

When the Good Go Bad: Why Juveniles Become Delinquent

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Introduction

This teaching unit is a focused examination of juvenile social deviancy geared to 8th grade, "C" level Special Education students in New Mexico. The unit will survey "causes" of juvenile delinquency such as childhood trauma, dysfunctional family life, drug abuse, economic deprivation, and gang involvement that can impact the present and future lives of students. The class will consider how these "elements" contribute to social deviancy. The specifics discussed within this curriculum unit can be used to develop lessons that could be utilized as a nine-week component of a middle school literature curriculum. "C" level Special Education students tend to read two to four grade levels below their current grade placement. Study and organizational skills amongst "C" level Special Education students are often unfocused and inconsistent.

A primary goal of this curriculum unit is to engender among Special Education 8th graders a clearer sociological awareness of the causes and implications of juvenile delinquency to equip students with stronger decision-making skills. To clarify aspects of juvenile social deviancy, the curriculum unit will utilize four key teaching and learning components. First, the teacher will invite guest lecturers, such as the school policeman, the school social worker, and school counselor to speak with the students. The guests will clarify what they mean by the term "juvenile delinquent", and why, from their prospective, juveniles become delinquents. Second, the teacher and students will read two works of literature that involve issues of social and juvenile deviancy. As per Albuquerque Public Schools district goals, students will be expected to read independently, generalize, make judgements, recognize main ideas, and draw conclusions. Third, all students will participate in round table discussions, and in role-playing about issues such as gangs and drugs. Finally, students will compose an essay about the causes and possible cures of juvenile delinquency as one means of teacher assessment, learning and understanding.

The unit goals are:

- Foster clearer understanding of key aspects of juvenile delinquency
- Elevate student reading levels while stimulating independent reading

The unit objectives are:

- Develop an understanding of the power of personal decision-making in the lives of individuals
- Integrate related academic fields such as history, reading, and sociology into to the study of literature
- Build understanding of poverty and how deprivation impacts the lives of students
- Strengthen the following areas of reading: understanding main ideas, generalizing, making judgments, and drawing conclusions
- Motivate potentially at-risk students by integrating relevant and accessible material and resources that connect to their daily lives to instill within students self-respect, respect for others, and a sense of empathy and compassion

Background

Subject background necessary for teacher understanding of covered content materials includes a thorough familiarization with Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and Hinton's *The*

Outsiders; understanding of such basic economic terms as poverty line, scarcity, opportunity cost, and budgets; and knowledge of and an ability to impart reading strategies to students.

The mean "C" level reading class size at Jefferson Middle School is twelve students. For this writer's 2000 Brigance Testing of students' reading comprehension levels, the mean comprehension level is at 6.0. Two-thirds of the C-level reading students live with one or none of their parents. All of the C-level students manifest one or more of the following behaviors: poor academic performance, attention problems, hyperactivity, poor language abilities, memory deficits, and/or aggressive behavior.

Tom Sawyer

Most of the adventures of Tom Sawyer actually occurred in 1840's Missouri to Mark Twain. Many scenes involving Tom – fighting, skipping, school, falling for a girl, and running away from home – are played out today. Yet much is different in 2001 America compared to 1840's Missouri of Mark Twain. First, Missouri was a slave state until the Civil War. Tom's aunt has a slave named Jim. Second, Tom lives in an era when there were no cars, planes, computers, television, movies, or telephone. Travel, communication, information acquisition, and entertainment options were far different for Tom Sawyer than for many youths of today. Third, Tom lived in a small town where a (Protestant) church assumed a prominent and pervasive part in the lives of most townspeople. Finally, Tom's romantic notion of a gang was nothing compared to today's gang activities involving guns, drugs, and homicides.

The Outsiders

S.E. Hinton wrote *The Outsiders* when she was only sixteen years old and thus an age peer of the characters about whom she writes. Hinton depicts the trials and tribulations of a group of working class teens in Tulsa during the 1960's. The working class teens, referred to as the "Greasers," are often at odds with teens from the wealthier part of town. In fact, one of the wealthier teens is stabbed to death by one of the "Greasers" in an altercation precipitated by the "rich kids."

