



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2017 Volume II: Literature, Life-Writing, and Identity

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## **Uncovering Individuality in a Scripted World**

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### **Introduction**

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*“Life is like a book. There are good chapters, and there are bad chapters. But when you get to a bad chapter, you don’t stop reading the book! If you do...then you never get to find out what happens next!”<sup>1</sup>*

If life is like an evolving story, why then do my students define themselves by only one chapter? Why do they define themselves according to their climatic experiences rather than their personal resolve? This dissonance of beliefs ---“*where* I am from” and “*who* I am”---- causes friction in the urban classroom both relationally and instructionally. This short-sighted way of living---this lack of vision---not only poses a dangerous threat to students’ well-being, but it is indeed an urgent need that must be redressed with practical truth. The dissonance of beliefs ---“*where* I am from” and “*who* I am”----causes friction in the urban classroom that undermines social and academic growth.

In an effort to help my students more clearly define the difference between their *person* and their *personal experience*, this unit allows students to view life and identity through the eyes of both fictional and nonfictional characters, as they first study a literary work and then, informational texts. Through the process of analyzing character, historical research, and personalized discussion and writing activities, students will explore various aspects of individual identity in connection with familial, social, and political constructs.

This unit follows two tracks, one reading and one writing. Its components work to increase literacy across various mediums, expose students to various forms of expression, and inspire further research. In essence, the seminar format offers culturally-relevant texts with multi-faceted meanings from which students can draw various conclusions. This versatility allows for purposeful group discussions and collaborations as well as personal reflections. Furthermore, this work will support the mission of Central Junior High School by prompting students to discover, analyze, and discuss personal identity within the context of one’s history and future. Throughout the unit, students will grapple with two core questions: Where do I come from? and Where am I going?

When grappling with these two core questions, one must factor in the concept of location. The concept of

location is multi-faceted. On one hand, the term *location* can refer to the *state of being* in a certain place or condition. On the other hand, the term *location* can refer to the result of *being strategically positioned* in a certain place. The two definitions support the premise that location can be the result of one's own decisions, the decisions of others, or a combination of both factors. This reality--- that we are not the sole proprietors of our own lives---illuminates human impressionability and the importance of embracing one's unique identity, passions, and purpose as the gauge for creating a life and legacy--- rather than pushing back one's unique identity, passions, and ultimately capsizing purpose for the acceptance of another.

This unit strives to encourage students to grapple with the idea that the distinction between where they are from and where they are going can be a matter of direction. In fact, these two states of being may have very different projections. Indeed, the projections can be in opposite directions. I want my students to realize that where they are from does not define where they are going. If they can change their perception of self, they can change the trajectory of their life.

By beginning the unit with a focus on family, relationships, and the self, I will be able to relate the subject matter to something students are familiar with and are interested in. I teach a very diverse group of students, and I believe that the social and political issues addressed in the writings are topics my students will invest themselves in. As students grapple with various literary components, they will be able to articulate the purpose of the text and its effect on themselves as an audience. In totality, my hope is that by using culturally-relevant texts, students will be able to engage in critical dialogue about the self, youth culture, and American social expectations and constructs.

The first text that I have chosen for this unit is *The Piano Lesson*, written by August Wilson. This play highlights the importance of legacy and the dilemma of trying to preserve the past and stride toward the future simultaneously. This work will then turn to informative articles about the *Greenwood District* and the *Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*. This second portion of the unit will be supplemented with a complementary audio-visual clip that discusses how Tulsa's Greenwood District redefined success for African-Americans and how Greenwood continued to develop business capital despite opposition.

## Background

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Central Junior High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma was created to offer quality relationships, relevant instruction, and rigorous academic challenges for all students. Grounded in the work of Daggett, who believed that effective instruction is relevant, rigorous, and fueled by relationships, Central's site personnel are driven to cultivate academically-strong and culturally-competent scholars.<sup>2</sup> We have growth-mindsets, strategically offering and driving many Fine Arts Classes, such as Studio Art, Dance, Orchestra and Drama into academics. These classes also prepare our students for the Fine Arts Magnet program at the high school level.

Central Junior High School students fall within the ages of 12-14, and they are beginning their secondary schooling. Students come from diverse backgrounds and display a wide range of academic skills (above and below grade level). Nearly 100 percent are victims of poverty and have endured trauma in the home. Many also face the problems that go along with being a minority in a very segregated city. These traits have significant negative influence on the quality of learning and undermine social and academic growth. Behavioral interventions will interrupt the unit flow for some students, but instructional supports such as

conferences and independent study sessions reinforce content that is missed.

Many contemporary middle schools, especially in high-poverty or inner city situations, encounter similar students. All or parts of this unit would be appropriate for any students facing these realities.

## Content Objectives

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The time allotment for this unit is four weeks. The elements of the unit are easily extractable, and they can be taught independently or as a whole. In the beginning, we will follow two tracks, one reading and one writing. This unit will satisfy Oklahoma OAS and Common Core objectives for middle-school students. It will also increase literacy across various mediums, expose students to various forms of expression, and inspire further research. In essence, the seminar format offers culturally-relevant texts with multi-faceted meanings from which students can draw various conclusions. This versatility allows for purposeful group discussions and collaborations as well as personal reflections.

These contrasting genres, theatre and nonfiction, present varied perspectives on issues of identity within familial and social constructs. This juxtaposition of realism against theatre is engaging, and both pieces are historically accurate. The varied mediums appeal to different learning styles, close analysis of voice, writing features, author's purpose, and other elements of writing across the genres. Studies of the Greenwood District are aimed to enhance student knowledge about African-American history and Tulsa's business community. The study of "Black Wall Street" calls into question stigmas about people living in the inner city and their ability to generate wealth.

