



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute

2008 Volume II: Storytelling: Fictional Narratives, Imaginary People, and the Reader's Real Life

The Godfather to American Gangster: A Mythology of the American Anti-hero, 2008

Guide for Curriculum Unit 08.02.08

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This unit consists of approximately four class sections of block period ninety-minute seminars in which students will enjoy exposure to and discussion of various model samplings of versions of the lone anti-hero, a figure who exemplifies the deepest “American” yearnings for a free, yet ordered existence within the parameters of the hierarchies of his own criminal design. This figure also serves as a dramatic counterpoint to the traditional heroic code exemplar of the Arthurian “knight in shining armor” or to the ancient Homeric model of a moderately flawed, though highly idealistic vision of the “wanderer” who remains ever faithful (though not necessarily sexually so) to familial, spousal, and communal/ethnic commitments and codes of appropriate conduct while off on twenty-year adventures (i.e., Odysseus).

Our primary texts include F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* , Mario Puzo’s and Francis Coppola’s *The Godfather* (and its filmic representations), Brian DePalma’s *Scarface* (a retread of *Macbeth*), Ridley Scott’s *American Gangster* , and David Chase’s *The Sopranos* . The culminating activity or assessment for learners of this unit will be to synthesize, create, and present to other classmates an original, unique version of the heroic or anti-heroic pattern represented in mythology.

(Recommended for English, grades 10-12)

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