

Food, Culture, and Conflict Within *The Poisonwood Bible*

Kristen Kurzawski

Brashear High School

Overview

Rationale

Objectives

Strategies

Classroom Activities

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Appendices-Standards

Overview

My unit will focus on Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible*. This unit will begin with a research component, then a series of presentations, and move to reading and discussing the novel. The research, presentations, and book discussions will center on food as part of a culture's identity. After reading this book several times and teaching it earlier this year I realized that many of the conflicts in the book are a result of the characters relationship with food. By focusing on culture and food I think my students will begin to understand the complex workings of missionary work, colonialism, and food culture.

This unit is designed for an AP Literature and Composition course, but it could be easily adapted for any senior English course. My students are middle class students who are college bound. While they work hard in class and do the readings, I must be prepared for a certain lack of prior knowledge when they enter my classroom. This unit is designed specifically with the understanding that my students, despite being enrolled in a higher level course, may not have the certain analytical skills or cultural knowledge that one might expect from an AP English student. Therefore, the goal of this unit is to give the students some cultural background on the story, give them the opportunity to research which will aid in their interpretation of the novel, and use the cultural knowledge and research to drive our discussion and work with the novel.

Rationale

Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible* is a complex narrative which examines a family taken out of a comfortable environment and placed in a unique and challenging one. The Price family leaves America and heads over to the

Congo for a year of missionary work in 1959. On the surface the book seems to be about the women of the Price family and their relationship with the patriarch, Nathan Price. The story is told by the women of the family. The daughters tell the bulk of the story with the mother's narrative acting as a framing device for each section. When I initially taught this story I focused on the relationship between the women and Nathan. My discussion questions were designed to examine how each daughter evolved and found her own identity. I asked my students to look at how the narrative structure influenced their interpretation of the story. While these basic concepts went well, my students discovered a better way to analyze this novel.

During our discussions of the novel we, as a class, began to see that many of the relationships between the characters were defined by food. The way a character was able to adapt to life in the Congo seemed dependent on how they approached food customs in the Congo. As our discussion continued I began to see another way to teach a unit on Kingsolver's book. The conflicts and changes in the novel seemed to actually be built around food, and upon deeper examination I began to realize that a better focus for our analysis would be on colonialism. The Price family goes to the Congo to do missionary work. They plan to teach the Congolese people about Jesus, and by doing so change their way of life. This larger issue of colonialism which looms over the story is played out through characters and their attitudes and ideas about food. This unit is designed to look at the intrinsic connection between the food we eat and how it defines our culture. This then leads to the examination of the impact of colonialism and missionary work on the identity of a culture.

Culture and Food

In order to use food as a way to examine culture in the novel it is important to come up with a working definition for culture. First I would like to examine what it means when we talk about culture. What is culture? Why is it important? Is it regional? Is it related to ethnicity or religion? Webster's *New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* has the following definition for culture:

1. The quality in a person or society that arises from a concern for what is regarded as excellent in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits, etc.
2. that which is excellent in the arts, manners, etc.
3. a particular form or stage of civilization, as that of a certain nation or period: *Greek culture*.
4. development or improvement of the mind by education or training.
5. the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group: *the youth culture, the drug culture*.
6. *Anthropol.* The sum total ways of

living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.

When looking at the entry above, the anthropological definition seems to be the closest definition to what I want my students to examine while reading *The Poisonwood Bible*. The Price family arrives in the Congo to change the “total ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.” Even though Nathan Price does not say that he is there to change the culture of the Congolese people, it is clear that by trying to get them to adopt a new religion he is asking them to reject their current beliefs. Interestingly enough, many of their religious beliefs are tied to their food customs.

