



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1990 Volume IV: American Family Portraits (Section I)

Depicting Family Life: Changes and Modifications

Curriculum Unit 90.04.02
by Delci Lev

Introduction

The Betsey Ross Arts Magnet (BRAMS) is a middle school that draws its population from two separate pools: first, a lottery system which includes students from the entire city, the second being local community students. BRAMS is considered as the neighborhood middle school. The students attending are not required to be gifted in the arts, but must express an interest in the field. Admittance is not predicated on any specific academic criteria. As a result students who attend BRAMS are from every part of the city, various socioeconomic backgrounds, and have a wide range of academic abilities.

My current assignment is teaching Language Arts and Social Studies to fifth and sixth grade students who are in the academically lower division. Their problems range from low academic performance, specific learning disabilities, emotional problems and language deficits.

As the classroom teacher my task is to motivate these students and to provide constructive learning experiences to meet their needs. In today's society all educators are in competition with advanced scientific and technological devices that control the rudimentary learning process.

For the purposes of this curriculum unit, I will develop a program specifically for these students in order to develop their reading, language, writing, listening and thinking skills. By utilizing an interdisciplinary approach and providing written, verbal, visual and manipulative materials students will gain an understanding of the learning process via numerous learning modalities. The design would be to correlate the Social Studies and Language Arts classes so that students will have an understanding and appreciation of the history and literature from 1945 to the present. Students will have an understanding of the different racial and ethnic groups in our society, as well as the different family structures and customs. It is anticipated that students will gain an understanding of themselves, their families and the different groups of people that live in America.

The Influences of Scientific and Technological Advancements

With the advancements in science and technology many changes in the life-styles, values and attitudes are exhibited in the American family. These advancements have affected the students in our classrooms and as teachers we observe and experience these changes daily. Although our students are living in an era where scientific and technological discoveries and advancements are prevalent, it does not mean that these advancements should obstruct the learning process. What is observed is that very few students are reading

for enrichment or pleasure. Reading in many instances is being replaced or substituted by television, cinema, videos, radio, cassettes, tapes or records. Mathematical computation is no longer a step by step process, within seconds an accurate answer will be displayed in the window of a calculator. Spelling need not be perfect, a simple understanding of phonic sounds is all that it takes and in seconds a response with the correct spelling of the word will appear in the window of a computer; if a synonym is desired, with the push of a button the new word will appear. Whatever happened to the 3R's—Reading, Writing and Arithmetic? Are we scoring any higher? Is there a decline in the illiteracy rate in America? Is there a decline in the number of high school dropouts? Is there an increase in the aim for higher education? Are we cheating our students of the vital process of learning, the understanding of their heritage, and the history of the making of this highly scientific and technological society we live in today? Do our students really understand the skills, efforts and strategies that go into the making of these sophisticated tools for arriving at answers and solutions to questions they may have? Are we requiring our students to think effectively, strategically and critically? Do our students appreciate and understand these advancements and utilize them properly and effectively—or do they just take it all for granted?

I am a firm believer that with the proper portions of (1) understanding the learning process and (2) utilization of modern scientific and technological instruments, we can provide effective and constructive learning experiences for our students. A balanced diet of understanding the learning process and utilizing advanced scientific and technological devices will develop students' understanding and appreciation of the era we live in. It will help them endure the challenges and defeats they will experience in life.

By utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, I will assist students through the learning process giving them an appreciation of their heritage as well as an understanding of the scientific and technological advancements in society.

The Family

The learning process begins at home. Some students come to school anxious and motivated to dive into the learning program; they are equipped with the necessary tools for the beginning stages of formal education. Unfortunately some students do not fare as well and learning experiences must be provided so that they can meet each stage of formal education. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to diagnose and prescribe the needs of each individual student so that he/she may develop academically, socially, and emotionally. This requires a wellplanned constructive learning program that is teacher initiated and motivated to develop the foundations for learning.

The learning process is highly affected by the family and the home environment that our students come from. Students come from many different family structures, ethnic and racial backgrounds which have a direct influence on the learning process and their performance. If students are given the opportunity to understand themselves and their families, they will appreciate the likenesses and differences between themselves and their peers—then the learning process becomes a socially and emotionally sound program. It is an effective means of educating students to become functional and productive citizens in our society.

