



Literature as a Mirror of Reality: The Family in Historical and Sociological Perspectives

Guide for Curriculum Unit 86.01.05

by Miriam G. Marshall and Gregory M. Huff

The topic “Literature as a Mirror of Reality: The Family in Historical and Sociological Perspectives” is three part in nature. First, working through the several books pertaining to the history of the family (Stone’s, Ozment’s and Aries’s) as well as several articles relating to this subject, notably Stone’s “Family History in the 1980’s: Past Achievements and Future Trends.” We hope to build a framework through which to explore with our students how families from the 1800’s to contemporary times acted and were acted upon by the forces of society. This will essentially be an attempt to define what family is and how families evolve over a historical time line, within various countries, and within various cultures, leading ultimately to the various families and cultures in the United States.

Secondly, after having explored the concept of family in historical terms, we will attempt to add some substance and color to this framework through a reading and discussion of the stories and plays we’ve chosen (“Death of A Salesman,” “The Oxcart,” and “Raisin In The Sun”). These books will be utilized to explore the modern family across various cultures, within Europe and more specifically in America. These literary families and characters will reflect the climate and mood of the society and times in which they were written. The issues we will explore will revolve around how families react to and are changed by poverty, prejudice, and overall cultures within which they live.

Finally, with the historical framework coupled to our literary reading and discussions, we will begin to explore the dynamics of our students’ families, and hopefully provide them some insight into how families behave—more specifically their own—as well as offering them a chance for some appreciation of literature.

(Recommended for English/Reading classes, grades 6-12; History classes, grades 6-12; and Sociology classes, grades 6-12)

Key Words

Marques Rene Oxcart Drama Literature Miller Arthur Death of a Salesman Family Life History

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