

Lighting the Kindle of Justice: Teaching the Crucible in the 21st Century

Grades: 9-12

Lesson Plan Type: Standard Lesson Plan

Estimated Time: 60-90 minute sessions

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Preview

Overview

This lesson provides supplemental resources and activities to teach Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* from a social justice standpoint. The lessons will explore parallels between the play *The Crucible* (1953), the film adaptation *The Crucible* (1996) and Ava DuVernay's Netflix special *When They See Us* (2019) through examining criminal and social justice, false accusations, the American caste system and mass hysteria. The sessions described should not be considered a comprehensive outline of the teaching of *The Crucible*, but only an addition to the wonderful literary teaching that the play already allows. These lessons however greatly amplify the opportunity to make a timeless play even more relevant, important, and useful in the conversation of navigating the injustices of today's society.

Featured Resources

[Student Examples and Teacher PowerPoint-Lyschel Shipp](#)

From Theory to Practice

Donachie, Pat. "Culturally-relevant pedagogy critical to meet needs of today's students." Education Dive. 21 July 2017.

Emdin, Christopher. "Teaching Isn't About Managing Behavior: It's about reaching students where they really are." The Atlantic. 24 July 2020.

Love, Bettina L. and Gholnecsar E. Muhammad. "What do we have to lose: toward disruption, agitation, and abolition in Black education." International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education 2020. DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2020.1753257.

Shipp, Lyschel. "Revolutionizing the English Classroom through Consciousness, Justice, and Self-Awareness." English Journal, Vol. 106, No. 4, March 2017, 35-40.

These authors and educators encourage or engage in the use of culturally relevant, reality pedagogy and abolitionist teaching that amplifies and centers the voices, experiences, and culture of marginalized youth. This movement in education is to disrupt oppressive educational practices through the dismantling of Eurocentric curriculums. It is a push to recognize, acknowledge and affirm the identities, lives, and realities of the students we teach and the societies in which they currently live. It is also an emphasis on creating meaningful, highly engaging lessons by connecting what students are already familiar with to help them make sense of the histories, the content, and ways in which they are being taught.

Standards

NCTE/IRA NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

State Standards (Georgia);

Subject: Language Arts

Grade(s): 11

Standard: ELACC11-12RI1. – Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Standard: ELAGSE11-12RI2: Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

Standard: ELAGSE11-12RL3: Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Standard: ELAGSE11-12RI4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

Standard: ELAGSE11-12RL5: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a

comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Standard: ELAGSE11-12RL7: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

Standard: ELAGSE11-12W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Standard: ELAGSE11-12W9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Resources and Preparation

Materials & Technology

- Electronic devices to access the articles.
- Blank copy paper/chart paper to create sketch notes.
- Art supplies (pens, markers, crayons, colored pencils)
- Netflix/Amazon Prime Account (Access to the Netflix series *When They See Us* and the 1996 version of the play *The Crucible*)
- One classroom computer with a projector and screen/smart screen to watch movie clips

Printouts

- Optional (you may provide students with hard copies of each article; otherwise allow students to access articles online).

Websites

[Red Scare](#)

[A Brief History of the Salem Witch Trials: One town's strange journey from paranoia to pardon](#)

[The True Story of How a City in Fear Brutalized the Central Park Five](#)

[The Central Park Five: Conviction and Exoneration](#)

["How to make an innocent client plead guilty" by Jeffrey D. Stein.](#)

[The Curriculum](#)

[Netflix](#)

Preparation

1. Visit the links for each article to make sure that they are still active and working.
2. Create QR codes or short URL links so that students may access the links quickly and easily.
3. Make sure that all students have access to an electronic device (laptop, tablet, cell phone, or desktop computer). Students will need internet access to view the articles.

4. Students have the option to work in groups of four or individually. If students work in groups, decide how you will group students.
 5. Watch the movie clips beforehand to ensure that they are appropriate or permissible for your students, school, and district. The scenes chosen do not include any explicit language, but may evoke strong emotions in students. This disclaimer is not intended for you to shy away from tough conversations, but to prepare you as a teacher to have them.
 6. It is encouraged that students complete an anticipation guide before engaging in the lessons below.
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Instructional Plan

Student Objectives

Students will

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of multiple texts
- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account;
- Provide an objective summary of the text
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings;
- Analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful

Session One

1. Students should complete an anticipation guide for the play *The Crucible*. The guide should include statements reflective of the themes of the play including some that lend itself to discussion of the criminal justice system.
2. Have students discuss their stance on the statements. You can do this by having students move to opposite sides of the room to share their ideas. A more effective and efficient way to engage in discussion is to place 4-6 chairs at the front of the room with either 2 or 3 chairs on opposite sides of each other. Read the statements aloud and ask students to come up to the seat only if they **very strongly** agree or disagree with a statement and are compelled to argue it. This way, the class will hear strong arguments about each of the statements.

Session Two

1. To prepare for the reading of *The Crucible*, students will be asked to work in groups to read four articles about the Red Scare, Salem Witch Trials, and The Exonerated 5. Students will be determining any overlapping themes and central ideas, responding critically to what they were reading, asking questions to deepen the conversation, and analyzing the way the diction impact the text.
2. Divide students into groups of four or less. Allow any student who would prefer to work alone the opportunity to do so.
3. Provide each group with a sheet of blank chart paper or copy paper that they will use for their sketch notes. Students who opt out of drawing/sketching images may divide their

chart paper into four sections by drawing a line vertically and horizontally through the center. They may plainly write out their notes.

