



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2005 Volume I: The Uses of Poetry in the Classroom

Rhymes and Rhythms of Black History

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Introduction

I am a special education teacher at East Rock Global Magnet School. I currently co - teach in the 8th grade. As a magnet school we have students bussed from all over the city and in a variety of programs across grade levels. These programs include special education, hearing impaired and a New Arrival Center for students who enter the New Haven Public School system from other countries with little to no knowledge of the English language. This vastly diverse population varies in economic standing, national origin, ethnicity, and religious beliefs, as well as academic achievement and ability. This population is represented in each classroom. With this in mind, the teachers at East Rock have to discover creative ways to teach and reach a variety of students at various levels at the same time.

This unit is being developed to expose my students to new ways of communicating and expressing themselves, as well as understanding how to interpret what others are expressing through their poetry. In this cross curricular unit I plan to introduce reading and writing poetry to my students in English class. I will then continue to use poetry to teach different time periods of Black History as the subject matter or time of authorship relates to that period. We will concentrate on the Middle Passage, Slavery and the Underground Railroad, Emancipation, Harlem Renaissance, Jim Crow and Civil Rights to present day. I will have the students interpret the meaning of the poetry as well as create their own poetry in their response to the literature, which is a skill needed for the 8th grade Connecticut Master Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) in 10th grade.

Rationale

Emphasizing connection across curriculum creates powerful learning opportunities that help students find relevance in the content and become more actively engaged in learning. By focusing on the use of thematical units, students are better able to understand relationships and make connections across literary and content specific material.

Black History is either mentioned slightly or else completely omitted from some History textbooks. In partial compensation, Black History has been assigned the month of February for celebration. During this time most students are exposed to the same few prominent figures and their accomplishments, for ex. Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad, and Rosa Parks' - Bus Boycott. The most talked about moment is Martin Luther King, Jr.'s - "I Have a Dream" speech.

In the past I have chosen to read a novel about a famous black activist. This approach proved to be long and boring for the students. This unit will allow me to use other forms of literature to teach Black History, such as poetry and song. This method will prove to be more interesting and allow me to cover a variety of topics.

The advantages of teaching history through poetry are twofold. First, you have the opportunity to teach two subjects at once. Not only are the History lessons being taught in an unorthodox way, but you are teaching Language Arts lessons in the process. This is accomplished by looking at how the poet uses language and how a very few verbal images can create a powerful response.

Objectives

Students will:

1. construct meaning through initial understanding and interpretation.
2. identify or infer central idea, tone, purpose or theme.
3. compare and contrast written works with similar topics, theme, characters or problem.(Reading Standard 1.2)
4. will compose essays and poetry that reflects personal points of view.(Language Arts / English Standard 1.4)
5. exhibit and or publish their writing piece.
6. will recite poems created by them and other authors.
7. will participate in choral speaking.
8. explore the social culture of African Americans at significant historical periods.
9. investigate the goals and struggles of a minority group in America; African Americans. (Civics / Government Standard 2.0)

Strategies

I have been told that the best way to have students understand poetry is to have them write poetry. Therefore, I will start this unit in English class with an introduction to poetry: what is poetry? We will cover types of poetry, reading poetry and writing poetry.

At a glance, poetry in all its forms and styles is a way of expressing one's feelings, thoughts and emotions. It uses colorful language that creates an atmosphere or suspends you in a moment of time, so that you too can experience what the author is saying. This is one of the reasons I thought it would be a perfect form of expression for teaching History. Poetry through the years has recorded history vividly. It tends to see history

through the lives of individuals, sharing their mood and state of mind.

I would like to find out what my students know or don't about poetry. I will ask them to spend five minutes to respond to the following journal prompts: Poetry is..., The subject(s) or theme(s) of poetry are..., and I think poetry is? After posing the same question to fellow teachers and friends I received an array of answers. Consensuses of their response are: Poetry is music, the tempos and tones of life. It is the human voice singing joys, pain and grief. It is the voice of dance. Poetry is language, its structure, grammar, syntax, and the origin of thought. It is expression through metaphor and the rhythm of persuasion. Poetry is pictures painted with words. Poetry is seeing and noticing nature and all that lives in it up close and personal. It is looking at the universe, microscopic and vast. Poetry is the connection between reason and emotion; it helps us think and validates feelings. It calls for the imagination and demands an answer. Poetry is memories of the human race, the record of our experience through time. It gives life to dates and eras, and tells the reality of war, events and historical movements. Poetry asks the questions needed for spiritual journeys. Poetry is the universal voice, the human spirit calling across all boundaries. Through it we learn about others and ourselves.