Students will be asked to defend one side of the argument that both Wilson and Greenwood present: What fraction of your history are you required to preserve? What fraction of your history are you able to build upon? Furthermore, students will also be asked to explain their personal connections with both pieces, and how our wants, obstacles, and actions are influenced by external happenings.

Texts within this unit serve a two-fold purpose: to promote student-awareness during their process of self-formation; to promote social-awareness and teach students how to work and thrive within a diverse community.

## Featured Text: The Piano Lesson

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The Piano Lesson is a play that follows the lives of the Charles Family, as members question and challenge various aspects of their identity. At the center of controversy is a family heirloom---an engraved piano that depicts the successes and struggles of three generations of the Charles Family from being enslaved to the present. Throughout the course of the play, members struggle with the idea of selling the piano to invest in real estate and build upon their legacy or to preserve the piano as a reminder of their legacy.

August Wilson was a man of humble beginnings.<sup>3</sup> In response to bullying from his classmates, he began to

immerse himself in reading and writing as a personal escape. In his poetry, he sought to depict the rich people-people interactions he found in his neighborhood. He aspired to share their stories through complex characters and vivid dialogue. These same characters later found their way into his plays. His most defining works comprise the Century Play Cycle. The overarching purpose of the Century Play Cycle was to embody the social and political realism of each decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the action of the play is fictional, he intended to evoke real conditions in a distinct historical context, and that helps make the play resonate with the study of factual history. *The Piano Lesson* was the fourth play in the cycle, and it debuted on November 26, 1987.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Plot**

In *The Piano Lesson*, the Charles Family inherits an heirloom piano that has faces and memories of earlier generations beautifully carved into the legs of the piano. Boy Willie (nephew/son) who desires to be an entrepreneur recognizes that the piano has not been played for years. He strategizes about how to sell the piano, gain a profit, and use the money toward the purchase of property that once belonged to the late Mr. Sutter.

Historically, Mr. Sutter was the slave-master and owner of the Charles family. In fact, he traded Great-Grandmother Berniece and her young son in order to purchase the piano as an anniversary gift for his wife. Overtime, because Mrs. Sutter began to miss her slaves, Mr. Sutter asked Great-Grandfather Willie Boy to engrave the piano with the faces of the Sutter children. Great-Grandfather Willie Boy took this opportunity to carve faces and memorable moments from the Charles Family into the wooden legs of the piano. Mr. Sutter was enraged with this act of disobedience, but Mrs. Sutter was enamored by the realistic carvings of the slaves that she had come to love and miss so deeply. Years later, in a desperate attempt to preserve the family's history and dignity, relatives and friends of the Charles Family plotted to steal the piano from the Sutters and replace it in the Charles home, where it yet remains in the opening scene of the play.

Unlike her brother, Berniece refuses to sell the piano because she believes that it symbolizes the family's strength, history, and legacy. In the midst of ideological conflict, various members of the family are visited by the "Ghost of Mr. Sutter," who appears numerous times, but says very little. Through a series of bouts with the "Ghost of Sutter" and with one another, Boy Willie and Berniece realize that the piano's sole purpose is to bring peace into the home through music---to settle every uneasy soul, including Mr. Sutter's.

## **Plot: The Ongoing Conversation**

August Wilson adds dimension and vivacity to characters in the play through their use of informal language in dialogue. These seemingly improvised, hilarious, challenging, and even saddening conversations create and maintain the momentum of the play. At the beginning of the production, Wilson uses this casual, conversational tone to reveal characters that are understandable and relevant to audience members. Through his artful use of words, Wilson sets the stage for an ongoing dialogue among his characters about the challenge of striving toward future goals when the past seems to be domineering the present moment.

Through a close study of character dialogue, I want my students to be able to trace the directions of a conversation (ebbs and flows), its intended purpose, and its overall effect when the conversation has closed. This exercise will ultimately help students realize how words shape an environment---whether spoken intentionally or in a moment of indiscretion. This analyzing of the text naturally creates opportunities for personal reflections and group discussions. Furthermore, elements from both experiences can be used in future play-writing projects.

## **The Conflict**

The major conflict of the play is the characters' struggle to define success and legacy. In previous generations, the Charles family owned neither the products of their talents not even themselves. They have had to respond to that historical injustice, and Willie Boy and Berniece are now trying to work out how best to "own" the legacy of their family talents, oppression, and struggles. Because the two characters have different opinions about what constitutes success and legacy, contention begins to develop among siblings. Relationships become strained, and the family structure begins to implode. Adding to this tension, the Ghost of Sutter begins to visit the home in unpredictable intervals. His references are allusive; his haunting presence makes family members frantic. In spite of all confusion, a solution must be agreed upon that will guard the virtues of respect and peace.

### **Conflict: A Conflicting Interest**

In *The Piano Lesson*, characters are reminiscent of the modern family due to their honest and realistic interactions with one another. In some instances, their reactions appear spontaneous, making them even more endearing. This spontaneity of conversation highlights the synergy that people experience when in the presence of individuals who share some of their same passions or the lack thereof. On the other hand, this unfiltered spontaneity has the ability to consume reason and discretion. Indeed, familiarity among characters often leads to frank rebukes and discussions that become emotionally-charged and even volatile. The differing levels of emotion reveal character triggers, illuminate areas of emotional brokenness, and emphasize the need for family members to work together and reach compromise.

