



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2002 Volume I: Survival Stories

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## His Story, Her Story, Our Story / Narrating History Through Art

Curriculum Unit 02.01.07  
by Sandra Friday

### Rationale

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Three units that I have written for the Yale New Haven Teachers Institute have incorporated a major creative arts project that has far exceeded my expectations in the classroom with the at-risk high school students that I teach at the Wilbur Cross Annex. The success of each of these units has inspired me, an English teacher, to be more creative and bold in combining a significant art component with the literature and writing skills I teach. This unit exploring art as the narrative of history, or art as a *memory holder* for history, is the result of personal experiences and revelations over the past two years. It has become apparent from implementing my previous units that the students I teach respond favorably and open up creatively when studying and creating art as part of their learning experience in an academic class, where they least expect it. Hence, this unit, which explores how various mediums of art, actually tells the stories of history, many of which are about survival of one kind or another.

### Public and private history

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Much of the history narrated by these creative mediums is what I call *public* history, events that belong to our common memory, chronicled in our history books, such as: The Civil Rights Movement, the Underground Railroad, and the *Amistad* incident. But creative mediums also narrate *private* history, such as that found in the poem *Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden, in which the narrator provides a unique perspective on his father getting up early on Sunday mornings in a bitter "blueblack," cold house to make a fire so the house will be warm for his children, and the narrator realizes, now that he is grown, that no one ever thanked his father. This is a *private* and very poignant history lodged only in the memory of the narrator. Some narratives are a combination of both public and private histories. The history of the orphan trains that ran from large eastern cities out West in this country from the late 1850's to 1930 is such a combination public and private stories. While over 200,000 children traveled on the orphan trains, and this piece of our history gets a few paragraphs in American history books, individuals who are still living who made that journey have narrated their personal survival stories, and these have been published.

While one assumes that the histories that art tells are grounded in non-fiction, they may also be fictional, created for the purpose of teaching us something about ourselves as individuals or as a people. The short story "Mr. Toussan" by Ralph Ellison that I discuss in its own section of my unit does this.

## The scope of the creative mediums

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These *public* and *private* histories are told through the medium of paintings, photographs, sketches, poems, rap, short stories, storybooks, songs, murals, videos, drama, dance, and even quilts. My unit will explore several of these mediums, and in one or two cases students will compare how more than one medium tells the same story. For example, in this unit, students will compare how three different authors narrate and illustrate, in children's books and a children's video, the story of Harriet Tubman, leading slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Students will listen to a cut from Cornell West's *hip* CD *Sketches of My Culture* in which West and his collaborators extol the civil rights struggle of Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, and Malcolm X in a tune aptly titled 3M's. They will look at Jacob Lawrence's hair-raising painting, *Confrontation at the Bridge*, of a defining moment in the Civil Rights Movement when, in Selma, Alabama, black and white civil rights activists were met with fierce police dogs and state police as they attempted a peaceful march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on their way to Montgomery. Students will compare this painting to photographs on the Internet of this same confrontation. Crossing the bridge is also documented in the video *Eyes On the Prize*.

## Murals hold history and lead to a student mural project

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Murals are a powerful means of narrating history. Usually, by their sheer size they command our attention. The first murals that immediately come to mind are the massive murals painted by the Mexican Diego Rivera, in 1932-33, at the Detroit Institute of Art, narrating the history of the auto industry. A capitalist Edsel Ford hired a Communist Diego Rivera to capture the story of the auto industry on the walls of the Institute. Rivera's murals emphasize the continuous cycles of the myriad connections and interactions necessary for man to produce the complex vehicle. The rhythm of these murals is established through the interaction of robust men working in sync with intricate machinery and equipment. They remain the largest murals painted by a Mexican in this country. The book *Diego Rivera/ The Detroit Industry Murals* by Linda Bank Downs reproduces the murals in great detail and it documents the entire process by which murals such as these are created. Fortunately, Rivera's cartoons (full-scale drawings for the murals) remain intact and are part of the process featured in this book. This book will be invaluable for my students in their final collaborative project of creating a mural on the wall in our school cafeteria.

For those who wish to pursue Mexican murals further, there is an illuminating book filled with colorful paintings titled *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* by Desmond Rochfort. It is apparent from studying this book that the role of these artists' murals fused a relationship between politics and art that became part of Mexico's national identity. One gigantic mural by David Alfaro Siqueiros, on the side of a building at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City, is titled *The People for the University. The University for the People*. The mural portrays five gigantic figures representing: Science, Technology,

Industry, Agriculture, and Culture. This mural, along with others in the book, might be an inspiration for students who are planning the mural in our cafeteria.

A historical survival story is documented in *The Amistad Murals* by Hale Woodruff at Talladega College in Alabama, portraying, in three separate murals, the tumultuous survival story of the Mende people of West Africa, kidnapped and sold into slavery in Cuba in 1838. The murals are accessible on the Internet. Of course, we in New Haven have a particular interest in this piece of history since one of the three trials to determine the culpability of the leader Cinque and his people was held here in New Haven in 1839, and our harbor now is home to the full scale replica of the Cuban ship Amistad that brought Cinque and the other Mende people from Cuba to the North East.

