



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2007 Volume I: American Voices: Listening to Fiction, Poetry, and Prose

The Civil and the Wild in American Discourse

Curriculum Unit 07.01.05
by Melissa Dailey

Introduction

"The Civil and the Wild in American Discourse" helps students develop a stronger sense of voice through the study of the civil and wild in American literature. According to the *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* civil is: "1. of, pertaining to, or consisting of citizens: *civil life; civil society*. 2. of the commonwealth or state: *civil affairs* . 3. of the ordinary life and affairs of citizens, as distinguished from military and ecclesiastical life and affairs. 4. befitting a citizen: *a civil duty* . 5. of, or in a condition of, social order or organized government; civilized. 6. adhering to the norms of polite social intercourse: *civil relations* . 7. marked by benevolence: *He was a very civil sort*. 8. (of divisions of time) legally recognized in the ordinary affairs of life: *the civil year*. 9. of or pertaining to civil law" (Costello 249).

"Wild: 1. living in a state of nature; not tamed or domesticated: *a wild animal*. 2. growing or produced without cultivation, as flowers, fruit, or honey. 3. uninhabited; underdeveloped: *wild country*. 4. uncivilized; barbarous: *wild tribes*. 5. of unrestrained violence or intensity, etc.: *wild storms*. 6. characterized by violent feelings or excitement: *a wild look*. 7. frantic; distracted: *to drive someone wild*. 8. unruly or lawless: *a gang of wild boys*. 9. unrestrained by reason or prudence: *to regret one's wild youth*. 10. amazing; incredible: *It's wild that he's suing for divorce*. 11. disheveled: *wild hair* . 12. wide of the mark: *a wild throw*. 13. *Informal*. Intensely eager or enthusiastic: *I'm wild about your new hairstyle*. 14. (of a card) having its value decided by the wishes of the players. -adv. 15. in an unrestrained manner; wildly. -n. 16. Often, **wilds** , an uncultivated, uninhabited region or tract; wilderness: *a safari to the wilds of Africa*. -v.t. 17. *Slang*. To attack or assault violently: *The gang wilded some runners*" (Costello 1523) .

This unit focuses on the outsiders' point of view on the ills of society. Tone, structure, style, sound, audience and content all play a role in voice. Each of these elements has the potential to be civil or wild. Frequently the civil does not exist in absence of the wild. The two are frequently merged. Just as an individual is not one dimensional, the means of expressing oneself is not one dimensional. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Miss Watson, a civilized character, owns a slave, which is a rather savage act. Therefore her character exhibits not only hypocrisy but complexity. Miss Watson also represents education which is a construct of the civilized world. In Huck's depiction of life outside the civilizing forces of Widow Douglas' household he says, "It was kind of lazy and jolly, laying off comfortable all day, smoking and fishing, and no books nor study. Two months or more run along, and my clothes got to be all rags and dirt, and I didn't see how I'd ever got to like it so well at

the widow's, where you had to wash, and eat on a plate, and comb up, and go to bed and get up regular, and be forever bothering over a book, and have old Miss Watson pecking at you all the time" (Twain 24). Here it is clear that Huck perceives education as a part of Widow Douglas' plot to "civilize" him.

Although there is much criticism of the idea of civilization in Twain's text, the civil is extremely useful. Many writers use it when trying to reach a certain audience or objective. Claude McKay chose the sonnet to comment on American society. The sonnet conveys that McKay is educated and has control of language. Nevertheless the content is at times aggressive and hostile; he uses images of wild animals to expose the savageness of America. In his poem, "America" he writes, "Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,/ And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth," (McKay 985). This shows the complexity of voice through the concepts of civility and wildness. His message is powerful because of the manipulation of the civil and the wild and of language. Through the study of the elements of voice students will develop a more sophisticated perspective on how to create and manipulate their own use of language. A greater range within their voice will emerge. In addition, through the analysis of different writers and artists, students will develop an understanding of the role of civilization in their own lives and have an opportunity to reflect on the civilizing forces of their own educations.

