



Reading for Craft through an Author Study

Curriculum Unit 16.02.01, published September 2016

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How could it be wrong if it's the literature? If you're just letting literature speak for itself, and not using it to fix the student, then you can look at the intent of the author, the skill of the author, the crafting that it takes and how the way that character speaks reflects a whole lot about them. People then say, well, she must not be educated. We sometimes use the language and say because you speak this way, you are less than, you are not educated, but it's some of the language that moves Wall Street. We can move Wall Street with that, Coke and Pepsi, but for God's sake don't let it in the books we're teaching. -*Sharon Flake*

Introduction

In this intensive unit with a subject focus on author's craft, students will examine the craft of a local author in Pittsburgh, PA, named Sharon Flake. Author's craft is the style that an author chooses to write. Through careful analysis students will review the author's craft of Sharon Flake throughout the course of one year. This unit will be an introduction to author's craft for students within a 4th-grade classroom within the inner city. Students will read three novels written by Sharon Flake: *The Skin I'm In*, *Money Hungry* and *Begging for Change*. Ultimately, they will understand the craft of one particular author and familiarize themselves with the usage of methods of craft, in order to have rigorous text discussions and translate such styles into their own writing. This unit primarily focuses on the work of an author whose main characters are of African American decent, yet teachers may use this model with other works by authors who include characters of varying multicultural backgrounds—and it can be used at any grade level from elementary to secondary. This unit addresses instruction for mostly inner city youth; however, the methods can be adapted to fit suburban or rural communities. If teachers are looking to conduct an author study that addresses diverse backgrounds, particularly that of African Americans, Sharon Flake is a good author to start with. There are other authors who may be considered, like Sharon Draper, who writes in a similar fashion to Flake's, yet Draper's audience may be more appropriate for secondary learners. The goal of this unit is to prove that students can learn how to read for craft effectively through an author study.

Background

The students whom I teach are predominately of African American decent, and mostly of lower socioeconomic status. In my school the population of students is 96% Black/African American. My school was the first school in the neighborhood that enrolled Blacks. Poignantly, my school is an African Centered Academy, which infuses the principles of Nguzo Saba. These principles highlight a way of life surrounding many African Americans. The hope is that students will incorporate these values, which will be covered later in this unit within their daily lives,. The students live in the inner city of Pittsburgh, in a neighborhood called the Hill District. The neighborhood of the Hill District is a Historically Black Neighborhood, the oldest Black neighborhood in Pittsburgh. The Hill was one of the first areas that Blacks migrated to during the Great Migration. The Hill District has many businesses that are Black owned and operated. Most of the students whom I teach come from a section of the Hill called “Sugar Top,” which received its name during the Harlem Renaissance period. Sugar Top was a place that was “sweet,” a place where Black entertainers performed and helped to make its culture so rich. For instance, the Hill District is the setting of the late August Wilson’s ten plays. I say all this to emphasize that with all this history and greatness and the rich substance of the community, why are my students still struggling in reading comprehension? I argue that it is because students do not see themselves reflected in the literature that they read over an extensive period of time. I teach two sections of ELA to 5th grade students. This coming year I will be teaching 4th grade, and hopefully in the upcoming year loop with my students. This unit is designed to be implemented throughout the course of a year in order for my students to master the skills regarding craft of text.

Rationale

The current curriculum does not keep the students whom I teach in mind. It’s as if the curriculum is saying that the only way to teach about Blacks lives are through works that represent oppression. Current curriculum units provide instances such as the Civil Rights Movement that is a reminder of the struggles Blacks endured, in essence, making Blacks think the only way their culture lives, has lived, or is worth living is through struggle. What about the success despite the struggle? In other words, why do my students have to think that the only way they have “made it,” is through a fight, through a struggle, and this is the only way that they can survive? The mentality then becomes “Let me put up my guard for the battle,” and literature that doesn’t speak to their current experiences becomes the battlefield.

My current curriculum includes novel studies in which students study one novel and take a closer look at the themes throughout; however, at the intermediate level, which are 3rd to 5th grades, author studies are not built in. The current curriculum provides literature in various units that focus on other cultures and even tie in with the Black culture, but not nearly to the degree that I believe is necessary for students to feel comfortable enough to grapple with literature on a deeper level. Why literature? Why does literature matter? Literature has to become so meaningful that these students who are deprived of their voices in literature can now see that once the battle is won, they can use what they have learned to face any other challenge depicted in literature.

