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"Dead of Summer" Lesson Plan Guide

by Ryan La Sala

Unit Overview

Duration: 1 week

Grade Level: 9-12

Program: Florida Teens Read (FTR)

Subject Integration: ELA, Environmental Science, Social-Emotional Learning

Essential Question: *What responsibility do communities have to confront harm from their past, and how does silence about that harm affect the people living with its consequences?*

Content Advisory: This novel contains horror elements, references to serious/terminal illness, and themes of environmental contamination. Teachers should preview and consider students' readiness for suspenseful, emotionally heavy content.

Learning Objectives — Students will be able to:

- Analyze how the town's chemical spill functions as both literal backstory and metaphor for buried harm
- Examine Ollie's grief and isolation and how they shape his choices
- Evaluate the novel's use of horror and atmosphere to explore real-world environmental injustice
- Discuss the ethics of institutional or community silence about known harm
- Express understanding through analytical writing and research projects

ONE-WEEK LESSON PLAN

Day 1: Anchor's Mercy: Paradise With a Secret

Objective: Establish the setting and its hidden history

Materials: Book, setting analysis chart, brief overview of real environmental contamination cases

Opening (10 min):

- Quick-write: "Describe a place that seems perfect on the surface but might be hiding something."
- Partner share

Main Activity (35 min):

- Introduce Anchor's Mercy and its charming surface appearance
- Discuss the 1960s chemical spill and its long-term health effects on residents
- Brief overview: What are real-world examples of towns affected by environmental contamination?
- Discuss: Why might a town's history of harm stay hidden for decades?

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What does the town's history suggest about how communities handle harmful secrets?"

Assessment: Setting analysis, real-world connection

Day 2: Ollie's Grief and Isolation



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Objective: Examine how illness and grief shaped Ollie's choices before the story begins

Materials: Book, character timeline

Opening (10 min):

- Think-pair-share: "How might a serious family illness change a teenager's relationships with friends?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Read and discuss Ollie's mother's illness and the year the family spent away
- Build a timeline of Ollie's life before and after the family's time on the mainland
- Discuss: Why do you think Ollie stopped talking to his friends during that year?

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What is Ollie most afraid of returning to?"

Assessment: Character analysis, emotional comprehension

Day 3: Coming Home to Something Wrong

Objective: Analyze how La Sala builds atmosphere and suspense in Ollie's return

Materials: Book, atmosphere/mood chart

Opening (10 min):

- Discussion: "What makes a 'coming home' story feel unsettling instead of comforting?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Read and discuss Ollie's return to Anchor's Mercy
- Chart details that build dread and suspense as things start to "go horribly wrong"
- Discuss the tension between Ollie's need to reconnect with friends and the town's rising danger

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What is the first sign that something is truly wrong in Anchor's Mercy?"

Assessment: Atmosphere and craft analysis

Day 4: Silence, Harm, and Responsibility

Objective: Evaluate the ethical questions raised by the town's history of contamination

Materials: Book, discussion questions, optional real-world case study

Opening (10 min):

- Partner discussion: "Who is responsible when a community's harm is covered up for decades?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Discuss what the novel suggests about institutional or community silence
- Connect to a real-world case of environmental injustice (teacher-selected)
- Big question: "Is it possible to fully move on from a harm that's never been acknowledged?"

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What would accountability look like for Anchor's Mercy?"



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Assessment: Ethical reasoning, real-world application

Day 5: Facing the Truth

Objective: Synthesize the novel's themes through research and analytical or creative writing

Materials: Research materials, writing supplies, project choice cards

Opening (10 min):

- Preview project options; students select and begin

Main Activity (35 min):

- Option A: Research a real case of environmental contamination and its effects on a community; write a one-page comparison to Anchor's Mercy
- Option B: Analytical essay — "How does La Sala use horror to dramatize the real-world consequences of environmental injustice?"
- Option C: Write a letter from Ollie to his younger self, before the family's year away
- Share work in pairs or small groups

Closing (5 min):

- Class closing: "One thing this book changed about how I think about community responsibility is..."

Assessment: Research quality, analytical writing depth

Differentiation

- **Advanced learners:** Research the long-term health effects of a real environmental contamination event and present findings to the class
- **Students with personal connections to illness or loss:** Offer optional private journaling; coordinate with a school counselor if needed
- **Students needing support:** Provide graphic organizers for the timeline and atmosphere-tracking activities
- **Content sensitivity note:** This book addresses serious illness and horror elements directly. Build in norms for respectful discussion before beginning.

Materials List

- Class set of "Dead of Summer"
- Setting analysis and atmosphere/mood charts
- Character timeline template
- Teacher-selected environmental injustice case study for Day 4
- Research materials and project choice cards for Day 5