



Biographies for Change in a Time of Conformity

Curriculum Unit 06.03.02
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During the 1950s in America, conformity to group norms was the common behavior of the majority of people, both young and old, as they settled back into their traditional roles with the ending of World War II. Not everyone, however, chose to conform to the cultural norms, and the postwar era in America also became a time for sowing the seeds of great, even revolutionary social change. In my curriculum unit, I plan to focus on three particular social movements that drastically changed America's perspectives on music, on civil rights, and on the environment. Each movement has its human catalysts, without whom the great momentum may well have eventually dissipated. These seminal figures--Elvis Presley, Malcolm X, and Rachel Carson--were children of their times and, so, in an effort to better understand postwar America, we should not refer only to history textbooks (which provide the 'bare bones' facts but not necessarily the full significance of the spirit of the 1950s), but also to biographies that can 'flesh out' the times with more personal, human events.

Biography is like a versatile lens by which we can examine in detail a human being's life. But it can also be used to focus on the world in which that person lived. The reader comes away not only knowing about the person's life, but also about the social, economic and political fabric of the time. Everyone would agree that biographies can inspire us. After reading such stories, we tend to emulate the admirable qualities we saw in that figure, but we may also better identify with the subject because the story, the biography, has included his/her weaknesses that make them human, like us. Students need to be exposed not just to fiction but to good representative examples of nonfiction, particularly in history and science. One of the most effective ways to do this is through biography. In my experience as a teacher, I have found that young students enthusiastically respond to the literary and the more broadly humanitarian features of biography. Three figures, unrelenting and often flamboyant, will lead our study of the postwar era in America: Elvis Presley, Malcolm X, and Rachel Carson.

Introduction

I am an instructional coach for literacy at Barnard Environmental Studies Magnet School. The self-contained class of fourth-grade students to whom I will be teaching this unit are a heterogeneous group with varying abilities in the ten-to-eleven age range and are primarily of African-American or Hispanic-American descent. Although I have designed this unit with them in mind, I am confident that it could easily be used by teachers in

other intermediate grades as well. The focus in my curriculum unit will be on *literacy*, both reading and writing. The following 4th Generation CMT objectives will be our reading comprehension focus as students read, discuss, and write in their 'response journals':

- Identify or infer important characters, settings, problems, events, relationships, and details within a text.
- Use stated or implied evidence from the text to draw and/or support a conclusion.
- Make connections between the text and outside experiences and knowledge.
- Select and use relevant information from the text to summarize events and/or ideas in the text.
- Select, synthesize, and/or use relevant information within a written work to write a personal response to text or to extend or evaluate the work
- Demonstrate an awareness of a character's values, customs, and beliefs included the text.

In addition to these specific objectives for written response are the following unit objectives:

Unit Objectives

- To learn about the lives and times of Elvis Presley, Malcolm X and Rachel Carson.
- To learn about the specific features found in informational texts.
- To gain practice in reading nonfiction texts where you will be called upon to use, understand, and interpret such features as the index, glossary, diagrams, charts, timelines, etc.
- To learn about the literary elements found in the genre of biography: setting, characterization and theme.
- To improve comprehension skills by responding to specific CMT strand questions in a response journal.
- To learn to use a variety of graphic organizers to help organize and more clearly understand the reading content.

Strategies

- To read grade-level appropriate biographies of Elvis Presley, Malcolm X and Rachel Carson in various settings: shared reading, guided reading and independent reading.
- To regularly reflect on what you are reading and write down your responses to specific questions in a response journal.
- To view exemplary journal responses written by students, analyzing and critiquing them in an effort to improve one's own writing.
- To use a rubric of 0, 1, 2 to measure the quality of one's written response.
- To use the comprehension strategies of guessing/ predicting, connecting, wondering, noticing, picturing/ visualizing, and figuring out in a 'before, during and after reading' framework.

While reading and discussing the biographies of the 3 key figures in the unit, we will consider the following 3 aspects of the subject's character and life: the subject as revolutionary, the plateaus the subject reached during his/her lifetime, the pivotal events that influenced his/her life.

There is a definite need for young students to read more nonfiction, which requires different comprehension strategies than fiction does. In order to help students improve their comprehension of informational texts, the teacher must provide enough comprehension strategy support *before, during and after* their reading. As Nancy N. Boyles suggests in her book, *Constructing Meaning Through Kid-Friendly Comprehension Strategy Instruction*, it is important for the teacher to present the reading material in chunks and to teach the students how to monitor their reading using comprehension strategies. The goal is to have actively engaged readers before and during their reading of nonfiction. The proof of their engagement will be shown in their improved comprehension after reading (pp.84-85).

To help students organize and better understand what they read, I will use 'thinking frames' (graphic organizers) as presented in Robert J. Marzano et. al.'s *Classroom Instruction that Works* such as webs, tree diagrams, matrixes and t-charts to compare and contrast the biographic subjects, their movements and their times.

