

African American History in the Language Arts Curriculum

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Overview

The purpose of this unit is to provide middle school students with an understanding of accurate African-American history in order to better analyze and interpret African-American literature. History, beginning with Africa and slavery, will be taught along side literature.

Although this unit is written for use in the middle school level, it can be adapted for different grade levels. It can also be used in any setting whether urban or rural, and across curriculum levels. In this curriculum poetry, informational texts, and the anthology called African American Literature, which has been approved for use at Frick International Studies Academy, will be used. Teachers who wish to enrich their existing Language Arts or Reading curriculum by incorporating African American history and literature would be interested in using this unit.

Rationale

According to the U.S. Census, as of 2000, almost one third of the population is non-white. African-Americans are no longer the numerical minority in the United States, yet our country is still striving to overcome racism and prejudice. Even if a school population is racially homogeneous, students need to develop understanding and acceptance for other cultures. Moreover, parents and educators know that education is the key to moving toward understanding and compassion for others. As the U.S. continues to try to improve racial relations and overcome prejudice, it is therefore even more important to use curriculum that is representative of many cultures. Over half of the population in my school is in fact, African-American. This unit will be shared with my 7th Grade students in an urban school setting. There is also a small ESL (English as a Second Language) population, with children from all over the world.

How many of the students that you teach know a lot about African-American history? Are you unsatisfied with the lack of American-History that is being taught in your current curriculum? Perhaps you are a teacher who is looking to incorporate African-American history and literature into your curriculum or move from teaching about basic African-American history during the month of February. Whether teaching Language Arts, Math, Science, or Social Studies, this unit can easily be adapted, modified, and shared across content areas.

Many times African-American history is not taught as part of the Language Arts classes per se, but merely talked about in order to build background for reading literature. This unit was developed to teach an African-American literature unit while also teaching a more thorough American history from an African-American perspective. For example, if students analyze the importance of the South in African-American culture, they will better understand the many

connections about the South made in and between specific works. Children naturally question their world and everything around them. Teachers of elementary school or high school will find students eager to question, evaluate, and apply knowledge to their reading and understanding of literature and other texts used in this unit. Teaching African-American history along with literature will also give respect and further validation for the work, and help to foster healthy dialogue among students.

Educators and administrators in the Pittsburgh Public schools believe that it is crucial to provide all students with a curriculum that is rich with representation of all cultures. English and Language Arts teachers, most likely believe that students should be exposed to literature that exemplifies and follows different time periods and social and political movements, so that they can make connections between literature and history. As a Language Arts teacher myself, I believe curriculum should include true and accurate history, providing important information from which to interpret and analyze literature. Teaching African-American history in Language Arts will help students to build meaning as they think critically. This curriculum unit will provide that base for students, as they will be reading rich literature while synthesizing history.

Many students are exposed only to basic history that is often repeated during schooling. It is very common for example, for students to know merely the names and contributions of famous African Americans. Some children are only given a part of “the story” during history lessons when there has been history that is given with missing or inaccurate information, (Davis X). Students are frustrated when they later learn that they were given missing pieces. Now students will learn information that they may have not known before. It is also not common for Americans to know that African kings used other Africans with whom to trade for goods overseas. Most students are not aware that president Lincoln did not readily sign the Emancipation Proclamation, and did not completely abolish slavery (Packard 38), as many people today believe. These pieces of historical information, for example, will give teachers and students the opportunity to have the necessary dialogue about what one group of people can do to those of their own culture, and about how history was recorded and taught. They can also make connections about promoting unity and not greed.

Events such as slaves jumping from slave ships to their deaths, and slaves wearing iron muzzles while working daily jobs, (Boyd 27-28) are also not common knowledge. Students will learn about the great lengths that slave masters went to torturing slaves who did not obey orders, such as making devices to hold them in captivity, (Boyd 63). They will also find out how our own president Eisenhower’s administration may have deliberately limited the provisions in the Brown V. board of Education, (Borstelmann, 93). In this unit students will be able to explore African American history from the point of view of African Americans who lived through history. Students will finally be able to judge for themselves about this history as

Young students especially, are often not given the opportunity to question history and even discuss cause and effect relationships in history. If students are taught African American history beginning with slavery and in a chronological order they would also better understand the many complex social issues involved in peoples’ lives. For instance, young students do not know that Africans long ago did not even know that that white Europeans existed, and that African governments had their own systems which were simple and relied heavily on family and

their own African history, (Boyd 23). Indeed, history taught with true facts, is important. Students then can be challenged further to analyze literature while making those necessary connections to history. In an on-line publication, Kathryn L. Walbert, Ph.D. of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Oral History Program says that, "Students may have to grapple with a contradiction between what their book says about an event and what their interviewee reports, finding ways of explaining the differences and deciding which account they find more credible or persuasive." (<http://sohp.unc.edu/scholarship/walbert/>).