Overview

"Civil Discourse in America" will emphasize the power of the spoken word to articulate an outsider's perspective on society's problems. We will use a variety of genres and media to explore this concept. We will study the manner in which one conveys her unrest, whether it is through music, poetry, prose, speech, art or the essay, and whether the tone is civil or wild. In an attempt to capture "American voices" there will be a cross section of texts that will include authors of both sexes and different ethnicities.

The readings will include: Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* ; Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* ; Martin Luther King Jr., "Address to the March on Washington"; Sojourner Truth, "Speech at Meeting Commemorating Emancipation"; Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"; Claude McKay, "Outcast," "America," and "If We Must Die"; Miguel Pinero, "La Bodega Sold Dreams" and "The Book of Genesis According to St. Miguelito." Each of these texts comments on the ills of society focusing on the issue of race in America. Although each of the texts has a critical view of mainstream attitudes toward race their critique does not end there. Thoreau for example attacks the U.S. involvement in war. Particularly as the unit delves into art and music the problems with society broach different issues. For example the subject of consumerism in America is attacked in Barbara Kruger's art. The media is brought into consideration in Kruger as well as bands like Public Enemy and Black Flag. Each of the writers is critical of the mainstream in one fashion or another. I have selected a variety of genres to represent the various ways in which one can express him or herself. In addition to the texts above we will listen to music and look briefly at art.

In this unit students will think critically about what they are reading as well as the world around them. They will engage the writing process while being aware of their purpose and audience. Drawing connections between texts and to personal life will be key to the intent of the unit. Students will evaluate the imagery, voice, syntax and diction of a variety of texts.

Students will produce numerous writing assignments. A journal will be kept throughout the unit. The journal

will be used for responses to reading, writing prompts, classwork, homework and drafts of major writing assignments. Journal writing assignments should be no less than a page each. The following writing assignments will be required: a speech, an expository essay and an analytical comparison essay. The papers should be between three and five pages each while the speech should be shorter. Drafts of these assignments will be submitted and discussed. The final project will be in the genre of the student's choice. She may rewrite a previous assignment if she wishes. Time in class will be provided for peer evaluations and teacher conferences. The final projects will be published in a class magazine. Part of the intent of the unit is for students to sharpen their own voices. Through the study of different writers and artists students will develop an understanding of how to manipulate the elements of language in construction of their voices.

Some of the pre-reading questions will include: What does "civil" mean? What does "wild" mean? What constitutes "civil language"? What constitutes wild language? What is civilized and how does it relate to language? When is it important to use civil language? When is uncivil language appropriate? When and why is uncivil language used? How have American ideas about what civil is changed over time? What are civil rights? Who are the voices from the outside? How does being an outsider relate to being civilized or wild? In what ways have you been civilized? In what ways are you wild? What are the controlling forces in your life? What are the positives and negatives of being civilized or wild? Students will discuss these questions in both their journal and in class.

Student Body

This unit is designed for an honors section of 11th grade American literature. I teach at the Sound School in New Haven Connecticut. The Sound School is a college preparatory school that offers a focus in aquaculture and agriculture. It is a magnet school. The student body comes from New Haven and twenty surrounding towns. Currently there are approximately three hundred students. Next year we will increase our size to three hundred and sixty. The individual class size is approximately 18 at this time. The campus is unique in that it consists of multiple buildings. Students travel from one building to the next when going to class. In addition to moving from class to class even in inclement weather, students are extremely active in their coursework. Students are frequently on the water. As a result we attract students that are used to an engaging curriculum. It can create a challenge to the core academic subjects that are taught in the classroom. In English I try to make the classroom as active and student-centered as possible. Unfortunately my classroom is small and somewhat cramped. Therefore it is difficult to maneuver some activities. Nevertheless it does not stop us. If need be we go outside.

I am designing this course for an 11th grade American Literature course. I will be teaching multiple sections, including honors. In addition to the honors section, there will be groups of students with a little less motivation.

