



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2004 Volume III: Representations of American Culture, 1760-1960: Art and Literature

A Bird's Eye View of the Caribbean: Art, Folklore, and Music (A Supplement to African American Studies)

Guide for Curriculum Unit 04.03.06
by Lorna Edwards

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 interdisciplinary unit is a continuation of the story of the African Diaspora with a focus on the Caribbean islands. The unit will begin with students learning about the Caribbean region's geography, history, and culture by exploring visual and performing arts. Students will analyze and interpret paintings by two American artists, Winslow Homer and Jacob Lawrence, as well as Caribbean works seen on Internet sites. Students will also be exposed to other cultural expressions in the Caribbean as they tune their ears to the sounds of salsa, meringue, calypso, and reggae music. As students share in the use of oral tradition, they will not only gain a better understanding of life in the Caribbean, but they will also compare and contrast the African and Caribbean versions of Anancy stories and determine how these folktales have changed as they journeyed across the Atlantic Ocean. Selected literature will enable students to understand how immigrants from the Caribbean assimilate in the United States.

Some teachers might want to place a greater emphasis on other subjects than on music, art or storytelling. I have included in the narrative some information and suggestions that Social Studies and Language Arts teachers might find useful as students explore the topic from a more historical perspective. Topics range from colonization by European nations to slavery, slave rebellions, and pirates (both male and female). The final assessment of the unit will require students to select a medium to explain life on a Caribbean island of their choice. They may choose to write a storybook, create an animated cartoon or a photobiography (documentary). Dance students may retell the story through dance with the aid of a narrator. Another option is to write an I-Search paper describing what students learned about the Caribbean. It is my intention that upon completion of the unit, students will have developed a greater appreciation for people living in a world that is similar to, yet, at the same time, different from theirs.

(Recommended for Reading, Language Arts, Social Studies, Visual and Performing Arts, grades 6-8.)

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