



Inspiration via Critical Literacy: Filling Gaps in the Canon

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Introduction / Rationale

Three years ago, my district adopted a new curriculum for our middle schools. One of the major selling points of this curriculum was that it would provide students with opportunities to access diverse texts from diverse authors, which would in turn positively affect student performance on standardized tests. The idea was that our state test asks students to read, analyze, and write texts of historical and scientific nonfiction, so students should have a focus on that in their Language Arts classes throughout the year. An added bonus, theoretically, was that having an array of different texts would increase student engagement compared to whole-novel study or consistent examination of short stories. However, over the last three years, I have witnessed my students engage most deeply and understand most thoroughly literary texts (fiction and nonfiction) that tell stories about people and characters authentically dealing with conflicts the way that they do in real life.

The reality of my and my students' situation is that the structure of our curriculum, what I am required to teach and the assessments they are required to take, is not going to completely change overnight. However, when we do get opportunities to study the stories my students find most exciting, I try to capitalize on this learning time. These stories allow my students to see either themselves reflected, or they allow the students to see into an experience that is totally different from their own - exemplifying Emily Style's notion of curriculum acting as both a window and a mirror, which I will discuss further later on in this unit.¹ When we study these texts, my students are able to bring their own background knowledge to make profound self-to-text, text-to-text, and world-to-text connections that demonstrate a high level of comprehension and critical thinking, which is what I dream of as a teacher of reading and writing. They are, without necessarily knowing the terminology, practicing their own critical literacy.

My students' interactions with these texts are often deeply critical, as learners challenge the life-likeness of the characters' actions, or as they challenge their own ideas about how they might respond in a certain conflict. They do a great deal of perspective-taking, and they ask "why" and "what about" all the time, as adolescents are wont to do. This critical reading and connection-making has inspired me to develop my new curriculum unit. In this unit, I plan to support students in learning about Black creators who have similarly taken a critical eye to the texts they engage with. We will read and analyze works from Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Walker, Ken Harper, and others, to identify the ways that their writing reflects their own critical reading

of the canon that came before.

The main goal of my curriculum unit is for students to build an understanding of the ways in which writers pull inspiration from deficits that they find in the “windows and mirrors” they are presented with. For example, taking a close look at the inspirational lineage between Virginia Woolf and Alice Walker, both feminists in their own right, but the former in possession of a significant blind spot in her writings—Black women. In this unit, we will explore how Walker and several other Black creatives are able to critically read the works that they encounter (and frequently appreciate, and sometimes love!) that do not consider Black readers and viewers, and then re-create the texts in a way that it does represent a broader, Black audience.

Throughout this unit, students will read and compare works from Black authors and the works *they* have pulled inspiration from throughout history. Students will then conduct research on the ways that Black creatives have adapted and rewritten texts to better represent themselves. Finally, students will create and present a product to demonstrate their research findings. Additionally, though this will certainly be less objectively measurable, my goal for this unit is to remind students that despite the strictures in life on what we must do, there are also avenues by which we can pursue what is truly important to us, just as the authors we will study have done.

Demographics

I teach Seventh Grade English Language Arts at P.S. duPont Middle School in Wilmington, Delaware. Within our school building are multiple educational programs, including the Brumskill Early Childhood Assistance Program, the BSD Gifted Program, and Special Programs (which encompasses the Brandywine Autism Program and the Independent Learning Program), in addition to the middle school students (sixth, seventh, and eighth graders) I teach. Students attending P.S. live in many neighborhoods in both the city of Wilmington and surrounding suburbs. According to the Delaware Report Card website, which the Department of Education uses to share demographic and proficiency data about schools in the state, P.S.’s 2024 student population is 50.33% African American, and 27.37% of students are White, with the remaining 22.3% of students identifying as either Hispanic / Latino, Asian American, Multiracial, or Hawaiian / Pacific Islander. We are a Title I school, with 30.17% of students identified as Low-Income, and 2.67% identified as Homeless. We also serve students with disabilities, who make up 21.76% of our population, and English Learners, who make up 4.27% of our population.²

I include this abundance of demographic information to paint a clear picture of what my classroom looks like. I do not teach in the Gifted Program, nor do I teach in the preschool we share our building with, but I do teach students from every other group that I mentioned above. This means that I and my co-teachers are tasked with ensuring that the curriculum that we get from a large textbook company works for students who may be in their first year of English Language Development classes, or those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) who may have learning disabilities that affect their performance in Language Arts classes. This also means that many of my students are not fully represented in the texts in our curriculum (or for some, not represented at all).

In my classroom, students read informational, argumentative, poetic, and literary texts, with what I perceive to be an emphasis on historical and scientific articles. Students analyze and annotate these texts toward the goal of learning how to identify central ideas and themes, infer information or character motivations, compare authors’ purposes, and otherwise achieve the objectives set forth in the Common Core State Standards. In class, students complete both multiple choice tests and writing assignments in order for me to assess their

understanding of our units. Students also participate in the NWEA MAP interim assessment, which measures their growth in reading and math over the course of the year. At the end of the year, students participate in the Smarter Balanced assessment, which measures grade-level proficiency in reading and math. In 2023, the end of year assessment for reading showed the following results: 16% of students scored “Exceeds,” 20% of students scored “Meets,” 18% of students scored “Below,” and 46% of students scored “Well Below” the proficiency level.³

Because I am aware of how many students do not meet the proficiency level in reading based on our end of year assessment, I prioritize critical reading and writing in my classroom. I hold students to a high expectation, and provide the necessary support for them to meet that expectation. Students practice independent reading, annotating, and writing to build the skills necessary for them to perform well on assessments, but also which they will need throughout their lives. My new curriculum unit re-emphasizes my commitment to these high academic standards, as well as creates more opportunities for my students to truly see themselves represented in what they read and write.

