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EDTL 7100

Unit Development- Statement of Purpose

*Statement of Purpose:*

Between covering the multitude of standards and preparing students for state-mandated, high-stakes tests, teachers can sometimes omit a variety of activities to save time and to streamline lessons. As our world and workforce rapidly change, students need a contextualized learning environment where they can solve real-life problems, complete activities they can connect with, and use technology rather than sit at a desk and listen to a lecture. Students need to be challenged, encouraged to think critically, and be shown that English is important and needed for their futures and for the roles they will play in society. Reading and writing need to be made a required skill, rather than chores to complete. Students need to be given multiple opportunities to connect and interact with the material in an enriching, safe environment. Currently, the Shakespeare units being implemented are not being connected to students’ lives and this unit strives to correct that problem. This proposed curriculum map addresses these needs for a contextualized learning environment during the study of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet.*

The purpose of this ninth grade unit is to gain a greater understanding of William Shakespeare as an author, Elizabethan England as a culture, Shakespearean language, and the play while engaging in a variety of activities within a contextualized learning environment. Too many times, students are turned off from Shakespeare because of the difficult language and the strange customs and social life of the 15th century. According to Dr. Lund from Oxford University, it is the teacher’s responsibility to acclimate students to certain ideas before they read the play (Lund, 2005). Introducing certain concepts before reading will help students better understand the language and the different actions that happen within the text. Dr. Lund is an advocate for teachers to provide different lessons and activities beyond reading the play with their students, such as connecting with the characters, analyzing behavior, and applying the situations to current society. This can help students see the importance of a play hundreds of years old (Lund, 2005). Properly sequenced, Shakespeare units can be fun and engaging. The proposed curriculum map incorporates the aspects of language, culture, the author, and the play in a way that the play becomes more sensible. The aspects build in rigor and intensity, and flow from easiest to the most difficult.

This unit is very valuable because it gives students a greater appreciation of classical literature and allows them to see the character types in real life. According to Dr. Lund, “**Shakespeare was an outstanding observer and communicator of human character. Many of his characters have become immortal in the sense that they capture types which are universal. Students today continue to identify with them and their struggles. There is much profit to be gained from comparing and contrasting Shakespeare's characters with each other, and from learning the reasons for their strengths and weaknesses,” (Lund, 2005). Dr. Lund points out that Shakespeare’s character types still exist in stories today and in real life. Examining these characters gives students a greater and deeper insight to human behavior. Beyond relating to and examining the character types, students will also become more aware of the power of figurative language, dramatic devices, and the importance of morals, such as teamwork, honesty, and looking beyond a person’s flaws. Those skills will help students throughout school and college, as well as help prepare them for life. Learning good character traits will make them better people and citizens, and learning figurative langauge will prepare them for future literature classes, as well as make them stronger writers.**

The concepts and activities incoporated into this new unit will help students become more well-rounded and have a broader sense of knowledge regarding culture, language, and customs. There are so many references to Shakespeare and to *Romeo and Juliet* in modern society; learning the play will help students pick out and understand those references. Learning drama and Shakespeare broadens ones horizons, making a person more sensitive and appreciative of other artistic forms (McDougal Littell, 2000). While students might not enjoy painting, writing, building, or other artistic mediums, the students can appreciate the hardwork and effort because they have experienced Shakespeare in class. This unit is different from most Shakespearean units; the focus is on the culture and language as well as the play. The play cannot be understood if separated from the two, so it is important that students learn all parts and aspects of Shakespeare.

In addition, the different projects and activities done with this contextualized Shakespeare unit will make students more effective citizens by enforcing real world writing skills, responsibility, timliness, respect for others, and teamwork. Having more opportunities to strengthen values that are appreciated and needed in society will cement these values with the student. Carolyn Starkey maintains that reading Shakespeare can help students write for the real world by writing letters between characters and writing resumes for certain characters. Opportunities for real world learning and writing can be integrated even in classical literary texts (Starkey, 1994). Students can use the play as a way to practice practical writing they will use over and over again, instead of seeing the play as a burden. Learning how to write a proper letter and resume will make students stronger candidates for jobs and make them more marketable.

Overall, the ninth grade English course is designed to provide students with a deeper knowledge of the English language, strengthen the concepts that have been previously taught, and to expose students to new topics and ideas through critical thinking. This contextualized unit will provide students with skills needed for college and the workforce, as well as society. The study of Shakespeare aides in the skills students will need throughout school and beyond to make them effective students and citizens, while making the content enjoyable, real, and relevent to the twenty-first century.

References:

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