



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

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## Poetry and Prose to Increase Literacy and Writing Skills

Curriculum Unit 07.01.07  
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### Introduction

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"...words are just voices on paper." - Maxwell Kane, *Freak the Mighty* <sup>1</sup>

The underlying rationale for the creation of this unit is that it will allow for the instruction students at multiple learning levels through various modalities to increase both literacy and writing skills. The use of poetry, songs, speeches, as well as movies and television commercials will help students to learn to listen to and express voice, and it will make it possible to instruct students with diverse strengths, weaknesses, cognitive abilities, and learning styles. This unit will be helpful to teachers of classes at all learning levels.

Since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (ECHA) Public Law 94-142 in 1975-- now entitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA (Public Law 101-476), Individualized Education Programs (IEP) has been a requirement of law for all children and youth with disabilities found eligible for special education. Each student's IEP must list goals and objectives for educational activities and include information about the student's assessment and educational placement, the instructional content areas to be addressed throughout the year, the timelines and persons responsible for activities corresponding to the goals and objectives, how student progress will be evaluated, and the related services that each student needs in order to benefit from his or her special education.

As an eighth grade teacher in a classroom that is inclusive of students with and without special educational needs, I individualize all lessons to address each student's specific learning ability and Individualized Learning Plan (IEP). My students' comprehension and writing levels range from first grade to eighth grade. My students have learning and intellectual disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder, Autism, as well as behavioral issues. I also have students who speak English as a second language. I typically develop several versions of each lesson plan to address my students' many learning styles and IEP's. For example, a typical lesson with an objective of showing comprehension of the main idea would have the following approaches. Group A students would be required to write a new title for the selection and use specific information from the reading selection to support their response. Group B would be asked what they believe the main idea is but may not be asked to support their response. Group C students may simply be asked to copy the title of the article and write the words "main idea" next to it, while Group D would be given a picture that represented the story's theme and asked to orally explain what the picture is mainly about. Consistently developing and teaching different

variations of lessons is necessary for my students to achieve learning objectives.

One requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act (Public Law 107-110) is for all students to be assessed using the same assessment measures. Students are rigorously instructed on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) objectives since the CMT is the assessment measure used by New Haven Public Schools. My students are more interested in how each lesson affects their grades than they are with the actual learning of the desired skills. I believe that students need to be evaluated to assess strengths and weaknesses. I also believe that teachers should create lessons that not only teach desired objectives; but also inspire students to become life long learners. My Assistant Principal who often visited my class informed me of his experiences with using poetry as a teaching tool. He informed me that he experienced students at many learning levels show comprehension when responding to poetry. This conversation inspired me to use poetry to teach learning objectives. I believe poetry allows students at all learning levels to analyze and interpret written works because poems are generally shorter and hold a higher interest level than other texts assigned.

At the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year I decided to use poetry to achieve my goal of having motivated students who read and write due to inspiration instead of simply completing an assignment to receive a passing grade (with little retention of learned skills). I began my first lesson (on the first day of school) by introducing "The Seedling" by Paul Laurence Dunbar and informing my students that they would be required to learn the entire poem and recite it in front of the class. Students' learning styles were easily addressed due to my plan to have students pace their learning of the poem at one sentence per day. I expected my students to organize a revolt. They instead began reading and reciting the poem. Some students even memorized the first stanza during the first class period. I then asked the class what they believed the poem was mainly about. Almost the entire class responded that the poem was about a seed becoming a plant. I next asked what message the poem was trying to convey. I was amazed when almost my entire class responded that the poem was about a child growing up. My students who were at various areas of the spectrum of comprehension and skill level were collaboratively interpreting a written work with little direct instruction. It was at this point that I realized that poetry can be used as a learning tool to achieve many goals in writing and reading. Poems seemed to maintain a higher-interest level than the assigned text and involved expressed messages that were easier for students to analyze through-out all learning levels. Upon the realization of the effectiveness of poetry, I decided to use popular songs to achieve Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) objectives. It is my belief that songs are poems put to music. I was once again amazed at how my students were able to display comprehension of the text from a song. The comprehension was remarkable because my students were not able to show proficient understanding of the same comprehension goal through reading stories from an assigned text. I was equally fascinated when I revisited the assigned text (that my students seemingly were not able to comprehend) and had a majority of my students respond to comprehension questions proficiently. The assigned text did not appeal to my students. They repeatedly would state that they found the text boring and too long. The songs were generally shorter (usually not longer than five minutes) compressed stories. Students were able to transfer their understanding of the text of a song when assessed on the same criteria from an assigned text.

This unit will be helpful to teachers who plan on integrating literacy and language arts lessons creatively. This unit is designed to last for six weeks and is divided into three two-week long sub-units that will each fulfill literacy and language arts objectives. The sub-units are titled "Hip Hop and the Classics," "Who Gets It Right the First Time?," and "What Are We Really Watching?" The selected works will focus on analyzing, comparing, and mirroring the voice of writers, poets, and orators, such as Talib Kweli, Nina Simone, Langston Hughes, Notorious B.I.G., Rudyard Kipling, Zion I, Dylan Thomas, Tupac Shakur, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Materials I will use for movie and television commercial analysis and comparisons in this unit include: *The Chronicles of*

*Narnia: the Lion the Witch and The Wardrobe, Misery, Holes*, and various television commercials. I will also use the United States Constitution for exercises on revision.

