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A Bird's Eye View of the Caribbean: Art, Folklore, and Music

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by Lorna Edwards

Introduction

Crystalline waters, exotic plants and flowers, lush vegetation, tropical paradise! These are terms frequently used to describe the Caribbean islands that stretch from Florida to the coastland of South America. This region in the Western Hemisphere is more than a vacation paradise. This interdisciplinary unit is a continuation of the story of the African Diaspora with a focus on the Caribbean islands. Lessons are designed for middle school students in New Haven, Connecticut, many of whom are of Caribbean heritage. I teach at an Arts Magnet school, therefore, the arts and academics will be integrated. Students will be allowed to express themselves in various forms. As a class, we will learn about the Caribbean region's geography, history, and culture mainly by exploring visual arts. For the execution of a major portion of this unit, students will examine selections from the works of two American artists, Winslow Homer and Jacob Lawrence, as well as Caribbean works seen on Internet sites. Lessons are geared for four seventh or eighth grade classes with an average of twenty-five students in each class. There will be twelve classes; each will run for approximately fifty minutes. Modifications to the lesson plans may be made, as necessary, based on the needs of the students. Teachers may teach the entire unit or use segments of the unit as they seem fit.

The idea for this unit came from heterogeneously grouped students in my seventh grade English class while we were studying the African Diaspora. I usually ask students to evaluate the unit and offer suggestions for improvement should I teach the lesson again. Many students, especially those of African descent, expressed the idea of studying " *something new* " given that they have been learning about the contributions of African Americans since their elementary years. We cannot study the influence of Africans in the Americas without looking at the Africans who came from the ancestral homeland and were shipped to the Caribbean islands to be subjected to the atrocities of slavery. Just like African Americans, these people managed to carve out a life and culture for themselves in spite of the hardships they endured. Consequently, this unit might also be used as a supplement for African American studies.

The unit will be implemented by using various formats to accommodate different learning styles. All other teachers who work with these students will be included within my overall lesson plans. Some may be involved for just one lesson, while others will incorporate a few lessons related to examining the extent of Caribbean influence in the creative and performing arts. The teachers of African and Hip-Hop dance will discuss the history of rhythm and dance of the Caribbean and their influence in today's pop culture in the United States.

The Band teacher will incorporate the Caribbean influence in music in Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad, and other Caribbean islands.

Some teachers might want to place the focus on academics as students study the Caribbean islands. I have included in the narrative some information and suggestions that the Language Arts and Social Studies teachers may use as students explore the topics from a more historical viewpoint. The Social Studies component of the lesson will require students to learn how islands are formed; they will also engage in map reading skills. Students will be required to locate places on a map of the Caribbean area and research the geography, history, and culture of the region. The acquired information will be later incorporated into writing an I-Search Paper and in the creation of a story (historical fiction). In order to make it more engaging, I will encourage students to include some of their teachers, classmates, and relatives as characters in these stories. Both Social Studies and Language Arts teachers will collaborate during the entire execution of this curriculum unit. The Language Arts teacher will review the elements of effective note-taking and the Social Studies teacher will assist students in researching the island nations with a primary focus on the impact of Europe on these countries. Literacy requires that students make connection with the text in order to gain meaning. As students conduct their research, they will constantly compare and contrast the similarities and differences of their knowledge of the United States and what they are learning about the Caribbean region.

I had mentioned that a segment of this unit will require students to write a final paper in the form of an I-Search paper. I prefer this format because it allows the students to improve on their ability to take notes, paraphrase and analyze. This also minimizes our struggle against plagiarism. I could not do this without the assistance of the Technology Resource and Library Media teachers. The former will bookmark websites on how to conduct research, summarize, and paraphrase. I will conduct mini-lessons as the class visits the respective websites and work on various activities. In the initial stage of their research, students may work in pairs, if they desire. The Library Media teacher will select books related to the Caribbean islands and any other material that will help the students to write a good research paper. Students will check out books, use reference materials, and obtain ideas for their I-Search paper. The *K-W-L chart* will be a useful tool as students write their I-Search paper on a Caribbean island of their choice. The introduction will state what they know about the island and what *questions* they want answered as they write the paper. They may also state the reason for selecting that particular island; maybe their grandparents or a friend came from that island nation. Maybe they just wanted to learn about a place of which they know very little or absolutely nothing. Next, students will describe the process they used to obtain their answers and then report their *findings* . It is so important to remind students that there are available sources other than the Internet. They may peruse library books or interview people, which could include classmates who could offer helpful suggestions on how to obtain additional information. The final portion of the I-Search Paper will allow students to express their feelings as the research progressed. Did they require constant encouragement from their parents? Did a peer steer them in the right direction to get information? Did they find this information useful or how will they use this information later in life? In this section, students may describe how they processed the information gathered and created meaning based on their experiences.

