

## Film Approval Request

**School:** Union High School  
**Course:** EN 300 – Honors English

**Department:** English  
**Grade Level:** 11

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**Title:** *Easy A*

**Year:** 2010

**Director:** Will Gluck

**Rating:** PG-13

**Reviewed by:** Dana Bobertz, Jon Tummillo, Doreen Sahr, April Mckee, Maureen Dreher

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### **Summary of Plot:**

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is re-imagined as a contemporary high school comedy in this tale of a scheming student who plots to give her popularity a boost by painting herself the easiest lay in school. Like most high school kids, Olive Penderghast just wants to be popular. So much so that when her best friend, Rhiannon, asks Olive how her weekend went, the bored teen decides to whip up a spicy white lie just to make things interesting. But that minor exaggeration begins to take on a life of its own when it reaches the ears of motor-mouth gossip Jesus freak Marianne, and in no time the entire student body is abuzz over unassuming Olive's unrepentant weekend of debauchery. Of course not a word of it is true, but that doesn't stop everyone in school from talking, and an amused Olive from deciding to go with the flow. Playing the role of the hussy to the hilt, the girl who used to be invisible begins dressing provocatively and turning heads in the hallways. The students aren't the only ones taking notice, either; Olive's English teacher, Mr. Griffith, is concerned that the kind of attention she's receiving isn't healthy for a developing girl, and his wife, the school guidance counselor, is in full agreement. The only people who seem remotely interested in the truth are Olive's trusting and open-minded parents. As Olive takes note of the parallels between her own situation and the plight of *The Scarlet Letter* heroine Hester Prynne, she realizes that she may be able to manipulate her newfound notoriety to give fellow classmate Brandon's popularity a much-needed shot in the arm. Olive never thought her little game could possibly have any negative effect on anyone but herself, but when loose lips start sinking ships all around her, she realizes that it's high time for the truth to come out. (*Fandango.com*)

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

Students in the Honors course read *The Scarlet Letter* during MP2. After their reading, they will compare the characters in *Easy A* to the characters in the novel. They will also draw parallels between the novel and the film.

## Film Approval Request

**School:** UHS

**Department:** English

**Course:** EN 301/200

**Grade Level:** 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 10<sup>th</sup> grade honors

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**Title:** Lee Daniel's The Butler

**Year:** 2013

**Director:** Lee Daniels

**Rating:** PG-13

**Reviewed By:** L. Romero, J. Hajkowski, J. McDonagh, M. Kaplan

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**Summary of Plot:** Cecil Gaines was a sharecropper's son who grew up in the 1920s as a domestic servant for the white family who casually destroyed his. Eventually striking out on his own, Cecil becomes a hotel valet of such efficiency and discreteness in the 1950s that he becomes a butler in the White House itself. There, Cecil would serve numerous US Presidents over the decades as a passive witness of history with the American Civil Rights Movement gaining momentum even as his family has troubles of its own. As his wife, Gloria, struggles with her addictions and his defiant eldest son, Louis, strives for a just world, Cecil must decide whether he should take action in his own way.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

Rated PG-13 for some violence and disturbing images as they occurred throughout the Civil Rights Movement, language, implied sexual material, thematic elements and smoking however all of the material is presented in an artistic way that is integral for character or plot development.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

The film chronicles the most important events of the past eight American presidencies in an artistic way by following the unique perspective of an African American butler in the White House. This works perfectly in American Literature (EN 301) and to pair with I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings in EN 200 to parallel many of the events Maya Angelou lived through.

## Podcast Approval Request

**School:** UHS

**Department:** English

**Course:** EN 301

**Grade Level:** 11<sup>th</sup> grade

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**Title:** Serial Podcast, season 1

**Year:** 2014

**Where It Can Be Found:** <https://serialpodcast.org/>

**Reviewers:** L. Romero, M. Kaplan, M. Bajwa, J. Hajkowski

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**Summary of Plot:** *Serial* is a podcast exploring a nonfiction story over multiple episodes. First released in October 2014, it is a spinoff of the radio program *This American Life*. Episodes vary in length, and were available weekly during the first season and biweekly during the second season. It ranked number one on iTunes even before its debut and remained there for several weeks. *Serial* won a Peabody Award, the first of its kind, in April 2015. Sarah Koenig hosts the series, which was co-created and is co-produced by Koenig and Julie Snyder, both producers of *This American Life*. The nonfiction investigation for season 1 centers around a murder case that happened on January 13, 1999. On this day, a high-school senior named Hae Min Lee disappeared after school in Baltimore County, Maryland. A month later, her body was found in a city park. And two weeks after that, her former boyfriend and classmate, 17-year-old Adnan Syed, was arrested for the crime. He was convicted, and sentenced to life in prison. Syed has always said he had nothing to do with Lee's death. Sarah Koenig sorted through thousands of documents, listened to trial testimony and police interrogations, and talked to everyone she could find about what happened between Adnan Syed and Hae Min Lee. What she discovered is a story far more complicated than the jury, or the public, ever got to hear.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

This is a non-fiction, journalistic investigation of a true crime. There is some language and sexual content mentioned as it is necessary to the investigation but none of it is presented gratuitously.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

This investigation follows a real-life murder case and forces listeners to use their listening skills and reasoning skills to piece together information and make decisions about how memories work, bias works, and ultimately how the American justice system works. This works as a strong non-fiction component as well as fulfilling CCCS for listening and problem solving.

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## What Teens are Learning From 'Serial' and Other Podcasts

Linda Flanagan

<http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2015/03/11/what-teens-are-learning-from-serial-and-other-podcasts/>

It didn't take long for Michael Godsey, an English teacher at Morro Bay High School in California, to realize that his decision to use a public radio podcast in the classroom was a wise one. It wasn't any old podcast he was introducing to his classes. It was "Serial," the murder-mystery phenomenon produced by reporter Sarah Koenig of "This American Life," which already was transfixing a wide swath of the adult population.

"Even if they weren't into it, I told them it was the most popular podcast of all time, and that was interesting," Godsey says. He needn't have worried. The podcast seized his five classrooms of 10th- and 11th-graders. "I had kids cutting other classes so they could come listen to it again," he says. "Kids who were sick, who never did their homework, were listening at home."

