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## **The Godfather to American Gangster: A Mythology of the American Anti-hero, 2008**

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### **Unit Prospectus**

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As an instructor of Language Arts at New Haven's High School in the Community, established in the early 1970s as an "alternative high school" designed to meet the challenges and opportunities of both New Haven's at-risk and eccentrically advanced learners, I have decided upon an appropriate revision to the current half-credit Mythology course for upperclassmen, operating throughout the entire gamut of basic, intermediate, and advanced levels of academic performance. This revision will be to implement a curriculum change to the course that may serve as a greater impetus to learner interest and involvement, while enhancing learner intrinsic motivation for a course of study that can cater to cultural fascinations which lie beyond the sphere of the classroom.

In order to imbue or infuse this mythology course with a heightened degree of interest for learners, beyond the typical academic obligations of any school endeavor, the introduction of the notion of "the American anti-hero" can serve as a noteworthy adaptation and antithesis to the traditional tragic hero pedagogies featured in much of ancient and even modern classroom versions of the mythology of the Western canon.

Learners in this course, which alternates every marking period with a similar survey course on poetry, and which lasts for a ninety minute block period each day, will arrive to the class with a variety of interests, abilities and expectations. This unit's focus on a thoroughly "Americanized" version of the tragic hero paradigm should foment greater enticement and productivity for learners, based on perceived relevance to learners' extracurricular proclivities and a contemporary fascination with protagonists who rebel against established societal norms and authorities. A discussion of American gangster mythologies should serve to augment student appreciation for earlier classical renditions of such stories, while highlighting, through contrast, the conventional aspects of the tradition just as such mythologies also deviate from earlier conventions.

Within the context of my course, which surveys aspects of ancient Greek, Roman, Nordic, and even Eastern samplings of ancient and modern storytelling, it is often compelling to illustrate to students the primarily American affinity with the mythologizing of the gangster in both filmic and literary texts, as a counterpoint to the conventional heroic quests featured in more traditional writings derived from the Western canon, such as

Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, the story of *Perseus and Medusa*, the Old English *Beowulf*, and Malory's *Morte D 'Arthur* journeys.

Most often in the evolution of the American heroic journey/quest, the archaic, anti-heroic, jaded figure of the "lone rider" who tames the wild West without a name and wields his own brand of vigilante justice (in the cinematic style of Alan Ladd, Gary Cooper and Clint Eastwood, circa 1940 to mid-1960s), gives way to the alluring figure of the anti-heroic, romanticized gangster (a la Michael Corleone, Henry Hill, Tony Montana, Tony Soprano and Frank Lucas) who represents both an idealistic vision of romantic bandits and equalizes the scales of justice through his perversely vile codes of honor. Simultaneously, he explodes and reinforces ethnic stereotypes in presenting the often-complex facets of his personality to readers and audiences as a palatable, enticing, even attractive version of the "common" everyman.

Ultimately, the curriculum unit I propose for my mythology course on the topic of the American anti-hero/gangster will serve the needs and interests of my learners well, most of whom are products and inhabitants of an urban culture which finds value and relevance in the topics associated with this proposal (violence both peripheral and integral to the narrative drive, a psychologically tormented, complex hero immersed in the mire of his own flawed nature). In the hope that ancient and modern storytelling will have even further impact and value to my learners, I plan to pursue this subtopic of the American anti-hero within the context of my mythology class as a counterpoint to more traditional models; moreover, this curriculum unit will allow a thorough exploration of the guiding questions related to precisely how fictional narratives compel and broaden our perspectives while simultaneously limiting and confining our vision. This latter notion will serve as a central discussion point which I can then readily share and exploit at High School in the Community to enhance the scope, vision and perspective of my own learners as we examine the value and liability of the "truthfulness" of filmic and written mythological texts.

This "American Gangster" curriculum unit will consist of approximately four class sections of block period ninety-minute seminars in which students will enjoy exposure to and discussion of various samplings of versions of the lone anti-hero, a figure who exemplifies the deepest "American" yearnings for a free, yet ordered existence within the parameters of the hierarchies of his own criminal design. This figure also serves as a dramatic counterpoint to the traditional heroic code exemplar of the Arthurian "knight in shining armor" or to the ancient Homeric model of a moderately flawed, though highly idealistic vision of the "wanderer" who remains ever faithful (though not necessarily sexually so) to familial, spousal, and communal/ethnic commitments and codes of appropriate conduct while off on twenty year adventures (i.e., Odysseus).

In the early stages of the unit, the instructor and learners will explore the overarching, guiding questions posed by a study of the heroic journey, namely which universal stages or milestones of life are represented by the established heroic pattern, and which deviations from the pattern are posited in certain predominantly American texts. Additionally, an investigation as to the significance of such digressions from this typical pattern of the heroic code should expose or guide learners to the critical issue of whether or not a notably "Americanized" version of the ancient pattern has now evolved in our Postmodern era, not only as a mere deviation of the timeless hero journey so deftly exemplified by Joseph Campbell and his disciples, but more significantly as a novel, relevant variation of the code. Such a variant of the code is accessible to American audiences of the late 20th and early 21st Centuries, readers who inhabit a culture replete with the visual imagery and triumphant commercial marketeering of the anti-heroic/ ethnic representation of the "rebellious hero" who defies the authoritarianism and the Euro-centric/ Anglo-centric locus of societal norms and expectations.

Through gradual, deliberate, Socratic discourse, as well as by individual and collaborative assignments which will heighten the investigation of critical elements of and deviations inherent in the established heroic formula (denoting a code of the “antihero” or villain as protagonist), learners will discover a variety of emblematic motifs, stages, talismans, and symbolic representations that are often evocative of the cultural/ethnic values from which specific narratives emerge. Anti-heroic texts are essentially variations on the themes of much more ancient texts. The culminating activity or assessment for learners of this unit will be to synthesize, create, and present to other classmates an original, unique version of the heroic or anti-heroic pattern represented in mythology, based on our analysis and application of such patterns studied in model texts. That is to say that students will compose an original mythology from class discourse, reflection, and interpretation of sample texts featuring the heroic quest (code).

From such an investigation of the anti-heroic spin on classical hero mythologies, learners will come to appreciate the role which the ethnic culture of both reader and storyteller plays in driving or informing particular heroic texts, while learners also

examine the curious distinctions, the similarities and differences which are exhibited by the texts, based on ethnic choices or stereotypes. Students will discover through close readings (both literary and filmic) that the ancient heroic patterns featured in Greek, Nordic, and Old English texts (i.e., *Beowulf*) possess a resonance to current Postmodern audiences, suggesting an elasticity, a universal malleability of the heroic code which allows for a constriction or expansion of the code based on ethnic demands or expectations.

