

Teacher's Rationale

School: Arrowhead High School

Teacher: Freeburg

Title: **Lessons in Taxidermy** by Bee Lavender

Grade or Course: Modern Literature

Approximate date(s) a book will be used:

Semester 1

Semester 2

This book will be (check one or more):

studied by the whole class. (but students are allowed to read an alternative)

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:

- Places the challenges of growing up into context
- Deals with issues of conformity, suffering, inner strength, loss, and young motherhood.

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

- Explain the structure of selected classical and contemporary works of literature, in whole and in part, from various cultures and historical periods, and illustrate ways in which authors use syntax, imagery, figures of speech, allusions, symbols, irony, and other devices in the context of history, culture, and style
- Draw on a broad base of knowledge about the universal themes of literature such as initiation, love and duty, heroism, illusion and reality, salvation, death and rebirth, and explain how these themes are developed in a particular work of literature
- Investigate and report on ways in which a writer has influenced or been influenced by historical, social, and cultural issues or events

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

Some of the descriptions of medical procedures and the aftermath border on gruesome. The author does not sugarcoat or downplay any of her afflictions or what condition they leave her body. Students in class will be alerted to passages that contain this level of detail. Students will discuss the author's intent and technique.

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

Atlas of the Human Heart: A Memoir by Ariel Gore

Skin Game by Caroline Kettlewell

Alive by Piers Paul Read

Summary of the book:

This book is an autobiographical account of a young woman's battles with disease, poverty, and finding her place in the world in the face of overwhelming obstacles. **Lessons in Taxidermy** is set in the Pacific Northwest and chronicles her journey from childhood to motherhood and the lessons she learned throughout.

Reviews and/or awards of the book or author:

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Lavender, writer and online publisher of the parenting zine *Hip Mama*, holds nothing back as she recounts her life spent in and out of hospitals and her subsequent dissociation from her own body and emotions. She struggles with health problems from birth, which are compounded by her surroundings, including frequent encounters with street fights, domestic violence and poverty. Her voice is as strong as the front she puts up for the multitude of doctors she sees, and it's hard not to be in awe of what one fragile human being can withstand in the course of such a short lifetime (Lavender is now 35). Before Lavender has graduated from high school, she's endured cancer of the throat and skin (diagnosed as terminal at one point), cysts requiring massive jaw surgery, life-threatening allergies, internal infections and a major car accident resulting in multiple serious injuries. While Lavender herself steers far from any sort of self-aggrandizing, and her prose is somewhat inexpert, witnessing her strength and sheer determination to live makes this striking book completely engrossing. When questioned once about how she sees herself, Lavender explains, "primary identity is found in my body, in the scars, in the injuries and injustice and disease and decay." Lavender's struggles continue as she faces childbirth and recurrent health difficulties, but as her challenges grow, so does her strength to meet them, and this unforgettable memoir ends with Lavender's desire to "live as much as possible while I have the time." (Apr.)