Unit Objectives and Rationale

Sense and Sensibility

By Jane Austen

When is it good to be passionate (sensible) about something and when is reason or logic (sense) the best response?

Unit Objectives

- Students will discuss in which situations they believe it is best to use reason or passion through textual, current, and personal examples.
- Students will understand the implications of and identify the principles of romanticism and classicism within a text.
- Students will apply reading strategies such as inquiry, inference, discussion, analysis, symbolic thinking, reflection, etc. in order to better comprehend the text.
- Students will assimilate grammatical knowledge learned through the text into their own writing.
- Students will compare and contrast their own world with that in the novel using their understanding of the 1800s period: the history, culture, language, and dress.

Unit Rationale

Sense and Sensibility is a classic romantic English novel from the 1800s. It is a well known text by a very prominent author. Given its textual difficulty, it makes sense to defend its inclusion in this course. I will teach the novel within the context of the application of the characteristics of reason and logic and not simply as a plain text for the following reasons:

- Studying Sense and Sensibility is a novel that addresses the themes of the use of reason and passion in decision making. Studying it through that lens is very relevant to students at this age. During this stage of development in the students’ lives, they are developing moral dimensions: at times they act very impulsively and at others, they display great wisdom. They are learning to think like adults and as such, must learn how to reserve or apply a passionate response or a more logical one. This text is rich with examples of characters using logic and passion and includes the consequences of their actions. Learning about the application of moral dimensions is very relevant and meaningful to adolescents.

- This text embodies the elements of romantic literature very well and contrasts those elements with neo-classicism, the predominant genre before it. These two types of literature comprise a principal part of the literary cannon and so as educated members of society it is important for students to understand elements of these types of literature and be familiar with example texts. This will help them as they continue studying both English and history in school.

- Within this novel the themes of money and inheritance, marriage, the individual and society, contrasts between expectations and reality, and contrasts between appearance and reality, among others, are addressed. These themes will be discussed through the

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symbolism within the text and all of them are relevant in students’ lives today and/or in the near future. We will discuss how to consider these issues and how to treat them.

- Because the text is challenging, students must learn to apply reading skills in order to comprehend the themes fully. To interpret the text successfully, they will learn how to effectively inquire to gain more knowledge about a topic, make inferences and connections about information, discuss and analyze ideas to develop them more fully, think about symbolic ideas effectively, and reflect about their learning. These skills will help students in their reading throughout their school careers and also throughout life as it is important to develop strategic thinking.

- Because of the time period the novel was written in, the language in the novel is different than common language today: the vocabulary and syntax are more demanding of the reader as are the descriptions that portray the plot, but when studied through a lens that focuses on a topic relevant to students (such as the situational application of passion and reason), these things become less difficult to navigate. This challenge presents a useful arena for students to study mechanics, vocabulary, syntax, description, etc. that will develop better understanding of the text and other future texts. These elements of grammar study will not be the main focus of our study, but students will learn about them in order to increase their comprehension of all written expression.

- Learning about history in context helps students understand and absorb it better. Often history is taught in a manner that isolates it from students’ real life experiences. While reading the book, we will be comparing and contrasting our culture and personal lives to that in the book so students understand the world through different perspectives—they will understand our own world better by understanding a past one.