



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2005 Volume II: The Challenge of Intersecting Identities in American Society: Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Nation

Female Adolescent Identity Formation: Am I Powerful or Powerless?

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"The best educated human being is the one who understands most about the life in which he is placed."

- Helen Keller, 1880-1968

Introduction

I am a Language Arts teacher at Wilbur Cross High School. Wilbur Cross is one of the largest high schools in New Haven, CT with a student population of approximately fourteen hundred. The school is definitely a reflection of the city, New Haven as a diverse urban community. Students who attend the high school filter in from local neighborhoods including: East Rock, Fair Haven, Foxon, The Cove, and The Hill. The blending of various races, ethnicities, languages, cultures and socioeconomic status is representative of the diversity that is home to the city of New Haven and reflected in our school.

Class periods at Wilbur Cross high school are approximately forty-five minutes in length three days a week and ninety minutes one day a week. Ideally this unit would be most effective if instructed during block scheduling; however, because our school only has one long period a week it will extend over a longer span of time. The particular classes that I instruct have given me an opportunity to observe the different dynamics within the school as well as experience the collective culture or environment the school provides. Although I teach a number of different classes I have chosen to direct my unit towards my English 4 class. Even though the unit is targeted for the senior class, the lessons can be modified for various grade and ability levels. Certain lessons can be omitted or altered, yet the concepts can be applied universally.

My English 4 class consists of lower-level or reluctant readers and writers. These classes are labeled "basic" on the hierarchal tier because these students do not read and write on grade level based on educational records and standardized test scores. Despite the classification of these students as lower level, they are quite capable of reading, writing and communicating when provided with the appropriate outlet to choose the genre of literature they desire to read as well as the way they want to express themselves in writing and verbally; that is, when they have ownership of and responsibility for their education and the route it will take. Too often

many teachers may assume that basic means lazy or incompetent. In my opinion, basic level students just need a little more of the teacher's patience, direction and acceptance than students on the higher levels. When teacher expectations for lower achieving students are compromised, an injustice is committed toward the student as well as the educational system in general. By lowering the expectations for students that some teachers deem unable to learn, education is counter productive. In the long term this action establishes a permanent underclass of uneducated adults. In fact, basic students are the ones that need to be challenged by educators with lessons that initiate critical higher order thinking processes.

Just recently I attended an adolescent literacy conference sponsored by the Yale University Child Social Development Department that affirmed my beliefs about alternative, progressive approaches for instructing lower level students and the responsibility of the educator to do so. Many of my students have never finished a book before they enter my classroom either because they read below their grade level or because they were turned off by reading in their earlier academic years. Some of my students can read, but don't read. This type of reader is what Kylee Beers refers to as a "dormant reader". Regardless of the reason students don't read such an obstacle must be addressed in the classroom and implemented across subject areas with interdisciplinary lessons that concentrate on strengthening reading and writing skills in addition to learning the content knowledge. With this said, I consider myself to be an advocate for those lower achieving students. It is imperative that as educators we reach these students before they leave the high school and provide them with the basic skills, that means, life skills in addition to content knowledge; that they need to survive in the real world.

As an observant educator, I regularly notice the dynamic between the girls and boys in my classroom as well as in the school as a whole. I have noticed that many female students experience conflict during their high school years that affects their self-esteem and overall identity formation. Body image, peer acceptance and the standards of beauty are issues that influence adolescent female identity formation. Because these girls are at such a vulnerable stage in their lives they need positive reinforcement, an outlet to express their voice and encouragement to create and maintain a healthy self-esteem and identity. Too many girls succumb to peer pressure and the prescribed identity they are supposed to be instead of who they really want to be. Or, if they are uncertain about whom they want to be, they aren't equipped with the appropriate psychological and cognitive resources to make a smooth transition from adolescence to adulthood. These girls struggle to find their voice in a society that limits and silences them on many levels. The purpose of this unit is to utilize the literature in order to model voice, inspire the reader through perseverance, and encourage the student to make a connection outside herself, in other words to view the larger picture as an attempt to gain perspective.

Rationale

To some, the mysterious jungle of the teenage mind is made up of scary and distorted passageways that many adults refuse to explore. Along the same lines, society views teenagers as threatening because of their resistance to conform and their relentless effort to test the boundaries and question authority as methods of making sense of their surroundings. Interacting with my students, I can confirm that adolescents have certain qualities that set them apart from adults. They question why the world is constructed in the manner that it is. Adolescents argue, they love controversy and this curiosity towards the unknown and the desire they express to debate topics can be organized and developed in the classroom environment. For this reason, it is crucial

that teachers harbor the gifts and talents that their students possess by encouraging them to question, evaluate and reflect upon the text and the world. I have attempted to incorporate lessons in this unit which will generate meaningful discussion on gender that students can question, debate and apply to their daily lives.