We will then create a list of some responses, which in and of themselves will stimulate a lively discussion on their conflicting views. I will introduce types of poetry and discuss the language used that makes them descriptive, such as, imagery, metaphors, similes, allusions, conceits, paradoxes, and symbols.

Students will be asked to focus on a subject or a word and write about how it makes them feel. Since this unit is not a course in poetry but instead uses poetry to teach content, we will not concentrate on form, but free verse.

By way of introduction, we will look at approximately three poems concerning the same social issue and discuss them. I have chosen three poems that share the same theme: "homelessness". We will read and discuss the poems. I will instruct the students to: read each of the poems and decide if the authors were talking about the same thing, identify the theme, circle the word in each poem that made them think they all had the same theme. Finally, I will ask them to use the homelessness poems as an example and write a poem with "peer pressure" as the theme. To think about a time when they were, or witness someone else under peer pressure to do something that they normally would not do. The students will write a free verse poem expressing their feelings about the topic.

The remainder of the unit will be integrated into the social studies curriculum.

The curriculum is an exploratory survey of United States History from pre - Colombian times until the present. As each era that is covered in this unit is being taught, I will introduce the relevant Black History through poetry. We will discuss poems to experience a vivid account of what it was like to be an African American, present at those designated times in history.

In addition to any other activities in this unit the students will keep a journal to complete a specific summary analysis of each poem read. The format can be found in lesson one.

Poetry and Historical Events

The poems that we will be discussing representing moments in history will be introduced throughout the school year as they apply to the social studies curriculum. These poems are emotionally powerful. The emotions that these poems were written under are felt by the reader. The poets who wrote their poems about what was happening during their time were brave. They were not scared to face the problems of their day head on. They talk about slavery, murder, and unfair social issues that were accepted by the majority population. This could have caused them grief from the powers that be or radical groups who believed in and actively participated in the events at hand. The subjects of these poems make them more personal and engaging. To understand the poems better, I feel it is necessary to review something about the author as well as the time period the poem was written. In the resource section of this unit I will include the websites where I located each poem in its entirety.

The first episode in Black History we'll discuss is the Middle Passage, which was the journey of slave trading ships from the west coast of Africa, where the slaves were obtained, across the Atlantic, where they were sold or, in some cases, traded for goods such as molasses, which was used in the making of rum. The Middle Passage was the longest, hardest, most dangerous, and also most horrific part of the journey of the slave ships. We will illustrate this period by reading the poem called "To Cinque" by James Monroe Whitfield (1853).

This poem is relevant because it not only covers the Middle Passage but is also it is a part of the history of New Haven, CT. In February 1839, Portuguese slave hunters abducted a large group of Africans from Sierra Leone and shipped them to Havana, Cuba, a center for the slave trade. This abduction violated all of the treaties then in existence. Fifty-three Africans were purchased by two Spanish planters and put aboard the Cuban schooner *Amistad* for shipment to a Caribbean plantation. In July the Africans seized the ship, killed the captain and the cook, and ordered the crew to sail to Africa. On August 24, 1839, the *Amistad* was seized off Long Island, NY, by the U.S. brig *Washington*. The planters were freed and the Africans were imprisoned in New Haven, CT, on charges of murder. The murder charges were dismissed, but, the Africans continued to be held in confinement as the focus of the case turned to salvage claims and property rights. President Van Buren was in favor of extraditing the Africans to Cuba. However, abolitionists in the North opposed extradition and raised money to defend the Africans. The court ruled that the case fell within Federal jurisdiction and that the claims to the Africans as property were not legitimate because they were illegally held as slaves. The case went to the Supreme Court in January 1841, and former President John Quincy Adams argued the defendants' case. Adams defended the right of the accused to fight to regain their freedom. The Supreme Court decided in favor of the Africans, and 35 of them were returned to their homeland. The others died at sea or in prison while awaiting trial. (Meyers,11)

