



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2005 Volume III: History in the American Landscape: Place, Memory, Poetry

The Architectural and Social Space of the American Front Porch

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Narrative

I am a high school English teacher in an urban school with a student population that is nearly 100% African American. The Architectural and Social Space of the American Front Porch is designed for my 10th grade Ethno-literature course. In the past, I have concentrated my units on kinship and memory; we look at how our identity is shaped through shared experiences with parents, siblings, and community. We spend a good amount of time reading poems, short stories, and vignettes that speak to the forces that shape us as members of particular groups, including birth order, rituals, customs, and environmental influences. My current objective in my Ethno-literature course is in facilitating students to make connections between how their personal identity is shaped through a variety of unrecognized but powerful influences such as memory and thus how cultural identity is passed along.

Because this course is an elective given by the English Department, I have flexibility and creativity in establishing objectives and designing assessments; that makes this unit perfect for 10th grade Ethno-literature. I keep my hand on the CAPT with reading and writing assessments, but add dramatic performance. I keep my eye on New Haven's emphasis on developing student literacy, but also work with dialogue and dialect. The public school system is geared toward uniformity in both instruction and assessment. While educators agree on the need for sound critical thinking skills flourishing Bloom's Taxonomy and State Standards in their lesson plans the reality of the situation is quite different. Educators must place their index finger on a specific student's name and then drag it linearly across the paper to a grade that was accessed in a manner comparable to all the other students. The primary value is on verifiable grades that are text based and standard driven.

This system is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is opposed to any teenager's needs and completely opposed to the values of an oral-based culture. While America is a country that says it values individuality, it must be individuality of a particular *sort*. And it is the profound importance placed on written text/documentation that has had to and has exaggerated the undervaluing of an oral and performance based culture. In my opinion, this has led to a conundrum for English teachers: How does an educator honor cultural values that do not align with both the short and long-term goals a serious student must reach? To prepare students for college, Hamlet, The Crucible, and maybe even Beowulf must be studied. SAT and CAPT work is crucial, and let us not forget to place a pedestal under vocabulary. What is too often lost is making an intimate connection between

the student and what is being taught.

Connecting Students to Topic

Ironically, in trying to understand, preserve, and honor the African American's historical roots in slavery, our study of slave narratives and novels (such as *Roots* and *Family*), only exacerbate the problem of non-standard English being used in the classroom. I have a searing example of this from my American Literature course. A student came to me after school and said that she had refused to read from the novel *Family* (a Civil War slave story spanning multiple generations) during class because she felt that "it made fun of her [living] relatives." I asked her to explain. "Miss, a lot of my family in the South sound just like those slaves, and it makes me feel funny. I don't want to feel sorry for slaves because it is like saying that I should feel sorry for my family. I'm a traitor if I look down on my own family."

The following day I asked the class who wanted to continue to read aloud from the book (this has always been a significant part of our classroom practice). Some students said *no* to any further in-class reading of this novel and for the very reasons that the young woman had articulated the previous day. Others didn't care (which is even worse!) because they felt no connection to the characters; not surprisingly, they also felt no connection to the story. Whether this was a type of defense, boredom, or both I can't say, but I found the slave narrative novel to be ineffective in making a connection from text to life for my students. While the storyline was fascinating, a deeper understanding of the characters through their speech rather than their condition could not be a shared exploration for the class *and* the teacher.

My questions, then, are these: How does one avoid being a "missionary," or how does one instruct without devaluing? My answer is this: remove the conflict between opposing values. To do this, I intend to explore through personal interviews, literature, and film the value of orality and performance as expressed through the American front porch.

The Porch Connecting Home, Community, and Student

The focus of my unit will be The Architectural and Social Space of the American Front Porch, from its initial design and function to its current use, and *what this architectural place means to my students' lives*. The front porch is iconic America and is shared by any age, gender, and class. Most importantly for my students will be the fact that the porch is a "place" and "space" where kinship and oral performance allow the transmission of cultural values; also, it is a place where outside forces, such as technology or social sanctions, act upon those values. I will define architectural structures such as veranda, lanai, back porch, stoop, as well as the anthropological and sociological terms such as gesture, space, and place. I will touch on the architectural history, courtship patterns, technology, and the prejudices that class structure plays on personal expression in a semi-private space.

The purpose of this unit is to first, recognize the significance of the front porch as both an architectural (material) place and a social (immaterial) space, and its essential function in allowing people to interact in a neutral (liminal) area. Second, it is to create a positive, conscious connection between oral cultural roots and the front porch. We will do this by recognizing the importance of storytelling in transmitting values by tapping into the students' already existing experiences with front porch culture. We will look specifically at how family

is defined within the semi-private (liminal) front-porch-space by using Frost's poem "The Death of the Hired Man," and how identity and community are expressed through the use of the front porch in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1). Students will write interviews with people in their family, school, or community with this common architectural feature (in time, we will look at how prejudice and power is played out around this structure). I will present models of front porch experiences in literature, poetry, and film. My goal is to have students produce a written and/or auditory work that they perform on a mock front porch set up at the back of our classroom. Their performance must demonstrate an understanding of the concepts of the unit, i.e. gesture, orality, performance, culture, liminal, space/place, and kinship.