I plan to teach this unit using the instructional model reflective of a balanced reading program (again as outlined by Nancy Boyles in the aforementioned book). I will thus be able to organize my variety of materials (big books, biographies, children's history texts, articles, etc.), and there are many, according to format and reading level. The components of this model are: shared reading, guided reading and independent reading.

Briefly, during shared reading the teacher works with the whole class and reads a text aloud with the students following along (in their own copies or from a visual displayed in the front of the room). The teacher models comprehension strategies and provides opportunities for students to think aloud too. The texts used may be beyond the students' instructional reading level.

During guided reading the teacher works with small groups and uses reading materials appropriate to that group's instructional reading level. During this time the teacher guides the students as they read limited amounts of text per day. Reading is followed by dialogue among the students in the group, working to establish a shared meaning of the text. It is during this time that the teacher can closely monitor students'

progress in various reading skills and can provide opportunities for all members in the reading group to think critically.

Independent reading is done concurrently with guided reading and is a time where students read alone or in pairs. The texts need to be at their independent level--that is, at a level that they can read by themselves. After they have read the chapter or section, students will turn to their response journals and write a written response to that text, selecting from a number of possible questions reflective of the CMT (Connecticut Mastery Text) reading comprehension objectives. Some sample questions that I plan to include are:

- If you wanted to describe how the figure in this story changed, which event would you write about?
- Using information in the passage, write a paragraph that could have appeared in _____'s journal.
- Imagine that you are going to write a letter to the person you have been reading about. Write two questions you would ask that are not already answered in the story.
- How did _____'s beliefs guide his/her actions?
- What type of person do you think _____ was? Use information from the story to explain your answer.
- Imagine that you are going to give a talk to your class about _____. Using information from the story, write two important ideas that you would use in your speech.

The lessons in this unit will be introduced three to four times a week for a period of 45-60 minutes over a three-month period. My curriculum unit is divided into 4 sections:

Section I: Getting My Mind Ready to Read Nonfiction

Section II: Elvis Presley and the Rock and Roll Movement

Section: III: Malcolm X and the Civil Rights Movement

Section IV: Rachel Carson and the Environmental Movement

Section I - Getting My Mind Ready to Read Nonfiction

Students need to learn *how* to read nonfiction because of the many unique features found in it. Fontas and Pinnell outline these in great detail in the chapter, 'Teaching Genre and Content Literacy' in their book *Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6: Teaching comprehension, Genre and Content Literacy* . Typically found in

informational texts are the following features:

Print Features -- *i.e.*, bold or italic print, bullets, titles, headings, subheadings, labels, captions.

Graphic Aids -- *i.e.*, diagrams, sketches, graphs, figures, timelines, maps, charts.

Organizational Aids -- *i.e.*, table of contents, index, glossary, preface, appendix.

Illustrations -- *i.e.*, colored and/or black and white photographs or drawings, labeled drawings.

In both small and large group lessons the students need to gain practice in reading texts where they will be called upon to use, understand, and interpret such features as the index, glossary, diagrams, charts, timelines, etc.

A nonfiction text focuses on a specific topic and provides the reader with factual information through both text and visual images. Although biography is nonfiction, it exhibits characteristics found in fiction. This genre has particular appeal to young students because it blends together factual information with such features found in fiction as a central character, a focus on formative events, the tension produced as a result of internal conflict and struggle and problem resolution. (Fontas and Pinnell 2001, p. 405).

What are some of the literary elements of biography that need to be taught? First, there is **setting**, the place and historical time when the subject lived. This will be of particular importance because it is through a study of the subject's life that we come to a clearer understanding of the social movement that arose during the subject's lifetime. Second is **characterization** where we look at the subject's character and motives as well as the events and people that influenced the subject's actions and decisions. In a well-written biography we are able to see "the social-political climate of the time through the subject's eyes" (Fontas and Pinnell 2001, p. 405). People of accomplishment often have to undergo a number of difficult trials during their lives before reaching their goals. It is the courage they show in the face of adversity that we find most admirable. Indeed, many never receive recognition for their accomplishments during their lifetimes. Nevertheless, they leave a legacy behind them. It is the fourth feature, **theme**, which allows us to look more closely at the struggles and ultimate achievements the subject makes. "For many readers, the impact of biography is even more powerful because the person and events are real" (Fontas and Pinnell 2001, p. 405).

It is essential for teachers to use high-quality informational texts such as biographies to help students develop *content literacy*. Fontas and Pinnell, in their aforementioned book, maintain that "content literacy involves the strategies required to read, comprehend, and write informational texts in a variety of subjects" (p. 400). A student with a firm foundation in content literacy and, therefore an ability to derive meaning from the text, will be able to anticipate the types of organizational structures used in the text and to understand the various graphic features that will need to be interpreted. He/she also has knowledge of the vocabulary specific to the topic (Fontas and Pinnell 2001, p. 400).