School is an uncertain time for any adolescent comprised of a series of highs and lows. A typical high school student is very preoccupied with the moment because the moment is manageable. They can not imagine anything beyond the moment so their interactions and experiences are highly influenced by external factors which play a dominant role in the formation of identity. Also, many high school students are superficial with their immediate outlook on the world. They make rash judgments of themselves and those around them. These quick judgments or labels are an outcome of the level of uncertainty, inconsistency, and instability adolescents are experiencing during this time period. Labels are necessary in language as well as daily communication but if abused and misinterpreted can be offensive and damaging. For example the words: girl, curvaceous, tall, blond are all words that describe a person. Each descriptive word contributes to a label that describes the person as a whole. However, when these labels are linked to associations that make assumptions about the individual without concrete knowledge prejudices are formed that may categorize the individual falsely. I would like my students to recognize the difference between using labels to describe someone and defining someone by the label that describes them. Also, negative connotations bombard girls during adolescence with "isms, such as sexism, capitalism, and lookism, which is the evaluation of a person solely on the basis of appearance (Pipher 23)." In an existence with so many uncertainties, any change in routine or a sign of defeat can trigger a crisis. Also, the emotional inconsistencies that adolescents endure reflect in their erratic cycle of high and low behavior. At the same time, the media tends to capitalize on these feelings of inadequacy and use it to market a product by distorting images of reality. I would like the students to practice using the same critical eye that they evaluate the literature with and apply it to the media as well.

My reasoning for including a psychological perspective of adolescence, in particular female adolescence is because literature lends itself to multiple interpretations or perspectives. During analysis, students incorporate their personal experience or their baggage that they carry with them from prior knowledge and apply it to the text. Also, literature in itself is made up of various stories and histories so an individual might better understand the text if they understand the writer and the context in which the writer expresses themselves. I carry this philosophy into the classroom as I tend to view each student from a psychological perspective as a whole and not just what I see in front of me on any particular day. In addition, much of the research I have used to create this unit has been written by psychological sources who have earned doctorate degrees in psychology specializing in adolescent identity formation, primarily Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D., John Santrock Ph.D. Erik Erikson, Ph.D., and Mary Pipher, Ph.D.

I have noticed that high school students are reluctant to evaluate and make predictions about their futures because their method of thinking and processing is centralized in the present. Also, high school is a constant for many adolescents; especially for upperclassmen as they move towards the end of their high school career. For this reason, graduation is often traumatic for many adolescents as they transition into adulthood and onto a different stage of their lives. It is important as an educator to realize that this stage is both exciting and terrifying at the same time. Also, I have discovered that by directing my lessons towards topics that adolescents are encountering such as a journal prompts, a coming of age thematic novel or a poem demonstrating conflict results in productive class discussion, expression through writing and peer support that others are experiencing the same difficulties. In twelfth grade students continue to practice the skills they have learned throughout their high school career. I emphasize the writing process as well as strengthening writing skills and reading ability through written and verbal communication. I have my students practice the

writing process regularly through multiple drafts, pre-writing activities, peer editing and publication. Journals are used frequently because they are informal, meaning they are not evaluated traditionally with a letter grade but evaluated with feedback in the form of narratives and a check system and they maintain the writing process over the course of the school year documented with dates. Students enjoy reviewing their journal writing and reflecting or monitoring their progress periodically. Because the journal is considered informal is it safer for the students to express themselves openly as opposed to in a formal paper that places pressure on the student to perform to a specific standard that may be intimidating.

I chose a topic concerning gender for three main reasons: as a woman I am affected by gender in my daily interactions, as an Language Arts teacher there are many themes related to gender present in the literature, and as an educator there are numerous lessons that the students can learn from the female experience that are in turn applicable to the human experience. I will consider my essential questions both my own and those that I pose to the students from a literary analytical point of view. This unit can certainly be applied to any Language Arts, History and/or Social Science curriculum by supplementing the information with appropriate content material that adheres to the subject area standards. For example, if taught in a history classroom, a teacher might emphasize the historical context of the time period and the events that affected the experience. Also, in a social science classroom the teacher might introduce the psychological perspective or sociological perspective by providing research and studies that discuss gender topics. Along the same lines, it is my belief that the literature will give the students a voice to connect to their own struggle with identity formation.

Before the unit begins students must have certain skills and a degree of prior knowledge to participate in the unit lessons. Students must participate in discussion with an open mind. That does not mean that all of the students must agree but that they must hear each other and respond in a respectful manner that does not offend or criticize others. Also, students must be willing to read and respond to the texts both through writing assignments and class discussions. Students must also have an understanding of certain terms that will be discussed in the unit: stereotype, gender, discrimination, prejudice, culture, norms, roles, bias, sexism and identity. I don't want to merely define these terms for the students, but allow the students to be active participants in the search for knowledge. In other words, I will guide the students to reach the meaning of each term.

Pre-Unit Activities

The lesson on defining terms will take place prior to the start of the unit; however it will not just be assumed that after one lesson the students will know the terms. The terms will be continually reinforced throughout the unit in discussion and evaluation of the literature. I will start by asking the students if they have ever heard of these terms. I would like to chart out their thinking or prior knowledge before I teach new knowledge so that I can gauge where they are coming from. There are ten terms, so I will break the terms into two groups of five and teach a different lesson for each group. This separation of terms makes it more manageable and meaningful for the students. Also, asking what the students think makes learning more productive because it is easier to change what people think than what they know; that is, it is easier to debate opinions as opposed to beliefs.

