EXISTENTIAL THEMES IN LITERATURE: A HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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B.A. California State University, Sacramento, 2004

PROJECT

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EXISTENTIAL THEMES IN LITERATURE: A HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

A Project

By

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I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this project is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for this project.

__________________________, Graduate Coordinator
Dr. Victoria Shinbrot

Date

Department of Liberal Arts
Abstract

of

EXISTENTIAL THEMES IN LITERATURE:
A HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

by

Amy Cristine Ewart

I have created and developed an interdisciplinary high school curriculum that examines themes of existential thought in selected literature. The literature examined in this curriculum represents existential thought during the post Enlightenment era, the Czarist Regime of Russia and the war stricken world of twentieth century Europe. This course is designed to engage students in deep analysis of literature in order to extract, examine and discuss the existential themes of the text. The curriculum is divided into several units and two distinct sections. The introductory section provides students with a clear depiction of existential thought as it was first introduced by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and affords students the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to identify and evaluate existential themes in literary excerpts. The second section provide an opportunity for students to read, analyze, evaluate, and critically assess four pieces of literature that contain some of the many existential themes introduced in the first section. Each piece of literature is also introduced with a general and over-arching introduction to the historical social and political context within which each author wrote. Throughout the entire course students will be asked to reflect on the literature and make distinct connections to their own lives and the role of existential thought today. As students analyze literature and the historical context of each author’s life, they will also be identifying more modern manifestations of the existential notions of anxiety, absurdity, alienation, freedom, authenticity and death. This will allow them to understand and identify the manifestation of existential thought in their own lives and assess the relevance of such deep philosophical thought in the world today.

______________________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Victoria Shinbrot

______________________________
Date
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Josh Rasin. Thank you for standing beside me while I explored the existential realms of my own existence, waded through the deep pools of my own anxiety, discovered many of life’s absurdities and pushed relentlessly against those outer boundaries of existence. Thank you for teaching me that it is through love that the meaning of existence is found.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of those existential thinkers who came before and will come after this moment in history. It is through them that the sense of wonder and the relentless search for the truths in life will continue on throughout the ages. I would also like to thank Dr. Victoria Shinbrot for her incredible support and unrelenting dedication to the foundations of true academics and classroom expectations. Last, but not least, I would like to thank and acknowledge my parents for their incredible support and love throughout this process of furthering my education and my own personal growth. I could not have done this without them.
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Chapter 1
COURSE OVERVIEW

Summary

This course will examine several sources of literature with the intention of extracting the existential themes found within each text, closely examining them, and comparing them to one another and to our own world. The adolescent experience generates a number of existential questions simply by default. This time of adolescence is like a whirlwind that forces students to stand at the edge of their very own existence and ask the questions like “Why am I here?” “What is my purpose in the world?” “Who am I?” This is what makes this course so critical to the development of student’s critical thinking and their ability to identify and decipher complex philosophical dilemmas. What is most important about this course is that it caterers to individuals who are the most receptive to the depths of existential thoughts because by their very nature they are already there, and immersed in it. Every turn they make, they question life, take risks and make their very own leaps of faith. This curriculum is designed to embrace and extract not only the themes in the literature reviewed, but also the existential themes found in the lives of students. The overall objective of this curriculum is to teach students what existentialism is, how to identify it presence in literature and how to think beyond the scope of objectivity.
The key concept of this course is as follows:

Within the texts there will be some combination of the themes below. Students will be examining and discussing the realities of these themes in the lives of the characters and in addition to discussing the experience of the characters, students will be reflecting upon how they experience these themes in their own realities.

- Alienation
- Anxiety
- Death
- Absurdity
- Freedom
- Authenticity

Course Organization:

In order to have the opportunity to see the development of existential thought from its roots through the present era the texts for this course will be read chronologically. The course will begin with an introduction to existentialism as a school of thought in order to form a basic understanding of the topic at hand. From there, students will read texts by two of the founding philosophers of existentialism and then move on to chronologically ordered literature. The reading schedule will reflect these three major course segments: Introduction, Philosophers, and Literature. Reflections, discussions, and assessment will take place during each section as well as at the end of each unit.
Texts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction: Unit 1</th>
<th>Philosophers: Unit 2</th>
<th>Literature: Units 3-6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Nathan Scott</td>
<td>Soren Kierkegaard</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirrors of Man in</td>
<td>Present Age</td>
<td>Notes from Underground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existentialism</td>
<td>Fear and Trembling</td>
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<td>Jean Wahl</td>
<td>Fredrich Nietzsche</td>
<td>Franz Kafka</td>
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<td>Short History of</td>
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<td>Metamorphosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Existentialism</td>
<td>Gay Science (excerpts)</td>
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*Please note that this is not a complete list of texts and will be supplemented by other articles and excerpts throughout the course.*
COURSE SYLLABUS:
Philosophy/Literature
High School, California 2010-2011

Instructor: Ms. Amy Ewart  Period: 6
Website: http://existentialthemes.wetpaint.com/  Room: 1

Course Length:
One eighteen-week term of 90 minute block classes.

Course Description:
This course will survey the themes of existential thought in nineteenth and twentieth century literature, as well as examine and identify how individuals define their authentic identity through their relationship to the absurd, alienation, freedom, death and anxiety. The underlying questions to be asking throughout this course are, “how do these five areas of life impact the experiences of humanity?” and “does each individual have the same experience and definition of each one of these five realms and do they harness the same relationships to these complex realms as one another?” By seeking the existential realities of the characters, students should be able to recognize the significance and role of self-examination, the investigation of the limits and boundaries of the individual and the impact that existential thought has had upon society.
Course Organization:

This course is a lecture/seminar course with detailed introductory lectures when new topics or authors are introduced and followed by seminar-based discussions. Students are expected to read assigned reading daily and keep an on-going journal throughout the entire semester of reading notes, which may include insights, questions, or reflections. Students who plan to take this course must have passed at least two years of Honors English. This course is open to juniors and seniors only.

Course Objectives:

• To provide students with an in depth exposure to existential philosophy and literature.

• To demonstrate the multiple facets of literature and how literature is able to provoke and illustrate philosophical, sociological, emotional, and historical realms.

• To develop and enhances students’ critical thinking skills and ability to analyze and interpret literary themes.

• To assist students in becoming more comfortable with examining abstract concepts and ideas.

Students will be able to:

• Recognize philosophical and existential themes in literature.

• Write clear reflective analyses of literature and create clear
Required Texts:

- **Mirrors of Man in Existentialism**: Nathan A. Scott
- **The Gay Science**: Fredrich Nietzsche
- **Notes from Underground**: Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- **The Basic Kafka**: Franz Kafka
- **The Stranger**: Albert Camus
- **No Exit**: Jean Paul Sartre
- Additional excerpts to be provided by instructor

Assignments and Grading:

- Midterm (10%)
- Final (10%)
- Homework and Class work (50%)
- Journal: (15%)
- Oral Presentation: (5%)
- Group Project: (10%)

Student Responsibilities/Behavior Expectations:

It is expected that students contribute to a positive learning environment where all students can achieve to their greatest potential. Any behavior that disrupts student learning will not be tolerated. To ensure a positive learning environment the following rules must be followed:

- Show courtesy and respect for everyone
- Raise your hand to ask or answer questions
- Come to class prepared to learn
Behavior that violates the class rules will result in logical consequences including verbal warning, detention, parent/guardian contact, or a referral to the office and on-campus suspension.

Homework and Assignments:

Students will be required to do between 20 minutes to an hour of homework or studying every night. There will be homework and studying assigned on the weekend. Homework will be in the form of note taking on readings, research projects, writing assignments, skill building activities, and studying for class discussions, quizzes, and tests. Assignments turned in late will automatically be docked half the points. Exceptions include excused absences; students will have one day for each excused absence to turn in their assignments.

Student/Parent/Teacher Communication:

Parent calls home will occur to congratulate exemplary work and to inform parents if students are not working to their full potential. Parents and students are encouraged to e-mail or call me concerning class work and student achievement.
Chapter 2
COURSE UNITS

Unit One: Introduction to Existentialism

Section One: Accessing Prior Knowledge; Students’ Relationship to Existential Thought

Time Frame: Three ninety-minute class periods

Objective:

This section is intended to introduce students to critical thinking and self-examination. In many ways, this portion of the unit is designed to get students to think outside of the box and relate their own interpretations of themselves to the world around them. This will assist students in creating an overall sense of what it means to exist in this current place in time and therefore should prepare them to examine how authors contemplated this very idea throughout history. Once students recognize what it means to examine life in this way, they will be better prepared to extract the existential themes illustrated throughout the pieces of literature selected for this course. It should “awaken” students to think more “existentially” which will in turn provide them with the tools necessary to recognize existential thoughts, moments, feelings and ideas in the literature examined throughout the term.

Overview:
In addition to jumpstarting the student thought process, students will also examine what it means to search for and detect ‘theme’ in literature; therefore we will also refine what the term existentialism means, how to identify it in literature, and how to closely examine text for such a deep philosophical theme.

Students will examine the historical development of existential thought and develop a keen understanding of what deep philosophical questions it wishes to address. They will also take into account what historically relevant events occurred during the times in which existential writing was most prevalent. This segment of the unit will consist primarily of students evaluating their own personal connection to the existential dilemmas of human kind. This will be done through oral presentations, reading journals, song analysis and connections to the cultural experience that students have today.

This introductory section will be divided into the following two sections: The existential thought process experienced first hand and what is existentialism—a brief historical overview

Summary:

Students will be asked to contemplate the very basic questions of existence and examine their view on the meaning of life. This segment will provide students an opportunity to delve into the depths of critical thinking and self-reflection. It will also allow them to witness how differently we all view ourselves, the world around us, and our place within. This purpose of this segment is to get students warmed up, connect their dendrites to this unfamiliar way of thinking by making it relevant, challenging and
interesting. This will be accomplished through oral presentations that address certain reflective, contemplative and existential questions. Students will have time to share with the class their own views, own understanding and own perspectives of their own adolescent worlds. It will give students voice, create a safe environment and encourage individual and independent thinking.

Assignments/Assessments:

- Oral Presentations
- Reading Journals

An informal assessment will occur as students present their “answers” to their own existential questions during the oral presentations. This will allow the instructor to gauge whether or not students are able to approach the topic of existentialism with critical examination and thorough analysis. It is necessary that students demonstrate the ability to think critically and philosophically inquire about the world around them. This ability must be met before moving forward in the curriculum, as it is the crucial foundation for the entire course.
Assignment 1a: Oral Presentations

The objective of the oral presentations assignment is two fold. First, and more generally speaking, this assignment is designed to open students up to one another in the classroom and to establish a safe and trusting environment. For students to share their own answers to some of life’s most basic existential questions requires them to take a risk, their own leap of faith, and to delve into a realm that may in many ways fill them with anxiety and deep philosophical doubt. Therefore, in order for students to truly engage in this course, they need to feel that the environment of the classroom feels safe enough to do so, thus the oral presentation at the very beginning of class pushes their boundaries and allows the instructor to facilitate a warm and inclusive environment. The other, and more academically driven objective of this assignment is to provide students with an opportunity to seek and identify their own beliefs about existence and the meaning of life. The over arching concept here is to get students thinking for themselves and to jump head first into the existential realm of thinking.
Handout 1a: Oral Presentations

The purpose of the oral presentation is not to measure your current knowledge of philosophy or of existentialism, but for you to give your peers some insight into what drives you as a human being. We are all on this Earth together, existing in some fashion or another, and, well, let’s face it, we aren’t always on the same page as one another. Please take time tonight to ponder the answers to the questions below and answer them according to your own thoughts and feelings. This is not a collaborative project, nor a research project, so resist the temptation to use the opinions of family members, friends, and the Internet. Take some time with this and think of this assignment as a freedom to express yourself. Good luck!

Ask yourself the following questions and respond:

- What is my purpose?
- Why am I here?
- What is the meaning of life?
- What is the meaning of my existence?
- Where do I fit in the world?
- What is important to me in life? Freedom? Knowledge? Belongings?
- What characteristics of self are important to me?
• How do I view myself in relation to the rest of the world?

• Am I really the same person that people view me to be?

Feel free to insert any additional questions along this line of thinking that you would like to address. Be insightful!

We will be presenting in class for the next 2-3 days. I will be randomly calling on students each day, so be prepared to present at any time. If you are not ready to present when you are called, you will receive zero points for this assignment. You also must prepare a one-page paper* with your answers and insights typed and ready to be turned in immediately following your presentation.

*Note: Your paper does not need to be in essay format, but must have coherent thoughts and sentences relating to your presentation. Also, it must demonstrate that you have done some real thinking about your responses and preparation for your presentation.
Assignment 1b:

It is critical that students demonstrate their ability to critically assess texts, lectures, videos and activities therefore they will be expected to participate in daily writings that will record thoughts, insights, feelings and ideas about existential concepts, figures and events. Therefore, students will be responsible for keeping a reading journal for the duration of the course. Students’ journals should include their own insights, thoughts and reflections about texts, classroom discussions, lectures or activities regarding existential events, figures and ideas. These should be daily entries, which should include a combination of notes, drawings, ideas, and “ah-ha” moments. It is also expected that students contribute at least three to five sentences of writing per day in their journals. If students choose to draw their reflections, they must also support their illustrations with words clearly explaining how this encompasses what they have learned. These journals will be a book in progress and will consist of students’ very own feelings, thoughts and ideas. They will also be recorded in a designated composition book or binder. Think of this journal as a constant dialogue between the students and their instructor where students can share their analyses and thoughts about the content of this course and where the instructor can provide critical and constructive feedback. These journals should be reflected upon on a weekly basis. Reflecting upon thoughts and ideas will help you to become better writers and learn more about your own relationship to history. The following will be taken into consideration when grading: Was there
evidence of effort to reflect upon texts, classroom discussion, videos or other activities done in class? Did you enter reflections on a daily basis? Did your entries clearly demonstrate that you read the assigned texts and participated in class?
Handout 1b: Daily Journals Assignment

As we go through the semester we will be reading several different texts. There will be informative texts discussing the foundations of existentialism, novels, short stories, plays and philosophical works. Due to the extensive range of texts, I require that each student keep a journal throughout the semester. This journal will contain thoughts, questions, quotes, insights, “ah-ha moments” and general notes regarding the readings, lectures, and class discussions. Each day you will write three to five sentences regarding the text being discussed. Also, keep in mind that sometimes texts don’t “speak” to us as much as others, so you may feel as though you have less to say about some texts than others, which is okay. If this is the case, your journal entry might be about how this text doesn’t resonate with you or perhaps how it did not make sense to you. Please be aware that if this if your entry, you must explain specifically why it did not resonate with you.

Journal Entry Examples: (See also Journal Rubric in Appendix)

Acceptable Entry:
While reading Camus’ *The Stranger* I found that Meursault’s lack of emotion for his mother’s death was atypical of a son’s reaction to such an event. It seems that this theme of apathy is the general tone of his character throughout the novel so far. I am not sure how this characteristic relates to the existential individual. Is there something more to his character than this that should have been revealed while reading the text?

Unacceptable:
After reading Camus’ *The Stranger* I didn’t get it. He seemed boring. I didn’t like this book.

Unit One: Introduction to Existentialism

Section Two: Introduction to Existentialism

Time Frame: Six ninety-minute class periods

Objective:

In an age of mass production and constant media stimulation, it is imperative to provoke our students to think for themselves, to embrace individuality and refine their senses in order to recognize the deeper, more subtle components of life. The high school student is the prime candidate for learning about, and embracing, existential literature since they are living through the stage of adolescence when the struggle of the alienated individual searching for meaning and understanding in life is so prevalent. Students at this age are for the first time recognizing the absurdity of the world, grasping for freedom and all that comes with being free, and are beginning to recognize the limitations of human life. With the right direction and right atmosphere, students will find themselves discovering some of the most profound philosophical concepts in the world of existentialism. This unit is dedicated to laying out parameters, (not to be used interchangeably with the terms boundaries and limits) of what existentialism is, its historical relevance, its organic development throughout the world of philosophy and literature and how to recognize its themes in samples of nineteenth and twentieth-century writings. As a result of this introduction, students will be able to define existentialism,
identify key components of existential thought and demonstrate through biographical accounts, timelines, and primary source analysis knowledge of existential origins, themes and controversies.

Overview:

Students will focus on defining, identifying, and evaluating the major existential themes found in the literature of this course. These existential themes are identified as the deep exploration of the absurd, alienation, isolation, freedom and death, an uncontainable method of thought a close examination of existence and the relevance of choices and freedom.

Existentialism as a “school of thought” can be said to have officially established itself in the world of pop culture post World War II in Paris. Through authors like Camus and Sartre, people were now accessing the troubled world of the existential mind. People scattered these authors’ works across their living room coffee tables, discussed the latest existential article found in Vogue magazine and everyone in the halls of academia found themselves high on the buzz of existential reflection. It was a short-lived craze that would eventually be chalked up as a post war emotional response and its popularity among to masses declined almost as quickly as it rolled in. Students will begin their inquiry by hypothesizing what led to this instant popularity and what caused its ultimate decline. This leads to the first set of concrete questions that students must really delve into. Is tragedy the trigger to provoke deep self-examination? Why would this post war world generate a perfect moment in history for existential thinking to manifest in the realm of
pop culture? Why would this way of thinking and this way of being be unsustainable by the masses? Could this really be the first time that humanity entered the realm of existential thought? What other points in history do you that existential thought may have found its way into literature and philosophical thinking? Why do you suppose this is?

Overall, this introduction to existentialism will invoke students to recognize the age-old question that has plagued mankind throughout history: “Why am I here?” Existentialism tells us that there are no objective, concrete answers to this question and therefore, according to the existentialists, the real and true condition of mankind is not one that is part of a perfectly organized cosmos, but rather one of homelessness, abandonment, and exile. At the conclusion of this introductory section students will be able to examine and identify the main ideas and philosophies of historically relevant thinkers, identify and evaluate the culturally relevant changes of the world through a close examination of history in Europe, Asia and the United States between the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries. Students will also be able to identify, analyze and explain the five themes of existentialism and develop and clear foundation of how to identify these themes in literature.

This introduction relies heavily upon a brief historical examination and therefore students gain foundational knowledge of the age of reason and correlate its connection to the beginning of existential thought. Existentialism in the nineteenth century can be viewed in many ways as a response to the Age of Reason. Philosophers and Enlightenment thinkers of the centuries prior had placed mankind’s nature in a position
synonymous with reason. There was an order to everything, including nature, and therefore this order included man. It was felt by the enlightenment thinkers that man’s purpose and place could be understood and explained by means of logic. According to the enlightenment thinkers, not only could life be understood through empirical data and experience, but also men themselves had some official place in the world according to the order of things.

Thinkers that contributed to this overall sense of the world included, but were not limited to, Isaac Newton, Galileo Galilei, Denis Diderot, Nicholas Copernicus, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. One of the first, and most prominent reactions to the Enlightenment thinkers was Hegel (1770-1831). According to Hegel, each life, each finite reality of man, was all a part of the Absolute Mind. The attempt to understand any finite thing seemed synonymous with the drive towards the desire to understand the whole world. The more inquiries we make about the world and ourselves, the closer we come to knowing, understanding and capturing the Absolute and Infinite Self.

Moving along the timeline of history, humanity also had its own reactions to the first era of mass production—the Industrial Age. During the Industrial Revolution so many components of society were changing; particularly components that felt fixed and unchangeable. People began to feel uncertain with the growth of major cities, factories, the middle class, and population, which occurred at a furiously rapid pace. Many artisans, craftsman, and tradesmen were quickly replaced with factories and machines that could
mass-produce goods. This was the beginning of what we currently witness in the 21st century with the settled capitalist society and the age of technology.

One of the greatest responses to the capitalist ‘machine’ was Karl Marx. Marx recognized the toll that capitalism took upon the worker. The assembly lines required men, women and children to perform daunting tasks over and over and over again with no actual attachment or connection to their labors. No moments of reflection to stand back and revel at the result of their hard labor and think, “look at what I have created”. The workers were completely alienated from the fruits of their labor, and according to Marx this meant that they were also alienated from their own identity and self. The gap between man and himself, his fellow man and his community grew disparagingly larger and larger as the capitalist structure became more and more permanent and efficient. The theme in the 19th century was that of alienation and a widening distance of the individual from the whole.

Summary:

Overall, students will develop a keen understanding of existential thought, how it infiltrated society and the historical motivations that fueled it to continue. Students will walk away from this unit with this general understanding as well as a solid foundation of the major themes of existential thought. For the purposes of this curriculum, these major themes can be categorized into five realms and are as follows.

**Existentialist Imagination:** (as witnessed in the literature of twentieth-century authors)
The existentialist imagination lays its foundation upon the reflections that man’s experience is that of exclusion, alienation and “of being shut out”. It is through man’s search of comfort and belonging in a world that he has been arbitrarily placed in without his consent that he is unable to find any safety or meaning.

**Importance of the Subjectivity of Truth:**

Reflections of the meaning of life must be centered on man himself and he must possess a passion for the quest to understand the realities of his own existence. Man should concern himself with seeking his own truth and not settling for the objective truths offered to him about his world. Man is responsible for recognizing that there are no objective answers to life’s plaguing questions and that nothing is accessible through the objective experience of the world.

**Achieving the Authentic Life:**

Man is ultimately on a quest to gain and maintain the courage to live a life authentically and not simply seek comfort and refuge in the “social stream”. Human beings must be able to recognize the lack of authenticity found in mass culture. This element of existentialism focuses tremendously on the individual, which by the nature of individuality is inevitably accompanied by isolation and loneliness. (Student discussion here should consist of relevant and relatable examples of this in order to create student understanding. Relate it to their lives as they experience them now, the high school student’s life is FULL of these types of experiences and are the best candidates to truly understand what this means.)

**Boundaries:**
This component recognizes that human life is only understood when we are able to live on the boundary of life. We must feel “shipwrecked” or plunged into the deepest despair, anxious, aware of vulnerability and death that we can begin to experience the secret realities of our collective experiences. Great literary examples of this are *The Stranger* and “The Hunger Artist”.

**Indirect Communication:**

Those who make a true and passionate attempt to think existentially are attempting in some way to make sense of their own life. This thinking will inevitably lead to a desire to communicate newly formed understandings but the traditional expository writing will simply not suffice. Existential thoughts are a way of being, not thinking; therefore these understandings and ways of being can only be expressed in their entirety through literature, poetry, short stories, novels, plays and pseudonyms. These are the vehicles that will plunge the audience into the throws of the absurd, and cause them to experience the realities of alienation, anguish, death, boundaries, and cover them in a blanket of anxiety. This is where the audience finds themselves only at the mercy of themselves to create the tools necessary to fight through these realities and search for the subjective truths that lie within to deal with the depths of existentialism.

**Activities/Assessment:**

- Facebook Templates of the Enlightenment thinkers
- Timeline of major historical events and great thinkers from the seventeenth-century to the present.
Students will be given a formal assessment where they must identify existential themes in literary passages. The assessment will consist of students being given a number of excerpts and will be asked to identify the prevalent existential themes of the text through written responses. This will indicate the level of students’ preparedness to move on to the next units where we will be examining complex existential literary works.
Assignment 1c: Facebook Templates of the Enlightenment thinkers

Since this segment of the curriculum is designed to introduce students to the beginnings of existential thought, it is imperative that they first understand what may have caused this type of human thought—the Enlightenment period. Therefore, this assignment is about researching some of the most prevalent philosophical thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Newton, Diderot, and Galileo and identifying the emphasis that many of them placed on the order of things. In order to make this assignment more relatable, students will be provided with a familiar template that resembles the social networking site, Facebook, to record their findings regarding the not so familiar philosophical platforms of several Enlightenment thinkers. Students will be placed into groups and assigned a thinker. They will also be given biographical information regarding their assigned thinker and will be responsible for extracting the relevant information as prompted by the template. The objective of this assignment is for students to research, comprehend and identify the major components of these thinkers’ ideologies and record their new knowledge onto a this Facebook template and then share their findings with the class. At the conclusion of this assignment, students will have a deeper understanding of the Enlightenment thinkers and will be able to identify the common thinking that occurred amongst them—the idea
that humanity could be placed into perfect order of things and logically assessed and understood.
Assignment 1d: Timeline—Seventeenth-Century through the Nineteenth-Century

In addition to the research aspects of the Enlightenment period, students will also be responsible for identifying the main historical events from the seventeenth-century though the nineteenth-century. Students will not be responsible for conducting in-depth research of the events, but will be given a list of events along with a brief description that they will have to place in order along the timeline. This will help students better understand the events that transpired in the world over these several centuries. Since this is not a history course, we will not spend a tremendous amount of time discussing each and every detail of these events, but rather use this activity as an exercise to help familiarize students with “major” world events. This timeline will be a wonderful reference for students throughout the course and is designed to simply serve as such. Students will focus their timelines on the relevant discoveries of the Enlightenment thinkers discussed in the previous assignment, the world wars, the Industrial Revolution, imperialist conquers of other countries and important rulers.
HISTORICAL TIMELINE
Unit Two: Fathers of Existentialism-Kierkegaard and Nietzsche

Section One: Kierkegaard-The Theistic Father of Existentialism

Time Frame: Five Ninety-minute Class Periods

Objective:

After completing this section, students will be able to identify and describe the historical stage in which Kierkegaard wrote his works of existential thought. Students will also be able to interpret the existential components of some of his written work and criticize or defend his notions and understanding of the world. Students will be responsible for making clear connections between Kierkegaard’s existential understanding of the world and the nature of man’s relationship to the divine.

