



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2011 Volume I: Writing with Words and Images

Encountering Injustice: Analyzing Words and Images in the Civil Rights Movement

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Introduction

Having an assigned core text can be a positive or negative experience for a Language Arts teacher, depending on the district's choice of book. The assigned text in the second quarter of New Haven's eighth grade curriculum in Language Arts is an important and engaging book called *Getting Away With Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*. In general, there is a lot of good work being done around this text by my students, but it feels scattered, unorganized, and at times un-scaffolded. Students also do not have the background knowledge to approach this text without adequate preparation, and it's not always a simple job to provide that information in a coherent way without detracting from the work of reading, writing and analysis that should be the focus of teaching this text. This unit should solve these problems and offer suggestions for teachers using the book, or books like it, in their classrooms.

Getting Away with Murder tells the story of Emmett, a fourteen-year-old Chicago boy who was murdered in Money, Mississippi while visiting relatives in 1955. He was killed for allegedly whistling at a white woman. The book also explores the societal context that allowed Emmett's killers to be exonerated in a court of law. His trial gained national attention when his mother bravely advocated for justice and demanded an open coffin, as well as when his uncle took the daring step of testifying before an all-white jury. Despite their heroic efforts, lawyers for the prosecution worked with the local sheriff to ensure that a biased jury comprised entirely of white men would acquit Emmett's killers. This gross miscarriage of justice is often presented as the catalyst that sparked the Civil Rights movement. I have taught this book for two years now and have utilized many primary source materials from the Civil Rights movement, but have yet to write a unit that addresses both the text and its place in American history. Such a unit would be applicable to all 8th grade L.A. teachers in New Haven and anybody teaching Till's story. Some of the activities would also be useful to a Language Arts or history teacher approaching any part of the Civil Rights era.

While students certainly make an emotional connection to the text, I have found that some of the time we could spend thinking and writing about the big ideas in the book is lost due to lack of *historical* context for my students. Students don't come into eighth grade with a strong background in Social Studies and I am not sure that the Civil Rights movement has ever been covered extensively in their previous educational experience. Students generally have Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks as reference points, but cannot articulate much

background knowledge beyond that. They do have a knowledge of slavery and Civil War era history, but often confuse Civil Rights with the Civil War. For example, students have said things like, "When Malcolm X escaped slavery...".

Due to this gap, some of my teaching has centered around building background knowledge and context. At times, the classroom has felt more like a Social Studies class than an English class. I usually advocate this interdisciplinary approach, but in this instance, we can lose sight of the Language Arts skills we are trying to build through the reading of this text. Assigning a research project early on in the unit has not been effective in remedying this problem. I haven't found a way to share/publish this work that creates a common core of background knowledge. While I ask each student to become an expert on one term or person from the Civil Rights era, even this work is done out of context. When they share their work as we come across it in the text, they are often unable to connect it to the larger Civil Rights narrative in a meaningful way. While I generally believe that new learning should come from student exploration and inquiry, in this case it can actually mean that we spend a good portion of the curricular time allotted to this unit focused on learning the history of the Civil Rights movement. Any teacher with a jam-packed curricular calendar knows that the few precious weeks dedicated to a class text need to be carefully planned in order to maximize student learning.

For this reason I believe that direct instruction in the history of the Civil Rights movement will be the most effective approach to building a context for the story of Emmett Till. Students will have the opportunity to expand upon this knowledge, but providing a common core of information will be essential before jumping into the text. Creating this context can be done through one or more PowerPoint presentations or assigned reading that provides background. This approach will help shift the focus in class from one of researching and learning basic American history to a nuanced approach to reading and writing about non-fiction. For example, instead of spending days in the computer lab researching, students can use the time to discuss the construction of history through written and visual documents.

Regardless of contextual knowledge, each time I teach this book, students connect to the text and become immersed in what happened to Emmett. My classes are comprised of largely African American and Hispanic students who are outraged by the Jim Crow environment of Emmett's world. They connect personally to his naivety in encountering the larger world and its bewildering norms. A few of my student also come from Cambodia and Thailand. Some have left destructive situations in their homelands to find a better life in New Haven. They can speak about the injustice of civil rights violations from a firsthand (or, when relating their parents' experience, secondhand) perspective. While their relationship to Emmett's experience is different than that of my African American and Hispanic students, it is no less intense.

In many ways my students are making the kinds of deep thematic connections teachers of English are constantly encouraging. In order to further enhance this notion of thematic connections, an additional aim I have started developing this year is to connect our work across quarters with our year-long theme of "Justice and Injustice." This thematic approach can also be done for a single quarter or abutting four to six week units. It's important that students think about what these words mean in multiple situations and time periods throughout their eighth grade year. For that reason, reading *Getting Away with Murder* can be followed up with reading novels and memoirs from other settings. This year, for example, my class tried social issue book clubs in which students read about Sudan, Iran and Sierra Leone. By the end of the year we also read books written about the Holocaust to broaden our conversation.