Not all that much is known about the author James Monroe Whitfield. He was born in New Hampshire in 1822 to free blacks, probably attended a local school in New Hampshire, and eventually married and had two sons and a daughter. By the late 1840s Whitfield was working in Buffalo as a barber. In 1850 Frederick Douglass urged Whitfield to stop working at his lowly, menial job, but Whitfield, like many of the free blacks during this time, had few other opportunities for employment and needed the money to support his writing; he remained a barber for the rest of his life, working in Buffalo during the 1850s and in several Oregon and northern Californian cities and towns during the 1860s. Though little is known about Whitfield's private life, he became fairly prominent in his public life as a poet and social critic when his poems began to appear during the 1840s and 1850s in William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* and Frederick Douglass's *The North Star* and *Frederick*

Douglass' Paper. His poetry writing ended in 1853 with the publication of *America and Other Poems*, which was published by the James S. Leavitt Company in Buffalo, New York. Whitfield died in San Francisco in 1871, at the age of 49, and was buried in the city's Masonic cemetery. (Sherman,71)

"To Cinque" gives accolades to the African chief for successfully overcoming what was meant to be his destiny, slavery. It goes on to say that his name will shine so that others like himself may follow his lead to maintain their freedom. Whitfield also states that Cinque's feat will be known throughout time because of its major historical significance. It also states that his name will give others courage, strengthened by the strong desire for freedom to fight and defeat those with money and power. Ending with the thought of a higher power will be on their side.

Our next theme will be slavery, which existed in America from the start of the Atlantic slave trade in the 16th century to the end of the American Civil War in 1865. Slave owners rationalized slavery by telling themselves that their African slaves were less than human and ignorant. They made themselves believe that they were doing them a favor. In fact slaves were anything but ignorant and happy with their conditions. The first poem on this theme we will read is "On being brought from Africa to America" by, Phillis Wheatley (1778).

Phillis Wheatley was America's first black poet. She was born in Senegal, Africa in 1753. She experienced the voyage of the middle passage before being sold into slavery at the age of seven to John and Susannah Wheatley of Boston. She was to be a household servant tending to Susannah Wheatley, but soon she was accepted as a member of the family and was raised with their other two children. She learned to read and write and by the age of twelve she was reading the Greek and Latin classics, and passages from the Bible. At thirteen she wrote her first poem. Most of her poems reflect her religious and New England upbringing. (Wagner,19)

In the poem "On being brought from Africa to America", Phillis Wheatley begins by giving credit to her slavery as a positive, because it has brought her to Christianity. Although she was a true Christian, this was also a safe subject for a slave poet. Expressing gratitude for her enslavement may be unbelievable to most readers. It is possible that the misconception that slaves were happy living in the state of slavery instead of their "savage homeland" came from poems like this. The word benighted means overtaken by night or darkness or being in a state of moral or intellectual darkness. She compares her skin color with her original state of ignorance of Christian salvation.

The phrase "mercy brought me" and the title "on being brought" ignores the violence of the kidnapping and the voyage on a slave ship, but at the same time credits not the slave trade, but (God's) mercy for the act of her positive state of mind. She is denying the power of those human beings who are responsible for enslavement. She gives credit to mercy for her education in Christianity as well. In turning to God, she reminds the reader that there is a force more powerful than they are, a force that has acted directly in her life. To name her color as sable, which is very valuable and desirable, contrasts with the term "diabolic die" of the next line. In the second-to-last line, she may be including Christians among those who may be refined and find salvation. She tells the reader that Negroes may be saved. In her last sentence, the word "join" indicates that the angelic train will include both white and black.

Our next poem on the theme of slavery will be "Bury Me in a Free Land" by Frances Harper (1854). Frances Harper was born in Baltimore on September 24, 1825. Her mother died when she was three and she was raised by relatives. Frances was educated at a school run by her uncle, Rev. William Watkins until the age of thirteen when she found work as a seamstress. Harper wrote poetry and her first book, *Forest Leaves*, was published in 1845. In 1850 she became a teacher in Columbus, Ohio and soon after became a traveling

lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society. She supported the prohibition and women suffrage. Often, she read her poetry at public meetings. (Sherman,112)

"Bury Me in a Free Land" was written in rhyme and with biblical imagery. Harper tells her story as a tacit narrative. You can see the slaves' fear in this poem. They are not asking for a beautiful or grand grave, but rather simply to be buried on free land. It is too horrible for them to even think that they would have to endure this suffering for eternity, when death is supposed to be the ultimate peace. Being buried in this land of slavery, their spirit would not be able to rest.

