

## **Taking a Stand for High School Literacy**

By

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In Annie Dilliard's autobiography of her childhood in Pittsburgh, she tells the story of when throwing snowballs at passing cars and one motorist stopped his car, got out and gave chase to her group of rascals. She describes her red-alert reaction and the burst of adrenaline that whisked her and her fellow marksmen off into the alleys and backyards of their neighborhood. She narrates, with breathless detail, her redoubled efforts at escape when a look back showed the man in the long winter coat and business suit gaining on her and an accomplice. Dilliard and her cohort made snow tracks like footprints at a crime scene crisscrossing and doubled back, around the sides and backs of houses, through the hedges, up and down the lawns of Point Breeze, taking every short cut and narrow passage way through the neighborhood and still losing ground to their bloodhound pursuer. With rubber legs, pounding heart, burning lungs and reeling minds, finally the kids are grabbed by the man and the three -- the victim turned lawman and the two perps -- stagger and gasp and cough without a word. When his wind returned enough that he could begin his You stupid kids speech, Dilliard listened perfunctorily, but stood more in awe of the glory of the supreme effort she had given and the persistent, dogged and determined chase which he had won the day. She looked at that red-haired man with respect; she glorified him and called him her hero, for more than getting caught, Dilliard valued the passionate way that the man had given chase and never given up.

Such a story illustrates the principle tenets of taking a stand: Refusing to let pass a wrong that has been committed, and pursuing with passion, determination and courage a way to right that wrong or expose its injustice. Dilliard's story also raises the questions that allow us to examine the motivations of those who stand up and say with words and actions (like Peter Finch's character in the film "Network") "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it any more!" How many people passed through that gauntlet of snow and ice balls before finally one person stopped, got out of the car, and yelled, "Hey!" What prompted the man to leave his car door wide open and chase pell mell through the maze of streets, allies and yards? What drove his relentless hunt?

"If we don't stand for something, we may fall for anything", said Malcolm X, and he was talking about the importance of taking a stand. It is important for teenagers to understand why a person must, at some time in their life, square their shoulders and hold themselves high, in words and in deeds. Taking a stand has everything to do with recognizing right from wrong. It also has to do with stopping the wrong by standing up for the right. Many teens, however, may confuse taking a stand with simple rebellion, and this is an important differentiation to learn. When they are trying to find their own way, when it seems that the most important things are to be part of a group and against the status quo, more than ever are they vulnerable to a fall for something that has no substance, is wrong, or even evil.

Children need to hear adults say what is right. Just as importantly, they need to hear teenagers say what is wrong. They need to see examples of people of all ages acting courageously in the face of peer pressure and society norms and unjust laws. Knowing what another person endured and overcame by standing for a principle or for a fellow human can encourage and empower them to stand up for themselves to unkind words, mean spirited acts, or even inhumane policies.

What may seem the smallest of actions may turn entire lives around, and isn't teaching about changing lives one at a time? Some of the selections that would be taught in this unit could change a life. More important, students can change their own lives. This learning business we are in must help students to prove to themselves and to others that they can read, write, speak/listen/view and do research. The philosophy of this unit and my classroom generally is: What do you know? What can you do? How can you prove it?

### **What Do You Know?**

This is the part of the course that is traditionally teacher driven. I see it more as giving students a context for the literature and cultural documents that they read, see, talk about, and write about. It is where the English curriculum meets and crosses over into history, civics and social studies and where many opportunities exist for across the curriculum projects. The teacher here is more like a docent than a knowledge dispenser. I would hope to work with other people (librarian, social studies teachers) and the internet to guide students in the cultural context for the things they are learning.

To gain knowledge, students will read alone, out loud, and in the classroom a number of different texts, including The Catcher in the Rye, A Raisin in the Sun, The Crucible, selections from Coming of Age in Mississippi, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, and "Letter from Birmingham Jail." They will watch documentary footage of civil rights demonstrations and protests as well as a video production of a fictitious meeting between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Students will do some basic research to understand what it means to take the stand in a court trial, and what "taking the Fifth" means.

### **What Can You Do?**

Through the course of the unit, students will have many opportunities to meet district communication standards, and for producing evidence for New Standards Portfolio. They will read different kinds of texts: literature (such as Catcher, Raisin, and autobiographies), informational (reference sources, National Archive and Records Administration primary sources), and public documents ("Letter from Birmingham Jail"). They will write responses to the literature they read, as well as writing narrative accounts, a literary genre with the theme of Taking a Stand (poem, short story or a play), and a persuasive essay.

Students will also meet standards for listening/speaking/viewing through small group tasks (Taking a Stand and Raisin in the Sun role plays), presentations (persuasive speech for The Crucible), and making informed judgments about things they see (The Meeting, The Front and The Crucible).

### **How Can You Prove It?**

I believe in portfolios. They work across the curriculum, they are an authentic way of assessing student proficiencies, and they show evidence of meeting the standards in a way that requires students to be responsible for proving what they know and can do. This Taking a Stand unit will allow students to gather entries for many New Standards Portfolio exhibits (reading, writing, speaking/listening/viewing). In this unit, students will read five of the 25 books (1 million word equivalent) required by the New Standards Portfolio. They will read three of the four different types of text required by the Reading Exhibit. They will do three of the nine writing entries needed for the Writing part of the portfolio, and two of the four entries for the Speaking/Listening/Viewing exhibit I consider a student's portfolio to be 50% of their final exam grade, but I would like Pittsburgh Public Schools to use them as a graduation requirement, to be reviewed by a panel of disinterested teachers, administrators, parents and community representatives. Diploma candidates should have to present and defend their work to prove their qualifications. I know that portfolios work this way. Joe proved it to me.