In order to make a successful transition from one historical setting to another, students will have to fully understand some of the concepts behind the larger year-long theme, along with the role of the individual in

shaping history. A common vocabulary would help facilitate these connections. Students should understand words like *oppression*, *resistance*, *non-violence*, etc. We can also create a space to focus on the roles of martyr, victim, hero and writer within the Civil Rights movement. These roles are transferable to other times and places (as are roles like bystander and collaborator). Introducing and discussing these roles will also enable students to critically evaluate Emmett's role and encourage them to begin the process of argumentative writing. Emmett has been cast in each of these roles at various points, and students should be able to argue for their own view of Emmett at the end of our unit of study. This assignment will also fulfill persuasive writing requirements.

Also relevant is the district's approach to whole-class texts. For both fiction and non-fiction books, New Haven uses the shared reading method under a curriculum program called Plugged-In to Reading developed by Janet Allen. The primary notion of this program is that a fluent reader or recording reads the book aloud while students follow along in their own books. The theory behind this approach is that students can focus on comprehension/analysis of the text, while the decoding is done for them. By pairing the text with the spoken word, students can learn new words and improve their reading fluency. While the Plugged-In program comes with a CD on which an actor reads the text to students, the same methodology can be implemented with a teacher reading aloud. For example, many times in our fiction units, I read to students rather than play the CD. This approach is really successful with middle-school students, especially in heterogeneous classes in which there are readers of all levels. There is no question as to whether all students are actually reading the text as there might be when a text is sent home to be read, and the class has a shared reading experience. At the same time, however, this means that at least twenty minutes every day must be devoted to reading if the class is to finish the book in a timely fashion. Therefore, all classroom activities are transformed into one or more "mini-lessons." Mini-lessons are effective teaching units as they promote student-centered learning with minimal direct instruction from teachers. In short, we don't ask students of all learning types to stay focused on one teacher talking for an extended period of time. Rather, mini-lessons are short bursts of vital information and modeling so that students may then have success in independent practice. These mini-lessons can be scaffolded to promote the construction of skills over the course of the unit and promote student achievement. The exception to this format would be the one or two classes in which the teacher uses a more traditional lecture, a question answer session, or even the viewing of a documentary to provide a context for Emmett's murder.

In addition, each of our shared reads (called core texts) comes with a plethora of materials to support instruction as a part of the Plugged-In to Reading program. These materials include text connections (often primary source documents) and graphic organizers focused on reading and writing strategies. For the purpose of this unit, I won't include these materials. While I use many of them on a frequent basis, they too can feel scattered. It doesn't always feel as if we are working on a few skills over time. Instead it sometimes feels as if we are completing assignments almost randomly, and their only common element is the text on which they are based. Hopefully narrowing our focus to a few key ideas will also help deepen student understanding of the book and the Civil Rights movement.

In many ways, the different parts of this unit all point toward more cohesive scaffolding as an aim. For that reason, it may make sense to investigate what this term *scaffolding* means and how it might be accomplished. Jerome Bruner introduces the notion of scaffolded lessons in his argument for structure in education. He writes,

...the curriculum of a subject should be determined by the most fundamental understanding that can be achieved of the underlying principles that give structure to that subject. Teaching specific topics or skills without making clear their context in the broader fundamental structure of a field of knowledge is uneconomical in several deep senses. In the first place, such teaching makes it exceedingly difficult for the student to generalize what he has learned to what he will encounter later. In the second place, learning that has fallen short of a grasp of general principles has little reward in terms of intellectual excitement. The best way to create interest in a subject is to render it worth knowing, which means to make the knowledge gained usable in one's thinking beyond the situation in which the learning has occurred. ¹

What Bruner states so articulately is the great challenge of teaching a historical text: in our rush to explain everything about the *events* in the book, we sometimes lose its *meaning*. This unit will redirect the focus of this text away from events to deeper themes and more lasting skills.

Rationale

Like any teacher, I can sometimes feel very conflicted when I try to define for myself my central purpose in any lesson or unit. I entered the teaching profession due to a deep-seeded desire to foster equality in educational opportunity for students of any background. I hold tight to that purpose as the central focus of my professional life and the ultimate reason behind anything that I do in the classroom. For this unit, that means providing opportunities for all my students both to learn the content of our shared text and to develop higher-order-thinking skills necessary to approach written and visual texts analytically.

At the same time, there is a definite and undeniable pressure to prepare students for the standardized testing that at times seems to so dominate our teaching and learning lives. Regardless of my personal opinion of this testing, it is the primary marker by which both today's students' academic capability and our skills as teachers are assessed. It would be foolhardy for any teacher to ignore this reality and destructive to both students' and teachers' reputations and chances for promotion. For that reason, any approach to instruction will have to imbed the skills necessary for success on the Connecticut State Mastery test.

