

Teacher's Rationale

School: Arrowhead Union High School

Teacher: Budzien / Vacek / Judd / Freeburg

Title: The Night In Question by Tobias Wolff

Grade or Course: Modern Literature X

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 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:

The stories' subject matter is, generally, that of youth and young adulthood, and most importantly, about observation. Wolff's protagonists seem to have a preternatural writer's eye, which is part of what I look for in fiction. That's one of the great things about a great writer -- that ability to see things in ways most of us don't.

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

The gist, as so often in Wolff's stories, (as with the little boy all grown up and with a family of his own in the story "Firelight") is about how childhood experience colors our adult lives. The stories carry beauty and insight into the human psyche, and leaves one wanting to read more of this Stanford professor's works.

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

There is an occasional profanity; some mild sexual situations are included or hinted at but not fully realized. Crude sexual innuendo and language in "Bullet In The Brain" by the antagonist bank robbers. Nothing "over the top."

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

Back in the World, In Pharaoh's Army, or This Boy's Life all by Tobias Wolff.

Summary of the book:

The Night in Question is a brilliant collection of short stories. I heard Wolff reading an excerpt from this book recently on National Public Radio and simply could not get enough! (I waited in the driveway for ten minutes in order to hear the end of the story. I could not turn off the radio, and I went out and bought the text the next day). Tobias Wolff has his own unique style of finishing off each short story; by bringing other characters into the story near the end, the narrative perspective is changed in an instant. He writes with such passion and brilliance, it is almost impossible for anyone to lay down 'The Night in Question' before having finished the short story he or she is currently reading.

I recommend this book to anyone who likes good short stories and anyone who likes to lay down the book after each and think it through. Stories are widely varied and cover Vietnam, dog attacks, bank robberies, migraine headaches, and high school boys eyeing up their friend's stepmother. There really is much more to these stories if one cares to read between the lines - a little less than what one might find in a typical Hemmingway short story, but the language of Tobias Wolff makes up for that.

What Tobias Wolff does is stamp his own individual touch on everyday stories. He brings readers beneath the skin of his characters and just when you think you have a bead on the character he is describing, he brings elements into their development which throw you and touch you.

A writer struggles in the condensed form of the short story to make characters as real as possible. If he is lucky, he might manage to create that 3D image that sticks in the reader's eye. What Tobias Wolff does is create virtual 4D characters. They are so vivid they leap off of the pages into your memory where favorite images are stored.

Reviews and/or awards of the book or author:

Tobias Wolf has been a finalist for the National Book Award and has won the Los Angeles Times Book Award in 1989 as well as the PEN/Faulkner Award and the Rea Award for excellence in short stories.