Unit Objectives

- To engage students in visual analysis of art
- To use questioning strategy to develop observation and high order thinking skills
- To use art to gain a better understanding of life in the Caribbean islands
- To demonstrate literary skills required to identify and analyze visual, oral, and written sources related to the Caribbean area
- To share in the use of oral tradition of folktales
- To determine how point of view influences the understanding of history
- To engage in the writing process

The class will start this unit by building on students' prior knowledge of the Caribbean Area. Those who have lived on an island will express their views of living on an island. Here in New Haven, there are many students in the class who have lived on, visited an island, or know someone who has experienced living on an island. If this lesson were implemented in an area where students have not had this experience, then I would probably ask them to imagine what island life might be like. This is a grand opportunity for students to reflect on books that they have read or movies they have seen. If necessary, students will be prompted to discuss means of transportation, ways to make a living and get a good education. Who knows, maybe they will ask their parents to spend a vacation on a tropical country located to the south of Florida in order to gain firsthand knowledge.

After discussing what it is like living on an island, students will view the DVD, *National Geographic Video - Jewels of the Caribbean Sea* (1994) that gives an overview of the geography, history and culture of the region. I think it would be interesting for students to note the influence of the British, French, Spanish, and Dutch in that region as they merge with the cultures of the African, Indian, and Chinese immigrants. Such a merger produces a culture that is definitely Caribbean even though each island has its own distinct flair. Students will take notes on the similarities and differences of the various island nations. The information gathered will be included as they research selected islands in the library or on the Internet, and conduct interviews with people who have lived in or visited the selected island.

Looking at Art

Winslow Homer

Every piece of art has the potential to tell a story and we will examine some artwork in order to obtain information about life in the Caribbean. The next activity will require students to explore paintings produced by a famous American artist, Winslow Homer (1836-1910) who was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Much of his time was spent producing oil paintings even though he is known more for his success using the medium of watercolor. *Winslow Homer's Watercolors* (1986) contains representation of paintings that were created during Homer's many vacations traveling across New England, Canada, the Caribbean and Florida. The National Gallery of Art has produced a video recording entitled *Winslow Homer, the nature of the artist* (1986). Students will use this video to explore Homer's paintings in watercolors and oil and tell stories about life in the Bahamas, Bermuda, and Cuba. If the video is unavailable, then a possible alternative is to secure about six or seven copies of *Winslow Homer Watercolors* by Helen A. Cooper from the public library. This way, students will be able to work in groups of three or four as they engage in a visual analysis of selected paintings on the Caribbean. Another option is to borrow slides from the History of Art department at Yale University.

In the 1880s, Homer produced paintings showing Cuba and the Bahamas, in particular Nassau. This was a period when Nassau was becoming a popular tourist spot. This flourishing city had a population of somewhere between ten to twelve thousand people. The suburban areas behind the hills were inhabited mainly by people of African descent which made up seventy-five percent of the population. At this time, many of the Africans who were brought across the Atlantic Ocean were still alive; they and their descendants maintained their customs. European or American tourists walking the narrow streets on the island would definitely get a taste of the Bahamian culture. There were brightly colored clothing, houses painted with every color of the rainbow, and open bazaars.

Just by looking at Homer's tropical watercolors, we can discuss the rich vegetation, blooming flowers, and a wide variety of tropical fruits. There are also mountains, beaches and busy city streets. Architecture would also be a point of interest as we examine houses ranging anywhere from mansions to houses with aluminum roofs to thatched-roof huts. People's homes sometimes are indicative of their economic status.

Homer's painting, *Native Huts, Nassau,* 1885 , illustrates a blend of both African and European architecture. The use of thatch for the roof is part of the region's legacy of slavery. Raised construction, clapboard walls and windows with wood shutters indicate the European influence. Students will be prompted to determine whether a community is privileged based on what is depicted in the paintings.

Homer would visit the Caribbean islands every winter. His watercolors are usually not on view because they are fragile to light but they are accessible in books. The scene depicted in *Turtle Pound,* 1898 shows two black men, one lighter skinned than the other, in the open ocean lifting a turtle to a partner who will receive it. In the Bahamas, this is a way to earn a living so this gives us a view of life in the Caribbean as students try to understand some of the occupations on the islands. Young turtles caught in the ocean were placed in seawater pens to be fattened before they were sold for human consumption. The painting suggests an intimacy between man and nature (the blue sky).

