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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1987 Volume IV: The Writing of History: History as Literature

At Home: The Ties That Bind

Guide for Curriculum Unit 87.04.01
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A sense of history heightens the enjoyment of literature. A true sense and appreciation of a particular time and the events which helped to shape it can make literature an all-enveloping experience. It is important that our students be taken out of the ongoing “now” in which they seem to exist and be shown how the past has contributed to our present and may contribute to our future.

My unit will focus on the teaching of two novels and an autobiography. “The Human Comedy,” “A Separate Peace,” and “Farewell to Manzanar” take place on the American homefront during the early stages of World War II. This period of upheaval, turbulence, and change can be likened to adolescence. The teenaged protagonists of the three books under study are attempting to confront and define themselves, to find truth and logic in the world, to challenge authority and, above all, to determine what is right and just. Our students bring this quest to our classrooms on a daily basis.

I will use my research as background material which will provide a sense of historical detail. I will emphasize how the time period affects the characters in the books under study and encourage my students to make connections with their own lives. We will move from observation (general) to interpretation (specific), especially in discussions of teenager’s relationship to authority. Personal growth and awareness will be at the center of our discussions and writing assignments.

(Recommended for English/Language Arts classes, grade 8)

Key Words

Adolescence American General Literature Young Adults War World II

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