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Myth, Allusion, and the Humanities

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Introduction

This curriculum unit is designed for the high school English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, especially for 9th grade. It takes as its subject matter myths and spiritual texts insofar as their elements, morals, and themes recur as allusions in literary and philosophical traditions we call the "humanities." By concentrating on developing students' abilities to identify and interpret allusion to culturally and literarily significant myths in more contemporary texts, this unit affirms that high school-level literacy that prepares a student for continuing higher education benefits from substantive content knowledge that enables one to participate in the humanities as a tradition rather than as a disparate set of texts. The texts proposed in this unit are in no way exhaustive, but their merit rests in the fact that they are highly alluded to and, thus, provide valuable knowledge that will enable students to make sense of other high school and college literature that references them.

The unit is planned to take up approximately one academic quarter composed of 15, 90-minute class sessions which meet every other school day. Depending on the skill level of your students, you may find this unit appropriate to start the year or to come sometime later. As written, the unit includes explicit instruction in reading, writing, and discourse habits that will be expected of students throughout the entire school year. You may cut some of the explicit instruction if you teach this unit later in the year when students have already been trained in these habits. The backward design philosophy informing this unit is grounded in McTighe and Wiggins's *Understanding by Design*.

Unit Overview

In this introductory unit to 9th grade ELA, students will learn how myths and spiritual stories ask and answer fundamental, humanistic questions about where we come from, who we are, and where we are going. While teachers may choose alternatives, this unit proposes Text Sets that pair a modern poem that contains an allusion to a classic myth or spiritual text with a relevant excerpt from that source. The text sets detailed

below to fulfill the learning goals of the unit include selections from Old Testament Bible's *Genesis* along with Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay," the siren excerpt from Homer's *Odyssey* along with Margaret Atwood's "Siren Song," and the Amar Chitra Katha graphic novel version of *The Gita* paired with T. S. Eliot's "The Dry Salvages. These foundational myths and spiritual stories are chosen because the concepts, themes, symbols, and images in them are highly alluded to in later and contemporary literature and philosophy and because they offer insights into humanistic questions that span across time and geography.

Students will learn how knowing these classic texts is crucial for being able to understand how later storytellers allude to these in order to develop their answers to humanistic questions. Students will learn that these connections between storytellers across time and geography constitute traditions and that being familiar with traditions makes one a more aware, empathetic, and insightful inquirer in the humanities. As humanists-in-training, students will engage in discourses with their peers about fundamental human questions and develop a formal, argumentative short essay citing textual evidence to answer the prompt: *How does an author use allusion in order to communicate an answer to a fundamental human question? What is the value of studying ancient texts?*

Enduring Understandings

As this unit is designed to occupy most of an academic quarter, to build foundational habits and skills that will serve students throughout their high school ELA sequence, and to hook students by getting them thinking about classic humanistic questions, there are a handful of Enduring Understandings students should take away from the unit:

- Myths and spiritual texts ask and answer fundamental questions about what it means to be human.
- Different mythological and spiritual traditions offer similar and different ideas about what it means to be human.
- Humanities is the study of how humans have asked and answered the questions of who we are, where we come from, and where we are going.
- Reading for deep understanding requires becoming familiar with classic stories, images, and ideas to which storytellers continue to allude when communicating meaning.
- Strong readers use pre-reading, during-reading, and after-reading strategies to understand and interpret difficult texts.
- Reading for enjoyment and reading for understanding are both important, but they require different attitudes and skills.
- Reading for understanding requires an academic mindset, skills, and strategies that everyone can learn and in which they can improve.
- Writing for different audiences requires different styles and approaches, and writing for a formal audience requires pre-writing, during-writing, and after-writing strategies
- Being reflective of one's own understanding, misunderstanding, and goals can help one learn better.

Essential Questions

In order to guide students toward arriving at the big ideas characterized in the Enduring Understandings, the following Essential Questions should be posed in the introduction to the unit and returned to throughout the unit. Students will have the opportunity explicitly to answer these questions and see how their answers change over the course of the unit as they gain new knowledge and skills:

- What does it mean to be human?

- What common elements do stories share that can help us understand their meaning?
- How do writers use allusions to communicate an answer to a fundamental human question?
- How do strong readers make sense of difficult texts?
- How do strong writers develop impactful writing?

Knowledge and Skills

The unit aims to train students in the ELA 9-10 Common Core-aligned skills of literally comprehending, figuratively interpreting, and making connections between texts, both antiquated and contemporary. While there is a heavy focus on foundational reading and writing skills and academic habits that will serve the disciplined collegiate reader who can independently decode, interrogate, interpret, and make meaning of and between a variety of texts, the unit also places emphasis on students' comprehending the genres of myth and spiritual text. The following curriculum unit may be adapted for use throughout the high school English or humanities curriculum. In those cases, while the knowledge and skills required may not change, the need to provide explicit instruction and multiple practices may be adjusted.

By the end of the unit, students will know:

- key terms (e.g. humanities, allusion, myth, spiritual story, tradition, theme, character, setting, plot).
- the differences of aim, attitude, and method of reading for enjoyment versus reading for understanding.
- the differences of aim and strategy for developing writing for specific audiences.
- the plots and themes in classic myths and spiritual stories that inform later works of literature.
- requirements for an MLA-formatted, typed essay.

By the end of the unit, students will be able to:

- identify literary elements of setting, character, and plot, in order to arrive at literal comprehension and thematic understanding of a myth or spiritual story.
- use context clues and outside resources to determine the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary to support literal comprehension of text.
- use a Three-Reads strategy to analyze literal and figurative meaning in poetry.
- participate actively and appropriately in small and large group academic discourses about humanistic questions.
- analyze how an author uses allusions to communicate meaning.
- write a formal, MLA-formatted argumentative writing piece in multiple stages.
- employ written and verbal feedback on writing to inform revisions.
- self-reflect on learning in order to appreciate personal growth and set goals for further learning.

