



Splitting Hairs: Comparing Themes in Fiction and Non-Fiction Texts

Curriculum Unit 12.01.02, published September 2012

by Jessica L. Shupik

Introduction

Hair. Everyone has it. Everyone wants to change what he or she has, or does not have. Everyone can relate to each other over stories about hair. From musicals, to documentaries, to personal narratives, people have told stories about hair in all forms of communication. My students are fascinated by hair qualities and hairstyles. As with most other teenagers, all of their "attention focuses both on appearance (hairstyle) and social factors"¹. Additionally, hair is a multibillion-dollar industry. More than 250,000 businesses in the United States are classified as beauty salons and employ over 845,000 people.² These beauty salons, along with some 720,000 other businesses classified as other types of beauty-related businesses, compose an industry with over \$40 billion in annual sales³. In Pennsylvania alone, annual sales total \$1.5 billion and job growth between 2000 and 2010 increased 22%⁴. In America, non-natural African American hair care accounts for an estimated \$1.8 billion to \$15 billion in annual sales⁵. Hispanic and "all other hair care" accounted for approximately \$3.6 billion in hair care product sales in 2011⁶. This is why I selected "hair" as the unifying theme for this curriculum unit. The unit will explore the history and consumer culture of hair care and hair styling through literature.

The issues that we will be exploring in class are more serious than they first appear. My students are not the only ones who are concerned with hair. I have my own interests and curiosity about "good" hair. People of all ages, races, and economic backgrounds are keeping the industry alive and even growing during an economic recession. The importance that people place on hair is a matter of political and philosophical debate with everyone weighing in on the matter, from children in the classroom, to feminist theorists, to big industry. What constitutes "good" hair is a universal theme that is explored routinely in literature, and not just a transparent hook to engage my students with the reading and writing skills for the unit.

This curriculum unit will teach about comparing and contrasting universal themes in fiction and non-fiction texts that revolve around rites of passage and the consumer culture of hair. I will begin the unit with a brief discussion of consumerism among American teenagers and "ethnic" hair products and hairstyles, with a focus weighted toward black youth because of the demographic composition of my students and because African Americans make up an estimated 30% of the hair care industry⁷. The beginning of the unit will focus on consumer culture that drives hair care and hairstyles using songs, video clips, art, pictures, and newspaper articles. All of these materials will aid in introducing the literary concepts of theme and universal theme while

being unified through the themes of hair, rites of passage, violence, and social acceptance. The remainder of the unit will focus on analyzing themes in short stories and excerpts using compare and contrast methods. The end result for each student will be a compare-and-contrast essay analyzing the universal themes in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" and an excerpt from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I selected these particular texts because they each touch on a coming of age story that turns on hair, and they both address the theme of "Search for Self" for ninth grade.

Rationale

The ninth grade curriculum in Pennsylvania is focused on the short story. The Common Core Curriculum was adopted and adapted for English in Pennsylvania. Very little will change in the curriculum with the adoption of the Common Core Curriculum; however, one major change will be in the amount of non-fiction text required. In every class, teachers are required to include between 60% and 75% non-fiction texts. This can pose a challenge for teaching the short story. I have taught ninth-grade English in Philadelphia for four years, and a topic that many of my students have issues understanding is theme. The textbook that a majority of teachers in Philadelphia use for literature presents concepts and situations that can be very foreign to most of my students, particularly in the stories that are included to highlight theme. The new minimum requirement on non-fiction texts and previous experience teaching ninth-grade English has inspired me to write a more localized unit for students to compare and contrast universal themes.

Literature

The very relevant subjects of fitting in and finding yourself by having the right hairstyle or "good" hair unify the literary texts that I selected. Everyone wants to fit in and find him or herself. Having the right hair is the hook in these texts because it is a major focus of my teenage students. Fitzgerald's "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" and the excerpt from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* both address rites of passage and a coming of age for young adults. Both of the main characters, Bernice and Malcolm X, attempt to fit in by dramatically altering their hair according to current fashions. Bernice, a white girl, uses a story about cutting her long hair into a controversial bob in order to gain popularity with her cousin's friends and "walk unchallenged in the starry heaven of popular girls" ⁸. In his autobiography, Malcolm X recalls growing his hair out specifically to conk (relax) it and look more like a white person.

Both situations have negative results for the main characters. Bernice quickly realizes that she has been manipulated into getting a bad haircut even as she sits in the barber's chair. She wonders to herself if she will be blindfolded, "No, they would tie a white cloth round her neck lest any of her blood—nonsense—hair—should get on her clothes;" Bernice then compares the barber shop and the barber with the guillotine and the hangman ⁹. Bernice's bob turns out to be a social disaster, but the full consequences of her actions do not even register with her until she remembers a dance being held for her and her cousin; her aunt reminds her that the hostess of the dance considers bobbed hair "her pet abomination" ¹⁰. The moment she bobs her hair, Bernice loses favor with the popular kids. The promise of bobbing her hair gained her popularity, but the action of cutting her hair off caused her to lose everything. Fitzgerald's story ends with Bernice seeking revenge by cutting off her sleeping cousin's hair. The general themes of adolescent insecurity, vengeance, violence, popularity, and surface beauty resonate for most, if not all, teenagers. While the universal theme is open to interpretation, I have no doubt that my students will tap into their own experiences and relate to

Bernice or her cousin on some level.