## Objectives of the Unit

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The study of any form of literature, its poetic devices, figurative language, and analysis of a diverse sampling of such literature provides a potent framework in which students can begin to think creatively and independently. By encouraging a free-flowing, guided discussion from a sampling of seminal works emanating from the “gangster genre”, and by offering a close, methodical, detailed reading of passages from these texts, which often feature a variety of topics in “Americanism” and “the American dream”, teachers may achieve a modicum of fulfillment in their didactic purpose. Teachers may be empowered to act as facilitators of cognitive development and comprehension through the exploration of an American ideal and its disintegration, usurpation, or perversion by the code of the gangster hero.

Students, on the other hand, can emerge from the Language Arts classroom, where such critical discourse should transpire, as more able close readers of pattern, foreshadow, detail, and other literary devices. They may develop a renewed fervor for reading and studying a variety of texts and gain an academic mindset that favors Bloom’s Taxonomy. Learners will not only read for comprehension, but ultimately investigate text in order to analyze, deconstruct, synthesize, and finally evaluate these works, or even create classroom products (i.e., projects, academic papers) that imitate or emulate the literature studied.

Such critical evaluation (the final stage of learner achievement in Bloom’s Taxonomy) is only possible through detailed assimilation, argumentation, and grappling with a text’s significance (or perceived significance) once comprehension of the basic elements of a text have been accomplished.

To study selections of American gangster narratives affords any student the opportunity to investigate the

entire gamut of philosophical, political, or cultural ideologies associated with such works. Such study also enables learners to realize that literature is often a powerful vehicle, even a catalyst for informed debate and creative exposition of ideas. If students can be guided through Socratic questioning and subtle direction to discover the broad arguments and subtle distinctions within such literary and filmic works of art, then they are led in a direction where they may use the same set of interpretive skills to critically analyze not only “gangster texts” that may seem enticing and relevant, but also any text from any academic discipline or artistic sphere. Students can then be hopefully inspired toward developing questioning techniques and critical mindsets that will serve them not only as learners, but also as critical, open-minded, reflective human beings throughout life, even as they continue to advance the “stories” of the individual journeys of their lives. In such a fashion, heroic, gangster literature, whether fictional or adapted from truth, can serve as a model for students’ own personal heroic journeys, so that literature can be viewed as just as potent an alternative to student growth as actual, non-literary characters operate as role models to students in their own developments.

Indeed, by studying the literary and filmic texts of the American gangster, in which complex ideologies and notions about power, ethnicity, gender, loyalty, and betrayal are often buried within the artistic beauty and artifice of the text, students can become academic “detectives” of a sort. They can begin to ascertain the means and methods by which writers so eloquently and expertly imbue their melodious language with complicated truths and argument. For a class of tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders who are adolescents on the cusp of young adulthood and its implied responsibilities, the transition from high school to the world beyond the classroom can seem tumultuous from many angles, including social and psychological aspects. The challenge for the Language Arts teacher is to harness these turbulent energies of such students and to direct them in a creative way toward a kind of success in the classroom that is based on critical thinking and attention to clarity (both oral and written).

A curriculum unit on the American gangster is appropriate for learners, not only those who may initially shy from the density of certain texts, but also for those who are facile readers. Once a teacher has provided the poetic tools, devices, and discussion jargon to engender academic success, students’ esteem will be bolstered as they transfer discussion of texts beyond the academic forum and into their homes and lives. This study will allow for the didactic techniques and strategies of brainstorming, cooperative learning, guided discussion, and persuasive argument of ideologies and positions, while permitting students to draw connections between the texts and any other knowledge they may bring to the discussion from other sources (television, movies, music, other classes, personal experiences). Our academic analysis of this literature is the perfect vehicle in the Language Arts classroom to ensure that learning and teaching flow across the continuum of a curriculum. Often historical, sociological, and psychological concepts are acknowledged in discussions of such literature.

In essence, students should be able to glean parallels and connections to their own lives, thereby providing a profound relevance to their learning experience, through a discussion of “Americanism” and aspects of the “American Dream” in both its ideal and real forms (as presented in the works of Mario Puzo, Francis Coppola, and more contemporarily, in Brian DePalma’s *Scarface*, Ridley Scott’s *American Gangster*, and David Chase’s *The Sopranos*). Students will be able to see the cross-cultural, multi-cultural significance and perspectives offered by these works of such diverse authors (directors), while simultaneously recognizing the common threads of each text’s anti-heroic quest for the elusive “American Dream”, a mythical notion which appears to transcend race, ethnicity, and even generations or socioeconomic circumstance.

Through guided discussion, cooperative learning and the composition of persuasive essays (or more informal journals), students will learn to compare and contrast issues presented by the textual samplings discussed, and will learn to argue in logical defense of their own positions based on the words and thematic message

presented either by an author's voice or by authorial omission. Most essentially, students should come to appreciate the artifice and beauty of the literary form while understanding its power to inspire freedom of thought and intellectual debate within the context of our examination of particular antiheroic representations.

Such representations often will serve as counterpoints to convention amidst the larger context of readings in this mythology course. Students' synthetic creations of personalized heroic journey storyboards, written work, artistic representations, musical compositions, or electronic presentations (i.e., PowerPoint presentation) will serve as summative, culminating assessments as to whether or not basic comprehension, interpretive, and analytical skills have been mastered regarding our literary investigation.

## Strategies and Modes of Inquiry for Implementing the Unit

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### The Great Gatsby

The initial literary selection of F. Scott Fitzgerald's quintessential example of pre-World War II decadence among the nouveau riche class of society, *The Great Gatsby*, will serve as a discussion springboard and essential template from which the class may wrestle with fundamental questions regarding the definitions of American success. Guiding questions will include "What is the American Dream, as you understand it?" and "Is the American dream a dated, outmoded concept only accessible to certain segments of society, for example, those of European descent who are upper middle class and beyond in the social stratosphere?" These questions will be foundational to our investigation as we attempt to unravel the reasoning behind the American gangster's need to operate beyond the realm of organized, legalized society.

Indeed, the gangster often thrives in a terrain that is at once roguish (villainous?) and liberating, an arena which can serve to inform society's mechanisms while it undermines them from an alternate, though parallel world view. That is to say that the world of the rogue, whether he be Jay Gatsby or Frank Lucas ( *American Gangster* ) is so compelling to readers because we find ourselves at once repulsed and envious of the hierarchies and codes of perversely honorable conduct as featured in these texts, and we seek to imitate and cheer the liberty and countercultural, anti-authoritarian image of the American gangster, although we may publicly acknowledge an aversion to his criminality and Macchiavellian assertions. Students will be challenged in the opening classes of this unit to explore their own tastes, attitudes, and behaviors as we read passages from *Gatsby*, Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*, and Ridley Scott's *American Gangster*.

