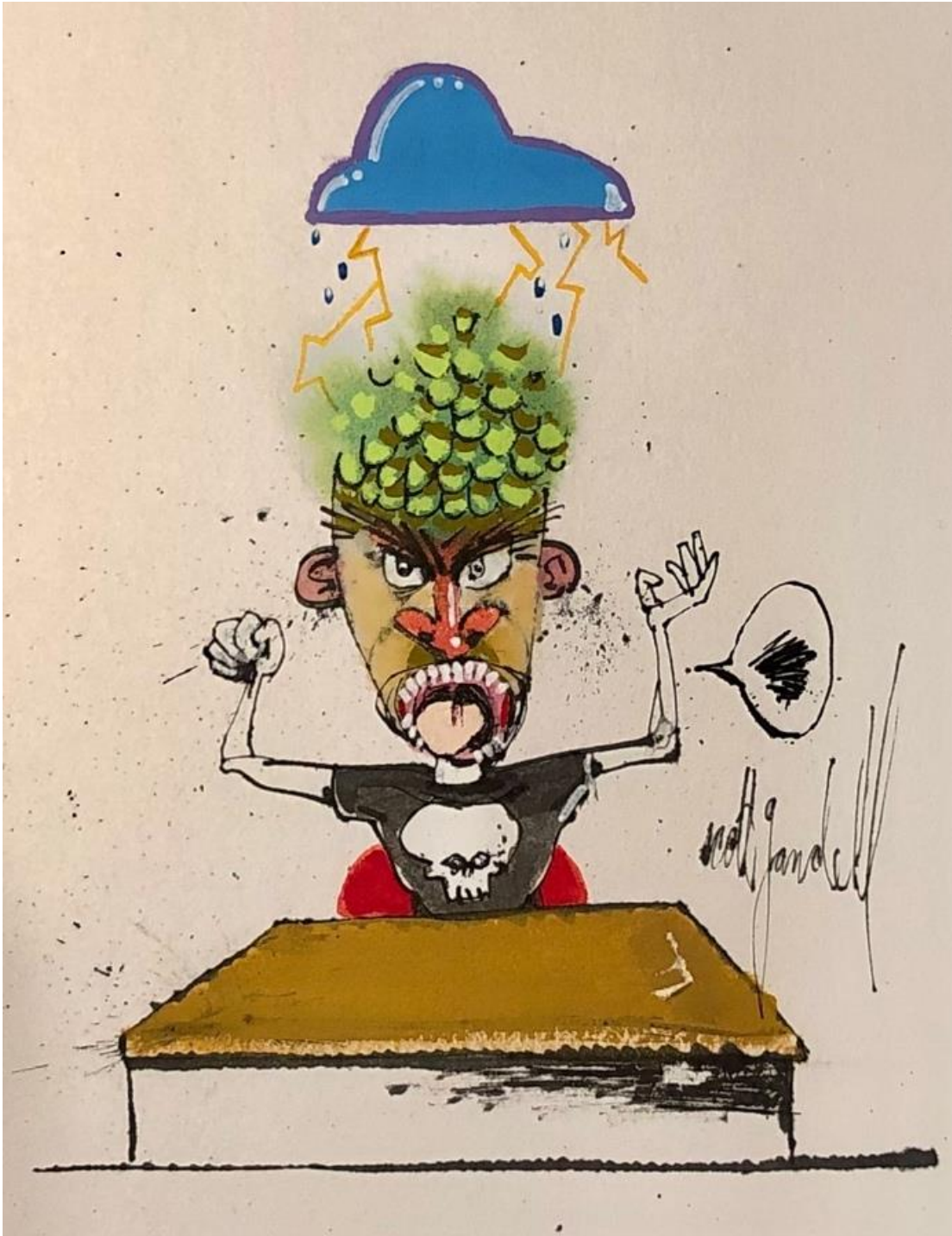


The Good Mr. Finn

By Jervey Tervalon

Illustration by Scott Gandell

Curriculum developed by Andrew Ramirez



OVERVIEW

Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	* 16-18/ 11th - 12th grade
Genre/s	* Memoir * Vignette
Length	* 729 words (7 minute read)
Content Advisories	* References to violence * References to drugs * Language * Reference to gangs
One-Sentence Summary	After running out their previous teacher, a rough class is assigned a new teacher that changes the way they act... but for how long?
Lesson Planning	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Public education vs. Private education * Classroom culture * Gangs and violence * Alternative identity and mainstream response * The value of a good mentor * Long term financial issues with education <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Anger * Boredom * Masculinity * Pride * Knowledge * Authenticity
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	* Inner city education in the 80s * School-to-prison pipeline
Complementary Text	* Novel Excerpt: The Nickelboys by Colston Whitehead * Article: "What Students Are Saying About How to Improve American Education" by The Learning Network * Interactive webpage: The State of Funding Equity Data Tool by The Education Trust
Author	Jervey Tervalon is a Los Angeles-based writer and professor.
Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	<p>Grades 9th-10th Common Core Standards:</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9</p>