Content Objectives

Framework for Understanding

The first question you may ask upon opening this unit is simply, “what, again, is critical literacy?” The term is frequently considered to have grown from Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire’s, work.⁴ Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* describes the traditional model for teacher-student dynamics as being “fundamentally narrative [in] character.”⁵ He writes about the “narration sickness” that plagues education, the way societal expectations assume that the teacher is the one narrating what needs to be learned, and students are the objects, empty and waiting to be filled with whatever information the teacher has to share.⁶ Freire names this the “‘banking’ concept of education,” as it envisions students as empty banks that need funds deposited into them by their teachers.⁷ Flaws are evident in this traditional understanding of education. Freire identifies the nonsense that is the perception of teachers and students as total opposites, clarifying that students (identified by him as part of the “oppressed” for which the book is named) come to their interactions with teachers with their own knowledge and with the “vocation to become fully human.”⁸

These Freirean foundations beg the question of what, if not the banking model, is an appropriate method for teaching, a method that would acknowledge the humanness of students in addition to teachers. Freire’s suggestion is “dialogical relations” which he describes as the dialogue between teachers and students that transforms the relationship from subject and object to collaborators in learning.⁹ Freire discusses “problem-posing education,” which is the antithesis of the banking model. In this model, students are presented with real-world scenarios and issues that they have to consider in conjunction with their own prior knowledge. This form of education, Freire claims, is “education as the practice of freedom,” as it considers humans and the world interdependent, and sees reality as occurring *with* people as opposed to being objective and separate from us.¹⁰ In this model, everyone has the opportunity to contribute to education as it occurs, because everyone has their own, unique experiences that inform their interactions with the world, whether teacher or student.¹¹

This historical background is crucial to our understanding of what we now call critical literacy, which scholars agree is the practice of questioning texts, challenging norms, and interacting with the world rather than what some might believe to be the passive process of consuming a text.¹² This definition follows neatly Freire's problem-posing model, as it similarly prioritizes the impact of an individual's experiences in the educational setting. Text-to-world connections are crucial in critical literacy, as students (and teachers!) must consider how their experiences affect their reading, as well as how the experiences of the author have affected their writing. For example, McLaughlin and DeVogd offer a list of questions that may help encourage students to develop a critical stance when reading or viewing a text, including but not limited to: "Whose viewpoint is expressed?", "Whose voices are missing, silenced, or discounted?", and "What action might you take on the basis of what you have learned?"¹³

While what I have discussed above reflects critical literacy specifically as it relates to classrooms and teacher-student dynamics, one must also understand that critical literacy is a way of existing in the world and maneuvering through texts that may not have been created with you in mind. This notion reflects greatly the work that we have been doing in the seminar at the Yale National Initiative, *A History of Black People as Readers: A Genealogy of Critical Literacy*, led by Roderick Ferguson. In seminar meetings, we have discussed how Black people from the time of slavery into the present have encountered texts that were, in some way or another, "not for them," and how these individuals have read them subversively, toward the end of finding freedom—whatever that may look like for the individual.

This brings me to Toni Morrison and her book, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, which we have been discussing in seminar meetings. In this book, Morrison lays out her own critical literacy practices that she employs as she reads works from white writers as a Black reader. Morrison begins her book by describing her reading of Marie Cardinal's *The Words To Say It*, drawing our attention to two moments in the book which Morrison reads critically. The first is the author's description of an anxiety attack that she experienced "during a Louis Armstrong concert" and the second is Cardinal's documentation of her emotional responses to war in Algeria.¹⁴ Morrison notes that "black or colored people and symbolic figurations of blackness are markers for the benevolent and the wicked" in Cardinal's book.¹⁵ Morrison continues on to share with us the process by which she has critically read Cardinal's descriptions of Blackness. She shares that these specific instances that stick out for her are not really necessary to understand *The Words To Say It*, but rather they serve as examples of "how each of us reads, becomes engaged in and *watches* what is being read all at the same time."¹⁶ By writing this, Morrison explains her own approach to critical literacy. There is a meaning that the author intentionally imbues in the text (in the case of Cardinal, the meaning being to tell the story of her life in the form of a novel), and then there is the meaning that is meaningful to the reader (for Morrison, this is the ways that societal constructs surrounding Blackness have informed Cardinal's writing). By explaining her critical process, and then cataloguing the examples from Cardinal's text, Morrison helps us to understand both the deeply personal ways in which she reads, as well as what we can all learn about the representations of Black people in canonical literature by examining how Blackness is written with our own, more critical eye.

Morrison tells us more about her critical literacy by defining her use of the term, "Africanist," which she describes as "denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people."¹⁷ Morrison is clear that she is critically reading for the ways in which ideas surrounding Blackness have informed all of American (and global canonical) literature, and shares various case studies, beginning with the aforementioned instances from Cardinal's *The Words To Say It*. Over and over, Morrison

describes how the ideas that white writers have about Blackness have tinted the literature they have created, imbuing everything with hierarchical beliefs about whiteness's purity and Blackness's corruption.¹⁸ It is this critical literacy that my unit is truly based on: the reading of a text to find what is being implied or left out in regard to Blackness, and ultimately, the study of how Black creators have reanimated texts to address such inequities.

In a commonly cited essay among teachers of reading, English teacher Emily Style describes this kind of literature—literature that allows students to see both themselves represented as well as provides students the opportunity to learn about people different from them, as windows and mirrors.¹⁹ In “Curriculum as Window and Mirror,” Style, like Freire and Morrison, acknowledges that “learning never takes place in a vacuum; it is always contextual.” She believes that to address the highly contextual (and personal!) nature of learning, what we teach students needs to function both as a window and a mirror “in order to reflect and reveal most accurately both a multicultural world and the student herself or himself.”²⁰ My unit proposes that “canonical” texts from white creatives lack the “window and mirror” quality when it comes to non-dominant cultures and people groups, thus creating a need for Black creatives to construct their own.