Overview:

As demonstrated in the previous section, the beginnings of “formal” existential thought in the realm of the philosophers can be traced back to Kierkegaard’s response to the enlightenment thinkers and the romantic notion that reason and nature were as one. Along with this sentiment, was the belief that mankind could be calculated into that perfectly arranged natural and reasonable world. The reliance placed upon empirical data to explain why we are here was not enough for thinkers like Kierkegaard to feel satiated and content. As the realms of science, mathematics and medicine were rapidly advancing, Kierkegaard noticed that mankind was relying more and more upon these
disciplines to ‘solve’ the mysteries of life and death. He witnessed the masses leaping farther and farther into the arms of the logical, rational and empirically driven areas of human thought. He spent the majority of his career in self sabotage so that he could constantly make the “leap of faith” that he so famously composed in ‘Fear and Trembling’. His philosophical interpretations of the world were generated by his life experiences and his life experiences were in many ways prompted by his philosophical understandings. He emphasized subjectivity of thought and regarded the objective view of the world, as discussed intensely in the writings of Hegel, as one that merely consisted of on-lookers and bi-standers. He convicted these members of the public of having no true and real connection to the self or the divine. His response and way of thinking was in many ways ill received by the masses and Kierkegaard was eventually written off as a troubled soul who was far too focused on examining only one sliver of the human experience. In the next two sections of this unit students will be able to evaluate how this man was in many ways ahead of his time, noting that his existential experiences were shared through “indirect communications” such as philosophical writings, stories, pseudonyms and metaphors. Kierkegaard was an individual who expressed his disdain for becoming a philosopher with a fixed doctrine; yet somehow he found himself intensely focused on the notion that there was without doubt a vast disconnect between man and himself. Without a connection to himself, man had no hope to sustain a connection with God. In order for man to connect to himself and his world, he must find himself on the cliff of humanity and recognize his own freedom to take the leap of faith into the arms of the illogical, ethereal, and unexplainable realm of God. It is this leap that demands
mankind to recognize his freedom of choice, the reality of death, the sense of feeling completely alone and beyond the scope or reach of the masses. This ‘cliff’ is where the existential man is created according to Kierkegaard.

Summary:

Any century that finds itself in the aftermath of the French and American revolutions, amongst the age of the Napoleonic Wars, and unknowingly becomes the precursor to a century where electricity, the assembly line and the computer become the norm, promises to provide a tremendous amount of existential fodder. As a resident of Denmark in the early 19th early, Kierkegaard witnessed a tremendous amount of industrial growth and a significant number of border shifts in Europe. There were a significant number of major advancements made in the realms of science, mathematics and medicine which in turn fueled mankind’s reliance upon the rational, explainable, and logical realms to solve the mysteries of life. With an understanding of this historical backdrop, students should be able to speculate what the motivations behind Kierkegaard’s existential quest may have been. In the eyes of Kierkegaard, there are four major elements that comprise the existential thinker along with three very distinct levels of ascending human experience. Students will spend a significant amount of time familiarizing themselves with the following four elements and levels of human thought.

Four Elements of the Existential Thinker:

1. The existential individual is in an infinite relationship with himself, and will have infinite and continuous interest in himself and his own destiny.
2. The existential individual always feels himself to be in a transitional, ever-changing experience of Becoming. One is not simply able to be something, but must always be becoming something through sustained and constant effort.

3. The existential individual is always impassioned with a passionate thought and is inspired to make attempts to capture the infinite within the confines of the finite.

4. The existential individual also contains within them the undeniable and pure passion for freedom and the responsibility that comes with such freedom.

Assignments/Assessments:

- Analysis of a quote from Kierkegaard’s Repetition
- Story analysis and Venn diagram of the two different types of truths
- Matrix Movie Clip Analysis
Assignment 2a: Text Analysis

In order to best prepare students for the in depth analysis of literature in the next several units, it is imperative to first allow them to develop and refine the tools necessary to analyze a text in order to extract a deeper meaning. Therefore, as an introduction to how texts will be examined and analyzed throughout the duration of this course, this particular assignment will prepare students to critically examine texts and analyze their deeper meanings and implications. This exercise will serve as a measuring tool for the instructor to gauge student levels of understanding of text analysis, existential foundations, and will serve as an informal assessment of overall reading skills, philosophical ability and existential knowledge. The assignment requires that students examine a very short excerpt from one of Kierkegaard’s nineteenth century texts and examine it for existential implications and metaphorical nuances. The guided reading questions are designed to assist students in asking focused questions while reading and to act as a foundation for classroom discussion about the relevance of self-awareness and conscious questioning of life’s purpose.
Handout 2a: Textual Analysis of Kierkegaard’s Repetition

Read the following excerpt from Kierkegaard’s Repetition and answer the guided reading questions below. Be aware of the use of metaphors and the overarching existential themes throughout the passage. Also, be cognizant of the intensity in which the author asks his questions.

One sticks one’s finger into the soil to tell by the smell in what land one is. I stick my finger into existence—it smells of nothing. Where am I? Who am I? How came I here? What is this thing called the world? What does the word mean? Who is it that has lured me into the thing, and now leaves me there? …. How did I come into the world? Why was I not consulted, why not made acquainted with its manners and customs but was thrust into the ranks as though I had been bought of a “soul-seller”? How did I obtain an interest in this big enterprise they call reality? Why should I have an interest in it? Is it not voluntary concern? And if I am compelled to take part in it, where is the director?

Guided Reading Questions:

1. What does the author mean by sticking one’s finger “into existence”?

2. What is the implication of existence smelling like nothing?

3. Which questions resonated the most with you as you were reading? Why?

4. Which of these questions, if any, did you directly or indirectly ask and answer when preparing your oral presentation for the previous unit?

5. What existential ideas can be extracted from this passage? Define and explain how you know them to be existential in nature.

6. Do you ever find yourself asking similar questions to these? If so, Who do you ask them to? Do you think that this type of questioning is a rational examination of life, or is it absurd to think this way? Why or why not?
Assignment 2b: Subjective and Objective Truths

In Nathan Scott’s text, *Mirrors of Man in Existentialism*, there resides a story about a graduate student who is confronted with two very different types of truth and who exemplifies the critical differences between the enlightened thinker and the existential thinker. The student is experiencing what Kierkegaard classified as subjective truth, while also experiencing what is commonly referred to as objective truth. This assignment is designed to demonstrate to students the incredible value that many existential thinkers placed upon subjective thinking and to help students differentiate what is meant by logical and calculable truths and what is meant by internal and unexplainable truths. After all, this dichotomy is the birth of existentialism. After reading this passage, students will compare and contrast the two types of truths illustrated in this story by using a Venn diagram template and write a one-page reflection in response to the writing prompt provided.
Read pages 10 & 11 in Doctor Scott’s text, Mirrors of Man in Existentialism, and respond to the prompts below.

1. Using the Venn diagram template above, list the similarities and differences between the two types of truths exemplified in this story.

2. Are there many similarities between these two truths? If so, what are they?

3. What makes both of these two types of truths valuable to the experience of humanity?

Writing Prompt:
Write a reflection that describes how you have experienced these two types of truths in your own life experiences. Which type of truth do you find more important or relevant in your own life? Why?
Assignment 2c: Movie Clip Analyses of the Matrix

This assignment provides students with an opportunity to take their new knowledge of Kierkegaard’s leap of faith and existential decision making and use it to assess and evaluate the two situations viewed in the clips of The Matrix. In the first clip, students will evaluate the discussion between Neo and Morpheus and determine how it encompasses the conscious decision man can make in order to transcend into a life where one questions their own reality and makes attempts to understand the complexities of why they exist. This clip will assist students in making clear connections between Kierkegaard’s aesthetic realm and the matrix as well as emphasize the intensity of making the choice to become conscious.

The second clip that students will view is a brief, one-minute clip that actualizes the leap of faith that Neo attempts to make. It is simply a visual manifestation of a physical leap of faith and should provide students will another way of interpreting Kierkegaard’s leap of faith. This clip will facilitate a group discussion regarding the realities of making such a leap and what it means to fail and not successfully land on the other side. These clips are simply meant to help students fully develop a keen sense of the existential ideas presented in Kierkegaard’s texts and further solidify the foundation of existential thought for students. By providing visuals, students will be able to access the information via multiple modalities, thereby increasing the likelihood that the information will connect to students.
Handout 2c: Analyses of The Matrix (Two movie clips)

The Red Pill or the Blue Pill?

1. What does Morpheus say that Neo has the look of? How is this sentiment related to Kierkegaard’s notion of the self-examined life?

2. Why does Morpheus ask about believing in fate? Why is this relevant?

3. What is the difference between knowing and feeling that the world is in someway different?

4. What is the Matrix?

5. How does this discussion relate to the notions of objective and subjective truths?

6. What do the red pill and the blue pill represent? What would you choose?

The Leap of Faith

1. What does Morpheus tell Neo he has to let go of? How does this relate to Kierkegaard’s ideologies?

2. Why is Morpheus able to complete the jump and Neo is not?

3. What sort of attitude doe Neo have towards the act of jumping?

4. Does this attitude help or hurt his chance of success? Why?

5. What do the people watching this jump program think about the possibility of him accomplishing the jump on the first try?

6. Is Neo successful in the jump? Why or why not? What does Kierkegaard say is necessary to have in order to make the leap?
Objective:

At the conclusion of this section, students will be able to define and evaluate Nietzsche’s existential view of the world. Students will evaluate what is meant by the term absolute freedom and humanity’s inescapable responsibility to such freedom. Students will also be able to compare and contrast the differences and similarities between the thoughts and philosophical values of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, paying close attention to the relevance that faith and religion have in their ideologies.

Overview:

As a German philosopher of the late nineteenth-century, Nietzsche lived during the height of the industrial revolution and was able to examine the world through a lens that saw a great shift in the way humanity worked and lived. As this century unfolded, more and more men, women and children found their place as cogs in the machine of the industrial machine. In many ways, Nietzsche saw a very similar world to that of Kierkegaard and students should be cognizant of making this historical connection. However, as the previous section illustrated, Kierkegaard maintained a critical connection to the importance of faith and the role of God when approaching the existential dilemma. This was not the case for the German philosopher. According to Nietzsche, “God is Dead” and we are the ones who ‘killed’ him. This quote is one of his most famous and most meaningful when summing up his over-arching existential philosophy. A significant
portion of this section will be spent discovering, discussing and examining what this idea of God’s death means to the philosopher, the existentialist, and the way in which one perceives the world. Students will read a number of excerpts from Nietzsche’s text *The Gay Science* in order to better extract this sense of absolute freedom and responsibility that Nietzsche emphasizes. Student will be responsible for answering the following questions:

1. What is meant by the phrase “God is dead”?

2. How can God be killed? What do you think Nietzsche meant by this notion that we are responsible for it?

3. Do you think that this era and/or century had any influence upon how Nietzsche came to this conclusion that God has perished? If so, what would that influence have been?

