

The Road by Cormac McCarthy (2006)

Summary of the Work:

From *Good Reads*: “*The Road* is a searing, postapocalyptic novel destined to become Cormac McCarthy’s masterpiece.

A father and his son walk alone through burned America. Nothing moves in the ravaged landscape save the ash on the wind. It is cold enough to crack stones, and when the snow falls it is gray. The sky is dark. Their destination is the coast, although they don’t know what, if anything, awaits them there. They have nothing; just a pistol to defend themselves against the lawless bands that stalk the road, the clothes they are wearing, a cart of scavenged food—and each other.

The Road is the profoundly moving story of a journey. It boldly imagines a future in which no hope remains, but in which the father and his son, “each the other’s world entire,” are sustained by love. Awesome in the totality of its vision, it is an unflinching meditation on the worst and the best that we are capable of: ultimate destructiveness, desperate tenacity, and the tenderness that keeps two people alive in the face of total devastation.”

Rationale:

This novel clearly works well in a senior-level English class like AP Literature and College Literature. In fact, on the AP Lit exam Question 3 (where students write on a novel of their choice that best fits the prompt), *The Road* is one of the most oft-chosen novels. As well, in a course like dual-credit College Lit (Lit 110, MUS), the novel successfully reaches a range of readers on several thematic and discursive levels. A plethora of themes play out in the novel as the father and the boy eke out their existence journeying south towards a coast in a laid-waste landscape: life; death; family; parent-child; protector-protectee; morality and moral compass; justice; minimalism; the vanishing natural world; the motif of the boy and father “carrying the fire” and the suggestion of a messianic parable etc.

“All powerfully and poetically exploring a dying earth riven by an unidentified apocalyptic event.” (from *The Artifice*).

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

In 2006, McCarthy was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in fiction and the Believer Book Award and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction. On April 16, 2007, *The Road* was awarded the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Interesting backstory (from Wikipedia): “On March 28, 2007, the selection of *The Road* as the next novel in Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club was announced. A televised interview on The Oprah Winfrey Show was conducted on June 5, 2007, McCarthy’s first, although he had been interviewed for the print media before.^[8] During Winfrey’s interview, McCarthy insisted his son, John Francis, was also his co-author, as some of the conversations between the father and son in the novel were based upon conversations

Noted Distinction: Readability

- Lexile Score: 800

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

between McCarthy and John Francis in real life. McCarthy also dedicated the novel to his son, possibly as an expression of paternal love as well as a depiction of it, although he did not say as much in the interview.”

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Connection to the Curriculum:

RI.11- 12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RI.11- 12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text. RI.11- 12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, cultures, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)