Alice Walker's Revision of Virginia Woolf

The first case study for critical literacy that I will introduce to my students in this unit is the relationship between Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. In the first essay of her book, “Saving the Life That Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life,” Walker writes explicitly about the same lack of or misrepresentation that Morrison discusses in *Playing in the Dark*, and which Style wrote her entire essay on: “The absence of models, in literature as in life... is an occupational hazard for the artist.” Walker goes on to write later in the essay about her thoughts upon being asked about the main difference between literature from Black and white Americans. Walker writes that the differences are less interesting to her than her observations that “black writers and white writers seem to [her] to be writing one immense story—the same story, for the most part—with different parts of the immense story coming from a multitude of different perspectives.”²¹ As Walker goes on in her book, we see some of the “different perspectives” she is referring to. Specifically, we see her address Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Before we can understand Walker's revision, we first need to know what she was revising. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, originally written in 1928 as a series of lectures for students at Cambridge University about women in fiction,²² asserts that “women have been categorically denied the conditions necessary to produce literature,” money and a room of their own.²³ We turn to “In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens” to see how Walker has used her critical literacy to respond to Woolf: “What then are we to make of Phillis Wheatley, a slave, who owned not even herself?”²⁴ In response to the idea that women just need to get themselves some money and a place to write, Walker pushes back, looking to an example of a “sickly, frail black girl... who, had she been white, would have been easily considered the intellectual superior of all the women and most of the men in the society of her day.”²⁵ Walker notices the absence of a Black female perspective in Woolf's text, and begins re-writing passages from *A Room of One's Own*, bracketing her interjections to clearly indicate where Wheatley needed to be included: “[insert ‘eighteenth century,’ insert ‘black woman,’ insert ‘born or made a slave’],”²⁶ “[add ‘chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one's body by someone else, submission to an alien religion’],”²⁷ referring to Woolf's discussing women of the sixteenth century with a talent for writing with the former interjection, and the idea that women with gifts were countered by misogynistic society in the latter.²⁸

Laurie McMillan discusses Alice Walker's critical literacy in her article, "Telling a Critical Story: Alice Walker's 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens.'" McMillan writes that Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* "renegotiates readings of the past" as a form of literary criticism, but for our purposes, we can use her article to also understand Walker's critical literacy.²⁹ McMillan describes three of Walker's essays ("Beyond the Peacock," "Looking for Zora," and "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens")³⁰ by using verbiage from Henry Louis Gates: "Walker 'signifies' on the writers Flannery O'Connor, Zora Neale Hurston, and Virginia Woolf." McMillan paraphrases Gates in explaining that, "'Signifying,' ... is a critical approach with African American roots that enacts repetition with difference." Repetition meaning that the re-writing takes inspiration from its source material, but difference meaning that changes are made to shed light on misrepresentations from the original.³¹

McMillan goes on to describe the relationship between "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" and *A Room of One's Own* specifically. Regarding Woolf and Walker, McMillan writes, "both writers combine attention to socio-material conditions ... However, the African American oppression Walker writes of tends to be more horrific than the injustices suffered by the middle-class white women of Woolf's text."³² McMillan writes about Walker's instinct to alter Woolf's original text so that it "speak[s] to the experiences of Phillis Wheatley, as well as to the situation of the many black women who were unable to produce creative writing despite a potential talent."³³ Later in her titular essay, Walker shares a narrative about the ways in which Black women, from the time of slavery on, have created art in their daily lives despite the harsh conditions imposed upon them by a society that reveres whiteness. Walker addresses the gaps she has found in Woolf's writing with her own work, creating a narrative about the Black women whose conditions were not considered in *A Room of One's Own*.³⁴

Lorraine Hansberry's Revision of Sean O'Casey

Another example of a Black creator's critical literacy leading her to re-write a text from a white creator is that of Lorraine Hansberry's reading of *Juno and the Paycock*. Lorraine Hansberry first saw Sean O'Casey's play about an Irish family living in a Dublin slum during her freshman year at the University of Wisconsin. "She was mesmerized; the student portraying O'Casey's heroine wailed in grief at the death of her son, killed in the Irish struggle for freedom."³⁵ After some years, Hansberry reflected that she "'considered [her] own evolution as a writer in ways [she] had not heretofore done."³⁶ Hansberry saw in O'Casey's play reflections of her own upbringing; she saw the parallels between the Boyles living as an oppressed people in a struggling nation and Black Americans, who are also an oppressed people living in a struggling nation. In his biography of Lorraine Hansberry, Charles J. Shields writes that the Boyles in *Juno* "spoke in their own vernacular, used their favorite expressions, and shook their fists at those who were dominating them," which again aligns with the Black American experience.³⁷ In her informal autobiography, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, we see Hansberry reflect on the experience: "The play was *Juno* and the writer Sean O'Casey—but the melody was one that I had known for a very long while."³⁸ She goes on to write that she was seventeen years old, and at that time "did not think then of *writing* the melody as [she] knew it—in a different key," but that the experience stayed with her, ultimately leading to the play's influence on her writing of *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Hansberry further discusses O'Casey in a 1959 interview with radio personality Studs Terkel. When Terkel asks Hansberry to share her thoughts on the Irish playwright, she begins, "Yes. I love Sean O'Casey."³⁹ She goes on to share that what she admires in O'Casey's plays is how he accepts and uses "the most obvious instruments of Shakespeare. Which is the human personality and its totality."⁴⁰ Hansberry goes on to say how important she feels it is for Black writers to use a similar model, because "O'Casey never fools you about the

Irish... the Irish drunkard, the Irish braggart," etc.⁴¹ But Hansberry is clear that there is no need to *copy* O'Casey or writers like him, because the experience of Black people in the United States is "material... too rich to copy anybody."⁴² Hansberry looked at O'Casey's *Juno* as a jumping off point for her own writing about the Younger family on the South Side of Chicago; as O'Casey represented his culture and his people, Hansberry would also represent her culture and her family in *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Hansberry also discusses with Terkel how important it is to write not a general story that appeals to everyone, but rather a highly specific story. Hansberry talks about critics of her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, who claim that "the characters of [her] play transcend category," meaning that her play is not truly about the Black experience, but rather "a play about anybody."⁴³ Hansberry replies to these criticisms by saying that "in order to create the universal you must pay very close attention to the specific."⁴⁴ She explains that *A Raisin in the Sun* is not only about "a Negro family, specifically and definitely culturally, but it's not even a New York family or a Southern Negro family. It is specifically South Side Chicago."⁴⁵ Like O'Casey, Hansberry wants to represent a very specific situation in her play, but in her work, represents Black families in Chicago, rather than Irish families in Dublin.