Unfortunately, as a product of the inner city, attending public schools in Pittsburgh, I noticed that some of my peers in the inner city were plagued with feeling like they needed to play “catch up,” not only to their

Caucasian counterparts, but to any other student who may have been outperforming them. I believe this feeling of incompetency starts with literacy and the inability to read critically. With this author study students will be able to engage in higher-order thinking in regard to author's craft. I am focusing on author's craft because I believe that students will be able to become better readers and writers when they are aware of the intentions of an author and learn to keep an eye on reading with craft in mind.

I am focusing on the work of a local author, Sharon Flake, primarily because she is an African American author, and because she has grown up in the inner city, she is a reflection of the culture that I teach. Moreover, the issues that surface in her novels are based on the lives of inner-city youth. I believe it is critical that students see themselves in the literature they read. Despite what may be going on at home or in the world, Black students may be able to finally celebrate who they are without making accommodations for those who cannot relate to their experiences. When students see the covers of the novels of Sharon Flake, they will see a face that looks similar to their own. Students will no longer feel detached from literature because they don't visualize themselves in the text. Now they can see an achievement that is amazingly crucial. From this work my hope is to launch more author studies that hone in on craft.

Why is Teaching Author's Craft Important to Inner-City Youth?

I want to give my students an opportunity to become comprehensive readers, and I believe that process starts with reading for craft. I believe that students can relate to the style of an author whose genre is realistic fiction that focuses on inner city youth. When students use craft to foster deeper meaning, I believe that they may be able to progress as comprehensive readers. My current curriculum puts more emphasis on students' understanding and using habits of effective readers such as: summarizing, inferencing, drawing conclusions, and synthesizing, to name a few. These strategies are used when students analyze literary elements like plot, theme, and characterization. With this method, students do not pay particular attention to the intricacies that craft entails. The curriculum that I teach merely scratches the surface of the depth that is outlined in the Common Core State Standards in relation to the requirements surrounding Craft and Structure. The curriculum broadcasts a lightweight approach to craft and structure, focusing on figurative language and on some structural pieces such as description and word choice. In other words, the curriculum permits teaching and learning of author's craft in spurts throughout various units and not as nearly as extensively as is necessary for students to master reading at the level required by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Moreover, I would like students to read like writers. This is a reversal of a way of thinking in regards to literacy development, but writing is the highest form of literacy development. When students think like writers, they are putting a magnifying glass on the deliberate intentions of a writer by questioning how and why the writer chose to position the words the way that he or she did. Students can then mimic those crafty methods, which will prove that they have discovered the intent behind the authors' words. It is critical for students in the inner-city to perform at this level. I believe this because they are so far behind other students, and focusing on metacognitive strategies is not enough to propel students of the inner-city through to college. I believe it is important to start at this level of 4th grade because, as I mentioned, I want to prevent them from having to "catch up," especially when it's too late.

In order for students to master the skills the standards outline, it is essential that they are given adequate time and resources to allow for that mastery to occur. In my experience, students shut down when reading for two reasons: the text has no real connection to them or they cannot decode the words at the level presented. I want students to surpass their flaws and connect with text on a deeper level than what is on the page.

Background of Sharon Flake from an Unpublished Interview

I had the privilege of conducting an interview with Sharon Flake on July 12, 2016. The insight I learned from Ms. Flake will be helpful in preparing for a unit on teaching author's craft to inner-city youth.

Sharon Flake grew up in the inner city of the northern region of Philadelphia, PA. In an interview, when asked what inspired her to become a writer, Sharon Flake stated, "Have you heard of the saying, many are called but only a few are chosen? My grandfather wrote poetry. I also think I've been genetically encoded. I write about the inner city because I was born in the inner city. My father loved North Philadelphia; he is 90 years old. He's always talked about it as if it were a shiny castle on a hill. And so, it makes me want to cry. I grew up on a really small street where my neighbors still know who I am, they know my name. They loved being Black. I hope people walk away saying, she loved those people, and she loved those kids, they walk away saying that's where her heart is."¹ It is crucial to include work from such a passionate author concerned with the future of inner-city youth. Sharon went on to explain that the genre of literature she writes falls in the category of realistic fiction. She added that what she writes is "simplistically complex," simple in nature, with layers that add to text complexity. She proclaimed that her protagonists primarily speak African American English, and that the language is textured. She said that she plays around with writing more than people think she does; she tries to take people and language out of boxes. Importantly, Sharon writes in a way that she believes children feel. Her goal is to capture the words, the essence, and the intent behind the words.

