



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2006 Volume III: Children's Literature, Infancy to Early Adolescence

Students: Take Charge of Your Reading

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Overview

- "Medicine for the soul." ~Inscription over the door of the Library at Thebes
- "A book is like a garden carried in the pocket." ~Chinese Proverb
- "Mrs. Varner taught me that reading books would open the world to me..." — Rep. Leonard L. Boswell (D-IA)
- "In the old days, in my mother's time, I heard colored people ...had to learn to read in secret...A book was a precious thing..." -Rose Smith

How many students fervently believe in the force of the above sentiments? Reading increases vocabulary, increases knowledge of the known and unknown world, advances writing, and improves grades and test scores. "Reading strengthens the self," writes Harold Bloom. He quotes Waldo Thoreau Emerson as saying, "Reading falls apart and much of the self scatters with it." The author Norman Mailer wrote in a newspaper essay that Johnny can't read because the visuals he encounters move at such a fast pace that it feels like there is no time to sit and just read a book. Whatever the cause, it is difficult to inspire some high school students to read in their leisure time. It is difficult to compel the students to reach the twenty-five books requirement that is part of the literacy portfolio. Many just copy the backs of books or plagiarize from the Internet instead of reading the books. With the females, the competition is the so-called "urban books," which are unacceptable to include in the twenty-five books requirement. Many males don't complete books or read enough articles to make reading an essential routine.

The goal of this curriculum unit is to stimulate students to become enthusiastic about reading and to value books and reading as the authors of the above quotes value them. In preparation for an unknown future, the goal is for students to become lifelong readers and to become responsible learners. The purpose of this curriculum unit is to motivate students to become critical thinkers, discriminatory readers and world players in the scheme of life. As Bloom quotes one of Emerson's principles of reading, "You must be an inventor to read well."

What is relevant to African American adolescents that draws them and excites them to read? Where is the African American student's place in the world of reading? How can he enter the text so that he can transfer the ideas and themes to fit his world, and how can the reading transform and broaden his ideas of the world? Those are the questions this curriculum unit will answer.

African American teenagers face racism, police brutality, violence, self-hatred, crime, drugs, community decay and many other ills of society. Who cares about books and reading? What does reading have to do with any of these debilitating conditions that are consistently affecting teens? To help engage students to connect with universal themes, fairy tales can be compared to the current literature. What was the theme of *Hansel and Gretel*? From a class perspective didn't those children face poverty? Poverty was the reason they were thrust out of the house. The conflict was between the haves (the witch) and the have-nots. Historically when there is poverty, child abuse sometimes occurs. Looking at the story through the lens of gender, why are the ones who are evil, greedy and violent - the mother, who has the idea of losing the children in the woods, and the witch - both female? At some point in history an unwed woman was considered a witch. Some of the issues brought out in *Hansel and Gretel* could be faced racially, as with *The Learning Tree*, which exposes poverty, racism, violence, crime, drugs and self-hatred. There is an ideology that links both texts. The reader could use her life experiences to interpret text, but by using multiple meanings, context, theoretical approaches and various lenses to make sense of the text, the reader can bridge the gap from the known to the unknown.

Males in high school and beyond seem to think that reading is too passive. It's for females. Identity is an issue for both males and females. Who is in and who is out? *The Ugly Duckling* certainly did not fit in and was made to feel alienated and not acceptable. *Kaffir Boy* was alienated, abused, tortured and terrorized in his own native country. In *Metamorphosis* Gregor felt such an outcast in his own home that he turned into a bug to be stomped on and killed. Sometimes students, especially males, will read nonfiction to learn something new or legitimize and support their experiences and view of themselves. *The Pact: Three Young Black Men Make a Promise to Fulfill a Dream* or *Think Big* by Ben Carson tell stories of triumph, encouraging African American males to read and interact imaginatively with the authors. Starting small with familiar themes and issues from children's literature and building reading strategies that give students authority hopefully will lead students to eventually read rich text such as: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, *Invisible Man*, *Song Of Solomon*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Unknown World*, and so on.

