Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Developer/Publisher: National Endowment for the Arts

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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 (1.5)   [learn more about EQuIP](#)
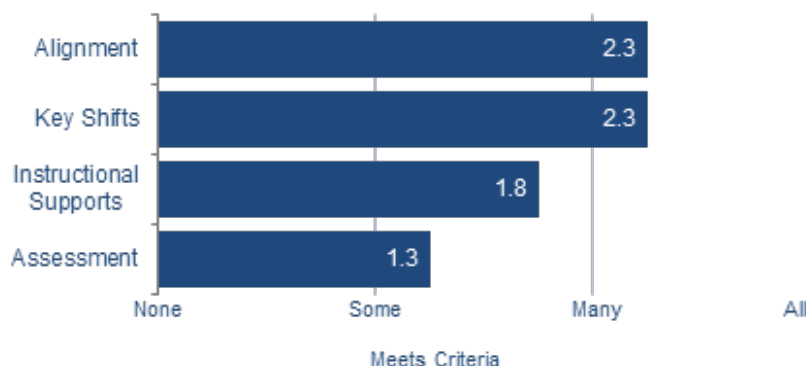
Subject:
English Language Arts

Grade:
9-12

Scope:
Unit

Duration:
2 Weeks

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OER Project
Learning and Teaching Department
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

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. A Spanish version is also available. 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

This is a well-organized, traditional, single-novel literary analysis unit. While the text, Tom Sawyer, is indicated for the 6-8 CCR text complexity band, the unit poses many text-dependent questions appropriate for grades 11-12 that provide opportunity for a deep, thought-provoking read of the novel. The unit focuses on figurative language, character development, point of view, satire, and theme. Teachers will appreciate the standard structure of lesson plans, progressing from text-focused reading homework, to discussion, to writing. One drawback of the unit is that it may try to cover too much ground in too short a time period. Ten days is reasonable for a reading of Tom Sawyer, however, it is questionable that students will be able to complete the amount of writing suggested in the unit in the time allotted. For example, one lesson suggests having students identify humor and sarcasm in the first three chapters, discuss the use of satire within the novel and how it reflects Twain's skepticism of society, then write a two page paper on how the limits of school and church affect the child characters in the novel. This is an ambitious plan for a single traditional class period. Many of the lessons seem best suited to block periods. Also, the broad scope and fast pace of the unit leaves out time for the development of research skills, extended writing skills (including revision), and multi-text analysis. This unit would be ideal for the beginning of the year to give students a foundation in close reading skills, and could build toward a comparative, synthesis, or research unit that includes rich non-fiction texts. Teachers will appreciate the strong questions posed in the unit, but will need to develop specific reading and writing supports, and create evaluation criteria for assignments. No rubrics are provided. This unit could easily be put into stronger alignment with the CCSS if the close read of Tom Sawyer were paired with opportunities to revise writing for a purpose, conduct research, or examine how other fiction or non-fiction texts treat shared themes.

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

Review 2

The most significant problem with the use of this text is the text complexity level. It is not an appropriate text for an 11th grade American Literature course. The lexile level is high 5th grade low 6th grade and when you add the qualitative rubric it might move to 8th, possible 9th grade depending on the reader tasks. This being said, the actual unit was relatively well designed and I would recommended it for a lower level grade, possible an 8TH grade humanities class where US history is being taught.

The largest issue with the National Endowment units is the purpose for which they were designed, which means they have left out many of the scaffolding pieces that a classroom teacher would expect to see addressed. The tasks and the structure of the units is a solid foundation for adding the scaffolds for ELL, SPED and below grade level readers as well as the rubrics and assessment guidelines that are non-existent. The lessons my also take a bit longer than projected if you add the scaffolded pieces. This unit does not address academic vocabulary development or the writing process which it really needs to do. There is also significant room to expand the use of informational text and/or literary non-fiction in order to create balance it the types of text. Each of the National Endowment units is structured around learning about the structure and tools of literature so there is room to further develop students understanding of things like Biography, Culture and History, Characters, Narrative and Point of View, Symbols, Figurative Language, Character Development, Plot Unfolds, Theme, What Makes a Great Book by adding other pieces of literature that address these areas and this would address other CCSS, showing students how to connect multiple pieces of literature together. This would also create choice which these units do not have as they are focused on one text.