### **Joe's Story**

#### *The Battle*

She came to advocate for her son's passage of English 3B; a course that he had taken and failed for the second time. He had cut class 16 times in the fourth quarter and had a failing mark as well. Joe failed the third nine weeks in much the same way. Now he would not graduate without going to summer school.

The conference began adversarially: the mother armed with Joe's incomplete portfolio, failure notice, and Navy enlistment orders in hand; the eleventh grade academic counselor holding Joe's transcript, and myself with the holy Grade Book, loaded with slashes for unexcused absences and red letter E's for failing performance. The mother put the blame on every teacher Joe had, every school Joe had ever attended, every student that Joe had ever had a fight with.

"We didn't want Joe to come up to Carrick, anyway", she fired. "We wanted him at Oliver, but they kicked him out. Yinz said he had to come here, but Joey couldn't take the computer classes that he wanted. That's why we got him into Brashear, but that damn principal never liked Joe and gave him all shop and vo-tech classes."

"Mrs. Stevens, this is the second time Joe has failed this course," I explained and pushed the grade book between us to show her the blanks and nulls in her son's course

work. "He didn't even turn in his portfolio, which was half of his final exam grade. He knew he was failing and that he needed an 'A' on the final to have any chance of passing."

"Nobody told me he was failing. Alls I get is this letter yesterday sayin' that Joe can't graduate. Now hows I 'sposed to do something about it if I don't hear about it until he's already failed?"

"I sent a poor work notice home in the mail," I shot back.

"You think Joe would have let me see that? He probably intercepted it."

"I gave Joe a grade report every three weeks that he was to take home and have you sign. I can tell from the grade book that he never did that. Look, here's one of the grade reports, unsigned, in his portfolio. He never told you about his work in school?" I was building a good defense, but I didn't want to add to the pile of blame that was filling the conference. I refrained from asking Mrs. Stevens why she hadn't asked Joe how he was doing in school, why she hadn't called school or me to find out herself. I was hiding.

"Why didn't I get a call to tell me he was failing? If I had known this earlier, I could have done something. Joe's dad would have kicked his ass if he knew he was failing. You people never even let me know."

Direct hit. I had not called home. Despite my principal's requirement to make one phone call home each day, whether it be for praise or poor performance. In the nine weeks that I had Joe in class, I never once called his parents. I had not been a responsible teacher. Though Joe failed the third nine weeks of English 3B in another teacher's classroom and then requested another classroom because of a conflict with a student there, though I had written to Joe's first semester teacher at Brashear to obtain (but never received) the work he had done there, though I was in class every day prepared to teach Joe and 90 other students, offering to help him on the days he did show up, I was at fault.

"When does Joe start taking responsibility for what has happened?" the counselor stepped in. Reinforcements.

"Alls I know is that if Joe don't ship out to boot camp on July 7 he ain't gonna make it to aeronautics school. His recruiter has it all arranged," said his mother. "Give him a D- and we'll be done with it."

"I can't give him a D-, Mrs. Stevens. In the last nine weeks he earned a failing grade. He failed the third nine weeks in Mr. Spokes' class, too."

"What is it with you people? You think that D means anything? You think he'd be the first one to pass for just sittin' in class? I graduated from this high school reading on a fifth grade level. My son's a lot smarter than that. You should see his scores on the ASMAT test. Give him a D. Please."

The battle turned on the intonation of that one word of civility and need. I did not think that I would falter. I was standing hard and fast, with reason and record to hold me up. Suddenly, I realized the power that I held. This woman came to beg for her son, and the twisted lines of anguish in her brow, the tired and teary eyes that met mine, showed a parent desperate for what seemed to be a last chance to save her son.

“What do I have to do?” she asked. Then she stated, “I’ll pay you whatever you want.”

The counselor and I looked at each other in disbelief.

### **The Standard Line**

We laughed about it later. My principal told the counselor and me to write down a statement about what happened in the meeting with Joe’s mother. We three discussed the absurdity of the situation, and my principal told me since I had sent a poor work notice home I was covered. Given the record there was every justification for giving Joe an E.

“In fact,” the principal said, “If he did pass, I would want to know why.”

A feeling gnawed at me; a thought that I was not yet done with Joe. In a moment of weakness, I had told his mother that Joe could pass if he got an 'A' on his portfolio. She was ready to do it for Joe right there and then, fifth grade education and all, but I said no to that. Joe would have to do it himself. I did not see any way that he could ace the portfolio given that he had completed very little work from my class, or his other English teachers this year.

But it was possible. According to the district’s grading policy, a teacher has the option of passing a student with a D minus if the student gets an 'A' on the final, even if they failed the third and fourth quarters. Joe had already scored 40 out of 50 on the literature test part of the final exam. Joe could get an 'A' on the final and pass the class if he scored 50/50 on the portfolio. My principal did not believe me until I showed him the Pittsburgh Public School grading policy in my grade book.

Joe and his dad were waiting for me at 7:30 a.m. when I came to school the next day, the final student day of the school year. He had a draft of the reflective essay required by the portfolio in his hand. I wouldn’t let Mr. Steven’s stay in the room with Joe, but he did hear me explain to his son that Joe needed to present his portfolio to me by noon and that it must be perfect to pass the class. His dad promised to stay close by, to take the whole day off work if necessary to get Joe “graduated.”

“You better do good, boy, or I’ll kick your ass” the father growled lowly to his son as he left the room.

