Mythical Allusions and Clichés in Literature and Popular Culture

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INTRODUCTION

The inferences readers glean from literature affect thoughts, actions, emotions, and even decisions in life.   Avid readers make associations the instant they read about an idea, event, or person and create meanings outside of the original concept.   These readers make connections between old and new knowledge and structure ideas that fit an understanding.   When comprehension of innovative information is achieved, the popular culture is likewise affected.   One such example of a stimulus is the presence of allusions and clichés in literature. Allusions to the familiar are clichés, but they are also threads to connect the reader or listener to the familiar, so unfamiliar material can be added and learned in contextual association with the hyper-familiar.

Every year my 9th and 10th grade students read different stories embedded with allusions generated from mythological stories handed down from generation to generation. Without much background knowledge on the subject of mythological creatures, characters, places, or events, my students would have much difficulty understanding the references made by an author or speaker of a story or poem.   My students, lost in the meaning conveyed, end up confused and oftentimes generate a different sense than what the author or speaker originally intends.   Students lose interest when they do not comprehend what they read.   In the hope of making students familiar with classical or mythical references, I want to prepare a unit that introduces them to examples of mythological stories from different cultures.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

This unit will follow CLEAR objectives in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) Curriculum and Texas Education Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).   The objectives cover both English Language Arts and Social Studies.   For the lessons included in this unit, the student will:

English Language Arts

ELA.R.5.a 1 Activate prior knowledge of mythology and the nations where the myths are found.

Set a purpose for reading.

Make predictions about a text as they read.

ELA.R.5.b.2 Use reading strategies or text coding to mark or highlight important details found in the text to enhance comprehension.

ELA.R.9.2.c. Select and read a variety of texts from a variety of sources for a variety of purposes.

ELA.R.9.2.c. Analyze narrative text structure and its features.

ELA.R.9.2.e. Analyze literary elements for their contributions and meanings to texts.

ELA.R.9.3.c. Interpret words and phrases in a variety of contexts to increase comprehension.

ELA.R.9.3.e. Discriminate between connotative and denotative meanings and interpret the connotative power of words.

ELA.R.9.3.g. Use reference materials such as glossary, dictionary, thesaurus, and technology to determine precise meanings and usage.

ELA.R.9.5.c. Determine a text's main or major ideas and relevant supporting details.

ELA.R.9.5.d. Summarize texts for a variety of purposes.

ELA.R.9.5.e. Identify causes and effects from a piece of text.

ELA.R.9.5.f. Draw inferences from a text.

ELA.R.9.5.h. Demonstrate comprehension skills through his/her responses and questioning strategies.

ELA.R.9.5.b.4. Visualize images the text description evokes.

ELA.L.9.1.b. Interact effectively in a response and feedback activity.

ELA.L.9.2.a. Analyze and evaluate aesthetic language in literature and in spoken messages.

ELA.L.9.2.b. Interpret and evaluate written and oral texts.

ELA.L.9.2.c. Use higher order of thinking to participate in academic discourse.

ELA.L.9.5.a. Recognize the power of language to reinforce or change, to acknowledge or deny the worth of an issue or idea.

ELA.W.9.6.b. Engage in conference concerning aspects of one's own writing and the writing of others.

ELA.W.9.7.a. Collaborate with other partners for particular purposes.

ELA.V.9.2.c. Evaluate and critique persuasive techniques of media.

TEKS Objective 1 Produce an effective composition for a specific purpose.

TEKS Objective 2 Produce a piece of writing that demonstrates a command of the conventions of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar usage, and sentence structure.

TEKS Objective 3 Demonstrate the ability to revise and proofread to improve the clarity and effectiveness of a piece of writing.

Social Studies

TEKS Objective 2 Demonstrate an understanding of geographic influences on historical issues and events.

TEKS Objective 3 Demonstrate an understanding of economic and social influences on historical issues and events.

TEKS Objective 4 Demonstrate understanding of political influences on historical issues and events.

TEKS Objective 5 Use critical thinking skills to analyze social studies information.