Charles J. Shields also references playwright Loftin Mitchell in his biography of Hansberry to describe a further connection between O'Casey's work and *A Raisin in the Sun*: "'There was always a 'good' white who helped the Negro solve his problem,' said playwright Loftin Mitchell. However it's 'difficult to recall', he said, 'an instance of an Englishman 'helping' the Irish in one of Sean O'Casey's plays.'"⁴⁶ Mitchell, and in turn Shields (and Hansberry herself), help us understand how O'Casey's work felt relatable to Hansberry, but they also lay the groundwork to help us see where the gaps existed that inspired Hansberry to write *A Raisin in the Sun*. Looking at the totality of canonical literature, it is sometimes difficult to find representation of Black individuals or families who are round characters with agency. O'Casey helps to fill a similar void in Irish literature through *Juno*, and Hansberry helps to fill the void in American Literature with *Raisin*.

Hansberry clearly articulates her critical literacy in her media interactions when *Raisin* was first coming into the public consciousness. She is often misquoted, originally so by Nan Robertson, as saying that the play was not "'a Negro play,'" but a play about "'honest-to-God, believable, many-sided people who happen to be Negroes.'"⁴⁷ Hansberry hates this misattribution, expressing in an interview with Eleanor Fisher in 1959 that "it is impossible to divorce the racial fact from any American Negro' since 'part of his daily experience is that of being a unique person in American culture who is a Negro.'"⁴⁸ Hansberry does not want to tell a color-blind story in *Raisin*, she wants to tell a highly contextualized story that more accurately represents herself. As she states in her interview with Studs Terkel, she was never trying to copy O'Casey,⁴⁹ but rather use her emotional response to his work to put her own experiences to the stage. She saw that O'Casey told a specific story about the Boyles in Dublin, featuring their triumphs and flaws and fears and pains, and she wanted to tell a story of the triumphs, flaws, fears, and pains of the Youngers on the South Side of Chicago.⁵⁰

Ken Harper's Revision of L. Frank Baum / MGM

A third case study we can turn to in order to understand inspirational lineages between "canonical" texts and the works Black creatives have developed to address the gaps they leave is the 1975 Broadway musical, *The Wiz*. *The Wiz* (And, to be clear, for the purposes of this curriculum unit, we will be focusing only on the original Broadway production, rather than its 1978 film adaptation.) was the brain-child of Ken Harper, who had until that point been working as a radio DJ, first in the army, and then on WPIX, New York, where he worked as the Music and Public Affairs Director.⁵¹ Society writer David Patrick Columbia, on his website *New York Social*

Diary writes in August of 2021 about his experiences meeting Harper in passing some 50-odd years prior: “I had met Ken through Bob Schulenberg back in the late ‘60s... The only thing that intrigued me was that he had an idea for a Broadway musical: a black version of ‘The Wizard of Oz.’”⁵² Columbia writes about not ever really getting to know Harper, but being “fascinated by his ‘idea’ if only because it was ‘thinking big’ and he was then just some young guy in his late 20s who admitted to Big Dreams.”⁵³

Why adapt *The Wizard of Oz* (the 1939 MGM film) or perhaps *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (the 1900 novel from L. Frank Baum), and more to the point of this unit, why create an all-Black adaptation? To answer this question, we must look not only at the content of *The Wizard of Oz* when compared to *The Wiz*, but also at the historical culture of a predominantly white Broadway. In his book, *African American Perspectives in Musical Theatre*, Eric M. Glover argues that even if a musical has an all-white cast and an all-white production team, it is still simply called a musical. He writes that, “In the United States, white people are the default, and nearly all aspects of everyday life cater to white people at the expense of others,”⁵⁴ which reflects a similar notion that Morrison expresses in *Playing in the Dark*. Morrison writes, “In this country... American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen.”⁵⁵ Once again, we see how figurations of whiteness create an “amnesia about Black people’s activity and influence in the history of the musical,”⁵⁶ as Glover writes, but also how it impacts the world around us. Broadway, much like American literature, and American culture for that matter, has a history of centering whiteness to the detriment of others, creating a chasm where the experiences of any other race or culture group should be. Enter, *The Wiz*, and productions like it which feature and celebrate a Black cast and production team.

The Wiz, as a musical almost completely designed and performed by Black people, addresses these problems with Broadway and musical theatre at large in its own way, while also re-writing an all-white story to represent Black audiences. Ken Harper brought in William F. Brown to write an adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz* with cultural touchstones for Black viewers,⁵⁷ and Harper brought in Charlie Smalls as the composer, who “drew from pop culture, blending rhythms from R&B, soul and pop.”⁵⁸ Charlie Smalls appears in a 1968 episode of *The Monkees*, several years prior to his work on *The Wiz*, but demonstrating what I believe to be the spirit of his work on the music for the show. In a clip I found on TikTok from creator TV Tangents (@tvtangentspod), Smalls converses with Davy Jones, who asks him “tell me, why don’t I have soul? You’ve known me all these years, why don’t I have soul?” In response, Smalls clarifies that Jones *does* have soul, and explains the difference “rhythmically,” because “that’s the only way [Smalls] can really talk, is in music.” Smalls goes on to describe the difference between the accented beats that their souls “emanate on,” and gives the example of the Beatles playing on the “one and three,” and then the “two and four” beats being “Motown Soul.”⁵⁹ The clip is beautiful, as it is a rare example of Charlie Smalls on film, discussing what he knows best, which is music. His sentiments in the clip reflect what Hansberry said about her adaptation of O’Casey: “writing the melody as [she] knew it—in a different key.”⁶⁰ It also reflects Alice Walker’s single “immense story” comment when asked to compare literature from white and Black Americans,⁶¹ in that in all of these instances, we see the critical literacy of Black creators, who could see the spaces where they *should* fit into the canon, but also where they have not yet been represented. In some cases, like in those of Walker and Hansberry, these creators have been able to take inspiration from predecessors who likewise made space for themselves in their respective canon (O’Casey depicting the struggles of an Irish family during civil war, and Woolf speaking on behalf of women writers in early twentieth century England). Similarly, Smalls could see the greater story of music, and how there should be space for both “white soul” and “Motown soul” in that story.⁶² *The Wiz* serves as a creative space to show how Black voices can tell the same story as white voices, but in a way that

respects and celebrates their own Souls. Smalls wrote songs that reflected the original *Wizard of Oz*, but which made space for the Black cast and audience to see themselves on stage.