In my few years of experience, I have found it to be more successful to make this skill work implicit rather than explicit. Students quickly lose interest when I start to explicitly state the academic lingo they have heard for so many years (visualizing, inferring, summarizing, synthesizing, etc.). However, there are many opportunities to *implicitly* include these skills within our unit of study. In fact, I think this text is the ideal place to foster many of those skills. For example, we can infer societal attitudes based on the actions and reactions of citizens of Money, Mississippi following Emmett's death. We can summarize Jim Crow laws or write a timeline of events to create a visual map of events leading to Emmett's death. We can examine Chris Crowe's purpose in writing the book by reading some supplementary writing of his and talk about his message to us as readers. All of this skill work can be done through formal or informal class discussion, journal writing, and mini-lessons. These assignments can be flexible from year to year depending on assessed student need, and for the most part, will not be the focus on my work here in this unit. In fact, this unit is not largely concerned with the day-to-day reading of the text, but the skills, context, writing and opportunities for enrichment and analysis around the text.

A final purpose for anyone to teach is the opportunity to enrich students' inner lives and help shape their view of the world. Perhaps a better way to phrase that would be to give students the information and tools needed to shape their own worldview. Understanding the role of justice, oppression, individual agency, and the construction of history is the foundation needed to take a critical view of any society. It would be truly ambitious to hope that students might glean all of these complex ideas from a few weeks' study, but when this unit is combined with similarly themed units throughout a year, I hope that together we might plant the seeds needed for deep critical analysis as my students grow and learn throughout high school, college, and beyond.

Objectives

Tomlinson and McTighe advocate the backward planning approach to lesson and unit design ²: teachers should start with their objectives and then craft strategies and lessons that will achieve those ends. Therefore, it may be helpful to linger on the goals of this unit before delving into the sorts of activities and plans that can accompany the text.

In writing this unit, one objective is to create cohesion across the many areas this text and students' work together touches upon. I want to help students discover the climate and history of the Civil Rights era, while also setting up a foundation on which to connect the idea of injustice and civil rights struggles to eras and locales beyond the South of the 1950s and 60s. Students should also have the opportunity to at least briefly engage with a variety of texts: primary and secondary, visual and written, prose and poetry. Through this immersion we can construct the beginning of an ongoing dialogue about the role of each and how we can approach them as readers. While we cannot possibly tackle all of these genres exhaustively, I want to at least present students with the idea that different kinds of readings will require different strategies. There are a number of texts available that present Emmett's Till murder in a variety of formats, including a picture book written in the form of a poem, a historical novel, a documentary, and a collection of primary source documents (see student reading list).

In addition, *Getting Away With Murder* includes several powerful, and disturbing, images. These include an image of Emmett's mutilated corpse in his casket ³ and an image of students holding a sign that reads, "We Will Not Go to School with Negros." ⁴ Students naturally flip through the book when they first pick it up, and for that reason, seeing these images can be one of their first encounters with the reality of the Civil Rights Movement. They often have vocal and emotional reactions to seeing these images. I think these moments provide a valuable opportunity to discuss the power of images and do some analysis of photographs. These images might be a gripping way to introduce the unit and create some contextual knowledge as well. It might also be worth investigating iconic images from other parts of the Civil Rights Movement and discussing how they are framed/created and what their role might be in our understanding of the historical narrative of the time period.

Students will also create our own poems about the era and the text. Although this assignment needs refining, it has been largely successful for students. Other formal assessments might include persuasive essays or a formal class debate. This is an ambitious aim for what will essentially be a four-to-five week period, but through careful crafting of lessons and use of resources, it is very possible. I imagine this unit to be a touchstone for the rest of the year-- one that we can return to in our studies from January to June. Below is a

list of some of what I hope students will know and be able to do by unit's end. Many items on the list are continuations of year-long skills and content, although some will be new to this unit. Following this list are descriptions of many of the activities designed to reach these objectives.

Content:

- The societal conditions at the start of the Civil Rights era
- Some of the early actions in the Civil Rights Movement
- The role of Emmett Till's murder as a catalyst for greater national action
- The differences between the North and South during this era
- Definitions of martyr, victim and hero

Analysis:

- The role/importance of images in reaching an audience (i.e, the way that photographers and writers can present information to evoke emotion)
- The role of an author/photographer's point of view in creating argument
- The idea that history is a construction of images/texts
- The difference between primary and secondary sources
- Ways to approach the analysis of images
- Ways to approach textual analysis including citation from texts
- How non-fiction and historical fiction differ in presenting a historical event

Writing:

- Persuasive argumentation using citations from texts
- Writing creative poetry that also provides a definition or explanation of a historical event or term

Strategies

Below are explanations/rationale for classroom activities and assignments. I do not think it is advisable (or possible) to do all of these activities in a given year, but each classroom makeup is different, as are students' needs, and one can select accordingly from the choices below as needed.

Context Building: Teaching students the historical information they will need

BKWLQ with Primary Documents (Pre-reading)

The KWL Chart is a common activity in which students create three-columned charts titled "Know," "Want to Know," and "Learned." They then go through the process of writing what they already know about a topic, generating questions about the topic individually or in groups, and finally recording new learning at the end of a unit of study.