In turning to the Underground Railroad, we will read "Follow the Drinking Gourd" author unknown. "Follow the Drinking Gourd" is a coded song that gives the route for an escape from Alabama and Mississippi. Of all the routes out of the Deep South this is the only one for which the details survived. The route instructions were given to slaves by an old handy man named Peg Leg Joe. Working as an itinerant carpenter, he spent winters in the South, moving from plantation to plantation, teaching slaves this escape route.

The poem / song tells the slaves at sunset: you will hear someone make a sound like a quail. If you head north in the direction of the North Star you will find someone waiting to lead you along the Underground Railroad to freedom in the North. Other code words are: *freedom* referring to a better life in the North, *old man* referring to a conductor of the Underground Railroad and *drinking gourd* referring to the North Star as the brightest star in the sky and key star in the constellation, the Big Dipper.

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued in two parts. The first on September 22, 1862 was a preliminary announcement outlining the intent of the second part, which officially went into effect January 1, 1863 during the second year of the American Civil War. It was Abraham Lincoln's declaration that all slaves in all states which had seceded from the Union and which had not returned to Federal control by January 1, 1863 would be emancipated. The ten implicated states were individually named in 1863.

To make this event come to life, we will read a portion of the poem, "Emancipation", by Paul Laurence Dunbar. He was the son of two former slaves, born in Dayton, Ohio, and attended public school there. Paul was taught to read by his mother and gained an enormous amount of knowledge from stories his father told. His was an escaped slave from Kentucky and served in the Massachusetts 55th Regiment during the Civil War. Paul was also one of the last of a generation to have personal contact with former slaves. He dug deep into the oral tradition and became a powerful interpreter of the African American folk experience in literature and song. He fought for the cause of civil rights and higher education for African Americans in essays and poetry that today would be called militant. (Wagner,73)

"Emancipation" encourages Blacks to celebrate and to remember this Emancipation Day, January 1,1863. It goes on to say that we have made some progress but it is not over. He tells them to let their actions be positive and represent great destinies. He reminds slaves and former slaves that blood was freely shed to reach this milestone and never to forget or stop striving. He tells them to look at the best that has happened so far and move in that direction on a firm path, because it will not be easy but the reward is worth the struggle. He encourage them by telling them that they have survived the worst, that this is a time to move forward, and that success is guaranteed. He shouts that they will never again endure the oppression of chains and whips but will now achieve honor and glory.

The Harlem Renaissance was a creative outburst of activity among African American from 1920 - 1930. It was a literary movement and social revolt. This was partly the result of the African American great migration north and their need to celebrate their heritage. A reflection of the mood of the Harlem Renaissance is "Fifty Years,

1863 - 1913" by James Weldon Johnson (1913).

He was born on June 17, 1871 in Jacksonville, FL. He is best known as a poet, composer, diplomat, and anthologist of black culture. His mother was a schoolteacher and she trained in music and other subjects. Johnson graduated from Atlanta University in 1894, and graduated from Columbia with his M.A. He was a principal of a black high school in Jacksonville, FL. He studied law at the same time and was admitted to the Florida bar in 1897 and begins practicing there. At this time he and his brother, a composer, began writing songs. They wrote about 200 songs for the Broadway musical stage. His most famous poem was "Lift Every Voice and Sing". His brother later added music to the poem, which is considered to be the "Negro National Anthem".

(Wagner,352)

"Fifty Years, 1863 - 1913" is staged around a poetic form of migration from Africa to slavery in America, so it also usefully recaps the periods we have already studied. One would expect him to be talking about the migration from south to north in the United States, since it was prevalent at that time. This poem is in direct relation to President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and the work that still needs to be complete to reach the point that the document expresses. He starts the poem by stating that God used Lincoln to free them, like Phyllis Wheatley not giving man credit. His religious beliefs are obvious. He goes on to say how long ago and how far it was when they started their journey from Africa. He encourages the reader that there was a purpose and a reason for what they endured. He goes on to proclaim the land that their blood, sweat and tears had made prosper. He tells his fellow man not to be ashamed of anything that they have endured, but instead be proud of the fact that they have earned this day and all the rights that should come with it. He tells them to stay focused and keep the faith that all is not well, but will be because their destiny is in God's hands. He reminds them that too many have died and suffered willing for God to let it be in vain.