In addition, when we think about our basic needs in life, food is a driving force. It is one of our primary needs. “Food is the first, most constant and universal need of man” (Renaud 97). Without food we could not survive, so it is does not take a large leap to make the connection between food and our culture. “Sometimes, both material and social cultures are directly based upon the type of food and the occupations resulting from the nature of food” (Renaud 97). This is certainly the case with early hunter/gatherer cultures which had to be concerned about where the next meal was coming from. The occupations, value systems, and social hierarchy developed based on how a person contributed to the survival of the larger group. This survival is obviously tied to our bodies’ need for sustenance. Often the food sources available to the people are fundamental in the creation of the culture of the people. E.B. Renaud’s examination of Native American culture in “Influence on Food on Indian Culture” is an excellence example of how a culture centered around one food source. Renaud looks at the effect of the bison on the Native Americans. It was the primary food source for most of the tribes within the Western Plains area. This area includes the central area of the United States from Texas to Canada and from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Renaud’s study notes that “Within this extensive region were found tribes of different stock and origin but having an essentially similar culture. This explanation for this resemblance in material and social culture is to be seen in their common food supply”(98). He goes on to demonstrate how this one food source dictated the day to day life of various Native American tribes. First, the bison migrated, which forced the people using the bison as a food source to migrate as well. In addition to providing food “it also furnished them with skins to cover their tents . . . Thus a by-product of the staple food of the region became the roof of the nomadic bison hunter” (98). So first the bison provides food, then it provides shelter (and presumably clothing), and it also dictates where the people live. The effect of this food source continues. “The Indians of the Plains being nomadic because they chased the migrating buffalo, could hardly use pottery. Cooking pots, bowls, bottles and like objects of baked clay are too bulky, heavy, and breakable for hunters always on the go” (98). Renaud’s study

continues by showing how every element of the Plains Indians was influenced by *one* food source. An entire culture is built out of a people choosing the bison as a source of food.

Renaud's study is an excellent resource for beginning this conversation in the classroom. In our global world cultures are evolving, blurring, and blending. So it may be difficult for students to believe or comprehend the impact of one food source on a culture when their own livelihood does not depend on such a limited food source. Looking back to a culture not influenced by television, the internet, or movies will clarify the connection between food and culture.

When we look at how our relationship with food has changed over time the link between food and culture becomes even clearer. Initially humans ate to live. Finding food to fuel the body was an activity that took up most of early humankind's day. As technological advances in food preparation were discovered, so did our relationship with food. Initially food was eaten in raw form, meat was eaten off the animal's body without cooking, and plants and vegetables were eaten in their original state. Eventually humans began to cook their food, and this is when food and culture began their relationship. "Cooking was a precious invention because of the way it forged community" (Fernandez-Armesto 19). A group would find the food, then a group would prepare the food, and as a group they would eat the food. The preparation and eating of food became a communal activity, setting the course in motion to create customs which lead to cultures.

The use of fire and cooking utensils began to define the earliest cultures. First there was fire. "Fire functioned as a focus, we assume, before or apart from its adaptation for cooking, because of the other functions which make people gather around it: for light and warmth, for protection from pests and predators. Cooking perfected fire's power of social magnetism by adding nourishment to these functions" (Fernandez-Armesto 11). So once the power of fire was harnessed by a group of people for cooking, the importance of fire in bringing a group together was solidified. "It socialized eating by making it an activity practiced in a fixed place at a fixed time by a community of eaters" (Fernandez-Armesto 11). Cooking of food began to bring order to these early communities, thus making it clear that the formation of these early cultures is linked with their food preparation and eating habits. Cooking food also leads to more elaborate customs within a culture. Eating can become ceremonial. "The enhanced value cooking imparts to food elevates it above nourishment and opens up new imaginative possibilities: meals can become sacrificial sharings, love feasts, ritual acts" (Fernandez-Armesto 11). This concept is seen today in our holiday meals and family gatherings. Many current religious ceremonies, like Christian masses for example, bring food and drink into the ceremony. This integral part that food has