Through a close study of the evolution of conflict, I want my students to be able to identify the exposition, rising action, and climax of the most pertinent conversations. By completing this exercise, students will be able to explain which "triggers" lead to explosive debates of value. With this information, students will draw inferences about why certain "triggers" affected different characters, based upon what they know about the character and his or her history. This survey of information can then be applied to the study of teenage interpersonal relationships. Students will be able to draw cross-comparisons between fictional characters in the play and everyday interactions with their peers. Through the process of reflection, I want students to realize the fragility of human emotion, the need to create healthy boundaries for communication, and the importance of remaining attentive to nonverbal communication.

## **The Resolution**

While in the midst of another argument, the "Ghost of Sutter" suddenly appears. In an act of chivalry fueled by frustration, Boy Willie volunteers to fight the Ghost of Sutter to the death. As this wrestling between man and spirit unfolds, Boy Willie is witnessed being physically over-powered---almost suffocating at the hands of Mr. Sutter. The conflicts in the play are resolved when Berniece sings a spiritual prayer while playing on the piano. Her song lyrics are a desperate cry to her ancestors for strength to drive away the "Ghost of Sutter" and the oppression that he represents. As she passionately delivers the song, the haunting ghost of Sutton leaves, and Boy Willie is saved from death. After some time passed, the two agree that the piano should stay in the home, and that Berniece should continue to play piano---because its sound peace and joy maintains peace and joy in the home.

### **The Resolution: The End in Sight**

Wilson's use of literary devices gives readers insight into the life, actions, and motivations of his characters.

For example, Wilson uses figurative language devices, like the extended metaphor and imagery, to describe what happens in the final scene:

“The sound of a train approaching is heard; the noise upstairs subsides. Come on, Sutter! Come back Sutter!”

From these lines, the reader can infer that Sutter’s tormenting spirit has been carried away by a train. This train is cited earlier in the text as a place of decision; a place where two roads diverge; a place of brokenness--ultimately a place of healing. In essence, when Berniece called for the strength of her ancestors, she found new strength that transcended the history of the piano itself-- she found the means to an end that she deeply desired. Through her voice and passion, she ushered in confidence, vision for the future, and healing from the past. In this last frame, the audience sees how she has transformed to become Master over the past and a Forerunner for the future. She has “taken ownership” of her family’s legacy in a new and deeper way. Through a close study of literary devices in select scenes, students will be able to understand and analyze text for deeper meaning. The ability to look beyond the surface will allow students to better understand character motivations. Through such exercises, students will sharpen their sense of discernment---a skill that can be translated to real-life situations. My aim is to help students determine the advantage or disadvantage of a moment of interaction. In this way, students can strategically position themselves for future success.

I believe that this play will be relevant to my students because the central conflicts presented in the play are relevant to students’ lives. My students often come from broken or non-existent homes, and their sense of familial belonging is strained. Students often consider school an exciting, caring refuge, and they consider their actual residence an unwanted, cold space. With the usage of this play, I want to give students permission to be authentic---responding to the ebbs and flows within the Charles family; engaging in character and personal reflection about how the extremity of their condition impacts and or alters their convictions. Conversely, I want to emphasize that *The Piano Lesson* also depicts how a powerful and rich family legacy, created by talented and determined ancestors, can transcend historical oppression. In this unit, my students will look for strength and pride in their history that can be used for motivation. This study intimately connects with the context of the Greenwood District: the cultural complexity of its uprising, its powerful and rich legacy, and its current aptitude for future development.

Throughout the study, this unit continues to call into question: How much of our past are we responsible to maintain, and how much we are empowered to build upon? Is the past a forecast of the future, or are the two separate entities that can be aimed in entirely different directions?

## **Featured Text: The Greenwood District and Tulsa Race Riot**

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### **Background: The Greenwood District, “Black Wall Street”**

During the oil boom of the 1910s, the area of northeast Oklahoma around Tulsa flourished, including the Greenwood neighborhood.<sup>5</sup> With the prospect of a better life in view, the number of Black families in the Greenwood District continued to steadily increase. As the needs of families began to grow and emerge, local community members began to open businesses that would meet consumer demands. Greenwood Avenue also

housed the offices of almost all of Tulsa's black lawyers, realtors, doctors, and other professionals. Overtime, the area evolved into a thriving Black enterprise---garnering national attention as the "Negro Wall Street," or more recently described "Black Wall Street." A bustling center of commerce, this district was so successful that a dollar would stay within the district an estimated nineteen months before being spent elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

Consumers enjoyed all of Greenwood's various attractions: nightclubs, hotels, cafés, newspapers, clothiers, movie theaters, grocery stores, beauty salons, shoeshine shops, youth organizations, and religious societies. Even notable jazz and blues artists such as Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and many others visited Tulsa to play at white nightclubs and then jammed after hours with local musicians on Greenwood Avenue.<sup>7</sup> The Greenwood District served as a national model of an independent, thriving African-American community.

Although the work of Tulsa's Greenwood District was respected nationally, the work of the Greenwood District was not respected by local residents and authorities. The *thought of Negroes rising* in enterprise made some apprehensive. Would one culture eventually overpower another? Would the Negro lead the Master? In essence, Greenwood's advancements challenged Whites' sense of identity, stability, and control. Conversely, in the eyes of Greenwood entrepreneurs, the district represented *Blackownership* and *independence* in a time of inequality. Business gave them the *opportunity to provide for their own* with high-levels of professionalism that were without rival in the already-segregated city. These contrasting ideologies about human potential, and economic enterprise preserved legacy caused friction between members of the Black and White communities. This deep-seated animosity ultimately erupted into an ongoing series of protests, shoot-outs, burnings, and bombings. In just three days, *history was changed forever*.

