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Themes in Encanto and Wadjda

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Introduction and Rationale

I teach 5th grade English Language Arts and Social Studies at a small, diverse elementary school in the heart of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Located in midtown, our students come from all over the city, including the community surrounding our school. Half of our students walk to school. The other half wakes up early to take long car rides across the metro area. Tulsa is still segregated; students coming from different areas of town represent racial and socio-economical differences. Academically, students who read on a 2nd grade level and students who read on a high school level all sit in the same room. For this reason, I chose the movie *Encanto* to anchor this film unit. Students seem to gravitate towards this film regardless of their backgrounds, personalities, or interests. I chose *Wadjda* because it is about a girl who lives in a different part of the world and will challenge students to use their empathetic skills. This unit will focus on 5th grade ELA standards and needs. However, students in 3rd - 6th grade can benefit as well.

I try to put myself in my students' shoes as much as possible when planning my lessons and units. As a general rule, if I find something uninteresting or boring for myself, I have to change the lesson somehow. I am a product of the school district I teach in and when I look back at my elementary school days, I only remember happiness, exploration, and genuine fun. Unfortunately, the state of education has drastically changed. Teachers enjoy less freedom and are pressured to prepare students for an incredible number of assessments throughout the year. In my own bubble, I try to create the excitement for learning that I had the privilege of experiencing. However, eleven-year-olds are not the easiest crowd of people to impress or engage. One thing that my students have better than my generation is their abundant knowledge of the world and current events. I recognize that they have lived through unprecedented times their entire lives. I am always impressed by the current events they bring up in class and the topics they ask to learn about. Throughout the year, we study four to five novels. Each protagonist has a unique background and most are from different countries from Mexico to India, to South Africa. Students build empathy towards these characters and enjoy learning about the worlds in which they live.

In 5th grade, students engage with texts critically and learn to interpret stories. A strong emphasis is placed on recognizing literary devices, themes, plot development, characterization, and point of view. Great storytelling captivates young readers and even self-proclaimed haters of reading will become engrossed in our class novels. The most ambiguous standard to teach kids in literature for me is theme. The term can refer to

lessons in a story or overall topics present. For this lesson, I will focus on the latter, thematic ideas in a story.

Theme can be difficult to teach because first students must understand the plot. Then students must recognize the actions of characters and their motivations. After all of this, students can answer the question that leads them to the theme; what is this story actually about? The question is challenging because a story is almost never about just one thing. For instance, we read the historical fiction novel, *Esperanza Rising*, every year. The thematic ideas are immigration, coming of age, riches to rags, and injustice. My goal is for students to recognize the motivations of characters and thematic topics in a film as they do in a novel. In elementary school, films are typically used to share information or to illustrate a complex topic for students. In this unit, film will give students an opportunity to analyze storytelling using a different medium. We will use the movies *Encanto* and *Wadjda*, the first a wildly popular film and the second a critical success.

Content

Why Use Film in a Literature Classroom

Using film is beneficial for students. It will be more accessible for students who are unable to read on a higher level. Students of this generation are comfortable with expressing their thoughts and emotions digitally through emojis, video game avatars, and virtual reality experiences. In school districts across the country, students use “mood meters” to express how they are feeling in class or about a situation. Studying the artform of film and the techniques used to show mood will resonate with students. Having students analyze a film helps them to be more digitally literate. They will have to analyze the elements of the film and explain how it explains the plot and characters.

In “Beyond School Breaks” Lisa Domke mentions that films in elementary classrooms are often used for rewards for students or as a transition to a long school break. When films are used in the classroom, the activities usually stick to comparing a book to a film adaptation of the book. Rarely are films analyzed for their own artistic qualities. Domke says,

Filmmakers communicate messages through various elements specific to the medium of film. Just as readers can analyze a picture book’s visuals (e.g., the illustrator's use of line, color, composition, and media), viewers can analyze a film's elements to make sense of the movies they watch. Considering camera angles, lighting choices, sound effects, and music, for example, allows viewers to engage more fully with the creative and persuasive aspects of films. By analyzing films as texts and by examining the ways filmmakers use the medium's unique elements to tell a story, students can build their critical visual and media literacy skills and, in the process, meet Common Core State Standards for English language arts.¹

In order to develop media literacy, which is imperative to this generation’s success in the future, students should interpret various types of media including cinema. Films have their own way of communicating ideas and sentiments, and students can learn to navigate them. Students can learn the language and components of film to better analyze films.