As opposed to Bernice's disastrous haircut, Malcolm X remembers being quite pleased at the time with the physical transformation of his first conk; he vowed that he would never be without a conk again, and he wasn't for many years ¹¹ . In his autobiography, he looks back on the physically painful experience of his first conk, remembering feeling as if his "head caught fire," as if the comb "was raking my skin off" ¹² . He recalls that he gritted his teeth and "tried to pull the sides of the kitchen table together" ¹³ . Even after all of the agony caused by applying lye to his hair and scalp, he remembers admiring himself when the conk is done, noting how "white" his newly straightened hair looked in the mirror. At the time, Malcolm X was enamored with his conk, and his hair gained him entry into his desired social circle of "sharp-dressed young cats" ¹⁴ . Later in his life when he told his story to Alex Haley he felt differently saying,

That was my first really big step toward self-degradation... I had joined that multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are 'inferior'—and white people 'superior'—that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look 'pretty' by white standards" ¹⁵ .

Malcolm X ends this chapter of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* with a strong suggestion, based on his personal experience, for black Americans to shift their focus away from hair and towards learning because he sees conking hair as a legacy of slavery pertaining to the humiliation of black men. Some of the same themes from "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" are found in the excerpt from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, such as popularity, status acceptance, violence, liberation, maturity, and surface beauty. Unlike Bernice, who is Caucasian and comes from a wealthy Wisconsin family, Malcolm X had the added pressures of racial and socioeconomic discrimination. Again, different readers could interpret the universal theme of the excerpt in different ways, but many more of my students will be able to relate personally to Malcolm X's story because they have had their hair relaxed or know someone who has had his or her hair relaxed.

Resources

I always strive to write engaging and relevant lessons for my students. This curriculum unit is no exception. In order to engage my students with the lessons, I have differentiated instruction by alternating between high-interest and low-interest materials throughout the unit. High-interest materials are pieces that will appeal to my ninth grade students' interests and curiosity. Some of the high-interest materials include short video clips from the movie *Good Hair*, *A Girl Like Me*, a musical video clip from *Sesame Street*, songs from the musical *Hair*, a photograph of a young boy touching President Obama's hair, articles about Olympian Gabby Douglas's hair, and pictures of an art show by Lorna Simpson that displays wigs and hair.

Good Hair is a 2009 documentary that Chris Rock made about the hair-care industry in America. Many of my students have already seen the movie, but they will be asked to reflect on their own first experiences with dramatic hairstyles or treatments as rites of passage. They will watch clips from *Good Hair* in conjunction with the brief 2005 documentary, *A Girl Like Me* that conveys the average experiences of a black girl made by high school student Kiri Davis. The musical video clip from *Sesame Street* is of a Muppet who sings about how much she loves her hair and the different ways that she can style it. Although my high school students are well beyond any interest in *Sesame Street*, I will ask them to compare and contrast the message of liberation in this clip with the more critical tone of Malcolm X's story about conking. The songs from the musical *Hair* might be high-interest materials because I normally do not play music in my classroom. I do not expect my students to necessarily enjoy the music, but I do think that they will like determining the tone and mood of

each song using the music and lyrics. The news photograph of a boy touching President Obama's hair will be used to practice narrative writing. Students will see only the picture on my Promethean screen; then they will have to write a narrative describing what they think happened before and after the picture was taken. The pictures of the Lorna Simpson art show that displays wigs and hair will provide more practice for narrative writing. Lorna Simpson is a photographer who explores American impressions of African American women ¹⁶ . Students will select one of the wigs to write a narrative about. They will use details in their narrative writing to convey the character of a person who would wear the particular wig they choose. More information about these materials is located in the annotated bibliography.

Low-interest materials are pieces that might be more difficult to understand or not as entertaining to my students. Some of the low-interest materials include a newspaper article about a Native American student not wanting to cut his hair in 2008, a newspaper article about Rastafarian students being able to wear their dreadlocks and caps in school, a video clip and corresponding article from CNN about the growing industry of hair salons, and an excerpt about a girl's observations of her family's hair from Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*. My students struggle with non-fiction texts that are not written in narrative form. The CNN video clip will most likely assist them in their understanding of the material, but it will not necessarily pique their interest. Students will practice comparing and contrasting non-fiction texts with the newspaper articles. The excerpt from *House on Mango Street* will provide another opportunity for students to practice compare and contrast writing, but they will need to compare it with a non-fiction text in preparation for the final essay. *House on Mango Street* is a collection of vignettes about a girl's coming of age in a Hispanic neighborhood of Chicago. See the annotated bibliography for more information about these materials.

Social Aspects of Hair

Consumer culture deals specifically with people's desire to belong to a group, to be socially accepted. The culture of having the right hair is explored in literature regularly, as in "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Bernice competes with her cousin to get a boy's attention by telling a story about plans to cut her hair. The prize for telling this story and ultimately cutting her hair is not just a boy; it is more about belonging to the right social group. Bernice's revenge act of cutting off her cousin's hair is symbolically violent and will most likely lead to her cousin's social demise. Malcolm X tries to solidify his role as a man, and a pimp, when he conks his hair. Being one of the cool cats was so important to Malcolm X, that he endured the physically violent practice of relaxing his hair and subsequently burning his scalp. The violence, symbolic or real, in both stories is connected to rites of passage into the character's chosen social group and revenge for being forced out of the group. The main difference between advertising of hair care products and actual consumer culture is that advertising makes it seem like getting the right hair is a simple and painless process, whereas the actual process is time consuming, laborious, and frequently physically painful. There is a price to pay, outside of your wallet, for gaining entry into and remaining a part of a social group. Both stories expose the personal and emotional costs of belonging.

Anthropologist Elizabeth Chin wrote an ethnography about the consumerism of pre-teen students in the Newhallville neighborhood of New Haven, Connecticut, titled *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture*. A section of the book takes up the debate over ethnically correct dolls, particularly the way that some of the girls groomed their white dolls. Since the late 1980s, major toy manufacturers have been mass-producing "ethnically correct" dolls, and the idea behind making these dolls is to help minority children feel more secure with their identities by playing with dolls that look like them ¹⁷ . This idea was partly inspired by the Clark doll studies in the 1930s and 1940s. Psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Phipps Clark conducted several studies to learn about black children's views on race. During these studies, children were given a black

doll and a white doll and asked to point out which one looked "nice." More often than not, the black children pointed to the white doll as "nice" and the black doll as "bad" ¹⁸ . Adults tend to assume that "the physical aspects of toys—their gender, skin tone, hair—determine how children will use and relate to them" ¹⁹ . However, that is not the only determining factor of a child's self-worth, and the logic behind this thinking is flawed. Chin is able to gain social acceptance with a group of pre-teen girls through the grooming rituals that the girls practice with each other, with their family members, and with their dolls. She also states that the "girls reject the idea that their 'self-esteem' can be boosted through consumer items that address issues of race but not class" ²⁰ .

The social aspects of hair are not limited to girls. National Football League rookie players have gotten embarrassing haircuts, and now hair dying for the Miami Dolphins, as a hazing ritual and a rite of passage onto the team ²¹ . Hair cutting has long been a ritual for passage into a social or religious group as with Cook Islanders, Hindus, and Roman Catholics. It is a tradition for men to meet at the barbershop to get a shave and a haircut and exchange news or gossip. As with women, men look to their barbers as a source for news both near and far and these visits to the barber are a universal experience that all men share ²² . Hair is both a cultural and literary theme that is expressed in "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and subsequently presented to my students as an example of universal theme.

History of African Hair and American Consumer Culture

As journalists Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps note, since the beginning of African civilizations "hairstyles have been used to indicate a person's marital status, age, religion, ethnic identity, wealth, and rank within the community.... The hairstyle also served as an indicator of a person's geographic origins" ²³ . For certain tribes, you could ask someone to be your friend by offering to braid their hair ²⁴ . Much importance was placed on hair for these social reasons and also because a person's spirit was believed to be in the hair ²⁵ .

In addition to social aspects of hair, the aesthetics of hair were also important to Africans. Many African cultures believed that an abundance of thick hair was a sign of a woman's fertility, and she was therefore seen as being more beautiful ²⁶ . A woman or man with unkempt hair was seen as undesirable to the opposite sex ²⁷ . However, aesthetics was never the main focus of Africans. A deeper social, aesthetic, and spiritual meaning has been "intrinsic to their sense of self for thousands of years" ²⁸ . It is impressive that the beliefs and rituals that formed around African's hair are still present in today's society ²⁹ .

The history of American consumer culture for most black people, particularly when considering the slave trade in America, "has had a long and ugly association with the most profound sorts of violence" ³⁰ . Before even departing for the colonies as slaves, interior Africans were kidnapped or physically forced by coastal Africans to march to the coast. Upon arrival, the coastal Africans in exchange for jewelry or weapons would trade the interior Africans to European slave traders. The slave traders would then shave the heads of their new slaves, unaware of the historical, social, and cultural significance that hair held for Africans ³¹ . After arriving in the colonies, Africans, now slaves and property of the slave trader, would step off the boat and onto trade blocks where white slave owners would auction them off or barter for other products because Africans in the colonies were considered to be commodities, not people. Slaves were made acutely aware of their value the same way that the children in Newhallville, a neighborhood of New Haven, Connecticut, knew how much they cost their parents. The slaves who were not sold or traded would be discounted, like last season's fashion line, or loaded back on the boat to travel to the next trading block.

After slaves reached the plantations, they were not given time to groom their hair or provided with their combs, "so the once long, thick and healthy tresses of both women and men became tangled and matted" ³² . Slaves frequently hid their hair under rags because they were embarrassed or ashamed of the condition of their hair and the subsequent ringworm outbreaks and lice infestations that occurred. These scalp diseases would leave scabs and the rags covering the wounds caused infection which lead to a cycle of breakage and bald patches ³³ .

The practical benefits of being a slave with light skin and straight hair were established early on with the two different assignments: house hand and field hand. Generally, the half-African, half-Caucasian children of the slave owners would have the advantage of being light-skinned with straighter hair, and thus have the privilege of working as a house hand ³⁴ . These house hands "experienced a closer relationship with the White population—laundresses, barbers, cooks, nursemaids, housekeepers, chauffeurs, valets—[and] often styled their hair in an imitation of their White owners" ³⁵ . Imitating "white" hairstyles was encouraged in house hands, and some slaves combined West African, American Indian, and European practices to straighten their hair and style it like their white owners while others continued to braid or wrap their hair in the West African manner ³⁶ . According to Byrd and Tharps, "After two centuries in bondage, a unique homegrown system of Black hair care had developed.... the goal of grooming the hair had morphed from the elaborate and symbolic designs of Africa into an imitation of White styles adapted to Black kinks and curls. Both women and men were interested in straightening their hair because straight European hair was held up as the beauty ideal" ³⁷ . Although they were without their regular tools and commercial products, slaves were able to use axle grease, butter, bacon fat, and butter knives to straighten and dye their hair ³⁸ .

Slaves who tried to escape, could be caught and returned to their owners where severe physical punishment awaited. Newspapers would take advertisements featuring the characteristics of runaway slaves, and "the hair was considered the most telling feature of Negro status, more than the color of the skin" ³⁹ . In fact, the true test of blackness was "if the hair showed just a little bit of kinkiness, a person would be unable to pass as White... which is why some male slaves opted to shave their heads to try to get rid of the genetic evidence of their ancestry when attempting to escape to freedom" ⁴⁰ . At the same time, staying on the plantation as a light-skinned, female house hand with "good hair," or long hair free of kinks and frizz, was equally torturous. Slave owners would frequently take slaves as concubines, and "the jealous mistress of the manor often shaved off the lustrous mane of hair, indicating that White women too understood the significance of long, kink-free hair" ⁴¹ . Here again, the violence of shaving or cutting hair links back to the themes of the unit, Bernice, and Malcolm X.

Of course, hair care did not cease to exist after slavery was abolished. It is instead the beginning of the recognition of an ethnic hair care market. The Emancipation marked the creation of the black consumer market with enough disposable income to buy cosmetics, primarily "bleaching creams and hair-straightening products" ⁴² . Overuse of these bleaching creams and straightening products led to bald patches and hair breakage. Both Annie Turnbo, founder of Poro, and Madam C. J. Walker, founder of Walker Manufacturing, experimented with formulas to help care for damaged hair and scalps like their own ⁴³ . Both women's stories demonstrate the way "black" hair was used to make money and build the race. They not only provided products that were in demand, but they also trained a sales force of young, black women, which provided work opportunities to those that would have otherwise been unemployed. While Poro eventually went under, Madam C. J. Walker became the first African American millionaire and "came to symbolize all that Black hair stood for in the first half of the twentieth century" ⁴⁴ .

Consumer culture for black Americans is a double-edged sword. African Americans, once considered commodities themselves, are expected in modern society to forget their violent histories and participate as unbiased consumers. My students continue to experience societal pressures, stereotypes, and expectations surrounding the idea that white and light skinned people are somehow better than dark skinned people. They are also subject to the common assumption that all "black" hair is kinky and bad and all "white" hair is straight and good. This is clearly not the case for either group as there can be black people born with straight hair and white people born with kinky hair. However, these racist stereotypes will persist until society as a whole changes its perception and treatment of people without regard for the color of their skin or the style of their hair. In the meantime, my students and I will explore the cultural and historical significance of "good" hair.

Good Hair

My students are knowledgeable consumers, whether or not they are aware of it. They all recognize the social status that comes with having good hair and they know how to get good hair and how much that hair will cost. Like Malcolm X, they desire straight, flowing, "white" hair. The standard of beauty for black Americans has not changed much since the 1940s.

"Black" hair and "white" hair are visibly different, but Chin discovered that her Newhallville girls' treatment of both types of hair is the same. She observed the way that the girls treated "white" hair in two types of situations: her own hair and white dolls. One example is when a girl pulled the gold hair bow off her head and her relatives told her to stop "pickin' at Miss Chin's head" ⁴⁵. I have had similar experiences with my students wanting to style my hair. I have gone from having a ponytail one minute to individual plaits, cornrows to individual plaits, and buns on the top of my head just to name a few of the hairstyles they gave me. My students and I were able to bond socially as females and enjoy a few laughs at my expense because we were able to communicate about the girls' personal issues instead of homework and impending tests. This bonding experience is common among Africans and African Americans as Kathy Peiss notes in *Hope in a Jar*, "Hair grooming had long brought black women together to socialize while engaging in the time-consuming rituals of washing, combing, and plaiting, the tactile pleasures of working with hair mingling with the diversion of visiting and chatting" ⁴⁶.

Chin recognizes that the girls playing with her hair were not trying to "rearrange my race or racial identity in some biological sense; nevertheless, they were working to make me more like them just as they did with their dolls" ⁴⁷. I have experienced similar attempts by my students to make me physically look more like them, to look cooler in their eyes. While they made valiant efforts to style my hair in a way that was cool to them, and in many cases identical to the way they had their own hair styled, I generally ended up looking more funny than cool considering my teacher clothes and obligatory chalk marks on my pants. Eventually, they decided it was better to stick with simpler styles, such as French braids, fishtail braids, and occasionally curling my hair for special events.

The other situation in which Chin observed the girls handling "white" hair was when they played with white dolls. She noted, "From Cabbage Patch Kids with their yarn hair strung with beads and wrapped with foil to long-haired blonde dolls sporting intricately braided 'dos, white dolls in Newhallville were... not quite recognized as such" ⁴⁸. She did not see many children in Newhallville with ethnically correct dolls and thusly interpreted their treatment of white dolls as an attempt to identify with them more readily. While I am not sure I agree with Chin's inference, I do think it is important to note the preference amongst the children for Barbie hair and consider that it might be related in part to the lack of availability of dolls with "ethnic" hair.

There is a definite hierarchy of hair, and much of it can be seen simply by observing pictures of African American celebrities and noting similarities and differences between their hairstyles. A Google search for "African American celebrity hairstyles" returned thousands of pictures, most of which portrayed women with long, relaxed hair. I was able to construct a rough hierarchy of "good" African American hair. The least desirable hairstyle is a short, natural style, followed by long and relaxed with tight curls, short and relaxed, and finally long and relaxed with loose curls. Overwhelmingly, it appears that "good" African American hair for women is still "Barbie" hair.

The results of my first search were mostly expected, but when I tried a similar search for "white" hair, I realized how many assumptions I make on a regular basis. As a comparison with my search for African American celebrity hairstyles, I performed three different Google image searches for "white" celebrity hairstyles. The first search I did was for "Caucasian celebrity hairstyles." The results were a bit scattered and I realized that not many people would use that terminology in a Google search. I cleverly revised my search to "white celebrity hairstyles," or so I thought it was clever. After again realizing that almost no one would type that phrase to search for Caucasian hairstyles, the pattern that I initially saw made more sense. The results displayed hair that was so blonde that it looked white. Finally, partly out of frustration at not being able to think of the proper phrase and partly out of curiosity, I searched "celebrity hairstyles." The results were very surprising a bit disturbing to me. The results showed 29 white women, a majority of them blonde. I certainly expected a number of white women in my search results, but not 100%. I should also note that although I never specified that I was looking for female hairstyles, there were no men in my results. After getting over my initial shock that Google deemed that my search for hairstyles was specifically for Caucasian, female celebrity hairstyles, I took a closer look at the hairstyles in the results. As with the African American hairstyles, there was a distinct preference for long, straight hair. The bob was at the bottom of the hierarchy, followed by long hair with loose curls, and finally long, straight hair. There was a distinct preference for blonde hair with some of the pictures showing brunettes with dramatic blonde highlights.

My personal realizations helped me understand that the default for celebrity hairstyles is white, blonde, and female. This was an enlightening experiment that showed me the keywords for "good" hair in consumer culture are set to "white." This "unmarked" category is the default setting regardless of its moral or aesthetic validity. I would also like my students to run these same searches and report on their findings.

Objectives/Standards

I will be teaching this unit to my ninth grade English classes. We have fairly regular access to computers, but we may not have copies of the stories and books for each student. It is my goal to read "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" on laptops in the classroom and secure copies of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* for each student to borrow and read at home. The texts I selected relate to the theme for ninth grade: Search for Self. All of the main characters are trying to figure out who they are as people, and they explore their identities through their hair.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education is currently in the process of adapting the Common Core Standards for English. The standards will be in use throughout the School District of Philadelphia beginning September 2012. I am basing my objectives on the most recent draft of the Common Core Standards for Pennsylvania. My objectives for this unit are students will be able to: cite textual evidence to support analysis

of the text and make inferences based on an author's beliefs about a subject; analyze U.S. documents of historical and literary significance, including related themes and concepts; independently gather vocabulary knowledge; independently and proficiently read and comprehend literary non-fiction text; determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development; write explanatory texts to examine complex ideas and information clearly and accurately; organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections; use transitions to link the major sections of the text; and provide a concluding statement. These objectives are adapted from the following Common Core Standards:

1.2 Reading informational Text

1.3 Reading Literature

1.4 Writing

Strategies

I will be implementing several different strategies, including technology, for this curriculum unit. The main strategies that I will use are collaborative group work, reading journals, quizzes, and graphic organizers. These strategies will be spaced out during the unit and will serve as formative and summative assessments in addition to a final essay comparing and contrasting the universal themes in each story.

Collaborative Group Work

I will divide each class of approximately 33 students into groups of three or four. My goal is to create heterogeneous groups based on previously collected data. Groups will work together with different roles to complete: scribe, task manager, timekeeper, and researcher. The timekeeper can double as the researcher in groups of three. The scribe will take notes on the discussion; the task manager will ensure that every task is completed; the timekeeper will make sure that the group does not run out of time; the researcher will refer back to the text for evidence or examples as needed. At the end of such work, students will give group members grades based on their performance in their roles.

Collaborative groups will work together on the compare and contrast writing assignment for *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and the *Sesame Street* video, on the compare and contrast writing assignment for non-fiction texts, and on the compare and contrast writing assignment for *House on Mango Street* and a non-fiction text.

Reading Journals

Students will be required to take structured notes while completing a reading assignment for homework. The format should be familiar by the time we reach this unit, but I will review it again prior to their first reading assignment. All notes must include a page number for future reference. Beyond the page number, I require students to question the text, note important characters and events, make inferences about the text, and record quotations that may be useful for their essay assignment on universal themes. Reading journals will be checked as credit for completing a homework assignment.

Quizzes

As added incentive to read and take notes that demonstrate an understanding of the text, I will administer pop quizzes on reading assignments. The questions will be open-ended and will cover a few major events or characters from the previous reading. Students will be allowed to use their reading journals to complete their quizzes. These periodic quizzes may also include vocabulary that I assign based on the text.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are visual alternatives for students to organize thoughts and ideas. I will provide students with a Venn diagram for their small writing assignments and a compare and contrast chart for their essays on universal theme.

Lesson Plan Format

My lesson plans all follow the seven-step lesson plan because both my district and union require this format. The steps are as follows: Do Now (Warm-up or Anticipation Set); Direct Instruction; Guided Practice; Independent Practice; Closing (including Exit

Ticket); Homework; and Assessment. A cycle of feedback between teacher and student is established when using the seven-step lesson plan that promotes understanding of the material. The teacher can also build lessons on each other using the feedback from previous lessons.

Classroom Activities

Plan #1: Theme and Universal Theme

Objectives:

Students will be able to cite textual evidence to support analysis of the text and make inferences based on an author's beliefs about a subject; analyze U.S. documents of historical and literary significance, including related themes and concepts; independently gather vocabulary knowledge; write explanatory texts to examine complex ideas and information clearly and accurately; and organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections.

Materials:

For this plan, I will need a smart board, projector, computer, speakers, picture of Barack Obama and boy, the *Sesame Street* video clip, and the final essay assignment sheet.

Learning Plan (2-3 day lesson):

Day 1

Students will be presented with an image of Barack Obama bending over to let a young, black boy touch his hair ⁴⁹. Their Do Now assignment will be to write a brief narrative explaining what they think happened

leading up to that photograph being taken. Students will have the opportunity to share their narratives with the class. I will be sure to have at least three students read their narratives aloud so the class has enough to compare during a discussion. Students will then watch a *Sesame Street* video clip about hair ⁵⁰. After the conclusion of the clip, I will ask students to explain the similarities and differences between the picture and video clip. We will then construct a definition for "theme" as a class. I will then explain what a "universal theme" is and have students to list universal themes that they have seen in movies or read in books. Students will complete a Think-Pair-Share and the class will make a master list of universal themes. We will select a theme that makes sense for their narratives and for their Exit Pass, students will either continue the narrative they began or write another narrative that explains what they think happened after the photograph was taken. Each narrative must have the five parts of plot, at least one major character, and made direct reference to the events portrayed in the picture. For homework, students will revise their narratives and check them for the five parts of plot, one major character, direct reference to the events in the picture, and reference to the universal theme the class decided on. They will also have to write one paragraph explaining how their narratives convey the universal theme selected during class.

Day 2

Students will begin class with a selection of writing prompts about the theme of hair for their Do Now. They will pick one and write a response: describe what you think "good" hair is; describe a time you got a bad haircut or hairstyle and how you felt; describe your hair and compare it with the hair that you want (color, length, style, et cetera); explain how much time and money you think it takes for the average person to maintain "good" hair on a daily basis. Prior to discussing student responses, we will review theme and universal theme. Students will then share their responses to the Do Now prompts and I will facilitate a discussion of what they believe constitutes "good" hair, why they believe certain hair is good, and the industry of hair in the United States. If possible, I will have students rearrange the desks into a large circle so they can have a conversation with each other while I listen, take notes, address unanswered questions, and prompt quiet students for their opinions. I will not contribute opinions or participate in the discussion until it starts to slow down. At that point, I will read over some of the notes that I took and prompt a new discussion on stereotypes that are applied to different hairstyles and people with certain types of hair, making reference to the picture and video clip from the previous class. I will again remain an observer of the discussion. If there is time, students will have a final discussion about the benefits of mutual grooming and hair rituals. The Exit Pass will be a question asking students to think about why they think the things they do about hair and "good" hair. For homework, students will read the final essay assignment and be prepared with questions, if any, about the assignment. The essay assignment guidelines can be found in the appendix. They will also write a paragraph explaining the theme of the day's lesson.

Plan #2: Comparing and Contrasting Theme

Objectives:

Students will be able to cite textual evidence to support analysis of the text and make inferences based on an author's beliefs about a subject; analyze U.S. documents of historical and literary significance, including related themes and concepts; independently and proficiently read and comprehend literary non-fiction text; determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development; write explanatory texts to examine complex ideas and information clearly and accurately; organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections; use transitions to link the major sections of the text; and provide a concluding statement.

Materials:

For this plan, I will need the song "Hair" and the corresponding lyrics, the CNN video clip and article, copies of "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," images from "Wigs," copies of "Hairs," the video clip of *A Girl Like Me*, copies of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, compare-and-contrast charts, the *Sesame Street* video clip, a reading quiz, *Good Hair*, and an assortment of articles.

Learning Plan (4-5 day lesson):

Day 1

Students will listen to the song "Hair" from the musical *Hair* for their Do Now. ⁵¹ I will provide lyrics for their reference. As they listen, students will assess the tone and mood of the song, explain the theme of the song, and explain how the theme does or does not fit in with the universal theme that we selected for homework. The class will watch a video clip about the growing industry of hair salons and reflect on similarities and differences between their thoughts and the news report ⁵². I will provide the text article for reference and a compare and contrast table, and students will individually write a 3-paragraph compare and contrast essay. The aim of the activity is to get students in the habit of writing compare-and-contrast essays in preparation for their final assessment. For their Exit Pass, students will review the reading journal format. I will distribute copies of "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" that students will need to read and take notes on for homework.

Day 2

For the Do Now, students will select a wig or hairpiece from a series of images from the Lorna Simpson art show "Wigs" and write the outline of a narrative about the kind of person they think would wear the wig or hairpiece. ⁵³ Students will read the chapter titled "Hairs" from *House on Mango Street* and watch *A Girl Like Me*. ⁵⁴ We will analyze tone and mood as a class, and then students will individually write a three-paragraph essay comparing the tone and mood of "Hairs" with the tone and mood of *A Girl Like Me*. For their Exit Pass, students will write a couple of sentences explaining the overarching theme that links all of the materials we have used for this unit. I will distribute copies of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* that students will need to read and take notes on for homework.

Day 3

For the Do Now, students will complete a compare-and-contrast chart for the theme and tone of the *Sesame Street* clip, "Hairs," and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Students will individually complete a reading quiz on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and "Bernice Bobs Her Hair." The class will then watch a series of short clips from *Good Hair* and, in collaborative groups, read an article from a selection about Olympian Gabby Douglas, Rastafarian students, or a Native American student. The groups will then work together to analyze the universal themes in *Good Hair* and the articles. The articles are located in the annotated bibliography. As an Exit Pass, students will reevaluate their ideas about the universal theme for this unit's lessons. For homework, students will complete a compare-and-contrast chart for universal theme in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and "Bernice Bobs Her Hair."

Day 4

The remaining days of the unit will be focused on writing and revising their essays. An alternative cumulative assignment can be completed in conjunction with math teachers. The math classes will address ratios and

proportions and the English classes will work on research. Students will be given some statistics and numbers for the beauty industry and will find some of their own. They will then interview local salon owners and work in math class to create ratios and analyze the data. English class will focus on writing a research paper using citations.

Annotated Bibliography

2012 economic snapshot of the salon industry. in Professional Beauty Association [database online]. 2012 [cited August 15 2012]. Available from <http://www.probeauty.org/research/#national-salonspa-industry-profile>.

This resource is a profile of the economics of the salon industry in America. It includes sales, establishments, and jobs.

2012 salon industry state portraits. in Professional Beauty Association [database online]. 2012 [cited August 15 2012]. Available from <http://www.probeauty.org/research/#national-salonspa-industry-profile>.

This resource is a profile of the salon industry in America broken down by state. It includes state industry trends, sales, and employees.

Lorna Simpson biography. in Biography.com [database online]. 2012 [cited August 15 2012]. Available from <http://www.biography.com/people/lorna-simpson-507345>.

This resource is a biography of artist Lorna Simpson.

I love my hair. in Sesame Street [database online]. 2012 [cited July 15 2012]. Available from http://www.sesamestreet.org/play#media/video_7d8a6fe6-cae4-44ef-8305-e28ac7885055.

This resource is a video of a Sesame Street character. She sings about all of the ways she styles her hair.

Industry information Sheet—Beauty salons (NAICS 812112) including day spas. in The University of Georgia BOS/SBDC, Applied Research Division [database online]. 2001 [cited August 15 2012]. Available from <https://www.georgiasbdc.org/pdfs/beauty.pdf>.

This resource is a profile of the beauty salon industry in America including statistics, trends, and resources.

Byrd, Ayana D., and Lori L. Tharps. 2001. *Hair story: Untangling the roots of black hair in America*. New York: St. Martin's.

This resource is a book about the history of "black" hair stretching from Africa in the 15th century to present-day America.

Chin, Elizabeth. 2001. *Purchasing power: Black kids and American consumer culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

This resource is an ethnography of the Newhallville neighborhood in New Haven, Connecticut. The focus is on how poor, black children navigate the consumer culture in America.

Davis, Kiri. A girl like me. in Reel Works Teen Filmmaking [database online]. 2005 [cited July 15 2012]. Available from http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/films/a_girl_like_me/.

This resource is a seven-minute documentary about the importance of appearance to young, black women. It includes a recreation of the Clark Doll Studies and interviews with several of Davis's peers.

Finn, Joan. A worldwide look at the ritual of male hair grooming. in NorthJersey.com [database online]. 2011 [cited August 16 2012]. Available from http://www.northjersey.com/community/events/131198689_A_worldwide_look_at_the_ritual_of_male_hair_grooming.html.

This resource is an article about photographer Jay Seldin's observations of worldwide rituals for male hair grooming while taking pictures for *The Barbershop Book*. It also includes some history of worldwide hair grooming rituals and a couple of pictures from his book.

Fitzgerald, F. S. Bernice bobs her hair. [cited 5/5 2012]. Available from <http://www.sc.edu/fitzgerald/bernice/bernice.html> (accessed May 5, 2012).

This resource is a short story about the socially awkward Bernice and her visit with her cousin, Marjorie. Marjorie coaches Bernice on being popular; eventually, Bernice becomes more popular than Marjorie. Marjorie seeks revenge, which ends up backfiring.

Hill, Jamele. Gabby Douglas' hair draws criticism. in ESPN [database online]. 2012 [cited August 15 2012]. Available from http://espn.go.com/olympics/summer/2012/espnw/story/_/id/8232063/espnw-gabby-douglas-hair-criticized-social-media-sites.

This resource is an article about Olympic gold medalist Gabby Douglas and the media focus on her hair.

Jones, Athena. Hair salons and barbershops: A growing industry. in CNN [database online]. 2011 [cited July 15 2012]. Available from <http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/15/us/hair-salons-economy/index.html?iref=allsearch>.

This resource is an article about the growth of the hair salon industry, particularly in Maryland.

Kelly, Omar. Hair-raising hazing for Miami Dolphins rookies. in South Florida Sun Sentinel [database online]. 2012 [cited August 16,

2012]. Available from

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/sports/sfl-hairraising-hazing-for-miami-dolphins-rookies-20120727,0,5625568.story>.

This resource is an article about hazing within the Miami Dolphins.

Knight, Paul. A Native American family fights against hair length rules. in Houston Press [database online]. Houston, TX, 2008 [cited July 13 2012]. Available from

<http://www.houstonpress.com/2008-07-10/news/a-native-american-family-fights-against-hair-length-rules/>.

This resource is an article about a school district in Texas that tried to make a 5-year-old

Native American boy cut his hair prior to matriculation.

Mack, Aarika. Louisiana school district relents, allows Rastafarian students' dreadlocks, caps. in First Amendment Center [database online]. 2012 [cited July 15 2012]. Available from <http://archive.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=5845>.

This resource is an article about a Louisiana school board allowing students to keep their

dreadlocks and head coverings in school because of their first amendment rights.

MacNicol, Glynnis, and Ortiz, Jen. Happy 50th birthday, Mr. President! Watch Obama go gray. in Business Insider [database online]. 2011 [cited July 15 2012]. Available from <http://www.businessinsider.com/barack-obama-birthday-grey-hair-2011-8?op=1>.

This resource is an article with a pictorial timeline about how the president's hair has

grayed during his term. It includes a picture of a young boy touching his hair.

Meisel, Melissa. Diversity is the direction: New developments in the ever-evolving ethnic hair and skin care marketplace. in Rodman Publishing [database online]. 2012 [cited August 15 2012]. Available from <http://www.happi.com/articles/2012/04/diversity-is-the-direction>.

This resource is an article about the trend toward natural hair and natural skin and hair

care products.

Peiss, Kathy Lee. 2011. *Hope in a jar: The making of America's beauty culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

This resource is a book about the history of beauty culture in America. It includes a look

at the contributions of Annie Turnbo Malone and Madam C. J. Walker to the beauty

industry.

Ragni, Gerome, and Rado, James. Hair. [cited July 13 2012]. Available from <http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/hair/hair.htm>.

This resource is the lyrics to the song "Hair" from the musical *Hair*.

Saint Louis, Catherine. Black hair, still tangled in politics. in New York Times [database online]. 2009 [cited July 17 2012]. Available from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/27/fashion/27SKIN.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2.

This resource is an article about the political nature of black hairstyles. It presents

opinions about chemically treated hair and natural hair and makes reference to the Chris

Rock documentary, *Good Hair*.

Sanchez, Raf. Story behind five-year-old touching Barack Obama's hair in the oval office revealed. in The Telegraph [database online]. 2012 [cited August 1 2012]. Available from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/9290667/Story-behind-five-year-old-touching-Barack-Obamas-hair-in-the-Oval-Office-revealed.html>.

This resource is an article revealing the true story behind the picture of the young boy

touching President Obama's hair.

Simpson, Lorna. Wigs (portfolio). in Walker Art Center [database online]. 2009 [cited August 1 2012]. Available from <http://artsconnected.org/resource/84890/wigs-portfolio>.