in our culture began when humans began to prepare food. The use of utensils also extends the impact of food on cultures. A group's use of "the spit or the skewer, and even the kindled fire, are cultural objects" because these cooking techniques helped define future food preparation and use of food (Fernandez-Armesto 17). Our production of food creates a sort of ritual. For example, the Italian family that creates large batches of homemade pasta each winter requires a group of people in the kitchen each working on a task. Each person has their job and way of completing their task that builds to the whole. The technique of mixing the dough and rolling it out by hand is very different from using a mixer and a pasta maker. The different level of technology used in the process effects the number of people needed for the task and what each person will do in the kitchen. The family custom of prepare the homemade pasta is greatly affected by the techniques and technology they use. This same concept can be applied to early cooking efforts. The techniques changed the length of the preparation of food and how the foods were eaten which then helped to define the culture. As food production and technology evolves we begin to lose the community created through cooking and food. "The loneliness of the fast food eater is uncivilizing. Food is being desocialized" (Fernandez-Armesto 19). This desocialization has led to a unique lack of food culture in the United States in the last forty years.

The clear lack of food culture in the United States may create issues with this unit for some teachers, but these problems may be solved through another book by Barbara Kingsolver. Kingsolver recently published *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. The non-fiction book chronicles her family's attempt to eat only local food for one year. The goal was to eat food of none origins. This goal for a family in the United States seems absolutely impossible, but the Kingsolver family accomplished it. It was her family's attempt to re-discover their food culture. Kingsolver states, "A food culture is not something that gets *sold* to people. It arises out of a place, a soil, a climate, a history, a temperament, a collective sense of belonging" (17). While it is clear that food culture was once defined by our location and the history of our people the United States seems to have lost that sense of culture. Despite discussing culture and food in class with students it may be difficult for them to truly understand the correlation between what they eat and who they are because that does not paint a pretty picture of Americans. What we eat is mass produced, processed foods. These foods can be acquired anywhere in the United States, and so it seems there is little relation between food and culture in our modern society. Kingsolver's book is an argument against that idea and a demonstration of how things may be changing. It is my goal to have the students read this book independently as an accompaniment to *The Poisonwood Bible*. The two novels work well as companion texts and might encourage the students to rediscover their own food culture.

Colonialism and *The Poisonwood Bible*

One thing that must be discussed with students in this unit is the effect of colonialism and missionary work on cultures. Most students think of these things as positives because they are Americans. Our nation was built on a colonization process and missionary work. Today many of my students still go on mission trips with their local churches. For our students these are positive things. They do not seem to realize the impact of going into a country and asking them to change their religion, way of developing food, or their education system. Most students do not consider the destruction caused by the colonization of the Americas. The Native American tribes discussed in the Renaud article above were destroyed because of colonialism. The colonists came and killed off many of the bison herds, and this then led to the destruction of the way of life of the Plains Indians. Even though students are aware of what was done to the native people in the Americas, few make the connection between those events and their mission trips each summer. Therefore it is important to first consider what the colonialism and the colonization process entail, and how missionary work connects to this process. So it is helpful to consider a basic definition for colonialism. This is easier said than done because of the various forms of colonialism. However it is clear from all definitions that “colonialism is a form of domination—the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behavior of other individuals or groups” (Horvath 46). This basic concept of colonialism should help the students begin to consider what is going on in the story and help them link it back to the concept of food culture.

Kingsolver’s novel presents colonialism in two ways. First the Price family and their missionary work in the Congo demonstrates an imperialistic view of colonialism. The second concept of colonialism is depicted through the various Western countries who have either been in control of the Congo or who are working to gain control of various natural resources in the Congo. Both types demonstrate the two common thoughts about colonialism “—either it has been a dirty business engaged in by evil people or a praiseworthy endeavor undertaken by fine gentlemen for the noble purpose of saving the wretched, the savage, the unfortunate” (Horvath 45). The Price family feels that they are there to save the savage people of the Congo, and the Western countries involved in the various political upheavals going on are clearly engaged in “a dirty business.” Regardless, as the novel progresses it becomes clear that Kingsolver thinks everyone is involved in something dirty. Which leads to another term the students may need to consider when reading about the Congo—neocolonialism. “The first use of the word may have occurred in the 1950’s. Newly independent nations found themselves only partially independent, and a new term to be exploited for political purposes was needed. The events of the early 1960’s especially in connection with the secession of the Katanga from the Congo plus the military

actions of white men and Western nations in the Congo, provided the emotional ingredients for the birth of the term” (Horvath 46). It becomes clear throughout the novel that the idea of an independent Congo and the election taking place during the story is a sham. The massive political upheaval that takes place is due to the neocolonialism the Congo has been subjected to.

