

Final Critical Curation Project

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EDTL3933: Reading & Teaching Adolescent Literature

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Using *Juliet Takes a Breath* by Gabby Rivera as an anchor text, the curation project is focused on the topic of love and understanding complexities, difficulties, and deeper analysis of relationships. This is geared towards high school seniors or freshmen college students. Using a variety of materials, students will explore the concept of love. Students will be pushed to critically analyze relationships through a variety of mediums so they are potentially better prepared to navigate relationships in the real world. Students explore the concept of love but dive deeper into subcategories such as warning signs, familial influence, advocating for oneself, jumping in underprepared, and more.

There are many reasons why this topic is important for students as they mature and engage in romantic relationships. Many times students will get into serious relationships without stepping back and seeing the full picture or what they are getting into. Perhaps they don't completely know this partner, yet, they may make choices that put them in danger and alienate themselves from friends and family. While many texts can be seen as love stories- one of the most famous being the canonical *Romeo and Juliet*- when one looks closer there are many warning signs that would have prevented tragedy. What may seem like love where someone is willing to do anything to show their loyalty and passion for their partner, infatuation and false claims of love at first sight can put people in danger. This unit will have real world application as seniors in high school or early college students, begin navigating more serious romantic relationships.

The essential questions to use with this unit are: 1. What defines love? What are the different types of love: infatuation, true love, familial love, love at first sight, etc.? 2. How do characters in different mediums navigate the complexities of love, and what can one learn from their experiences? 3. What are the potential dangers associated with love and how can one look out for them? 4. How do societal norms and expectations influence a person's understanding and experience of love?

Supplemental Texts: (6-8, varied types)

1. Juliet Take a Breath by Gabby Rivera

This novel follows Juliet as she explores her sexual identity and takes a summer internship to Oregon to meet her idol who gets in a relationship with, but things do not work out as perfect as she first

believes. Lesbianism and polyamory are explored which will compliment the heterosexual relationships mostly taught in texts. Readers will also explore Juliet and Harlow's relationship as they explore similarities as they discuss sexuality and feminism. However, the relationship faces hurdles as they have to navigate their racial identities and allyship.

2. "Eraser Tattoo" by Jason Reynolds

This short story is available on CommonLit 360 or available in the novel *Fresh Ink*. It describes two teenagers in love, Dante and Shay, who are saying goodbye as their neighborhood becomes gentrified and the new homeowners are physically pushing them out of the way to move in. Shay takes an eraser and burns it into Dante's arm so he remembers her. The story seems romantic until students realize Shay is going to physically burn her initial onto Dante's arm which is an extremely unhealthy way to deal with the ending of a relationship; equally bad is that Dante allows the physical abuse to occur without comprehending how negatively this relationship is on him personally.

3. Song Lyrics- various

Love songs may seem one way on first listen, but upon further examination they may not be as romantic as they seem. For example, The Police's "Every Breathe You Take" and Blondie's "One Way or Another " may sound romantic or catchy but they both have language about stalking and control. Hinder's "Lips of an Angel "seems sweet until the lyrics reveal the male is talking to his angel on the phone while laying next to his current girlfriend. In selected songs, students can listen to the music and describe how it seems at first- romantic, loving, repetitive- and then look closer, doing a line by line analysis of what the lyrics actually mean. This will allow students to differentiate between first impressions and reality as well as appearance and reality in relationships.

4. *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare

This film is a modern retelling of the classic *Romeo and Juliet* where the Montague and Capulet families are feuding when their respective children fall in love, go against their families, and end up killing themselves. Upon first reading, there are some parts of the story (in film and print) that seem very romantic. The famous phrases of "star-crossed lovers," wanting to be the glove on Juliet's hand to touch

her face, and the passionate speeches they each give describing how their world is empty without the other may seem very romantic. However, upon closer examination the two speak very little, don't know each other at all, Romeo was just making suicidal comments about not being able to be with a different girl named Rosaline, and the lengths the two go to to deceive their families and ultimately end up dying are easily after knowing each other for 24 hours is comical.

5. Anti-love Poetry by Poetry Foundation

The anti-love poetry collection compiled by the Poetry Foundation will give students an opportunity to explore different poems; this collection has a variety of uses. "December" by Michael Miller and "Time does not bring relief; you all have lied" by Edna St. Vincent Millay are relatively simple poems about loss of a romantic partner, yet some are more complex such as "The Breather" by Billy Collins where one partner believes they are in the relationship equally only to realize the other person is not invested. Students can start with more traditional poems about love and loss, but their view of love can be challenged by some of the more atypical poems that will make them wonder if the relationship and response to the aftermath of the relationship are healthy or not. Using the essential questions for the unit, students can summarize and discuss how love and its sub-themes are present in poetry. Due to the variety of poems students may pick from, this resource may work best at the beginning of the unit when students are beginning to form their ideas and definitions of love and its problems. Or, teachers may want to focus the poems and do the poem selection to address a specific topic.

6. "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry

This short story is available on CommonLit 360 or in the public domain in places like Project Gutenberg. This classic short story features a heterosexual white couple but introduces the element of poverty: they both sell or trade what little they have to make the other happy. Money can be a difficult topic for couples to navigate and socio-economic status will impact the types of problems couples may have. While Jim and Della's relationship seems more healthy and the couple more grounded, their poverty is a challenge yet has a happy ending, in this instance. Also the text introduces some other topics to explore such as how physical beauty can impact love: Della sacrifices her beauty, selling her hair, to buy

Jim a gift but the comments about her worth contingent upon her physical beauty, a topic worth exploring with students.

7. *Love Murder* by Pray and Cassette

Pray and Cassette discuss on their podcast true crime stories of love and its many problems, including murder. They describe their show as “about seemingly normal people driven to terrible madness by passion and rage.” The podcast has 295 episodes and is accessible through their own website, apple podcast, or on spotify, and it can be accessed for free. Podcasts are a different format to continue to explore the idea of love and when love turns bad. While listening, one of the four English core standards, students can see how relationships may begin as very romantic and positive which makes people miss warning signs that things are going in an unhealthy route.

References

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