Literacy expert Janet Allen ⁵ has pointed out that this is problematic, as students often don't have the contextual knowledge they would need to fill in the "Know" column at the start of a unit and cannot express the curiosity necessary for the "Want to Know" column. She has suggested the simple modification of beginning by adding an article designed to build contextual knowledge. For example, when teachers want their students to understand the reality of segregation, they might give them a copy of common Jim Crow laws. Student would write what they learn from this document in the "B: Build Background Knowledge," column, then proceed to add additional information they know and generate questions for learning. After reading *Getting Away With Murder*, students can add information to the "L: Learned" column and then generate additional questions for the "Q: New Questions We Have" column.

This is a quick way to introduce concepts to students, but still put the onus on them to generate their own learning. While the teacher provides the text, the students are responsible for teaching themselves the information contained within it. It's also an essential activity for generating student interest. The BKWLQ chart might be a good activity to combine with a lesson on the differences between primary and secondary documents as well, particularly if the teacher uses primary documents for background knowledge. This activity should be charted and left up in the room to remind students of their lingering questions as they progress through the unit.

Context building/poetry assignment (Pre/during reading)

One assignment that I have presented to students in the past is one in which they are assigned or choose a term related to the Civil Rights Movement. These subjects can be anything from "lynching" to "Martin Luther King Jr." to "Medgar Evers." Students research the term and fill in a graphic organizer. Usually the research is pretty informal— from Wikipedia or online encyclopedias. Then students use the information they find as inspiration for a poem that helps explain the term to the rest of the class. When the term comes up in the course of our shared read, students can then act as experts and explain their research. There are many poems written about Emmett Till that would make wonderful models for this assignment, including the picture book *A Wreath for Emmett Till* (see student reading list).

One issue that has cropped up with this approach is that students were still researching their terms out of context. So while each becomes an "expert" on a piece of the puzzle, so to speak, the entire picture of the

Civil Rights Movement still remains fragmented. I think there are a couple of ways to solve this, but one will certainly be graphically. Students can actually write their term on a literal puzzle piece that then fits into a larger grid. The pieces can be arranged next to each other in a way that flows logically. A timeline may also be a traditional, and appropriate way to approach organizing these fragments of information.

Finally, for a spin on this assignment, teachers can highlight the visual history of the Civil Rights Movement by giving each student an iconic image. This variation can be combined with lessons on how to interpret images, and teachers can ask students to write poems based on their images without the background research. After they write the poems, teachers can give students a second, captioned, version of the image and ask them to compare their interpretations to the historical record. The poetry is the important part of this assignment, because it taps into students' creative, emotional and expressive side. In my experience, poetry unleashes reservoir of feeling that might be necessary for such an emotionally charged book. I've attached the assignment sheet for this exercise at the end of this unit.

Genre Comparison: Approaching Texts with Genre in Mind

Image comparison/Image analysis (pre/during reading)

For many of us, not just our students, our first and most powerful connection with the Civil Rights era comes from memories of powerful images. Whether it be Martin Luther King Jr. being carried off to jail or segregationists harassing young girls as they attempt to enter a recently integrated school, the images that survive from that era often tell the story as well as any written text. For many students, confronting these images can be a challenging experience. Some have personal connections to racism; others have visceral rejection to the kind of hatred they see. Rather than shy away from these visuals, this is an excellent opportunity for students to incorporate visual literacy and student centered discussion into the unit. Students should be encouraged to use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to encounter these images and attempt to create meaning before being given background information.

VTS is a teaching strategy available nationally. My personal experience and therefore the lesson later in the unit are based on a similar methodology employed by the Yale Center for British Art. I will include information on VTS below, but include a disclaimer that I have not experienced professional development on this methodology. The homepage for VTS lists multiple outcomes of using this visual analysis strategy. The first three are:

- Uses art to develop critical thinking, communication and visual literacy skills
- Asks educators to facilitate learner-centered discussions of visual art
- Engages learners in a rigorous process of examination and meaning-making through visual art ⁶

All of these are critical goals. In short, teachers ask students to simply look at an image with no introduction. The teacher can then ask, "What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you think this (ask for evidence)? What more can you find in there?" By going through this process, teachers ask students to find evidence within the image to support their notions of what a picture is showing. This doesn't take very long and can be a powerful introduction to the era, book, or new knowledge. The attached lesson plan shows how to use a modified version of this process in a lesson on images.

Enrichment: Compare/ Contrast with 'Mississippi Trial, 1955'

Chris Crowe, the author of *Getting Away with Murder*, had also written a historical fiction account of Emmett's murder called *Mississippi Trial, 1955*⁷. A group of high achieving students can read both books simultaneously as enrichment for motivated students. They can analyze how an author approaches the same material from a historical versus fictional perspective. This comparison would open up many avenues for deep analysis of genre without changing authors, which helps student understand the difference between genre rather than point of view, writing, or writing style. Such an exploration would ask students to consider not only the author's choice of genre, but characterization in different genres and the relationship between writing and history. Students can begin to think about how authors are active in writing and re-writing the historical record. They may also consider how different genres evoke different responses within the same reader. Finally, this sub-group can discuss when an author might choose to write in one genre over another, and begin to tackle analyzing an author's purpose.