4. What role do you think religion played in his thought process? Does he sound like an atheist?

5. In what ways do Nietzsche and Kierkegaard share similar ideologies? In what way are they different?

When students are discussing this deep and probing questions, the important realizations that need to be made must relate to the notion that mankind’s obsession with answers, science, rationality, logic, mathematics and explanations are what inevitably diminished God’s relevance, God’s mystery and His unquestionable authority. It was Nietzsche’s
belief that with our loss of faith and increasing dependence on the new reality of modern thought that we now took God’s responsibility out of the equation and replaced it with our own. Without God, humanity now became completely free and absolutely responsible for its existence. Fate and destiny became impossible, and mankind was faced with the reality that the new set of values and ethical doctrines for humanity would have to be created by humanity itself. This also implied that suffering was self imposed and he saw that existence without God in many ways demanded that humanity say yes to a world of suffering and still make that leap of faith that Kierkegaard so graciously illustrated. Yet this leap would not be a leap into the arms of God, but rather into nothingness. The willingness to accept this and still take that leap is what introduces the notion of absurdity in the existential realm. This scenario begs the question that if one knows that making this leap could cost an individual everything and gain this illusion of nothingness, why would anyone choose to take this path? This brings the discussion full circle and back to the absolute freedom to choose and the swelling amount of responsibility that man has to choose wisely.

Summary:

There are a few themes that students should be able to extract from their readings of Nietzsche’s texts in this section. From The Gay Science, students should be able to identify and evaluate how God’s “death” affected the modern world. These excerpts should illustrate for students the incredible weight and burden that absolute freedom and choice place on humanity. This theme is extremely prevalent in existential literature and this introduction should prepare students well for deeper examinations of this freedom as
seen in the next several units. In addition, the excerpts and discussions surrounding Thus Spoke Zarathustra will also illustrate for students the incredible power that the will of mankind has when it comes to saying yes to that leap into nothingness and humankind’s daily existence in a world that is absolutely absurd.

Assignments:

- Compare/Contrast Kierkegaard & Nietzsche
- Define, Explain and Illustrate each of the main themes in existential writings.

Assessments:

The formal assessment of this section will be students’ definitions and explanations of existential themes and the analysis of the movie clip. These two assessment tools will allow the instructor to determine whether or not students really understand the anguish of absolute choice and freedom; and it will also be clear as to whether or no students were able to extract the prevalent themes in existentialism during the examination of philosophical texts.
Assignment 2d: Comparing and Contrasting Nietzsche and Kierkegaard

Since Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are often referred to as the first thinkers in the chain of existential thought it serves great purpose for students to see how they are the same and how they differ. One of the most prevalent distinctions is that Nietzsche’s philosophical ideas do not lie upon a deity or faith, but rather are founded upon man’s ability to accept nothingness and a life that may very well be founded on a sense of meaninglessness. Students will use the following handout to record their findings regarding the main components of both philosophers’ existential thoughts and then summarize how the two thinkers differ and relate to one another. This assignment will solidify students’ foundational knowledge regarding the first existential thinkers and prepare them to move on to further detecting existential thoughts and themes in the literature of the next several units.
Handout 2d: Comparing the Fathers of Existentialism

On one side of the table, write down a minimum of five different main ideas of each philosopher’s ideologies and briefly describe their relevance to existential thought. In the bottom square, summarize what these two philosophers’ ideologies have in common and/or differences when it comes to the point of human existence.

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<th>SOREN KIERKEGAARD</th>
<th>FREDRICH NIETZSCHE</th>
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**SUMMARY:**
Assignment 2e: Identifying Existentialism in Nietzsche’s Writing

Students will continue to learn how to identify existential themes in literature by reading and analyzing an excerpt from Nietzsche’s Gay Science. This assignment is intended to help exemplify the notion that we are living in a world of absurdity that is in no way comprehensible through this newly found scientific and rational world and that in effect, we as society have killed God. This “murder” has in fact deemed us entirely responsible for our own existence and with that responsibility comes great anxiety and a massive amount of responsibility to derive our own meaning from a completely meaningless world. Students will read the excerpt, answer the questions that follow and then engage in a group discussion regarding their findings. This will hopefully ignite an in depth discussion regarding the importance and relevance of God’s presence and the intense amount of responsibility that individuals have when it comes to the meaning of life.
Handout 2e: Excerpt from The Gay Science

The Madman. Have you ever heard of the madman who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the marketplace calling out unceasingly: "I seek God! I seek God!" As there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. Why? is he lost? said one. Has he strayed away like a child? said another. Or does he keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea voyage? Has he emigrated? - the people cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. "Where is God gone?" he called out. "I mean to tell you! We have killed him, you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? - for even Gods putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our knife - who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse ourselves? What lustrums, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater event - and on account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher history than any history hitherto!" Here the madman was silent and looked again at his hearers; they also were silent and looked at him in surprise. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, so that it broke in pieces and was extinguished. "I come too early," he then said. "I am not yet at the right time. This prodigious event is still on its way, and is traveling - it has not yet reached men's ears. Lightning and thunder need time, the light of the stars needs time, deeds need time, even after they are done, to be seen and heard. This deed is as yet further from them than the furthest star - and yet they have done it themselves!" It is further stated that the madman made his way into different churches on the same day, and there intoned his Requiem aeternam deo. When led out and called to account, he always gave the reply: "What are these churches now, if they are not the tombs and monuments of God?"

Questions:

1. What does the madman mean when he says “God is Dead! And we have killed him!”?
2. What existential themes are present in this text?
3. Does this text insinuate that Nietzsche was an atheist? Why or why not?
4. What does the madman mean about coming too early and not at the right time?
Unit Three: Dostoyevsky and *Notes from Underground*

Section Title: Dostoevsky’s Nineteenth-Century Russia

Time Frame: Two ninety-minute class periods

Objective:

This is the first of four units where students are asked to focus on an author’s life and then read, analyze, and critically examine a literary piece that they have created. This unit, in addition to the next three, is divided into two different sections. This first section is a brief biographical examination of the author’s life and his place in history. The second section will require that students read a piece of literature written by that author and analyze how it demonstrates a real connection to existential thought. The purpose behind this organization is so that students can first examine the factual realities of the authors in the objective world which will ultimately build a foundation that will better prepare students to examine the authors’ subjective worlds as illustrated in their texts.

Students will begin this next unit with an examination of the Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky. It is expected that this unit will provide students with a strong fundamental understanding of nineteenth-century Russia, and major events during Dostoevsky’s life prior to the writing of *Notes from Underground*. Students will be able to identify experiences that may have influenced his writing and evaluate how these experiences may have provided fodder for the writing of his existential text *Notes from Underground*. 
Overview:

*Russia in the Nineteenth-Century*:

Czar Nicolas I was in power during Dostoyevsky’s life and promoted a political climate that repressed Russian society. The implementation of a secret police, an interconnected web of spies throughout the communities and strict censorship were only a few characteristics of the tyrannical monarchy that the Russian people experienced and endured. Students will examine what the Czarist rule could mean for writers and revolutionaries alike. It is reasonable to say that a man’s character is ultimately influenced by the early years of his life, as well as the political and societal context of his own life. This was no different when discussing the life of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and much can be said about how his writings may have been affected by the time in which he lived. Whether or not he was interested in a bloody revolution to overthrow the controlling Czarist regime, or more passively accepting of the socio-political climate of his time is not necessarily relevant to students’ understanding of existential themes in his literature. However, the presence of an internal revolution of subjective thoughts and spiritual realities as demonstrated in *Notes from Underground* is relevant. The presence of alienation and revolution against the laws of nature as experienced by the Underground Man is enough to inspire a deeper self-examination in his readers and promote consciousness of the soul. Students will be afforded the opportunity to make connections between the Russia that Dostoevsky lived through and how this may have influenced his perceptions of humanity, of life and how it may have instigated the questions he had regarding his own experiences of reality. A brief discussion about the
political and historical climate of Russia during the nineteenth-century will simply
instigate a classroom discussion where students are able to discuss the relevance, or
irrelevance, of the times one lives in when it comes to the subjective existential
experiences one has of the world. During this discussion the instructor should ask
students if they think that they would feel differently about the meaning of their own life
if they lived in Europe, or if they lived in another time in history. Would they feel the
same levels of anxiety about their existence if our military were weaker? If our president
were a dictator? Would they feel the same way about death if they lived in a time where
there was no such thing as religion? Would life seem as absurd if the lived in a small
community of tribes and lived primitively? The instructor should also ask them to
defend their positions and explain why and how the times in which an individual lives
can influence their experiences of the world around them.

Summary:
First and foremost, instructors should be cautious about incorporating a historical
introduction of an author into the literary units of their curriculum. With such
introductions, students will tend to want to read into the texts as an autobiographical
account of an author’s life or of their times. It should be stressed when discussing the
major events of any author’s life that this should be viewed as the subjective realities that
an author has lived through and in essence has provided them with inspiration and
wisdom within that context. This is an important distinction to make with students. The
events are responsible for creating a subjective truth for the authors, which are indirectly
communicated through literary pieces in order to capture the existential essence of their lives.

Students will be better prepared to understand the moments of conflict, isolation, love, loss, alienation, absurdity, and life’s limits through their examination of the context of Dostoyevsky’s life. The censorship and controlling leadership, the religious vein running through the Russian people, and the rapid industrial growth of the surrounding world are all general realities of Dostoyevsky’s nineteenth-century Russia. Students must determine whether these experiences shaped Dostoyevsky’s subjective reality to create truths of his own, which can be seen so vividly throughout his text.

Assignments/Assessments:

- Timeline of Nineteenth-century Russia
- Writing Prompt: What would you think and feel about life if you had experienced these same things?
Assignment 3a: Timeline Activity

For a majority of the units, students will create a timeline that contains some of the major life events of each author. The purpose of this timeline is to provide students with a way to visualize and organize the place in history that the author lived through and to reference the key aspects of their lives as it pertains to the existential texts that they create. Timelines are an excellent introductory activity for students to utilize in order to generate a foundational understanding of a new or unfamiliar topic. More specifically, it also affords them the opportunity to solidify their knowledge of an author in order to better understand the possible correlation between major events in the lives of authors and the themes of existentialism in their texts.
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Assignment 3b:

Students will engage in a twenty-minute free-write experience where they are asked how they would respond to some of the major life experiences of Dostoyevsky had they occurred in their own lives. They will be asked to imagine themselves in a jail cell, awaiting their own execution and what that might be like for them. What subjective realities would they create for themselves? They will also be asked to think about how they would handle the moment in which they are steps away from their execution only to be pardoned of it and then forced to serve in the military in exile. Students will ponder what they may see as important and relevant in this sort of life. They will be discussing their own perceptions and subjective truths, which will help to solidify the importance of self-examination. Many students will express subjective interpretations of death, some will express the amount of anxiety and fear that they would feel, whereas others may have little connection to these experiences because they seems too distant and too abstract. This exercise will allow students to experience a few moments of the alienated individual and the anxiety that life and death can create for a person living in this place of exile, fear and uncertainty.
Handout 3b: Writing Prompt

Imagine for a moment that you too have experienced a life where you are surrounded by people who suffer and that you are completely alone in the world without parents to help guide your way. Imagine that you are trying to promote some intense political and societal belief and are arrested for being affiliated with the wrong people at the wrong time. Then your impending death awaits you and at the last moment, as you are steps away from the firing squad, you are no longer condemned to death, but rather condemned to exile and isolation. What do you think along the way? What sort of things are you experiencing? What do you feel? What do you do? How do you cope? For the next twenty minutes, write down how you would manage this life and how you maneuver through these intense experiences.
Unit Three: Dostoyevsky and *Notes from Underground*

Section Two: Theme of Alienation in Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*

Time Frame: Seven ninety-minute class periods

Objective:

Students will be able to detect, assess and analyze the over-arching theme of alienation and isolation in Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*. Students will also draw on their knowledge of nineteenth century Russia and the biographical account of Dostoevsky’s life to make connections between the text and his experiences. It is crucial to note that this text is not to be considered an autobiographical story of Dostoevsky’s life, but students should recall the notion of “indirect communication” mentioned in the introductory unit of this curriculum and how this piece of literature conveys the subjective realities of the author’s life. As a piece of existential literature, *Notes from Underground* does indeed indirectly communicate the subjective experience of the existential theme of alienation and isolation, which was indeed something that Dostoevsky had experienced a tremendous amount of, both objectively in prison, and subjectively in love. Students will evaluate the characters and what they symbolize in relationship to the underground man. Furthermore, students will focus on the main character and his interactions with the world and extract, discuss, and analyze the realities of isolation and alienation.
Overview:
Meeting the Underground Man

This first portion of the unit will be dedicated to students getting to know the ‘Underground Man’ and who he is. This character is methodically introduced in the first of two chapters in the text and within the first few sentences, Dostoyevsky introduces and forms a character comprised of a whirlwind of ideas, anxieties, insecurities, and judgments. In the beginning of their study of this text, students may wonder where this text is going and what to make of the character and the author’s intentions. It is crucial that students spend time digging into the text and become acutely aware of the metaphorical language in which the main character is speaking. Getting to know the Underground Man is extraordinarily challenging for readers as he seems distracted, intense and without direction. In addition to these qualities, he is never officially introduced by name or setting. Students will be required to derive meaning from the cryptic gibberish that he seems to speak and should be able to identify the way he views the isolation in which he lives, the meaninglessness of life, the intensity of self awareness, the limitations of humanity when faced with the walls of the laws of nature, logic and calculations and that man will act in conflict to his own best interests if it means that he is preserving his right to desire and the precious freedom to choose.

