



The “Spectacle” of Disability Representations

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
English/ Grade 9

Keywords: Disability Narrative, Of Mice and Men, North Carolina Selective Sterilization Program, Eugenics, Socratic Seminar, Spectacle, Detournement, Representation, Social Justice

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: The following unit will be used to encourage students to think critically about representations of oppressed groups; specifically, this unit focuses on representations of disabled persons. Students begin by reading *Of Mice and Men* and analyzing archetypal characters, then we use informational text to connect these representations to images and media presented today. The informational text is relevant to North Carolina students as it details the North Carolina Selective Sterilization Program. To synthesize the information to this point, students will conduct a Socratic seminar on the novel and the informational text. Students will finish the unit by creating a detournement, which is a project that subverts media images. They will be choosing problematic messages in modern media that are harmful to disabled groups. With that problematic image, students will juxtapose images that undermine the problematic message. This will involve using filmmaking computer programs.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 37 students in Grade 9

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The “Spectacle” of Disability Representation

Stephanie Alyse Misko

Background

The unit that follows is intended for an Honors English I class of approximately thirty to forty students. I consider this an Honors curriculum unit partially because of the higher order thinking skills involved to complete the assignments, but mostly because of the volume of work required. I fully believe that this unit can be used with a Standard class that reads and writes on grade-level, but some modifications will be necessary for some of the higher-level content to be comprehended by all students.

I will teach this unit in a large, suburban high school in Cornelius, NC. The students at my school are mainly middle to upper class and read on grade-level. This particular high school is highly regarded for excellent test scores and graduation rate. My students are proficient test-takers with solid study habits and motivation. But as English I students, they no longer have a lengthy state test at the end of the semester, nor do my students (usually) need extra assistance to meet grade level requirements.

Because of the listed accolades, I feel this unit is particularly crucial for honors students who focus heavily on honing tested skills and regurgitating answers. This unit will ask students to be critical, original, creative, collaborative, and reflective. These are skills that are not tested and rarely emphasized in other subjects. From my experience in the classroom, units that emphasize critical thinking are especially effective because they allow students to express opinions, and this is particularly appealing to teenagers that are mostly voiceless (either by choice or circumstance) in their own community. In the past, both honors and standard classes exceed my expectations when asked to complete units like the one listed below.

The English I curriculum is separated into four units: short stories, non-fiction texts, poetry, and drama. Each unit lasts approximately 3-4 weeks. Alongside the genre-based units, we will study novels as well. The following unit will conclude the three week non-fiction unit; students will be familiar with analyzing media and persuasive texts. To analyze non-fiction, students will be comfortable with skills such as identifying bias, assessing credibility, analyzing purpose, targeting an audience, and using rhetorical and persuasive devices. During the non-fiction unit, students also will be reading *Of Mice and Men* both in and out of class. The following unit will connect a fictional novel with non-fiction/informational text.

Objectives

This unit is anticipated to last between eight to ten days from the completion of reading *Of Mice and Men* to the presentation of the Media Detournement Project. We meet five days per week for ninety to one-hundred minutes per day. I will not teach this unit for ninety minutes per day, but will likely run another unit in conjunction with this one and spend approximately forty minutes per day on this material.

I will use this unit to meet the new Common Core State Standards, but I have not necessarily used the same phrasing as the Common Core State Standards. These new standards are all worth addressing, but I feel there are certain objectives that relate to personal growth that are not included in the published standards. For instance, a major goal of this unit is to foster empathy and understanding for differences between people. These intrapersonal skills are not covered by Common Core. So instead I have combined and reworded those objectives in a format that makes sense to me and the growth of my students.

1. *Students will draw thematic connections between fiction, non-fiction, and their lives.*

As I have emphasized later in this unit, my first and most important objective for this unit is to have my students draw connections between the text and their lives. Using non-fiction texts such as documentaries and articles, students will understand the connections between the characters and events (both historical and thematic) in *Of Mice and Men* and current events from the Great Depression and current events from later in the twentieth century. I will evaluate whether that objective is met during informal class discussion, the Socratic seminar discussion and the final submitted project.

2. *Students will participate respectfully, thoughtfully, and professionally in a wide range of discussions on sensitive topics.*

This objective will require students to articulate complex thoughts using intentional language and tone. This objective will be met during informal class discussion and the Socratic seminar that will end the unit. Seminars are graded partially on content, but also on conduct. I include five categories on my rubric, and the three following categories focus on a student's professionalism during the conversation: Conduct, Speaking, and Listening. The conduct category rates a student's focus and behavior. The speaking category judges the student's articulation, leadership and inclusiveness of others. Finally, the listening category assesses a student's ability to connect his or her comments to the comments made by others.

