



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1985 Volume II: American Musical Theater

Loving and Losing

Curriculum Unit 85.02.05
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This curriculum unit will attempt to compare two contemporary plays, *West Side Story* and *Man of La Mancha*, with their Renaissance predecessors, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Don Quixote*. My focus will be on loss, which affects my students just as powerfully as the characters in the plays. For many, adolescence is a time of constant strife: their coming of age, their loss of innocence, their search for identity, and their first sexual awakenings. Many of their feelings will be mirrored in the readings.

This unit is geared for my top eighth-grade English classes. It will take approximately one-half year to complete, provided students do all of their assigned reading. High school students would also benefit from the unit.

The topic of loss will allow my students to deal with issues of maturity, decision-making, and value formation in an open, informed, and frank atmosphere. Students do not want to sidestep important questions or distort reality with half-truths or myths. They are concerned about what is valuable in their own lives, the lives of their peers, and the world at large. Students want to learn. They want to examine and compare values, beliefs, and other points of view because they constantly face situations that demand choices which will affect the rest of their lives. Educators must accept the responsibility of aiding students in this critical area by providing educationally sound, well-prepared opportunities for exposure to sensitive topics.

The objectives of this unit are:

1. to compare two contemporary plays with their Renaissance predecessors;
2. to show my students that the theme of loss has long been part of mankind's tradition;
3. to show my students that loss in literature has direct relevance to their personal lives;
4. to show my students that their urban lives may bring them more loss experiences than non-urban adolescents;
5. to show my students that the grieving process over loss is a normal part of human life, and a necessary one if they are to grow;
6. to help my students abandon their unrealistic expectations about life by showing them that life is what it is—often unfair, even cruel;
7. to show my students that they are not alone in their feelings of loss—that loss is a normal, inevitable part of human life;

8. to show my students that life can be exciting and rewarding, even with loss, if the painful experiences are used to renew their energies and directions;,,
9. to give them some direction in how to deal with and accept loss.

The teacher who uses this unit on loss can try some of my teaching techniques, which I have developed through my counseling training:

1. I prepare my lesson plans with great care and detail;
2. I share my own personal experiences with my students;
3. I adopt a non-judgmental attitude concerning what the students tell me during class discussions;
4. each teacher must evaluate the specific teaching situation, taking into account the students and their families, the administration, and the community;
5. I set as the opening task the development of closer relationships in the classroom between students, to hasten the sharing process. Remember, just because the students are classmates does not necessarily mean that they are personally acquainted. An ice-breaker to help develop a friendly atmosphere is important;
6. I continually work on building confidence and trust among the students. I move slowly from the introductory sessions to more personal and sensitive subjects. Students should understand that confidentiality is essential within the group, but that the goal is not “true confessions.” No one is to be forced to talk or share if he or she does not want to. However, there should be a concerted effort on the part of the teacher to keep the sharing process moving forward. Otherwise, the group discussions may stagnate and remain at a very superficial level;
7. I bring my bereavement counseling experience into the classroom, to explain that showing grief is a normal part of being human. This helps fulfill Objective #5—to show that the grieving process is normal and necessary.

Working not only as an English teacher but also as a bereavement counselor has made me aware of the need for students to be exposed through literature to the theme of loss. A student suffers loneliness when he leaves the security of the family circle for school. He wonders if there will be friendly faces to greet him. This might lead to a discussion of the gang comradery within the Jets and the Sharks in *West Side Story*. Loss is the disruption he fears if his parent changes jobs and he must start all over in another town. The transient Puerto Rican population in my school is familiar with this. Can he relate those feelings to the Sharks adjusting to Manhattan? How do my students feel when a secret or confidence has been betrayed, as in *West Side Story*? Do they not experience the loss of trust, of faith, and of a so-called friend? Loss is the emptiness he feels if he is left out when others are invited to parties. Why were Don Quixote and the Sharks also left out? Loss is the confusion during moments he cannot find something—a watch, homework, a favorite record. Is there any connection to Don Quixote's absent-mindedness or Anita's deliberate changing of Maria's message? Loss is the sadness and the self-doubt a student endures when he is forced to give up goals. Physics attracts him as a career, but algebra gives him trouble. He dreams of singing like Michael Jackson or Prince, yet cannot carry a turn. He dreams of performing on MTV but his talent on the drums is not good enough to make the school band. Are a student's strivings at times similar to Don Quixote's unreachable, "impossible dream"?