Flake continued to oppose notions that discredit the African American Language. Sharon stated, "Sometimes when teachers walk in and see literature, they see it's not Dickens, therefore it's not there. They say, 'Oh, I love *The Skin I'm In*, but we correct the English.' And I think, oh well, I bet you don't correct the English of *To Kill a Mockingbird* because somehow you think standard dialect makes sense, and inner city dialect, or urban dialect, or African American dialect doesn't make sense, and sometimes people use the work to fix the children."

I was very touched by what Ms. Flake shared. She helped me understand her intentions as an author and what not to do with the work she has published. I will use the discussion we shared to present the work within the author study as a piece of literature and not try to change or fix the students. Many times, my students come in speaking a vernacular that I think does not sound educated. I fall into that same trap of trying to "fix" the language of my students by changing the language. It's as if I only focus on correcting them so much that I may have missed an important message they were attempting to express. Sharon Flake is challenging me to let literature stand alone as a tool for expression, however that may be. This interview has taught me that just because language is different doesn't necessarily make it wrong. I also believe that when students see someone in a book talking as they do, they may be able to relate to the character on a deeper level than they would when reading traditional novels that may use standard vernacular.

Students need a variety of literature in front of them. I once had someone tell me that any kind of reading is good reading, as long as you read. I think this is what Sharon Flake means by letting literature be a work in itself. She is speaking of acceptance, which I believe inner-city youth do not feel about themselves. Sharon even added in the interview that she enjoys the movements of the youth today; she believes that the youth are finding their voices right now, dealing with self-esteem like her characters, and that this is empowerment. Sharon added, "In the book *The Skin I'm In*, the teacher says what does your face say to the world? If you look at this movement, if you look at what's going on, these kids are saying my face according to you says that I am a threat." What a powerful statement. When students see Black faces on the cover of a book, perhaps it makes them feel that they are not threatening. It makes them feel accepted because they actually "made it"

into a book, something that is deemed so permanent and everlasting. Although, once I was not pictured, I am now; my story, from my view, is being told, embraced, and celebrated. Students then think, “By golly, if learning author’s craft is what you want, I sure will stand at attention”—this is the mentality that I want my students to gain, and I believe this can be done with an author study of an writer who speaks of characters who, although they are fictional, may be exactly where they are—mentally, socially, and physically.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy or teaching is a phrase that has created buzz over the past years, and it sheds light on bringing diversity in the classroom, and making students of all cultures feel accepted and appreciated. In Darius D. Prier’s *Culturally Relevant Teaching: Hip Hop Pedagogy in Urban Schools*, he exclaims that “under conditions in America urban schooling increasingly has been restructured as a technical-rational process of producing learning outcomes under highly disciplined and alienating conditions, with a basic skills curriculum and a test-preparation pedagogy that do not acknowledge or engage urban students’ everyday lived experience, respect their culture and language, or involve them in struggles to construct empowering and self-affirming identities and to resist oppression.”² This is the primary reason why it is so critical to do an author study like this one on the work of Sharon Flake. Sharon dispels the notion, mentioned above, that urban students lived experiences should not be represented. Sharon Flake speaks from the voice of the inner-city youth, and channels their lived experiences through her unique characterization in her novels, particularly in the three novels in this unit. Moreover, Prier proclaims the “No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) does not make visible the structural obstacles that children of color and their families face, such as health disparities, labor market discrimination and the like, processes that a class analysis alone cannot unmask. This is vintage whiteness.”³ Once again, Flake helps to wipe out this bias. It is critical that students of the inner-city see themselves in the work they read about. One would argue that Flake writes about Blacks in the inner city, but not about all other cultures. In the interview with Sharon Flake, she shared the fact that she has travelled throughout the world and that people of many cultures have been touched by the work that she has brought forth. I believe that it is refreshing to see a minority culture expressed in literature. As a Black woman, when I see a text reflecting my culture I feel as though “I made it!” I want to make sure that there is a non-stereotypical way in which I and my students are “represented,” and Sharon Flake does this.

The Value of Author Studies

There has been research behind the value of author studies within the elementary classroom. Particularly, the article “10 Reasons to do an Author Study” states ten reasons supporting author studies⁴. Some of those reasons are listed below, along with my rationale for why this reason applies to teaching students in the inner city about a local author.

Reading Skills

More students of the inner-city need to focus their eyes on text and need to be taught how to develop skills in reading. An author study can be beneficial in achieving this goal.

Critical Thinking

Students can be taught how to analyze text at deeper levels than when just examining literary elements in conjunction with metacognitive skills.