Making a contemporary connection, students will visit a website of urban murals which also narrate history such as: Richard Wyatt's mural *Hollywood Jazz* in San Francisco, depicting musical legends: Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole, and Billie Holliday; Noni Olabisi's mural in Los Angeles, *To Protect and Serve*, dedicated to and featuring the Black Panther Party.

It is my plan that the study of murals will culminate in a student art project in our cafeteria, where there is a very, very old, dog-eared mural, which our staff has discussed replacing. This unit seems like the perfect opportunity for this student project.

While Lois Mailou Jones's painting *The Ascent of Ethiopia* is not a mural, it is a large, (approximately 60 x 44 inches), vibrant painting, which might inspire students creating a mural for our cafeteria. Jones's painting, done in 1932, the same year that Diego Rivera was working on his murals in Detroit, narrates four thousand years of black history, beginning with a profile of a black pharaoh and pyramids at the bottom and ascending to skyscrapers and black musicians, actors and painters at the top. It is remarkable to see the progression of these four thousand years in one painting. Aaron Douglas, an artist associated with the Harlem Renaissance, painted a similar work in 1944, titled *Building More Stately Mansions*, (54 inches x 42 inches), in which he also spanned these four thousand years, using some of the same symbols as Jones. I have slides of both of these paintings and plan to show them side-by-side, asking the students to compare their colors, symbols, and flow or composition as vehicles for history and as survival stories. This will be an excellent lesson in visual literacy and an ideal opportunity for the students to practice preparing for and writing a standard five-paragraph essay. (**I will develop this exercise in my LESSON PLAN:** I will ask students to identify and compare: the *colors and hues* in each painting, the symbols in each, and the *composition or structure* of each painting. They will make their *observations* and record their *evidence* on Graphic Organizers and then turn this activity into a five-paragraph "formula" essay, a skill I stress in my classes.)

### **History recreated through a series of paintings**

Sometimes an artist chooses to convey a historical event through a *series* of paintings. Jacob Lawrence was famous for recreating survival stories in this way. His series of sixty panels titled *The Migration Series* depict the mass migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North during the Industrial Revolution in this country. By viewing these panels from beginning to end students will see that each subsequent panel tells more of the story and reveals the desperate conditions that drove African Americans from the South and the hardships they faced in the North. Examples of these desperate conditions in the South appear in panel nine, showing cotton crops destroyed by the boll weevil; panel ten, showing a table set with barely any food (because the war had doubled the cost of food); panel 15 shows an African American weeping under the limb of a tree where a noose hangs; and panel 17 shows a white landowner dealing unjustly and harshly with a black tenant farmer who has lugged his crop in to the landowner for payment.

Examples of the hardships faced by the migrants when they arrive in the North appear in panel 22 showing three African Americans in handcuffs, arrested for no apparent reason; panels 46, 47, and 48, showing housing in the North as crowded and unhealthy; panel 49 showing a segregated restaurant in the North; and panel 52, showing angry northern workers beating up migrants with whom the northerners now had to compete for jobs. This series expresses graphically that survival is fraught with struggle and pain, and sometimes failure.

Lawrence, a participant in the great migration himself, painted this series when he was twenty-two and twenty-three years old, and it was sold shortly thereafter to the Phillips Collection in Washington D.C. and to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Phillips purchasing the odd numbered paintings, and the MOMA purchasing the evens. From time to time the Series comes together for an exhibit.

In 1993 this Series, narrated by Jacob Lawrence himself, was made into a children's storybook *The Great Migration*, and includes an image-rich poem by author and poet Walter Dean Myers, titled *Migration*, in appreciation for Lawrence's work. This poem narrates a public history, and its opening lines begin:

In the waiting room, "Colored,"  
Hands, calloused and as black as the rich  
Georgia/Carolina/Alabama dirt they leave behind,  
Clasp and unclasp silently,  
Some hold Bibles older than freedom. . . ( 1 - 5 )

Lawrence lived the great migration himself, living in three different cities by the time he was six years old, finally, being left behind for three years by his mother while she tried to establish herself in New York City. At thirteen he was reunited with his mother in Harlem where he began first as a student of art and then as a master painter. His private history is narrated and laced with his paintings in a children's book titled *Story Painter: The Life of Jacob Lawrence* by John Duggleby. Lawrence's own personal experience in the migration and life in Harlem is highly visible in his art, a private and public narrative, converging.

Lawrence painted a forty-panel series narrating the public history of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the brave black leader who liberated the slaves of Haiti from the French in 1800, although L'Ouverture himself was captured and imprisoned in France where he died. Not only is this series about the valiant struggle of a brave man to free Haiti from slavery, but also it symbolizes man's need to live freely and his struggle to win that freedom, even at the expense of his own life. Collaborating with author Walter Dean Myers, Lawrence used these action-packed paintings to create a children's storybook, just as he did with *The Migration Series*.

