

Author: Cormac McCarthy

- ***Intended Audience***

English 11 Honors

- ***Brief summary and educational significance***

Pulitzer Prize Winner 2007

James Tait Black Memorial Prize Winner 2007

Quill Book Award Winner 2007

An unnamed narrator and his son travel “the road” through a post-apocalyptic landscape, trying to reach the east coast. They must struggle to survive against nature (the constant dust, cold, and gray of nuclear winter) and against other humans who are intent on stealing their supplies or cannibalizing them for food.

Stylistically, the novel is as starkly written as the landscape in which it takes place, yet it will also provide upper level juniors with challenging reading and a compelling story.

- ***Purpose of teaching the work and how it will be used***

This book will be a required summer outside reading book. The summer outside reading books read by the English 11 Honors students all address the importance of identity and how characters in different circumstances must maintain a sense of selfhood.

The Road connects to *A Lesson Before Dying* and *Animal Dreams*; all three books share themes of community, self-understanding, and responsibility. Recurring themes for the year include the environment and differing points of view on the role of the individual and community in American society.

The post-apocalyptic setting of *The Road* provides a compelling landscape to explore how one maintains one’s sense of humanity when everything else seems lost. The man and his son (nameless throughout the novel—not even given that much identity), must struggle to remain “the good guys.”

The English 11 Honors course focuses on American Literature and culture, and McCarthy’s book, while being a well-decorated work of fiction, also provides one nearly unimaginable vision of America’s future.

- ***Potential problems with the work and how they can be handled***

Cannibalism—one pathway to survival after the apocalypse is through eating other human beings. Though the novel is harrowing and the fear of cannibalism is ever present, the actual topic of cannibalism is fairly subtle. One scene of victims being held in a basement by cannibals might be somewhat shocking.

Suicide—the wife and mother of the main characters has taken her life, and throughout the novel the father considers whether or not he will have the courage to take his own life and the life of his son, if the need arises.

Both of these acts are the possible outcomes of people's desperation. How the protagonists confront those who have chosen these paths, and confront their own mercilessness and fear, are major ways that the novel addresses its themes. Are we human any longer if we cannibalize other humans? What is our responsibility to those we meet on "the road"?

- ***Alternate works***

Ayn Rand, *Anthem*