3. *Students will use visual media to analyze and evaluate a piece of informational text.*

Students will use the detournement project to consider visual text and its underlying meaning. This project will require them to then make an original comment on the purpose of a specific visual media text. Students will also create an argumentative media text.

Why Should We Still Read Fiction in English Class?

In recent years, legislators and curriculum writers have questioned the reading of fiction in English class. To me, this is very bewildering. What exactly does one do in English class without novels? This opposition is also deflating to my practice; novels and storytelling have shaped my entire life and have led to my career. To question the need for fiction in the classroom is like questioning the need for love within a relationship; it may not be a logical and rational decision, but it is the foundation and the motivation for reading in the first place. Kyleene Beers writes in *Notice and Note*: “We come to know much of this information – perhaps all information – through our narrative thinking. And much – not all, but much – of the narrative we encounter is fiction.”ⁱ The foundation for all knowledge begins with the narrative.

But of course, the attack on fiction is not coming out of nowhere. Those who believe that we should teach solely non-fiction are not simply living to destroy what I love; they believe that non-fiction is what our students truly need to be successful in the twenty-first century. Under the Common Core State Standards, teachers are expected to utilize non-fiction as seventy percent of the text read in class. Long gone are the days that students spend their college years writing poetry and reading Dickens to prepare for the workforce. The reigning mentality is that non-fiction text is more rigorous and that students can learn about other disciplines through the reading of non-fiction; it’s the equivalent of hitting two birds with one stone. Our students need to be more prepared to enter a trade, to participate in civic discussions, and to read more complex syntax. In a competitive and changing economy, students need to have ready-to-use skills that directly address the needs of the marketplace. It is easy to understand the shift away from the humanities and towards math and science.

While the argument for curriculum that teaches trade skills is undeniable, English Literature still has a place in the 21st century. In *Notice and Note*, Kyleene Beers acknowledges the importance of teaching informational text, but maintains that reading fiction is fundamentally more important to the development of active citizens. She writes, “Granted, we need to be able to read repair manuals, and we certainly need to be able to think critically and analytically about what our politicians offer us as evidence and reason...[but] with fiction we continue to think about what it means to be human.”ⁱⁱ The skills required for reading and analyzing a novel are the skills necessary for students to become informed members of society. At the conclusion of each novel, my students

conduct a Socratic seminar where they analyze the big life questions that are raised in the novel. The topics we cover include: the complexity of love, the parent-child relationship, the role of society in one's racial and gendered identity, and the struggles of growing up. Because of pacing restraints, students are not allowed the time to explore ideas in the context of other disciplines. Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not living" – meaning that until we consider the world we live in, we cannot make educated decisions about our role within it. For students to become educated citizenry, it is important to engage in these conversations. Finally, students develop empathy (something especially important when considering social justice issues) during the study of literature. Beers summarizes current psychological research showing the positive correlation between reading fiction and living emotionally healthy lives.ⁱⁱⁱ In defense of my discipline, and in defense of the literature that I love, I believe that all professions require the ability to draw connections, think critically, and empathize with others.

Why Use Fiction to Teach about Social Justice?

I have chosen to use the novel *Of Mice and Men* to begin the study of disability representations, perceptions, and justice with the students in my class. In previous years, students read the novel with moderate to little interest for the first five chapters, but become instantly passionate during the final chapter when George murders his best friend Lennie. With each group of students, there will inevitably be a cataclysmic argument that alters the class dynamics for at least the next week. The theme of friendship and loyalty is something with which they can connect. Without realizing it, my students dig into deep and relevant issues, all in the name of a fictional character in a fictional text. How could George be so cruel? Is it fair to kill Lennie simply because he has a mental disability? Yet when I asked the class's opinion about forced sterilization cases in North Carolina, not a single student had even heard of these cases. So to some degree, those who oppose the teaching of fiction are building their argument on very valid ground; our students are unaware of the complex social issues that surround their daily lives. Informational and non-fiction text allow for students to explore social and historical issues.

But as an educator, I know that fiction can be used to launch a more profound understanding of informational and non-fiction text. Asking students to draw connections between themselves, other texts, and the world around them is crucial, although it is a skill that has been deemphasized with the attack on teaching fiction in English. But I know that this is the skill that hooks my students into a discussion about the big questions in life. Drawing connections delivers a response to the endless cry of "why are we doing this?"

Therefore, I am using literature to begin a discussion of disability. Students will ask themselves how disability is treated in the United States and more specifically, here in North Carolina. In the 2013-2014 North Carolina State Budget, lawmakers made devastating cuts to programs for education, the unemployed or disadvantaged, and

women's health. Yet money was allocated to pay reparations to families damaged by the forced sterilizations that occurred for decades in this state. Even though the effects of these sterilizations are devastating, the conversation about reparations has been relatively hushed. These are policies that directly affect my students, and they do not even understand the word "sterilization."

