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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

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

Strange Fruit: An Exploration of Imagery and Socio-politics of Post-Katrina New Orleans

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The essential questions for this unit are: What makes one a citizen and what happens when the government fails citizens? Why does the government fail them? What role should the government play in the wake of natural disasters? How do political dynamics affect public policy decisions?

Through an exploration of imagery, film, socially-conscious literature, and discourse, the students will examine the factors that contributed to the unnatural disaster that occurred post-Katrina. They will use graphic organizers and cooperative reading groups as described in the unit, to discuss the differences between political and humanitarian responses. Further, the students will investigate the idea that humanitarian crises that are exacerbated by public policy are unnatural and that due to the mismanagement of federal, state and local governmental agencies, thousands of residents of New Orleans were displaced, traumatized, or lost their lives after the levees broke.

The strategies in this curriculum unit will be integrated into the subjects of reading, writing and social studies and will be taught over the first quarter of the school year, starting with the very beginning of the year by encouraging students to develop into engaged citizen-learners. The unit is recommended for English 11, U.S. History or Government classes.

(Developed for English, grade 10M; English, grade 11M; and Reading, grades 9-12; recommended for English, grades 10-12; U. S. History, grade 11; Government, grade 12; and Reading, grades 9-12)

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