Special Considerations

Many of my students have Southern roots; they are in New England to live with Northern relatives while getting their education, or to live safely (for whatever reasons) through their teenage years, or they have many extended family members living in the South. Their connection to their ancestry and culture is vague; it is experienced as most children experience culture: disconnected from any knowledge of the past that shaped it. What *is* different, however, is that they learn about their family and culture primarily through orality, and specifically from elders, such as aunts, grandparents, God relatives, or fictive kin assuming the role of an elder.

With this in mind, it is important to know that my Ethno-literature course centers on personal information. Establishing a safe, risk-taking learning environment as quickly as possible is essential. To achieve this, I need to learn about my students' home lives right away. I found journal writing gives me the largest doorway into their experiences. I would caution teachers who are not comfortable with journal writing to suspend their feeling for the length of this unit and use it, especially in the beginning, and to also read and comment to the responses, preferably displaying model responses on the overhead projector for the first several weeks. My method is to have students who do not want their work to be displayed to place an "X" at the top of the page, but they are only allowed two "X"s during the unit. They are cautioned that their journal responses, for the most part, may be shared with the class.

Knowing which students have issues in connecting to the word *home* is critical. Some of my students are in group homes, some are in foster care, some are homeless, either literally or in the sense that they are living with distant relatives during the school year. Some students may have recently lost parents and therefore have to redefine home; some have been told renting does not count as having a home. It is important that your class be allowed to define the word *home* for themselves and that all the variations in defining the word *family* and *home* be respected. In defining family, some students may recognize gang members, and they are correct to include them as clan members, extended family, or fictive kin. However, in this case I maintain control of that definition by defining *nuclear family* and then merely mentioning the varieties, rather than incorporating them into the definition. The glossary at the end of this unit gives definitions from academic sources that I have found appropriate, with the exception of the word *home*. In that instance, I suggest using Robert Frost's explanation from "The Death of the Hired Man" as the prompt from which the class can arrive at their own definition: "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in" (53).

Objectives

My objectives for students are:

- (1) to keep a thorough, organized notebook and journal throughout the unit; this will be used in the final assessment in an open notebook test grade.
- (2) to define the terms for this unit and to be able to use those terms appropriately when producing their own work.
- (3) to list the types of influence architecture, technology, art, society, and family traditions had/have on how the front porch was/is used.
- (4) to make a personal connection between an architectural structure and their life experiences past, present, future in their home and their community.
- (5) to construct a piece of art (audio, visual, and/or written) of publishable quality and to perform or display that art in public in a self-assured manner.
- (6) to recognize the role of dialect, gesture, ritual, folk tales, and kinship in their culture.
- (7) to recognize debasing terms (sexist, elitist, racist) and to use language carefully by consciously selecting and using words to affirm or break stereotypes.
- (8) to connect multiple art forms in the study and production of text: music, poetry, fiction, film, theatre.
- (9) to diagram a segment of the community by taking a field trip into their neighborhood.
- (10) to practice CAPT skills: read, interpret, connect, and evaluate.
- (11) to connect the unit with our school's Mission Statement (To produce lifelong learners who contribute responsibly to their local and global community) by strengthening their connection to the community through a recognition and appreciation of the architectural feature of the front porch (extra credit on the final assessment. See footnote #2).

Lesson Plans (with Materials)

Procedure

Week 1: Day 1

Materials: teacher overhead projector with transparencies of words/definitions

student notebook, journal

I introduce the title of the unit to the class: The Architectural and Social Space of the American Front Porch. I hand out the list of objectives for the unit and ask them to place them in their notebook (2). We read and review each one.

I start this unit by presenting the following words and definitions on an overhead projector to be recorded in their notebooks. The definitions that I use are listed (in order of unit presentation) in the glossary at the end of this paper under "Use first in unit presentation": clan, kin, fictive kin, kinship, nuclear family (types of families are extended, single-parent, blended, adoptive, step, foster, fictive).

Before I present each definition, I lead a brainstorm. I start brainstorms to set a positive direction . For example, I say *clan* and then say *Wu-Tang* (an early rap group called *The Wu-Tang Clan*). Even without knowing the definition of clan, they are familiar with the structure of rap groups. This allows me to explain that the clan structure of social groups is primitive, but that does not mean simple, old, outdated, or inferior, since *The Wu-Tang Clan* is relatively recent. Primitive means *first* , and the process of breaking down stereotypes begins with the very first word. We go through each word using this process, and I refer to stereotypes that follow these words whenever it is appropriate.

I end class by having them write a response to a prompt in their journal (presented on the overhead) (3).

Before placing the prompt on the overhead I remind them of the "X" system, and to tell them that I will present models in the next class of the first four responses that most clearly fulfill the requirements (4).

Prompt #1: The type of family system that I belong to is _ (name type from definitions) ___. If I could choose a family system, it would be__ (type) ___ because _ (reason) _ . My closest fictive kin member is__ (name) _ because__ (reason) _ .

Week 1: Day 2

Materials: teacheroverhead projector with transparencies of words/definitions

studentnotebook, journal

I begin class by presenting the four models of journal responses on the overhead. We discuss why I chose those four as models. Next, we follow the same structure as Day 1: brainstorming and then defining the words culture, oral culture, folklore, folk tale (or story), legend, gestures, ritual. The brainstorm allows students to be prepared for the prompt, since we list fairy tales (book, film, Disney) and home-spun tales during the brainstorm. This is followed by a journal response.

Prompt #2: My favorite story was (told) (read) to me by_____. I like the part where_____. I prefer to have stories (told) (read) to me.

