ABSTRACT

HAYHOE, REBECCA SIMS. Examining the Portrayal of Family in Twentieth Century African American Literature: Theory and Practice for the High School English Classroom. (Under the direction of Dr. Barbara Bennett.)

In this project, I explore the need for an improved approach to incorporating multiculturalism in the high school English classroom. Research has shown that teachers who do desire more multicultural classes often face two problems: 1) lack of materials that fairly and accurately represent minority writers and 2) fear of teaching literature that raises controversial issues. I have designed a three-and-one-half-week thematic unit focused on family life in twentieth century African American novels. This unit, by using Harvey Daniels’ strategy of literature circles, introduces students to at least six African American novels and includes numerous poems and short stories from other African American writers. I include detailed lesson plans for each day; the structure provided by these plans should help teachers confront and manage the anxiety they might feel about teaching literature that provokes sensitive and sometimes difficult conversations. These plans provide a more complete and balanced approach to introducing minority works than the approaches of traditional literature anthologies.

Within this project, I provide a brief overview of how each novel on the reading list relates to the theme of family life. I also explain the value of literature circles and the steps that must be taken to incorporate this strategy in the classroom. In addition to explaining the benefits and uses of literature circles, I also explore the importance of teaching students about dialect. I include several lesson plans that help students evaluate the use and significance of literary dialect. The final chapter of this project includes the specific plans for
each day of the unit. I have provided detailed assignment sheets for each of the major forms of assessment within the unit. This thematic unit provides students with choice and responsibility, which should increase their interest and investment in the readings and activities. They will finish the unit with a greater exposure to African American literature, and because of their ability to be active learners in the unit, the students should also gain a deeper understanding of this literature.
EXAMINING THE PORTRAYAL OF FAMILY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY
AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE:
THEORY AND PRACTICE FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM

by

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Chair of Advisory Committee
DEDICATION

To Steven, who lovingly and patiently pushed me to finish this project.

To my parents, who have always encouraged my love of reading and supported my decisions.
BIOGRAPHY

Rebecca Hayhoe was born in Florence, South Carolina. She earned her Bachelor’s degree in English education from Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. After graduating from Winthrop in 2004, she moved to Raleigh and began work on her Master’s degree in English at NC State. Rebecca has worked as a teaching assistant during her time at NC State, and upon graduation, she will move back to her hometown with her husband, Steven, and will teach high school English. She hopes to use this thesis in her future classes.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, Dr. Bennett, for so graciously agreeing to direct my thesis when you did not even know me; I appreciate the advice and support you have given me. Thank you also, Dr. Smith McKoy and Dr. MacKethan, for encouraging my love of African American literature and for demonstrating great teaching in your classes.
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Chapter One

Overview and Rationale

Overview of the Project

This project presents lesson plans for a three-week thematic unit to be taught in the high school English classroom. The unit focuses on the portrayal of family in twentieth century African American novels. The cooperative learning and reading strategy of literature circles, based on the work of Harvey Daniels, provides the foundation of the daily lesson plans. The literature circles will consist of three to five students who have chosen to read the same novel. Each literature circle will study a different novel, but from whole-class presentations on the novels, the students will be able to learn about the other works being read by their classmates. For each literature circle, one novel will be the core work of the unit, but the lesson plans presented here are integrated; students will work with twentieth century African American poetry, music, and art in addition to the novel they choose. The lesson plans are based on the South Carolina state standards for English Three, the level at which American literature is taught. Though these lessons use the South Carolina state standards as a basis, they could be adapted to fit the standards of other states. The plans can be used for any academic track because the strategy of literature circles allows students to read at the level they choose. The reading list provides books of varying difficulty so that tracking is not an issue. Because each individual school in South Carolina has the ability to assign any books it chooses, the reading list I have prepared for this project may need to be modified according to the school’s required reading list, its stance on controversial works, and the
availability of the books in the English department and school library (or the teacher’s personal library).

**Reading List**

Tananarive Due, *My Soul to Keep*

Ernest Gaines, *In My Father’s House*

Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*

Brian Keith Jackson, *The View from Here*

Randall Kenan, *A Visitation of Spirits*

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*

Ann Petry, *The Street*

Connie Porter, *Imani All Mine*

Mildred Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

**Rationale for the Project**

In educational theory, the call for more multicultural classrooms has been sounding for decades. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) drafted a document in 1970 that described the role educational institutions should take in making education more multicultural. The document, “‘No One Model American’: A Statement on Multicultural Education,” called for education that “values pluralism” (AACTE). In 1975, The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) issued a resolution prepared by its members that addressed the need for the inclusion of more multicultural materials in the classroom. The statement entitled, “Resolution on Multicultural Curriculum Materials,” asked publishers to produce a greater number of
materials that “accurately and sensitively depict Mexican American, Asian American, Afro-American, Native American, and other indigenous minority cultures and traditions, for use in elementary schools, secondary schools, and colleges.” Twenty years after the AACTE and NCTE documents were written, a group devoted entirely to the pursuit of multicultural education at all levels was formed. The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) was organized by volunteers committed to a “philosophy of inclusion that embraces the basic tenets of cultural pluralism.” Though these and other professional educational organizations have been emphasizing the need for classrooms to be more multicultural for years now, numerous educational researchers have recently described major steps that still need to be taken. Decades after the resolutions from AACTE and NCTE, the call for more multicultural classrooms still persists.

The push for more multicultural classrooms has not been entirely fruitless. In the text, *Teaching English in Middle and Secondary Schools*, the authors Maxwell and Meiser note that in the high school classroom students are now more likely to encounter African American male writers like Ellison, Hughes, and Richard Wright, but they also point out that “In recent years, African American women writers have been included in college literature classes but are not likely to appear at the high school level” (236). Students are beginning to be introduced to African American writers, but for some students, this introduction is narrow and may be limited, as Maxwell and Meiser indicate, to only well-known African American male writers.

One contributing factor to this problem of narrow representation of minority writers is that numerous anthologies continue to include only token representations of
diverse authors. Even though publishers of anthologies have responded to the pressure to include more diverse works, problems still remain with these more inclusive anthologies. In the article, “A Case Study of American Literature Anthologies and Their Role in the Making of American Literature,” Dave Winter investigates how American literature has been taught throughout the preceding decades at his school. Part of this investigation involved studying the anthologies that had been used. Winter reflects on how an older anthology presents problems that can still be seen in texts today:

The tendency of anthologies to overrepresent female and minority authors as poets is well chronicled and certainly has outlived the 1960s text analyzed here. Not only are the poems buried in the backs of the textbooks, but they also take up less space. The fact that longer works by women and minorities are less likely to be anthologized further reduces the emphasis that American literature teachers place on women and minority authors. (41)

Winter’s observation indicates that not only is it important for teachers to examine which authors are included in the anthologies, it is also necessary to examine factors such as where the minority works are placed in the text, how the works are prefaced, how long the works are, and how representative they are of different genres. In “Making Literature with the Anthology,” Tim Murnen examines the way a particular anthology presents a one-sided portrayal of Native Americans and warns that teachers should not assume that an anthology that presents a diverse group of writers is, in fact, more multicultural (29). He suggests that teachers ask themselves, “Are the portrayals of author and subject truly representative of the cultures being depicted?” (29).
Recently, NCTE revised its 1970 statement, “Non-White Minorities in English and Language Arts Materials,” to reflect the changes that have been made by teachers and publishers who choose to present more diverse literature. Their revised statement reflects the problems of non-whites receiving only token representation in these more diverse anthologies and classrooms. In the position statement, the organization outlines problems such as those that Winter and Murnen observed: “inaccurate depictions of non-whites,” “biased and out-of-date commentaries,” “misrepresentation of the range of genres within which non-whites write” etc. NCTE offers suggestions to help book editors and publishers address these issues, and they also provide suggestions for teachers and administrators who choose their classroom material. The NCTE statement insists that a multicultural education is not achieved simply by reading a few works by those they call “acceptable non-white writers” (“Non-White Minorities”).

Infusing a course with more diverse literature, even if the curriculum includes more than token representations, does not necessarily make a course multicultural. Teachers must know how to teach the literature and how to adjust their traditional methods of teaching. Numerous scholars and educators have addressed this need for better practices. bell hooks tells teachers directly: “If the effort to respect and honor the social reality and experiences of groups in this society who are non-White is to be reflected in a pedagogical process, then as teachers on all levels, from elementary to university settings, we must acknowledge that our styles of teaching may need to change” (91). hooks cites the example of a female professor who teaches a Toni Morrison novel, but ignores Morrison’s race; she fails to adjust her teaching practices at all (93). hooks laments the fact that some white English professors will include black writers on the
sylabus and “‘boast’ about how they have shown students that Black writers are ‘as good’ as the White male canon when they do not call attention to race” (93). Steven Athanases examines why teachers have been slow to adopt more multicultural practices in their classrooms. In “Building Cultural Diversity Into the Literature Curriculum,” Athanases explains that many teachers feel that they do not know enough works by minorities. Teachers worry that they will not have time to read through such a wide-range of materials to pick the best works for their class.

Returning to the issue of the remaining problems in anthologies, Athanases notes that another impediment to having a multicultural classroom is that many teachers tend to rely completely on these anthologies that have “typically limited their selections by women and authors of color to sections at the back of these books devoted to categories such as modern poetry” (142). Athanases also addresses the fact that the works by minorities that are included tend to be shorter, narrower, and stereotypical. In addition to teachers’ lack of knowledge of minority writing and the problems with the materials they have been given, there is the impediment of teachers’ “personal characteristics” (Athanases 143). Teachers may fear leaving the safety of what is comfortable and familiar to them. They may worry about covering themes and issues that could stir up debate and emotional reactions. bell hooks also acknowledges this fear of teachers: “The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, class, etc., is often rooted in the fear the classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained” (93). hooks acknowledges these fears, but does not attempt to completely assuage them; instead, she suggests that teachers ensure that all individual voices in a classroom be valued and that a classroom community be
built even though tension may still be present. She sees the rewards of a diverse classroom as outweighing any temporary tension or emotional outbursts. hooks’ discussion of transformative pedagogy is theoretical. She occasionally offers examples of strategies she has used in the classroom, but detailed descriptions of appropriate practices are beyond the scope of her paper. Athanases says it is not difficult for teachers to find “suggestions of titles and annotated bibliographies for more inclusive curricula” (144). He says, though, that there is a need for material that helps teachers know how to teach multicultural material and how to integrate the material into their curricula (144). He offers guidelines for choosing appropriate works, and he provides a general framework for how to begin integrating multicultural literature into the classroom, but there are no detailed lesson plans or instructional strategies described.