Students who have encountered loss will notice every couple there is to see, hand-in-hand. Happy people will seem to be everywhere, intensifying their sense of isolation. One of the insanities of loss is that the rest of the world seems to go on thriving while the pulse beat within ourselves feels so deadened. This preoccupation with self is a symptom of loss to which my urban students can relate. At times everything in their lives is a reminder of loss. It is as if a great cosmic conspiracy were in operation, inflicting pain. Television shows, other people's conversations, songs, foods, strangers on the street, certain automobile models, items of clothing, all become tragic reminders, intensifying a teenager's preoccupation with loss.

There are many gaps to be filled as students struggle to replace missing experiences or lost identities. They long for what has been lost, their dream, their loved one, their health, their wholeness at some point. Feelings of guilt and self-blame often set in. The vocabulary of mourning begins like this—"If only . . ." Life requires all students to make choices. Inescapably, they make some wise ones and some foolish ones. Sometimes it is hard to accept their human limitations.

Students' losses do not involve merely everyday occurrences. Bereavement comes from the word "reave," meaning to be dispossessed, to be robbed of something belonging to oneself. Most of our students have been deeply hurt in the course of their short lives. Tragedies and disappointments have befallen them. Many situations can carry a sense of irrevocable loss: rape, chronic illness, birth defects, the breakup of a love affair, the loss of a job, the loss of a dream or goal, the loss of personal belongings in a fire or flood, a move which necessitates losing friends and roots. On occasion they have trusted others who have betrayed their trust.

Students may have grown up with broken families, and alcoholic or mentally ill parents. Even the happiest families have various sorrows. Their parents and siblings are as they will always be. They cannot change them. They cannot make them happier, less neurotic, or more careful of themselves. For the events of the past are unalterable, and the sense of loss may be experienced as a death that has occurred. But in both the students' and the play characters' lives, there are flashes of beauty, love, and hope that also sometimes—however fleetingly—touch them.

Intentionally or not others have hurt them. Pain is one of the most significant factors that shape them into the persons they are. Their scars are a part of their personal histories and present strengths. The scars remain. Losses shatter students' innocence as they learn how vulnerable they are. Loss is a lesson in vulnerability; it

teaches students that they have no guarantee against having to give up the people and things most precious to them. Over the years, whatever strong feelings of abandonment, fear, guilt, hurt, or anger students have encountered may return to haunt them during subsequent times of crisis. Hurtful experiences require a long time to burn themselves out completely. Sometimes it is hard to accept these human limitations. Our job is to help give students some direction in acceptance.

One of the hardest things to do is to release students' unrealistic expectations concerning what they feel life ought to be. Life ought to be fairer in its distribution of suffering. Life ought to involve choices not equally painful. Life ought to provide more opportunities to grow through joyous times than through suffering. The fact that some of my inner city teenagers try to live good and decent lives ought to result in their not having to suffer any momentous losses. That they have learned so much from suffering ought to spare them from all major hurt in the future. Each of these notions, they learn, is an unrealistic expectation. Life is what it is. Just like Don Quixote, we are all vulnerable and needy people. In human life fairness has nothing to do with illness, death, divorce, accidents, shattered dreams, and a host of other losses. The world cannot be what we want it to be but like Don Quixote we can only try.

My students will hopefully learn that as they release overly idealistic expectations of life, space is created for realistic self-renewal. They begin to recreate themselves, their goals, their relations with others, their approach to living. When their expectations of themselves and others gradually become more realistic, they become less easily disillusioned and more easily satisfied. "Life is so much a matter, they realize, of walking in gardens and learning to recognize that a garden is where one is." ¹

As for the ultimate loss—death—that occurs in both plays, where the major characters vanish from everyone's life. Many students can relate to it, having lost a parent, relative, pet, or at least having been constantly threatened with their loss.