	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3</p>
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Author Biography

Jervey Tervalon, MFA, is the award-winning, *Los Angeles Times* best-selling author of five books, including *Understand This*, a novel based on his experiences teaching at Locke High School in Los Angeles, for which he won the Quality Paperback Book Club’s New Voices award. His newest novel, *Monster’s Chef*, was released by HarperCollins in 2014. He was the Remsen Bird Writer in Residence at Occidental College and is now an associate professor at National University and a lecturer at the College of Creative Studies at UC Santa Barbara. He’s lectured at USC and Occidental College. He is also an award-winning poet, screenwriter, dramatist, and the Founder and Editor of *Locavore Lit LA*. Jervey was born in New Orleans and raised in Los Angeles. He received his MFA from UC Irvine and studied with Thomas Keneally, author of *Schindler’s Ark*.

Artist Biography

Scott Gandell wears many hats. He descends from a long line of creatives and business professionals. His experience is as diverse as the subjects he illustrates. He is a proud alumnus of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. (https://www.gallerynucleus.com/artists/scott_gandell)

SYNOPSIS

The young narrator is a student at a rough middle school in Los Angeles. His temporary teacher, a condescending man, is hated universally by the class. The day before Spring Break, another student tries to punch him in the face. The teacher runs away never to be seen again. Their next temporary teacher is a gay man named Mr. Finn. To the shock of everyone, instead of being treated like all the other teachers, he wins the students over. Through kindness and hard work, Mr. Finn builds great trust with the class. But just like any temporary teacher, soon he leaves and a new teacher comes in.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic

Journaling:

In a 15-minute journal entry, explore the following prompt:

Write about a time you “rooted” for somebody... maybe your favorite sports team, or a friend or family member who plays in a band, or a stand-up comedian you saw at a show. How did it feel to cheer them on? Were the other people in the audience on your side, or against you? After the event, did you feel overjoyed... or defeated... or somewhere in between? Did you get a chance to talk to whoever you cheered for? How did they feel, or how do you think they felt?

Note: You may tell this story any way you want... but be sure to pay close attention to emotions you felt during the experience, as well as how your emotions changed, shifted, or differed from others around you.

Main Ideas

Small-Group Discussion:

Based on the story, as well as your personal experiences, what’s the most effective way to lead people? Do good leaders rely primarily on kindness, or harsh discipline, or something else? If you were put into the position to lead a group of people, how would you go about it? Do you believe good leaders are people who always know what they’re doing?

**Go around the small group, sharing thoughts and ideas. How do your answers overlap and differ from one another?*

Passage-Specific Themes

Small-Group and Class Discussion:

Read the following passage from “The Good Mr. Finn.” Discuss the questions below in small groups, then share your ideas with the class:

Spring break was coming and soon we’d be free from this school that was about keeping us locked in and off the streets and not much more. The single goal after school was getting home without getting beat down or jacked. But before the great spring break immigration could commence, Steve Rogers had to get beat down. The clock hands were about to align at three and he stood before us scowling and severe, sporting a glaring white dress shirt starched to the point of rigidity and a narrow black tie for added emphasis, not realizing his beat down was coming.

Up to this moment he was our better, or so he thought.

Question One: What does the author mean by school “keeping us locked in and off the streets and not much more.” Based on this passage, what is the school doing wrong? Is it the teacher’s fault? Is it the students’ fault? Other than the students and the teacher, who else could help make this situation better?

Question Two: Think of different perceptions of the same event. Imagine the teacher was describing this class to another teacher. How do you think he would describe the class, and his experience with them? Do you think he dislikes his students as much as they dislike him?

In other words, do you believe the teacher is as bad as the students describe him? Why do you think Tervalon chooses to not include the inner thoughts of the teacher in this passage, as well as the rest of the story?

Universal Themes

What goes into creating one’s own identity? Is identity something people are born with, or something they develop as they grow older? What aspects of identity, in your opinion, can change? Do you believe certain aspects of people’s identity never change? Explain.