Hinton describes, through her "Greaser" characters, the socioeconomic disparities existing in 1960's Tulsa. One of the "Greasers" laments that "it isn't fair that we have all the rough breaks" such as alcoholic or absentee parents who are economically deprived. The "Greaser" fails to see that by assuming a positive and focused control of his life he substantially increases his chance of success. There are strong elements of passivity and negativity amongst the Outsiders. Perhaps the passive and negative attitudes are part of the Outsiders' sub-culture wherein parental and peer apathy manifest themselves in succeeding generations. There need not be. Several of the Outsiders exhibit intelligence and sensitivity, which, if nurtured and mentored by schoolteachers and counselors, churches, and governments programs (see *Common Purpose* by Lisbeth Schorr) could evolve into productive, adjusted, and confidently optimistic adults.

Connections

Are poor reading skills associated with crime, teenage pregnancy, school dropouts, and poor academic achievement? G. Reid Lyon, chief of the child development and behavior branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NIH) feels there is definitely a connection. Lyon cites a NIH study that found 75% of all school dropouts as reporting difficulties. Previous research has also shown a connection between reading deficits and juvenile delinquency. Melvin Roman's 1951 unpublished survey showed that 84% of children active in the treatment clinic of the New York City Children's Court manifested a reading deficit of two or more years (Roman). More

recently, Jane Hodges and Nancy Giuliani wrote that "a characteristic of juveniles incarcerated in correctional and detention facilities is their poor academic achievement." (Hodges and Giuliani)

Background on Juvenile Delinquency

It seems relevant that teachers of this curriculum unit be cognizant of some research and theories about why juveniles become socially deviant. L. Yukon, interviewed by this writer, cited childhood trauma, abuse, and neglect as major contributors of criminal activity among adolescent and young adults. Trauma is often a cause of drug addiction, and a majority of those incarcerated are, or had been, active addicts prior to arrest and conviction. The social worker also cited recent studies that have shown that empathetic ability and trust are established in the first year of life. If empathy and trust are not developed in the first year(s), they might not be developed later in life. These emotionally impoverished children can become sociopaths who commit crimes without remorse.

Economics, Poverty, and Juvenile Delinquency

Is there a correlation between economic deprivation and a tendency for juveniles to turn to crime? Professor Blank writes that the mutual relation between violence and poverty is obvious in American urban ghetto neighborhoods, where random violence has increased and homicide rates have soared, especially among young black men (Blank 47). Outside these ghetto areas, American crime rates have declined over the past twenty years.

Economic poverty, from 1900 Hell's Kitchen in New York City, to today's ghettos in Washington D.C., can be breeding grounds of ignorance, anger, apathy, and extreme risk-taking on the part of youths. If juveniles are not aware of potential economic opportunities (say, in computer and communication technology), they might never feel motivated to stay in school and receive skills training. If juveniles, such as those in *The Outsiders*, see the contrast between themselves and wealthier youths, the poorer youths might develop an anger toward their situation and a system that deprives them of material benefits. If juveniles see, hear, and feel the apathy of parents and peers, those juveniles might develop an attitude/mind-set of pessimism and indifference. If poor juveniles see their parents deriving temporary pleasure from drugs and alcohol, and unprotected sex, those juveniles might be willing to risk their lives for short-term bursts of psychological and physical pleasure.

A Changing U.S. Economy

The fate of the poor in America is closely linked to the economy. Professor Blank, in *It Takes a Nation*, notes that the nature of jobs available to less-skilled workers has substantially worsened. Among the least skilled men, wages have fallen more than 20% in the past fifteen years. Fringe benefits and career opportunities have become more limited for low-skilled workers.