Before students begin a study of the literature and plays, a key strategy of this unit will be to familiarize them with the theme of loss with two examples from mankind's tradition of unbearable losses. This will be done by studying the Holocaust as discussed by Viktor Frankl to show the horrors of losing one's family, and by studying the story of Job, to show the despair in losing everything. Both examples are valuable because they show students there are ways to cope with even the severest loss.

In presenting Frankl to the class, I will read out loud selections from Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, which discusses the horrible loss suffered by him and all humanity in the Holocaust. I will then take a selected group of students on a trip to the Holocaust memorial on Whalley Avenue in New Haven.

At certain times, when the brutality of the concentration camp pressed in on Frankl, he held a fantasy in his mind that gave him the strength not to choose suicide. He imagined himself after the war standing before a classroom of students. In his fantasy he was teaching students about the meaning that can be found in suffering. Frankl determined that he would take along with him these horrors and that the horrors would be transformed into something of great value and merit. Quoting Nietzsche, Frankl boldly declared, "That which does not kill me, makes me stronger." ²

Frankl perhaps has taught as many people how to survive loss as any single author ever will. His experiences as a concentration camp prisoner in Germany in World War II are chilling and inspiring. Virtually his entire family was murdered in the Holocaust. Still, Frankl found a way to sustain a sense of personal meaning in life not to be destroyed by the events that happened to him: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's

own way.”³

Following our work on Frankl, I will have students read selections from the “Book of Job” in the Bible’s Old Testament. I will use the *Good News Bible*, since it is readily available and as accurately as possible puts the words of the Bible into today’s everyday English. Students will read Chapters 1, 2, 3, 29, 30, 38, and 42. See Lesson Plan 1 for related activities.

Having students read passages aloud from the “Book of Job” will teach them the importance of struggling through the adversity of loss, just as did Don Quixote, “who strove with his last ounce of courage to reach the unreachable star.” Studying Frankl and Job will help to fulfill Objectives #2 and #9—to give students a view of mankind’s tradition of loss and to help them see ways of accepting loss.

The next step in the strategy will be to study loss in the literary works of *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*. Students will read *Romeo and Juliet* out loud in class and *West Side Story* as homework. I will play a recording of *West Side Story* in the classroom to supplement the homework.

Also, I will explain the background of how *West Side Story* evolved from *Romeo and Juliet*. I will tell my students that when William Shakespeare sat down in 1594 to compose a play about a pair of teen-age “star-crossed lovers,” he based his story on a narrative poem he had recently read, by Arthur Brooke, called “The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet.” When Arthur Laurents sat down some 360 years later to mull over the idea Jerome Robbins had been thinking about for several months, it was Shakespeare’s play, *Romeo and Juliet*, to which he turned to base his *West Side Story*.

I will then have my students compare *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story* by having them list on the blackboard similarities and differences. This will help fulfill Objective #1. I will then tell them to look for the similarities and differences mentioned below as they proceed with a comparative study of the works. The feuding houses of Montague and Capulet in old Verona have their counterpart in the rival gangs of New York’s West Side. In both plays we are introduced to the feuding world through younger and lesser members of the gangs. Laurents follows Shakespeare, and Sampson and Gregory become A-Rab and Baby John. Prince Escalus and his Veronese officers who break up the first street fight find their counterparts in Officers Krupke and Schrank.

The Capulet ball has its obvious parallel in the settlement house dance. Both couples experience love at first sight. Juliet’s balcony scene becomes Maria’s fire escape. Bernardo’s knifing of Riff and the subsequent death of Bernardo at Tony’s hand follows the pattern of killing and counter-killing of Mercutio by Tybalt, of Tybalt by Romeo. The exile of Romeo results from public knowledge of his deed. Tony, not having been apprehended at the scene of the killing, becomes a fugitive. The two men’s suicidal gestures are similar. Tony no more wishes to live without Maria than Romeo wished to live without Juliet.

The plot line of *West Side Story* deviates from Shakespeare’s drama at times, especially in the brief final death scene. Laurents avoids Shakespeare’s scheme of the fake death of Juliet induced by a potion to save her from marriage to Paris and to allow time for a reunion with Romeo. Tony reacts to the news of Chino’s supposed murder of Maria by hurling himself into the arena crying, “Come and get me, too!”⁴ Tony dies by a bullet from Chino’s gun, a victim of the latter’s revenge.

