Existentialism: A Quest for the Absurd

WebQuest Description: This WebQuest entails the concept of existentialism; more specifically its subcategory of the notion of the Absurd. This WebQuest is to be completed after having read The Stranger and The Metamorphosis, by Camus and Kafka, respectively. Upon reading both texts, students are to analyze and draw parallels between each in the mode of existentialist thought. In order to do so, however, a basic knowledge of this term must first be ascertained.

Grade Level: 9-12
Curriculum: English / Language Arts
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Introduction

If you've ever held a common curiosity regarding human existence, your life's meaning, or the anxiety derived from contemplating such fettered topics, this assignment will further your interest and suggest some answers. Now that you have read The Stranger and The Metamorphosis and participated in class discussion, you should have been able to identify some similarities between the two stories, namely the central theme of existentialism. Armed with the fresh memory of both texts, you should be prepared to delve further into this philosophical concept; the consequent knowledge acquired should prove quite rewarding.

Tasks

In The Stranger and The Metamorphosis, Camus and Kafka both illustrate that human existence is absurd and lacks any grander significance. Therefore, the main characters (Meursault and Samsa, respectively) in each story are free to fit into their lives whatever meaning they choose. However, this can only happen after becoming aware of life's transience: Meursault is able to fulfill life and give it meaning by accepting his mortality as part of the "gentle indifference of the world." Similarly, Gregor Samsa succumbs to the absurdity of life and can enjoy living only when he accepts his need to disappear completely. In your designated groups, your task is to compare the protagonists of each novel to one another and how both conveyed the theme of existentialism through their character. Working together, you will present a Powerpoint presentation to the class. Each group will present an assigned theme of existentialism to the rest of the class, and how that aspect ties into each story's characters.

Process

You will be assigned into groups of 4. Your group must find examples in The Stranger and The Metamorphosis and contrast the presence of your assigned theme in each. You will present your ideas via Powerpoint presentation. The Powerpoint must be visually appealing, contain accurate information about existentialism, and each group member must present a segment of the presentation. Each group member will have a different role; they will be assigned a position: One will find examples in The Stranger, One will find examples in The Metamorphosis, One will record the findings and compare, and One will manage the construction of the Powerpoint, but all will help to contribute. Most of the information you will need to complete this assignment can be found at: http://www.dividingline.com/private/Philosophy/RealmofExistentialismbyKatharenaEiermann.shtml Some other potentially helpful sources: Some other potentially helpful sources: http://www.tameri.com/cswe/exist.html http://www.connect.net/ron/existentialism.html

Evaluation
In completing this WebQuest assignment you should have a confident understanding of not only existentialism in general, but its founding components as well. You should benefit from this assignment by realizing different theories on the human condition, and hopefully will be able to relate some of these ideas to real-life experiences. Also, this project should have made you more adept at utilizing Powerpoint as effective tool for conveying information. Don't hesitate to draw your own conclusions and personal insights as a result of reading these culturally significant novels and learning what they have to offer. Hopefully, either these readings and completion of this project may encourage you to explore further into the topic of existentialism; along with other major philosophies, it will drive you to ask questions and formulate your own answers, as well as drawing ideas from others. Invariably, some questions just lead to more questions than answers, but such is life.

Focus: This WebQuest imbibes the existentialist ideals derived from the novels The Stranger and The Metamorphosis, by Camus and Kafka, respectively. The focus is to have students compare the protagonists from each novel in an existential light. Objectives: Obviously, if you are to utilize some ideas from this WebQuest, it is appropriate that your students read/have read one or both novels. Students will learn to question more effectively the cause of such anxieties that question life in general. Students will also learn to effectively utilize Powerpoint.

Standards

Credits

Other