My students, however, are intimately familiar with the Holocaust. When they are taught about the Holocaust, students believe this was isolated and carried out by "brainwashed, crazy people." They fail to identify consistencies between beliefs and policies from Nazi Germany and other societies throughout time. In order to generate interest, I will juxtapose Nazi propaganda with American eugenics propaganda. This propaganda directly relates to Lennie's experiences as a disabled man in America, as well, which I will explain in greater detail when I discuss Lennie's story as a disability narrative. In turn, Lennie's narrative will hopefully illuminate the disability struggle within American culture.

What is a Disability Narrative?

In casual conversation, it is understood that to be disabled is to suffer from some visible ailment or be so mentally ill that one cannot function within society. During a recent discussion, I asked my students what it meant to be disabled, and they provided responses such as, "to be without an arm or leg or something", "to not be in regular classes with other kids" or "to need help with things that most people can do on their own." While the first two statements are extremely narrow and specific, my class decided that the third statement was something they all could relate to on some level.

A disability narrative, in my mind, details the personal struggle of an individual who deviates from expectations. Tobin Siebers argues that disability aesthetics are a form of art that celebrates the differences in people: "Disability does not express defect, degeneration, or deviancy in modern art. Rather, disability enlarges our vision of human variation and difference, and puts forward perspectives that test presuppositions dear to the history aesthetics."^{iv} Because Siebers includes all aspects of human variation in his definition of disability, nearly any text can be considered a disability narrative. Inevitably, every text includes a character that deviates from the norm, as this is needed to develop conflict and complex characters.

Why *Of Mice and Men* as a Disability Narrative?

I chose to use *Of Mice and Men* as the anchor text for both practical and theoretical reasons. As a ninth grade English team, we have taught this novel in the past and so I have the materials to build on. Also, the text is accessible for students at all levels of English I. The dialect makes the writing moderately challenging for any ninth grade student, but the plot line is linear and easy to follow. To differentiate for Honors students, I give assignments that require a closer reading of the text. Furthermore,

students have enjoyed the novel in the past and become very passionate about debating the justification for Lennie's death. Students relate to Lennie and George's friendship and can comfortably discuss the obligations and struggles of a long-term friendship. Furthermore, ninth graders find the characters to be likeable and the plot to be chockfull of drama. Most importantly though, I chose it because it includes multiple disability narrative "snapshots"; the novel follows characters with a variety of "defects", including race, physical disability, mental disability and gender.

Of Mice and Men is one of Steinbeck's most widely read literary works. It is a mere one-hundred pages about the friendship between two migrant workers in Depression-era California. Lennie and George are complete opposites, and they depend on each other for basic human needs. Lennie is described in the novel as being many things – slow, idiotic, silly, a crazy bastard – to describe his mental disability. Steinbeck places him at the center of the novel and explores the way that Lennie navigates Depression-era America. For Lennie's entire life he has been taken care of by another person; first his Aunt Clara cares for him, and then later George is his companion and friend. George makes it clear throughout the novel that taking care of Lennie frustrates him but it also gives him a sense of purpose. In the first few chapters, he repeats the mantra, "I could get along so easy and nice if I didn't have you on my tail."^v Yet he also takes pride in his and Lennie's unique loyalty and companionship: "Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go inta town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to...But not us."^{vi} George knows that without Lennie he would be lonely and his life would lack meaning.

While this novel largely comments on the values of community vs. the values of friendship, it even more clearly initiates the conversation about representations of disability. The novel is set in 1930, a time in American history when the mentally disabled were treated as a nuisance to society. With the creation of the intelligence quotient test (IQ test), the country began labeling a greater number of citizens as "defective persons." According to the chapter from Snyder and Mitchell's book, "Subnormal Nation: The Making of a U.S. Disability Minority", the assertion that a growing number of Americans were disabled was widely accepted by scientists and Americans, but this label was a fallacy. It was used to marginalize persons that were inconvenient, abnormal, or just too expensive to support.^{vii} Not surprisingly, these labels generally fell on previously oppressed groups: African Americans, immigrants, unemployed citizens, convicts, orphans, and underachieving students. This growing notion led to the nation's obsession with containing mental disability. "Defective persons" were often institutionalized away from society or were sterilized through the many eugenics programs that were created across the country. These programs existed in 31 states, including North Carolina where I teach. In this state alone, 7,600 citizens were sterilized involuntarily between the years of 1929 and 1974. According to "Subnormal

Nation,” social workers and health workers rationalized sterilizations by claiming that it was in the best interest of public health and safety.^{viii}