But the final moment is even more significant, for the curtain falls with Laurents’ Paris and Juliet (Chino and Mario) still alive. Maria’s act of not killing herself or any of the gang members whom she threatens in the final scene underlines the basic difference between this play and Shakespeare’s. Consequently, it becomes

important to the contemporary play's message that a resolution of the gang warfare be effected by the hand of one of the protagonists.

Following the study of similarities and differences between *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*, I will have my students look at the concept of "romance" that runs through both works to their tragic, violent endings. Once the environment has been established, each play moves quickly to the first confrontation of the young lovers-to-be, taking time only to introduce them to us separately first.

Romeo, we find, is already lovesick for a girl we shall never know—Rosaline. He moons for her:

"Tut, I have lost myself; I am not here
This is not Romeo; he's some other where."

Although Tony has no specific girl, he stands waiting to love:

"The air is humming
And something great is coming!
Who knows?"

And as he waits, the gang loses his interest: "Riff, I've had it," he says, as though to say, "This is not Tony, he's some other where." ⁵

The theme of romantic love can be used to tie into activities in Lesson Plan III, concerning "Myth vs. Reality." Following this, I will give my students a very practical, yet "fun" assignment. I will tell them that they are soap opera ghostwriters. These scriptwriters will cast their fellow classmates in the roles of characters with problems of loss and love. Together they will write a mini-series based on one story voted best by classmates. The series will be performed in front of the class.

After finishing with the theme of "romance" in the two plays, I will have my class look at the theme of urban violence and loss as portrayed in *West Side Story*. The entire action of *West Side Story* takes place in two days, but within this brief period of time there is uncovered all the ugliness, bitterness, loss, savagery, hatred, and turbulence in the lives of my students of the city street. Therefore, a study of this play helps fulfill Objective 4 concerning added urban loss, and also Objective 3, showing students how a study of literature has direct relevance to their personal lives.

West Side Story's atmosphere of violence and hatred uneasily held in check by authority is quickly established. The rivalry of the Sharks and the Jets is sociologically based on a familiar urban problem. The cause of the West Side Manhattan gangs' rivalry seems clear: it is between first-generation Americans whose security—social and economic—they feel to be jeopardized by the Puerto Ricans. "My old man says them Puerto Ricans is ruinin' free ennaprise," remarks Baby John concerning the newcomers' fighting to establish

themselves in an alien community. ⁶

Gangs come to symbolize the lack of control the law has over them. The communication gap is not only between gangs but also between generations.

The adult world seems far more alien to the youngsters of Laurent's play than to those of Shakespeare's. Cut off from sympathetic relationships with the grown-ups, the Sharks and the Jets have only each other. Their suspicion of the older generation alienates them and contributes to the tragedy. When Doc says, "You make the world a sick place," the retort is, "We didn't make it that way." ⁷

After we finish reading the play, I will tell my students they are roving reporters for the Journal Courier. They must write a feature story by tomorrow morning's edition on just what happened in this tragic story. They will be told to keep in mind while composing the story these famous journalism questions—who?, what?, where?, when?, why?, and how?

Then, I shall give my students a chance at roleplaying. I will tell them that they are now adult officers of the law. Each student-officer must imagine that he has just interrogated one of the juvenile delinquents in *West Side Story*, and has already taken scribbled notes on what the suspect said. The student-officer must now rewrite those notes into a sort of parole report on the delinquent. As part of the older generation, how does the student-officer react to questioning and counseling a troubled teenager? How does the "officer" feel about what is happening to the delinquent? For extra credit, I will have my students refer to the Hinton books in this unit's "Student Reading List."

The next strategy of this unit will be to study loss in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Wasserman's *Man of La Mancha*. Discussions will include a comparative summary of both stories, helping fulfill Objective #1.

Students will read aloud in class selected parts of *Don Quixote*. The actual reading of the unabridged edition would be too difficult for the junior high school students I teach. They will therefore read a retold version of the original story by Judge Parry. This abridgement of *Don Quixote* gives in simple narrative form the adventures of Knight and Squire, with as much of the wisdom and humor of their discourse as would be within the grasp of the younger generation of readers. Judge Parry has attempted to take a well-known story and tell it as if students were sitting around his own fireside. Teachers, however, should be familiar with the original story as they teach this unit.