RATIONALE

This unit on mythological allusions will help students understand references that are otherwise only read about in their respective mythological texts.   As students read their assigned selection, they will not only focus on the stories but also learn how the references are used in the selection and how they affect the meanings and help the reader understand the nuances provided by additional information.   The unit will also introduce (if they have not read or heard of the myths) or re-introduce (if they have already heard or read about the myths) students to three popular myths that are still commonplace in modern times as part of aesthetic language that relies heavily on the assumption that people know what the reference is about and should know what intended meaning is implied.   The three passages will be about Midas, Pandora, and Sisyphus. The exercise of spotting allusions in a text will eventually become second nature to students even as they read William Shakespeare's plays, Homer's epic adventure, or Sophocles' tragedy. Students will use their knowledge of allusions in meaningful discourses throughout the school year and employ words and phrases skillfully in their writings, readings, and conversations. At

the end of the unit, the students should have an ample list of allusions and use it as a bank of ideas or terms in the future.   As students increase their list of allusions, they also increase their list of vocabulary words related to the allusions they gathered.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Allusion and Clichés Defined

When an author borrows a word or a phrase from another work of literature, history, religion, art, or other events, factual or fictitious, an allusion or reference is made to an ancient story or myth. Writers or speakers use brief references to enhance the meaning of an expression or to provide depth to a character or plot.   As a literary device, an allusion helps extend the understanding or visualization of an event, an object, a character, or a time frame. With just a word or two, a writer can create expanded descriptions or images, provided the reader knows what is being referred to in the text.   A reader has to be well-read enough to recognize the allusions. For instance, in Homer's *Odyssey*, the epithet, **"as soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared …,"** is an allusion personifying the sun at daybreak sweeping across the sky.

A cliché, on the other hand, is a phrase or a sentence that is constantly uttered, not necessarily having its original definition. The saying "He was a man of **Herculean size** and strength" is a perfect example of a cliché expressing how strong someone is by comparing the man to the known strength of mythological Hercules. Clichés like this have become household expressions that cause the reader instant recognition of the subject.   Some allusions in literature or in everyday language have become clichés.

Examples of Mythological or Classical Allusions and Their Origins

Though myths do not seem to have a place in our society, Ancient Greek and Roman mythological allusions and clichés permeate our everyday language.   Such phrases as "Midas touch" or "Pandora's box" mean a lot to people familiar with the classic references and who have mastered the sophistication of language and the use of such insinuation. **Midas** was a king in Asia Minor who was granted a wish to turn into gold everything he touched. When everything including his food and daughter turned into gold, he decided the blessing had become a curse and didn't want it anymore. Modern day allusions to Midas are used to refer to business men who turn every transaction into a success or "gold."

> …This creature, part man, part goat, still groggy and much the worse for wear had been thoroughly trussed up to keep him from escaping. Midas immediately recognized Silenus, right-hand satyr to the god Dionysus, and ordered him set free…The god was so pleased, in fact, that he offered to grant whatever Midas   should wish for.

> Now, you didn't get to rule a kingdom in those days without a pretty active grasp of what makes for a successful economy. Midas didn't have to think twice. As the simplest plan for the constant replenishment of the royal treasury, he asked that everything he touches be turned to gold. ("Myth of Midas")

"Turning everything into gold" is a skill most businessmen prefer to have today.   It has become a measure of one's success if one is able to make every endeavor a money-generating scheme. Gone are the bad consequences or negative connotations of Midas' wish; it has now become synonymous with success. Materialistic as it may seem, most people's happiness depends on this skill.

Pandora, on the other hand, was a woman created at the bidding of Zeus to punish Prometheus for "creating and helping man" (Lass, Kiremidjian, and Goldstein 168). She married Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother. With her was a box, a gift from the gods, full of all the evils in the world and Hope at the bottom of the box.   She opened the box out of curiosity and released

all the bad things in the world as we know them now.   Pandora's curiosity in this tale has been referred to continuously in a situation when a person gets in trouble for being so curious about something and the consequences for the resulting action is one of severe punishment, either temporary or permanent.