For the first lesson on defining unit terms I will use transparencies on the overhead projector of photographs

of people and ask the students what they think about the images and what does the photograph tell them about who the people are without any other information provided. For example, to define and explore the term *stereotype*, I might put a photograph of a young Latina female inside a home cooking, cleaning surrounded by five children. I would then ask the students to describe what they see in the image and what does this image tell us about the person illustrated in the picture and how society represents the woman presented. This probing of questions will result in a list of student responses that I will chart on the board as a method of defining the term. Also, students will receive a copy of the *Power of Reading* written by Colleen Connell which is a wonderful excerpt that defines stereotyping and sparks discussion on the concept. I will use the same strategies noted above to define four more terms for the day.

For the following day, I will give students the terms used in quotes and ask them to define the meaning of the term through the context clues, sound and structure of the word. Students will draw a diagram with three boxes and label each context, sound and structure. They will look at the word in the sentence provided and write their response in the appropriate box in order to eventually define the term. For example, the word *identity* sounds like identify, identification, indicate, individual; the word can be broken down into four syllables i-den-ti-ty; and the context of the word would be the words around the sentence that it is in: The man's true *identity* was concealed under the mask he wore to disguise himself from the audience. Using all three methods context, structure and sound student will individually define the terms and then as a class we will assess the validity of the definitions to come find an actual definition for the term. Also, it would certainly be effective to incorporate a short activity like the "I am _____" in which the students list descriptors of themselves in a sixty minute time period (Tatum 20). This activity assists students in their knowledge and comprehension of what identity is and how it affects the way they view themselves as well as others. Also, another idea for teaching the term *sexism* might be to read a children's picture book that demonstrates sexist thinking by enforcing gender based stereotypes of women in passive domestic roles and men as ambitious public figures. As Tatum concludes, "we are better able to resist the negative impact of oppressive messages when we see them coming than when they are invisible to us (Tatum 47)." Another suggestion for initiating teaching the vocabulary term *gender* would be to write a journal prompt on the board for the students to respond to: Consider your family, how do parents treat the girls and boys differently? Some responses might discuss the boys are given more independence and punished frequently. Other responses might state that girls are expected to express their emotions. All of these shared responses will contribute to our discussion on gender-typed behavior and lead us to our definition of gender. John Santrock defines gender as "a sociocultural dimension of being male or female (92)." For this reason, we know that gender is not entirely biologically assigned but it is heavily influenced by external factors within society, cross culturally. When we are finished with the two lessons on defining important terms that preview the lesson, we will have compiled a list of terms, defined, including examples of how these labels are applied to represent certain individuals and interactions between people in society. The information that we have discovered will be charted and used as a reference as we progress through the unit.

As a Language Arts teacher I am always experimenting with different strategies for teaching vocabulary. Students are often reluctant to engage in vocabulary lessons because of the traditional, tedious instructional methods that have been implemented in the past; that is students are assigned ten words on Monday, asked to write them in sentences for homework and quizzed on Friday. I have learned that this method does not teach vocabulary and in fact it often disengages the students in the learning process by teaching them to study for the test instead of actually learning the words and applying them to their already existing lexicon. Considering, the objectives for these pre-unit lessons on vocabulary are to: familiarize the students with the key vocabulary terms that will be reiterated throughout the unit, initiate the unit topics by correlating the

vocabulary exercises with activities that will broaden their perspective about the topics presented and equip students with the knowledge and skills to participate in the lessons that follow.

Objective

This unit will explore the "coming of age" process experienced by adolescent girls on their journey from children to adulthood. It will focus on the middle years or limbo period in which girls decide who they want to become as women or rather, society decides who they have to become because they are women. I will present the idea that during adolescence when girls mature into women they experience an identity crisis which inevitably alters their sense of self; that is it empowers or diminishes the way they view themselves and the world around them. At the same time, the self splits into an authentic self and a false self; that is the true self the adolescent is and the self that the adolescent presents to others. During adolescence when the self splits "identity is lost when there is no one to identify with and stereotypical messages are constantly fed to the individual (Erikson 120)." For example, if young girls do not experience or observe positive female role models that project the image of self-respect, intelligence and ambition, but on the contrary are repeatedly told through rhetoric and discourse that they are expected to be submissive, unintelligent and self-sacrificing they will likely lose their sense of self. This crisis experienced typically in the early years is affected by internal and external factors resulting in how women ultimately evaluate their self worth and the worth of those around them. Mary Pipher, author of *Reviving Ophelia* notes in the preface to her work, "in the sixties Betty Friedan wrote of " the problem with no name"(14).