The African American Literature anthology contains twelve units. One can use all twelve of the units in this curriculum, I will be using Units 1 to 5 to teach a few pieces from each. Although an anthology is selected as the base for this unit, any teacher can use it as a guide for which to develop his or her lessons. In each unit there is an introductory section on African American history. Following each section are literature selections, which were written during and exemplify those historical time periods and social and political movements. The book is much like a history book and an anthology built into one. Time lines of important social and political events in African American history are located throughout the anthology to help focus and guide students. Within the book are examples of many genres, including essays, short stories, plays, and poetry, and fits very well into any existing Reading and Language Arts curriculum. Writing assignments in particular, can become part of students' portfolios, an important component of the Pittsburgh Board of Education's plan.

Because the African American Literature anthology covers such a broad scope and sequence, I have selected five of the units in the book to show how this anthology can be used. While taking students through a timeline of major events, students will work through units One through Five. Ideally, teachers can use this unit from start to finish, again by using a timeline as a guide for teaching history. I will use other books along with this anthology to teach biographical information, history, and provide other pieces of literature. These books are listed in the Annotated Bibliography/Resources section at the end of this unit.

Students will need to use a variety of skills while completing lessons and activities in this unit. These skills are necessary in order to successfully meet the objectives and Communication Standards used by the Pittsburgh Board of Education. One Standard is being able to give oral presentations and express oneself orally. Indeed students will need to be able to participate in oral discussions. Children who are uncomfortable speaking in large groups will have the opportunity to speak either in small groups or contribute to discussions using writing.

Another standard that will be met is the use of technology. Students will need to be able to use computer technology as they research and type writing assignments. They will need to use skills necessary to connect to the Internet and computer software such as Microsoft Encarta. While utilizing these technologies, students will also need skills in order to recognize complex messages and differentiate between propaganda, biases, and stereotypes. These skills will fulfill yet another Communication Standard.

There are many other skills that students will need to be able to use in order to pass the assessments given by the state. Indeed while doing this unit, students will be given practice for these assessments such as the New Standards Reference Exam, as it too, requires these same

skills of students. Some of these skills required in this unit are being able to define and use vocabulary appropriately as they read. They will also need skills such as interpreting authors' point of view, analysis, and reading comprehension, as well as being able to apply knowledge and experience to other texts and ideas. These behavioral objectives will be more easily attainable with the use of strategies such as "Syllasearch," "Questioning the Author," and "Accountable Talk" adopted by the district. These techniques used by the Literacy Plus team, were designed in order to help students with reading fluency, understanding meaning, and fostering critical thinking respectively.

Finally, students will need to apply a variety of writing skills in this unit. Many activities in this unit involve writing assignments that can be used as portfolio pieces. Students must use language mechanics proficiently such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in accordance to the Communication Standards. Moreover, students must use transitional words for organization, and show evidence of responding to questions and writing prompts given by the teacher. Again, students will be given practice for the state assessments that test for writing proficiency.

Objectives

Each unit in the anthology starts with introductions about African American history. Also at the beginning of each selection is a "Before You Read" section to help teachers and students connect prior knowledge and experiences in order to build background for the reading. A short biographical piece precedes the selection as well. Teachers can use the suggested books that contain more biographical information about each author.

At the end of each reading selection important literary elements are defined such as internal and external conflict, point of view, flashback, and foreshadowing. At this time the units also provide writing opportunities for students. For example, there is a teacher-friendly "Responding to the Selection" section with comprehension and open-ended questions for discussion. A "Unit Review" follows each unit where teachers can take the opportunity to begin a culminating activity or larger assessment.