The Benefits to Teens from Working a Job

There can be positive and long-lasting effects on the minds of working teenagers. Initiative, self-responsibility, thrift, time management, and short and longer-term planning are some life skills that can accrue for a teen who works a few hours after school or on weekends. Some teens learn to budget their paychecks, deposit part of their paychecks into banks savings accounts, delay immediate gratification (by depositing a paycheck into savings rather than spending it on new CD's or clothes), and how to work as a team to accomplish a task on the job. Additionally, working teens learn about the "real" of economic world of which they will be a full-time part when they leave the school. Coming into contact while a teen with the "Real World" can help give the teen insights as to what he might want to do as an adult. For example, this writer worked

full-time as a conference attendant while in high school with another teen who today manages a large conference-training center in New York. The "seed" was planted in the mind of the teen while he set up and arranged conference tables, chairs, and charts to one day oversee a conference center. This writer benefited by befriending a real estate investor/builder who inspired the writer to own houses and land while still in his twenties. This writer hopes to secure a local homebuilder as a guest speaker to further plant the "seeds of success" amongst students by talking about his experiences in construction. The builder will discuss when and how young people can apprentice for homebuilders.

Working in a job outside the home while still a teen can orient a youth away from any possible juvenile delinquency and toward a life as a productive "economic citizen." When a teen works and saves income, he can develop future goals and plans such as paying for college, buying a house or land, or driving a better car. A working teen can meet older, successful adults not part of his/her family and school environment. Ambitious teens can find work-place mentors who can enlighten, motivate, and challenge them in ways that parents and schoolteachers might not. Work-place managers/mentors can open new horizons for teens by helping teens raise their personal expectation level concurrent with raising teen self-confidence and self-esteem. High schools can aid students in their job searches through the counseling offices and school to careers programs operated in conjunction with schools and businesses. Middle schools can promote job fairs and school to career fairs for their 8th graders.

Jobs while Students are in School

An informal, unpublished survey conducted by this writer at Albuquerque's Jefferson Middle School in May of 2001, showed the following job possibilities for young teens: babysitting, pet care, yard clean-up, newspaper sales, and clean-up of neighbors' houses and garages. High school students often work at fast-food retail outlets such as McDonalds. City governments have special programs for high-risk youth. In Albuquerque, programs such as the Mayor's Art Council summer program, offer summer jobs to high school art students.

Wage Changes during the Past Thirty Years

Less skilled adults, and those living by themselves or supporting families, find a different and often daunting economic situation. The kinds of jobs available to low skilled adults have deteriorated during the past thirty years. Among the least skilled men, wages have fallen more than 20% in the past 20 years (60). Career opportunities and fringe benefits have diminished for low-skilled adult workers. On the other hand, higher skilled men and women (with college degree or higher) have experienced substantial wage increases. These wages trends will probably continue in the future. Thus, college graduates in computer science, engineering, pharmacology, and health sciences will continue to receive relatively substantial salary vis-à-vis high school dropouts and high school graduates with no marketable job skills. The U.S. economy is moving toward a two-tiered job/career system wherein salaries for skilled technical employees are rising while wages for less-skilled adult workers is falling. Characters in *Tom Sawyer* and *The Outsiders* will eventually age and confront economic realities. Would Tom Sawyer of the year 2001 join the U.S. Navy to see the world? Would Ponyboy go to college to major in journalism? Teachers should link economics with *Tom Sawyer* and *The Outsiders* by asking students to predict the adult status of Tom Sawyer and the Outsiders. Teachers should ask students what Tom and the Outsiders could do to better ensure prosperous and happy lives.

Economic and Social Implications

To improve the living and growth conditions of more citizens, it seems imperative that

skills training be offered, encouraged, and made available within all socioeconomic levels of our country. Skills training is offered at local junior colleges and technical institutes in such careers as aviation mechanics, drafting, computer programming, and childcare. High schools such as the special, career-oriented skills high school on Long Island prepare future electricians, welders, plumbers, truck drivers, and draftsmen. All schools prepare students for productive careers by strengthening students' reading, writing, learning, and organizational skills. Rebecca M. Blank notes that African-American high school dropouts have unemployment rates of over twenty percent (58-59). Is there a connection between low skilled, low educated "minorities" and high incarceration percentages for minority males in their late teens and twenties? Certainly, young, unemployed or underemployed people continue to have to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. If their basic needs are not met through paychecks, the alternative means include drug dealing, gambling, theft, prostitution, and extortion.

Theoretical Perspectives on Delinquency

Travis Hirschi, writing in 1968, spoke of the delinquent as one who is "relatively free of the intimate attachments, the aspirations, and the moral beliefs that bind most people to a life within the law"(Hirschi Preface). Hirschi cites three theories of delinquency: Strain Theories, Control Theories, and Cultural Deviance Theories. Don C. Gibbons, in his *Delinquent Behavior*, offers readers other theories and perspectives on juvenile delinquency (Gibbons 98-99).

