THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA
OFFICE OF ACADEMIC SUPPORTS

Unit Plan: The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri	
Grade	11
Duration	Approximately 8 weeks
Edition (ISBN)	978-0-358-06268-4

Unit Overview

High level overview of the text at the core

The novel begins in Cambridge, Massachussetts in 1968 with the experiences of Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli, who recently immigrated to the United States from their native India. Struggling to assimilate to the Western culture, *The Namesake* explores two generations of the Ganguli family. The novel follows Ashima and Ashoke, and the experience of their son, Gogol, and his sister Sonia as they come of age in the United States. The novel highlights the shared bond between Sonia and Gogol as native born Americans, as well as their prominent Indian culture experienced at home, with all its highlights and challenges. The Namesake explores biculturalism, identity, and the universal quest for love and acceptance. Ultimately, Gogol first resists and then grows to understand his culture, family and establish his identity.

Teachers can view the Resources for Teaching South Asian Literature and South Asian History document for additional resources throughout the unit and school year.

Big Ideas

Conceptual understandings from the unit

- Rather than being static or stable, the roles of parent and child can be fluid as individuals adapt and grow; family can be created through community as well as birth and roles within a family can also change.
- Choosing a new name (for oneself or for another person) can be a revolutionary act, a way to claim or celebrate a new self and identity.
- The feeling of being an “outsider” in American culture is far more widespread than just cultural differences. One can feel like an outsider of society, community, and other areas of life for a multitude of reasons.
- The internal struggle of biculturalism and the impact of popular culture on the individual is an ever-changing process.
- Family bonds ultimately supersede external factors, even when there is conflict involved.
- The quest for love and other emotions are uniquely relative and universal to the human experience, regardless of culture.

Essential Questions

Questions driving the Big Ideas

- How do our names relate to our identities?
- How can a family’s beliefs and customs support/hinder exploration of personal identity?

- How is identity formed?
- Is it possible to assimilate two cultures without conflict?
- What does it mean to grow up?
- How does biculturalism shape our identity?
- What is the impact of popular culture on the individual?
- How is the quest for love reflected in the human experience?
- How important are family bonds in helping us discover who we truly are?

Culminating Task

Assessment that demonstrates mastery of unit content

For the Narrative Assessment, students will have three options to demonstrate their mastery and creative writing skills:

1) **Novel Continuation** → Students will write a short story that details how they imagine Gogol's life after the end of the novel.
2) **Alternate Character Narrative** → Students will imagine they are another character in the text and recreate a scene from the other character's perspective.
3) **Original Narrative** → This assessment will be more of a "big push" for students. For the original narrative assessment, students will choose an event or issue reflective of a character grappling with issues of identity, sense of home, and/or coming of age. The narrative should demonstrate a mixture of elements and key concepts representative of the unit's goals.

Key Background Knowledge

Core knowledge that students will build throughout this unit

Contextual Knowledge

- Brief history of Indian
- Basic beliefs of Hinduism
- Indian and Bengali customs
- Gender roles
- Bengali culture
- Western assimilation
- Diaspora
- First/Second generation
- Caste systems
- Social realities of Indian Americans
- Arranged marriages
- General understanding of Nikolai Gogol

Literary Knowledge

- The vocabulary of poetry (e.g., stanza, line, speaker)
- Poetic devices (e.g., alliteration, enjambment, rhyme)

- First-person narration (e.g., tone, irony, reliability)
    - Limited vs. omniscient
- Symbolism
- Analysis and citing relevant textual evidence to reinforce themes
- Direct and Indirect Characterization
    - Character motivation
- Imagery
- Figurative language
- Allusions
- Conflict (Internal, External)
- RAFT writing format
- Socratic seminar norms and procedures
- Interior monologue
- Connotation and denotation

Historically Responsive Literacy Framework

Dr. Gholdy Muhammad's Five Learning Pursuits

Identity

Students will…

- Think about their own identities and the factors that are attributed to the person they are today.
- Reflect on both positive experiences and adversities that shaped their individual identity.

Skills

Students will…

- Comprehend a grade-appropriate piece of text.
- Use direct and indirect characterization to analyze the evolution of characters in The Namesake.
- Identify and Analyze important themes, symbols, and motifs represented in the Namesake.
- Make a text-to-self connection in order to reflect on their own identity.
- Refine and produce a piece of narrative writing, reflecting on their own personal identities.

Intellect

Students will…

- Delve deeper into the concept of identity by examining the evolution of the characters throughout the novel.
- Utilize their understanding of the novel to produce a narrative piece using standard conventions and grammar reflecting on their own identity.

Criticality

Students will…

- consider the themes of biculturalism, identity and universal emotions (love, hate, jealousy etc) in order to develop a deeper understanding of personal identity.
- Reflect on the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to evolution of a person's identity.

- Analyze the challenges that stem from biculturalism and assimilation to Western culture.

Joy
Students will…

- Recognize themselves in the triumphs and challenges experienced by the Ganguli family
- Reflect on their own identities and develop a sense of pride for their own culture and backgrounds.
- Write a narrative piece celebrating their own identity.

Connections to Core Instructional Resources

Click HERE

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Alignment between unit content and SEL goals

This unit seeks to explore the ideas of identity, culture, and the universal feelings of love, rejection and loss. This unit is designed to address the Casel Framework. The elements of the "Casel Five" explored in this unit are:

1. Self Awareness The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
2. Social Awareness:The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
3. Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups

Skill Objectives: Students will learn to…

- express understanding of those who hold different opinions
- express empathy for othersrespect others and oppose stereotyping, prejudice and oppression
- advocate for the rights of others and contribute to the common good

Career Education and Work (CEW) Connection

13.1.11 Career Awareness and Preparation

B. Analyze career options based on personal interests, abilities, aptitudes, achievements, and goals

Naviance Task

AchieveWorks Personality Assessment- *Students will identify their personality type by choosing scenarios that best represent how they behave in real life. This assessment will help students understand others, understand themselves as well as clarify their career options.*

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Unit Development
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Unit Supports					
English Language Development (ELD)	**Multi Level Student Supports (MTSS)**	**Special Education**	**Career Work and Education/Naviance**	**Social Emotional Learning**	**ELA Content**
Amelia Schunder and Donna Sharer	LaTasha Stewart	Keren Tal and Jenn White	Cathey White	Jaimie L. Piotrowicz	Alison McMonagle