> Left alone with the mysterious casket, Pandora became more and more inquisitive. Stealthily she drew near and examined it with great interest, for it was curiously wrought of dark wood, and surmounted by a delicately carved head, of such fine workmanship that it seemed to smile and encourage her. Around the box a glittering golden cord was wound, and fastened on top in an intricate knot. Pandora, who prided herself especially on her deft fingers, felt sure she could unfasten it, and reasoning that it would not be indiscreet to untie it if she did not raise the lid, she set to work. Long she strove, but all in vain. Ever and anon the laughing voices of Epimetheus and his companions, playing in the luxuriant shade, were wafted in on the summer breeze. Repeatedly she heard them call and beseech her to join them; yet she persisted in her attempt. She was just on the point of giving up in despair, when suddenly the refractory knot yielded to her fumbling fingers, and the cord, unrolling, dropped on the floor. (Boyce)

The term **"Sisyphean task"** was coined from a Greek mortal's plight. **Sisyphus**, who was punished by Zeus, has to eternally push a rock up a mountain. As the rock and man reach the top, the rock rolls back down to the plains, and Sisyphus has to go after it to push it back up the slopes. According to the myth, Sisyphus was a deceitful man who stole and connived against the gods by revealing their secrets. His punishment was brought about when he deceived Thanatos, the god of death, so that no one who dies can go to the underworld. Many other characters intervened to punish Sisyphus, but Zeus was the one successful. Sisyphus' story personifies a modern man's zeal to work hard everyday to no avail. Modern day reference to Sisyphus may include situations wherein a person may have been fraudulent in his transactions and may be referred to as "a Sisyphus," or when a person faces a task that is overwhelming in its magnitude of responsibilities involved, thus labeling the task "Sisyphean."

> But even this paramount trickster could only postpone the inevitable. Eventually he was hauled down to Hades, where his indiscretions caught up with him. For a crime against the gods - the specifics of which are variously reported - he was condemned to an eternity at hard labor. And frustrating labor at that. For his assignment was to roll a great boulder to the top of a hill. Only every time Sisyphus, by the greatest of exertion and toil, attained the summit, the darn thing rolled back down again. ("Sisyphus")

"By Jove!" is an expression used by writers instead of saying "By God" to avoid being offensive to God. Jove is the Roman mythological name for the patriarchal god also known as Zeus in Greek mythology. Although this god is not as infallible as the Christian God, the "comic overtones" of the phrase "By Jove" made it a favorable incorporation for Renaissance writers such as William Shakespeare (Macrone 17). This phrase was used by Shakespeare in his play *Love's Labours Lost* (Quinion).

"Between Scylla and Charybdis" is a phrase that refers to a person who makes a choice between two hard decisions where the person can fall prey to one or the other. It suggests an inescapable binary, an extremely limited arena of optionality. In mythology, it is a reference to the two monsters that appear in the Homeric epic the *Odyssey*. Scylla is a six-headed monster who devours sailors as they pass by her, and if the sailors survive her, they have to go through Charybdis, the monstrous whirlpool that sucks in the sailors and their ship. "Caught between Scylla and Charybdis" gave origin to the modern day phrase "caught between a rock and a hard place." Today, Scylla and Charybdis are mentioned in songs such as Sting's (a popular rock and roll artist) "Wrapped Around your Finger." Sting's lyrics mention these two monsters at the

beginning of the song as he sings, "You consider me the young apprentice caught between the Scylla and Charybdis hypnotized by you if I should linger," meaning he is trapped within another person's control.

"Achilles' Heel" refers to a weakness a person possesses. In mythology, it refers to Achilles' only vulnerable spot, where an arrow strikes and leads to his death. Achilles is a tragic hero in Homer's *Iliad* who at birth was dipped by his mother in the River Styx to make him invulnerable. But because his mother held on to his heel while she dipped him, she left the heel open to danger. People nowadays refer to a person's flaw or disadvantage as an "Achilles' heel" or "Achilles' tendon."

"Beware of Greeks bearing gifts" is another phrase that appears both in literature and popular culture. It is a reference to an incident in the Trojan War mentioned in Virgil's *Aeneid*. The Greeks presented the "Trojan horse," another phrase from the same story, as a peace offering to the Trojans that hid Odysseus' soldiers within; in the midst of the Trojans' victory celebration, the Greeks stealthily infiltrated Troy. In modern culture, these two references are used in situations when something is presented under false pretenses or when an enemy suddenly offers a gift.