Godsey is one of a growing number of educators who are using podcasts like "Serial" to motivate their classrooms and address education requirements set by the Common Core state standards. Improving students' listening skills is one of the essential components of the new education mandates, and using audio in the classroom can be an effective way to promote listening.

"It's a really nice way to spend time together as a class," says Eleanor Lear, a high school English teacher at a private all-girls school, who has been using podcasts from Chicago Public Media's "This American Life" and WNYC's "Radiolab" for about four years. Powerful podcasts that tell good stories not only captivate students, Godsey adds, but also help them tune out the static of modern life.

"I think the kids really appreciate getting the story told to them, as opposed to so much hitting their senses," he says. "They're not overstimulated by it," he says, noting that contemporary podcasts resemble radio shows from the past.

Learning through listening has surprising educational advantages as well. Students can listen to content two-to-three grade levels higher than they can read, according to Monica Brady-Myerov. She spent her career in public radio and now runs an online site, Listen Current, to help schools make better use of public radio's rich strain of stories. An unfamiliar word that might stop them on the page doesn't compel them to tune out from a story told aloud. Also, kids for whom English is a second language benefit from hearing spoken English and following along with an accompanying transcript, she says.

If podcasts are a modern version of old-time radio programs, then "Serial" is this generation's "War of the Worlds." No one has packed up a car to escape fictitious aliens, as they did after listening to Orson Welles' tall tale, but "Serial" listeners of all ages have been swept up by Koenig's investigation into a decades-old murder of a high school girl in Baltimore.

The podcast's first season consists of 12 40-45 minute "chapters" narrated by Koenig, involving interviews with former witnesses, detectives, lawyers and classmates of Adnan Syed. He was convicted of the murder of his ex-girlfriend, Hae Min Lee, and is now in prison. The series unfolds in real time — Koenig apparently is searching for answers along with the listeners — and challenges followers to wrestle with Adnan's guilt, the criminal justice system and the events that unfolded around the day Lee was last seen alive, January 13, 1999. Last fall, "Serial" was the most popular podcast in the world, the Wall Street Journal reported, and set the iTunes record for fastest downloaded podcast.

Students flock to the show for several reasons. The events took place during high school, making the subject matter feel familiar and relevant in a way that classic literature doesn't, Godsey says, while the excellence of the storytelling takes hold of the listener. Narrator Sarah Koenig's quick shifts in tone and perspectives — we spend three minutes with a lawyer, say, then with a former classmate and then a detective — is especially appealing to teenagers who bore easily, Godsey says. ("They were spaced out within three minutes of Edgar Allan Poe," he adds, about that failed listening experiment.)

And "Serial" is novel, not only to the kids, but also to the teacher. "It was new to the world, and they were very excited that I didn't know the outcome before they did," Godsey says. When the semester ended, 90 percent of his students reported enjoying "Serial," some suggesting that they preferred podcasts to written stories, novels or poems.

What do students learn from the experience? "They enjoy it so much that they don't realize they're learning at the highest level," says Alexa Schlechter, a 10th-grade English teacher at Norwalk High School in Connecticut, who had never used a podcast in class before trying "Serial." Listening to and engaging with "Serial" helps many students address one of the main challenges in developing their analytical skills: getting beyond simple explanations of what happened, and figuring out how and why an event occurred, she says. Poring over text of the transcripts in class to uncover answers, students also develop their critical reading skills, she says. (See how students answered questions about discrepancies between the cell phone records and Jay's testimony at Schlechter's blog.) Students publicly debated Syed's guilt or innocence in Godsey's classes, addressing a Common Core standard to improve speaking

skills, and worked together with other students to create their own podcasts or present mock closing arguments.

Students also learned how to navigate Google maps, finding the exact streets in Baltimore where important events were said to have occurred, and “driving” them, virtually, to assess the evidence. And for some students, delving into “Serial” marked their introduction to public radio and to the adult educated world. “So often my students are disconnected from where my [adult] friends are,” Schlechter says. “Now there’s no divide.”

Teachers were similarly inspired, if occasionally overwhelmed by the out-of-class preparation required for such pioneering work. Godsey and Schlechter both were hooked on “Serial” when it dawned on them to share the learning experience with their classes, and their personal enthusiasm for the story drove their teaching. The energy and originality of the podcast inspired them as much as it did the students.

Because the case revolved around high school kids, teachers also were better able to appreciate their students’ contributions and point of view, in a way they might not have had they been discussing “The Great Gatsby” or “War and Peace.” In this way, “Serial” helped teachers better grasp their students’ fresh insights. And devoting so much class time to this one complex story triggered ideas for new ways to discuss the classics. Next semester, Godsey’s English classes are going to do their own “Serial”-style podcast, telling Arthur Miller’s “The Crucible” from Abigail’s perspective.

Even the violent subject matter brought unexpected grace to the class. The humanities, after all, dwell on the conflicts within and among human beings, but novels and distant nonfiction can feel unconnected from teenagers’ lives. “Serial,” on the other hand, with its focus on the actual murder of a young woman and the current imprisonment of her convicted killer, forces listeners to confront — and feel — the reality of human frailty.

For her part, Schlechter is determined to keep the murder victim present in her students’ minds, so that the young girl at the center of the mystery isn’t lost in the class exercises. “I keep a photo of her in the classroom, so she’s not just a subject, or a character,” Schlechter says.

As for teachers who insist on having structured lesson plans and prepared assignments to accompany a podcast, external resources are becoming available to schools. During the semester he taught “Serial,” Godsey created about 400 pages of lesson plans on Teachers Pay Teachers to accompany the podcasts, which he now sells to interested educators. Listen Current, just 2 years old, provides transcripts and lesson plans for public radio stories on a variety of subjects. Brady-Myerov estimates that 4,000 teachers used her materials last year, and that 100,000 students, middle through high school, tapped into their curated podcasts (much of the material is free.)

“Teachers are desperate for new resources,” she says, and public radio stories, which are known for being authentic, accurate, well told and sharply edited, are ideal for sparking student interest. For a class on the birth of the labor movement, for example, Listen Current recommends a public radio podcast that includes archival sound, music and voices.

“If you give teachers content-based audio, you’ll get so much more student engagement,” says Brady-Myerov.

To the extent that he can, Godsey is gearing up for “Serial’s” second season. He wonders if the first season’s rollicking success is replicable, at least for his students. Either way, the podcast has rebranded radio as the next new thing, despite the medium’s long history. For students accustomed to the flash-bang of modernity, ambling podcasts in the classroom may be just what they need.