Teachers must expand their definition of what a text is. In “Let’s Go to the Movies: Rethinking the Role of Film in the Elementary Classroom” Michelle Whipple argues that teachers should expand their definition of “text” to include film. Educators should embrace a medium that is pervasive in everyday life. Movies have a huge impact on popular culture and can be utilized in an educational setting. Whipple argues that instead of criticizing the decrease in written text, educators can use students’ movie experiences and film knowledge to further support their literacy development. Educators can use students’ social media savviness to build on their digital media knowledge. Educational websites such as Edmodo and Flip grid, mimic social media experiences for classroom use.

In other words, the validation of alternate texts such as photographs, computers, television, film and videotape, through their emphasis and use in the classroom, may allow those students who are in some way at-risk in their literacy development to participate in classroom discourse, to become a part of the classroom community, and to be validated as learners and people.²

English Language Learners who may not experience their second language at home can watch a movie in more than one language. Movies are dubbed and subtitled in various languages. Therefore, students can respond to the movie experience and participate in class in a more equitable way.

In her class observations, Whipple notices that students naturally make intertextual observations about books and their film adaptations. She observed students as they moved from 5th – 7th grade in a longitudinal study. In a conversation she recorded, students compared the use of suspense in books versus movies they had seen. They concluded that suspense in books was harder to convey than in movies. When discussing a book during class, students would often bring up a film adaptation of the book, yet the teacher would often direct students back to the book instead of incorporating the film into the discussion.³

Using film in the classroom is a way to expose students to different places around the world. In “The Art of Teaching Social Studies with Film”, Russell argues that “teaching with film is a powerful and meaningful instructional strategy.” Russell discusses ways that films are useful in the classroom. One way is that film can be a “depicter of an atmosphere”.

Using film as a depicter of atmosphere is effective and has been found to be valuable for helping visually construct an understanding of historical places and settings. This method allows teachers to show students architecture, living conditions, clothes, and weapons of different historical periods. Films are excellent resources for depicting atmosphere, considering that production companies spend millions of dollars recreating realistic representations of events, time periods, and/or persons depicted in movies.⁴

When filmmakers film on location, students are able to see real images of places around the world and not just recreated depictions.

Students will get a visual representation whether it is via animation or live action of the way of life in a place. The producers of Encanto, for instance, went to great lengths to depict Colombian culture in the animation. Students will get a window into the culture, music, dance, and food. Wadjda, set in Saudi Arabi is the first film completely shot in that country and will show students the culture of a society vastly different from theirs. In

some films produced by American or other western countries, middle eastern or third world countries settings are filmed in a sepia color. This effects the mood of the movie and makes the setting seem dangerous, and super-hot. The colors in Wadjda are vibrant and views will not be influenced by the typical sepia color.

Another method Russell describes is “using film as a springboard”.

Simply put, using film as a springboard means a teacher is using film to motive and grab the attention of student. Using film as a springboard promotes and encourages quality discussion and higher-order thinking. ⁵

Students can become more interested in the places they learn about, and the issues discussed in the films by being exposed to the places depicted. Films that are widely well known in popular culture are best suited for this strategy. The chance of students being at least familiar with the film is higher than a more obscure film. There will be more references students can relate to during the conversations and deeper discussions about the films.

Encanto and Wadjda Together

The movies complement each other well in this unit. There are obvious differences for students to contrast: one movie is animated, the other isn't; one protagonist has a large family and the other lives with only her mother; lastly, one has a goal to fit in with her family and the other desires independence. First students will watch Encanto, which is a Disney animated film released in November 2021. Wadjda is a live action film made in Saudi Arabia 2012. The movies complement each other in this unit because the major differences between the films are obvious. Yet, they are both heartwarming films with similar thematic ideas. Both films follow a young, preteen girl protagonist while she attains a goal for herself and for her family. Both girls feel like outcasts. Finally, both girls struggle to meet the expectations of adults in their lives. The thematic ideas students will explore in both films are family loyalty, familial love, family roles and girls' roles in society, coming of age, and overcoming obstacles.

Encanto Synopsis

Encanto is about a family set in a hacienda in Colombia. The protagonist of the story is Mirabel. She is a member of the enchanted Madrigal family. Each family member has a special magical power except for Mirabel. The movie follows her journey to feeling fully accepted by Abuela, the matriarch of the Madrigals. Mirabel learns the family is losing its magical powers and goes on a quest to save the candle.