In *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie is treated as a “defective person” needing containment. In the opening chapter of the novel, George tells Lennie that it is better if Lennie does not speak during an interview with a new boss. George explains that anytime Lennie speaks, he ruins the opportunity. The other characters reiterate Lennie’s need for isolation and containment. Crooks, the disabled African-American character, claims that if George left Lennie, “They’ll take you to the booby hatch. They’ll tie you up with a collar like a dog.”^{ix} Crooks understands that without George, Lennie would be contained in an institution. Also, George announces to himself, Lennie, and others that traveling with Lennie makes his life more difficult. Finally, when the novel opens, it is Lennie’s interaction with non-disabled characters that causes George and Lennie to be run out of their most recent job. When Lennie attempts to interact with another non-disabled woman, he unintentionally murders her. The reader then has the sense that Lennie’s disability makes him dangerous. The novel ends with George shooting and killing Lennie, this done out of mercy or friendship. Slim, a fellow rancher and George’s friend, claims that George had to do it. Yet this seems to me and to my students an extreme response. George recognized that Lennie could not survive in society, so he decided to end Lennie’s life before he could inflict any more harm on others. This is shockingly similar to the eugenicist mindset that was predominating in the 1930s. Both eugenicists and George believe that in eliminating the chance for disabled persons to reproduce, they are serving the greater good of the abled. It may be worth having a discussion about contemporary cases of mercy killings, including euthanasia.

Also, Lennie reflects popular representations of disability. In Paul Longmore’s essay “Screening Stereotypes: Images of Disabled People in Television and Motion Pictures,” he identifies recurring themes surrounding disability in popular culture. Longmore specifically explains how Lennie is commonly seen as sexually dangerous: “Mentally retarded adult men also at times appear as sexually menacing figures, partly because of their supposed inability to control their emotions, to gauge their own strength, and to restrain a propensity toward violence.”^x This representation reinforces the notion that mental disability is cause to isolate individuals from society. In the second chapter, Lennie is warned not to look at Curley’s wife, but Lennie is distracted by how “purty” she is.^{xi} When he is alone with Curley’s wife, Lennie is unable to control his desire to touch her. Not having an awareness of his own strength, he smothers her to death. This unrestrained sexual attraction is what ultimately leads to Lennie’s “sterilization”; George murders Lennie before he can suffer any societal consequences at Curley’s hands. Of course this connection between Lennie and Curley’s wife, two oppressed characters, leads to tragedy and comments that their relationship cannot fit into society.

What is detournement?

Detournement is to “subvert spectacular (commodified) representations and practices”, according to Professor James Trier.^{xiii} This is a practice that I studied with Trier during my Master’s degree at UNC-Chapel Hill. Since detournement is the act of “subverting spectacular representations”, it is important to identify what it means for something to be spectacular. Guy Debord theorized that the spectacle included all of the objects, media, customs, and ideas that situate the viewer as a receiver of information, rather than an active communicator.^{xiiii} This means that as consumers of media, we are passive listeners with little agency regarding what we consume; instead we just accept and participate within the parameters set by the spectacle.

The theory of both detournement and the spectacle is both complex and abstract for a group of high school students. While considering and modifying the practices outlined in Trier’s essay “The spectacle and detournement,” I will introduce these concepts to my students so that they can easily apply the concept to modern representations. Trier’s strategies apply to all forms of “the spectacle”, but I will modify his strategies to specifically address the spectacle of disability representations. Fortunately, as defined by disability aesthetics, nearly all representations can be considered disability representations.

As Trier’s student, I created a detournement in which I subverted representations of mill workers during the early 1900s. My experience with creating a similar project will allow me to guide my students through this process.

Classroom Activities

Day One: Introduction to Global and Local Eugenics

The beginning of this unit is the day after students finish reading *Of Mice and Men* together as a class. Prior to today, I will have not initiated any conversations about representations of disability. While reading, we will focus primarily on plot, character development, and historical context.

Today will be the first discussion of the eugenicist argument presented in *Of Mice and Men*. To open the argument, I will begin with a definition of eugenics. I will use the definition provided in Merriam-Webster.com: “a science that deals with the improvement (as by control of human mating) of hereditary qualities of a race or breed.” I begin most classes with a journal writing, so I will ask students to read this definition, then explain how eugenics has been important in our history (both global and local). Students will have ten minutes to write a response and then I will ask two to three students to share out their responses. Because most ninth graders study the Holocaust in ninth grade World History, I expect responses to focus on that example.

To build on their example I will show an example of Nazi eugenicist propaganda; the example that I will use is taken from www.facinghistory.org. The poster reads, “You are

Sharing the Load! A Genetically Ill Individual Costs Approximately 50,000 Reichsmarks by the Age of Sixty." The text is paired with an image of a German man lifting a large bench with a disfigured man on each end. The image attacks these programs by presenting disability as a drain on society. I will lead full class discussion using the following questions:

- What is the literal message of the poster?
- What do you notice about the portrayal of the two men on the bench? What do you notice about the man that is lifting the bench?
- How does the poster appeal to the audience? Identify which persuasive technique is used and where.
- Is this an effective poster?