This curriculum unit is predicated on the fact that students must be given opportunities to explore, to think and to initiate selfdirected activities, in order for the learning process to become a vital and influential experience in their lives. They should gain an understanding and appreciation of who they are, their heritage, and their place in society. Students will be given opportunities to read, write and think strategically and critically, in addition to opportunities to utilize the scientific and technological advancements that are part of the society they live in.

The Objectives of this Curriculum Unit

The Role of the Family from 1945Present.

1. To develop an understanding of different racial and ethnic groups in our society.
2. To develop an understanding of different family cultures and heritage.
3. To develop an appreciation of literature as a vehicle for understanding the period in history from 1945 to the present.

Skills Objectives

1. To gain an understanding of the historical, scientific and technological events from 1945 to the present.
2. To provide students with good writing dynamics (grammar, punctuation, capitalization).
3. To develop reading comprehension skills (literal, interpretive and evaluative).
4. To develop research and study skills.

Literature Selections

For the purposes of this unit, three novels that represent different racial and ethnic groups of today in comparison to the traditional values and attitudes of earlier times in the history of our country have been selected: *Going Home* by Nicholasa Mohr, *The Shimmershine Queens* by Camille Yarbrough, and *Lottery Rose* by Irene Hunt represent the time period from 1945 to present. These novels will be compared to the attitudes, values and time period of the 1640's in Nathaniel Hawthorn's *Scarlet Letter*.

Through the reading and understanding of these literary materials students will be able to understand and appreciate how the values, attitudes and lifestyles of families have changed over the years, and the effects that advancements in science and technology have had on the attitudes of the family today.

Historical Background—1945 to Present

This period of time has been selected to reflect the cultural, social, historical and economical values of the heritage of my students. By selecting this timeframe will enable students to identify family members in nuclear or extended family structures, and to ascertain what effects certain times in history had on their heritage. They will gain an understanding of the events in history that have directly and indirectly affected their life-styles today. It will give them an appreciation and understanding of where they came from and where they are going. It will assist them in developing and understanding the challenges in life that everyone is confronted with. The learning experience will be systematically structured to give students the opportunity to reflect and understand the advancements society has made over a period of time.

LESSON PLANS

All activities completed by students will be included on a timeline in the classroom. This will provide students with a visual perspective of events.

Students will be introduced to important political, social, economic, scientific and technological events.

Objective : To provide students with an historical overview of the time period 1945 to present. They will read and discuss an illustrated text, *1945-1981—America Today* by Naunerle Farr. This text was designed to provide high interest material at a lower level. Completion of the text will precede the activities included in the unit.

Vocabulary:

boycott
candidates
Chicanos
demilitarized zone
integration
launching pad
missiles
neutral
dictator
Distinguished Flying Cross
federal
guerrilla fighters
impeachment
nuclear weapons
presidential primaries
satellite
snipers
unemployment insurance

Personalities:

Fidel Castro
President John F. Kennedy
Neil Armstrong
Mao TseTung
Chou EnLai
Martin Luther King, Jr.
Thurgood Marshall
Shirley Chisholm
Robert F. Kennedy

Activity #1—Meet the Presidents of the United States

Objective : Students will work in groups of three or four and select a president. Together they will write a biography for this assignment.

Presidents of the United States—1945 to Present:

Harry S. Truman	1945-1943
Dwight D. Eisenhower	1953-1961
John F. Kennedy	1961-1963
Lyndon B. Johnson	1963-1969
Richard M. Nixon	1969-1974
Gerald R. Ford	1974-1977
James Earl Carter	1977-1981
Ronald Reagan	1981-1990
George Bush	1990-

Students will be supplied with a form to complete for President:

Name of President _____

Date and place where born _____

Date and place of death _____

Important event(s) that took place during this administration which affected family life in the United States.

Event: _____

Its effect on the family: _____

Activity #2—Report the News

Objective: Pretend you are a newspaper reporter. Using who, what, when, where and why, report the event. Select one political event from 1945 to Present.

Activity #2 Worksheet

Who: _____

What: _____

When: _____

Where: _____

Why: _____

Politics

1945—F. D. Roosevelt was inaugurated as president for his fourth term. Harry S. Truman was his vice president.

1946—United Nations was established in New York City.

1947—Boulder Dam was renamed Hoover Dam.

1950—The population of the 48 states was 150,697,361.

Congress created the National Science Foundation.

1951—Oil was discovered in North Dakota.

1952—Puerto Rico became a commonwealth of the United States.

National political conventions were televised for the first time.

1953—Small Business Administration was created.