We use a rotating block schedule at the Sound School. This means that the first two classes of the day are an hour and ten minutes, the third period is an hour and the final two class periods are fifty minutes. One class gets dropped each day.

The Novel

The initial reading will be an excerpt from Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. This text will begin the unit because Maya loses her voice after a traumatic experience. She does regain her voice through the help of a teacher and of literature. The excerpt I selected describes Mrs. Bertha Flowers' influence on Marguerite regaining her voice. This is an important text to begin with: it brings to light the importance of one's voice, and students will be working on their own voices during the course of the unit. In addition it reinforces the concept that the voice we will be covering includes the written as well as the spoken word. Mrs. Flowers says to Marguerite, "Your grandmother says you read a lot. Every chance you get. That's good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning." (Angelou 57) At this point I will play a reading of the excerpt to the class. At this point we will discuss the sound of the voice and how it contributes to the meaning of the work. Students will evaluate how the spoken word is a crucial component to voice.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn will be read in its entirety. Huck Finn is a character who lives outside of society. He only visits the civilized world when he ventures onto land and experiences society. Widow Douglas attempts to "civilize" Huck but he rejects her efforts. He absorbs some of society's values but questions them at the same time. The individuals, like Miss Watson, who are supposed to be "civilized" own slaves. Huck struggles with what civilized society tells him is right about slavery and what he believes in his own heart to be true. For example he feels compelled at times to turn Jim in but knows in his heart that it is the wrong thing to do. That Huck lives outside of the societal norm is actually a good thing. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* society is a corrupting influence. This sets up a framework through which students question values and society.

Another concept that will be broached is the issue of language and dialect. The use of vernacular is tied to civilization. Mark Twain's use of dialect also works to identify a character as out of the mainstream. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* contains a variety of voices outside the mainstream that can be evaluated. The analysis of different types of outsider voices will continue throughout the unit.

We will begin the discussion of language by discussing the use of the word "nigger." Is this a civilized word and what does it say about the person that uses it? Are there contexts where the use of the word is appropriate or important? Reading the article, "Teaching the N-Word" by Emily Bernard could prove worthwhile at this juncture. Because this article deals with the issue of using "nigger" in the classroom this should set the tone for a mature discussion of the topic. Once the article is read and we have our own discussion on the word we will draw connections to the text. Should the characters in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* be deemed uncivilized because they use the word? In what ways can we see past the use of the word as hostile and offensive and see its worth in the text? How does the use of satire affect the use of the word? Can a character be moral and still use the word? How so?

Huck Finn's language is clearly not standard English yet he is a moral and civilized citizen. Jim too is a good person but uses language that is not considered to be of the educated and superior class of society. On the other hand there are characters like Pap Finn that are not morally sound and use non-standard even hostile language. The language of each character can be seen in somewhat complex terms of civilized and wild at the same time. Nevertheless it is fairly clear that Standard English is thought to be the most civilized manner to communicate. Characters like Tom try to sound like a model citizen by attempting to use inflated language while Judge Thatcher is a truly educated and moral citizen and uses the language to prove it. Even though

Judge Thatcher's language is an indicator of high status the mainstream of the text is of speakers of non-standard English. The folk language is the predominant language. (Sewell)

It should prove interesting to discuss the issue of switching language. This is when an individual can switch from using non-standard English to using standard English. For the students it will be interesting for them to explore their own ability to switch from using one form of the English language to another. We will discuss the importance of such a trait as it applies to the lives of students today. Students should be able to speak one way with their friends and another way when applying for a job or writing a paper for class. It is a skill that apparently Huck does not have but some of the other characters do have.

We will spend approximately three weeks on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* . In this time one of the strategies I will use with the students to get them thinking critically is to have them generate their own questions about the text. I will guide them through the process of creating questions worth discussing. We will focus on interpretive and "big idea" questions. Students will guide discussion with questions they generate on their own.