Existential Themes of Alienation and Isolation:

It should not surprise students that Dostoyevsky would write a text in which a man has lived underground for years. This text in many ways represents the subjective realities that existed for Dostoyevsky during his prison sentence and military exile. This
theme of isolation and alienation is extremely prevalent and raw throughout the entire text; and it is crucial that students are able to recognize the underground man’s struggle with both the desire to merge into the flow of humanity and his simultaneous internal, and sometimes external, anger with the objective realities of life and its commonly accepted limitations. The following existential realities of the underground man are the most prevalent and will be discussed and analyzed throughout this unit.

There are a number of instances where Dostoyevsky makes it clear that humanity’s reliance upon the laws of nature and calculable interpretations is muddling up their ability to comprehend the depths reality. He is plagued with the notion that in order to access the flesh of life that one must attain true self-consciousness and with that comes the anxieties of alienation, insecurities and the duality of simultaneously feeling beneath and above humanity. This way of thinking is very clearly illustrated in the first lines of the text as his introduces the character as a man who spitefully refuses medical assistance for the liver pain he is experiencing. It tells the readers that this character is one who would rather live in the throws of suffering and pain than to submit and become a slave to the logical, medical ailments that take man out of his misery. It is through suffering that man can access the realities beyond what Dostoyevsky perceives as the impossible wall that the laws of nature build in the minds of the enlightened man. This notion is intensely developed in the first chapter of the text through as he writes about the ultimate pleasure that can be found in despair. The man who experiences a toothache can derive pleasure in moaning and annoying those around him even though it in no way diminishes the amount of pain he is suffering from. Along these same lines, the existential theme of the agony of
freedom also shows up here as he reminds us that one cannot blame the laws of nature for the pain and suffering of the toothache. The laws of nature therefore cannot provide man with any form of comfort or true ailment for their suffering, which in turn should illustrate to us as the reader that the realities which we can be explained away by nature do not in fact encompass the subjective realities that we experience. This is the heart of what Dostoyevsky is illustrating for his readers and the underground man represents the alienated, suffering, insecure, existential man that exists on the other side of that wall of reason.

In the second section of the text, the readers are exposed to a completely different side of alienation. The first section was an isolated man’s stream of consciousness and his reflections on pedantic societal behaviors. The second section of the text illustrates the realities and loneliness of the underground man’s alienation in respect to other people. The moments of vanity, revenge, humiliation, jealousy and fantasy illustrated in this portion of the text illustrates the intense price one pays for traveling beyond that scope of the “wall” that the laws of nature have built for the enlightened man. The interactions during the dinner with friends, demonstrated the rage and suffering one might feel when isolated and alienated or misunderstood. The vane obsession with appearing ‘best and highest’, especially during the interactions with the prostitute, generates an intense anxiety that cannot be controlled. Furthermore, the underground man’s alienated experiences in a world that includes other people illustrates the intense loneliness that comes when one feels completely and utterly alone even when in the presence of others. The existential dilemma that is generated in this story is that man has the absolute
freedom to make the choice to move beyond the confines of the laws of nature and not settle for their perfectly assorted answers and calculable rationales, but it shall come at the price of loneliness and alienation. With this absolute freedom to choose, does man choose to become completely conscious, awake and alone or does he simply choose to stop at the foot of that wall of the laws of nature and submit to it and declare that moving beyond it is an impossibility and that he is simply a part of the perfectly constructed web of reason, logic and nature.

Summary:

After students conclude their reading of Notes from Underground, reflect upon the text in their journals and participate in a number of seminar based class periods it should be evident that this text can certainly be considered a precursor to the wave of existential thought that officially came to fruition nearly a century later. As one of the earliest existential novels, Dostoyevsky was able to illustrate not only the importance of challenging the rational and logical, but made it seem imperative for man to break free of those confines so that he maintained the most important component of humanity even if it meant alienation, despair and suffering. For him, this was a small price to pay in order to maintain his separation from a perfectly organized world. Mankind could ultimately preserve the one thing that made him better and higher than all other things—freedom.

Assignments/Assessments:

- Character Analysis Worksheet: Alienation and the Underground
- Analysis of the closing paragraph
Assignment 3c: Character Analysis and Author Analysis

Students will analyze and assess the main characters of the text and discuss how each of these characters enhance and/or reflect the Underground Man’s sense of alienation. The purpose of this exercise is to help students to closely examine the text and evaluate the characters and their relationship to the protagonist. These relationships are what help to define the Underground Man and to illustrate to the reader the realities that he experiences. As the first formal character analysis of the curriculum, students will need to be guided through this exercise and therefore cooperative groups will be the best approach. For each group of six, students will be given different characters to assess and will then discuss their responses collectively. Students will assess the following characters: The Underground Man, Officer, Simonov, Zverkov, Liza, and Apollon,

In addition to analyzing characters, students will also be responsible for linking previous knowledge of the author’s life and the story content. Students should be able to make the connection that every individual is only capable of writing or discussing that which they can subjectively experience in reality, fantasy or both. Students must be able to connect the components of the text that resemble some known experiences of the author’s life and distinguish how well they correlate to one another. The instructor must be sure to remind students that this does not mean interpreting the text as an autobiography but rather an opportunity to identify the connection between the author’s subjective reality and the text.
Handout 3c: Character & Author Analyses: Notes From Underground

Character's Name ____________________________________________

1. Is the character static or dynamic? How do you know?  

2. Describe the character ____________________________________

3. What parts of the story provide the deepest understanding of this character? ______

4. In what ways is the character influenced by his/her surroundings? ______________

5. How is this character's society or reality different than yours? _________________

6. How does the character respond to other characters?  
   (Especially the Underground Man) ____________________________________

__________________________________________
7. Is the character self-aware? Do they know how others view them?

8. How does the character view themself? What is their existence like?

9. Do you think this person’s behavior is normal and acceptable based on society’s standards today? Why or why not?

10. In what ways did this character help to enhance the theme of alienation? (*Think about how they related to the Underground Man)
Author Analysis:

1. Based upon what you know about the author and the content of the story, what type of person is the author? ________________________________________________
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2. What major influences do you think caused the author to write in this way?________
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Unit Four: Franz Kafka and *The Metamorphosis*

Section One: Franz Kafka and the Twentieth Century—Biographical Introduction

Time Frame: Three ninety-minute class periods

Objective:

The over-arching goal of this introduction to the era in which Kafka lived is to again provide students with some historical background of the novelist and to help them better understand the context in which texts like *The Metamorphosis* and “The Hunger Artist” were written. At the conclusion of this unit, students will be able to identify the major historical events during Kafka’s life and will construct a timeline representing this era. Students will also be able to identify and recognize the incredible influence that the First World War had upon the literature of the early twentieth century and the sense of disillusionment that followed those years of violence.

Overview:

Prior to World War One, the world was bursting at the seams with industrialized cities, plentiful resources acquired during the imperial age, and a whole new approach to work, life and war. The Great War is one that ultimately affected the world forever, especially in the realms of art and literature. People witnessed a sense of violence and destruction like they had never seen or felt before. The weaponry was stronger, the chemicals were torturous and the young men on the front lines came home mangled, debilitated, emotionally numb, or simply did not come home at all. As a reaction to this, the art and literary world sought refuge in the new movement of surrealism where they
were free to allow the thoughts and feelings of the dream world to seep into reality. This sense of disillusionment with pre-war institutions was so vivid and clear through these fantasy pieces. With that said, the “Lost Generation” of American writers were joining the literary fight against pre-war institutions and they too contributed a sense of cynicism, disbelief and the desire to find themselves while traveling the European countries.

Although Kafka was not considered one of the lost generation writers, he certainly was a man who could write about the subjective, dream-like, fantasy world in which he lived.

One of the most incredible components of Kafka’s life was the time in which he lived and the fact that his writings straddled the pre and post war worlds. His adult life and literary career contained elements of the Marxist anti-capitalist world as well as the disillusionment of the post World War and its contemporaries. His texts ultimately illustrate illusions of fantasy within the confines of reality. The bizarre characters of mice, insects, hunger artists, panthers, et cetera, provide elements of fantasy and dreams while simultaneously demanding that the reader be fully present in reality’s elements of limits, boundaries, disgust, hardship and despair. It is the presence of these two elements, reality and fantasy, and the presence of isolation and despair in *The Metamorphosis* that make it clear that Kafka was indeed an existential thinker. Students must be able to reflect on the world in which surrounded Kafka and again inquire whether this post war world influenced his writing and his clear existential themes of alienation, anxiety and despair.
Summary:

Understanding the historical background of Kafka’s life is not imperative to interpreting his texts, but it is indeed an additional lens with which students can use to further examine his metaphorical, fantastical and surreal texts. A foundational understanding of Kafka’s time in history assists students in better understanding the realities that he was immersed in and the tremendous amount of isolation that he himself had unarguably experienced. This section should also direct students’ attention to the vast differences during the First World War as well as the world both before and after the Great War. In conjunction, the instructor should be certain to emphasize to students the importance of the growth of industrialization and the emphasis placed on work and labor, the realities of advanced warfare during the Great War and the sense of devastation and disillusionment that humanity felt with regards to pre war institutions. The historical examination on a larger, macroscopic scale will indeed help students to better understand the possible influences on Kafka’s work, which then in turn help to decode some of the cryptic metaphors in Kafka’s texts.

Activities/Assessments:

- Kafka Jeopardy!
- Kafka Timeline
Assignment 4a: Timeline of Franz Kafka

For a majority of the units, students will create a timeline that contains some of the major historical events of each author’s life. The purpose of this timeline is to provide students with a way to visualize and organize the place in history that the author lived through and to reference the key aspects of their lives as it pertains to the existential texts that they create. Timelines are an excellent introductory activity for students to utilize in order to generate a foundational understanding of a new or unfamiliar topic. More specifically, it also affords them the opportunity to solidify their knowledge of an author in order to better understand the possible correlation between historical events in the author’s life and the themes of existentialism in their texts.
FRANZ KAFKA TIMELINE
Assignment 4b: Franz Kafka and the Twentieth-Century—Jeopardy!

The objective of this activity is for students to solidify a working knowledge of Kafka’s life through participating in a familiar game of Jeopardy! Instructors should create a Jeopardy game via http://jeopardylabs.com that contains questions regarding Kafka’s upbringing and writing career.

For this activity students will be placed into groups of four and given a small white board and a dry erase marker. The instructor will place the game on the projector and a group will call the dollar amount and category out. The instructor will read the question and student groups will have 10 seconds to write down their answers. At the end of ten seconds they will be prompted to show their white boards; and those who have the right answer will receive the “money”. This will continue for the duration of the game and the team who has the most money at the end, wins. This is a fun, challenging and interactive way to help students become more familiar with the biographical account of Franz Kafka and the era within which he lived, wrote, and died.
Unit Four: Franz Kafka and *The Metamorphosis*

Section Two: Existential Themes of *The Metamorphosis*

Time Frame: Six ninety-minute class periods

Objective:

This section of the unit is designed to help students identify, assess, evaluate, contemplate and analyze the realities of alienation, isolation, and despair as depicted in the Metamorphosis. These existential themes are prominent throughout the text and as students analyze this text, they will better understand how these notions of solitude and isolation contribute to the existential dilemma. Students will see the realities that man faces when peering out at a world that is carrying on around him, seemingly to ignoring him, while he continuously bumps up against the overwhelming anxiety and boundaries that reality creates.