All these phrases are allusions most people use without realizing their origins or meanings. While these allusions are the only ones mentioned, there are others throughout literature and popular culture. Some of them are names of companies and organizations; others are names of books and events. A few examples of famous allusions are **Atlas**, a Titan who was tasked by **Zeus** to carry the world on his shoulders, now commonly used as a name for travel agencies or transportation services; **Chaos**, the great, unorganized, dark void believed by early Greeks to be the "source of the first proper beings," referred to nowadays as the state of being disorganized or being in disarray; **Ajax**, the Greek warrior in the Trojan War who eliminated the enemies in battle and is now a name for a major cleaning product; **Nike**, a winged goddess of victory and now used as a brand name for a major athletic shoe company; **Mars**, known to the modern world as a popular candy bar, is the Roman name for the Greek god of war, **Ares**; "**of titanic strength,**" is a phrase that is originally a reference to the mythological Titans' unsurpassable strength and now a phrase used as a description for superhuman strength; and "**jovial countenance,**" a reference to **Zeus**' Roman name **Jove**, now used as a description to mean good-humored personality.

The Shakespearean Connection: Ovidian Rhetoric

William Shakespeare, known for his comedies, tragedies, histories, drew a lot of inspiration from Ovid's poem "Metamorphoses." Some of the plays that incorporate Ovidian specifics are *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*. Shakespearean plays embody a lot of human conditions as well as the life style of his time. Shakespeare also used a lot of mythological allusions to create more drama or meaning to the actions and thoughts of his characters. In Act One, Scene 1, lines 142-144 of the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, Lord Montague expresses concern about Romeo's behavior: a manner that isolates Romeo with a tear-stained face as he strolls in the forest. Lord Montague mentions that Romeo comes home at daybreak "to draw the shady curtains from Aurora's bed." In Greek mythology, Aurora is the goddess of dawn.

> Many a morning hath he there be seen,
> With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew,
> Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sights;
> But all so soon as the all-cheering sun
> Should in the farthest East begin to draw
> The shady curtains from Aurora's bed (I.i.139-144)

In almost every act of the play, Cupid is mentioned along with his mother, Venus. Act Two Scene I, lines 10-14 refers to Venus and Cupid as Mercutio teases Romeo of his love struck dilemma.

> Appear though in the likeness of a sigh;
> Speak but one rhyme, and I am satisfied!
> Cry but "Ay me!" pronounce but "love" and "dove";
> Speak to my gossip Venus one fair word,
> One nickname for her purblind son and heir,
> Young Adam Cupid, he that shot so trim… (II. i.10-14)

Venus is the Roman name for the Greek goddess Aphrodite. She is known to be the goddess of beauty and love. In line 13, Mercutio implores to the goddess for wisdom about her son, Cupid in line 14. Cupid's counterpart in Greek mythology is Eros. Cupid or Eros is the god of erotic love. Today Cupid is the much commercialized icon for Valentine's Day with his bow and arrow ready to strike at anyone who needs love or is in love.

Shakespeare points out more mythological figures in *Romeo and Juliet*, such as Phoebus in Act Three, Scene 2, line 2, and Phaeton in line 3. Phoebus is known as the sun-god and is "an epithet of Apollo because of his connection with the sun" ("Phoebus"). Phaeton is Phoebus' son who was punished by Zeus by striking him with a thunderbolt that caused him to lose control of the chariot he was driving. In the play *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet wishes the sun to go down and immediately for nightfall to come so that Romeo can go to her.

> Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
> Toward Phoebus' lodgings! Such wagoner
> As Phaeton would whip you to the West,
> And bring in cloudy night immediately. (III.ii.1-4)

Today Phoebus and Phaeton are both used as names for reputable companies that manufacture lighting equipment or cars. Volkswagen has a luxury sedan called "Phaeton."

Julius Caesar is another Shakespearean tragedy that contains mythological characters. In Act One, Scene 2, line 112, Cassius refers to Aeneas, the mythological founder of Rome, as he recounts his brave act of saving Caesar from the river Tiber and compares it to Aeneas' deed of rescuing his father, Anchises, from the burning city of Troy:

> But ere we could arrive the point proposed,
> Caesar cried, "Help me, Cassius, or I sink!"
> I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor,
> Did the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
> The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
> Did I the tired Caesar. (I.ii.110-115)

Troy was a place focused on in the Trojan War in Homer's *Iliad*. In the past, most people "believed that Homer's Greece with its powerful kings and great fleets of vessels was a myth" (Andrade). Due to the initial discovery made by Heinrich Schliemann, known to the world as the father of archeology, archeological discoveries today provide evidence of a Troy that did exist and that it was nine times burned and destroyed and nine times rebuilt (Andrade).