Speeches

The next piece I will include is Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Address to the March on Washington." This text will introduce students to civil rights and the power of speech including particular rhetorical devices. Dr. King was a leader in the civil rights movement. He spoke of nonviolent means to solve the problems of racism in America. To say his speeches were extremely powerful and skillful is an understatement. His speeches are not only a segue into the concept of civil rights but an excellent opportunity to analyze rhetorical strategies. I think his language is a good starting point for this part of the unit.

I will provide students with a list of literary devices such as anaphora, metaphor, simile, alliteration, allusion, etc. We will read the speech aloud as a group. While reading, students will look for examples from this list. Once we have finished reading, students will have the opportunity to look over the speech and identify the literary devices. This will lead to a discussion of King's language and questions about its effectiveness. Some questions we will discuss are: Is King an "outsider"? Who is his audience? Does King speak in a civilized manner? How is King different from Huck? How is he the same?

Sojourner Truth also spoke of the injustices in society. In her speeches, "Ain't I a Woman" and "Speech at Meeting Commemorating Emancipation," Sojourner Truth depicts the double oppression of being a woman and an African American in America. Sojourner Truth's language was somewhat different from King's. Her language was not standard and therefore was not considered civilized by the mainstream, white society. In this way she differed from King. He used standard English to convey his message. Although she uses nonstandard English, her voice is heard and her message is clear. How did this happen? This could lead into an interesting discussion. Some of the questions I will ask are: In what ways would Sojourner Truth's language be considered civilized and in what ways would it not be considered civilized according to mainstream standards? How was the word of an African American woman actually heard at that time? What difference does this difference in voice make?

Once the discussion of the speeches winds down, students will take the opportunity to write their own

speeches in their journals. Only one draft is required at this time. It is merely an exercise to get students thinking about issues and utilizing rhetorical devices. Nevertheless students must keep in mind their audience. I want them to take a stance on an issue in America today. They should focus on a societal problem. Students will identify themselves as an outsider in some way and identify their audience. They will select a tone for their speech. They may choose a genial tone or an unruly one. They may use standard or nonstandard English. Select students will perform their speech in front of the class. Each of the following criteria will be evaluated on a scale of one to ten: the audience is identifiable, it deals with a problem currently affecting society, there is an appropriate tone for the subject and audience, the language is compelling and persuasive, there is sufficient support for the position, it is coherent and cohesive and there is a clear style.

Essays

The next part of the unit will focus on essays. Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" is clearly a must-read in this unit. This essay touches upon a number of the themes I have already mentioned. Like Huck, Thoreau seems to make a choice to live literally outside of the mainstream. Whether these men have a choice is debatable to a certain extent. Nevertheless the environment they live in, albeit temporarily, is outside of society. It might even be interesting to debate the privileged status of Huck and Thoreau as compared to the status of King and Sojourner Truth. How does their status as outsiders differ? How does this affect their message? Do any of them have choice? If so, to what extent?

There are a number of connections that can be made with "Civil Disobedience." Students should be able to relate to statements regarding war. This could be tied to what is happening today with the war in Iraq. Thoreau discusses slavery in his essay and this can be tied to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Sojourner Truth. Finally, his discussion of a civil type of disobedience is similar to King's.

After reading and discussing "Civil Disobedience," students will write a connection response in their journals. At this time I will discuss with the students the importance of the journal. Thoreau kept his own journals. His journal writings were a jumping off point for much of his writing. The journal is an excellent tool for self-reflection and drafting.

Julia Alvarez reflects on her own experience in "First Muse." Alvarez was born in the United States but moved, with her family, to the Dominican Republic for a period of time. Eventually the family returned to the United States. In her essay, "First Muse," Alvarez talks about her experience as a woman in the Dominican culture and her experience with American schools both in the Dominican Republic and in the United States. As a female it was expected that she get married and have children. Her career was not a topic of interest to others.

