

Teacher's Rationale

School: Arrowhead

Teacher: Balistreri/Budzein/Freeberg/Judd

Title: In the Lake of the Woods

Grade or Course: Modern Lit

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:

John Wade, the main character of In the Lake of the Woods, has his aspirations of being elected U.S. Senator dashed when his involvement in the My Lai Massacre is brought to light by political opponents. The issue of a candidate's military service is a complex, volatile, and current one which Modern Lit students, many of whom will vote for the first time in the next election, need to explore.

Wade's Traumatic Stress Disorder, resulting from his war experience, is pertinent to anyone who has veterans as friends or loved ones.

John and his wife Kathy have a powerful, if somewhat pathological, love for each other. They meet in college, which, of course, is where most modern lit students are headed. The book's exploration of "the nature of love" is, therefore, relevant.

The book explores political strategy and election psychology, both of which are in the news whenever elections approach.

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

Tim O'Brien, the author, is often studied in freshman college classes. A recent graduate just e-mailed to say she had heard O'Brien speak on her first day at Clemson University! So, it helps our students as they move on to be familiar with him.

The book is written in a non-traditional style, with some chapters being factual evidence, some being conjecture, some being flashbacks, and some being straight narrative. Exposure to these modern techniques of storytelling is a goal in any *modern* lit course.

As a book about war, love, politics and crime, it holds the students' interest.

As a mystery, it requires higher level reading skills, like extrapolation, analysis and synthesis, of the students.

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

As John Wade questions his sanity, his morality, his duty as a soldier and the basic goodness or evil of humanity, he has a crisis of faith. During his dark nights of the soul, he sometimes yells, “Kill Jesus” in the throes of his angst. Some students are, understandably, offended. However, this motif, a character questioning or challenging God, is a common one in literature (Christ himself does it on the cross.) Class discussion of why this motif is so prevalent in literature and in history is often lively.

The book has many scenes from the Vietnam War. In those scenes, both vulgar language and graphic description of violence may upset some. Still, this realism can lead to a beneficial exploration of what war does to people.

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

The Red Badge of Courage – Stephen Crane

Summary of the book:

See below

Reviews and/or awards of the book or author:

In the Lake of the Woods – Tim O’Brien

On a lake deep in Minnesota’s north woods, John and Kathy Wade are trying to reassemble their lives. John, a rising political star, has just suffered a devastating electoral defeat. Kathy attempts to comfort her husband, but it soon becomes apparent that something is horribly between them, that they have hidden too much from each other. Then one day Kathy vanishes. Their boat is gone – did she drown or is she lost? Or did she flee, disappearing into a new life? As a massive search gets under way, the possibilities multiply in terrifying directions. Uncovering the truth requires an investigation of Wade’s life, and gradually we come to see that he is a sorcerer lost inside his own magic, a Houdini capable of escaping everything but the chains of his darkest secret.

Reviews

Library Journal 6/15/94

New York Times Books of the Century

Tim O’Brien is the winner of the National Book Award for *Going After Cacciato* (1978)