Strain Theories

Hirschi explains the classic strain theories as "pressure provided by legitimate desires" (5) that exert influence which induces man to act defiantly. For example, a 24-year-old law student might feel compelled to cheat on his third year course in business contracts to gain an 'A' for the course so that he can continue to rank in the top ten percent of his law class. The law student's father finished in the top ten percent of his law class of his law school class, and the son feels strong to pressure replicate his father's academic success. The 24-year-old student has acted in a deviant way to attain an end he feels is justly his: a high class ranking.

Control Theories

According to Hirschi, under control theories, "deviance is taken for granted" (10). Control theory expects alternations in virtue. The degree to which men consider rectitude varies considerably. Control theory advocates believe that there is a rational-calculation component involved in deviancy - that a person weighs his options prior to committing a deviant act such as shoplifting from a department store. Hirschi further states, "control theories assume that delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken" (10). Thus, a young person without a family, without a church, and without close friends might be more likely to use stolen credit cards for her own purchases of merchandise.

Cultural Deviance Theories

Hirschi states that theories of cultural deviancy assume that men are incapable of committing deviant acts, at least not by their own personal social and moral standards (11). For example, present day gang members may feel it perfectly normal to carry firearms, shoot rival gang members, use cocaine, and deal in marijuana distribution whereas the greater society generally condemns and makes illegal such practices. Gang, or socially deviant, behavior accepted by insiders is simply learned behavior, much like the thieves in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. Thus, according to Hirschi, cultural deviance theories don't attribute any particular motivational impulse or pressure to explain deviant

behavior.

Overview of Unit Lesson Plans

The following section will present three lesson plans designed to enhance the students' understanding of the central theme of juvenile delinquency, and of engendering improved reading skills amongst the writers Special Education students. First, there's a lesson on vocabulary terms designed to develop economic knowledge. This lesson is designed to dovetail with the conclusion of *Tom Sawyer* wherein Tom and Huck discover \$12,000 in gold, which they are entitled to keep. What should the boys do with their fortunes? Second, there's a brief role-play scenario involving the possible sale of marijuana by students on school grounds. How do students handle this situation involving an illegal substance? Finally, students will learn about context clues and how student use of context clues will help students' vocabulary development.

Economic Decision Making – Terms to Know

This writer always injects components of economics into his curriculum unit. The obvious justification is for Special Education students to be better versed on several economic, dollars and sense realities. By equipping students with some basic economic knowledge, we can set the stage for their understanding and appreciating the power of personal initiative, budgeting, savings, and delayed gratification.

The writer uses *Tom Sawyer* to highlight and clarify key economic terms such as budgets, barter, bank, interest, consumer goods, credit, money, savings, economics, entrepreneur, investment and market.

The following is a brief list of important economic terms with which all teachers should be familiar. Knowledge of these terms will help the instructor to better classify various components of the curriculum unit to students. Instructors may want to introduce and discuss some, many, or all of the vocabulary terms with their students at the outset of the unit as well as throughout the nine-week unit.

ECONOMIC VOCABULARY

1. Asset	A physical or intangible right that has economic value. Key examples of asset are land, equipment, plant, patents, money, and bonds.
2. Barter	The direct exchange of one good for another without using anything as money or as a medium exchange. Two farmers might barter, between them, corn for carrots.
3. Budget	A financial forecast that shows, for year, quarter, or month, the planned expenditures of a business, private individual, or government body, and the expected revenue or income that will pay for the expenditures.
4. Budget Lines	A line indicating the combination of commodities that a consumer can buy with a given income at a given set of prices.
5. Capital	Capital consists of durable produced goods that are in production. The essential components of capital are equipment, structures such as factory buildings, and inventory such as rubber used in tire manufacturing.
6. Interest	Predetermined amount of money a borrower must pay for the use of borrowed funds. A bank pays you interest when you leave your money with them.

