the world population, the country's prisons hold 22% of the world's prisoners.
 - Free Write: What is your first thought after reading this statistic? How does it make you feel? Are you surprised or not? What do you think this statistic says about the United States as a country?
 - Students will respond to the prompt for ten minutes and then pair-share with a student across the room from them. This will move into a whole class discussion on the topic. As we discuss as a class, I will explain why I think this issue is important - that it's a continuing injustice that has continued to exist throughout my country's history - and that it connects directly to the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. With this connection in mind, I will refer back to questions we asked last week: What is the purpose behind creating a novel that highlights injustice and racism in our world? How can these novels affect others?
 - For me, I will say that this novel inspired me to think more about the U.S. Justice System today and to take action to create change. This idea will eventually lead into students choosing their own issue and taking action.
 - For the last half of class, we will watch the first 45 minutes of the documentary "13th," which discusses race, (in)justice, and incarceration in the United States, and the discrimination against people of color.
 - Before class tomorrow, students should write a brief reflection on their reaction to the documentary and its connection to the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
- **Day 2:** Since students now have a general understanding of the injustices of the U.S. Justice System, they will now have the opportunity to ask an expert about the realities of this injustice. My Aunt Jen Reith works in the prisons of Nevada as the Director of Mental Health for the Department of Corrections of Nevada (that's a mouthful) meaning she works with mentally ill patients who have been arrested. She's been passionately working for the last few years to change the horrible practices and "treatment" of patients in prisons.
 - At the beginning of class, I will tell students about my aunt and the work she does. I will give some details about where she lives, what she does, and what she's trying to do. Students will then have ten minutes to write down at least three questions they'd like to ask her.
 - After students have written down their questions, we will Skype her for (at least) thirty minutes. My aunt will give some descriptions about what she does and the injustice she sees and students will then have time to ask her their questions. As students listen to her, they should be taking notes.
 - This will be an opportunity for students to learn more about this topic from an expert, and also hopefully inspire them to make change in the community.
- **Day 3-5:** These days will be a combination of discussing the novel and relating it to real events. A few real topics we will touch on:
 - Emmett Till - Past, Present and Future - Connect to the recent confession of the woman who accused him.
 - The Scottsboro Boys
 - The Rise of For-Profit Prisons
 - We will still be reading the novel in class and for homework. By the end of this week, students should have read through Chapter 22 (page 217).

Week 3: Themes in our Lives

- **Day 1:** This week we will be focusing in on the novel closely. We will be exploring themes in the novel. Like we did in the first week, each day students will add new thoughts to the various character, theme, and idea posters around the room. As new characters or ideas/themes emerge in the novel, I will add those new posters to the walls.

- After discussing the new ideas on the posters in the beginning of class, we will build upon what we discussed last week. Students will break up into small groups of three to four. Each group will have a theme to tackle (such as “women,” “race,” “family,” or “compassion,” etc.). Each group will take their theme and connect it to their daily lives. If a group has the theme “women,” for example, they might write about how women have fewer opportunities or experience prejudice. They could connect this theme to real, big events like controversies, and/or they could connect it to their personal experiences and lives. The goal here is to spark students’ interests in these topics and see how these themes surround them every day.
 - Each group will present their ideas to the class as their peers take notes.
 - After students have presented, students will brainstorm and reflect upon the themes that are most important to them as human beings. Students will have time to free-write on one of the themes (or a theme that they think it important that hasn’t been covered in class). They will write about why that theme is significant to them and how it may affect their real lives.
 - We will continue to reflect and build upon this next week.
- **Day 2-5:** The remainder of the lessons will be focused on analyzing and discussing the text. As we move through the book, we will read chunks of it aloud in class and discuss different aspects of it. At the end of each lesson during these days, we will watch short clips from the movie of the sections we just finished reading. After watching these clips, we will compare them to the text.
 - Students will continue thinking about their chosen topic (or topics) during this week. There will be opportunities to free-write and reflect more on their ideas.
 - By end of this week, students will have finished reading the novel.

Week 4: Personal Exploration

- **Day 1-5:** This week will be about exploring a personal social justice topic. In the previous weeks, I modeled my chosen topic - Mass Incarceration - and showed students the different issues surrounding that topic in the United States and different possible methods of activism. Now students will have a chance to think about their own social justice issue.
 - There will be several free-write and brainstorming activities where students will think about issues that are most important to them.
 - On Friday, several volunteers from the community will come in and speak to the students about their personal activism. As volunteers speak, students will take notes and reflect upon how these modes of activism may or may not connect to their personal interests.
 - By the end of the week, students should have officially chosen their topic of activism and their project idea.

Week 5: Personal Activism

- This week is dedicated to *doing* the project.
 - The project requirements are listed below.

Summative Assessment:

Project Goals:

To help students...

- Discover what they care about and find effective ways to contribute to their community and world;
- Move beyond where they are now as writers, readers and critical thinkers;
- Understand the creation of a powerful message as a process that involves thinking, drafting, revising, editing, and collaboration;
- Develop and practice research skills that may be applied to academic and real world settings
- Practice divergent and creative thinking, explore curiosity and use questions to shape research practices;

- Engage as active participants in their own learning;
- Investigate the importance of civic engagement creating positive social change.
- Access and educate or advocate about their passion to an authentic audience in the world.

For this project, students will...

1. Select an issue that is important to them.
2. Conduct research online, in books, and out in the community.
3. Identify an existing individual, group, or organization already working on this issue.
4. Take action. Find a way to make a difference in the community.

Activism Options:

1. Volunteer with an Existing Project or Organization

- (Participate in a community clean-up, volunteer at an animal shelter, teach technology to the elderly, run in a charity race)

Or...

2. Create a Project of your Own!

- (Organize and host a community clean-up, host a screening of a documentary film, organize a day of action, conduct a food drive)
- Students must find an authentic audience for a personal project. Who are you trying to reach?

Unit Plan Reflection:

I wanted to create this unit because I feel I have been a perpetrator of passiveness in the classroom and my life. As educators (and people), it's "easy" to learn about all the bad things in the world - to talk about how horrible the justice system is; or racism, sexism, discrimination, abuse, and so on. While we torture ourselves by learning about the injustices of the world, we often do nothing to stop them. Of course, education is the *first* step in making a difference. By educating ourselves and others, we are bringing these issues and their importance to light. However, if we bring these issues to light but continue to do nothing, then what is the point? I have found myself feeling frustrated, ashamed, and helpless.

As I reflected on these negative emotions, I thought back to my student teaching experience last year when I taught the young adult novel *Feed* by M.T. Anderson and discussed all the societal realities critiqued in

the novel. We discussed how the environment was dying, how technology was taking over people and destroying their relationships, how the education system was deteriorating...but we never discussed what to do about it. Looking back, I imagine that some of my students might have been incredibly frustrated. I felt this sense of frustration in many of my master's courses (Sorry, Lee), because I often felt I wasn't learning practical skills. Now, I think I might have passed this frustration onto my own students.

My hope is that by modeling activism with my own example of Mass Incarceration as well as examples from other members of the community that students will become inspired to explore activism in their own way. I hope to give my students a sense of agency and independence. I hope that they will feel empowered to make change in the world and *act*.

While I set up this unit to be five weeks long, I understand that it will likely take much longer than that. I realize that reading an entire novel, modeling activism, *and* completing a project in the community will take some time, especially for ninth grade students. When I look over this unit in the future, I want to add exercises in each week to help students prepare for the final project. That way, they will be thinking about their project and activism the whole time and won't be flustered during the last couple of weeks. I plan to do this through writing exercises and prompt, or discussions with their peers. I also want to provide more examples of activism throughout the first few weeks so that students are exposed to a variety of examples.