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| **Unit Title** | The Age of Realism (1865-1910) | | | | **Length of Unit** | 14 class periods |
| **Unit Description and Rationale** | This unit explores American literature from the Age of Realism. Literature from this era shifts away from the ideals of Romanticism to emphasize the realities of everyday American life for ordinary people. The Realist emphasis on particular places and people highlighted the growing regional differences as America expanded westward. Writers like Mark Twain deliberately challenged the sensibilities of the East Coast literary establishment by including regional dialects and local forms of speech in his writing. As students read and interact with literature from this era, they can enjoy the unique color of places and characters even as they wrestle with the distinct questions that emerge. As with all great literature, the questions ultimately transcend history and geography to challenge contemporary readers. What does it mean to be human? To love? To die? To live justly and courageously? | | | | | |
| **Unit Generalization**  ***By the end of this unit, my students will understand…*** | | | **Guiding Questions** | | | |
| Realism as a literary movement rejects Romantic idealism to emphasize the particular realities of ordinary life—simple, gritty, local, complex. The American Civil War was a key historical factor in destroying idealism and advancing realism. Instinctively naturalistic, realism precludes the full-scale rejection of religious sensibilities in modernism. | | | * What historical events contributed to the rise of literary realism? * What are the central tenets of realism? * How does realist literature shape our idea of America? * How does literature from this period portray what it means to be American? * How does literature from the period wrestle with the effects of slavery and racism? * Where can we see the influence of realist literature in American culture today? * What are the core moral and theological concerns of realist literature? | | | |
| **Critical Vocabulary:** *includes the academic and technical vocabulary, semantics, and discourse which are particular to and necessary for accessing a given discipline.* | | | | | | |
| Realism, regional realism, Reconstruction, dialect, vernacular, free verse, slant rhyme | | | | | | |
| **Critical Content: My students will KNOW…** | | | | **Key Skills: My students will be able to (DO)…** | | |
| 1. The historical context of literary realism, especially as it concerns post-Civil War America and the aftermath of slavery. 2. Influenced heavily by Emerson’s Transcendentalism, the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson bridges the Romantic and Realist periods in American literature, albeit with markedly different styles. Whitman’s poetry is experimental (for its time) and characterized by long lines of free verse that give it a prophetic energy. Dickinson’s poetry, on the other hand, is tight, formal, and cryptic. 3. The literature of Mark Twain represents three major literary shifts: Romanticism to Realism, East to West, standard English to regional dialects. 4. A contender for the “Great American Novel,” *Huckleberry Finn* continues to be a controversial classic for its depiction of race and slavery (especially its frequent use of *nigger*). | | | | 1. List the historical and cultural issues at play in the shift from Romanticism to Realism. 2. Describe the core tenets of literary realism, especially as it contrasts with romanticism. 3. Analyze and discuss the poetry of Emily Dickinson. 4. Analyze and discuss the poetry of Walt Whitman. 5. Evaluate the literary, historical, and ethical merits of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* in light of ongoing controversy over its depiction of race and slavery. | | |
| **Performance Assessment:** *The capstone/summative assessment for this unit.* | | | | | | |
| **Claims:**  (Key content and skills to be mastered and demonstrated through the capstone assessment) | | Students will be able to evaluate the literary, historical, and ethical merits of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* in light of ongoing controversy over its depiction of race and slavery. | | | | |
| **Stimulus Material:**  (Engaging scenario that includes role, audience, goal/outcome and explicitly connects the key generalization) | | Imagine you and your peers serve on the curriculum committee at your high school or college. A group of parents, students, and teachers has recently circulated a petition to remove *Huckleberry Finn* from the school’s reading lists and library because of its racist language and offensive representations of African Americans. Other parents, students, and teachers have sent in letters insisting that the novel is a literary masterpiece and demanding that it continue to be taught at your school. Your committee is going to hold a community meeting to decide the issue. Take a side in the debate and prepare a presentation to articulate your point of view. How will you make your argument for or against *Huckleberry Finn*? What kind of evidence will you cite to support your claim for either the book’s educational value or its inappropriateness? How will you construct your argument so it will address the concerns of parents and teachers as well as students?  From American Passages: Regional Realism, Instructor Guide, <https://www.learner.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/american-passages-unit08ig-REGIONAL-REALISM.pdf> | | | | |
| **Product/Evidence:**  (Expected product from students) | | A written presentation that evaluates the merits of Huck Finn as part of a high school literature curriculum. | | | | |
| **Differentiation:**  (Multiple modes for student expression) | | N/A | | | | |
| **Supporting Texts** | | | | | | |
| **Primary**  *(Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Creative Nonfiction, Historical Documents)* | | | | **Secondary**  *(Information, Academic Research, Literary Criticism)* | | |
| *American Literature* (Apologia)  *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain (Bantam Classics)  “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses” by Mark Twain | | | | “’Huckleberry Finn’ and the N-word,” <https://youtu.be/nW9-qee1m9o>  Huck Finn in Context: A Teaching Guide, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/teachers/huck/index.html>  American Passages: A Literary Survey – Regional Realism, <https://www.learner.org/series/american-passages-a-literary-survey/regional-realism/>  Scholarly articles  KSP, *On Reading Well*  Meadville Tribune, “Untold stories: Mark Twain visits Conneaut Lake” | | |

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| **Learning Experience #1** | |
| **Date:** |  |
| **Time:** |  |
| **Description/Overview:** |  |
| **Materials:** |  |
| **Critical Content (KNOW):** |  |
| **Key Skills (DO):** |  |
| **Assessment:** |  |
| *Lesson Plan and Instructor Notes* | |
| PREVIEW |  |
| WORKSHOP  *Prepare*  *Model*  *Practice*  *Discuss*  *Assess* |  |
| ASSIGN |  |
| CLOSE |  |