There are a number of reading strategies that students need to be explicitly taught in order to be successful readers of nonfiction. How can we improve a student's comprehension of informational texts? Boyles suggests that we provide students with strong comprehension strategy support throughout their content reading--that is, before, during and after. (Boyles 2004, p. 84). There are six comprehension strategies: guessing/

predicting, connecting, wondering, noticing, picturing/ visualizing, and figuring out. In fact, these identical strategies are taught and practiced by students reading fiction texts as well. What is different when reading nonfiction is the kind of predictions students will make before reading, the type of connections that will help them better understand the text, the clues to meaning found in the particular structure of the texts and the way the graphics help support the reader's understanding of the text (Boyles 2004, p. 87).

To clarify the differences between reading fiction and nonfiction, Boyles suggests selecting a fiction and nonfiction text on the same topic and using them with your students in a shared reading format. During such lessons I will lead students through a comparison of the different ways to prepare for each of the readings. Boyles offers teachers a very useful chart entitled "Getting My Mind Ready To Read: Applying Comprehension Strategies to Fiction and Nonfiction" on p. 89 of her previously mentioned book, In this chart a listing of specific questions for fiction and then nonfiction is given to facilitate practice of each comprehension strategy. For example, when teaching students how to make connections in fiction, the question asks the students to reflect on personal experiences or books they've read that may relate to the story. When making connections to nonfiction, the question asks the students to reflect on what they already know about the topic.

In an effort to encourage my students to use the strategy of wondering during guided reading, I will present them with an 'interview organizer' similar to the one included in Debbie Deem et. al.'s book *Ready-To-Go Management Kit for Teaching Genre* . The details of this lesson are given in Lesson Plan I.

In each of the next three sections we will consider the following 3 aspects of the subject's character and life:

- The subject as revolutionary
- The plateaus the subject reached during his/her lifetime
- The pivotal events that influenced his/her life

These aspects will be explored during the three types of reading. Reading of chunks of the biography followed by discussion to arrive at comprehension of the material will be the focus during shared and guided reading. It will be within the independent reading sessions that students will clarify their thinking and understanding of what they have read by writing in response journals. As Fontas and Pinnell suggest, "The writing students do in a response journal is another path to meaning" (p. 284). To help initiate students' thinking about what they have read, I will provide a number of response journal questions from which they can select.

Section II - Elvis Presley and the Rock and Roll Movement

The Movement

Rock and Roll effectively combined elements of many musical traditions including blues, gospel, country and western, boogie-woogie and rhythm and blues. According to Stephen Feinstein in his book, *The 1950s From the Korean War to Elvis*, explains that Rock and Roll was such a hit because of "a winning formula--simple

melodies, basic chords, and a backbeat. It was loud and sexy" (p. 25). For a time Rock and Roll was referred to as the Big Beat.

The timing for this brand of music was right as one-third of the U.S. population in the mid-1950s was under fifteen years of age and searching for an identity. Rock and Roll held great appeal for all these young people who were struggling not only to define themselves but also the world they now lived in. Here was a new form of music, shunned by their parents, which David Shirley in *The History of Rock and Roll* describes as an "exciting mix" of both black music and white music (p. 41).

The early 1950s was a time when white musicians and white musical styles, in fact, dominated mainstream radio play and record sales. Black artists' blues and rhythm and blues music at that time held appeal for a smaller African-American market. Says David Shirley, "If this new style of music that was now sweeping Memphis and the surrounding area was ever to find a mainstream national audience, it would have to be introduced by a white musician" (Shirley 1997, p. 14).

Rock and Roll took the nation by storm. Screaming teenagers feverishly danced to the beat of Elvis's music. What helped spread his fame was television. As Karal Ann Marling describes in her book, *As Seen on TV*, "Rock 'n' Roll and television were made for each other. In dancing blips of light, television registered the bobbing hanks of hair, the swinging jackets, the swiveling hips. Detail wasn't important: on the little living room screen, motion--new, exciting, and visually provocative in its own right--was the distilled essence of Elvishood" (p. 179). The Rock and Roll Movement was in full swing under the leadership of 'the King'.

The Man

The person who filled the bill in 1953 was 18 year old Elvis Presley. At a time when segregation predominated, Elvis introduced 'race music' to the world. Other people had played similar music before he came along but, as Holly George-Warren states in her book, *Shake, Rattle & Roll: The Founders of Rock & Roll*, Elvis put "his unique stamp on the sound and brought it to everyone across America" (p. 6). He effectively served as the catalyst for Rock and Roll.. As the Beatle John Lennon said so emphatically, "Before Elvis, there was nothing" (*The Importance of Elvis Presley* by Adam Woog, p. 9).