After reading Parry's work, my students will read *Man of La Mancha* at home. I will supplement the homework with a recording of the musical played in the classroom. In the readings, students will be introduced to the main character, Don Quixote—a withdrawn, gaunt man, about fifty years old, who lives in a village in the province of La Mancha. He spends most of his time reading books on chivalry, to such an extent that he decides to become a knight-errant himself. Dressed in rusty, old armor—including a visor made of pasteboard—he mounts his old horse, whom he calls Rocinante, and sets out on his adventures, having given himself the title "Don Quixote."

When Dale Wasserman wrote *Man of La Mancha* he never treated Don Quixote, in spite of his absurdities, as a clown, but rather engendered audience sympathy for the idealistic, pathetic, and somewhat foolish knight whose mission had been to correct the wrong in the world.

Many varied interpretations have been given of the character who has steeped himself in medieval romances. On one level, he can be viewed as a simple-minded buffoon or a raving lunatic. But is he merely the hero of

some burlesque, practical joke? It has been suggested that Cervantes put a tremendous amount of himself into his creation. This makes him one of the most puzzling people in literary history, and the only certain judgment that can be made on his character is that we cannot be definitely certain of all the implications in the Don Quixote figure.

I tell my students to “become” Don Quixote, and tell their friends what has been going on (we tried this in the seminar and it was very successful). They will tell everything that is troubling them. This ties in with *Man of La Mancha* when Cervantes says, “You will impersonate the man” as he becomes Don Quixote. As my students play Quixote, I will tell them to relate to a time in their lives when they too were made fun of.

For another activity, I will explain to my students that the popular design advertising *Man of La Mancha* on playbills has been a distorted image of Don Quixote on his horse Rocinante fighting a windmill. I will ask my students to design a book jacket with captions. They are to create an illustration perhaps better than the popular design at capturing the sense of the play. I will tell my students to ask themselves while doing the project, What were the most exciting parts of the play or novel? For example, a rumble scene? Or the balmy old gaffer fighting windmills? The death scene? Or the loss of dreams?

Next, I will have my students study the biographical mystery surrounding Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*. In searching for information about the man who had written so important a literary classic, Wasserman found several documents which indicated that Cervantes’ life had been a series of misfortunes. From the limited biographical material, he learned about Cervantes’ army service, his disablement, his five years of slavery in Algiers, his excommunication from the Church, his three terms in prison, his broken marriage, his illegitimate daughter, and finally his writing of *Don Quixote*, begun when he was already in his fifties, impoverished, ill, and nearly blind. Wasserman decided to write a play combining the characters of Cervantes and Don Quixote because he felt that the author and the fictional hero were alike in remaining idealists despite adversity. As his theme, Wasserman used a quotation from Miguel Unamuno: “Only he who attempts the absurd is capable of achieving the impossible.”⁸

In view of Wasserman’s discoveries, I will ask my students to compare the loss experiences of Cervantes by engaging in a mini-debate as to who had the worst problems—Cervantes or Job.

At the start of the story of the eccentric knight whose aim is to restore chivalry, Quixote and Sancho Panza, his faithful servant, come to a roadside inn, which Quixote tells Sancho is a castle. There he meets Aldonza, a servant girl and whore. When he insists on calling her Dulcinea, the confused and somewhat irate Aldonza cannot understand why Quixote does not see her as she really is.

As students read and discuss both Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and Wasserman’s *Man of La Mancha*, especially concerning the knight’s love, Dulcinea, they will be asked to note how Quixote’s unrealized expectations of life and love eventually lead him to irrevocable loss. This discussion will help fulfill Objective #6, concerning unrealistic expectations.

Don Quixote’s mission has basically good motives, and we can sense at least three views that might be taken of Cervantes’ purpose in writing this work. The first is that, by making Don Quixote a thoroughly ludicrous figure, he is mocking the idealistic utopians who set out to right all the wrongs of the world. The second is that Cervantes is deploring the fact that a man with such a noble purpose is so rare that he does look absurd. The third is that Cervantes is obviously seeking some kind of value judgment on romantic chivalry and knight-errantry from within the historical context of his time. We notice, for example, how ridiculous Don Quixote’s gallant gestures are toward Dulcinea, the lady of his choice, and toward the two women at the inn. Yet we

cannot help observing that he is showing them a respect they probably never received from anyone else.