## Objectives

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The unit is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To motivate students to read and write due to inspiration
2. To teach analysis of voice
3. To integrate literacy and language arts with drama
4. To improve students' abilities to read and write
5. To allow students to develop their voices
6. To teach active listening skills

## Strategies

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I plan to begin this unit directly after the completion of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) in April. This is a good time for teachers to reinforce, and students to practice, the skills assessed on the CMT. Troup Magnet Academy of Sciences focuses on the development of all necessary skills. There is a one-hour, fifteen-minute literacy block schedule as well as a one-hour writing block schedule. During our literacy block schedule, classes are split virtually in half. Our school participates in the Read 180 initiative which involves small group instructions with reading specialists who reinforce core reading strategies and behaviors. Students attend during the literacy block on alternating days. This allows for small group instruction in the class room for the half of the class that is not attending Read 180 on a particular day. I will be able to use the block schedule in correlation with the small group setting to provide direct instruction in listening and analyzing poems, songs, speeches, historical documents, movies, and television commercials. The time allotted for the writing block (one hour) will be used for the writing aspects of this unit.

*A foreground to speaking is listening. Learning to be a reader is learning to listen to the text. Listening to the voices of the text is the basis of interpretation. Langdon Hammer2*

To learn how to analyze voice, it is fundamental that students learn how to listen for voice. Students must gain an understanding that voice conveys information about the speaker. Students must learn some information

heard in a human voice include body size, age, race, and gender. The Poetry and Prose to Increase Literacy and Writing Skills unit will begin with direct instruction in listening with respect to voice. Students will then be instructed on the different kinds of voice (human voice, conceptual voice (voice found in the concepts being written about or through visual images being conveyed), voice in nature , etc.) to prepare a foundation for analyzing, interpreting, and expressing voice. Students next will analyze rap songs and compare the interpreted voices of the artists to the interpreted voices of the writers of classic poems, analyze speeches and historical documents with a focus on the writing process, and finally analyze and interpret the voices of characters in movies and television commercials. The culminating projects for this unit will involve students using their analysis and interpretations to develop songs, poems, speeches, and commercials with similar structures and/or organizational patterns as those analyzed while expressing their own individual personalities.

### **Comparison Matrix**

Many of my students are visual learners and graphic organizers are helpful to them and students at all learning levels. Visual learning is a graphic way of working with ideas and presenting information; graphic organizers condense complex information into meaningful displays. A graphic organizer that I often use is called a comparison matrix. A comparison matrix allows students to identify similarities and differences independently, collaboratively, and through explicit guidance. Students simply list the items (in this case the names of the writers) to be compared across the top of the grid and the comparison criteria is listed down the left hand side of the paper. Students then fill in the boxes for each artist and can then visually compare and contrast both writers. For example, if students created a matrix for two artists and had "person" listed on of the comparison criteria, they would simply write "first person" under Nina Simone and "third person" under Talib Kweli since "Four Women" by Nina Simone is written in the first person and "For Women" by Talib Kweli is written in the third person. I suggest that teachers create the comparison matrix grid on a wall and add each item (artist) as they are analyzed thus making the matrix a growing wall of analysis. A completed comparison matrix is also useful for summarizing.

### *Hip Hop and the Classics*

The artists being compared in the Hip Hop and the Classics sub-unit are Talib Kweli, Nina Simone, Notorious B.I.G., Langston Hughes, Rudyard Kipling, Zion I, Tupac Shakur, and Dylan Thomas. <sup>3</sup> These names will be listed across the top of the matrix. The criteria used to compare these artists include:

1. Purpose of the voice - who is the speaker talking to and why?
2. Speaker of the voice - is the speaker of the voice human or non-human?
3. Where the voice can be found - can the voice be found in the concepts being written about or through visual images being conveyed?
4. Relationship between speaker and audience - how is the speaker addressing the audience?
5. Expressed information about the speaker - what information about the author (age, race, gender, etc.) can be determined?

A sample of a comparison matrix is included in Appendix A

### *Who Gets It Right the First Time?*

The speeches that will be analyzed in the "Who Gets It Right the First Time?" sub-unit are the "I Have a Dream" speech and "The Emancipation Proclamation." The focus of analysis will be on how revisions made the speeches more powerful. The United States Constitution will also be analyzed with a particular focus on how the amendments are revisions to the original document. Both the speeches and the Constitution will be analyzed using a comparison matrix according to the following criteria:

1. Purpose of the voice - who is the audience?
2. Speaker of the voice - is the speaker speaking from the perspective of an individual or a group?
3. Where the voice can be found - can the voice be found in the concepts being written about or through visual images being conveyed?
4. Relationship between speaker and audience - how is the speaker addressing the audience?
5. Expressed information about the speaker - what information about the speaker (age, race, gender, etc.) can you determine from my speech?