## Film Approval Request

**School:** Union High School

**Department:** English

**Course:** Senior Topics

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

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**Title:** A Bronx Tale

**Year:** 1993

**Director:** Robert De Niro

**Rating:** R

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### **Summary of Plot:**

As he grows into a teenager on the streets of the Bronx in the socially turbulent 1960s, Calogero (Lillo Brancato) gets taken under the wing of neighborhood mobster Sonny (Chazz Palminteri). Sonny initiates the boy into the ways of gangland life, in direct conflict with his straight-arrow bus driver father (Robert De Niro). But when Calogero falls for his African-American classmate, Jane (Taral Hicks), the repercussions threaten the entire neighborhood.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

There is profanity used conversationally (as one would expect in an urban setting), although no profanity is used in a way that is too explicitly out of context or flagrant. Racist language is displayed in dialogue, but is used in a way that is historically accurate to an Italian-American neighborhood during the racially segregated 1960's and is represented as a historical reflection of the time period. The film does not contain any overt or flagrant sexual references nor does it delineate sexual imagery.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

This film would be used in companion with Chazz Palminteri's one-man stage drama (screenplay) of the same name. It would be used as a way to reinforce students' textual examination of narrative. It would also be used as secondary source material for a comparative analysis essay.

## Film Approval Request

**School:** Union High School

**Department:** English

**Course:** Senior Topics

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tumillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

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**Title:** Big Fish

**Year:** 2003

**Director:** Tim Burton

**Rating:** PG-13

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### **Summary of Plot:**

When Edward Bloom (Albert Finney) becomes ill, his son, William (Billy Crudup), travels to be with him. William has a strained relationship with Edward because his father has always told exaggerated stories about his life, and William thinks he's never really told the truth. Even on his deathbed, Edward recounts fantastical anecdotes (younger Edward played by Ewan McGregor). When William, who is a journalist, starts to investigate his father's tales, he begins to understand the man and his penchant for storytelling, finding that what he once considered elaborate myths are founded on remarkable truths.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

There is very little, if any, profanity used conversationally. There are no flagrant or explicit sexual scenes, nor are there any overt references to sex.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

This film would be used in companion with Daniel Wallace's novel, *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions*. It would be used as a way to reinforce students' textual examination of narrative. It would also be used as secondary source material for a comparative analysis essay.

## Film Approval Request

**School: UHS**

**Department: English**

**Course: Horror Literature**

**Grade Level: 12**

**Reviewer(s): A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa**

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**Title: Count Dracula**

**Year: 1977**

**Director: Philip Saville**

**Rating: None (TV Movie)**

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### **Summary of Plot:**

**This version of Dracula is closely based on Bram Stoker's classic novel of the same name. Jonathan Harker visits the Count in Transylvania to help him with preparations to move to England. Harker becomes Dracula's prisoner and discovers Dracula's true nature. After Dracula makes his way to England, Harker becomes involved in an effort to track down and destroy the Count, eventually chasing the vampire back to his castle.**

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

**This film has no sex scenes and mild violence as it is a BBC made-for-TV movie.**

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

**This film version of the novel is a faithful adaptation and gives a visual perspective of the novel, also allowing students to make comparisons between the text and the film and also analyze why changes were made.**



## Film Approval Request

**School:** UHS

**Department:** English

**Course:** Horror Literature

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

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**Title:** Fright Night

**Year:** 1985

**Director:** Tom Holland

**Rating:** R

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### **Summary of Plot:**

One night, teenager Charley Brewster sees a coffin being transported to the house next door. A couple of days later, he concludes that his neighbor Jerry Dandrige is a vampire, who has committed some recent unsolved murders. Charley decides to look for help first from his friend Evil Ed Thompson, since the policemen do not believe his accusations. Jerry is upset and promises to kill Charley. Later, he meets Peter Vincent, a middle aged man, who is a vampire killer in a television show but does not believe in vampires in real life. Amy and Ed seek out Peter Vincent, and the group tries to prove to Charley that Jerry is not a vampire.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

This film received an R rating for horror violence. It features mild language with no sex scenes.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

This film will be used to show clips. It feature teenagers and are struggling to make sense of the world around them. It follows the themes found in the two

**major works read in this course. It features a modern day vampire amid modern day teenagers.**

## Film Approval Request

School: UHS

use for clips only – not whole film

Department: English

Course: Horror Literature

Grade Level: 12

Reviewer(s): A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

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Title: Interview With A Vampire

Year: 1994

Director: Neil Jordan

Rating: R

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### Summary of Plot:

This movie centers around two vampires. One longs for a companion, while the other cannot bear to kill humans to satisfy its hunger. It's about a vampire who gives a down-on-his-luck man a choice to either live eternally or die. The man's decision causes him to regret many of the things that he does in his life to come.

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### Language/Sexual Content:

There is one brief nude scene and some mild language.

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### Rationale for Usage:

This film gives insight into the central question of the class: Why has the vampire genre remained so popular over the centuries? It features a cast of extremely well-known actors and follows the story of the bestselling novel of the same name by Anne Rice.

## Film Approval Request

**School: UHS**

**use for clips only – not whole film**

**Department: English**

**Course: Horror Literature**

**Grade Level: 12**

**Reviewer(s): A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa**

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**Title: Once Bitten**

**Year: 1985**

**Director: Howard Storm**

**Rating: PG-13**

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### **Summary of Plot:**

A vampire Countess needs to drink the blood of a virgin in order to keep her eternal beauty. It seems that all is hopeless, until she bumps into Mark Kendall, played by a teenage Jim Carrey.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

Rated PG-13 for mild sexual content (one momentary scene where boys are showering in a locker room – only seen from behind) and comic horror violence.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

This film explores the central question of the class in a new and comedic way: Why has the vampire genre remained so popular over the centuries? More importantly, its characters are teenagers who the students will be able to relate to and make connections with their lives.

