



Yale-New Haven  
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2001 Volume III: Reading and Writing Poetry

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## **African American Poetry: Songs of Protest and Pride**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 01.03.03  
by Jean Sutherland

Beginning with the words of Negro spirituals, through the poetry of the Civil Rights Movement and the development of “black pride,” up until the more strident words of today’s African American poets, in this unit, students will integrate poetry they read with the events of African American history. The “songs” they examine will include actual lyrics set to music as well as other forms of conventional poetry. At the same time, lessons will provide opportunities to examine and use the basic elements of poetry. Students will create their own poems, bringing their personal feelings to the material being examined in class. They will also have some opportunity to develop the use of expository writing as they write essays related to the poems they have read.

Besides developing the ability to recognize and use the basic elements of poetry, the unit also attempts to help students develop an understanding and appreciation of the pride and strength African Americans have displayed throughout history. In turn, activities attempt to develop a sense of pride in each student. The unit is part of a school team including Geraldine Martin and Stephanie Zogby, whose units also appears in this volume. Some of the team’s approaches are discussed in my unit.

(Recommended for Language Arts [Reading, Writing, Speaking], Social Studies [African American History], and Social Development, grades 3-6.)

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