Another important figure in the Harlem Renaissance was Langston Hughes. We will read his "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"(1920). Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, on February 1, 1902. His mother was Carrie Mercer Langston who was separated from Langston's father shortly after his birth. His father was James Nathaniel Hughes, whose ancestors range from a Jewish slave dealer to an English poet, a Cherokee Indian woman, and a French merchant. He had a hard time dealing with racial discrimination and moved to Mexico. Langston's mom did not want to go that far away from all she knew. Langston was sent to live with his grandmother in Topeka, Kansas at the age of two. After her death he lived with her friends for two years until his mother remarried and sent for him at the age of fourteen. They moved to Cleveland, Ohio where he wrote his first poem and was elected class poet. His father wanted him to join him, so that he could see to his future. So at the age of eighteen with the desire to be a poet and the need to broaden his horizons he went to Mexico. His father expressed a strong desire to send him to college and Langston agreed to go to Columbia University. He did not return to school after a year but took odd jobs in the city. His need for adventure arose again and he traveled to Africa, Holland, and much of Italy and Spain before returning to Harlem. He had several other jobs as he continued to write poetry, but his travel made him eager to finish his studies. He entered Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and received the degree he had started at Columbia. During this time he was continuously writing and being published. (Wagner,392)

In "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", Hughes uses the river as a metaphor for the source of life, following black life as it moves from the Euphrates and Nile rivers in Africa to the Mississippi river in America. It has the effect of pushing Negro history back to the creation of the world on the Euphrates: Adam was a black man. Hughes also uses rivers and the mention of Abraham Lincoln to tell the entire history of a people who had first been free

and then enslaved and then regained freedom. The mention of his soul, having grown deep like the river, could mean that enduring through time has brought spiritual growth. The reference to the river's color as muddy then turning golden in the sunset thus, color changing from dark to light, could refer to the heavy burdens of the slave era becoming lighter. Although, burdens of slavery have been lifted, Negroes are encountering a new burden of freedom without rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness or even protection under the law.

This leads to our next theme, Jim Crow. "Jim Crow" generally refers to the laws and regulations that arose in the South following post-Civil War Reconstruction. During this time in history, blacks were judged inferior to whites, creating in the whites' eyes the need for segregation. Because of the mandated segregation established by these laws, African Americans were prevented from achieving economic, political, and cultural power and equality and persecuted if they overstepped any boundaries, and sometimes even if they didn't. The term is used to refer to both the oppressive laws as well as the general time period during which they were predominant (from approximately the mid-1870s through the 1960s.) We see the express mood of this time with two poems.

In "I, Too, Sing America", Langston Hughes is criticizing the attitude of white America in the 1930's. In this poem he is a servant who works for a white man and is sent into the kitchen when company comes. He laughs because he has self-pride, knowing that he is strong and beautiful inside. Hughes uses metaphor when he says, "tomorrow", referring to the future. He believes that white America will one day view everyone as being equal. He thinks that one day they too will see his beauty and be ashamed of their behavior. With the title, Hughes is really saying that everyone in America is American. No matter the color of your skin, your religion, race, ethnicity or origin, everyone is American.

"Strange Fruit" written by Lewis Allen and sung by Billie Holiday. Allen was really Abel Meeropol, was a Jewish schoolteacher from New York. He wrote a poem called "Bitter Fruit" as an outraged response after seeing a photograph of the lynching of Thomas Shipp, an occurrence that was frequent during this period. Meeropol was a member of the American Communist Party and, using the alias, he published the poem in the *New York Teacher* and, later, the Marxist journal, *New Masses*. After seeing Billie Holiday perform at the club, Café Society, in New York, Meeropol showed her the poem. Holiday liked it and after working on it with Sonny White, turned the poem into the song, "Strange Fruit". The record made it to No. 16 on the charts in July 1939. (Margolick, website)

The "strange fruit" represents the black bodies that were left dangling from a tree as if on display after being hung. They were left on display for a warning to other Negroes and for brag rights, something to be proud of. "I got me one of them N——"! Blood dripped from their bodies from the beatings that they endured before they were put out of their misery from dying. Allen uses imagery in creating a contrast between nature and the unnatural. The beautiful image calling to mind the "pastoral" scene of the countryside is then undercut by the bulging eyes and twisted mouth. The contrast is made between the sweet and fresh scent of the magnolia and the burning flesh. This use of contrast makes the images in your mind more vivid and repulsive. He goes on to describe what happens to the fruit / body as it rots on a tree. After it is already rotten / dead, it has to endure more abuse from Mother Nature (weather) and her children (crows).

