

The Emergence of the Anti-hero in the 1950s

By

Elizabeth Claytor

Taylor Allderdice High School

Narrative

Each September, I have the pleasure of meeting a new group of 16 year-olds and together we begin to explore American literature from the Puritans through modern literature. Our curriculum is well-grounded in the classics; my job is to make the classics exciting and relevant to the lives of my students. I read newspapers, magazines, and professional journals with the literature I am teaching in mind. Whenever possible, I bring current events and current issues into the discussions in my classroom with the hope that my students will see that their study of American literature should not and cannot be understood without making connections to the real world in which we all live.

If our class discussions touch on the 1960s, I am able to sustain their interest by retelling my memories of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the first time I saw a hippie with a wilted lettuce leaf strapped to his wrist on Walnut Street in Shadyside, the day Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald live on television, why I was not at Woodstock, and the list goes on. All of this first-hand experience is intriguing, but it is not always the focus of my American Literature course. Our readings and discussions in the 1950s seminar have helped me discover ways to connect my students' interests in the 1960s to the significant body of literature we are required to read which originates in the 1950s or was inspired, in part, by historical events from the 1950s. I have long wondered why there is this nostalgia among some segments of our population for the 1950s and why our youths are openly nostalgic for the music, the clothes, the excitement of the 1960s. Dr. Groch, our seminar leader, articulated a possible answer to this question: those who are nostalgic for the 1950s wish that the 1960s had never happened. (1)(Lecture, Chatham College, Laughlin Hall. April 4, 1999) But the 1950s and the 1960s did happen and we, as a people, were forever changed.

I have always had an interest in history, but I chose to major in English because I have never been motivated by the mental exercise of remembering facts, dates, and the causes of wars. I have always been more interested in the interrelation of history and writings. As my own teaching repertoire has grown, I have taught the traditional material and explored characterization, thematic development, plot structure, symbolism, and figurative language, but I have also added historical perspective to my teaching of works which are traditionally taught in American Literature courses; Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is one example. I began in small ways by including enrichment projects which required student research on McCarthyism and the Cold War. I have expanded and shifted my teaching focus for this instructional plan by choosing to analyze the emergence of the anti-hero as an artistic instrument or type of protagonist which became popular during the 1950s. When discussing the character of John Proctor, the protagonist in *The Crucible*, it will be noted that he does not match the Aristotelian definition of the tragic hero, nor does the play match the Aristotelian definition of tragic drama. John

Proctor is very much a Puritan and, at the same time, a man for the 50s.

As the decade of the 50s began, America seemed calm, self-satisfied and rejoicing that it had survived the trauma of World War II and could return to its pre-war normalcy. The period which is generally referred to as the 1950s did not begin precisely on January 1, 1950, and end on December 31, 1959. In fact, the changes in our country for the period which we refer to as the 1950s began in the mid-1940s after World War II and concluded with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in November 1963. However, the serenity of the 50s belied a host of issues which were broiling just below the surface.

In addition to the obvious changes in our country which were created by the war, there are also very important changes brought about in the areas of women's rights, civil rights, the structure of the family, politics and economics. These changes led to the excitement, the violence, the beauty of the 1960s. World War II was the end of the segregated army; African-American men and women returned home and demanded the rights granted to them under The Constitution and earned by them through their service to their country. At the conclusion of World War I, African Americans returned home with the same expectations and demands, but the political, social and economic climate was not right for changes in 1919. 1945 was different. After World War II, a sense of well being made it possible for Americans to open themselves to new avenues of thought. A movement like the civil rights movement was an expensive one to organize and mobilize, and America's post-war wealth was at an all-time high. The availability of financial resources helped the movement, spearheaded by the charisma of Martin Luther King, Jr. In addition, the Indian revolution and the activism of Gandhi is credited with readying the emotional focus of this country for the civil right movement.

The Cold War made the difference, and America was stung by the pressures the Communists were placing upon the American image abroad. Americans were terrified that the USSR would overtake the world, especially the United States at the conclusion of World War II. Thus, the Cold War began. As a small child, I remember taking part in air raid drills at school. At government expense, air raid sirens were mounted on the roofs of our schools, and we were marched out into the corridor of our school and instructed to place our heads against the lockers, shield our eyes, and protect ourselves from the ravages of a nuclear attack. No one questioned what I have come to see as a preposterous farce perpetuated on America's children, their parents, and the public. At the same time, I remember shadowy television pictures of a man named Joseph McCarthy interrogating frightened, nervous looking men. Communist influences and spies were supposedly everywhere. They were supposed to be bad; they would take our home, my Daddy's job, and we would all end up living in a prison camp. My mother said McCarthy was crazy, but I didn't understand what was going on for many, many years. Senator McCarthy and the HUAC grew in power after World War II. The United States' three-year alliance with the Soviets was always an uneasy one. Following the war, containing the Soviets became part of our domestic policy. The Cold War began with the dropping of the atomic bomb, a defining event for our country. Throughout the 50s, we presumed the existence of the Soviets as enemies, and our foreign policy was driven by the belief that this enemy