I remind them about the "X" system; they are to use it wisely. For the next class, I will count the number of told versus read responses and present the findings. We will discuss the reasons for the preferences. I will also ask for volunteers to tell the name of their favorite story and their favorite part.

Week 1: Day 3

Materials: teacheroverhead projector with transparencies of words/definitions

studentnotebook, journal

I begin class by presenting the tally; I ask them to theorize on the results. Students are intensely interested in speculating on their cognitive processes (integrating them as a community and creating a risk-free learning environment is under way). Next, students volunteer their favorite story and why. We discuss gender biasstereotypingin TV, film (Disney) and text: boys like action, girl’s romance? Boys are strong and aggressive, girls are weak and passive? Next, we follow the same structure as Day 1 and 2: brainstorming and then defining the words: Lanai, veranda, porch (types of porches are front, back, sun, screened-in, three-season, sleeping), stoop. Discussion: where would each be found? What kind of activities might occur on each of the porches (front, back, sun, screened-in, three-season, sleeping). What stereotypes do we carry when we decide the location of these architectural features? This is followed by a journal response.

Prompt #3: If I owned a home, I would want (name of porch-type) because _____.

For the next class, I will count the specific types of porches and present the findings. I will break down the answers not only as to types of porches but gender preference. We will discuss the reasons for the preferences.

Week 1: Day 4 and 5 (or one block period)

Materials: teacheroverhead projector with transparencies of words/definitions

studentnotebook

I begin class by presenting the tally; I ask them to theorize reasons for the results; specifically, are there any surprises? Next, we will discuss the new vocabulary terms: liminal, public, private, place, space, home. I save *home* for last because each class must develop their own definition (5). I use Robert Frost’s “The Death of the Hired Man” as a prompt on the overhead: “Home is the place where, when you have to go there,/they have to take you in” (53). After a brief discussion they get into groups of three; one student is the scribe. They work on their own definition, keeping in mind our Day 1 vocabulary kin groups. We come back as a class. They come to the board and write their definition. From there, we read them and reach a consensus on our own definition of home, which we will use throughout the unit.

Week 2: Days 1-4

Materials: teacheroverhead projector with transparency notes/illustrations, CD player,

CD West Side Story.

studentnotebook

It is important that students review the difference between *space* and *place* . I give a brief background of West Side Story, and then I pass out the lyrics. We listen to the two minute song and discuss the words *space* , *place* , and *somewhere, halfway* (in reference to *liminal*). I ask them to “make a prediction”: What might this song have in connection with a unit on front porches?

Next, I will present overhead notes on the American front porch. The best site is http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CLASS/am483_97/projects/cook/popul.htm, which gives explanations on the origins, stylistic evolution, popularization, cultural significance, and the porch's decline and recurrence in modern times. I used this site in conjunction with Michael Dolan's *The American Porch: An Informal History of an Informal Place*. My emphasis is "to define and distinguish the American front porch as an American cultural object" (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/>).

Overhead Notes (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/>):

When and Why the Front Porch Became Popular in American Architecture

- 1) Present in colonial times, but not popular until 1840's & 1850's.
- 2) Late 19th & early 20th century, almost universal and a distinctive feature of American domestic architecture.
- 3) Why? Due to both technological & social forces

1840's industrialization and technology created a leisure class with conflicting desires:

- 1) because technology makes building lighter, cheaper, quicker, less complicated
- 2) mass immigration = cities expanding
- 3) free time = time to enjoy life
- 4) BUT fast pace of technology scaring people
- 5) countermovement to preserve & enjoy the American landscape...
- 6) ...and to STAY connected to nature (6).

Landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing contributes hugely to the popularity of the American front porch

- 1) he created & sold huge numbers of popular pattern books
- 2) he linked the American house to the American landscape
- 3) he was the first to define the porch as necessary in both business and home...
- 4) ...as the intermediate space between the world (public/nature) and the home (private/human). "LIMINAL"
- 5) Jackson saw the porch as connecting people to nature

Physical Development of the American Front Porch

Colonial Architecture (1650-1850)

- 1) Primary styles: Georgian, French Colonial, Spanish Colonial, Dutch Colonial
- 2) French Colonial: southern homes had wide, covered veranda

3) purpose was for human comfort and connection to outdoors from house

Greek Revival (1830-1855)

1) front porch usually covered by a roof resting on huge columns.

2) Purpose: impress anyone approaching.

3) Not for use or comfort; however, 2nd floor balcony usually turned into a sitting porch.

Gothic Revival Architecture (1840-1860)

1) Inspired by Andrew Jackson Downing

2) goal to blend with the natural landscape

3) "sitting porch" ornate decorations, filigree, lattice, aprons, brackets

4) porch now an essential element of American architecture

Italianate Architecture (1840-1885)

1) New England and Midwest

2) full or partial front porches, smaller in urban areas

3) decorations took on new importance

4) elaborate columns & posts, ornate, painted porch roofs, fancy brackets

Stick Style Architecture

1) greatly influenced by Andrew Jackson Downing

2) First truly American architectural form

3) New England & California

4) spacious porches; wrapped around entire house, intricate rails and brackets

5) porches on other floors

Second Empire Style Architecture

1) entire front porch: front, back, wrap around.

2) influenced by many architectural styles

Romanesque Architecture (1875-1895)

1) heavy masonry gave medieval look

2) fortress-like with semi-circular arches

3) New England & Midwest

4) second story balconies

Questions at end of note taking:

1) How many of these types have you seen in New Haven?