Overview:

*Meeting Gregor Samsa:*

One of the most important components of this text is the way in which Kafka introduces the protagonist of this short story. The reader is immediately thrown into the anxiety of this man, Gregor Samsa, who upon wakening, immediately discovers that he is a giant insect. This immediate literary “leap” into the awakening of Gregor Samsa is in many ways the same fashion in which the existential man enters the world. He wakes one day trapped in the same confines of reality, with the same fixtures surrounding him, only to find out that he himself has drastically changed. He has become something that one
may detest, something that seems so absurd that he no longer can connect with the normal things in his life, including family, work, eating, moving, sleeping et cetera and something so alienated that he may find himself simply longing to once again be a part of the human experience. This can be detected within the first several paragraphs as the reader comes to learn that our main character was once indeed a man who was overworked and lacked connections to others, only to wake up one morning and become an insect that works tirelessly to get out of bed only concerned with his timely arrival to the train station for work. Within the first few pages, readers begin to see his overwhelming concern with work and his almost lackadaisical attitude about his outrageous transformation. It is key to ask students at this point what they would think, do or feel if they woke up one morning only to find themselves to now be a giant bug. Would they worry incessantly about work or school? Or would they concern themselves with the absurdity of the transformation itself? This question should generate a discussion with students that will bring a number of important realizations. The first of these realizations is that the existential man can find himself in an alternate reality when his awareness of his own alienation and loneliness occurs. In addition to this, students should also make note of the way in which the author makes no mention of the character’s anxiety of becoming a bug, but rather only his anxiety of being late for work. The instructor should be asking students about what this tells us about the character’s focus and what is it about Gregor’s focus that seems odd or off putting. These questions should generate a serious discussion about the underlying message that Kafka seems to be sharing with his audience about the anxiety of work, the absurdity of how important it has
become to humanity, and the transformation that happens to us when we begin to recognize the alienation that we feel from humanity.

**Character Analysis:**

In order for students to better understand and identify existential themes in The Metamorphosis, they must first get analyze the characters of this story other than Gregor Samsa himself. Mr. Samsa and Mrs. Samsa are the parents of Gregor and Grete is his sister. In addition to his immediate family, there are several different housemaids, three to be exact, as well as three travelers. Last but not least there is also Mr. Manager, Gregor’s boss. Each one of these characters represents some important component of Gregor’s life.

**Grete:** Grete is Gregor’s young sister. She is sweet and passionate about the violin. She first has compassion for her brother, then becomes his caretaker, and eventually begins to take away the only constants, i.e. furniture, in his small reality. She inevitably becomes the antithesis to his existence and castes him away and replaces him as the family’s protector and condemns his entire existence. She vocalizes her belief that if he truly loved his family, he would have disappeared on his own in order to relieve them of their suffering and grief.

**Mrs. Samsa:** Gregor’s mother. She is faint of heart and has tremendous trouble breathing. She is also saddened by the transformation of her son and in many ways cannot face the fate that has befallen her son. She is shielded by her daughter and terrified of the realities that have taken over Gregor’s existence. Yet, as the story continues and Gregor struggles,
her health seems to be improving and she takes up sewing and becomes a stronger pillar of the family. However, she still faints when she is confronted with the reality of what her son is.

Mr. Samsa: Gregor’s father. He is hard-fisted and reliant upon Gregor for finances after his business fails many years before the story takes place. He spends the majority of his time simply wasting away around the house reading newspapers and never amounting to much day-to-day. However, after Gregor is transformed, Mr. Samsa returns to work and becomes the pillar of the family again, which pushes Gregor further from the picture of being necessary or relevant.

Existential Themes of Alienation and Despair:

Throughout this text there are a number of existential themes that pull the reader into the realms of the absurd, the alienated, and the isolated. Similar to other existential authors, it is through indirect communication that Kafka lures his readers deeper into the rabbit hole of inquiry only to discover that they are experiencing the pangs of anxiety and despair that the characters themselves are immersed in. The relationship that Gregor has to his work and the sacrifices he makes on behalf of the company are repaid through low wages, and under-appreciation. The financial responsibility that he has to his family and the anxiety that this causes for him is also clear. Furthermore, the absolute lack of connection and concern for himself is after all the most absurd. The isolation he feels from himself is almost more intense to witness than the isolation and alienation he feels
from his family. He cannot accept who he is, he is merely concerned with their reactions and their sorrows and offers the readers little, if any, self-reflection. This absolute disconnect and alienation from reality is further developed as Gregor looks upon his family while they go about living their lives, only to shift from having compassion for him, to resenting his current condition, and then from trying to change his experience of reality to dismissing him all together. The way in which the characters of Gregor’s family dance around him in this text illustrates with incredible finesse the process in which an individual is slowly cast out and alienated.

In many ways the room in which Gregor lives in is the most symbolic of this alienation. The four walls in which he lives is only accessible by a door which shifts from opening via his control to being controlled by those other family members who live in the house. Students should be asked to focus on why it matters who is in control of the door. It should be noted that once he has transformed and opens the door after some hesitation, he is hoping and wishing to be understood. Everyone immediately rejects him and the door is slammed and locked from the outside, which demonstrates that our hero is no longer transformed and fearful to expose himself, but has now exposed himself and was rejected by those people he cared for the most. This element of rejection is the ultimate in alienation and as people enter in his room throughout the text he always remains hidden, conscious enough not to scare them. With his family in control of the door, at first his sister enters the room consciously and with tenderness and eventually by the end of the story people are opening the door only to dump unwanted belongings into the room and in effect pretend that he simply does not exist. This door becomes the catalyst for
Gregor’s travel between his room, which is a world of alienation, and the rest of the apartment, which is a world that reminds him of his distant past and thereby generates a stronger consciousness of his isolation and plunges him further into despair.

Summary:

This particular text demands that the reader straddle the line between reality and fantasy while experiencing the dark realities of alienation and despair. While Gregor is transformed into a bug and trapped in the confines of his own room, it is the presence of others and their clear rejection of him that inevitably make him feel the most alone. The way in which his sister comes in to care for his “needs” but never accepts him for what he has become makes him conscious and aware of his isolation and disgusting presence. The judgment with which his father bestows upon him crushes his sense of pride and sense of self. Overall, the way in which people respond to Gregor’s transformation is what makes him feel the most alone. He had done his best. Felt lonely on the sales road, worked himself to the bone, supported his family for years, planned to send his sister to the conservatory so she could play the violin and when he transforms into something repulsive to them, he is immediately cast away as though none of that mattered. He became useless and a burden to them and would eventually perish from the disparaging isolation and loneliness. Students should conduct an in-depth examination of what it means to be transformed into something that you do not chose, but rather something arbitrarily decided on. The instructor should ask students if they can think of a time in which they were transformed into something that they didn’t choose yet people treated them differently because of it? In what ways does this transformation feel familiar to
students? How can they relate to becoming something that they didn’t want to become? How were they treated? Did they feel alone? Did they feel anxiety and despair? This is the heart of the text and so many young students can find a connection here with Gregor. This may feel very familiar when reflecting on their relationship to their parents. They have undoubtedly at some point in their adolescence felt rejected by their parents and trapped in this foreign, bug like world, where they are misunderstood and alienated. This discussion should build an even stronger connection between students and their own existential experiences of the world.

After a significant amount of text discussion, character analysis and thorough examination of Gregor’s character, students should have been able to generate connections between Kafka’s own life and the life of Gregor as well as identified the subjective existential realities that they too experience. This in depth analysis of isolation, alienation and despair should complement the previous unit on Dostoyevsky and provide students with a more complete and solid foundation for understanding these existential realms both through literature, and within themselves. It is also designed to equip students with the tools necessary to analyze the next piece of literature and discover the concealed theme of existentialist boundaries found in Camus’ The Stranger.

Assignments/Assessments:

- Guided Reading
Assignment 4c: Guided Reading

The objective of this reading assignment is to guide students’ focus to moments of existential thought and experiences that occur during the story. Since this story has a number of metaphors and existential undertones, it is imperative that students have a guide to help them uncover the existential themes of alienation, despair and anxiety. This handout and list of questions will help students to organize and identify their findings of existential themes while reading, which will assist them in further evaluating the text during seminar and small group discussion.
Handout 4c: Guided Reading The Metamorphosis

1. What does Gregor wake up to find? What does this transformation mean existentially?

2. How does Gregor perceive his life? What does he feel about his job?

3. What is Gregor’s role within the Samsa family? How does this change?

4. How might Gregor perceive this metamorphosis as a good thing?

5. Do you think that Gregor felt sub human or dehumanized before this actual change took place?

6. How does Gregor’s family characters change throughout the story? Be specific.

7. What is the significance of Gregor’s palate for food? Why do we need to know this?

8. What is Gregor wounded by and who wounds him? What is the significance of the object and the perpetrator?

9. How does Gregor react to Grete removing the furniture from his room? What does this symbolize?

10. If you were to identify with one of the characters in this novella, who would it be and why?

11. What existential theme did you find to be the more prevalent? Why? Site specific examples.
Handout 4c: Guided Reading (Continued)

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Unit Five: Albert Camus and *The Stranger*

Section One: The Short Life of Albert Camus

Time Frame: Three Ninety-minute Class Periods

Objective:

The overarching objective of this unit is to introduce students to the era in which Camus wrote, how this era influenced and created the subjective interpretations he had of the world around him and to illustrate the major events that occurred during his short forty six years of life. At the conclusion of this unit, students will be able to map out the major historical events that occurred during Camus’ life as well as chart the major events of Camus’ life that ultimately created his own subjective reality. This particular unit will place a tremendous amount of focus on the historical realities that Camus faced during the twentieth century as these events truly transformed global existence for all of mankind. At the conclusion of the unit it is expected that students will have a solid foundation knowledge of the major events in Europe during the Second World War and how the political climate was did not welcome the type of thinking or publications of Camus.

Overview:

Born in the Northern African country of Algeria in 1913, Albert Camus was raised by his widowed mother and grandmother in the Northern part of the country. Camus’ father was killed during the very first year of the First World War; therefore
before Camus was even old enough to understand the cold realities of death, war and politics, he would permanently be affected by the repercussions of their intense presence in the early twentieth century. As mentioned in the previous Kafka unit, the twentieth century carried with it a tremendous amount of disillusionment with institutions and the behaviors of humanity.

After the war ended in 1918 the world experienced a tremendous amount of economic strife, which created the perfect storm for the rise of other political and economic structures and would eventually give rise to the fascist state. While the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy was becoming stronger and stronger, Camus was at the University of Algiers busy developing a theater that offered a stage for socialist plays for audiences of Algerian workers. He also joined the communist party and became a journalist in 1938 where he focused on the state of Muslim affairs in certain geographic areas of Algeria. Although World War II broke out in 1939, Camus did not find himself directly affected by it until he traveled to Paris in 1940, which was the same year that the Germans invaded France. This forced him back to North Africa where he was self proclaimed as a pacifist and wrote a number of articles expressing his anti-war sentiments. This behavior inevitably caused him to be exiled from Algeria and deemed a threat to national security and within the same year, he returned to France. During the first few years of his arrival there, the Germans had seized and occupied Paris and a majority of Northern France and he became a journalist for an underground publication that smuggled news regarding the war to the Parisian people. It was during the War that
Camus published a number of his most infamous works including The Stranger and The Myth of Sisyphus. After the war ended in 1945, Camus would continue to write and publish his work. His work would continue to be charged with themes of the absurd, the importance of internal thoughts of rebellion, deep human examination and the intense experiences brought about via alienation, death and despair. His dedication to writing would eventually be globally recognized and in 1957 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature.