existed. To sustain the support of our citizenry, it was necessary to create a narrative explaining what we were and what we were not. Senator McCarthy's zealous pursuit of Communists helped shape this narrative for a time. In some ways, the 50s was a monolithic decade of goodness and consensus; in other words, what was mistaken for serenity and happiness was merely passive acceptance of the status quo.

I have identified the following broad categories as the framework for preparation of this teaching unit.

Senator Joseph McCarthy and Communism

In late 1949, Arthur Miller published *The Crucible*, a play set in seventeenth-century Salem, Massachusetts which explores the themes of mass hysteria, repression of individual freedoms and requirements that citizens monitor the behavior of fellow citizens and inform on those who did not conform to the established religious and social order. Miller had begun work on *The Crucible* before Senator Joseph McCarthy began his vicious attack upon the Hollywood artists' community and destroyed the lives and careers of many of Miller's friends and colleagues. Miller, himself, was called to testify before the HUAC, but he refused to name the names of anyone he knew who was or had been a member of the Communist party. Miller's refusal to name names resulted in McCarthy charging him with contempt of committee. This ruling was overturned in a later court proceeding which took place after the senator had left public office.

Richard Wright, Communism and Native Son

While the copyright date for *Native Son* is 1940, this powerful novel explores the seeds for social upheaval which did not reach maturity until the 50s and 60s. Richard Wright was born on what some scholars refer to as a farm; others refer to the birth place as a plantation in Natchez, Mississippi on September 4, 1908. Wright's father was an unsuccessful farmer who deserted his family in 1914 when young Richard was only six years old. Despite a childhood and adolescence carved out in the hostile environment of the deep south, Wright graduated from high school as valedictorian in 1925. Shortly thereafter, Wright and his family moved north, eventually stopping and staying in Chicago, Illinois. The Wright family was part of the Great Migration which saw thousands of African-Americans move northward in search of better jobs and freedom from oppression. *Native Son* is set in the underbelly of the city of Chicago where Wright and his family made their home. Wright soon discovered that life in Chicago was not any better than life in Mississippi; thus, Bigger Thomas was born. Wright's affiliation with the Communist Party affected the response to and critical reception of *Native Son*. Although Communism was not whole-heartedly embraced by most Americans, it was not the anathema it came to be during the 50s.

Civil Rights

Social unrest and racial discrimination brought about the civil rights movement. Reports of Martin Luther King's mission to Birmingham, Alabama, the lynch murder of

Emmett Till, and the desegregation of schools in Little Rock, Arkansas became international news stories. The Communists capitalized on America's social ills, especially with its African-American minority population and actively recruited members from this group. Richard Wright's *Native Son* explores the appeal of Communism for African-Americans. In response, American politicians were inclined to include African-American citizens in the wealth and economic growth the majority population enjoyed after World War II. Civil Rights legislation was passed in the 50s which affirmed the rights for all citizens, including African-Americans. My personal memories of this period are painful. Each fall, when school opened across the country, the tension, fear and anger felt by many in this country was palpable in the predominantly-white school which I attended. My classmates would not talk to me or include me in their games for the months of September and October. By late Fall, the media coverage of integration initiatives subsided, the atmosphere in my school would become more peaceful. The militant push for civil rights bypassed Pittsburgh from the late 1950s until the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. whose death evoked violent unrest in this country and new tensions in our schools. By 1968, I was the teacher--not the student--trying to encourage my African-American and Caucasian students to sit together and work together in the classroom. From 1968 through the early 1970s, group work in the classroom was difficult, if not impossible, because of the national civil unrest.