The passion and unapologetic way with which Elvis brought Rock and Roll to the world marks him as a revolutionary. He redefined music forever. As students read about the early years they will note the fair amount of opposition that Elvis faced. Presley became the symbol of his rebellious generation and, in fact, revolutionized youth culture (Woog 1997, p. 11). Finally here was an artist whose music spoke directly to teenagers . Historians maintain that Rock and Roll really began in 1956 with Presley's recording of 'Heartbreak Hotel'. Indeed, no other single recording has ever had a bigger impact. Young people in postwar America, bored with the complacency all around them and unlike their parents who were striving to build new lives in suburbia, began to assume their own identity, to develop their own interests and to create their own idols. That is not to say that the youth were not caught up in the same consumer consciousness as their parents. Presley represented to them a young person from a lowly background who had made it as evidenced in the expensive clothes he wore, the sleek cars he drove and the large mansion he bought for himself and lived in. He had won for himself both fame and fortune and he had done it *his way*.

Not only did Elvis Presley introduce Rock and Roll to the world, he personified it. With great effect he played his untamed music while he wore his ducktail pompadour with long sideburns, dressed in flashy clothes and became notorious for his shocking gyrating dance moves on stage. Some say he was responsible for "single-handedly releasing the pent-up sexual frustrations of 1950s youth" (*Elvis Presley* by Magdalena Alagna, p. 6).

Plateaus and Pivotal Events

In an effort to provide a framework to guide students in their reading of Presley's life I will lay out what I consider to be the plateaus in his life and the pivotal event that influenced him during each plateau. I have laid out three plateaus that we will focus on in our study of Elvis. As a child Elvis loved to sing hymns in church. He entered his first plateau when his parents gave him a guitar for his 11th birthday. His interest grew in music as he listened to cowboy singers on the live radio show called Grand Ole Opry. While roaming the Memphis neighborhood called Shake Rag, he listened to street musicians play rhythm and blues and was very impressed by their music. The pivotal event during this plateau came when he sang an R & B song entitled 'Long Black Train' at a school talent show. His performance was met with hearty cheers from all of his peers. "Everything seemed to change for me that day," Elvis said. "After that I could always count on my music to help me make friends--especially girls" (*Elvis Presley The King* by Katherine E. Krohn, p.18).

Presley's second plateau was his whole recording career. He began recording his music under the guidance of Sam Phillips. Especially successful was the hit, 'That's All Right, Mama' which quickly climbed to the number 3 spot on the Memphis charts. Elvis grew in popularity. The pivotal event during this plateau took place when he was performing at the famous Grand Old Opry in Nashville. The audience gave him a very cool response and did not appreciate his brand of music. Elvis was so upset that he wouldn't play for 2 weeks. This event was a negative one but ultimately made him want to work harder to reach his goals. Phillips persuaded him to perform on a nationally broadcast radio program called the Louisiana Hayride and he was a big hit. He went on to record many other songs.

The third plateau that we will look at is Elvis's life after the army. He had many successes but in the context of a frustrating career, filled with ups and downs. His musical hits were not consistently great as they had been in his early career. The pivotal event is the peak he reached in the 1970s when he was called the King of rock and roll.

I provide these plateaus and pivotal events because an important unit objective in our reading of biographies is to trace the subject's character development. The sample questions cited in the beginning of this unit require the student to do just that. It is a very interesting though sad journey we take in tracing the life of Elvis. Initially we feel exhilarated when we read about the rush of exciting events that swept him up and made him a star. When asked how he first got into the music business, Elvis replied, "I just fell into it, really...The people were looking for something different and I was lucky. I came along just in time" (Woog 1997, p. 31). We approach the last year of his career and indeed his life with a feeling of sadness. Elvis tried to make comebacks and to some degree was successful but all the drugs he took and the eating binges he went on eventually took their toll and ultimately led to his early death.

In regard to response journals, I plan to include the following journal questions for students to reflect on and write about after reading:

Write an entry that could have appeared in Elvis's journal during the time

- when he was first making TV appearances.
- when he was stormed by loving fans on stage
- when he was in the army.
- when Colonel Parker became his new manager.

How did Elvis's beliefs about his music guide his actions on stage? If you wanted to describe how Elvis changed, what event would you write about? Imagine you are a young fan of Elvis when he first became popular. What two questions would you include in a letter to him? What type of person do you think Elvis was? Use information from the biography to explain your answer.

Section III - Malcolm X and The Civil Rights Movement

The Movement

During the years following WWII African-Americans began a long struggle to improve conditions for themselves. This was called the Civil Rights Movement. "With the war's end, many African-Americans came out of the military service determined to fight racism at home" (Collier & Collier 2002, p. 26). During this time blacks in the U.S. were treated like second-class citizens. It was in the South that segregation was especially rampant. Diane McWhorter in her previously mentioned book succinctly defines segregation as "a surreal conspiracy of law, politics, economics, and tradition that trapped black Americans in a lowly corner of society" (p. 13). Blacks had to attend segregated and usually inferior schools, sit in separate sections of buses, trains and theatres and use restrooms and water fountains identified by black-only signs. They had to be treated by black doctors and were not allowed to enter most health clinics or hospitals. It was in the South that lynchings continued and the Ku Klux Klan continued to terrorize many blacks. In addition, throughout most of the South they were denied the right to vote.

One of the fronts on which African-Americans fought relentlessly was in education as they strove to attain equal education for their children. They viewed education as the means by which they would gain economic freedom (Collier & Collier 2002, p. 28). In 1950 the NAACP took up this cause and went to court to challenge this practice of racial segregation of schools. It was as a result of the famous Supreme Court case known as *Brown vs. Board of Education* under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall that an end was put to legal segregation of blacks in American schools. Change was slow but it had begun.

In 1955 segregation on buses was challenged in Montgomery, Alabama by a black seamstress named Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat in the white section of the bus. Martin Luther King, Jr. took up her case and led a highly successful bus boycott. Collier & Collier state that times had changes and "Black leadership was growing bolder" (p. 37). Although King insisted on using nonviolent tactics to achieve their goals, white opponents to the civil rights movement did not and our country saw violence rear its ugly head over and over again. Many freedom riders fighting segregation as well as those involved in the movement in the 1960s to register blacks met with severe beatings and even death. Demonstrators united with King against segregation endured police use of high-pressure hoses, wild dogs and billy clubs. An event that ultimately led to the passing of the first civil rights act was the Ku Klux Klan church bombing in 1963 in Birmingham that killed 4 innocent young black girls.

A growing number of more militant black leaders, impatient with the many set-backs in the movement and the slow change taking place, started to make their voices heard. They favored a more confrontational approach to protest segregation and racial violence in the South. The Civil Rights Movement was, in fact, splitting up. One of these militant and very outspoken leaders was Malcolm X.

The Man

Malcolm X had his first official contact with the civil rights movement in 1965 when he gave a speech in Selma, Alabama to a black audience at Brown Chapel. It was here that he urged people to take their freedom by any means they could. He, for one, did not intend to use nonviolence and criticized King for doing so. McWhorter describes the pose that Malcolm X struck on stage. "He was fierce, aggressive, antiviolen, and not even Christian" (p. 123). His stance was revolutionary. Malcolm X was a clear and ringing voice for social change during the civil rights movement in postwar America. He expressed rage at the slow pace of change for African-Americans in our society. Representing an opposing view to Dr. Martin Luther King's, Malcolm X initially preached racial separation and complete equality by any means necessary. Eventually joining the civil rights bandwagon, he presented himself as the more dynamic alternative to King's moderation. His primary message was to urge African-Americans to close ranks and unite together before aspiring to integrate with white society. Then they might be able to negotiate their relationship more from a position of strength. By highlighting the limitations of the civil rights movement, especially its failure to address the economic deprivation of the northern African-American ghettos, Malcolm X pushed Dr. King toward a more radical and wide-ranging agenda.

Malcolm X was forever listening to and learning from the influences around him. His ability to grow and change because of new life experiences and insights he gained are legendary. Arthur Diamond highlights this ability in his book, *Malcolm X: A Voice for Black America*, when he says about him: "One quality that he consistently showed in his life was his ability to change: to listen, to accept that he was wrong, to learn, and to grow" (p. 114). Malcolm X's rigid stance toward segregation, for example, softened as his knowledge and varied experiences grew. "By 1965 Malcolm's philosophy had grown closer to King's vision of a just, multiracial society" (Whorter 2004, p. 127). As a result of his 1964 pilgrimage to Mecca where he interacted with Muslims of many races, he came back to America reconsidering his anti-white stand (McWhorter 2004, p. 127). His changing views also led to his split with the Nation of Islam. One wonders what new growth and changes in philosophy that Malcolm X might have undergone and the impact he might have had on the civil rights movement had he not met his untimely, violent death on February 21, 1965.

Plateaus and Pivotal Events

Malcolm X entered his first plateau when as a young teenager he dropped out of school and began a life of street crime. At 16 he began drinking and taking drugs. Never sticking with any job for very long, in Harlem he began to hustle marijuana. He was fascinated by all the con men he met and like them he began to live by his wits, selling drugs and living the 'fast' life. At 21, however, he was arrested for a string of burglaries and was given a ten-year prison sentence at Charlestown State Prison. The pivotal event during this time was his prison experience where he learned about the Nation of Islam. Malcolm was reborn and stated that the teachings of its leader, Elijah Muhammad, "hit him like a blinding light" (Cwiklik 1991, p. 17). While in prison Malcolm X reformed his life and at 27 was released from prison on parole.