I would like to consider a few essential questions that I have based my unit upon: What exactly is the catalyst that forever alters the psyche of a young girl and molds the woman she will become? How does the media's portrayal of women affect female identity formation? How do central themes imbedded in cultural expectations affect the roles that women inherit? There are numerous factors that influence this process; however, I will concentrate on relationships (interpersonal and intrapersonal) and how they affect the identity formation or lack of in adolescent girls. As an educator I would like to encourage the authentic self to come through reading, writing and communication with others as an effort to reach some resolution or answer to these questions. If no specific answers appear, at least we gain knowledge and awareness of a topic that affects our students during a crucial time in their lives.

The student oriented long term goals are assessed by classroom observation and frequent evaluation of progress. Also, I assess student learning and performance through rubrics, maintenance of records and continual student self-evaluation and reflection as well as peer evaluation. Students will be able to think critically about the world by responding to prompts that initiate critical thinking. I will rely on higher order questioning from "Bloom's Taxonomy" which emphasizes six levels of cognitive skill building. Students will be able to think independently about the literature, their lives and the world. In other words, students will form their own opinions about what they think the author means, the author's purpose and whether the author meets criteria for requirements of good literature. Students will be able to find a place or voice in the literary community through verbal and written expression. Ideally, all English teachers would love for their students to view the literature with the same passion as they do; however, if the students do not take away an appreciation for the text I would like them to have successfully mastered the ability to use language to learn written and verbal communication and apply their learning to various settings comfortably. At the same time, I would like the students to increase vocabulary through consistent exposure to literature and interaction with

text. Also, students will be able to view the literature as the human experience and apply their experiences to the literature and vice versa. I would like my students to begin to think outside of the box using the connections they make about the literature to analyze their lives and critically think about their goals, dreams and purpose.

My student centered goals in the classroom are to provide a safe and productive learning environment. Also, as an instructor I would like to create a community of learners and discover the similarities and differences that make each of us unique individuals contributing to the multicultural aspect of the classroom setting. In addition, I intend to model and emphasize mutual respect, reciprocity and accountability by consistent discussion, reinforcement of classroom objectives and positive reinforcement. Lastly, I would like to harbor diversity by teaching tolerance and acceptance in the classroom through activities that encourage listening to others opinions and discovering that right and wrong are not always the learning objectives of the lesson.

Relationships are basic human interactions. In its most basic sense they are the bonds or lack of that humans form intentionally or unintentionally to function in society. Relationships are the most primitive yet most complicated motivator for an individual. External relationships affect the individual whether apparent or not. External relationships are so powerful, especially during adolescence with the emphasis on peer groups and the transfer from parental influence to peer influence that they have the propensity to create and eliminate an identity by forming and/or destroying self-esteem. Many people never realize how much power and control others actually hold over their lives and their livelihood in general. For this reason, the way an individual views the world and how he interacts with others is directly correlated to his views of himself. Adolescents learn early that no individual lives in a bubble isolated from others. They are continually tested and displayed for an audience of their peers while at the same time struggling to discover themselves as individuals.

My hope with this unit is to utilize the literature to provide a positive outlet for students to form their own identity by using the literature and the human experiences provided therein. Although this unit emphasizes the experience of women it is not by any means exclusively for female students. The intention of this unit is not to exclude men but to use the experiences of women to share a different perspective. In that sharing we may discover the commonalities present within humanity. I would like my students to attempt to think outside of themselves and notice the central themes that everyone experiences regardless of gender, race or ethnicity. This is no way an attempt to instill my values on my students but to present multiple issues on a valid topic that affects both men and women, at that time the students can use the material to form their own judgments about the literature, their lives and the world around them. I have chosen to emphasize the female experience because of my own experiences, the fact that traditional education often emphasizes male dominated literature and accomplishments, and my observations that many adolescent females are very lost concerning who they are and who they want to become. I believe that this unit will assist my students on their journey to discover their personal identity.

Strategies

Any successful educator engages the students in the learning process and makes accommodations and adjustments as needed. There are four steps to learning that I will utilize in order to teach an effective unit. First, know your audience. The audience must be established initially in order to know how to approach

teaching the lessons to the students. I intend to teach this unit in the second or third marking period of the year so that by that time I will have established a rapport with students, students will be familiar with their peers and the class will have created an environment conducive to addressing such issues as gender. Second, by this time I should know the ability level of each student and to what extent that is what they are capable of producing, as well as their comfort level, their strengths and weaknesses will let me know how much I need to modify or simplify the material. Third, I will present the information in a creative, enthusiastic manner. I have learned that if I am passionate about a topic it reflects in the manner that I convey the material to my students. If I am not interested in the topic why the students should and believe me they know if I am not interested. What I mean by creativity and adjustment is applying Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences to the unit so that each student can be successful even if they don't necessarily fall into the dominant category of learning verbally or mathematically. This means, providing alternatives and options with each activity, giving the students a choice on how they want to respond. Lastly, I will personalize the material by making a connection with the topic "I remember when..., have you ever had a friend that...can you think of a time when... so that students can make sense of the information and understand how it applies to them.