The Role of Women

When we study *The Crucible*, we discuss the role of women in Puritan society. The first women accused had no status and enjoyed no respect in the community: Tituba, a slave, Sarah Good, a woman whose husband had abandoned her and her children, and Sarah Osbourne, a woman who had married a younger man who enjoyed no status in the community. Women derived their status from their husbands in Puritan society. It is extremely difficult for young people today to understand the traditional roles of women which prevailed through the nineteenth century. The doctrine of separate spheres may help in this regard. The world, as perceived in the past, was divided into two spheres: the private and the public sphere. Men operated in the public sphere of government, politics and economics. Women operated in the private sphere of home, hearth, children, and love. The private sphere was considered the better and purer sphere. Students will be quick to reject this entire notion as sexist or chauvinistic, but the teacher should not let that happen. Sexism, as we understand it today, was not a part of the world perception. Periodically, we must pause and carefully point out the flaw in looking back on history and judging it with a late twentieth century bias. Women in earlier times did not have the options of a modern woman: to have a career or not have a career, to marry or not marry, to have or not have children, or to live alone in their own apartment or house. Women in the 1950s were certainly much freer than their seventeenth century counterparts; however, most women were encouraged to marry and have children right after or within a few years of graduating from high school. The media culture of the 1950s presented an image of womanhood which was idyllic, but it did not match the life that real people were living. We have not grown in understanding and tolerance as much as we would think we have. In response to school violence, many of society's critics blame the single-parent family, the two-wage-earner family, or just the family that is too busy to spend

time with their children or monitor the activities of their children. Emboldened by what is perceived as the deterioration of our society, some critics have dared to say out loud that women belong at home, raising the children, and removing themselves from the workplace entirely. These important family-related issues that every young person must confront at some point in their lives, and discussion of these issues will most certainly stimulate lively classroom discussions and help students see the gender and class issues at work in Salem as well as in their own lives.

The Instructional Plan

Core Student Readings

Miller, Arthur. *The Crucible*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1976.

Miller, Arthur. "Tragedy and the Common Man."

<http://www.deathofasalesman.com/study.htm>

Wright, Richard. "Introduction: How Bigger Was Born," *Native Son*. New York: Harper and Row, 1940. vii-xxxiv.

Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. New York: Harper and Row, 1940.

Films and Documentaries

East of Eden. Dir. Elia Kazan. Perf. Julie Harris, James Dean, Raymond Massie, Burl Ives. Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. 1954.

Native Son. Dir. Jerrold Freedman. Perf. Carroll Baker, Oprah Winfrey, Elizabeth McGovern. Cinecom Pictures. 1986.

David Halberstam's The Fifties: Series. The History Channel, 1995.

The Front - Dir. Marvin Ritt. Perf. Woody Allen, Zero Mostel, Herschel Bernardi, Michael Murphy, Andrea Marcovicci. Columbia Pictures Corporation. 1976.

The teaching focus for this instructional plan analyzes the emergence of the anti-hero as an artistic instrument or type of protagonist which was popularized during the 1950s. Students will examine the character of John Proctor in *The Crucible*, Howard Prince, the character portrayed by Woody Allen in the film *The Front*, the nature of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, and the popularity of James Dean, specifically noted in the film *East of Eden*. When discussing the character of John Proctor, the protagonist in *The Crucible*, it will be noted that he does not match the Aristotelian definition of the tragic hero, nor does the play match the Aristotelian definition of tragic drama. Students may be introduced to the writings of Aristotle and his influence on literary criticism.

Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero is that the character must be a man, must be of high birth or stature, and must have a tragic flaw. Then, they will read Arthur Miller's essay "Tragedy and the Common Man." Written in 1949, "Tragedy and the Common Man," is the preface to *Death of a Salesman* and can be found at www.deathofasalesman.com/study.htm. In addition to what Miller says about heroes, the essay is a model for the rhetorical study of its organization, structure and support for an argument. Then, prepare students for their own writing of an essay which uses comparison or contrast of two pieces of writing. Finally, they will write an essay which

discusses how Miller's definition of the tragic hero differs from Aristotle's definition. Average students might be asked to write a precis of the essay or to relate what Miller says about tragic heroes to John Proctor. Develop an assignment-specific rubric to evaluate student writing.

In addition to the reading and discussion of *The Crucible*, this unit includes selected viewing and discussion of portions of *David Halberstam's The Fifties*, a documentary produced by the History Channel and based on Halberstam's best-selling book. This documentary makes history accessible for students and helps them understand what was taking place in the United States and the world at the time Arthur Miller wrote this play.

Reading and Discussion Time: 2 - 3 Weeks.

Before reading *The Crucible*, administer a pre-reading exercise which assists students in focusing on offenses against society, the church and government which are central to one's understanding of the play. The list will generate discussion about the terminology used and will direct student reading of the play. An excellent pre- and post-reading list of offenses against society appears in The Perfection Form company's teacher's guide to *The Crucible*.