Alvarez shares with the reader her experience as an outsider within her own outsider community, the struggles that she endured as a result of this outsider status and how she succeeded in becoming who she wanted to be. A number of interesting issues are brought to light. She discusses the role of women, language and writing. The essay ends on a hopeful note. Alvarez finds that writing is her life, and she doesn't have to pursue it in the absence of romance.

At the end of this section students will be required to write an essay. I will encourage students to steer clear of the five paragraph essay and use the essays we've read to guide them. At this juncture we can discuss the

civilizing aspect of the five paragraph essay. In order to refine their skills as a writer it is important to learn the five paragraph essay structure. It is a building block to clarity. Nevertheless it is stifling and rudimentary. It is essentially unnecessary except to have students conform their writing. Therefore, students will have a few options for the essay. They may write an analytical piece using one of the texts. They may also write a more personal piece in the same vein as Alvarez or Thoreau.

Poetry

Although Claude McKay was born and raised in Jamaica he is also an important African American voice. He lived in America for a period of time, and wrote some intense poetry as part of the Harlem Renaissance. I thought it was interesting that McKay chose to write some of his poetry in sonnet form. He used a very traditional structure for his somewhat radical poetry. Although his sonnets are not exactly in the perfect sonnet style, he does choose the sonnet. He uses a structure that shows he is educated and has a command of the language while expressing some ideas on the wilder side. His role as an outsider is distinct and disturbing.

The three sonnets I want to focus on are "If We Must Die," "Outcast" and "America." All of these poems were published in the *Liberator*, a New York magazine of the 1920s. McKay even worked for the magazine for a period of time. These poems have a strong message about being African American. In "If We Must Die," McKay is urging people to fight back against injustice. He wants African Americans to fight back literally. He says, "And for their thousand death blows deal one deathblow!" (McKay 984) and "Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" (McKay 984) This is a very different message from what we heard earlier from King. In "Outcast" McKay depicts the experience of the African American and identifies him or her as estranged from society. This truly identifies him as an outsider. This estrangement is a direct result of the white man's influence. He says, "For I was born, far from my native clime,/ Under the white man's menace, out of time" (McKay 987). Finally I would like to discuss "America." In this poem there is a sign of hope. McKay declares that he hates America but admires its strength. He says, "I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!" (McKay 985) I think it's a good idea to end on a more positive note but not take away from the aggression and antiestablishment elements of the poetry.

Studying the prosody of the sonnets should surely be an objective. Like King, McKay uses many literary devices such as alliteration, simile, and metaphor. The meter of the poem would also be interesting to identify. We should discuss Frost's "sound of sense" in relation to the poetry. How does McKay's poetry sound in relation to what he is saying?

When introducing the poems, I would like to have the students read the poem out loud. I would then have the students reread the poem to themselves underlining any line or word that stood out to them. When the students read the poem out loud again, I would have all of the students read their underlined sections out loud with the primary reader. Once we have read the poem a few times and the students get a feel for it, I will have them write about the poem. I want them to write about one line or word in the poem and discuss why it is important, and then we will all discuss what they have written.

Miguel Pinero's poems "La Bodega Sold Dreams," "The Book of Genesis According to St. Miguelito," and "Seekin' the Cause" are powerful as well. I tested out the poems "La Bodega Sold Dreams" and "The Book of

Genesis According to St. Miguelito" on a few of my classes this year. I was pleased to note that some of the students were excited about the content and language used in the poem. In "The Book of Genesis According to St. Miguelito" he begins the poem with, "Before the beginning/ God created God/ In the beginning/ God created ghettos & slums" (Pinero 349) The mention of ghettos was exciting to some of the students. This was something they were familiar with. The language as well as the environment it describes is something they rarely read about in school but deals with the lives they lead. The Latino students in particular were truly engaged in the lesson. It was something closer to home than, let's say, The Odyssey. They were impressed by the fact that he used Spanish in the poem with the English. They were excited to read the nonstandard English. In "La Bodega Sold Dreams", which we read first, Pinero writes, "i dreamt i was this poeta/ words glitterin' brite & bold/ strikin' a new rush for gold/ in las bodegas" (Pinero 347) Students immediately dove into the language of the poem. They started asking questions. "Why does he use Spanish?" was one question. In "The Book of Genesis According to St. Miguelito" the religious allusions caused a stir. The students also debated the meaning of "and the people were cool" (Algarin & Holman 351). At one point a frustrated student said, "Why doesn't he do something about it instead of just complaining?" This was a good time to discuss whether or not literature and art are "doing something" or not. I think this is an important issue to discuss. Even if this issue has not been made clear by this point I may bring it up again. I want the students to see how powerful their own voices can be.