2) How many houses are on one city block?

3) How many have porches?

4) What type of porches do you think there are?

5) How many are in use?

Have students make a map of one street crossing their school or in their town. Make it as detailed as possible, with houses, trees, driveways, and beginning and end units on street. They are to file this in their notebooks for a comparison.

Week 3: Day 1

Materials: teacher hard surface to write on, unlined paper, pencil

student hard surface to write on, unlined paper, pencil

I will take the students on a walking tour of one street adjacent to the school. My class has between 24-27 students. I will assume 24 students; they will form six teams of four students per team. Each team will travel one side of a street (predetermined by teacher).

The four students will chart the houses along the street and: 1) identify type of porch with intricacy of design, 2) type and use of furniture; also, any inferences they can make about the inhabitants (owners, renters, race, gender, social class) 3) signs that signal welcome or warning 4) a list of questions that the group generates about the project (i.e. What does the use of plants tell us about the owner?) (7).

Week 3: Day 2-4

Materials: teacher large plain paper covering bulletin board, magic markers

student notes from mapping field trip

We will compare our local maps to the maps we made from memory (Week 2: Days 2-4) to see how accurate our memories were. Then, the small groups will compile their information and chart it on the bulletin board.

Week 4: Day 1

Materials: teacher overhead projector with transparency notes/illustrations

student notebook

I will present notes from the site <http://xroads.virginia.edu/>, using the same style that I've used all along, on The Cultural Significance of the American Front Porch. Now we're rolling! The ground work of terms and historical roots is done; we have ventured into our neighborhood. At this point, I will move into the human needs and desires especially in the aesthetic sense and we are ready after these next few days to move to the literary component of this unit (8).

The notes that I present on the overhead come from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/>. Below is an example of the kind of material I will present: Start with a pithy quote and then overheads of supporting details. These quotes can easily be recycled for an essay, test, or quiz grade at the end of the unit or for a midterm or final exam.

Quote: Country "For the American porch has, in its time as an American cultural symbol, represented the cultural ideals of our nation."

Features:

- 1) connects nature and land to home
- 2) recognizes that our love of nature conflicts with our need to control it (9).

Quote: Community "The front porch provided a compromise for these two opposing American ideals and connected human control, in the form of the house, to nature and the wilderness outside it."

Front porch demonstrates American's simultaneous ideals

- 1) nature versus controlling nature
- 2) privacy but not isolation
- 3) equality yet class system

Quote: Family "The front porch represented the American ideal of family."

Features:

- 1) the porch serves as an outdoor living room (cool at night, watch children, and mingle)
- 2) sanctity of home maintained (individuality and privacy are American values)
- 3) sense of "neighborliness"
- 4) gives permission to relax
- 5) maintains "controllable" ties to community. No one had to come *into* home to ask for advice or help
- 6) allows transmission of traditions (from old to young, among cultures).
- 7) liminal space = non-judgmental OR judgmental. Emotional cease-fire zone
- 8) Ritual patterns: courtship, storytelling

Week 4: Day 2-4

Materials: teacher construction paper, scissors, glue, multiple dittos of poems

studentjournal

I shift students from note taking to art by presenting a variety of poems about front porches (10). Students can use their journals to write their initial responses to each poem. I also encourage them to note a "golden line": This is a line that makes the poem a poem for them; a line that "speaks." The poems that I have selected to use are from Dolores Hayden's American Yard ("Sachem's Head" and "Pregnant in June"). The latter poem addresses in-between-ness (pregnancy/porch) and is filled with non-mechanical sounds. The former poem has the intrusion of mechanical sounds and carries a longing to return to a quiet past. Eileen Moeller's "It's Coming on Summer" (online at www.shinnycatdesign) combines porch uses: community watching (gossip, speculation), death passing (a gravedigger riding by on a bicycle), the future (a baby in a rocker). Last, Koethe's Falling Water: poems, contains "From the Porch," where the narrative brings the reader from the past to the future by looking out from his porch.

After the students journal and refer to a golden line, they select a colored piece of construction paper on which to mount their own front porch poem. They will cut up the poems we have read and create their own expression of a front porch experience by gluing down the pieces. They may add their own connecting words or phrases. The only requirement I make (you do not have to) is that they have an idea of the TONE they want to express and try to create that atmosphere: dark, light, thoughtful, humorous, or sad. This exercise gets students thinking artistically; also, it begins the process of personal investment for their final project.

Week 4: Day 5

Materials: teachernothing

studentjournal

All the poems should be displayed on the bulletin board around the neighborhood map of porches. Each student reads his/her poem standing at the board. The poem is then taken down and passed around, while the next student gets up to read. At the end, all the poems are placed back on the board. Students are to select the poem that "made me think the most" and journal a response.

At this point, I will have a mock-up of a front porch built at the back of my classroom, complete with a rocking chair. I intend to use the porch specifically for staff and administration to visit my class with "front porch stories." I will ask students to collect stories from their kin or fictive kin to share with the class, and these stories will be used on "special days" or as fillers for the last 10 minutes of class. The porch will be 8' x 4' and it will be in front of the bulletin board. The board can be decorated to look like windows, plants, and a door are recessed within. The more artistic in class can fully express themselves here. An overhang of blue tarp will hang overhead. I have figured that the tarp and plywood should cost less than \$60.00, especially if one recycles materials to get a more authentic, weathered look.