## Film Approval Request

**School: UHS**

**Department: English**

**Course: Horror Literature**

**Grade Level: 12**

**Reviewer(s): A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa**

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**Title: Salem's Lot (TV movie)**

**Year: 1979**

**Director: Tobe Hooper**

**Rating: TV-PG**

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### **Summary of Plot:**

Salem's Lot is a town which a new member, Mr. Straker, has taken as his new "home", and has a mysterious partner, namely Mr. Barlow. Not too long after Straker arrives in Salem's Lot, people start disappearing from sight and dying from odd causes. No one is sure why, including Ben Mears, who is in town to write a new book on the town's rumored haunted house called the Marsten House, which overlooks the town and hides a terrible secret about to be unleashed.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

There are no sex scenes and it features very mild language.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

This is a visual representation of a novel to be read in class, making an already accessible novel even more entertaining. It conveys how the tale happens in small town USA and reinforces the vampire character as one that does not only live in big dark castles.

## Film Approval Request

**School: UHS**

**Department: English**

**Course: Horror Literature**

**Grade Level: 12**

**Reviewer(s): A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa**

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**Title: Salem's Lot (TV movie)**

**Year: 2004**

**Director: Mikael Salomon**

**Rating: TV-14**

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### **Summary of Plot:**

**Ben Mears, a writer, returns to the small Maine town of Jerusalem's Lot (also known as Salem's Lot), where he spent the first few years of his life, to write a book. Little does he or the townsfolk realize that a couple of other new residents are coming...Straker, an antiques dealer, and his partner and master Barlow, an ancient and malevolent vampire bent on making Salem's Lot his new home.**

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

**There are some minor references to sex but there are no sex scenes in this production. The language is mild. As a made-for-TV movie, everything is pretty reigned in to allow for TV viewing.**

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

**This is a visual representation of a novel to be read in class, making an already accessible novel even more entertaining. It conveys how the tale happens in small town USA and reinforces the vampire character as one that does not only live in big dark castles.**

## Film Approval Request

**School:** UHS

**use for clips only – not whole film**

**Department:** English

**Course:** Horror Literature

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

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**Title:** The Lost Boys

**Year:** 1987

**Director:** Joel Schumacher

**Rating:** R

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### **Summary of Plot:**

Financial troubles force a recent divorcée and her teenage sons Mike and Sam to settle down with her father in the California town of Santa Carla. The town is plagued by bikers and some mysterious deaths. At first, Sam laughs off rumors he hears about vampires who inhabit the small town, until he makes friends with two other boys who claim to be vampire hunters. But after Mike meets a beautiful girl at the local amusement park, he begins to exhibit the classic signs of vampirism, sleeping days and staying out all night, and is drawn into the gang of bikers by the beautiful girl. The younger boy starts getting into trouble because of his friends' obsession. Fearing for his own safety, Sam recruits the two young vampire hunters to save his brother by finding and destroying the head vampire.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

There is strong language briefly and an implied mild sex scene with no nudity.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

The Lost Boys is a fun film to watch and is certainly one of the better vampire films to come out in the 1980s. It features actors who have since become famous and who the students can relate to. It is a good "intro to vampires" movie. It also is a visual representation of the female vampire character. It is a great movie to discuss what it feels like to want to fit in with the "cool" crowd! The main character makes questionable and dangerous decisions in order to attempt to fit in, which is something teenagers can relate to.



## Film Approval Request

**School:** Union High School

**Department:** English

This film is currently available in the UHS Library.

**Course:** Senior Topics

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

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**Title:** The Shawshank Redemption

**Year:** 1994

**Director:** Frank Darabont

**Rating:** R

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### **Summary of Plot:**

*The Shawshank Redemption* is a 1994 American drama film written and directed by Frank Darabont, and starring Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman. Adapted from the Stephen King novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*, the film tells the story of Andy Dufresne, a banker who is sentenced to life in Shawshank State Penitentiary for the murder of his wife and her lover, despite his claims of innocence. During his time at the prison, he befriends a fellow inmate, Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding, and finds himself protected by the guards after the warden begins using him in his money-laundering operation. Andy looks to find salvation by having his name cleared, despite futile attempts to do so, so he takes matters into his own hands by escaping the notoriously impenetrable prison, framing the warden for his financial misdeeds and plots of murder, and offering his friend Red a chance at redemption as well.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

There is profanity used conversationally (as one would expect in a prison setting), although no profanity is used in a way that is too explicitly out of context or flagrant. The film contains several sexual references, but they only occur in the first third or so of the movie. Although the film is rated "R", it is artfully and responsibly executed and suitable for the age range of 17-18 year olds.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

This film would be used in companion with Stephen King's short story, "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption", as a means to reinforce students' textual examination of narrative. It would also be used as secondary source material for a comparative analysis essay.

## Novel-Review Checklist

**Title:** *A Bronx Tale*

**Author:** Chazz Palminteri

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

### **Content/Scope/Theme of the Novel:**

*A Bronx Tale* tells the story of Calogero Anello, a young boy from a working class family who accidentally gets involved in the world of organized crime. Calogero's father is a bus driver who tries to instill working-class family values in his son. As Calogero gets older, the aura and mystique of the Mafia, and the charms of Sonny, the local mob boss who befriends Calogero (and ends up becoming a father figure to him), become difficult to resist. As Calogero comes of age, he must struggle with the choice of following his beloved father's values or submitting to the temptations of the life of organized crime. Considered a 'coming of age' narrative, themes explored include, but are not limited to, familial obligation, moral values, racism and equality, and territoriality.

### **Point of view or bias of the author:**

*A Bronx Tale* is an autobiographical one-man drama. With a very stylistic challenge set for its performer, the screen play, which features a myriad of different characters, is told about all from the voice of one. Being that the text is autobiographical in nature, Palminteri founded the narrative upon truthful observation and presents certain realism to setting, characterization and plot.

### **Accuracy and documentation:**

*A Bronx Tale* is a screenplay, scripted for stage performance. Being that the screenplay is meant to be recited/performed by a sole narrator, it possesses a very visceral and humanistic tone.

### **Ethnic/culture/gender representation:**

The narrative displays, historically/contextually, a New York City borough post-World War II and at the onset of the civil rights movement. The primary setting focuses on an Italian-American neighborhood as juxtaposed to a tertiary setting, an African-American neighborhood. This very melting pot in New York City, Brooklyn, offers a variety in ethnicity, culture and gender.

### **Language/Sexual Content:**

Some conversational language used in the narrative is as inappropriate as one would expect when voiced among an inner-city community such as Brooklyn. There are scenes that feature the violent nature of organized crime, as well as scenes that describe racial tension, but these scenes are described with care and tact.