Pre-Writing

In writing workshops, pre-writing activities are highly encouraged. I like to model many of my lessons from Nancie Atwell's *Lessons that Changed Writers* because it synthesizes the material and is teacher friendly. In order to pre-write, students must brainstorm. I will try different strategies to obtain information like graphic organizers, listing, mapping. Any of the above strategies work as long as they generate thinking about the topic and getting the information down on paper. This step is the first in the process and I do not ask the students to organize their thinking at this point only to get some ideas together.

Chalk-Talk is an activity I learned during a Connecticut Writing Project seminar. It is a method for introducing a topic and gaining prior knowledge from the students. The teacher will place a word or a phrase on the board and have students take turns writing a comment, example, question or description. After, each student has written as much as they can on the topic or time has elapsed the teacher will discuss the class findings.

Journal Prompts initiate thinking about a topic or question that the teacher wishes to pose to the student. Journals can be used to engage the students into the lesson as well as practice the writing process in an informal venue.

Pre-Reading

Anticipation Guide is made up of statements that interest the students. The anticipation guide asks the student to agree or disagree with the statements presented. Generally, the statements are controversial and will spark a debate. The purpose is to get students thinking about the issues that will appear later in the text as the read.

Tea Party is a strategy that uses lines from the text to make predictions and inferences about meaning. This activity is called Tea Party because students are out of their desks interacting with each other and reading the lines provided similar to a party in which participants engage in conversation or mingle with others exchanging information. The lines from the text are presented to the students before they view a whole copy of the text, so the students are not familiar with the material they are just asked to take the lines they receive and share them with their classmates. After students share information they will attempt to organize the information and read the organized lines to make predictions and inferences about what they will read.

Writing

Mini-lessons can be effective strategies for teaching grammar and spelling. The teacher can get ideas for possible mini-lessons by reading the student journals, published papers or through routine observation of student needs. For example, if I notice that students have a tendency to use *got* in their writing repetitively I might teach a mini-lesson replacing the word *got* with action verbs. Also, word usage can be a valuable mini-lesson such as the difference between: there, their and they're. Another idea for a mini-lesson on inferences. In order to review inferences with students, I will distribute cartoon comic strips to the students and ask them to read them and decipher what is happening in the picture. As students respond, I will ask them how they know if the words were not describing exactly what was happening in order to introduce inferences.

Think/Pair/Share allows the student to *think* about the topic and write their individual response, *pair* up with a partner closest to them and *share* their responses. This strategy allows the class to gain instant peer feedback in a smaller group setting with may be less intimidating than larger cooperative learning groups or whole class discussion where some students might feel reluctant to share their work.

Reading

Read alouds are effective strategies for modeling fluency and voice. Reluctant readers benefit from hearing skilled readers read aloud. The teacher will read the chosen text to the students in whole class instruction. I have discovered that students enjoy being read to regardless of their age. Picture books are good resources for read alouds

Point Reading is a strategy that increases comprehension and develops fluency through multiple readings. Poetry is an excellent genre for administering the point reading strategy. Before I introduce this strategy I like to give the students a justification for re-reading a text by making a connection to their interests. For example, I might ask the students about their favorite movie and ask them how many times they have viewed this particular movie. This line of questioning gets students excited about their movie and leads into a discussion about multiple viewing and multiple reading. At this time, I will explain to students that when you read you visualize similar to creating a movie in your head. Also, when you see a movie more than once you notice things that you would not have necessarily noticed had you only viewed the movie once. To use the point reading strategy first, the teacher will read the text one time while the students follow along. Next, the teacher will read the text again while the student highlights or underlines words, phrase, or lines that are significant to the meaning of the text. After, the teacher will read the text and the students will join in with the reading when they get to the point they have highlighted. After, the teacher will create a list from the students' responses and narrow down the list to the most important one. This strategy is used as a method for interpreting the text and comprehending the meaning.

Post-Writing

Peer editing is helpful for student's to gain feedback from their peers in addition to the knowledge about their strengths and weaknesses from their teacher. During adolescence, students are peer centered so it is helpful to direct the social aspect of this age group towards meaningful class instructional time.

Multiple drafts are necessary to monitor student progress from start to finish. When drafts are maintained students can observe the writing process and reflect upon their growth.

Questioning

Robert Probst's *Dialogue with a Text* has been an extremely helpful questioning method

because it prompts students to think critically about the text.

Benjamin Bloom's *Taxonomy* provides questioning methods that build upon prior knowledge to initiate higher order thinking skills.

I often justify the above strategies I use to my students because I want the students to know the purpose or the objective for the lessons. I find that when I explain my rationale to the students they are more responsive because they are active participants in their education. Stating the rationale gives the students ownership and many times alleviates their initial reluctance to participate in the lessons.

Classroom Activities

The following lessons are suggested for a ninety minute block period. However, some of the lessons can be condensed to accommodate a forty-five minute period schedule and thereby extended over a longer time bracket.

Lesson One: Interview of a Female Role Model

Purpose: To initiate interest in a gender based topic by personalizing the information and applying it to the students' lives and experiences therein. Asking a student to share information about an older sibling, mentor, coach, teacher, mother, grandmother or friend builds a sense of fosters community, pride, respect and responsibility in the classroom by demonstrating that we all share commonalties. Students will generate pride towards those individuals they admire and express their interest in the lives of others by participating in this lesson. Also, this lesson provides examples of positive female role models that inspire us to achieve higher expectations and withstand struggle

Initiation : Students will quick write in their journals: What makes a role model?

