



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

Loving and Losing

Guide for 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. 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. 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 eight-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.

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.

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

(Recommended for English classes, grades 7 through 12)

Key Words

Dance Choreography Musical Theater Drama History Performances Loss

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