**Is it for the beginner with no background in the subject?** (If extensive background in the subject is required, please note this): This story can be understood and analyzed without any prior knowledge of the text. Pre-reading research tasks could help reinforce understanding of New York City geography and culture or general mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American History, but this is not necessary for a student to approach and execute an examination of the text. This text is a perfect companion piece for any lesson dealing with civil rights and racial turmoil of the time.

**Style**

<b>Is the writing</b>	<u>Clear</u>	Confusing	<u>Lively</u>	Dry
<b>Is there oversimplification to the point of being unclear, inaccurate or misleading</b>			Yes	<u>No</u>
<b>Is the organization logical:</b>			<u>Yes</u>	No
<b>Quality of the index and/or cross-references:</b>			<u>Yes</u>	No
<b>Is the information readily accessible</b>			<u>Yes</u>	No

**Comparison**

<b>Does this book present new material for this grade range:</b>	<u>Yes</u>	No
<b>Does it cover basic material better than extant standard works:</b>	<u>Yes</u>	No

**Briefly describe the potential appeal to intended audience:**

Powerful narratives capture and inspire powerful human emotions. This is such a text. *A Bronx Tale* will “speak” to any audience of any age because it is able to encapsulate so much of the human condition. It is a funny story sometimes, and very touching at other times. It is filled with life and colorful characters and great lines of dialogue, and Palminteri, in only such a way that a man can tell a story he *lived*, finds the right notes as he moves from laughter to anger to tears. What's important about the story is that it is about values. It is extremely informative and instructional about what to do and, just as importantly, what not to do when faced with adulthood.

**Recommendation**

**FOR GENERAL PURCHASE FOR SCHOOL** Yes No

**NOT RECOMMENDED** \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Rationale/Comments/Areas of Concern:**

The film adaptation of the screen play is an interesting tale and perhaps best captures the magic of this cult classic. Robert De Niro, famous actor, saw Palminteri perform this drama and wished to direct the film. Palminteri, with merely a handshake and gentleman's agreement, allowed De Niro to make his directorial debut as long as Palminteri was guaranteed to play the role of central character, Sonny. De Niro, in turn, agreed to play the role of Angelo Anello, the father. Although most know of this narrative because of the film, it is Palminteri's drama that inspired it all.

Reviewer: A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

Date: March 14, 2016

## Novel-Review Checklist

**Title:** *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions*

**Author:** Daniel Wallace

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

### **Content/Scope/Theme of the Novel:**

A young man (William Bloom), at the deathbed of his father (Edward Bloom), tries to reconcile his memories of his dad with who he really is. Whereas he always saw his father as an irresponsible liar, he comes to understand his dad's exaggerations and their roots in reality. The theme of fantasy v. reality is prevalent, but themes such as familial obligation, mortality, and legacy are featured as well.

### **Point of view or bias of the author:**

The book is written in a chronological (although they may not appear so at first) series of tall tales. Despite the novel's first-person narration, there is no present tense part of the book. The various stories are Will's retelling of tales that Edward has told about his life. The 'My Father's Death Take' chapters are William planning out his final conversation with his father in his head and how it will go, so that when the actual conversation takes place, he will be able to get to bottom of the truth and of truly understanding his father.

### **Accuracy and documentation:**

*Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* is a fictional novel draws elements from the epic poem *The Odyssey*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and American tall tales. The story of Edward Bloom also includes a few events based on the Twelve Labors of Hercules.

### **Ethnic/culture/gender representation:**

This story is one of southern Americana. Despite the narrative featuring a Caucasian family residing in the southern region of America (Alabama), minor characters mark a variety in race and gender. For instance, one of the major characters is a female, Edward's wife, Sandra, and one of the minor characters is the Blooms' doctor, Dr. Bennet, who is African-American.

### **Language/Sexual Content:**

There is no controversial language used in the narrative, nor are there any explicit sexual references or scenes. It remains "classy" and appropriate for all ages.

**Is it for the beginner with no background in the subject?** (If extensive background in the subject is required, please note this): This story can be understood and analyzed without any prior knowledge of the text. Pre-reading research tasks could help reinforce understanding of southern geography and culture or general mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American History, but this is not

necessary for a student to approach and execute an examination of the text. Since students examine Homer's *The Odyssey* during freshman year, prior knowledge can be reinforced to better understand text. Companion poetry by James Joyce, *Ulysses*, and brief examination of American Tall Tales may buttress understanding of text but are not mandatory.

**Style**

<b>Is the writing</b>	<b><u>Clear</u></b>	Confusing	<b><u>Lively</u></b>	Dry
<b>Is there oversimplification to the point of being unclear, inaccurate or misleading</b>			Yes	<b><u>No</u></b>
<b>Is the organization logical:</b>			<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No
<b>Quality of the index and/or cross-references:</b>			<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No
<b>Is the information readily accessible</b>			<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No

**Comparison**

<b>Does this book present new material for this grade range:</b>	<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No
<b>Does it cover basic material better than extant standard works:</b>	<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No

**Briefly describe the potential appeal to intended audience:**


In so many ways this text focuses on one's ability to tell one's story. It also concentrates on the credibility of stories that have been passed down as legacy among family and friends. It toils with the strange nature that humans exhibit when telling a story so often, exaggerating and embellishing events and characters, that reality becomes distorted to myth through time but, nevertheless, remains tied to the truth. Any audience can identify with this.

**Recommendation**

<b>FOR GENERAL PURCHASE FOR SCHOOL</b>	<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No
<b>NOT RECOMMENDED</b>	_____	

**Final Rational/Comments/Areas of Concern:**

One of the most striking elements of this narrative is the consciousness William, Edward's son,



has of his father. Being that his father is such a good story teller, he becomes jaded over time by the elaborate myths his father creates. The true moment of captivation is when William realizes that the tales he thought his father weaved *too* imaginably are founded upon truth and reality. It calls to question what a reader, son or daughter, *knows* about his or her parents. After reading this book for the first time, I immediately called my father with a barrage of questions I had concerning some of the tall tales he told me. This text has *that* type of power: it demands the reader to question his or her reality.