Reflect on your identity as a person. What, to this point, has helped shape your identity? When it comes to other people, do you gravitate toward people with a similar identity to yours, or different? Why do you think this is?

Key Vocabulary

Definitions are context-dependent. Make sure any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
commence	ample	concentrated
starched	shell shocked	condescension
powder blue	torment	elusive
haymaker	leisure suit	civil
devour	scowling	surreal
stray	zig-zag	dutiful

Vocabulary Activity Options

1. Select one word from the vocabulary list. What makes this word special to you? Perhaps it’s the definition... maybe it’s just the way the word sounds... or the way it looks on paper. It could be a combination of things too. With a partner, discuss what makes the word special to you. Then, ask your partner what they think of the word. Take turns sharing your FAVORITE word with a partner, and take notes on what your partner has to say.

Then, share your partner’s favorite word to the class. (This is where your notes will come in handy!) Share what your partner liked about the word, as well as their logic for why it was such a great word.

2. Write a short story, poem, or essay about your LEAST favorite word from the vocabulary list. Your creative endeavor could be rooted in why you dislike the word... could have to do with its definition, the way the word sounds... even just the way it looks on paper. Maybe the word is associated with a negative or detriment to this world. Finally, use your least favorite word as the title of your short story, poem, or essay.

If you are up for it, share an excerpt of your creative work with the class.

3. Select a word from the vocabulary list that can mean two different (or different-ish) things. An example of this is “punch”... which can be a delicious fruit drink, or hitting someone or something. How does the word manage to serve both definitions? Which version of the word do you prefer, and why? Maybe it sounds more like the definition, maybe it just looks or feels right. After, a few students may present their dual meaning vocab word to the class. After each presentation, have the class vote on which version of the word they prefer.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. Do you think the class is right for wanting to “beat up” their teacher at the beginning of the story? Why or why not? What does the teacher do to perhaps deserve it? In what way is the class being unfair to the teacher?
2. What kind of student do you think the narrator is? What things can you infer about the narrator from this story, despite there being very little description of him.
3. What kind of teacher do you think the students will get after Mr. Finn leaves? Do you think the class will accept or destroy their new teacher? Do you think Mr. Finn will have a lasting effect on the class after he’s gone? Why or why not?
4. What does the narrator mean by, “Spring break was coming and soon we’d be free from this school that was about keeping us locked in and off the streets and not much more.” Why do you think the narrator chooses to add *and not much more* to the end of the sentence? How does this change or affect the impact of the sentence? Or does it have no effect at all?

** Text-Dependent Question Options

1. Associate one shape to Mr. Finn and one shape the “bad” teacher the narrator refers to as Steve Rogers. (Example: Mr. Finn is a circle. Steve Rogers is a trapezoid.) After you have a shape for each teacher, find two examples from the text that support this shape association for both characters (so FOUR text examples total, two for each teacher). Be sure to pay attention to how each person is characterized, and explain the connection between that characterization and the shape you have chosen. Share your shape associations with the class.

HEADS UP: If you cannot think of a good shape, you may associate a color instead. (Ex. Mr Finn is a dark shade of magenta. Steve Rogers is yellow.)

2. Do you think the narrator is a good student or a bad student... or somewhere in the middle? How does the text indirectly tell us what kind of student the narrator is? Furthermore, do you think the narrator wants to beat up the teacher at the beginning of the story? Why or why not?
3. How does the world OUTSIDE of the classroom reflect or contradict the world INSIDE of the classroom? Find two moments from the text... one that describes the world within the classroom,

and one moment that describes the world outside of the classroom. What are the similarities or differences between these two text examples?

4. How does the artwork support or enhance the TONE of this story? In your opinion, does the art represent the peaceful essence of Mr. Finn, or the chaotic energy of the class, and the teachers before them? Or is it a combination of the two? Explain.

Writing Exercises

Narrative

“The Good Mr. Finn” tells the story of a class that feels hatred toward one teacher, and respect toward another, Mr. Finn. This duality creates an honest three-dimensional portrayal of the class that feels believable and relatable. We’ve all been in good classes... and not-so-good classes... who hasn’t?

With this in mind, I want you to think of the best teacher you ever had, ever since you started school. As you think, ask yourself what made this teacher so interesting to you? Maybe it was their dedication to the subject they taught? Or maybe they were incredibly organized and prepared everyday? Maybe they just had a sense of humor that could always catch the class’s attention.