1954—Forrestal—the world's largest warship was commissioned in Newport News, Virginia.

Nautilus—first atomic submarine was commissioned in Groton, Connecticut.

1955—USS Saratoga—the world's most powerful warship was launched in Brooklyn, New York.

Plans were announced by the United States for the first satellite to circle the earth.

1956—The first interstate highway system—construction began.

1957—The first civil rights bill in 87 years was signed under President Eisenhower.

1958—NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) was founded.

1959—Alaska was admitted as the 49th state.

Hawaii was admitted as the 50th state.

The first seven astronauts were chosen by NASA.

1960—July 4, the 50star flag became official.

1961—The first American, Alan B. Shepard, Jr. rocketed into space.

1962—Lieutenant Colonel John Glenn, Jr. orbited the earth; he was the first astronaut to do so.

1963—President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

1964—Martin Luther King, Jr. awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1965—Several space flights and space walks were made by American astronauts.

1966—Ronald Reagan, actor, was elected governor of California.

1966—Three hundred thousand Americans were fighting in Vietnam.

1967—U.S. astronauts were killed in a flash fire at Cape Kennedy, Florida.

Thurgood Marshall was the first black to be appointed to the Supreme Court.

1968—Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Tennessee

Senator Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles.

1969—Richard M. Nixon was inaugurated as president; Spiro T. Agnew was his vice president.

Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldren were the first men to walk on the moon.

1970—Establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency.

1971—Vietnam peace talks began their fourth year in Paris.

1972—Appollo 16 and Apollo 17 made trips to the moon.

Harry S. Truman died, age 88.

United States ground troupe left Vietnam.

1973—United States and North Vietnam signed a peace agreement in Paris.

Cambodia bombings ceased.

1975—On April 19 the Bicentennial Celebration began.

1977—President James Earl Carter was inaugurated; Walter Mondale was his vice-president.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations became well known for his controversial speeches.

1978—Hubert Humphrey died; he was a former vice president.

Federal minimum wage was raised from \$2.30 to \$2.65.

1979—The nuclear plant on Three Mile Island malfunctioned.

U.S. first Skylab launched in 1973, landed in the Indian Ocean and Australia.

Department of Education was created under President Carter.

1980—United States population reaches 226,504,825.

Inflation reaches doubledigit, and interest rates are 20%.

Gold hit a high of \$800 an ounce.

1981—United States census revealed that over onehalf of the U.S. population lived west of the Mississippi River.

1982—The U.S. dedicated a memorial to the 57,939 soldiers who lost their lives in Vietnam; it is located in Washington, D.C.

1983—Sally Ride was the first American woman in space.

Guin Bluford was the first black American in space.

1984—Representative Geraldine Ferraro became the first female vice-presidential candidate to run on a major ticket.

President Reagan visited China.

1985—"LiveAid" concert, lasting 17 hours, on radio and television raised \$70 million dollars for starving people of Africa.

A group of top artists called USA for Africa recorded "We Are The World"—90% of the proceeds went to victims of famine in Africa.

1986—Warren E. Burger resigned from the Supreme Court after 17 years; he was the chief justice.

The Challenger exploded shortly after launch, killing all seven crew members, including Christa McAuliffe; she was a science teacher.

Activity #3—How My Life Changed

Objective : Select a discovery in science technology. Pretend you lived before the discovery you've listed, explain how this new discovery would change your life.

Science and Technology

1946—The "auto bank" was created in Chicago.

1946—The first electronic computer was completed, Philadelphia, Pa.

1947—Instant camera was invented.

1947—Television sets sold in the U.S. for the first time.

1947—An airplane achieved supersonic speed in California, for the first time.

1947—Diesel engine buses were replaced by streetcars in New York City.

1947—The first 200M lens was demonstrated in New York City.

1948—The first longplaying record was developed by CBS laboratories.

1950—For the first time, automobile sales in the U.S. averaged more than five million per year.

1951—The first commercial color telecast was transmitted in New York City.

1951—Coastto coast dial service began in this country.

1952—Cinerama was demonstrated in New York City.

1953—First helicopter service began in New York.

1954—Gas turbine auto engine was demonstrated.

1954—Jonas Salk, M.D. began inoculating children against polio.

1955—First speedboat exceeded 200 miles per hour.

1956—The first baby gorilla was born in captivity, Columbus Ohio Zoo.

1957—Air Force Strato fortresses (3) circled the globe in 45 hours and 19 minutes.