Week 5: Day 1-3

Materials: teacher overhead transparencies of author information. Copies of "The

Death of the Hired Man."

studentnotebook

The biographic information on Robert Frost is plentiful. I suggest giving students a brief historical context to place Frost in his time. Also, I think it is important to note that Frost made a career marketing his image as a Yankee farm boy and the front porch served as a valuable prop in tying him to the common people and the rural community. Frost's poetry serves as a conduit between the forces of raw nature and civilization.

"The Death of the Hired Man" should be read in its entirety by the teacher. I suggest numbering all the lines to make discussion of the poem easier. What will be important for students to remember is how *they* defined home and how Frost is defining home through this couple (11); also, how does Frost use the space and place of the front porch to connect to the interior of their private lives? The discussion of this poem only reveals the hidden complexities and a deeper appreciation of what is happening in the home and, metaphorically, to the community and the country because of the changing times: machines replacing manual labor, youth replacing old age, education replacing common sense. The pervasive sense of loss is everywhere. Remind students of the role the porch played in courtship, and how this porch shared by a married, white, Northern couple is no longer the site for hope and a long future, but it is the site for despair and the end of life (12).

Questions:

- 1) What kind of porch do you imagine the couple to be sitting on? Why have you made this choice? Students should include all the elements they have learned about architecture and social cues.
- 2) Why did Frost choose a front porch as the setting for this discussion? Students should include literary considerations as well as social/architectural reasons.

Week 5: Day 4-5

Materials: teacheroverhead transparencies of author information, copies of (or dittos of excerpts) from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* studentnotebook

An excellent web site for biographic information on Hurston is online at BookRags Book Notes: www.bookrags.com/notes/tewg/. Also, BookRags has a wonderful synopsis of each chapter. Janie's story (the protagonist of *Their Eyes*) is a frame narrative taking place on a front porch. This novel is in sharp contrast to "The Death of the Hired Man." Here a single, Southern, African American woman talks to another woman on a front porch and their conversation is turned outwards towards the community. As Janie fills her best friend in on her past, the story shape becomes a frame narrative. I will sit on the porch in a rocking chair and tell my student Janie's story. As 10th graders, this book is on their 11th grade reading list, and I will be whetting their appetite to read it. Furthering their interest will be the movie version starring Halle Berry. Front porch clips from the movie can be used (13). As I tell Janie's story, I will stop at the points where the front porch is used either as a prop in conversation or as a setting for the action. I used the Perennial Classics edition published in New York, 1998. The following page numbers are linked to the specific topics of front porch culture:

Narrative opens: on porch

Page 2-4: watching the community.

Page 32-33: Janie marries and watches the sunrise from the porch

Page 40: a committee meeting is held for political purposes

Page 47: a signifier of status within the community

Page 50: oral storytelling; folktales told

Page 63-69: philosophy; listener/talker; play acting/performance for community

Page 72-74: community gathering; deals made

Page 74-75: power stand between men/women; husband/wife

Page 99: Janie meets new love-to-be; watches moonrise from porch (see pg. 32-33)

Page 101-108: courting rituals

Page 112: gossip

Narrative closes: on porch

What is central to this story is how the porch is the center of the identity of the individual, the home, and the community.

Questions:

1) What kind of porch do you imagine the characters to be sitting on? Why have they made this choice? Students should include all the elements they have learned about architecture and social cues.

2) Why did Hurston choose a front porch as the setting for this discussion? Students should include literary considerations as well as social/architectural reasons.

Week 6: Day 1-5

Materials: teacherrubrics for criteria on individual projects

studentnotebook

Final assessment: Students are ready to assimilate all this information into a product reflecting their own experiences, to be played out on a front porch. I will have students take one entire class to brainstorm ideas. Among their choices are producing a one act play modeled after "The Death of the Hired Man"; a short story modeled after Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; 2-3 poems modeled after Hayden, Koethe, or other poems presented; a CD or tape of "porch sounds" from the neighborhood to be played during these productions; a song. Students will be required to make a rubric listing areas in which they should be graded. I will finalize the rubric.

Week 7: Day 1-5

Materials: teacherrubrics for criteria on individual projects

studentnotebook

After the presentations, students grade themselves in their rubrics before turning the material in. Also, I pass out a file card and have each student answer this statement: "The person who was the most help in our group

was _____ because _____.” That student gets 5 points extra credit, plus class recognition. Needless to say, these cards are kept private from the class; I am the only one with access to them. Those students who worked alone do not get this option. It is not a penalty, since no points are removed, but at this point my students know that they are rewarded for acting responsibly in their community of peers.

For a test grade, students will take their “My overall objectives are for students...” ditto saved in their notebooks and answer each numbered objective with supporting evidence from their notes. Each objective is worth 10 points, totaling 100 points. FCA’s can be individually tailored; however, since I am using this unit as an English Department elective, I will take points off for sentence fragments, multiple misspellings, illegible handwriting, and lack of vivid language (weak verbs, flabby adjectives, vague phrases).

This unit can easily be formatted to fill an entire marking period. If time allows, showing the film *Beloved* or *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a wonderful closing; or, another favorite is Spike Lee’s *Crooklyn*. This film has “stoop sitters,” as does the now popular cartoon “Hey Arnold!” (featuring the stoop kid, who will never leave his front stoop). Students can list similarities and differences in oral presentation, storytelling, performance, rival relationships, etc. How is space and territory marked? How do different age groups, cultures, socio-economic groups delineate and use their territory? This is a great way to allow students ownership of their environment.