Another creative on *The Wiz*'s production team who prioritized telling a Black story was Geoffrey Holder, who was initially on the production team as costumer, and ultimately became the director for the show.⁶³ He put together an adaptation that not only allowed room for Black ideas and music and style, but favored them. Holder, a Trinidad-American, infused the show with fashion that would reflect his culture as both someone of Trinidadian origin and as a Black man in the United States.⁶⁴ Many credit Holder with being the reason that *The Wiz* came to be, and certainly came to be the cultural phenomenon that it is. In fact, according to an article that quotes him in the *New York Times* in May of 1975, it was he who first said that the show should even be called *The Wiz* when Harper shared his idea for an all-Black *Wizard of Oz*: "I loved the idea immediately and said if it's black, it must of course be called 'The Wiz.'"⁶⁵ As Jennifer Dunning, a *New York Times* dance critic, discusses in the 2005 documentary, *Carmen and Geoffrey*, Holder was in talks with "some young producer" (Harper) to create what she describes as a "safe" adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*, but Holder wanted to take the idea to a higher level.⁶⁶ Holder's son, Leo Holder, also spoke about his father's work on *The Wiz*: "How can you do something that everybody knows, and still surprise them... And somehow he did it."⁶⁷ Looking at Holder's designs for the costumes in *The Wiz*, we see (and hear! In *Carmen and Geoffrey*, he describes his creative process with accompanying visuals⁶⁸) how Holder incorporates "his outrageousness," as Dunning says, into the visuals for the show. She discusses the bright colors and stunning motifs that Holder brings to *The Wiz*.⁶⁹ Though many story elements parallel the original MGM film, *The Wiz* is visually entirely its own, representing a whole new demographic in its bright colors and "big, expensive, loud, subtle, juicy art," largely thanks to Holder.⁷⁰

The Wiz encountered some substantial issues during previews, and soon after the musical opened in January of 1975, the show began receiving negative reviews from critics. However, the show went on. They embarked on "the largest Broadway publicity campaign of the time," and *The Wiz* was one of the first shows to advertise on television.⁷¹ Harper also reached out to "Black communities and school groups that brought in thousands of young people, many seeing a Broadway musical for the first time."⁷² Additionally, an editorial defending the show appeared in the *New York Amsterdam News* ("the oldest black newspaper in the country").⁷³ The editorial's author wanted to remind Black audiences that white critics would likely not readily relate to a production that so heavily emphasized its Blackness, and encouraged them to see the show and take in the "references to black culture... and the message of black pride" that white audiences might not appreciate.⁷⁴

Ultimately, *The Wiz* won seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical, Best Choreography, Best Costume Design, Best Director of a Musical, and others.⁷⁵ Many doubted its ability to succeed due to its diversion from what was typical of Broadway at the time,⁷⁶ and as David Patrick Columbia thought "in the late 60's," the difficulty the show would have in improving upon the 1939 film.⁷⁷ But since the show's original run in 1975, it has been adapted to film, toured the country, been produced by local theatre companies more times than I can know, and was produced live for television in 2015.⁷⁸ It has also been revived on Broadway in 2024, to portray the story "'through the Blackest of Black lenses for Black's sake.'"⁷⁹ Rather than leaving the legacy of *The Wizard of Oz* to simply be about a little white girl who, though she makes friends with a lion and a man made of tin, never encounters a Black character, Ken Harper and the team from the original Broadway production of *The Wiz* adapted both the story and the mores of a largely white Broadway culture of the time to give us *The Wiz*, which in turn paved the way for future Black Broadway productions.⁸⁰

Teaching Strategies

Critical Literacy

As discussed at length in my “Content Objectives,” critical literacy is the act of reading a text by engaging with questions of whose voices are present or absent, what is being represented and how the authors are representing it, and what the text means to me (Or does it mean anything to me at all?). To successfully teach this unit which is all about accessing our own critical literacy and analyzing the critical literacies of those who have come before, students will need to be introduced to these guiding questions, which I will pull directly from the McLaughlin and DeVogd text referenced above.⁸¹

Gallery Walk

A gallery walk is a strategy in which students are exposed to a series of images, brief texts, or historical artifacts and provided with guiding ideas or questions to consider as they peruse. The images or texts are placed around the room, or along a wall, so that students move around and view them as they would works of art in a gallery. Students are provided with sticky-notes or clip-boards to take notes, either for themselves or to share with others as they look at the same artifacts. I like to provide students with a small amount of context when conducting a gallery walk, in order to get the most accurate sense of the connections they make with and between the materials they are viewing.

Modeling & Gradual Release

Modeling and gradual release are teaching strategies that go hand in hand, as modeling is the first step of the gradual release method. Gradual release refers to providing diminishing levels of support when teaching students a new skill. The first step, and the highest level of support requires the teacher to demonstrate how to use a new skill. For example, if teaching students to utilize critical literacy, you would first read a brief text aloud, and then you would provide a step-by-step explanation of your thoughts as you refer to your list of critical literacy questions, ask yourself where you might see misrepresentations, and perhaps even make an error and correct it while analyzing the text, all to show students what “good readers” do to read and analyze something new. This is modeling. The second step of the gradual release strategy requires the teacher to have students work together as a class, or in small groups which later report to the class, to practice the skill the teacher has modeled. This might look like providing students with their own copies of a text, and guiding them in timed increments through first asking the critical literacy questions and then analyzing the text using them. The last step of the gradual release strategy has teachers allowing students time to independently practice their new skill with support upon request, and depending on students’ level or need, the teacher may choose to go over answers with the whole class. This precedes requiring students to engage with a skill completely independently or assessing students’ ability with said skill.