This project attempts to address the two major problems faced by teachers who want to create multicultural classrooms: 1) curriculum material that purports to be diverse but is biased and limited and 2) fear of losing order and control in the classroom as a result of presenting sensitive and controversial topics. To address this first problem, I chose to design the unit with African American novels as the core works. This allows teachers to stray from the anthology for a few weeks, but it does create the problem of availability. One of the benefits of literature circles (which will be discussed in further detail) is that teachers only need three to five copies of each novel, not an entire class set. Though it may take some searching on the teacher’s part and possibly even some requests for parents or members of the community to donate copies of these books, teachers will find that introducing their students to a wide range of novels may spark more of an interest in African American literature than simply assigning an excerpt from a famous
African American novel presented in the anthology. For teachers who want to (or are pressed to) use the anthology, this unit involves using the anthology as a supplement to the novels. In conjunction with reading their novels, students will read African American short stories and poems.

The reading list I have prepared for the unit includes several novels by authors who are frequently anthologized, but there are also a number of authors whom the students are not likely to encounter in a traditional English class. The reading list includes only African American authors. Although I could have designed a unit on family life in twentieth century novels written by authors of various ethnicities, I believe this unit will allow students to explore African American literature and culture in more depth than if they were to explore the writings of several different ethnicities at once. As I chose the works for this list, I wanted to choose works of varying difficulty and works that focus on the idea of family, but most importantly, I wanted to avoid choosing works that are a mere token representation of African American writing. I believe that each of these novels does, as NCTE outlines, “represent non-white minorities in a fashion which respects their dignity as human beings and accurately mirrors their contributions to American culture, history, and letters …” (“Non-White Minorities”). I also think that this list avoids the problem of presenting “only popular works by a few ‘acceptable’ non-white writers” (“Non-White Minorities”). I will discuss the value of each of these works individually in the next chapter.

To address teachers’ fears of entering unknown territory when they introduce works by minority writers, I have prepared detailed lesson plans. The plans include strategies that should help students build trust and respect for each other. Several
activities are designed to help students feel that their individual opinions matter, to build confidence and security. The readings for this unit should raise discussions about controversial and sensitive topics, but the lesson plans I have written should help teachers navigate those conversations and feel more comfortable with the subject matter. Though the lesson plans are written with my particular reading list in mind, the plans could easily be adapted to fit most reading lists.

This unit does present a potential problem because, as it is introduced here, it is out of context; I do not address in detail what lessons would need to be covered to prepare the students for this unit or what should be done to continue the discussion of what they learn after the unit is complete. If this unit were to be taught in isolation as it is presented here, then it does nothing to address the problem of curriculum material that claims to be multicultural but is really only a token representation. To be successful, this unit must be covered in a course that has already introduced students to numerous minority writers and that will continue to explore works by non-whites.

**Rationale for the Theme**

Organizing curriculum materials around a common theme is a frequently used strategy in English classrooms. In her instructional book, *Making the Journey: Being and Becoming a Teacher of English Language Arts*, Leila Christenbury describes the benefits of thematic units: “Asking students to consider literature under the umbrella of a theme can be very helpful as students try to make sense of a poem or a novel. It can connect what could otherwise seem so disparate it is impossible to grasp” (140). Maxwell and Meiser point out additional benefits. They note that a thematic unit can heighten student interest (226). Students may be able to relate to the theme, and since thematic units
usually ask students to make connections to their own lives, they can bring in reading materials in which they are interested. Thematic units also provide teachers with the ability to integrate different genres in what Maxwell and Meiser call “a natural way” (226). Bringing in different genres all related to the same theme allows for creativity. The teacher or students can bring in music, film, comic books, advertisements, etc. Finally, Maxwell and Meiser point out that thematic units “provide for different reading levels” (227). In a thematic unit, students can be reading different works, and because all of the works are connected thematically, general class discussion can involve every student no matter what he or she is reading.

Believing in the strengths of thematic units, I chose to focus this study of twentieth century African American literature on the theme of family life. The literature in this unit allows students to explore numerous questions about family: What does it mean to be a family? Who can be a family member? What role should family play in a person’s life? What responsibility, if any, does one have to one’s family? What factors can divide a family? Etc. This theme is particularly evident in the works I have chosen, but it is also a universal theme. Students should be able to answer these questions about the novels but also about their own families and cultures. This theme also connects particularly well to other disciplines. In political science or sociology classes, students might be asked to discuss the form and function of family, and currently, the question of family is a major issue of debate. The readings could lead to discussions of how the government defines family and how it should or should not be defined. If this unit followed Antebellum or Civil War readings, students could identify how and why African American families have changed since that time period. Leila Christenbury warns
that teachers should not ask students “to see or find a predetermined theme” (14). She says, “Announcing or insisting that a certain piece of or pieces of literature have a set theme is intellectual hostage taking” (140). Keeping this warning in mind, I plan to use the theme of family life as a flexible connection between the works. Students will be encouraged to describe other themes or to argue against the theme of family if they so choose.

**Overview of Literature Circles**

Literature circles have been used for decades at all levels of education though they have been called different names: reading groups, book clubs, reading circles, etc. The origin of literature circles cannot be traced to any particular teacher or group of teachers, but in 1994, Harvey Daniels wrote *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* which gave rise to the “official” term, “literature circle,” and presented a specific model for the strategy. Daniels’ book, because it was the first to define literature circles and their detailed structure, is the seminal work on this topic. Other research on literature circles is generally a development or adaptation of Daniels’ work.

The driving forces behind literature circles are student choice, responsibility, and collaboration. Daniels lists twelve key factors that must be present to make literature circles “authentic and mature”:

1. Students *choose* their own reading material.
2. *Small temporary groups* are formed, based on book choice.
3. Different groups read *different books*.
4. Groups meet on a *regular, predictable schedule* to discuss their reading.
5. Kids use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion.

6. Discussion topics come from the students.

7. Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome.

8. In newly forming groups, students play a rotating assortment of task roles.

9. The teacher serves as a facilitator, not a group member or instructor.

10. Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation.

11. A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room.

12. When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and then new groups form around new reading choices. (Daniels 18)

The lesson plans I have written will show how I choose to implement these factors, but one important concept to understand beforehand is the assignment of student roles. When students first begin working in literature circles, each student is assigned a specific task. The goal is that students will eventually be able to assume the roles naturally and not need to complete role sheets, but in the beginning, the roles provide structure and guidance for students who most likely do not know how even to begin having a discussion about a book. The students rotate their roles either at each meeting or after finishing a book depending on the teacher’s preference.

Daniels provides examples of several roles, and other educators have come up with numerous variations. The basic roles are discussion director, literary luminary, connector, and illustrator (Daniels 62). A discussion director is responsible for preparing questions to get the discussion started and for encouraging group members to respond. A literary luminary makes note of particularly effective or significant passages. He or she reads the
passage aloud, and group members discuss the meaning of the passage. The connector links the novel to real-life experience, encouraging students to think about how the book relates to them. Finally, the illustrator provides an artistic interpretation of the text. Daniels believes the role of illustrator is valuable because it allows students who do not “always succeed at the usual school-language prompts” to be able to respond to the work (62).

There is a great amount of flexibility with the roles used in literature circles. Sandra DaLie discusses her adaptations of the roles and explains that in certain school environments, it is beneficial to design a role that works particularly well when attendance is a problem (90). She rewrote the basic role sheets to appeal to her high school students by writing the descriptions as if students are applying for a job. She includes a “job description,” a “qualifications” section, and a “responsibilities” section (DaLie 88). The role assignments can be easily adapted to fit the needs of different groups of students.

Daniels and other proponents of literature circles acknowledge that students cannot simply jump into literature circles and have productive conversations; they must practice the strategy before they can use it effectively. Literature circles can be taught by using a short novel the entire class is reading, by using a short story, or by using the fish bowl method where one group demonstrates a session and the other students analyze the discussion (Daniels 58). I have designed this unit based on the assumption that the students in my class will have already had this practice with literature circles and will be ready to discuss their novel without the use of the role sheets. The lesson plans I have
prepared are written with the expectation that students are mature enough in their literature circle skills to write reading response logs.

**Rational for Literature Circles**

Literature circles are a potentially fun way to get students interested in reading, but this reading strategy is also grounded in educational and critical theory. Literature circles value students’ responses to the text; they support Louise Rosenblatt’s school of reader response theory. Students are encouraged to make connections between their previous experiences and the text. Daniels argues that literature circles provide safe places for students’ responses because the teacher “cannot be in every group at once; it’s impossible for a backsliding teacher to force premature analysis on more than one student group at a time” (35). This collaborative structure prevents teachers from delivering to the students the New Critical “correct” reading of a work.

Literature circles are also grounded in the collaborative learning movement. Daniels is careful to distinguish between “cooperative” and “collaborative” work. Literature circles ask students to do higher-level thinking activities that are “student centered” and “open-ended,” making the strategy collaborative, contrasting with traditional cooperative activities that simply ask students to do with a group the rote activities they could do individually (38). Daniels admits that some educators view the role sheets as a hindrance to true collaboration, but he explains that the sheets are a “temporary, transitional helping tool” (38). He defends this temporary use of the designated tasks by citing a well-known figure in educational theory: “We think that our roles provide a kind of surrogate adult help in the child’s zone of proximal development: as Vygotsky (1978) says, what children can do with our help today, they can do on their
own tomorrow” (39). Another important theoretical implication of literature circles is that this strategy combines readers of all different levels – it makes detracking work. Students decide which books they will read, so they are in charge of grouping themselves, and they lose any stigmatized labels. Students have the chance to challenge themselves when they are interested in a more difficult book, or they can “take a break” and read at their own comfort level (42).