This multi-genre approach would also help remedy an on-going problem of differentiation within a classroom. Often, when we focus on differentiating instruction for struggling students we make sure to provide extra support when needed and offer them easier reading choices. We check in with them more often than high achieving students and modify writing assignments to suit their needs. However, we do not often remember to differentiate for our accelerated readers. They also need support in reaching their full potential; I could easily see a group of highly motivated students taking to this assignment. Their work could be completed through journal writing and meeting times set aside during the regular day or class session.

Approaching Larger Themes

Hero vs. Victim vs. Martyr Persuasive Essay (after reading)

One of the big ideas I want students to grasp through this unit is that history is really an interpretation of words and images from the past and about the past. That is, there is no one record of human history that is the "truth"; there are a series of attempts to record, sometimes faithfully and sometimes not, events as they happen. Recorders do this through writing or creating visual images. Throughout this process, historical figures, just like actors are cast in roles. They can be heroes or villains, sympathetic or hateful.

Sometimes these roles are clear. For example, Emmett's murderers were bad men, and while we could explore what racism does to peoples' values, on some level they are just detestable. At other points, a person's role in history is a bit more nuanced. I think students in eighth grade, are just becoming aware of a "shades of gray" approach to thinking, and they find it interesting to consider interpretation and perspective. I would like to point out to them that Emmett was thrust into the history books violently, and he himself had no authority over his "image control." We don't know how Emmett would like to be remembered, but we have seen him portrayed as many things throughout the years. Some consider him a hero for bravely defying social norms, while others see him as a hapless victim. Some see him as an innocent martyr, sacrificed like so many others in that great and ongoing struggle for equality. In an interview after the murder, the killers portrayed him as a wild boy who was abusive to women, while his mother wrote extensively about her loving, stuttering son who couldn't whistle if he wanted to.

Students should begin to make the distinctions for themselves and to consider just who they think Emmett was and why these conflicting views exist. This consideration is especially poignant because they themselves are generally thirteen or fourteen in eighth grade, and Emmett was fourteen when he died. In many ways, their own identity and sense of self are just forming. Students also need to start to develop the claim-and-support mode of argumentation. Usually this teaching is done through persuasive essay writing. I want to ask

students to claim Emmett's role as hero, victim or martyr and support that claim with evidence from the book and from our study of the Civil Rights Movement.

Role of the individual: Bridge to social issue book clubs (after reading)

For much of the text of *Getting Away With Murder*, we focus on the role that society, oppression, and the legal system played in allowing two white men to murder a fourteen-year-old African American boy. However, it's also important to consider the role individuals played in Emmett's death. Of course, there are the murderers to consider. But one must also consider Emmett's actions, those of his Uncle Mose, and the sheriff's handling of the case. Within the Plugged In Materials that accompany the book, there is a graphic organizer that asks students to assign responsibility to members of the Money, Mississippi community for Emmett's death. This is an important exercise for encouraging students to understand the concept of personal responsibility. I would like to extend this from a single day to a larger project.

One way to enlarge the class's scope might be to ask students to assume responsibility in their own lives for community service projects or to identify injustices for which they were bystanders (or perpetrators). Understanding the roles of individuals in injustice will be vital to moving forward in our social issue book clubs and the text offers a great opportunity to explore the way in which we're all responsible for one another.

Reading/Analysis Skills

Author's POV (During reading)

Students sometimes struggle with understanding how an author's perspective will shape his or her writing and story-telling. They tend to think there is one "right" narrative, or some sort of underlying undeniable truth that guides all writers of non-fiction. It is often fascinating for a teacher and illuminating for a student to provide an alternative approach to understanding history. *Getting Away with Murder* offers innumerable opportunities to investigate these different perspectives.

Students can start with the primary voice available to them in this text, that of the author Chris Crowe. As a class, students can complete a brief author study (look at some biographical facts and perhaps an online video interview) and discuss and chart how Crowe's life might shape his writing. These questions can then be turned into a protocol for further use, and so students may want to be a part of that protocol's creation. Some suggested questions might be:

- Why do you think he wrote this book?
- What does he want us to know?
- What is his message about injustice?
- How does he view the events of 1955?
- How do you know? (This is a good opportunity to introduce using text evidence to support student answers.)

After discussing this secondary source, teachers can then introduce primary sources (another great opportunity to teach this difference). In the comprehensive volume *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative*, Christopher Metress has compiled every essential document from the time of Emmett's murder, everything from Langston Hughes's response to the verdict to modern literary explorations of the themes of Emmett's death. That being said, two of the most powerful documents for students might be the interview of both the killers with *Look* magazine after they were exonerated (in which they outline their recollections of the murder, protected from prosecution by double jeopardy) ⁸ and excerpts from the memoir of Emmett's mother, Mamie Till Bradley, as told to a reporter from *The Chicago Defender* ⁹. There is also an amazing video of Mamie Till Bradley in the documentary *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till*. ¹⁰

Students will connect with the powerful emotions in these pieces, and teachers can guide them in similar discussions to that of Crowe's work, asking variations of the questions students investigated when exploring Crowe's point of view. Teachers can set their own protocol for what questions to ask and how to approach this process. Teachers can also extend this activity by using multiple primary and secondary source documents, perhaps starting class with a read aloud of a document and running through the protocol repeatedly throughout the unit. This will help reinforce the idea of author's point of view, as well as the essential concept that there are multiple narratives in history.

