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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2008 Volume III: Democracy in Theory and Practice

Our Spiritual Strivings: Understanding African American Identities in a Conflicted American Democracy

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The primary purpose of this unit is to create an historical and theoretical framework that can be used by the students to understand African American Literature as a potential resolution to the fundamental contradiction between the rhetoric of democratic ideals and the realities of racial injustice. The texts for this unit will include some excerpts from the primary documents of our democratic republic (*the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, The Federalist Papers*), a number of arguments and historical accounts from both black and white perspectives about racial injustice in the 19th century, and a variety of early 20th century African American writing (both essay prose and poetry) that speaks to this issue. African American writers covered include Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, James Weldon Johnson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay This unit culminates with classroom project that involves students writing about and publishing poetry and personal essays that address issues of injustice in their community.

(Developed for American Literature and English, grade 11; recommended for American Literature and U.S. History, grades 9-12)

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