In a community as diverse as the Sound School, it is very important to represent the many voices of America. I am sure this is true for any school environment, but it is crucial to expose students to the literature of their own culture. At the Sound School there are students of different races, religions, socio-economics and styles. Because it attracts students from the various surrounding communities, the Sound School has an extremely eclectic student body.

One strategy I will use in teaching these poems will be to have students generate "I wonder why" statements about the poetry. Students will create their own questions in their journals. Then we will share their questions and record them on the board and in the journals. Once the "I wonder why" statements are recorded students will select two to respond to. They should come up with their own responses to the questions. Students will share their responses and hopefully this will prompt a discussion about the poetry.

The Pinero poems are critical of the conditions of the poor. Pinero's style differs from McKay's greatly. They use different language and different structure for their poetry. McKay uses a very "civilized" approach. He uses standard English and the sonnet form. On the other hand, Pinero uses non-standard English and Spanish in his poetry while using free verse. Nevertheless they comment on problems in society as an outsider. Therefore it would be fitting for the students to write a comparison paper at this juncture. This is another piece to go into the journal. Only one draft is required at this time. Still, I will have students engage in peer evaluations and teacher conferences.

Music

I have selected punk rock, rap and hip hop. As far as the rap and hip hop is concerned, artists such as Public Enemy and Tupac represent the older sound. Public Enemy is critical of society and the media. In the song "She Watch Channel Zero?!" television is depicted as a mindless activity that brainwashes the individual and creates a false sense of reality. In the song "She Watch Channel Zero" Chuck D from Public Enemy states, "2,

7, 5, 4, 8 she watched she said/ All added up to zero/ And nothing in her head/ She turns and turns/ And she hopes the soaps/ Are for real- she learns/ Is that it ain't true, nope/ But she won't survive/ And rather die and lie/ Falls a fool- for some dude- on a tube." Other songs by Public Enemy are more political. It would be interesting to tie in a few other songs. I will ask students to bring in examples of rap and hip hop from today that convey a message critical of society. Some questions we will discuss are: How does Public Enemy convey their message? How would you describe Chuck D's voice? How is the sound of today different from that of the 80s?

Punk rock originated in the 70s. It was popularized briefly at this time. The music really expanded in America in the 80s when it truly existed as an underground sound. During these years spent outside of the mainstream punk rock developed a following. Nirvana was really the band that took this kind of attitude to the masses. Grunge is really a different sound all together, but punk built up to it. Now there are bands toting the title punk rock in the mainstream. Although it was a sound that appealed to the white, middle class teen, other cultures also found an appreciation for it. Bad Brains for example is a band comprised of African Americans. They were just playing the music they felt inspired to make when labeled punk rock. At any rate, this music was a way for people to express their discontent. Punk rock has had a revival among the youth of today. Therefore I felt it was a good medium to convey these themes and concepts discussed in this unit.