## Ralph Ellison narrates the same history painted by Jacob Lawrence

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Students will read Ralph Ellison's brilliant short story "Mr. Toussan" based on the same historical event about survival that is the subject of Lawrence's series and of his storybook with Walter Dean Myers. This will give the students an opportunity to compare how two authors and an artist "tell" the same historical event. Ellison sets his story in the South where two young black boys have just been chased across the street by a white man who does not want them picking up cherries that have fallen from his cherry tree. They are hurt and humiliated that this white man won't even allow them to have the cherries that are rotting on the ground. The whole of the story is their conversation in which the older of the two boys tells the younger the story told to him by his father about "Mr. Toussan" (he is young and does not know that the hero's real name is Toussaint L'Ouverture) the black man who fought against white men for freedom, and although he was captured and died in prison in France, far away from his beloved Haiti, the revolt that he started succeeded, and the people of Haiti were freed from slavery. When the older boy has finished the story, it is clear that the young boy feels empowered and he suggests that maybe they should have another try at the cherries across the street. Ellison's story seems innocent, but couched in its *innocence* is the power of retelling a piece of history and the empowerment a father has given his son by telling him this piece of history. Much went into the crafting of this story, making it rich for exploration with students.

## The history of the Underground Railroad narrated for children

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The Underground Railroad is a historical phenomenon of humanity's desire to escape the inhumanity of slavery at great risk and has been the topic of many artistic mediums. Students will compare two children's storybooks and a children's video that all tell the story of the Underground Railroad. Students will learn that the conductors on the Underground Railroad were white sympathizers, escaped slaves, and blacks born in freedom; women made up many of these *conductors*. One of these storybooks by painter Jacob Lawrence, *Harriet and the Promised Land*, contains his series of seventeen canvasses narrating the story of Harriet Tubman's life, focusing on her relentless efforts to rescue slaves on the Underground Railroad. Another storybook titled *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* illustrated and narrated by Faith Ringgold also tells Tubman's story. The children's video narrated by Morgan Freeman and titled *Follow the Drinking Gourd* is based on the song by the same name and tells the daring adventure of a family trying to escape slavery on the Underground Railroad.

In 1940, at the age of twenty-three, Lawrence painted a series of canvasses, depicting the runaway slave Harriet Tubman with a price on her head, leading slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Tubman's story was not well known in the forties, and Lawrence's series did much to begin to educate blacks and whites about her heroism. In 1993, combining these dramatic and vibrant paintings with the rhyming verse that accompanied them, he created a children's storybook, *Harriet and the Promised Land*, which won several awards. It quickly becomes clear why Lawrence, the painter, is known as a social realist.

Faith Ringgold, famous for her painted story quilts that combine painting, quilted fabric and storytelling, wrote and brilliantly illustrated in her children's book, *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*, another version of Harriet Tubman's valiant rescue of slaves from the South, based on a recurring dream about flying

to freedom that Tubman is said to have had when she was ill and near death. Thus, Ringgold's storybook is a dream variation of Tubman's rescue work, and Tubman appears in a conductor's uniform on the train in the sky. She proceeds to tell the story of slavery to a young black girl named Cassie, and Cassie actually travels an imaginary route on the Underground Railroad. Ringgold manages to infuse a poignant history lesson full of facts into her storybook such as: slaves worked long hours for no pay; runaway slaves who were caught might be sold away from their families and never see them again; neither legal nor church marriages were allowed among slaves; it was against the law for slaves to learn to read or write; gatherings, even to hear the word of God, were illegal, and seeing a star quilt hanging on a house on the Underground Railway meant it was safe for a runaway slave to take refuge. Her somewhat primitive illustrations are highly imaginative and colorful.

The thirty-minute children's video titled *Follow the Drinking Gourd* , written by Bernadine Connelly, narrated by Morgan Freeman, with music by Taj Mahal, and with colorful illustrations by Yvonne Buchanan richly recounts the brave adventures of a mother and her two young children trying to escape slavery, on the Underground Railroad, and reach their father. The vibrant illustrations are full of life and action. There is mystery and suspense as a traveling carpenter, a burly white man with a peg leg, comes to their plantation and cryptically signals the girl Mary, her mama, and Mary's brother Samuel that it is time to make their escape and follow the Big Dipper, known in the song as "the drinking gourd." Naturally, there is anxiety about making their get-away and what will happen to them in their flight. Like Ringgold's story, *Follow the Drinking Gourd* seems very personal because we know the children's names, and especially in the video, there seems to be real peril as they run from dogs and hide out in risky places. Along the Railroad, people intervene and help them on their journey.

The two storybooks and the video narrate the history of the Underground Railroad differently and effectively. Students will be comparing these three narratives for the details that they convey about the Underground Railroad and the function each serves. Students will explore the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman, Jacob Lawrence, and Faith Ringgold on the Internet and, in a systematic way, report back on the riches and connections they find.