6 Thinking Hats

The 6 Thinking Hats is a “parallel thinking process” that helps participants in a discussion consider a topic from multiple perspectives.⁸² We have used this strategy in every seminar meeting we have had this summer in *The History of Black People as Readers*, though our framework (which is what I have listed below) has been modified slightly from the original descriptions on the de Bono Group webpage. I am describing the hats as I have used them in seminar, with language adapted by Professor Roderick Ferguson. The strategy assumes

the existence of six imaginary hats that symbolize a different way of approaching a subject:

- The Information Hat – focusing on the facts that are needed to understand the topic at hand
- The Positivity Hat – attending to the potential positives about the information
- The Feelings Hat – focusing on the feelings that you may connect to the information you are processing
- The Creativity Hat – considering what can be done with the information that you are studying
- The Caution Hat – understanding potential problems that are associated with the information
- The Overview Hat – reviewing what has been said thus far in the discussion in order to move to a new “hat”

This strategy provides students with guidelines as well as various opportunities to share their unique contributions to a class discussion.⁸³

Guided Research

Guided research is a scaffolding strategy that allows students, particularly in upper elementary to middle school, to engage in many of the skills that are needed to conduct research, but with a higher level of support than older students who may be able to do research independently. Students are provided with key terms and search phrases, and for students who require a higher level of support, perhaps even an array of texts that they can use to collect their research. An example of what this might look like in the classroom is providing all students with a print-out of possible search terms or phrases such as “Lorraine Hansberry interview” or “The Wiz Costumes,” and providing other students, who may have a higher support need, with a printed copy of a source that discusses the costume design from *The Wiz* or a section of a transcript from an interview with Lorraine Hansberry. All students may be provided with reminders on what a reliable source is or how to differentiate between a primary and secondary source.

Classroom Activities

Throughout this unit, students will engage in the following activities in stages as they are broken down below. All of the instruction and activities in the unit are designed to address the unit’s essential question: How does critical literacy help lead Black creators to create stronger representation of themselves in a world where that can be hard to find? The goals for the unit are to enhance students’ efficacy with critical literacy through explicit instruction on and practice with the strategy, and then for students to conduct research in order to learn more about the critical literacy strategies I have detailed in my Content Objectives that Black creators have used throughout history.

Part I: Instruction on Critical Literacy and Background Knowledge

In the first part of this unit, students will need significant support in developing background knowledge surrounding critical literacy and the content we will be studying. On day one of instruction, we will begin class with an introduction to the unit title: *Inspiration via Critical Literacy: Filling Gaps in the Canon*, and a gallery walk. In the gallery walk, I will pair images that show the juxtaposition of media created with and without Black audiences in mind, as well as images that demonstrate the general idea that our society has largely been developed in a way that erases or diminishes the contributions of Black creators. Examples of artifacts I

may include in the gallery walk are paired stills from television shows made for viewers from different demographics, campaign posters or buttons made in support of Black or white politicians at pivotal moments in US history (the Civil Rights era, the Obama campaign, and, given recent events, artifacts surrounding the endorsements for Kamala Harris in the 2024 election), and images related to the anchor texts for the unit: “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” and *A Room of One’s Own*, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Wiz* and *The Wizard of Oz*. I will also include captions for each image, so students have some context for what they may be seeing for the first time in this unit.

While students navigate the “gallery” of images and artifacts, I will provide them with guiding questions such as:

- What do you notice about who is in these images and who is not?
- Why do you think some of these pictures are paired together?
- What do you notice about similarities and differences between the paired images?
- What do you predict we will be learning about in this unit, based on the images in the gallery walk, as well as the unit’s title?

Students will receive sticky notes to put general observations or questions near the images they observe and to respond to at least one of the guiding questions. After students have time to maneuver through the entire “gallery,” we will regroup as a class to discuss their findings and their notes.

To end the first day of instruction, I will provide a more formal overview of what we will be learning throughout the unit. I will use a slide presentation to preview the unit’s texts and relevant vocabulary, such as critical literacy. I will also provide students with a critical literacy handout that offers reminders of the term’s definition and the focus questions we will use while reading a text.

Part II: Modeling & Gradual Release with Virginia Woolf and Alice Walker

Over the next three days of instruction, we will begin to study Alice Walker’s “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” as well as its relationship to Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. I will begin day two by modeling my critical literacy process as I read an excerpt from “Chapter One” of *A Room of One’s Own*, in which Woolf attempts to go into the library at the fictional Oxbridge, but is denied entrance because she is a woman.⁸⁴ As you will likely notice as you read through Woolf’s text, it is written in such a way that it makes comprehension difficult, regardless of a student’s level of need. Because of this, I will likely utilize an online summary or even an AI differentiation tool to make the text more accessible for my seventh grade students, who are all at various levels in both their academic and English Language Acquisition journeys. I would encourage other educators who use this unit to use their best judgment when deciding what version of the text to use with their specific students. I will also make use of visuals to aid both in my students’ understanding of the content of what we are reading, as well as the context (a short video about British women’s rights in the early twentieth century, a photo of Virginia Woolf, contemporary graduation photos from Oxford showing that all the graduates are men, etc.).

Some examples of what I might say when I model my critical literacy for students are listed below:

- Wow, Virginia Woolf seems to be a really good student and reader!
- She is interested to learn more by going into the library and seeing the original copies of the book she’s talking about.
- Oh, I guess she’s not allowed into the library because she’s not a man, so she’s not really a student at

the university.

- Why do you have to be a man to go to the library?
- If Virginia Woolf isn't allowed in the library, I wonder who else is being kept out.

If students have anything to add, I will invite them to do so, and then I will provide a second excerpt, this time the spot in "Chapter One" where Woolf first introduces her thesis, that women need only money and a room of their own to write fiction.⁸⁵ With this example, I will rely on the students' critical literacy to begin thinking through who is represented and who is not in the text, using their list of guiding questions.