Assessment/Unit Correlation with District Performance Standards

Even though this is an elective within the English Department, I know that passing the CAPT is imperative; therefore, I address as many of the Content Standard requirements as possible. All content standards will be satisfied by reading a variety of poems and a novel excerpt; also, students will respond in brainstorms, whole class discussions and small group settings, and their critical thinking skills will be utilized in essay and journal writing. They will interact with their environment through a neighborhood field trip to map porches. These individual maps will be tallied and transposed onto a class map. They will interview family/staff/community members for “front porch stories.” Students will create a found poem and read/perform the poem for the class. Ultimately, they will produce a play, essay, poem, CD, or short story. (The Hillhouse Drama Club will perform the plays.) The specific Content Standards that will be satisfied are:

For Content Standard 1, we will generate anticipatory sets, brainstorm categories, interpret text using prior knowledge (1:2), generate questions (1:5), make predictions (1:6), use the structure of text/visual to extend and interpret meaning (1:8), make inferences from text (1:12), and interact with others in creating, interpreting, and evaluating written, oral, and visual texts (1:2, 1:14).

For Content Standard 2, our work in orality and performance will allow us to produce texts that communicate effectively by determining the appropriate text structure on the basis of audience and purpose (2:1), communicate effectively in a variety of literary modes (2:2), gather and organize information from primary and secondary sources (2:3), engage in presenting ideas to an audience ((2:4), and engage in writing, speaking, and developing visual texts through reflection and revision (2:5).

For Content Standard 3, students will speak and write using conventional patterns of syntax and diction (3:1), but also select when to use variations of language appropriate to purpose, audience, and task (3:3), develop

fluency and competency in English by building upon the students' strengths in their language and culture (3:4), and understand that accepted practices in spoken and written language may change over time (3:5).

For Content Standard 4, students will explore and respond to contemporary poetry and literature (4:2), identify unique and shared qualities of the voices and cultures in poetry and literature (4:9), evaluate the merits of the work based on individual preferences with knowledge of standards (10:3), explore and respond to the esthetic elements of literature, including spoken, written, and visual text (10:7), demonstrate and understanding that literature represents, recreates, shapes, and explores human experience through language and imagination (10:6), and use literature as a source to explain ideas and decisions as well as political and social issues (10:8)

Endnotes

(1) I previously mentioned my problem using slave narratives; it distances some students, plus it can exacerbate the problem of non-standard English being used in the English classroom. I have three answers for this: 1) sometimes it is the best choice 2) slave narratives must be used sparingly to be effective and to that end I will 3) survey Hurston's novel so that the dialect is second to the placethe front porch.

(2) This list is used as a final assessment tool. At the end of the unit, students will check off the objectives they met as a student and as a class. For a test grade, I ask students to respond to each of the ten objectives (10 points each) using their notebook: I met this objective because _____. #11 is 10 points extra credit. Teachers can determine their own Focus Correction Areas (FCA's).

(3) Earlier I'd reviewed the journal writing process: 1) journals *never* leave the classroom. 2) they must write until the timer beeps; their pen can't leave the paper. writing time depends on how much class time remains, usually between 5 and 10 minutes. 3) any response may be shared in class. They are allowed two private responses during the entire unit, which I will recognize by the large "X" placed at the top of the page. 4) they are to write the response number and the date on the top line. This allows me to later pull specific responses for a quiz grade or for essay topics. The larger point is that NO IN-CLASS WRITING IS WASTED. Journal writing does not mean diary writing; it counts.

(4) My system for selecting models is this: I tell students that I take the first four (or whatever number I am looking for) that meet the requirements I've given. In fact, as the unit progresses I make sure that as many students as possible are represented, but always stick to the "these were the first four I found, although many of you did fine work..." or words to that effect.

(5) Edward T. Hall's *The Silent Language*: Chapter 10 "Space Speaks," covers the territoriality of humans as social creatures. Children learn to recognize and define space culturally; for example, American children require almost seven years before mastering the basic concepts of place." This chapter is fascinating reading and you may want to introduce some of the material, as time permits.

(6) This is a perfect place to link our ancestor's fears with our current cultural fears as expressed in Sci-Fi and horror movies. Americans value individuality and intensely fear mechanizationsuch as evil robots in I-Robot with Will Smithplus all the Star War movies that equate mechanization with de-humanization. Robots, androids, and people who are "hooked up" to machines touch on our cultural collective fears.

(7) These deductions will be part of looking at how we judge people and form stereotypes. Was one porch "manly," another "feminine"? What inferences did we make according to the condition of the porch about the type of person who lived there?

(8) One of the best books to gather quotes and sources to individualize this unit, plus fascinating photographs taken from across the country, is *Out on the Porch: an Evocation in Words and Pictures*.

(9) Our anthem *America, the Beautiful* can be used here as an example of the fierce connection American's had for their land: spacious skies, amber waves of grain, purple mountain majesty, endless plains.

(10) I enlarge the poems before copying them, filling up the page with their print, and I make at least twice as many copies as there are students. This enables them to do an exercise (explained in the paragraph) when we are through reading.

(11) A teachable moment may occur here: How does one's definition of home shape the decisions one makes in life? Look at how this couple defines home and the decision they eventually arrive at. Is the decision irrelevant or "canceled" when the hired man dies? Or does the decision matter on its own merits? There are many questions that can be posed and discussed around these points.