After reading *The Crucible*, teachers may want to administer the same reading exercise. This time, students will focus on offenses against society, the church and government which are central to their understanding of the play and the ensuing discussion will determine if their attitudes have been influenced by the reading of the play. A variation on this exercise would be to instruct students to assume the persona of a major character in the play and rank the offenses according to their importance. To conclude this section of the unit, students may write a commentary to explain their responses.

Students will read Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* before the seminar discussions on the 50s begin. Large classes might be divided into groups and asked to prepare dramatic readings of key passages from the play which have been selected by the teacher before the unit is begun. These readings will be presented to the class. As these presentations are made, teachers should use these opportunities to discuss plot, setting, character development and the numerous themes of mass hysteria, misuse and abuse of judicial power, and blind conformity. In addition, the teacher will establish a national, social, and historical backdrop for Miller's work. The teacher will present a series of mini-lectures (5-10 minutes) which will provide biographical information on Arthur Miller and his times. Especially important for understanding the context in which this play was written is the knowledge that Senator Joseph McCarthy's committee subpoenaed Miller to testify before it. Miller's refusal to name names resulted in a contempt citation. Parallels between Miller and his protagonist in *The Crucible* cannot be ignored. Like Miller, John Proctor refuses to identify any of his friends and neighbors as witches or wizards. He dies to protect his name. Miller and Proctor have the courage to stand up for their beliefs.

Through discussion, students will develop a list of the traits of a hero and keep them in their notebooks. Next, the teacher will provide a brief overview of the Aristotelian definition of the tragic hero to be followed by close reading of Miller's essay "Tragedy and the Common Man." Students will compare the classical definition of a hero with Miller's definition of a hero. There are two possible writing assignments which seem appropriate at this time. More advanced students, after reviewing the format for writing an essay of comparison and contrast, might write an essay which compares Aristotle's definition of a hero to Miller's definition. Less advanced students might develop their own definition of a hero and compare it to Miller's definition. An alternate assignment might require a written discussion of John Proctor as a hero or an anti-hero. To evaluate student writing, an assignment specific rubric follows.

Name _____ Period _____ Date _____ <div style="text-align: center;">Title for the Assignment</div> CONTENT: 50% _____ Clearly stated thesis: identifies character as either a hero or an anti-hero _____ Supporting piece of evidence #1 _____ Supporting piece of evidence #2 _____ Supporting piece of evidence #3 _____ Conclusion WRITING MECHANICS: 50% _____ Inclusion of rough draft with final draft _____ Absence of spelling errors _____ Absence of fragments and run-ons _____ Absence of capitalization and punctuation errors _____ Varied and vivid word choice Score _____ Letter Grade _____ Evaluator _____
--

Next, students will learn more about Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee. The first artists to be called before the HUAC are known as The Hollywood Ten. The Ten were a group of Hollywood screenwriters and directors who were questioned about their Communist affiliation and the affiliations of their acquaintances. Upon the advice of their lawyer, Marvin Gang, the Ten stood on their first amendment rights which guarantee freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. This legal stance failed, and they were held in contempt of Congress and jailed. Thereafter, those citizens who were called invoked the Fifth Amendment so as not to incriminate themselves. Taking the Fifth Amendment is a total act of silence; one cannot testify on any subject or the door is opened up to any and all questions. Taking the Fifth Amendment was an unhappy choice for many because it had come to be associated with organized crime. A major crime figure, Frank Columbo, who had been pronounced guilty in the court of public opinion, invoked the Fifth Amendment during Senate hearings conducted by Senator Estes Kefauver. Invoking the Fifth Amendment

was perceived as a way to weasel out; therefore, invoking the Fifth amendment was an admission of guilt. At this time, use selected portions of the *David Halberstam's The Fifties* series which includes film footage of Senator McCarthy whipping the nation into a frenzy over communism. This frenzy carried over into television programming and film. School children practicing their air raid drills, public information ads, and television programs like *I Led Three Lives* were part of an organized campaign to identify and eradicate Communists from America. A discussion of Senator McCarthy's possible motives, his effect on the country, and the aftermath of McCarthy's committee work will be discussed. Students will be asked to consider Arthur Miller, the playwright as a hero or anti-hero. It seems appropriate to also consider how and why McCarthy was given or so easily assumed the power and influence which he enjoyed for a time. Comparisons of the phenomena of mass hysteria and blind conformity in both the 1640s and 1950s can be explored at this point.