Abuela left her village as a young woman with her husband, Pedro and their three babies. Their family and village were under attack. While trying to escape the looters threatening the village, Pedro sacrificed himself for his family. Immediately after Pedro dies, a magical candle appears protecting Abuela and the babies, giving their family magical powers.

Encanto is the first movie in this unit because the storytelling is rich, and students can easily follow the story. One of the movie's best traits is its departure from the typical Disney formula for feminine protagonists. As Amador mentions, Disney stories with a feminine main character use romantic interest as a main plot point. In the past decade, Disney has attempted to transform the feminine leads to be less romantically motivated. ⁶

Disney released Brave in 2012; it tells the story of Merida and her desire for agency and rebellion against

being married off by her family. Frozen, one of the most successful Disney animated movies centers on the love between two sisters. Romance is part of the story but isn't the dominant storyline. The protagonists have the traditional features in a Disney princess or fairy tale - large, charming eyes, long locks of hair, mobile expressions. Disney released Frozen in 2013 and subsequent movies pushed the transformation of Disney heroines further. Moana, released in 2016, is a story of a girl who is destined to be the next chief of her people. The love of her people and desire to explore the ocean motivates her to go on a quest to save her village on the island. ⁷

Like its predecessors, Encanto is not centered on romantic love but on familial love. Mirabel has big eyes, but she wears glasses. She has a more realistic body type than other Disney heroines. Like Moana, Mirabel also embarks on a journey to save her family and village. However, Encanto has a more ambiguous ending than Moana. Not all of the movie's questions are answered by the end. In the past, Disney might have ended Encanto neatly and would allow Mirabel to receive her gift after helping her family. But Mirabel still does not have any special powers and does not give an answer as to why. The interpretations are endless and leave some viewers feeling unsatisfied. Still, during the movie students will have an opportunity to interpret the various elements and use of music, animation, and storytelling.

Music in *Encanto*

The songs in Encanto are not only catchy but are essential to the narrative of the movie. Encanto uses musical numbers to push the plot forward and to anchor the theme. Typically, in animated films characters sing musical numbers to express feelings or to introduce themselves. In Encanto, the audience learns more about the characters emotions and motivations and the plot is more developed by the end of the songs. The music expresses the mood of the scenes in combination with the animations.

During Antonio's Candle Ceremony, Mirabel sings, "Waiting on a Miracle." The scene begins at 22:16 minutes. Abuela kneels to congratulate Antonio getting his gift and says, "I knew you could do it! A gift as special as you!" She calls for a family photo and a camera flashes as the Madrigals pose as a group. The light freezes on the family and the scene begins to move in slow motion as soft music plays in the background. Mirabel looks on as her family takes the picture and begins singing the lyrics,

"Don't be upset or mad at all, don't feel regret or sad at all, hey, I'm still a part of the family
Madrigal, And I'm fine, I'm totally fine. I will stand on the side as you shine. I'm not fine, I'm not
fine..." ⁸

Even if a person watches this scene with no sound or captioning, one can see and feel the angst building in Mirabel and can understand why she feels this way. This scene is important to the characterization of Mirabel. The audience is already aware that Mirabel does not have a gift and suspects she feels left out. Yet, students can use this scene to dig deeper into Mirabel's motivations and understand her choices later in the movie. In this scene Mirabel watches her younger cousin receive his gift. Students can recognize that she has complex emotions and must grapple with how much she can simultaneously feel happy for her cousin and sad for herself. Mirabel feeling like an outsider within her family is a thematic idea in Encanto.

The climax of this scene is Mirabel singing around the house while fireworks and embers of the candle swirl around her. The song ends and immediately Mirabel sees cracks in Casita and notices something is wrong with the house. The tension between Mirabel and her Abuela grows as Mirabel tries to alert at the party, but when

no one else can see the cracks, she is embarrassed. Her abuela harshly scolds Mirabel. The entire scene illustrates Mirabel's desire to be accepted by her Abuela and introduces major conflict in the show, something is wrong with Casita, therefore, something is wrong with the magic.

Musical numbers in animated movies have been a staple of Disney movies. The songs become large successes that attribute to the movies' massive success. In *Encanto* the songs share more about the characters. Once Mirabel decides to save the miracle that is the source of her family's magic, she begins questioning family members for help. As she questions her sister, Luisa, she learns more about the pressure she has been under during the song, "Surface Pressure".