4. Ask students to access the four links to each article by typing in the short URL or by scanning the QR codes you created. Students may divide the reading of the articles between each other or they may individually read each article if time permits.
5. Allow students a set amount of time to read their article. Students will take notes on their reading. The notes they take will be used to create their sketch notes. Here are the four elements they should look for:
 - Central Idea/ Overlapping/Interacting Themes
 - Vocabulary/diction & its impact: How do the meanings of the words affect the message, tone, or how you receive the argument?
 - Comments/Reactions: What are your thoughts while reading?
 - Questions: What questions do you have for the author or about the events/article/etc.?
6. After each student has read and taken notes, allow time for group members to discuss the articles with each other.
7. Allow students time to create their collaborative sketch notes.
8. Allow each group to share their sketch notes. From the presentations, students should form a class discussion about the parallels between the Red Scare, Salem Witch Trials and the Exonerated Five Central Park case.

Session Three

1. Define/clarify the meanings of duality, contradiction, parallel plot, abstract, and concrete. Inform students that they will be identifying dualities, contradictions, and parallel plot lines within texts (films) and distinguishing between “abstract” and “concrete” concepts in both texts (films). Ask students to take notes while they are watching the two film clips.
2. Play *When They See Us* from 0:00-7:30. Then play *The Crucible* from 0:00-5:38.
3. Allow students a few minutes to process and think about both scenes and to write down examples of dualities, contradictions, parallel plots, and abstract and concrete concepts. Students may then share in pairs or small groups, then whole class.
4. Allow students a few more minutes to answer the question: How are the themes of **hysteria** and the **presumption of guilt** foreshadowed in the opening scenes of “*When They See Us*” and “*The Crucible*”?
5. Begin reading/acting out Act 1 (Note: you may begin the reading of Act I before this activity so that students have an introduction to the play, but this activity should be done before the reading of Act II).

Session Four

1. Review the two standards:

-Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed)

-Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

2. Continue the reading of Act I of *The Crucible*. Watch up to the end of Act I on film.
3. Have students answer the following questions in a written response with textual evidence:

-What is the impact of beginning *The Crucible* in medias res?

-Which narrative choices does the author make to create hysteria within the play? (Please review narrative elements prior to this question/session. Narrative elements may include dialogue, setting, plot, characters, pacing, description, reflection, etc. These elements are also included on the Georgia Milestones Four Point Holistic Narrative Writing rubric).

4. Refer to the Georgia DOE Teacher’s Guidance Student Skills/Concepts: “Note what has been added or removed from various interpretations of a text; think about an author’s purpose and strategy in deletions and additions that are specific to medium.” Have the class discuss.

Session Five

1. Begin reading Act II of the play *The Crucible*.
2. Play the following three clips from *When They See Us*: 11:18-13:00; 18:39-22:13; 52:21-55:55 (7 min. 50 sec.) and one clip from *The Crucible* 28:03- 35:12 (6 min. 15 sec.).
3. Have students identify dualities, contradictions, and parallel plot lines in the way that the “**suspects**” in both films are questioned and the interactions between those with power and those without. Discuss as a class.
4. Complete the reading of Act II.

Session Six

1. Begin reading Act III of *The Crucible*.
2. Play the following clip from *When They See Us...* and from *The Crucible*.
3. Have students discuss the following questions:
 - What emotions did the court scenes evoke for you?
 - How were those emotions different for each scene?
4. Complete the reading of Act III.

Session Seven

1. Read Act IV of *The Crucible*
2. Have students look back at the anticipation guide they completed before reading *The Crucible*. Are there any statements on the anticipation guide which you agree or disagree with after reading *The Crucible*/reading & watching about *The Exonerated 5*? Have you changed your mind about any of your beliefs? Did any of the situations in the play/series challenge how you felt about any of the statements?
3. Play the following two clips from *A Fall from Grace* 3:05-9:30; 24:14-25:45.
4. Discuss as a class: What do you notice about the attitude surrounding the concept of the plea deal? (From the public defender (Rory-Tyler Perry), assistant public defender (Jasmine), and the client (Grace)).

5. Have students read the article “How to make an innocent client plead guilty” by Jeffrey D. Stein.
6. Have students respond to the following prompts:
 - Put yourself in the positions of attorney and client. What choice would you make if you were ever put in this situation and why?

 - Think about Tituba and Mary Warren's confession in *The Crucible* and Kevin, Yusef, Antron, Raymond, and Korey's confession in *When They See Us*. Given what you know about plea deals (statistics included) do you believe the parties involved made logical or reasonable decisions? Why?

Extensions

- The Crucible- American Society 300 Years Later: This summative assessment is in the form of an extended piece of writing that is both a literary analysis and explanatory piece which identifies correlating themes both within the play, *The Crucible*, but also in American society today. The assignment will also ask you, as you discuss a societal issue both in 1692 Salem and current America, to include an in-depth analysis of a character and their role or function within that society as they contribute to or fight against the societal issue. Introduce and discuss the societal issue in great detail with relevant and properly cited facts and analyze your character’s role through an analysis of their speech, thoughts, actions, and effects on others. Place that character’s actions in the context of today and explain how their actions perpetuate or ameliorate the problem. You may decide on both the character and issue on your own. Some possible topic suggestions include: poverty, flaws in the criminal justice system (plea deals, mass incarceration, false accusations leading to arrests/sentencing, cruel & unusual punishment), raids (ICE), religious institutions, etc. You are not limited to these topics at all.
- Visit www.innocenceproject.org to research and read about the cases of exonerated victims of wrongful imprisonment and to engage in activism by taking a stand against wrongful convictions.

Student Assessment/Reflections

- Observe students’ participation as they work to create their sketch notes.
- Assess students’ depth of knowledge evidenced by their analysis of the intersection and overlapping of central ideas, their comments, and questions, and their examination of diction used in the texts.
- Assess students’ ability to produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience by having students submit their written responses to the prompts and questions. ([Georgia Milestones Writing Rubrics](#))