“That’s some motivation,” Joe quipped and sat down to begin reading through the New Standards Portfolio packet and his folder of work. The packet had more than 50 pages. Joe’s folder had one thing in it: a monologue he wrote for Walter Younger as a sequel to Lorraine Hansberry’s play A Raisin in the Sun.

Through the remainder of the day, Joe and I worked in that room. I graded portfolios from all of my other students, and Joe agonized over the portfolio requirements. Occasionally I would help Joe to understand the entry slips and answer his questions about the genres of reading and writing we had done. I urged him to visit his other teachers in the building to collect any and every piece of work he did in their classes. He came back with a presentation that he collaborated on. Another teacher did not have any of Joe's work, but helped him write portfolio entry slips for pieces of reading and writing that they both knew Joe had done. He brought back a short piece of informational writing about an artist that he had researched in his drawing class. Joe wrote from memory a book report he had done on Gordon Parks' autobiography A Choice of Weapons, and tried to document all the reading he had done during the school year. I sent him to the library to look up bibliographic information on the titles he recalled, and told him to write a paragraph summarizing or responding to each book. I even made a phone call to his English teacher at the school he attended the first semester to obtain work he had done there. Not much to obtain, and what she did have, the teacher had just thrown away as she cleaned out her files. She said she never received my request for Joe's file. She talked to Joe on the phone as well and wished him good luck.

After that phone call, Joe looked defeated.

"You just don't have enough evidence to make this a portfolio that exceeds the standard with honor," I said to Joe as I showed him the portfolio rubric. "Why don't you just defer your basic training? Pass the class in summer school and you'll be back on track in two months. It's not the end of the world, Joe."

"I can't...I won't...do that," Joe looked at me with a reddened and tightened face. "You don't understand; I've got to get out of here. If I don't go to basic training on July 11, I'm gone. I'll fill up my car with gas, and just drive somewhere. I don't know what I'll do, where I'll go. But, I can't stay here any more..."

Joe was looking straight at me with tears dropping from his cheeks. He wiped his face with his shirt sleeve and told me that he wanted to go to aeronautics school, that he could go to college through the Navy, that he was drowning in a whirlpool of meanness, apathy and ignorance that was swirling through his 'hood. I believed that if he didn't get out, he might not get out alive. "So are you going to give up your dream?" I asked. "Will you dry up like a raisin in the sun? You going to fester like a sore and then run? Stink like rotten meat? Are you going to sag like a heavy load? Will you explode?"

Joe was quiet, but making eye contact. His eyes clearly showed that he got the metaphor in Langston Hughes' poem that prefaces "A Raisin in the Sun." He was thinking about his dream and his reaction to its deferment.

"I know I screwed up. I should have been in class. I spent too much time on my damn car instead of doing my homework. But it's not all my fault. Teachers losing my work—". He stopped, thinking that he did not want to go there. He went back to his desk and resumed his task.

About 12:30, Joe asked me to “look over” his reflective essay before he made a “good copy.” I told him that I could not do that, that this was a test, and he would have to reread it, revise it according to the requirements listed on the entry slip, and proofread it himself.

He was stunned, but went back to his desk and worked on his essay some more.

## **Outcome**

Joe walked to my desk at 1:15 p.m. with his thin portfolio in his hand and his dad sitting across the room.

“I guess I’m done,” Joe said with resignation. He knew, and I knew that his portfolio wasn’t complete, and that he had nothing more to complete it with. He stood at my desk as I leafed through the folder of his work. I was very conscious of Joe’s father in the room, and the awesome responsibility I felt then. I read Joe’s essay, which was really just a review of the portfolio pieces he had in his folder. It didn’t do what I had hoped it would; that is, give me overwhelming evidence that Joe could write an engaging essay with well documented examples of the kinds of reading, writing, speaking and listening that Joe could do. I had hoped the essay would be all the proof I needed to certify that Joe met the district standards; that I could justify to my principal my decision to pass Joe.

What was I thinking? How could I justify passing him with little or no evidence that he was qualified to graduate? What would happen to Joe if he didn’t graduate? What kind of scene would transpire when his dad heard me say “You did not pass.” How could his other teachers have passed Joe, and why was I the one who had to make this decision? I barely had Joe in my classroom for a semester, and now I am responsible for determining whether his life turns in a positive direction or spirals to hell? I really did not know which way to go. Was I going to stand up for the district’s standards, even if the district had not really done a good job by Joe? Could I take a stand on behalf of this child and provide him the chance to learn from his high school experience and go onto a life of learning? What guarantee did I have that passing Joe would make any difference in his life? I had no answers to my questions, and either choice of my dilemma was shaky.

“What does this portfolio show about you, Joe?” I asked, looking for some way to know what to do. I really had not made a decision.

“I know it doesn’t look good, but I can read and write,” Joe defended.

“Tell about something that you read this year,” I said. “Tell me about this Gordon Parks book. What genre of literature was it?” I asked, using the language of the New Standards portfolio.

“What does ‘genre’ mean?” Joe asked. I was used to the question. Students asked it a million times over the course of the past weeks’ work on the portfolios.

“What kind or type of literature is it?”

“Well, it’s a book about his life. He wrote about the things he did. He got into fights when he was young; I think because he was black. He really got into trouble once because of it. There was a lot of racist people back then. Then he was in the military, then he worked on a train and played basketball and that’s how he got around the country. He started learnin’ about photography got really good at it. I think he won some awards for his pictures. He even made movies, and was a musician, too. The book is about his life. What’s that, a biography?”

“Well, no that’s –“

“Oh no, it’s autobiography. I liked this book.”