Think/Pair/Share : After thinking independently about the journal prompt students will share their responses in partners reading their responses word for word to their peer. This is a strategy that helps students improve their writing because when they listen to their writing read aloud they can recognize errors.

Reading : Students will read *An Interview with Sandra Cisneros* ; however the interview will be separated on index cards designated by number in question and answer format. This interview contains thirteen questions followed by thirteen answers so in a typical classroom with twenty-six students each student will get a part. Each index card will be numbered one through thirteen and will say question or answer. We will proceed to read the interview together in question and answer form. Students will take turns reading aloud as if they are the role of the interviewer or interviewee. Organizing the lesson in the manner holds all students accountable because they each have responsibility in the learning. Also, it is more interactive and each student gets an opportunity to participate and express their voice.

Discussion of reading : How does Cisneros identify herself? What is her most difficult challenge? How did Cisneros find her voice as a writer? Does Cisneros feel that society views women in a positive or negative way?

Writing : Considering the interview we read, create three potential interview questions you would ask a female role model. When students finish generating their individual questions we will create a class list of potential interview questions. Some examples for possible interview questions may be: What do you remember most about growing up? What was the hardest experience you encountered? How did you manage to get through difficult times? Did you have a role model that guided you in the right direction? What were you passionate about?

Homework/Independent Assignment : Students will choose ten of the questions the class generated for potential interview questions and conduct an interview with a female role model of their choice. The interview will be in question and answer format similar to the Cisneros interview. The interview will be typed as a finished product and presented to the class one week from the date assigned.

Lesson Two: Response to Literature

Purpose: To increase reading comprehension skills by recognizing sensory and descriptive language in the literature. This short story provides an effective example for teaching this lesson because it is manageable for students in length; however the author does not sacrifice impact with brevity. Also, the topic can extend to discussion on gender roles and female expectations in society.

Initiation : Students will respond to an anticipation guide as a pre-reading strategy to the short story *Girl* by Jamaica Kincaid. The anticipation guide will consist of a list of statements organized in the form of a table that initiate an emotional response. For example, cooking, cleaning and raising children are not *really* considered work. Students will circle whether they agree or disagree with the statements provided prior to reading the story.

Reading : Students will read the story *Girl* by Jamaica Kincaid once independently. We will read the story a second time aloud while I read aloud students will highlight any words that they view significant to the meaning of the story in one color as well as sensory words in another color. Students will proceed with the *Point Reading* activity in an attempt to decipher meaning from the text. The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate to the students that multiple readings increase reading comprehension skills and overall understand of the text. Also, students will notice that after the first reading they didn't necessarily understand the meaning in fact many will have questions and this is the right opportunity to have students discuss the text. Also, after students highlight the most important word they can tell why they chose that word which will later lead to a better understanding of the short story.

Discussion : After reading the story, I will make a list of all the sensory words the students discovered and post them on a transparency. On another transparency, I will transcribe significant words in the text. Because Kincaid uses a great deal of sensory language it would be effective for students to chart out their thinking from the text emphasizing the words that represent the five senses. What was the most important word or phrase? Does this remind you of anything you have heard, seen, read? What questions do you still have of the text?

Closure : Students will reconsider the anticipation guide to check their understanding and monitor if they have any changes in their thinking after reading the short story *Girl* . Does the story affirm their thinking or does

the story alter their thinking? Students will discuss the change or consistency of their responses.

Lesson Three: Poem Interpretation

Purpose: To strengthen analytical and reading comprehension skills by reflecting on a poem.

Initiation : Students will participate in a pre-reading activity called Tea Party described by Kylene Beers to initiate thinking about the text before reading the text. The students will be able to make predictions about the text by using the information provided to make inferences about the relationships and sequencing. I find that students are often intimidated when I ask them to make inferences because they assume the activity is too sophisticated. However, what many students do not realize is that they make inferences on a daily basis subconsciously without even realizing they are practicing the skill. Students activate prior knowledge when they make inferences about a text before reading the text. For this particular lesson students are given separate lines from the poem *Introspection* by Nikki Giovanni. Students will consult with classmates by reading their line to as many people in a five minute period. Students will try to construct the poem from the various lines distributed. Students will read the lines they have organized and brainstorm about what they think the poem might be about and why they think so.

Reading : Students will read the whole copy form of Giovanni's *Introspection* once independently, once following along while the teacher reads it aloud, and once in which each student will read a line as we go around the room.

Writing : Students will question the text by writing three "I wonder why questions" independently. Students will question anything they are uncertain about in the poem beginning each question with "I wonder why".

Discussion : Students will exchange their questions with a partner and their partner will answer their questions while they answer their partner's question. After, students will return papers and agree or disagree with the possible answers. If they disagree, students will describe what they feel the answer should be. So, when they are finished each student will have three questions with three possible answers that they agree or disagree with and explain why.