Academic Habits of Mind

Finally, as this curriculum unit may be used at the start of 9th grade, it is designed to train students in and to have them continually practice a set of "academic habits of mind" that will serve them as growing readers, writers, and thinkers. The list below reflects the set developed by my department in keeping with our Social Emotional Learning (SEL) goals. Students in the unit consciously reflect on their own behavior and performance in class using these virtuous habits in order to become autonomous, self-aware, and intentional learners. Please feel free to replicate, expand upon, or adapt this list of academic habits of mind to your teaching context:

- CURIOSITY – desire to know about the world
- OPENNESS – willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world
- ENGAGEMENT – sense of investment and involvement in learning
- CREATIVITY – ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas
- PERSISTENCE – ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects
- RESPONSIBILITY – ability to take ownership of your actions and understand the consequences of those actions for yourself and others
- FLEXIBILITY – ability to adapt to situations, expectations, and demands
- METACOGNITION – ability to reflect on your own thinking and learning

Rationale

Why develop a unit on myths focused on *allusion*, given the many literary devices students are certain to encounter in their study of literature in English? The answer is that this unit results from a backwards plan where the end goal is students' rich participation in the "humanities." By "humanities," I mean that set of academic disciplines, artistic products, and intellectual activities through which people have asked and answered fundamental questions about what it means to be human. The set of questions people have asked, how they have formulated them, and when and where they have attempted to answer them is as diverse as the history of human cultures and languages. Being able to wade into this human conversation, learn from it, and advance it is a wonderfully difficult and complex journey for any student, and making sense of how to teach it is equally challenging for instructors.

By 2024 I am not sure we can even count the number of pieces that have been written decrying the "death of the humanities." While I am not interested in rehashing any of these specific arguments, I want to weave together a few threads that motivate my development of this unit, and what my aims are in developing a humanities-oriented ELA curriculum unit for the public school student. These threads ultimately point me to a view of what goes into a humanities education, and how this curriculum unit serves that end.

First, in the ongoing debate between whether our educational focus for students should be on skills or content, I think it is fair to say that the answer is that *bothmatter*. I'm sure you have heard that a student with content knowledge about baseball is more likely to answer reading comprehension questions correctly about the subject of baseball even if she otherwise has been shown to be less skilled in reading comprehension than a peer who knows nothing about baseball (see Bibliography). It is perhaps uncontroversial to say that textbooks, school of education professors, and continuing education trainers for ELA teachers have for a long while emphasized exposing students to a large variety of texts and text types from a wide variety of authors in order to maximize their familiarity with as many subjects as possible and also to increase their familiarity with a variety of ways the written word can be crafted for diverse purposes. *Does this pluralization of readings in practice serve student literacy or not?*

I cannot answer that question in a scientific way here, so I will at least try to offer a speculative response. Putting aside the practical constraints on real life teachers, let's just consider the written curriculum document with its idealized modeling of the learning process: When professional textbook writers or individual teachers get to work developing curriculum units which meet the demand for exposing students to such a wide variety of texts, they do not do so haphazardly. If following the Understanding by Design (UBD) model or some similar

framework, texts as content will be selected for their relevance to the Essential Questions and Essential Understandings organizing the unit. If guided by the Common Core, designers will also attempt to collect texts of sufficient complexity and challenge for students at a particular grade level resulting from quantitative and qualitative analysis coupled with the educator's professional judgment. These aims may also be achieved by including in a unit opportunities for students to select their own texts that meet a set of important standards-based criteria.

Further, articulated or unarticulated, curriculum designers may be guided by a set of additional educational aims that inform text selection, including cultural responsiveness, LGBTQ+ inclusion, antiracism, critique, tradition, patriotism, and character formation, to name a few commonly discussed today. Within that short list are those unmandated educational aims which most energize and polarize. In popular discourse, these aims are dubbed "political" or "moral" and are quickly flattened, becoming labels with which one can be associated to the approbation of her social network or their denigration. At their best, these educational aims allow teachers to expose students to a set of meaningful content that implicitly or explicitly promotes some values that inspire them in their work as educators or that reflects their individual expertise. At their worst, however, these ulterior aims (which for many teachers may in fact be their primary aims) result in students receiving fragmented educational experiences year-on-year in their ELA educations, drawn this way or that by the interests of whoever happens to be their ELA teachers.

And so I return to the question: "Does this pluralization of readings in practice serve student literacy or not?" It would be unfair of me to put too much weight on my choice of the word "fragmented" to motivate my answer to that question. I strongly suspect upon a more scientific investigation we would find some important *practical* value to the under-regulated autonomy of teachers to design curricula responsive to their individual passions and the needs of their students as individuals and members of various communities. The great variety of texts meeting the demands of a host of textbook publishers' stakeholders may also produce a valuable assortment. Nevertheless, allow me now to pull on this thread I've spinning, which ultimately concerns the relationship between high school ELA curricula and the "humanities" as a set of disciplines and a mode of inquiry.

As in all disciplines, studying the humanities requires both a mastery of skills and knowledge of content that inform an intellectual tradition so that one may become capable of participating in and perhaps furthering, critiquing, or otherwise directing that tradition into the future. While not all high school students will go to college, I take as granted that the Common Core standards that (are supposed to) guide the work of public-school teachers are designed to equip students graduating high school with the academic skillset to continue to undergraduate education should they have the means to choose. But even if college were out of the picture, I would argue that high school graduates deserve to be able to read for what Mortimer J. Adler calls "understanding," a literacy characterized by the ability of a student to identify and persist in reading a text whose ideas are challenging in a way that requires effort and persistence, which are rewarded with a unique kind of "enlightenment."

While the term "enlightenment" may feel antiquated, I imagine that many would agree that a sense of wonder, an "AHA!" moment, or the feeling that you have come to understand something deeply world-changing through the words of another is a familiar experience to educators. Arguably it is that intellectual pleasure and experience of eye-opening insight that we have with others through reading their words or talking with them or writing out our own thoughts that inspires many to a life of learning and teaching in the first place.

Humanities disciplines are those dedicated to honing the skills and knowledge relevant to reading for *understanding* in Adler's sense. However, those scholars and academics who are vocationally dedicated to the humanities do not merely design courses in which they assign a variety of texts and text types organized by essential questions alone. Texts are also selected because their framing of and contribution to answering essential questions has played a historically pivotal role in an ongoing conversation that constitutes some *tradition*. Sharper, more practiced, and more insightful humanists are those with deep and wide familiarity with influential texts and ideas that are taken for granted or explicitly debated by later writers, artists, and thinkers. In short, taking text as the example, our ability to engage later works with understanding, to read sympathetically as well as critically, depends *in part* on reading the earlier texts that inform the later ones.

But if chronology and direct influence were all we cared about, then humanistic inquiry would be sequestered to small cultural bubbles alone. What I would argue is wonderfully true about the humanities in the 21st century is that as more philosophical, literary, cultural, spiritual, institutional, or other traditions acquire a voice in humanistic conversations, we continue to gain an opportunity for more profound, more expansive, and more just insights into what it means to be human. While there is value in studying "traditions" insofar as these have been limited by geography and time, there is even greater value in uncovering the permeable borders between traditions, both as historical fact and as theoretical possibility.