“Well, what do you make of the title A Choice of Weapons?”

Joe paused, and pondered. His interpretation came out straight and true.

“It means that he decided to fight with words and photographs and stuff. He didn’t like the way blacks were treated and decided to show how it was wrong.”

The significance of Joe’s understanding of what he had read and the connection of the book’s theme to his own life was clear to me, and to Joe, too. He was confident in his analysis of the other things he had read as well. Just as quickly was he able to point out the examples of his writing and explain what type of writing it was and how the pieces showed evidence of meeting the standards. He went through the other pieces in his folder then, explaining each one. Using the district’s rubric for evaluating portfolio’s, I saw that Joe’s nearly met, or met the standard. The problem was that to pass Joe, he needed to exceed the standard with honors. In words that Joe and his dad understood, he needed an ‘A’ on the portfolio. It was not an A portfolio. What would I, what could I say now?

“I’ll tell you what, Joe, this is really hard to do”, I began knowing in my mind that Joe could not pass, yet knowing in my heart that he should. “I feel like a judge at a trial who has to decide a case based on the evidence before him. That is the position I as a teacher am in. It does not seem fair that I have to be the one who decides whether you pass high school or not, but that’s where we are. I guess that’s why they pay me the big bucks.” We both smiled and that broke some of the tension. “Neither of us would be here today if you had done what you were supposed to do-- come to class and done the assignments. Most of the things that have happened in your high school career are your responsibility, and I look at the evidence in my grade book and in your portfolio, and I cannot find enough to certify that you should graduate.”

Joe was looking fearful. I did not even look at his dad. I was directing everything to Joe. His parents had clearly made Joe stand up to this, and had stood up for him in the process, but Joe had to take the rap, and if he were to gain from this schooling, he had to stand up for himself. I thought about Holden Caulfield, and I thought about The Catcher in the Rye as an allegory for Joe’s situation and many teenagers who do not take a stand. I always think that if teenagers could read and understand that they are Holden, they might not make the bad choices that Holden did. Although it is a book about coming of age, Catcher is also about Holden’s inability to stand up for the things and the people that are important. Holden’s collapse is the result of his unwillingness to face the music. Despite his fantasy about being the person that catches the children before they fall over the dangerous cliff, he did not stand up for James Castle and the boy gets beaten up.

Holden gets beaten too, but he tries to stand up for things and at times that are inappropriate (Goodman 3-16).

What could Joe learn from those who stood up to persecution and refused to confess to things that they knew were not true? What would Joe have learned about his tormentors and how to rise above their taunts from reading Arthur Miller's play The Crucible and studying the menace of McCarthyism as well as modern day recurrences of witch hunts?

Could Joe have learned from the righteousness and dedication of high school students who took a stand at the lunch counters of Greensboro N.C. despite ridicule, harassment, and bodily harm? Could Ann Moody's autobiography as well as selections from Martin Luther King and Malcolm X show Joe how things can change and what people do to change them? What could he learn about the American Dream from a family facing housing discrimination before laws protected against it?

If people like Joe are going to graduate from public high schools, and people like me are the ones to certify that Joe is literate, then we must have a curriculum that immerses students in reading, writing, speaking listening and viewing and helps them to master these aspects of literacy. We must also put onto students the responsibility for proving their literacy in order that they will graduate. This is the stand we must take.

## **Taking a Stand: We Didn't Start the Fire**

### **Lesson 1**

Use of Billy Joel's song "We Didn't Start the Fire" to introduce The Catcher in the Rye as a cultural document. The teacher will model the use of the internet as a research tool by looking up Catcher reference in the song lyric. Students do quick and dirty research to explore names and events in the song and to explain their relevance to the taking a stand theme. Examples: Harry Truman, H-Bomb, the Rosenbergs, Communist Bloc, Peyton Place, Little Rock, Sputnik.

PPS Communication standards to be met:

#1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.

### **Lesson 2**

Holden Caulfield takes a stand in a field of rye. Active reading, discussions, and reflection to understand the characters and conflicts, narrative structure of the novel, as well as the symbolism of the allegory.

PPS Communication standards to be met:

#2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.

#6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.

### **Lesson 3**

Holden's stand on hypocrisy, alienation, loss of innocence, or search for identity. Discussion of the major themes of the book, the symbolism and the meaning of the title.

Students learn to write or practice writing the analytical essay. by reading and discussing examples and by using the writing process.

PPS Communication standards to be met:

#3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

#4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas.

### **Taking a Stand: McCarthyism**

Many individuals and groups of people took a stand in the 1950's in America. The United States seemed to be drawing a line in the sand with the Truman Doctrine as a stand against the expansion of communism in Europe. The economic aid given to Greece and Turkey in 1947 helped to set in motion alliances both economic (the Marshall plan) and military (North American Treaty Organization) that intended to bar the Soviet Union from any further expansion westward, or southward. This stance hardened and fortified and impelled the U.S. into a protracted military war in Korea that was never won. In some ways it shows that taking a stand without any insight into what one is standing against can lead to decisions that retroactively are intended to justify the effort and risk associated with taking the stand in the first place. Effort is expended to demonize the opposition, to fortify the home turf, and eventually, to cultivate a "You are either with us or against us" mentality (Polenberg 86-126, Chafee 86-126).