After this discussion, I will juxtapose North Carolina's sterilization propaganda. I chose a pamphlet titled "You wouldn't expect-" that was published in 1950. This pamphlet reflects similar ideals as the prior image because it focuses on disabled persons' shortcomings, which means they will be ineffective parents. To guide this discussion, I will use the following questions:

- What similarities do you notice between the two pieces of propaganda?
- What is the literal message of this pamphlet?
- How does the pamphlet appeal to the viewer? Identify persuasive techniques and how they are used.
- Why do you think this message was received so positively? How does the author appeal to the audience?

Next, I will pass out the NPR article, "A Brutal Chapter in North Carolina's Eugenics Past," explaining North Carolina's sterilization program. We will read it aloud as a whole class, stopping to identify and analyze the similarities between this program and what the students have learned about the Holocaust. I would like for students to notice the similar ideology that disabled people were considered a "burden" to society; furthermore, students will hopefully identify the very narrow definition of social fitness/normality within both institutions.

Day Two: In Defense of Eugenics

Because I want students to consider all perspectives before forming an opinion, I will use this lesson to explore the reason why eugenicists believed that sterilization was helpful for all citizens. First, students will be provided with the following article to read independently: "Sterilization was often the way out." In this article, the writer presents the viewpoint of sterilization supporters. While reading, they should answer the following questions independently.

- 1.) Who is the speaker of this text? Use evidence to support your answer.

- 2.) According to the speaker of this text, why were individuals sterilized?
- 3.) How does the speaker defend sterilization? Through logic, emotion, or ethics? Give examples from the text.
- 4.) Is this a credible source for information? How do you know?
- 5.) Why do you believe that so many people wanted to support this program? Use evidence from the text.

These are questions that incorporate our non-fiction concepts as well. After I allow students approximately 40 minutes to complete the assignment, we will have a discussion about their responses. I feel that if I follow the questions above, our conversation will address all major points in the article.

Day Three: Socratic seminar

Today my students will lead a 45 minute Socratic seminar using the handout titled, “*Of Mice and Men*, Disability, and Sterilization Seminar” that I have attached to this unit. Students will choose five questions that interest them and they will respond in 4-6 sentences. Also, each student will be responsible for generating an open-ended question that could potentially be posed during discussion. Students will take 20 minutes to complete this assignment.

I will then review the rules and expectations for a Socratic seminar, but students should be familiar with these since I regularly conduct Socratic seminars in my class. The rules that my class will follow during the seminar are as follows:

- One person speaks at a time
- Do not raise your hand; just wait for your turn to talk
- Do not dominate conversation, but instead work to include all participants
- Make connections back to the text
- Stay focused – Do not talk, draw, whisper, laugh, or have side conversations during the Seminar
- Listen and respond to others

For classes who are inexperienced with Socratic discussion, it may be helpful to use an example. Teachers from all grade levels have posted videos on YouTube, so a simple search will yield a variety of examples. When choosing an example for my students, I choose a discussion anchored by a familiar text.

Because the Socratic seminar should be student led, I will merely observe and avoid contributing to or redirecting the conversation. Students will use the questions from Part One of the handout titled, “*Of Mice and Men*, Disability, and Sterilization Seminar Questions”, but they may move through them in any order. They also may not address many of the questions I generated, and they are encouraged to focus on the questions that they generated in Part Two of the handout. While students discuss, I will listen use the

attached rubric to grade participation and conduct. I will only interject if behavior problems or disrespectful comments occur. Otherwise, the seminar will be entirely student-led.

Day Four: Disability Artifacts

To introduce the practice of detournement, I will use a clip from *The Matrix*. *The Matrix* is a 1999 blockbuster film chronicling Neo's departure from the real world (or the matrix) to discover truth. His guide is Morpheus, and Morpheus describes the ways in which the matrix controls all that we do and think. In fact, he compares the matrix to bondage slavery. In many ways, the matrix is another form of a spectacle; it's a series of contrived images that control a passive, ignorant audience. In his article, "The spectacle and detournement," Trier suggests showing a sequence of scenes to scaffold students' understanding of "The Spectacle."^{xiv} If using the DVD to view *The Matrix*, these scenes can be accessed in the following chapters with the following titles: chapter 8, "Morpheus' Proposal; chapter 9, "Down the rabbit hole"; and chapter 10, "Slimy rebirth." The first scene shows the main character, Neo, taking the red pill, which means that he has decided to leave his life of "bondage" to the spectacle so that he can experience what is real. In the second clip, Morpheus describes human beings as the battery that keeps the matrix (or spectacle) running. This sequence of clips, as suggested by Trier, beautifully explains the ways in which media create a spectacle in which we feel the need to consume.

