

Teacher's Rationale

School: Arrowhead Union High School

Teacher(s): Fellmeth/Freeburg/Johansen

Title: *A Good and Happy Child* by Justin Evans

Grade or Course: Modern Literature Y

Approximate date(s) a book will be used:

_____ Semester 1

___X___ Semester 2

This book will be (check one or more):

Studied by the whole class. (Students have option to choose different text).

Studied by small groups.

Placed on a reading list.

Placed in a classroom library.

Recommended to individual students.

Part of a larger study of (explain):

Other (explain):

Ways in which the book is especially appropriate for student in this class:

A Good and Happy Child introduces students to a new type of genre: psychological thriller/horror. Cleverly written and structured, the story immediately captures the attention of the reader and keeps it throughout the novel. Evans' first novel explores the notions of demons--how real they are and how real we are able to make them. Eleven-year-old George Davies' father, a self-purported mystic and studier of demonology, dies a mysterious death after traveling to Honduras for equally mysterious purposes. Soon after, George is visited by a "Friend" that only he can see, who leads him on thrilling yet terrifying journeys to a shadowy ether-world, pulling him ever closer to a dangerous awareness of his father's death. Is the boy really possessed, or simply crazy? And which is better? Evans deftly marks the labyrinthine wards of clinical treatment in stark contrast with scenes of floor-dropping exorcisms as the boy becomes ever more volatile and his Friend ever more diabolical. This is an edgy, compelling read--more unnerving than scary—that will encourage discussion and debate amongst student readers.

Ways in which the book is especially pertinent to the objectives of this course or unit:

The author of *A Good and Happy Child* keeps a webpage devoted to this novel which highlights his writing process, research, and provides an e-mail address encouraging readers to contact him. The opportunities to use this valuable source for projects, discussions, and individual reader questions are endless. The site encourages students to interact with the text in new ways, teaching them to become more advanced readers. <http://www.justinevans.com/book.php>

Special problems that might arise in relation to the book and some planned activities that handle this problem:

The book has some mild violence and potentially frightening scenes. The book also addresses such topics as psychiatric treatment and demonic possession. Discussions to break down the material and dissect the text will help students to process and question the purpose of these scenes as the novel progresses.

Some other appropriate books an individual student might read in place of this book:

The Drowning Tree by Carol Goodman would be an appropriate alternative title as would *In the Woods* by Tana French.

Summary of the book:

Thirty-year-old George Davies can't bring himself to hold his newborn son. After months of accepting his lame excuses and strange behavior, his wife has had enough. She demands that he see a therapist, and George, desperate to save his unraveling marriage and redeem himself as a father and husband, reluctantly agrees.

As he delves into his childhood memories, he begins to recall things he hasn't thought of in twenty years. Events, people, and strange situations come rushing back. The odd, rambling letters his father sent home before he died. The jovial mother who started dating too soon after his father's death. A boy who appeared one night when George was lonely, then told him secrets he didn't want to know. How no one believed this new friend was real and that he was responsible for the bad things that were happening.

Terrified by all that he has forgotten, George struggles to remember what really happened in the months following his father's death. Were his ominous visions and erratic behavior the product of a grief-stricken child's overactive imagination (a perfectly natural reaction to the trauma of loss, as his mother insisted)? Or were his father's colleagues, who blamed a darker, more malevolent force, right to look to the supernatural as a means to end George's suffering? Twenty years later, George still does not know. But when a mysterious murder is revealed, remembering the past becomes the only way George can protect himself—and his young family.

Reviews and/or awards of the book or author:

Publishers Weekly (Starred Review)

"This stunning novel marks the debut of a serious talent... The intelligence and humanity of this thriller should help launch it onto bestseller lists."

Library Journal - Marianne Fitzgerald (Starred Review)

"This debut novel grips readers from the first chapter. Is George really possessed by a demon, or is he just losing his mind? Evans delivers a creepy and entertaining story full of perfectly written characters."

Kirkus Reviews (Starred Review)

"A psychological thriller that keeps the reader on edge until the last page. With occasional echoes of *The Exorcist*... a haunting story of guilt, denial and the possibility of demonic possession."