We then turn to the Civil Rights Movement for racial equality in the US that, through nonviolent protest, broke the pattern of racial segregation and achieved national equal rights legislation for blacks. Throughout this period different leaders used different methods to achieve equal rights. No one of these was more important than the other and together they created the beginnings of equality. To help understand this period, we will

read "Searching for The Prize" by George Cassutto.

George Cassutto was born on June 16, 1960 in Baltimore, Maryland. His parents were survivors of the Holocaust from the Netherlands. It was hearing about their experiences that led him into the field of teaching history. He teaches national, state, local government, and AP US history at North Hagerstown High School. He has been teaching since 1983. Although he is not a black man, direct knowledge and relation to an oppressed people gives him enough background and emotion to relate.

"Searching for The Prize" is mainly about racism, poverty, and the troubles whites have relating to blacks and the ways in which blacks are discriminated against. The divided opinions about Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, concerning which of them had the better approach, are addressed in this poem, along with an overview of the history of blacks. The author is saying that his skin color (white) gives him some knowledge of the terrible times that blacks had to endure at the hands of his people, yet he is also saying that because he is white he could never really understand. He speaks about Martin's spirit of hope and his "Dream" that one-day blacks and whites could hold hands and be friends, while Malcolm hated the white man for the enslavement and thoughtless killing of his people. He balances these viewpoints and tries not to be judgmental. Cassutto goes on to say that no one should be poor, that everyone should be treated equally. No one is stronger than another. Poverty and the reality of ghettos will mean more boys and girls in gangs, with more casualties. He continues on to say that if we do not learn from the past, society will repeat the same mistakes. Skin color should not hold back a person's knowledge and understanding of the world, but sadly it does. He ends by saying that white people can increase their understanding by putting themselves in the place of African Americans, although they will never fully appreciate the black experience.

Lesson Plan I: Specific Summary Analysis

Overview:

It is important to know something about the time period the poem was written in as well as the poet, to effectively interpret poetry.

Objective:

Students will:

1. Read poetry to interpret meaning.
2. Keep notes of analysis in journal.
3. Write an introductory paragraph for each poem.

Materials:

1. Copy of poem
2. Journal

Procedure:

The students will complete the following steps for complete analysis.

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 1 Title | The students will ponder the title before reading the poem, and deciding what the poem may be about. |
| 2 Paraphrase | They will then translate the poem into their own words, writing a sentence or two for each stanza of the poem. |
| 3 Connotation | I will tell them to contemplate the poem for meaning beyond the literal. They will answer these questions in their journal: What do the words mean beyond the obvious? What are the implications, the hints, the suggestions of this particular word choice? |
| 4 Devices | I will also tell them to note anything that is repeated, either individual words or complete phrases. Anything said more than once may be crucial to interpretation. |
| 5 Attitude | The students will be instructed to observe both the speaker's and the poet's attitude (tone). Diction, images, and details suggest the speaker's attitude and contribute to understanding. (This will not be obvious in Phillis Wheatley's poem) |
| 6 Shifts | I will tell the students to look for a change in feeling. It may be noticeable with key words: but, yet, however, although; punctuation: dashes, periods, colons, stanza and line division changes in sound may indicate a change in meaning; changes in diction: slang to formal language, positive to negative; or one crucial part that stands out, maybe presenting the complete idea all by itself. |
| 7 Title | The students will examine the title again, this time interpretively. |
| 8 Theme | I will tell the students to identify the theme, recognize the human experience, or condition suggested by the poem. |

After the student completes these steps, the meaning of the poem should be clear. The students will then write an introductory paragraph for the poem. It should include the title, the author, an explanation of the speaker's position, any title significance, an overall statement of "meaning" and a clear statement that answers every aspect of the prompt.