To further elucidate my point, I will show the swastika and ask students what this symbols connotes. I expect my students will immediately associate the swastika with the Nazi party and genocide. They may also be reminded of certain white power movements that use the swastika as a symbol. I will then explain to students that the swastika was original a religious symbol which means "to be well" in Hindu and a sign of peace and good fortune in Buddhism.

Next, I will use the "Media Detournement Project" to introduce the project they need to complete. After reading over the assignment sheet and rubric, I will provide an example of detournement. This detournement can be found on YouTube under the title "TSWL Detournement" and submitted by the user msa8hpsm. The video subverts a scene from the classic teacher savior film, *To Sir with Love*. I will only use the first seven minutes of this detournement as this is a very extensive detournement and I do not want to overwhelm my students. The original message shows the teacher, Sir, telling his students that it is "your duty to change the world. If you can. Not by violence, peacefully. Not by a mob." As this scene is repeated throughout the detournement, the author uses footage from the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-War Vietnam movement, highlighting the power of large group protest.

After viewing, I will ask students to identify the argument of the detournement. English I students are generally familiar with the many movements of the 1960s, and so I believe they will understand that the author is trying to show that change can only be

achieved by force and many people uniting under a common cause. If this message is not understood, I will begin the detournement again and will stop after each clip to discuss how it subverts the original message.

Day Five- Day Seven: Detournement Project Work Days

On Day Five, I will allow students approximately 40-45 minutes to complete #1-2 on the Media Detournement Project handout. This will require students to have access to computers to conduct research. I expect students to be comfortable with this first task since we have analyzed artifacts together in class already.

On day six, students will receive more scaffolding in order to complete #3 on the Media Detournement Project handout. Before giving students individual work time, I will model some brainstorming for #3. I will ask one student to share the brainstorming that they completed for #1 and #2. We as a class will brainstorm some artifacts that could challenge the original artifact. I expect to spend approximately ten minutes brainstorming as a group. I will then allow students another 45 minutes to work independently. Overall, I will set aside an hour in total.

On Day Seven, students will create the Media Detournement product. This will require students to use Photostory, which is a simple and intuitive videomaker, or iMovie. Either program can create a professional product. Again, all students will need access to computers to complete this assignment. I will allow 45 minutes of individual work time. If students finish before the 45 minutes, I will ask them to use the provided rubric to evaluate another student's project.

Day Eight: Presentations

Students will show each detournement to the class and explain the original message they were attempting to subvert. They will then explain how each artifact subverts the original message. This will be an informal presentation and other students will be allowed to ask questions after the presentation. I will use the attached rubric to evaluate projects.

Appendix 1: Implementing Common Core Standards

RL9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from it.

Socratic seminar demands that students use textual support and draw inferences from the novel. The questions that I generated on the preparation handout require students to interact deeply with the literature.

RI9-10.7: Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums, determining which details are emphasized in each account.

While reading various accounts of North Carolina sterilization, students will be focusing on the details that change between each account. They will also determine how the emphasis of certain details in an account can create a different narrative. Students will also consider this standard as they view the example of a detournement: How has the author subverted the meaning of the subject by emphasizing different details?

RI9-10.8: Determine and evaluate the argument and claims in a text, assessing if reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant; identify and fallacious reasoning.

Before creating the detournement project, students will need to evaluate the argument made in a visual or film text. In order to create a detournement, they will be required to identify any “holes” in the argument because they will need to emphasize these inadequacies.

W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation

The Media Detournement Project requires students to consider many perspectives and sources and synthesize those into a single text. They will synthesize these materials with a specific argument in mind.

SL9-10.1: Initiate/participate in collaborative discussions with diverse partners, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

More formally during the Socratic seminar and informally during class discussion, students will be interacting and discussing important topics and ideas. These conversations will be more structured at times and less structured at others so that students can take ownership of the content and tone.

Bibliography for Teachers

Beers, Kylee, and Robert E. Probst. *Notice & Note: Strategies for Close Reading*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2013.

Beers and Probst provide instructional strategies that are useful for struggling readers. I have used some of these strategies with accomplished readers as well, as all students need reminded to be close readers. Additionally, Beers provides rationale for each strategy as well.

DeBord, Guy. *The society of the spectacle*. Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1995.

This is the political text that originally identified the spectacle and the practice of detournement. It is a lengthy, complex, and abstract political text, but it can be helpful to pull from when teaching a higher level class.

Longmore, Paul. "Screening Stereotypes: Images of Disabled People in Television and Motion Pictures." In *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability*, 131-146. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.

Longmore explores the popular stereotypes seen in film. This is an excellent source to use when students are considering the direction they want to go in with the Media Detournement Project. For each stereotype that he explores, he provides relevant pop culture references. I found it to be a helpful guide for considering stereotypes in literature as well.

The Matrix. DVD. Directed by Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski. Warner Brothers Pictures, 1999.