### **May 31, 1921**

*"I could see planes circling in mid-air. They grew in number and hummed, darted and dipped low. I could hear something like hail falling upon the top of my office building. Down East Archer, I saw the old Mid-Way hotel on fire, burning from its top, and then another and another and another building began to burn from their top."<sup>8</sup>*

This eye-witness account given by Buck Franklin, a prominent lawyer and survivor of the Greenwood Race Riots, vividly describes the brutal destruction that occurred to the 35-block commerce center known as "The Black Wall Street."<sup>9</sup><sup>10</sup> Within three days, May 30-June 1, 1921, more than 300 Black-owned businesses, hotels, theatres, restaurants, and much more laid in ruins. <sup>11</sup> Brimming over from dispute---steeped in racism and feelings of inferiority---this sudden onslaught became known as the Tulsa Race Riots. These unprecedented acts of hatred have forever changed the culture and climate of North Tulsa's Greenwood District.

The crux of the dispute was that a Black man had "allegedly assaulted" a White woman. Sarah Page, a young elevator operator, encountered Dick Rowland, a young shoe shiner, on his way to the top-floor "Blacks Only" restroom in the Drexel Building. <sup>12</sup> When the elevator stopped unevenly on the top floor, Rowland accidentally tripped and steadied himself against Page. This force caused their two worlds to collide...in more than one way.

In a moment of terror, Sarah Page screamed. Rowland fled away. When authorities came, accusations were made that Rowland sexually assaulted Page.<sup>13</sup> Police briefly investigated the incident, concluding it was the

result of an accidental fall or lovers' quarrel (an ultimate social taboo, considering the cultural climate of the 1920's). Page chose not to press charges, but word continued to spread about the assault. Rowland feared for his life and took refuge at his mother's home in the Greenwood neighborhood. One day later, police found Rowland and put him in the Tulsa City Jail. Later that day, the police commissioner received an anonymous call threatening Rowland's life, and he was moved to a more secure location in the Tulsa County Courthouse.

As newspapers continued to circulate articles declaring "A Night of the Lynching" for Rowland, townspeople eagerly awaited justice for both parties.<sup>14</sup> White crowds began to gather around the courthouse, demanding that Rowland be turned over to them. To prevent the possibility of lynching, members of the Black community rallied in front of the courthouse as well. In apprehension of a "Negro uprising," members of the White crowd gathered weapons, armory, artillery, and National Guard members as a means of force and protection. Day and night, both crowds grew in number, and the racial divide became more evident. Hatred seethed, and the first shot---perhaps an accident---perhaps a warning---was fired when a white man told an armed black man to surrender his pistol. This opened an exchange of fire that erupted into "the first battle," leaving twelve men dead, ten white men and two black men. As white forces moved back their enemy, they began to loot African-American businesses for weapons and ammunition, shooting bystanders who were in the way.<sup>15</sup>

In those night hours, the Oklahoma National Guard was assembled alongside patrol men to guard the courthouse, police station, and public facilities from black rioters.<sup>16</sup> In essence, a protective boundary was made around white districts adjacent to Greenwood.<sup>17</sup> On June 1, 1921 the morning air was tense with stand-offs, gun-fights, and several buildings going under fire on the Greenwood District boundary line. As time continued, protestors continued to loot and burn Black-owned businesses. Tulsa Fire Fighters who attempted to stop the burning were held at gunpoint and told to turn around.<sup>18</sup> Air-attacks assumed, and bombs were dropped on buildings, homes and fleeing families.<sup>19</sup>

Buck Franklin reflected on this scene:

*"The side-walks were literally covered with burning turpentine balls. I knew all too well where they came from, and I knew all too well why every burning building first caught from the top," he continues. "I paused and waited for an opportune time to escape. 'Where oh where is our splendid fire department with its half dozen stations?' I asked myself. 'Is the city in conspiracy with the mob?'"*<sup>20</sup>

Civil unrest continued to spread across the city of Tulsa. Middle-class families who employed blacks as live-in cooks and servants were aggressively confronted by white rioters to turn over their employees to detention centers. Some families complied with the threats; some families refused to comply with the threats and suffered attacks and vandalism.<sup>21</sup> When state authorities arrived the morning of June 1, 1921, martial law was declared, and the violence stopped.

Following the riot, the number of casualties remained unclear. In terms of property loss, the entire Greenwood commercial district was destroyed: 191 businesses, a junior high school, several churches and the only hospital in the district; 1,256 houses were burned and another 215 were looted but not burned. The Tulsa Real Estate Exchange estimated property losses at \$1.5 million in real estate and \$750,000 in personal property (\$30 million in 2016 dollars).<sup>22</sup>



Originally, the Tulsa City Council passed an ordinance that prevented the black people of Tulsa from rebuilding their community because they wanted to rezone the area as a commercial district.<sup>23</sup> Attorney Buck Franklin fought against this plan, sued the city of Tulsa before the Oklahoma Supreme Court, and he won. This public record allowed Tulsans the opportunity to begin rebuilding their community.<sup>24</sup> Over time, many efforts have been made to restore the historic Greenwood area. Indeed, the downtown area has increased in overall commerce, but there is still room for further development.