## Survival stories of children on the orphan trains

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Another survival story relying heavily on the railroad is the narrative of the orphan trains in this country between 1850 and 1930, carrying thousands of destitute children from the unforgiving cities in the East to what was hoped would be the more nurturing farmlands in the Midwest. This narrative unfolds both a public and private history affecting more than 200,000 children whose parents had either died or simply no longer had the wherewithal to care for them. Two children's books *Orphan Train Rider*, *One Boy's True Story* and *We Rode the Orphan Trains* both by Andrea Warren give first-hand accounts of some of the orphan train survivors whom she interviewed as elderly adults and their reflections on their harrowing experiences. It becomes clear that the children had varied experiences; some were taken into families and made to feel as if they belonged, while others were treated as if they were merely slaves to be used for labor. Naturally, these survivors have a very personal perspective on this piece of history that those of us who are merely observers do not.

In *Orphan Train Rider* , Lee Nailing tells his very personal story of being left by his father who simply could not care for him and his brothers and sister after the death of their mother. As the result of the orphan trains, the siblings were all separated, but were given families and homes in which to grow up.

## Poetry celebrates the history of survival

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Poetry is an effective medium for telling history, especially when it contains strong sensory images. While poetry is a genre of literature, it is my conviction that, like drama, it does not come alive until it is read aloud. It is my intention, when reading and studying poems, to have the students read them aloud. Two short poems come to mind that tell private histories. One is *Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden which extols a father's sacrifice for his family when he rose early every Sunday morning, "put his clothes on in the blueblack cold," and stoked the fire so the house would be warm for his family when they rose. The narrator, who is now an adult, realizes the love that went into those Sunday mornings and becomes aware of his own guilt at how *indifferently* he, as a boy, treated his father who not only stoked the fire but also polished his shoes. The final stanza exposes the narrator experiencing an epiphany, signaling his own insight as a grown man.

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices? ( 10 - 14 )

The poem *While I Slept* by Robert Francis is also about awareness that comes with growing up and perhaps with the loss of his parent. The narrator describes the private history of his mother creeping softly into his cold bedroom to pull a blanket around his shoulders while he sleeps peacefully, and years later, he laments that now she sleeps permanently under the quiet rain, while he sleeps fitfully, waking and sleeping and waking and sleeping. His lament ends with this stanza:

Now she sleeps, sleeps under quiet rain  
While nights grow warm or nights grow colder  
And I wake and sleep and wake again  
While she sleeps. ( 9 - 13 )

In another poem that tells a private history about a father, *Without Title, For My Father Who Lived Without Ceremony* by Diane Glancy, the narrator uses poignant images to describe her father who was part-Cherokee, but who had moved from the land and the life he loved to work in town in a meat-packing plant, where his spirit is barely surviving. The dichotomy of moving from the land where Native American men proved their

prowess by hunting buffalo, to a meat-packing plant where animals are corralled in stockyards and their carcasses hung on conveyor belts for processing, seems too much for her father, she observes. The final lines of the poem reiterate this:

I remember the silence of his lost power,  
The red buffalo painted on his chest.  
Oh, I couldn't see it  
But it was there, and in the nights I heard  
his buffalo grunts like a snore. ( 18 - 22 )

The preceding poems about fathers and mothers all express a degree of regret, as does the poem *Lineage* by Margaret Walker in which the narrator extols her grandmothers, in sensory images as strong and powerful as the grandmothers themselves:

My grandmothers were strong.  
They followed plows and bent to toil.  
They moved through fields sowing seed.  
They touched earth and grain grew. ( 1 - 4 )

But then, in the final provocative line, the narrator wonders, " Why am I not as they?"

When the students interview the senior citizens at the Stetson Library on Dixwell Avenue to learn *their* private survival stories, it will be interesting to ask them how they view *their* grandmothers and how these women view *themselves* as grandmothers. (See the subtitle **Through Art, Students Narrate . . .** that follows)

Another outstanding and dramatic survival story full of powerful images is the poem *Ego Tripping (there may be a reason why)* by Nikki Giovanni, in which the narrator, representing *woman the mother of all humankind* , celebrates her god-like qualities and women's gifts to the world. It begins:

I was born in the congo  
I walked to the fertile crescent and built the sphinx  
I designed a pyramid so tough that a star  
                  that only glows every one hundred years falls  
                  into the center giving divine perfect light



I am bad ( 1 - 6 )

Not all survival stories are as upbeat as *Ego Tripping* . Dwight Okita, in his poem titled *In Response to Executive Order 9066: ALL AMERICANS OF JAPANESE DESCENT MUST REPORT TO RELOCATION CENTERS* , a fourteen year-old American girl of Japanese descent who has packed a few things to go to an internment camp, does not understand why, *suddenly* , her best friend Denise, a white girl, will have nothing to do with her and, in fact, accuses her of trying to start a war. While thousands of Americans of Japanese descent were shuffled off to internment camps, it was the *private* experience of individuals and of children as well, like this one.