Summary:

The undertones of existential thought, and the overtones of absurdity are what make Camus’ works some of the greatest of all time; and perhaps these themes would have never come to fruition had he not experienced the absurdity of a post and pre world war era. It is crucial that students develop a strong working knowledge of Camus’ life experiences, and more importantly develop an understanding of the world in which he lived. If students are able to understand the historical context in which The Stranger was written, they will be more likely to recognize the motivations for Camus’ obsession with mortality and the conclusion that it is the presence of death that make life completely absurd and meaningless. If students are able to understand the atrocities that occurred during the First World War, the economic and political climate of the era between the two world wars, and the intense realities of World War II, they will be able to better analyze and extract the existential themes of death, alienation and the absurd found in The Stranger.
Assignments/Assessments:

- Timeline: Camus’ Life
Assignment 5a: Timeline of Albert Camus

For a majority of the units, students will create a timeline that contains some of the major life events of each author. The purpose of this timeline is to provide students with a way to visualize and organize the place in history that the author lived through and to reference the key aspects of their lives as it pertains to the existential texts that they create. Timelines are an excellent introductory activity for students to utilize in order to generate a foundational understanding of a new or unfamiliar topic. More specifically, it also affords them the opportunity to solidify their knowledge of an author in order to better understand the possible correlation between major events in the lives of authors and the themes of existentialism in their texts.
CAMUS TIMELINE
Unit Five: Albert Camus and *The Stranger*

Section Two: Existential themes in *The Stranger*

Time Frame: Nine ninety-minute class periods

Objective:

This unit will most likely prove to be the most difficult and perhaps the most fascinating for students. This section provides students with an opportunity to examine the absurdity of existence through the lens of Camus’ character Meursault and to analyze and discuss the boundaries of reality to which he travels. This exposure to the absurd can in many ways alter the way in which students view their own worlds, at least temporarily, and will certainly enlighten them to what it means to travel beyond the scope of morality, control, laws and death. It will provide students with yet another tool, another lens with which to see the world. By the end of the unit, students will be able to compare the experience of the absurd to the experience of alienation and evaluate their similarities and differences. Students will also be able to identify the intensity with which the existential theme of absurdity flows through the text. Students will question realities of the freedom humanity can discover when they stand at the boundary of life. At the end of this unit, students will ultimately be able to masterfully discuss the existential theme of absurdity and the liberation that comes when man realizes that he has reached the ultimate limit of his own existence and anxiety.
Overview:

Meeting Monsieur Meursault:

As with the previous units of this curriculum, the ‘meeting’ of the protagonist is crucial to student analysis of the underlying existential theme. In the case of Camus’ *The Stranger*, Meursault represents the existential realities of a man who experiences life as meaningless and fails to recognize the finality of death. It is these paired thoughts that cause him to experience his existence in a very lifeless and indifferent fashion. It can be seen very vividly in part one of this text that Meursault is unmoved by almost everything around him expect for his own physical gratifications, desires or discomforts. The only times in which the reader is exposed to his emotional experience of life is when he is discussing the way he feels physically during moments in which he “should” be more focused on the emotional weight of the scenario. Students should be directed to focus on how he Meursault describes his processional to the funeral for his mother, how he expresses his experience with Marie for the first time in the water, and how he feels walking along the beach moments before he kills the Arab man. In each on of these scenarios the only thing that is described in absolute detail is the way in which he experiences these events physically. Camus illustrates only the heat of the sun overhead and the sweat beading across his forehead during the processional and in no way even alludes to Meursault’s emotional response to the process. Again this is illustrated by the way in which Meursault wanted Marie physically when touching her in the water and in no way exposes the reader to his emotional desires for her. As far as the reader is
concerned, he truly has no emotional attachments or sentiments that require further investigation. This is even further exemplified by his lackadaisical attitude towards her when she inquires about his love for her and then again when she wants to marry him.

This overarching lack of emotional response and clear sense of clinging only to the present and physical moment of the now, demonstrates to the readers that this character deems the entirety of life meaningless and that by not recognizing that there is a future or a past, Meursault is in effect denying the existence of death. If each moment simply is, and if he pays no attention to the reality that more moments are to come, and that each moment has its inescapable end, he is in fact denying that death is present. As the very end of this existential text, Meursault finally becomes aware of the reality that death is near; and not death in general, but his death.

It is through the startling realization that death is certain that he discovers that it is only through the acknowledgement of death that life becomes meaningful. This is the absurdity of it all. Man is hurled into this world arbitrarily, given the freedom and plaguing responsibility to make millions of choices, assign those choices some moral or ethical meaning and that the only certainty is that this meaningless life will be extinguished at some unknown moment in time. It is the challenge of man to find comfort within the confines of this absurd existence and in the case of Meursault it was the discovery that the world was indeed indifferent and that the choices of his path were his alone that bestowed upon him a sense of calmness.

*Character Analysis:*
In order for students to better understand and identify existential themes in *The Stranger*, they must first get analyze the characters of this story other than Meursault. There are three very crucial characters in the text that help the protagonist to develop and become self aware enough to recognize the sheer absurdity of life. In order for students to grasp the indifference that is so prevalent in the life of Meursault, Camus used three very distinct characters to reflect his sentiments of meaninglessness and relationship to death. Each one of these characters represents some extremely important component of the absurd and the meaning that one ascribes to life.

*Maman:* Meursault’s deceased mother. Although Meursault’s mother is never an actual living character, she immediately represents the relationship that Meursault has with death as well as with life. It is extremely interesting that Camus chooses to use the protagonist’s mother to depict his relationship to death, primarily because as his mother she inevitably also conveys his relationship to life. As a mother, she provided life to him and therefore it is brilliantly connected that she should be the one to also represent the character’s changing relationship to death. This character in effect contains the entire existential dilemma of man’s relationship to the absurdity of the world. She is the arbitrary giver of Meursault’s life, and then her death becomes the catalyst for his own subjective experience of death. This life-death relationship is the central existential theme of the absurd and it is his relationship to this character, or this absurdity that is put on trial, which in effect demonstrates his indifference to the moral structure of this
experience called life. He is well aware that everything in life simply does not matter, holds no value and is not worth attaching himself to for he, like everyone else, is simply waiting to die. His indifference to his mother’s death and his indifference to life is his mirrored response to the way life meets man with its non-judgmental indifferent to man.

*Marie:* Meursault’s mistress. In many ways Marie represents the illusion of freedom in Meursault’s life. Instead of looking for a way to reverse the reality of his mother’s death through mourning or guilt or sorrow, Meursault seeks physical comforts in Marie. She encourages him to take pleasure in her physically and does not push or reject him when he does not give the emotional responses that she would prefer. This allows him to remain in a place where he doesn’t have to acknowledge the absurdity of life and he can remain in a simple place of physical indulgences. As she fades away while he is in prison, his intense introspection and self-reflection becomes present and more and more overbearing to the demeanor of his character.

*Raymond:* Meursault’s Friend. Raymond’s character represents the antithesis to Meursault’s indifferent, emotionless attitude. He is passionate, connected, hot tempered, and emotionally responds to almost everything, especially humiliation. The presence of his character in this novel provides students with a way to interpret and detect the clear indifferent attitude that Meursault exemplifies by comparing his aloofness to the heated emotional behaviors of Raymond. He is the character that edges Meursault closer and closer to the edge of existence and into seeing the reality of his own death and the innate
absurdity of his own life. Raymond provides the tool necessary for Meursault to make the
final choice to commit to his awareness of the absurdity of life and the powerful reality of
choice in a meaningless existence. The gun represents this life changing choice of
whether Meursault chooses to become accepting of life’s pointlessness and the
inescapable reality of death. This choice ultimately frees him from the looming reality of
death for when he becomes condemned he becomes able to accept the finality of death
and that in that knowledge he becomes truly able to live.

Existential Theme of Absurdity:

After thorough analysis of the protagonist and supporting characters, students should
be able to clearly identify the indifference with which Meursault approaches the world
and thereby recognize that this behavior illustrates the epitome of the existential view that
life is completely absurd. In many ways, this theme of absurdity builds upon that notion,
which was so prevalent in the first part of Notes from Underground, that the laws of
nature are not sympathetic to the suffering of humanity, but simply generate a wall with
which to contain man and limit his understanding of his own existence. The themes of
alienation, isolation and despair that were prominent in the previous two literary pieces
are extraordinarily relevant when discussing the absurdity of life depicted in The Stranger
and the notion that death is constantly looming over one’s life is perhaps the most
important realization of all. In order to reach the conclusion that life is absurd and
without meaning means that the individual must initially make a leap of faith into the
unknown, come face to face with the wall of the laws of nature, endure the anxiety of the
freedom to make the choice to continue, transform into someone that is perhaps so misunderstood that they are alienated from all others only to realize through reflection and hindsight that life itself has no intrinsic meaning and simply has the intention only to end in death. It is this reflection, this very moment of examination that one reaches the limitations of life and arrives at the absurd. This text exemplifies the arrival at this place of absurdity in an incredibly powerful way. It will be through this text that students can reflect on the exhausting journey of the existential man and perhaps conclude that this level of existence is an infinite abyss through the absurd that simply takes the individual from life to death and that he is ultimately responsible for the meaning ascribed to it.

Summary:

While this story portrays an individual who simply has no hope and clear indifference to the choices and realities of life, this story brings to life the notion that when man can recognize that he is ultimately condemned to death he becomes able to live. Students will begin to identify that the stance of the existentialist is that there is no meaning to life, that individuals at times feel estranged from reality when struggling to prescribe some meaning to a life that is absurd in that it simply leads humanity down the path to death. This text demonstrates this profound notion that humanity must create its own meaning to life in order to respond to life’s indifference to mankind. The laws of nature that govern man’s logic and intellect are indifferent to his experience of himself and the world. His suffering is his own, and in effect so are his joys. Therefore to give meaning to life, one has to accept death and that it is simply the last limitation, or
boundary of man. This unit will tie together the previous units by giving students an ultimate “ah ha” moment of the path of the existentialist.

Assignments/Assessments:

- Comic Strip/Story Board—Path of the Existential Man
- Character and Author Analysis.
Assignment 5b: Story Board of The Stranger

This assignment is designed to help students to illustrate and evaluate the main components of The Stranger. This assignment requires students to draw six to eight different scenes from the text that they found to be the most relevant to the theme of absurdity, alienation, death or any other existential concept that they discover while reading the text. They will be asked to draw the scene and to provide a caption below the illustration that describes the existential element that is depicted. This assignment is beneficial for many different students since it employs multiple modalities with visual, verbal, and logical learning styles deeply incorporated.
The Stranger Storyboard Assignment

This storyboard assignment will consist of a series of drawings that illustrate and depict a scene from the story that exemplifies an existential theme that you observed while reading this text. It can illustrate one main existential theme that you identify or several different existential characteristics if you discover a number of them. Think of this assignment like it is a comic strip from the newspaper. You must support the illustrations with captions that describe the existential component below the drawing.

Select six-eight segments of The Stranger that you believe to be the most significant to the theme of existentialism and create your storyboard.

Your storyboard must include the following:

- A minimum of six frames that clearly illustrate the scene/section of the story.

  (*If you want to create the frames using cut outs from magazines and create a collage that would be acceptable as well.)

- You must include color in each frame

- A caption describing the existential theme must be included

- An accurate account of the story must be created. You are not making a new story but rather illustrating components of the Stranger.
Assignment 5c: Character and Author Analyses The Stranger

Students will analyze and assess the main characters of the text and discuss how each of these characters enhance and/or reflect Meursault’s sense of life, death and the absurdity of it all. The purpose of this exercise is to help students to closely examine the text and evaluate the characters and their relationship to the protagonist. These relationships are what help to define Meursault and to illustrate to the reader the realities that he experiences. As done previously in this course, students will approach this assignment in cooperative groups. For each group of six, students will be given different characters to assess and will then discuss their responses collectively. Students will assess the following characters: Meursault, Raymond, Marie, Maman, the prosecutor, and the Chaplin.

In addition to analyzing characters, students will also be responsible for linking previous knowledge of the author’s life and the story content. Students should be able to make the connection that every individual is only capable of writing or discussing that which they can subjectively experience in reality, fantasy or both. Students must be able to connect the components of the text that resemble some known experiences of the author’s life and distinguish how well they correlate to one another. The instructor must be sure to remind students that this does not mean interpreting the text as an autobiography but rather an opportunity to identify the connection between the author’s subjective reality and the text.
Handout 5c: Character & Author Analyses: The Stranger

Character's Name ________________________________

1. Is the character static or dynamic? How do you know?

2. Describe the character ________________________________

3. What parts of the story provide the deepest understanding of this character? ________

4. In what ways is the character influenced by his/her surroundings? _________________

5. How is this character's society or reality different than yours? _________________

6. How does the character respond to other characters?
   (Especially to Meursault) _________________
7. Is the character self-aware? Do they know how others view them? 