I might also use this image to lead students into discussing how this picture relates to the racial situation in America. The man in the pound or pen is a reminder of slavery. The black man is imprisoned and the position

of his hand reminds us of the stockade. The red on his hand suggests pain. The figure in the pound is left-handed and the shadow of his stubby fingers rhymes with the flippers of the turtle who is trapped. The wings of the bird (probably a seagull) in the cloud, rhymes with the flipper which suggests freedom. There is quite a contrast between the captured turtle and the free bird which could spark a discussion on the blurry lines between emancipation and enslavement. The figure in the foreground shows that he is in command and he has the physical strength to rise above the horizon. He is poised between the emblems of confinement and slavery. The boat in the background on the left signifies that things "are just moving along." Neither figure is a whole man and Homer identifies with these men as his name is half-submerged in the water on the side of the pound.

My classes have often visited the Yale Center for British Art; therefore, students are already familiar with the process of analyzing and interpreting selected paintings. As they engage in class discussions, they will build on their prior knowledge of connecting art and literature to historical events. In addition, these discussions will foster further development of high-order thinking skills. *Be careful not to divulge too much information about the painting to the students since this might overload them and inhibit their participation in class discussions.* In order to make meaning of the paintings, students will be asked to either list what they see or tell the class what they see as they look at the painting. As students describe what they see, I will ask whether their peers see the same thing or something else. I will encourage students to reflect on their initial reaction and back up their responses with evidence available in the painting. Some of the possible questions might include, "What makes you say that? How can you tell? What else is happening in the picture?" For elaboration, I will encourage students to give detailed descriptions of what they see as they try to explain what is depicted in the scene. Students will imagine themselves in the scene and tell where they would place themselves or how they would feel if they were a part of the action. By engaging in the questioning strategy, students will draw conclusions based on the visual evidence they gather. Analyzing and discussing these images will also help students to further develop observation skills through comparing and contrasting. To bring closure to the lesson, I will ask students to summarize the ideas that were discussed. Paraphrasing their responses will validate the ideas that were generated.

It is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers as we discuss paintings in order to make the connection with history and society at large. I think the painting, Th *e Gulf Stream,* 1889, is an excellent choice to spark discussion among the students. A half-naked black man with a calculating look on his face appears helpless on the deck of a schooner with broken masts. The sea is rough and there is a pool of sharks in the foreground. This painting is loaded with symbolism. The look on the man's face might suggest that he is aware of his dire situation but has no desire to change it. The sugarcane, which is rope-like, is a reminder of life on the plantation. The schooner has neither sail nor rudder. Does that mean that the young man has resigned himself to his fate and has no choice but to go wherever life takes him? As he looks out, is he looking back at where he came from? Is he thinking that maybe the shark-infested water is not as bad as slavery? The sun falls on the boat so there is a glimmer of hope as this man tries to survive in the horrific environment. There is blood in the water; were there others in the boat? What do you think happened to them? What evidence is there to support your response? These are some of the questions we will try to answer as the class analyzes and interprets Homer's painting of the Gulf Stream. You might even want to extend the lesson as the class examines the way shapes repeat themselves in the painting. The shark is aligned with the man in the boat. The mast rhymes with the waves in the background and the waterspout with the shark's fin and the triangle on the boat. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer but students must support their deductions with evidence shown in the painting.

Many families have stories about surviving the devastating effects of hurricane in the Caribbean. *After the*

Hurricane, 1899 may be used to continue the dialogue of man's struggle against nature and his will to survive. The presence of gray clouds becoming clear and waves indicate that the storm has subsided. A young black man lays in a fetal position on the beach. His arm cradles his head and the position of his left hand under his mouth can easily remind one of a baby sucking its thumb. This is a rather admirable yet infantile pose. His arched back suggests he is still alive even though he has collapsed from exhaustion as he tries to reach land. This trapped man has to deal with the predicament of enslavement and subjection to what life has to offer him. The well-built man with brawny muscles is unable to resist nature's control of his life. A critical take on this painting might invoke sympathy from students in a manner similar to Homer's whose signature is aligned to the figure. The discussion of slavery continues. The black man is washed ashore on a foreign land and his boat is smashed to pieces. There is much ambiguity; he is knocked down but not dead so he will get up again. Students will be prompted to follow the line from the man's head to the boat and back (note that his legs are concealed by the remains of the wrecked boat). This outlines a merman, a fascinating, exotic and sensual being.

Sponge Fishing , 1885 (a misleading title) can be used to generate discussions about transportation in the Bahamas. The schooner *Annie Nassau* is seen in the foreground crowded with dark skinned people who most likely are islanders traveling between the islands. A young woman is seated in the stern and she seems to be gazing at a boy who has come up from the water with what appears to be a shell or sponge. There is another schooner in the background of the painting.