7. Consumption	The total spending by individuals or a nation, on consumer goods (cars, houses, food, entertainment) during a given period.
8. Division of Labor	A method of organizing production whereby each worker specializes in part of the productive process. Labor specialization yields higher total output because labor can become more skilled at a particular task, and because specialized machinery can be introduced to perform more carefully defined subtasks.
9. Economics	The study of how a society allocates its scarce resources. Economics asks, "What goods are produced? How are these goods produced? And for whom they are produced?" Economics is the study of "Consumer and Producer" choice, as well as the study of money, banking, capital, and wealth.
10. Income	The flow of wages, interest payments, dividends and other receipts accruing to an individual or a nation during a given time period (usually a year).
11. Labor Force	In official United States Statistics, that group of people 16 years of age or older who is either employed or unemployed and seeking work.
12. Market	An arrangement whereby buyers and sellers interact to determine the prices and quantities of a commodity. Some markets are conducted over the telephone or are organized by computers.
13. Money	The means of payment or the medium of exchange. Money consists of coins, paper currency, and demand or checking deposits.
14. Opportunity Cost	The value of the next best use or opportunity for an economic good, or the value of the sacrificed alternative. Thus, say the best alternative use of the inputs employed to grow 20 bushels of wheat was to grow 15 bushels of soybeans that could have been produced but were not.
15. Real Wages	The purchasing power of a worker's wages in terms of goods and services. It's measured by the ratio of the money wage rate to the consumer price index.
16. Saving	That part of income that is not consumed. Savings are the difference between disposable income and consumption.

Matching Quiz on Economic Terms

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. Asset | A. The flow of wages, interest, payment, and dividends accruing to an individual during a given time period |
| 2. Interest | B. The study of how a society allocates its scarce resources |
| 3. Saving | C. The value of the next best use of opportunity for an for an economic good, or the value of the sacrificed alternative |
| 4. Market | D. Direct exchange of one good for another using anything as money |
| 5. Opportunity Cost | E. Method of organizing production where in each worker specializes in only part of the productive process |

6. Money	F. Amount of money that a borrower must pay for use of borrowed funds.
7. Division of Labor	G. That part of income that is not consumed. The differences between disposable income and consumption
8. Income	H. An arrangement whereby buyers and sellers interact to determine prices and quantities of a commodity
9. Economics	I Means of payment, or the medium of exchange
10. Barter	J. A physical property or intangible right that has economic value

The economic quiz encourages students to focus on ten key economic terms. The definitions are found on the same pages as the economic terms, so that if a student is close to knowing what a term means he can probably hone in on the correct definition. Thus, his/her prior knowledge can be reinforced.

Scenario for Class Role-playing

- Invitation to start selling Marijuana at Middle School
- Monitored by Teacher and School Policeman

A popular, older student (Alex) approaches a younger, less popular student (Carl) with an economic proposition. It's early September:

Alex: Let me show you something that will make you popular while also make you a lot of money.

Carl: What's that Alex?

Alex: I've got a secret source of something that makes people feel happy and for which they will pay you big bucks.

Carl: I want new friends and need money. What's this secret thing that so many people want?

Alex: I've got a small sample here in this plastic bag.

[takes a plastic bag out of his pocket]

Carl: It looks like chopped up straw.

Alex: It's marijuana. I call it pot.

Carl: I've heard of pot. You smoke it, right?

Alex: Yeah, you smoke and inhale it using a pot pipe.

[takes out a pot pipe from another pocket]

It feels *so* good...like you're floating on Cloud Nine!

Carl: Isn't marijuana illegal?

Alex: It shouldn't be illegal. Hey...smoking pot is a lot worse than smoking cigarettes.

Carl: But if pot is illegal, couldn't we get in trouble if anyone found out about us selling pot?

Alex: You only sell it to people you know won't tell anyone about it...and who can pay you cash. Believe me Carl, you'll be making more money than anyone in 8th grade in this school.

Carl: Yeah, but there's a policeman in this school.

Alex: You only deal with people who wouldn't snitch because they could get in trouble themselves.

Carl: Well, if I can't get in trouble with the policeman...

Alex: You won't get in trouble. No one will ever know what you're doing.

Carl: Are you sure?