Some punk rock bands from the 80s include: Black Flag, Minor Threat and Fugazi. One song by Black Flag of note is "TV Party." It is a commentary on the laziness of society and it is critical of the media. "We've got nothin better to do than watch TV and have a couple of brews. Don't talk about anything else we don't want to know." The message is critical of society and is conveyed through yelling or screaming and short, fast, heavy music. This song can be compared to Public Enemy's "She Watch Channel Zero?!" Minor Threat is a straight edge band which means they don't partake in drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or promiscuous sex. This group chose a lifestyle different from the mainstream and expressed their views in their music. It would be interesting for students to compare the music of the 80s to that of the music today. I would ask students to bring in examples of current punk rock to compare. Some questions we could discuss include: How have the messages changed or stayed the same? How does the mainstream status of current punk rock affect its message? What kind of language is used to convey their message? What kind of sound do they use? How is punk rock different and/or similar to rap and reggaeton?

Art

I want to do a brief section on art. Barbara Kruger places words over images. Her artwork comments on issues in our society regarding topics such as women and consumerism. I just wanted to introduce students to yet another medium one can use to voice his or her opinion. One reason I like Barbara Kruger is because she uses words in her art. Her voice is conveyed through images and words. For example she places the words, "Your body is a battleground" over an image of a woman's face. The image is formatted as if it were an advertisement. The words are displayed over the image in an aesthetically pleasing way. She uses black and white photographic images with red and white words which create a stark juxtaposition within the image. In addition, she uses the photograph's negative image as well as the positive one. She uses a very civilized structure but the image itself is rather wild. The message is politically charged, commenting on the status of women's bodies in our society. She uses marketing, a whole language on its own, to develop a voice for her work. Students will discuss what kind of voice Kruger creates with her work.

The students will create their own collages where they select an image and place words over the image as Kruger does. As in the other assignments I would like the students to select an issue they feel is plaguing society and work from there. They can find a picture in a magazine or online. They can also draw the picture if they feel compelled. There must be text over the picture that makes a statement about the issue they are dealing with. The best piece will be used as the cover to the magazine.

In addition, students will select an advertisement to evaluate. They can analyze the voice of the ad. Who is the audience of the ad? What is the message? What strategies are used to convey that message?

Final Project

Students will produce a magazine for their final project. Each student will rewrite one piece they have written during the course of the unit. They may also choose to express themselves through poetry or a short story. We did not write poetry or short stories in this unit, but if students choose they may use one of these genres. Students will still be responsible for a rough draft, peer evaluation, and final draft if they choose the poem or the short story.

During the pre-writing stage students need to do the following: Identify yourself as an outsider. In what ways are you outside the mainstream? What makes you an individual? What issues do you feel are problematic in our society? How are you going to convey your message? Do you choose a civil approach or a wild one? Why select that tone? Why is it more affective for you purpose and for your audience? What type of language are you going to use? What rhetorical devices will you use?

Students will have the opportunity in class for peer evaluations and teacher conferences. The entire writing process will be part of the final grade. In addition, students will present their final product to the class before including it in the magazine. We will select the best student collages for the front and back covers of the magazine. Each student's work will be printed in the magazine. The final product will be copied on eleven by seventeen paper, folded in half and stapled. Students will engage in a public reading of their work and we will distribute the magazine to the students.

Conclusion

There are a variety of texts in this unit that will engage the students. This cross-section of texts represents the voices of America. Of course not all voices are represented, but this is a good sampling. It will give the students the opportunity to begin thinking critically about the world they live in. In addition to thinking about the issues that these texts bring to light students will analyze the language of the texts. There are many chances for students to write in this unit. They will be writing an expository essay, an analytical essay, a comparison essay, a speech, journal entries and a final piece of their choice. Through this work students should sharpen their own voices. They will hone their ability to manipulate language. This unit works to teach students that the civilized and the wild can work together to convey a strong message. Neither is good or bad but has strengths and weaknesses that can be utilized.

Lesson Plans

Each of the following lessons will be for an hour and ten minute class period.

Initiation : We are starting a unit called "Civil Discourse in America." The unit will focus on the outsider's perspective on the ills of society. In addition we will focus on the development of voice. We will be reading a variety of literature as you can see from the bibliography. Before we launch into the reading I would like you to explore some key concepts in the unit. The key ideas are outsiders, civility, wildness and voice.