Thus did the Cold War develop into a second Red Menace at home. No longer were the communists across the oceans, but in our own country. Demagogues like Joseph McCarthy used their positions of power for political gain, yet cast their coercion and scapegoating as taking a stand against the enemy within. It did not matter that McCarthy had little or no proof; convictions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg as well as Alger Hiss showed all that there were traitors in our ranks, and the cancer must be cut or else our way of life was doomed to collapse inward and fall into the godless pit of communism. So fearful were the people of the faceless Reds that McCarthy and his cronies reigned with terror. They ruined reputations, livelihoods and lives with the question "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist party?" Even being an acquaintance of someone who had been named as a communist or a sympathizer was enough to end a career. It was in the drama of committee hearings in the U.S. Congress that many whose names were impugned with red came to a moment where they

had to take a stand: many felt it was their civic duty to name names and tell all that they thought they knew about the Bolsheviks in the bathroom (Navasky 223-278). A few stood up for what they thought were principals of jurisprudence: innocent until proven guilty, a trial by a jury of peers, the right not to answer a question (Chafee 62-94).

## **Lesson 2: Taking The Stand**

Ideally, this part of the unit would be learned in a social studies classroom with cross curricular planning between the teachers. It could fit into a unit on the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, or other jurisprudence topics.

- A.** Students working in small groups would prepare a lesson to teach the class about their topic. In a jigsaw, students would learn about the Cold War, the Red Scare/McCarthyism, the Fifth Amendment, and Puritan society. Students use five days of class time to research and prepare a 20-minute lesson that gives an overview, then focuses on one main point about their topic. Audio/visual aids, a skit or dramatization of the main point, and a quiz to check for understanding would also be required. Teachers could model a lesson, and then assist each group in finding resources and understanding the information.
- B.** Students would be asked to dramatize a kangaroo court to illustrate the coercion of witnesses, using examples from the news of the day, their own experience, or a situation of their own invention.
- C.** Two videos would then be screened and discussed: The Fifties, a documentary, part of which covers McCarthy and the House Unamerican Activities Committee, and The Front, a film starring Woody Allen about the Hollywood blacklists.

PPS Communication standards supported:

- #1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
- #5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
- #8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.

## **Lesson 3: The Crucible**

Before reading Arthur Miller's play, students will read Stephen Vincent Benet's essay "We Aren't Superstitious" to understand the events of the Salem witch trials. The play will be read through the eyepiece of "Who is taking a stand? What are the reasons for the stance?" Examination of the phenomena of blaming, scapegoating, and naming names, as well as analyzing the power of the mob versus the rights of the accused. Attention will

be paid to Miller's character directions regarding McCarthyism and his motivations for writing this play in the 1950's.

Students will read aloud and enact sections of the play.

Students will write about major ideas in the plot: Why John Proctor confesses then recants; a comparison between the two ministers Parris and Hale; how the characters change over the course of the play; hypocrisy in The Crucible; and the meaning of the title of the play.

PPS Communication standards supported:

#2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.

#3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

#4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas.

#5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.

### **Taking a Stand: Civil Rights Movement**

Those who stood up to the bully strengthened and emboldened others who saw the 1950's as the right time to stand together for other civil rights: the right to vote, the pursuit of happiness, and the American Dream. Some, like Rosa Parks made their stand by sitting down. Others, like student activists in Greensboro, NC and other cities in the south, endured attempts at public humiliation and bodily harm while sitting-in at segregated public facilities to protest Jim Crow laws. Thousands disobeyed unjust laws and stood nonviolently as a way to change society. As the jails filled and the images of the brutality against them came through to the people in newspaper accounts, newsreels, and the new mass medium of television, public sentiment turned and government was forced to act to extend and protect the basic human and civil rights of all American citizens (Chafee 151-195).

Not everyone agreed with the nonviolent method for change, especially as the victories for civil rights became fewer, or the implementation of federal laws and Supreme Court decisions came very slowly. Although a figure of the 1960's, Malcolm X's ideas of militancy clearly had their roots in the awakening of the 1950's (Chapman, 332-347). His stand was against any person who would deny full and immediate rights for African Americans. Especially in his early years as a spokesperson for the Nation of Islam and even after he broke with the group's leader Elijah Mohammed, Malcolm X stood for unqualified recognition of and retribution for the wrongs done to African Americans, even to the point of armed defense (his famous "by any means necessary"

principle). He also called to task the black leaders of the civil rights movement for, as he saw it, standing by idly while black men and women were harassed, intimidated, tortured and murdered. There is some evidence in his later speeches and in his autobiography of his movement to the center, or the realization that social change required coalition building (Breitman 194-226). Malcolm X was murdered before he could meet in the middle with members of the movement, such as Martin Luther King or the student leaders of the sit down strikes.

#### **Lesson 4: Nonviolence**

Students will examine the belief system existent in those that stood up to unjust laws in the civil rights movement of the 1950s. After defining what civil rights are, students will read a chapter called “The Movement” from Ann Moody’s autobiography to see that people of their own age group lead some of the most important change in our country’s history by refusing to submit to unjust practices. (Sitkoff 61-87). Students will watch and discuss one installment called “Ain’t Scared of Your Jails” from the PBS video series Eyes On The Prize showing sit-ins and non-violent protests. Inevitably the question of “Why would they let others beat them without fighting back?” will be asked and this should provide an opening for study of nonviolent passive resistance. Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” will be read and discussed as the political justification for the civil rights movement.

#### **Lesson 5: By Any Means Necessary**

Selections from Black Voices and Malcolm X Speaks, should appeal to any students who do not buy the nonviolent line. There is, however, more to Malcolm X than just wearing an X hat and claiming him as a hero. Reading from his autobiography about his childhood, and then digging into his political philosophy will take some close reading and cooperation with other readers. The study will, however, allow a comparison between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King by viewing “The Meeting” a film about a fictional meeting between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.

Unit objectives and PPS communication standards to be met:

Use encouragement to work cooperatively in a group.

#3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

#6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.

Read a variety of texts for comprehension, such as “The Movement”, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” and selections from Malcolm X Speaks, and Black Voices

#2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.

Interpret and use metaphors.

Interpret a video production of The Meeting.

#5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.

Write an effective comparison/contrast essay.

#4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas.

#7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.

#8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.

### **Examples of student materials for Lessons 4-5**

#### *"The Meeting" journal entries*

Each entry must be at least 10 complete sentences (one page) long. Do all entries in your small brown journal.

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY #1**

#### **My dream for my community**

Explain your dream for the way the world should be. Go into some detail about the problems that people need to solve. Write also about the ways that you can begin to solve them.

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY #2**

#### **Taking a stand**

Write about when you had to stand up for someone or something. Write about what kind of stand you took (what did you do or say). Give as many details as you can about whom or what you were standing up for, and why you thought it was the time to take a stand.

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY #3**

#### **Forces**

Make a chart in your journal in which you list

at least ten items in each column:

Forces that keep people together

Forces that break people apart

#### **JOURNAL #4**

#### **Prediction**

After reading about Malcolm X's childhood experiences, what would you predict that **he** would say were the problems of the world today, and what would you predict **he** would say about how to go about solving them.

## **"Letter from Birmingham Jail" vocabulary**

Write the context sentence and the appropriate dictionary definition for each word.

negotiation (4)

oppress (9)

advocate (12)

segregation (12)

civil disobedience (15)

precipitate (19)

complacency (20)

pious (28)

irrelevant (28)

## **"Letter from Birmingham Jail" response sheet**

1. To whom is Dr. King writing this letter?
2. What are the four basic steps of Dr. King's nonviolent campaigns?
3. What is the purpose of King's direct action program?
4. Why does Dr. King say that African Americans could no longer wait for desegregation to happen?
5. Dr. King was criticized for breaking laws. What kind of laws did he say he broke and why did he break them?
6. To what does King compare "a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light"?
7. In the middle of what two forces of the Black American community did Dr. King put himself?
8. What, according to King, is a "more excellent" way of gaining the civil rights owed to Black people?
9. Why was Dr. King disappointed in the white Christian church?
10. Who does Dr. King say will someday be recognized as the real heroes?

## **Essay Quiz: Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"**

Directions: Use at least SIX of the nine vocabulary words correctly in an essay that explains Dr. King's dream, what problems needed to be solved to achieve his dream, and what he was willing to do to solve the problems. **DOUBLE SPACE YOUR ESSAY.**

**UNDERLINE EACH VOCABULARY WORD USED.** You may use different forms of the vocabulary words but beware that misspelled vocabulary words will be marked down.

negotiation

oppression

advocate

segregation

pious

precipitate

civil disobedience

irrelevant

complacent

## **Paragraph on Dr. King and The Dream**

Assignment: Use the writing process to write a paragraph on one of the three topics below.

1. Dr. King had a Dream, and I, too, have a Dream.
2. Do you think that Dr. King's Dream came true? What examples of the Dream can you see in effect today? What parts are still not real?
3. Using Dr. King's philosophy of judging others not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character, how should we choose friends, employers, and government officials?

Prewriting -- 10 points

Generate ideas with a list, a cluster, or freewriting.

Drafting -- 20 points

Organize your ideas into a paragraph on your topic. Double space your draft. Write on one side of paper only.

Revising -- 20 points

Read your paper aloud to a partner. Ask them these questions, and write down their answers on your draft:

What is the topic of this paragraph?

What examples from Dr. King's writing ("I Have a Dream," and "Letter from a Birmingham Jail") are used to explain the topic?

How could I improve one part of my paragraph? (not including spelling and punctuation)

Now read your paragraph to yourself. Decide the changes that you can make, and write them in the spaces and margins of your draft. Correct spelling and mechanical errors, and make a clean ink copy.

Turn in all prewriting and drafts.

## **Autobiography of Malcolm X.**

Group assignment: define terms. Write the context sentence and your understanding of their meaning.

Marcus Garvey (p. 333)

intuition (334)

balking (336)

incensed (338)

psychological deterioration (339)

Mosaic dietary laws (341)

hypocrisy (346)

Individual assignment: Write complete sentence answers to each question.  
(20 points; +10 bonus if all in group have homework completed)

1. Where did the family originally live?
2. Who was Marcus Garvey and why was he so controversial?
3. What was the mother's vision?
4. How was the father killed? What were the official and suspected explanations?
5. What happened to the insurance money?
6. How did the family survive economically?
7. Explain the reasons for the conflict between the mother and the Welfare people.
8. Why was 1934 the worst year for the family?
9. Give examples of the types of food the family ate during this time.
10. Explain the significance of "Not to Be Sold."
11. Who were the Gohannas and what was their significance in the story?
12. What kinds of trouble did the author get into as a child?
13. What lesson did he learn about gambling?
14. What did the family learn from the Seventh-Day Adventists?
15. Why did the Welfare people first label the mother as "crazy"?
16. Why was the mother jilted by the big black man from Lansing?
17. Explain the process of degeneration in the mother's mental state.
18. Where did all the children go when their mother was hospitalized?
19. What was the author's life like with the Gohannas?
20. As the author sees it, what was the biggest impact of the welfare department?

## Malcolm X jigsaw exercise

Expert group 1 The Autobiography of Malcolm X -- Chap. 15 (p 364-371, 380-382)

Tasks for all expert groups:

Note the date and the audience of the comment.