A sample of a comparison matrix is included in Appendix A.

## **Hip Hop and the Classics**

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Let's be honest, some of your students are reluctant readers. . .Action adventure movies? Now that speaks to them. Downloading music? That engages them. Deconstructing narrative fiction as we analyze the literary devices of similes? Some days I could hear the snoring before their heads hit the desk... Alan Sitomer <sup>4</sup>

Many of my students have difficulties in reading, writing, and public speaking. Guided reading of poems and song lyrics combined with listening to poetry and songs with a focus on voice will be an excellent tool for increasing student reading comprehension. Duplicating the organizational structures and patterns of poems will help motivate the students to write original poems to express their own voice. My students will spend five days reading selected poems and compare the speaker's voice in the poem to the speaker's voice in selected songs with similar themes. My students will then over a five day period have an opportunity to write and then read original poems and songs to the class. This will decrease their apprehensions towards public speaking and help them learn to listen to each other in the classroom.

We will use themes that students can connect with in order to learn how to interpret voice and accomplish

understanding of standard-based objectives. Students who achieve objective requirements through themes that they can relate to are more likely to show proficiency when assessed on the same themes using less familiar texts. This is my motivation for using rap songs and classic poems to improve reading comprehension and interpretation of voice.

### **Talib Kweli and Nina Simone**

The first comparison will be between the rap song "For Women" by Talib Kweli and "Four Women" by Nina Simone. Talib Kweli began his musical career as a member of Black Star in the late 1990s, and is one of the few artists who create music that actually has some meaning. The rapper's music has the potential to educate and entertain simultaneously. Nina Simone has been described as a Singer, Pianist, Arranger, Composer, Honorary Doctor in Music and Humanities, High Priestess of Soul, and Queen of African Rooted Classical Music. The song by Talib Kweli was written as a tribute to Nina Simone's poem. The comparison of the song and poem is a creative way for students to analyze voice.

I will begin the lesson by reading "For Women" by Talib Kweli. This will immediately gain students interest. I will next begin a discussion of what students believe the song is about and the structure and organization of the song. We will pay specific attention to what "person" the song is written in because the song is written in third person while the poem is written in first person. We will discuss how the perspective that a song is written from affects interpretation of meaning. I will next have different students read the song to the class. I will then lead a discussion with the class about the different images they saw as each person read the song. I will then play the song and have students write a short response to the song that states how their initial images changed or remained the same after hearing the song. Finally, I will have students create their own songs with a similar structure, and theme. It is my goal that the completion of these exercises will model the process that we will use throughout this unit for analyzing poetry and prose as well as set up a foundation for interpreting voice.

I will continue the comparison process by reading "Four Women" by Nina Simone. I will next begin a discussion of what students believe the poem is about. I will ask them to identify the structure and organization of the poem with a focus on the fact that the poem is written in first person. Simone in the stanza of the poem about Aunt Sara writes "my skin is black, my arms are long" <sup>5</sup> while Kweli writes "her skin was black like it's packed with melanin." <sup>6</sup> This will be discussed so students can not only learn to listen for subtle similarities and differences, but so they can also learn how the voice of the speaker changes based on subtle similarities and differences. I will next have different students read the poem to the class. I will then lead a discussion with the class about the different images they saw as each person read the poem. I will then have students write a short response to the poem that states how their initial images changed or remained the same. A great way to differentiate this is to have students draw pictures that depict the images heard (imagined). Finally, I will have students create their own poem with a similar structure and theme.

### **Notorious B.I.G. and Langston Hughes**

The second comparison will be between the rap song "Juicy" by Notorious B.I.G. and "Harlem: A Dream deferred" by Langston Hughes. Notorious B.I.G. was an American rapper and hip hop artist noted for his "loose, easy flow," dark, semi-autobiographical lyrics, and storytelling abilities. Langston Hughes was an American poet, novelist, playwright, short story writer, and newspaper columnist. Hughes is best known for his work during the Harlem Renaissance. "Juice" has been described as a

"rags-to-riches chronicle" detailing Notorious B.I.G.'s early years in poverty, his initial dreams of becoming a

rap artist and early influences, his time in drugs and crime, and his eventual success in the music business. The poem, "Dream Deferred," by Langston Hughes, has been described as one man's expression of his dreams during a difficult time period. Both the song and the poem address a similar issue. Hughes addresses the issue through rhetorical questions such as "what happens to a dream deferred?" "Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?" <sup>7</sup> Notorious B.I.G. addresses the issue from the perspective of achieving his dream by writing "I made the change from a common thief, to up close and personal with Robin Leach..." <sup>8</sup>

I will begin the lesson by reading "Juicy" by Notorious B.I.G. I will next begin a discussion of what students believe the song is about and the structure and organization of the song. I will next have different students read the song to the class while the rest of the class highlight key words and phrases as they listen. I will then lead a discussion with the class about the different images they saw as each person read the song. I will then play the song and have students write a short response to the song that states how their initial images changed or remained the same after hearing the song. Finally, I will have students create their own songs with a similar theme.