We all live and think in a world produced by artifacts of the "humanities" and various distinct and intersecting traditions in this global sense. We have received these millennia-long conversations by and large in written form. The written word and the type of thinking that goes with reading another's writing is crucial to the kind of ongoing forms of inquiry and contemporary conversations that make up the living humanities. Simply put, one cannot enter cogently into a conversation in the humanities without 'conversing' with the texts and thinkers that have shaped and been shaped by traditions. This process is in many ways analogous to the way mathematical building blocks of arithmetic and geometric proof establish a foundation for participating in more advanced mathematics. They both provide the raw materials of mathematical thinking along with common vocabulary and symbols to participate in and perform mathematical inquiry with others. While we can only stretch the analogy so far, the givenness of mathematics' incremental structure in school ought to be extended to ELA as education for the humanities.

At the level of high school education, then, our aim cannot be for students to match the breadth and depth of reading that a student may achieve by the time she completes ten years of postsecondary education. Rather, our concern could be with supporting students to develop the skills and content knowledge that are foundational for their continuing participation in humanistic forms of inquiry as reader-citizens or, perhaps, as undergraduates in American colleges.

While what I've written above leaves several under-supported claims in need of qualification, for the purposes of this curriculum unit, I hope at least to have provided an adequate rationale. In sum: to read for understanding is to participate in humanistic inquiry, and to engage in humanistic inquiry calls for familiarity with texts and ideas that influence others in a variety of traditions. From a literary perspective, it is *allusion* which exemplifies this quality of conversational heritage, one that cannot be understood and interpreted by students without familiarity with the sources to which an author alludes.

It should come as no surprise that fewer students choose to study humanities disciplines in college year-on-year, not only because professionally-motivated students do not see a direct road from the humanities to high-salaried jobs but because they have no explicit training in any humanistic tradition in the first place. I suspect you'd find that most students take ELA as their model of an English major in college, and they

conclude that the only reason to major in English is if they particularly enjoyed reading the literature assigned in their high school ELA classes and if they do not care about a major that presumes to serve as job preparation.

ELA education in high school should have a broader scope that serves all of the criteria for text selection I outlined above while adding this one: to equip students with skills and knowledge that would allow them to participate in humanistic traditions. Such students could have a framework for accessing a variety of disciplines in college from philosophy and comparative literature to area or interdisciplinary studies. And those same students would, as citizens, be able to track the continuing impact of the stories, myths, fairytales, philosophies, and their morals, themes, and concepts that continue to inform how we individually and collectively think about and debate matters of pressing human concern within families, neighborhoods, spiritual communities, and within ever widening spheres of political participation. While this pluralistic state of our human world is the condition for the kind of fragmented text selection common to American public education which I described above, I do not believe the opportunities for appreciating meaningful connections across traditions to create a more inclusive human conversation is likely if students are not taught to identify and think through the historical and textual links that constitute humanistic traditions.

Thus, this unit teaches students to identify highly alluded to stories in later and contemporary texts from a variety of cultural and spiritual traditions to prove in practice what may be lost in my theoretical articulation above: human understanding of questions of human concern are formed in an ongoing conversation of which we can become increasingly conscious. This consciousness is a way of continuing inquiry into ourselves and improving our answers to the questions that continue to shape actual human lives in all our diversity and that press on us as ethical and political agents. This is a high school ELA curricular unit satisfied with Common Core skill standards and with an ulterior aim of supporting students as humanistic inquirers, readers conscious of and participants in traditions that we can access in and through the English language.

Key Performance Task

Development of student mastery of the standards of this unit will be assessed using the variety of formative assessments described by the teaching strategies and classroom activities below. Here I outline in greater detail the Key Performance Task, or summative assessment, that allow students to demonstrate their overall standards mastery by the end of the unit. Teachers may revise classroom activities in ways they think can better support their students in being able to show mastery of standards through these tasks.

I use the Goal, Role, Audience, Situation, Product, and Standards (GRASPS) model of Wiggins and McTighe in *Understanding by Design* (UBD) to outline each of these Key Performance Tasks. GRASPS is a useful framework because it helps teachers develop more authentic skill and knowledge performances for students that both motivate interest and connect thoughtfully to real-world applications of those skills for students. I use the 2nd person in order to be clear that this assignment description is student-facing.

Key Performance Task: Argumentative Mini-Essay

Goal: You will produce an argumentative essay that can be read aloud to an audience in order to persuade them of your argument using evidence and reasons.

Role: You are a 9th grade student at your school who wants to communicate his/her/their ideas clearly effectively in writing and speaking.

Audience: Your audience will be school leaders and teachers as well as your peers. You should assume they are able to understand common academic language, but they may not have read the specific stories you choose to write about. You will have to provide all the necessary information and quotations to make your argument clear.

Situation: Your school is hosting an essay contest. The winners will get to read their essays aloud to the school to make an argument answering the debate question: “What is the value of studying old texts?” You want to win!

Product: You will produce an approximately 600-word, MLA-formatted analytical mini-essay answering the question: *How does an author use allusion in order to communicate an answer to a fundamental human question? Given this, conclude your essay by answering the question, “What is the value of studying ancient texts?”* Your final product will be the result of a multi-stage drafting, conferencing, and revision process. Your essay must have an introduction, two body paragraphs with two pieces of evidence each, and a conclusion.

Standards: *Teachers may reference any argumentative writing rubric that is adopted by their department.

Teaching Strategies

The belief at the heart of this unit is that students get better at the skills of reading, writing, and collaboration by practicing explicitly articulated methods for each over and again with newer texts. Here is a description of the specific strategies adopted by my English department in order to ensure consistent training of students horizontally and vertically across their high school English experience. While the terms used to describe these strategies are particular to my department, they have ample analogues in teacher training frameworks you likely employ in your practice. Practicing these strategies allows students to answer the essential question: How do strong readers make sense of difficult texts?

Reading Strategies

Distinguishing Challenging Texts

By the time they are in 9th grade, students tend not to have a nuanced understanding of reading as a diverse set of skills. Rather, their reading education has focused primarily, and rightly, on the elementary acquisition of the ability literally to comprehend text by acquiring sufficient vocabulary knowledge, fluency in decoding, and familiarity with various sentence structures. They likely think of reading as something either easy or hard or interesting or boring. What they do not yet know is that the possibility of a text’s being interesting or boring is, in fact, dependent on one’s ability literally to comprehend it at an elementary level in the first place. Students are often turned off by the more challenging or antiquated texts we present them in school not because the content is not potentially interesting to them but because their literal comprehension has not brought them to the point of being able to take an interest in the first place.