The third day of instruction will begin with the final step of gradual release, and I will have students work with an excerpt from Alice Walker's essay, "Saving the Life that is Your Own." I will provide students with a piece that illustrates Walker's discussion of how a lack of models limits the imagination of a creator, and her comparison of works from Black and white writers.⁸⁶ In small groups, students will apply their critical literacy questions to the text, and they will take the next step, and begin observing how Alice Walker might use Virginia Woolf's text as a jumping-off point to create a wider array of representation. I will provide the below questions to the student groups to write responses to, in addition to their use of the critical literacy questions for discussion:

- Why does Walker say models are important in the artist's life?
- What does Walker say is the main difference between literature from Black and white authors?

Once students have had time to review the brief excerpt from "Saving the Life that is Your Own," they will then receive an abbreviated version of "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," which we will read as a class (I will abbreviate the version my students read to focus primarily on the discussion of Virginia Woolf and Phillis Wheatley, and then focusing on Walker's narrative about how Black women from the time of slavery have created artwork in their daily lives), and then they will again work in their small groups to address the critical literacy questions on their handout. I will also provide background on Woolf, Walker, and Wheatley with pictures to help students comprehend as they read.

On the fourth day of instruction, students will receive the following questions to work through in their small groups regarding Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," to support them in deepening their critical reading of the text:

- Whose writing does Walker re-write in her essay?
- Who does Walker say is an example of someone who Virginia Woolf forgot about in her speeches?
- Provide one example of Walker rewriting Woolf's text so that it represents someone who was originally left out.
- How did Walker use her critical literacy when reading Woolf's text?
- How did Walker use what she found when using her critical literacy to create something that better represented the people who were missing from the original?

Part III: Guided Research on Text Pairings

Over the next five days of instruction, students will work in pairs to research either of the remaining paired texts I have detailed in the Content Objectives section of this unit. They will create research questions using the following sentence template: What connections can I find between _____ by _____ and _____ by _____? Students will have a choice between doing their research on the relationship between either O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* and Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, or MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* and Ken

Harper's *The Wiz*. Students will begin by reading excerpts from each of the texts in their pairing that demonstrate the connections between the two, and will then use a handout with guidelines for search terms to ensure that they find quality information that supports their research questions. For students with a higher support need, I will also provide webpages or pages from relevant books that students can use to source the information they need. Below are details regarding the text excerpts and brief activities I will have students use to focus their research for each text pairing.

O'Casey and Hansberry:

Students will read parts from the opening scenes of each play and apply their critical literacy questions to each. They will also complete a Venn diagram to compare and contrast what they notice about the Boyles and the Youngers as characters, as well as the specific language the characters use when communicating with one another. They will then read a brief summary of the middle sections of each play, followed by a reading of pieces from the last scenes of each, and then they will add to their Venn diagrams. Students will also watch clips from film adaptations of each text and take notes on the characterization they see. Finally, when students have time to conduct their own research on the connections between the two texts, I will provide them with the following questions to make sure they find the relevant information they need:

- Where did Lorraine Hansberry grow up? What about Sean O'Casey?
- How did where each person grew up affect the plays they wrote?
- How did Lorraine Hansberry learn about Sean O'Casey?
- What did Lorraine Hansberry decide she wanted to do similarly to Sean O'Casey? Why? What about the differences?

MGM and Harper

Students who choose to focus on *The Wiz* will begin by looking at examples of costumes designed by Geoffrey Holder and comparing them to the costumes from the 1939 *Wizard of Oz* using a Venn diagram. Students will then look at the scripts from both *The Wiz* and *The Wizard of Oz* and compare the language used in each, as well as anything else they notice as similarities and differences. They will then use the critical literacy questions to consider who each version of the story represents and who is left out. Students will then read a summary of each text, and view video clips from both the MGM film, as well as the 1978 film adaptation of *The Wiz*, specifically to see the differences and similarities between the songs "We're Off to See the Wizard," and "Ease On Down The Road #1." Students will also compare the language, characterization, and visuals from each film in a T-Chart. Then, when students are conducting their own research on the paired texts, I will provide them with the following questions to make sure they find the information they need:

- Who were the people who created the idea, the script, the music, and the costumes for *The Wiz* on Broadway in the 1970s? What about *The Wizard of Oz* (or the book that came before)?
- Were there a lot of other musicals on Broadway that had an all-Black cast and crew at the time that *The Wiz* came out?
- What were people's reactions when *The Wiz* first came out?
- How did the people who created *The Wiz* help to make it a success, even when it seemed like it might fail?

Part IV: Multimedia Presentations

The final part of this unit will require students to compile the information that they have gathered about their

text pairings into a multimedia presentation to share their research. Students will work together to decide which video clips, images, and text excerpts best illustrate the connections between the texts in their chosen pairing, and then put it all together into a presentation to share with others in the class. They will include a slide answering the unit's essential question based on their research, explaining how critical reading can lead to better representation from marginalized creators. Ultimately, students will present their research in small groups.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

My district uses the Common Core State Standards, and I specifically use the Grade 7 English Language Arts Standards. Those listed below come from sub-categories Reading: Literature, Reading: Informational Text, Writing, and Speaking & Listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1 & CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1: Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.⁸⁷

Students will read, synthesize, and quote information from literary and informational texts throughout this unit. They will be reading from essays, plays, speeches, and songs, as well as websites, journal articles, and books in order to practice their own critical literacy, as well as researching the critical literacies of others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3: Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).⁸⁸

In their research, students will be focusing heavily on how the experiences of the creators they are studying impacted their creation of certain texts. For example, students learning about Lorraine Hansberry's childhood in Chicago or her first viewing of *Juno and the Paycock* will have to explain how those events influenced her ideas about the world for her to write *A Raisin in the Sun*.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation. & CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.⁸⁹

The bulk of the independent work that students will be doing in this unit is research. They will receive guidance, but ultimately it will be their responsibility to locate and utilize the appropriate information to respond to their research question. They will be synthesizing what they learn from reading their paired texts, as well as information they gather from websites, books, etc. in their presentations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research⁹⁰

Students will be utilizing textual evidence from various sources to support their research findings, as well as when they answer the questions I have paired with each text we will read.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.5: Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.⁹¹

Students' final projects for this unit will be incomplete if they do not include sound, video, or images to support their research. They may choose to include pictures that compare and contrast costuming choices, or they may include songs from the different musicals. However, regardless of what media they choose to include, a major part of the work they will be doing is curating artifacts that help their audience understand the connections between the paired texts.