(12) Frost's poem can be experienced in a variety of ways; it depends on the individual class as to whether they have the interest or you have the time to present them. The poem has been performed as a play by many colleges and theater groups, among them Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Georgia, and a review of the play can be read online at www.the-stalliononline.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2004/12/02/41af70a221441. Also, Andrew Violette has an audio CD produced in 2004 titled "The Death of the Hired Man." A clip of the opera can be heard online through Amazon.com. Finally, Frost can be heard reading his work online at Modern American Poetry through HarperAudio at http://town.hall.org/Archives/radio/IMS/HarperAudio/012294_harp_ITH.html. He is not a good reader of his work; plus, today's younger audiences expect an element of performance which is not present in Frost's personae or tone.

(13) The films that identify the front porch as a significant part of the setting that I have located are in Michael Dolan's *The American Porch: An Informal History of an Informal Place*. In an insert of color and black/white illustrations and photography, Dolan identifies : Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Zora Neale Hurston), *The Color Purple* and *Beloved* (Maya Angelou), *It's a Wonderful Life*, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, *High Noon*, *Elvis's Love Me Tender*, and *My Darling Clementine* (insert between 186-187). All these clips, if not actually viewed, speak to American identity as captured on film and the power of the porch to cement that identity.

Glossary: terms listed in order of unit presentation

Use first in unit presentation (Week 1: Day1)

The following definitions from:

Schwimmer, Brian. Cultural and Kin Terms: Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba. 28 June 2005. www.umanitoba.ca/anthropology/tutor/kinmenu.html>

Clan: a large family group that includes many relatives (grandparents, uncles/aunts/parents, cousins)

Kin: people related to you through blood relations (biological descent)

Fictive kin: people NOT related to you by blood (biological descent) but they are those whom you define as "family" because of a history of close relationships (perhaps your best friend, adopted children, someone who lived with your family for a long time, etc.).

Kinship: principle of organizing individuals into social groups, roles, and categories based on parentage and marriage.

Nuclear family: a family consisting of two parents and their unmarried children. Types of families include extended, single-parent, blended, adoptive, step, foster, fictive, (gang?)

Use second in unit presentation (Week 1: Day 2)

The following definitions from:

Webster's New World College Dictionary: The Dictionary for the 21st Century. Fourth Edition. 1999.

Culture: the ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc. of a people or group that are transferred, communicated, or passed along, as in or to succeeding generations. Our focus will be on an oral culture

Folklore: all of the unwritten traditional beliefs, legends, sayings, customs, etc. of a culture.

Folk tale (or story): a story, usually of anonymous authorship and containing legendary elements, made and handed down orally among the common people

Legend: a story handed down for generations among a people and popularly believed to have a historical basis, although not verifiable

The following definition from:

Goody, Jack. "Oral Culture." *Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular*

Entertainment: A Communications-centered Handbook . Ed. Richard Bauman. New

York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Oral culture: the verbal transmission of cultural values and social rules; the deliberate act of teaching the young through stories that instruct and entertain.

The following definitions from:

Hibbitts, Bernard J. (1995). "Making Motions: The Embodiment of Law in Gesture."

Journal of Contemporary Legal Issues 6:51-81. U. of San Diego School of Law.

Gesture: Gestures are strongly contextual, unlike writing. Gestures perform many functions, but declined in importance with the onset of writing. Most important, gestures are visible and enhance community identity and individual status.

The following definition from:

Pearson, Michael Parker. (1984). "Mortuary practices, society, and ideology: an

ethnoarchaeological study." *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*. Ed. Ian Hodder.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 99-113.

Ritual: behavior showing stylized repetitions that express society's fundamental social values. Ritual is characterized by fixity, being bound by rules, a kind of performance like a play, which has a prescribed routine of expression.

Use third in unit presentation (Week 1: Day 3)

Lanai: a veranda or open-sided living room of the kind found in Hawaii

Veranda: an open porch or portico, usually roofed, along the outside of a building

Porch: a covered entrance to a building, usually projecting from the wall and having a separate roof. Types of porches are front, back, sun, screened-in, three-season, sleeping

Stoop: a small porch or platform with steps

Use fourth in unit presentation (Week 1: Day 4-5)

The following definitions from:

Webster's New World College Dictionary: The Dictionary for the 21st Century. Fourth Edition. 1999.

Liminal: at the point where one perception or condition blends or crosses over into another

Public: of, belonging to, or considering the people as a whole; of or by the community at large

Private: of, or belonging to, a particular person or group; not common or general

The following definitions from:

Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995.

Place: Described by Dolores Hayden as "one of the trickiest words in the English language," she states that "An individual's sense of place is both a biological response to the surrounding physical environment and a cultural creation..." (16). Further, "in the nineteenth century and earlier, place also carried a sense of the right of a person to own a piece of land, or to be part of a social world...People make attachments to places that are critical to their well-being or distress" (16).

Space: Lefebvre-after-Hayden "argues that every society in history has shaped a distinctive social space that meets its intertwined requirements for economic production and social reproduction" (19).

The following definition from:

Frost, Robert. "The Death of the Hired Man." *Complete Poems of Robert Frost* . New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1949.

Home: Have your classes develop their own definition, but use Robert Frost's "The

Death of the Hired Man" as a prompt: "'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,/they have to take you in'" (53).

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Brueggemann, Sarah. "Highlight of summer." *Coastal Living*. Vol. 9, June 2005: 120-23.