Nevertheless, in having students consistently read challenging texts, they come to associate reading with

drudgery, lose motivation or confidence in reading at all, and then fail to grow as authentic readers outside of school. Thus, it is imperative that students be taught to understand reading as a diverse set of skills, and that strong readers choose the right skills for the given text based on their goals. Simplifying Mortimer J. Adler's framework, students in this unit are taught that reading can be for three distinct goals: (1) entertainment, (2) information, (3) understanding. While one text could possibly provide all three experiences, they won't necessarily, and good readers learn not to judge a text that is adequately informative negatively for not being entertaining, etc.

Though it is not built into this unit plan, teachers should establish a parallel running assignment of "reading for entertainment and information." In other words, students should read books that are pleasant and hold their interest, whether they are fictional and entertaining or non-fictional and informative about some subject in which the student is interested. Books, articles, magazines, or other should be embraced as the kind of media that readers use to receive communication through the written word. The only condition should be that the content is communicated in writing. Students should choose their own texts to read. These should be at a reading level that presents little to no barriers to a students' literal comprehension. Various methods could be used, but teachers should dedicate in-class reading time for students to read their book for entertainment or information so students can develop a positive association with reading in the mode of a confident reader rather than in the mode of an aspiring student. Having students present their book to peers in small group, write up a book review, and rate their book out of five stars could be simple ways of having students express their joy, foster enthusiasm for reading, and become more self-aware of their own taste.

By contrast, students should be taught explicitly that reading for understanding when the text is above one's reading level requires and additional set of skills. By practicing these and coming to understand challenging texts literally, students become stronger readers who can access a greater variety of texts for entertainment or information. Beyond literally comprehending challenging texts, reading for understanding requires analyzing the structure of a text in order to arrive at its theme, or larger message. Because reading for understanding requires going beyond what a text literally says toward its inferred or figurative meanings, it is doubly-difficult. First a student must use strategies to arrive at literal comprehension. Then she must use further strategies to analyze meaning. When reading a difficult text, then, students will be taught that they must read it *twice*. They must also actively read by annotating and taking notes, whether guided by graphic organizers or, eventually, self-generated in a notebook. They must also recognize that since it is harder and slower work to read complex texts, they must come to the task expecting that. The difficulty will create confusion that will invite boredom and sleepiness. Students should know that reading challenging texts requires sitting up straight, with a writing utensil actively to take notes, with bright light so eyes are not strained. They should save reading in bed for entertaining and informative reads.

*Note: the specific Three-Read strategy for close reading poetry is detailed in the Activities for Text Set 1 below.

Before Reading

For each text studied in the unit, students will use the pre-reading strategy of previewing key vocabulary and generating a Know, Don't Know, Unsure if I Know (KDU) chart. Students will also participate in a Do Now task that gives the opportunity to preview from their own and their peers' perspectives the ideas, themes, or topics that they will encounter in the reading. Students will then read the text twice.

During Reading

On the first read, students will merely focus on making sense of the unfamiliar vocabulary in order to arrive at an initial summary of what they literally comprehended in the text. Students will guess at the meanings of the words they are unsure of, then use context clues on the *first* read in order to guess meanings. Students will then compare their guesses against dictionary definitions and update their personal dictionary in their notebooks accordingly.

Students will then conduct their *second read*. Students will begin a guided close reading to identify the key textual elements of setting, character, and plot before drawing inferences and identifying theme, if there is one. Students identify setting in the text by identifying the where, when, and mood, recording these in a graphic organizer. Teachers may provide "mood" word lists as a scaffold. Then students will identify any characters in the text and characterize them in relation to SLATE (speech, looks, actions, thoughts, and effects on others).

After Reading

After completing the second read, students will provide a more detailed summary of the key "plot" points in the story. It is worth noting that since the myths and spiritual stories in this unit do not necessarily contain all of the moments commonly associated with a "plot map," the expectation for students is primarily to provide literal summary of key *changes* in events from the beginning, middle, and end of the text.

Participating in small or whole group discussion, students will collaborate to answer inference-questions that require evidence and explanation to support these. Such discussions usually will conclude with a final writing task for each student individually to record her answer to the question using evidence, providing a work product teachers may use to assess individual student understanding and writing skill.

Writing Strategies

The description below explains the writing cycle that should be used when students complete the Key Performance Task. I will not duplicate this information as a Classroom Activity, but you should plan to allot approximately six class periods to this process. The process is designed to habituate students to the extensive, intensive, and reflective activity that is the production of polished, formal writing. It is also designed to ensure students rely on their own skills and understanding in order to produce a polished final piece of writing rather than turning to AI tools or editing software. To that end, the process explicitly begins with handwriting and moves under supervision into a typed format. Teachers are encouraged to use the "version history" feature in modern word processing software in order to verify within reason that students have made their own edits to their essays. Sentence or paragraph-level copy-paste changes may be indications of plagiarism. Practicing the following process writing cycle allows students to answer the essential question: How do strong writers develop impactful writing?

Before Writing

Using the accumulated notes from close reading and discussion on all of the required texts, students will have a robust set of material and discursive experiences to help inform their argument. With these, students will brainstorm an outline to their essay, providing their initial answer to the prompt and then selecting at least four pieces of evidence from two myth-allusion text pairs. Teachers should assess these outlines before students begin the writing process.

During Writing

Students will compose four drafts of their essay. The first draft is to be handwritten using a graphic organizer explicitly tied to the argumentative essay writing format adopted by your school. This draft should receive comments from the teacher focusing on quality of evidence selection and line of reasoning. The second draft should be typed in class and be a near word-for-word copy of the handwritten draft but for any changes based on feedback. Teachers should then provide targeted conferencing with students in order to provide feedback on this draft. Verbal feedback in conferencing helps build student investment and can provide greater clarity than mere marks on a page. Students will then edit a third draft based on feedback. Students will then use a proofreading, and MLA formatting checklist in order to polish a fourth, final draft of the essay for submission. This final draft may be submitted digitally or printed and turned in as hard copy for assessment.

