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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2016 Volume III: "Over the Rainbow": Fantasy Lands, Dream Worlds, and Magic Kingdoms

Easing on Down the Road: Reading Critically, Writing Fantastically

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Critically reading and discussing literature from multiple angles is something that many middle school students do not do in English Language Arts classes. The Common Core State Standards call for students to engage in close reading of text, but narrowly focusing on close reading limits student capacity to think abstractly and critically about what they read. Students need to learn that there are more than one narrow lens for unpacking meaning from a text.

In order to deepen student understanding so that they approach a piece of fiction more critically, students will be introduced to five critical literary lenses that can be used to explore fiction: history/author's biography, New Critical (close reading), Feminist, Reader-Response mythological/archetypal/symbolic. These different angles will be explored by reading modified critical readings that apply to *The Wizard of Oz* and *Anthem*, two works that contain fantasyland settings that will be studied in the unit. As students learn the conventions of fantasylands and the structure of a narrative, they will learn and play some insider secrets to do some creative writing of their own.

This unit is intended for sixth grade students that are at or above grade level. Students are not generally introduced to literary criticism in middle school, so it could easily be scaffolded higher to introduce the concept to older students. Teachers looking for ideas or resources for how to get students thinking about and writing their own fantasylands may also benefit from this unit. The assessment is also flexible enough that it could be easily used in many different English Language Arts classes.

(Developed for English Language Arts, grade 6; recommended for English and Language Arts, grades 6+)

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