The visuals and music work together to show the audience the boiling anxiety Louisa feels underneath her strong exterior. She sings, "Under the surface, I'm pretty sure I'm worthless, If I can't be of service. A flaw or a crack, the straw in the stack, that breaks the camel's back. What breaks the camel's back?" The tempo of the song gradually progresses to this point. Then the song comes to a stop, and she sings, "Pressure like a drip, drip, drip, that'll never stop." Louisa's scene illustrates tone for students. As the lyrics swiftly move through scenarios of bravery, the animation shows her anxiety growing. Louisa sings, "Under the surface, I worry something is going to hurt us. Under the surface, the ship doesn't swerve. Has it heard how big the iceberg is?" Mirabel is then on the Titanic and Louisa grabs her and rescues her to shore." She then sings, "Under the surface, I think about my purpose. Can I somehow preserve this? Line up the dominos, a light wind blows, you try to stop it toppin', but on and on it goes." Mirabel and Louisa are standing at the end of a domino chain, as a tornado swirls around, knocking down the dominos. ⁹

Casita

Casita is the Madrigal's personified house. In Mirabel's first musical number and the movie's opening song, "The Family Madrigal", she is introducing the Madrigal family to a few village children, and the audience. Before she introduces the family members in the song, she begins to command Casita. When she wakes up, Casita slides Mirabel's glasses to her by tilting a shelf while the wooden floorboards shuffle and become arms that throw her shoes to her. Throughout the movie Mirabel is the only character that seems to have a relationship to Casita.

While Abuela can command Casita, it is through Mirabel's conversations that the audience discovers Casita's personality. While the family leaves Casita to go to the village, Mirabel turns around and waves goodbye. Casita waves back by fluttering the shutter doors and sliding the roof boards like piano keys. In a later scene, Mirabel wants to help decorate the house for the family event. She says, "It's not like these decorations will decorate themselves." The offended Casita droops its draped decorations like puppy dog ears.

In previous Disney movies, an animal or creature serves as the protagonist's side kick. In *Encanto*, Casita is Mirabel's companion throughout her adventures. When Casita shows cracks, Mirabel seems to be the only one who notices them. When she warns Abuela, and the entire party comes to see the cracks, the cracks have disappeared to Mirabel's dismay. As Mirabel later tries to find the cause of the magic weakening, Casita follows her everywhere. Only when she enters Bruno's Tower can Casita not enter with her.

Wadjda Synopsis

Wadjda is a coming-of-age movie set in Saudi Arabia. Wadjda is a 10-year girl who wants to buy a bike. She attempts to earn money for her bike by selling contraband bracelets at her school, doing favors for classmates, and entering a competition at her school. Unlike Mirabel who has a large extended family living

under one roof, Wadjda lives with only her mother. Her father visits them often, but he may marry again and get a second family. Wadjda is aware that her mother is distressed about her father having a second family and finds ways to support her throughout the movie. Students will explore themes of being an outsider and family roles and society in this movie.

Director Haifaa Al Monsour

Haifaa Al Monsour is a Saudi Arabian director. Wadjda is the first film shot entirely in Saudi Arabia and by a woman director. Some aspects of the film mirror Monsour's life. As a girl her father purchased a bike for her to ride in her backyard like Wadjda. Her parents are educated and relatively progressive like Wadjda's parents. Monsour does not cover her face now and was not made to do so as a girl like Wadjda. Still, like Wadjda, Monsour grew up in Saudi Arabia, a conservative religious theocracy where women are denied equal rights and status as men. Monsour directed many scenes from a van because she could not be seen working with men in the streets. Although women do not work on television crews Riyadh, Monsour hired women to work on her film crew in costume and make-up. ¹⁰

Wadjda Scene Selection

The bicycle is a symbol of freedom in Wadjda. Before Wadjda spots the bike she wants, she gets in a tussle with her friend Abdullah. On his bike, he rides by and pulls off Wadjda's headscarf. She chases after him as he drags her scarf behind him. Finally he drops it on the ground and she reaches down to pick up.

Abdullah:

Did you really think you could catch up with me?

Wadjda:

If I had a bike, you'd see.

She watches Abdullah and the other boys ride off on their bikes. Later after school, Wadjda runs into Abdullah again.

Abdullah:

I've brought you something. (He hands her a package that appears to be a headscarf.)