The first unit in the anthology helps to motivate students and encourage them to contribute to discussions about how they feel about African American history and how it was recorded. They will be able to use prior knowledge and experiences as they discuss the importance of teaching true history and acknowledging that history has often been recorded from the point of view of different people. In addition, the first unit gives an introduction to life in the South, an important element in understanding history and struggles of African Americans. The unit begins with a large map of the United States that contains lists of names of important events, African slaves, and African Americans and then a map of Africa. Students will want to discuss how the map gives a visual picture of just how much African American history has been recorded and left unknown to many US citizens. They will also identify some important traditions in African countries such as dance and music and how it connects with African American customs today.

Later, students will then read a selection called “The Revolt of the Evil Fairies” by Ted Poston. This short story is about a southern town dealing with racial prejudice before the Civil Rights Movement. Next, is an excerpt from Maya Angelou’s I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, describing the part of her childhood when she was sent south to live with her grandmother. Indeed these selections give a sensible starting point to begin discussing how history is tied into important social issues of a people particularly African Americans. Also at this time teachers can use other works such as And Still I Rise by Maya Angelou and Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 189-2000 by Adam Fairclough to help supplement the timeline and stimulate interest. These additional books are listed in the Bibliography.

Unit Two introduces how stories were told in the motherland, Africa. Students will learn about oral storytelling, early writing, and African folktales. The teacher will introduce some African proverbs, and the selections “Wulbari the Creator” by Virginia Hamilton, and “Olode the Hunter Becomes an Oba” by Harold Courlander. They will be able to make comparisons about African traditions, their importance, and the way in which stories are told today.

In Unit Three “The Beginnings of African American Literature” introduces slavery and African American Writers from the Revolutionary era. This will provide necessary background to reading the autobiographical essays such as, “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano,” written by an ex-slave. It will also stimulate discussion about history, how it was recorded, and the ways in which people coped. Teachers can use other books such as Slave Narratives, and Autobiography of a People: Three Centuries of African American History Told by Those Who Lived It, which are also listed in the Bibliography to supplement the reading from the anthology.

In Unit four students will explore politics in American history after emancipation as well as African American poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar and W.E.B. Du Bois. They will read Booker T. Washington’s “Up From Slavery” and learn how African American poetry played a part in activism. Students will then make the connection between activism today and in history. Other poems will be used from books of poetry by Nikki Giovanni and Langston Hughes, and the book of poetry called I Am the Darker Brother. At this time the teacher may assign students a report about African American journalism or different social and political movements in African American history. Students can also have the opportunity to write poetry about African American struggles or contributions.

Finally, Unit Five from the anthology will take students through the Harlem Renaissance. The history selection about this time period will help students to understand how many African American artists became part of a “community.” Writer Jean Toomer is featured in Unit Five with relationship to the South. The students will learn as the unit suggests that the South is “home” to many African Americans. Students therefore, will gain knowledge about how the South is an important element in African American history and literature. Not only will students read literature by writers like James Weldon Johnson, but they can explore African American art and music during this part of the PTI unit as well.

Teachers can also facilitate discussions about both literature and informational texts using questions using the “Questioning the Author” strategy, a strategy developed by Isabelle Beck

from the University of where they analyze text, character motives, as well as authors' points of view. These pieces can then be turned into portfolio pieces, another important piece to the communications curriculum in the Pittsburgh Public Schools as well as many other progressive districts.

When students read and discuss literature they will analyze and interpret meaning, while connecting it to history. Teachers can create many different types of assessments such as short quizzes and tests about history. Teachers may also want students to complete other projects that show understanding, application of knowledge, and expression. A final project as noted in the unit can also help to motivate students and give them a "voice" when expressing connections to a particular time in African American history and literature. Overall, while moving through the anthology, students will be learning about current African American literature and movements from their own experiences and other selected texts. Most importantly, they will learn about the many connections between literature that can be made to different times in African American history. Using the "Questioning the Author" will help students to make meaning with the text. (Beck, 1996: 4, pp. 385-414). Teachers can also assign homework for students to develop essays responding to literature and fiction pieces of their own. These can include responses to literature and responses to information.

Again, even though only the first five units from African American Literature, Voices in a Tradition will be used in this PTI unit, it is assumed that teachers may want to continue to use the anthology to complete other areas of study, or simply pull lessons from this unit. While students complete this unit, they will be working toward many of the Communication standards. The standards set in the Pittsburgh Public school system will be defined and used throughout the Strategies and Appendix sections. Because these standards are similar to many state standards, they can easily correlate with those in other school districts. Standard 2 for example, states that students will read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts. This unit contains many opportunities for students to meet this standard since they will be writing critical responses as well as fiction pieces of their own, modeling after specified genres. The teacher can adapt and modify these lessons and objectives for students of varying achievement levels. Students will also be asked to locate and use other African American texts using library and computer sources, Communication Standard 1. As one can see from these two examples, this unit will easily help to satisfy many communication standards.

