

Punching Bag – Classroom Lesson Plan

By Rex Ogle

Includes Virtual Author Interview

Book Synopsis

Punching Bag by Rex Ogle is a memoir that chronicles the author's experience of childhood poverty, abuse, and instability. Through candid and often painful reflection, Ogle recounts emotional and physical abuse, food insecurity, and the struggle to survive in a volatile household. Despite trauma, the memoir highlights resilience, truth-telling, and the power of sharing one's story. Themes include survival, identity, family dysfunction, poverty, trauma, and personal strength.

Banned / Challenged Status

Punching Bag has been challenged and removed in some districts due to depictions of child abuse, poverty, sexual references, and strong language. Critics argue that the content is graphic and mature for school audiences. Supporters emphasize the memoir's authentic portrayal of lived experience, its potential to validate students facing hardship, and its importance in fostering empathy and awareness of domestic abuse and poverty.

Essential Questions

- How does trauma shape identity?
- What does resilience look like in the face of abuse?
- Why is it important for marginalized voices to share their stories?

Lesson Objective

Students will analyze how memoir as a genre conveys emotional truth and evaluate how the author portrays resilience and survival.

Lesson Structure (60 Minutes)

- Warm-Up (5 minutes): Why might someone choose to share a painful personal story publicly?

- Direct Instruction (15–20 minutes): Examine memoir structure and voice. Define key terms: trauma, resilience, narrative voice, lived experience.
- Guided Practice (15 minutes): Analyze a pivotal memory in the text. Synthesis Question: How does Ogle balance vulnerability and strength in his storytelling?
- Independent Practice (15 minutes): Choice-based analytical or reflective response.
- Exit Ticket (5 minutes): Identify one moment that demonstrates resilience.

Independent Practice Options

- Option A: Analyze how narrative voice builds authenticity.
- Option B: Reflect on how poverty and instability affect opportunity.
- Option C: Write a short reflective piece on the importance of telling difficult truths.

Creative Interpretation Option

- Resilience timeline
- Theme web exploring survival and identity
- Visual metaphor representing strength

All creative responses must include an artist statement citing specific textual evidence.

Reader Impact + Student Voice

- Why might this memoir resonate with some readers?
- How does the book portray both harm and hope?
- What responsibilities do schools have in addressing difficult realities?
- How can personal narratives foster empathy?

Intellectual Freedom Connection

Writing Prompt: Should schools provide access to memoirs that confront abuse and poverty? Support your reasoning with textual evidence.

Author Interview

Author interview provided by UNBAN COOLIES.
Visit: <http://www.youtube.com/@unbanCOOLIES>

Lesson materials developed in partnership with UNBAN COOLIES.