Wadjda:

We're not even yet. When I get my bike, and I win the race, then we'll be even.

Abdullah:

Don't you know that girls don't ride bikes?

Wadjda:

Losing to a girl will be a double loss. ¹¹

Wadjda continues to walk home and then she looks up and sees the bike floating along the street wall. In an

interview with Cineaste, Monsour says, “For us, heaven is green. Not blue. Of course, our flag is green.” when explaining the significance of the color of the bike.¹² Although, the bike is not floating, but is tied to the roof of a car, the choice of the color and the way the bike is introduced seems deliberate. Wadjda is instantly drawn to the bike and begins to follow it to the shop. The shopkeeper tells her that the bike is too expensive for her. The audience can tell by her facial expression that she is fixated on the bike and her following decisions in the story will be influenced by her desire for the bike.

Against the backdrop of the Saudi traditions, the bike can be a metaphor for freedom of movement and independence. Women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia. Wadjda’s mother is at the mercy of her driver and gets into arguments with him to her own detriment. The driver decides that he will not pick her up anymore because he is late and she misses work. Monsour mentions that although women are the employers of the drivers, “On the other hand, the drivers know the women cannot go anywhere without them. So, the drivers are in control.”¹³ When Abdullah takes Wadjda’s headscarf, even in a playful manner, it shows the power dynamic that will always exist between her and boys. Wadjda sees owning a bike as a way to level the playing field between her and Abdullah and to enjoy the freedom of movement that is denied to women. Garcia says,

“Al Monsour often frames Wadjda and Abdullah together and separately in long shot their backdrop a series of forbidding empty lots and construction sites. As Wadjda traverses one sandy parcel, a worker hurls sexual remarks, extending the feeling of fore-boding from the previous scene at school in which Ms. Hussa silences the garrulous girls. Suddenly, the many shades of Wadjda’s vulnerability are palpable, Al Mansour height- ening our sensibilities to the dangers all Saudi women and girls confront in a society where men move freely and women are con- strained, judged by the measure of their modesty.”¹⁴

She is fully aware of the struggles her mother has with the driver. She later goes to Iqbal the driver’s house with Abdullah to convince him to drive for her mother again. Abdullah threatens Iqbal to ask his uncle to look into his immigration status. Later, when he drives Wadjda and Mother to the mall, she insults his manners and he insults her back. Mother’s friend in a later conversation mentions how she hates riding with the drivers. It is common knowledge that the drivers are rude and the power dynamics are lopsided. Mother mentions being in a car without air conditioning for three hours. This is one aspect of life that is difficult for women to navigate. A bike as a symbol is still a toy and an age-appropriate desire for Wadjda.

Wadjda’s Defiance

As Garcia mentions, Wadjda is “quietly rebellious, not a fiery revolutionary.”¹⁵ She rebels against her school and headmistress, Hussa. In the opening scene, the shot is on the shoes of the girls standing in rows, singing a Quranic hymn or verse. The shoes are all black dressy shoes with white, frilly socks. Wadjda is not fully paying attention and waves to girls as they walk by. The teacher calls Wadjda’s name to come forward and the row of girls part down the middle revealing Wadjda’s shoes, black high-top Chuck Taylor Converse All-Stars with purple shoe laces. In American culture, Converse were part of counterculture, anti-fashionists who view themselves as the fringe of society. Wadjda rebels against the oppression of Saudi culture towards women in her own way.

Her tennis shoes are not the only way in which she rebels using her wardrobe. She also wears a vest over her

abaya. She is punished by Ms. Hussa for not wearing her headscarf and has to stand out in the sun. She also wears blue jeans under her abaya. She wears a t-shirt under her abaya.

Later she also rebels by writing her name on the family tree even though only males are listed. She writes her name on a stickie note only to find later, someone (probably her father) has taken her name off the tree.

Teaching Strategies

The goal of this unit is for students to be able to recognize thematic ideas and then to compare those ideas in the two films. Students will explore the themes and film elements using a variety of strategies. Students will need to study similar topics more than once to internalize the concepts. Students will use the plot mountains after each film to check for understanding of the film's storyline. This will prepare them for the character analysis of the protagonist in each film and a second major character. Following this, students will complete a gallery walk of scenes from each film to analyze the films' elements. Lastly, students will compare themes in the film using Venn diagrams and t-charts.