I have decided to use literature circles because I believe that they do give students more choice and responsibility in their own learning. I want students to develop a genuine interest in reading, and at the end of this unit, I want that interest to extend to African American literature, and I think the best way to do that is to let the students choose books that appeal to them instead of trying to choose one novel that both represents African American literature and appeals to the students. I like the fact that the students have the ability to decide at which level they will read. I think that when the description of a book really appeals to them, then the students will challenge themselves. Most importantly, I find it beneficial that the students will be introduced to not one, but at least five other African American novels. Though they will not read each novel, they will at least learn about other novels they might be interested in, and they will learn about these works from their peers, not from their teacher.
Works Cited


Chapter Two

Descriptions of the Novels

In this chapter, I present a brief overview of how each novel I chose to include in the unit relates to the theme of family.

**The Bluest Eye**

Toni Morrison presents two families in this novel: the Breedloves and the MacTeers. The MacTeer family is a stable family; the parents love their children and protect them. Mrs. MacTeer is often an angry, mean woman, and Mr. MacTeer is preoccupied with making enough money to support the family, but they provide safety and comfort for their girls. The MacTeers take in Pecola Breedlove to live with them after her family falls apart. Cholly Breedlove is a drunk and violent man, and his wife believes it is her job to punish her husband for his sins. Pecola is detached from her parents; she finds comfort when she talks with the whores who live above her. Cholly rapes his young daughter, and Pecola becomes pregnant with his child.

Though Morrison presents the hatred and perversion in the Breedlove family, she tells the stories of Cholly Breedlove’s and Polly Breedlove’s pasts, and these stories lead readers to feel more sympathy for the two characters. Cholly’s past is haunted by events that stripped him of his manhood, and Polly has had to deal with always feeling ugly and isolated. In the novel, both the Breedloves and the MacTeers face the racism and poverty of the early 1940s. *The Bluest Eye* will lead students to consider what factors make a family strong and what forces can destroy one. Morrison reveals that people can be better understood when their family histories are examined and their past situations explored.
**Imani All Mine**

This novel was written for an adolescent audience. It is one of the shorter, easier reads, but Connie Porter’s story of teenage pregnancy is complex, and she presents mainly non-traditional family structures. The main character, Tasha, gives birth to her daughter, Imani, at the age of fifteen after being raped by a teen-age boy she barely knows. Tasha lives with her single mother, who mothered her at a young age as well. There are few fathers who stick around in this novel. Tasha’s best friend is a single mother of twins; her gossipy neighbor raises a drug-dealing son on her own; and her best friend’s mother lives alone as well. Though Tasha struggles to raise Imani, she forms a close and loving bond with her daughter, and she proves to be a good mother even without a father to help her.

Porter highlights numerous social problems facing poor black families. She looks at gang violence, drug problems, lack of education, and abuses of the welfare system, but she examines these issues through the funny, often naïve, voice of Tasha. This novel will appeal to students who want to read books that address current, relevant issues. *Imani All Mine* should lead students to question how “family” should be defined today.

**In My Father’s House**

In this work, Ernest Gaines explores the effects an absent father has on his family. The main character of the novel, Phillip Martin, is a prominent minister and political leader in his town. He seems to be a good father and husband, and he is widely respected. Unbeknownst to the community, Phillip fathered three children out of wedlock before becoming a minister. He left the mother of his children behind, never to talk to her again. At the beginning of the novel, Phillip’s oldest son, Etienne, tracks him down. Etienne is
ready to kill his father; he blames him for all of the pain his family has gone through. Etienne realizes that killing Phillip will not restore his lost manhood, but he does confront Phillip and condemn him for leaving his family behind.

Gaines show in this novel the ease with which the father is able to abandon and forget about his family while those he left behind struggle and are virtually destroyed by his absence. This novel is a tragic portrayal of family – Phillip is unable to repair the damage he has caused. This novel should lead students to consider the importance of a father and the effects of abandonment.

**A Lesson Before Dying**

This Ernest Gaines novel examines how a small black community in the 1940s attempts to function as a family. The main character, Grant Wiggins, lives with his aunt in the small Cajun town – his parents left the town years before the story is set. Grant’s relationship with his aunt, Tante Lou, is tense because Grant realizes that his aunt and the entire community expect him to be the black man who can be different from all those who came before him. They believe that he will not run, that he will stand up for them.

When a young black man in the town is sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit (he happened to be with the boys who did commit it), Grant is asked by his aunt’s best friend, Miss Emma, to help the young man become a real man before he is executed. Grant struggles to help Jefferson become the hero that he knows he himself cannot be. Gaines examines how the black community works together, comforts its hurting members, and yearns for a true example of manhood. Students who read this novel will be able to examine how a community can function as a family when traditional families are absent.
This novel is a beautiful story about family history. Gloria Naylor highlights both the pain and the pride that can be passed from generation to generation. The family in Mama Day is a family of women: Cocoa (Ophelia), Abigail (Cocoa’s Grandmother), and Miranda (Cocoa’s Great-Aunt), who is known to all as “Mama Day.” The strength of the women is derived from Cocoa’s great-great-great grandmother who, through her mysterious power over her owner, was able to obtain her freedom and the rights to the lands of Willow Springs, the sea island where the majority of the novel is set. The importance of family history is a major theme of the novel as Mama Day realizes that the women of the Day family will never be able to find peace until they come to terms with the tragedies that occurred in their family’s past. Though the pain their foremothers suffered haunts the women, they work to preserve their history. They sew an elaborate quilt representing generations of Days to pass on to Cocoa’s future children and grandchildren. Mama Day treasures a cane made by her father and a faded ledger that contains her family’s history.

The Day family is the centerpiece of the novel, but Naylor explores other aspects of family life. Cocoa’s husband, George, grew up in an orphanage without a true family, and his lack of family history pains him; he yearns for what his wife has. Naylor examines the Day family from the inside perspective of Cocoa and also from the outside perspective of George. The community of Willow Springs also functions as a family. Even though Mama Day has never mothered a child, she serves as the matriarch of the island. Through Mama Day’s position on the island, Naylor explores the ability of this all-black community to function as a family although, like any family, Willow Springs is
plagued with its share of problems and troublemakers. The community also has its own traditions to help reconnect its members and to preserve the past. Mama Day’s power in the community is somewhat magical. She knows the powers of roots and herbs, and she uses her power to protect her family. This novel is one of the longer works on the reading list, but students should find the story captivating. Naylor presents family history in all of its complexity.

*My Soul to Keep*

Tananarive Due’s novel is another of the longer works I included on the reading list, but it is a book the students are not going to want to put down. In this thriller, the main character, Jessica Wolde, is an investigative reporter. She has a beautiful five-year-old daughter and is married to a man who speaks eight different languages, has a flawless appearance, and cries at the death of his beloved dog. Jessica’s co-worker dubs her husband, David, “Mr. Perfect.” Jessica and David seem to have a wonderful relationship; they argue occasionally, but forgive each other quickly. Jessica, after seven years of marriage, begins to realize that there are some strange things about David. She eventually learns that he is an immortal who has been living since the 1500s. David is willing to do anything to make sure that his wife and daughter live with him forever, even though his actions may cost him his wife’s love. Due portrays a man who cares for his family above all else, but his love becomes terrifying for Jessica as she realizes that he will kill for her.

Family is important to each of the characters in this novel, and Due reveals that family members are not always knowable: Jessica lives with her husband for seven years before learning his secret. Due also leads readers to consider how much right family
members have to alter the lives of their spouses or children. Students will be able to discuss whether or not David’s love for his family is too strong.

*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

This work is a classic adolescent literature novel. Usually taught in middle school, I chose to include this book as an option for struggling readers. In the novel, Mildred Taylor presents a strong, traditional family that is struggling against the racism of the early 1930s in the South. The story is told from the perspective of Cassie Logan, the young daughter in the family. The father of the Logan family works hard to save the land the family owns despite threats from powerful white men in the community, and the children struggle to understand why they are not treated well by whites in the community. The members of the Logan family value closeness and honesty; they are able to withstand the racism of the community because of their reliance upon one other.

The mother of the Logan family encourages her family to help less fortunate black families in the community even though they are threatened by whites because of this help they give. She knows that her family is better off than many other black families, and she feels she and her family have a responsibility to help them. The black community forms an extended family for the Logans.

Taylor’s portrayal of the family is honest. Though the family is incredibly stable, she shows the bickering and misunderstandings that occur. The children disobey their parents and question the decisions they make, but there is an ever-present sense of security and love for the family members. This novel is heart wrenching in its portrayal of the violent and merciless hatred of many whites for the blacks in the community, but the ability of the Logan family to stand up against racism and protect each other is
encouraging. Students can see that it is possible for families to withstand even the worst of circumstances.

**The Street**

In this novel, Ann Petry explores a mother’s love and its inability to overcome societal forces. Lutie, the main character, leaves her husband after finding him with another woman. She takes her son, Bub, with her to Harlem where she hopes they can start a new life. Lutie finds that her love for Bub cannot overcome the power of the street. As Lutie searches for jobs, she often talks to Bub about their lack of money. Bub eventually turns to the street as he tries to earn money for his mom. Lutie finds that no matter what she does to try to save herself and her son, the street always wins.

Petry presents a sympathetic mother who is striving to do all that she can for her son, but in this novel, the street becomes a stand-in family. When Lutie is out working, Bub is forced to be at home alone. She worries that Bub will be drawn in with the boys who have been raised by the street, not parents, and her anxieties come true. The street is cold, detached, and merciless, and both she and Bub fall victim to its cruelty. This novel is a somber picture of the struggles poor blacks faced in the 1940s. Students will see the difficulties that can face a parent trying to save his or her family. Petry reveals to readers that sometimes love is not enough to keep a family together.