I saw Denise today in Geography class.  
She was sitting on the other side of the room.  
"You're trying to start a war," she said, "Giving secrets away  
to the Enemy, Why can't you keep your big mouth shut?" ( 16 - 20 )

Students will listen to excerpts from Cornell West's CD *Sketches of My Culture* , a composite of poetry, gospel, blues, jazz, and rap, narrating the survival of black people from the days of slave ships to the present. One such excerpt on this CD is titled "3 M's," in which the lyrics celebrate the contributions of Martin Luther King, Medger Evers and Malcolm X to the Civil Rights Movement. These tracks might inspire students to write a rap or lyrics or a poem of their own about survival.

Cornell West's piece, "3 M's" could also be expanded to a specific event in history narrated by Jacob Lawrence in his graphic painting *Confrontation at the Bridge* , commemorating the attempted crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, during the Civil Rights Movement when peaceful marchers on their way to Montgomery were met by armed state troopers with billy clubs and vicious dogs. Students could study the composition of Lawrence's painting and watch the video *Eyes on the Prize* that documents this attempted crossing, followed by a successful crossing of the bridge.

## Private histories of survival narrated on stage

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Students will also read/perform and study two scenes from two separate plays in which black men act out their determination for a better life and for their survival: Walter Lee in *Raisin in the Sun* lays out his determination and soulful *need* to be more than a white man's chauffeur. Walter expresses to his mother his frustration with his current job:

"A job. Mama, a job? I open and close car doors all day long. I drive a man around in his limousine and say, 'Yes, sir; no, sir; very good, sir; shall I take the Drive, sir?' Mama, that ain't no kind of job . . .that ain't nothing at all. Mama, I don't know if I can make you understand." 1

To his wife he expresses the frustration that comes with not being taken seriously by her:

"That's it. There you are. Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And his woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. Man say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby! And his woman say: Your eggs is getting cold!" 2

Troy Maxson, a garbage collector in August Wilson's *Fences* set in the 1950's, reveals a similar desire and need to change his life when the audience learns from him that he is determined to become the *driver* of a garbage truck and not just the lowly guy *hauling* at the back of the truck. He asks why only white men drive the trucks and he is determined to change this, even though, ironically, he does not have a driver's license.

I ain't worried about them firing me. They gonna fire me 'cause I asked a question? That's all I did. I went to Mr. Rand and asked him, "Why?" Why you got the white mens driving and the colored lifting?" Told him, "What's the matter, don't I count? You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck. That ain't no paper job!

Hell, anybody can drive a truck. How come you got all whites driving and the colored lifting? "He told me, "Take it to the union." Well, hell, that's what I done! Now they wanna come up with this pack of lies. 3

In both of these plays, the private histories of fictional black men testify to, or model, the tenacity of black men to survive, against the odds, in this society.

## **Through art, students narrate public or private history**

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It is my intention that each student will choose a medium and narrate a history, tell a survival story, fictional or non-fictional. Some students will interview the senior citizens who made a train trip with them to Harlem and who have visited them at school. These senior citizens meet (about a hundred strong) every Wednesday afternoon at the Stetson Public Library on Dixwell Avenue in New Haven. The students will then retell these histories through one of the mediums to which they have been exposed in this unit.

Students may choose to retell one of the histories or survival stories they have studied in this unit. They might even choose to collaborate with another student or a senior citizen, for that matter, to narrate a historical event. Certainly the mural in the cafeteria will be a collaboration, which could reach even beyond the students in the immediate classes studying this topic. This mural project will require careful planning but has tremendous potential as a learning experience, a collaborative experience, and as testimony to the story-telling qualities of art.

At the end of the unit, students will present either to the rest of the class or to the rest of the school, in a culminating celebration, the creative art that they have produced. This will include the mural spanning a wall in the school cafeteria on which students will have collaborated in designing and painting. Of course we will invite the senior citizens who participated in the interviews.

Each student also will have a portfolio that begins with an exercise in visual literacy, incorporates graphic organizers, and culminates in a five-paragraph essay. These activities are spelled out in the following Lesson Plans I and II.

## Introduction to the Lesson Plans I and II

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My lesson plans include exercises in: visual literacy, making observations and gathering evidence on graphic organizers, and writing a five-paragraph essay using the data gathered. Studying colors, symbols, and composition or form, students will compare and contrast two paintings: *The Ascent of Ethiopia* by Louise Mailou Jones and *Building More Stately Mansions* by Aaron Douglas that both narrate the history and survival of the black race and culture in this society.

**Lesson Plan I: Students will compare and contrast (1)colors and hues, (2)symbols, and (3)the flow or composition of the two paintings that narrate the history and survival of the black race and culture in this society. They will practice the skill of making observations about art and gathering the evidence to support these observations.**

For these exercises the two paintings will be projected simultaneously onto a screen, using either an overhead projector or two slide projectors. For this activity it will be necessary to make slides of these two paintings or to have them imprinted side-by-side on an overhead plastic sheet.

