



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

The Invisible People: American Art and Literature Represents the Marginalized and Disenfranchised

Guide for Curriculum Unit 04.03.08
by Sandra K. Friday

The aim of this unit is to teach skills for discerning American culture through paintings, sculpture, murals and photographs, enhanced by short stories, poetry, storybooks, and documentaries. Just as we continue to design strategies to teach students the skills for *text-rendering*, so I have designed strategies to teach students skills for *art-rendering*, or for *visual literacy*.

Students can apply the rubrics I have designed to the various genres that will allow them to open the art that represents invisible people, groups, and movements in our culture such as: a fifteen-foot-tall bronze sculpture by Elizabeth Catlett memorializing Ralph Ellison and his autobiographical *Invisible Man*; southern sharecroppers, portrayed in the documentary *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee and Walker Evans, eking subsistence from the land in the 1930's; and Civil Rights demonstrators marching to meet "Bull" Connor on a bridge in Birmingham, painted for posterity by Jacob Lawrence. Students will also practice using text-rendering rubrics as they read literature to enhance the art.

American art and literature will provide the content, while the rubrics for text and art-rendering and writing will arm students with skills and strategies for future learning. The final project requires students to re-create a piece of art or create art of their own that represents an individual, group or movement invisible to the majority of our society. They will apply the art-rendering rubric to their own piece and, using this rubric, present their work to the class.

(Recommended for English, Literature, Art, and History, grades 9-12.)

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University
For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>