

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: Michael Myers Grade: 9-12 (OHS Book Club) School: OHS

Book Title: Blindness Genre: Fiction

Author: José Saramago Pages: 352

Publisher: Harcourt Copyright: 1999

In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.

Book Summary and summary citation: (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

From the Publisher

Winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize for Literature. A city is hit by an epidemic of 'white blindness.' The blindness spreads, sparing no one. Authorities confine the blind to a vacant mental hospital secured by armed guards. Inside, the criminal element among the blind hold the rest captive: food rations are stolen, women are raped. There is one eyewitness to this nightmare who guides seven strangers through the barren streets. The developments within this oddly anonymous group -- the first blind man, the old man with the black eye patch, the girl with dark glasses, the boy with no mother, and the dog of tears -- are as uncanny as the surrounding chaos is harrowing.

A parable of loss and disorientation, of man's worst appetites and hopeless weaknesses, *Blindness* is one of the most challenging, thought-provoking, and ultimately exhilarating novels published in any language in recent years.

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s): (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

1. Verify meanings of words by the author's use of comparison and contrast and cause and effect. 12AVA
2. Apply knowledge of roots, affixes and phrases to aid understanding of content area vocabulary. 12AVD
3. Use multiple resources to enhance comprehension of vocabulary

6. Apply reading comprehension strategies, including making predictions, comparing and contrasting, recalling, summarizing, making inferences and drawing conclusions. 12RPA,C
7. Demonstrate comprehension of print and electronic text by responding to questions (e.g., literal, inferential, evaluative and synthesizing). 12RPB
11. Analyze the features and structures of documents and critique them for their effectiveness. 12RAIA
12. Identify and analyze examples of rhetorical devices and valid and invalid

inferences. 12RAIB

13. Critique the effectiveness and validity of arguments in text and whether they achieve the author's purpose.

12RAIC

14. Synthesize the content from several sources on a single issue or written by a single author, clarifying ideas and connecting them to other sources and related topics. 12RAID

College Prep

18. Compare and contrast motivations and reactions of literary characters confronting similar conflicts (e.g., individual vs. nature, freedom vs. responsibility, individual vs. society), using specific examples of character's thoughts, words and actions. 12RALB

19. Recognize and analyze characteristics of sub-genres and American Literature. 12RALC

20. Analyze the characteristics of various literary periods and how the issues influenced the writers of those periods. 12RALC

21. Evaluate ways authors develop point of view and style to achieve specific rhetorical and aesthetic purposes (e.g., through use of figurative language, irony, tone, diction, imagery, symbolism and sounds of language), citing specific examples from text to support analysis. 12RALD,E

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be "cut and pasted" (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Review #1

Jesse Barrett

More frightening than Stephen King, as unrelenting as a bad dream, José Saramago's *Blindness* politely rubs our faces in apocalypse. Its detailed history of an unaccountable epidemic of "white blindness" that inundates the nameless inhabitants of a nameless country makes you fear for your own sight: Have the corners of the pages dimmed ever so slightly? Saramago won this year's Nobel Prize for literature, and at 76 his powers have not dimmed: This fable is so unsettling, so limitlessly allegorical -- the Holocaust, AIDS and Bosnia come to mind -- that it feels infinite. "The whole world is right here," one character tells another. *Blindness* merely amplifies everyone's fundamental helplessness and interdependence and makes plain the lies they tell themselves to get through the day. As a blind ophthalmologist puts it, his useless expertise an emblem of the surplus with which we all burden ourselves, "Perhaps only in a world of the blind will things be what they truly are." In Saramago's view, that truth is what we cannot bear to see. Strip away the power of our eyes, "the windows to the soul" -- a metaphor with which the author teases us repeatedly -- and what's left, he suggests, is little more than ravenous beasts mauling their competitors in the fight for survival. "Evil ... as everyone knows, has always been the easiest thing to do." The reasoned calm with which Saramago depicts the unspeakable (as society collapses outside its walls, the main characters, the first to go blind, struggle for survival inside the asylum in which they have been quarantined) makes the reader long for mercy, for some release from the suffering. And even when that release comes, when the inmates escape the asylum to wander a world gone blind, it's hard to know what to make of it. Are we better off learning to live with our blindness or glorying in what little we can see? And when sight returns, what seems at first to be a happy ending may be anything but.

A metaphor like "white blindness" might easily seem forced or labored, but Saramago makes it live by focusing on the stubbornly literal; his account of a clump of newly blind people trying to find their way to food or to the bathroom provides some surprisingly gripping passages. While this epidemic has a clear symbolic burden, it's also a real and very inconvenient affliction. Saramago is familiar with this balancing act: he has an affinity for skepticism, and his curling, run-on sentences, some of them lasting several ages, have the dense eventfulness, but rarely the tilt into fantasy, of Gabriel García Márquez's in *Autumn of the Patriarch*. The result is a minute study of how effortlessly we can be divested of all that we call "humanity," how fear and selfishness conspire to let us do our worst. "God does not deserve to see," thinks the doctor at the book's lowest point, and Saramago's powerful achievement is to make his readers wonder: What have we wrought by choosing so selectively what we can bear to look in the face? -- Salon

Review #2

Library Journal

To describe as allegory this story of unnamed characters in an unnamed city who are struggling with an undiagnosed epidemic of "white blindness" is both too simple and too complex. Beyond any emblematic purpose, the characters act out life with all its paradoxes and hidden truths. Ultimately, the greater meaning here is the simple story of human frailty and community in the modern world. In searing prose, both complex and minimal, all this and nothing more is revealed. No wonder Saramago won the Nobel prize this year. (LJ 8/98)

What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?

Title: Johnny Got His Gun Author: Dalton Trumbo

Title: The Stand Author: Stephen King

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Document any potentially controversial content:

Some violence, language, sex, and adult situations. There is also a rape scene.

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

Gifted/Accelerated Regular At Risk

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Reading level of this title (if applicable):

Date Submitted to Department Chair: Oct. 30, 2007

Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults