



Revisiting Race and Riot: Exploring Tulsa's Conflicts in Fiction, Nonfiction, and Image

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Introduction

There is no way to slice Tulsa's history today without hitting the Race Riot of 1921 or its causes or effects. It was, after all, the largest racially motivated uprising in our country in the 20th century. However, the event managed to remain untouched and un-talked about for decades. When I began my teaching career neither my students nor I knew anything about it. The historical event at the heart of this unit has been most often called the Tulsa Race Riot. Riot really isn't the correct word, and its use in the context of today's highly publicized racial conflicts—Trayvon Martin in Florida, Michael Brown in Florida, Eric Harris in our own hometown, and Sandra Bland in Texas, among others—will invite us to explore the use of the word and its alternatives.

Recent violence against black Americans by law enforcement and civilians, as well as the barrage of writings and opinions about the current state of race in America will provide a counterpoint to our study of the Tulsa 1921 incident. They cannot be avoided; the past and present become lenses with which to look from both ends of our timeline to the opposite ones. Remarkably, many of my students know little to nothing about the 1921 event. But they certainly are aware, through social media especially, about the racial events of the last two or three years. Unfortunately, many of them confuse memes with facts, and doubt reason and research to favor sensationalism. The use of primary and secondary historical resources, in addition to fiction, image, and poetry, will guide my students through sensitive issues in our city's history and help them see the present with the wisdom of historians.

Jessica Brantley created her seminar Literature and Information to explore the challenge—often misunderstood—of incorporating non-fiction not only in Common Core classrooms, but also in others where the Common Core emphasis on informational texts has caught on. Nonfiction is often over-emphasized or poorly chosen. Particular problems in selection of non-fiction might include poor writing quality, lack of literary style and elements, forced and/or unusual connections to the content or other literature. In an opinion piece for the New York Times, Kate Taylor gives examples such as pairing the issue of teenage unemployment with *Tom Sawyer* and excerpts from *The Odyssey* to the challenges faced by modern veterans returned home (1). With easy internet access and a lack of canon like one might consult for fiction or poetry, it is far too easy to settle on a text which may align in some way but be less than ideal or even absurd. We searched out and studied quality pairings of fiction and poetry with literary non-fiction.

The seminar readings were organized in four themes: Feminism and Gender; the African-American Experience; Imagining Perfect (and Imperfect) Worlds; and Speeches, Real and Imagined. My unit clearly falls into the category of the African-American Experience. One reading from that selection was James Baldwin's essay "A Report from Occupied Territory." In it he pleads for the recognition of "our common humanity." Written in the mid-1960s, it bridges the two time periods in my unit. Tulsa Race Riot survivors issued the same plea in 1921, and African-American communities across the country including Tulsa are issuing it again today. My students sometimes feel as though they live in occupied territory. They are on the front lines of this conflict. They tend to look or at least dress like Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown. Sagging pants and hoodies are *de rigueur*. They avoid social situations and geographic areas that put them at risk of being singled out and don't think they should have to change to fit in or be safe.

Background environment and students

Phoenix Rising is a partnership between our school district and the city's juvenile bureau. It was created because of the great need for a school or program that could accommodate a concentrated number of students with histories of severe discipline problems, chronic and temporary trauma, and the challenges of substance abuse and other dysfunctions that accompany these things. While most are fast-tracked into my small school because they are involved in the juvenile justice system, we have others who are not "in the system," but who share characteristics that make this the best school for them. They too have not been successful in traditional high schools or other alternative schools. They experience the same instabilities outside of school that affect their ability to prioritize academics. This is the last stop for many of them academically. It is a therapeutic, not punitive program. We are responsible for meeting state and federal mandates, but often our first objectives for our students are to teach them how to be students and feel safe and successful again. We want to send them on as productive, engaged citizens who are on the positive side of the justice system. In a school such as ours, it could be easy to lower expectations. One of my greatest challenges is to introduce and maintain a level of rigor to which my students are generally not accustomed.

My students are amazing young people who have endured struggles that many cannot imagine. Inevitably, they are years behind their grade level, especially with math and reading. Their lives have been defined at least temporarily by situations beyond their control, especially those that come out of generational poverty, trauma, criminal behaviors, and substance abuse. Many have living situations that are non-traditional, to say the least, and are often inadequate or temporary. They are between 13 and 20 years old, often at least a year behind in credits. However, they are funny, creative, and curious about many things. Despite the fact that few have regular access to technologies that most of us take for granted, they are social media savvy. They are emotionally motivated, drawn quickly into conflict and drama. About many issues they are skeptical, and whatever I teach them must be convincing, relevant, and at least a little exciting.

The Unit

The unit should take about a month. With the included content and activities I can address quite a few mandated objectives. We'll work chronologically through the events and their representative texts. We will begin with the Tulsa Race Riot, reading Baldwin's "A Report from Occupied Territory" about two thirds of the way through, following with our contemporary section, and finishing with reflecting and drawing conclusions. The plan is to finish the unit with a whole-class project (remember that my classes are small) like a curated wall museum or video production.

Content objectives

Five years ago Shanedra Nowell, another Tulsa Fellow, wrote a YNI unit about the Tulsa Race Riot. It is an excellent unit. I write this one to better accommodate the challenges of my classroom and to pair it with racially charged events occurring today. In such a short time the number of conflicts tied to race has increased; so also have demonstrations of tolerance and activism, as well as a proliferation of voices from many perspectives.

More and more often, the themes of social justice and social marginalization find their way into what I teach. These themes address quests for understanding among my students while also hopefully making them more aware of their own citizenship. Especially those involved in the justice system are at risk of developing permanent hostility to authority and the stereotypes of people and institutions they associate with it. There is challenge and risk in exploring the various hostilities and conflicts in the unit. How can I know I will not cause increased anger and further alienation? But what is the cost of ignoring these events and issues? We will discuss the current efforts of local historians and leaders to see Greenwood and more of North Tulsa as a people whose pride and perseverance caused not only a recovery but success on a larger scale than that of 1921 Greenwood. Included in our readings from the past and present are narratives that challenge hate and intolerance and encourage racial pride, stamina, and positive activism. We will end with an emphasis on solutions. The students will demonstrate their understanding of the histories and certain language arts concepts through their critical readings and their writings, which will encourage them to look carefully at what fact and truth we can learn from fiction, and what literary beauty and style we can experience in nonfiction.

The past

In 1921 Oklahoma had only been a state for fourteen years. All-black towns proliferated in the post-Reconstruction era; in fact, Oklahoma had more of them than any other state. Freedmen migrated north into Indian Territory looking for a fresh and fair start; others who had married into tribes in the east were part of the Indian Removal exodus in the 1830s (2). From the beginning, the territory had a rich African American history. But in the first part of the 20th century, oil was discovered south of Tulsa, and the city's fate was sealed. It was a bit of the Wild West, with young men—black and white—flocking in to meet the great demand for work in the oil fields (3). Moneyed barons jockeyed for the hot spots where they would drill, pump, and ship, leaving the area scarred in their wake. As if in apology, in downtown Tulsa oil-funded art deco architectural masterpieces were going up, and stately homes surrounded them in nearly all directions. There were impressive homes to the north, but in a way, this was not Tulsa, it was Greenwood. Little Africa. Niggertown. The Frisco tracks and 1st Street divided the east part of downtown, white to the south, black to the north. In many ways it served as a mirror of industry, wealth, and community success. Other African-American communities around the country admired the area, also dubbed Black Wall Street or the Negro's

Wall Street. Scott Ellsworth notes, "...in the early years of the twentieth century, Tulsa became not one city, but two. Confined by law and by white racism, black Tulsa was a separate city, serving the needs of the black community. As Tulsa boomed, black Tulsa did too (4). While Jim Crow laws kept the races separate, most Greenwood area residents didn't much mind; they had a thriving community with everything they needed and in which to operate freely. Like all cities, Greenwood had its share of unsavory characters and businesses, but the money remained local and buoyed the economy.

In 1919 61 lynchings were recorded across the country. James Weldon Johnson of the NAACP called it the "Red Summer" (5). In the vacuum of law enforcement, in Tulsa in March, 1921, W.E.B. Dubois told the community, "We have suffered and cowered... When the armed lynchers come, we too must gather arms. When the mob moves, we propose to meet it with sticks and clubs and guns" (6). In Tulsa specifically, vigilantism had become norm. A series of events had led alleged criminals—both white and black—to fear their fate not only in the legal system but also at the hands of citizens. The last of a series of actions leading up to May, 1921, by "vigilance committees" was the lynching of white man Roy Belton, accused of hijacking and fatally shooting a cab driver. Tulsa Police Chief John Gustafson's passive presence at the site allowed thousands to witness and participate by tearing bits of his clothing for keepsakes. The Chief did not interfere. This lynching of a white man seemed to secure the opinion of many Tulsans, especially black ones, that the justice system had fallen apart (7). Lynchings were an African-American reality; now it was clear than in these parts law enforcement was not likely to stop it. Add to this the resentment that some lower class whites had towards the black community. The events that follow are hardly a surprise.

Downtown Tulsa was a happening place in the Twenties. Money was to be made on both sides of the tracks, and a young man could make a pretty penny as a bootblack for while oilmen and executives downtown. Dick Rowland had dropped out of Booker T. Washington High School to make money doing just that, and he was successful. He and the other young men in his shine shop had permission to use the restroom in the nearby Drexel Building, accessed by a ride in an elevator run by white women. On May 30, he rode the elevator with Sarah Page. At some point she yelled and he ran from the elevator. Accumulated accounts now indicate that most likely she tripped and he grabbed her arm to prevent her fall. But the white newspapers in town reported the incident as intended rape. Rowland was arrested, and the evening Tribune ran the headline, "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator" (8). Other accounts said the headline read "To Lynch Negro Tonight" (9). We'll never know for sure. There appear to be no existing copies of that paper. They were quietly eliminated from the Tribune archives and other collections.

In any case, the taut line of racial tension in Tulsa had snapped, and white men by the dozens and eventually hundreds began to gather round the courthouse. The Tribune trumped up the story again and in the afternoon paper reported that a mob of white men was "forming in order to lynch the negro" (10). With the endorsement of the local press, there was sure to be trouble; Greenwood residents recalled the recent lynching of Roy Belton and general lawlessness condoned by local authorities. Men of Greenwood gathered and headed to the courthouse to offer assistance. Whether he wanted or solicited it or not, Sherriff McCullough never took it. He did lock the building and lock the elevator at the top floor so that Rowland inaccessible. When 50-75 Greenwood men returned to find 1500-2000 white men, they were again turned away, told to go back home. A shot was fired when a fight ensued between a white man who'd questioned a black veteran about his Army issue 45-caliber. Gunfire continued on both sides. Interest in Dick Rowland was eclipsed by a determination to take out the whole race in Tulsa. In fact, Rowland was slipped out of town by Sherriff McCullough the next morning and was never seen again. Sarah Page refused to prosecute, left town, and also disappeared (11).

Not long after midnight the burning began. The fighting held off near the Frisco station until about 6:00 AM. A

whistle blew signaling the beginning of a battle Greenwood could never win. Hundreds of whites—those set upon wiping out black Tulsa—were deputized. With their inauspicious authority, they looted and burned houses, shot men, women, children, and elderly couples, and marched hundreds who hadn't fled town to holding centers at the convention center, the ball park, and the fair grounds. When fire trucks arrived to put out the first fires, they were kept away by whites. At some point private planes appeared to support the attack. More than a thousand homes were burned; the business district was reduced to rubble; maybe upwards of 300 black and white Tulsans died. Many families fled never to return. There was no law enforcement they could appeal to until the National Guard arrived. They had been summoned soon after midnight June 1. They arrived at 9:15 the next morning, but it was much too late. The Red Cross and local institutions provided most of the help in the following weeks. City officials refused outside donations, glibly claiming the responsibility as their own. Furthermore, the city passed fire codes making it almost impossible for Greenwood residents and business owners to rebuild.

Fortunately the challenge to the fire codes was upheld, and maybe more remarkable than the massacre itself was the rebounding of the Greenwood area. When Dubois was back in Tulsa in 1926 he wrote, "Black Tulsa is a happy city. It has new clothes. It is young and gay and strong. Five little years ago fire and blood and robbery leveled it to the ground, flat raw, smoking. . . Yet it lived. . . Scars are there but the city is impudent and noisy. It believes in itself. Thank God for the Grit of Tulsa" (12). He was referring to the proliferation of retail, service, and entertainment business that continued to grow up to World War II. Again there were doctors' offices, hotels, night spots, pool halls, drugstores, the rebuilt Dreamland Theater, barbershops, candy stores. The John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation and some of today's community leaders are making a concerted effort to shift the current perception of Greenwood residents as victims to that of survivors and thrivers.

The present

While my students have been relatively ignorant of Tulsa's racially conflicted past, they are acutely aware of the present. This spring a reserve officer accidentally and fatally shot Tulsan Eric Harris, an African-American, thinking the gun was his Taser. Investigation results suggest that our sheriff's office is rife with nepotism, falsified documents, and disregard by some officers of black Tulsans. When I started writing this unit, it was the last of a string of seemingly racially charged events leading to death between African Americans and authorities across the country. Since then, Sandra Bland, roughly treated by officers after a minor driving infraction, died of an apparent suicide in questionable circumstances. My students have followed the stories of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray, but generally through their Facebook newsfeeds. When I was reading Race Riot narratives and analysis, I was struck with similarities—newly sprung up, it seems—with what I was reading in local and national reports in the present. These deaths—Martin, Gray, Brown, and Harris—have happened too recently to have been placed in a sound historical context; still, we can find similarities in theme and fact among these stories. In reflection, all sources I encountered gave as one of the greatest causes of the Tulsa Race Riot, if not the greatest cause, to be local lawlessness and vigilantism. Flaws in law enforcement or local authority have been at the root of each of these deaths. Said the Chicago Tribune in 1921: "Corrupt politics is directly responsible for race riot. Let us face that fact and not lose ourselves in secondary considerations. Race riots are not problems of race; they are problems of government" (13). It is a big leap from this statement to blaming these recent events on government or police corruption, but the fact is that in Oklahoma 2014 and 2007 were record-setting years for the number of deaths by police (14). Just as white and black papers influenced actions and reactions in 1921, journalism and the media have influenced young people today. Culture as it plays out on the internet is as productive as traditional journalism. The hip hop world has responded with protest lyrics; hip hop artists are releasing articulate statements in tribute to

Brown, Martin, and Gray. Poems, song lyrics, memes, Ted Talks, blogs, and videos have appeared in unmanageable numbers on the Net. My students and I will read examples from past and present from a variety of these media.

Review of recent events

Between 2012 and the end of 2015, at least seventeen examples of deaths of African-Americans by law enforcement or other authorities have made news across the country. We discuss them online, at work, and at home. As of today, as with the OJ Simpson case, almost all Americans can tell you who Trayvon Martin is, who Michael Brown is, who Sandra Bland is. Others are less well-known nationally but have occupied significant time and space in the media. I'm including a synopsis of some of the better known incidents for future use. It is a challenge to write about these events objectively. But by the end of this list one cannot help but feel the accumulated sadness and importance of such a trend. All summaries were confirmed with reports from the New York Times published over the last two years.

In February of 2012 Trayvon Martin was shot by George Zimmerman who was patrolling the neighborhood on his crime watch shift. New to the neighborhood, Martin had set out to buy Skittles and a drink. Zimmerman followed him. The 911 operator told him not to. There were no witnesses except Zimmerman himself. In the end, while Zimmerman had minor injuries from a scuffle, the unarmed Trayvon Martin, who had apparently done nothing to provoke Zimmerman in the beginning, ended up dead.

In July, 2014, Eric Garner died while in police custody of cardiac arrest. They suspected him of selling untaxed cigarettes; he had been arrested before and was no stranger to Staten Island police. While he was a large man, four or five officers brought him down. One held him in an illegal choke hold and smashed his face into the concrete. They disregarded his cries that he could not breathe. New York Mayor DeBlasio called the incident "deeply troubling."

In August, 2014, eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was shot to death in Ferguson, Missouri. An altercation occurred when an officer in his car approached Brown and the man with him. Brown had physically assaulted the officer then, but he was unarmed. Brown was shot multiple times, and notably, was left in the street in the summer heat for four hours. In reaction to Brown's death, black residents of Ferguson looted and rioted off and on for several days.

In November of 2014, someone called the police to report a boy with what was probably a fake gun. Soon after, twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was shot by police. He had pulled the toy from his waistband but had not aimed it at police. He had been told to raise his hands. The possibly ambiguous response caused his death. Protest signs afterwards declared "Danger Police in the Area" and "Police Terror: This Stops Today." Both signs remind us of Baldwin's "A Report from Occupied Territory."

In April, 2015, in Baltimore, Freddie Gray was arrested by police and at the time had no apparent injuries. A week later he had died of spinal injuries while in custody. He was denied an inhaler; he may have been hauled and out of the police van for unknown reasons. There are still mysteries regarding his death. As in Ferguson, days of protests ensued after Gray's death.

The death of Eric Harris in Tulsa in April, 2015, is described above.

Selection of texts and images

The increased emphasis on informational or non-fiction texts is not only in locations where Common Core State Standards are in use but in districts who have chosen other sets of academic standards, as well. Oklahoma's existing standards for language arts emphasize literature and its extensive catalogue of forms, genres, subgenres, and literary elements. Fictional and informational texts share equal billing in the newly released draft of critical reading standards for Oklahoma. Language arts teachers know from experience that narrative is powerful. Janet Alsup sums up her research on the importance of narrative for cognitive and social development: "There is certainly evidence, both empirical and anecdotal, that such complex human development is nurtured through reading, and responding to, narrative fiction" (15). Legal treatises on reparations won't reach the hearts of most students, but an emotional appeal with well-chosen narrative examples and literary quality just might. Ta-Nehisi Coates's "The Case for Reparations" has both qualities. Recently Toni Morrison said of Coates, "I've been wondering who might fill the intellectual void that plagued me after James Baldwin died. Clearly it is Ta-Nehisi Coates" (16).

Not all informational texts—or texts of any kind—are going to be engaging, but in selecting them for my classroom, I will consider best practices for text selection for at-risk students that I've researched for previous units and used successfully in my classroom. First, it should be culturally sensitive to and reflective of the students; second, the content should be meaningful to their environments and home lives; third, the content should be readily engaging; and fourth, texts should be inclusive and respectful, avoiding middle class success stories and representing instead the "limits of resources of students and families within the curriculum, varying models of family systems" (17). For example, in the past I had assumed that my students would enjoy *Animal Farm*. I assumed that they would not touch *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. I discovered the opposite. The allegorical and somewhat fantastic world of talking animals baffled and frustrated my class. In *Maggie* they found class struggle, street fights for territory, abusive characters they understood, and colloquial language. They not only liked it, they identified with pieces of it and worked harder to understand the challenging vocabulary and historical context. There is no shortage of well-written non-fiction or historically significant writing. From Cullen to Coates, the content of this unit lends itself to a wide selection of both. My classroom challenges usually demand that I use shorter texts: short fiction, excerpts, essays, and articles, for example. I work hard to get as much meaning out of them as possible.

Fiction

Limited fiction exists about the Tulsa Race Riot. Rilla Askew's *Fire in Beulah* is a novel about environment and conflicts that led to the event. It is almost 400 pages and has some mature content. A few of my seniors may be able or want to take on the whole thing. My plan is to use the last chapter, entitled "Greenwood." While it inevitably brings all the key players together for resolution, the setting is the Greenwood area, and events are the riot itself, from beginning to end. This historical fiction provides extensive use of literary elements, emotional imagery, and character development. *Tulsa Burning* is a short novel for 4th and 5th graders that might be a resource. The story and issues are more emotionally simple, but it might still be appropriate for lowest or younger readers. I will consider excerpts from Richard Wright's *Black Boy* if I feel I need additional fiction. Common themes would be anger, pride, race and self-image, and courage.

Poetry

Poems for the unit will include Countee Cullen's "Incident" (from our seminar) paired with Mari Evans's "Alarm Clock." Both illustrate a moment's shift from innocence to racial separateness and awareness of their narrators. The second pairing will be Claude McKay's "If We Must Die" and A.J. Smitherman's "Thinking He Can Whip the World" (18). The first is a cry to arms if necessary; there is dignity fighting for the cause of race even

in the face of loss. It echoes one of Dubois's statements about facing the growing racial violence. He was speaking to a black audience in Tulsa two months before the riot. A.J. Smitherman edited the Greenwood paper the *Daily TulsaStar* and is a character in *Fire in Beulah*. His poem, like McKay's, celebrates pride and courage of race in the face of war. Finally, we'll look at the lyrics of the song "Baltimore" that Prince wrote in tribute to the city after the death of Freddie Gray. We'll find contrasts and comparisons in tone, images, and form with the McKay and Smitherman poems. Anastasia Tolbert's poem "What to Tell My Sons after Trayvon Martin" is a beautiful and sad cataloging of what a young black man may or may not do in public, visually reducing his rights to nothing. This poem can be found through a Google search for the title and author at KUOW radio station.

Non-fiction

Eighteen years ago I had in my class the grandson of George Monroe who was at that time one of the few remaining survivors of the 1921 violence. He came to school events and conferences, and I did not then recognize the potential resource he might have been. With no living survivors today, first-hand accounts of the riot will come from two main sources, *Riot on Greenwood* and *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, both of which have many accounts to choose from. There are parallels (Rilla Askew is basing some of her novel on accounts present in Parrish's *Death in a Promised Land* and other resources) among texts that provide clear examples of how we might be affected by fictional and factual accounts of singular events. The basic narrative accounts in the books by Johnson, Parrish, Ellsworth, and Brophy are similar. Shanedra Nowell's unit takes a closer look at differences and their significance. We will read the alleged and controversial content of the May 31 *Tribune* article which incited the riot (19). I will pair this with the American Red Cross "Narrative Report as of December 31st, 1921." It contradicts the *Tribune* article and "places the blame upon 'the lack of law enforcement'" (20). Keeping my students in mind, these texts cover a variety of reading levels.

Corrupt law enforcement is the problem in James Baldwin's 1966 "A Report from Occupied Territory." We'll look at his varied tones and narrators as well as connections to present events and those we will have just studied. I stumbled upon a piece in the New York Times this week that covers the deaths of six black or mixed men and boys who died at the hand of police violence recently. Each gives a brief summary of salient points for the case and the family's reaction. Some reflect sentiments of post-riot Tulsa/Greenwood. The last thing we'll read for the unit is an interview with Dan Smolen, the attorney for the family of Eric Harris who died at the hands of a reserve deputy in Tulsa recently. He looks into problems faced by the disenfranchised like the poor, minorities, and the homeless when they encounter police.

Images

For Images of the Tulsa 1921 disaster, I will use two technology-friendly sources. The first is an app created by the Tulsa Historical Society (available through app stores). It is full of images and other reproduced primary source materials. The other is Politico Magazine online. Its photo essay "Before Ferguson, There Was Tulsa," by Tim Madigan, another riot authority contains thirteen large, clear photos with commentary. Both are readily available for teacher use and are excellent quality. Finally, we'll look at readily available riot images from Baltimore in the last year. Contrasting 1921 photos and those from Baltimore, we'll discuss the nature of the words riot, massacre, and disaster and try to decide how best to apply them to the two events. I also want students to use their social media to collect memes from recent events where black Americans might be perceived to have been victims of authority because of their race. Students will provide these images.

Strategies and activities

My strategies are usually a balance of standard language arts classroom ones and experiments geared for my very at-risk students. In response to reflection of previous units and trials last year, I'm including more Google drive use, more physical learning, and more visual literacy to pair with textual literacy. Students who suffer from severe or regular trauma can benefit from writing—a lot—especially personal and reflective writing.

Image literacy

We are bombarded with imagery all day. It makes sense that we include critical “seeing” along with our critical reading. My students are very responsive to image, especially some of the struggling readers. Image fills in gaps in understanding and reinforces strategies for analysis. Some see form in image more clearly than in text. The learned skills can eventually translate to textual analysis. They are often more comfortable collaborating around an image than a text, as well. There are a variety of specific strategies here. What I choose depends on the kinds of images we're studying. For the 1921 photos, we'll look at perspective, setting, period details, mood and tone, the subjects and their body language, and maybe composition. Another set of questions I might use for my younger students is 1. What do you see, hear, and smell? 2. What is going on? 3. What do the subjects feel? 4. What do you feel?

Image literacy activity

For this activity we'll use Tim Madigan's photo essay *Before Ferguson, There was Tulsa*. (There are so many images one could use from Tulsa resources. I am working with these for easy access as well as quality.) The first photo is of a man in overalls holding both hands in the air. We will also look at the second photo, of one black man standing in an ambiguous movement over a dead man whose face is covered. Photo number three is of a woman, with others, looking out of the back of a wagon that is carrying her to a holding station. My students will want to use photo number eight, which has more action. Black and white men—only the latter are armed—are piled into an open car with one standing on the sideboard. Motion and tension pervade the picture. The last photo is in a clean white hospital room. Dark faces and hands are in stark contrast to everything else. Expressions cover a variety of emotions, but body language is significant here, too. We'll follow this up with an image of black and white protestors in Ferguson with their hands up, in unplanned imitation of the Black men being marched to the ball park of Tulsa (described two paragraphs below).

One at a time, we'll study the photos on the Promethean board. I will model to students how they might “annotate the picture” by writing, drawing, highlighting elements of the photo like they would a text then turn that over to them, hopefully. After discussing each image as a class, I'll distribute the images to pairs or groups where they will find excerpts from our readings that match the images. They'll present to the class, explaining their deeper understandings of the images and their reasons for selecting those excerpts. We'll spend additional time comparing and contrasting the two photos, past and present, of the marchers with their hands up (described below) and maybe add a written response to them.

Kinesthetic tableaux

Using bodies and faces to enact scenes and emotions bridges cognitive and emotional understanding and reinforces emotional intelligence which is important but sometimes a weakness for my students. Physical learning also breaks down classroom norms of behavior and experience and encourages students to take

risks. They will experience vicarious emotion and physicality by recreating photographs with their bodies and faces. There are two sides to this; classmates are also invited to interpret what they see, now that it is more concrete live and in front of them, in a less abstract form. Actors and witnesses can reflect in writing and conversation. Kinesthetic tableaux and visual literacy skills will be used together at times. In addition to other photos, I'll depend heavily on the *Before Ferguson...* photos. We will definitely use numbers one, two, three, and eight—described above. In addition, I will use number ten, one of the most famous riot photos. Its caption in the Tulsa Tribune article was “Blacks Taken into Custody from Motley Parade to Ballpark.” Number 12 depicts a white family as they go through the belongings of Greenwood residents. One stares defiantly at the camera with a gun hanging by his side; others go through items seemingly unaware of the camera. It is the representation of one kind of white family during the riot.

Kinesthetic tableau activity

As they enter the room, students will choose a table by the photograph or photographs on it. (Alternately, depending on the make-up of the class, I may assign the photos to groups for more dependable results.) They will have up to fifteen minutes to analyze the photo. Towards the end I'll give them additional time and an inclusive list of emotion words. They will select appropriate words for the faces they see. They'll spend the next small chunk of time recreating the photos with special attention to body language and facial expression. They will photograph their tableaux for discussion afterwards. Each student will do a reflective journal to discuss how they felt about the photo before and after studying it and creating their interpretive tableau. As a class we'll debrief the activity and discuss its use in other situations.

Close reading strategies for poetry

Poetry is usually a weakness for my students. They often are more successful beginning with lyrics or verse with which they are already familiar. Because these poems have context and they'll be developing some mastery of the content, I hope they will be receptive to some traditional forms in addition to more accessible contemporary ones. I am more successful with more simple strategies than those with too many steps (like TPCASTT—which language arts teachers will know). I've been sticking to these steps and encouraging the students to add two questions of their own: 1) Title—what is it and what does it suggest to you? 2) Summary—find the main idea. 3) Specific language—look up words you don't know and catalog and think about the images and words that stand out. 4) Theme—what happens when you add title, summary, imagery and language together? The students or I can follow up with additional questions about other elements like tone, form, poem, or context as the poem dictates. We practice annotation with everything I can reproduce for them to write on. I regularly stress the importance of writing on documents and annotating whenever the situation allows.

Poetry activities

I will give students printed copies (which they can write on) of Countee Cullen's *Incident* and Mari Evans's *Alarm Clock*. They will read them silently then I or a volunteer will read them aloud. I will model annotating part of one on the Elmo then turn them over to their personal annotations and the questions above. Depending on students present, we may do more of this together (many of them struggle with annotation and close reading but the more we do it the better they get). For the same reasons they may also pair up for this. Together we will discuss our answers, find several topics of compare and contrast (like theme, setting, voice or tone), and create Venn diagrams to organize their thoughts.

Towards the end of the unit we'll listen to Anastasia Tolbert's *What to Tell My Sons after Trayvon Martin*.

Without a written transcript we'll listen to the poem several times. They will take notes on what they hear. If we need to we'll listen again. I'll give each student five sticky notes. Each student will write five words, phrases, or images that stood out to them, one on each note. We'll put these on the wall and then organize them into categories that appear, like emotion, personal experience, powerful language, or theme. This organizer will drive our discussion of them poem. Finally, for each of the categories, each student will write a sentence or two summarizing our decisions about the poem.

Writing

I want student writing to be directly responsive to what they've learned from text. This is where they will show they understand the elements of the seminar I think are most important to them; namely, they will discover fact and truth in fiction, and humanity and literature in nonfiction. Two of my previous units have emphasized personal writing—autobiography and memoir. This time I want their writing to be more critical and outwardly focused. In some cases working through the planning and prewriting stages will be enough, as with the Venn diagram for the two poems (above). Other assignments will include more attention to skill and development and use more of the process. Short pieces will explore critically literary and historical elements in fiction and nonfiction. Creative writings will give them other ways to display their understandings. Examples might be persona pieces, or they might create new personal statements for social media or in short video essays. Writing assessment is rubric based. Quality peer feedback is a goal that we struggle with but work towards.

Notes

1. Taylor, Kate. "English Class in Common Core Era: 'Tom Sawyer' and Court Opinions." *New York Times*, June 19, 2015, New York/Region sec.
2. Johnson, Hannibal. "The All-Black Towns in Oklahoma." Hannibaljohnson.com. December 31, 2004. Accessed July 28, 2015.
3. "African-American Settlement (1836-1945)." Preservationcommission@cityoftulsa.org. Accessed July 28, 2015. <http://tulsapreservationcommission.org/tulsagoohistory/african-americans/>.
4. Ellsworth, Scott. *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.
5. Johnson, Hannibal B. *Black Wall Street from Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District*. Austin, Tex.: Eakin Press, 1998.
6. Gerkin, Steve. "First Charged, Last Freed." *This Land Press*, March 20, 2014, Magazine sec. Accessed July 12, 2015. <http://thislandpress.com/03/20/2014/first-charged-last-freed/?read=complete>
7. Ellsworth, 32, 42-3.
8. *Black Wall Street*, 199.
9. Ellsworth,
10. Ibid, 48.
11. Ellsworth, 61, 97.
12. *Black Wall Street*, 141.
13. Parrish, Mary E. Jones. *Race Riot 1921: Events of the Tulsa Disaster*. Tulsa, Oklahoma: Out on a Limb Publishing, 1998. 113.
14. Branstetter, Ziva. "Tulsa County Reserve Deputy Bought Cars, Equipment for Undercover Unit." *Tulsa World*, April 14, 2015, Local sec.
15. Alsup, Janet. "Teaching Literature in an Age of Text Complexity." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 57, no. 3 (2013): 84.
16. Wallace-Wells, Benjamin. "The Hard Truths of Ta'Nehisi Coates." *New York Magazine*, July 1, 2015.
17. Rogers-Adkinson, Diana, Kristine Melloy, Shannon Stuart, Lynn Fletcher, and Claudia Rinaldi. "Reading And Written Language

Competency Of Incarcerated Youth." *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 24, no. 2, 197-218. Accessed July 11, 2012. Reading and Writing Quarterly 24, no. 2 (2008): 197-218. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=a61990b2-f3db-4e22-8dcd-b345beb74c80@sessionmgr12&vid=8&hid=7>.

18. Brophy, Alfred L. *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921 : Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
19. *Black Wall Street*, 199.
20. *Ibid*, 200.

Academic standards

Oklahoma does not use Common Core standards. We are in the process of writing new objectives. I include CCSS for those who might want them—specifically grades nine and ten because they translate vertically to grades above and below easily. I also include our soon-to-be-replaced state objectives. This unit covers a broad selection of reading, writing, and thinking objectives, and regardless of the standards documented, any language arts teacher will understand that it would be easy to adjust the unit to include more specific or additional objectives.

Oklahoma PASS standards

Reading/Literature: standards 1-4

Writing/Grammar/Usage/Mechanics: standards 1, 2

Oral Language/Speaking and Listening: standards 1, 2 including visual literacy and evaluating media.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards for Grades 9-10

Reading Standards for Literature

Key Ideas and Details: standards 1,2

Craft and Structure: standards 4, 6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: standard 7

Range of Reading Level and Text Complexity: standard 10

Reading Standards for Informational Text

Key Ideas and Details: standards 1, 2, 3

Craft and Structure: standards 4,6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: standards 7, 8

Range of Reading Level and Text Complexity: standard 10

Writing Standards

Text Types and Purposes: standard 2, 3

Production and Distribution of Writing: standards 5,6

Research to Build and Present Knowledge: standard 9

Range of Writing: standard 10

Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration: standards 1, 2, 3

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: standard 6

Language Standards

Knowledge of Language: standard 3

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: standards 4,6

Annotated bibliography

"A Look at Families' Reactions to Police-Related Deaths." *New York Times*, April 28, 2015, U.S. sec. Accessed July 15, 2015.
http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/04/28/us/ap-us-police-interactions-family-vignettes.html?_r=0.

This piece reports the reactions of six families of high profile deaths of minority boys and men at the hands of police around the country. Their public grief and wishes are varied and moving. They echo some themes of post-riot Tulsa/Greenwood.

Adams, Beau. "Justice for All: Attorney Dan Smolen Takes the System to Court." *The Tulsa Voice*, April 1, 2015. Accessed May 12, 2015. <http://www.thetulsavoice.com/April-B-2015/Justice-for-all/>.

I'll encourage my students to read this insightful online interview with Dan Smolen, the attorney for family of Eric Harris.

"African-American Settlement (1836-1945)." Preservationcommission@cityoftulsa.org. Accessed July 28, 2015.
<http://tulsapreservationcommission.org/tulsagoohistory/african-americans/>. A source for Oklahoma state history with some unique perspectives.

Alsop, Janet. "Teaching Literature in an Age of Text Complexity." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 57, no. 3 (2013): 181-84.

Askew, Rilla. "A Fictional Account of the Tulsa Oil Industry and Racially Charged Atmosphere Leading up to the Riot in 1921. It's a Good Read Regardless of Whether It Might Be Used in the Classroom." In *Fire in Beulah*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.

Anastasia Tolbert reads her poem "What to Tell My Sons After Trayvon Martin."

<http://kuow.org/post/poet-anastacia-tolbert-what-tell-my-sons-after-trayvon-martin>.

Beautiful and very relevant to my black male students and their peers.

Baldwin, James. "A Report from Occupied Territory." *The Nation*, July 10, 1966.

Baldwin's essay profoundly links events of 1921 to today. He discusses his

Harlem as occupied territory where lawlessness among authorities was similar to that in the early stages of the Tulsa riot existed.

Branstetter, Ziva. "Tulsa County Reserve Deputy Bought Cars, Equipment for Undercover Unit." *Tulsa World*, April 14, 2015, Local sec.

Brophy, Alfred L. *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921 : Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

This book covers the riot and conditions before and after, including the challenge of reparations. It contains A.J. Smitherman's poem "Thinking He Can Whip the World." It includes other Smitherman poems about the event, as well.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1, 2014.

Coates includes the Tulsa Race Riot in his arguments for reparations.

Ellsworth, Scott. *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

Probably the most respected historical account. His page notes at the end are

interesting and informative. It has some good photos, as well.

Gates, Eddie Faye. *Riot on Greenwood: The Total Destruction of Black Wall Street, 1921*. Austin: Sunbelt Eakin Presss, 2003.

A collection of accounts and stories from survivors, their descendants, and white observers. Written by a local historian who knew many of these people, it is very conversational and intimate.

Gerkin, Steve. "First Charged, Last Freed." *This Land Press*, March 20, 2014, Magazine sec. Accessed July 12, 2015. <http://thislandpress.com/03/20/2014/first-charged-last-freed/?read=complete>.

The author has spent the last few years doing research to look into remaining mysteries and unanswered questions from the riot.

Johnson, Hannibal. "The All-Black Towns in Oklahoma." Hannibaljohnson.com. December 31, 2004. Accessed July 28, 2015.

Hannibal Johnson is a local attorney and historian, specializing in the history of Greenwood. He is an advocate for race riot education. His books and articles are great resources not only for the '21 riot but for local history in general.

Johnson, Hannibal B. *Black Wall Street from Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District*. Austin, Tex.: Eakin Press, 1998.

A well-known and oft-used source of the history of the massacre. See above entry.

Johnson, Hannibal B. *Images of America: Tulsa's Greenwood District*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2014.

Excellent set of photographs of the Greenwood district from before and after the 1921 event.

Mosle, Sara. "What Should Children Read?" *New York Times*, November 22, 2012, The Opinion Pages sec. Accessed May 8, 2015. http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/22/what-should-children-read/?_r=0.

Presented at our first seminar meeting, this article looks at the vagaries of poorly

chosen and used informational texts to satisfy CCSS.

Myers, Anna. *Tulsa Burning*. New York: Walker, 2002.

A fictional account of the Tulsa riot appropriate for elementary students. Its use would be for my very lowest readers.

Parrish, Mary E. Jones. *Race Riot 1921: Events of the Tulsa Disaster*. Tulsa, Oklahoma: Out on a Limb Publishing, 1998.

Parrish was present during the riot and was hired as a reporter soon after. She gives her account, supplemented with other witness accounts, photographs, and copies of other primary documents.

Rogers-Adkinson, Diana, Kristine Melloy, Shannon Stuart, Lynn Fletcher, and Claudia Rinaldi. "Reading And Written Language Competency Of Incarcerated Youth." *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 24, no. 2, 197-218. Accessed July 11, 2012. *Reading and Writing Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2008): 197-218.

<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=a61990b2-f3db-4e22-8dcd-b345beb74c80@sessionmgr12&vid=8&hid=7>.

This research has served me well for the last three years.

Taylor, Kate. "English Class in Common Core Era: 'Tom Sawyer' and Court Opinions." *New York Times*, June 19, 2015, New York/Region sec.

Wallace-Wells, Benjamin. "The Hard Truths of Ta'Nehisi Coates." *New York Magazine*, July 1, 2015.

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