To facilitate student access to historical documents, use the resources of the internet to take virtual tours of seventeenth-century Salem, Massachusetts, the setting for *The Crucible* or read documents from the hearings of Senator Joseph McCarthy's hearings on Un-American Activities. Assign a culminating activity or final project for this segment of the instructional plan. Students will access the following web sites and choose one exercise from this group for further reading and exploration. The student presentations from the internet research will highlight the many historical changes which brought about the isolation and alienation experienced by many Americans.

Once students select an internet research project related to Salem, Massachusetts in 1640 or the McCarthy era, they will follow the instructions in each exercise and produce a final document. To keep them focused, the teacher might require a daily journal in which students record and annotate every site they visit in preparing their project. The student presentations from the internet research will highlight the many historical changes which brought about the isolation and alienation experienced by many Americans.

Internet Research: 1 week

The following web sites will facilitate students research:

sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/cruc/crucsg1.html 23 May 1999

sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/cruc/crucsg2.html 23 May 1999

sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/cruc/crucsg3.html 23 May 1999

Student Presentations: 1-2 weeks

Students will present their findings to the class. Teachers and students will use an evaluation rubric to score each presentation. Evaluations should be completed by all participants: a self evaluation worth 25%, a class evaluation worth 25% and a teacher evaluation worth 50%. A sample evaluation form follows:

ORAL PRESENTATION EVALUATION FORM

Name of Presenter _____ Period _____ Date _____

Scale: 5- High; 1- Low 5 4 3 2 1

Interest _____

Creativity _____

Visual Impact _____

Eye Contact/Voice/Poise _____

Evidence of
Research/Preparation _____

Circle One: SELF TEACHER STUDENT

Comments: _____

Viewing, Discussion and Composition: 2 weeks

Students will view *The Front* directed by the once blacklisted Marvin Ritt and starring Woody Allen. *The Front* is an original script by Walter Bernstein, a blacklisted screenwriter. The cast contains blacklisted performers as well who are noted in the film credits. Woody Allen portrays a small-time bookie, Howard Prince, who agrees to "front" for a Jewish friend who writes scripts for television. Prince's "scripts" are so successful that he conveniently forgets that all he has done is lend his name to the work. There is humor in watching Prince become caught up in his new found success and stardom. However, as Senator McCarthy's HUAC net widens, Prince's deceit is discovered and situations grow serious again; he cannot ignore what is happening in the artists' community and the larger world around him. Students will appreciate the connections between their study of *The Crucible* and this dramatic depiction of the effect of blacklisting in Hollywood during the McCarthy Era. They will recognize the character of Howard Prince as both a reluctant and unlikely hero or, like John Proctor, possibly an anti-hero.

Reading and Discussion: 2-3 Weeks

The second core reading for this unit is Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Before reading the novel, students will be instructed to keep a reader-response journal. They will be assigned a section from the novel which they must read closely and prepare notes to help them lead a class discussion. The reading can be divided into three parts using the structure Wright imposed upon the novel: *Fear, Fate and Flight*. To facilitate discussions, form discussion groups in which each student has a specific responsibility. Following are suggested roles in group work: (1) a reporter who develops questions related to character and plot facts; (2) a response coordinator who selects passages for further discussion which strike a responsive chord or which are confusing; (3) a historian who clarifies events in the plot or setting with pertinent historical background; (4) a color analyst who will note unusual word choices, use of figurative language and varieties in sentence structure and choice of detail and point these writing features out for the class. Students will be instructed to create open-ended questions which will lend themselves to discussion. Avoid questions which can be answered with one sentence or which can be answered as "yes" or "no." Students will be evaluated on their work within the group and their participation in the whole class discussions. To evaluate the discussions, teachers may use a variation of the rubric for the internet research presentations.

Native Son appears on many lists of banned books, or it may appear on a supplemental book list. If it is not possible to teach this novel to your entire class, students may read Wright's essay "How Bigger Was Born." This essay explains the author's rationale for the novel and the development of its protagonist Bigger Thomas. It also may serve as a model for writing the essay. It is rich in its development of a thesis and its careful listing of and development of details.

It is important for students to understand the appeals made by the Communist Party to African-Americans. I remember reading a passage in a book dealing with old Russia which said: "We must be ready to make endless sacrifices if we are able to overthrow the Czar." And again I'd say to myself: "I've heard that somewhere, sometime before.'...Actions and feelings of men ten thousand miles from home helped me to understand the moods and impulses of those walking the streets of Chicago and Dixie" (2).