Plot Mountain Diagrams or Freytag's Pyramid

Plot mountain diagrams, also known as Freytag's Pyramid, are visual models of a plot development. These diagrams come in a variety of different graphic organizers. First, students will diagram the plot progression of chapters in the memoir. Next, students will take one of their journal entries and fill in the plot on their own plot mountains.

Character Trait Analysis

Students will analyze the protagonists of each movie. The teacher will write the name of the character at the top of the chart. Then students will use stickie notes to write a word that describes the character. Under the word the students write an explanation for the character trait they wrote down. For instance, if a student writes, "spunky" to describe Wadjda, under the word the student can write, "She wears tennis instead of her school shoes" or "She doesn't follow all of the rules."

Gallery Walk

I will have screenshots of a few scenes from each movie. Students will have a notetaking sheet where they jot down their ideas or thoughts of the scene. Typically, a question will be posed for them to answer or an element that they will look for in the picture of the scene. Students can work with a partner or individually as they walk around the room filling in their notetaker sheet. The notetaker sheet should have the images and questions making it simple for students to follow. Teachers can set a timer and have students go to the first station for a set time period. Then when the timer alerts them, they switch and go to the next station and fill out their notetaker. Once all of the students have completed the gallery walk, the class will have a discussion about the questions and what their notes.

Some of the scenes from the films for the gallery are listed below:

- Mirabel's song "Waiting for a Miracle" in Encanto

- Mirabel and Abuela’s fight in Encanto
- Opening shot of shoes in Wadjda
- Wide shot of Wadjda walking with Abdullah in Wadjda
- Wide shot of Wadjda watching her classmates get in trouble in Wadjda

T-Chart

Students will compare various aspects of each movie using t-charts. To use a T-chart, students will need a sheet of paper with a large lowercase “t”. On each side of the vertical line, students write the topics that they will compare. For instance, on one side a student can write, “realism” and the other side “fantasy”. Then under each section students will list the attributes of the topics as they saw from the films. Students can work individually or with a partner. When the students are done with their charts, the class can review the t-charts together. The teacher can copy the answers on to a large t-chart on chart paper to capture and consolidate the most frequent answers.

Another strategy for using t-charts is to put students into groups and have each group work on different t-charts. One group can have “realism” and “fantasy” another group could have “Wadjda” and “Mirabel,” lastly another group could have “feeling like an outsider in family” “feeling like an outsider in society” to compare the perspectives of Mirabel and Wadjda. The purpose of the t-charts is for students to list attributes that they see about the topics.

Venn Diagram

Venn diagrams can also be used the same way as the t-charts. The difference with the Venn diagrams is that the diagrams have a space for students to organize the topics’ differences and similarities. Good topics to use for the Venn diagrams would consist of the thematic ideas themselves so that students can have a visual notion of which themes in the films overlap. For instance, family, outsider, coming of age, and family roles could be in the center of the Venn diagram. The words, “independence” and “rebellion” could be on Wadjda’s side of the diagram and “redemption” and “forgiveness” could be on the Encanto side.

Classroom Activities

We will begin with classroom discussions about the two films. Some questions may be appropriate to ask during the movie, especially if time does not permit the class to watch the entire film. Other questions should be asked after each film. Finally, after watching both films we will discuss and compare them together. Before students are about to complete any of the activities independently, it’s important for students to fully grasp the basic plot of the film. The following discussion questions will probe students to think about the elements of the films that help tell the stories. During the discussion, we will rewatch specific scenes to look for certain elements.

After we finish the whole group discussions, students will discuss the films with partners and groups. They will use the strategies mentioned about to complete character analysis, gallery walks, t-charts, and Venn diagrams. By beginning with the discussions, students have a foundation to draw from when they are completing the activities as a group. Students will complete the character analysis, gallery walk, and plot diagram after each movie. They will complete the Venn diagram and plot charts after watching both movies to

compare the films.