**A.** The teacher will lead a guided discussion of the **colors and hues** used in these two paintings, asking students what they notice at first glance about the colors in these paintings. They will notice that the shades of purples, greens and browns in Aaron Douglas's painting are muted and understated, while Jones uses bright hues of blues, purples, greens, and yellows, accented with black. There are more differences in the colors and hues in these paintings than there are similarities. For this exercise, students will record the colors and hues they see in each painting and for evidence identify objects in each painting that represent those colors and hues. A **graphic organizer** divided into quarters is useful for this activity. The top two quarters can be used for one painting and the bottom two for the other. On the left side students can record the colors and hues they see and on the right side they can identify objects in the painting that are those colors.

**B.** Next the teacher will give the students a **Venn diagram** (two overlapping circles) and ask students to point out **objects (symbols)** that they see in both paintings such as the pyramids and the sphinx. Objects that appear in both paintings will be recorded where the two circles in the diagram overlap. Then they will find objects or symbols that appear in only one painting. Where the circles do not overlap, students will record on one side objects and symbols unique to one painting and on the other side objects and symbols unique to the other. Hence, there will be three lists in the diagram, two that contrast with each other and the one list of objects and symbols in the middle that the paintings share.

**C.** Once the students have recorded the symbols on the Venn diagram, they will fill out **three more graphic organizers** : one listing on the left side the objects and **symbols shared** by the two paintings and on the right side what they think these represent, and two separate organizers for **symbols unique to each painting** . For example each painting contains a dominant figure of the sphinx and pyramids, no doubt representing the powerful culture of Africa in Egyptian civilization. On the other two graphic organizers students will list the symbols that are unique to each painting and on the right side, across from the symbol, write down what they think it represents in the painting. Obviously, before filling out these three organizers, the teacher will lead a mini-discussion about the titles of these paintings and the overall theme of the paintings. Knowing this, it will be easier for students to speculate on and decode the symbols on their graphic organizers. For example, Douglas includes, in the right forefront, a figure (could be a teacher or a mother) showing a globe of the world to two children. Students will speculate on what these figures and the globe

represent. Jones includes a palette and brushes in her painting and also a black figure at an easel. Students will identify what they think she is conveying in her painting through these symbols about the rise of the black culture in our society.

**D.** Once students have observed the colors and hues of these paintings and they have recorded the symbols and what they represent, they will be ready to compare and contrast the overall **flow or composition of the paintings**. It helps to know that both of these large paintings of a very large topic are approximately the same size, almost sixty inches high and approximately forty-five inches wide. To begin looking at form and structure students will observe how the symbols flow. In Douglas's painting, the sphinx and pyramids appear to dominate the upper left part of the painting, while the contemporary figures appear prominent in the foreground. In Jones's painting the black sphinx and pyramids dominate the lower right foreground and the contemporary figures gradually rise out of this, culminating in the upper right hand corner, at a piano, on stage, and at an easel in front of skyscrapers. Students will observe where the myriad symbols are positioned within this flow.

Again, a **graphic organizer divided into quarters** is helpful for students to record the structure they observe in each painting and how this structure or **flow** conveys the artist's statement, keeping in mind the titles of the paintings. Again, the top two quarters can serve for observations of structure on the left and evidence on the right for one painting, and the bottom two quarters can serve the same purpose for the other painting. These observations and evidence can be general or specific, depending on how in-depth the teacher wants to make the lesson.

**Lesson Plan II: Students will use their observations and evidence they have gathered to write a formula five-paragraph essay comparing and contrasting these two paintings. I refer to the word formula because it is empowering for students to learn that any time they are faced with an expository essay assignment, they can rely on this formula, once they have learned it. I like the expression I saw somewhere, "Writing should be crafted, not sprayed." Knowing the formula builds confidence in students and reduces tendencies to spray thoughts and evidence as a result of anxiety.**

A highly effective metaphor for the formula five-paragraph essay that has proven itself again and again is the simple **three-battery flashlight**. I simply draw a flashlight on the overhead or blackboard and write *thesis* next to the bulb. Where the top part of the flashlight screws into the body, I write *controlling idea "A," controlling idea "B,"* and *controlling idea "C."* *These four parts, I explain, make up the introductory paragraph: a thesis sentence and a sentence stating each controlling idea.*

I show the students how to copy *controlling idea sentence "A"* to open **paragraph two** which is the first support paragraph, and that what follows is the evidence to prove *controlling idea sentence "A."* This **second paragraph** is the **first battery** in the flashlight. Next I show them that they must copy *controlling idea "B"* to open **paragraph three** which is the second support paragraph, and that what follows is the evidence to prove *controlling idea "B."* The third paragraph is the **second battery** in the flashlight. Then, I show them that to open **paragraph four, the third battery** in the flashlight, they copy *controlling idea "C,"* followed by evidence to prove this controlling idea. When the controlling ideas are used to open the support paragraphs, they are called *topic sentences*.