Sample Lesson Plans

The following plans are a sample of how I might structure two of these activities. They lend themselves to single-day or two-day mini-lessons, while some of the larger projects outlined above would need backward planning and more careful scaffolding.

VTS Lesson Plan: Image Analysis Mini-Lesson

Context:

I imagine this lesson to be a pre-reading activity which can be used with ANY photograph (or artwork) from the era. Teachers would have already given some quick background knowledge of the Civil Rights era, perhaps the day before, through a PowerPoint and class discussion. Now, before beginning *Getting Away with Murder*, the teacher can ask students to investigate some powerful images from the Civil Rights era. I am not writing this for any specific image, but rather as an open-ended lesson. This activity can be an opening to a variety of lessons or reading segments of the book.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to analyze an image from the Civil Rights movement in order to build upon their understanding of history and the historical narrative

Lesson Outline:

- Project image if technology is available or have copies ready to hand out as students come into

class.

- Introduce the aim of the lesson saying something like, "Today we are going to look together at this image and see how it relates to the information we've been gathering on the Civil Rights era. We are going to try to figure out what is happening in this image and what story it might be telling."
- Start by inviting students to spend a few minutes really studying the picture and ask them to notice everything they can. Give them a minute or so to get started, and then ask students to start raising their hands and sharing what they see. Tell them to stick to just DESCRIBING what they see (how many people, what are they wearing, etc.) You may want to chart their answers or keep notes on the board to refer to later.
- Push students to notice as much as they can in the image. You can ask slightly leading questions, but do not provide the information for them.
- When you are satisfied that they have exhausted describing the image, ask students to begin to tell you what is HAPPENING in the image. Push the conversation further by asking, "Why do you think this?" or "What shows you that?" Try not to affirm or disaffirm student answers. Stick to pushing for elaboration and visual evidence only.
- Allow students to continue this for awhile. You can also ask a small group of students to do this in a "fishbowl" format if you are worried about management while other students take notes on what they say. Alternatively, you can ask students to undergo the same process though writing in their notebooks quietly if the class struggles with orderly discussion.
- When students have reached a consensus or stalemate as to what is happening in the image, only then can you step in and provide some context for the image.
- You may want to push students to consider why the image is iconic or what its intended audience was.
- Make sure you make an explicit connection to the day's activity or reading in order to ensure a smooth transition to it and reinforce the relevance of the era.

Primary Source Lesson Plan: Text Analysis Mini-Lesson

Context:

Like the visual analysis lesson plan above, this lesson could be used in multiple places within the unit. It provides a general process for how students might look at author point of view. Again, this lesson won't use a specific document, but rather highlight the protocol. It might be worth noting, however, that using this protocol to investigate the primary text, *Getting Away with Murder*, is probably a good jumping off point for further textual analysis.

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to analyze author's perspective and purpose in primary and secondary source documents in order to better understand the relationship between authors and their messages to readers.

Lesson Outline:

- Introduce to the class that today you are going to be looking at a piece of writing related to the Emmett Till case. You are going to ask students to investigate the author's perspective and how that might shape the writing or message of the text.
- If the piece you are looking at is a short piece, you might read it aloud (with or without projection if that technology is available). If it is a longer piece, you can copy it for kids and either ask them to read it quietly or complete a class shared read, depending on the needs of your students.
- You can then introduce the protocol questions in a variety of ways. If this is the first time you are using the protocol, you might want to model some thinking or writing about each of the questions and chart students' answers. If it's a short piece, you might want to go through the protocol as a class. Alternatively, you can split students into groups and ask them to discuss and/or write on one of the questions and then come back into a whole group and share
 - Why do you think the author wrote this piece? Point to the part of the text that made you think this.
 - What does the author want us to know as readers? Why do you think this is the author's message?
 - What is the writer's message about justice or injustice? This might be a tough question for students if it's not explicit or if they don't have sufficient information about the writer; feel free to sub out for another question.
 - How does the author view the events of 1955 around Emmett Till's death? What makes you think this?
- It is important to end this mini-lesson by exploring how the work of the day widens/changes/differs from the narrative the class has about Emmett's death until this point. What new perspective does this give us and how does it change our understanding of this historical event?
- Make an explicit transition to the day's reading or writing.

Civil Rights Era Research and Poem

Together we'll be reading the story of Emmett Till and his murder. This murder was a key part of the Civil Rights Movement in our nation's history. In order to better understand why this happened and its effects, each student will research one topic and write a poem that highlights some of the important information related to that topic.

Step one: Developing Questions and answers

Use the graphic organizer on the back of this sheet to write your own questions and answers about your topic for each of the 5 Ws and an H. **Remember to write down the source from which you got the information.**

Step 2: Writing your poem

Pick some of these key details and use them to write a poem about your topic. A successful poem:

- Is revised and edited
- Incorporates some elements of poetic devices including imagery, figurative language, rhyme, etc.
- Includes at least three details about your topic.