Learners will be expected to approach our readings and discussions thematically, while we listen poignantly to one another's observations of text and our relationships/reactions to it. In so doing, we will have examined an element of ourselves which may be discovered in these texts, and will have gleaned universal aspects which cause the American hero to be much more countercultural and antithetical to societal norms than earlier, Classical heroes, to which learners will have already been exposed (i.e., Perseus, Heracles, Beowulf, Arthur).

Through our initial observances of *Gatsby*, our in-class, shared discussion periods and whole class debriefings (colloquially referred to as 'think-pair-share' techniques among educators) should serve to enlighten learners to discover that the American hero is more than flawed by pride or some other singular defect of character, and that unlike the literary examples which precede the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the American gangster is at once representative of the plight of the underclass and immigrants in their quest for the American nirvana, as well

as being symbolic of an indictable counterpoint against the achievement of the American Dream, since the gangster seeks to operate against the codes of hard work, fair play, and lawful citizenship which such a dream intrinsically infers.

Our initial discussion of *Gatsby* will include inquiries pertaining to whether or not the American dream is contingent upon the achievement of a form of “contentment” or “happiness” for the individual (in *Gatsby*’s case traversing time to regain the lost love of Daisy Buchanan whom he left to pursue the “quest” incumbent upon his warrior stature and his growth through adventure in World War I); or whether or not the acquisition of wealth is the essential arbiter in determining one’s success at realizing the dream. Although *Gatsby* argues and, in fact, quarrels with apparently reliable narrator Nick Carraway that one can indeed return to the idealized past, it is Nick who, as a surrogate moral voice for the reader, reminds *Gatsby* that the past does not exist, and is therefore an unworthy dream to be sought as a representation of the American ideal. On the other hand, learners will explore *Gatsby*’s acquisition of enormous wealth and power, evidenced by his superfluously gaudy mansion on Long Island, his Rolls Royce, his nightly parties for the nouveau riche and his name change from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby, suggestive of the necessity for economic status and identity re-invention in order to attain heroic, “American” greatness.

Learners will focus specifically on the character of Meyer Wolfsheim, who, as Fitzgerald’s creation, best delineates a character who most clearly evinces *Gatsby*’s fundamental and necessary involvement in organized crime activity (bootlegging) as foundational to *Gatsby*’s “greatness”. As such a character (based on real-life underworld figures Meyer Lansky and Arnold Rothstein, who is credited with fixing the 1919 World Series), Wolfsheim represents the powerful nexus between the wilderness and civilization (as depicted in Anglo-Saxon texts including *Beowulf* ) that is mandatory if *Gatsby* is to achieve a social status which makes him at once beloved and feared. As a springboard to other anti-heroic gangster texts, learners can view *Gatsby* as their initiation point, since *Gatsby* would seem not to require a connection to the criminal world as a Caucasian war hero with attachments to blue-blood money and Ivy-league prosperity. Nevertheless, students will have to wrestle with the tension caused by his tacit need for Meyer Wolfsheim in order to regain the past through his own money and power.

Perhaps Wolfsheim is the reason that *Gatsby* becomes great, but of course, as in all heroic journeys, the fates will not be denied, and *Gatsby* is star-crossed and so must die as a victim to a lesser man’s revenge. Perhaps *Gatsby*’s demise is a reminder of the significance of the American lower middle-class and its importance as an underpinning, bolstering agent to society in general. Perhaps *Gatsby* is only made great by his bootlegging which feeds off of the misery and illegal quest for drugs (alcohol) of the desperate lower classes. His death may therefore be considered poetic justice. These notions of social relevance and criminal connection are in no way an accident as crafted by Fitzgerald, and *Gatsby*’s convenient use of criminal enterprise to achieve his American dream must be punished. Students will investigate the novel with a focus on the above perspectives so that as we approach Mario Puzo’s anti-hero, Michael Corleone, we may better understand his own drive to divest himself of all ethnic (Italian-American?) considerations in favor of a perceived, idealistic vision of all that is supposedly “American”, despite the warnings of Fitzgerald.

## **The Godfather**

From the infamous opening line of Francis Coppola’s *The Godfather*, where we listen to the ironical musings of undertaker Amerigo Bonasera (whose name most emphatically and ironically suggests that the American Dream is unreal and who has come to Don Vito’s wedding to ask for the justice denied him by America’s flawed judicial system), to the final moments of the film, in which Don Vito’s favorite son Michael ascends to



criminal emperor in a visual representation that highlights these ethnic and ancient symbolisms (submissive kissing of the hand by subordinate henchmen), Michael Corleone, as written by Mario Puzo for his pulp fiction rendering *The Godfather*, and as later portrayed by Al Pacino in the 1972 film of the same name, is an idealistic figure. He remains convinced that the pursuit of the American ideal requires his simultaneous attachment to forms of Old World Colonial/Puritanical Americana and his imperative detachment from the ethnic demands of his patriarchal, Italian ancestry. This perennial tension between ethnic loyalties and American considerations is best embodied in the aforementioned humiliated undertaker's confused and ironic explanation to Don Vito, in the first and seminal line of the film, "I believe in America...America has made my fortune...I brought my daughter up in the American fashion... *but I taught her never to dishonor her family* . . ." [emphasis added]. This emergent tension between the ethnic past and the American future so succinctly expressed by Amerigo Bonasera ultimately becomes the narrative impetus of the pursuit of *The Godfather's* anti-heroic figure, Michael Corleone.