In Act Three, Scene I, lines 58-74, Caesar explains to Metellus Cimber, Cassius, and the other conspirators that he is as unmoved as the "Northern Star" and Olympus and will not be swayed to grant their petition to lift the banishment of Metellus' brother Publius Cimber.   This scene tells of a ploy by the conspirators to have Caesar negate their request and give them a reason to murder him.

> I could be well moved, if I were as you:
> If I could pray to move, prayers would move me:
> But I am constant as the northern star,
> Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality
> There is no fellow in the firmament.
> The skies are painted with unnumber'd sparks,
> They are all fire and every one doth shine,
> But there's but one in all doth hold his place:
> So in the world; 'tis furnish'd well with men,
> And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;
> Yet in the number I do know but one
> That unassailable holds on his rank,
> Unshaked of motion: and that I am he,
> Let me a little show it, even in this;
> That I was constant Cimber should be banish'd,
> And constant do remain to keep him so.
>
> Hence! Wilt thou lift up Olympus? (III.i.58-74)

The North Star is an allusion to a star used in navigation used by travelers and explorers to find their latitude. Olympus is a reference to Mt. Olympus in Greece and the mountain purported to be the dwelling of the mythological gods and goddesses in ancient times.

In Act Three, Scene I, line 271, Antony mentions Ate, the Greek goddess of revenge as he vows before Caesar's dead body that he will make sure that Caesar's death will be avenged.

> And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
> With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
> Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
> Cry 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war;
> That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
> With carrion men, groaning for burial. (III.i.270-275)

Homer, Sophocles, and Mythology

Homer's epic adventures the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are rich in mythological characters and events. They are themselves part of mythology, and people refer to Odysseus, the *Odyssey*'s main character, to point to a man or woman who traveled far and wide in a successful attempt to come home and be with his family. The movie *O Brother Where Art Thou?* is an example of story in the classic tradition of the *Odyssey* set in a different time period, with different characters but with the same plot and themes involved. It is a story of three convicts, one retaining the name of Homer's Ulysses, also known as Odysseus, who escape from prison in the 1930s in Mississippi in an attempt to get home in time to prevent Ulysses' wife from remarrying and also to recover some lost bank loot that they had buried. While the characters are on an adventurous journey to get home, they encounter temptress women who symbolize the sirens and a one-eyed salesman who represents the Cyclops.

The *Iliad* is the first part of the epic adventure that begins in Troy. Unlike the second part of the second part of the story, the *Iliad* is the story of Greek's victory against Troy. The Trojan War was prompted by the abduction of Helen to be a bride to Paris, prince of Troy. Helen was married to King Menelaus of Sparta prior to the kidnapping. The Greek gods and goddesses played a big part in the war.

Sophocles is a Greek playwright who wrote during the golden age of Greece. He wrote the Greek tragedy *Antigone*, a story about a woman of principle during a time when women's

opinions were not as highly valued as they are now.   Antigone is the daughter of King Oedipus in *Oedipus the King,* another play by Sophocles. When Oedipus died, his two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, came to an agreement to share the kingdom. But Eteocles did not uphold his word and waged war against his brother Polyneices. Both princes died and left the kingdom to Creon who then became the king.   Creon decreed that Eteocles be buried as a hero and Polyneices be left on the battlefield to rot.   Antigone, seeing that one of her brothers would not have a proper burial, decided to oppose Creon's decree.   Thus, tragedy struck with Antigone's, Haemon's and Eurydice's deaths.

Just like Homer's epic, Sophocles' *Antigone* is rich in mythological characters and events. One such character, **Dirce**, is mentioned in play's **Parodos**, a Greek dramatic terminology meaning a passageway when the chorus and another actor enter to the stage.   Dirce is the daughter of the sun-god Helios and the second wife of King Lycus of Thebes.   Dirce was dragged by a bull, and when she died was thrown into a stream as a punishment for her maltreatment of Lycus' first wife, Antiope.