In *Don Quixote* there is also an inherent admiration for the refusal on the part of the utopians to surrender to despair. For while the hero's attempt to attain the impossible dream makes the work one of disillusion and despair, seen from one angle, it is a work of stimulating optimism when viewed from another. In *Don Quixote's* failure dwells the triumph of the human spirit over the gross impersonalities of life which try to stifle it, and in this way the book is a permanent tribute to man's indomitable will, power of perseverance, and stoical strength in the face of apparently insurmountable social obstacles. The hero, for all his external absurdities, stands as a tribute to inner individualism. As students study this story, I will have them contrast *Don Quixote's* idealism with reality. Also, *Quixote's* handling of loss ties in well with Objectives #8 and #9—that life can be exciting and rewarding, in spite of loss, and that there are ways to effectively deal with it.

Meanwhile at the inn, *Quixote*, waiting to be dubbed a knight, sees a barber wearing his shaving basin as a helmet. *Quixote* seizes it, calling it the magical helmet of *Nambrino*. *Aldonza*, still confused by *Quixote's* chivalry, asks why he behaves so strangely. *Quixote* explains his actions in a song, the "Impossible Dream." Questions of unrequited love and loss continue. After *Quixote* has defended *Aldonza* against the attacks of the multeers, the innkeeper knights him in a ceremony called "The Dubbing." *Aldonza's* experiences as a lady are short, however, as the men later carry her off and rape her.

Disillusioned, *Aldonza* loses whatever little faith she has in *Quixote* and his impossible dream. This scene ties in well with Lesson Plan III, "Myth vs. Reality," on whether "it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." (Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

The doctor and the padre, having failed in their first attempt to bring *Quixote* back to his home, return with a new plan. Disguised as the Knight of the Mirrors, the doctor challenges *Quixote* and forces him to look into the mirror of reality where he sees himself as a demented old man. The doctor then takes *Quixote* home, defeated and dying. *Aldonza*, realizing that this defeat means she will no longer see the knight who had treated her as a lady of quality, goes to his home. After fighting her way into his room, she begs him to become again the wonderful knight. Roused by hearing *Aldonza's* voice the lyrics of the "Impossible Dream," *Quixote* gets out of bed and puts on his armor in order to begin another quest. The effort is too much, and he collapses and dies. *Quixote's* death, however, has changed *Aldonza*. She now calls herself *Dulcinea*; his loss has transformed her into the ideal woman he always saw. The final scene shows Cervantes back in the dungeon with his fellow prisoners who, inspired by his story, have returned his manuscript. As the play ends, Cervantes, now seemingly armed with *Quixote's* bravery, leaves to face his Inquisitors.

Students will be told to notice as they hear the prisoners singing together "The Impossible Dream" as Cervantes faces his Inquisitors that the manuscript loss of Cervantes may parallel their own lives. While Cervantes goes to his death, his manuscript lives on in the hands of the prisoners, who now have new hope in their lives. This ties in well with Objectives #7, #8, and #9—that life can be exciting in spite of loss, that no one is alone in his loss, and that there are ways of coping with loss.

As students read the works in the unit, they will realize that even if they wished to remain the persons they previously were, it is simply not possible. Their lives may be permanently strengthened. No one stays the same. Human existence begins and ends with change and separation, the major determinants of loss. In between birth and death, my students are destined for an almost continuous series of changes. *Don Quixote* believed this. "I am I, *Don Quixote*, the Lord of La Mancha, my destiny calls and I go; and the wild winds of fortune will carry me onward."

A study of the lost goals and lost lives in the literature of this unit will force my students to decide whether or not to accept the statement, “it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.”

In the final analysis, loss cannot be ignored, for it will not go away. Each loss must be faced, grappled with, and managed. Then students can deal more effectively with each new experience. With so much of living entwined with losing, the way to cope with loss is one indicator of the way our students will cope with life.

LESSON PLAN I

Have students read for homework the *Man of La Mancha* . Have students read out loud in class *Romeo and Juliet* . Have the teacher read aloud the story of Job from the Bible, Old Testament, and selections from Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning* .

