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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1987 Volume II: Epic, Romance and the American Dream

“The Treasure of the Sierra Madre”: An American Grail

Guide for Curriculum Unit 87.02.03
by Casey Cassidy

Throughout history men have attempted to make sense of their lives, to give it meaning through external means. These may be physical, philosophical, or religious in nature. Many are the tale of adventures in search of stones of magical ability, fountains of youth, golden amulets of fantastic power, the grail supposedly possessing spiritual and life-giving properties, and thousands of other objects that have fired man’s imagination and desire. Even in our own time men continue to search for these “somethings.” These quests are about mankind’s search for itself, an immortality of the flesh and spirit. First and foremost I would like to present my students with the idea of the quest. Secondly, I would like students to gain an introductory appreciation for a new and different literary experience. I want them to be exposed to the ideas and literature of another time and place. These will be contained in some very brief readings and discussions centering on the nature of the grail and the early quests for it. Third, there will be a study of man’s obsession with gold. This yellow metal has transcended its purely economic value and spiritual objects. Finally our discussion of the grail, gold, questing, and man’s nature will culminate in a critical reading of the fascinating and revealing book by B. Travern, “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre.”

(Recommended for Social Studies and English classes, grades 7-8)

Key Words

Travern B. Writing Instruction General Composition The Treasure Of Sierra Madre

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