Writing

The article expresses the idea that the author becomes a “writing mentor.” Students of the inner city sometimes need a model before they feel confident in moving forward to do work on their own. Moreover, as the article suggests, it helps students build confidence in their own writing.⁵

Love for Reading

The article claims also that kids often bond with “their” author, a process that makes reading a personal, fulfilling experience⁶

Exposure to Reading Genres

An author study can be a stepping stone granting students the opportunity to inquire into different styles of writing by other authors and discover the various types of crafts of writing.

Informational Reading

An author study can lead students to find out information about an author. When you teach works by a local author, perhaps the author can provide a school visit to interact with students who have read his or her books. This also helps for inner-city students who thrive on making connections with the literature they read.

Transition to Current Curriculum

An author study can be short or long, depending on the skills needed for students to acquire. Students of the inner-city and in an elementary school particularly need repetition, and the idea of studying one author over time (short or long) can help with students becoming comprehensive readers.

In *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It*, Kelly Gallagher and Richard Allington, they emphasize that the “first step in broadening our students’ reading windows comes when we recognize the three factors that serve as major contributors to readicide.”⁷ I have come to understand readicide as the genocide of reading. Two of the factors that I find the most critical are the focus on test preparation, which essentially removes the study of novels and additional challenging works in reading and the fact that there is not enough reading done in school. This is why I appreciate the steps that the authors outline to stop readicide from continually happening. The authors continue to emphasize that much damage can be done when students’ brains are not stretched by longer, challenging works. They suggest keeping in mind the work of Maryanne Wolf, who cautions that “adolescents go through major brain development stages and when they aren’t stretched in these periods of their life, their cognitive window may run the risk of shutting down.”⁸ The authors recommend various ways to deal with this issue, and the one that resonates with me primarily is to take a stand: “be the lead person on your campus and in your district in making sure that curricular decision makers understand what is at stake—that a short, choppy curriculum can damage our students’ ability to think long after they leave the K-12 school system.”⁹ With this unit, I am taking a stand and giving students an opportunity to get more reading done in school and not just focus on test preparation. Importantly, to achieve all of this I am using novels that students will read throughout the author study.

Moreover, in *Readicide*, the authors consider an opposing view, that the over teaching of books prevents students from engaging in the reading flow. In the book *Making Mind* reading flow refers to a mind lost in a state of reading and tuning out all reality for the sake of being engrossed in the literature.¹⁰ There is a notion

that too much focus on deeper analysis can be detrimental and taint students' experiences when reading. I can understand this viewpoint, and I agree that reading analysis can be overkill. At the elementary level I believe that students need to be shown how to analyze literature through engaging texts so that the reading flow is not interrupted; it is then ignited. I believe that through an author study of writer who writes in ways that relate to their lives, they will be able to experience reading flow where it may have been disrupted or corrupted due to their inability to comprehend the words on the page.

The Value of Local Author Studies

Conducting an author study is essential for students to become familiarized with a style of writing, in order to perfect their own. Additionally, when students are aware that the author they are studying resides in the city they are from, it takes meaning to a different level. I believe students will become more intrigued and curious about someone who is from their area. Students may be inclined to read more, just to find out if their city or something that reminds them of home is represented through the author's expression. An opportunity may arise for students to meet a local author as well, an event that will be entirely enriching. Students can ask questions and get actual feedback from the author. Moreover, this opportunity can add value in students' lives by helping them meet success in their own backyard.

Teaching Strategies

Teaching Author's Craft

According to Lester Laminack, craft is the art of writing, essentially leaving a "voice print" behind for any reader to find. In other words the craft of a writer is like a fingerprint that is easily identified by the reader who is a detective. Craft highlights word choice, attention to detail and the placement of words on the page. Laminack continues that it is important to read with craft in mind; it helps students learn how writers create their work. He emphasizes that when students read with eyes and ears of a writer, they become engrossed in a reflection process, and they discover when, why, and how an author used a specific technique. ¹¹

Moreover, the sound of writing is where it all begins, Le Guin explains in *Steering the Craft*: "The noise words make, the sounds and silences that make the rhythms marking their relationships—both the meaning and the beauty of the writing depend on these sounds and rhythms."¹² This is the entire premise of craft, and students need to be shown such complexities in examining the craft of an author. There are various areas surrounding the craft of an author that students can review within this unit. I suggest using the following for the author study of Sharon Flake:

Description

The students can review Sharon Flake's use of descriptive language across various texts within the author study.

Word Choice

The students can review the language that Sharon Flake uses in which she makes connections.

Point of View and Voice

Students will be able to identify with the techniques of narration throughout the texts read.

Repetition

Students identify repetitions of words, phrases or symbols throughout Sharon Flake’s novels.