Another important term to think about with this novel is imperialism. Imperialism is a form of colonialism which is closest to what is found in the Congo and in Kingsolver’s book. “Imperialism is a form of intergroup domination wherein few, if any, permanent settlers from the imperial homeland migrate to a colony” (Horvath 47). This is seen in Kingsolver’s tale when the Price family arrives to take over for another group of Christian missionaries. The Price family plans to stay for a year and return to America. Few of the people from the Western world in the novel plan to stay for more than a short period of time. The goal seems to be to come to the Congo, dominate the people (and hopefully get something out of them in the process) and then return to the homeland richer in some way. For Nathan Price the riches would come from his ability to convert savages to the Christian faith. This would have garnered him attention and power back in America. Another character, Eeben Axelroot, demonstrates the need to dominate in order to gain material wealth. Eeben Axelroot arrives in the Congo to take advantage of the people there, and he insinuates himself into every plot to rob the native people of the wealth of the land. While Axelroot never leaves Africa it is because he is moving from country to country in Africa robbing the next group of people. Additionally, Kingsolver implies that he would not be permitted back in his homeland.

The goal of Nathan Price upon his arrival in Africa is that the native people will assimilate his cultural views and beliefs; however it is clear upon their arrival in the Congo that this will not be the case. Instead Kingsolver portrays a very different kind of experience. Typically “the colonizers acted a ‘donor’ culture and the colonized people constituted a ‘host’ culture, with the vast amount of cultural transfer going, as the name implies, from donor to host” (Horvath 47). Kingsolver plays on this concept in her novel. Nathan’s attempts to transfer his culture on the Congolese fail over and over again. His beliefs and teachings contrast with the Congolese people basic survival in the jungle. He tries to get the people to grow corn, but the rains and the tough clay ground prevent the seeds from taking root. He also tries to baptize the people in the river, but several children have been killed by crocodiles in the river. They reject his teachings continuously throughout the book, and his refusal to learn from them leads to his family’s slow deterioration. As the people of the village stop feeling sympathy for the Price family, their survival comes into question. In order to survive, various members of the Price family begin to assimilate the culture of the Congolese. No character depicts this change more than Leah Price. Upon her

arrival in the Congo she was a staunch supporter of her father, but as the novel progresses she sees that what her father is doing is wrong. She rallies the family together and begins to find ways to help them survive. She does this by becoming part of the Congolese culture. She learns how to hunt, prepare food, and speak the language. By the end of the novel she has married a man from the village and calls Africa her homeland. Leah's transformation and Nathan's failure and eventual demise demonstrate Kingsolver's message about colonialism.

Objectives

My objectives are ground in the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for reading, writing, speaking, and listening. While I am sure there are many standards covered by this unit, the standards I am going to discuss are the ones that I would like to focus on with this unit.

The research portion of this unit will cover a few standards in reading and speaking. First, it will cover portions of Standard 1.2., which covers reading critically in all content areas. Specifically, this unit will help students meet Standard 1.2.11.A., "Read and understand essential content of informational texts and documents in all academic areas", and Standard 1.2.11.B., "Use and understand a variety of media and evaluate the quality of material produced. These portions of the standard will be met through the actual research process. The students will read books, articles, essays, and journals in various libraries and on the internet during the course of their research. In order to meet the requirements of the assignment they will have to be able to assess the value of the information they find and evaluate the best sources for their research. They will then take research they collect and turn it into an informative presentation. For the presentation they will meet a portion of Standard 1.6. The students will meet 1.6.11.C., "Speak using skills appropriate to formal speech situations." This will be met as each group delivers their presentations. The group members are expected to demonstrate understanding of how a speech must be delivered in order for the audience to comprehend the information in the speech.