This article, with brilliantly-colored photography by Sara Gray, reveals a modern day ritual of "porch-lighting" on Martha's Vineyard. As far back as 1869, when hundreds of silk lanterns were hung from porches to honor the visiting governor, the tradition of lantern-hanging from porches continues. The festival is now called "Illumination Night." For future dates and to plan a trip, email mvcm.org or phone 508/693-0525.

Dolan, Michael. *The American Porch: An Informal History of an Informal Place*.

Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2002.

Dolan begins with the various theories of how the American porch got its foothold in this country. From there, he narrates with light humor (and a few typos) the rise, fall, and rise again of the porch. He takes a fairly comprehensive look at the mediums that used the porch to signify American values, starting with the "front porch President McKinley, and how the porch became part of the American consciousness through film..

Frost, Robert. "The Death of the Hired Man." *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*. New

York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1949.

This book contains most of Frost's most powerful poetry.

Goody, Jack. "Oral Culture." *Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular*

Entertainment: A Communications-centered Handbook . Ed. Richard Bauman. New

York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

This handbook is an excellent resource for teachers who are preparing Honors or Advanced Placement courses. It lays the groundwork for students who want to go deeper into cultural performance.

Hall, Edward T. *The Silent Language*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980.

Of interest to this unit is chapter 10: "Space Speaks." Hall covers the territoriality of humans as mammals and as social creatures. How children learn to recognize and define space is culturally defined; for example, "An American child requires between six and seven years before he has begun to master the basic concepts of place." Hall sweeps his eye over cultures ranging from the army to

school to other countries. His writing is informative, engaging, and would make a wonderful resource for extra credit projects.

Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995.

Dr. Hayden covers the complex topic of the public versus the private needs for space and place; she then explains the impact of public policy on individual and social identity by using global and individual case studies. Students will easily be enthralled by the story of Bidy Mason in the chapter "Rediscovering an African American Homestead." Each chapter could be a unit in itself in a variety of disciplines.

. *American Yard: Poems* by Dolores Hayden. David Robert Brooks: OH, 2004.

Perfectly crafted formal and free verse poems capture the American experience that because of the tight use of metaphors and accessible language students will recognize as the human experience.

Hibbitts, Bernard J. (1995). "Making Motions: The Embodiment of Law in Gesture."

Journal of Contemporary Legal Issues 6:51-81. U. of San Diego School of Law.

An excellent source for definitions; further, Hibbitts studies the political, social, and economic functions of gestures.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Perennial Classics: New York, 1998.

This novel captures with poetic genius the community of Eatonville, the first Afro-American town in the United States. Modeled on Hurston's own life and desires, the novel carries its audience full circle from a coming-of-age story to a story of self-realization and self-acceptance.

Koethe, John. *Falling Water: poems*. HarperPerennial: New York, 1997.

Pearson, Michael Parker. (1984). "Mortuary practices, society, and ideology: an ethnoarchaeological study." *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*. Ed. Ian Hodder. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 99-113.

An excellent source for definitions; further, Pearson studies belief systems and their influence on a culture's ideology.

Price, Reynolds, ed. *Out on the Porch: an Evocation in Words and Pictures*. New York: Algonquin Books, 1992.

If you use no other book, Price's photographs of porches used with literary excerpts are priceless (no pun intended). The introduction sets a tone and direction that can be used in full or segments can be lifted to compliment other key issues in your unit.

Webster's New World College Dictionary: The Dictionary for the 21st Century. Fourth Edition. 1999.

Online Sources

Cook, Scott. American Front Porch. June 2005. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~>

[CLASS/am483_97/projects/cook/popul.htm](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CLASS/am483_97/projects/cook/popul.htm)

This site offers an illustrated, complete, and succinct historical evolution of the American front porch. It is extremely informative and accessible, with links to "all things porch."

Kramer, Meredith. "BookRags Book Notes on Their Eyes Were Watching God." 30 June

2005. www.bookrag.com/notes/tewg/

This site offers everything one needs to study Hurston's novel. From author notes, plot and chapter summary, and major topics and themes traced through each chapter.

Modern American Poetry. HarperAudio: Recording Frost Hired Man, 1956. 30

June 2005. http://town.hall.org/Archives/radio/IMS/HarperAudio/012294_harp_

[ITH.html](http://town.hall.org/Archives/radio/IMS/HarperAudio/012294_harp_)>.

A live recording of Frost reading several of his most popular poems; however, Frost is not a good reader of his word, and I would suggest listening to him read only for the intensely impressed or curious.

Schwimmer, Brian. Cultural and Kin Terms: Department of Anthropology, University of

Manitoba. 28 June 2005. [. ca/anthropology/ tutor/kinmenu.html](http://www.ca/anthropology/tutor/kinmenu.html)>

An excellent source for definitions and for links to kin information, Schwimmer provides everything from graphing kin lines to college resources.

Sondheim, Stephen. Westside Story Lyrics. 5 June 2005.

www.reelclassics.com/Musicals/Westside/westside-somewhere.htm.

All Bernstein and Sondheim's songs and lyrics for the Broadway musical are presented as they actually appeared in the 1957 version with Natalie Wood/Richard Beymer. It also contains information on all the actors and singers.

Vidette, Andrew. Opera: Audio CD Opera: "The Death of the Hired Man." New York:

Innova American Composers Forum, 1996.

This is an opera based on Frost's poem. By accessing this site, students can hear a snippet of the opera. While it is probably not something students would want to hear in its entirety, it is worth knowing how malleable art can be.

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