Some of Homer's other paintings depict his view of everyday life. *Sponge Fishing, Nassau,* 1885 will pave the way for students to discuss the Bahamian ways of earning a living. Labor was divided between the men and women. Men labored at sea in the broiling sun. Women cleaned, sorted, and processed the catch. Boats were also used as a means of transportation. In this painting, one can see the view of the wharf from the water. White men, probably tourists or buyers, wearing black hats and blue jackets, observe as black fishermen donning straw hats unload the catch of sponge on the dock. One can almost get a feeling of the busy wharf just by looking at the colors of black, brown, red, blue, and green. The painting also shows gray and white clouds and palm trees. The bright light of the Caribbean was typical of Homer's watercolors, revealed as large sections of exposed white paper. These paintings were often done rather quickly outdoors and were dried in the hot sun. Discussions of Homer's paintings with titles such as *The Sponge Diver, The Conch Divers, The Coral Divers* , and *Shark Fishing* can be useful in determining some sources of income in the Bahamian economy.

Homer returned to the Bahamas in 1898 and stayed for two months and painted at least twenty-five watercolors. Many paintings contain subjects similar to his first visit -- young black men in water, coastal scenes, seaside resorts clouds and tropical vegetation. Pages 208-216 of Cooper's book provides several opportunities for students to discuss what they learn about the Caribbean just by looking at paintings of the bright colors, calming waters, and devastating effects of natural disasters.

Back on his 1885 trip, Homer left Nassau and went to Cuba. At that time, Santiago de Cuba, the second oldest port in Cuba, was famous for exporting agricultural products such as coffee, sugar, tobacco and cotton. Rum and minerals such as cooper and nickel were also exported. Natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes destroyed the area so people traveled from Havana by ships around the coast, or on land by horse. During the five weeks that Homer stayed in Cuba, he produced at least eighteen watercolors and a few drawings. Some such as *Street Corner, Santiago de Cuba,* 1885 showed the Spanish architecture with elaborate ironworks, repeated vertical forms, and brightly colored buildings. Students will be able to remark on the warm colors of orange-gold, reds and blues. Could this be part of the African influence on the island?

On Homer's two visits to Bermuda, a coral island unfamiliar to American tourists, he executed a total of nineteen paintings. The average Bermudan worked as a domestic helper, manual laborer, or farmer; therefore, Homer's work included fewer local people interacting with nature than his works in the Bahamas. Along with the exotic plants, sea animals, and green landscape, a visitor may encounter animals roaming the islands especially in the rural areas. This is captured in Homer's *Bermuda Settlers,* 1901 (p. 223) showing five wild razorback pigs roaming a cedar grove. I am fond of this painting because I think it truly summarizes the Caribbean experience of nature. There are hills, the sea and deep blue sky, hibiscus, oleander and poinsettia flowers.

Other strategies will be applied as students explore the Internet to examine the works of some Caribbean artists. There is a collection of Haitian, Cuban, and Jamaican art on the website, http://www.galleryofwestindianart.com/. Students may click on the thumbnail images and get a larger version of the paintings shown at the Gallery of West Indian Art in Kingston, Jamaica. One can also find biographical information on the artists. Another website with Caribbean art is http://caribbeanartist.com/. The works of Romeo Downer from Barbados is displayed here. There are paintings of people and places from Downer's homeland. Others represent island scenes from Jamaica, Trinidad, Dominican Republic, St. Thomas, and St. Lucia. To safeguard against viewing inappropriate sites, I will solicit the Technology teacher's assistance to create a web page for the sole purpose of viewing Caribbean art. The Technology Center is equipped with at least thirty computers so students will have the choice of working individually or in pairs as they select two or three pieces of art to be analyzed. Students will be given a list of questions that will guide them through the analysis (Lesson One). I am extremely grateful to the Visual Arts teacher who assisted me with this portion of the lesson. We will also visit the school library and the public library to borrow books on Caribbean Literature (see Students Bibliography). As students explore the literature, they will be encouraged to pay attention to the illustrations, which will hopefully give them ideas that will aid in their determining how and what will be illustrated in the stories they will create.

A Bird's Eye View

This segment of the unit focuses more on historical information on the Caribbean region, therefore, Social Studies and Language Arts teachers might peruse the information given here in order to determine the areas they want to highlight.

Effects of Slavery in the Caribbean

Many artists have created visual representations of various aspects of African American life. Students have explored Winslow Homer's perspective of black experiences in the Caribbean. Now, students will explore another artist's rendition of the experiences of people of African descent living in the Caribbean. The idea of using two American artists, one black and the other white, is to encourage dialogue on how perspective influences our understanding of history and the way we view life.

The Harlem Renaissance has its place in history because of the positive manner in which African descendants are portrayed with pride, accomplishment, and hope. Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) is part of the Harlem culture and his perspective of black history is different from that found in mainstream textbooks. His artwork, based on his experiences as an African American, also portrays the universal quest for freedom, dignity, and

social justice. Lawrence was a storyteller who used his artwork to document the struggle for freedom and social justice among people of African descent. His paintings depict joy, pain, suffering, weakness, and strength of the characters in the stories that were being told. Dramatic diagonals, which place the viewer above the scenes, create tension. Rough application of paint creates a sense of urgency. The decorative form draws on a combination of folk, modernist, and African art.