Reviewer: A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

Date: March 14, 2016

## Novel-Review Checklist

**Title:** Different Seasons [1982] (“Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption” is a novella within this anthology)

**Author:** Stephen King

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

### **Content/Scope/Theme of the Novel:**

“Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption” is the opening story in the collection *Different Seasons* (1982) and embodies classic King themes of fear, confusion, and loss of control, albeit transformed and shifted to the fractured domesticity of a high-security prison. The chills and breathless horror commonplace in much of King’s other writings have been replaced by the psychological torture of living in a confined space for an indeterminate amount of time. The story was eventually made into a popular film released in 1994 under the title *The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont).

### **Point of view or bias of the author:**

“Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption” is presented in the form of a monologue, a written narrative that Red prepares to come to terms with his life in prison and the aftermath of his incarceration. Although Red spends much of his time recounting Andy’s story, he admits that the narrative is as much about him as it is about his friend. Red merely uses Andy’s story as a parable to convey his own sense of frustration, despair, and, ultimately, hope. King’s use of the first-person also gives the story credibility and authenticity. Red’s frank, down-to-earth voice, grammatical mistakes, and use of prison slang, such as *screws* instead of *guards*, make the story much more real.

At the same time, first-person narration reveals the limits of individual perception and the human tendency to remember details selectively. Red describes how Andy became a Shawshank legend and says that dozens of men could recall seeing Andy confront Byron Hadley on the roof of the prison’s license-plate factory, even though only a dozen or so men had actually been there. For this reason, readers must question Red’s account of events as a biased observer who freely admits that so much of what he knows about Andy comes from rumor and hearsay. Furthermore, Red’s admiration of Andy makes the story less credible as a factual account but insightful as a window into Red’s own psyche. Andy’s hopes and dreams of life outside reflect Red’s own, just as Andy’s eight-year struggle to overcome his fear of escaping Shawshank mirrors Red’s own fears of the future and life on the outside. So while Red’s warm, immediate, and engaging style of storytelling infuses the novel with directness and authenticity, Red is an unreliable narrator, attempting to overcome his limitations as an imprisoned observer to construct the story he wants to tell about both himself and the inmate who changed his life.

### **Accuracy and documentation:**

Although this novella/short story is considered a fictional narrative, it is based on the reality of incarceration in a real-world setting. King uses many allusions and often refers to popular



culture knowledge in order to add a sense of realism to his fiction. King based the fictional Shawshank Prison on the actual Alcatraz Prison (San Francisco, CA), and some of the characters featured in this fictional tale correspond to real-life prisoners incarcerated at Alcatraz.

**Ethnic/culture/gender representation:**

Considering the narrative takes place extensively within a prison in the state of Maine, featuring prisoners of many ethnicities and from many cultures, much variety is offered via characterization. Since the story concerns an all-male prison, mostly the male gender is featured.

**Language/Sexual Content:**

Some conversational language used in the narrative is as inappropriate as one would expect when voiced among a prison community. There are references to molestation and sexual abuse among inmates in the narrative, but there are no graphic scenes nor any explicit language used to describe such in detail.

**Is it for the beginner with no background in the subject?** (If extensive background in the subject is required, please note this): This story can be understood and analyzed without any prior knowledge of the text. Pre-reading research tasks could help reinforce understanding of prison setting and culture, but this is not necessary for a student to approach and execute an examination of the text.

**Style**

<b>Is the writing</b>	<b><u>Clear</u></b>	Confusing	Lively	Dry
<b>Is there oversimplification to the point of being unclear, inaccurate or misleading</b>			Yes	<b><u>No</u></b>
<b>Is the organization logical:</b>			<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No
<b>Quality of the index and/or cross-references:</b>			<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No
<b>Is the information readily accessible</b>			<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No

**Comparison**

<b>Does this book present new material for this grade range:</b>	<b><u>Yes</u></b>	No
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**Does it cover basic material better than extant standard works:**

Yes No

**Briefly describe the potential appeal to intended audience:**

Since many students are aware that the adapted film version of this text is among the “best movies ever made” (IMDB ranking = currently #1 above classics such as *Godfather*, *Star Wars*, *Citizen Kane*, etc.), there is a preconceived “buzz” surrounding the story itself. Students may be inclined to examine the textual origin of what is considered the “top rated movie” of all time. Also, since the text is relatively “contemporary”, students may take a liking to its narrative, approaching the text as germane to their experiences with the world.

**Recommendation**

**FOR GENERAL PURCHASE FOR SCHOOL**

Yes No

**NOT RECOMMENDED**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Final Rational/Comments/Areas of Concern:**

Surely I may be biased, but I chose this text largely due to the incredible impact it’s had on me. Whenever I am having a conversation with someone about the story, or whenever I have picked up the text to re-read it, I am reminded that Stephen King was able to create a fully holistic narrative that touches upon any and every human emotion in such a timeless way that it can be revisited again and again. As for the film adaptation, it is one of those movies that, when it is on TV, I *have* to at least listen to in the background. It’s become as quotable as any material I’ve experienced, and I’ve often used quotes from the text in conversation with students, family and friends. It is unflinchingly teachable and resonates in effect.

Reviewer: A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

Date: March 14, 2016

## Novel-Review Checklist

**Title:** Dracula

**Author:** Bram Stoker

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

### **Content/Scope/Theme of the Novel:**

*Dracula* is an 1897 Gothic horror novel by Irish author Bram Stoker. Famous for introducing the character of the vampire, the novel tells the story of Count Dracula's attempt to move from Transylvania to England so he may spread the undead curse and the battle between Dracula and a small group of men and women led by Professor Abraham Van Helsing. Although Stoker did not invent the vampire, he defined its modern form, and the novel has spawned numerous theatrical, film and television interpretations. Some of the many themes include the battle of good versus evil, technology and modernization, the importance of love, teamwork, sacrifice and female empowerment.

### **Point of view or bias of the author:**

The story is told as a series of letters, diary entries, and ships' log entries, whose narrators are the novel's protagonists, and occasionally supplemented with newspaper clippings of relating events not directly witnessed. The events portrayed in the novel take place chronologically and largely in England and Transylvania during the 1890s and all transpire within the same year. A short note is located at the end of the final chapter written 7 years after the events outlined in the novel.

### **Accuracy and documentation:**

Although *Dracula* is a work of fiction, it does contain some historical references. Stoker came across the name Dracula in his reading on Romanian history, and chose this to replace the name originally intended for his villain.

### **Ethnic/culture/gender representation:**

It takes place at the end of the Eighteenth Century in Transylvania, England, and Eastern Europe. Characters are both men and women of various social backgrounds.

