The Great Gatsby

Developer/Publisher: National Endowment for the Arts

View Resource ⬆

Review Year: 2013
Note that this resource may have been updated since the review. Check the developer website to see if there is a more recent version available.

Format:
☒ online
☒ PDF
☐ editable document

Professional Development:
Selected participants in The Big Read receive a grant, access to online PD, and additional supports.

Standards Correlation:
None

2013 OER Review Full Report
This resource was reviewed by Washington educators with subject matter expertise and deep familiarity with the state learning standards. Learn more about the review instruments and process by reading the full report.

Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products (EQuIP) Overall Rating:
Needs Revision (1.8)  learn more about EQuIP

Subject: English Language Arts
Grade: 9-12
Scope: Unit
Duration: 2 Weeks
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OER Project
Learning and Teaching Department
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Amount of work required to bring into CCSS alignment:
Minor-Moderate

Background from OER Project Team
The unit from the Big Read, a program of the National Endowment for the Arts, was designed to meet NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) standards. This should factor into the viewer’s analysis of the review results. Resources include reader, teacher, and an audio guide. Though the program supports organizations developing community-wide reading programs with associated events, the digital materials are available to all in pdf format which may be printed.

Reviewer Comments

Review 1
The unit for Great Gatsby created by the National Endowment for the Arts “Big Read” program is highly engaging. The ten lessons within it ask the students to read and analyze a complex literary text but many of the assignments lack formative assessments and rubrics that could be more helpful.

In the Reader’s Guide, the historical context time line is concise and easy to use for a quick reference of the time period. And the information about F. Scott Fitzgerald helps the reader understand how his life is incorporated into Gatsby’s world.

Additional Fitzgerald book titles are listed as are other works about Fitzgerald, the writer, and the Jazz Age. Also, referenced are many educational websites.

The “Essay Topics” listed in the Teacher’s Guide ask students to write using "supporting reasons that should be backed by references to the text," which aligns closely with the CCSS.

However, the ten (daily) lessons seem the most problematic. The time frame recommended is too short for many of the assignments given. One example is that I would not begin the essay assignment on day nine and ask for an outline on the next day. Then "have students work on their essays in class while they partner with another student for editing and rough drafts,” on day ten. Overall, this type of writing will take at least a week or more. I would start by giving a rubric, going over past exemplary student papers, brainstorming, writing, editing, revising and re-writing before publishing. Another area of writing weakness was the lack of on-demand writing, which could be incorporated into any of the ten lessons.

Two of the three handouts seemed relevant, including the one on "Prohibition" and the one on "Gatsby’s Guide to Manhood". I am fascinated by "Harlem in the Jazz Age" but this handout would fit better with Zora Neale Hurston and Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Although the NCTE Standards are definitely addressed in this unit, some of the ideas in the Capstone Projects and discussion questions (in the Reader’s Guide) are far more personal response or artistic interpretation than text-dependent questions. Also, even though the audio guide was interesting for me as I adore Maureen Corrigan, Robert Redford and Sam Waterson, I question how relevant it would be to high school juniors and if they would be willing to sit through it for 29 minutes.

This unit has many elements that I will definitely use next year and with a few improvements, it could be go-to piece of the American Literature curriculum for many Washington State teachers.
I would use this material in my classroom: Agree
On a 4 point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree

Review 2

The unit plan being assessed for this novel is 10 days and provides discussion, writing, and homework activities for each day. All activities that are presented are grounded in the text and focus on literary skills such as characterization, figurative language, plot and theme to name a few. While instructions for the daily activities are clear, concise and text-centered, student handouts and rubrics are not included within the reviewed materials. Daily activities (discussion, writing and homework) are varied allowing students a range of modes to demonstrate their knowledge/comprehension/analysis of the text, yet no clear, aligned rubrics are present.

Multiple opportunities exist for students to write for different purposes and audiences; however, no rubrics/assessment tools are provided. These writing tasks require students to refer to text evidence to support their stances.