Alex: Of course I am. I've been dealing for more than a year. No one knows, outside of my "customers"...what I'm doing...what do you say...you could start small...selling it to three or four 7th graders...

Carl: Well...

We stop the role-play here.

We ask several questions:

1. What is the legal penalty for selling and using pot?
2. Is the use of marijuana unhealthy...for you heart and lungs?
3. Why would Carl decide to work with Alex?
4. What would you (other students) do?
5. If you know that use of pot is illegal, would you consider using or selling it?
6. Do you know anyone who smokes pot? If you do, what do they tell you about it?
7. What is likely to happen next?

As resource guides on marijuana, teachers can use the National Institute on Drugs Abuse publications on marijuana such as *Marijuana – Physiological Effect*, and *The Brain's Response to Marijuana*. Additionally, all teachers should have a Teacher's Edition of *Teen Health*, the 7th grade Health textbook used by Albuquerque Schools.

Follow-up Role-play

It's late November

Alex: What's up, Carl?

Carl: Alex...we need to talk

Alex: Do you want to expand your business?

Carl: Not exactly.

Alex: What, then?

Carl: I want out.

Alex: What?

Carl: I don't feel right about what I'm doing.

Alex: Aren't you making money... and new friends?

Carl: Yeah, I am making money. You were right about that. I was able to take Ashley to the movies last week.

Alex: Money, girlfriend, popularity... it's all good, Carl.

Carl: But, what's not good is having to sneak the stuff into my house and to lie to my folks about where and how I get my money. They think I'm cleaning yards.

Alex: Hey... you're not hurting anybody.

Carl: That's another thing. In our health class, we're studying marijuana. Smoking pot isn't healthy. Inhaling it can damage the lungs and disorient the brain. So, maybe I'm hurting the three girls I'm selling it to.

Alex: You're getting a guilty conscience. There's no room for that, Carl.

Carl: Maybe I'm glad I still have a conscience. You know, I don't think anyone ever know what I'm doing. I mean, dad and mom are working all the time and I'm pretty much on my own. But it's because I'm on my own and have some responsibility that I've been thinking about selling pot...

Alex: Yeah?

Carl: Because marijuana use is not healthy, and marijuana sales are illegal... I'm out.

Alex: No more money... No more girls... Just what are you going to do?

Carl: I've got a new weekend job... cleaning yards...

Student Questions

1. What do you think about Carl's decision to exit the selling business?
2. Would you have done as Carl did?
3. Do you think that Alex will recruit a new marijuana salesman?
4. Do you think that Carl is thinking about long-term future?
5. Is Alex thinking long-term?

Key Questions for our Students

Upon completing *Tom Sawyer* and *The Outsiders*, students and teacher will discuss what we mean when we use the term "juvenile delinquent". Is a juvenile delinquent one who breaks the law? Is a juvenile delinquent one who transgresses beyond what's deemed culturally/socially appropriate? Students will be queried as to why some other members of their communities consider Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, and the "Greasers" delinquent. Does skipping school or starting altercations with a newcomer constitute juvenile delinquency? Does wearing slicked-back hair constitute a delinquent act?

Reading Plan for *Tom Sawyer*

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is comprised of 35 short chapters of six or seven pages per chapter. The Albuquerque Public School copies of *Tom Sawyer* are supplemented with end-of-chapter questions to clarify events and enhance readers' comprehension. For example, readers are quizzed on the murderous events of chapter nine's graveyard scene involving Tom, Huck Finn, Muff Potter, and Injun Joe. Additionally, questions from chapter 34's revelation that Tom and Huck are now wealthy from their gold discovery can lead the teacher and students to the topics of money, budgets, and savings. The end-of-chapter questions highlight main ideas, story sequence, vocabulary, and main characters with the major purpose of clarifying reader comprehension and meeting District Standards for 8th grade Literature.

All students read *Tom Sawyer* during the three weeks invested in Twain's book. The teacher reads aloud the preface and chapter one to better "set the stage" for the class. Then, students will be assigned Home Readings twice each week of a single chapter per reading.

