

NEH Summer Institute

Paulette F. Brewington

Slavery, Literacy, and Freedom

27 Jul. 2005

The Ghost in the Machine of Secondary English/Language Arts:

Slavery, Literacy and Freedom

A Charlotte, NC, county commissioner commented in an e-mail that a reason

CMS can't teach kids within the urban black community [is] ... The live in a moral sewer with parents who lack the desire to act properly. That immorality impacts negatively the lives of these children and creates an environment where education is considered acting 'white' and lack of education is a 'plus' in their world.

<http://forums.go.com/abcnews/thread?threadID=102691>

In a quixotic approach to the political deconstruction and destruction of African American intellect, morality, and aesthetics in one fell swoop, the commissioner, by his own admission, conjured up old “ghosts” -- the absence of true historical and literary African-American Studies in the classroom.

In Toni Morrison's “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” the question is raised, “*Is the text (of American literature) sabotaged by its own proclamations of ‘universality’? ... Are there ghosts in the machine? Active but unsummoned presences that can distort the workings of the machine and can also [make] it work?*” Thus, in the 21st Century, does the limited, sanitized presence of African-American literature in the anthologized English literature achieve the same end?

Perhaps the firestorm of criticism resulting from this remark prompted a later statement that suggests what black students in CMS (and I believe all students in North Carolina) need is a more serious examination and incorporation of African-American Studies into the school curriculum.

Perhaps through guided close readings and intertextual studies of an expanded “canon” of African American literature in the classroom, or better, a course devoted to the study of African American literature, *all* students can continue to develop and increase literary and critical thinking while experiencing enlightenment and self-actualization through engagement with the texts. To the former, the attached syllabus is merely a suggested point of departure; a suggested model for integration of texts in the secondary classroom.

Slavery, Literacy, and Cultural Freedom
National Endowment for the Humanities
2005 Summer Institute
Paulette F. Brewington

- I. **Native American Storytelling and Mythology**
Objectives: Sacred texts, oral texts and storytelling, narration
“Building a Sense of Community in the Classroom”
- A. “How the World Was Made”
 - B. “Sky Tree”
 - C. “When Grizzlies Walked Upright”
 - D. “Circle of Stories” <http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories>
 - E. **Project: Using a flow Map, write a myth according to the rubric, create a work of art from the list provided, present to class, and create an illustrated anthology.**
- II. **The Arrival and Survival of Change**
Objectives: autobiography, survival, bondage, “self” and the “other,”
democracy and the crucible of faith; comparison/contrast
- A. Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, from *La Relacion*
 - B. Anne Bradstreet, “Upon the Burning of Our House”
 - C. Mary Rowlandson, from *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*
 - D. William Bradford, from *Of Plymouth Plantation*
 - E. *Cultural extension*: from *Stay Alive, My Son* (Khmer Rouge and Cambodia)
 - F. “Amistad America” www.Amistadamerica.org
 - G. **Project: Based on your observations or experiences, think of a time survival meant overcoming great odds. Using a Venn diagram, to map your ideas, write about that observation or experience; discuss the role that strangers played in that event; and contrast/compare it to one of the above selections**
- III. **The Diaspora, Slavery, Spirituals – Chaos, Codes, and the Cosmos**
Objectives: Puritanical codes, enlightenment, sermonizing, jerimandizing,
drama; auralty, orality, and agency; lyrical and rhetorical devices;
cause/effect writing
- A. Jonathan Edwards, from “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”
 - B. Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*
 - 1. Puritanical codes
 - 2. From *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano* or What was Tituba’s true history? What motivates her actions? Her confessions?
 - 3. See what really happened: www.pbs.org type *ergot* in the search box
 - 4. **Project: Metaphorically speaking, what has been poisoned in Salem?**
In a one-two page essay, present your answer with evidence from any

of the above readings or any other relative sources.

C. Spirituals, the Afram Oral Tradition

Rhyme, Meter, Message, Agency

1. "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"
2. "Go Down. Moses"
3. "Follow the Drinking Gourd"
4. "Oh Freedom"

5. **Audiotapes of Spirituals – Gates, Quimby Family**

C. "Sorrow Songs" from *Souls of Black Folk* = literacy

D. Project: Using the attached rubric for questions, interview a family member or neighbor on their favorite spiritual and/or song, then prepare a one-two page report. Present to the class, and combine as an addition to the class anthology. This is a nice exercise for interviewing the elderly; it may open floodgates of memory. Write everything so that we can extend the project to memoir writing.

IV. Romanticism, Reason, and Abolition (1750-1850)

For educators and scholars who dare to think outside of the "canonized box" and who dare critically consider literary diversity: Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 1992.