I will continue the comparison process by reading "Harlem: A Dream Deferred" by Langston Hughes. I will next begin a discussion of what students believe the theme of the poem is and have them identify patterns they notice while listening to the poem. I will next have different students read the poem to the class. I will then lead a discussion with the class about the different images they saw as each person read the poem. I will then have students write a short response to the poem that states how their initial images changed or remained the same. This will show how mental pictures created by personal interpretation of voice can be changed based on how the voice is presented. Students may form a specific image when reading a selected piece and form an entirely different one when listening to the tone of the author or how the author stresses certain words or syllables. Finally, I will have students create their own poem with a similar theme.

### **Zion I and Rudyard Kipling**

The third comparison will be between the song "How Many" by Zion I and the classic poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling. Zion I is a hip hop duo famous for the use of poetic, positive, and socially conscious lyrics. Joseph Rudyard Kipling was an English author and poet, best known today for his children's books, including *The Jungle Book*. Zion I begins each stanza with the question "how many?" while Rudyard Kipling begins each stanza with a clause "if." Zion I and Rudyard Kipling have both creatively written pieces about ponderings. The focus of analysis in this section will be on how the very different writers used a similar strategy (ponderings) to express themselves.

### **Tupac Shakur and Dylan Thomas**

The final comparison will be between the song "Me Against the World" by Tupac Shakur and the classic poem "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas. Tupac Shakur was an American artist renowned for his rap music, movie roles, poetry, and his social activism. Dylan Thomas was a Welsh poet and writer. In "Me Against the World" Shakur writes "...through every dark night theres a bright day after that, so no matter how hard it get(s), stick ya chest up, keep ya head up, and handle it." <sup>9</sup> This is similar to Thomas in his poem to his dying father when he writes, "...Rage, rage against the dying of the light." <sup>10</sup> Both writers are expressing their view on how to handle difficult situations. Students will interpret on how these vastly different writers expressed a similar view and how repetition was used to stress a particular idea.

The culminating project for "Hip-Hop and the Classics" sub-unit will be in-class presentations of either original

poems and songs or excerpts from a student's favorite song or poem. The presentation will be videotaped to provide students an opportunity to critique themes expressed in their classmates' poetry and their oratory skills.

### **Who Gets It Right the First Time**

*What I had to face, the very bitter lesson that everyone who wants to write has got to learn, was that a thing may in itself be the finest piece of writing one has ever done, and yet have absolutely no place in the manuscript one hopes to publish. Thomas Wolfe<sup>11</sup>*

One of the central problems my students face when writing is their belief that their first draft is a finished work. Many of my students believe that editing and revising are merely sections of their Connecticut Mastery Test. The "Who Gets It Right the First Time?" sub-unit will help alleviate this misconception. It is my belief that if my students are able to view the drafts of speeches of well-known orators with a focus of how the author's changed their speeches to better express their views, they will be more willing to revise and re-write their own speeches. Speeches often consist of the voice of an individual expressing the views of many (an example of this is the "I Have a Dream" speech). The United States Constitution is a single document that collectively expresses the voice of every citizen in the United States in an on-going effort to protect each individual. The Constitution is a document that has been amended twenty-seven times since its first draft was written in 1787. Each amendment to the Constitution was to better protect or in some cases acknowledge the rights of certain groups or individuals who voiced opposition to the original document. Students will review a copy of the United States Constitution and its Amendments with a focus on how the voices of many people continue to shape American law.

An inventive approach for the interpretation of voice and accomplishing language arts standards is the use of historically significant speeches and documents. Students who gain understanding of standard based objectives through themes that transcend the usual literacy and language arts themes are more likely to show proficiency when assessed on the same themes using traditional text. It is this belief that is my motivation for using speeches and the United States Constitution to improve reading comprehension, interpretation of voice, and encourage revising written works. This aspect of the sub-unit will also be useful in United States history instruction.

### **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

One of the primary language arts goals for eight-graders is to write persuasive essays. The "I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. will be viewed as a persuasive essay since it embodies the elements of a persuasive essay. The speech expresses a specific stance on a topic and supports the stance with facts, examples, experiences and details. The speech also has a clear introduction, body, and a conclusion which is the structure of essays taught in grade eight.

The "I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is one of the most well known speeches in America and is closely associated with the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Most students have been exposed to this speech at some point in their schooling. Most students who have heard this speech may be surprised that the speech was developed through constant editing revisions that spanned several years. I believe if students are able to examine revisions to a speech that is so well recognized, they will be more willing to revise their own written works.

I will begin this sub-unit with an audio playing of the "I Have a Dream Speech" by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



This will allow students to listen to the finished speech in the voice of the original speaker. Students will also have a copy of the speech to read along while listening. Students will be instructed to underline parts of the speech where Dr. King raised or lower his voice in order to stress a particular point. I will then have students create their own speeches with a similar theme. I will ask them to raise or lower their voices in certain areas of the speech to stress a particular point.