I believe this historical study will be relevant because although many students are familiar with the geography of the Greenwood District, many students are unknowledgeable about the cultural legacy of the Greenwood District. This lack of consciousness is understandable, seeing that much of Greenwood's history has gone undocumented in major textbooks and unspoken of in public circles. In fact, many of my students have come to believe the only good that comes from *that area---their area---*is the result of street hustle, affiliations, and other negatives. I aim to confront this mentality through close readings of informational texts that prove Greenwood---*their neighborhood---*began as a bustling center of commerce and featured highly-successful black professionals. Much like the Charles family, previous generations of these entrepreneurs owned neither the products of their talents or themselves. They were forced to respond to historical injustice, and their successors strived to find a way to best "own" the legacy of their families, talents, oppression, and struggles. When this dignity came under attack in the marketplace, men fought to preserve what was rightfully theirs. Decades later, younger generations continue to fight for this same cause: Identity and Ownership. *Who am I? Where am I from? What is rightfully mine?*

Furthermore, because my students often define themselves according to *where they are from* and *what they do not have*, I would like to use this segment to reiterate one truth that Wilson emphasized through acting: An individual can physically live and build on the strength and wealth of their ancestors. For my students, this truth can also be taken literally. (*Oh, I love the irony!*) Through personal reflection and group discussions, I hope to help students find strength and pride in their history that can be used for motivation. With the completion of this unit, I want my students to understand that *they are human beings, not locations. Locations can change* based on one's own decisions, the decisions of others, or a combination of both factors. *Where you are from* and *where you are going* can potentially be in opposite directions. Nevertheless, *personal success is optional*. As individuals, we may not have the ability to exercise complete control over the *content* in our lives, but we do have the ability to potentially change the *context* of our lives.

## Strategies

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### The Piano Lesson: Collaborative Learning for Scripts

Collaborative learning for scripts happens when students are divided into small groups to read or analyze a portion of the script or text. This format of discussion encourages deep-thinking and inspires creativity. As students spend time with one another, they will draw on each other's creativity and embody believable characters. They will, in turn, come into a deeper understanding of the text and its meaning. This strategy is also more engaging for students because it encourages student voice and choice (in regards to groups/roles). In light of progress monitoring, small group assessments can be done formally and informally. While students are working, teachers can do a series of walkthroughs to assess collaboration skills, reading fluency, and characterization. These observations can also be documented and scored according to a formal rubric.

The small group experience is maximized when student apprehension is minimized. To minimize learning anxiety, teachers can intentionally design groups according to three categories: comfort, personality, and strengths and weaknesses. These variations progress as students have increased experiences with the text and with one another.

Comfort-Zone Grouping places students in groups with people they are comfortable working alongside. This 'comfort,' or 'common understanding' among peers will help readers ease into the activity and their character roles. I suggest that you limit the amount of times students work within their "comfort zone" to further encourage tolerance for diversity and classroom unity. Students would preferably work in this first grouping for one-two cycles. Following these cycles, group students according to *personality*--- place them among people they do not normally communicate with or work alongside. This strategy stretches outside of their comfort zone, and it facilitates new relationships. Using these rotations will prepare students for the last rotation: strength ratios.

When using Strength Ratio groupings, place students in groups where their strengths can be utilized and where their weaknesses are balanced by other team members. For example, pair naturally theatrical students with those students who are naturally more reserved. Assign fluent readers roles with more dialogue, and less-fluent readers to roles with less dialogue.

When reading through scripts, always encourage "sound" from actors on first run-throughs. The goal is to successfully *finish the assigned reading*, not to read it perfectly. Remember, laughter is like *medicine*. Allow students to laugh through the awkwardness of trying something new. Yet, continue to push them to *finish*, not *perfection*.

### **The Piano Lesson: Analyzing Texts**

As time continues, students will begin to identify the author's purpose and interpret a speaker's messages (both verbal and nonverbal), analyzing plot structure, character interactions, and historical context. Understanding the author's message will naturally prompt students to identify his original purpose for composing the script. Knowing the *intent* of a message is pivotal to knowing the *extent* that a message can be applied to one's own life and purpose.

Students will analyze and annotate given scenes in terms of character wants, obstacles, and actions, and graph textual features including character arcs and plot structure. The ability to critically analyze characters allows students to discover the heart of Wilson's characters. Through a series of exercises, students will be able to visualize character change over a segment of time. In essence, students will be able to trace how life's circumstances positively and negatively affect choice. Throughout the course of the unit, students will take use artifacts to engage in discussions that prompt them to reflect, to draw text to life connections, and to build on the ideas and opinions of others.

### **Tulsa Greenwood District, 1920s and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Articles and Audio-clips**

Students will read, analyze, and discuss articles about the "*Tulsa Greenwood District and Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*." These excerpts are from articles published in *The Tulsa World* or on *The Tulsa World* website. The first article, "The Tulsa Race Riots: The Questions that Remain" details the history of the nationally prominent Greenwood District and the sequence of events that led to the Tulsa Race Riot.<sup>25</sup> The second reading, considered a primary document, circulated on June 2, 1921---one day after the Riot. Titled, "Dead Estimated at 100; City Quiet," this account describes living conditions post the Martial Law declaration.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, students

will read a text that recognizes Tulsa advocates who rallied for legislative action to help preserve Greenwood's rich legacy. Entitled "Senate Passes Bill Requiring Teaching of Tulsa's History," this article discusses how the Greenwood District and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 came to be recognized as an important aspect of *America's* history.<sup>27</sup>