After Writing

Once students have completed their final draft, they should engage in several meta-cognitive strategies. First, they should self-assess their essay against the rubric (teachers should use whichever argumentative essay rubric is adopted by their department). Second, they should answer the reflection questions, such as the following: (1) What am I proud of in this essay I wrote? (2) What was challenging or new to me in developing this essay? (3) What habits do I need in order to develop strong essays? (4) What do I want to remember for the next time I write an essay? Finally, after students receive their final graded essay back, they should read any comments and rubric descriptors received, record their performance in an ongoing Key Assessment tracker, and answer reflection questions there, such as: (1) What are 1-2 key strengths in this essay? (2) What are 1-2 key weaknesses I need to improve in my next essay?

Text Sets

In order to select texts to teach in this unit, I propose that teachers identify highly alluded to texts that ask and answer fundamental questions about what it means to be human and that draw from a sufficient variety of traditions to be of relevance to our students in our contexts as well as to expand their thinking into others'. The "fundamental question" this unit specifically attends to and to which myths and spiritual stories especially address is "What does it mean to be human?"

Below are brief summaries of the key content elements for each assigned text that teachers should know in order to guide students' analyses of how mythical and spiritual texts answer the essential question as well as those texts which allude to them. As they are frequently alluded to, you may pick a variety of other contemporary texts that could be especially engaging to your students. I offer suggestions for further texts in the Additional Texts section. As described below, this trio of text sets I have selected is virtuous not only because each pair is allusively connected but because each set has thematic connections to humanistic questions that extend beyond the historical confines of time and geography. Thus, these sets give students the opportunity to recognize the humanities as a larger human activity of making and expressing meaning, with similarities that connect people and differences that may enlighten us.

I provide detailed lesson plans as "Activities" for the first text set. Teachers should treat these as templates to duplicate for the next two text sets using the provided resources referenced at the end of this unit and any

other teacher-generated resources. In all cases, this unit is designed to cycle the same teaching strategies outlined above and articulated in the Activities below. In short, hook students with an independent thinking and writing task, explicitly state the learning task for the day, use strategies of turn-and-talk, batch call, stop-and-jot, small group work, and whole group discourse to support student advancement through the Reading Strategy described above, then conclude with an Exit Ticket timed writing task that assesses student understanding of the key take-aways from the lesson and that practice the analytical writing required for the Key Performance Task. It is imperative that students get as much practice and feedback as possible on analytical writing in order to master the skill standards that organize this unit. I recommend referencing *Teach Like a Champion 3.0* for a more detailed breakdown of how to employ each of the teaching strategies mentioned above.

As a final prefatory note, teachers may be wary about including excerpts from the Bible or other spiritual texts in a public school classroom. It is worth noting that the Common Core standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.9 explicitly uses the Bible as an example of a source that students could know in order to analyze how an author “draws on and transforms source material in a specific work.” Public school educators have good reason to be thoughtful and considerate in teaching these texts, which will likely be of great significance for our students and their families, and which will be interpreted and discussed in historical and literary rather than explicitly spiritual or metaphysical terms. See Classroom Activities for an example of how to address this topic directly, to frame appropriate use of these texts, and to gain student and parent buy-in. You may find it helpful to send home a note to parents to make them aware that you will be studying spiritually significant texts as great literature that has informed the thinking and writing of later authors, not that you will be teaching any particular religious doctrines.

Text Set 1: The Bible, Genesis 1-3

Given the pervasive influence of Christianity on the English-speaking world, it is well understood that the contents of the Bible have had a significant impact on the English literary tradition. While one may pick a great variety of books of the Bible to which there is much allusion in later literature, Genesis 1-3’s description of the creation of the world and Adam and Eve’s “fall” from Eden is particularly salient. It is an origin story that addresses at least two of the fundamental questions listed above. It is also of reasonable length to be accessible to 9th grade students.

Originally written in Hebrew, debates about who authored it and when are outside of the scope of this unit. For our purposes, it is enough to understand the following: Gensis 1-3 provides some answer to the question “What does it mean to be human?” These books describe an omniscient God which brings the earth, light, and creatures into existence from nothing and calls these “good.” God then creates “man,” “Adam,” as well as a “garden” in which he may live called “Eden.” Eden is presented as a paradise that contains all the things Adam could want, but God forbids him from eating from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” with the consequence that if he does he shall “surely die.”

Deciding that it is not good for man to be alone, God then extracts a rib from Adam and creates for him a woman, “Eve,” to be a partner to him. They are both naked and not ashamed. However, a serpent tricks Eve into eating from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, claiming that she will not die from it. She encourages Adam to eat as well. Having disobeyed God, both become aware of their nakedness, develop shame, and are banished from Eden to suffer in the world.

This account of the origin of humanity introduces several key ideas for students to consider in understanding

how it answers the essential questions. First, that the world and humans came into being from nothingness from the act of an all-powerful God. Two, that a condition of human life is self-consciousness of our nakedness and suffering, or the ability to die. Three, that developing this ability to die, or the “fall” from Eden was the result acquiring a particular kind of knowledge, that of good and evil.

Key symbols for students to identify are the association of the serpent with deception, or evil, and the apple with temptation toward something dangerous.

Text Set 1: “Nothing Gold Can Stay” by Robert Frost

This poem utilizes naturalistic imagery and an allusion to Eden in order to communicate the theme that nothing can last forever. The poem’s focus is on images of nature. Students will need support to make the connection between nature as living plants that can die and human nature as living beings that can die.

Activity 1

This and the following activities are expected each to take one 90-minute class session, factoring in time spent during some classes on choice, independent reading described in Teaching Strategies above as well as for direct instruction in grammar and yearlong vocabulary study.

This class serves to launch the unit, introduce the concept of the humanities, and to get students engaged in the fundamental questions they will explore as humanists-in-training. Class begins with a Do Now prompt for students to answer in their journal: What does it mean to be human?

After sufficient time for reflecting and writing independently, students turn and talk with a partner to share their responses. Afterward, we open the floor for whole-group share out. There are no right or wrong answers here. As students provide their responses, the teacher will record answers on the board to create a visual display of the variety of perspectives in the room. Teachers will use this to transition to a unit launch. In a brief lecture format in which students may take guided or independent notes, teachers will define the humanities as the attempt to ask and answer fundamental questions like these about what it means to be human. Myths and spiritual stories are those that often provide us perspective and insight into these questions. Whether we’ve read them or not, they have had a profound influence on how we already answer these questions, and can help us understand even better how people answer these questions today.

It is recommended that teachers compile all of the printed materials of this Text Set into a Text Set packet. However, it is up to the teacher whether to use digital or paper materials and to distribute in whatever format is appropriate. In what follows, I will refer to the Text Set packet. Opening the Text Set packet, students will turn to the biography of Robert Frost. Students will read and annotate the text and answer the comprehension questions independently and silent: What do you now know about Robert Frost? What kind of poetry did he write? Then have students share out what they learned in a batch call of three students.

