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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2011 Volume IV: The Big Easy: Literary New Orleans and Intangible Heritage

Performing Resilience: The Study of Culture and the African Diaspora through Literature and Dance

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This unit uses literature and dance to explore culture, the African diaspora, and students' resilience. Two non-traditional texts are used, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and an Oakland, CA based hip-hop dance style called TURF dancing (Take Up Room on the Floor). The reading of *Mumbo Jumbo* will mainly be a character study of Jes Grew, a "virus" spreading across the U.S. and causing people to dance. We will study Jes Grew as a part of the African Diaspora and an example of resilience. Students will then use the same analysis to explore TURF dancing. As a final project, students will need to answer the question, "How does culture support the resilience of people and community?" They will answer this question through a self-created project in which they explore their own resilience, keep a journal, write a final essay, and participate in a student-created performance. Specific skills addressed are close reading, narrative writing, and a study of metaphor, personification, character, and theme. This is designed for my 9th grade English class but can easily be modified for higher-level English classes.

(Developed for English, grade 9; recommended for English and Social Studies, grades 9-12)

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