This resource is a gallery view of artist Lorna Simpson's photography installment, Wigs.

It includes pictures of wigs and hair.

Stilson, Jeff. 2009. *Good hair*, ed. Chris Rock, eds. Jenny Hunter, Kevin O'Donnell. Vol. DVDHBO Films.

This resource is a documentary about what African American women will do to get

"good" hair. It includes interviews with celebrities, some history of the African American

hair care industry, and an overview of the Bronner Brothers International Hair Show in

Atlanta, Georgia.

Thompson, Cheryl. Black women and identity: What's hair got to do with it? in MPublishing [database online]. Ann Arbor, MI, 2009 [cited August 15 2012]. Available from <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mfsfront;c=mfs;c=mfsfront;idno=ark5583.0022.105;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1;g=mfs>.

This resource is an article about the importance of hair to African American women. It

includes a brief history of African hair care and the ethnic hair care industry.

X, Malcolm, and Alex Haley. 1992. *The autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: One World/Ballantine.

This resource is an autobiography written by Alex Haley about Malcolm X's transition

from a country boy to a hustler to the spokesman for Black Muslims.

Appendices

Compare-and-Contrast Essay Guidelines

Students will write a compare-and-contrast essay analyzing the universal themes in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" and an excerpt from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The graphic organizer below will aid students in arranging their ideas. Students will use the point-by-point format to write a five-paragraph essay (introduction, similarities, first story differences, second story differences, conclusion) with at least one piece of textual evidence per paragraph. The essay must be typed double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font and include a works cited with parenthetical citations in MLA format. There is a two-page minimum.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST GRAPHIC ORGANIZER		
	Bernice	Malcolm X
SETTING		
CHARACTERS		
PLOT SUMMARY		
THEME(S)		
UNIVERSAL THEME(S)		
TEXTUAL EVIDENCE		

" alt=""/>

Endnotes

1. Elizabeth Chin. 2001. *Purchasing power: Black kids and American consumer culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 164.
2. "Industry information Sheet—Beauty salons (NAICS 812112) including day spas" in The University of Georgia BOS/SBDC, 2001, <https://www.georgiasbdc.org/pdfs/beauty.pdf> (accessed August 15, 2012).
3. "2012 economic snapshot of the salon industry" in Professional Beauty Association, 2012, <http://www.probeauty.org/research/#national-salonspa-industry-profile> (accessed August 15, 2012).
4. "2012 salon industry state portraits" in Professional Beauty Association, 2012, <http://www.probeauty.org/research/#national-salonspa-industry-profile> (accessed August 15, 2012).
5. Cheryl Thompson, "Black women and identity: What's hair got to do with it?" in MPublishing, Ann Arbor, MI, 2009.
6. Melissa Meisel, "Diversity is the direction: New developments in the ever-evolving ethnic hair and skin care marketplace" in Rodman Publishing, 2012.
7. Thompson, "Black women and identity."
8. F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Bernice bobs her hair," 1922, <http://www.sc.edu/fitzgerald/bernice/bernice.html> (accessed May 5, 2012).

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Malcolm X and Alex Haley. 1992. *The autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: One World/Ballantine, 56.
12. Ibid., 55.
13. Ibid., 55.
14. Ibid., 45.
15. Ibid., 56.
16. "Lorna Simpson biography" in Biography.com, 2012, <http://www.biography.com/people/lorna-simpson-507345>.
17. Chin, *Purchasing power*, 143.
18. Ibid., 144.
19. Ibid., 171.
20. Ibid., 172.
21. Omar Kelly, "Hair-raising hazing for Miami Dolphins rookies" in South Florida Sun Sentinel, 2012.
22. Joan Finn, "A worldwide look at the ritual of male hair grooming" in NorthJersey.com,
23. Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, *Hair story: Untangling the roots of black hair in America*, 2.
24. Ibid., 6.
25. Ibid., 5.
26. Ibid., 4.
27. Ibid., 3.
28. Ibid., 7.
29. Ibid., 7.
30. Chin, *Purchasing power*, 30.
31. Byrd and Tharps, *Hair story*, 1.
32. Ibid., 12.
33. Ibid., 13.
34. Kathy Lee Peiss, *Hope in a jar: The making of America's beauty culture*, 42.
35. Byrd and Tharps, *Hair story*, 19.
36. Peiss, *Hope in a jar*, 13.
37. Byrd and Tharps, *Hair story*, 16.
38. Ibid., 17.
39. Ibid., 17.
40. Ibid., 18.
41. Ibid., 19.
42. Ibid., 30.
43. Peiss, *Hope in a jar*, 67.
44. Byrd and Tharps, *Hair story*, 25.
45. Chin, *Purchasing power*, 82.
46. Peiss, *Hope in a jar*, 90.
47. Chin, *Purchasing power*, 166.
48. Ibid., 172.
49. Raf Sanchez, "Story behind five-year-old touching Barack Obama's hair in the oval office revealed" in The Telegraph, 2012.
50. "I love my hair" in *Sesame Street*, 2012,
http://www.sesamestreet.org/play#media/video_7d8a6fe6-cae4-44ef-8305-e28ac7885055 (accessed July 15, 2012).
51. Gerome Ragni and James Rado, "Hair," in *Hair*.
52. Athena Jones, "Hair salons and barbershops: A growing industry" in *CNN*,
53. <http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/15/us/hair-salons->

54. onomy/index.html?iref=allsearch (accessed July 15, 2012).
55. Lorna Simpson, "Wigs (portfolio)" in Walker Art Center, 2009, <http://artsconnected.org/resource/84890/wigs-portfolio> (accessed August 1, 2012).
56. Kiri Davis, "A girl like me" in Reel Works Teen Filmmaking, 2005, http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/films/a_girl_like_me/ (accessed July 15, 2012).

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use