1957—Asian flu spread from China to the United States.

1958—U.S. nuclear submarine Seawolf remained submerged for 60 days, setting a world record.

1959—Oil found and drilled in 31 states.

1960—The first weather satellite was launched to photograph cloud cover, Tiros I.

1962—Telstar was launched by NASA, a communications satellite for A.T.&T.

1963—The U.S. pumped 2.6 million barrels of oil during the year.

1964—U.S. Surgeon General reported that cigarette smoking is dangerous to one's health.

1966—The first successful artificial heart pump was surgically installed by Dr. Debakey.

1969—The first human heart transplant was performed in Houston, Texas.

1972—Longshoremen's strife on the West Coast lasted for 135 days.

1975—Airlines offered "nofrills" fares.

1976—U.S. Viking I landed on the planet Mars.

1976—The Concorde, a supersonic transport plane made its first flight across the Atlantic.

1977—Video games began to be marketed for home consumption.

1978—Three Americans crossed the Atlantic in a hotair balloon.

1979—The world's worst oil spill—affected Gulf of Mexico and the United States Gulf Coast.

1984—"Baby Fae" twoweeks old, was the first human to receive the heart of a baboon. She lived three weeks.

1984—The Supreme Court ruled it illegal to use video cassette recorders to tape film and TV shows.

1987—AZT, the first drug treatment for AIDS was approved by the FDA.

Literature

All questions in this section are of a literal, evaluative or interpretive nature. They are to be answered as the novels are read, first in group discussion and finally in written form.

1. *Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Summary: The novel takes place in the year 1642 in Boston. The community, at the time, was small and had been settled by a small religious group called Puritans. Puritans had a very strict religious code that governed their lives. Many things we do today—our dances, dress and dating patterns—would be considered sinful by Puritan standards. This is the story of a woman who had a baby by a man other than her husband, which by Puritan standards was a sin. Her punishment was to wear a scarlet letter A on her dress for the rest of her life as a reminder to her and everyone else that she had committed a sin.

Activity #1. Discussion

- A. List main characters.
- B. Discuss their role.
- C. What was family like in 17th century Boston?
- D. Discussion of family values, structure and attitudes that existed then.

Values, family structure and attitudes discussed and reflected upon in *The Scarlet Letter* will be listed on a matrix for comparison of the same type of information gathered from additional readings.

2. *Going Home* by Nicholasa Mohr.

Summary: Felita is a teenager being raised in New York City. Her family originally emigrated from Puerto Rico and she lives with her two brothers, a great uncle and her parents. Neither she nor her brothers have ever visited Puerto Rico. This summer her entire family will visit for two weeks and she will stay on for the remainder of summer with her great uncle in the mountains.

Her experiences in Puerto Rico made her grow up and these new experiences have given her a greater understanding of herself and her background.

Vocabulary:

chica
hombrecito
Latino
Abuelo
Abuelito
si
senorita
bodega

Questions:

1. List the main characters in the book.
2. Draw a family tree to see the relationship amongst the family members.
3. Why do you think Mami wants Tito to have dinner with the family instead of watching TV?
Papi is working the night shift at work in addition to his daytime shift. The family misses him
4. but Mami explains they need the extra money for their trip to Puerto Rico. Have you ever saved for something over a period of time? What sacrifices have you had to make?
5. Gigi's family structure is different from Felita's. In what way and how do you think it affected the family life?
6. Imagine you were Vinny Davila, having just arrived in a new country. What do you think life would be like?
7. Abuelita lived in this country for thirty years without learning the language. Do you think this created limitations for her? If so, in what way?
8. Felita's family treated male and female children differently. Explain the differences in the treatment and why do you think these different treatments exist?
9. Vinny and Felita have a special relationship. What is the basis of it? How did it begin?
10. Are all people of Spanish backgrounds alike? Explain the differences.
11. What is the difference between a Puerto Rican background and a Latino background?
12. Why did the Davila family move to the United States from Columbia?
13. Explain the differences between family life in Puerto Rico and New York City.
14. Explain life in San Juan and life in the mountains of Puerto Rico.
15. Describe some of Felita's experiences?
16. What did Felita's summer in Puerto Rico teach her?
17. Compare Felita's feelings about her family before and after her trip to Puerto Rico.
18. Write a short essay and include what you learned about family life from this book.
3. *The Shimmershine Queens* by Camille Yarbrough.