Use of Figurative Language

Students take a look at metaphors, similes, and personification throughout texts by Sharon Flake.

Close Reading and Text Complexity

In “Reading with an Eye on Craft/Close Reading,” the writer highlights that “we need to slow students down as they read and provide a focus that helps them see and appreciate each choice a writer makes—to instill a habit of slowing down as readers requires practice and focused attention on the writer’s craft.”¹³ Close reading is a district wide initiative. The Common Core State Standards emphasize three shifts, which are: “Regular practice with complex texts and their academic language, reading, writing, and speaking grounded in texts, both from literary and informational and the final shift which is building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction.”¹⁴ Two of the shifts tie close reading and text complexity together. In my school close reading is evident when these three steps occur: Read, Reread, and Respond. We identify those steps as the 3Rs of Close Reading. It is critical to understand that not every text is meant to be closely read. Our guidelines suggest focusing on a chapter or small section of a book that is complex enough for students to engage in rigorous discussions. The process of close reading starts when students conduct a cold read; this lets student get a feel for the passage. Second, the students reread. During the rereading stage students are usually looking for particular things within the passage that lead to deeper meaning. For instance, in regard to author’s craft, students may review the methods of descriptive language used to describe the characters in the passage. Lastly, students respond to what they’ve read and reread. The response is a result of a question or purpose for reading set at the beginning of the read. Students may respond in written or verbal forms. The goal of close reading is to show students how to analyze text.

Furthermore, text complexity refers to text that is layered. Understanding text complexity starts with sorting out the difference between difficult and complex. In “Unlocking the Secrets of Complex Text,” the writer suggests that a textbook might be difficult, but it might not be sufficiently complex if it has already laid out the thinking for its readers. A high quality non-fiction trade book, on the other hand, might seem easier at first glance, but if it’s well-written and conveys multiple ideas, its complexity will reward close reading.¹⁵ The operative words “well-written,” and “multiple ideas,” are essential to text complexity. The article has a chart, that shows how teachers can determine if a text is deemed complex. The chart has particular specifications such as the types of questions that can lend themselves to being complex or difficult. I think it is key to understand that complex texts do not necessarily prescribe the thinking for its readers. Complex text allows readers to make inferences and draw conclusions regarding the author’s intentions.

Teaching an Author Study

The goal of an author study is to introduce students to multiple works of one particular author. Moreover, conducting an author study allows students to gather information about the author through research. The key to doing author studies is that a purpose is set for reading whether it be for identifying craft, making

connections regarding literary elements, i.e., setting, plot or characterization.

Incorporating Technology

In my school there are a certain number of iPads per grade level that students are able to use. If you have technology that is available to this degree, I think that such incorporation would be beneficial. Consider downloading the novels or other books within an author study. The use of technology can reach diverse learners who may need visual stimulation. In tablets there are features of highlighting and note taking that can assist with students' ability to comprehend text. Many times the number of actual hardback novels can be limited, and students may not be able to "make a mess of the text," since they must return them for use for the following year. Having a tablet or other technological device may be another alternative when reading for craft through an author study.

Incorporating the Writing Workshop

Lucy Calkins is the founding director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. Much of her work is implemented in classrooms throughout the United States, and it includes the writing workshop. The writing workshop is a strategy that is used to engage students in the process of writing.¹⁶ There are five stages to the writing process, and they are: pre-write, draft, revise, edit and publish. During each step students polish their writing piece by piece until it is published. During the first stage, prewrite, students are brainstorming and mapping out their ideas. The second stage, draft, gives students the chance to write without judgment after they have determined an idea. The third stage, revise, grants students opportunities to share their writing with other students for peer-review as well as conferencing with the teacher to gain feedback on how to stretch out or eliminate elements from their current work and make it stronger. The fourth stage, edit, students receive feedback on how to correct errors. The fifth stage, publish, students rewrite their final copy. This writing process can be essential when students read for craft through an author study. Many of the works throughout the author study will require students to write using a certain technique that the author uses. When students are aware of the process in publishing written works, they may be able to effectively shape their craft.

Nguzo Saba Infusion and Theme Walk

My school, which is an African Centered Academy, implements the seven principles of Nguzo Saba, which are: *Nia, Ujima, Ujamaa, Umoja, Kujichagulia, Kuumba* and *Imani*. The chart located below in the section on Teaching Resources outlines each principle, its definition, and how the strategies can be implemented throughout an author study with a focus on author's craft. Although some methods are mentioned to lead an author study of Sharon Flake, they can be adapted to be used in any work of literature. Here are a few of the principles and how they can be implemented in an author study with a focus on author's craft:

Ujima

Ujima means collective work and responsibility: students can review how the author describes the problems the characters face, and how the community is described when facing problems—students can question the author chose to present such instances in a certain way

Kujichagulia

Kujichagulia means self-determination: This is a major principle that can be used in reading all three novels,

particularly *The Skin I'm In*—students can look at the author's methods in describing the characters and the point of view.