Through close analysis of various passages of text, including this opening scene of the novel in Don Vito's study, a scene which deftly portrays the ancient Sicilian codes of favors offered and gifts exchanged, and through examination of later passages featuring Michael's Oedipal conflict with Don Vito and his ultimate and untimely atonement with and usurpation of his father's role as head of the family (indicative of the usurpation of "Americanism" over ethnicity), students will address Michael Corleone's anti-heroic pursuit for legitimacy in a criminal underworld. Simultaneously, students will juxtapose his pursuit with that of Jay Gatsby's, in order to determine whether ethnicity is at all a consideration in the anticipation and quest for the illusory and elusive American ideal. Students may well discover through guided discussion and debate that Michael Corleone and Jay Gatsby, although separated by a span of twenty years in fictional American history, are actually composites representing the very same anti-heroic features: each character returns to his home with the badges of a war hero, each reluctantly immerses himself in the necessary evils of criminal enterprise (although outwardly appearing at once fashionable and ready for business while draped in the clothing of the American elite, including seersucker suits, ascots, and the embellishments of well-groomed, respectable gentlemen of society), and each character pursues an elusive female from his past who is rooted in the traditions of the American mythos. For Michael Corleone, Puzo actually causes him not only to pursue his feminine fantasy, as does Gatsby, but furthermore to pursue a mate whose very name, Kaye "Adams", bespeaks the origins and traditions of a burgeoning "America"! Puzo insists that our speculations are correct by denoting that Michael's wife is descended from the Adamses of American yore, thereby bolstering our reader's perception that Michael's desires for Americanization extend beyond his own personal drives to reject ethnicity for only himself and actually transcend to the level of ensuring that his immediate family and progeny will be cleansed of the pollution of his Italian ancestry. An interesting corollary to this notion is that for Michael Corleone, Americanization, which is commensurate with legitimate enterprise, can only occur once all remnants of original ethnicity are purged (in fact, a rather impossible and racist assertion).

We will examine moments in *The Godfather* narratives where a compromised blending of ethnicity and Americanism is portrayed, suggesting that the American ideal can only be realistically or pragmatically grasped through a *mélange* of ancestry that recedes toward the past and simultaneously thrusts toward what is considered to be "American". This feature is best seen as the immigrant anti-hero is viewed to reject the homeland while he propels toward the future of an invented new ethnicity and identity. In a related parallel, Fitzgerald posits Gatsby's failed quest to regain his past relationship with Daisy as a model for this type of hopeless mire pitting past against future, a dilemma in which Michael Corleone finds himself torn (best embodied by the narrative's literal destruction of his Sicilian first wife in favor of a second WASP wife, just as he ascends to the role of criminal kingpin). The celebrated closing line from *The Great Gatsby* ("So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.") is then reinterpreted by Puzo and his

successors as an incessant, hopeless recession toward our original ethnicities, all the while pursuing an elusive American ideal that remains idyllic and attainable only in ours and Michael Corleone's anti-Italian, anti-heroic dreams.

The great irony, perhaps, is that the original ethnicity of one's homeland or ancestry and the future ancestry or identity to which one aspires can both be viewed as inventions whose purpose is to serve the narrative by allowing anti-heroes to cross from the threshold of an early perception to a more refined perception. This is to say that the movement from Old World (ethnic origin) to New World (America) is actually an internal shift from lesser enlightenment to greater wisdom, clearly an imperative moment of growth in the consciousness of any tragic hero.

Michael Corleone may well be the character that solidified Al Pacino's career in the pantheon of exceptionally gifted "Method" actors whose portrayal of the reluctant mafia boss who envisions himself as the equivalent of a corporate CEO lent itself to myriad re-readings by those in the business, educational, political, entertainment, and, indeed, criminal spheres of society. Indeed, many sought to emulate the truisms of its musings, rhetoric and economical dialogue on hierarchy, loyalty, power, and family; however, it can be argued that Pacino's most durable delineation to date remains that of *Scarface's* Tony Montana. Montana's defiant, ethnically-charged, post-modern interpretation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* continues even twenty-five years after its theatrical release to taunt and tease the imagination of young and old who are drawn to understand the ethnic American anti-hero and the engines that compel him.

## **Scarface**

Students need only to shop at their local malls or cursorily scan their peers' choice in clothing to note the exceptionally profound interest that Americans of diverse ethnic backgrounds have exhibited for Brian DePalma's 1983 film *Scarface*. As a class, we will examine the seemingly interwoven connection between immigrant ethnicity and the designation of "outsider" to the American experience of opportunity. Of particular interest to us will be the notion of whether or not every immigrant culture that lands on America's shores is subject to a form of ostracizing by those who are already indigenous, full-fledged citizens, regardless of such citizens' original, ancestral status as immigrants.

Are the latest immigrants to America's shores perennially the most disadvantaged in terms of opportunity, thereby resorting to violent criminal methods in order to participate in the already established opportunities of America which precede their arrival and to which they are legitimately denied? Tony Montana, a character of Cuban descent, who is ironically portrayed by a Sicilian-American, and whose compatriots are played by actors from a variety of ethnicities, including Jewish, German, Italian, Bolivian, and Puerto Rican to name a few, is often seen by audiences to be an esteemed model for Spanish-speaking immigrants, regardless of country of origin. For others who feel a sense of disenfranchisement from the established, authoritarian, legal and bureaucratic infrastructures of contemporary American society, Tony Montana's countercultural actions and attitudes are deemed heroic. Our unit will examine the motivations of ethnic populations who relish attaching themselves to the fictitious Tony Montana, especially when such fascinations with the character squarely position such populations beyond the law-abiding, hard work ethos and Puritanical precepts associated with what is traditionally American.

In particular, we will explore whether or not hard work, or industry, is essential to the achievement of the American ideal of success, a success which is predicated upon monetary gain enforced by the tacit threat of violence, as evidenced by *Gatsby* and the Corleones. For, while Jay Gatsby and Michael Corleone each represent hard work at criminal enterprise and subsequent wealth which is Machiavellian in pursuit of an



idealistic dream, Tony Montana represents the aggressive immigrant drive toward financial success that makes no apologies for the utility and necessity of violence required to join the ranks of the established wealthy. Students will study Montana's rise to power in the criminal underbelly's cocaine trade of the early 1980s, and will examine whether his perceived reputation as a no-nonsense, uneducated, assertive workhorse in pursuit of "the world and everything in it" and his hierarchical, patriarchal algorithm for its attainment ("first you get the money, then you get the power, then you get the woman") can be considered a re-interpretation of the American dream, as it speaks to contemporary immigrants. We will also entertain the possibility, by contrast, that Montana is merely a hyperbolized, self-oriented gangster with no redeeming qualities who exemplifies a bastardization of immigrant ardor and industry in the achievement of only financial (American?) prosperity with no interest in the actual dream of fulfilling "American" promise.

We will also examine whether or not Brian Depalma is interested in portraying the lack of homogeneity in ethnic/immigrant groups as a fractious weakness against a dominant, unified American authority. This ethnocentrically "Hispanic" tension is demonstrated in the filmic text by several distinctive Spanish speaking groups and the rivalries among their ethnicities, rivalries which are either ignored or ignorantly perceived as homogeneous to the "American" outsiders of the text. Cubans compete against Colombians who compete against Bolivians who compete against Puerto-Ricans, who all collectively compete against the "American" establishment represented by a thoroughly WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) investment banker/money launderer and an equally white corrupt cop who favors handouts from criminal immigrants as a means to his own financial success.