While reading through these artifacts, students will critically think about how structure impacts the message of informative texts. More specifically, students will study the articles in terms of their features: clarify unfamiliar words by creating footnotes; annotate argument claims, evidence, warrants, and counterclaims; identify the author's point of view; analyze and weigh bias; compare and contrast pieces of texts; create original counter-arguments for the conflicts presented using a two-point thesis statement and evidence. Furthermore, students will participate in small and large group discussions about the articles' central conflicts, the author's purpose for writing, and the overall impact of their work. After each article reading, students will view supplemental documentaries that highlight the rich history of the Greenwood area. Using video as texts, students will engage in critical analysis and dialogue about cinematic features, content, purpose, and overall audience effect. Students will also be challenged to draw text-to-text connections between what was *read* and what was *shown cinematically*. Films featured in this study include: *Black Wall Street*, *America in Color*, and *OETA's Story on Tulsa's Greenwood District from the 1921 Race Riot to the Present*.<sup>282930</sup>

### **Tulsa Greenwood District, 1920s and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Explore Downtown Fieldtrip**

Following the film-study and discussion, students will take a field-trip to explore downtown Tulsa and the Greenwood area. The all-day excursion will include a guided tour of the Greenwood Cultural Center and The John Hope Franklin Park of Reconciliation. The presentations at the sites are very engaging, and my students become even more deeply invested in the process of understanding the climate and culture of Tulsa during the 1920's. At the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park, the students enjoy learning outside in nature. The realistic monuments, historic facts and poetry, and the beautiful landscaping truly make learning a relaxing experience. Visiting The Greenwood Cultural Center is an eye-opening experience for students. Here, they are able to view primary documents about the Tulsa Race Riot, including survivor photographs. Students also participate in a series of group dramatization and reflection activities that allow them to experience the myriad of emotions African-Americans felt during that time of oppression. In a closing intimate discussion, students are encouraged to preserve the rich legacy of the Greenwood District---to resolve not to let their history fade into the background noise of their daily lives---and no longer be distinctive. Throughout this entire experience, students are inspired about African-American history, Tulsa's history, and the city's advancements.

## **Activities**

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My strategies are usually a balance of standard language arts classroom reading and writing protocols and activities that inspire interpersonal reflection and artistic creativity from my students. In response to reflection of previous units and trials last year, I'm more intentionally pairing visual and textual literacy. Students will also benefit from ongoing text discussions and both reflective and formal writing opportunities during this unit. Noted below are sample lesson plans for the five main sections of the unit: Small-Group Work, Article Analysis, Article Analysis with an Audio Complement and the Explore Downtown Fieldtrip Discussions. Lastly, a brief description of the Final Project can also be found below.

## **Mixed Small-Groups: Analyzing Character's Wants, Obstacles, Actions**

### **Act II, Scene 4: Boy Willie and Berneice's Argument over Perception**

For this activity we'll focus on Boy Willie and Berneice's argument over *perception* in Act II, Scene 4. The argument begins while Boy Willie watches Berniece comb her daughter's hair. The child cannot sit still, and she complains that her mother is combing her hair too hard. Irritated, Berniece replies: "Be still, Maretha. If you was a boy I wouldn't be going through this." Immediately, Boy Willie openly rebukes the comment, stating that it degrades the child's unique individuality and purpose. As the scene evolves, Boy Willie and Berneice begin to passionately argue about the opportunities that Blacks have to be successful compared to days past.

At the beginning of class, students will answer probing questions about *limits* and submit their reflections in Google Classroom. Questions include: *1. Have people ever put limits on you? If so, how did you respond? Have you ever put limits on yourself? What was the result of having those limits? (4-5 sentences)* After submitting this work, students will create a hashtag (#) that summarizes their perspective on *limits*. This will be displayed on the online class wall. Some examples of hashtags include: #limitLess #whatlimits? #BreakEm. As a whole class, we will briefly discuss student ideas, and allow them the opportunity to volunteer explanations (7-8 minutes for entire Entry Activity)

With the first activity completed, students will be informed that the day's work will focus on *Limits: How limits affect our thinking, and how limits affect the way we live. We will discuss the power of limits by closely studying how they affect character's wants, obstacles, and actions.* Students will then be directed to the specific scene study and group rotation. While in their groups, students will have 15-20 minutes to read through the scene and discuss what each character believes about limits. For this discussion, students are documenting their answers and evidence on a character chart (to be used for the remainder of class).

Once time has expired, we will begin a whole class discussion about their findings, and record their collective responses on a class anchor chart. We will then define the terms *want* in our own terms (these can be added to a separate vocabulary chart). By focusing on terms one-by-one, students are prepped for a second reading of the script. The second reading will be done using film. As a group, we will complete the chart for *select* characters, and the students will work independently on others. Watching the same scene, students will study the actors to determine their *wants*. Students will record their observations in their charts. We will discuss their conclusions, and move forward to cover *obstacle* and *action*. The same process loops as we talk about new terms. Naturally, after watching the same clip twice, students will most likely be able to vividly explain what character action without using the audiovisual. Students will be given time to work independently to complete the entire chart, and this sample will be used for assessment.

### **Tulsa Greenwood District Article Analysis: Inspectional Reading, Close-Reading, Recognizing and Annotating Textual Features**

For this activity, the emphasis will be on studying an article in terms of its features. More specifically, students will: clarify unfamiliar words by creating footnotes; annotate argument claims, evidence, warrants, and counterclaims.