Lesson Plans II: Relating to the Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance in Retrospect: Connecting Art, Music, Dance, and Poetry

Overview:

The Harlem Renaissance was a vibrant time that was characterized by innovations in art, literature, music, poetry and dance. In this lesson, students conduct Internet research, work with an interactive Venn diagram tool, and create a museum exhibit that highlights the work of selected artists, musicians, and poets of the Harlem Renaissance. Critical thinking, creativity, and interdisciplinary connections are emphasized.

Objectives:

Student will:

1. Research, evaluate, and synthesize information about the Harlem Renaissance from varied resources
2. Highlight their understanding of the Harlem Renaissance through the creation of an exhibit
3. Highlight the connections across varied disciplines (art, music and poetry) using a Venn diagram

4. Orally present their work to the class.
5. Respond in writing to reflective / assessment questions

Teacher Preparation:

1. Preview the Harlem Renaissance website preview listed on the handout.
2. Navigate through the varied websites to foresee any difficulty your students might have.
3. Visit PBS Biographies: Duke Ellington and listen to the following songs:
 1. "East St. Louis Toodle -oo"
 2. "The Mooche"
 3. "Mood Indigo"

Make sure all computers have RealAudio player or other software downloaded for listening to the audio files.

Purpose:

To provide students with a brief introduction to the Harlem Renaissance. Although this lesson discusses music and art as well as poetry, we will be looking at the poetry in the other forms of expression.

Procedure:

1. Open PBS Biographies: Duke Ellington, and tell students that they are going to hear three jazz tunes by Duke Ellington, a famed jazz musician of the Harlem Renaissance.
2. Ask students to listen for connections as you read the fourth paragraph of Lindy Hop in Harlem: The Role of Social Dancing. Have students brainstorm examples from today's popular culture that show connections across music, dance, and art.
3. Share the following paintings with the class:
 1. "Dust to Dust" by Jacob Lawrence
 2. "Blues 1929" by Archibald J. Motley Jr.

Ask students to share their responses to the paintings. These might include such things as the color, mood, composition, and feelings the paintings express.

4. Listen to Langston Hughes' poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers". Ask students to share their responses to this poem.
5. As a class, visit the "Websites Related to the Harlem Renaissance" that are listed on the handout to explore different aspects of this time period. Ask students to respond to the following questions: What were you able to learn about the Harlem Renaissance: by listening to Jazz music, listening to an Essay, by looking at paintings, listening to a poem, and browsing a website? I will ask for student volunteers to share thoughts with the entire class. Focus the discussion on how different disciplines can enrich our understanding of a topic in different ways. Also encourage the students to examine what elements of poetry they saw or heard in all the forms of expression.

Lesson adapted from ReadWriteThink: Lesson Plan - A Harlem Renaissance Retrospective: Connecting Art, Music, Dance and Poetry <http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesso>

Lesson III: Using Poetry as a Weapon for Social Change

Overview:

Throughout time, poetry has been and still is used to record history, reflect the mood of the people, and to speak out against social injustice. We have already looked at the past; we will now look at some more current social issues through contemporary poets.

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Understand the importance of using poetry in many forms as a social tool for social change.
2. Gain a new perspective on the African American experience by interpreting and analyzing poetry written from an African American perspective.
3. Gain an understanding of the importance of the notion of civil disobedience and non-violent protest.
4. Recognize recurrent themes and writing strategies used to encourage social change.

Materials:

1. "My Poem" by Nikki
2. "Behind the Wall" by Tracy Chapman from CD Tracy Chapman and copies of lyrics
3. "Darryl Strawberry Asleep in the Field of Dreams" by Paul Beatty
4. "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" by Gil Scott-Heron

Procedure:

1. The poem/song "Behind the Wall" by Tracy Chapman will be played on CD. After we hear it, I will pass out the lyrics. The students will participate in a discussion about the poem: What issues it brings up, why it is or isn't effective, why Tracy Chapman wrote it, what she was hoping to accomplish by writing it, who she wrote it for.
2. Next Nikki Giovanni's "My Poem" will be read twice by volunteers. The first time it is read the students can follow along on the page. The second time I have them close their eyes and just listen. After the read aloud, I will ask the student to free write about the poem maybe about three minutes. I will then ask the students to look through their free write and underline a sentence or phrase that brings out the meaning of the poem. We will then share and create Our Poem with their responses on poster board. We will talk about the social aspects of the poem, and what Giovanni means by the word revolution.
3. The students will listen to and read "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" by Gil Scott-Heron. The students will then be asked to free write about how Giovanni's and Scott-Heron's idea of "Revolution" is similar or different. I will ask volunteers to share their responses.
4. I will tell the students that "Darryl Strawberry Asleep in the Field of Dreams" by Paul Beatty was written in response to the movie "Field of Dreams". I will read the poem first and then ask for a student volunteer. A brief discussion will take place. I will take note of how many students saw the film. I will ask if they noticed the problems that Beatty is talking about. And what do they think of his criticism?