Write down one quotation from the writing that seems significant.

Summarize the main idea(s) from the passage.

Explain how this fits in with what you already know.

Expert group 2 reads from Malcolm X Speaks

“Foreward”

"A Declaration of Independence" (p. 18-22)

"On Racism" (p. 195-196)

"His Own Mouth, His Own Mind" (p. 225-226)

Tasks for all expert groups:

Note the date and the audience of the comment.

Write down one quotation from the writing that seems significant.

Summarize the main idea(s) from the passage.

Explain how this fits in with what you already know.

Expert group 3 reads from Malcolm X Speaks

"Intermarriage and a Black State" (p. 196-197)

"The Man You Think You Are" (p. 197-198)

"How to Organize the People" (p. 198)

"Advice to a Nonviolent Heckler" (p. 208)

Tasks for all expert groups:

Note the date and the audience of the comment.

Write down one quotation from the writing that seems significant.

Summarize the main idea(s) from the passage.

Explain how this fits in with what you already know.

Expert group 4 reads from Malcolm X Speaks

"On Black Nationalism" (p. 212-213)

"The American Ambassador" (p. 213-214)

"The Role of Young People" (p. 220-222)

"Actions Worthy of Support" (p. 223-224)

Tasks for all expert groups:

Note the date and the audience of the comment.

Write down one quotation from the writing that seems significant.

Summarize the main idea(s) from the passage.

Explain how this fits in with what you already know.

### **Group written and oral quiz**

A. Choose roles for your group:

READER-- reads questions aloud to group.

WRITER-- writes group members names and jobs and group's answers to questions, including quotations.

TEXTMASTER(S)-- Finds and reports quotations from MX texts to support each of group's answers.

REPORTER-- Makes oral report of group's work.

B. Read, discuss, and write complete sentence answers to the three questions. You must provide quotations (Text name, page and paragraph numbers) from the MX texts to support your answers.

1. By definition an autobiography is a person's own life story told by them because they believe their life to be an important example for other people. What is Malcolm X's life an example of? Is it important? Why?
2. "The night fell over the earthly remains of El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, who had been called Malcolm X; who had been called Malcolm Little, who had been called "Big Red" and "Satan" and "Homeboy" and other names..." -- from the Epilogue of The Autobiography of Malcolm X.

What significance do you find in changes that Malcolm X went through in his life?

What do you believe about a person that goes through such changes?

3. What relevance do you find for your own lives in Malcolm X's words and ideas?

### **Paragraph on Malcolm X**

READ your notes about Malcolm X from his childhood to his adult years from your study guides and the expert group reports.

THINK On your notes, mark with a star (\*) the things that you think are significant or important, especially things about Malcolm X's ideas on the causes and consequences of racism.

WRITE a paragraph on one of the three topics.

Explain Malcolm X's ideas on the causes and consequences of racism in America. Use his words to help explain.

Explain how Malcolm X's attitudes about separation of the races changed over the course of his life. Use his words to help explain.

Explain what Malcolm X advocated African Americans should do to get the civil and economic rights that are guaranteed them by the Constitution. Use his words to help explain.

Do some prewriting (list, cluster, freewriting) (10 points).

Write a draft. Double space. Write on one side of the paper only (20 points).

Use a peer editor to read your paragraph and ask them these questions:

What is the topic of my paragraph?

Which of Malcolm X's words are used to explain the topic?  
How could I improve one part of my paragraph? (not including spelling and punctuation)  
Revise (make changes right on your draft) and make an ink copy to turn in with your draft and prewriting (20 points).

### **Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X comparison/contrast essay**

Write a multiparagraph composition that compares and contrasts Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.

Point out the most important similarities and differences between the two men.

Use three (3) quotations from MX and three (3) quotations from MLK as support for your composition.

Make a conclusion whether there are more similarities or more differences between the two. Use the comparison and contrast vocabulary.

#### **EXTRA CREDIT**

Use and explain an original metaphor in your essay to represent Dr. King and Mr. X (20 points).

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Prewriting
  - A. List the similarities and differences of MLK and MX.
  - B. List three (3) quotations from MLK and three (3) from MX to show the similarities and differences.
2. Choose the most important similarities and differences and decide how you will organize your essay (make an outline).
3. Draft your essay.
4. Revise your composition with the aid of a peer editor. Revise for content and proofread for errors.
5. Turn in your prewriting, your drafts and revisions, your peer editor's responses, and an ink copy of your essay.

#### **Comparison/Contrast essay -- Peer response**

Read your draft essay to another student. Have them sign their name on this checklist to show they helped you revise your paper. Ask them these questions and write down their responses:

1. What is the thesis statement of my essay?
2. Is it clear whether I am comparing or contrasting MX and MLK?
3. EXTRA credit. Do I use metaphors in my introduction and throughout my paragraph to compare MLK and MX to something?
4. (If comparing MLK and MX) What three points of similarity does my essay show between MLK and MX?

(If contrasting MLK and MX) What three points of difference does my essay show between MLK and MX?

5. Do I use three quotes from each of the men to show how they are the same or different?
6. Do I explain the quotations?
7. Does my essay conclude with a restatement of how MLK and MX were alike or different?

Make changes to your draft. Write the revisions **RIGHT ON THE FIRST DRAFT** (in the margins, between the lines).