This is due on _____ . We will have time in class to do our research. Use it wisely.

Mississippi Delta
Freedom Schools
NAACP
sit-ins
Brown vs. Board of Education
non-violence
Medgar Evers
13th amendment
Segregationists
Birmingham church bombing
Rosa Parks
White Citizen's Council/KKK
march on Washington
Lamar Smith

Jackie Robinson
Chief Justice Earl Warren
sharecropping
SNCC
Freedom Riders
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Malcolm X
Plessy vs. Ferguson

| | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| My topic is: | |
| Question | Who... |
| Answer | |
| | Source(s) |
| Question | What... |
| Answer | |
| | Source(s) |
| Question | When... |
| Answer | |
| | Source(s) |
| Question | Where... |
| Answer | |
| | Source(s) |
| Question | Why... |
| Answer | |
| | Source(s) |
| Question | How... |
| Answer | |
| | Source(s) |

Appendix Two: Connection to Standards

Connecticut is one of forty-four states that adopted new national Common Core Standards. I think it is important to write any unit with these standards in mind, as future assessments will be developed around the skills they outline. Below, I have included a chart of the Common Core Standards (CCSS) for 8th Grade English

Language Arts. The chart aligns these standards with the current Connecticut State Standards and with the Connecticut 8th grade Assessment (CMT). I have only included those that apply to this unit of study. In addition to these reading standards, students must also respond to a writing prompt with a persuasive essay (generally of the five paragraph variety) and so persuasive writing must necessarily be a part of any major 8th grade ELA unit.

| CCSS | CT Standard Match | CT Assessment |
|--|---|---|
| <p>CC.8.R.I.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.</p> | <p>CT.6.R.11 Reading Comprehension: After Reading: General Understanding: Summarize information, including introduction and closing statements, main idea, most important supporting text-based facts, details and/or ideas, connections between the key ideas, and in one's own words.</p> | <p>CMT Reading Comprehension: Forming a General Understanding A1 Determine the main idea (nonfiction) or theme (fiction) of the text A2 Identify or infer important characters, problems, settings, events, relationships and details A3 Select and use relevant information from the text in order to summarize events and/or ideas in the text</p> |
| <p>CC.8.R.I.3 Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).</p> | <p>CT.8.R.12 Reading Comprehension: After Reading: Making Reader/Text Connections: Identify motivations and reactions of literary characters from different cultures or historical periods when confronting similar personal conflicts, and hypothesize how those characters would handle a similar modern conflict.</p> | <p>CMT Reading Comprehension: Making Reader/Text Connections C1 Make connections between the text and outside experiences and knowledge C2 Select, synthesize and/or use relevant information within the text to write a personal response to the text</p> |
| <p>CC.8.R.I.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.</p> | <p>CT.8.R.17 Reading Comprehension: After Reading: Content and Structure: Extend the meaning of a text by expressing an insight implied but not stated, e.g., author's perspective, the nature of conflict, or use text-based information to solve a problem not explicitly identified in the text, e.g., use information in an article about fitness to design an exercise routine.</p> | <p>CMT Reading Comprehension: Examining Content and Structure D1 Analyze and evaluate the author's craft including use of literary devices and textual elements D2 Select, synthesize and/or use relevant information within the texts to extend or evaluate the texts D3 Demonstrate an awareness of an author's or character's values, customs and beliefs included in the text</p> |
| <p>CC.8.R.I.7 Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.</p> | <p>CT.8.W.20 Writing Process: Publish/Present: uses different technologies to produce, design and publish a finished product, e.g., political cartoons, brochure, stock market or consumer analysis.</p> | |
| <p>CC.8.R.I.9 Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.</p> | <p>CT.8.R.10 Reading Comprehension: After Reading: Developing an Interpretation: Compare, contrast and critique two author's beliefs and assumptions about a single topic or issue and decide which author presents the stronger argument.</p> | <p>CMT Reading Comprehension: Developing Interpretation B1 Identify or infer the author's use of structure/organizational patterns B2 Draw conclusions about the author's purpose for choosing genres or including or omitting specific details in the text B3 Use stated or implied evidence from the text to draw and support a conclusion.</p> |

Bibliography for Teachers

Allen, Janet. *On the Same Page*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2002. This is a professional book on shared reading, the methodology employed by the New Haven school district in which students read along with a fluent reader in class in order to move the focus away from decoding toward comprehension and analysis.

Allen, Janet. *Tools for Teaching Content Literacy*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2004. This is a very practical collection of strategies and graphic organizers for bringing literacy skills into the disciplines. I find it useful not only when teaching Social Studies, but especially when reading non-fiction books with my students.

Bruner, Jerome. *The Process of Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

1960. A classic education text, Bruner's work really outlines the idea of building upon student knowledge in a structured way. It's a tough read, but lots of good info.

Grierson, Sirpa, Jacqueline S. Thursby, Deborah Dean and Chris Crowe " *Mississippi*

Trial, 1955: Tangling with Text through Reading, Discussion, and Writing." *College*

English Journal 96, no. 3 (2007): 80. This is a journal article that offers a few suggestions for using Crowe's fiction book with students.