Now have students open Robert Frost’s, “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” Using a Three-Reads strategy specifically for poetry, guide students through the following steps: First, the teacher reads aloud while students simply listen and follow along then jot down an End Note on the bottom of the page of what the poem seems to be about. Second, students read the poem for literal meaning, highlighting any unfamiliar vocabulary, then working with a partner to define those words in the margins. With the vocabulary clarified, students “translate” the poem’s couplets into their own words with a partner, jotting this revision down in the margin. Third, students read for figurative meaning, circling any words or phrases that require inference to

understand. Teachers should focus students on “gold” as symbolizing great value.

Have students work in small groups to answer the guiding question: “What is Frost’s message about nature in the poem?” Then open up to whole group discourse, leveraging active listening of small groups in order to call on students in a strategic scaffold, building from weaker toward stronger answers. Call on a student to summarize the ideas in order to arrive at a clear answer. An almost there response would be, “Everything changes.” Push students to note the negative or melancholy tone created by the phrase “sank to grief.” Then raise the question, do we know what it means that “Eden sank to grief?” Some students may have an answer, but we will turn to the source to understand for ourselves.

Conclude with an Exit Ticket asking students to list and explain the goal for each of the Three-Reads of poetry.

Activity 2

Open the class with the following Do Now journal prompt: What could be the value of reading religious, or spiritual, texts in school? What are some of the risks?

After actively monitoring student responses, have students turn and talk to share their responses. Then direct students whole group to share responses while recording a T-chart of Benefits and Risks on the board. Student responses will vary, but benefits could include: getting to learn about different things people believe, gaining wisdom, or learning the truth. Risks could include: offending someone, talking about a religion in the wrong way, teaching students a religion they don’t believe in.

Teachers should use this opportunity to affirm student perspectives and to legitimize their concerns. Motivate the teaching of spiritual texts because of their tremendous influence on how people have thought and wrote for as long as we have been writing. We’re surrounded by references from spiritual texts all the time, and to understand the images, ideas, and symbols all around us, we need to know where they come from. That said, our goal here is not to promote any particular religion or interpretation as the truth. Instead, we are here as humanists to learn what humans have written to answer those fundamental questions from last class, and to see how those answers can help us answer these questions for ourselves to make sense of what it is to be a human being in this world.

Students will engage in a small group activity to construct a set of guidelines for respectful discourse as we read spiritual texts this unit. Using a graphic organizer, students will work in groups to draft a series of commitments as to what actions and words they can use to show respect for the texts we will read and for their peers as we work together to understand those texts. After groups share out their responses, the teacher will collect these and compile them into a master list that will be copied and passed out in the next period for students to include at the top of the Unit Notes section of their binders.

The teacher will direct students to open to the teacher-created vocabulary previewing section of the Text Set packet. Students will proceed to follow the before reading strategies and complete a first read of Genesis 1-3. Students should submit an Exit Ticket answering the following prompt: How does Genesis 1-3 answer the question “What does it mean to be human?” Teachers should review these responses to gauge initial comprehension. If necessary, assign students homework to complete defining of any unfamiliar vocabulary included in the preview or independently identified by students as needed.

Activity 3

Students begin with a Do Now asking the skills question, “What strategies do strong readers use to understand challenging texts?” After actively monitoring student responses, use a turn-and-talk or move directly to warm-call in order to elicit a response that highlights the before, during, and after reading strategies introduced and practiced but not completed last class. If students are struggling to answer the question as written, ask them “Why should we read difficult texts twice?”

Call on students to summarize what they remember from Genesis 1-3 from last class. Then have students turn and talk to discuss their “pleasures and perplexities” after the first read. In other words, what did they find interesting and what did the find confusing. Once confident that students have externalized their reactions and hopefully helped each other a bit to answer some confusions, present the close reading question to focus their second read: “What is the setting of Genesis, and how is it described?” Students will use a graphic organizer independently to re-read Genesis 1-3, taking notes on where, when, and mood of the setting. As this is not a modern text, we do not expect students to find much by way of mood. Also, anticipate that students may misunderstand the setting as just “earth,” by focusing only on Genesis 1. Address this misconception individually or collectively depending on frequency of the error as you actively monitor student progress. Student notes should include direct quotations as evidence to support their response to the guiding question.

Then have students turn and talk to share their evidence and answer to the close reading question. Turning to whole-group, use a document camera to take model notes that students can copy or add to their own. Create a T-chart with “Evidence” on the left and “Inference” on the right. At the top of the page, write the prompt. Elicit student responses and record their evidence, citing line numbers. Push students to provide inferences explaining how their evidence answers the prompt. Student responses will vary, but teachers should focus on answers that indicate that Eden is a beautiful place, bountiful with food, in which humans have no shame, and which God considers “good.” If students do not also find evidence describing the world into which Adam and Eve are banished, pose this back-pocket question, “What about the setting outside of Eden?”

Once students have produced a class set of notes that indicates the *transition* from paradise to toil, direct instruct them that this event is often called the “fall” and gives an account of why humans experience death, pain, and suffering. Clarify that “evil” does not just mean doing bad things but it also means the experience of bad things like suffering and pain. Underscore that it is their action of defying God through temptation to eat the apple that leads to the fall. Students should add this term and definition to their Text Set notes. If there is time for further discussion, ask students, “Why is it that knowledge of good and evil causes Adam and Eve to experience suffering and death? What did they know before they ate the apple?” Interesting ideas students may produce could be that to know good is to know evil, so to be free from evil would also mean never knowing anything good. Eden is a paradise we could not recognize as good. If we want goodness, it must come at the cost of knowing evil, etc.

Students should now complete a timed final write Exit Ticket answering the prompt and using at least one piece of quoted evidence to support their response. Use the paragraph writing format aligned to the essay writing format adopted by your English department. As an example, I use TEQEC: Topic sentence, Explain the topic sentence, Quotation, Explanation of quotation, Conclude.

Activity 4

Open the class with a written Do Now question, “What is an allusion?” If your department provides students with lists of key literary terms as a resource at the start of the year, teachers should actively be looking for students to habitually open their class binders to locate the answer. If students are not using their resources, prompt them to “use their resources,” re-enforcing key academic habits of mind outlined in the Unit Overview

above.