Teachers can assign many different types of daily assignments to assess understanding and critical thinking, as shown in this unit. "Accountable Talk" which is an important goal for both teachers and students will be fostered as teachers use this unit. It helps guide students to critical thinking as they learn to listen to other students, think about their own responses, and respond to the ideas of others, (Institute for Learning, University of Pittsburgh, 2001). "Accountable Talk" will be a natural result as teacher s help to facilitate dialogue about texts.

Of course, Seventh Grade students should be able to successfully complete assignments and tasks, which will lead to learning outcomes set by specific measurable behavioral objectives. Since students will be required to read both expository and narrative pieces as well as prose, they must be able to read with fluency and analyze text, two of the first objectives outlined in this unit. Students must be able to read fluently, a skill with which "Syllsearch" can help. By doing

this, reading comprehension will also improve. For students must also be able to read different types of text and then show understanding by answering oral or written comprehension questions, and engaging in discussion. Setting forth this objective will help students to meet Communication **Standard 2** which states that all students should read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various complex texts.

Students should also be able to contribute orally to discussions while reading as **Standard 6** demands. This means that students should be participating in oral discussions whether in small groups or partnerships or in whole class discussions. The teacher can measure this objective through observation and assigning small group discussion roles to ensure that students are meeting the standard for each outcome. Naturally, as students and teachers continue to communicate orally, students will be meeting Communication **Standard 7 and Standard 5**, as students will be evaluating and judging what they are reading. They will also be meeting the objective that students will be able to evaluate decisions made by important historical figures and characters in literature.

There are many opportunities for teachers to provide students the opportunity to work in an interdisciplinary fashion. **Standard 9**, “All students communicate appropriately in business, work, and other applied situations” is an important standard as students will need to communicate with others outside the Communications classroom. The teacher can foster relationships with students and teachers in other content areas by assigning research and speech assignments, for example. Students can once again meet the objective of giving oral presentations, while satisfying Communication **Standard 8**.

In this PTI unit it will be necessary for students to apply knowledge about African American history and literature to write pieces such as responses to information and responses to literature, research reports, and poetry. Students will complete a research paper that will entail using the Internet and other resources such as the library. It will therefore be necessary for students to be able to define vocabulary terms throughout their note taking and research. The teacher can evaluate understanding of these terms, as students will be required to write the meaning of the terms in their own words. Students will meet **Standard 1** as they complete this research paper using computer and the library. They may also seek other staff members in the school for help with this research.

While completing the research paper and other writing assignments, students must use grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling correctly, as well as effectively use transitional words, and paragraphs for organization. They will be required to make cause and effect connections to interpret events in timelines during this research and during discussions about history. Students will easily meet **Standard 4 and Standard 3**. Finally, teachers will need to measure whether students can define and apply knowledge of some literary terms like simile and metaphor in order to develop creative writing pieces such as fictional pieces, poetry, and playwriting. Again, this is an opportunity to meet **Standards 4 and 8**.

Strategies

There are many ways that teachers who use this PTI unit can arouse curiosity and motivation in students, and help them to gain and use knowledge while learning in an environment safe for them to share and express their ideas.

First, students will be motivated when they are introduced to Unit One in the African American Literature anthology. Students will be encouraged to share prior knowledge about African American history and literature when using this unit. They are naturally motivated when they are given the time to speak in class and volunteer experiences. This will be encouraged throughout the use of the PTI unit.

The students will complete this unit with an interdisciplinary approach. It is important for students to understand the many natural connections that concepts have in the area of communications. It is only natural that parts of this unit can be studied in a Social Studies classroom and it is the hope that the teachers will work together to help teach about history and social issues. As students explore African American art and music, teachers in these areas will be a valuable resource, as they have no doubt studied about important art movements. Students understand this interdisciplinary approach and will enjoy working on it with many teachers.

One other important resource at school is the library. The school librarian will be able to assist students in the library as they begin their research. In addition, he or she will also be of help to teach students about how to access and use different library reference materials. The librarian can also work with the teacher to teach and encourage students about using the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. As students work toward reading twenty-five books they will be motivated to seek out African American fiction, poetry, and history books if they are introduced to the emerging teen and young adult section at the Carnegie Library.

Using cooperative groups is also an important strategy for motivating students in a variety of ways. First, students usually enjoy working in small groups. It gives those students who do not frequently participate in answering questions and in discussions in front of the entire class, the opportunity to share answers in a less intimidating setting. For some students it can mean learning more, as they can both learn from other students, get help from them, or work more intensely by being able to discuss concepts more critically. Students often feel safe working in small groups, as the peer group is not as strong. Many times they are more likely to participate. Teachers use this small group instruction to facilitate “Questioning the Author” reading and discussion groups and assign roles such as “recorder” and “reader” to specific students in order to help guide them. Finally, working in small groups gives students more time to engage in learning, as fewer students are competing for instruction.

Another way to both motivate students and build a safe community in which to discuss sensitive issues is to share my own family background with the students. My own heritage is that of African decent. My mother, who is white, married my Nigerian father in the 1960’s. Students will learn about the social unrest of the 1960’s as well as the political issues in Africa that stem from British and French rule as I tell them from my mother’s point of view. They can also learn about my own plight to find out more about my family history in Nigeria and make connections to the many African Americans who desire to go home to the South. Depending on the level of

interest in the classroom, students may want to do their own search about their family history at this time by designing a family tree or family newsletter.

Strategies used while reading will include “Questioning the Author” to help students build meaning and connect with the text. This includes previewing the text and developing open-ended questions at specific points before reading with the children. I will also model questioning techniques with the students so as to help them develop questions while reading. Students will use “Syllasearch” to help them to pronounce words as they read which will lead to higher reading fluency and understanding.

There are many opportunities for teachers to use writing as a strategy for helping students to make connections between African American history and literature. For one, students can write daily or weekly journals where they reflect about their reading, share ideas, and think metacognitively. Poetry also lends itself to expression and working through tough issues or developing ideas around contextual issues. Students can role-play not only characters in the scripts written by selected African American writers such as August Wilson, but by using situations in African American history to teach point of view and develop empathy. Writing a play set during a chosen period in African American history will in fact, be one way to culminate the unit. Students may also choose final writing assignments such as an interactive time line or poetry book.

Again, students will be able to use the Internet and computer software to learn more about history and African American literature. They can search for supplemental reading through the Carnegie Library Caroline Search and recommended websites for reading book reviews. The teacher may want to use videos to share biographical information about authors, history, or literature performances.

This unit will easily help those students will different learning styles and learning needs. Students who are visual and auditory learners will find success while completing assignments in cooperative groups. This will give them the opportunity to excel at classroom participation. They will also find success with using “Syllasearch” and the multidisciplinary approach to learning, as they will explore music and art. As for students with learning disabilities, they will be given extended time to complete assignments, as well as help from other students in group work, and will be able to make choices about completing certain projects. Working in cooperative groups also gives the teachers a chance to give some extra assistance to students who need it.

Classroom Activities

The teacher can follow the anthology [African American Literature: Voices in a Tradition](#) while integrating the following classroom activities, not necessarily in this order. He or she can use the timeline of events in African American history, which is located in the anthology.

Independent and Oral Reading

A frequent classroom activity will be oral and independent reading, as they will often read passages from selected books and from the anthology African American Literature: Voices in a Tradition. Before each selection, the teacher should build background by asking the students to share prior knowledge about the following content. The teacher will also be using the “Questioning the Author” technique (Beck, 385-414) in order to help the students to understand the texts while allowing the students to find the meaning. First, the teacher must model this type of interaction. He or she should explain the difference between literal and open-ended questioning. The teacher must know what it is that the students should understand from the text. This will help the teacher to choose or develop questions about the text. Using “Syllsearch” will help students with pronouncing vocabulary words or difficult names. The teacher can identify those words before introducing the reading and facilitate a “Syllsearch” lesson to introduce those words.

When students read together in groups the teacher may want to assign students different roles such as “reader,” “recorder,” or reporter. This will help students both to focus on the text as well as motivate them to work in groups. Certainly the roles can be changed as well as student groups.

Comprehension Questions

Students should frequently be developing answers to the many questions about the text and content that they are reading. Again, this can be done orally or in written work. Even though it is important for students to answer open-ended questions, they should also be asked literal questions.