Encanto Discussion Questions

- The opening scene begins with a flashback to when Mirabel was learning the history of the candle. This is right before her candle ceremony. The scene ends as she is opening the door. We do not see her get her gift. Later, during her opening song we learn she does not get gift. How does the previous flashback influence the audience's reaction to this news? (8:55 minutes – 9:05 minutes)
- Later during Antonio's (Mirabel's younger cousin) candle ceremony, he is nervous to walk down the aisle. He asks Mirabel to walk with him. Why do you think the filmmakers repeated the flashback here? What is different about this flashback from the opening scene? (17:44 minutes – 19:30 minutes)
- Why did the filmmaker freeze the characters in this scene? (22:14 minutes) Why is the camera flash frozen on them? Why is it effective for Mirabel to sing to the characters while they are still? The directors could have chosen to have Mirabel leave the party and sing alone. Why is she singing directly to her family members?
- The magic comes from the candle. What do you notice about the lighting in this scene? (Candles, sparkling lights, fireworks, lighting shown on family members?) Although Mirabel is singing in front of fireworks and the candle, and bright doors, the light does not shine on Mirabel. Why?
- Typically, at the climax of the song, the lights would shine brightly. Why is Mirabel still in the shadow?
- How does the lighting in this scene relate to the lyrics Mirabel is singing?
- Why is it effective for the cracks in Casita to be revealed after Mirabel's song?
- At (29:38 minutes) Abuela prays to her husband Pedro. How does Abuela really feel about what Mirabel said about the cracks? Why does she react differently at the party earlier?
- Listen closely to the lyrics of the song. How do the lyrics relate to the animation in the film? Do you think those scenes would be different if the film were live action and with real people?
- Why does the filmmakers show Louisa floating in clouds here? "Wait, if I could change, the crushing wait of expectations would that free up some room for joy, or relaxation, or simple pleasure? Instead we measure, this growing pressure, keeps growing, keeps going, cause all we know is..." How does this show Louisa's feelings? How does she feel about her role in the family?
- Why do you think so many characters were included in "We Don't Talk about Bruno?" How might that scene be different if only Pepa (Mirabel's aunt) sang the entire song? How does this affect the audience's perception of Bruno?
- Mirabel learns that Bruno still lives in the house behind the walls. He still "eats" with the family. How does this help you understand Bruno's motivation and relationship with his family?
- Each group of family members have color schemes. Mirabel's mom's family is blue, Pepa's family is yellow, and Bruno is green. Mirabel's glasses are green like Bruno. Why do you think she shares her colors with her Uncle Bruno? What do glasses symbolize? (Make the connection between Bruno's ability to see visions and Mirabel's gloves.) How are their stories connected? How are their family roles similar?
- What does Isabella realize her song about her family role? What is happening to the cracks in Casita as Isabella and Mirabel sing? Why do you think that is happening?
- Why do you think Abuela does not notice the cracks disappearing during the song? What happens during their argument?
- We see Abuela's discovery of the candle and leaving home in the opening scene of the movie. They repeat scenes of Abuela losing Pedro with Mirabel in the background. What are they trying to express? Why does Abuela walk past during the scene? Why does she walk past Bruno, Louisa, Isabella, and Mirabel specifically?
- Describe the lighting when Mirabel and Abuela hug.

Wadjda Character List and Discussion Questions

There are more basic comprehension questions in this list than the Encanto list because students will read subtitles. I will need to check comprehension of the film in order to discuss elements and interpret them. Students will also benefit from learning the characters' names before watching the movie.

Wadjda Character List

- Wadjda: the main character.
- Abeer: a school mate.
- Hussa: the principal of Wadjda's school.
- Abdullah: Wadjda's friend who owns a bike.
- Mother: Wadjda's mother
- Father: Wadjda's father
- Iqbal: Mother's driver who is often rude to her.

Wadjda Discussion Questions

- What was Wadjda's punishment for not singing the hymn?
- What does she help her schoolmate, Abeer, do? (00:17:44 minutes)
- How does Wadjda earn money at school?
- Why do the girls go inside while Wadjda plays hopscotch? (00:16 minutes)
- Why does Wadjda's mom depend on Iqbal?
- What happens to Abeer? (00:24 minutes)
- What forbidden items did Wadjda have (00:27 minutes)
- Why does Wadjda join the challenge the competition at school?
- Why does Wadjda's mom have an argument with Iqbal? (00:38 minutes)
- What did Wadjda give her mom? (00:45 minutes)
- What does Wadjda buy at the store instead of a bike? Why does she buy this item?
- Why does Wadjda say she didn't see anything when questioned by Ms. Hussa?
- Why does Wadjda write her name on the family tree? (1:05 hour)
- Why does Wadjda admit she's going to buy a bike with the money? What is Ms. Hussa's response?
- How does Wadjda's mom react to news of Wadjda telling them what she was going to do with the money?
- How does Wadjda finally get a bike?
- While watching the films, was it easier to interpret Mirabel's feelings in Encanto, or Wadjda's feelings in Wadjda? What were the differences that made one film's main character easier to interpret than the other?
- In Encanto, the music, or score is a huge part of the film. Wadjda has very little music throughout the film. If music were added, which important scenes would a director probably choose to add a huge musical number? What type of music might be added to those scenes? Why?
- In the scenes where Wadjda is walking to school and around the city, the shots are wide. The shots show Wadjda's surroundings. Why do you think the director chose wide shots during these scenes? Do you think you would interpret the scenes different if there were close shots of Wadjda's facial expressions instead? Why?
- When Wadjda finds her name taken off the family tree, the camera does not show a close shot of her face for very long. How does the camera show Wadjda's reaction? (Begin rewatching at 01:14 hours. The camera moves back and forth between Wadjda's hand and the family tree on the wall. Then the