At the beginning of class, students will answer probing questions about *struggle and opposition* and submit their reflections in Google Classroom. Questions include: *1. Does struggle (opposition) make a person better, or not? Does the absence of struggle (opposition) make a person weak? Explain your reasoning. (4-5 sentences)* Once done with this writing, students will submit their work online. As a whole class, we will briefly

discuss student responses, allowing them the opportunity to volunteer explanations (7-8 minutes for first exercise).

With the first activity completed, students will be informed that the day's work will focus on *Struggle: #Thestruggleisreal, and life becomes better or worse based upon how you handle opposition. We will discuss the effects of opposition by closely studying what triggered the rise, fall, and reconstruction of the Tulsa Greenwood District. We will also be analyzing this historic account in terms of argument: claim, evidence, warrant, and counterclaim---because Greenwood---indeed--- was in the center of controversy.* We will then refresh our memories on argument terminology. (This may be a call and response or individual-answer activity.)

After a brief review, students will then begin working through the text, "The Tulsa Race Riots: The Questions that Remain." First, students will complete a brief inspectional reading of the text: numbering paragraphs and circling any words that they do not recognize (3 minutes). Once the allotted time expires, we will then work whole-group to confirm answers about text sections and begin our work on vocabulary. The "Working Footnotes" section is crafted around student responses to vocabulary: words circled as "unknown" are defined in a new "Footnotes" section of their paper. Students will be allotted 5-7 minutes to independently research unknown words (including teacher-recommended words) on their devices. At the close of this activity, we will return to the whole-group setting, and students will share their research with the class. As students continue to share, the "Footnotes" section lengthens.

Next, we will read and discuss the article to better understand the sequence of events. During the second reading, students will read to answer a specific question related to identifying examples of terms within the text. As we identify and discuss answers, students annotate their copies with symbols and highlighters. This cycle continues until all terminology has been covered. We will then focus our attention on the *meaning* of the text by relating this story to *our person* and to *current society*. These conversations will first be had among peers using the Think-Pair-Share technique. Having this smaller audience will help students become more comfortable with sharing their personal convictions. In time, we will return to the large-group a last time to openly reflect on content ideas.

Questions that students will continue to grapple with include are below.

Relationships:

*What caused the riot? Were Rowland and Page a couple? What do you think would happen if they "went public"?*

Quotation:

"A riot is the language of the Unheard." -CBS<sup>31</sup>

How can we apply this quotation to the Tulsa Race Riot?

What were the "two battling armies" fighting for?

What did they fear they could lose?

How was their identity challenged?

What could have been done *differently*?

Personal:

What do you do when you feel like your identity is threatened?

What would you do if a peer was struggling in their identity and with feeling accepted? What would you do if this was a close friend?

Tulsa Greenwood District Article w/Audio Complement: Analyzing Cinematic Features, Explaining how Author's Purpose and Methods

For this activity, students will engage in film studies that highlight the *affluence* and *influence* of Tulsa's Greenwood District as well as the *aftermath* and *reconstruction* of the nationally-known "Black Wall-Street." In my classroom, such film studies will serve as supplements to the articles. The video clips will be further divided into distinct segments: *Life before the Race Riot* and *Life after the Race Riot*.

At the beginning of class, students will answer a writing prompt about *dreams* and submit their reflections in Google Classroom. Questions include: What does success look like for you personally? Describe your lifestyle *after college graduation*. *Some things to consider: Where will you live? What will be your career? Will you have a family of your own? (4-5 sentences)* Once done with this writing, students will submit their work online. As a whole class, we will briefly discuss student responses, allowing them the opportunity to volunteer explanations (7-8 minutes for first exercise).

With the first activity completed, students will be informed that the day's work will focus on *Success: Dreams only become tangible as you work, and success is optional*. We will discuss the power of dreams by closely studying the wealth and influence of the Greenwood District. Students will then be given a viewing guide that consists of various questions about the film: cinematic observations, character inferences based on body language, identifying embedded information, and overall comprehension questions. Students are encouraged to "search for answers" while the film is running. Periodically, the film will be paused so that we can discuss potential answers to a question; afterwards, we will resume watching. At the conclusion of the movie, students will draw text-to-text and text-to-life connections through discussion. We will end this learning session with exit ticket asking students to describe how the film affected them personally---what was their *takeaway*.

Questions that students will continue to grapple with are noted below.

Personal:

Personal qualities help people solve or overcome their problems. What qualities do you believe the members of Greenwood had, and have you seen them in your own experience, either in your own behavior or in behavior of someone you know?<sup>32</sup>

Group:

How would you describe the members of the Greenwood community?

How would you describe the atmosphere of the Greenwood District?

How does this area compare to Wall Street? Why would we---*Tulsa*---be given that name?

After reflecting on the quality of his life, Canadian hip-hop artist Drake boldly proclaimed, “We started from the bottom, now we’re here.”

What did it mean to “arrive” back then? What seemed most important? What does it mean to “arrive and be successful” today? Are our definitions of *hustle, grind, grit and success* the same?

What image is the most striking to you? Why?

Are there details in the 1920’s setting that are still familiar today (2017)? <sup>33</sup>

### **Explore Downtown Fieldtrip Discussions**

Visiting The Greenwood Cultural Center is an eye-opening experience for students. Here, they view primary documents about the Tulsa Race Riot, participate in a series of group dramatization and reflection activities, and discuss how to preserve the rich legacy of the Greenwood District.