After students complete their speeches, I will present to them excerpts of drafts of sermons and speeches that Dr. King revised to create his famous "I Have a Dream Speech" dating back to the late nineteen-fifties. One example appears in a draft of King's address to the National Press Club in July 1962. In it, he writes of a "land where men no longer argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character."<sup>12</sup> In his famous 1963 speech: "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."<sup>13</sup> Students will observe that the revision made that section of the speech more personal and thus more powerful. Students will analyze revisions and compare them to the original speech to interpret the effect the revisions had on the finished speech. Students will also view a copy of the final draft of the "I Have a Dream Speech" with handwritten notes on the back of the typed pages. Students will then be instructed to revise their own speeches to insure that the message they want to convey is clear and concise.

### **Abraham Lincoln**

I will continue the "Who Gets It Right the First Time?" sub-unit by reading "The Emancipation Proclamation" by Abraham Lincoln. The Emancipation Proclamation was an executive order by Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War, which declared the freedom of all slaves in the Confederate States of America. The Emancipation Proclamation will be used to show how even a President of the United States had to revise a document to better express him self.

I will distribute copies of the first and second drafts of the executive order. Students will be instructed to note how the preliminary version differs from the final version of January 1, 1863, by placing a greater emphasis on the preservation of the Union as a motivating force for the Proclamation. Students will also view editing marks on the document. Students will then be instructed to create their own "proclamations" with a similar theme as the "Emancipation Proclamation." Their topic will be freeing Americans from poverty.

After students complete their proclamations, students will then be instructed to revise them to insure that the message they want to convey is clear and concise. Students will then compare their two speeches according to the criteria previously mentioned.

### **The United States Constitution**

The United States Constitution is the supreme law of the United States of America. It was adopted in its original form on September 17, 1787 by the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Constitution has a central place in American law and political culture. The Constitution has been described as a "living document" because it continues to shape American culture and law through its Amendments. An amendment is a change to the Constitution.

The final study of voice in this sub-unit will be on how revisions can change interpretations of meaning. Students will analyze the United States Constitution. James Bryce is quoted as saying, "We have seen that the American Constitution has changed, is changing, and by the law of its existence must continue to change. . ."<sup>14</sup> Students will use this statement as the basis of their analysis. Students will first view the original

Constitution and discuss how the voices of individuals and groups created the Constitution and have amended it. They will then view amendments to the Constitution to determine how the amendment represented the voices of a particular group and changed the interpretation of the Constitution. One example of this is the original Constitution outlined rights for white land owners including the right to vote while the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution gave women the right to vote.

The culminating project for the "Who Gets It Right the First Time?" sub-unit will be a creation of a Classroom Constitution.

## What Are We Really Watching?

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My eighth-grade class is expected to achieve three specific Connecticut Mastery Test objects each semester. I diligently teach the required objectives according to our curriculum plan. My students quickly become bored with the repetitive nature of the assignments. Many students would exhibit work avoidance behaviors due to their lack of interest. One of my students suggested that I allow the class to watch a movie every Friday as a reward for their efforts during the week. I regretfully informed the student that I had specific objectives to achieve each day and would not be able to allow the class to watch a movie since a movie could not fulfill our Connecticut Mastery Test objectives. My student replied "why not?" It was this conversation that inspired me to use movies to assess proficiency on learned objectives. I began to use movies as the text for reading comprehension questions. Again, my students were able to show comprehension of objectives they previously had difficulty with.

### Movies

Movies and commercials are excellent tools for a study of voice. Movies and commercials will be helpful in most classes because they appeal to more than one modality at the same time. My students will analyze movies and commercials with the goal of differentiating between the voice of the characters and the voice of the creators of the movie or commercial which are different senses of voice. Students will spend five days examining television commercials and movies, and five days creating a commercial. The culminating project for the unit will be a commercial that each student (or group) will create that encompasses what they have learned about voice.

In the "What Are We Really Watching" sub-unit my class will view three movies that are based on books with a focus on interpreting how the characters express their beliefs or attitudes and those of creators of the film through their actions and choices.

*The Chronicles of Narnia; the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, Misery, and Holes* are a movies based on books. I plan on using the books as novels for guided reading during my literacy block prior to the start of this unit. I will begin this phase of the analysis process by first reviewing the books. I will ask my students what they believed the different characters sounded like through having students read the text aloud in the voice that they "hear." My class will then watch each movie that corresponds to a particular book (one movie per week). My students will then write a short response comparing how they thought each character sounded and how the creators of the movies interpreted the sounds of the voices. We will then discuss which interpretation of the voices the students prefer. I will then lead a discussion with the class about the different images they

saw in the movie. We will also discuss how personification was used to make non-human things have human voices. I believe my students will be able to note how they used their *Imagining Ear* to put a distinctive voice to the characters in print and compare what they "heard" to what the movie creators "heard." The *Imagining Ear* is a concept illustrated by Robert Frost which alludes to a reader forming visual images of a text.