Closure : Students will check their predictions and see how they have changed by speculating on the meaning of the poem; that is an interpretation of the poem after multiple readings.

Lesson Four: Discussing Positive Black Women by examining Rap Lyrics and Poetry

Purpose: It is my understanding that for some reason black history education starts and finishes with Martin Luther King Jr. for many students that I teach. If they were taught about other aspects of black history they have not retained that knowledge. Students I have asked on the high school level know mainly Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Rosa Parks. My observations of this injustice, that many black students do not know their history was apparent when I taught the play *Fences* by August Wilson. Prior to beginning the play, we learned about the time period leading up to and surrounding the civil rights movement. I have also noticed that students are easily persuaded by the medias' image of black figures which is in many ways inaccurate and derogatory. During a time when role models are few and far between, it is imperative that students are exposed to positive images from prominent figures that cultivate solid morals and values. As a Language Arts teacher, poetry is always a genre that the students struggle with, especially the reluctant students who have

been turned off by poetry and its ambiguity and difficulty level. However, I feel that if poetry is presented in a way that the students can relate to they are more readily engaged. Poetry is comparable to music lyrics because of its musical quality and the fluidity of words that can be interpreted in numerous ways. Many of the students that I teach enjoy rap and rhythm and blues music, so poetry and rap music make sense to incorporate together for a successful teaching strategy. Because women are generally portrayed in a negative image in rap music I chose to use rap lyrics that described women in a positive light along with a strong female poet Maya Angelou.

Initiation : It is important to precede this lesson with the sound recording of Angelou sharing her life as a child especially for this unit that concerns identity because she has endured many obstacles that have strengthened her character and shaped the successful woman she has become. Angelou is a good example to model to students because she is direct and the students can relate to her descriptive words. Also, in this particular sound recording she demonstrates a reading of her poem that illustrates the musical aspect of her words. Students will be assessed of their knowledge of the issues in the sound recording by the questions and the class discussion that precede the lyric poem pairing. *Phenomenal Woman* or *Still I Rise* are two examples of Maya Angelou poems that convey a positive image of female identity. Erika Badu or Lauren Hill are two female artists that convey messages of strong women who have endured struggles and survived.

Cooperative learning groups : Students will be organized into small groups of three to four. After listening to the poem and the lyrics they will answer the questions in writing together.

Reading : Students will receive a copy of the lyrics they will follow along with the sound recording and underline the most important word or phrase. Students will answer the following questions to accompany the song: What do you think the most important word in the text is and why?, Does this remind you of anything that you've seen either a movie, a book, another song, a story that you've heard from a friend or family member? How do the lyrics make you feel? What types of emotions do you think the artist is trying to convey to the audience? Students will use the same procedure and questions for the sound recording of the Angelou poems.

Writing : Students will chart their thinking on a transparency and share their information with the class.

Lesson Five : How powerful is the media's representation of women?

Purpose: Students will use a variety of magazines to critique the media's representation of female body images. This activity allows students to practice using a critical eye as they evaluate the different advertisements and articles that make up a typical female targeted audience magazine. Students will notice that many of the articles have a consistent theme base such as advice columns from experts on love, marriage, relationships, and sex, which reinforce the emphasis that women are interdependent and relationship oriented. Also, students will observe that many articles contain information on conflict resolution skills, communication with significant others, family and friends which are considered to be general qualities that women are expected to possess. Many articles describe how to accommodate others and improve appearances by weigh of clothes, changing body type through excursive and dieting as well as cosmetics. Students will evaluate the advertisements by recognizing marketing strategies that companies use to sell their products by way of celebrity endorsement, sexual appeal, status, statistic and Band wagon.

Hands on : Students will each choose a different advertisement to evaluate independently. Students will

answer the following questions: Describe the product that is being marketed in this particular advertisement. Which technique does the company use to market their product? What type of audience do you think the company is targeting? How are women represented in this advertisement? How are men represented in this advertisement? Do the models in the advertisement represent the average person, why or why not? Do the images display an array of body types, are they realistic representations? Is their one central standard of beauty that you notice in the ads you have reviewed, if so what are the standards of beauty projected in the marketing strategy? What messages are these ads provided to adolescence about female beauty?

Published thinking : On a piece of poster board provided students will cut out the ad they have chosen and glue it in the middle of the paper. Students will use markers to label their responses to the above prompts on the poster board around the ad by diagramming with arrows that led from the image to their remarks.

Writing : Students will finish by reflecting in their journals about the activity and making a personal connection with the material presented and their lives. Considering the discussion and the magazine evaluations how does the media's representation of body image and female standards of beauty affect the way you view yourself, explain? To modify this prompt for males I would ask them to write about how the media's representation of body image and female standards of beauty affect the way you view women that you interact with on a daily basis?

Discussion: Sharing the responses from both the males and females will most certainly initiate an interesting discussion.