Imani

Imani means faith: Students can review how the author chose to reveal the dynamics of family and beliefs and how the characters grapple with the complexities of life as adolescents in the inner-city.

Additionally, I would like students to use the novel as a way to identify the themes that may be in line with the principles throughout our school. Every month our principal has a book of the month that focuses on a principle of Nguzo Saba. The principal asks that teachers encourage students to do activities and think of ways the authors incorporate those principles throughout the books. I would like my students to make connections with the themes that are throughout the novels we read in the author study, just as is done with the principal's book of the month.

Small Group Instruction through Mini-Lessons

Small group instruction through mini-lessons is a strategy that I particularly enjoy when teaching a novel. When I taught at a Montessori school, students received mini-lessons on a regular rotation daily. Students were grouped homogeneously and were taught a lesson according to which skill they were working on from their individualized work plan. I would like to incorporate mini-lessons that focus on various elements of author's craft and keep in mind the varying comprehension levels of my students.

Activities

This unit is intended to be completed throughout the course of one year. Teachers can use discretion when doing activities. Depending on the skill set of the students taught, additional scaffolds should be considered, as well as enrichment of the activities below.

Activity 1: What's Your Craft?

Learning Objective

Students will be able to define what author's craft means.

Criteria

Students create one craft collage

Procedure

Start the lesson by sharing background about Sharon Flake. Show the three novels and ask students if they have an idea what the books are about. Afterwards, write the word CRAFT on the board, chart paper, or some other visual space. Distribute construction paper or cardstock and ask students to write the word CRAFT in the middle of their space. Ask students to return to a general meeting space to discuss the word on the board. Have students share what they believe the word means in general. Take the lesson further by asking what

craft means in various contexts: Art, Physical Education, Math, and English Language Arts. Write some responses on the space surrounding the word CRAFT. After taking the pulse of students' ideas regarding craft, provide students with the definition of author's craft. After providing the definition, ask students if the words they have shared come close to what author's craft means. Ask students to eliminate words that are not associated with author's craft. After narrowing the list down, ask students to think about their own style of writing. Provide students with magazine clippings and have them return to their seats to cut out images that reflect their writing craft. If students are having difficulty determining their craft, let them know that it is alright for their slate to be clean and that they can add images throughout the progression of the author study.

Activity 2: I Can't Hear You!

Learning Objective

Students will be able to write using an audible craft technique called repetition.

Criteria

Students will choose a section from the three novels: *The Skin I'm In*, *Money Hungry* or *Begging for Change* as a model to imitate that style of repetition. Afterwards, students write a narrative that is a paragraph or a page and has at least five repetitions of a noticeable word.¹⁷ The word can be a noun, adjective or verb.

Procedure

Choose a section in one of the three novels that showcases Flake's use of repetition. Here is an example from *The Skin I'm In* which speaks of a time when the teacher is not in the direct presence of the students:

When she's far enough away, John-John says to me, "I don't see no pretty, just a whole lot of black." Before I can punch him good, he's singing a rap song.

"Maleeka, Maleeka—ba-boom, boom, boom, we sure wanna keep her, baboom, boom, boom, but she so black, baboom, boom, boom, we just can't see her."¹⁸

Write this on chart paper, chalkboard, or someplace visible for students. Ask students to point out where they find repetition of a noun, verb, or adjective. Engage students further by asking questions like: What is the author trying to emphasize here? Why did the author choose to repeat certain words and not others? What impact does this repetition have on the character(s) as the plot unfolds? After discussing these questions, encourage students to choose a section from the book to mimic in terms of the style of repetition presented. The students can write about any particular topic. If students are having difficulty providing scaffolds may be necessary. Scaffolds may include: sample excerpts in which repetition is evident, and students can choose one from a pile, also giving students an opportunity to select certain topics from a different pile. Depending on the audience of learners, consider the gradual release method which gives students the opportunity to see examples of the product before being "released," to perform on their own. It includes three steps: I Do, We Do, You Do. First, the teacher demonstrates, and then students try as a class (as with the whole group finding areas in which repetition is used in the sample excerpt from *The Skin I'm In*), and finally, the student completes the task on his or her own.