This unit will guide students to interpret, analyze and evaluate their reading as they cross the bridge from assigned text to independent reading and from so called urban books to recommended books. Students will look at texts through various lenses based on gender, class, race, history, and ideology. Students will evaluate the literary quality of the text by asking and answering questions concerning the author, the background, theme, setting, characters, plot, style, point of view, balance, universality and the text's relationship to society. Students will critically analyze texts by first defining the key terms needed to be a literary critic or evaluator. Following a Web Quest, students will chart the literary definitions by giving the characteristics, examples, purpose and opposites of the terms.

To "see" the texts through various lenses, students will first analyze children's literature (*Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Tony the Tow Truck*, *The Ugly Duckling*, and *Charlotte's Web*), using a reader's response formula, which includes the characteristics the reader brings to the text, the meaning of the text, and the features of the text that support the meaning. Students will explore the historical and biographical backgrounds of the text and/or the author, the role of the female and the role of the male, and issues of power, culture, class and race. As critics, students will look beyond the surface of the text for connections to society and other texts. They will ask questions that systematically examine the underlying political, social and/or economical motivation of the authors and the texts.

Students will practice the theoretical approaches inspired by identity politics on children's literature. They should be able to easily read and identify the elements and qualities that have sustained the young children's classics. As critics, students will feel comfortable reading fairy tales, fables, folktales, myths and stories for

young children. They will be empowered to critique the stories and study the authors, the history and the background of the writing. After they gain confidence, students will read and use aspects of literary theory (the multiple perspectives of history, gender, class, ideology, and race) to critique *Macbeth* alongside the "urban" book, *The Coldest Winter Ever*, by Sister Souljah and a recommended book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neal Hurston. They will develop criteria for evaluating modern literature for older adolescents. Students should ask the questions: Why does a text continue to be read over time? What is the author trying to say? What is the author's purpose? How does the author support the purpose and the meaning? What is the universal theme that transcends time, place, class, race, politics, gender and even space?

As students develop skills for analyzing and evaluating literature, they will gradually assume the responsibility of deciding the criteria for selecting books. "Children learn when they take an active role in their own work." (Graves. 14) Using book reviews from magazines and established booklists as models, students will finally become editors and reviewers. Conclusions drawn from the focused approaches mentioned above should enable students to describe the qualities of their ten favorite books. The objective is for students to select and read challenging but interesting texts independently in order to fulfill the twenty-five books requirement. Students will compare and contrast traditional literature with recent books. Students will be permitted to include a so-called urban book to weigh against the evaluative criteria they have developed. They will set standards to develop a rubric to analyze and evaluate books. Based on the rubric, each group will generate a top ten booklist, write a comprehensive book assessment and publish a literary newsletter that will encourage the whole school to select texts from the list and the book reviews to fulfill their twenty-five-book requirement.

This curriculum unit will explore ways to engage African American high school students from grades nine to twelve to connect to the text and become confident, competent, committed, contributing critical and independent readers. The unit should be taught at the beginning of the school year for four weeks, but the focused approaches can be practiced throughout the year with many texts used in the English curriculum. The culminating assessment will be the book reviews in the newsletter created by the students.

Rationale

It seems difficult for some students to connect to the text. One reason why some African American students avoid reading or only want to read the banned urban books and / or don't perform well on the reading tests is that the text seems culturally insignificant to them, or is openly biased or exclusionary. Alfred Tatum, author of *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males*, recalled how the poverty and turmoil in his life could have had a negative effect on his literacy development, but meaningful and responsive literacy instruction helped nurture, sustain and encourage him to value the wonderful world of the written word. Reading helped with his personal growth and development. Through reading, he discovered new concepts, people and places.

Dr. Tatum listed four major barriers that stand in the way of raising the test scores of African American males: First there is no clear strategy to help students succeed. There is no existing role for literacy instruction for African American males. There is no clear consensus on effective reading instruction for struggling readers past the primary grades. Fourth, culturally relevant curriculum and forms of pedagogy, together with other factors known to benefit the achievement of African American students are not valued when teaching strategies and skills. (24) Why is there a so-called achievement gap? High school students do read. They just read what is relevant to them and reinforces what they already believe. Because historically, socially,

politically, economically and culturally African American students struggle to develop their identity, their images should be prominent throughout the texts they encounter in school and beyond, but the images they encounter should not just reinforce the urban stereotypes with which they are comfortable.

Dr. Tatum says the curriculum must go beyond reading instruction. The texts must address some of the psychological and emotional scarring of the war African Americans face to survive in the world. He quotes B. Kitwana as observing the following factors that still exacerbate the turmoil for African American students: globalization, economic neglect, mass media and popular culture, criminal justice, racial discrimination, crumbling Black communities and lack of fulfillment of civil rights promises. By contrast, an empowering curriculum, using worthwhile literature and encouraging critical thinking, is more likely to be found in higher achieving and non-urban white schools, according to Tatum's and Michael Smith's report on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

To empower students and, therefore, engage students, Tatum advises teachers to focus on activities that include: linking students with texts about issues that matter to them, using meaningful activities that address students' cognitive and affective domains, connecting the social, political, economical and cultural aspects of life to learning, developing skill and intelligence and nurturing the students' identity.

The gender perspective will take into account that African American females and males enter adolescence confused about their sense of identity. Their ideas about femininity and masculinity are connected to their sexuality and their appearance. It's not unique to African Americans, but the stakes are higher. (Tatum 43) Misguided notions, irresponsible decisions and destructive activities can be discussed by examining and questioning the role of the male or the role of the female portrayed in the text, as in *Cinderella*, excerpts from *The Coldest Winter Ever*, *Macbeth* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. By critically reading texts, students will not only extend the text into their own lives, but will stretch further by examining themselves, defining the roles played by characters, determining the meaning and the supporting structure of the text, and looking for the historical, biographical, political, social and ideological connotations.

Because young African Americans must live and learn amid turmoil, many feel they will never progress. Adventurous approaches to literature may help some students fix their lives *and* fix their "Chevys". Dr. Tatum describes his experience of "hooking" a young Black man, who was recently released from prison, to read *Makes Me Wanna Holler* by Nathan McCall. He invited him to read it as a way of examining his condition. Later he was able to convince him to read sociology texts and books about the economic conditions surrounding him. Just when he became worried that the association of literature and life wasn't going to be effective, his protégé thanked him by saying, "Man, this is the nourishment that feeds the mind."(38)

There are those who say it should not matter what is being taught or how it is being taught. The outcome should be higher test scores, and African American students just can't succeed. But cultural access is relevant to achieving higher standards of learning. Education maintains culture. Literature is culture. According to Chinua Achebe, "Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality." He says literature has social and political significance, allowing us to critically analyze our experiences, actions and relationships. Culturally relevant reading will help students have a point of view from which to link their own lives with the material, to analyze and to synthesize, evaluate, view the perspective of others and later be able to take some reflective action. If the reader isn't at the center of the topic, there is no incentive to fulfill the basic human need for identity, purpose, power and knowledge of the world. Reading should parallel the experience of the child so that she uses her prior knowledge to aid in stepping over to new knowledge. She understands.

She understands and she is comfortable starting at her center, but reading should also stretch the vision, preparing the student for the unknown. What is life like beyond her immediate circumstances? In a typical urban city where the main industry for employment has long fled, the focus of the news is sports. The focus of the economically, socially, politically and educationally depressed, oppressed and suppressed community is sex, drugs and violence. Therefore, those are the topics that attract the students - drugs, violence, sex and sports. The illusion of success for all in sports appears to offer the power of conspicuous yet legal consumption that they equate with success. Deborah Appleman in *Critical Encounters in High School* states that adolescents are faced with a destructive, bewildering and confusing world via the media. They live in a culture that values image over reality and consumerism over humanism. She said that literary theory reconceptualizes the familiar and comfortable, forcing the reader to reappraise his own ideas and the ideas of the text and using critical lenses to guide, inform and instruct. (2)

As a bridge between their world and the educational environment, aspects of literary theory can provide students with a way to "see" their world differently and analytically so they can intersect the culture of the school and popular culture. Literary theory accommodates multiple learning styles across the content areas. Students are directed to discover what factors and assumptions have shaped their world and then evaluate the perspectives of others. Students begin to understand ideology - why they hold certain values and why others hold certain values. Literary theory gives students the tools to question and challenge ideology. Unless students have the tools and skills to recognize, question, challenge and evaluate the cultural influences and forces over their lives, they will remain powerless. Eventually students will be able to ask, "What is the truth about literature? Whose heritage is it? Who has control over it?"

George Orwell declares, "No book is totally free from politics." Drawing on the author's background and other works adds to and further informs the reader's understanding of the text. When the reader looks at the text from the perspective of the role of the woman or the role of the man, the characters, incidents and themes distinguish themselves for analysis. Is the woman the head or the neck? Drawing on Marxist theory, Appleman says, "Text is a social construction - Who constructed it? What's it doing? What are the systems that are at work? What ideology is the text based on? What are the issues of power, class, race and resistance that drive the text?" (62) After the reader questions, answers, classifies and organizes the text, she looks further, deeper and between the lines to find the ambiguities, the inconsistencies, repressed concepts that were not revealed at first glance. Alas, to unlock the text in this way the reader must read it more than once — to the dismay of many students until they realize that literature is not a fixed object. It is a process, not a product.

Reading, understanding, interpreting, analyzing, constructing, deconstructing, synthesizing and evaluating define literature. What is literature? What is it not? The Oxford Dictionary defines literature as literally "acquaintance with letters" as in the first sense given in the (from *littera*, meaning "an individual written character). The word "literature" as a common noun can refer to any form of writing. "Literature" with emphasis on the uppercase L refers to written work of exceptional intellectual caliber. Who does control literature? Harold Bloom says in *How to Read and Why*, "...If individuals are to ...form their own judgments and opinions, they must read for themselves....Why they read must be for and in their own interest." The purpose of this curriculum is to impel students to read independently and critically, to go from the known to the unknown and to challenge themselves to read a variety of texts and genres. Although students may choose one text from any genre, is it in their best interest to read the so-called urban books? Do those books support or destroy the culture they inherit? Are those books really considered literature? Some say that they don't fit the standard by having poor grammar and syntax, a meaningless, nonintellectual, unbelievable story-line and inconsistent or unconvincing characters.

In a scathing essay Kia Gregory writes that such books reinforce stereotypical images of young people. They portray those who live in the "hood" as glamorous and stimulating. A subscriber to the Philadelphia Weekly responds, "It used to be what you heard in the barbershop. Now it's being passed off as literature." Kia laments that the so-called ghetto fiction silences serious authors. She says, "James Baldwin portrayed the 'hood', along with the glaring effects of poverty, racism, politics, sexuality and humanity. These are universal subjects with something to be learned, valued and gained." Writers defend their simplistic writing style by saying that they are reflecting their "voices." They plead that the more they write, the better they will become. Well, the more the students read, the better they will scrutinize their reading. Through multiple lenses students will be able to really see, critique and standardize their own reading. As Harold Bloom believes, "The use of reading is to prepare oneself for change; the final change is universal."

Objectives

The overall goal of this curriculum unit is to motivate high school students to read critically, independently and meaningfully so that they become lifelong readers. The objectives of the unit are to teach students to critically analyze and evaluate literature. As students peel off the layers of the texts, they will be able to think beyond the text and let the universe be open to them. Students will be able to not only make connections, but to reach and connect to a world unknown. Students will be able to set the definition and the properties of literature. Students will be able to know, understand and apply the different ways of looking at text. After students have practiced analyzing the text by using children's literature, they will go on to analyze age appropriate texts. Students will read many genres for a variety of purposes. Students will be able to write an evaluative and informative book review and a persuasive essay. Using technology and Microsoft's Publisher Program, students will create a literary newsletter and send their book reviews to authentic publishing websites. This curriculum unit will require students to reach the Pittsburgh Public School Communications Standards and master the Portfolio Pennsylvania State Assessment.

Strategies

The sequence of instructional activities will start with students' current needs, interests, and abilities. Then the activities and skills will build so that students will develop the expertise to be committed readers. Orientation skills will be reviewed, demonstrated, and practiced: setting learning goals, modeling, guided practice, group discussion model, cooperative learning, kwl, self-assessment, criterion-referenced feedback and reflection.

Long novels are intimidating to reluctant readers. Children's literature and short texts will be the passage to the longer age-appropriate reading for high school. Reading related articles, essays, movie dialogs, cartoons and song lyrics will help develop a knowledge base for students who may not be sophisticated enough to bring historical, biographical, political, social, gender, class, culture and racial background to the discussion. Because the targeted students are African American, African culture will drive the material, but students will progress from self-centered to center of the universe. Readers need to find themselves reflected as they gain confidence in criticizing their reading. A balance of gender-based material will be introduced as cooperative,

not as adversary. The abbreviated reading will not replace the longer text. The expectation of increasing the reading achievement of the students is very high, so this unit will not dumb down the requirements.

Reading efficiently, accurately and critically is a skill. The more one reads, the stronger the skill. The more engaged the reader is, the better he will scrutinize his reading. Students will read every day. Time will be allotted for students to read silently. Students also will be assigned to read for homework. Lessons must be a developing process: from the knowledge level, to comprehension, to application, to analysis, to synthesis, and to the evaluation level.

Learning is social. Research has provided the strategies and shown the benefits of guiding students to offer and accept their voices and choices in a student-centered activity. Literature circles will provide an atmosphere of discussion, cooperation, and an exchange of ideas. Reading, along with discussion, will be whole class, in pairs or groups of five. Eventually students will be encouraged to read solo. The teacher will serve as the gentle guide for discussion by providing some historical or biographical background, asking canny questions and encouraging students to think outside of the box and venture outside of their world.

Students will use graphic organizers to structure information in reading and writing. They will identify similarities and differences, solve problems, make decisions, create a rubric to assess the reading, and make analogies. Students will compare and coordinate new knowledge with what they already know.

To make the learning meaningful, the culminating activity has a knowledge artifact (book review), a transformational approach (reading urban books in comparison with recommended books) and a social action (book reviews to book websites and a literary newsletter, encouraging the whole school to read the top ten books). Besides points and grades, students should receive the Mary McCloud Bethune Award for leaving a legacy of sharing knowledge.

Lessons

On the board write the question: Is school important? After students have been orientated to learning, group, and behavioral procedures, they will read Gwendolyn Brooks' poem, "*We Real Cool*." Ask students to read aloud, indicating their sense of the poem through the inflections of their voice as they read it. Discuss the meaning of the poem, with the understanding that there is no definitive meaning. What words convey the meaning? Discuss the possibility of different voices, different perspectives. (Note: Gwendolyn Brooks wrote the poem as an ironic depiction of some young men she would pass by at a pool hall. Is everything as "cool" as it seems to be? Presently students say, "I'm just 'chillin'." How does their attitude compare with the speakers' attitude in the poem? Is school really important? In an interview Brooks says, "The 'Wes' in "*We Real Cool*" are tiny, wispy, weakly, argumentative, 'Kilroy-is-here' announcements. The boys have no accented sense of themselves, yet they are aware of a semi-defined personal importance. Say the 'We' softly." Brooks says that her aim is to write poems that "call" all black people in alleys, gutters, schools, offices, prisons, in pulpits, on farms, and on thrones not just to teach but to entertain and to enlighten.) Discuss the following questions: Is this a racist poem? Does this poem speak to only one gender, and does the poem depict a stereotype of that gender? Do only poor people have the attitude of the speakers? Does the poem have a historical context or could it apply during any time period?

Now pass out the story of *The Ugly Duckling*. Have students read the story in groups of four or five. As a group (not individually), they must discuss the meaning of the story and key concepts, words, phrases, and quotes that support the meaning. After each group shares its interpretation with the class, have the groups converge again to discuss the many perspectives from which the swan's story could be told. Encourage them to let their imaginations fly as they retell the swan's story. Discuss and share the possible perspectives: sociologist, psychologist, environmentalist, hunter, child, editorial writer, mother, father, little sister, teenage brother, developer, scientist, historian, prisoner, war protester, and the head of the NAACP. For homework have students rewrite the nursery rhyme, *There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe* from a different perspective.

Have students share their adaptations of *There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*. After reading *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by A. Wolf, ask students to compare the traditional story with the version from the Wolf's point of view. On the board write a quote from John Lye: "There are no absolutes, no foundational truth, no eternalities." Make a Venn diagram to compare the pigs' and wolf's perspectives. What happened in the story? Who was the victim? Describe him/them. Discuss the connotations of color, class, values, history, and gender from both points of view.

Lesson 2

Ask students to use examples to respond to the above quote. Give students instructions for the following Web Quest (Appendix I) so that they will learn about types of literary theory and related terminology: literature, text, literary criticism, literary theory, class, economic systems- capitalism and socialism, ideology, gender, race, and history. The Web Quest is designed to help students understand and apply some literary terminology and some aspects of literary theory. Students will have to extract the definitions from reading essays, web dictionaries and web encyclopedias.

Students should then complete a concept chart for each term with the characteristics, examples, opposites, and purpose of the term. Although each student will choose one perspective from which to view the text, as students are grouped in fours, it is the responsibility of each student to teach everyone in the group his or her perspective. All students should be knowledgeable about the literary terms related to their perspective. This lesson should take two class periods.

Based on the criteria of the rubric, students should demonstrate knowledge, application, and interpretation of the literary theories. To get an historical viewpoint students should look up the author to find out what was happening when the story was written and/or what experiences and beliefs the author had that might have influenced the writing, and who might have influenced the writer's craft. Students should use the information on the concept chart to look at the text several times through the eyes of gender, race, class, historical context and ideology. Questions as to the author's or the text's purpose and point of view should be posed.

Students should then retell the story from the point of view of a woman or a man, (if not evident) a working class or ruling class character, an African American teenager, the historical content of present day, and from the ideology of egalitarianism- equality of opportunity and everyone starting from the same position.

Lesson 3

On the board write, "Until lions tell their stories, tales of hunting will glorify the hunter." Ask students to bring in artifacts and examples that reflect the popular culture and their personal experiences. The items could be an article from a periodical, an ad, film, a television program, a music video, lyrics from a song or rap, a poem,

recruitment ads, or any other artifact. Have students describe the literary theories they have chosen briefly in their own words - historicism, gender, race, class, and ideology. In groups of three to four have each group select one example of popular culture. Have groups discuss which perspective could help students understand the artifact? How does using that lens help students to understand? How does using a perspective help students broaden how they "look" at "things"? Groups should keep these questions in mind as they discuss and share with the whole class. Discuss the quote and its relationship to seeing the world through critical lenses.

Lesson 4

Students should be able to understand how they bring their own beliefs and values to their interpretation of the world and to the text. Have students read the short stories, *The Pocketbook Game* by Alice Childress and *The Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant. Students should respond to the stories by completing the Reader Response Chart. (Appendix II) As readers, students interpret the world according to what's normal to them in their social world with the cultural meanings that accompany their social norms. They should ask themselves "Why do I have this opinion?" It is their educational, family, religious, regional, historical moment and cultural context that links them with the text.

What are the students' experiences, morals, social codes and views of the world? Students should describe their own personal qualities or events that connect them to the stories and would influence their responses. Next each student should describe the meaning he or she gets out of both stories. What factors are influencing the responses? The text is symbols on a page. The symbols only have meaning when there is interaction between the reader and the text. The experience (the process of literature) occurs when there is a combining of what the reader already knows, feels, and desires with what the text offers. The reader puts meaning into verbal symbols. Then the text makes a path to get to that meaning through its construction. Next ask the student to list the textual features that help the reader obtain meaning from the text. What did the text do as a work of art to help the reader build and synthesize meaning? What images were formed? What emotions did the text elicit? How did the text guide the active participation of reading? Remind students they may have to read the text more than twice with special looking glasses. For homework assign *The Secret Garden*. Students should provide the information requested on the reader response sheet.

Students have used visuals, young children's literature, poetry and short texts to scaffold and solidify new information and apply it to reading. Review the new information by comparing the different reactions, meanings and textual features for all three stories. As an assessment of comfort and understanding the five perspectives, have students discuss the application of each literary theory by forming a circle. Use props such as a hat or scarf for gender, clear glasses for historicism, sunglasses for race and a crown for class. The storytelling should reinforce students' knowledge, comprehension, application and some analysis of viewing literature through a critical eye. As each student takes an item (symbol), he must explain that represented perspective with an example from one of the stories by saying, "If I put this _____ lens on, this is what I see: _____. This text is about: _____." Each student should explain a point of view, then pass an item (symbol) to the next storyteller. There should be an assortment of examples.

Now students should be ready for the big questions, the big pictures and the big stories. The goal of this unit is to propel students to read independently and to broaden their reading material and viewpoint. Students are urged to have what Deborah Appleman says is "critical encounters with texts." In this lesson students will critically read the novels: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neal Hurston, *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah, *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde and Stuff* by Walter Dean Myers, independently outside of school along

with *Cinderella* and *Macbeth* in class. They will apply and critique each theory to create multiple interpretations, allowing the literary theories to guide them. Students will have three weeks to read the three novels outside of class. *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde and Stuff* can be read in two days. From the list each group will decide which book it will read first and how many pages should be read each day (at least 25 pages). Each student is responsible for keeping a daily response journal which includes reader responses-personal reactions, qualities and meanings of the text, other textual connections, and textual features. This response can be directed toward character(s), plot, setting, theme, conflict, mood, or tone of text. The response journal of one typed page is due at the end of the week with the name of the book, the author, date, and the pages that were read. Students will come to class prepared to discuss the book twice a week. To prepare for discussion in her group, each student must bring five questions that stimulate discussion about the big ideas of the book, that discuss interesting or puzzling quotes, phrases or words, that connect to experiences, events or other texts and/or questions the author or a character. To stimulate discussion, put quotes from the text on the board. Students will receive the following points:

- Preparation for book discussion 50
- Participation in book discussion 50
- Reader Response Journal 50
- Reflection of Multiple Perspectives 50
- Total 200

For two days out of the week students in groups of four will consider *Macbeth, Cinderella, Fast Sam Cool Clyde and Stuff, Coldest Winter Ever* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* from five different perspectives: class, gender, race, ideological and historical . There will be five theory stations around the room with questions and reflections. Each group will go to one station for a period. Students should discuss the questions but individually respond to the sheets as the questions and reflection apply to the book or story the group is discussing.

Class Station

Terms to Know

- Stages of History- Marx believed that history moved in stages from communalism to feudalism to capitalism to communism to the classless society under communism.
- Materialism- Each stage was shaped by the economic system. The key to understanding the systems was to focus on the "mode of production." It was necessary to focus on who owned the "means of production." Under capitalism a small class - the bourgeoisies - owned the factories. Under socialism, the workers would own the factories.
- Class Struggle- "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle." Feudalism and capitalism were characterized by the exploitation of one class by another.
- Dialectic- Marx believed that great historical changes followed a pattern whereby any idea or condition (thesis) brought into being its opposite (antithesis). The ruling bourgeoisie under capitalism brought the opposite, the proletariat. The two opposites would conflict until they produced a new higher stage. (synthesis)
- Capitalism- Marx saw capitalism as the cruelest system as a small class of owners exploited the working majority. It was the nature of capitalism for wealth and ownership to be concentrated in an ever-shrinking mega rich group. This internal contradiction would eventually destroy capitalism.
- Working Class Misery- It was the nature of capitalist production to become more and more

technologically efficient requiring fewer workers. Capitalism, therefore would be plagued with unemployment. As machines made a worker's skill less important, wages would sink lower and lower. The worker less needed would become more alienated. Under communism Marx saw a system free of exploitation.

Questions:

See Appendix

Gender Station

Students should examine the portrayal of the characters, male and female, the languages of the text, the attitude of the author and the relationship between the characters. What comments is the author making about society relative to the male and female. Is the relationship between the male and female complementary or adversarial?

Questions

See Appendix II

Race Station

Examine the omission or suppression of race along with stereotypical attitudes, behavior, speech patterns and images. Are African Americans portrayed as one- dimensional or in a demeaning manner?

Questions

See Appendix II

Historical Station

Have students examine the historical events and the biographies of the authors from the time the document was written. Provide articles of background and historical context concerning the Brothers Grimm, Walter Dean Myers, Zora Neal Hurston, Sister Souljah (There is an interview and character analysis at the back of her book.) and Shakespeare.

Brothers Grimm - Note that Cinderella is an adaptation of an earlier work from China where it was considered unsightly for women not to have very tiny feet. Most of the stories from that era and area were of emotional turmoil, fear of abandonment and parental abuse. They were not originally for children. Walter Dean Myers - Note that Walter Dean Myers was orphaned at an early age and used writing to compensate for his speech impediment. During the 1940's most African Americans were still feeling the pangs of the Depression. Quote: "I want to bring value to those who have not been valued..." Zora Neal Hurston - Note that Zora Neal Hurston was opposed to the Brown versus Board of Education decision because she thought it was patronizing and condescending. She felt men had no respect for strong, powerful women. They wanted women to be weak. Although she was said to love her blackness, as an anthropologist, she felt there was no such thing as race. Sister Souljah - Note that Sister Souljah was in the middle of a controversy with presidential candidate Bill Clinton for her statement, "If black people could kill black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people." She refused to back down when Clinton condemned her and scolded Jessie Jackson for supporting her. The quote was in this context "The government...were well aware...that black people were

dying everyday under gang violence. So if you're a gang member and you would normally be killing somebody, why not kill a white person. Do you think that somebody thinks that white people are better or above and beyond dying, when they would kill their own kind?" Shakespeare - Note that Shakespeare lived during the Elizabethan era with two classes- the upper class or nobility and everyone else. The upper class was well educated, wealthy and associated with royalty and high members of the church. Many members of nobility were involved in conspiracy so were often accused and punished by hanging, torture, decapitation and/or burning. Women were not spared. Single women were frowned upon and were sometimes accused of being witches. Most went into domestic service. The Bubonic Plague, carried by rats, killed millions across Asia during Shakespeare's time.

Questions

See Appendix II

As they write their book reviews, guide students to use a compelling, attention-grabbing introduction. A quote, a rhetorical question, a poem or anecdote are some suggestions. Have students include pertinent information about the author or an historical event for the background. Based on the criteria, prompt students to describe the main qualities of the book. Using notes from their reader response sheets, reflections and journals, students will describe one book in the form of a book review. Use the *New York Times Book Review*, *Barnes & Noble Review*, *Publishers Weekly*, and any other book review periodical as models. Discuss any literary theories that are evident in the reviews. Discuss the criteria for determining literary quality in the reviews. What would be the categories? Guide students to describe their criteria for understanding setting, character, plot, theme conflict, style, mood and tone of the text. Have students list the qualities expected from the different perspectives. Have students qualify the characteristics with ratings from **advanced** or **four-star** to **not recommended**. This student-generated rubric will be used for all books read and reviewed for the twenty-five book-reading requirement. Since students have read *Cinderella*, *Macbeth*, *The Coldest Winter Ever*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde and Stuff*, they should compare text and show how texts interconnect on thematic issues. Develop students' ability to judge by using evidence from the text. Encourage students to refute the inconsistencies, ambiguities and the controversial results of the multiple perspectives. Each month one group should be responsible for gathering book reviews, interviews, and authors' news to put in the literary newsletter created in Microsoft Publisher. Students should be persuasive, creative and informative with visuals, graphics and invigorating information. Book reviews may become poems, persuasive editorials, or letters to the author or one of the characters. As students choose, read and submit two books per month, each month the presiding group should compile a list of ten favorite books to share with the whole school as encouragement to read. Students must also submit book reviews once a month to on-line book reviews such as: <http://www.scholastic.org>., <http://www.smartgirl.org>., http://www.classiclitt.about.com/od/forstudents/ht/aa_litreview.htm, <http://www.clpgh.org/teensread/teenlists.html>., <http://www.speakuppress.org>., or <http://teenlink.com/submissions>

Stage 2

Students will select a book from the recommended list and another book of their choice each month. Armed with the mastery of looking at text with a critical eye students will read independently outside of school and thirty minutes during Sustained Silent Reading in class. They should continue to submit weekly journals.

Stage 3

Thematically students may choose one of the questions from the list of guided discussion questions on multiple perspectives to write a well-organized persuasive essay. Students will take a position and support it with evidence from reading, listening and viewing a variety of genres, fiction, and non-fiction and visual and audio media. First students should gather and select sources that support the view from one of the perspectives - race, gender (male or female), or class. As students critically examine information, they must decide what is relevant and note facts, expert opinions, quotations, and events that clarify and defend the view based on race, gender or class. With logical reasoning students should clearly show the concerns, expectations and beliefs of the stakeholders from the chosen perspective. Using propaganda techniques, students will argue in support of the position from the point of view of the stakeholder.

Once a month the class should synthesize their reading experiences with "book talk", sharing new discoveries, points of view and insights.

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