The reading of the novel will meet other state standards. The first standard my students will meet is a portion of Standard 1.1., reading independently. The students will meet 1.1.11.G., "Demonstrate after reading, understanding, and interpretation of both fiction and nonfiction text, including public documents." This will be met while the students read the novel, work in their double entry journals, and participate in class discussions. Students will be expected to make connections between the research projects and the events of the novel. They will also compare and contrast characters and events in the novel. Students will also meet several portions of Standard 1.3., reading, analyzing, and interpreting literature. They will meet portion 1.3.11.A., "Read and understand works of

literature”; portion 1.3.11.B., “Analyze the relationships, uses, and effectiveness of literary elements used by one or more authors in similar genres including characterization, setting, plot, theme, point of view, tone, and style”; and portion 1.3.11.C., “Analyze the effectiveness, in terms of literary quality, of the author’s use of literary devices.” These portions of the standard will be met during the course of our discussion in class and the journals.

The final essay in this unit meets all parts of Standard 1.5., quality of writing. The students are expected to write a clear, focused essay. The content of the paper needs to demonstrate deep analysis through its textual evidence and clear explanation of ideas. The essay should be well organized and logical. Finally, the essay needs to demonstrate a strong control over language and sentence structure. In order to achieve this the students will be expected to revise their essay several times and edit it before turning in their final copy.

Strategies

Various basic teaching strategies and techniques will be used in this unit. The four most important components of the unit are the basic research, the informative speech, the double entry journal, and the student run discussions. I have designed these parts of my unit so that the students in my classroom and my school will be successful, however, all of these techniques may be adapted and changed for use in other classrooms.

Students in my school do small research based projects each year, so they are familiar with the research gathering process. I have noted that my seniors do not seem to be willing to dismiss a source that is not a solid source of information. Also, I have found that the students rarely read the sources thoroughly, and have trouble synthesizing their sources into a speech or essay. To help my students overcome these problems I have developed certain techniques and expectations for them during the research process. First, I always limit the number of sources and require that the sources come from a variety of media. The limit on the number of sources encourages the students to only use sources that provide solid, in depth information. Without good sources they will not be able to complete the assignment. Second, I require the students to take notes throughout their research. Everything they find must be written down in a notebook (you may also use note cards), and the notebook is turned in at the end of the presentation for assessment. Recording their notes helps students to process what they are reading. Students are fond of printing up pages from the internet or online journals and databases and then highlighting their notes. This method of research has created a large number of students who have lost the ability to paraphrase, summarize, or quote research properly. When they record things in their notebooks, it forces the students to think about things. Students are also reluctant to write anything down

that is not useful, so they tend to examine their source in more depth. When recording notes from a source I require students to begin by citing the source at the top of the page and then record the page number on which they found each note. This helps avoid unintentional plagiarism and keeps research notes organized. While these simple techniques are not difficult, I have found that my students acquire better research and understand how to synthesize their information better when they do these things.

The informational speech is set up in the way most teachers would have speeches delivered in their classrooms with two minor exceptions. First, the speakers are required to provide each member of the class with an outline or guide to help them take notes on their speech. Since the rest of the unit depends on the students learning and comprehending the information in the speeches, this guide will help the students take notes on what they hear. The second thing I do is ask each group of speakers to create five comprehension questions about the material in their presentations. I take the questions from each group and combine them to create a quiz on the presentations. The outline and the quiz encourage the audience to pay careful attention to the speakers, and it makes it very important for the speakers to deliver their speech in a clear, organized fashion.