As this unit is centered around a specific novel, The Great Gatsby, there is not a progression of complex texts contained within this unit. Other than the few schema-building pieces of informational text (mainly these are in place to build students' schema of the time period that this novel was written and set in), the core reading of this unit is the novel itself. No information text is included that allows comparison/contrasts to be made with the novel or requires students to analyze how the two pieces treat a given topic/theme.

While the suggested time frame of 10 days to complete a complex novel such as The Great Gatsby seems rather lofty, the unit provides text-centered activities forcing students to think deeply. Since additional resource links are provided which, on initial review, include some lessons/activities/rubrics that could be included for a more thorough unit plan. While there is a link to additional outside resources, there are not any supports for lower level students or extensions for advanced students indicated in the reviewed unit. Activities (discussion, writing and homework) are varied allowing students a range of modes to demonstrate their knowledge/comprehension/analysis of the text, yet no clear, aligned rubrics are present. Taken in all, minimum work would be required for lessons to be classroom ready and solidly aligned with Common Core.

I would use this material in my classroom: Agree
On a 4 point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree

Review 3

The Great Gatsby Unit created by the National Endowment for the Arts focuses on the novel itself, the cultural and historical background of the times, and interpretations and discussion by people in the art world. Modeling critical thinking about the work, Robert Redford (actor, director), Matthew Bruccoli (Fitzgerald scholar) and others discuss the book as part of The Big Read, “a major initiative from the National Endowment for the Arts designed to revitalize the role of literary reading in American culture.” For anyone who has listened to a director’s cut of a film, this is similar. There are teacher lesson plans taking the students through the book in ten days, more or less, with guiding questions for the reading, discussion prompts, informational handouts and other electronic resources for processing the novel. The discussion around the novel is sophisticated, but very accessible, especially as much of it is spoken. Though the standards upon which the unit is based come from NCTE, the CCSS are similar. The unit addresses the standards in terms of reading, writing, speaking and listening. There are links to other interesting websites such as NEA’s Jazz in the Schools, the American Masters site, and the American History (somewhat interactive) Time Line. Though the lessons seem simple, the questions are solid and the whole
unit is manageable and stays focused laser-like on the text. Teachers will not be overwhelmed by too much information or possibility. The unit is interesting for the students, balances information with close analysis, and has ample opportunities for writing. The unit closes with a capstone project offering a variety of ways for students to express their understanding of the text.

I would use this material in my classroom: Strongly Agree

On a 4 point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree

Review 4

This unit could easily be used with minor changes. What is here is easily used and aligns to many of the CCSS standards, but modifications will need to be made to ensure that all students can access the material and that it is appropriately scaffolded for ELL, SPED and below-grade level readers. Addition of informational text to enhance learning about the 1920s, prohibitions and the jazz era could easily help to balance the text and to help build content knowledge. Explicit building of academic vocabulary could be built in to further strengthen and align the unit. Currently, the assessments are not bad, but there are not rubrics are criteria for assessment, so the inclusion of performance indicators would assist many teachers particularly those early in their careers. The unit does provide some alternative assessment opportunities entitled capstone projects; however, other types of assessments beyond an essay might engage students and would allow more standards to be met through research and synthesis of multiple texts.

One of the strengths of this unit is all the formative writing tasks that allow students to process their thinking about the book and the variety of discussion questions that force students to utilize the texts. A teacher can build on this, and if they want to use the focus lesson and add different types of literature from the same time period or other time periods to explore symbols, character, figurative language, etc. you could deepen how students look at Gatsby and literature.

Overall, this unit addresses many of the elements that the new CCSS requires, and as no single unit will do everything, as part of a whole would address a number of CCSS and the rigor of the questions and the type of writing would be good with minor changes and supports for students not at grade level.

I would use this material in my classroom: Agree

On a 4 point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree