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Speak Words, Recite Messages: The Oral Interpretation of the Word

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Overview

African-American students are sometimes scorned for their incessant chatter in schools, while they sometimes show a disinterest in reading, writing and computing. They talk and talk some more; often times little is their discussion about the academic discourse of the day. The naturalness of orality in the lives of African-American students has never been recognized as a part of who they are and where they come from in the academic setting. Hearing the story is essential in the culture of Africa, hence a part of the African-American psyches. The oral tradition was a central part of African culture. It was a practiced and natural form passed onto children bridging the gap between the generations and enhancing literary skills. African-American students' speech practice can seemingly serve as a cultural resource, and if it can be taught, and drawn on in the classroom, orality can become a way for them to connect to, rather than disconnect from, school.

This unit will explore, discover and recognize how vocalization of poetry, some of the religious preaching and political speeches by African-Americans who have influenced the students' community and American society. It will give students additional tools to become active and keen in their listening skills as another part of what occurs in oral presentations. Students will study the relationship of communicator and audience and how the two entities each play a major role in the creation or recreation of an oral work, given its specificity. Students will be given opportunity to perform at spoken word venues and witness performances of speeches, spoken word poetry, and oral recitations. In addition, students will reflect on historical implications and political overtones of the oral performances we study.

Students will learn prominent uses of vocal incantations, tone, lexis style, physical expression, and vernacular dialects. In bringing text to life through vocalization, they will be exposed to oral recordings of spoken word poetry, as well as video and audio recordings of speeches that draw attention to their social function or highlight political occurrences in the dynamics of American society and/or the American Black community. This unit will prepare the foundation for study of the students' own performance writings, and class readings, and improve students' listening skills. It will also give students a broader knowledge of orality and important texts in the history of African-Americans.

The unit can be used in a regular or advanced English Language Arts, American History, Civics, and General Law classroom for the high school level. The lessons within the unit can be adapted for use in Advanced Placement courses, as well as be adapted for use in a learning support environment. This unit uses the

Pennsylvania State Academic Standards from Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening; Arts & Humanities; History; and even some from Science and Technology.

Rationale

This unit is developed to enhance and support the mandatory implementation of African-American History and Literature in the School District of Philadelphia. It can be used across the curriculum if used in segments giving students access to the effects of voice and sound historically and the present day. Messages are expressed through voice and physical body language. Many speeches have had a significant impact on Americans, and voice continues to affect the nation; students can experience this while paying attention to the current Presidential election candidates during the nominees' spoken performances.

All Philadelphia students can be taught to familiarize themselves with some of the important differences in African historically noted oral learning styles. Voice explodes through its attention to detail, rising, falling, trembling, reaching, and spinning. Silence itself brings to life some truths from the speakers' and listeners' experiences. Students will learn and become familiar with the practice of the human voice, which is carefully honed and sculpted; and non-human voice, which is digitized and used as an icon for the vast spectrum of sound. This unit will delve into the methodology and aesthetic play of structuring an oral performance piece; ultimately students will produce an entire spoken word program.

In order for students to understand African-American and Caribbean "voice" as a component of culture, tradition, and meaning in day-to-day living, students will gain knowledge of the tradition of orality in Africa, and what occurred a long time ago when Africans were brought to the Americas and the islands surrounding the mainland. Language learning is complicated. Unfamiliarity and, sometimes, disdain for the subject matter, the fundamental tool through which the majority of us learn is lost to a large population of African American children. ¹ Students will have a way to find their voice using memory and reconstruction of knowledge from a deeply embedded conceptual framework of their cultures. Students will be asked to find significance in oral history performance. We will use the speeches of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X to note this phenomenon. The poetry of Amiri Baraka will be viewed, read, and analyzed for oral history significance too. Oral history performance is particularly appropriate in giving social, political, and moral instruction, obvious or concealed.

Students will begin to develop their own imagining ear ² as a way in which to infer meaning and definition in written performance pieces as well as in critically hearing speeches and deciphering poetic dialogue. Spoken language variation and the study of dialect will give students background information in discovering the links to themselves and their ancestry through literary methods from authors they will read and in their own use of spoken word performance projects.

Students will experience how prominent African-American leaders establish themselves through their skillful practice of spoken words. We will analyze the speeches of the men mentioned above and include the late U.S. Senator Barbara C. Jordan. Vocal performance in this unit refers to a broad spectrum of cultural acts—from religious ritual, to spoken word events, to church ministers' preaching, and African-American political speaking. These cultural performance acts are all, at root, a defined series of symbolic gestures, done in a set manner always with some variations, having set meanings, and performed with a particular end in mind. ³

Students will hear actual vocal performances from digitized media - Internet, iPods, and recordings digitally documented, taped or recorded and stamped on vinyl. Naturally, these same acts occur in Caribbean and African-American communities and groups. Therefore we will cover this happening in both communities.

Voice in Caribbean countries has brought forth many poets and song masters. The same cultural roots are intertwined with that of the African-American. Research shows that because of the separation and dispersion of African families held in captivity, traditions remained in the spirit of the elders. Elder members of families still carried within their souls some of the traditions of their homelands. Certain practices from the African tradition never died as captors were led to believe. This spiritual linkage to the folklore of the Motherland is represented in past and present vocal traditions of the Caribbean poet and storyteller singers. Students will become attuned to comparing and contrasting vocal performance styles, rhythms, and verbal repetition, and accustomed to recognizing call and response practices. Students will learn to hear the power in the lyrics and the rhythms and the relations between them. Through this type of examination, students will learn where power is held in either the words or the rhythms. Dialectic voice will be learned as not a "put down" characteristic but as an aesthetic language transformation reflecting the speaker's ancestors' geographical placement during the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Purpose of Voice

Within the structure of the core curriculum guidelines in Philadelphia, teachers are required to train students in analyzing, comprehending and deciphering literary elements used by various authors. Using voice to look at a vast number of the required and this unit's preferred poems, speeches, sermons, and essays will provide students with an opportunity to explore their own sense of who the speaker might be, how many speakers are heard, and what might be the message the author is trying to convey. For these reasons and more, students will learn to demonstrate fluency and comprehension in analyzing the uses and effectiveness of literary elements used by numerous authors. Students will be guided in reading selections aloud with accuracy using appropriate rhythm, flow, meter, tone and diction.

Viewing orality through literacy in this unit will introduce to students modes of communication such as poetic readings and text to speech recitation in can be treated as an oral genre. Students will learn that several specific writings can be specified as oral because of the dialect within poetry readings and speeches. Voice, vocal exchange, and sound in face-to-face interaction differ greatly from interaction between readers and the text on the page. In speeches and written poetic performances, speakers or readers can always refer back to a written text. This sets the stage for study of actual voices in interviewing, performances, readings, and listening. Voice is the vehicle for expression and persuasion, a personal style; it is like a fingerprint. Exchanging the presence of "I" depending on the relationship shared, voice is active in multiple forms, and is a shared creation of communication. Voice as a standard of physics is a product of a resonance of air that vibrates through the body. Students will learn all the aspects of voice as found in literary elements and in social interactions.

Whenever we speak we give listeners clues about our heritage and personality. Voice establishes and maintains relationships with other people. Authors use voice always in their writing; students must be active listeners when reading the word on the printed page developing their "imagining ear" as described by Robert Frost. The imagining ear is the process in which one can hear the tone from the words on the page using prior

knowledge and/or personal experiences. There is a somewhat exploitation of incompatibles and dissonances between written and spoken communication between personal and public modes. Also, between silent and performance reading, students will uncover these differences and find similarities beyond the words either written or spoken.

Dialect Matters

"When I know a man's sound, well, to me, that's him, that's the man. That's the way I look at it. Labels I don't bother with." - *John Coltrane* ⁴

Dialect in America can be a distressing subject in issues pertaining to the African-American voice. Africans in America were denied their languages, denied literate education, denied communication, denied the comfort and communion of the word. Work songs, originating in West African farmers, became the means to the end for slaves in America; thus began their assimilation to the English language. First, slaves were assimilating language practice through uses of diction, syntax and word recognition. It must be noted that the singing and call and response of the work songs were at first African in words but later sung in English. As a result, literacy education was offered to African-Americans. They were able to learn, develop, design, and implement a "new" language, one in which they could safely communicate with each other without the threat of incitement of rebellion toward their masters or owners. Therefore, dialect was purposeful and needed for survival in this country. It gave African-Americans the ability to move in and out of and within groups. Furthermore it provided relations in connections to people outside their closest circles.

Accents and speech patterns generally tell people where we are from without the speaker having ever disclosed the information, except, some would say, in the case of African-Americans. These patterns reveal identity through voice. There are, varied forms of language that acquire multiple forms of dialect, considering socio-economic status and more. Many social attributes bring about different languages; some are found embedded in the socially dominant language. Students will find they speak a different language than that of their parents and others of different age groups. In considering dialect, African-Americans have to also consider external perceptions, combined with speaking abilities, including skin tone, attractiveness, age, gender, hair and clothing styles.

Some aspects of dialectic language differ from European-based dialect speaking, with regard to semantics, phonology, and grammar. Furthering the distance created by dialectic speech patterns, regional speaking differences exist, as well. This measure of differentiating the spoken word establishes a community of people with the same status in a social class system. Ask students to consider when a phone call comes in, what are their first thoughts after saying and hearing, "Hello!" As stated by Baldwin in regards to the role of a speakers' language. "Language, also, far more dubiously, is meant to define the other—and, in this case, the other is refusing to be defined by a language that has never been able to recognize him." ⁵ Baldwin in this statement refers to the irony of the Negro dialect being critiqued through the lens of a viewer who also has adapted their language to fit their geographic location and economic status but, that viewer, despises the Negro.

At this point in the unit, students will be shown a series of videotaped speakers requiring an evaluation of speaker effectiveness on audience attitude and thinking. Students will be asked to answer the same question for each speaker. Describe the speaker in stereotypical terms, understanding that all students know what stereotyping is. If they do not understand the concept, explain it. Briefly brainstorm ideas and give evidence for each suggested idea. Within this component of the unit, a discussion about "code-switching" is certainly appropriate. Stereotyping is a standardized categorization and/or identification of a specific group of people by

conception or image invested with special meaning and held in common by several members of the group or other individuals or groups. ⁶ Students can also brainstorm a list of situations when code-switching concept is used in life and give basis to each suggested instance.

Code-switching will be defined as the ability to speak two or more different dialects, using one dialect rather than the other in particular social situations. It shall be determined that students shall not only speak the language of the streets, but also the language of the boardroom, and beyond. Switching dialects has to be considered, for students, as a way to be more socially acceptable, as a form of social flexibility and empowerment. Code switching is a part of the evolution of language, nurturing the ebb and flow of the phenomenon of dialect. Students should be guided in deciphering the meaning of the term, the appropriateness of its use, bringing dialects together fruitfully, and the social situations in which it can occur. Teachers might attempt to have students develop a catalog poem or spoken word poem illustrating their comprehension of the term.

African-Americans and others perceive Black English as having lower credibility in many areas of society. Race and dialect are considered an integral part of the communication. Black English, Negro dialect, and Ebonics are all considered as a sub-standard means to communicate to the rest of the American world. Students will gain knowledge of use of varied vernacular languages when presenting speeches, poems and/or writing self-authored creative writing assignments or while reciting the poetry of Paul Lawrence Dunbar or reading a paragraph or two from James Baldwin's article (see Teacher Resources).

While participating in this exercise, students will be better-shaped speakers through knowing about social penalties when overusing dialect, or when using dialect in distinctly inappropriate social situations. However, students should not be guided in a negative way to learn the difference of the two dialects, only that usage of Standard English dialect offers more social rewards than not. Another small group discussion can be developed to determine a correlation between being well-spoken and success. Students would have to sense levels of dialect use through personal or professional relationships, associations, as well as the highs and lows of "superstardom" in the African-American community. Students can journal about different instances or situations they either participated in or witnessed in code-switching errors. Have them evaluate and/or comment on the instance; then discuss the consequences or outcomes of the blunder.

Orality of Africa

"By our voices we recognize each other in the darkness." *from the Ifa Divination* ⁷

The act of expression is fundamentally oral. Africa was and continues to be an oral world. Africa was shaped by the living voice, but mutilated by the colonial structures that came into power, taking away the voice of its people. The objective in African orality is to use voice to translate everyday experiences into living sound. West Africa, in particular, uses voice in terms of several key principles. Orality is *functional*: always a form of communication; orality is *public*: sound travels and the more listeners the better; orality is *communal*: we share identity, land, language, values and needs through affirmations of creating sounds. Orality is *participatory*: letting each other know what we think of voice; sound, adding other verses while calling, shouting or responding; orality is *interdisciplinary*: the spirit moves the listener through sounds of the soul. Interdisciplinary in this context denotes physical, spiritual, and mental combination of speakers and listeners.

Orality is *experimental*: the creative moment, the experience, the product and the process. Orality is *vocal*: a talking drum, conversing in a language, recreates reality, a dialogue with another self. ⁸

Orality makes the listener do work, actively making connections between spoken images and/or ideas. African orality was an achievement of humankind that familiarized many with community life and history. Oral values stand in opposition to literate values: they favor process over product, practice over theory and improvisation over reproduction, social function over personal expression, spoken over written words, and the collective over the individual. Use this comparison statement with student small groups. Ask them to brainstorm (allow approximately ten minutes) ideas related to the lists of comparisons in the realm of values and traditions that they might practice in their homes or community outside of schools. Invite the opportunity for students born in other countries to present the collective information after the discussion groups finish the task. Prepare a short homework assignment for students, answering the questions: Why do I think the way that I do about orality? Am I afraid to discuss this subject? Where did the messages about orality I hear come from? Have my ancestors (grandparents, etc.) taught me anything about orality (stories, tales, and poems)? The following day, students can present their findings in small group discussions. Groups will choose a presenter/leader to report out to the whole class key points summarizing the discussion. This can stand as an exercise for connecting information to life and an exercise in summarization.

Oral Power in the African-American Community

Today's youth have brought to focus another dimension in rhetorical culture the spoken word being a powerful vessel for carrying the messages of any experience that effects communal interaction. Students have been outspoken in technology use as a medium to communicate both in spoken and written words. This practice also represents the power of the African oral culture and tradition, young African-Americans have set themselves apart from other generations in grasping and being moved by the lyrical attributes of spoken word poetry, call and response preaching, and rap (poetry in motion). The orator, poet, or preacher who animates his message so that the listener can become an active participant is considered a great speaker. As a result, speaker and audience become one in the message. Call-response oration can be deemed as a perfected social interaction referring to the power potential in the strong sense of group community, group unity, and group cooperation. Students will share their religious organizational practices. The mega-church has come to the forefront of the African-American community and young people are moved by the preacher who coaxes his audience with creativity, including tone, volume, physical movement, rate of speech, and rhythm. Each of these elements reaches a responsive chord with each person achieving a sense of equality and harmony to all listeners.

Students will be assigned to listen to both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X speeches. They will have to determine the type of speech, secular or religious. They will evaluate how the speaker and audience work together to build a desired result - unity. Students will learn the conceptual traits of the call and response orator: *Anaphora* - the repetition of words or phrases within successive sentences; *Vocal creativity* - changes in tone, rate, loudness, emphasis, intonation, and duration of words and phrases. *The Step* - a variation in pitch between words or syllables, sometimes heard in a step-up or step down pattern; *Cadence* - much like the pounding of the human heart or the measure marked by the African drum, words spoken in rhythmic balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliteration and assonances. *Synchronous kinesics* - body movements of the audience and speaker, people move in unison and reflect each other's movements; *Paralinguistic Behaviors* ⁹ - vocal behavior takes on the oral characteristics (i.e.- rate, loudness). ¹⁰ Students will analyze the process of speaker and audience, how they become a unified whole by isolating the conceptual traits mentioned above. Additionally, students will listen to the speeches of Senator Barbara C. Jordan and

determine differences and similarities in the call-response traits.

African-Americans are known to participate with a speaker in forms of verbal approval, verbal commands, hand clapping, foot stomping, finger popping, and more. These participatory behaviors are tolerated and encouraged by the performer/speaker; this is used for the flow of emotional and aesthetic impulses. King and X's oratory can provide students with a greater appreciation for the cultural heritage of the oral tradition. Students will find that call-response and the Afro centric philosophy of communication reflect a rich legacy that can be nurtured and expressed within the school setting. This practice is very African in origin and can be approached in the classroom in reference to voice.

Caribbean Cadence

Many of the languages spoken in the Caribbean Islands are deemed to be "broken English" but they truly are a distinct creation. Those who speak Caribbean languages, which are called Patois or Creole, speak a language that consists of an amalgamation between European English, Spanish, French, Dutch and African languages. Depending upon the colonizing European group, the language spoken by the African-Caribbean was influenced by the colonizer's languages. There is a definite and complex relationship between history, language, and social class on the influence of language in the Caribbean Islands. Again, we must refer to the discussion of dialect and its roots - vocal nuances, accents, and vocabularies to support and enhance the discourse.

Patois is the most striking and dominant language spoken by the Islanders; it is the language of Jamaica. Patois has also been found to have no representation of past tense. This therefore confuses translations often occurring in conversation. ¹¹ However, despite age, education, and social status of its speakers, Patois serves as a national vernacular shared across social boundaries and as a resource and locus for identity for many Caribbean Islanders living in America. There is a prevailing prestige norm to speak English and not Patois as it is noted to be socially undesirable in an urban context.

Assuredly, many urban teachers can attest to this when considering parent-teacher conference night: many parents speak the dialect of the Islands, while their students speak the language of conformity (the language of their peers which most would not call Standard English). For this and other reasons, Patois and Creole will be approached and heard throughout the exploration of this unit for their fundamentally rhythmic nature, their interconnecting of languages, and its notable cadence.

It has been revealed in the study of linguistics in the islands that "English" is preferred for general public communication, mass media news reporting, classrooms, and in business. However, code switching in these communities is greatly appreciated in many of these settings too. There is an enormous history lesson that can accompany this segment of the unit; teachers can trace language patterns, word associations and language absorptions from several African countries to the various islands of the Caribbean. The lesson can be designed as an I-Search for students in all grades and subjects. Students can research several points, such as: What territories make up the Caribbean Islands? Who were the first people in the Islands? What happened to the languages of Africans in the Caribbean? How important is history and social development in defining a language? Who were the conquering groups? Why did they come to the Islands to conquer the land? Also, students can trace word associations to Africa and other countries of occupying people's origin.

Students will be assigned to read for voice several poems written by Caribbean authors. The poets chosen for the unit are all from different regions/islands. They are: Louise Bennett, Derek Walcott, Claude McKay, Sam Selvon, and Grace Nichols, to name a few.

African-Americans Speak

African-Americans come from a rich oral tradition, yet they were denied literacy because of the systematic disenfranchisement of their culture and living. Most Africans brought to America in bondage were from the region of West Africa. In these regions the communal act of the oral tradition was acclaimed.

African-American oral culture, within the community, was centered in the church, then came into politics, then moved into the mass media. Those who are most admired in African-American communities are those who are known as skillful practitioners of language whatever the content, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Democratic Presidential nominee Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Maya Angelou, Malcolm X, Mohammed Ali, rappers Tupac Shakur and Kanye West, and many more.

Over the years African Americans have been mislabeled as culturally deprived and culturally disadvantaged, based on their language use. However, in recent years Americans have seen a shift in the negative attitude toward Black English speaking patterns. In naming the dialectic talk as African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) ¹² changes some of the negative connotations around the subject. Students will perform a comparison contrast analysis and reenact performances of two of the three Presidential Inauguration poems, ever presented in American History. Students will examine and evaluate varied literary elements, catalog figurative language uses, explain use of dialect when appropriate, and share with the class their overall thoughts about the poets' vocabulary choices in the historical context. We will investigate Robert Frost's presentation of "The Gift Outright" ¹³ at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration and Maya Angelou presentation of "On the Pulse of the Morning" ¹⁴ at President Bill Clinton's inauguration. Students will be asked to discuss the poetry in small groups and analyze one of the two poems then report out to the class their findings. Questions that will be used to guide their evaluations will be: How does the poem reflect the time during which it was written? How does the poet make us think about the past and/or present? What are the poet's dreams about the future? Does the poet's voice include all American people? Why or why not? Students will be required to cite examples from the text when answering the questions.

At this point in the unit, requesting the assistance of a history teacher in the building to co-teach or share ideas about background information will serve to pique students' attention in researching the political and historical influences found in the poetry that will help students gain a better understanding of figurative phrases, words and literary devices. Begin students in a literary conversation circles ¹⁵ discussing the use of personification, alliteration and/or assonance. Ask them to list the lines where they see the devices used.

Finally, students will be required and assigned to memorize and recite one of the poems to be recited in class the following week. Practice sessions will be held intermittently before the deadline for students to practice in front of the "live" group. Ask students to pay particular attention to enunciation of words, accentuation of voice, and tonal patterns for each student who recites. Have students set up a mock class competition using rules and procedures as defined by the class or as set by another group or organization. ¹⁶

Memorizing a poem is a way for students to have the opportunity to identify with the poem through vocalizing it, and for them to be able to consider every phrase, line, and word. Students can practice varying the sounds, adding pauses and emphasis in different spots to try to find the most accurate voice for each of the poems. All through the unit we will use several strategies for students to become good at memorizing their poems. Assessment of recitations can include, but not be limited to, physical presence, articulation of words, vocal tone, understanding of lexis choices, and overall performance (eye contact, sound level, and accuracy).

Throughout the unit, students will become acquainted with various speeches, essays, short stories and poems paying special attention to word usage and sometimes dialectic use. African-American writers' recent revival of oral perceptions of the memory process within literary context and framework are now seen and stated as a mode of thought. When reading the works of Maya Angelou, Kanye West, and Amiri Baraka students can not only take in particular remembered facts but also, construct and/or reconstruct remembered details, combined with an impression left by the original oral telling or instance. Place is an important factor in re-memory. ¹⁷ The oral orientation focuses the power of the spirit of visual memory. Using Toni Morrison's *Beloved* students will be able to better understand the use of the term re-memory in a more practical sense. It will be important to point out for students specific chapters for use in referencing terms or use the film DVD version to select the specific chapters, see if students can analyze voice using either print or visual media. African-American people may have been moved from place to place but the pictures of particular places remain in the mind. ¹⁸

One word, detail, or image dropped into consciousness may remind students of some part of their buried pasts as well. Try this exercise: have students place a notebook, journal or sheet of paper on their desks. Make provisions for the classroom to be very quiet, while asking students to close their eyes (speak in a soothing tone). Say to students, "Remember a long time ago, you are in the house where they first brought you home from the hospital, you are a very small baby." Repeat the place being careful to not say more than generalizations of an infant's homecoming as often as needed. Remind students that there is no talking and they must keep their eyes closed and bodies as still as possible. Provide a calming atmosphere in the room throughout this exercise. Next ask students to write down the first word, phrase or sentence that comes to mind when they open their eyes. Still there should be no talking in the room. Students should then place their pencils down. Students can then be asked to share what they wrote on the page - reading the word, phrase or sentence aloud. Assign homework for students to continue the story, poem, or essay for homework. Define the parameters for assessment paying close attention to the voice in which the story is told. Teachers may want to already have a rubric prepared for grading the assignment. To conclude the exercise, have a read-out and an explanation of their narratives and the connection to the concept of re-memory. During the readings, probe or point out for students whose voice is telling the story.

Vocal Performance and Digital Media

There is newness in the experience for African-American young people living in the digital age of technology. Teachers in the School District of Philadelphia and almost certainly in other cities and districts have to contend daily with iPods, MP3 players, cellular phones, and digital cameras more in their classrooms and in their school's public spaces. In this unit, students will be able to use these devices to archive their story and the stories within their community through use of spoken word poetry and speeches that will ask their audience to

take action for a stated reason and purpose. This strategy is discussed further in Lesson Plan 3 of this unit.

Students must be able to conceptualize and vocalize voice — ferociously intense, extracting the most visceral truths, exploding each syllable with attention to detail in yielding clear conviction of purpose. The human voice used in several digital media must be practiced for word pronunciation for mouth capabilities (rising, falling, trembling, reaching, and spinning), and in increasing students' potential for oratory growth and vocal awareness. For this reason, students will do a short warm-up exercise. Have students record in their journals or a notebook: "The tip of the tongue, the roof of the mouth, the lips and the teeth." Have them practice repeating this phrase repeatedly until they can clearly and concisely say it at a rapid pace without error.

Vocal sound is a personal icon and if carefully honed and sculpted, voice can make use of a spectrum of tones. Inner voice, as if taken from a secret world, forms within the physical body and then reverberates into the world around it. As noted in the section, *Orality of Africa*, students will notice the creation and recreation of images through the use of their voices giving control over their personal sound with meaning. Using techniques of enunciation, inflection and understanding of printed text will give students practice and training in oration and voice. This strategy can be used as an after-school activity called an Orator's Group, highlighting the call for students to become great public speakers. ¹⁹

When we consider the vocal performance of the typically prolific and emotionally charged African-American minister, meaning is above all conveyed by tone. This is witnessed in the influence the speaker has over his or her audience and the interwoven antiphonal conversation that occurs during the process of the performance. Students will have to determine how and why the call and response vocal performance regulates the leaders' social messages. Malcolm X's "Ballot or the Bullet," Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream," Mohammed Ali's poetic decrees against his opponents, and Barbara Jordan's 1976 "Keynote Address to Democratic National Convention" and her 1974 "Statement on the Articles of Impeachment" use many of the speaking strategies studied in the call and response. They will also compare this phenomenon in political speeches of African-American audience in listening to Barack Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech. Surely there will be opportunity to chronicle Obama's vernacular choices and audience as the campaign process progresses through the 2008 Presidential Election process.

Other African-American speakers will be compared and contrasted in regard to vocal performance too. Students will consider a series of questions before being exposed to the video and/or audio bytes. The questions considered will be: How important is it that members of the same speech community actually speak alike? How important is it that member of the same speech community share similar attitudes to each other's speech? To what extent do Americans/ Islanders actually speak alike? Is it important to not speak in dialect to an audience? When is dialect speaking appropriate? How and when is Standard English used in speeches performed by African-Americans? How can they be combined? Other speakers that will be heard in class will be those African-Americans and Islanders who according to the media "represent" their racial communities in general. Students will also determine what factors are brought forth in order to be a representative of that particular group.

Nonverbal Dialogue

When groups are viewing speeches, they will have to consider some of the physical language that a speaker shows as a part of the informing development within the oral process. Facial expressions, postural cues, physical stance and hand gestures are a rich source of social information. Animated and nonverbally active speakers are known to be more positively viewed by an audience in the African-American community.

Furthermore, the physical presentation of the speaker is considered a part of dialogue. A person's appearance factors into the sounds that come from the speaker's mouth, as well as considering what Frost notes as the "sound of sense". This sense sound is like hearing voices behind a door that cuts off the words but the listener knows what has been said upon seeing the people thereafter.

Furthermore, students will have to begin to recognize and distinguish different messages for the varied cultural backgrounds that may be represented in the classroom. These nonverbal language experiences will be an excellent discussion to supplement dialogue about body language and more.

Lesson Plan 1

Digitally Poetic Voicing

Goals: Students will learn to use voice appropriately as they read poetry from the printed page. They will learn how to use digital media appropriately. Students will learn to successfully record poetry and rhymes using digital devices and microphones. Students will also create their own poetry to perform for audiences. Students will be introduced to poetry that engages them in this medium of spoken expression. They will explore the power of poetry that is written to be read aloud. Students will examine rap as a form of poetry. Students will examine the different literary techniques in rap. Students will learn the rules and conventions of poetry, including figurative language, metaphor, simile, symbolism, and point-of-view. Students will learn to appreciate dialect in performance poetry.

Objectives: PA State Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening 1.1.11.C; 1.1.11.H; 1.2.11.B; 1.3.11.A; 1.3.11.C; 1.3.11.D; 1.6.11.A; 1.6.11.C; 1.6.11.F; 1.7.11.B; 1.7.11.C. PA Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities 9.1.12.F; 9.1.12.J; 9.1.12.K; 9.2.12.C; 9.2.12.E; 9.4.12.C; 9.4.12.D. PA Academic Standards for Science And Technology 3.8.12.B; 3.8.12.C.

Materials: Digital Voice Recorders (DVR), microphones, floor lift or podium, lined paper, audio recordings, iPods, recording capable cellular phones, any other recording devices, theatrical accent recordings, and copies of African-American and Caribbean poetry that you choose.

Audience: This lesson can be used in high school English Language Arts, drama; public speaking and performing arts classes.

Procedure: Day One - Introduce the word "poetry" to the class. Ask students to brainstorm ideas that come to mind when they hear the word "poetry." Create a word web. Have students listen to a reading by Kanye West from *Def Poetry Season 4* video. Ask students to listen to the selected poem twice. During the first viewing, students should pay attention to the words that stand out when they hear the poem. Have students write what words they hear the most. During the second viewing, students should listen for visual images that they hear in the poem. Have students write a simile or metaphor to represent the image. After students complete this activity, have them share their results. Engage the class in a group discussion. Direct students to discuss tone, microphone use, body language, and audience response. Repeat the process using the poem "No Lickle Twang" by Louise Bennett.

Day Two: Discuss the concept of "voice" employing interconnectivity that creates links between the poems

used and the texts being read. Students will look at poetry as social commentary. Handout the poem, Amiri Baraka's "Somebody Blew Up America." Read and discuss the section of the poem that lists several noted people. Instruct students to take notes. Have students underline at least three facts about history and politics. Assign homework- students must create a poetic explanation of their fact-finding choices. The poem students write must consist of at least six lines and should be written as a rap, sonnet, ballad or call and response chant. Have students practice reading aloud the poem at home so they are prepared to read it aloud the next day in class.

Day Three: Have students read their poetry for recording to begin to use digital devices to capture their voices. After each recording, ask students does the voice represent the meaning of each word they speak. Why or why not? What can they improve in the piece? Can anything be added to enhance the poem? Does the poem generate audience response? Should it? Why or why not? Student listeners can write in their notebooks at least three sentences of positive feedback about the details, timing, or topic of the poem.

Lesson Plan 2

Connections to the Word

Goal: Students will be able to develop poems, speeches, and raps from rendering the text of a famous book, story, poem or other speech. This lesson is designed to allow students to become self-empowered through this form of expression, which can heighten students' interest in writing poetry to enhance their own powers of self-expression. Students will learn the rules and conventions of poetry. In addition, students will interpret meaning in poetry.

Objectives: PA Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening 1.1.11.A; 1.1.11.B; 1.1.11.D; 1.2.11.C; 1.3.11.C; 1.3.11.D; 1.3.11.F; 1.4.11.A; 1.4.11.C; 1.5.11.D; 1.5.11.E; 1.5.11.F; 1.6.11.A; 1.6.11.B; 1.6.11.C; 1.6.11.F. PA Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities 9.1.12.B; 9.1.12.C; 9.1.12.I; 9.2.12.C; 9.3.12.D; 9.3.12.E; 9.4.12.B.

Procedure: Day One - Have students listen to the reading of Maya Angelou's "On the Pulse of the Morning" noting at least ten words they feel are worthy of noting. Then handout the printed copy of "On the Pulse of the Morning." Next, have students listen to a Caribbean speaker recording of Claude McKay's "The Tropics in New York." Have students to again list ten words in their notebooks they hear in this poem. Handout the printed version of this poem. Assignment: Create a poem, giving students a specified theme, using six words from one of your created lists in a six-line poem ²⁰.

Day Two - Introduce and discuss the following five strategies for reading and analyzing poetry. Ask students to: Read the poem more than once. Define any words that they do not understand. Look for emotions in the poem (happiness, sadness, anger, regret, grief, joy, etc.) Look for symbols. If there are any, what do they symbolize? Make connections between the poem and other works of literature that they have read. Assignment: Students will read at least five but not more than seven poems for homework. Students must use the strategies, take notes on their analysis and be prepared to share is with the class the next day.

Day Three - Begin classwork with readings from students who volunteer to share their six line poems. Discuss patterns of voice in their writings. Ask other students to write down their thoughts about each poem shared.

Probe student readers about use of titles, word choice, repetitions, etc. Ask class to respond to the spoken word with one word of praise, giving volunteer positive feedback. Assign a student to write down each word of praise on the board. Save the lists and give them to the reader. Use these praise words to develop a group epic or sonnet that can be performed by the entire class.

Day Four - Read to students the first few pages of *Zhakanaka: The Word*. Then show them the DVD version of the story. Discuss how the oral tradition connects people to more than just the printed text and how orality and written text can be connected into the new digital media. Over time, students will be able to develop perspective of self, politics and society through their own stories and then to the screen of a computer. Keep in mind that students will and can use digital video recording devices to post their stories to Youtube, Facebook, Myspace, Hypertextopia ²¹ and other online networks. Assignment - have students develop their own story centering on a single word theme (altercation, progress, change, education, incarceration, hope, etc). Assist students on the subject of using dialogue to produce voice in writing.

This assignment can be approached in small increments over a semester or report card period. The final products can be made into a film or audio production for web publishing or school film-day showing.

Lesson Plan 3

Verbal Illustration of Recitation - Books, Poems, and Speeches

Goal: Students will be able to perfectly recite memorized speeches, poems, and book dialogue segments. Students will listen, analyze, memorize and recite specific speeches, poems and some dialogue segments from books. They will learn to use their voice to bring their own meaning to the words, phrases, and sentences. Students will also be able to discuss and comment on the social and political messages, which may or may not be imbedded in the speech and/or poem. Students will be successful in using varied vocal tones and inflections, as well as, perfect body language that is agreeable to the audience and the message. Students will be able to expand in understanding new vocabulary.

Objective: PA State Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening 1.1.11. C; 1.1.11.H; 1.3.11.C; 1.3.11.D; 1.3.11.E; 1.3.11.F; 1.6.11.A; 1.6.11.B; 1.6.11.C; 1.6.11.D; 1.6.11.E; 1.6.11.F; 1.7.11.A; 1.7.11.C. PA Academic Standards for History 8.3.12.A. PA Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities 9.2.12.A; 9.2.12.B; 9.2.12.C; 9.2.12.F; 9.12.K; 9.3.12.A.

Materials: LCD Projector, Interactive Whiteboard; audio speakers, Internet access, computer, microphone, iPod, or other recording device, photocopies of all text to be memorized.

Teachers should already have prepared the following links for use in viewing varied speeches. The websites are as follows: Obama speech transcripts - <http://www.barackobama.com/speeches/index.php>; *A More Perfect Union*- <http://link.brightcove.com/services/link/bcpid900718856/bclid900554575/bctid1472313547>; *Yes, We Can*- <http://link.brightcove.com/services/link/bcpid900718856/bclid900554575/bctid1372110765>; Senator Barbara Jordan speech transcripts and her audio/visual speeches, *1976 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address*-<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barbarajordan1976dnc.html>; *Statement on the Articles of Impeachment* <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barbarajordanjudiciarystatement.htm>.

Audience: This lesson will satisfy any high school student of all academic tracks and at all levels. It can be adapted for the learning support setting, too.

Procedure: Day One - Introduce public speaking as a way of communicating messages to a larger community. Ask for one or two student volunteers to write brainstorming ideas on the board. Have students brainstorm ways and means they have incurred such speaking events. Ask students what purpose was served and/or addressed. Next, ask students to choose at least five of the most important ideas from the board in their notebooks. Students should be able to discuss in detail why they made their specific choices. Ask several students to share their responses publicly to the class. (This will begin their practice of public speaking.)

Assignment: List three speakers you like to hear, identify the title of their speech, the main idea, and what appealed to you to choose this speech.

Day Two - Student groups will be designated from homework assignment completion. Set up groups of not more than six students, assigning them by their top five answers. Try to connect students with others in the class whose answers do not match their own. This will elicit diversity in the group sessions. Have students discuss their personal answers with their groups; they are to have at least two reporters, giving detailed information to the whole class at the end of the session. Thereafter, show two speeches (preferably male and female) and one poetic performance from *Furious Flower* video. Model for students the reading of a book segment, noting vocal tones and inflections. Assignment: Give students a copy of a speech, poem or novel segment to memorize for the following week showcase.

Day Three - Ask students if they know how to begin a study in memorizing their assigned pieces. Discuss with students some memorizing techniques and have them write the techniques in their notebooks. Some of the techniques we will discuss are: Rewrite and organize notes, create index cards on key terms or definitions, and review and recite frequently. In addition, rhythm, repetition, melody, and rhyme can all aid memory. The use of rhyme, rhythm, and repetition all helped storytellers remember. Students can learn to break up the information into small bits that you can learn, one step at a time, and you may be surprised at how easy it can be. Students can utilize grouping techniques, "chunking", to form meaningful groups that they can learn over time. Another technique is to create an acrostic, which is a sentence where the first letter of each word represents an idea that you need to remember. Finally, students should give the material your full attention and concentrations, set realistic study goals, minimize distractions, organize the information, and create study tools for vocabulary such as flash cards and vocabulary sheets. Students should also know that repeating is still a great memory aid. The actual work of memorizing is repeating information repeatedly until it is stored in our mind. Tell students to recite the information to yourself out loud. Recitation is an important step in committing information to memory.

Assignment: Remember the first paragraph or the first seven lines of their assigned piece. Be ready the next day.

Day Four - Student volunteers can perform their homework assignment for the class. Choose several student audience members to check off words that speaker missed pronounced, left out, etc. Choose some other student audience members to determine the level of the performance. See rubric in Appendix B.

Following week - Assign specific students specific days to perform their assigned memorized piece. Use rubric to determine high scorers of the assignment. Provide for students an atmosphere conducive to the activity and maybe even prizes for all who complete the assignment.

Follow up activity - Upon all students completing their memorized performance, have top scorers repeat their

work at a public school event. Use these student speakers at the intermission of an assembly or some other large school gathering. Ask other students who scored next to the highest group of students to introduce their peers to the audience.

Teacher Resources

Anokye, A. Duku. "A Case of Orality in the Classroom." *Clearing House*. May/Jun97, v.70:5, p229. This is an article about how oral learning does not occur in urban classrooms and why it is important for teachers to include oral learning strategies into their classes.

Baker, Houston A. *Black Studies Rap and the Academy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. This short text covers the founding of Black Studies in American colleges and universities and many influences and investments that went along with these academic culture projects.

Baldwin, James. "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" *New York Times* (July 29, 1979). An article written by Baldwin while residing in France about race and dialect. Advanced Placement or Honors students may have an interest in reading this article for further inquiry and research.

Billings, Andrew C. "Beyond the Ebonics Debate: Attitudes about Black and Standard American English." *Journal of Black Studies*. V 6:1 September 2005; 68-81. A research study about the effects of racial dialects and their status in American society.

Gordis, Lisa, M. "Bring Forth the Old Because of the New: Early Americanists and Contemporary Culture." *Early American Literature*. v. 41, n. 2; University of North Carolina Press, 2005. An essay giving an overview of the American Antiquarian Society's conference concerning digital media, communication and the printed text.

Hamilton, Kendra. "The Dialect Dilemma." *Black Issues in Higher Education* 22.5 (21 April 2005): 34-6. A short article resource for teachers to use as background information to base discussion concerning dialect and the African-American community.

Harrison, Robert D. and Linda K. "The Call from the Mountaintop: Call-Response and the Oratory of Martin Luther King, Jr." *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Sermonic Power of Public Discourse*. Ed. Carolyn Calloway-Thomas and John Louis Lucaites. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993; 162-78. A powerful essay, all teachers of public-speaking should read this informative research. A must-have in your mind's eye reading.

Hart, Allen, J. and Marian M. Morry. "Nonverbal Behavior, Race, and Attitude Attributions." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. V 32. University of Iowa: Academic Press, Inc., 1996; 165-179. This article provides a researcher's look at physical communication and its ramifications in African-American and White American audiences.

Holmes, David G. *Revisiting Racialized Voice: African-American Ethos in Language and Literature*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004.

Jean-Baptiste, Alfred. *Caribbean English and the Literacy Tutor*. Toronto: Toronto ALFA Centre, 1995. <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/caribb/cover.htm>. This manual is available online in its entirety and is a wonderful resource for all teachers.

Jackson, Gale. "The Way We Do: A Preliminary Investigation of the African Roots of African-American Performance." *Black Literature Forum Review*. V 25:1 Spring 1991; 11. This article provides information about African-American cultural oral performance; it is very short and succinct.

Lee, Carol D. *Culture, Literacy, & Learning: Taking Bloom in the Midst of the Whirlwind*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2007. A scholar's discussion about the teacher and their stake in the re-claiming of multicultural education. This is an easy to read text that will enlighten many urban teachers.

Lock, Helen. "Building Up From Fragments: The Oral Memory Process in some Recent African-American Written Narratives." *College Literature*. V. 22:3; October 1995; 109. The article discusses memory of the racial self and orality for African Americans. This can be read by both teachers and students.

PA Department of Education's Academic Standards. http://www.pde.state.pa.us/stateboard_ed/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=76716&stateboard_edNav=|5467|&pde_internetNav=|. Information included on this site contains a quick link to the academic standards for each subject discipline.

Patrick, Peter L. "Caribbean Creoles and the Speech Community." *Society for Caribbean Linguistics*. <http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~patrickp/papers/CreoSpCom.pdf>. XII: St. Lucia; August 1998. Accessed July 2008. A very short research article about linguistics of Caribbean speech.

School District of Philadelphia. Book One. *Secondary Education Movement: Core Curriculum - Literacy*. Philadelphia: School Reform Commission, 2003. A resource book used to assist teachers in formulating lesson plans for English classes in high schools. This gives a vast number of lesson ideas and teaching strategies.

Sobol, John. *Digitopia Blues: Race, Technology, and the American Voice*. Canada: Banff Centre Press, 2002. A wonderful resource filled with information about voice, jazz and the use of blues in the African American community. It also ties the information to modern digitization practices.

Weiss, Jen. *Brave New Voices: The Youth Speaks Guide to Teaching Spoken-word Poetry*. An easy to read text, which contains strategies for teachers of poetry wishing to include spoken word into their classroom settings and their lessons.

Student Resources

Ali, Noaman. www.malcolm-x.org. Canada: 2000. Accessed July 2008. This site seeks to present Malcolm X within an Islamic context. It has various speech text and photos, but few audio resources.

Amiri Baraka. Dir. and prod. Lewis MacAdams and John Dorr. Videocassette. Lannan

Foundation, 1991. Amiri Baraka, poet, playwright, novelist, and essayist, reads from Bop trees and unpublished work to a college coffeehouse style audience. He is interviewed by Lewis MacAdams. This is an excellent video chronicle for showing students poetic delivery.

Brown, Sheree, and Douglass Johnson, Sr., *Zhankanaka: The Word*. Sarah Revel Books, 2004. This is the story of a little girl troubled

and discouraged by the cruel treatment of her peers. An insightful teacher comes to her aid, sharing knowledge, history and a word of encouragement. The book is accompanied by a DVD.

Fenton, James. "The Raised Voice of Poetry." *The American Scholar*. 2002. A succinct essay comparing and contrasting poet effects of English poetry readers. He explains the gift of voice has the audience feeling the words.

Frost, Robert. *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays*. Library of America: New York. 1995. This is a wonderful collection of Frost's works. Students can easily read or research many of the selected works.

Furious Flower I: Conversations with African American Poets. Ex. Prod. Joanne Gabbin. Prod. Judith McCray. California Newsreel, VHS; 1998. A four-part video series highlighting poetry performances and interviews. This is a wonderful collection consider purchasing the items for lifetime use. This series is now available for purchase in DVD format, titled *Furious Flower II*. This is a must own item for teachers of African-American poetry.

Holt, Rinehart and Winston. *African American Literature*. Austin: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998. This is a textbook anthology of African-American writings from Africa to the present. It offers a rich array of works for student use.

Husock, Howard. "Taste: A Standing Oration." *Wall Street Journal*. Eastern ed.: New York. April 28, 2006; W11. a short article you and your students can read together on what urban African-Americans professionals developed to assist in getting young Black children to take ownership in successful speaking abilities.

LouiseBennett.com. <http://louisebennett.com>, 2007-2008. Accessed July 2008. A plentiful website featuring the works and life story of Dr. Bennett-Coverley. Students can see and read her text written in Patois.

Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest. <http://www.poetryoutloud.org/>. National Endowment for the Arts & The Poetry Foundation: 2007. Accessed July 2008. This site can be used for its plethora of poetry recitation resources for teachers. It is a great website that gives teachers a practical wealth of poetry recitation information.

Randall, Dudley. Ed. *The Black Poets: A New Anthology*. Canada: Bantam Books, 1971. A wonderfully vibrant compilation of African American poetry from the Black Arts movement.

Top 100 American Speeches: Online Speech

Databank. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/newtop100speeches.htm>. American Rhetoric: 2001-2008. Accessed July 2008. This site can be used to access several of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., U.S. Representative Barbara C. Jordan and Malcolm X speeches. Housed on the site are both transcribed text and mp3 audio archival presentations. Students will enjoy surfing the site for more than what the site offers.

Appendix A

PA Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

1. Learning to Read Independent
2. Reading Critically in All Content Areas
3. Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature
4. Types of Writing

5. Quality of Writing
6. Speaking and Listening
7. Characteristics and Functions of the English Language

PA Academic Standards for History

1. Historical Analysis and Skills Development
2. United States History
3. World History

PA Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities

1. Production, Performance and Exhibition of Dance, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts
2. Historical and Cultural Contexts
3. . Critical Response
4. . Aesthetic Response

PA Academic Standards for Science and Technology

- 3.8 Science Technology and Human Endeavors

Appendix B

Recitation Rubric

Use the Poetry Out Loud contest rubric scale to determine the level of each student's recitation and memory. However, this rubric can be adapted to suit your classroom's needs.

http://www.pdfdownload.org/pdf2html/pdf2html.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.poetryoutloud.org%2Fteachers%2FPOL_Judges_Guide.pdf&images=yes

Notes

1. A. Duku Anokye.
2. Robert Frost. Processing of tone (projecting voice) from words on the printed page brought to sound using background knowledge and/or experiences.
3. Gale Jackson.
4. John Sobol. 19.
5. James Baldwin.

6. Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/stereotyping (accessed: July 12, 2008).
7. A central ritual within the Yoruba religion.
8. John Sobol.
9. Ibid.
10. Robert D. Harrison & Linda K. Harrison. The Call from the Mountaintop: ... 1993, 169-176.
11. Peter L. Patrick. 4, 5.
12. Carol D. Lee.
13. Frost's poem text can be found at this website, www.orwelltoday.com/jfkinaugpoem.shtml.
14. Angelou's poem text can be found at <http://poetry.eserver.org/angelou.html>. View Angelou reading the poem at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDtw62Ah2zY>.
15. A structured group that meets to discuss and respond to assigned independent reading assignments.
16. www.poetryoutloud.com
17. The visualization of a picture from the past, usually some fragmented piece of a person's heritage.
18. Helen Lock.
19. Howard Husock. Taste: A Standing Oration. 2006, 11.
20. A six-line poem has a central theme; each line is assigned an attribute. Line 1: color, line 2: sound, line 3: taste, line 4: feel, line 5: smells, line 6: looks.
21. A space for reading and writing stories for the web. www.hypertextopia.com

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

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