When we first arrive, students are encouraged to become acclimated to the museum. In order to facilitate this, students are assigned to study different sections of the museum with the intent of teaching that knowledge to the entire team. Students scatter all over the museum and engage in deep study for 10 minutes. After that time ends, students return to the larger group to share what they learned independently. Following this exercise, students are often asked to reflect on the conditions of Greenwood during the 1920’s: *How do you think they felt having all their businesses stripped away? How would you feel?* Upon their replies, docents begin to guide students into deeper thinking about The Riot through the use of dramatizations. For the remainder of the presentation, students are instructed to hold their hands above their heads. Students will automatically groan, knowing that this is uncomfortable---seemingly impossible. Little did they know that this was the posture many African-American captives held for days---with guns held to their backs. While students are learning about the marches, they are being challenged physically and mentally: *Can you imagine what it was like holding this posture all day? Could you do it? Would you stay submitted to the march? Or would you refuse to comply—break away---and risk dying?*

For their final activity, students engage in an intimate discussion with the museum director about the need to preserve the legacy of Greenwood. She discusses how the rise of “Black Wall Street” garnered national attention, but the destruction of “Black Wall Street” remained unspoken of and undocumented for decades. In conversation, she gauges students’ understanding of legacy through challenging questions: *What do your friends do, outside of school? (Questioning intentional connections and productive use of time) Do your friends know about Greenwood? Do you know how important it is to keep this legacy alive?* Students tend to be rather quiet during this conversation---I believe it is a sign that they are intently listening. In all, there were a few questions about details of the event, but silence was our honest response. Students continued this experience as they walked through the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park. Docent-led, students learned more about national figures and historic moments that forever shaped Tulsa, Oklahoma and the nation.

### **Final Project Description**

To conclude this unit, students will create an original business plan for the modern-day Greenwood District, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Our work will be framed according to the principles: *YourPurpose* is where your *talent* and *passions* collide, and *Purpose fuelsLegacy*. This process of learning about Purpose will occur in distinct stages. First, students will study *the self* through a series of surveys: their personality strengths and weaknesses, potential career paths, etc. Students will then take what they have learned about themselves, and complete a

short research project about future academic goals. This project will include their top career choice from survey results, one potential college-choice, a highlight of a successful person in this field, a description of current research developments in this field, and a statement about what they, as students, will add do to add to this work and meet community needs. During the last stages, students will learn more specifically about the components of a business plan and project specifications. The overall goal is that students will be able to merge what they know about themselves and business in order to creatively “Bring their Passions to Greenwood” and help restore what was lost. This project will conclude with speech, PowerPoint, and Display presentations.

## Notes

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3. American Masters, “August Wilson: The Ground on which I Stand, Biography and Timeline,” (Thirteen, 2015).
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8. Allison Keyes, “*A Long Lost Manuscript contains a Searing Eye-Witness Account of the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921: An Oklahoma Lawyer details the Attack by Hundreds of Whites on the Thriving Black Neighborhood where Hundreds Died 95 Years Ago*,” (Smithsonian.com).
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30. CBSNews.com, “*MLK: Riot is the Language of the Unheard: Three Years after ‘I Have a Dream,’ and the March on Washington*,”



Dr. King talked with Mike Wallace about Divisions in the Civil Rights Movement," (CBS Interactive Inc., 2013).

31. Mary RedClay and James Frieden, *"Discussion Questions for use with any film that is a Work of Fiction,"* (Teach with Movies, 2013).
32. Mary RedClay and James Frieden, *"Discussion Questions for use with any film that is a Work of Fiction,"* (Teach with Movies, 2013).
33. RedClay and Frieden, *"Questions for use with any Film,"* (Teach with Movies, 2013).

## Academic Standards

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Oklahoma uses Oklahoma Academic Standards to guide teaching and learning. This unit covers a broad selection of reading, writing, and thinking objectives. Regardless of the standards documented, teachers can easily adjust the unit to include more specific or additional objectives.

Standard 1: Speaking and Listening: Reading Standards 1-3; Writing Standards 1-2

Students will speak and listen effectively in a variety of situations, including, but not limited to, responses to reading and writing (including active-listening, interpreting speaker's messages, identifying speaker's purpose, engaging in collaborative discussion, and participating in informal and formal presentations)

Standard 2: Reading and Writing Process: Reading Standards 2-3; Writing Standard 1

Students will analyze details in literary and nonfiction/informational texts to distinguish genres. Students will paraphrase main ideas with supporting details in a text. Students will apply components of a recursive writing process for multiple purposes to create a focused, organized, and coherent piece of writing.

Standard 3: Critical Reading and Writing: Reading Standards 2-4, 7; Writing Standards 2-4

Students will evaluate how the point of view and perspective grade-level literary and/or informational text. Students will analyze key literary elements that contribute to meaning: setting, plot, characters (i.e. protagonist, antagonist), characterization, theme, and conflict (internal, external). Students will engage in informative and persuasive writing.

Standard 4: Vocabulary: Reading Standards 1, 3, 5; Writing Standards 1-2

Students will increase vocabulary knowledge through inference, context clues, and electronic dictionaries. Students will use appropriate vocabulary to communicate clearly in writing and achieve a specific purpose.

Standard 5: Language: Writing Standards 1-2

Students will apply knowledge of grammar and rhetorical style to writing. Students will use correct mechanics with a focus on commas, apostrophes, quotation marks, colons, and semi-colons. Students will compose simple, compound, complex, and compound complex sentences and questions to signal differing relationships among ideas.

## Annotated Bibliography

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