Journal Writing

Students can keep track of their own questions or points of confusion as they read. The teacher can encourage students to keep a journal about what they are reading and learning. For example, if a student reaches a part of the text that he or she does not understand, that very same question or term can be written down for later discussion or evaluation. Also, the teacher can develop journal questions for students to answer as they read.

Response to Literature and Response to Information Essays

There will be many opportunities for teachers to assign essays in response to reading in this PTI unit. First, students can write an essay by writing a review about a piece of literature such as poetry or a narrative piece. The students can use this opportunity to evaluate the piece of text by analyzing the content and the writing style. They can also make connections between the history being taught with the author’s motivation for writing the text and/or the characters. The teacher can also develop a question for the students to answer while referring back to the text in a Response to Literature essay. When students read slave narratives, for example, they can

respond to the information given by sharing their opinions while they pull examples from the text. They can also relate the piece to their own personal experiences when writing a Response to Informational essay. Students can use editing and revising groups to help one another correct and refine multiple drafts. They can use the classroom-based text for reference and practice with language mechanics.

Poetry

Not only will students be reading poetry throughout the anthology and supplemental reading, but also they will create poetry of all genres on their own. The teacher will want to share works as models for free verse as well as rhyming poems. The students will read and analyze poetry by authors such as Nikki Giovanni, Langston Hughes, and Maya Angelou. They will then develop their own to reflect what they read and/or express meaning after they are given questions by the teacher. Students can write poetry about some of the same themes that famous poets have written.

Final Activity

Although the following two final activities are suggested, students can develop a different activity that shows their understanding, application, and evaluation of African American history and connections to literature.

Writing a Play

After reading sample plays from writers such as August Wilson's "The Piano Lesson" in Unit Ten, students can choose to write a play exemplifying a historical time period in African American history. Students should create a setting using vivid imagery and fully develop characters who may represent those in history. The play should show the student's full understanding of historical events in a particular time period and how they impacted African American people of the time. The student should also develop a plot that reflects history and has an appropriate and relevant contains a conflict.

Newspapers

Another choice for a final activity at the completion of this unit is writing a newspaper that reflects a historical time or movement. This time period should again, exemplify important events in African American history, which no doubt affected the lives of African Americans. Students should include the following:

- a front news page, which gives the setting
- a local news page about news events in the student's city
- a sports page with relevance to African American involvement whether positive or negative
- a classified page (for example, advertisements for slaves, or apartments excluding African Americans)
- a cartoon page which may be a commentary about the time period
- an editorial, which may contain letters which reflect social movements, etc.
- a connection to literature of the time period. This may be a book or movie review, for example
- a travel section

Sample Introductory Lesson 1 "Who Am I?"

The purpose of this lesson is to motivate and introduce students to the PTI unit and the first unit in the African American anthology, African American Literature: Voices in a Tradition.

Objectives

TSWBAT: 1. Identify their individual personality traits and characteristics 2. Identify their "history" which has had an influence upon the decisions they have made and who they are as a person 3. Connect how one's family or ancestry can influence their life's decisions.

*Materials:*_

African American Literature: Voices in a Tradition anthology, Unit One, pgs. XVII to page 2, paper and writing materials

Procedures:

The teacher will introduce the students to the maps of the U.S. and Africa on pages XVII to XXI and ask the students to find the significance of printing African and African American names and

historical places on a map of The United States and Africa. The teacher will use queries from the “Questioning the Author” technique to illicit the response that the authors may have wanted students to see how vast and significant history has played in the lives of people including African Americans.

The teacher will introduce the PTI unit by sharing the title and asking them why they think that it is important to teach complete history. Using the QTA technique the teacher will illicit the response that knowledge of a people’s history can help others to better understand a culture and that remembering one’s history is important to people. The teacher will facilitate a discussion about how history can shape culture. He or she will then explain to them that the purpose of this PTI unit is to teach accurate African American history in a chronological fashion, which will help them to better understand African American literature. The teacher will explain to the students that they will learn African American history starting with slavery and African traditions.

The students will give examples to define culture. The students will give examples of history from their lives that have helped to shape who they are. Some responses may be that their life experiences have helped them to become interested in writing, art, caring for others, etc. Some students will discuss how people in their lives have been influential. Students will discuss the “Family Tree” quilt and read page 1.

Students will create a poem using their first and/or last names with adjectives, adverbs, and short phrases which show their “history” and who they are.

At the end of the lesson students will share responses and they will be asked to explain the people and influences in their own “history” which have helped to shape them into the people that they are.