The double entry journal is another possibly unique element to this unit, although I believe many English teachers use this technique in their classrooms. I have encountered this type of note taking and reflecting in many different forms and under many different names, but I find it easiest to call it a double entry journal because it has two types of entries. It is rather simple to create. Students simply take their notebook and draw a line down the middle of the page. On the left side of the page they record quotations from the text and on the right they analyze or interpret the quotation. In my school district students are asked to pull quotations that reveal significant moments in the text from grade six on through high school, so this journal moves a step beyond that exercise. The analysis on the right hand side of the journal requires that the students think carefully about the text and encourages a close reading. I also have one simple rule when it comes to the right side of the journal. The analysis must be as long as or longer than the quotation under discussion. Students are expected to bring their journal to class everyday. When there is a specific reading assignment due I ask the students to open their journals to the last page and I walk around the room and use a stamper to mark the end of their notes in their notebook. At the end of the unit I will collect the notebooks and assess the quality of analysis. I use the stamps to check to see who was doing their homework consistently throughout the unit. I combine these two things together to come up with their grade for the double entry journal.

A final technique that will be used in the unit is student directed discussions. I have found that the members of the class are more willing to contribute to class

discussion when their peers are running the discussion, especially since they each learn what it is like to run a discussion and have no one respond to the questions. During the course of their reading of the novel, the students will track a character and his/her reactions to the new culture. The students will look at how the character adapts, rejects, understands, or misunderstands the Congolese people. Periodically I will ask the students who are tracking the same character to sit in the front of the room to run a discussion. The students will know in advance when we are having a “Leah Day” or a “Adah Day” for example. The discussion leaders are expected to come to class on the day of discussion with a list of questions, discussion points, and quotations to use during the course of discussion. On student run discussion days I sit with the rest of the students and take notes. I try to maintain the position of an observer, but if there is a point where the class seems to misinterpret something or ignore something important I will join the discussion. I have made the student run discussion worth points on several occasions, but I have also not assigned points for it. It seems to work the same way regardless of whether the discussion leaders are receiving credit for their work. When I do choose to assess the student discussion leaders I have each student hand in the questions, discussion points, and quotations prepared for class, and I take notes on how often each student takes the lead and facilitates the discussion. These two components make up the grade for the student run discussion.

Classroom Activities

This unit will occur in two parts. First the students will complete a research project prior to reading the novel. They will be assigned the project, and while they work on gathering their research and putting the presentations together we will work on a separate unit. Immediately following the presentation of the research, we will begin the reading of the novel.

Research Project

Lesson 1

I will begin by presenting the research project (see Appendix #2) and the general outline of the unit to the class. I will explain that this will prepare us for the novel *The Poisonwood Bible*. Then I will tell the students that they will do research on one of four topics: Food and its relationship to Culture, Colonialism, Missionary Work, and the history of the Congo and the 1960’s. Students will pick groups (a teacher may certainly assign groups). Each group will pick a topic to research and present to the class.

Lesson 2

Today we will go over the details of the research and my expectations for the presentations. The students will then have time to meet with their group and create a research strategy before going into the library. We will then spend the next three days in the school library to help the students begin gathering research. Once our time in the school library is up the students should continue their research at home. The students will have two weeks after our school library time is complete to gather additional research and prepare their presentations.

Lesson 3

The groups will present their research to the class. It is rather important that the students take notes on the presentations because it will aid in their analysis of the novel. I would also like the presenters to handout outlines of their lectures to the class to aid the students in their note taking. When all of the presentations are complete the class will take a test on the presented material. The test will be made up of questions created by the presentation groups and any additional questions I may deem necessary.

Lesson 4

We will discuss the presentations and what we have learned from them. I will also remind them that our analysis of the novel will focus on how food and culture are linked, and the effect of colonization and missionary work on the culture of the people. It is important to focus the discussion on these points so that students can begin to think beyond simply acquiring new knowledge. They also need to begin reflecting on these concepts so that they can apply these ideas to the novel.

Reading of the Text

Lesson 1

The students will receive their texts. They will be asked to read through the arrival in the Congo for the next class (Book One, pages 1-34). We will review the concepts characterization, imagery, tone, narrative voice and structure. I will ask the students to consider these literary concepts while they read. They should also look for connections between the novel and the information they learned from the speeches.

Students will be asked to maintain a double entry journal during their reading of the text. On the right side of each page they should record quotations, and on the left side of the page they should record their analysis of the quotations. I will ask

them to focus their journal on the concepts of food and culture, colonialism and missionary work, characterization, imagery, tone, and narrative voice. They may certainly make other observations in their journals, but their focus should be on the things listed above.