Lesson Six: Memoirs

Purpose: People are experts on their own lives. There is a persistent desire within people to convey or tell their stories in their own words. The genre of memoir is an effective way for students to practice the writing process and express their voice by way of the written word. Writing is a process that must be practiced regularly to improve. Frequently, students in my classroom practice writing informally through journaling, but the memoir is a step towards more formal published writing. My students have no difficulties expressing themselves verbally. They readily participate in conversation and class discussion; however they often lack the appropriate skills to communicate in writing to their audience. I like to use the memoir lesson to get the students interested in writing by discussing a specific time or event in their lives. Students will use descriptive, sensory language to describe a vivid memory using action words to paint a picture to the reader taking the reader on a journey along with the writer. Also, this lesson requires that students convey their experience through specific, detailed accounts there is no room for ambiguity or vagueness in a memoir. This lesson is the first lesson of a unit on teaching memoir.

Initiation : Students will participate in a chalk-talk about memory. I will place the word memory in a circle on the board and students will take turns writing everything they know about memory; for example, what is their earliest memory, what is memory? There are three rules for chalk-talk: everyone must go at least once, no one must talk during the activity only through writing, and no one can cross off anyone's response.

Reading : Before assigning a memoir for students to write I like to model an example of my own personal memoir. If a personal memoir is unavailable, any vignette from Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* will be a helpful example for explaining the genre. Also, Cisneros is an appropriate pairing to incorporate while beginning to discuss gender and adolescence. What memory is the author conveying to the reader? What words does the author use to convey their message? What emotions do you feel as you read the memoir?

Pre-Writing : Students will brainstorm about an event in their past that sparks emotion or that they feel passionate about. For example, quince cumpleaños, graduation, the first day of high school or middle school, the birth of a child, a death or illness in the family, the loss of a friend, the end of a relationship. All of these examples noted above give the students an outlet or voice to express themselves through writing and sort out identity issues and adolescent experiences in a personalized genre.

Resources

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

Atwell, Nancie. *Lessons that Change Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.

Comprehensive lessons on teaching students to write a variety of genres.

Antonia, Maria and Oliver-Rotger. *An Interview with Sandra Cisneros* *Voices from the Gap* January and February, 2000.

Excerpt from a collection of positive female writers.

Beers, Kylene. *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.

Bloom, Benjamin, S. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* . Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1984.

Describes the three domains of learning including the cognitive levels.

Brumber, Joan, J. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* . New York: Random House, Inc., 1997.

Historical context on the evolution of the female image and how the representation of being female affects adolescent girls.

Carroll, Rebecca. *Sugar in the Raw: Voice of Young Black Girls in America* . New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997.

Memoirs that describe the experience of African American girls during adolescence considering conflict and resolution.

Ehlers, Tracy, B., and Sugar Turner. *Sugar's Life in the Hood* . Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.

Psychologist and former welfare mother who have been friends and colleagues for almost a decade unite to discuss struggles with oppression in an inspirational, true to life account.

Erikson, Erik. *Identity: Youth and Crisis* . New York: W. W. Norton, 1994.

Classic psychological evaluation of adolescence and the stages that correspond with the processes and behaviors.

Habell-Pallan, Michelle, and Mary Romero ed. *Latino/a Popular Culture* . New York: New York University Press, 2002.

Discusses issues of stereotyping and identity in Latino culture and the media's influence in shaping these images.

Hine, Darlene, C., and Kathleen Thompson. *A Shining Thread of Hope* . New York: Broadway Books, 1998.

Historical background detailing the obstacles that African American women and their families endured over the decades during and post slavery.

Muharrar, Aisha. *More Than a Label* . Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 2002.

Written by an undergraduate student from her account and observations of high school this is a comprehensible description of labels that define adolescents.

Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* . New York: Ballantine Books, 1994.

Psychological analysis of identity formation in adolescent females. Provides information on how parents and educators can assist in the process.

Santrock, John, W. *Adolescence*.. Columbus, Ohio: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1998.

Psychological perspective and evaluation of the adolescence stage of growth. Provides excellent resources for gender topics.

Tatum, Beverly, D. *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* . New York: Basic Books, 1997.

Description of identity formation and influences that affect the stages of childhood, adolescence and adulthood with particular emphasis on African American identity.

Velasques, Gloria, L. *Teen Angel* . Houston, Texas: Pinata Books, 2003.

High interest young adult novel in a series that describes an adolescent romantic relationship and their struggle with pregnancy.

Wolff, Virginia E. *True Believer* . New York: Atheneum Books, 2001.

High interest, young adult novel that is narrated by a young female girl growing up in the city evaluating herself and the world around her.

Student Reading List

Antonia, Maria and Oliver-Rotger. *An Interview with Sandra Cisneros* Voices from the Gap January and February, 2000.

Excerpt from a collection of positive female writers.

Carroll, Rebecca. *Sugar in the Raw: Voice of Young Black Girls in America* . New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997.

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around her.

Classroom Materials

- Overhead projector
- Transparency paper
- Markers
- Chart paper
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Notebook paper
- White Board
- Dry erase markers
- Magazines
- Pens/pencils
- CD player
- Copies of poems
- Copies of lyrics
- Copies of short story
- Copies of interview
- Copies of memoir

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