The questions in this unit do ask students to talk and write about the text specifically and many of the tasks build upon each other. The level of the questions was relatively high and would cause students to think deeply about the text. In a couple of places students were even asked to make connections outside of the text, but it would be good if this was expanded and students were asked to connect to other texts they had read or were reading as part of the unit.

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

Review 3

This unit on the Adventures of Tom Sawyer, by Mark Twain, is part of the Big Read Initiative, "a program of the National Endowment for the Arts, designed to revitalize the role of literature in American culture and to encourage citizens to read for pleasure and enlightenment." The project addresses research showing a decline in literary reading, particularly among the young. The instructional format is largely uniform for each novel in the NEA set. There are ten lessons of instruction that move logically from background knowledge, through the book with topics such as characterization and symbols, then ending with themes and a summation about what makes a novel great. The Big Read Tom Sawyer unit also has an audio portion delivered by such experts such as poet Dana Gioia, film maker Ken Burns, and Twain biographer Tom Powers; they offer the reader depth and explanation about the content and craft of the book, as Sam Elliot reads selected sections. Richness is created through the music such as the "mournful songs sung by slaves" and the sounds of steamboats punctuating the commentary. Twain was deeply affected by the sounds and rhythms of life on the Mississippi. The commentary discusses the creation of Twain's characters and particularly their voices, key to the popularity of his novels. The instructional activities include short writes, group presentations, guiding questions for the reading homework, discussions, and a capstone project. The questions and discussion prompts probe the novel deeply and ask the students to look for evidence in the text in their answers. Students engage in the spectrum of ELA; they read fiction and non-fiction, write in a variety of forms and for multiple purposes, listen, and speak. Students are asked to think about one text in terms of another, as well as being asked to compare and contrast multiple points of view on a single topic. For example, in Lesson 9 the students are asked to decide if the book depicts a positive or negative view of childhood after reading the novel and the article "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: A Nightmare Vision of American Boyhood," by Cynthia Griffin Wolff. The lessons are tied to the NCTE standards which are similar to the Common Core State Standards. There are many opportunities for formative assessment and the capstone culminating projects offer students numerous ways to illuminate their understanding of the novel. There are no

specific scoring directions. Also, there are no specific differentiation strategies for teaching below level or ELL readers, however the audio commentary makes the novel more accessible and interesting. Often students struggle with the dialect or voice of Twain's world and hearing the words spoken by Sam Elliott demystify the words on the page. For enrichment, there is a section of amazing additional resources. This unit is very user-friendly for the teacher, well-organized; it does not overwhelm with too much material and too many choices.

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

Review 4

The entire unit plan being assessed for this novel incorporates 10 days and provides discussion, writing, and homework activities for each day. Most of the reviewed activities are grounded in the text and focus on literary skills such as characterization, figurative language, plot and theme; a few of the activities could be strengthened by adding follow up questions requiring students to produce text evidence to back up their opinions.

Multiple opportunities exist for students to write for different purposes and audiences; however, no rubrics/assessment tools are provided. These writing tasks thoroughly require students to refer to text evidence to support their stances. Although no student handouts or rubrics are provided, text-centered activities are provided, so minimum work would be required for lessons to be classroom ready. Additionally, the writing prompts do not call specifically for students to engage in the writing process other than one lesson asking for students to work on their essay's outline, but this could be easily remedied if the writing process was a teacher's targeted objective.

While the reviewed activities are rigorous and provide ample opportunity for deeper learning, only a few pieces of informational text are included; these are connected to the literary skill that is the lesson's focus, and no modifications for lower level students nor extension activities for higher level students were noticed in the reviewed materials; however, additional resources are included which include an audio recording, virtual tours of the Twain house, a film on Twain and a researchable database for Twain's writings (these would be more appropriately used in schema building at the beginning of the unit however).

Overall, this 10 day unit which includes daily discussions, writing assignments and homework, on top of 25 pages of assigned reading per night, seems a bit overzealous; however, a teacher could take these lessons and stretch them into an extended unit without too much difficulty. The unit could also be strengthened by providing additional scaffolding and extensions for lower and higher level students.

Taken in all, minimal work would be required for the reviewed material 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