Malcolm entered his second plateau when he moved to Detroit and joined the Nation of Islam. He was very impressed with how Nation members followed a strict moral code which included not smoking or drinking. He marveled at the way they took pride in their black heritage. Like them, Malcolm X came to believe white people were all white devils who had brainwashed blacks and kept them in a subservient position. The pivotal event for Malcolm was when he actually met the leader of the Nation of Islam. "Malcolm was not prepared for the wave of emotions he felt when he finally met Elijah Muhammad and heard him speak. 'I worshiped him,' he later said" (Cwiklik 1991, p. 18). Malcolm X was soon named a minister of the organization and gave many

fiery speeches. He was responsible for recruiting many new members.

The third plateau that Malcolm entered began with his gradual disillusionment with Elijah Muhammad. Suspended by his leader from the ministry in 1963 for his remarks on the assassination of President Kennedy, Malcolm began to feel the growing tension between them. Other members of the Nation started viewing him as a competitor and the newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, which he had started, began denouncing him as a traitor. What particularly shocked him were the rumors that there was a conspiracy among his Muslim brothers to kill him. Jack Rummel in his book, *Malcolm X: Militant Black Leader*, uses a quote from one of Malcolm's writings to express how devastated Malcolm felt over this turn of events. He said, "I felt like something in *nature* had failed--like the sun or the stars" (p. 90). He resigned from the Nation in March 1964. The pivotal event for Malcolm was when he left the Nation of Islam. No longer influenced by his leader's philosophy, Malcolm began to experience real freedom of thought and in widening his horizons started thinking about the black struggle for independence in international terms. Also, his interest in traditional Islam grew. Malcolm X went on a pilgrimage to Mecca. It was here that he learned about the ideals of love and of brotherhood of true Islam. He became aware of how Elijah Muhammad had simply changed such teachings to suit his purposes. Although still not an advocate of integration, "he realized that white people weren't all devils, and that peace and understanding among all peoples was the highest goal" (Cwiklik 1991, p. 26). It must be said, however, that even though many of his beliefs changed once he left the Nation of Islam, his primary message stayed the same--that is, that blacks would only achieve freedom by fighting for it.

I will include the following response journal questions for my students to select from during their biography readings:

Write an entry that could have appeared in Malcolm X's journal during the time when

- he was living the fast life in Harlem.
- he was put in prison for robbery.
- he learned about the Nation of Islam from his brother.

How did Malcolm's beliefs about the plight of black people affect his actions? If you could have written Malcolm X a letter during his lifetime, what two questions would you ask him? Describe how Malcolm X changed over time. What type of leader do you think Malcolm was? Use information from the biography to explain your answer.

To help my students better appreciate and understand the momentous changes that Malcolm X went through in his life, I plan to have them record, compare and reflect on the numerous stages of his life after reading a biography in a guided reading setting. I will use a comparison matrix as included in Marzano et. al.'s aforementioned book. Lesson Plan II details this procedure.

Section IV - Rachel Carson and the Environmental Movement

The Movement

The chemical industry thrived in postwar America. One major development was the creation of plastic used to create everything from household furniture, to Tupperware, telephones and music records. A second focus was on pesticides. Some of the same organophosphate compounds used to develop chemical weapons during the two world wars was now being applied to the creation of both pesticides and fertilizers. Farmers were elated over their newfound ability, through the use of pesticides, to grow so much food without being hampered by insects and weeds. However, enthusiasm over this 'green revolution' was short-lived when evidence showed whole ecosystems being disrupted as a result of heavy pesticide use.

It was, in particular, the damage caused by the use of DDT, an organic pesticide which Stuart A. Kallen in his book, *A Cultural History of the United States: The 1950s*, describes "as prevalent in the fifties as automobile tailfins" (p. 106) that brought about an environmental consciousness not seen before. As the ill effects of this chemical surfaced, people began to realize that DDT was a harmful poison that tainted drinking water and killed wildlife. DDT also became linked to an increase in cancer rates in humans. The uninterrupted use of this pesticide continued until 1962 when Rachel Carson wrote her highly researched exposé, *Silent Spring*. In it she warned that the unabated use of chemical pesticides like DDT would result in the destruction of vast amounts of our nation's wildlife. Carson became the catalyst which eventually led to the banning of DDT in both the U.S. and Europe in 1972.

Throughout the nation an environmental movement began to grow. Both the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society boasted burgeoning memberships. Oil spill disasters spurred public consciousness and the environmentalist-sentiment that no longer could industrial progress be allowed to continue unchecked when it was wreaking irrevocable damage on our natural world spread. By the late sixties our nation witnessed a very active back-to-earth movement as people began to rediscover the beauty of our natural world. Typical of these times was the emergence of recycling centers, people's parks, health food stores stocked with organic foods and rural farm communes.