### **Language/Sexual Content:**

The novel shifts among the first-person perspectives of several characters. The tone is Gothic, dark and dramatic. The language is straightforward with few mild sexual references and no sex scenes.

**Is it for the beginner with no background in the subject? (If extensive background in the subject is required, please note this):**

**Yes**

**Style**

<b>Is the writing</b>	<b>Clear</b>	<b>Confusing</b>	<b>Lively</b>	<b>Dry</b>		
<b>Is there oversimplification to the point of being unclear, inaccurate or misleading</b>					<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Is the organization logical:</b>					<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Quality of the index and/or cross-references:</b>					<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Is the information readily accessible</b>					<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>

**Comparison**

<b>Does this book present new material for this grade range:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Does it cover basic material better than extant standard works:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Briefly describe the potential appeal to intended audience:</b>		

**Recommendation**

<b>FOR GENERAL PURCHASE FOR SCHOOL</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>NOT RECOMMENDED</b>		

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**Final Rational/Comments/Areas of Concern:**

The writing style is straightforward and very immediate: The characters write in their journals practically as events are happening, so we experience the events almost as the characters do. It serves as an encyclopedia for the vampire myth, it provides strong and intelligent female characters and it is incredibly suspenseful.

This novel is currently available in the UHS library.

Reviewer: A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa  
Date: March 14, 2016

## Novel Checklist Form

**Title:** Salem's Lot

**Author:** Stephen King

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

### **Content/Scope/Theme of the Novel:**

In 1975, a vampire comes to the small town of Jerusalem's Lot, Maine. He converts some of the people to vampires, and they transform others into vampires, until almost the whole town is undead. Author Ben Mears returns to 'Salem's Lot to write a book about a house that has haunted him since childhood only to find his isolated hometown infested with these vampires. While they claim more victims, Mears convinces a small group of believers to combat the undead. Two people eventually kill the head vampire and flee, leaving a town full of vampires behind. Salem's Lot contains and develops many themes including good versus evil, fate versus free-will, community versus individuality, and faith versus belief.

### **Point of view or bias of the author:**

Throughout the book, the author tells the story from the third person point of view. The scope of the narrator varies, however, as does the narrator's familiarity with the characters. In the main part of the book consisting of everything but the epilogue and the prologue, the narrator narrates what is happening in the lives of many of the people of 'Salem's Lot. Instead of following just one group of characters closely throughout the story, the narrator moves from one location to another and from one character to another, telling what is happening at that location or with that character at that particular time. The narrator is able to look into the minds of the characters and tell the reader what the characters are thinking.

### **Accuracy and documentation:**

While teaching a high school Fantasy and Science Fiction course at Hampden Academy, King was inspired by *Dracula*, one of the books covered in the class. "I was surprised at how vital it had remained over the years; the kids liked it, and I liked it, too. One night over supper I wondered aloud what would happen if *Dracula* came back in the twentieth century, to America. I began to turn the idea over in my mind, and it began to coalesce into a possible novel. I thought it would make a good one, if I could create a fictional town with enough prosaic reality about it to offset the comic-book menace of a bunch of vampires."-King

### **Ethnic/culture/gender representation:**

This novel takes place in a small town in Maine in 1975 and features characters of various ages and backgrounds. The main characters are inhabitants of the town. It includes the themes of good versus evil, fate versus free-will, and redemption.

### **Language/Sexual Content:**

King set the novel in the real world, using multiple allusions to everyday things to give this vampire story a totally believable background. Virtually every possible vampire text is mentioned, from *Dracula* (over and over), to the comic book *Vampirella*. There are some mild sexual references with little to no details given. There is no overt references or scenes.

## Novel Checklist Form

**Is it for the beginner with no background in the subject?** (If extensive background in the subject is required, please note this): **Yes No**

### Style

**Is the writing** **Clear** **Confusing** **Lively** **Dry**

**Is there oversimplification to the point of being unclear, inaccurate or misleading** **Yes No**

**Is the organization logical:** **Yes No**

**Quality of the index and/or cross-references:** **Yes No**

**Is the information readily accessible** **Yes No**

### Comparison

**Does this book present new material for this grade range:** **Yes No**

**Does it cover basic material better than extant standard works:** **Yes No**

**Briefly describe the potential appeal to intended audience:** **General** **Reporting**

### Recommendation

**FOR GENERAL PURCHASE FOR SCHOOL** **Yes No**

**NOT RECOMMENDED** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Final Rational/Comments/Areas of Concern:**

*'Salem's Lot* is great fun to read, and has been very influential in the horror genre.

This novel is currently available in the UHS library.

Reviewer: A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

Date: March 14, 2016

# Union High School

## EN411 Senior English Topics

### Summer Reading Film/Novels for Approval

Student taking EN411 Senior English Topics during the 2016-2017 school year and beyond will be required to complete a summer reading task that asks the students to choose and read one of two novels, then to watch the corresponding film and write an essay connecting the two in some way. Each pair of novels is designed to allow students to focus on either of the two semester courses they will encounter in EN411 – Gothic Literature or Film Adaptation. The essay topic is to be determined and can change with each year to allow for changes in student interest and to ensure students are completing original work.

#### Pair 1 – Focus on Film Adaptation

A. *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury

This novel has previously been approved by the Education Foundation and the Board of Education through the supplemental reading program at Union High School. A synopsis of the novel: “Ray Bradbury’s internationally acclaimed novel *Fahrenheit 451* is set in a bleak, dystopian future. Guy Montag is a fireman. In his world, where television rules and literature is on the brink of extinction, firemen start fires rather than put them out. His job is to destroy the most illegal of commodities, the printed book, along with the houses in which they are hidden. Montag never questions the destruction, returning each day to his bland life and wife, Mildred, who spends all day with her television “family.” But then he meets an eccentric young neighbor, Clarisse, who introduces him to a past where people didn’t live in fear and to a present where one sees the world through the ideas in books instead of the mindless chatter of television. Montag begins to question everything he has ever known. He starts hiding books in his home, and when his pilfering is discovered, the fireman has to run for his life.”