For those who have not already seen this film, it is a powerful exploration of societal constructions. The main character chooses to abandon the life of blindness in order to understand the truth. The film makes the more abstract ideas of spectacle more accessible for students. It is also appropriate for high school aged students.

Siebers, Tobin. "Chapter 1: Introducing Disability Aesthetics" in *Disability Aesthetics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010, 1-20.

Siebers explains aesthetics as "the [tracking of] the sensations that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies." He provides interesting examples of disability art and he presents ethical questions surrounding the categorization of "disability art." Such questions could be considered for in-class discussion or essay writing.

Snyder, Sharon L., and David T. Mitchell, "Subnormal Nation: The Making of a U.S.

Disability Minority.” In *Cultural Locations of Disability*, 69-99. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, 69-99.

This is a fascinating narrative of the ways society has attempted to categorize and quantify sanity and competence. This article focuses on nineteenth and twentieth century disability history. Snyder and Mitchell look mostly at sterilization, education, healthcare, and science.

Trier, James. “The spectacle and detournement.” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 51, no. 3 (2007): 274-278.

I read this text in graduate school and found it to be very interesting and extremely accessible. Trier manages to relate an abstract ideas to themes within blockbuster media. He provides many strategies for teaching detournement and even provides extension activities.

Reading List for Students

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.

List of Materials for Classroom Use

Begos, Kevin. “Sterilization was often the way out.” *Winston-Salem Journal*, December 9, 2002, accessed November 5, 2013, <http://www.journalnow.com/news/local/article_97931328-8fee-11e2-bf88-0019bb30f31a.html?TNNoMobile>

Rose, Julie. “A Brutal Chapter in North Carolina’s Eugenics Past.” *National Public Radio*, December 8, 2011, accessed October 17, 2013, <<http://www.npr.org/2011/12/28/144375339/a-brutal-chapter-in-north-carolinas-eugenics-past>>

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.

“German Poster – 1937” Facing History and Ourselves. <<http://www2.facinghistory.org/campus/oc/reslib.nsf/GL/Propaganda008>> (Accessed November 22, 2013).

“You wouldn’t expect-” Winston-Salem: Human Betterment League of North Carolina. 1950. <<http://familyinequality.wordpress.com/2011/06/24/no-family-for-you/>> (Accessed November 22, 2013).

“TSWL Detournement” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiB_sK91eec>

Of Mice and Men, Disability, and Sterilization Seminar Questions

Part One:

Choose 5 of the following questions to answer in at 4-6 sentences. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper and label them with the number of the question. These questions will be graded as part of your Socratic Seminar grade.

- 1.) Is it appropriate for North Carolina to compensate victims of sterilization now? Why or why not? Are reparations an acceptable way to apologize for sterilization?
- 2.) Should Lennie have been allowed to have children? Why or why not?
- 3.) What qualities make someone a capable parent?
- 4.) What qualities make someone a productive member of society?
- 5.) Should our government have the right to determine whether a person should have children or not?
- 6.) Should Lennie be held responsible for killing Curley's wife? Should he be charged in the court of law?
- 7.) Is it justified for George to kill Lennie?
- 8.) At one point George imagines what life would be like without Lennie. Why do you think he stays with Lennie instead of going on alone? Go beyond the obvious.
- 9.) Sterilization took place fifty years ago; what connections can you draw to our society today? Do we see eugenics happening in different ways?
- 10.) Refer to the last paragraph in the article "Sterilization Was Often the Way Out." Do you agree with Tote when he says, "Society can also be enriched by the way it responds to the needs of others"?
- 11.) What does it mean to be disabled?
- 12.) How are disabled citizens treated in our society today? How is disability treated in high school?
- 13.) What is the role of women in the text? What is Steinbeck saying about the role of women in society?

Part Two:

Write a question or topic that you would like to discuss during seminar. It must be open-ended, meaning there is no right or wrong answer and prompts discussion.

OF MICE AND MEN SOCRATIC SEMINAR RUBRIC

NAME: _____

	4	3	2	1
Conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Patient with differing opinions. *Asks for clarification. *Brings others into convo *Very focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Respectful. *Comments, but does not attempt to involve others. *Generally focused. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Participates but shows impatience. *Some focus. *Engages in “sidebar” conversations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Disrespectful. *Argumentative. *Does not participate.
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Speaks to all participants. *Articulate. *Takes a leadership role without monopolizing the discussion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Speaks to most participants. *Tends to “ramble on” after making a point. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Speaks too softly. *Needs prompting to get involved. *Has no sustainable point *Monopolizes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Reluctant to speak or does not speak at all. *Comments do not support point.
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Cites relevant text. *Relates topic to outside knowledge and other topics. *Makes connections between own thoughts and others’. *Willing to take an alternate viewpoint. *Asks questions to further dialogue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Makes limited connections to others’ ideas. *Some intriguing points that merit reaction. *Some references to text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Accurate on minor points, but misses the main point. *No textual support; “talking of the top of your head.” *Refuses to acknowledge alternate viewpoints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Illogical comments. *Ignores the movement of the seminar.
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Attentive and focused. *Builds on other’s ideas & gives others credit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Generally attentive and focused. *Responds thoughtfully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Appears disconnected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Inattentive. *Comments show lack of understanding. *Takes no notes.
Reading/ Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Familiar with text. *Understands major concepts. *Writing assignment completed on time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Fairly familiar with text. *Asks for references. *Writing assignment completed on time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Confused with key concepts of text. *Writing is completed, but maybe not on time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Unfamiliar with text. *Writing assignment completed but not on time.