The world of Bigger Thomas is supposedly harsher than the reality of living in Chicago's Black Belt, but the factors which shape Bigger's existence are real. Like Wright, Bigger is attracted by the propaganda of the Communist Party. Wright became involved with the party almost by accident being drawn in by the way members of the John Reed Club accepted him. The John Reed Clubs were an arm of the Communist Party. "Closely controlled by the Communist Party, the clubs were designed to serve as one of its cultural instruments. The express purpose...was... to clarify and elaborate the point of view of proletarian as opposed to bourgeois culture; to extend the influence of the Club and the revolutionary working class movement... To create and publish art and

literature of a proletarian character; to make familiar in this country the art and literature of the world proletariat...; To create and publish art and literature of a proletarian character; to make familiar in this country the art and literature of the world proletariat...; To achieve these ends, the clubs proposed to engage in agitational and propagandistic writing, art, and activities...." (3) Wright enjoyed writing for the various publications sponsored by the John Reed Club, but within a few years the party decided to take a different approach to recruiting members, and the John Reed clubs were disbanded in 1934. Being a card-carrying member of the party was not required for membership in the clubs, but it was tacitly understood that John Reed club members were supposed to support the party philosophy. For his part, Wright saw his role in the party as one of humanizing Communist thought and bridge building between the party and the masses. Kinnamon cites Wright's own explanation of how he saw his role in the party: "The Communists, I felt, had over-simplified the experience of those whom they sought to lead. In their efforts to recruit masses,.. they had missed the meaning of the lives of the masses, they had conceived of people in too abstract a manner. I would try to put some of that meaning back. I would show Communists how common people felt, and I would tell common people of the self-sacrifice of Communists who strove for unity among them" (4). However, the party saw Wright's role differently. He continued to write and contribute articles to Communist publications, but they were often on topics which were not of Wright's choosing. Although Wright was becoming more and more disenchanted with the party's use of his time and talents, he was, nevertheless, elected to the national council of the League of American Writers in 1935 (5). This league was planned as a replacement for the John Reed clubs. Wright remained a supportive party member until he broke with Communism. By this time, Wright had moved to New York City where he met and became friends with members of the now defunct Harlem Renaissance: Langston Hughes and Ralph Ellison. Work on *Native Son* began during the late 30s.

According to Margaret Walker, a one-time personal friend of Wright's, *Native Son* was modeled after Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Wright's essay, "How Bigger Was Born" supports Walker's assertion. "As I wrote I followed, almost unconsciously, many principles of the novel which my reading of other novels of other writers had made me feel were necessary for the building of a well-constructed book" (6). The novel was extremely well received and was quickly turned into a play. Wright chafed under the prevailing theatre system which took away control of his own work. Important production decisions were made by producers and directors, not novelists. Soon a film version of the novel was produced with Wright starring as Bigger Thomas. The success of this film was dubious; it is only briefly mentioned in the critical literature.

Viewing the film version of *Native Son*: 1 week.

Native Son was almost immediately developed into a stage play and a movie was filmed. Wright played Bigger Thomas in this version which is very difficult to find. There is a 1986 re-make which is readily accessible in video rental stores. Preview the film and decide how you want to use it in class. One method is to show a part of a film after students have read and discussed the piece as literature. Teachers might show Fear,

Flight and Fate after students have read each section of the novel.

Students will be instructed to react to the movie and identify changes or differences between the novel text and the screenplay. In a carefully written essay, students should identify the changes and differences between the film and novel and suggest how these changes affect their appreciation, understanding and response to Bigger Thomas and his story. For evaluation, teachers may use an assignment specific rubric which is a variation on the rubric suggested earlier in the unit.

Viewing and Discussion Time: 1-2 weeks

A second film, discussion and activity concludes this unit on the anti-hero. The life and short film career of James Dean is a cinematic reflection of changes in the viewing tastes of American filmgoers. The popularity of Dean and his classic performance in *East of Eden* is a response to America's questioning of its traditional values. "On screen...and in life James Dean acted out the restlessness and rebellion that youth in the status quo fifties felt but could not express. His passionate and futile confrontations with authority stirred shock waves of empathy in millions of people who sensed that there was something rotten under the arrogant apathy of the Eisenhower era, something unnamably ominous about the McCarthy-Nixon inquisition" (7).

Youth culture existed well before the 50s; however, teenagers became a distinct group from adults in the 50s. A connection between youth culture and consumer culture developed. A distinct set of commodities aimed at children appeared; three such commodities are the teen film, teen clothing, and teen music. James Dean, blue jeans and Elvis Presley were marketed toward the young. James Dean made only three films during his career which ended in 1955 with a fatal one-car crash on a lonely, isolated road, and sadly his untimely death helped build the mystique which so often enlarges the memory of celebrity icons who meet untimely deaths.