B. *Fahrenheit 451*, directed by François Truffaut

#### Pair 2 – Focus on Gothic Literature

A. *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson

B. *I Am Legend*, directed by Francis Lawrence

## Film Approval Request

**School:** Union High School

**Department:** English

**Course:** EN411 Senior English Topics - SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

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**Title:** *Fahrenheit 451*

**Year:** 1966

**Director:** François Truffaut

**Rating:** Unrated (predates rating; would be PG-13 at the most if rated today)

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### **Summary of Plot:**

*Fahrenheit 451* is a 1966 British Dystopian science fiction drama film directed by François Truffaut and starring Oskar Werner, Julie Christie, and Cyril Cusack. Based on the 1953 novel of the same name by Ray Bradbury, the film takes place in a controlled society in an oppressive future in which a fireman, whose duty it is to burn all literature, becomes a fugitive for reading. This was Truffaut's first color film as well and his only English-language film. At the 1966 Venice Film Festival, *Fahrenheit 451* was nominated for the Golden Lion. It is commonly referred to as a staple science-fiction that has remained influential within the science-fiction genre.

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### **Language/Sexual Content:**

There is no graphic language, nor is there any overt/explicit sexual content.

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### **Rationale for Usage:**

This film would be used in companion with Ray Bradbury's novel, and due to the fact that the film was unable to portray a lot of the science fiction elements of the text (mainly due to a lack of cinematic technology necessary to depict the wildly imaginative science fiction elements Bradbury presented in the narrative), it can be used in contrast for purposes of film adaptation. In the end, no matter how the film differs from the novel, it can be used as a means to reinforce students' textual examination of narrative. It could also be used as secondary source material for a comparative analysis essay. It connects both of the two semester courses and focuses on students more interested in the Film Adaptation course.

This film will be paired with *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, a novel previously approved by the Board of Education in the Supplemental Reading Program at Union High School.



## Film Approval Request

**School:** UHS

**Department:** English

**Course:** EN411 Senior English Topics – SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

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**Title:** *I Am Legend*

**Year:** 2007

**Director:** Francis Lawrence

**Rating:** PG-13

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**Summary of Plot:**

Adapted from acclaimed author Richard Matheson's influential novelette of the same name, Constantine director Francis Lawrence's *I Am Legend* follows the last man on Earth as he struggles to survive while fending off the infected survivors of a devastating vampiric plague. A brilliant scientist who raced to discover a cure for the man-made virus as humanity came crumbling down all around him, Robert Neville (Will Smith) was inexplicably immune to the highly contagious superbug.

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**Language/Sexual Content:**

Rated PG-13 for mild/implied sexual references, mild language, and horror violence.

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**Rationale for Usage:**

Students will have the option of reading *I Am Legend* as their summer reading assignment for the course and pairing the film with the novel for comparison and analysis. It connects both of the two semester courses and focuses on students more interested in the Gothic Literature course.

## Novel-Review Checklist

**Title:** *I Am Legend*

**Author:** Richard Matheson

SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT

**Grade Level:** 12

**Reviewer(s):** A. Kenny, J. Tummillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa

### **Content/Scope/Theme of the Novel:**

In this novel, the protagonist, Robert Neville, is seemingly the only survivor of a plague that has converted the rest of humanity to vampires. Robert's mission is to destroy "the others" before they can infect him. It is said that the pandemic was caused by a war, and that it was spread by dust storms in the cities and an explosion in the mosquito population. The narrative details Neville's daily life in Los Angeles as he attempts to comprehend, research, and possibly cure the disease, to which he is immune. Neville's past is revealed through flashbacks; the disease claimed his wife and daughter, and he was forced to kill his wife after she seemingly rose from the dead as a vampire and attacked him.

### **Point of view or bias of the author:**

The story is told in the third person from the point of view of Robert Neville, the protagonist. Throughout the novel, the reader sees what he sees and shares his thoughts and moods. We gradually learn how the state of affairs came to be through flashbacks that Robert recalls. There was the war that brought the plague in its wake, the insect bite he received from the vampire bat, his friendship with Ben, and the last days of his wife and daughter. When Robert meets the dog and later Ruth, he is afraid they are vampires, and we view these characters through Robert's eyes. We are given the same information Robert has, and we base our opinion on whether the character is trustworthy from that.

### **Accuracy and documentation:**

It is a playful take on an old archetype, the vampire. Matheson goes to great lengths to rationalize the vampire myth, transforming supernaturalism to medical causation. With *I Am Legend*, Matheson instituted the germ theory of vampirism.

### **Ethnic/culture/gender representation:**

The protagonist is Robert Neville, a 36-year-old blond-haired, blue-eyed man who is the sole survivor of a plague that has killed or transformed the rest of humanity to vampires. He has lost his wife and only child to the disease, and he has responded by barricading himself in his house and escaping through art, classical music, reading, drinking, and gallows humor. It is not clear what profession Robert was in, but he seems to be well educated and well rounded; he enjoys the arts, is a capable medical researcher as well as a carpenter and all around handyman.

**Language/Sexual Content:**

The tone is Gothic, dark and dramatic. The language is straightforward with few implied sexual references and no sex scenes.

**Is it for the beginner with no background in the subject?** Yes  
No (If extensive background in the subject is required, please note this):

**Style**

**Is the writing** Clear Confusing Lively  
Dry

**Is there oversimplification to the point of being unclear, inaccurate or misleading** Yes No

**Is the organization logical:** Yes  
No

**Quality of the index and/or cross-references:** Yes  
No

**Is the information readily accessible** Yes No

**Comparison**

**Does this book present new material for this grade range:** Yes  
No

**Does it cover basic material better than extant standard works:** Yes  
No


**Briefly describe the potential appeal to intended audience:**

*I Am Legend* showed that it was possible to return to older genre traditions thought dead and revitalize them, as authors Stephen King and Anne Rice did a generation later with the vampire myth. *I am Legend* is arguably the greatest short horror novel ever written, and its influence on the horror genre has been profound. Stephen King and many other of today's masters rank this book highly in their personal top ten lists of favorites. It is a short novel that can be read in one sitting; it is hard to put down, building in intensity from start to finish. Matheson creates an entirely new type of vampire fiction. Transcending the traditional vampire tale, he adds science fiction elements to produce a refreshing new interpretation of Stoker's legend.

**Recommendation**

**FOR GENERAL PURCHASE FOR SCHOOL** Yes No

**Final Rational/Comments/Areas of Concern:**



Reviewer: A. Kenny, J. Tumillo, A. Selby, T. Danza, J. Desousa  
Date: 3/16/16