After calling on a student to define “allusion,” remind students that we started this Text Set reading Robert Frost’s “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” That poem alluded to “Eden,” but we weren’t totally sure what it meant at that time. Now that we know, we can try to better understand Frost’s poem.

Students will take a moment to re-read the poem and review their notes. Then present them with the Discourse Question: *How does Frost use allusion in “Nothing Gold Can Stay” in order to communicate an answer to the fundamental human question, “What are we?”* Before beginning the discourse preparation process, explicitly ask students to explain what they need to know in order to answer the question. Students should recognize that they must identify where Frost uses allusion and then explain how he uses that to tell us something about what we are as humans.

Students will prepare for discourse by stopping-and-jotting their initial response to that question. Students will then break into small groups to conduct a peer-led discussion on the prompt. Using an academic habits of discourse guide, students should be sure to follow a clear protocol for participation: each student takes a turn to speak to give a response; each student listens and looks at the speaker when he/she/they are speaking; students use evidence to support their responses; students ask and answer questions to each other. After groups have worked together for some time, assign in each group a presenter who will share the group’s answer to the class.

After small group discourse, turn to whole group discourse. Groups’ presenters will take turns to share out their answers to the prompt, referencing evidence. Invite individuals from any group to respond to others’ answers with comments, questions, or critiques. Be patient and allow students to generate discussion independently without excessive intervention. When appropriate use guiding questions to support students to arrive at the idea that the allusion to Eden highlights a horrible transition from paradise to suffering and the introduction of death into human life. As Frost describes that in nature nothing lasts forever, the allusion to Eden makes the point that humans are also a product of the same nature, and we do not last forever either. Thus, Frost’s poem reveals that the natural world and human nature both experience change as decline, or mortality.

Give students an Exit Ticket final writing task to answer the prompt in a formal argumentative paragraph using their notes from discussion. This writing will serve as a resource for the final performance task and also provide a formative data point for teachers to reteach the ideas from the class or writing skills that will be essential when it comes to write the mini-essay.

Text Set 2

Excerpt from Homer’s *Odyssey*: The Sirens

Homer’s *Odyssey* provides a dizzying array of stories and Greek mythological figures which have been alluded to in the English-language tradition as well as in various art forms for centuries. In order to make time for at least three text sets this unit, I will specifically use the excerpt describing Odysseus’s encounter with the Sirens. In the passage, Odysseus’s journey brings him and his men on a dangerous path in which female, bird-like monsters lure sailors to their death with a beautiful song. Odysseus has his men tie him to the ship and

plug his ears while rowing swiftly on in order to protect him from temptation and death.

This passage is valuable as the “siren’s song” remains an idiom in modern English that refers to dangerous temptation. Further, though the *Odyssey* has no historical connection to the Old Testament, a common motif of the dangers of “temptation” are explored here just as they are in Genesis, which students studied earlier. This provides an opportunity to draw a thread between texts across time and geography that explore related themes when answering the question of what it means to be human. Here we are preparing students to engage in humanistic inquiry and to recognize the connections between myths and spiritual stories while not discarding their differences.

As this is an excerpt from the middle of the text, teachers should provide a background summary on the epic poem and the character of *Odysseus* as a Do Now task before having students launch into the close reading cycle.

“Siren Song,” Margaret Atwood

Atwood’s poem provides a wonderful twist in its allusion to the *Odyssey*’s myth of the Sirens. The speaker of this poem seems to be herself a Siren, reflecting on the power of her song and admitting that it is boring and that she wants off the island. The poem is a welcome addition to the unit because it provides a feminist critique of the sexist association of deadly temptation with women as Sirens. Further, given that this same association is made between the woman, Eve, and persuading Adam to eat the fruit that leads to the fall, there is an opportunity to have students reflect on how allusion in the humanities carries implicit associations which we may be able to challenge and reverse through art. Having students reflect on their own assumptions, the textual threads that inform our stories and language that create those assumptions, and how we can use art and conscious reflection on it in the humanities to reverse these assumptions would be a powerful outcome of this text set study. Further, Atwood’s poem offers another opportunity for students to practice the Three-Reads method for close reading poetry described in Activity 1 above.

In order to generate interest and provide student practice at literally comprehending non-fiction texts in keeping with the Common Core standard informing this unit, teachers should provide a biographic sketch of Atwood as a Do Now task before launching into the close reading of the poem.

Text Set 3

“The Gita” from Amar Chitra Katha

In order to support students in accessing multimedia text sources and also to make vivid a spiritual text that is visually rich in Hindu culture but may be unfamiliar to many students, I have selected the comic book retelling of the *Mahabharata*’s “Bhagavad Gita” for this text set. This text is an ideal choice for several reasons. First, it is of spiritual importance to a significant percentage of the world’s population and continues to be referenced and retold into the present. Second, its translation from Sanskrit into Romance languages and eventually English in the 18th and 19th centuries have made it an influential philosophical and artistic inspiration to thinkers and writers in the English language, showing up in a variety of allusions from Thoreau’s reference to it in *Walden* to the Wachowskis’ references in *The Matrix* film series. Finally, it provides insight and answer to the essential humanistic question “What does it mean to be human?”

This version of the Gita story simplifies and dramatizes the philosophical dialogue between Arjuna and Lord Krishna on the Kurukshetra battlefield about whether Arjuna is justified in fighting his own family and friends. It is nicely self-contained, in that it opens with the background context for the war that results in the famous battlefield scene that actually constitutes the original Gita. The context for the story is a war between two groups of cousins, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, over who has the right to rule the kingdom. Arjuna and Krishna are both Pandavas. Krishna is a friend, cousin, philosopher, god, and guide to Arjuna. Arjuna's distress at how it can be morally right to kill his cousins is met in dialogue by Krishna's injunction to adhere to his duty, or *dharma*. In this graphic novel version, Krishna's advice to spiritual realization through devotion, *bhakti*, knowledge, *jnana*, and disciplined action, *karma* is illustrated rather than merely described in dialogue. In order to support students in accessing the comic book medium, teachers will provide a scaffolded guide on how to read comics.

While the contents of even the graphic retelling of the Gita is worthy of a unit of study on its own, students should focus on the following key ideas because of their relation to the ideas and themes explored in the earlier two text sets as well as their distinct response to the essential question. First, that the condition of suffering and death is a mere bodily condition to be distinguished from the human soul, something that is more essential to the human. Second, that if bodily changes are superficial and what matters is enlightenment of the soul, then our actions that affect the body are insignificant. Third, that actions which lead the soul to enlightenment are the only justified actions, and these include fulfilling one's duty, spiritual devotion, seeking knowledge, and disciplined action.