Students will be surprised that the film version of *East of Eden* does not encompass the entire novel; only a tiny portion of the novel has been used for the film version. Elia Kazan directed *East of Eden*, a fact which is noteworthy because Kazan was called before the HUAC and testified against some of his Hollywood colleagues. His testimony permanently destroyed his previously close friendship with Arthur Miller. Indeed, Kazan and Miller have never spoken to each other since Kazan's testimony. Because of his cooperation, Kazan was not blacklisted and continued to work in films while others saw their careers destroyed or interrupted. Blacklisted writers, directors and others did not begin working again until the 60s.

East of Eden is John Steinbeck's re-telling of the Biblical story of Adam, Cain and Abel. It depicts the rivalry of two sons, Aron and Cal, for their father's love, a story which is told in a very small portion of the novel. It was the perfect vehicle for James Dean who was a rising matinee idol of the 50s. Dean's pouty, moody manner captured the essence of Steinbeck's troubled teen-ager. While the novel may not be a part of the required reading for an American Literature course, it would be an excellent choice for

supplemental reading or extra credit reading. To learn more about James Dean, the official James Dean web page will be an excellent starting point. Access it at the following address: <http://www.jamesdean.com> If your school has the capability, you could access this site using web television for an entire class presentation because there are links to a James gallery of photos, biography and other information about 50s matinee idols. If you want to conduct a final activity for this section of the unit, some useful web sites are jamesdeangallery.com and [schultzs.com/James Dean/index.html](http://schultzs.com/James%20Dean/index.html).

A final evaluation of the unit might include the following performance-based assessments. Students may select from this list or create a topic of their own on which to write their multi-source research paper at the end of the unit. A list of assessment topics follows. All projects require a written document which accompanies the oral presentation.

1. Prepare a photojournalistic essay to reflect a theme developed in *The Crucible* or *Native Son*.
2. Prepare a dramatic reading of selected Richard Wright poems which contain themes or concepts reflected in *Native Son*.
3. Read one of Richard Wright's short stories from *Uncle Tom's Children* and through an oral or written report indicate how it is similar to *Native Son*.
4. Using Yahoo, access United States Senate documents and read Robert C. Byrd's "The Senate - 1789-1989: Chapter 30 The McCarthy Era: 1947, and report your findings to the class.
5. For enrichment, read Ralph Ellison's short story "Flying Home." As additional background research the situation of the African-American man in the United States Armed Forces during World War II. Make an oral or written presentation to the class.

6. Research the Jim Crow laws and their effect on African-Americans. Search for parallels between your findings and the world of Bigger Thomas.
7. Select a key scene from *The Crucible* to be performed for the class. Be able to discuss your reasons for selecting the scene (This can be a small group project).
8. Research the film careers of one or all of these actors: James Dean, Marlon Brando and Paul Newman and discuss why the anti-hero fascinated the young audiences of the 1950s.
9. Pretend that you work for a real estate agency and your job is to promote the newly developed community of Salem, Massachusetts in 1640. Design an illustrated brochure which describes the community as an ideal place to live.
10. For those with an artistic flair, prepare a detailed mock drawing of Bigger Thomas' Chicago using details from the novel.
11. For those with an interest in the fine arts, prepare a presentation using any format or medium you deem appropriate to explore important or influential American visual artists, music, film or television programming during the 50s.
12. Research other periods which have produced mass hysteria or witch hunts of the type depicted in *The Crucible*. Give a talk to the class reflecting the significance of the period and relate your findings to the play. Suggested topics: The Julius and Ethel Rosenberg trial, the Alger Hiss Case, Naziism, or the Spanish Inquisition.
13. Research any writer, influential person or topic which was discussed during this unit with particular emphasis on why this person or topic is important to your understanding of the 1950s. A partial list follows:

Richard Nixon's role in the McCarthy Hearings

The assassination of John F. Kennedy and how or why it ended the 50s

The Hollywood Ten and their lawyer Marvin Gang

The Emmett Till Case

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the freedom movement

The internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II

The influence of the Cold War on film and television

Autobiographies of famous Americans: Jackie Robinson, Dorothy Dandridge, Paul Robeson, Josephine Baker, Elia Kazan, Richard Wright, James Dean, Arthur Miller, and others of the students' or teachers' own choosing.