Following the classes completion of Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, the teacher will show the modern movie version of the book. The movie version of *Tom Sawyer* will further serve as a springboard for the discussion led by the school social worker about aspects of Tom Sawyer's background and childhood: Tom's father (missing in the book), Tom's social circle, his schooling, and his future prospects. Finally, students will be writing a 250-word paper about one of three topics:

- What three parts of *Tom Sawyer* did you most enjoy? Why? Use your book as a guide as you write.
- What makes *Tom Sawyer* such a memorable book? Is there a happy ending?
- Write a short, standard book report on *Tom Sawyer* that includes an introduction, a discussion of several major characters, main events, what lessons you learned from Tom Sawyer, and why you might recommend *Tom Sawyer* to other students.

Reading Plan for *The Outsiders*

This writer approaches the reading of *The Outsiders* somewhat differently from that of *Tom Sawyer*. Before reading *The Outsiders*, the school policeman visits the class to discuss gangs, drugs, and juvenile delinquency with the class and provide framework and foundation just prior to reading the book. Then, the class will read aloud, with each student reading short, half-page sections designed to draw each student into the book's vortex. The teacher will read aloud passages of several pages to better sustain the narrative and students' interest in *The Outsiders*.

Halfway through *The Outsiders*, students will be asked to predict what will happen to several major characters (Ponyboy, Sodapop, Dally, and Johnny). Can students identify with any of the characters? Do you like the story? Why? Upon concluding the book, the students will view the fairly recent film version of *The Outsiders*.

Finally, this writer's students will write about what the Outsiders could do to better their lives. Previous 8th graders have suggested abstention from drugs and alcohol, participation in sports, church membership, and school involvement.

The time allotment for *The Outsiders*, including guest lecture, films, student and teacher readings, and our culminating writings is three to four weeks.

Reading Strategies

Pre-reading Strategies

Just prior to beginning our reading of *Tom Sawyer* and *The Outsiders*, the teacher will explain what is entailed in pre-reading strategies. Five techniques will be introduced that can make an immediate, noticeable change in how well students understand and remember what they read. Each step is done *before* students actually begin reading. By reviewing and clarifying the five pre-reading strategies, the instructor will move toward meeting District Content Standards for 8th grade Literature, most specifically in encouraging independent reading concurrent with strengthened student reading comprehension.

The five pre-reading strategies are to:

1. Start with a positive attitude. Think of reading as a way of unlocking the writer's messages to you, the reader. Think, too, of reading as an "active" mental search for key ideas that will help you, the reader, better understand the author. Before reading *Tom Sawyer*, students will visualize themselves sailing on a raft down the Mississippi River. They will be asked to remember the most enjoyable things they did the previous summer.
2. Control your concentration by controlling your surroundings. Choose a place to read where you will not be interrupted. Find a place that is relatively free of distractions such as friends and television. Read in the same place each day at a time of day when you are mentally alert. In this writer's classroom, there are four quiet, sectioned off areas that have conformable chairs or carpet where students focus on reading. We read for 36 minutes, and take a three-minute stretching break in the middle of the reading session. The class will do Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) twice each week in our four, quiet reading areas while reading *Tom Sawyer* and *The Outsiders*.
3. Preview before reading. Previewing is a way of quickly familiarizing yourself with the organization and content of written material before beginning to read it. When you preview, try to find only the most important ideas in the book, and note how they are organized. What does one look at in previewing a textbook chapter? The following eight components are important areas of a previewer to focus on:
 1. The title and subtitle,
 2. Chapter introduction, The teacher reads aloud each of the chapter headings of *Tom Sawyer* immediately prior to the class' reading of the chapters to introduce and set the stage for the chapter
 3. First paragraph,
 4. Bold font headings,
 5. First sentence under each heading,
 6. Typographical aids such as italics, colored ink, highlighted words, underlining, and enumeration/listing,
 7. Last paragraph or summery to help identify key ideas, and
 8. End of chapter material, such as vocabulary lists of discussion questions