Objectives: plot, mystery, point of view, figurative language, nature, self,

A. The Campfire – Was it something *gothic* I said?

1. Washington Irving, "The Devil and Tom Walker"
2. Edgar Allen Poe "The Fall of the House of Usher"
3. Edgar Allen Poe, "The Raven"

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=441#LESSON2

B. The Fireside Poets

Objectives: Poetic devices and Romanticism; patriotism and the power of Persuasion – ethos, pathos, and logos; literacy and agency

1. William Cullen Bryant, "To a Waterfowl"
2. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Old Ironsides"
3. James Russell Lowell, "The First Snow-Fall"
Trace Lowell's genealogy to the Civil War!
4. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls"
5. John Greenleaf Whittier – fireside poet and abolitionist:
"The Hunters of Men"
 - a. Phyllis Wheatley
 - b. Jupiter Hammond
 - c. George Moses Horton, a North Carolina slave

B. "The Declaration of Independence"

- C. Patrick Henry, “Speech at the Second Virginia Convention”
 - 1. Sojourner Truth, “Aren’t I a Woman”
 - 2. Phyllis Wheatley, “To His Excellency, General Washington”
- D. Benjamin Franklin, from *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*
- E. Benjamin Franklin, from *Poor Richard’s Almanac*
 - a. *Cultural Extension*: Americo Paredes, “Dichos”
 - b. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*
- F. Project: From the lists of topics, choose a topic for argumentation research paper. We will follow the research rubric from George Mason University through completion. Teacher will se a timetable for due dates.**

V. The Secret Society of the Sentimentals

Objectives: Elements of the sentimental novel, subversion of sentimentality in Afram literature, fallacies of argumentation, continue research agenda

- A. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
Harriet Jacobs, a North Carolina slave, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*
- B. William Wells Brown, *Clotel*
- C. *Psssst!!* Richard Wright’s *Native Son* is a nice contemporary example of the sentimental male Afram protagonist.

VI. The Civil War and Its Aftermath

Objectives: stream of consciousness, sentimental novel contd., morality, patriotism, and persuasive writing

- A. Ambrose Bierce, “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” and stream of consciousness
- B. *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, 20 min. video
- C. Abraham Lincoln, The Gettysburg Address and
- D. Robert E. Lee, “Letters to His Family”
- E. *The Red Badge of Courage*
- F. **Afram Soldiers and the Civil War**: Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy*

VII. Noah Webster and the American Language

- A. The New English versus the “Kings” English
- B. Language and Dialect – short history of the American English Language
- C. **Video: *Voices of North Carolina*, video of dialectal differences in key “language areas” of North Carolina**
- D. **Writing exercise – What is your dialect? Describe it by sound patterns, word choice, voice inflection, and region of the state or country. Good luck!**

VII. Regionalism, Realism, and Reconstruction

Objectives: Colloquial Language, Survival, Overcoming Setbacks, Coming of Age; Signification, Sermonizing, and Authentication of “Self”

- A. Mark Twain, “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”
- B. Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, **replaced with a reading or rereading of Toni Morrison’s, *Playing in the Dark***

- B. Bret Harte, "The Outcasts of Poker Flat"
- C. Forest Carter, *The Education of Little Tree*
- D. Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- E. Revisit excerpts from the Douglass Narrative; grandmothers, and rationing time- Nanny's history

F. Project: The quilt as individual and collective text. Based on readings, writings, observations, and personal histories, each student will authenticate "self" on a quilt block. All blocks will be assembled to a quilt. Students, parents, community, will decide on quilt design.

VIII. New American Voices

Objectives: Comparison and Contrast of Identity; Signification of Identity; free verse, repetition, metaphor, imagery, syntax, and diction

- A. Walt Whitman, "I Hear America Singing"
- B. Langston Hughes, "I Too"
- C. Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" Gates CD/audio
- D. Walt, Whitman, When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer"
 - E. Emily Dickinson, "If You were Coming in the Fall"
 - F. Emily Dickinson, "Success is counted sweetest"
 - G. Emily Dickinson, "Because I could not stop for Death"

IX. Beginnings of the Modern Age (Who says that poetry is no fun?)

Objectives: Imagery, free verse, syntax, and diction; "The Great American Novel?"

- A. Imagist Poetry
 1. Ezra Pound, "In a Station at the Metro"
 2. William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow"
 3. William Carlos Williams, "This is Just to Say"
 4. Wallace Stevens, "Anecdote of a Jar"
 5. Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool" Gates CD
- 6. Project: Write an Imagist poem – to be read aloud to the class.**
- 6. "*The Great Gatsby*"- While reading, try to formulate or theorize this text as "The Great American Novel."
Be prepared to support your answers with textual evidence.

***** This syllabus is subject to modification !!!!!!!!!!!**

[Back](#)