Furthermore, in addition to such issues of ethnic homogeneity or stereotyping by outsiders, we will consider whether accented speech or language is a fundamental cause of the anti-hero's relegation even farther to the fringes of legitimate society (Tony Montana has a heavy accent, whereas Michael Corleone and Jay Gatz have no perceived deficiency in acceptably "American" language which might cause them exclusion from the cultural establishment). We will also consider whether the gaudy trappings of Montana's lifestyle (exemplified by an enormous built-in bathtub in the center of his bedroom!) satirize the achievements of Gatsby and Corleone, who at least evince the conservative tastes of their epochs, mirroring the dominant, conventional American culture in their respective fashion and stylistic choices. Montana's drug addiction, ostentation in dress, mode of transport, and choice in decor, all conspire to indicate to the film's viewer that he remains well outside the mainstream of acceptable, conventional American society, despite his industry, business acumen, and rapid acquisition of wealth and status within the gangster community.

For purposes of the unit, the Tony Montana example from *Scarface* will also encourage students to reflect critically on whether or not a hero's outcome in the narrative is essential to his perception as "heroic", or whether the means and choices of a character's existence, in spite of tragic loss in the end, are the imperative ingredients in the determination of heroic stature. Pivotal to our discussion will be issues related to whether or not Tony Montana is a hero at all since he does not succeed, but is instead destroyed by his own pride and stupidity in crossing a Bolivian drug lord named Sosa. After all, just as we critique the violence inherent in Tony Montana's choices, so too Gatsby ends up shot to death in his pool, and Michael Corleone survives to old age through his wily nature, only to lose his daughter to violence and to die alone in a Sicilian village as dogs scurry around his dead body.

It would seem that the end is not justified by the means, and yet for the American antihero, both financial and political power remain essential pursuits despite a known tragic outcome. In such a paradigm, the quest for the grail is more critical than the attainment of it. As with Shakespeare's Macbeth, who may be considered an important inspiration for Depalma's *Scarface*, the title character's beheading by Macduff is not nearly as

critical as the haunting cautionary narrative focus of the play to remain wary of prophecies, ambitious motives, and hasty, violent choices in the acquisition of respect and power that are unearned or acquired out of turn. Still, as with *Scarface*, we can applaud Macbeth's resilience and heroism as he instinctively fights without hesitation for a cause that he knows is lost. Though Birnam Wood has miraculously come to Dunsinane and Macduff is surprisingly not of woman born, Macbeth will not yield. Tony Montana is willing to be assassinated by a hit squad from Bolivia while defiantly brandishing and capriciously firing an assault rifle in his own home; but he will not surrender without a fight. The anti-hero is heroic in his very defiance of inalterable outcomes.

## **American Gangster**

There exists perhaps no more defiant a figure in filmic gangster fiction than that of Denzel Washington's Frank Lucas of Ridley Scott's *American Gangster* (2007).

As an African-American crime lord who discovers his niche importing poppy from the Far East (resonances of the United States' current inability to curtail the export of poppy from Afghanistan in the "war on terror" of the early 2000s), Frank fashions his own criminal conspiracy to provide heroin to the urban underclasses of his socioeconomic environment, while blatantly and riskily flouting the conventions of his criminality, dressed in business attire, adhering to the conventions of seeming "American" legitimacy. In sharp contrast to the earlier figures emanating from European descent (whether Italian, Jewish, Irish, etc.) who emerge as leaders of criminal enterprise, this text bolsters the unconventional concept of African-American leadership within the gangster community, a community which historically does not favor leadership beyond the parameters of European ancestry. Similarly, Frank Lucas represents, as does Tony Montana, an ethnic characterization of a "real-life" figure upon whom the disenfranchised, in this case African-Americans who sense their own relegation to the periphery of society, can heap the sum total of their social and economic frustrations towards an iconic figure of an epic story. Indeed, African-American audiences may at once find a scapegoat and a savior who is relevant and envy-inspiring in his audacity and success at thwarting the conventions of his day (circa mid-1970s).

As with *Scarface*, it is no matter that the outcome of the text finds our anti-hero betrayed by those closest to him (an almost cliché convention of the modern gangster mythology), since the crucial thematic element for African-American audiences and others is to depict the folk story rise and fall of this "American" gangster. Frank Lucas reigns heroic for some in his destruction of the false boundaries of criminal success, in his blatant disregard for perceived historical limitations of his ethnic ancestry in America (i.e., slavery, racism, prejudice, as well as antagonizing legal decisions such as Jim Crow, Plessy v. Ferguson, etc.). Alternatively, Lucas appears anti-heroic for others in his postmodern redefinition of the American gangster as a black man who defies not only authority of friend and foe alike (as does Tony Montana), but who also disintegrates the larger authority of history and actually usurps what is understood to be exclusively white "American" success (albeit criminal).

As an interesting counterpoint to Frank Lucas' distinction as a successful African-American gangster, students will examine how his own clothing, style, physical bearing, gait, and grooming choices tend to mirror those of the Euro-centric mobster/leader/anti-heroes of the earlier films and texts (although *Scarface* is set approximately a decade later) to determine whether Lucas ironically embraces that which he desires to reject. They will investigate whether Frank Lucas is merely emulating rather than razing the stereotypes and subconscious power which Michael Corleone, Jay Gatsby, and Tony Montana possess in the American cultural consciousness. It may well be that Al Pacino's Michael Corleone merely gives way to Denzel Washington's

Frank Lucas in a superficial way, for by forcing him to imitate the lifestyle and choices of earlier criminal figures, Ridley Scott enables Frank Lucas to appear as neither original nor powerful in usurping European patriarchy and the conventions of the earlier American gangster hero.

Students will ultimately inquire whether Lucas is only a dim reflection of our American literature's and film's seminal anti-heroic figures who is designed simply to capitalize on these successes in a financial fashion for movie studios, through storytelling which can do nothing but imitate the epic nature of such earlier works in both scope and style. On the other hand, Lucas may represent a genuine visionary expansion of the American anti-hero, who in the year when Barack Obama is a viable Democratic candidate for President of the United States, represents a fundamental uplifting of African-American image and voice to the most elite circles of public discourse and power, and in so succeeding, disavows that merely pragmatic American claim of capitalistic gain for film producers at the expense of artistic innovation.