camera focuses on Wadjda putting the stickie note with her name on it in her pocket. (Students may need to watch this a few times in a row because the camerawork may seem subtle at first.)

- Why do you think the camera focuses on Wadjda putting the stickie note in her pocket? How do you think she feels about being taken off the family tree? Why?
- In the beginning of the movie, a few girls were giggling in the hallway and Ms. Hussa tells them to stop because worker men are nearby. She says, “A woman’s voice is her nakedness.” After watching the entire film, what do you think she means by this?

Comparative Essay

Students will choose one theme present in both movies and compare and contrast the ways each film depicts the theme. Students will use the graphic organizers and notes from the whole group, small group, and partner discussions to develop their writing.

Flip Grid Movie Review

After completing the teaching strategies, students will use their notes and information to create a video presentation. Students will choose one of the themes from the films and explain how the two films show that theme. Students will use Flip Grid, a free resource, that is available on their Chromebooks to create their videos. In the video, students will describe specific scenes or film elements to cite their thoughts on how the films show the themes. They will present a short summary of their essay in a creative, engaging way. Flip Grid is structured like many social media sites like Tik Tok or Instagram and is available on any device. The app allows students to add special features to their videos similar to social media apps. However, the app is designed for school use and is more secure than a social media app. Students typically do not need much introduction or explanation of how Flip Grid operates. This will be the closing activity of the overall unit.

Resources

Vocabulary Terms for Students

- Basic shot composition
- Editing techniques
- Use of lighting and camera technique
- Composers
- Sound Effects / Score
- Focus
- Genres
- Story/plot
- Scene/sequence

Trade Books for Students

The following books can be read aloud or read independently by students during the unit. The purpose of the books is to provide background knowledge and context for students about the settings in the films.

- *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai

- *Malala's Magic Pencil* by Malala Yousafzai
- *The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family* by Ibtihaj Muhammad
- *My Shoes and I: Crossing Three Borders* by René Colato Laínez
- *Welcome to Saudi Arabia (Welcome to the World)* by Bob Temple
- *Let's Look at Colombia (Let's Look at Countries)* by Mary Boone
- *How are Movies Made? Technology Book for Kids | Children's Computers & Technology Books* by Baby Professor
- *Filmmaking for Kids* by Kelly Schwarze

Reading List for Teachers

- 6+1 Traits of Writing
- The Writing Strategies BookFlipgrid in the InterACTIVE Class: Encouraging Inclusion and Student Voice in the Elementary Classroom by Joe Merrill

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

The following standards are Common Core ELA Standards Grade 5.

RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

RL.5.7 Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

RL.5.9 Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

W.5.8 Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.

W.5.9.A Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., how characters interact]").

SL.5.4 Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

SL.5.5 Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

Notes

¹ Domke, Lisa M., Tracy L. Weippert, and Laura Apol. "Beyond School Breaks: Reinterpreting the Uses of Film in Classrooms." *Reading Teacher* 51

² Whipple, Michelle. "Let's Go to the Movies: Rethinking the Role of Film in the Elementary Classroom." *Language Arts* 146

³ Ibid

⁴ Russell, William B. "The Art of Teaching Social Studies with Film." *The Clearing House* 158

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Amador, Victoria. "Fantasy Worlds and Disney Girls" In *Debating Disney: Pedagogical Perspectives on Commercial Cinema*

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Bush, Jared and Howard, Byron dir. *Encanto* 2021; Walt Disney Animation Studios.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Garcia, Maria. "Wadjda." *Cineaste*

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

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