14. Write a dialogue between a character from *The Crucible*, *The Front or Native Son* and a contemporary person. The dialogue should reflect what you have learned about culture, history, government, the character's beliefs, strengths and weaknesses of each representative person.
15. Imagine that you are John Proctor and that you have been keeping a secret diary since the day Betty Parris collapsed into her coma-like state. Write four entries--one the day Betty collapsed, one the night your wife Elizabeth was arrested, one the day you were arrested and one the night before your scheduled execution. Read the entries for the entire class.
16. Read John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* and suggest why director Elia Kazan chose to use a very small portion of the novel for his highly successful movie version starring James Dean.
17. Read a chapter from Victor Navasky's Naming Names entitled "The Reasons Why," a selection of first-person narratives by individuals who were called before the HUAC during the reign of Sen. McCarthy. Share with the class the content and tone of selected passages. How do these narratives increase your understanding of the 1950s?

Notes

- 1 Lecture, Chatham College, Laughlin Hall. April 4, 1999.
- 2 Wright, Richard. "Introduction: How Bigger Was Born" xvii.
- 3 Kinnamon, Kenneth. The Emergence of Richard Wright, 50-51
- 4 Kinnamon, 53
- 5 Kinnamon, 65
- 6 Wright, Richard. "Introduction: How Bigger Was Born" xxxi.
- 7 Herndon, Venable. James Dean 17

Teacher Reading List

- Alonso, Harriet Hyman. "Mayhem and Moderation: Women Peace Activists during the McCarthy Era." *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945 - 1960*. Ed. Joanne Meyerowitz. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994. 128 - 150.
- Bogle, Daniel. *Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography*. New York: Amistad Press, 1997.
- Brignano, Russell Carl. "Marxism, the Party, and a Negro Writer." *Richard Wright: An Introduction to the Man and His Works*. Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970. 50-86.
- Byrd, Robert C. "The Senate - 1789-1989: Chapter 30 The McCarthy Era: 1947 History, 09-01-1990." (1989)13 pg. Available: Online. Yahoo. 23 May 1999.
- Feldstein, Ruth. "I Wanted the World to See" Race Gender and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till." *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945 - 1960*. Ed. Joanne Meyerowitz. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994. 263 - 303.
- Felgar, Robert. *Richard Wright*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980.
- Hartmann, Susan M. "Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal." *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945 - 1960*. Ed. Joanne Meyerowitz. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994. 84 - 100.
- Herndon, Venable. *James Dean: A Short Life*. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974.
- Johnson, Barbara. "The Re(a)d and the Black." *Modern Critical Interpretations*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988. 115-123.
- Joyce, Joyce Anne. "The Tragic Hero." *Modern Critical Interpretations*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988. 67-87.
- Kinnamon, Kenneth. *The Emergence of Richard Wright: A Study in Literature and Society*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.
- Kunzel, Regina G. "White Neurosis, Black Pathology: Constructing Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy in the Wartime and Postwar United States." *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945 - 1960*. Ed. Joanne Meyerowitz. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994. 304 - 331.

- Meyerowitz, Joanne. "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946 - 1958." *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945 - 1960*. Ed. Joanne Meyerowitz. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994. 229 - 262.
- Navasky, Victor. *Naming Names*, New York: Penguin Books, 1982. 223-278.
- Rose, Lisle A. *The Cold War Comes to Main Street: America in 1950*. Lawrence Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1999.
- "SCORE--The Crucible--Activity 1. Chain of Events/Geometric Character Analysis." (DATE) 2 pg. Online. Internet. Available: sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/cruc/crucsg1.html 23 May 1999.
- "SCORE--The Crucible--Activity 2. Letter of Persuasion/Tribute to the Accused." (DATE) 2 pg. Online. Internet. Available: sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/cruc/crucsg2.html 23 May 1999.
- "SCORE--The Crucible--Activity 3. Poster Report." (DATE) 2 pg. Online. Internet. Available: sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/cruc/crucsg3.html 23 May 1999.
- Sitcom, Harvard. *The Struggle for Black Equality: 1954 - 1992*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993.
- The Crucible. Guide: A Teacher's Supplement*. Loan, Iowa: The Perfection Form Company. 1973.
- VanSpanckeren, Katherine. "Chapter 8. American Prose Since 1945: Realism and Experimentation." *Outline of American Literature* (DATE) n.pag. Online. Internet. Available: <http://www.usia.gov/products/pub/oal/oaltoc.htm> 23 May 1999.
- Walker, Margaret. *Richard Wright, Daemonic Genius: A Portrait of the Man/A Critical look at His Work*. New York: Warner Books, Inc. 1988.
- Watkins, Mel. *On the Real Side*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.