## **The Sopranos**

Finally, in a cumulative fashion, prior to students' presentations of their summative assessments which will be culminating projects of the unit, demonstrating understanding and evaluation, as well as offering original creations of the anti-heroic American journey, learners will then be exposed to the controversial final episode of the landmark cable television series *The Sopranos* as a coda to our analysis. Our examination of *The Sopranos* will attempt to investigate precisely how David Chase's creation simultaneously celebrates the earlier ethnic (Italian) anti-heroes of the gangster genre and undercuts the heroism of such a journey, all the while remaining ambiguous in the final moments of its narrative energy in order to leave all interpretation squarely in the hands of reflective audiences who may entertain variations of responses to the profound questions that remain on David Chase's canvas once his authorial voice is pre-emptively silenced. In so doing, David Chase has reluctantly become collective America's English teacher, especially when he noted recently in *The Sopranos: The Complete Book*, published in October, 2007, four months after the finale's debut, "Most of us should have done this kind of thing in high school English class and didn't."

This pivotal episode entitled "Made in America" is at once a culmination of the American societal and cultural values that David Chase is placing under scrutiny and indictment, and a reminder of the intrinsic dualism that "being produced in America" implies with intimations both honorable and empty. The double entendre of the title's reference suggests both official mafia membership and the colloquial expression of marketeers who heap value on the production of goods and services in the United States (it's actually a slogan from a Ford automobile commercial of the 1990s). The phrase has implications of avarice, consumption, gluttony, sexual excess, and self-orientation which speak to Tony Soprano's re-invention of the American gangster for contemporary, 21st Century audiences. Students will assess whether or not it remains a positive notion for a product to be "made in America", or whether such a phrase suggests the paradoxical notion of being constructed efficiently, yet easily breakable, indicating the fragility of the culture as a whole, which appears unable to vanquish enemies (Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan), to gain consensus in political matters, or to devise expeditious economic and immigrant policies that are both fair and equitable to all concerned, especially in the supposed "land of opportunity" which has long been seen as an oasis for immigrants seeking generational advancement and self-edification.

If Michael Corleone can be analogized to be an American-made Cadillac as juxtaposed to Tony Soprano's Ford truck, then interesting discussions can occur which examine each character's version of anti-heroic qualities. Ultimately, such a juxtaposition may indicate that Tony Soprano becomes a redux version of Michael Corleone, where Tony's lumbering, cumbersome physical presence is the result of guilt, consumption, greed and sexual

excess (as interpreted by actor James Gandolfini), whereas Michael's hangdog, hunched posture is caused by a more honorable "weight of responsibility" as the reluctant hero who fulfills his father's plans at the expense of his own. When we compare and contrast both of these Italian-American anti-heroes with the Cuban Tony Montana and the African-American Frank Lucas, we will more starkly see that the more gaudy, ostentatious, aggressive styles and upright gaits of the later anti-heroes betray the necessity of more recent immigrants to perform and behave aggressively in order to

compete with the slower, more established, less challenged earlier immigrants who possess a firm foothold in the American landscape and can, therefore, afford to be methodical, deliberate, and less forward in their course toward achieving acceptability as thoroughly "American" anti-heroes.

Indeed, students will come to realize that David Chase, in his final episode of *The Sopranos*, not only pays respect and homage to the Michael Corleone representation of the American hero, but more specifically references *The Godfather* in several dramatically cinematic ways, in part to highlight the distinctions between Michael Corleone and Tony Soprano. For example, not only have careful filmic readers learned through the course of *The Sopranos'* epic six seasons that its anti-hero is a fan of *The Godfather, Part II* (in which Michael succeeds in defeating his enemies, though alienating himself from all family and associates as a Nixonian character imprisoned by his own paranoia), but that, in fact, his favorite scene in all nine-hours of filmic text and Puzo's novel is a moment when Michael Corleone evinces himself (in an anti-heroic apotheosis) as an assertive power and assassinates his father's rivals and would-be murderers in an intimate Italian-American eatery, only after emerging from the restaurant's bathroom with a previously planted revolver. Such detail is not without merit for David Chase and for the filmic reader, because the crucial final episode of his series offers enough reminders and references to *The Godfather* and Tony Soprano's reverence for a fictional filmic figure, that their placement does not appear purely coincidental, except to the uninformed reader or audiences who have shallowly misread Chase's text throughout the series' run.

Students will reflect upon a careful viewing of images and cinematography of "Made in America", which will be juxtaposed with similar moments in Francis Coppola's *Godfather*, so that the sepia tones and orange hues of Chase's cinematography, as well as Tony Soprano's devouring orange fruit in this final episode can be highlighted as essential motifs before the highly charged ambiguity of Tony's final on-screen appearance. (Film critic Judith Vogelsgang and others have appropriately noted Coppola's use of the orange color and fruit in Gordon Willis' cinematography to be a consistent indication of foreboding doom or violence, often depicting enemies to the Corleone Family). It should therefore be no surprise to students that when David Chase's final moment of "Made in America" is seen, audiences are left with a profound ambiguity as to the outcome of his anti-hero Tony Soprano, just as Chase mocks the American audience's need in recent years for a sense of closure, whether psychological, spiritual, or cinematic. For the careful reader of his text, Chase has provided all the clues necessary for a satisfactory sense of closure to his narrative, despite the abrupt blackout and silence at the end of his culminating piece. As we witness Tony Soprano at a remarkably American diner, sharing a meal with his wife and family, and as we observe the orange colorations of the cinematography, and are drawn by Chase's direction to a mercurial figure at the diner's counter who is ominously eyeing Tony and his family, we, as critical readers are aware of the dramatic tension and the director's desire to draw us back into the past of the *Godfather* narrative as a referent for this moment. So the past informs the present, as well as the future, and when the mercurial figure glares at Tony, who meets his eyes, and then retreats to the diner's bathroom, only to emerge a few moments later (in the script), we know what actions will transpire without the gratuitous necessity of seeing them. We are "borne ceaselessly into the past", as Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* would have it, and our reminders of Michael Corleone's turning point of assertion become our cues for Tony's demise. As teachers and students, we do not require the graphic depiction of violence and gore which

will accompany Tony Soprano's death; we need only to "read" the film and its clues for details to determine that this anti-hero who has modeled his life on another fictional antihero receives his brand of poetic justice in being assassinated according to the form and content of his favorite movie scene. Perhaps David Chase is not only demonstrating the cliché that his own art (*The Sopranos* series) has imitated life for a suburban gangster imitating his favorite art (*The Godfather*), but that all art, and, in fact, all real life is informed by artistic representations which help to define not only what it means to be American, but most importantly for our unit, what it means to be heroic or anti-heroic.