Activity 3: Can You Repeat That?

Learning Objective

Students will be able to write using an audible craft technique called repetition.

Criteria

Students will choose two sections from two of the three novels: *The Skin I'm In*, *Money Hungry*, or *Begging for Change* as models to imitate their style in terms of repetition of structure. The "structural repetition is the similarity of the events in a story: happenings that echo one another."¹⁹

Procedure

Choose two sections from two of the three novels that showcase Flake's use of repetition of structure. Encourage students to think of the dilemma that the main characters face in *The Skin I'm In* and *Money Hungry*. Ask students to identify how the events are a repetition. For example, in *Steering the Craft*, Le Guin highlights *Jane Eyre* as a prime example of structural repetition. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane is bullied as a young girl, and then gains the courage to fight back, yet is ostracized for it—similarly, when Jane gets older she goes through some similar hurdles and must once again become heroic.²⁰ Ask for students to think of examples in movies, other books, or in their lives in which this structural repetition has occurred. When students have discovered the mirrored events, they should link up with other students to try to figure out one another's events. After students get the hang of the exercise, students will write a short narrative about a time in their lives that structural repetition is appropriate to describe what has occurred in their lives. This narrative account could be fact-based or fictional.

Activity 4: Take It Further—A Culminating Project, Finding Your Craft

Learning Objective

After reading the three novels by Sharon Flake: *The Skin I'm In*, *Money Hungry* and *Begging for Change*, students will be able to write using one of the craft techniques that the author used the most effectively, i.e.: repetition, figurative language, voice or descriptive language.

Criteria

Students will write a fictional narrative using one of the craft techniques that the author used most effectively. Students may choose one of the following craft techniques: voice, point of view, descriptive language, repetition or figurative language. Five or more occurrences of the technique are recommended. The narrative should be three to five pages.

Procedure

This activity should be mentioned to students at the beginning of the author study. Explain to students that close examination of the author's technique will be reviewed throughout all three novels. During a group discussion, after reading all three novels (although discussion of the author's craft should be evident throughout the entire author study), ask students to point out various occurrences in which the author mastered a certain technique in all three novels. This may take some time. Students may reflect at their seats and come up with at least three examples before sharing. After discussion, ask students to write a written

explanation stating why the author's use of voice, point of view, descriptive language, repetition or figurative language was the most effective. Once students have determined the technique that they want to use, ask them to come up with a fictional story that will use the technique they found the most successful. Use the writer's workshop model to lead students through this process.

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"Sharon G. Flake |." Sharon G Flake. Accessed July 11, 2016. <http://www.sharongflake.com/>. Great source for teachers to gain more information regarding Sharon Flake. Synopsis regarding books also includes sample lessons and discussions that teachers can have with students about the books.

Gallagher, Kelly, and Richard L. Allington. *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It*. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse Publishers, 2009. This text speaks to the genocide of reading, and how reading is decaying. Teachers will find this source essential for helpful tips on how to create a classroom environment that is rich in reading.

Laminack, Lester L. *Cracking Open the Author's Craft: Teaching the Art of Writing*. New York: Scholastic, 2007. There is a DVD included which goes through the elements of craft and included various mentor texts and lessons that can be done within the classroom surrounding reading for craft.

K., Le Guin Ursula. *Steering the Craft: Exercises and Discussions on Story Writing for the Lone Navigator or the Mutinous Crew*. Portland, Or.: Eighth Mountain, 1998. Print. Includes exercises regarding the steering of craft—allows the teacher to plan lessons that

focus on craft.

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"Unlocking the Secrets of Complex Text." *Educational Leadership: Tackling Informational Text!*. Accessed July 11, 2016. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov13/vol71/num03/Unlocking-the-Secrets-of-Complex-Text.aspx>. The article gives insight into text complexity.

"10 Reasons to Do an Author Study." Reading Rockets. Accessed July 13, 2016. <http://www.readingrockets.org/books/authorstudy/reasons>. The article gives suggestions on how to do an author study. Further exploration throughout the site will provide a tool kit for author study

Teaching Resource

Chart of Nguzo Saba Principles/Definitions with Unit Usage Ideas

Nguzo Saba Principle	Definition	Suggested usage in Author Study focused on Author's Craft
Nia, <i>Purpose</i>	To make as our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.*	Students can explore Nia through exploration of the purpose for why author uses certain characterization methods.