> Now the long blade of the sun, lying
> Level east to west, touches with glory
> Thebes of the Seven Gates, Open, unlidded
> Eye of golden day! O marching light
> Across the eddy and rush of Dirce's stream (*Antigone*, Parodos, 1-5)

Other mythological allusions mentioned in *Antigone* are **Thebes of the Seven Gates**; **Olympus**, "a mountain in Northern Greece and home to gods and goddesses"; **Aphrodite**, "goddess of love and beauty"; **Acheron**, one of the rivers in the underworld, a place of the dead; **Niobe**, a queen of Thebes whose children were killed by gods; **Persephone**, "wife of Hades and queen of the underworld"; **Danae**, a princess imprisoned by her own father due to a prediction that her son will kill him, visited by **Zeus**, had a son named **Perseus** by Zeus who "eventually killed his own grandfather"; **King Lycurgus**, "driven mad and imprisoned in stone" for refusing to worship Dionysus; **Hephaestus**, "god of fire"; and **Furies**, "three goddesses who avenge crimes" (McDougal Littell).

The Need for a Study of Mythological Allusions

Students of a modern society such as ours need to have the same familiarity with mythological allusions to infiltrate the academic world and be capable of the intelligent conversation called for in polite, professional, academic, or social circles. As mentioned previously, a reader or listener will only be able to spot the allusions if he or she is well-read and understands the reference. In what better way to present these mythical allusions than a classroom study that provides the students with firsthand information read and discussed in such a student-teacher directed atmosphere.

Teaching Methods for Mythological Allusions

Students will read and be entertained by mythological stories from the Greeks and the Romans that will introduce the origin and meaning of an allusion. They will initially read the two popular myths of Midas and Pandora and a less popular story about Sisyphus, and then cite examples from prior readings, experiences, or daily observations of events around them. As they read a variety of literature in class, such as William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Homer's the *Odyssey*, they will list all allusions they come across and research the origin and meaning of each one.   Close reading of the stories with annotations of important details and images will be utilized as part of the reading activity. Picture books, if available, will be used to compound student comprehension as well as videos or audio recording. Students will look for examples of literary terms or strategies as they are employed in

the text. For the grammar part of the unit, the students will learn which allusions are nouns or adjectives. As an enforcement activity, the students will be asked to create their own mythological characters and events with powers and stories surrounding them, borrow common mythological phrases and allusions, and have them "publish in the classroom" the stories in a mini picture book. The borrowed phrases and allusions will be highlighted and traced back to their mythological origin.

LESSON PLANS AND APPLICATION

This unit will be introduced to the students for a period of two weeks as they read the three initial myths, and then it will become a continuing study of allusions all throughout the school year. The first lesson will be implemented for a week or two during the first semester to prepare students to be familiar with allusions, read the three sample myths, and familiarize themselves with the basic skill of spotting diction, imagery, details, language, and syntax in a text. The lessons following the initial application will be executed as students read a variety of selections throughout the school year. Certain literature, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antigone*, and *Odyssey*, will be given more focus.

Lesson One: Tapping Prior Knowledge

Objectives: The student will activate prior knowledge; use reading strategies; select and read a variety of texts from a variety of sources for a variety of purposes; analyze narrative text structures and its features, and literary elements; interact effectively in a response and feedback activity; interpret and evaluate written and oral texts; recognize the power of language; and demonstrate an understanding of geographic influences on historical issues and events. (ELA.R.5.a 1, ELA.R.5.b.2, ELA.R.2.a, ELA.R.9.2.c, ELA.R.9.2.e, ELA.L.9.1.b, ELA.L.9.2.b, ELA.L.9.5.a, SS TEKS Objective 2)

Materials needed

Copies of the stories of Midas and Pandora, notebook, highlighter, and pen

Activities

1. Distribute copies of the myths.
2. Students read the tales and annotate the text by highlighting, underlining, and taking notes on the margins.
3. Students take notes in their notebook and use Cornell note-taking strategy to enhance comprehension.
4. Students cite examples of "Midas touch" or "Pandora's box" from their daily experiences, conversations, and observations.
5. Students actively participate in class discussion and questioning activity.

