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Reading The Grapes of Wrath in 2 hours (and nine minutes)

Purpose:

A study of John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, using excerpts from the book and the complete 1940 movie. This unit is designed to augment and run concurrently with a 4-week unit on Cannery Row.

Description:

Second semester of English III, American Literature is a contextual study of Modernism and Post Modernism, intended to be interdisciplinary with US History. The semester begins with lectures and visual presentations on the historical context, roots and causes, and literary characteristics and cultural landmarks of the early 20th century Modernist movement. The units on Cannery Row and Grapes of Wrath are introduced with a lecture on John Steinbeck's life and work, and run concurrently. Another lecture introduces the concept of the intercalary chapters and presents themes and motifs unique to Steinbeck's work.

For the duration of the four-week calendar, students have a strict reading schedule for Cannery Row; reading assignments, discussions, and quizzes occur on MTF (regular-schedule days of 45 minute class periods), and Grapes of Wrath discussions and viewings are on the weekly block day (90 minute block). Further contextual groundwork will be covered each week according to this schedule.

Block day classes devoted to "Grapes of Wrath" will be organized around 4 basic activities, in this order:

- A. Introductory material (youtube clips, articles, audio clips, and segments from Ken Burns' DustBowl documentary)
- B. Viewing of the movie "The Grapes of Wrath" – 4 sessions of 30+ m. (2:09:00)
- C. Listening segment: reading of an intercalary chapter from The Grapes of Wrath or chosen passage that is a timely coordinate. Use images with this activity – photography & art.
- D. Journaling to a prompt

Schedule

Pre-Teach (prior to Week One, introduced in the context of the *Cannery Row* unit.)

Lecture: Modernism

Lecture: Social Realism & Social Consciousness

Lecture: John Steinbeck (includes themes and motifs) – **Appendix A**

Lecture: Intercalary chapters – **Appendix B**

Week One

A. Introductory materials

- NPR audio, 6:52, “The Grapes of Wrath is 75, but its depictions of poverty are timeless”
<https://www.npr.org/2014/04/14/301833421/grapes-of-wrath-is-75-but-its-depictions-of-poverty-are-timeless>
- ppt The Dust Bowl and Depression timeline – **Appendix C**
- “The Plow that Broke the Plains,” Pare Lorenz (use 0:42-2:30)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQCwhjWNcH8>
- Dust Bowl Disaster slide show (4:03)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csnY0Tndj8>

B. “The Grapes of Wrath” 0-:30

C. Listening

- Intercalary Chapter 5 on banks and land ownership, farming practices and tractors, p. 40-47. Use photographic images.
- From Cannery Row, the frog capture, p. 85-86.

D. Journaling

What is an environmental event (possibly local) you have observed in your lifetime (whether or not you have been personally affected)? What were the causes? Effects? Did you observe any secondary and/or residual effects, or chains of effects? (Examples: floods, hurricanes, wildfires, drought, tornadoes, red tides, etc.)

Theatre Option: Act out the tractor segment.

Week Two

A. Introductory materials

- Introduction to Ken Burns’ “The Dust Bowl” (5:09)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guTek7ipD4U>

B. “The Grapes of Wrath” :30-1:00

C. Listening

- Intercalary chapter 11 on vacant houses (148-50). Use photographic images & deconstruct.

D. Journaling

Recall a situation of financial insecurity, if not your own or your family’s, one you observed, even in a book or in the news on a national scale. (bankruptcy, eviction, loss of job, etc.) How did you perceive the chain of events that led up to this situation at the time? How do you perceive it now?

Week Three:

A. Introductory Materials

- Woody Guthrie, Talkin' Dustbowl Blues (2:39)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkAxuqrVNBM>
- Woody Guthrie, Dust Pneumonia Blues
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_6GhaA0AXg
- Ken Burns' "The Dust Bowl" (section on government involvement, 10 m)

B. "The Grapes of Wrath" 1:00-1:30

C: Listening

- "Tom Collins" from America and Americans,
- Chapter 17 (p 249-253), intercalary chapter on world-building

D: Journaling

What are the things one does to build one's own personal community? You may discuss this from your own personal experience and perspective, or in a more abstract and general manner. Or both. Consider the stages an informal community goes through from Chapter 17 (... "leaders emerged, then laws were made, then codes came into being..." "...and with the laws the punishments...") What equivalents do you see in your own process of community building?

What are the desired benefits of this world-building? We are all members of more than one community, so you have choices. You may consider your experience joining a new sports team, or going to camp in the summer, or moving schools, or entering St. Michael's as a freshman.

Week Four:

A. Introductory materials

- Ken Burns' "The Dust Bowl" (10 m. section)

B. "The Grapes of Wrath", 1:30-2:09

C: Listening

- The growing season from The Grapes of Wrath, Chapter 25, p. 445-449
- "Starvation Under the Orange Trees" from "The Harvest Gypsies" in America and Americans, (p. 83)

D: Journaling

Who is a migrant/immigrant/emigrant/refugee? (Develop this idea. If you have to look up these terms, do so. What personal experience do you have with any of these concepts? Think especially of parents and grandparents – you might have to ask someone about their experiences.)

Final Essay, in-class timed writing:

Reading from Chapter 3 (p. 19-21)

Explain the metaphors you find in this chapter of the turtle, using the concept of vehicle and tenor.

Appendix A: ppt John Steinbeck

Appendix B: ppt Intercalary Chapters

Appendix C: ppt The Dustbowl and Depression Timeline