**The View from Here**

Brian Keith Jackson’s first novel weaves together three different narrative voices, and one of the voices is an unusual choice; he has an unborn child relate events in the novel from her perspective. Lisa, as her mother names her, is able to describe from inside her mother her view of the family’s life. Jackson emphasizes the bond between mother
and child through his choice of Lisa as narrator. This unborn child gives Anna hope for the future as she believes the birth of her baby will make her husband return to the loving man he was before their house was filled with little boys. Most importantly, Lisa is the catalyst to the reconciliation between her mother and father at the end of the novel.

Lisa’s father is haunted by a troubled childhood. J.T. was raised by a mother who stripped him of his manhood. She would tie him to a tree in the front yard in just his underwear after he soiled himself in his sleep. After the death of his mother, his older sister begins to demean J.T. She humiliates him in front of his wife and children. J.T. insists that his wife must give Lisa to his cruel older sister because he does not believe that they can afford to keep her. The family is torn apart by J.T.’s decision, and Anna struggles to keep them together.

In *The View from Here*, Jackson shows a family that is working to stay together. The novel is set in the 1950s in rural Mississippi, so in addition to dealing with their own personal struggles, Lisa’s family faces racism from the whites in the community. The family members eventually are able to reconcile their problems, and this touching novel illustrates how the love that binds families allows them to preserve through tough times. This novel is one of the shorter, easier-to-read novels on the list, and students should enjoy Jackson’s honest, moving portrayal of family.

*A Visitation of Spirits*

This novel is similar to *A Lesson Before Dying* in that it examines the role a black male is expected to take in the community. The main character, Horace Cross, comes from a long line of ministers and spiritual leaders. He knows he is expected to be like his grandfather, a respected deacon in the church, but he realizes that does not want to be his
grandfather, nor can he be him. Horace is one of the brightest students at his high school, so the black community views him as an example of what a black man can be. They expect him to do well in everything, but Horace is different from the other members of the community: he is gay. The community’s expectations that Horace be the best and the brightest weigh heavily on him.

Randall Kenan reveals how family history and family expectations can be a burden. The novel is narrated from the third-person perspectives of Horace, his cousin, Jimmy, and his great-aunt Ruth and his grandfather, Zeke. Through these different perspectives, he shows both the pride and the pain the Cross family has endured through the generations. Kenan presents the role extended family can play in raising (and pressuring) children. Several family members, including Horace’s father, have either died or deserted the family, so his grandfather raises Horace. The traditional nuclear family is absent from this novel.

Horace attempts to escape his family’s and the community’s expectations by turning to magic, but in the end, he takes his life. The novel is a poignant portrayal of a family member who does not fit the mold of his family. Though Horace loves and respects his family members, he knows he never can be the man they want him to be; their generations are not prepared to accept him and his homosexuality. Students who read this book will be challenged to think about where people who do not find safety and security within their families can turn.
Chapter Three

Study of Dialect in a Thematic Unit

The Importance of Teaching Dialect

Dialect difference among students is an important issue in education today. The issue of language variety has been a topic of concern and controversy for educators, policy makers, and even the general public: the Oakland Unified School District Board of Education’s “Ebonics controversy” in 1996 is a recent example of the public’s concern with whether or not students are taught a form of standard English. Teachers and policy makers question how to address dialect differences in the classroom, and the discussion usually centers on the assumption that a form of standard English is the “correct” way to speak and write. Though educators and the public offer their opinions about dialect differences, students are seldom taught about their language varieties. They are inundated with the widely held opinion that there is a right way to speak and write, but they are rarely encouraged to question why this “correct” language variety is viewed as superior to the others. Few students are taught to value their own dialects or the dialects of their classmates.

Students need to be better informed about the true nature of dialects. In the book *American English*, Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes present numerous myths about dialect held by the general public. Three of these common myths are: “Only varieties of a language spoken by socially disfavored groups are dialects;” “Dialects result from unsuccessful attempts to speak the ‘correct’ form of a language;” and “Dialects have no linguistic patterning in their own right; they are deviations from standard speech” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 8). The fact that these myths exist is
reason enough to teach students about dialect. Teachers can assume that students who do not see the “linguistic patterning” of other dialects will continue to perpetuate the stereotype that speakers of socially unacceptable dialects are ignorant. Teaching students about the rules of African American English (AAE) and other dialects gives them a more informed view of language differences, making it easier for them to avoid the racist stereotypes that often accompany these dialects.

In addition to the importance of educating students about the realities of dialects, there are several additional reasons that dialects should be studied in the classroom. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes outline these important reasons in their book. The first reason they present is that the study of dialects is interesting and relevant because people are in constant contact with dialect speakers. They observe that “our natural curiosity is piqued when we hear speakers of different dialects” (20). For teachers of high school English, this general interest is significant because it means that students typically will be motivated by their interest to study this aspect of language. Another important reason to study dialects is that these language differences can provide information about cultures that extends into the fields of “history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and geography” (20). Students can learn about how dialects help groups maintain their cultural history or how records of dialect changes can give insight into a group’s migratory habits (20). The importance of dialect in multiple fields of study is relevant to teachers since they are encouraged to present multi-disciplinary lessons in their classrooms and to show how the skills learned in English connect to the knowledge students are gaining in other classes.
The study of dialects is also important on a theoretical basis (21). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes say that this theoretical interest “may range from the investigation of how language changes over time and space to how language reflects and affects the cognitive capabilities of a speaker of a language” (21). When students study dialects, they are analyzing the structure of language. In studying the grammaticality of dialects, students are being exposed to traditional grammatical terms as they talk about parts of speech and how those parts are formed. This study of grammatical features can even lead to students being able to improve their writing skills in standard English. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes provide an example of this situation:

Vernacular speakers may, for example, apply knowledge about dialect features to composing and editing skills in writing. We have personally witnessed students, who studied third-person singular –s absence in a unit on dialects, transfer this knowledge to their writing when called upon to write standard English. (346)

When teachers do incorporate the study of dialects, it certainly does not mean that they must abandon the teaching of standard English. Exploring the balance between teaching about dialects and teaching standard English is beyond the scope of this project, but the study of dialects does not require teachers to ignore the fact that standard English is still what is socially acceptable and often necessary in the job market. For suggestions on how to strike a balance between the two, see Chapter Ten, “On the Applications of Dialect Study,” in American English.

**Resources for Introducing Students to the Study of Dialect**

Though the study of dialects does not yet have an established place in the high school English classroom, there are numerous curriculums designed for teachers who
want to introduce this area of study. PBS’s web site for the video *Do You Speak American?* provides detailed lesson plans for teaching language varieties. The plans correspond with the video and provide discussion points for segments from it. They include a series of five units and introduce students to African American English (AAE), Spanish and Chicano English, and regional language varieties. The plans address NCTE standards, and they help students examine their attitudes about dialects, learn about the history of language differences, and evaluate their own language use.

Another helpful source for introducing the study of language variety in the classroom is “Incorporating Dialect Study into the Language Arts Class.” In this article, Walt Wolfram describes the fundamental principles for creating a unit on dialect. The background information he provides and the sample exercises are a good starting point for teachers interested in teaching students about language differences. With Jeffrey Reaser, Walt Wolfram designed a curriculum unit for use on Ocracoke Island, North Carolina. These plans provide detailed, day-by-day activities. Like the plans for *Do You Speak American?*, these plans help students learn about language differences and their own language use and attitudes about dialects. Wolfram and Reaser have also produced another curriculum unit for dialect awareness, *Voices of North Carolina: Language and Life from the Atlantic to the Appalachians*. Though designed for middle-school students in North Carolina, the lessons could be adapted for high school students in other states. Most importantly, teachers with “little to no linguistics knowledge” should have no problems teaching these lessons (1). When choosing or designing a curriculum on dialect, Walt Wolfram suggests several important guidelines to consider: “A unit on dialects needs to focus on the fundamental naturalness of dialect variation in American society.
Students should confront stereotypes and misconceptions about dialects, and this is probably best done inductively” (347).

I have prepared an annotated bibliography with sources that, in addition to those mentioned above, 1) explain why dialect awareness is a legitimate and valuable area for study in English classes and 2) provide the foundation for the lesson plans I have designed.


This position paper clearly outlines teachers’ responsibilities to understand dialect differences, expose students to a variety of dialects, and aid students who speak different dialects in their reading and writing development. One of the goals the organization lists is that teachers should be able to teach students to respect language varieties. This statement from the NCTE is a clear message to educators that dialect awareness should be taught in the English class.


This chapter explores how Ebonics has been presented in popular culture since the Oakland court case. Rickford and Rickford focus on four categories of jokes: 1) – onics jokes, 2) invariant be jokes, 3) translation jokes, and 4) racial caricatures. The authors explore how Ebonics has become an outlet for people to express their racism and to perpetuate stereotypes. This source provided the foundation for my
lesson on misuses of dialect. The chapter is very accessible and would also be appropriate for lessons in a dialect unit when Ebonics is discussed.


This chapter focuses on the use of African American dialect in literature. The authors provide a brief history of the use of black dialect in literature. They also examine how the use of dialect allows African American authors to connect with their audience, often at the exclusion of white readers. Throughout the chapter, they recognize the controversy surrounding the use of black dialect, and they examine how it has been misrepresented in the past, focusing on the minstrel tradition. They end the chapter with an important question: “Does dialect literature limit or liberate?”

This chapter was particularly useful for me because of the many examples the authors give. They closely examine Langston Hughes’ “Mother to Son” and note that an African American journalist said the poem “would not feel the same in standard English.” This quote gave me the basic ideas for my lesson on Hughes’ poem. They also examine the controversy surrounding Harris’ Uncle Remus stories, another aspect of one of my lesson plans.


This chapter provides a brief linguistic/cultural history of the United States and examines our country’s history of suppressing non-standard dialects and of
pushing for the establishment of English-only. Smitherman points out several oppressive linguistic policies of the US and suggests four strategies to stop “the mis-education of the Negro – and you too” (311). These suggestions call for Americans, and more specifically, sociolinguistics, to talk to public officials, make use of the media, use organizations to take a stand, and vote.