Lesson Two: Creating Order out of Chaos

Objectives: The student will use reading strategies; analyze narrative text structures and its features, and literary elements; interpret words and phrases in a variety of contexts; use reference materials; draw inferences; and demonstrate an understanding of economic and social influences on historical issues and events. (ELA.R.5.b.2, ELA.R.9.2.c, ELA.R.9.3.c, ELA.R.9.3.e, ELA.R.9.3.g, ELA.R.9.5.f, SS TEKS Objective 3)

Materials needed: literary selections, notebook, pen, highlighter, color-coded folder with brackets (for different classes), and crayons

Activities

1. What might seem be a "Sisyphean task" may actually be a profitable activity in the end. Students will continuously list allusions as they read selections in class.

2. Students will receive a copy of the story of Sisyphus who was tasked to do something very extraordinary in hell as part of his punishment for being deceitful. They will compare their task in this activity to that of Sisyphus and decide whether the task given in different classes are similar to that of Sisyphus' task.

3. Students will then receive a copy of a list of some common allusions, and they will research the origins and meanings. Add this list to the existing list gathered by students.

4. Students keep a separate folder that contains the list and explanation for each allusion gathered. To keep the list organized and intact throughout the school year, the students will create a special notebook with the color-coded folder with brackets as cover and binder.

5. Students add illustrations to their notes.

6. The folder will be turned in during mid-spring semester.

Lesson Three: Grammatical Proportions

Objectives: The student will use reference materials; engage in peer conferences; collaborate; produce an effective composition for a specific purpose that demonstrates a command of grammatical conventions and ability to revise and proofread. (ELA.R.9.3.g, ELA.W.9.6.b, ELA.W.9.7.a, ELA TEKS Objective 1, 2, 3)

Materials needed: Grammar handbook/handouts, notebook, and pen

Activities

1. Students keep their list updated and label each entry as a noun or adjective.

2. Students use the allusions in sentences or classroom conversation.

3. Students identify the kind of phrase of each allusion (noun phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase, appositive phrase, participial phrase, etc.)

4. Students track the words or phrases used in conversations or writing daily.

5. Students write a creative narrative using some of the words and phrases they gathered with a minimum of 150 words.

Lesson Four: Heroic Task

Objectives: The student will produce an effective composition for a specific purpose that demonstrates a command of grammatical conventions and ability to revise and proofread; demonstrate an understanding of geographic influences, economic and social influences, and political influences on historical issues and events; visualize images; determine a text's main ideas; and evaluate and critique persuasive techniques of media.

(ELA TEKS Objective 1, 2, 3/ SS TEKS Objective 2, 3, 4/ ELA.R.9.5.b.4, ELA.R.9.5.c, ELA.V.9.2.c)

Materials needed: construction paper, scissors, crayons, colored pencils or pen, pencil, ruler, markers

Activities

1. Students use their creative writing activity and create their own mythological heroes and events.

2. Students skillfully craft a personalized book out of construction paper and other art materials.

3. Students publish their books in the classroom. The book publication will help the students feel an ownership of their learning and help them realize that work can be fun and interactive. The book will also help them remember their mythology.

Lesson Five: Scavenger Hunt (Reinforcement Activity)

Objectives: The student will interact effectively in a response and feedback activity; analyze aesthetic language; demonstrate comprehension skills through peer response and questioning strategies; analyze narrative text structure; and produce an effective composition for a specific purpose that demonstrates a command of grammatical conventions and ability to revise and proofread. (ELA.L.9.1.b, ELA.L.9.2.a, ELA.R.9.5.h, ELA.R.9.2.c/ ELA TEKS Objective 1, 2, 3)

Materials Needed: Magazines, newspapers, worldwide web, pamphlets, cut-outs, construction paper or poster paper

Activities:

1. Students will be divided into groups of three.

2. After students learn about the different mythological allusions, they locate examples of products, establishments, articles, ideas, etc. that use the names of these mythological characters or feats.

3. Students bring their findings to class and display them on poster paper. They write a short essay retelling once more the story behind a mythological hero or idea and explaining why the company or organization has used the name. They point out characteristics of the mythological character that may be found in the company's ideals.

4. Students then identify what selection or modern saying contains the allusion and discuss how the allusion contributes to the meaning or depth of the selection.

5. Then, each student discusses which of the mythological heroes they identify with the most and why they do.

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