Sample Lesson "African Storytelling--Proverbs and Folktales"

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to anthology Unit Two from African American Literature: Voices in a Tradition., about African storytelling and its significance.

Objectives:

TSWBAT: 1. Identify the importance of storytelling and oral history in African cultures.
2. Define the terms proverb and folktale. 3. Read and analyze sample African proverbs and folktales. 4. Identify the elements of proverbs and folktales.

Materials:

African American Literature: Voices in a Tradition anthology, Unit Two, pgs. 91-101; 107-117; paper and writing materials

Procedures:

AFRICAN PROVERBS: After students are introduced to this unit in the anthology, they will read and discuss about storytelling and its importance in the African oral tradition, pgs. 91-92. The students will define the terms proverbs and morals and make connections to the stories and proverbs that they know in their own lives. The students will read and discuss the proverbs together, pgs.94-96 and then match ancient proverbs with those that are known today. Finally, students will answer comprehension questions about the text on page 96. Students can work in groups or work independently.

AFRICAN FOLKTALES: Students will identify the "trickster" common in folktales such as Anansi (or Ananse) the spider and their significance. Then they will discuss having a moral of a story and the purpose of folktales in a culture. Students will then read and discuss "Anansi the Spider" and other folktales from the anthology, pp.99-100 and complete comprehension questions about the selection on page 101.

The teacher can decide whether or not to share the remaining four folktales with the students.

Works Cited

“Accountable Talk: Classroom Conversation That Works.” The Institute for Learning. Lauren Resnik. 2001. Pittsburgh.

<http://www.instituteforlearning.org>. An Internet site that explains what it means for teachers and students to engage in “Accountable Talk,” a researched-based principle adapted in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. “Accountable Talk” helps students to become aware of the components of a meaningful discussion. Through “revoicing” and understanding the need for proof in arguments, they become active participants in their own learning and make better use of classroom discussions.

Beck, Isabele, L. and M.G. McKeown. "Questioning the Author: A Yearlong Classroom Implementation to Engage Students with Text." Elementary School Journal 4 (1996): 385-414. This is an educational journal that outlines the technique called "Questioning the Author." Researchers knew that students often do not understand what they read. This technique teaches the teachers how to ask questions called "queries" which help the students understand even the most complex texts, without using literal questioning. The students are able to come up with answers to questions on their own, without the teacher having to ask leading questions.

Borstelmann, Thomas. The Cold War and the Color Line: Race Relations in the Global Arena. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

This author explores the history of race relations in America before and after 1945. Borstelmann discusses racial conflicts including white supremacy in relationship to the Cold War. This book discusses explicitly, the motives of the U.S. government in making laws that affected African American rights.

Boyd, Herb, (ed.). Autobiography of a People: Three Centuries of African American History Told by Those Who Lived It. New York: Doubleday, 2000. This history book is divided into three parts to tell about African American history through the eyes of many African Americans from slavery times through the mid 1990's. In this book are letters, essays, and poetry written by some famous and not so well known African Americans. Important events in history are told as well as information about how people lived during the span of three centuries.

Davis, Kenneth, C. Don't Know Much About History: Everything You Need To Know About American History but Never Learned. New York: Avon Books, 1990. Davis explains American history that may have never been taught or was forgotten. He explores the misconceptions about history and myths that were never taught in school.

FairClough, Adam. Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000. New York: Viking, 2001. With a strong focus on the South, the author explores the continuing African American struggle for equality since the time of Reconstruction. He outlines the political unrest that African Americans face in the fight to end discrimination and institutional racism in the U.S. The history book is complete with an explanation of specific events during The Civil Right's Movement.

Packard, Jerrold, M. American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow. New York: St.

Martin's Press, 2002. This is a history book that outlines the history of America after the end of the Civil War. The author examines how Jim Crow laws continue to affect the lives of African Americans. Even though the laws now protect people from discrimination, this book explains how people have "bought into" institutional discrimination and racism.

Safier, F. (ed.) African American Literature: Voices in a Tradition. Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1992. This book is a school-approved African American literature anthology for middle school students. The book is organized into twelve units. This student-friendly book contains narrative, prose, and expository pieces with questions and activities to guide students. Before each unit is a brief historical background section starting before slavery. Both vocabulary and literary terms are defined throughout the book.

"Teaching Oral History: How Should We Teach Educational History?" Publications, Papers, Exhibits by SOHP Staff and Affiliates. 2002. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Southern Oral History Program.