## **Commercials**

*Advertising is the greatest art form of the twentieth century. - Marshall McLuhan*<sup>15</sup>

An imaginative approach for the interpretation of voice and accomplishing language arts standards is the use of television commercials and movies. Students who gain understanding of standard based objectives through familiar modes are more likely to show proficiency when assessed on the same themes using traditional text. It is this belief that is my motivation for using television commercials to improve reading comprehension, and interpretation of voice.

I will begin this sub-unit by giving my class a homework assignment to look at as many television commercials as possible. I will then have students discuss a commercial with a focus on what they believe the commercial is about and the structure and organization of the commercial. I will then have students view different commercial clips in class. I will then lead a discussion with the class about the different images they saw in each commercial. I will then have students write a short response to the commercial they find the most interesting stating how the advertiser uses imagery to persuade someone to purchase a product. I will finally have students analyze their favorite commercial according to the following criteria:

1. Purpose of the voice - who is the speaker's target audience and what are they being persuaded to do?
2. Speaker of the voice - is the speaker of the voice human or non-human?
3. Where the voice can be found - can the voice be found in the concepts being written about or through visual images being conveyed?
4. Relationship between speaker and audience - how is the speaker addressing the audience?
5. Expressed information about the speaker - what information about the target audience (age, race, gender, etc.) can be determined?

Students will create their own commercial for a product using the previously listed criteria as a rubric. Each commercial will be videotaped to provide students an opportunity to analyze the images portrayed and critique oratory skills.

## Sample Lesson Plans

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I have included three lesson plans that reflect each of my three sub-units.

### Lesson One

Topic: Active Listening

Objective:

Students will demonstrate active listening skills through discussing interpreted information about the speaker of a song from listening to a song.

Prior Knowledge:

No prior knowledge is needed

Materials:

Overhead projector, transparency with Talib Kweli's "For Women," copies of "For Women" by Talib Kweli, highlighter, Compact Disc (CD) Player, and loose sleeve paper.

Procedure:

1. Discuss with class that a person's voice expresses information about the speaker including age, race, and gender. Inform students that they will listen to a song to determine this information about the speaker.
2. Distribute loose sleeve paper and have students divide the paper into fourths and label the sections "age", "race", "gender", and "why"
3. Distribute copies of "For Women" by Talib Kweli and highlighters. Inform students that they will use highlighters to highlight parts of the song that gives them information to determine the speaker's age, race, and gender.
4. Have students in groups (no more than four students per group) take turns reading and listening to each other read the poem. Instruct students to highlight parts of the song that gives them information to determine the speaker's age, race, and gender while listening to their group mates.
5. Discuss with class what they "heard" while listening to the song being read by group mates.
6. Project a transparency of the song "For Women" by Talib Kweli.
7. Inform students that they are about to listen to the song "For Women" by Talib Kweli.
8. Instruct students to use the charts they created to note examples that caused them to interpret the age, race, and gender of the artist. Play the song on a CD player.
9. After students complete their charts of interpretations, have them list specific examples from the song that caused them to make each interpretation in the "why" column.

Follow-up Activity:

Students form small groups and share their interpretations and reasoning.

Assessment:

Informally assess, checking students' understanding through reading their responses and listening to their discussions.

## **Lesson Two**

Topic: Editing

Objective:

Students will compare drafts of a speech to analyze revisions.

Prior Knowledge:

No prior knowledge is needed

Materials:

Two overhead projectors, transparency of Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, copies of "I Have a Dream " speech, copies of Dr. King's address to the National Press Club in July 1962, transparency of Dr. King's address to the National Press Club in July 1962, highlighter, computer with internet access, digital overhead LCD projector.

Procedure:

1. Discuss with class that people who give speeches edit and revise their speeches to better express their views.
2. Distribute copies of "I Have a Dream" speech, by Dr. Martin Luther King.
3. Play video of "I Have a Dream" speech using LCD projector and instruct students to read along.
4. Instruct students to highlight the section of Dr. King's finished speech that says "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."
5. Distribute copies of Dr. King's address to the National Press Club in July 1962 and highlighters.
6. Project transparency of speeches and underline the section that students will highlight.
7. Instruct students to compare the section that says "land where men no longer argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character." Inform students that Dr. King originally used this version but then revised it.
8. Discuss with students the effect the revision had on that section of the speech.

Follow-up Activity:

Students write a short speech and read it to a partner who then suggests possible revisions and how those revisions will possibly affect the speech.

Assessment:

Informally assess, checking students' understanding through listening to their discussion with partners and their responses.

**Lesson Three**

Topic: Television Commercials

Objective:

Students will analyze commercials with the goal of differentiating between the voice of the characters and the voice of the creators with regard to how the message is being conveyed.