Lesson 2

We will look at how the family approaches their trip to the Congo. What is apparent about each character's feelings based on their excerpts? What does each person feel is the purpose of the trip? When they arrive in the Congo what seems to be the most apparent culture clash? What seems to be a source of conflict in the story?

We will also do a close reading of the portion of the narrative by Rachel Price (pgs. 22-34). We will look at how this initial meeting between cultures goes awry, and the role that food serves in this meeting.

Before leaving class students will be asked to pick one of the characters and track their relationship to food and the Congolese culture through the book.

Lesson 4-10

The lessons throughout the reading of the rest of the book will focus on each character's relationship with the Congolese people and their culture. We will look at how each character evolves through the book, and we will examine how that evolution is related to food. The students who are tracking various characters will be asked to run discussion on days that we are focusing on their character. They should come to class that day prepared with various quotations and moments in the novel that they would like the class to examine.

We will also have discussions about the literary techniques used by Kingsolver. We will focus most of our energy on the narrative structure. We will look at how the alternating narratives functions within the story, and we will examine why Orleanna Price, the mother, speaks only at the beginning of each section. We will also consider why Nathan Price, the father, is not given a chance to tell his story. In addition to this focus we will of course look at tone, imagery, use of dialogue and other literary techniques within the story.

Lesson 11

Students will be assigned their final essay on this novel (appendix #3). Student will respond to the following question in essay form:

Pick a character from the novel and consider the following questions: How does his or her understanding of Congolese culture change throughout the novel? How does his/her relationship to food create or diffuse conflicts in the novel? Does he or she adapt to the new culture or reject it?

After considering these questions write an essay where you analyze how your chosen character's relationship, ideas, and understanding of food leads controls the outcome of that character in the book.

Annotated Bibliography

Goris, Jan-Albert. "Belgian Action in Congo". *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 270, Formulating a Point Four Program. (Jul., 1950), pp. 126-132.

This is a rather technical article, but it provides helpful background for teachers. This is useful for understanding the historical problems of colonialism within the Congo.

Harris, Jessica B. *The Africa Cookbook*. Simon & Schuster: New York, 1998.

This is an interesting book that combines traditional African recipes with information about African people and the food origins. Reading this book can provide the interesting anecdotes to use in class to illuminate ideas from the novel. Also, a teacher who is also a skilled cook could make some of the dishes to bring to class.

Horvath, Ronald J. "A Definition of Colonialism." *Current Anthropology*. 13.1 (Feb 1972): 45-57.

This article was fantastic due to Horvath's comprehensive look at colonialism. Many of the sources I found contradicted each other, but Horvath takes a look at how the definition has evolved and keeps evolving. He breaks the definition down into various parts and uses clear examples to clarify his ideas. It was the best source I found on colonialism.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. Harper Perennial: New York, 2007.

This is an amazing non-fiction story by Kingsolver about food. Kingsolver's family decides to try to live a year eating only local or homegrown food. Her narrative examines United States food sources, but it also looks at our culture's relationship with food. This would be a wonderful companion text for

Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*. I have been considering using this as an extension piece for this unit for an independent project.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*. Harper Perennial: New York, 2005.

This is the copy of the novel I use with my students. It a hardbound book that can take the abuse of students and it has large font so it is easy to read.

De Merode, Emmanuel, Katherine Homewood, and Guy Cowlshaw. "The Value of Bushmeat and Other Wild Foods to Rural Households Living In Extreme Poverty in Democratic Republic of Congo." *Biological Conservation* 118.5 (Aug 2004): 573-581.

This article studies the food culture of rural Congolese people. It focuses on the role of food found from hunting and scavenging. This is an informative article and gives an interesting perspective on the events in Kingsolver's novel. I would not recommend it for students due to the level of scholarly language. It is quite dense, but it is helpful background for teachers.

Neuhaus, Jessamyn. "The Way to a Man's Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology, and Cookbooks in the 1950s". *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 32, No. 3. (Spring, 1999), pp. 529-555.