Once they have completed the three support paragraphs or, to stay with the flashlight metaphor, dropped in the three batteries, they must screw the end or bottom on the flashlight to hold the batteries in place, making the light come on. This *end of the flashlight* is the conclusion to the essay. Without it, the batteries will fall out and the light (thesis) will not light up. The bottom end (conclusion) of the flashlight is a shadow of the top part

(introduction) of the flashlight. Hence, I write under the word conclusion: **shadow thesis** , and **shadow controlling ideas "A," "B," and "C."** These four sentences that make up the conclusion should be similar to, but not exactly like, the four sentences in the introduction. This flashlight metaphor for the formula five-paragraph essay is an easy concept for students to grasp, and the idea that a simple *flashlight* can represent a five-paragraph essay takes them by surprise. They become comfortable referring to it.

The first lesson in writing a five-paragraph essay is to model for students how to write the thesis, the first sentence of the introduction of a basic five-paragraph essay. I always point to the assignment as the key to the thesis, since students seem to panic when they are assigned an essay, never knowing where to look to begin. The **assignment** is to **write a five paragraph essay in which they compare and contrast the three elements they have studied of the two large paintings: *The Ascent of Ethiopia* by Louis Mailou Jones and *Building More Stately Mansions* by Aaron Douglas.** Because my students have limited skills in the writing process, I will probably model how to craft the thesis from the assignment given.

Once we have established the thesis, I will point out that in a five-paragraph essay there are three major support paragraphs, one dealing with each of the three elements they studied in the paintings. It is reassuring for them to know that they have already gathered the data on their graphic organizers, and now it is a matter of incorporating it into their essay. They will need to craft three controlling ideas to complete their introductory paragraph, one controlling idea for each of the elements: color and hue, symbols, and flow or composition. With their help, I will model how to craft one controlling idea and let them use that to craft the other two. Students do not understand that the reason these sentences in the introductory paragraph are called *controlling ideas* is because they control the next three paragraphs (the body) of the five-paragraph essay. In order to model the controlling idea, I will ask students to look at the first graphic organizer they did, comparing and contrasting colors and hues in these paintings. I will ask them to come up with an overall statement about the differences and similarities of colors and hues in these paintings. From their shared statements, we will craft a controlling idea that includes the information they have gathered on their graphic organizer. In other words, once they have crafted a controlling idea, they can use the information and details on their graphic organizer to support it. Modeling how to craft a controlling idea by looking at the data gathered on a graphic organizer and coming up with statements that include the information might be effectively done on an overhead projector where the statements made by the students could be written and projected for all to see what the choices are.

Once the students have crafted the other two controlling ideas, they will have completed the introductory paragraph of their essay. It is very liberating when they understand that they will now **rewrite each controlling idea** as the opening sentence to the three support paragraphs, using the evidence from their graphic organizers to support the controlling ideas that open each of these three paragraphs. Again, with their assistance, it will be necessary to model how to craft at least one of these paragraphs. By closely studying the controlling idea that takes in information on the graphic organizer about colors and hues, students should be able to see how they can use the left and right hand columns of the graphic organizer as evidence to write the support for their controlling idea. Hence by rewriting the first controlling idea as the opening sentence to paragraph two and by using the information on the graphic organizer on colors and hues, they will see that they have crafted the first support paragraph of their essay. They have made a statement and they have supported it.

This is the process they will follow to craft the second and third support paragraphs. Again, because my students' writing skills are shaky, I may model, with their help, the second support paragraph and leave them on their own for the third. What is important is that they understand how they combine the controlling idea

sentence in their introductory paragraph with the information and evidence they have gathered on the graphic organizer. Essentially, they have done the research by the time they come to writing the essay.

When students are faced with writing the **concluding paragraph** , I find that they don't know how to wrap up the essay and they often introduce new and extraneous information. It is illuminating for students to learn that the conclusion can be a simple reflection of their introductory paragraph, made up of the same basic four sentences contained in that paragraph. For this reason I call these four sentences the **shadow thesis** and the **three shadow controlling ideas** because, while they are not verbatim, they shadow or restate what the students wrote in the introductory paragraph. This modeling of the formula five-paragraph essay gives students a basic understanding of and practice in the basic essay, a skill they will carry with them beyond the English classroom.

## Notes

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1 Gates, 1753.

2 Gates, 1734.

3 Gates, 2413.

## Websites

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[www.hudson.acad.umn.edu/Lawrence/confront.html](http://www.hudson.acad.umn.edu/Lawrence/confront.html)

A site where students can view Jacob Lawrence's painting *Confrontation at the Bridge*

[www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/amistad/AMI\\_IMAG.HTM](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/amistad/AMI_IMAG.HTM)

This website has the Amistad Murals by Hale Woodruff

[www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/mar07.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/mar07.html)

Photographs of marchers *trying* to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in March 1965

urban totems: [www.-unix.oit.umass.edu/~afriart/urban.htm](http://www.-unix.oit.umass.edu/~afriart/urban.htm)

A site where students can view twenty-five contemporary murals from around the country, including *To Protect and Serve* , featuring the Black Panther Party.