8. How does the character view themself? What is their existence like? 

9. Do you think this person’s behavior is normal and acceptable based on society’s standards today? Why or why not? 

10. In what ways did this character help to enhance the theme of the absurd? (*Think about how they related to the Meursault)
Author Analysis:

1. Based upon what you know about the author and the content of the story, what type of person is the author? __________________________________________________________

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2. What major influences do you think caused the author to write in this way?__________

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Unit Six: Jean Paul Sartre and *No Exit*

Section One: No Exit—The Meaning of Death and the Absurdity of Life

Time Frame: Six Ninety-Minute Class Periods

Objective:

While the previous three literary units began with a brief biographical introduction to the author’s life and the historical context in which they wrote their pieces of existential literature, this unit will not follow the same pattern of organization. As this in the concluding unit of this curriculum, it seemed fitting to take the academic training wheels off and allow students to delve into Sartre’s play ‘No Exit’ without any biographical introduction of the author. This structure should provide students an opportunity to connect their own prior knowledge of existentialism and develop their own interpretation of the text. In addition, this format will also allow for a stronger concluding section to this course by ending the curriculum with a formal analysis of existentialism in the twentieth century and an examination of its course throughout history. By the end of this section, students will be able to assess the subtle nuances of Sartre’s play, ‘No Exit’, and develop their own analysis of the existential sentiments of choice, freedom and the relevance of death.

Overview:

Students will begin this section by reading the entire manuscript of ‘No Exit’ and utilizing a guided reading worksheet to discover and analyze the themes of existentialism.
During their reading, students will find that this text encompasses a tremendous number of existential themes that have been discussed in previous units as well as some new concepts such as the freedom of choice, the notion that existence precedes essence and the destruction caused by human nature. Students will first examine the characters and then analyze why the setting of hell is the most relevant component to this play’s central existential theme.

Character Analysis:

Unlike the previous texts, it is more challenging for students to pin point just one protagonist or antagonist in this text. The three people who are present in this text are all so clearly interconnected that there distinguishing the main character may be difficult for students. Guided reading questions for this text will assist students in identifying the different roles of each character. Students must examine who each character is and how each one relies on the others to define who they are. Since the play does begin with Joseph Garcin and the other two characters are admitted to hell after Garcin has assessed and built a relationship to his surroundings they are the ones who antagonize Garcin throughout the play. Therefore, no matter how subtle it may be to students, Garcin can indeed be considered the protagonist and Inez most resembles the dominant antagonist. Instead of an in depth character analysis, students will define characters by the relationships they have to one another. Students will identify that Inez embodies the existential thinker, while Garcin and Estelle embody the misunderstandings of human morals, ethics and choice.
Mr. Garcin sets the stage for the entire play. After he has asked a series of questions relating to things only relevant to the land of the living like toothbrushes, mirrors and sleep he is left alone by the valet. After experiencing this isolation for merely a few moments he immediately rings the bell for someone to come. He exhibits a sense of despair at this new feeling of isolation when no one comes for him and perceives his new life as one without escape. This thought process is quickly derailed when he is almost immediately greeted with the presence of Inez, who seems to relieve him of this despair, at least momentarily. He begins his relationship with her by adhering to manners and politeness only to experience her cold and shrewd responses. His relationship with Inez is the one that displays dialogue between the existentialist (Inez) and the common human experience (Garcin).

Garcin believes that everything is a fluke and randomly occurred, whereas Inez argues that it has been planned and determined for them. She believes that the scenario is intentional and has an order, yet it will be the choice of the three of them to devise the subjective reality of it. Estelle simply contests that ignorance is bliss and that she should like to think that it is all a fluke, thereby alleviating responsibility. In addition, Inez can further be seen as the existentialist when she asserts, "One always dies too soon—or too late. And yet one’s whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing up. You are—your life, and nothing else."

The three of them are each other’s torturer, which leads Garcin to assert, “hell is other people.” This relay of suffering is continuous and infinite to which there is no
escape and when they realize they are stuck in this continuum, they simply laugh with one another and Garcin’s fateful closing line, “Well, well then let’s get on with it…” iv

Existential Theme of Freedom and “Existence precedes Essence”:

One of the most prevalent themes in this text is the notion of the freedom of choice, and that no matter how much the three main characters attempt to believe that this situation is a mistake or a fluke, they are ultimately responsible for their own experience. They have the freedom to choose whether they torture one another, whether they obsess over the hopelessness of their existence and the freedom to cope with the reality without an exit. Students should be able to recognize that they are not required by any sort of devil or scientist to torture one another, but that they choose to torture one another by simply holding on to their own desires and insecurities. The notion that their current situation, i.e. their existence, came to be before the dynamics of their situation developed, i.e. their essence, is crucial to understanding Sartre’s idea of existence precedes essence. Individuals are not prescribed some specific fate, or preconceived nature, but rather they are placed into existence and ultimately responsible for their own essence. They become who they are based entirely upon their choices and therefore are accountable for all of the suffering they experience and inflict upon others.
Summary:

Students will conclude this unit with a working knowledge of the impact that the freedom of choice has upon the existential man. The examination of ‘No Exit’ will likely leave students with a daunting sense that the existential dilemma is brought on by death, freedom, anxiety, and alienation and indeed has no exit. To end the course with this piece of literature shows students that according to the existentialist, even in a life without death life is meaningless and still plagued with responsibility.

Assignments/Assessments:

- Guided Reading
- What would you do? Writing Prompt.
Assignment 6a: Guided Reading ‘No Exit’

The objective of this reading assignment is to guide students’ focus to moments of existential thought and experiences that occur during the play. Since this is the first play that students have read in this course, it is crucial that the instructor provide them with some parameters with which to approach the text. This handout and list of questions will help students to organize and identify their findings of existential themes while reading, which will assist them in further evaluating the text during seminar and small group discussion.
1. What material thing was it that Garcin was upset about not having? What was so absurd about his desire to have this item?

2. What did each character expect to find when they arrived in hell?

3. What did Garcin do almost immediately after the Valet departed?

4. What did both Estelle and Inez think and feel when they saw Garcin? What is ironic about their initial thoughts?

5. How does each character try to torture the other? (Be specific!)
   a. Garcin:
   b. Inez
   c. Estelle

6. Describe how the characters died.
   a. Garcin:
   b. Inez
   c. Estelle
7. Who seems to be the most accepting of their situation from the beginning? Explain.

Section II. Existential Themes

1. Inez describes her situation as “the same idea as in the cafeteria, where customers serve themselves.”
   a. What does she mean?

2. Estelle: “When I can’t see myself I begin to wonder if I really and truly exist.”
   Explain this idea existentially.

3. Garcin: “There’s no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is – other people!” What does he mean?

4. Garcin: “For ever, and ever, and ever. [A long silence]. Well, well, let’s get on with it…”
   a. Explain a theme of choice/consequence/suffering/anxiety/alienation in the end of the play. Don’t forget to use this quote.
Assignment 6b: Writing prompt

Students will imagine for a moment that they find themselves in the same predicament as the characters in the play. They will be asked to answer a number of questions and write a paragraph response describing what they would do and how they would feel if they were in this place. They will discuss what they would find intolerable and torturous about the situation and what components would be tolerable or perhaps relieving to them. This activity is designed to get students to think critically and existentially and will assist them as they evaluate the text.
Unit Six: Jean Paul Sartre and *No Exit*

Section Two: Jean Paul Sartre—The “Official” Existentialist

Time Frame: Three Ninety-Minute Class Periods

Objective:

As the concluding unit of this curriculum, students will get to the heart of what the term existentialism really meant in terms of an actual fixed philosophical doctrine. The previous authors, philosophers, and thinkers were all the precursors to this official doctrine of existentialism that manifested itself in Paris post World War II, but were not classified as existentialists until well after their time. Students may find it interesting that Jean Paul Sartre is the only individual of this curriculum that proclaimed himself to be an existentialist and that individuals such as Camus actually denied their affiliations with the discipline entirely. In lieu of a lengthy biographical account of Jean Paul Sartre, this unit section will focus on solidifying the definition of existentialism, as concluded by Sartre, and depicting for students where the train of existential thought has finally stationed after a few centuries of intense human thought. At the conclusion of this unit, students will be able to define and identify the official doctrines of existentialism, track the roots of existential thought from Kierkegaard to Sartre and evaluate the “grand finale” of the existential path of man.
Overview:

As the last section of the curriculum, this section bears a certain responsibility to act as the conclusion to this existential journey that students have embarked upon; therefore, further discussing Sartre’s existential doctrine, as seen in ‘No Exit’, ought to provide the best conclusion that can be given considering the open ended nature of existential thought.

Since students have delved into Sartre’s text, had classroom discussions surrounding the direct and indirect implications of the situation of the characters and have been exposed to the situational anxieties presented in the many other texts of the course, they should be able to identify how ‘No Exit’ provides the perfect conclusion to the existential journey.

This text begins with the scene of a man who finds himself in hell and experiences the reality of an alienated man in a room alone without the hope of even a moment to escape its isolation. He has been exiled; he is “underground” and outside of the existence of others. This can represent Dostoyevsky’s existential notion of isolation. Then we have the other characters, who come into the room and at first begin to relieve one another of the horrors of isolation and alleviate the fear that a torturer awaits them. However, as the infamous line suggests, “hell is other people”, Sartre resurrects the other aspect of the isolation which is the despair that comes from recognizing that one is alone when in the presence of others and that one cannot escape this reality when people are constantly invoking their desire to cause suffering to themselves and others. This
exemplifies the despair seen in Kafka’s The Metamorphosis. Camus’ notion of the absurd is also included in this text as Sartre brings about the way man’s relationship to death creates his relationship to his own existence. Camus felt that the presence of death created a naturally meaningless life and that man had to prescribe his own meaning and relevance. Sartre takes this one step farther to show that life’s mundane morals and ethics have even less meaning with the absence of death.

Sartre asserts that perhaps isolation, the presence of death and the freedom to create your own meaning in life are perhaps not the dilemmas of man, but the wonders and the blessings of being human. The choice to make meaning, the ability to create one’s own essence, the knowledge that one day life will conclude and the quietude found in isolation are all the extraordinary ways in which man can make the leap of faith into a realm free from simply being a part of Nature and the perfect order of things. In the end, it is the freedom to choose one’s own reality that creates life in the face of death, it is the constant presence of choice that provides company in the pangs of isolation, it is the constant metamorphosis of humanity that launches us into the absurd, and the presence of the absurd that gives us the freedom to choose our own meaning. The existential path is in fact a circle, spiraling through existence as a never-ending rabbit hole with no certainty of where it will cause one to land but with the certainty that it is the path in which one can take in order to escape the perfect order of things. The existential path is where humanity becomes self-defined.
Summary:

This section should have been a reflective experience for students to see the interconnections of existential thinking and the revolving door with which one can enter and exit its exclusive and isolated world. The leap of faith into the arms of God or into the arms of nothingness perpetuates the beginning of an individual’s self-reflection and the isolation in which one finds on the other side evokes a sense of anxiety and discomfort since it places one outside of the perfect order of Nature. The alienation is intensified by the presence of others who do not understand, who have no knowledge or notion of that leap or the presence of another realm of reality. The alienation causes one to question the meaning of life’s ethics and emotional responses and the recognition of death as the only certainty leads one to identify the absurdity of it all. Then the acknowledgement of a life without death provides the individual with the profound epiphany that it is the imminent reality of death, the alienation caused by others, the leap into the unknown and the freedom to choose all or none of this that gives man precisely what he is looking for—a way out of the system, an exit from the perfectly explained order of things.

It is the presence of death that is the official exit, and the beginning of this play called life is not meaningless because the curtain closes, but rather the curtain closes because the beginning would be meaningless without it.
Assignments/Assessment:

- Seminar discussion topics
- Song Selection
Assignment 6c: Seminar Discussion Topics

Students will be required to select a discussion topic to lead a ten-minute portion of a seminar discussion. Each student will select a scene or quote from the play ‘No Exit’ that represents a clear existential moment within the text and generate a series of questions to ask students during a seminar discussion. During this time, the student who is leading the seminar is responsible for asking more probing questions and assisting the class in approaching the text from a deeper and different perspective. This exercise provides students with an opportunity to take on a leadership role as well as share their own assertions, interpretations and understandings of the text. It also allows the instructor to identify those students who have grasped the existential themes throughout the course.
Assignment 6d: Existential Song Selection

One of the most connecting mediums for students is music. When given the opportunity to discuss or share their music students become a little bit more alive and tend to connect with the rhythm of the sound along with the lyrics. This assignment is designed to provide students with an opportunity to express their understanding of existentialism through song selection. Students will be asked to select a song that exemplifies any one of the existential themes that have been discussed over the duration of this course. It can be a song that focuses on the way an existentialist might view anxiety, absurdity, death, despair, or alienation. They will select the song, bring in a copy of the song for the class to listen to and then present for 1-2 minutes why they chose this song and how it relates to the theme of existentialism.
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