By the early 1970s the attitude of the American public reflected this growing concern over protecting our natural resources and as Edmund H. Harvey Jr., the editor of *Our Glorious Century*, informs us, the environment was rated our country's "most pressing domestic problem" (p. 361). A series of important legislation was passed during this decade and the Environmental Protection Agency was established.

Who was this seminal figure who set the stage for this environmental movement, who warned us of the urgency of saving our earth and, indeed, of realizing our interconnectedness with all of nature before it was too late? Let's take a look.

The Woman

Rachel Carson, former marine biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, was also a nature author of considerable renown. Her books-- *Under the Sea Wind*, *The Edge of the Sea* and *The Sea Around Us* (which remained on the New York bestseller list for 86 weeks) spoke of the interconnectedness of nature and all living things. In 1962, after year of arduous research, Carson published her book, *Silent Spring*. In this book she used her formidable skills as a writer to alert the world to the danger to our environment of unharnessed

technological progress. In *Silent Spring* Carson exposed the very harmful effects brought about by DDT. It took Carson years to write this book. She was compelled to finish it even amidst such trials as the death of her beloved mother in 1958 and having to undergo major surgery for breast cancer in 1960. According to Adele Glimm in her book, *Rachel Carson: Protecting Our Earth*, Rachel Carson "knew that this book was important, probably the most important work she had ever done or would ever do" (p. 88).

After its publication, Carson faced a barrage of attackers from the chemical, farming, and food industries. She also received both love and hate letters from the public. Not only was Rachel receiving a lot of mail in response to her book, but also the U.S. government received many letters from people alarmed by what they had read. In the Spring of 1963, the U.S. Congress began to investigate pollution and to determine how government groups could best cooperate together to control it. Rachel was called to testify before this committee to speak about pesticide pollution. She came prepared with 55 pages of meticulous notes and a list of experts who had read and approved her manuscript. Rachel made her case with both scholarly documentation and eloquence. As a result of her testimony, Congress began to pass bills to protect our environment.

While other revolutionaries used fiery speeches, violent and nonviolent tactics and political campaigns, Rachel Carson used her writing skills to create books that very powerfully influenced social change in American life.

Plateaus and Pivotal Events

Rachel Carson entered her first plateau when she switched majors while studying at the Pennsylvania College for Women. She gave up the study of literature for science, particularly, biology even though the road of a female scientist at that time was anything but smooth. According to Candice F. Ransom in her book, *Listening to Crickets: A Story of Rachel Carson*, "In the 1920s, science was not considered a 'proper' career for a young woman. Rachel was aware that there were few jobs open to a female biologist. But she listened to her heart. She knew she was making the right move" (p. 18). Carson graduated with high honors and received a scholarship in the zoology graduate school program at Johns Hopkins University. She went on to become a marine biologist and a writer of several books about the sea and its natural systems.

The pivotal event came in 1958 when Carson received a very troubling letter from a friend, a newspaper editor in Massachusetts, Olga Owens Huckins. She wrote about the large number of dead and dying birds found in her town after an aerial spraying of its marshes with DDT to get rid of mosquitoes. Olga personally witnessed the agonizing death of many of its birds. Useful insects like bees and grasshoppers also had been killed. Ironically, the mosquitoes had not been destroyed but instead had come back with a vengeance! Sickened by this report and prompted by her concern that these harmful effects probably were not limited to animals and insects but also were probably affecting humans, Carson began in earnest to read extensively about pollution and pesticides. The research she compiled was used in her book, *Silent Spring*.

Carson entered her second plateau with the publication of *Silent Spring*. In this book she made a proposal considered very radical at that time--industry needed to be regulated in order to protect our natural environment. Her view that our world's natural resources needed to be properly cared for clashed with the Eisenhower administration's desire to relax existing conservation policies and open the forests, mountains and rivers to suburban development. Rachel became the catalyst for changing our view of man's relationship with the natural environment. It was through her efforts, her articles, books and speeches that she informed the public that the natural world was in grave danger if man continued his reckless treatment of the natural environment.

The pivotal event came with the aftermath of its publication. Rachel Carson was often pigeon-holed (stereotyped and marginalized) as a 'nature nut' by critics. She met with a lot of adversity, especially from the chemical industry. "There was money to be made advertising, selling and using chemical pesticides and money to be lost when a Rachel Carson suddenly told the whole world that many of these chemicals were dangerous to people and all natural life" (Glimm 200, p. 90). In the end, Carson was victorious and strict measures were taken to protect our vulnerable environment. The message of *Silent Spring* still resonates today. As Catherine Reel exclaims in her book, *Rachel Carson: The Wonder of Nature*, "Nearly 30 years after her death, her words still bring the beauty and the harmony of the natural world to life" (p. 65). It is up to us to preserve it.