Media Detournement Project

In the past three weeks, you have read *Of Mice and Men* and considered the many archetypes of disability presented in the novel. During Socratic Seminar, we considered the archetypes that are present in modern society. From the artifacts presented, it is clear that our conceptions, expectations, and politics of disability have changed significantly since 1930; however, **are modern representations of oppressed groups more accurate and just?**

In the movie *The Matrix*, Morpheus, defines the matrix as “the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.” As a class, let’s more deeply explore the messages within media and the ways in which it “blinds [us] from the truth.”

What is a Detournement?

The purpose of a Detournement is to challenge the meaning behind the media that we consume. We often view advertisements or consume products that reinforce a message that may be harmful to or inaccurate of certain groups. To create a detournement, you will identify one message (or artifact) that you believe misrepresents disabled persons. (Remember that disabled persons can include many groups of people like we discussed in *Of Mice and Men*) You will then pair this artifact with a series of images that undermine, or disprove, the original message.

So how do I complete this project?

- 1.) Identify a media artifact that misrepresents disability and is also controversial. Look for artifacts in magazines, on YouTube, on clothing, in music, etc. _____

What is the message that is sent through this media?

- 2.) Which aspects of this message do you find troublesome, biased, or untrue? _____

- 3.) Identify at least 5 images, quotes, videos, etc. that can be used to challenge the troublesome aspects of this media artifact?

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

4.) Using either iMovie or Photostory, create a Detournement using the original artifact and the five artifacts from #3. If you are unsure how to compile these appropriately, the following is a suggestion (you are welcome to use a different structure):

- Original artifact
- Artifact 1 from #3
- Original artifact
- Artifact 2 from #3
- Original artifact
- Artifact 3 from #3

- Original artifact
- Artifact 4 from #3
- Original artifact
- Artifact 5 from #3
- Original Artifact

How Will I Be Graded on this Project?

Objective	93-100	85-92	77-84	76 and below
Read non-fictional text for accurate comprehension and analysis.	The student exhibits a strong understanding of the underlying message of each text.	The student exhibits an understanding of the message of the text.	The student exhibits an undeveloped or incorrect understanding of the message of the text	The student does not exhibit an understanding of the text.
Use multiple texts to make an argument.	The student chooses texts that make a strong argument against the original text's message.	The student chooses texts that make an argument against the original text's message.	The student chooses texts that respond to, but maybe not argue against, original text's message.	The student chooses texts that are not relevant to the original message.
Use technology to create an original and professional product	The student maximized the capabilities of the program to create a product that is professional and original.	The student used the program effectively to create a product that is professional.	The student used the program effectively to create a product that could be improved upon.	The student either did not use a program or created a product that included a major flaw that interferes with the presentation's meaning.
Present information clearly, concisely and logically.	Presentation is organized; presenters are confident and professional.	Presentation is mostly organized; presenters are mostly confident and professional.	Presentation lacks organization; lacks confidence or professionalism.	Presentation is incoherent or no presentation is given.

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- ⁱ Kylene Beers and Robert E. Probst, *Notice & Note: Strategies for Close Reading*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2013), 16.
- ⁱⁱ Beers and Probst, *Notice & Note*, 17.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Beers and Probst, *Notice & Note*, 17.
- ^{iv} Tony Siebers, "Chapter 1: Introducing Disability Aesthetics," in *Disability Aesthetics*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2010), 3.
- ^v Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 7.
- ^{vi} Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 13-14.
- ^{vii} Sharon T. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, "Subnormal Nation: The Making of a U.S. Disability Minority," in *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 74.
- ^{viii} Snyder and Mitchell, "Subnormal Nation", 70.
- ^{ix} Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 72.
- ^x Longmore, "Screening Stereotypes: Images of Disabled People in Television and Motion Pictures," in *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2003), 141.
- ^{xi} Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 32.
- ^{xii} James Trier, "The spectacle and detournement," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 274 (2007): 6.
- ^{xiii} Guy DeBord, *The Society of the spectacle*, 99.
- ^{xiv} Trier, "The spectacle and detournement," 276.