Prior Knowledge:

No prior knowledge is needed

Materials:

Television, Video Cassette Recorder (VCR), loose sleeve paper

Procedure:

1. Play excerpts of television commercials to class.
2. Have students write what message the characters in the commercial are trying to convey based on specific actions.
3. Have students write what action the creator of the commercial is trying to persuade the viewer to take.

Follow-up Activity:

Have students discuss another possible way to convey the same message.

Assessment:

Informally assess, checking students' understanding through their responses.

## Appendix A

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Comparison Matrix

### Items to Be Compared

(table available in print form)

## Appendix B

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National Standards For Language Arts Addressed In This Unit

1 EVALUATION STRATEGIES - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics). <sup>16</sup>

2 COMMUNICATION SKILLS - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. <sup>17</sup>

3 MULTICULTURAL UNDERSTANDING - Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles. <sup>18</sup>

4 APPLYING LANGUAGE SKILLS- Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

<sup>19</sup>

## Resources

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Alvarez, A. (2005). *The Writer's Voice* . New York: W. W. Norton & Company. This book offers insight on author's voice with regard to what it is, how it develops, and why it should matter. It also gives examples on how a reader hears and responds to voice.

American Rhetoric, (2007), Retrieved May 15, 2007 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/>>. This website is excellent for teachers and students who want to access famous speeches. American Rhetoric is an index of thousands of speeches. The database includes audio, video, and text versions of speeches.

Author Unknown. *Literary Terms (For I Have a Dream speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.)* . Retrieved April 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://esd.iu5.org/LessonPlans/Speech/literaryterms.htm>>. This website provides an excerpt of the "I Have a Dream" speech color-coded to show how parts of the speech can be used to analyze literary terms.

Author Unknown. Student Instructions (for)Writing a Persuasive Speech. Retrieved April 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web: <http://esd.iu5.org/LessonPlans/Speech/speech.htm> >. This website provides a great guide for writing persuasive speeches. It includes a pre-test, persuasive speech outline, and a scoring rubric.

Author Unknown. Martin Luther King, Jr.: I Have a Dream (Video). Retrieved April 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEMXaTktUfA> >. You Tube is a popular website where users can upload self-created web casts. Though more known for its outrageous video footage, You Tube also is an excellent source for educational broadcasts. This site allows teachers and students to view a video of the "I Have a Dream" speech.

Author Unknown . (2007). *Dr. Nina Simone*. Retrieved May 2, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.ninasimone.com/>>. This is the official Nina Simone web site. The site provides biographical information about Dr. Nina Simone.

Author unknown. Misery. (2007). Retrieved May 2, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.horrorking.com/misery.html> >. This website has a description, and character lists for Misery.

Author Unknown. (2005). First 1100 characters of Analysis of Dream Deferred by Langston Hughes. Retrieved May 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.123helpme.com/preview.asp?id=99890> >. This website provides a partial analysis of "A Dream Deferred."

Author Unknown. (2001). *Tools to use when creating GO's*. Retrieved May 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://edtech.tennessee.edu/~anonis/USES/uses.html>>. This website is useful for teachers who would like to use graphic organizers. The site provides guidelines for creating graphic organizers.

Author Unknown. The Constitution of the United States of America. Retrieved May 15, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.table.html#amendments> >. This website provided by Cornell University makes available digital versions of the United States Constitution and its Amendments.

Brown, G. (1915). The Imagining Ear. *Browne and Nichols School Lecture* . This is from lecture notes taken during a speech by Robert Frost. It is collected in the Library of America. This lecture gives insight into how we visualize what we listen to.

Cable News Network. (2007). *King papers part of movement's past, future*. Retrieved April 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/01/09/mlk.papers/index.html>>. CNN has provided access to parts of the "I Have a Dream" speech with a focus on revisions made in its formulation.



Education World. (2007). *National Standards*. Retrieved April 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/lang\\_arts/english/k\\_12.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/lang_arts/english/k_12.shtml)>. This site provides listings of national standards for language arts.

GEAR UP Inland Empire. (2005). Historical Role Models. Retrieved April 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://www.gearupinlandempire.org/cd-rom/historical\\_role\\_models.htm](http://www.gearupinlandempire.org/cd-rom/historical_role_models.htm) >. This site provides links to information about historical role models. Also included is a checklist of characteristics of each which is useful for students who have trouble connecting to a text.

Henning, K. (2001). *For Writers, Writing Is Never a Waste of Time* . Retrieved May 2, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.clickz.com/showPage.html?page=840371>>. This article provides insight into the rigors of the writing process.

Laker, F. (2007). *New insights into mind of MLK* . Retrieved May 2, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://digg.com/world\\_news/New\\_insights\\_into\\_mind\\_of\\_MLK](http://digg.com/world_news/New_insights_into_mind_of_MLK) >. This site is a collection of Martin Luther King Jr.'s papers. It features drafts of famous speeches as well as documents from his college days.

Library of Congress. The Construction of the Proclamation. (2002). Retrieved May 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trt028.html> >. This website has copies of drafts of the Emancipation Proclamation. This site is useful for revision exercises.