With your favorite teacher in mind, write about one experience you or the class had with this teacher. Maybe it was an interesting lesson they taught. Or maybe they improvised and had to break up a fight, or help out in an emergency. Or maybe you just had a positive learning experience that you want to share.

You may write your narrative out as one class day, or one single period, or even just a quick moment or instance where the teacher showed greatness. As you write, focus on showing not just how the teacher functioned, but also how the student or students reacted to the teacher too.

Descriptive

“My heart stopped and sweat stung my eyes. Did he just call me ‘Jervey Topsy Turvy’? He had just drawn a target on my back. I’d be getting punched while dudes be shouting, “Punk ass Jervey Topsy Turvy!”

In a one page response, describe a time when you were caught off guard or surprised by something. Be sure to include what led up to the moment, as well as what happened after. Use rich language to describe how you felt, as well as what you said and thought during the moment.

NOTE: This unexpected moment does not have to be about a big, life-changing event. It can be as simple as you want — like eating an unexpectedly good cheeseburger... or hearing a funny joke! Just be sure to tell the story with plenty of details to keep the reader interested.

Complementary Text Option

Read this paragraph from Colson Whitehead’s novel *The Nickelboys*. It’s about two friends who are sent to a segregated boys reformatory with a cruel administration and a haunting past. The following passage

describes the annual “Fight Night”, where two boys (one white, one black) fight each other in a boxing match.

The combat served as a kind of mollifying spell, to tide them over through the daily humiliations. The colored boys had held the boxing title for fifteen years, since 1949. Old hands on the staff still remembered the last white champion and talked him up. Terry (Doc) Burns had been an anvil-handed good old boy from a musty corner of Suwannee County, who’d been sent to Nickel for strangling a neighbor’s chickens. Twenty-one chickens, to be exact, because “they were out to get him.” Pain had rolled off Doc Burns like rain from a slate roof. After he returned to the free world, the white boys who advanced to the final fight were pikers, so wobbly that over the years the tall tales about the former champion had grown more and more extravagant: nature had gifted Doc Burns with an unnaturally long reach; his legendary combo had swatted down every comer and rattled windows. In fact, Doc Burns had been beaten and ill-treated by so many in his life—family and strangers alike—that by the time he arrived at Nickel all punishments were gentle breezes.

** Writing Exercise

In “The Good Mr. Finn” Tervalon writes:

“Sit down,” he demanded, but no one listened. A skinny kid rushed him first, a slit-eyed wannabe gangster. Steve shouted at him to sit back down, the class had not ended. And Steve got slugged. He ran for it as he had to do and sprinted to the asphalt playground and did zig-zag patterns as the skinny wannabe gangster trailed him throwing stray haymakers. It was mesmerizing and satisfying until it became clear that Steve was kind of elusive. The bell had rung and we all headed home for our Easter break.

PROMPT: Both excerpts describe a violent event that gives the audience an enjoyable, even cathartic, experience. Compare and contrast the two types of violence in each excerpt. Why does the violence appeal to each crowd in the text? In each excerpt, do you believe the violence justified or unnecessary? Do you believe a world without violence would be a better place? Explain. Why do you think both audiences enjoy violence in these moments?

(As you think about these questions, be sure to think about who is fighting who in each excerpt. Also, is each “fighter” prepared for the fight? What is at stake for each fighter? Is it a fair fight?)

Interactive Classroom Activity

STEP ONE: Students will explore the [“State of Funding” interactive map](#). While gathering information from the map, students should note which states have the highest funding, and which states are closest to the bottom. After clicking around this map and looking at a few numbers, in your opinion is there a LINK between educational effectiveness and the amount of money that is poured into it?

STEP TWO: After, students will take a look at the article titled, [“What Students Are Saying About How to Improve American Education”](#). After reading a few student testimonies from around the United States (and noting which part of the country they are from) how does their opinion of education support or challenge the amount of educational funding that is entering their state?

STEP THREE: After looking at both of these sources, do you believe money is the “answer” to poor educational systems throughout the US? Or is it just one part of a bigger puzzle that our nation still needs to solve, as we enter a new era of students finding their way in the world?

COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

This story and its exercises are appropriate for 9th grade and above. 9th- and 10th-grade standards are cited.

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, or orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A: Analyze a. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and reasoning.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A: Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, a. Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes)d include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics, multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, oc(extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

Text-Dependent Question Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C: Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas d and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A: Analyze a. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, oc(extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B: Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.