At the age of twenty-one, Jacob Lawrence completed the forty-one panel *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series in 1938. This series which is a chronological documentation of the history of the Haitian revolution, paved the way for Jacob to use his art to capture the stories of Africans who escaped slavery and helped to free other slaves. Each small picture, accompanied by a narrative caption, uses characters that are recognizable throughout much of his work. Other historical series are devoted to Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass.

The book *Toussaint L'Ouverture: The Flight to Haiti's Freedom* , written by Walter Dean Myers, illustrates Lawrence's panels mentioned above. Students who choose to do a visual presentation or create a storybook for their final assessment of the unit will be able to obtain ideas on how to make their drawings or paintings tell their stories in an effective manner. The book can be used to introduce students to the history of the French-speaking island of Haiti which contains an accurate account of the activities of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution. The paintings will evoke lively discussions as students read to learn about one more African who refused to accept the conditions of slavery and joined with a band of other slaves to defeat the French army on the island of Haiti. L'Ouverture, who was regarded as a vagabond by the French, out-maneuvered their army by using guerilla tactics and surprise attacks. The many failed attempts to capture him frustrated the French. Toussaint L'Ouverture headed a successful revolt against France that eventually led to Haiti's independence. Haiti is the first nation in the western hemisphere to gain independence from Europe. Unlike many countries, Haiti gained both political and economic independence from the mother country France. Other countries could still rely on their economic ties with the colonizers. But this island nation became isolated from other wealthy countries such as France, the United States, and Canada. Many think that this is a contributing factor to the nation's impoverished conditions today.

The Maroons of Jamaica

In 1655, the British captured the island of Jamaica from the Spanish. The story is pretty much the same of slavery being introduced in the New World. This is another opportunity for students to realize that not all Africans were subservient and that many resisted the slave masters. One such group of Africans was the Maroons who were runaway slaves living in the hills of Jamaica. When the Spaniards fled Jamaica to Cuba, they left their slaves behind. The coming of the British caused many Africans to rebel and join other Maroons in the hills and forests. This group of well-organized men and women were trained to defend their settlement. They would raid plantations to get guns, other ammunitions and food. These fierce and ferocious fighters who led almost all slave rebellions in Jamaica from 1655 to the 1830's were determined to resist the Europeans, survive, and maintain their freedom.

The history book has one story but in interviewing a friend, who is a descendant of the Maroons, I was able to get the story from another perspective. It is fairly close to the textbook account but has some variation. My friend's great-aunt thought it important that future generations have knowledge of their history as it dates back to their ancestors in Africa and I feel quite fortunate to have access to this valuable piece of information. At the time of the existence of the slave trade between Britain and the West Indies, two brothers who were African chiefs from the Ashanti tribe, Cudjoe and Accompong, were sold in Jamaica. They too, like other Maroons, refused to submit to the conditions of slavery and escaped to the hills. Cudjoe and Accompong

became leaders of the group that perpetually waged war against the British colonists. Another shipment of slaves to Jamaica brought along Nanny, the sister of the Maroon leaders. Like her brothers, she was a skilled warrior who also escaped to the mountains, quickly became leader and was involved in many altercations with the British. Nanny Town, named after her, is still a substantial part of Jamaica's history. She is celebrated as Jamaica's only female national hero. Could it be that the leading role of Maroon women has contributed to the matriarchal society found on many Caribbean islands? This question could pave the way for persuasive writing or discussion in the class.

The Maroons still maintain much of the African traditions and have their own system of government separate from the democracy that governs the rest of the country. The leader of this group is called a Colonel, and to this day, they still occupy land free from taxes, which was part of the peace agreement made in 1739 between Nanny and the British. Maroon wars led to significant changes for people of African descent living on the island of Jamaica.

Slave Rebellions

The British abolished slavery in 1834 but the blacks still lived under subhuman conditions. Other Jamaican national heroes to be considered are , Paul Bogle and George William Gordon, who were involved in the fight to establish better living conditions for the blacks on the island. The Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 will also provide information on resistance by people of African ancestry.

The abolition of slavery required the replacement of laborers to work on the sugar plantations. Laborers from East India were introduced. Later Chinese immigrants were brought to the islands but they soon became merchants and shop owners. Over a period of time, all the races in the Caribbean intermingled and intermarried. Such unions have produced a people of mixed race, a normal and acceptable occurrence in the region.