Resources

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

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As I have mentioned throughout this unit, I teach learners with a variety of support needs. I am sure that you do as well. I have found this text to be incredibly helpful when it comes to ensuring that my instruction is appropriate for all of my students. It provides a variety of strategies that help students develop their literacy skills, from vocabulary to inferencing and many more.

Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*. Modern Library ed.. New York: The Modern Library, 1995.

Though I have listed suggested scenes to have students analyze, you know your students better than I do. For this reason, I highly recommend reading the entirety of *A Raisin in the Sun* prior to deciding what to ask students to read from the play. You and your students may find value in comparing a different part of the play to O'Casey's *Juno*.

Lumet, Sidney, director. *The Wiz*. Universal Pictures, 1978, 2 hr., 14 min..
<https://www.netflix.com/watch/1130238?source=35>.

I was insistent in my Content Objectives that we focus on the original Broadway production of *The Wiz*. This is because the film adaptation of the show differs from the production that Ken Harper, Charlie Smalls, William F. Brown, and Geoffrey Holder created in many ways, but primarily it differs in that it was not produced by an all-Black team. Because of this, it is very important to make sure students focus on the Broadway show in their research in order to meet the goals of this unit. However, I am including the film adaptation in this bibliography so that you can see a visual representation of the work that Harper et al. put into the show, even if it is not an original Broadway cast recording. Though I can't consider it a perfect manifestation of Harper's work, it is still a good, accessible resource to show students because it features an all-Black main cast, and also because it's fun!

O'Casey, Sean. *Juno and the Paycock*. London: Macmillan, 1928. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uva.x000600810>.

For the same reason that I included *A Raisin in the Sun*, I include *Juno and the Paycock* in my list of teacher resources – so that you can determine what scenes make the most sense for you and your students to

analyze.

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⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 71.

⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 71.

⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 72.

⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.

⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79-80.

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¹¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 81.

¹² Ellis and Eberly, "Critical Literacy: Going Beyond the Demands of Common Core," 9-10.

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¹⁴ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, v-ix.

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- 20 Style, "Curriculum as Window and Mirror."
- 21 Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, "Saving the Life that is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life."
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- 26 Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens."
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- ⁴⁰ Hansberry, interview.
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- ⁴⁴ Hansberry, interview.
- ⁴⁵ Hansberry, interview.
- ⁴⁶ Mitchell, "The Negro Writer and His Materials," quoted in Shields, *Lorraine Hansberry*, 196.
- ⁴⁷ Carter, "Lorraine Hansberry," 125.
- ⁴⁸ Carter, "Lorraine Hansberry," 125.
- ⁴⁹ Hansberry, interview.
- ⁵⁰ Shields, *Lorraine Hansberry*, 210-211.
- ⁵¹ Fassler, "The Wiz."
- ⁵² Columbia, "A happy Broadway Tale."
- ⁵³ Columbia, "A happy Broadway Tale."
- ⁵⁴ Glover, *African American Perspectives in Musical Theatre*, "An Anti-racist Approach to the Study of Culture."
- ⁵⁵ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 47.
- ⁵⁶ Glover, *African American Perspectives in Musical Theatre*, "An Anti-racist Approach to the Study of Culture."
- ⁵⁷ New York Film Academy, "Charlie Smalls and the Story Behind The Wiz."
- ⁵⁸ Lamb, "Celebrating *The Wiz*."
- ⁵⁹ (@vttangentspod), "Charlie Smalls on #TheMonkees."
- ⁶⁰ Nemiroff, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, 87.
- ⁶¹ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, "Saving the Life that is Your Own."
- ⁶² (@vttangentspod), "Charlie Smalls on #TheMonkees."

⁶³ Fassler, "The Wiz."

⁶⁴ Skott, "The Wiz."

⁶⁵ Lester, "Geoffrey Holder."

⁶⁶ *Carmen & Geoffrey*, 49:22.

⁶⁷ *Carmen & Geoffrey*, 52:35.

⁶⁸ *Carmen & Geoffrey*, 49:55.

⁶⁹ *Carmen & Geoffrey*, 54:00.

⁷⁰ *Carmen & Geoffrey*, 54:00.

⁷¹ Lamb, "Celebrating *The Wiz*."

⁷² Fassler, "The Wiz."

⁷³ Lane, "Exclusive: Black Broadway."

⁷⁴ Lane, "Exclusive: Black Broadway."

⁷⁵ Lane, "Exclusive: Black Broadway."

⁷⁶ Lane, "Exclusive: Black Broadway."

⁷⁷ Columbia, "A happy Broadway tale."

⁷⁸ Lamb, "Celebrating *The Wiz*."

⁷⁹ Kumar, "Reviving *The Wiz*."

⁸⁰ New York Film Academy, "Charlie Smalls and The Story Behind *The Wiz*."

⁸¹ McLaughlin and DeVoogd, "Critical Literacy as Comprehension," 53.

⁸² The deBono Group, "Six Thinking Hats."

⁸³ The deBono Group, "Six Thinking Hats."

⁸⁴ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, "Chapter 1."

⁸⁵ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, "Chapter 1."

⁸⁶ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, "Saving the Life that is Your Own."

⁸⁷ Common Core State Standards Initiative, “English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 7”; Common Core State Standards Initiative, “English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Informational Text » Grade 7.”

⁸⁸ Common Core State Standards Initiative, “English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Informational Text » Grade 7.”

⁸⁹ Common Core State Standards Initiative, “English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 7.”

⁹⁰ Common Core State Standards Initiative, “English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 7.”

⁹¹ Common Core State Standards Initiative, “English Language Arts Standards » Speaking & Listening » Grade 7.”

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