Summary: This is the story of Angie, a young girl living with a depressed mother, a father who is frightened, and cruel classmates. She daydreams to give herself some peace. As time passes her romantic daydreaming doesn't work. An old cousin comes to visit and teaches Angie to dream in a more constructive way. Through the help of a friend and a teacher, Angie learns to make dreams reality.

Questions:

1. List all the main characters in the book.
2. In a brief paragraph describe their personalities and the role they play in the book.
3. Draw a family tree.
4. Describe Angie's pain at having to see her parents' conflicts.
5. Describe the getup gift.
6. Why do you think the disruptive behavior stopped when Mr. Tucker entered the room?
7. What does Angela mean when she says, "They should be doing their task"?

8. Charlene, Cheryl and Pat talk a lot of junk and start things—you're the teacher in the classroom, how would you handle it?
9. Angie often plays the role of the parent—Why? Have you ever been in that position? If so, would you share the experience with us.
10. Angie had to miss her first day of acting and dancing class—because her mama asked her to stay home with Lavenia. How do you think she felt?
11. Ms. Collier has a contract with her students. What are the terms of that contract?
12. What are the differences between Angie and Charlene?
13. When Angie's father was away she felt a loss, how did she express this?
14. What does "Shimmershine queens" mean? Express that with color and then with words.
15. Explain the phrase, "I'm not gonna let Mr. Fear set up housekeeping in me."
16. Prior to Angie's father's return, she feels anger towards him—why do you think she feels this anger?
17. How did Ms. Collier change Angie's life?
18. Angie stole something from the store—what was the price she had to pay? Do you think she'll steal again? Why, why not?
4. *Lottery Rose* by Irene Hunt.

Summary: Georgie Burgess is a sevenyearold victim of ongoing child abuse by his mother and her boyfriend. Georgie is classified as a failure at school; his behavior is hostile and he appears to be retarded. Georgie has a private world, that of flowers—they are a source of beauty and happiness to him. The police are finally called to intervene during a beating. Georgie is placed in a boys' school run by Catholic nuns. In a more positive and nurturing setting, Georgie slowly emerges as a bright and loving child.

Questions:

1. Generate a list of possible reasons explaining the abuse against Georgie.
2. Once abuse begins, describe the cycle. Use the list developed in question #1.
3. If you were Georgie's teacher, imagine Judge O'Neill has asked you, as Georgie's teacher, to write a letter explaining his progress. Do so.
4. What changes have you seen in Georgie? List them.
5. Discuss the people in Georgie's life who have helped these changes come about. What have they done to effect change?
6. Record any stories of child abuse seen on the television news and bring it to class. Cut any newspaper articles regarding the same issue.
7. If a friend came to you and confided to you that they were abused, what would you do?

We have completed four novels, and in the process discussed family structures and values. Let's discuss the elements that make a family work. Have families from different cultures changed over time? Discuss.

Bibliography for Teachers

Farr, Naunerle, *19451981—America Today*, (D'Ann Calhoun, ed.) Pendulum Press, Inc., 1976.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Scarlet Letter*. Pendulum Press, Inc., 1974. Illustrated.

Hunt, Irene, *Lottery Rose*. Scribner, 1976.

Jarolimek, John, Walsh, Huber M., *Readings for Social Studies in Elementary Education*. The Macmillan Company, 1969.

Mohr, Nicholasa, *Going Home*. Bantam Skylark Books, 1989.

Rico, Gabriele Luser, *Writing the Natural Way*. J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983.

Yarbrough, Camille, *The Shimmershine Queens*. Bullseye Books, Alfred A. Knopf, 1989.

Bibliography for Students

Farr, Naunerle, *19451981—America Today*, (D'Ann Calhoun, ed.) Pendulum Press, Inc., 1976.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Scarlett Letter*. Pendulum Press, Inc., 1974.

Illustrated version of the Hawthorne classic. Depicts society's view of a woman having a child by a man other than her husband and the consequences of such an act.

Hunt, Irene, *Lottery Rose*. Scribner, 1976.

Mohr, Nicholasa, *Going Home*. Bantam Skylark Book, 1989.

Story of a young Puerto Rican girl being raised in New York City and the changes made in her life after visiting her family in Puerto Rico for the summer.

Yarbrough, Camille, *The Shimmershine Queens*, Bullseye Books, Alfred A. Knopf, 1989.

The story of a young black girl who faces many difficulties. Through the advice and guidance of an old cousin she is able to overcome her problems and create a healthy constructive life.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>