The Buccaneers

In the 1600s, outlaws from Europe, West Africa and the Caribbean islands took refuge in the Caribbean. They became known as the Buccaneers and were pirates who navigated the waters of the Caribbean Sea. In the 1660s, they would plunder Spanish ships laden with treasures of gold and other valuables. The most famous buccaneer was a Welshman named Henry Morgan who is connected with the history of Port Royal in Jamaica. The British government often ignored the illegal acts of these pirates and Morgan was knighted, became Sir Henry Morgan, and eventually became Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica.

At one point, Port Royal was known as the wickedest city in the world because it was famous for sentencing and hanging pirates. Three pirates were tried and sentenced to hanging. One man was hung and the other two were spared when it was discovered that they were pregnant. Anne Bonny and Mary Read, raised and dressed as boys, were the 'best known women pirates of all time' (*Kingfisher* , p.19). Port Royal was destroyed by earthquake in 1692 when the sea swallowed the land. *Giddy House* , a tourist site in Jamaica, now serves as a reminder of that devastation. Some students might want to research the pirates who were involved in the dangerous lifestyle in the Caribbean. They may also try to determine to what extent, if any, how does the movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean* shed light on the truth about piracy. Were they surprised about any findings?

Oral Tradition

In every culture people tell stories that are passed down from one generation to another. Oral tradition is one way to keep the values of a culture alive. These stories are based on real events that convey information about human behavior. They are used to teach lessons, give information, or to entertain. Although the stories are made up, there is some element of truth in them. Sometimes, the history of a people can be told through songs, rhythms, dance, and performance. Caribbean folklore is kept alive through traditional song and dance that combines the languages of the European colonizers and Africa.

Each island uses its own unique creole language which is a blend of French, English, Spanish and Dutch with a sprinkling of African words. The folktale, *Palampam Day* by David and Phillis Gershator, is an example of such a blend. The author's note in the back (which I think is impressive) explains the meaning of some of the words.

African descendants are familiar with Anansi stories whose main character is a trickster spider who tries to outsmart everyone he encounters. It is believed that these stories originated among the Ashanti people of Ghana, West Africa. Every tribe in Ghana has its own version of Ananse story in which the names of Anansi, his wife, and children as well as other characters have different names but the moral remains the same. I have changed the spelling of the spider's name to match what I noticed in the African publications. The spider is known as Brer Anancy in the United States; Bro' Anansi, Bra' Nancy or Anansi in the Caribbean and the spelling and pronunciation vary according to location.

The book, *African-American Folktales for Young Readers* , is a collection of stories from the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean. Louise Bennett-Coverly, a well-known Jamaican folklorist, is recorded in this anthology retelling Anansi stories reflecting the Jamaican tradition. Students are already familiar with Anansi stories as they are told from a West African perspective. In this segment of the lesson, students will identify changes that occur as oral traditions are passed down through generations of different people. The class will use this as an opportunity to view once again the video recording of *Stories from the Black Tradition: A Story-A Story* (See bibliography).

I will then read the Jamaican version of the story- "Bra Tookoma and the Gum Tree" () which is basically the same story that teaches a lesson on not being greedy. Students will determine how the story has changed as it was transported across the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean. *The Legendary Kweku Anansi Stories* , written by Greg Clifford, Ananse's eldest son and rival is called Ntikuma. The Transatlantic Voyage resulted in the name being changed to Tookoma. In the Jamaican tradition, Tookoma, sometimes called Tacooma, is also Anancy's son and rival. Two other recurring characters in Jamaica's version are Anancy's wife, Crooky, and Asunu the elephant.

The above named website has a collection of Caribbean folktales. Most, if not all of these folktales, have been translated from the dialect spoken on the particular island to Standard English for all to understand. I will read a portion of an original folktale written in the Jamaican dialect so that students will have an idea of the authentic sound. I must hasten to state that the Jamaican dialect is more a spoken language than it is a written language. Before reading for the class, I would have practice reading the selection several times for the purpose of obtaining fluency; I have not done this since my elementary school years of participating in Festival competitions. It is expected that a few students will be able to translate the segment into Standard

English since many are of Caribbean heritage or have associated with people from the Caribbean. For other students, this experience will be absolutely foreign.

Another book from which students may learn more about Caribbean culture through storytelling is, *Doctor Bird: Three Lookin' Up Tales from Jamaica* (see bibliography). These stories from the parish of St. Mary, found on the north coast of Jamaica, mention some unfamiliar articles such as cho-cho and cerassee vine. I will introduce a few of these articles by bringing samples to the class and explaining their uses. Cho-cho is a green colored squash. Cerassee, used to make tea, grows like a runner on the ground or on fences. Yam, described in African or Caribbean setting, is a brown root tuber and is a carbohydrate. To continue with the lesson, the class will be divided into groups of three or four. Each group will be asked to read aloud and discuss the moral of one story then summarize it for the class.