Game 1 Love & Loss

Word Bowl of Feelings:

unrequited fate	
feud	quest
loss	anger
love	frustration
romance	jealousy
idealism	envy
realism	hatred
suicide	conflict
tragedy	pride
morbid	sadness

Have students select from a bowl separate pieces of paper with one of these words written on them. Sentence starters—I am feeling angry when . . . will be used to start an informal discussion about feelings which permeate students and the play characters.

The value of this type of activity in terms of self-awareness, understanding of human behavior and motivation, analyzing life situations, examining personal values, alternative forms of action and goals, cannot be minimized.

Aristophanes said, “By words, the mind is excited and the spirit elated.”: It is as true today as it was when he said it in Athens 2,400 years ago.

Game 2 Trivial Pursuit, the Biography Edition

After the students have studied Cervantes, Shakespeare, Bernstein and others, put a list of facts about these people on index cards. To make the game more personal have each student write ten facts about himself.

These thoughts can be further brought out in the word bowl discussions.

Who am I?

1. April 23rd marks both my birth and death dates.
 2. I have been considered the greatest dramatist, poet, and wordsmith in history.
 3. I wrote 37 plays in 25 years.
 4. I was baptized and died in the English village of Stratford.
 5. I died April 23, 1616.
- or:
1. I was born in 1547.
 2. I was a soldier wounded at the battle of Lepanto.
 3. In 20 years I wrote 40 unsuccessful plays.
 4. I was excommunicated in 1597 for “offenses against His Majesty’s most Catholic Church.”
 5. I died in 1616.
 6. I served three terms in prison on various charges.

LESSON PLAN II

Creative Writing Activities:

Win a Witty Whitaker Award

The teacher is a judge for the Whitaker Award, given annually for the best movie review. As contestants for the award, each student must first view “West Side Story” and “Man of La Mancha” and then review them according to these criteria:

1. Describe the effect these films have on you. Make this a personal uncompromising statement.

2. Explain this reaction by referring to various elements of the films: story, setting, cast, sound effects, characters, ideas, photography, directing dialogue, and costumes.
3. Then review one of the most recent teenage movies:
“Friday the Thirteenth, Part 5,” “Police Academy 2,”
“Their First Assignment,” “Moving Violations,”
“Rappin,” and “Last Dragon.”
4. Select a winner and justify your choice in writing.

Moving Write Along!

Since your students were such a success at the Whitaker Awards, they now can compete for the New-Loss Medal, which will be awarded for the most original book report. Have them read the novelization of *West Side Story* or the retelling of *Don Quixote of the Mancha* and write a book report on either one.

LESSON PLAN III

Students will first read the plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story* .

Myth vs. Reality—“Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?” (Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

“When you see that special person, does your heart stop? Are your palms sweaty? Are you at a loss for words? If that boy or girl doesn’t know you’re alive, does that excite you even more? What makes you feel this way? Is it love or romantic love?” ⁹

Today love and romance are so closely linked that we use them as synonyms. Why cannot the famous couples we have seen on television, in the movies, and read about in books live happily ever after? Could they be in romantic love? In *Gone With the Wind* , *Love Story* , *Wuthering Heights* , “Camelot,” and “Casablanca” the theme of unrequited love is repeated. You can never have the person you are in love with. To be a true romantic is to be pure and pine away for someone. Students who have fallen in love with Prince, Madonna, Michael Jackson, or Tina Turner know the feelings of unrequited love, that is unreturned. Romeo pined for Rosaline, Dante for Beatrice, Don Quixote for Dulcinea, Tony for Maria, Queen Guinevere for Sir Lancelot, Rick for Ilse, Heathcliff for Cathy, Rhett for Scarlett, and Oliver for Jenny.

Romantic love is incomplete and forever. At the beginning of *Romeo and Juliet* , for example, Romeo’s passion for Rosaline shows many qualities of romantic love. His love is unrequited; Rosaline will never marry him. He is wildly in love, and he is suffering because he cannot have her, yet he obviously enjoys his passion since he does nothing about it. This is not the end of Romeo’s romantic career. Romeo and Juliet fall madly in love knowing the family feuding which heightens their desire. Many things keep them apart, but they do manage to

keep their passion alive forever by dying. Their passion is more important than life.

