



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
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## **Splitting Hairs: Comparing Themes in Fiction and Non-Fiction Texts**

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This curriculum unit is designed to teach students to compare and contrast universal themes in fiction and non-fiction texts by focusing on social rites of passage and the consumer culture of hair. We will begin with a discussion of consumerism among American teenagers with a focus weighted toward black youth given the demographic composition of my classes. In most cultures, social relationships are often built around the grooming and styling of hair, as with mother-daughter bonding. In the first part of the unit, songs, video clips, art, pictures, and newspaper articles will be used to show how a multibillion-dollar industry has shaped hair care and hairstyles in America. All of these materials will aid in introducing the literary concepts of theme and universal theme. The remainder of the unit will focus on analyzing themes in short stories and excerpts related to hair and rites of passage using compare-and-contrast methods. Each student will write a compare-and-contrast essay analyzing the universal themes in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" and an excerpt from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. This unit is intended for ninth-grade English, but the activities can be adapted for grades 7-12.

(Developed for English I, grade 9; recommended for English I, grade 9; English II, grade 10; English III, grade 11; English IV, grade 12; and English/Language Arts, grades 7-8)

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