<http://sohp.unc.edu/scholarship/walbert/>. A publication website from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill outlining the Oral History Program and its research. People who look at this site would be interested in the value of teaching educational history.

William Andrews and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (The Library of America) Slave Narratives. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 2000. This book of narratives contains actual pieces written by a diverse group of African and African-American slaves. Because they are actual accounts of personal experiences, the reader gets a true picture of what life was really like from a slave's point of view. Many well-known people are included such as Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth.

Reading List for Students

Allen, Samuel, W. I Am the Darker Brother. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1968. This young adult book of poetry features poetry done by several writers. This anthology will appeal to young readers as it gives a more modern perspective.

Angelou, Maya. And Still I Rise. New York: Random House, 1978. A collection of poetry by Maya Angelou.

Bambara, Toni, Cade. Gorilla, My Love. New York: Random House, Inc., 1972. This short piece appeals to young readers as they can relate to "Squeaky," a tough and street-wise girl who struggles with teenage issues.

Giovanni, Nikki. Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992. A collection of poetry by Nikki Giovanni.

Hughes, Langston. The Dream Keeper and Other Poems. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1970. A collection of poetry by Langston Hughes.

Hughes, Langston. Selected Poems of Langston Hughes. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1954. A collection of poetry by Langston Hughes.

Shange, Ntozake. Nappy Edges. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1978. This book of poetry will appeal to middle school students, as her works here are poignant, yet go against rules of grammar.

Works for Classroom Use

"Afro-American Writers before the Harlem Renaissance: Dictionary of Literary Biography." Detroit: Gale, 1986. A complete biography of African-American writers before the Harlem Renaissance.

"Afro-American Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940: Dictionary of Literary Biography." Detroit: Gale, 1987. A complete biography of African-American writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940.

Angelou, Maya. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. New York: Random House,

1970. An autobiographical book about life as an African American. Written with rhythm and poetic qualities, this book is a good piece that celebrates pride, courage, and self love.

Boyd, Herb, (ed.). Autobiography of a People: Three Centuries of African American

History Told by Those Who Lived It. New York: Doubleday, 2000. This history book is divided into three parts to tell about African American history through the eyes of many African Americans from slavery times through the mid 1990's. In this book are letters,

essays, and poetry written by some famous and not so well known African Americans. Important events in history are told as well as information about how people lived during the span of three centuries.

Davis, Kenneth, C. Don't Know Much About History: Everything You Need To Know About American History but Never Learned. New York: Avon Books, 1990. Davis explains American history that may have never been taught or was forgotten. He explores the misconceptions about history and myths that were never taught in school.

Gaines, Ernest, J. A Gathering of Old Men. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1983. Fictitious characters both white and black, tell the story about racial relations surrounding a murder of a white Cajun man. As the story unfolds, the men have to confront their own truths about their own relationships.

Jenkins, Everett, Jr. Pan-African Chronology: A comprehensive reference to the Black Quest for Freedom in Africa, the Americas, Europe and Asia, 1400-1865. Jefferson, NC: Mc Farland and Company, Inc., 1996. A historical reference book from African history to African slavery in Europe, Asia, and America.

Laye, Camara. The Dark Child. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1982. This book is a poetic novel about an African teenager's childhood before moving to France.

Lindsey, Howard O., "A History of Black America", Greenwich, CT: Brompton Books Corp., 1994. A history book which outlines the true accounts of slaves and African Americans who were involved in the war and fought for freedom.

Litwack, Leon. , Been In the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery. New York: New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1979. Complete with letters, diaries, and journal entries, this book unravels true accounts of African Americans during the period of time often overlooked in history. One who reads this book will experience a chronological history of those who lived during the period of time between slavery and Reconstruction.

Ranson, Roger L., Conflict and Compromise Cambridge, NY, Cambridge University Press, 1989. A history beginning with the discovery of the "New World" with an emphasis on slavery and African American history.

William Andrews and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (The Library of America) Slave Narratives. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 2000. This book of narratives contains actual pieces written by a diverse group of African and African-American slaves. Because they are actual accounts of personal experiences, the reader gets a true picture of what life was really like from a slave's point of view. Many well-known people are included such as Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth.

Appendix-Content Standards

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

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

C 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.

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

C 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.

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

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

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

C 9: All students communicate appropriately in business, work and other applied situations.