4. Activate your background knowledge. It's important to link what you have already experienced to what you are about to read. For example, a student who sings in his church choir might better relate to a story about Ray Charles. A student who enjoys her art class could better empathize with Van Gogh. Additionally, students can use brainstorming to activate their background knowledge. Brainstorming is as simple as jotting down on a piece of paper everything that comes to mind about a topic. While brainstorming, students should ask themselves questions about the topic. For example, if the story or chapter is about American Gospel singing, one might ask why Gospel-blues originated in the American South. Prior to reading *Tom Sawyer*, students will be asked when the last tried to avoid a chore such as painting a fence, or when they last skipped a day of school to go swimming or to the mall.
5. Develop guide question. Readers can form questions to guide their reading and hold their attention while reading. Then, take each major heading and turn it into a series of questions. The questions should ask something that you feel is important to know. Questions should begin with *what*, *why*, or *how*. Finally, students should stop and check to see if they have found answers to their questions when they have finished reading a chapter. While reading *Tom Sawyer*, students will ask themselves *what* they would do if they had witnessed a murder, *why* they might testify at a murder trial, *how* they would spend or save a \$12,000 windfall.

Reading Strategies

Concurrent with reading *Tom Sawyer* and *The Outsiders* students will learn effective reading strategies to facilitate their mastery of District Content Standards for Literature/Reading. Specifically, students of this curriculum unit will read independently in addition to class work and will read to generalize, to make judgments, and to draw conclusions. Students recognize main ideas and key details, predict outcomes, and recognize authors' viewpoints. Additionally, students will write to summarize, evaluate, and analyze what they read.

Context Clues

Students can often figure out the meaning of a difficult word from the words before and after the difficult word. The words around the difficult word – the sentence context – give the readers clues as to the definition of the difficult word. These clues are called context clues.

Using the *Tom Sawyer* as a basis for our class on context clues, we would use the following examples.

1. Definition clue for the word *equity*.

The new judge in Tom's town wanted to practice equity, general principles of fairness and justice: in his role as town Judge.

"Equity" is here defined within the sentence.

2. Example clue for the word *fabrics*.

Aunt Polly used a variety of fabrics, including cotton, wool, and linen, in her clothes she was making.

"Fabrics" is here said to be composed of certain materials.

3. Contrast clue for the words *affluent* and *thwarted*.

Some residents of Tom's town were affluent; others lived in poverty.

A reader can summarize that "affluent" means wealthy, or the opposite of poor.

Tom's plans for skipping school were thwarted when Aunt Polly decided to

walk Tom to school that day.

The reader can summarize that "thwarted" means a failed attempt of some plan.

Possible Reasons for Getting into Trouble

This curriculum unit has suggested that economic deprivation, dysfunctional family structure, childhood trauma, and negative peer pressure can lead youths into juvenile delinquency. Our students will be asked to cite other possible causes of delinquency. Is it possible that brain injury can lead to a youth's poor impulse control that in turn might lead him to throw a rock through a window or to push a peer down a flight of stairs? Is it possible that violence has been glorified in our society today as a result of sensationalizing movies and television? Have movies that show characters coming back to life masked the finality of death? Finally, do juveniles fathom the implications and consequences of violent acts? In-class discussion will ponder the above question while considering why youths get in trouble.

How to Reduce Deviant Behaviors

In the presence of the school policeman and school social worker, the class will consider and debate the role and efficacy of parents, peers, police, schools, churches, and community centers in reducing or eliminating behaviors deemed deviant or delinquent by our society. Questions asked of students about delinquency can serve as an introduction to such ATI seminar topics as nurturing relationships, labeling, expectation levels, strain theory, and learned behavior.

Assessment

This unit seeks to meet New Mexico State and District Standards for 8th grade Language Arts/Literature within the strands of the Reading Process, Reading Comprehension, and Reading Analysis. The specific assessment means to be used include: end-of –chapter comprehension questions, weekly vocabulary quizzes on story words, demonstrations of student oral reading mastery, student book report writing that demonstrates proper analytical skills, and Brigance Testing of Reading Comprehension levels.

Conclusion

This nine-week curriculum unit will focus on a dual goal of improved reading skills concurrent with a clearer and deeper understanding of some of the hows and whys of juvenile delinquency. 8th graders need to experience debate and informative lecture on pertinent, and often personal, social issues of juvenile deviancy.

Under the New Mexico Scope and Sequence of the Literature Curriculum, our Special Education students will learn effective-reading strategies designed to improve their reading comprehension and to give students effective tools to become active, independent readers.

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