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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2013 Volume II: Interpreting Texts, Making Meaning: Starting Small

Teaching Post-Civil War History in Document-Based Fiction

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I have designed a unit that empowers me to teach fiction and non-fiction books using interpretive methods. My goal with this unit is to increase students' personal knowledge of history in the US. I want my students to be able to clarify what American citizenship is and know the difference between true citizenship, according to what the Constitution and the Bill of Rights originally articulated, and the second class citizenship that was accorded many Americans during this time period. I also want them to determine the sacrifices made by all groups involved in the journey to true equality and becoming a part of the American nation. Finally, to answer the age-old question, why studying history matters, I want my students to make some sort of personal connection with the author, someone possibly not so different from themselves. Interpretation of what they read will undoubtedly produce many meanings, not just what emerges from my customary historical angle. This unit is not just a component to build a reading unit. It also encourages my students to interpret their reading and to see that there are several possible interpretations. That leads to discussion.

(Developed for U. S. and N. C. History, grade 8; recommended for Middle School U. S. History, grade 8, and High School U. S. History, grade 11)

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