



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2005 Volume I: The Uses of Poetry in the Classroom

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## **Crime and Poetry: Examining Crimes Against Humanity Through the Poetry of the Oppressed, Specifically Poetry from the African American Experience Through the Jim Crow Era, and The Holocaust**

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This unit will scrutinize crimes against humanity by examining poetry of the oppressed, specifically poetry from the African American Experience through the Jim Crow Era, and the Holocaust. As the two atrocities against humanity are presented, the students will read poems that represent the emotional and physical hardships that humans have experienced throughout time. We will specifically examine poems written by African Americans from the twentieth century, and victims and survivors of the Holocaust. The unit will span six weeks, with the examination of poems related to these crimes as the thread that runs continuously throughout the semester. By examining the poems for voice, theme, figure, and symbol the students will gain a deeper knowledge of the emotions and the voice of the oppressed, as well as the historical background of these crimes. The unit will use paintings, drawings and photographs to help tell the story of each crime. Some of the poems will be ecphrastic while others will describe remembered scenes. The students will read and analyze the poems as well as write their own poems from the point of view of the oppressed. In exposing the students to the Jim Crow Era and the Holocaust simultaneously, the hope is that they will gain a perspective about humanity from the oppressed point of view, realizing ultimately that crimes against humanity are not specific to certain populations; they are crimes against both individuals and the soul of all humanity. Through hearing the voice and becoming the voice students will gain perspective, empathy and self-knowledge regarding the human condition.

(Developed for English, grade 10; recommended for English, grades 9-12)

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