Though her purpose in this chapter is not explicitly school-reform, Smitherman’s argument presents support for the idea that schools should be teaching dialect awareness. Schools should not be yet another arena where English-only is pushed.

Another chapter of Smitherman’s, “CCCC and the ‘Students’ Right to Their Own Language,” also provides evidence for why dialect awareness should be taught.


This chapter explores literary dialect, the impact of dialect on a speaker’s achievement in reading and writing, dialect awareness curriculums, and community-based dialect programs. The chapter offers several specific lesson ideas and includes a helpful annotated bibliography. The authors provide compelling, specific rationale for why dialect awareness should be taught in schools (though this idea is presented throughout the book). I also used this chapter for its straightforward definitions of “eye dialect” and “mock language.”

**Rationale for Teaching Literary Dialect**

With Wolfram and Reaser’s curriculum units and the lessons for *Do You Speak American?*, teachers have the resources they need for introducing the study of dialects in their courses; however, these plans are designed as self-contained units. Teachers spend
the designated time on the unit and then move on to another unit or focus of study. Though resources for teaching an introductory dialect unit are plentiful, there are not many resources designed to help teachers continue the study of dialect throughout the semester or school year. In the lesson plans for *Do You Speak American?*, the authors encourage teachers to connect the lessons about dialect awareness to lessons throughout the semester. They offer general advise: “Interest in and respect for language diversity and the function and value of vernacular varieties of English (see NCTE Standard 9) can be reinforced by tying the information in this unit to units on poetry, writing style, African American writers … or culturally conscious writers.” *The Do You Speak American?* plans do offer a few ideas for applying dialect study to the study of literature, but the plans are fairly brief. There is a need for more specific lesson plans that focus on integrating the study of dialect throughout the semester.

In the lesson plans I have designed for this unit, I have incorporated specific lessons on the study of literary dialect. The plans ask students to consider how dialect is written, what purpose it serves, and when it is appropriate to use it in writing. The activities I have prepared to help students consider these topics will lead to discussions about how dialect can be used to stereotype particular groups or to make fun of a group’s use of language. The study of literary dialect will also allow the students to discuss the grammaticality of African American English, and seeing the use of dialect in these novels may help students who are speakers of AAE connect to the novels or feel pride in their own use of dialect. Dialect is an important aspect of the novels the students are choosing from for their literature circles, so it should not be ignored. In South Carolina, there are no state standards devoted solely to the study of dialect, but one of the Reading standards
does address this topic; the standard states that students should be able to “demonstrate the ability to evaluate an author’s use of stylistic elements such as foreshadowing, flashback, soliloquy, irony, dialect, asides, tone and figurative language.” This broad standard allows teachers to justify students’ study of dialect to supervisors not convinced by research alone.

This thematic unit must follow a unit that introduces the study of dialects. At some point in the semester (preferably the beginning), students need to gain a basic understanding of language differences before they can knowledgeably analyze the use of literary dialect. Students would be unable to complete the dialect lesson plans I have written without having been introduced to the rules of different dialects and the history of those varieties. I would most likely use the PBS *Do You Speak American?* curriculum to teach the students about dialect. As students work through the lesson plans I have presented here, they may need to revisit their notes and writings from the dialect unit to help them remember the history and rules of African American English. Since this unit focuses on African American literature, the students will examine only AAE, but these same plans could be adapted when working with Southern literature or Hispanic literature, for example.
Works Cited

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Chapter Four

Assessment of Literature Circles

As I noted in Chapter One of this project, when students first begin their work in literature circles, they are assigned specific roles. As they read and discuss their novels, the students are responsible for fulfilling these specific roles within their literature circles and for completing the corresponding role sheets. This initial structuring prepares students for leading discussions without the use of role sheets. The following lesson plans are designed for students who have already been taught to work in literature circles and who have already had several opportunities to work with each assigned role. The plans I have written do not ask students to limit themselves to a specific role or to complete a role sheet. Doing away with the contrived roles allows students to have the kinds of discussions Harvey Daniels describes as “natural and sophisticated” (62).

Once students are ready to move away from the artificial structuring of literature circles, they still need to be prepared to discuss their chosen work when they come to class. The requirement of open-ended literature logs makes students responsible for responding individually to their assigned reading. In these logs, students can model their responses after the roles they first practiced in the literature circles. For instance, a student might choose to connect a particular passage from the novel with his or her personal experiences, or a student might choose to respond to a significant passage with a visual representation of that key moment. For my students, I will ask that each response be about one page in length (an artistic response should be accompanied with a paragraph of explanation). The students will be expected to complete a literature log entry for each assigned section of reading (in this unit, that will mean the students are completing an
entry every other day). These literature logs ensure that students are ready to talk about 
the novel when they meet in their literature circles. They also provide a way for me to 
monitor student growth. When I assess the literature logs, I will focus solely on content 
by asking the following questions about the entries: Has the student shown an 
understanding of the novel? Is the student going beyond simple plot summary? Are the 
student’s responses thoughtful and well developed? When I assess the literature logs, I 
will respond to each student’s progress through individualized comments and 
suggestions.

The literature logs provide one method of assessment when the students are 
working in literature circles, but I also need to assess the work the students do as they 
discuss their novels. For this aspect of literature circles, my assessment will be based on 
my observations. As the students meet in their literature circles, I will be circulating 
among the groups. I want to interrupt the groups as little as possible as I observe their 
interaction, so I plan to make mental notes as I sit with a group and then jot down my 
observations after I leave that group. These open-ended observation notes will allow me 
to note students’ development and any problem areas I might need to address in private 
conferences. In the lesson plans, I have not set aside specific times for reading 
conferences. I plan to meet with students when appropriate times arise. For instance, 
when the students have finished the class activities for the day, they will have time to 
read their novels, and I will use this time to meet individually with students. These 
conferences will last about five minutes and will consist of me asking the student to talk 
about the book he or she is reading and the progress that has been made in the unit. I will
also use this time to address any problems I have observed. I will find time to meet with each student at least once over the three-week period.

The major form of assessment of the literature circles will be the final project of the unit. This project asks the students to show the class what they have been discussing throughout their time working together. The students in each literature circle will work together on this assignment, and each student will be responsible for speaking during the presentation. I will monitor each student’s contribution to his or her literature circle by observing the students as they work on these projects, and at the end of the unit, I will ask the students to reflect on their literature circle’s ability to work together and to rate each student’s contribution to the literature circle. One additional form of individual assessment that I have built into the unit is a rather open-ended question on the unit test that asks students to make connections between the shorter works they have read in the unit and their novel.

For some school districts, the methods of assessment I have planned in this unit may not yield enough grades. Harvey Daniels offers suggestions for this potential problem. He recommends, “If at all possible, derive your formal grades from other activities, so that you don’t undermine the genuineness of conversation in literature circles – and don’t replace the collaborative culture you’re trying to build with competition” (166). Daniels goes on to identify some ways teachers have been able to address the problem of grading, but I have tried to provide other opportunities for grading by incorporating additional activities in the unit. I have provided a brief overview of the assessment measures I will use in this unit (I provide more details about the assessment measures in the lesson plans). I have divided the assessment measures according to
whether they are formative and summative. The formative measures will allow me to assess students’ progress without attaching a grade to their work. The goal of this form of assessment is to allow students to grow and improve as the unit progresses. Summative assessment is an evaluation of each student’s work in the unit, a way to attach a grade to what they have accomplished.

**Formative Assessment**

Informal Observations

Student Free-writes

Literature Logs

Individual Reading Conferences

**Summative Assessment**

Presentation on African American Families in Popular Culture

Formal Literature Log Entry

Unit Test

Literature Circle Presentation
Work Cited

Chapter Five
Lesson Plans

Materials Used in the Lesson Plans


Preparation for the Unit

Before the unit begins, I will dedicate a portion of a class period to letting the students preview the books from the reading list. This is the day when students will be able to browse the novels and decide which one they want to read. I will display the books on tables, and the students will be able to walk around the room and thumb through them. They will be able to gauge the length and difficulty of each novel. I will provide a written summary of the plot of each novel, and I will provide a general warning if the novel contains any graphic violence, graphic sexual episodes, or vulgar language. After the students have had plenty of time to shop through the books, I will ask them to list their top three choices. I will try to give the students their first choices, but it may be necessary to give them their second or third choices in order to have fairly equal numbers of students in each literature circle.
Monday, Week One

Introduction to the Unit and Historical Overview of African American Families

Goals

The students will be able to:

- Describe their perceptions of the word “family” and the phrase “African American family”
- Construct a definition of “family”
- Summarize an article that provides an overview of the history of African American families
- Explain the importance of knowing the general history of African American families
- Make connections between the information discussed during the class period and works they have read earlier in the course

Materials

- Access to the website <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/family/history.html> or handouts of the article from the site
- Sticky notes and bookmarks for setting reading schedules

Procedures

- I will begin the class period by writing the word “family” on the board. The students will have five minutes to free-write about the word. They will be instructed to write down whatever comes to their minds when they think of this word, and they should not worry about correctness as they write.
- The students will then get into groups of three to four and use their free-writes as a basis for defining the word “family.” They will have approximately seven to eight minutes to talk about the main ideas from their free-writes and come up with a group definition.
- We will come back together as a whole class, and the individual groups will share their definitions. We will look for commonalities and come up with a working definition of family for our class.
• After this activity, I will have the students return to their free-writes on “family” and have them free-write for five minutes on the phrase “African American families.”

• I will ask the students to share ways their perceptions of African American families might differ from their perceptions of white or Asian or Hispanic families. I will ask them to think of any stereotypes of African American families seen on television, in movies, in music, etc. We will explore the issue of stereotypes in more depth as the unit progresses.

• The students will read the two-page historical overview of African American families during the time of slavery. I chose this particular article because it does not make faulty generalizations about slave families; the author explains that there were major differences between slave life in the North and slave life in the South and among different masters. She also makes it clear that African Americans did work hard to form lawful families and to preserve their families.

• I will ask students to write down the main ideas from the article as they read (I will circulate among the students as they write). Then, as a class, we will summarize the article, and I will ask students to hypothesis how the facts from the article might still affect African American family life today. In other words, why is it important that they understand the history of African American families?