In order to support students in making the connection between this and the other texts they have studied, teachers should note that "what it means to be human" here is not the condition of suffering highlighted in Text Set 1 but one of release from suffering through performing certain types of soul-oriented action. It is outside the scope of this unit to guide students in noting parallels between this view and some interpretations of Christian theology as depicted in various textual sources. It is important that students not narrowly conclude these texts are somehow making altogether opposite claims. Instead, students should be supported in discussions that articulate similarities and differences without taking these to be final. This is the condition of reading excerpts, and students should understand that.

"The Dry Salvages" by T. S. Eliot

In order to provide students with a manageable text for this unit with an explicit allusion, I excerpt only the third poem in Eliot's "Four Quartets," also known as "The Dry Salvages." I reserve this poem for the final text set, as it is the longest and most challenging, and students will benefit from the earlier practices before arriving at this one. As this is an especially challenging poem, teachers should have students read the entire poem twice but only focus their close reading, Three-Reads strategy on stanza 3, which specifically includes the allusion to Gita.

Dry salvages refer to a group of rocks with a beacon off the coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts. In this poem, Eliot explores the nature of time and human existence, looking for meaning in life while dramatizing the struggle between the physical and spiritual worlds. The connection between these questions and themes and the Gita is made explicit when Eliot asks in stanza III, "I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant." In the stanza, Eliot presents a series of wistful and poetic images describe the passing of time as both causing regret for a lost past and the impending future into which life fades. In this way, the poem directly connects to themes from Text Set 1, as does the Gita, but alludes to the Gita in a way that answers that question about what it means to be human in distinct, modern terms. Eliot enjoins the reader to "fare forward" into the

future, embrace and celebrating action in life without bemoaning the lost past or the need to accomplish a specific "fruit of action" in the future.

While initially enigmatic to students, this poem's meaning becomes much clearer with the background knowledge of the story of Krishna and Arjuna, the lessons Krishna teaches, and an understanding of the meaning of the word "action" that Eliot employs in allusion to the Gita. As in the text sets above, students should read the poem first, attempt an interpretation, then study the alluded to text before finally returning to a re-read discussion, and final write on the connection between the poem and its source text.

In teaching this poem within the context of this unit, teachers should be careful not to get distracted analyzing excessive literary devices in Eliot's poem. The key focus should be to unlock meaning that is gained through knowledge of the allusion's source and for students to articulate that meaning in discussion and formal writing.

Additional Text Sets

I have detailed specific content knowledge relevant to three text sets that could occupy the full curriculum unit. This is a choice of quality coverage over quantity covered. Unfortunately, limiting the text set to three has the downside of limiting the variety of mythical and spiritual reference points students can be exposed to. Ultimately, the choice to focus on student practice of long form reading and writing strategies limits the amount of content one can reasonably expect to cover within the unit. However, pacing may differ depending on the level of ability of a given group of students. Using the same structured format for before, during, and after reading, small group discussion and writing analytical paragraphs as Exit Tickets, teachers may easily incorporate further or alternative Text Set pairs into this unit.

In order to support greater diversity of representation in the text set, teachers should consider extending the length of the unit, or replacing Text Set 2 with one of the sets below. Some of these examples are more advanced and could be appropriate for later grades. Alternatively, as the argument of my rationale is to engender in students a clear vision for the intentional connections between texts across time and geography in a humanistic tradition, consider building further lessons using the texts below that return to the same humanistic essential question and which continue to make explicit allusive connections.

- "Ring of Gyges," Plato's *Republic* paired with excerpts from *The Lord of the Rings* (Consider using clips from the theatrical version in order to incorporate multimedia modalities in the classroom. Provide students with guides for translating close reading strategies of text to film. The same rule of multiple reads, or views, should apply.)
- Excerpts from Qur'an and Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* (This text could be used for a novel-length study. Mahfouz's writing uses extensive Islamic allusion, implicitly and explicitly. Giving students selected passages to interpret before and after reading the Qur'anic references would be valuable. For a shorter task, consider issuing students just pages 19-21 and pair it with Surat al-Baqarah, verse 187. Providing background material on Ramadan and the five pillars of Islam could provide helpful context. Students should note that the reference to distinguishing light from dark in Mahfouz's text alludes to marital relations as well as eating and drinking, providing greater insight into the implications of Kirsha's party with the men.

- "The People Could Fly" tale, excerpts from the Bible's book of Songs, and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. Morrison's novel borrows heavily from direct allusion both to the Old Testament Bible's Songs as well as the Black American slave legend of flying Africans. Having taught Morrison's novel in the past, much of its meaning is under-appreciated by students based merely on giving them these allusive references. Using the methods outlined in the Teaching Strategies and Activities above, consider having students read key passages from the novel, then study the allusive references, and finally return to the novel to note how directly understanding the allusive reference impacts their interpretation of the meaning of those passages of the novel in relation to an essential question. To extend the reference, consider having students identify and explain the allusive connection between Beyonce's *Lemonade*, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, and "The People Could Fly." This more advanced study could have the aim of students' making interpretive connections that may be less intentionally given by the allusions, from fashion choices, to the Gullah people, to the legend of flying Africans and the implication of the legend on Beyonce's answer to the essential question, "What does it mean to be human?" Here is an opportunity to extend the humanistic question away from a universalistic analysis of the human toward a particular, identity-rich and historical one.

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

New Haven Public Schools adopts the Common Core State Standards for all grades. This unit has been planned backward starting with the specific reading, writing, speaking, and language standards that the unit aims to teach. The core standard that animates the entire unit is CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.9, which states, "Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare). Meeting this standard requires students to practice a set of others, which were selected in turn. These include the ability for students to cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what a text says explicitly as well as draw inferences from the text. Students should be able to do this in writing and speaking about fiction and informational texts. In order to meet this standard given essential humanistic questions organizing the unit, further relevant standards to the unit are those that concern students' ability to identify themes in texts and build to this complex skill by first determining the meaning of unfamiliar words in context using a variety of strategies. Demonstrating knowledge of key terms and concepts in the unit also requires students to be able to precise language and domain-specific vocabulary, such as "allusion" and "myth" in order to explain their thinking. Finally, the Key Performance Task requires students to practice the writing standards related to generating a formal piece of writing using a style guide, such as MLA, and also to polish spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Teachers should modify instructional activities, design reteaches, and revise the unit timeline as needed in order to support student growth in mastering Common Core standards.

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