Indeed, just as audiences must struggle with an ending unseen in *The Sopranos*, a satisfaction stripped away from their perceptions prior to closure, so too we as students and teachers must seek to define and redefine the heroic journey in our own wanderings, both real and imagined, while we attempt to create identity and purpose in our own fictitious and actual life journeys (in many cases, as in Tony Soprano's, informed predominantly by fiction). It is the journey, therefore, of the American anti-hero, the outsider who forges a place and meaning for himself from his chaotic, often criminal freedom to explore beyond societal norms, which continues to inform and is reciprocally informed by the culture, so that this cyclical journey is generationally repeated, renewed, reinvented and so that the anti-hero's adventure becomes our vicarious adventure, and the journey in itself finally triumphs over the outcome. Resolutions or denouements to stories (or lives) are merely circumstantial or irrelevant-where to be "made in America" is to wrestle with fashioning meaning from ambiguity and relying on past models to influence future re-inventions, while side-stepping the pitfalls of cliché, where, paradoxically, the journey becomes the end as we compose our own heroic adventures, replete with just enough criminality for our quests to remain mischievously, refreshingly original and, therefore, unabashedly "American"..

Students will creatively explore the aforementioned devices of foreshadow, allusion, pattern in texts, and characterization in order to synthesize these notions into a culminating activity in which their own invented heroes or anti-heroes may further develop the themes or motifs studied through this mythology unit. It is hoped that learners will be empowered by the clever craft of Fitzgerald, Coppola, DePalma, Scott, and Chase to become self-actualized, self-styled inventors of their own heroic stories. Whether through writing culminating projects, preparing Powerpoint presentations, artistic renderings (including music and dance), filmic or storyboard portrayals, students will come to appreciate the value of heroic storytelling's potential to entertain, inspire, educate, comfort and compel humanity toward its best self as we, both teachers and students, continue to wrestle with the challenges and complexities of our own shared humanity while we pursue the real and imagined journeys that lie before us.

## Lesson Plan: The Great Gatsby

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Concept/Topic: The notion of "Americanism" as it is represented in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

**General Goals :** Students will come to appreciate the notion of "Americanism" that is represented by the acquisition of wealth, social status, power, material possessions and the longing for the past idealism that are presented in Fitzgerald's work. Jay Gatz will be seen as a template from which other American anti-heroes derive their understanding of power, prestige and their associations with other men and women in the larger American society.

**Specific Objectives :** Students will be able to perform close readings of selected moments from the text which indicate Gatsby's "Americanism" such as talismans of power, social prestige or the acquisition of things and even people.

Students will list in a whole group format and then in smaller cooperative pairs precisely what it means to be "American" for Gatsby, and then they will investigate his shadier, underworld alliances (such as those with Meyer Wolfsheim) to determine if such mischief is a requirement for the American anti-hero.

**Required Materials :**

Fitzgerald's text and a DVD copy of *The Great Gatsby* , DVD player with LCD projector, remote control for close reading of visual text, and a deck of playing cards and highlighters.

**Anticipatory Set :**

Students will be asked to define what it means to be "American" by jotting notes in a brainstorming session at the start of class. They will further be asked to compare their own understanding of what is American with Gatsby's in order to determine whether time or distance (or age) has adjusted perspectives on the issue. A whole class debriefing seminar will serve as a follow-up to this activity.

**Procedures :**

Students will be handed playing cards (which has an illicit gangster quality all its own in school!) and will be asked to link up with members of the class who share their same number or face in order to further discuss and write down moments where Gatsby's quest for Americanism or his ascent to power and wealth are apparent. Page numbers and moderate phrases for reference will be important for students to record.

Students will further explode this discussion of Gatsby by breaking into new groups based upon the suit which each class member holds, so that a secondary, deeper discussion can emerge from the first.

Students will then share the insights of their discussions in a whole-class debriefing session.

**Independent Practice :**

Students will individually write about the acquisition of wealth and whether or not it is a necessary component in the achievement of the American dream. They will also discuss in journals whether or not a return to the idealized past (as Gatsby attempts to do in winning Daisy through wealth) is important or significant to the quest to capture "Americanism".

**Closure :**

As students exit the class, they will compose on a notecard reflection of their thoughts related to the American dream (just three to five items) based upon the day's discussions and journaling; their inferences and analyses will be left on oversized notepad paper and class bulletins for continual reflection as we investigate aspects and shifts in the American ideal throughout the unit, while reading a cross-section of gangster stories. For homework, students will be asked to address and journal on the mystery surrounding Gatsby and whether or not his criminal activity is a necessary requirement of the American anti-hero in that he should possess a moderate quality of mischief to be considered truly American.



Students with exceptionalities may be given specific homework related to cross-curricular connections (i.e., researching the Jazz Era of the 1920s, dance, styles, automobiles, the Great Depression after 1929, and American attitudes of the epoch.)

Students with learning disabilities will either have the length and depth of their reflective journals, textual citations, and scripts, or storyboards mitigated, while allowing them other venues by which to assess Gatsby's American anti-heroicism (for example, through drawing, storyboarding, poetry, song or other less conventional journaling variations).

## Lesson Plan: The Godfather

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**Concept/Topic:** The notion of "Americanism" as it is redefined as a counterpoint and juxtaposition to traditional White Anglo-Saxon Protestant models seen in the text *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. We will address the extent to which ethnicity (in this case Italian-Americanism) and gender (patriarchy) play a role in the redefinition of "Americanism" through the central character of Michael Corleone.

**General Goals :** Students will come to understand how aspects of Jay Gatz's "American" work ethic, monetary success, the acquisition of power through material possessions, and the introduction of criminality are usurped, twisted, deepened and reworked by Mario Puzo's Michael Corleone, who seeks to divest himself of ethnicity in order to adhere more forcefully to the Fitzgerald model. We will also address the inherent irony in Michael Corleone's patterning himself on a Gatsbyesque model, especially since Gatsby is a criminal representation whom Michael resists in rejecting his father Don Vito.

**Specific Objectives :** Students will be able to perform close readings of selected passages which detail Michael Corleone's pursuit of "Americanism". Students will locate specific references (five to ten) to the text and film as an aid and impetus to guided, Socratic discussion, and they will journal on specific topics for no more than ten minutes at a time on such passages. Of particular interest will be Michael's physical transformation through clothing adjustments, hair style, choice in schooling (Dartmouth) and spouse (Kay 'Adams', reminiscent of Colonial America), and his utter rejection of Italian-American ethnicity and its corollaries-Catholicism, mobster affiliation, ethnic language.

