



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2001 Volume IV: Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary Art and Literature

High School Students Research, Read, and Write Children's Literature

Guide for Curriculum Unit 01.04.04
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This unit is designed for at-risk high school students, some of whom already have a child, and many of whom have young siblings, nieces and nephews. At a time when literacy among school children is of grave concern, it seems crucial to teach teens not only the importance of reading to children but how to do it. It also goes without saying that many at-risk teens were short-changed when it came to being read to and reading storybooks when they were children.

This unit is designed around storybooks whose themes are about being excluded and being different. It uses storybooks that focus on the many issues that arise when a person is or feels that he/she is excluded. It explores why people exclude others. It explores what happens to characters who do not conform to the status quo. Through a children's story it introduces students to different ways of listening and hearing what another person is saying.

The unit is rich with skills such as: using the Internet to research articles that focus on the importance of reading to young children, learning how to use a graphic organizer to make observations and gather evidence that one can turn into the formula five-paragraph essay, learning to use the children's department in the public library, and last but not least, writing and illustrating a children's storybook. There will be myriad opportunities to learn the craft and magic of reading storybooks out loud, and there will be several opportunities actually to read to young children in schools.

There are two hands-on art projects, which are especially important for students who often do not get an opportunity to take art classes, and therefore never discover their own creativity. I have found that hands-on art enhances and enriches almost every unit I teach, even though I am an English teacher.

(Recommended for Reading and Creating Children's Storybooks/English, grades 9-12.)

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