I will include the following response journal questions for my students to choose from after reading:

- How did the times in which Rachel Carson live influence her actions?
- How did her love of nature and beliefs about the natural world guide her actions?
- Write an entry that could have appeared in Carson's journal during the time when she first learned about the destructive effects of DDT
- What type of person do you think Rachel Carson was? Use information from the story to explain your answer.
- Imagine that you are going to give a talk to your class about Rachel Carson. Write two important ideas that you would use in your speech.
- What quality do you most admire in Rachel Carson?

Elvis Presley, Malcolm X and Rachel Carson, leaders in their time, went through many changes in their character development and they have each left us with enduring legacies. The social movements they were so closely linked to helped shape the decade known as 'The Fifties' making it the distinctive and memorable era that it became, one that we in the new millennium look back upon fondly with not just a little bit of nostalgia. In Lesson Plan III I will ask my students to explore the impact that each of these figures had on our society. I will use a bubble frame to organize the information and the conclusions we arrive at.

Lesson Plan I

Objectives: To practice the comprehension strategy of wondering by asking questions before, during and after reading a biography in a guided reading session.

To imagine you are the subject whose life you have read about and respond to questions as you think he or she would have.

Materials: Multiple copies of the biography, notebook paper, copies of the graphic organizer called the interview organizer, chart paper, markers.

Procedure: 1. Distribute copies of the answer organizer, (a graphic organizer with 3 columns with consecutive titles of your questions, character's answer, character's qualities and have students examine its structure before using it.

2. Provide practice for students to ask substantive wh-questions (who, what, where, when, why, how) by modeling a few yourself about a well-known character such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Then elicit examples from the students in the reading group and record them on a large version of the interview organizer displayed on the large chart paper.

3. Proceed to the second column and have the students imagine they are the character (in this case, Dr. King) and ask them to respond to the questions in ways they think he would have answered. Record these in the appropriate column.

4. Examine each response and together have the students come up with character qualities reflective of these responses.

5. After looking at the given biography chosen for the group (at their instructional level), exploring the cover, table of contents, index and a quick review of any illustrations or photographs, ask the students to write down on notebook paper some questions they are wondering about before reading the book. Return to these questions later after finishing the book to see which ones were and were not answered in that text.

6. After reading the book (which may not be completed for a number of days), ask the students to write down 4 or 5 wh-questions that they would like to ask the subject they have read about. They are then to write down what they think the subject would say and finally to infer what character traits such responses exemplify. Encourage a lively discussion.

(I took the idea of the interview organizer from Debbie Deem et. al.'s aforementioned book.)

Lesson Plan II

Objectives: To record, compare and reflect on the many stages in Malcolm X's life. To specifically think about what he was like at the beginning of his life and then at the end.

Materials: Multiple copies of a biography of Malcolm X, notebook paper, post-it notes, a comparison matrix on chart paper, markers.

Procedure: 1. After reading a biography of Malcolm X, display the enlarged comparison matrix on chart paper as shown below:

The Many Transformations of Malcolm X

Stage His Priorities His Beliefs

2. Begin with a discussion of how people change over time. Ask them to think about the many changes they have gone through in their lives thus far.
3. Ask the students to go back to their books, and mark passages in the story with post-it notes that show a distinct change in Malcolm X's life examining also if and when his priorities and beliefs changed. Realistically, this may well be done over a period of many days and managed by taking a chapter at a time. Discussion should naturally follow as students share their findings.
4. Together as a group fill in the categories on the above comparison matrix.
5. Ask the students to fold a piece of notebook paper in half and label one column 'beginning' and the other 'end'. Then ask them to write down a description of what Malcolm X was like at the beginning of his life, perhaps when he was a successful student before his father was killed and at the end of his life after he had broken away from the Nation of Islam.
6. Students will then share their responses and a discussion will ensue.

Lesson Plan III

Objective: To compare and contrast the accomplishments of Elvis Presley, Malcolm X and Rachel Carson and the impact they had on American society.

Materials: Student copies of a bubble frame (a web), an enlarged bubble frame displayed on chart paper, markers.

Procedure: 1. This will be a culminating whole class lesson after students have all done extensive reading about these 3 figures. Distribute a copy of a bubble frame (many circles connected with lines). Ask them to write the main topic, '3 influential people', in the large center circle and the name of a figure in each of the medium-sized circles.

2. On lines extending from each of the medium-sized circles ask students to work with a partner and list accomplishments made by each figure.

3. Come back together as a whole group to discuss ideas and to record ideas on the enlarged bubble frame on chart paper.

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Appendix

This unit has incorporated the following Connecticut Board of Education Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks:

- 1.1 Students use appropriate strategies before, during and after reading in order to construct meaning.
- 1.2 Students interpret, analyze and evaluate text in order to extend understandings and appreciation.
- 1.4 Students communicate with others to create interpretations of written, oral and visual texts.

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