Students will also be able to note the "outsider" status of Michael in relation to his family which impels him to reject ethnicity and criminality, and which, ironically, places him in a realm with the women of the Corleone family, positioned as outsiders to the dealings of the men of the story, who embrace ethnicity and gangsterism.

### Required Materials :

Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (and Francis Coppola's *Godfather* and *Godfather, Part II* ), notebook, highlighters, writing implements, DVD player or VCR, possibly a digital LCD projector with remote control for pauses during discussion and juxtapositions with text.

### Anticipatory Set :

The guiding question "What makes someone American?" will be converted to "How is Michael Corleone

changing to make himself more American?" Students will be asked to cite five to ten specific references to either the visual or literary texts which support the notion that Michael is divesting himself of family attachments, ethnic affiliations, or religious practices associated with Italian-Americanism. Students will then write a journal response of no more than fifteen lines for approximately 10 minutes in which they reflect on Michael's changes and ponder exactly what his understanding of "American" might be. Students will then present observations in a debriefing format to generate further class discussion.

### **Procedures :**

In cooperative groupings, students will be asked to rotate with their journal entries to other members of the class in order to refine their interpretations of precisely how Michael Corleone has become a more American character in appearance and reality. The class will reunify and debrief, with group leaders presenting or an open forum discussion helping us to revisit the issue as we approach the text, exploring the possibility that both Gatsby and Corleone are actually representing the same unrealistic, archetypal notion of "Americanism" which is at once elusive and mythical.

### **Independent Practice :**

Students will work in cooperative pairs or triads to rewrite some of the dialogue from specific scenes in the text where Michael is developing his "American" sense of identity, and they will incorporate this sense of his new identity into their brief scenes to be presented later in the class. Students will be instructed to ensure that the dialogue for their scenes is reflective enough to denote or mention specific changes to Michael's intrinsic character which make him appear to audiences to be embracing an American ideal instead of a mobster's persona, while he ironically assumes the mantle of his dead father.

### **Closure :**

Students will wrestle in a final reflection on the topic of whether Michael Corleone is in fact guided by the hand of destiny or fate in his anti-heroic journey, and whether his resistance to ethnicity is merely symbolic of his desire to resist the existential angst of his own predicament in being unable to overcome the destiny that has positioned him, because of his character and innate abilities, at the helm of his family's criminal responsibilities.

Students will reflect in their journals for as to whether or not autonomy and willfulness are imperative qualities to the fulfillment of the American Dream, or whether fate can play an equal hand in the achievement of "Americanism".

Students with exceptionalities may be given specific homework related to cross-curricular connections (i.e., reports or Powerpoint presentations on the post-World War II era, the New York Mafia families of the 1940s and 1950s, the Communist takeover of Cuba (featured in *Godfather II* ), the political climate in the United States which allowed for organized to flourish, or analysis of the female characters of the text as outsiders).

Students with learning disabilities will either have the length and depth of their reflective journals and textual citations mitigated, while allowing them other venues by which to assess Michael Corleone's turn to "Americanism" (for example, through drawing, storyboarding, poetry, or other less conventional journaling variations).

## Lesson Plan: The Sopranos: Made in America

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Concept/Topic: The notion of “Americanism” as it is represented in David Chase’s *The Sopranos* , specifically the final episode of the series, entitled “Made in America”.

**General Goals** : Students will come to appreciate the complexity of the final episode of the HBO television drama *The Sopranos* as a commentary on the shift, not only in organized crime in the United States since the periods depicted in *The Godfather*, but most especially as an analysis of the redefining of American values for fictional organized crime figures, the anti-hero genre, and the rest of us in general.

**Specific Objectives** : Students will be able to perform close readings of selected visual passages which serve as reminiscences, foreshadows, and harbingers of doom for the Soprano family and which are based on re-interpretations of particular moments of literary and filmic climaxes depicted in Puzo’s *The Godfather* .

By watching the entire episode “Made in America” and by performing a shot by shot analysis of the final scene and of specific earlier scenes which are suggestive of “Godfather” motifs, students will ascertain the enlightenment which can only be derived from critical, close readings of texts that inform one another, especially when juxtaposed in the correct context.

Ultimately, students will be asked to write an original ending to this pivotal episode which is an ending that is consistent to earlier themes, foreshadows, ironies, characterizations, and discussions of “Americanism” from earlier classes.

### Required Materials :

DVD copy of “Made in America”, DVD player with LCD projector, remote control for close reading of visual text, and articles of interviews given by creator David Chase regarding his mercurial thoughts on the episode and its interpretation.

### Anticipatory Set :

The guiding questions “How is Tony Soprano different from Michael Corleone, Jay Gatsby, or other fictional, ethnic mob representations we have studied?” and “Is Tony Soprano more American than the others or not?” will be addressed prior to viewing the episode “Made in America”. Students will be asked to be mindful of images or moments which remind them of previous texts or films as we watch.

### Procedures :

Students will take notes, scribbling any moment in the episode which they believe can enlighten us as to Tony Soprano’s “Americanism” or his connection to *Godfather* storylines, motifs, symbolisms, ironies, or cinematography.

When the episode is over, students will use their notes to answer a question and compose a response to the issues of Tony’s redefinition of Americanism as a gangster/anti-hero, and his possible demise.

### Independent Practice :

Students will individually locate at least five (5) moments in the filmic text where suggestions or hints are

made at Tony Soprano's potential demise.

Such moments will serve as springboards for a creative composition where students either analyze or conjecture what the next scene of the defunct series would be, or where they compose, script, or storyboard what the next scenes might look like.

In performing these didactic tasks, students will be relying on visual cues and close readings to construct interpretations, and will be connecting their thoughts to previous works studied and more general questions related to analysis and evaluation.

### **Closure :**

Students' inferences and analyses or scripts/storyboards will be collected for further work and discussion, and will also serve as the springboard for later culminating presentations regarding each student's assessment of the significance of the episode's title, the role and redefinition of American identity in the storyline, the role of women in the text, and the conjecture related to the ambiguous ending of an extraordinarily popular piece of fiction.

Students with exceptionalities may be given specific homework related to cross-curricular connections (i.e., researching the New Jersey mafia, comparing and contrasting Tony Soprano with Michael Corleone or other fictional anti-heroes, locating other *Godfather* references in other *Sopranos* texts and episodes to shed light upon our discussion of the anti-hero/American identity, etc.)

Students with learning disabilities will either have the length and depth of their reflective

journals, textual citations, and scripts, or storyboards mitigated, while allowing them other venues by which to assess Tony's American antiheroism (for example, through drawing, storyboarding, poetry, song or other less conventional journaling variations).

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