Today we are still attracted to romantic love and its emotional fireworks. We still want to believe that love is an emotional thing and that its emotions are eternal. The problem is that romance is based on tragic or incomplete love. Passion comes from danger and uncertainty. But peace, harmony, and trust come from having a long-term, healthy relationship. We all want both—romance with a happy ending. Hence the popularity of romance novels, and movies like “An Officer and a Gentleman.”¹⁰

Students must pretend they are one of the famous couples in history and write a last letter to their lover describing their feelings of loss. Then they will pretend that they are teenage advice columnists like Dear Beth in the New Haven Register. They will practice letter-writing skills by stating a problem they would like resolved. They must follow these guidelines:

1. Do not make fun of the writer or the problem.
2. Remind the writer that he or she is not alone.
3. Give alternatives for consideration.
4. Reveal candidly how you would have survived the experience.
5. Have you learned anything from the situation to help yourself?
6. Address the letter “Dear concerned,” “At a loss,” “Frantic,” “Upset,” etc.
7. Exchange letters anonymously and read the replies out loud.

Notes

1. Ann Stearns, *Living through Personal Crises* (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1949) p.169.
2. Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Pocket Books, 1963) p.130.
3. Frankl, *Ibid.*, p.104.
4. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet/West Side Story*, introduction by Norris Houghton (New York: Dell Pub. Co., Inc., 1965) p.11
5. Shakespeare, *Op cit*, p.9.
6. *Ibid.*, p.8.
7. Shakespeare, *Op cit.*, p.219.
8. Abe Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1977) p.327.
9. Sharon Linnes, “Romantic Love,” *Voice* 69 (September 1984):19-28.

10. Linnes, Op cit., p. 22.

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This is the classic work on surviving unbelievable losses in the concentration camps.

Good News Bible . New York: Collins/World, 1976. This version of the Bible was chosen for reading selections of Job because it is readily available, is authoritative—issued by the American Bible Society—and is written in easy-to-read modern-day English.

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This review points out the theatricality of the physical production—the suspended stage platform, the transformation of Cervantes into Don Quixote done simply with a makeup kit in full view of the audience, and his horseback ride on wooden frames attached to two dancers wearing horse head masks.

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These are a must in your classroom library.

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This book will prove invaluable in terms of both consultation and concrete help to those dealing with loss and trauma.

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Wasserman, Dale. *Man of La Mancha* . New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1968.

This book had to be obtained through interlibrary loan from a New York library. The preface and introduction are much better than those in the latest paperback version.

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Volume 1 is through the Renaissance. The two sections on Cervantes—pp.1367-1468 and pp.1528-1631—are part of this anthology of Western literature.

Worden, William. *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* . New York: Springer Pub. Co., 1982.

The author describes the mechanisms of grief and the procedures for helping clients accomplish the task of mourning to facilitate moving through the process of normal grieving.

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This is an excellent and rare book on child bereavement. This is a juvenile book found in the New Haven Public Library.

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This is a heroic story of youth and belonging written when the author was a girl of sixteen. It is about a gang of teenagers from the wrong side of the tracks, trying to find their place in a world they never made, and having to face the harsh loss by death of a favorite gang member.

Hinton, S.E. *Rumble Fish* . New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1983.

This is a portrayal of a tough guy rusty James who relies on his older brother, the Motorcycle Boy, to bail him out. But his blind drive to be like his brother explodes—and this time the Motorcycle Boy is not around to pick up the pieces.

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Fifteen-year-old Tex likes everyone and everything—until he learns the secret about his birth that ends his easygoing days forever.

Hinton, S.E. *That Was Then, This is Now* . New York: Dell Pub. Co. Ind., 1971.

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The introduction was helpful in doing this paper.

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West Side Story began on the Broadway stage and was immediately recognized as a success. Here the classical story is retold in a modern setting. This is easier to read than the play.

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This copy is a must in the classroom, because it is considered a classical critical edition.

Sohn, David. *Pictures for Writing* . New York: Bantam Books, 1969.

Through exciting photographs, examples of fine writing and exercises for practice, the student can build his skills while strengthening his powers of perception and artistic observation.

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