This is a fascinating discussion of how cookbooks reflect the female/male dichotomy of the 1950s. It is a helpful thing to think about when examining the relationship between the women in the book and Nathan Price. This article also takes a different look at food and culture by examining how culture defines male and female roles through food. This is an interesting concept that becomes an issue within the novel.

Renaud, E. B. "Influence of Food on Indian Culture". *Social Forces*, Vol. 10, No. 1. (Oct., 1931), pp. 97-101.

This is an incredibly helpful article for examining how food and culture relate. This article makes the connection simple to understand, and it would be excellent to use within class itself.

Appendix #1

Standards

Standard 1.2.11.A., “Read and understand essential content of informational texts and documents in all academic areas.”

Standard 1.2.11.B., “Use and understand a variety of media and evaluate the quality of material produced.”

Standard 1.6.11.C., “Speak using skills appropriate to formal speech situations.”

Standard 1.1.11.G., “Demonstrate after reading understanding and interpretation of both fiction and nonfiction text, including public documents.”

Standard 1.3.11.A., “Read and understand works of literature.”

Standard 1.3.11.B., “Analyze the relationships, uses, and effectiveness of literary elements used by one or more authors in similar genres including characterization, setting, plot, theme, point of view, tone, and style.”

Standard 1.3.11.C., “Analyze the effectiveness, in terms of literary quality, of the author’s use of literary devices.”

Standard 1.5.11.A., “Write with a sharp, distinct focus.”

Standard 1.5.11.B., “Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic.”

Standard 1.5.11.C., “Write with controlled and/or subtle organization.”

Standard 1.5.11.D., “Write with a command of the stylistic aspects of composition.”

Standard 1.5.11.E., “Revise writing to improve style, word choice, sentence variety and subtlety of meaning after rethinking how questions of purpose, audience and genre have been addressed.”

Standard 1.5.11.F., “Edit writing using the conventions of language.”

Appendix #2

The Poisonwood Bible Research Project

In order to prepare for our reading of Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible* we will need to do a research project. Students will work on their research in groups, and each group will research a different topic. This project will end with a presentation of your research, and then a test on the information presented by the groups.

Project Details

1. Each group will research one of the following topics: Food and its relationship to Culture, Colonialism, Missionary Work, and the history of the Congo in the 1950's and 1960's.
2. Each group will use at least six sources during the development of the presentation. A bibliography page following MLA format must be handed in the day of the presentation. In addition, all research notes must be handwritten in the notebooks. Notebooks will be checked during and after the research project to ensure that sources are documented and notes are taken properly.
3. The presentation must be at least ten minutes in length, and all group members must participate during the presentation.
4. Each group must provide an outline of their presentation to the class prior to the presentation to aid in note taking.
5. Each group must create a PowerPoint to use as a visual during the presentation. A copy of the PowerPoint slides must be handed in the day of the presentation.
6. Each group must create five multiple choice questions about the information delivered in the presentation. These questions will be used after all of the presentations to assess the class.

Each group should hand in one copy of the attached checklist along with all of the necessary work prior to delivering the presentation.

Presentation Date _____

Group Members _____

Research Topic _____

Presentation Checklist

Please attach one copy of each of the following items:

_____ Bibliography of sources in MLA format

_____ Presentation outline

_____ PowerPoint presentation slides

_____ Five multiple choice questions

Appendix #3

The Poisonwood Bible
Essay Topic

Pick a character from the novel and consider the following questions: How does his or her understanding of Congolese culture change throughout the novel? How does his/her relationship to food create or diffuse conflicts in the novel? Does he or she adapt to the new culture or reject it?

After considering these questions write an essay where you analyze how your chosen character's relationship, ideas, and understanding of food controls the outcome of that character in the book.

Your essay needs to demonstrate the following:

- A clear, central focus
- Ideas supported by direct references to the text
- Elaboration and explanation of ideas
- Sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure
- Clear control over conventions

This essay is worth 100 points

Due Date _____