Individual Practice : Students will write responses to the following questions in their journals.

What does "civil" mean? What constitutes "civil language"? When is it important to use civil language? When is uncivil language appropriate? When and why is uncivil language used? How have American ideas about what is civil changed over time? What are civil rights? What is voice? Who are the voices from the outside?

Group Practice : Students will share their responses with the class. All of the students are responsible for taking notes on what is being said. We call this "listening with a pen."

Closure : What conclusions or new insights do you have about the unit themes based on the class discussion? Jot down your ideas in your journal. Tonight for homework you will be reading Maya Angelou. Think about voice while reading.

Homework : Read excerpt from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou.

The second lesson will focus on voice and Maya Angelou.

Initiation : I will play a reading of the I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings excerpt. How did hearing the excerpt affect your understanding of the text?

Individual Practice : Respond to the following quote in writing. "Your grandmother says you read a lot. Every chance you get. That's good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning."

If you need guidance in writing the response use the following questions: Who is speaking to whom? What does the quote mean? Why is it significant?

Group Practice : Students will share their responses to the quote. I will also encourage them to draw connections to their own sense of voice.

Closure : Describe your own voice. How is it unique? Describe one incident or person that helped you to develop your voice. What helps Marguerite develop her voice?

The next lesson is not ordered as the lesson that would come after the previous lesson. This lesson would appear later in the unit.

Initiation : We will be reading a few Claude McKay sonnets. Each of them comments on the conditions in America at the time of the Harlem Renaissance. Claude McKay may exist outside of the mainstream white society but he uses both civilized and wild means to convey his messages.

Group Practice : One student will read the poem, "America" out loud. Students will then underline a line or word or words that stand out to them. Another student will read the poem out loud. As this person reads, the rest of the class will read their underlined passages with him. If the students are into it which they usually are we will read it a third time.

Individual Practice : Students will write about a line or word in the poem that they think is important. They will explain why they think it is significant.

Group Practice : Students will share their responses.

Individual Practice : If the students have not already discussed the following, I will hand out additional questions.

What literary devices does McKay utilize?

How do the traditions of the sonnet contribute to the meaning of the poem?

What kind of imagery does McKay use?

How does the poem combine the civil and wild?

Closure : What new insight do have about the poem?

Bibliography for Students and Teachers

Algarin, Miguel and Holman, Bob. *Aloud Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Café*. New

York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1994.

Alvarez, Julia. "First Muse." *Something to Declare* . Chapel Hill: Algonquin, 1998.

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. The Language of Literature*.

Evanston, Illinois: McDougal Littell, 1997.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." *Borderlands: La Frontera* . San

Francisco: Aunt Lute books, 1999. 75-86.

Bernard, Emily. "Teaching the N-Word." *The American Scholar* . Autumn 2005.

Cooper, Wayne. *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance*. Baton

Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

Costello, Robert B. *Random House Webster College Dictionary*. NewYork: Random

House, 1991.

King, Martin Luther Jr., "I Have a Dream." *The Heath Anthology of American*

Literature: Volume Two. Ed. Lauter, Paul. Boston and New York: Houghton

Mifflin Company, 1998.

McKay, Claude. "America," "If We Must Die," "Outcast," *The Norton Anthology of*

African American Literature. Ed. Gates, Henry Louis Jr. and McKay, Nellie Y. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997.

Sewell, David R. "Not All Trying to Talk Alike: *Varieties of Language* in Huckleberry

Finn." *Mark Twain's Languages: Discourse, Dialogue and Linguistic Variety*.

Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Resistance to Civil Government." *The Heath Anthology of*

American Literature: Volume One. Ed. Lauter, Paul. Boston and New York:

Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998.

Truth, Sojourner. "Speech at Meeting Commemorating Emancipation." *American*

Speeches: Political Oratory from Abraham Lincoln to Bill Clinton. New York: Library of America, 2006.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* . New York: Bantam Dell, 1981.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>