• Students should think back to other African American works they have read so far during the course and recall how families were portrayed in those works (this unit would probably most appropriately be placed later in the semester after students have read slave narratives and other early African American works). If time remains, students should browse through the “original documents” on the PBS website <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/family/docs.html>. The site features correspondence between family members, journal entries, and excerpts from slave narratives.

• For the final ten minutes of class, the students will meet in their literature circles and set their reading schedules. The ending date for each group is Friday of week three. They will be meeting in their literature circles every other day, so they need to have a new reading assignment set for each meeting date. I will have
bookmarks prepared that have the list of meeting dates, and the students can then write down what pages are due on each date. The students are completely responsible for deciding how to “chunk” their novels. Sticky-notes are useful because students can place them at the end of each assigned chunk. I will need a copy of each literature circle’s reading schedule.

Assessment

- My assessment of students’ understanding of this lesson will be based on observation. This lesson is intended to help students start thinking about the theme of family and to prepare them for their reading. I will monitor their group work and pay attention to their responses in class.
- I will read the students’ free-writes, focusing solely on content. This will help me gauge the students’ attitudes about racial differences. I should be able to see if there are any racist issues I need to address or any misperceptions that I can help the students recognize. I would try to address these issues in a nondirective way by adjusting my lessons to help lead students to recognize their prejudices instead of telling them how they should think. I will respond to the students’ free-writes with brief written comments and then return the papers.

Tuesday, Week One

Preserving Family History

Goals

The students will be able to:

- Summarize the plot of “Everyday Use”
- Identify the point of view in the story and explain its significance
- Compare and contrast Dee’s and Maggie’s attitudes about heirlooms
- Identify and describe the themes, images, and characterization of the short story
- Explain the importance of quilting in African American culture
- Construct a list of other ways families are able to preserve their history

Materials

- Access to
  <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1680140> and
<http://www.quiltstudy.org>

- Alice Walker, “Everyday Use”

**Procedures**

- The students will read “Everyday Use” in class. (Because they are reading their novels and writing their literature logs for homework on an almost daily basis, I have tried to provide time for additional readings in class). Students who finish reading the story early can read from their novels.

- Once everyone has finished reading, we will discuss the story as a class. Since the students have experience leading their own discussions in their literature circles, I will let the students direct the conversation.

- Through the discussion, the students should touch upon the themes, images, and characterization in the story. I want students to discuss the point of view from which the story is written, so I will raise this element of the story if students do not address it in their discussions.

- After the discussion, students will listen to the NPR broadcast of a brief interview with Dr. Raymond Dobard who has written about the coded meanings in quilts from the slave era. I will ask the students to pay attention to the evidence he presents for his position as they listen to the interview.

- After the interview, I will ask the students to discuss whether or not they think Dr. Dobard’s ideas are credible, and I will ask them to consider the challenges of finding support for his position.

- Students will have time to browse through a collection of African American quilts at <http://www.quiltstudy.org>. By going to the search page of this site and searching through the Robert and Helen Cargo collection, students can see 156 different quilts and read about the details of the quilts.

- As the students search through the quilts, I will ask them to write down the name of their favorite and briefly describe what kind of meaning they gather from observing this piece of art.

- I will ask the students to explain, based on “Everyday Use,” the radio interview, and the online collection of quilts, why they think quilting is significant to many African American families and to other ethnic groups as well.
• I will ask the students to list other ways that families, including their own families, preserve their histories.

Assessment
• During the class period, I will assess the students’ abilities to accomplish the goals listed above by informal observation. Students will have a formal assessment of these goals on the unit test.

Wednesday, Week One
Discussion of Novels and Preserving Family History, continued

Goals
The students will be able to:
• Participate in discussions with their literature circles about the novels they are reading
• Plan for their final projects on their novels
• Compare and contrast Giovanni’s poem, “Hands: For Mother’s Day,” with “Everyday Use”
• Use the poem to define “motherhood”
• Explain the form of the poem and the relationship of the form to the meaning
• Define the term “allusion”
• Describe how this poem addresses the idea of preserving family history

Materials
• Assignment sheet for final project (see attachment)
• Nikki Giovanni, “Hands: For Mother’s Day”

Procedures
• For the first forty-five minutes of class, students will work with their literature circles to discuss their understanding and interpretation of the first section of their novels. They will use their reading logs to guide their discussion.
• I will provide the students with assignment sheets for the project they will be completing by the end of the unit (see attachment). We will go over the assignment sheet, and students will have five to ten minutes to do any initial planning or role assigning they need to do.
• I will ask for a student to volunteer to read Giovanni’s poem aloud.
• I will give students a brief explanation of names in the poem they may not recognize (Emmett Till, Ethel Kennedy, Betty Shabazz), and I will teach the students the term “allusion.”

• The students will come with a definition of “motherhood” using Giovanni’s poem and will compare and contrast the ideas of this poem with Walker’s “Everyday Use.” I will ask them to consider how the poem addresses preserving family history.

• I will ask the students to explain why they think the poem is written the way it is, and we will discuss the way the form contributes to the poem’s meaning.

**Assessment**

• I will informally assess the students’ work in literature circles by sitting in on some of the group discussions (though I will sit in as a fellow reader, not as a teacher or grader).

• I will assess the students’ abilities to accomplish the other goals listed above by informal observation. Students will have a formal assessment of these goals on the unit test and on the final project.
Literature Circle Project for African American Novel:
A Family Scrapbook

Assignment: Create a scrapbook for the family in your novel and present this project to the class, explaining the significance of each page.

Purpose: To produce a work that illustrates your understanding and interpretation of your novel and to provide your classmates a preview of the book so they will know if it interests them.

Audience: Your classmates and fellow readers

Materials: Your novel, construction paper, markers, crayons, scissors, glue, other craft materials

Due Date: Tuesday of week four

Creating the Scrapbook

Components

1. Your scrapbook should include a family tree for the primary family in your novel (fill in as much of the tree as you can with the information you are given in the text).

2. Your scrapbook should have at least two visual representations of a significant event, character, symbol, setting, etc. from the novel. These representations may take the form of drawings, collages, paintings, etc. Be creative!

3. You should also include at least four written representations of a significant event, character, symbol, setting, etc. from the novel. These representations may take the form of diary entries by a character, letters between characters, poems, official documents, eulogies, wedding vows, etc. Be creative!

4. At least one written representation in your scrapbook should incorporate the dialect used in your novel. The dialect you use should look like that which your author uses.
Getting Started
Use your notes and reflections from your literature log to help you pick out the important aspects of the novel you want to represent. As you talk about your novel with your literature circle, plan ahead for the representations you may want to include.

Division of Labor
Your literature circle may choose to divide the work, or you may produce each page as a group. The choice belongs to your literature circle. You will have some class time to work on this project.

Presentation
When you present your scrapbook to the class, each group member must explain the significance of each least one page. Your presentation should last approximately 10-15 minutes.

Evaluation
Your literature circle will be graded on the finished project and the presentation. Your grade will be based on the following criteria:

**Participation** – Did each group member effectively contribute to the project? (I will use my observations and your group members’ feedback to determine this). Did each group member take part in the presentation?

**Accuracy** – Is each page of the scrapbook consistent with the novel? Can each page be supported with information from the novel? Is the dialect incorporated in the scrapbook consistent with the dialect in the novel?

**Rationale for Choices** – Has the group chosen significant aspects of the novel to represent? Is the logic and reasoning behind each page of the scrapbook clearly explained?

**Quality of the Scrapbook** – Is the scrapbook creative, well organized, and thorough? Do the written representations follow the rules of standard English or the dialect being used?
Thursday, Week One

*The Function of African American Dialect in Literature and Family Struggles*

**Goals**

The students will be able to:

- Recognize the use of dialect in “Mother to Son”
- Decide what role dialect serves in the poem
- Evaluate the effect of the dialect features upon the reader
- Describe the role of the mother in the poem and her attitude towards the problems she has faced
- Compare and contrast the images of motherhood they have seen in Walker’s, Giovanni’s, and Hughes’ works with the images of motherhood in the novels they are reading with their literature circles

**Materials**

- Langston Hughes, “Mother to Son”
- Set of index cards with questions prepared for each group

**Procedures**

- I will ask for a student to read “Mother to Son” aloud.
- I will ask the students to call out examples of dialect features they see in the poem. (If they need to review specific terms or rules they learned from the dialect unit, I will lead them in a brief review at this point).
- Students will, individually and on a sheet of paper, translate this poem into informal standard English, and I will then ask for students to volunteer to read the altered poems.
- After hearing a few of the poems, students will get together in small groups for a “fan and pick” activity. I will give each group a set of index cards. One student fans the cards out facedown, and the student to his right chooses a card and must answer the question. This procedure is repeated until every student has had the chance to answer a question. The questions/directives for this activity will be:
  1. Explain any aspects of the poem (meaning, characterization, images, etc.) that change when the poem is read without the dialect features.
2. Why do you think Hughes chose to include dialect in this poem?

3. Explain the effect that the dialect has on the sound of the poem when read aloud (read the poem aloud again if you need to).

4. Explain your response as a reader to this literary dialect – how does it affect your reading of the poem?

- I will circulate while the students do this group activity. Groups that finish earlier than others simply repeat the steps so that students end up answering more than one question.

- The students will come back together as a group, and we will discuss the content of the poem. I will ask the students to compare and contrast the mother in Hughes’ poem with the mother from “Everyday Use” and the picture of motherhood presented in “Hands: For Mother’s Day.”

- I will ask the students to describe the roles that mothers play in the novels they are reading. Groups will have the chance to talk about how mothers, or absent mothers, differ between the novels they are reading.

- I will also ask the students to describe any struggles their characters face similar to those of the mother in “Mother to Son.”

**Assessment**

- The students’ understanding of dialect will be assessed informally during class and will be formally assessed in both a later writing assignment and on their final projects.