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Downs, Linda Bank. *Diego Rivera: The Detroit Industry Murals* . New York: The Detroit Institute of Arts with W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.

Reproductions of the murals painted by Rivera at the Institute including detailed reproductions of the cartoon drawings he worked from with documentary photographs of Rivera at work, including a discussion of the murals and a small poster of the most famous section of the murals.

Duggleby, John. *Story Painter: The Life of Jacob Lawrence* . San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998.

A colorful biography interspersed with photographs of the artist and reproductions and discussions of his art.

Ellison, Ralph. "Mr. Toussan," *Black Perspectives* , Los Angeles: The Scholastics Black Literature Series, 1971.

The highly engaging story of two young black boys on a hot summer day in the South, having what appears to be an innocent conversation about a historical figure who freed Haitians from enslavement by the French. What the reader realizes is that the historical figure that lived some 250 years ago and freed the Haitians is also freeing these young boys as his story unfolds.

Connelly, Bernadine. *Follow the Drinking Gourd* video, Rowayton, CT: Rabbit Ears

Production, Inc., 1992.

A highly animated 30-minute video, narrated by Morgan Freeman with music by Taj Mahal, about the perilous escape of a family (a mother and her two young children) of slaves from the South. They get help along the way, especially from a craggy white man called peg-leg Joe, and eventually, by following the Big Dipper known in lore as the drinking gourd, they are reunited with their father who is waiting for them in the North.

Gates, Henry Louis and Nellie Y. McCay, editors. *The Norton Anthology: African American Literature* , New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997.

A monumental representation of all genres of African American literature dating from 1746 to the present, including several complete works such as Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* and August Wilson's play *Fences* .

Hayden, Robert. "Those Winter Sundays," *Hear My Voice* , Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994.

A multicultural anthology of literature from the U.S. that contains the short but poignant poem, "Those Winter Sundays."

Hughes, Langston. (illustrated by Brian Pinkney). *The Dream Keeper and other poems* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

A combination of some of Hughes's poems about aspirations and Pinkney's compelling black and white illustrations.

Lawrence, Jacob. *The Great Migration* . New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992.

This book contains all sixty paintings in Lawrence's *Great Migration* series, including his own narration that accompanies the paintings.

Lawrence, Jacob. *Harriet and the Promised Land* . Hong Kong: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1997.



Lawrence's stunning narrative paintings, including his rendition of her story in verse, documenting Harriet Tubman's heroic rescue of slaves, herself a slave, risking her life with every trip from the South to the North.

Minnesota Humanities Commission. *Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural American Writing* . St. Paul: Minnesota Humanities Commission, 1991.

An anthology of Native American, Hispanic American, African American, and Asian American prose, poetry and drama.

Myers, Walter Dean. (Paintings by Jacob Lawrence). *Toussaint L'Ouverture, The Fight for Haiti's Freedom* . New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Forty-one highly animated paintings documenting the life of a black man, Toussaint L'Ouverture, who gave his life to free the Haitians from enslavement by the French in the first years of the 1800's. Walter Dean Myers tells the story to accompany the paintings.

Ringgold, Faith. *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* . New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 1992.

A gorgeously illustrated children's book, the story is based on a recurring dream that Harriet Tubman is said to have had near the end of her life, in which she is a conductor on a train that travels through the sky, and rescues slaves, delivering them to freedom.

West, Cornell. *Sketches of My Culture* . New York: Sheridan Square Entertainment. LLC, 2001.

A lively, articulate compilation of narrative by Cornell West, of gospel, blues, jazz, and rap telling the survival story of black people from the days of slave ships to the present.

Powell, Richard J. et al. *Rhapsodies in Black, Art of the Harlem Renaissance* . Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

A combination of reproductions and a candid discussion of the Harlem Renaissance as more than an isolated historical moment, but rather a phenomenon that connected to other parts of the world. Among the reproductions is the painting by Louis Mailou Jones, *The Ascent of Ethiopia* .

Powell, Richard J. and Jock Reynolds. *To Conserve a Legacy, American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities* . Andover Academy, Andover, and Massachusetts: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1999.

The fascinating account of a collaboration with historically black colleges and universities to gather and restore a remarkable wealth of their art. Among the reproductions in this book is *Building More Stately Mansions* by Aaron Douglas.

Rochfort, Desmond. *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* . San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993.

Stunning reproductions and discussions of the bold murals, both in the U.S. and

Mexico, of the three best-known Mexican muralists.

Warren, Andrea. *Orphan Train Rider, One Boy's True Story*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996.

The account and photographs of Lee Nailling who rode the orphan train in 1926 when he was seven years old. His wrenching story of losing his mother, being given up by his father and separated from his siblings.

Warren, Andrea. *We Rode the Orphan Trains* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001.

Non-fiction accounts and photographs of adults who rode the orphan trains when they were children.

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