Ujima, <i>Collective Work and Responsibility</i>	To build and maintain our community together and to make our Brother's and Sister's problems, our problems and to solve them together.*	Students review how the author describes the problems the characters face, and how the community is maintained throughout the text—and question why the author chose to write in a certain way
Ujamaa, <i>Cooperative Economics</i>	To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them.*	Evaluate the author's intent behind how characters in the inner city respond to the notion of cooperative economics. Particularly in <i>Money Hungry</i> and <i>Begging for Change</i> in which the main character is an entrepreneur.
Umoja, <i>Unity</i>	To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.*	Identify the author's usage of language and characterization that describes unity.
Kujichaguila, <i>Self Determination</i>	To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.*	This is a major principle that can be used in all three novels, particularly in <i>The Skin I'm In</i> —students can look at the author's methods in describing the characters and the point of view.
Kuumba, <i>Creativity</i>	To do always as much as we can, in the way that we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful than when we inherited it.*	Students can review the novels and compare and contrast the author's creativity and style for writing as a whole.
Imani, <i>Faith</i>	To believe with all our hearts in our parents, our teachers, our leaders, our people and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.*	Students can review how the author chose to reveal the dynamics of family and beliefs and how the characters grapple with the complexities of life as an adolescent in the inner city.

***Definitions Cited From:** "The Founder's Message 2000." *The Official Kwanzaa Web Site* Accessed July 13, 2016. <http://officialkwanzaawebsite.org/NguzoSaba.shtml>.

Reading List for Students

Novels for Author Study

The Skin I'm In

This story is about young Maleeka who is in bit of an identity crisis. She is tall, skinny and dark-skinned. She seems to be very uncomfortable in her skin because of how she is treated. Readers will find out how Maleeka's perception of her skin unfolds. "Will she love the skin she's in?"²¹

Money Hungry

There is a saying, "Money is the root of all evil." In the story the main character Raspberry Hill adores money so much, it will leave readers wondering if she values money over friendship and if it will be worth the risk in the end. What will she lose? What will she gain?

Begging for Change

The sequel to *Money Hungry*. So much has changed, and the shifts in family dynamics have created quite a

strain on Raspberry’s life. Can she stand the test of time with so much change?

Materials

Class Set of *The Skin I’m In* (soft cover and/or electronic if available)

This novel should be read throughout the first quarter of the school year.

Class set of *Money Hungry* (soft cover and/or electronic if available)

This novel should be read throughout the second quarter of the school year.

Class set of *Begging for Change* (soft cover and/or electronic if available)

This novel should be read during the third quarter of the school year.

Composition Notebooks

The notebooks can be used for daily/weekly journaling or note-taking regarding reading for craft through the author study.

Appendix—Implementing District Standards

The following standards are the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for 4th Grade Literature. Each of the standards listed address the area of content covered within this unit: Craft and Structure.

Language in Literature

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.4 “Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).”

Students will examine the author’s use of descriptive language throughout the author study. Sharon Flake describes her characters through narrative techniques, such as dialogue, as well as journaling.

Structure in Literature

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.5 “Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.”

Students will analyze the differences in craft throughout the various texts in the author study.

Point of View in Literature

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.6 “Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.”²²

Students will explore the author’s shifts in point of view throughout the author study.

Endnotes

1. "Interview of Sharon Flake."
2. Prier, Darius C. *Culturally Relevant Teaching: Hip-hop Pedagogy in Urban Schools*, 58
3. Ibid
4. "10 Reasons to Do an Author Study."
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
7. Gallagher, Kelly, and Richard L. Allington. *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It*. 12
8. Gallagher. Allington. *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It*. 16
9. Gallagher. Allington. *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It*. 20
10. Tague, Gregory. *Making Mind: Moral Sense and Consciousness in Philosophy, Science, and Literature*. 85
11. Laminack, Lester L. *Cracking Open the Author's Craft: Teaching the Art of Writing*. 16
12. Le Guin, Ursula K.. *Steering the Craft: Exercises and Discussions on Story Writing for the Lone Navigator or the Mutinous Crew*. 1
13. "Reading with an Eye on Craft/Close Reading."
14. "Preparing America's Students for Success."
15. "Unlocking the Secrets of Complex Text."
16. Calkins, Lucy, *The Art of Teaching Writing*. 183
17. LeGuin. *Steering the Craft: Exercises and Discussions on Story Writing for the Lone Navigator or the Mutinous Crew*. 41
18. Flake, Sharon. *The Skin I'm In*.11
19. LeGuin. *Steering the Craft: Exercises and Discussions on Story Writing for the Lone Navigator or the Mutinous Crew*. 40
20. Ibid
21. "Sharon G. Flake."
22. "Preparing America's Students for Success."

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