**Friday, Week One**

*Discussion of Novels and Family Struggles, continued*

**Goals**

The students will be able to:

- Participate in discussions with their literature circles about the novels they are reading
- Identify common myths about African American families
- List problems and/or stereotypes that African American families face today
- Relate the common myths to their novels
Materials

- Niara Sudarkasa, “Dispelling the Myths About Black Families”

Procedures

- For the first forty-five minutes of class, students will work with their literature circles to discuss their understanding and interpretation of the second section of their novels. They will use their reading logs to guide their discussion.
- Sudarkasa presents six different myths about black families in the chapter from her book entitled, *The Strength of Our Mothers*. The descriptions of the myths are brief, about a page in length. The students will be divided into six groups, and each group will receive one myth to read and study.
- After learning about the myths they have been assigned, each group will “teach” the other groups about their myth.
- This chapter was published in 1996, so the students should consider which myths they still consider to be true and which myths they think have already been dispelled.
- I will ask the students to talk about ways American culture might perpetuate these myths, and I will ask them to talk about any additional myths they think exist that may not have been mentioned by Sudarkasa.
- The students will discuss how their novels either perpetuate these myths or challenge them.

Assessment

- I will informally assess the students’ work in literature circles by sitting in on some of the group discussions (though I will sit in as a fellow reader, not as a teacher or grader).
- I will assess the students’ understandings of the myths by having them complete a brief, informal homework assignment based on the class discussion.

Homework Assignment

- For Monday of week two, the students will need to bring in a pop culture representation of African American family life. They can bring artwork, songs, scenes from television shows, etc. Each student will have four to five minutes to present his or her representation and to explain how it perpetuates myths about
African American families or challenges those myths. A student who is unable to bring in an actual work can write a paragraph or two describing a television show he or she has seen in the past or can bring in song lyrics, etc. This assignment could be presented to the students earlier in the week so that they can have more time to think about what they will bring in. This would also give the teacher time to reserve the necessary equipment and to approve or refuse material that might be inappropriate.

Monday, Week Two

Discussion of Novels and Representations of African American Families in Popular Culture

Goals
The students will be able to:

• Participate in discussions with their literature circles about the novels they are reading

• Evaluate how their examples of popular culture representations of African American families relate to the myths discussed in class on Friday

Materials

• Television, VCR, CD player, etc. (any equipment the students may need to present their representation)

Procedures

• For the first thirty minutes of class students will work with their literature circles to discuss their understanding and interpretation of the third section of their novels. They will use their reading logs to guide their discussion.

• For the remaining class time, students will present their representations of African American families. There will not be enough time for every student to present today, so the presentations will continue during the next class period.

• As students explain how their representations relate to the myths discussed in class on Friday, their classmates can offer their opinions as well.

Assessment

• Once again, I will sit in with the literature circles as a fellow reader. By this point in the unit, I should have been able to have spent time with each group.
• When students present their homework assignments, I will be evaluating their analysis of the representation. This will not be a major grade, but it allows me to make sure that the students are making connections between what we do in class and the outside world.

**Homework**

• The students will need to read Richard Wright’s “The Man Who Was Almost a Man.”

**Tuesday, Week Two**

*Representations of African American Families in Popular Culture, continued and Representations of African American Dialect in Literature*

**Goals**

The students will be able to:

• Evaluate how their examples of popular culture representations of African American families relate to the myths discussed in class on Friday and on Monday
• Explain the difficulty of accurately representing dialects in literature
• Define “eye dialect” and “underground signifying”
• Distinguish between artistry and accuracy in relation to dialect use in literature
• Describe the different uses of dialect within a single text
• Examine the structure of the family in the story and the role of the son

**Materials**

• Television, VCR, CD player, etc. (any equipment the students may need to present their representation)
• Richard Wright, “The Man Who Was Almost a Man”
• Excerpt from Ronald Macaulay, “‘Coz It Izny Spelt When They Say It’: Displaying Dialect in Writing”
• James Peterson, “Linguistic Identity and Community in American Literature” (for the teacher’s use only)
• Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes’ *American English* (for the teacher’s use only)
Procedures

- The students who did not have time to present on Monday will present today, following the same procedures from Monday.

- After the presentations, the students will read the excerpt from Macaulay’s essay. Once they have read through it once, I will let them work with a partner or in small groups to translate any parts of the excerpt they can’t understand.

- I will ask the students to summarize the excerpt and explain the author’s main point. I want this excerpt to open up discussion about the difficulty of writing dialect.

- I will introduce the term “eye dialect” to the students using the definition from *American English*, page 394. I will also introduce them to the term “underground signifying” from Peterson’s essay, page 440. I will write both these terms and their definitions on the board.

- We will examine Wright’s short story. I will ask the students to characterize Wright’s use of dialect by finding examples of both eye dialect and underground signifying.

- I will ask the students to work in small groups to find examples of any places in the short story where the dialect doesn’t seem to be an accurate representation of what they know about AAE. Once they’ve found examples, I want them to decide why they think Wright made the decision he did.

- If time allows, I want the students to compare and contrast the speech of the black characters with the speech of the white characters and explain the effects of the differences. The main white character, Jim Hawkins, is also the boss of the young black boy, Dave, so there is also the aspect of master/subordinate speech to explore.

- I will ask the students to describe the structure of the family and Dave’s position in the family. I will also ask them to compare this family structure to the structure of the family in their novels.

Assessment

- I will evaluate the presentations just as I did on Monday.
• I will evaluate the students’ ability to evaluate the accuracy of dialect in a writing assignment on Wednesday of week two.

**Wednesday, Week Two**

*Discussion of Novels and Writing Assignment on Dialect*

**Goals**

The students will be able to:

• Participate in discussions with their literature circles about the novels they are reading
• Produce a brief essay analyzing the use of dialect in the novels they are reading

**Materials**

• Assignment sheets for formal literature log entry (see attachment)

**Procedures**

• The students will spend the first thirty minutes of class analyzing their novels with their literature circles.
• For the remainder of the class time, the students will apply the lesson from Tuesday to analyze the use of dialect in their novels. They will write a brief literature log entry. I will provide the students with a formal assignment sheet (see attachment). The students will use the remainder of the class time to work on this assignment.

**Assessment**

• I will collect the literature logs from half of the literature circles at the end of the class period. I will evaluate the completeness and thoughtfulness of the students’ responses. This evaluation will not be a formal grade, but I will provide feedback to the students
• I will assess the students’ understanding of dialect through a formal evaluation of their writing assignment.
Formal Literature Log Assignment

Assignment: Analyze the use of dialect in the novel you have been reading.

Purpose: To help you apply the knowledge you have been gaining about literary dialect and to give you another way to evaluate and respond to your novel.

Audience: The other students in your literature circle who are familiar with your novel and your teacher

Due Date: Monday of week three (this assignment will serve as the basis of discussion for your literature circle on Monday, so you will not need to complete a literature log for that day)

Writing the Analysis

You will choose three short passages (1-2 pages) from your novel in which the author has used dialect. For each passage you will answer three questions:

1. To what extent is the author’s use of dialect accurate? Use your knowledge of the grammar and features of AAE to answer this.

2. What effects does the dialect have on the passage you have chosen? (Think about how it affects characterization, themes, images, etc.)

3. What is your reaction as a reader to the dialect used in this particular passage? Your response to each question should be about 5-6 sentences in length.

Evaluation

I will evaluate the thoroughness of your answers – are your responses developed with specific details? I will also evaluate the accuracy of your responses – have you correctly used the terms and ideas we’ve been learning? I will grade each response on a scale of 1-5 based on the thoroughness and accuracy, so the assignment is worth a total of 15 points. You will share these responses with your literature circle.
Thursday, Week Two

The Absence of Family

Goals

The students will be able to:

- Predict how a radio play differs from a theater production or a short story
- Suggest the skills they will need to employ to follow and interpret the radio play
- Define “chorus” and “monologue”
- Identify important traits of the main character from the radio play
- Evaluate the effects of an absent family
- Discuss the topic of “passing for white”
- Evaluate the use of dialect in the radio play and the purpose it serves

Materials

- Access to the online radio dramatization of Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s “The Stones of the Village” <http://www.scribblingwomen.org/home.html>

Procedures

- I will ask the students to think about how their listening skills change whenever they listen to the radio. They will list those things that they think they will need to pay attention to as they listen to the play.
- The students will listen to the play.
- After hearing the play, I will ask the students how they were able to determine the characters’ emotions, the settings, the actions, etc.
- I will give the students the definitions of “chorus” and “monologue” and ask them how these devices contributed to the play.
- I will ask the students to discuss the issues of family in the play, focusing on the main character’s absent family.
- I will ask the students to consider the different dialects used in the production, and I will ask them what the different dialects tell them about the characters.
- I will introduce the term “passing for white,” and we will discuss the main character’s motivation for doing this. (I will need to point out to the students that this work was published much earlier than the novels they are reading so that they can understand the context).
• If time remains, I will give the students background information about Alice Dunbar-Nelson and ask them to explain how knowing about her background affects their understanding of the play.

Assessment

• I will evaluate the students’ understanding informally though their responses in class, and I will evaluate them formally on the unit test.

Friday, Week Two

Discussion of Novels and Biographical and Historical Criticism

Goals

The students will be able to:

• Find biographical information on the author of their novels
• Find historical information about the time in which the novel is set
• Evaluate how the biographical and historical information affect their interpretations of the novel

Materials

• Access to the Internet

Procedures

• The students will divide their literature circles into two smaller groups. One group will research biographical information about the author of their novel, and the other group will research major historical events from the time period in which their novel is set. I will encourage the students to use scholarly and reputable sites (a reminder from a lesson I would have taught at the very beginning of the course).

• The students will have forty-five minutes to complete this activity.

• Then, the students will come back to their literature circles, and each group will teach the other group the information they found.

• The students will use this information as the basis for their discussion in their literature circles that day. I will ask them to consider how the information enhances or changes their interpretation of their novel.
I will also ask the students to debate among their literature groups whether or not they need to know this additional information in order to have a complete understanding of the novel.