Leander Independent School District. (2007). *Instructional Strategies That Work*. Retrieved May 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://classroom.leanderisd.org/webs/marzano/identifying\\_similarities\\_and\\_differences.htm](http://classroom.leanderisd.org/webs/marzano/identifying_similarities_and_differences.htm) >. This website has instructional strategies for analyzing similarities and differences and examples of comparison matrix's.

McLuhan, M. (1976). *Marshall McLuhan Quote*. Retrieved May 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/marshall\\_mcluhan.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/marshall_mcluhan.html)>. This web site provides quotes about advertising.

National Resource Center on AD/HD. (2007) *IDEA (The Individual with Disabilities Education Act)*. Retrieved May 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.help4adhd.org/en/education/rights/idea>>. This site provides information about laws that apply to special needs students.

Philbrick, R. (2001). *Freak the Mighty*. New York: Blue Sky Press. This book is a story about the friendship between two special needs children.

Sitomer, A. (2006). Tupac Shakur in Language Arts Class? *Real-World Teaching Tools*, 27, 66-67. This article provides a guideline for integrating poetry and Hip Hop songs into language arts lessons.

Sunnemark, F. (2004). *Ring Out Freedom!: The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the*

Making of the Civil Rights Movement. Retrieved April 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://books.google.com/books?vid=ISBN0253216591&id=8bJ8SrMf9-wC&pg=PA6&lpg=PA6&ots=iuMukClOfk&dq=published+works+on+using+speeches+to+find+voice&sig=eWfs7RakpyPDEx3-gHjrigUGjhE>>. This website provides excerpts from the book Ring Out Freedom. It includes insight into how Dr. King became the voice of the Civil rights Movement.

Thomas C. & Mary L. O'Haver. (1997). *I Have A Dream*. Retrieved April 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.towson.edu/csme/mctp/StudentProjects/IHaveADream/Ihaveadream.html>>. This website provides examples, procedures, and evaluation criteria for creating a five paragraph essay.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). Langston Hughes

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Langston\\_Hughes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Langston_Hughes)>. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about Langston Hughes and links to his literary works.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). *The Notorious B.I.G.* Retrieved May 12, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Notorious\\_B.I.G.#\\_note-allmusic-rtd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Notorious_B.I.G.#_note-allmusic-rtd)>. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about Notorious B.I.G. and links to his literary works.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). *Zion I* . Retrieved May 12, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zion\\_I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zion_I)>. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about *Zion I* and links to their literary works.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). Hip hop music. Retrieved May 12, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

**[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip\\_hop\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip_hop_music)** >. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about the history of Hip Hop music.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). If-. Retrieved May 12, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If%E2%80%94> >. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about "If" by Rudyard Kipling.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). Rudyard Kipling. Retrieved May 12, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudyard\\_Kipling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudyard_Kipling) >. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about Rudyard Kipling and links to his literary works.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). Dylan Thomas. Retrieved May 12, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dylan\\_Thomas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dylan_Thomas) >. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about Dylan Thomas and links to his literary works.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). Tupac Shakur. Retrieved May 12, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupac\\_Shakur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupac_Shakur) >. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about Tupac Shakur and links to his literary works.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). Zion I - 'How Many (Audio)'. Retrieved May 15, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

**<http://www.undergroundhiphop.com/audio/detail.asp?ID=4392>** >. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about "How Many" by *Zion I* and links to a audio version of the song.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). Emancipation Proclamation. Retrieved May 15, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation\\_Proclamation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_Proclamation) >. Wikipedia is a free on-line dictionary that is helpful for teachers and students. This search provides information about the Emancipation Proclamation and links to excerpts of drafts of the document.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2007). *No Child Left Behind Act*. Retrieved May 12, 2007 from the World Wide Web:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No\\_Child\\_Left\\_Behind#Student\\_testing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Child_Left_Behind#Student_testing)>. This site provides information about the No Child Left behind Act.

## Notes

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2. Professor Langdon Hammer, lecture on March 16, 2007
3. Alan Lawrence Sitomer "Tupac Shakur in Language Arts class?," *Real World Teaching Tools* 27 (2006): 67.
4. Alan Lawrence Sitomer "Tupac Shakur in Language Arts class?," *Real World Teaching Tools* 27 (2006): 66-67.
5. Nina Simone, *Four Women*
6. Talib Kweli, *For Women*
7. Langston Hughes, *A Dream Deferred*
8. Notorious B.I.G., *Juice*
9. Tupac Shakur, *Me Against the World*
10. Dylan Thomas, *Do not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*
11. Kathy Henning, *For Writers, Writing Is Never A Waste of Time*, ClickZ.com (2001)
12. Steve Almasy, *King papers part of movement's past, future*, CNN.Com (2007)
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14. James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, new ed., vol. 1, chapter 35, p. 401 (1924).
15. Marshall McLuhan, *Marshall McLuhan Quotes*, Brainy Quotes.com
16. Education World. *National Standards*, (2007).
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