### **Lesson 6: A Raisin in the Sun**

Lorraine Hansberry's play may have been born from her own family's housing discrimination suit, but the theme of dreams and what people will do to realize them can appeal to all of us. By role playing the family's dilemma before reading, then reading, discussing and responding in a journal to the plot, characters and symbolism of the play, students are able to answer not only Langston Hughes poetic question that gives the drama its name ("What happens to a dream deferred?"), but also will recognize the stand taken by each of the characters in the drama.

### **Lesson 7: Press conference**

As a culminating activity and a way of celebrating the work and learning of the unit, students will get to role-play a press conference with characters and figures from the literature they have studied. Volunteers will be chosen to play the parts of the characters from the plays, stories, films, and nonfiction that we read. These actors must be chosen carefully to get willing and motivated persons. They will dress and play the part of their character for the duration of the press conference by making an opening statement to the reporters in as authentic a way as possible. These actors should wear some costume that will help them get into the part and identify them for the reporters.

The reporters will prepare questions for each of the panel and get credentials for the press conference. The reporters will stand and ask their questions of the panel, who will respond in character, based on what students have learned.

The press conference will be videotaped, and students will be able to watch the proceedings.

Press release/Request for coverage

On Wednesday, January \_\_\_\_\_, characters from various American literary works such as Catcher in the Rye, The Crucible, The Front, A Raisin In the Sun, "The Movement," "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and Malcolm X Speaks will meet the press in Room 337 of Carrick High School.

The protagonists of the novels, films, and short stories, will give first person perspectives on their stories and take questions from the media. Holden Caulfield, John Proctor, Abigail Williams, Lena Younger, Walter Younger, Beneatha Younger, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X are expected to be present.

All reporters must file their questions with their editor by \_\_\_\_\_. The requirements for questions are:

1. Questions must be written legibly and in complete sentences.
2. Reporters must have five (5) questions for each of the six (6) characters. (30 points)
3. Reporters must indicate in writing who the question is intended for.
4. Reporters must make specific reference to the text in the question, by referring to the page number, the chapter, or by describing the scene in question.

Please indicate the name of your newspaper or television station on your question sheet. Only reporters with approved credentials will be allowed to speak at the press conference.

Sample of Reporters' questions for Holden Caulfield

What went through your mind when you were hiding in Phoebe's closet?

Why did you call your brother D.B. a prostitute?

Why do you insult people and lie right to their face?

## **Opportunity**

What can be gained by studying American literature and history together in the way outlined in this unit? Students should be able to meet many district standards for communication, as well as produce artifacts for their New Standards portfolio. They should become more self directed in their learning, and confident in their ability to handle complex and challenging material. Teachers, as well, should gain confidence and be able to work in a collegial fashion across disciplines to enhance and broaden their own learning and the life-long learning of their students.

This unit is not an end, nor is it complete. It could be added to and changed even as it was being taught. In some ways it is sequential, but it is open enough that pieces could be rearranged. It could take as little as nine weeks or as much as a semester of class time to do, and teachers should not feel constrained by time to “cover the material.” It is better to do more with less, and strive for quality.

## **Joe's graduation**

Joe had taken the stand for himself and his literacy that hot and sweaty day back in June, when other students had gone off to their summer vacations. He struggled with assessing what he knew and what he could do, and found out that when he set himself to the task, he could read, write, speak and listen in different ways and for different purposes. He had some people there to help him, propping him up, both with encouragement, harsh though it seemed to him at the time, and with rewards for his effort.

“I go back and forth, Joe,” I said to the student who had taken up my entire day. “On the one hand, you haven’t met the standards for graduation. This is entirely your fault. On the other hand, your work here today and our conversations about your learning show me that you do read and write and speak and listen in all the ways required by the literacy portfolio. Should you have to learn the lesson of failing to succeed in your life?”

“Mr. Dropcho, I already know about failing. I want to do something else, something better. That’s why I want to get out of here. I want to go to aeronautics school.”

Now I felt my heart rising up into my throat, and into my eyes “Then here is what you must do.” I blinked a few times as I spoke again. The words being exchanged, and the feeling that what I was doing at this moment could make the difference in this person’s life were making me cry. “You must graduate, and you will. By the power invested in me by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I can certify that you have earned an 'A' on your final exam which allows me to pass you with a D for English 3B, and therefore, you have met the qualifications for graduation.”

The smiles were audible, and we all suddenly felt lighter and free.

“Thanks, Mr. Dropcho...”

“But there is more that you have to do, Joe. I am going out on a limb for you. I will have to justify to my principal why I passed you, and I will have to live with myself, too. So you have to promise me that you will continue learning.”

“Okay, I promise.”

“You have to get better as a reader and a writer and a speaker and listener. You have to promise me that you will read every day, even if what you read is the newspaper, a magazine, an owner's manual, a textbook for your class, or a novel that you get out of the library. You have to read more and learn to read better.”

“Okay, I will.”

“And you have to get better as a writer. You have to practice writing every day, even if the writing that you do is a letter to your parents.” Joe nodded his assent. I hoped that he was realizing that high school was a beginning, and that what lay before him was a lot harder than what he was doing now. He was looking at me intently. “And you can come back here in the future and talk to me about what you have made of yourself, maybe talk to my students about what you have done. And if I were one of the people that you would like to write to, I would feel honored and surely would write back.” I handed him his portfolio and told him that he should keep it.

“Thanks...thanks for this chance,” Joe broke through. “I’ll do it.”

We shook hands, Joe and I, Joe’s father and I, and said our goodbyes and good lucks. When he walked out I had no way to know whether he would keep his promises, or if I would hear from him again, or if what I had done was the right thing. But, I knew that I had taken a stand, both for the district’s literacy standards, and for Joe.

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