Assessment

- I will ask each literature circle to turn in a list of the main facts, both biographical and historical, that they found through their Internet research. This will let me know if I need to correct any erroneous information.
- I will circulate throughout the literature circles as the students work and will sit in on some of their discussions.
- At the end of class, I will take up the literature logs of the second half of the class and evaluate those as I did the first group.

Monday, Week Three

Discussion of Novels and the Prejudiced Use of Dialect

Goals

The students will be able to:

- Participate in discussions with their literature circles about the novels they are reading
- Evaluate the use of AAE in literature by writers of different races
- Decide whether or not they think authorship affects the purpose and effect of literary dialect

Materials

- Joel Chandler Harris, “The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story”

Procedures

- The students will spend the first forty-five minutes of class in their literature circles. Their written analyses of the dialect in their novels are due today, so their literature circle discussions will focus on dialect.
- After the literature circles meet, I will give a brief introduction to “The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story,” letting students know that is the one work from the unit that was not written in the twentieth century.
• The students will read Harris’ short story. I will ask them to predict the race of the author. I’ll ask them to jot down on a sheet paper their prediction with a 2-3 sentence rationale for their decision.

• I’ll reveal his identify, providing a brief biography, and I’ll then ask the students to explain how they knew the author was white or how they were fooled.

• I’ll ask the students to explain whether or not the race of Harris affects their reading of the story. I’ll ask the students to compare Harris’ use of dialect with Wright’s, Hughes’, or that of the author of their novel. Do they feel differently about Harris’ use of dialect because he is white – is his use of dialect less authentic?

• If time remains, then I will ask the students to construct in small groups a list of guidelines they think should be made for authors who use AAE in their literature. Some groups may decide that there should not be any guidelines, but whatever the group’s decision(s), they must support their response with detailed explanation. I hope that this activity will lead students to talk about the possibility that some authors may misuse AAE in a stereotypical way.

Assessment

• I will assess students’ understanding of stereotypical dialect on the unit test.

Tuesday, Week Three

Prejudiced Use of Dialect, continued

Goals

The students will be able to:

• Decide whether or not they think authorship affects the purpose and effect of literary dialect

• Define “mock language”

Materials

• Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes, American English (for the teacher’s use only)

• “’Twas da Night Befo’ Christmas” in Rickford and Rickford, pages 210-211 (see attachment)
Procedures

- If the students did not have time to start or finish their guidelines on Monday, then they will do so during this class period.
- We will talk about the students’ guidelines, and I will introduce the term “mock language” from *American English*, page 400.
- The students will silently read the Ebonics version of “The Night before Christmas.” (This is an activity I would definitely *not* do if I had a class of students who might use this activity as an excuse to make racist comments). I would begin this part of the lesson by explaining my purpose for having the students read it. I want them to see how language can be misused to make fun of groups of people. I will acknowledge that the students may find some aspects of the story amusing and that they are free to laugh, but I will explain that we will be analyzing the story to try to determine the purpose of the author.
- I will ask students to analyze the features of the story – is the dialect use accurate? I will ask students to think back to the Ebonics controversy we talked about in the dialect unit and, with that context in mind, to think about the purpose of this text and its possible effects. I will ask the students to consider the authorship of this story – is it okay for whites to make fun of AAE; is it okay for speakers of AAE to make fun of their own dialects?
- The students will read the concluding paragraph from Rickford and Rickford’s chapter on Ebonics (see attachment). I will ask the students to take a stand on the “humor.” They should decide whether or not linguists make too much of the parodies – is the humor innocent, or do they believe it is racist? (adapted from *American English*, page 340.)
- The students will write a brief reflective paragraph about the day’s lesson and make suggestions for how dialect misuse or mock language might be prevented (if they believe it should be prevented).

Assessment

- I will assess the students’ understanding informally through their responses in class. I’ll look over their reflective paragraphs and comment on them, but they won’t be graded.
**Wednesday, Week Three**

*Discussion of Novels and Unit Review*

**Goals**
The students will be able to:

- Participate in discussion with their literature circles about the novels they are reading
- Recall the main ideas from the unit

**Procedures**

- The students will spend the first forty-five minutes of class in their literature circles.
- After meeting in their literature circles, the remainder of the class time will be spent wrapping up the unit and reviewing for the unit test to be given on the following day. The unit test features questions about all things that have not already been assessed formally and will not be assessed by the final project.
- To review for the test, I will ask students to work in groups and prepare a list of all the important ideas from the unit. As a class, we will come up with a master list of the important information from the unit. I will fill in any information the students do not add, and if students mention information that has already been assessed, then I will explain how I have already evaluated those skills.

**Assessment**

- The students’ work in their literature circles will be evaluated on their final projects.
- Their understanding of the main ideas from the unit will be assessed on the test.

**Thursday, Week Three**

*Unit Test*

**Goals**
The students will be able to:

- Demonstrate their understanding of the themes we have discussed in the unit
- Define important terms from the unit
- Compare and contrast works read in this unit
Materials

- Unit test (see attachment)

Procedures

- Students will take the unit test, and if any class time remains, they will work on their literature circle reading.
Unit Test for the Theme of Family in Twentieth Century African American Works

Short Answer

Answer four of the following questions. Your responses should be three-four sentences in length. (5 points each)

1. Compare and contrast how motherhood is presented in two of the following works: “Everyday Use,” “Hands: For Mother’s Day,” and “Mother to Son.”

2. Define one of the following terms and give an example of its use from one of the works we have read in this unit: allusion, monologue, chorus, or mock language.

3. Identify, using at least one text from this unit, one way a family can preserve its history. In the text you have chosen, why is preserving family history important?

4. Describe at least three techniques that radio plays employ to indicate and develop setting, characterization, and plot.

5. Think back to your classmates’ presentations about the portrayal of African American families in popular culture. Briefly explain whether or not you think myths about African American families are perpetuated in our culture. Use at least two specific examples for support.

6. Briefly explain how fatherhood or manhood is represented in “The Man Who Was Almost a Man.”

Essay

Answer both of the following questions. Your response should be one to two paragraphs in length. (20 points each)

1. Compare and contrast a short story or poem from the unit with the novel you are reading with your literature circle. Think about choosing either a work that closely relates to your novel or that starkly contrasts. Use the portrayal of family in the short work and your novel as the starting point for your comparison.
2. Using what you have learned in the unit, construct your own definition of “family.” Explain how your perceptions of family have changed or been reinforced as a result of the readings from the unit. Use at least two works (fiction or non-fiction) from the unit to support your response.

Points possible: 60
Points you earned: ____
Friday, Week Three

*Final Meeting of Literature Circles*

**Goals**

The students will be able to:

- Participate in discussions with their literature circles about the novels they have finished reading
- Compare and contrast the African American novels with other novels they have read
- Debate the role the race of the author plays on the subject matter presented in the novels

**Procedures**

- The students will spend the first forty-five minutes of class participating in their final literature circle meetings.
- After the students talk in their literature circles, we will, as a class, make generalizations about the novels they have read.
- I will ask the students to compare and contrast these African American novels with other twentieth century novels they have read so far in the course.
- I will ask the students to debate why the African American works they have read are not more frequently included in course curriculums. I will also ask the students to evaluate whether or not we need to consider the race of an author when reading a novel.
- This final class period will be open for students to introduce any other questions or topics of discussion they would like to raise.

**Assessment**

- I will assess the students’ abilities to judge and evaluate their novels by informal observation of their responses to the class discussion.
Monday, Week Four
I will return the students’ unit tests and talk about any issues of concern I have after grading the tests. The students will have the remainder of class time to work on their final projects

Tuesday and Wednesday, Week Four

*Final Project Presentations*
Conclusion

Though the lesson plans I have presented here are detailed, there are still areas for further development. In this project, I do include several plans that incorporate the use of technology, but technology is not a major aspect of the unit. For teachers who have technological equipment available, one possible way to integrate more technology would be the use of online forums where students can discuss their novels electronically. A teacher might decide to replace a few days of in-class literature circle meetings with a few online discussions. An additional way to integrate technology in this unit would be to ask students to produce their family scrapbook using PowerPoint. I chose not to include these activities because I felt that the plans were already quite ambitious, but were a teacher to expand the length of time devoted to the unit, additional options for incorporating technology are endless.

The reading list I have provided for this unit also could be developed further. The majority of the works I have chosen do contain controversial material, and for many of the books, this controversial material is at least one graphic sexual scene. Since students choose which books they read, I hope that this ability to choose will ward off parent complaints. *The Street, The View from Here, In My Father’s House,* and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* are the less controversial novels, but I expect that some teachers may need to add to this list additional novels that will receive approval in a conservative school district. I also expect that there are a number of books that I did not place on the list that are important African American novels that address the issue of family. There is no limit to the number of books that can be placed on the reading list; the only requirement is that
students have access to the novels, so the reading list I have presented could be adapted easily.

In this unit, I do not present specific plans for adapting the lessons for students with special needs. Instead, I attempted to include lessons that require a range of skills and that allow different students to show their strengths at different times. For instance, some students may be able to analyze and interpret the radio play more easily since they will be able to hear the work while other students will benefit from being able to read short stories. Students who do well sharing their ideas verbally will benefit from the homework assignment in which they present a popular culture representation of an African American family. The final project for the unit allows students to use their various strengths since I ask for both written and visual representations of scenes from the novel. The lesson plans also cover a range of readings: from easy to difficult, from fiction to nonfiction, from poem to novel. Teachers who have students with special needs can choose to leave out some of the supplementary material or find optional ways of presenting the material. The variety of the lesson plans is one of the major strengths of the unit because it allows students to use a range of skills.

The most valuable aspect of this project is its provision for student choice and responsibility. Students choose the novels they will read; they choose how they will write their literature logs; and they choose how they will design their final projects. The students direct their literature circle discussions; they set their reading schedule; and they provide direction for whole-class discussions. The assessment measures I have designed for the unit reinforce student choice as they allow the students to decide exactly how they will display the progress they have made.
Student choice and responsibility usually lead to greater student interest and participation since the students see that their opinions are valued and that they have the ability to take charge of their learning. This increased interest can produce students with a greater understanding of and love for great African American novels, a genre that has been neglected for too long in high school English classes.