To gain a further understanding of the Spanish culture in the Caribbean, we will explore the Puerto Rican folktale of *Lazy Peter and His Three-Cornered Hat* (McDougal Littell, p.842). Lazy Peter is a trickster who fools others. He may be compared with the West African spider, Anansi, the U.S. Brer Rabbit or the Native American, Coyote and Raven. As students read the story, they will discuss themes and connections that cross cultures. They will read to find out how Lazy Peter tricks the farmer. They will also identify the conflict and discuss the idea of whether justice was served. The Artistic Director of the school, who is also a professional storyteller, will tell the same story of *Lazy Peter…* as she shares her craft of storytelling with us. Students will then determine which is better, reading the story or telling the story?

Teachers might even want to explore *Names/Nombres: A Personal Essay by* Julia Alvarez (McDougal Littell, 2001, The Language of Literature: Grade 7 textbook, p.37). This essay describes the life of a New Yorker who spent ten years in her parents' homeland, the Dominican Republic. Information about the Spanish tradition and how immigrants assimilate in the United States can be gleaned from this selection. Students may learn more about Caribbean immigrants in the United States by exploring *If I Could* Write This in Fire: An Anthology of Literature from the Caribbean (see Teacher Bibliography). As a class we will read and discuss *Passing* by Michele Cliff from Jamaica. *Passing* describes how a Jamaican woman, with white features and a black grandfather, lives as a white woman in the United States. I chose this selection with the hope that students will gain a better understanding of the idea that many Caribbean people are of mixed race mainly European, African, and Indian. There are also Chinese, Jews, Syrians, and East Indians in the region. Another book from which students may explore to find out more about island life is, *A Small Place* written by Jamaica Kincaid. Much can be learned about the island of Antigua by reading this book. *A Thief in the* Village and Other Short Stories of *Jamaica* by James Berry is also recommended. *The Diary of Latoya Hunter: My First Year in Junior High* tells about a Jamaican girl attending middle school in New York. These and additional books mentioned in the bibliography may be used as models when students create their stories.

Music

The Music teacher will explain the purposes and meanings of calypso, reggae, salsa, and merengue. Music is used as a means of communication and expressing political and philosophical views. Songs are also sung as work songs, market songs, wake songs, lullabies, or Spanish dance songs. The lyrics of calypso music poke fun at people during festival celebrations or carnivals. Caribbean carnival, celebrated before Lent, bears much resemblance to Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Louisiana. One can guarantee that there will be much music,

singing, dancing, and elaborate float parades. A well-known calypsonian, Sir Lancelot, who was also an actor and composer, became popular from the 1940s onward. He starred in the in the 1943 movie *I Walked with a Zombie* . Two examples of Sis Lancelot's calypso songs are, *If you want to be Happy,* and *Shame and Scandal in the Family,* both of which are available on CD. Further exploration will allow students to examine the works of Bob Marley (reggae), and Harry Belafonte (calypso). Many will quickly identify some of Belafonte's songs--Jamaica Farewell and the Banana Song. Listening to and discussing the music of Tito Puentes and Celia Cruz will expose some students and remind others of salsa and merengue. The Band teacher will incorporate the Caribbean influence in music in Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad, and other Caribbean islands.

Lesson One

(Recommended for Language Arts, Visual Arts)

Caribbean Culture and Art

Objectives:

To engage students in visual analysis of art

To use questioning to develop observation and high order thinking skills

To use art to better understand life in the Caribbean

Materials: Video recording- *Winslow Homer, the nature of the artist* , National Gallery of Art, York Productions Inc., 1986. Color/30 minutes, VHS format

Alternate book **,** Helen A. Cooper, *Winslow Homer Watercolors*

Procedure: Class will discuss, describe and interpret Homer's watercolor painting, *After the Hurricane* . Use questioning strategy to encourage students to explain what they see in the scene (refer to section of narrative subtitled Winslow Homer.) As students observe and discuss painting remind them that there are no "right" answers. The teacher should be hesitant to divulge too much information about the painting since this might inhibit student participation. As students answer basic questions they will draw conclusions about the artist's work. Students might connect with the painting as they imagine they are a part of the scene. Ask where would they place themselves and why? Students must supply evidence to support their response.

Activity: Summarize the ideas that were mentioned as the class discussed Homer's *After the Hurricane* . Paraphrase your answers and support your speculation with evidence.

Share your response with the class or a partner.