Discussions Questions:

1. Why did the poet write this poem?

2. What was he trying to accomplish by writing this poem?
3. Was he successful in what he were trying to accomplish? Why or Why not?
4. Who is the audience for this poem? A white audience or an African American audience or both?
5. Did any of the poems manage to make you look at something differently?
6. How is the term "revolution" used similarly or differently in two different pieces that use it?

Lesson adapted from African – American Poetry Unit: Studying the Great African – American Poets of the 20th Century (<http://msu.edu/~miazgama/aapoets.htm>)

Bibliography

Teachers

Brook, Cleanth & Warren, Robert Penn. Understanding Poetry 4th ed. New York: Holt,

Rinehart and Winston, 1976.

A very basic set of principles for analyzing poetry.

Holbrook, Sara. Practical Poetry: A nonstandard Approach to Meeting Content – Area

Standards. Portsmouth: Heinman, 2005.

A collection of instructional strategies with student samples, with chapters devoted to core content areas.

Koch, Kenneth. *Rose Where Did You Get That Red?*. New York: Random House, 1973.

A good book for those beginning poetry.

Margolick, David. *Strange Fruit*. As published in *Vanity Fair* - September 1998.

<http://www.ladyday.net/stuf/vfsept98.html>

Sherman, Joan R ed. *African - American Poetry of the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago:

University of Illinois Press, 1992.

An anthology of thirty-five poets presented. Each poet's poems are printed chronologically.

Wagner, Jean. *Black Poets of the United States*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press,

1973.

This book focuses on a half – century of African American poetry published from 1890 to 1940.

Students

Poetry for Kids Web Site

Curriculum Unit 05.01.05

<http://www.42explore.com/poetry.htm>

This site links to many other sites on specific poetry topics for students.

Resources / Web Sites

Poems

" To Cinque" by James Monroe Whitfield

<http://amistad.mysticseaport.org/library/misc/whitfield.to.cinque.html>

"On being brought from Africa to America" by, Phyllis Wheatley

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=620>

"Bury Me in a Free Land" by, Frances Harper

<http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/2001/harper0105.html>

"Following the Drinking Gourd" by Bernadine Connelly

<http://www2.lhric.org/pocantico/tubman/gourd.htm>

"Emancipation" by, Paul Laurence Dunbar

<http://www.dunbarsite.org/gallery/Emancipation.asp>

"Fifty Years, 1863 - 1913" by James Weldon Johnson

<http://www.nku.edu/~diesmanj/johnson.html>

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes

<http://www.duboisl.org/ShadesOfBlack/LangstonHughes.html>

"I, Too, Sing America" by, Langston Hughes

<http://www.oldpoetry.com/poetry/15962>

"Strange Fruits" by Lewis Allen

<http://www.fotografianegliannitrenta.com/can11.htm>

"Searching for The Prize" by George Cassutto

<http://www.cyberlearning-world.com/black.htm>

Website for Lesson II

Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance

<http://www.jeannepasero.com/harlem.html>

This website contains a brief summary of the history, art, music, journals, and newspapers of the Harlem Renaissance.

The Harlem Renaissance Collection

<http://165.29.91.7/classes/humanities/amstud/97-98/harren/HARREN.HTM>

This website provides a very brief historical overview of the time period and includes links to noted leaders, writers, and entertainers.

Paintings

Rhapsodies in Black: by Charmine Watkiss for the Institute of International Visual Arts.

<http://www.iniva.org/harlem/home.html>

This site combines images and text to elaborate on some key themes.

Essay

Lindy Hop in Harlem: The Role of Social Dancing

<http://artedge.kennedy-center.org/exploring/harlem/themes/lindyhop.html>

Jazz Music (audio)

PBS Biographies: Duke Ellington

http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_ellington_duke.html

Poetry (audio)

The Academy of American Poets: Langston Hughes

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?45442B7C000C0E01>

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

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