Newkirk, Thomas. *Holding on to Good Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones: Six Literacy*

Principles Worth Fighting For. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2009. Although I didn't use this book directly in my unit, it's just been a refreshing read over the last year. Newkirk does a great job of cutting through trends in education in order to identify core principles that Language Arts teachers should strive to hold onto. A must-read for any teacher, regardless of discipline.

"What is VTS," Visual Thinking Strategies, Accessed July 3rd, 2011, <http://www.vtshome.org/pages/what-is-vts>. More information on the VTS strategy including some useful videos and demonstrations.

Wiggins, Grant and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design* . Alexandria, VA: ASCD,

Outlines the methodology of planning backwards. This book really helps reshape how teachers think about lesson planning and helps replace ownership of curriculum and planners with teachers.

Reading List for Students

Texts Directly Related to the Story of Emmett Till

Campbell, Bebe Moore. *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* . New York, NY: Ballantine Books,

1992. This is a fictional account of a story much like Emmett's. It might make an interesting comparison for students who are interested in seeing how historical events become inspiration for writing.

Crowe, Chris. *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*. New

York, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2003. This is the core text of this unit and an excellent non-fiction read. Many students struggle with engagement in our non-fiction text, but students seem to love this one.

Crowe, Chris. *Mississippi Trial, 1955*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2003. Crowe's fictional account of Emmett's murder. The protagonist in this story is actually a white boy visiting his grandfather at the same time that Emmett visits from Chicago. It's an interesting read as it retells Emmett's story from the outside and perspective of the white community.

Nelson, Marilyn. *A Wreath for Emmett Till*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company,

2005. A children's picture book written in poem form. This could be a great model for a poetry assignment or an attention-grabbing intro to Emmett's story.

Other Civil Rights Stories

There are a number of really high quality books for young adults based on the Civil Rights Movement. These are just a few I have read or used in my classroom.

Bolden, Tonya. *Tell All the Children Our Story*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.,

2002. This is a history of the African American experience from slavery through Civil Rights, told from the perspective of real children. It is a beautiful book, full of visuals and artwork.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham 1963*. New York, NY: Random

House, 1997. This tells the story of the Watson family, visiting their relative in Alabama from Michigan. One of the sisters is almost in the church that is bombed in 1963. This might be a useful book for illustrating the differences between Northern and Southern culture. It's also written around a fifth grade level for a struggling student that might want to know more.

Levine, Ellen. *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*.

New York, NY: Puffin Books, 1993. This book might be a great choice for a motivated student who wants to know more about how the Civil Rights movement developed following Emmett's murder. Teachers can also use the primary source documents to emphasize for students the important role young people played in working against this injustice.

Weatherford, Carole Boston. *Birmingham, 1963*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong Press, 2007.

This is a picture book that tells the story of the Birmingham church bombing. It is full of photographs from the era and is both simple and extremely powerful.

Materials for Classroom Use

The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches and Firsthand Accounts

from the Black Freedom Struggle, edited by Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow,

Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, Darlene Clark Hine. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1991. A wide-ranging collection of primary source

documents that can be used to provide further information or supplement research.

The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative, edited by Christopher Metress.

Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2002. This is an amazing collection of any document you could imagine relating to the Emmett Till case, from before the murder up until the current day.

"The Murder of Emmett Till". <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/>. A collection of resources from PBS connected to an American Experience episode centered on Emmett's murder. I haven't really looked into using these resources, but there are some great images and I am sure there is a lot of valuable information located here.

"The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till: New Documentary Uncovers Evidence in 1955 Murder"

http://www.democracynow.org/2005/6/15/the_untold_story_of_emmett_louis. This is an interview with the director of the documentary *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till*. Students can read it before or after viewing the documentary in order to understand the director's motivation and background.

The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till. Directed by Keith A. Beauchamp. 2004. Ventura, CA: Velocity, 2006. DVD. Perhaps the best thing about this documentary is that it includes extensive footage of Emmett's mother, Mamie Till Bradley, before her death. There are also interviews with many of the people who were there during Emmett's murder and trial. It goes deeper than the book and would make an excellent follow-up after students read Emmett's story.

Notes

1. Jerome Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 31.
2. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1998).
3. Chris Crow, *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of Emmett Till* (New York, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2003), 33.
4. Ibid., 37.
5. Janet Allen, *Tools for Teaching Content Literacy* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2004), 25.
6. "What is VTS," Visual Thinking Strategies, accessed July 3rd, 2011, <http://www.vtshome.org/pages/what-is-vts>.
7. Chris Crowe, *Mississippi Trial, 1955* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2003).
8. William Huie Bradford, "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi," in *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative*, ed. Christopher Metress (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2002):200.
9. Ibid., 227.
10. "Grade 8 ELA Crosswalk," SDE: English Language Arts (ELA) CCSS, last modified 2/28/2011 accessed 5/22/11, <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=322620>.
11. *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till*, directed by Keith A. Beauchamp (2004; Ventura, CA: Velocity, 2006), DVD.

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