Lesson Two

(*Recommended for Language Arts, Creative Writing, Visual and Performing Arts)*

Oral Tradition--- *Lazy Peter and His Three-Cornered Hat* retold by Ricardo E. Alegria

The Language of Literature, McDougal Littell, p. 842

Objectives:

To understand and appreciate a Caribbean (Puerto Rican) folk tale

To discuss and compare reading a story versus telling a story

To create and share folktales with peers

CMT Objectives:

To use context clues to define vocabulary terms

To use active reading strategies

Procedure: After reviewing the elements of a folktale, students will read the folktale in their textbook. The Storytelling Troupe will then perform this and other folktales for the class. Students will discuss and compare the effectiveness and difference between reading a story versus using the craft of storytelling. Students will also read other folktales from the Caribbean (see Student Bibliography, Folktales and Legends). Folktales will be read both silently and orally.

For the activity stated below, students will visit the library to read and review books which may be used as models for their stories.

Activity: *Oral Presentation* Pretend you are a child living on a Caribbean island. Create your own folktale and share it with your peers. Use the writing process to draft, revise, edit and publish your folktale. Your final product could be in the form of a book, poster, or cartoons. You may also choose to do a video recording or PowerPoint Presentation.

Lesson Three

(Recommended for Language Arts, Social Studies)

Life In Cuba

Objectives: To further develop critical thinking and analytical skills.

To determine how point of view influences our understanding of history

To learn about growing up in Cuba in the 1970s.

Materials: Map of the Caribbean, Guest Speaker, Notebook

Procedure: Students will use a K-W-L Chart while listening. They will begin by completing the K column (What they know about life in Cuba). Students will locate the island of Cuba on the map of the Caribbean. Students will then fill in the W column (What they want to know about Cuba). Remind students that this lesson will focus on obtaining information from the Cuban's point of view, not what is recorded in the textbook. Review various methods of note taking. As students listen to the speaker, they should note what is revealed about life in Cuba in the 1970s. Students will also seek to find answers to the questions they had written in the W column of the KWL chart. Students will either ask questions of the speaker or conduct their own research. They will then complete the L column (What they learned) of the K-W-L Chart. This lesson will culminate in a class discussion in which students will mention whether they were surprised about anything that the speaker said.

Activity: Write a narrative depicting what you learned about life in Cuba. This account should be written from the Cuban-American's viewpoint.

Activity: Describe at least three things you learned about Cuba from the speaker. Were you surprised about anything? If yes, explain. How have these findings changed your learning experiences?

Final Assessment of Unit

Integrating the Arts

Based on your Art Emphasis, select a medium to explain life on a Caribbean island of your choice. For Creative Writing and Visual Arts, you may write a storybook for fourth or fifth grade students. For Video, create an animated cartoon or a documentary. Dance students may retell the story through dance with the aid of a narrator. Students of Photography will create a photobiography (documentary). Feel free to form groups of three or four students. Be creative and have fun. Remember, your final product will be viewed by your peers and teachers.

Teacher Bibliography

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If I Could Write This in Fire: An Anthology of Literature from the Caribbean , Edited by Pamela Maria Smorkaloff, The New Press, New York, 1994

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Yvonne McKenley, *A Taste of the Caribbean* , Thomas Learning, New York, 1995.

Visual Geography Series , Lerner Publication Company, Minneapolis, 1995.

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James Berry, A *Thief in the Village and Other Stories of Jamaica* , Penguin Books, USA 1988

Petronella Breinburg, *Stories from the Caribbean* , Raintree Steck-Vaughn Publishers, Austin, Texas, 2000

Pat Persaud, *The Remarkable Mr. Pom Pom* , The Children's Writer's Circle, Kingston, Jamaica, 1990

Philip M. Sherlock and Carl Craig, *West Indian Folktales* , Oxford University Press, 1998

Michael Ofori Mankata, *Ananse's Justice: A Ghanaian Folk Tale* , Afram Publications (Ghana) Limited, 1995

Michael Ofori Mankata, *The Elephant and the Crab* : A Ghanaian Folk Tale, Afram Publications (Ghana) Limited, 1996

Books with Paintings or Pictures

Students may explore these books to get ideas for illustrating the stories they will create.

Davis and Phyllis Gershator, *Palampam Day* , Marshall Cavendish, New York, 1997

Walter Dean Myers, *Toussaint L'Ouverture: The Flight to Haiti's Freedom* , Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, New York, 1996. Paintings by the African American artist, Jacob Lawrence

Gerald Hausman and Ashley Wolff, *Doctor Bird: Three Lookin' Up Tales from Jamaica* , Philomel Books, New York, 1998. Illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez

Monica Gunning, *Not a Copper Penny in Me House: Poems from the Caribbean* , Wordsong/Boyds Mills Press, Pennsylvania, 1993. Paintings by Frane Lessac

Harry Belafonte and Lord Burgess, *Island in the Sun* , Dial Book for Young Readers, Penguin Putnam Inc., New York, 1999. Pictures by Alex Ayliffe

The title of this book is the first line of a calypso song made popular by Belafonte. The brightly colored artwork was produced by collage.

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