



The Eye of the Beholder: A Critical Look at Visual Arts and “A Raisin in the Sun”

Curriculum Unit 21.01.05

by Daniel Croteau

Introduction

In my unit, students are asked to use the six hats analytical method to interact with both visual and written art. During the unit, students will be introduced to the six hats technique and apply the practice to art work from artist collective the Spiral Group as well as various versions of their core text. For our core text, my students will be reading Lorraine Hansberry’s 1959 play “A Raisin in the Sun.” The text is important to our unit because Hansberry is an artist who is creating works reflective of the social movements of the period of time in. Many of these social movements still resonate today.

One of the standards that my language arts students are expected to demonstrate mastery in revolves around the comparison of written and visual art. In this unit, students will be provided opportunities to compare the written word to various filmed performances of the play. In doing so, students will be able to see how other artists interpreted the work of Lorraine Hansberry. By showing multiple versions, my hope is that the students will see that there is no right or wrong answer. In turn, a secondary goal of this unit is to have students start to determine how they would approach the art and how they can use these thoughts and ideas in the creation of their own work.

My students are coming of age in a time of multiple movements that are fighting for major societal changes. People not much older than them are sharing their thoughts and taking action in physical protests and sharing of their stories and experiences on social media. A major way that people can share their thoughts and opinions is through the creation of art. In this unit, students will have the opportunity to consider how they too can be a part of this process by cultivating their voice.

A key component of this unit is student voice. In language arts class, we study various aspects of reading and writing. In middle school, students are really beginning to find and develop their voice. It is my responsibility to provide opportunities for students to safely do that by not only reading the works of others, but creating their own texts to be analyzed. One way to do this is by using art.

Art techniques are being used across the board to enhance educational outcomes for a number of learners in a number of fields as broad as medicine. Art analysis is being used to enhance critical thinking skills because,

often in art analysis, there is no single right or wrong answer. Besides analytical skills, critical thinking involving art has been shown to have an impact in increasing student's empathy.¹ Living in a post pandemic world, students are in need of more opportunities to cultivate social emotional skills. In acknowledging feelings associated with both the artist and the viewer, learners are able to build empathy. Also, students are pressed more to use sight to look for visual clues leads to learners being able to better read people in general.

When looking at the Civil Rights Movement, we specifically examine the work of the artist collective the Spiral Group. We will examine how the work of artists such as Romare Bearden and Norm Lewis were reflective of the time and their philosophies. In reading the texts, students will be asked to consider what is important to not only Hansberry, but to themselves, in terms of the Civil Rights Movement. They will be asked to choose a movement that they feel passionately about and to create art that represents their viewpoint on the issue. Students will then have the opportunity to do some small research on a movement they feel particularly drawn to in order to create this art. After creating their art, students will be asked to reflect on how their work represents said view point.

In the final stage of this culminating activity, students will be asked to go on a gallery walk of their classmates' artistic productions. Students will be asked to transfer the skills that they have developed while analyzing the work of other artists to that of their classmates. It is my purpose to push my students to see themselves as producers, not just consumers, of the written and visual texts.

Rationale

I work as part of middle school team in a magnet school in New Haven. As a middle school teacher, I have the same group of students two years in a row as they complete seventh and eighth grade. This unit is being developed for my future eighth grade students, who I am currently my seventh graders. Over the past year, my students have struggled to engage. They have been expected to cultivate their own work environments, learn multiple new schedules, and navigate an educational world that their teachers barely understand. In conjunction with this, they are witnessing the ongoing hate crimes going on against multiple communities of color. It is my hope that this unit will help to instill in them or reaffirm their sense of personal agency.

So much of my students' world is visual. From memes to videos to selfies, my students are inundated with numerous images that they are both consciously, and unconsciously, interacting with. It is my purpose to give the students a stronger lens to analyze these images, to give them a road map to help them become critical consumers, and to produce their own images that will help them share their own messages.

It is important for my students to understand that there is more to art, film, and literature than what they are typically exposed to. Toni Cade Bambera speaks in her essay "Language and the Writer" about the presence of multiple literature and film canons. As the dominant intellectual elite continue to examine the canon, the steadfast determination to maintain the scope of dead white men at the center of the canon must continue to be deconstructed.² In providing opportunities for students to view different texts, they are given a lens to examine through that they have not previously been provided. It my hope that throughout the unit, students will see that the world of art, film, and literature is something they have an inside look into rather than feel that it is a world that is completely foreign and alien to them.

In his article “The Problem of Online Film History,” Thulani Davis discusses the need for students, both black and white, to experience “black actors portraying black life dilemmas in which the stakes are high and every character has a compelling need to influence a decision to be taken about the future.” In speaking about this, Davis is reaffirming the need to establish writers like Lorraine Hansberry in the film cannon. “A Raisin in the Sun” is distinctly an African American story about a family’s choice that will have a huge impact on the outcome of their collective and individual destinies. It is also important to teach this film because so many times the tone of African American works are comical rather than dramatic. The need for balance is important in terms of creating empathy and a realistic depiction of the world.³

Furthermore, when provided the opportunity, research shows that students are more responsive to learning about social movements when art, specifically photography is used.⁴ In teaching informational texts, it is helpful to use images to help activate learning in visual learners. This works to ground the text for the students. By activating the senses, student outcomes are enriched because they are using more of their brains to think critically about the material presented.

Students creating creative assignments in response to social justice movements gives the students the sense of being an active agent of change. By creating art, students are not only expressing themselves and their emotions, but also taking action to help drive change.⁵

Furthermore, art has a way of leveling the playing field. Among my seventh graders, I also have a significant number of bilingual learners who come from many different parts of the world. With various levels of language acquisition, it can be a struggle for me to provide the necessary supports at their level for them to engage in my class. One thing I have found that my students have been successful with is practicing reading and writing skills in relation to visual texts. I have used short Pixar films to model reading skills as well as have the students demonstrate their understanding of the skill using material that equalizes the playing field in terms of the language. Most of the videos I have used have limited dialogue and the students are asked to interpret the actions of the characters and the pictorial representations that the artist provides to them. It is with this in mind that I developed my unit.

Content

In the last year, the conversation about America’s ongoing struggles with racial equality has come to the forefront. This has been a dialogue that has always been on going intensified with people home with time to reflect and the overwhelming incidents of police brutality against people of color coming more into focus on social media platforms and in mainstream media. Whether it is a video of an assault or a picture of a protest or a mural to a victim, visuals are being used to tell stories, important stories, about the way this country handles issues of race. Visuals alone are not used to tell the story, but are often the source of vocal outrage.

Young people are increasingly aware of what is going on in the world around them. They are aware that they are growing up in times where people will need to continue to stand up and fight against oppression. Currently, there are major movements involving racism against the African American and the Asian American communities as well as ongoing discussion of sexual harassment, gender inequality, and the acceptance of transgender people. The students need to believe that they play a critical role in shaping the world for their own futures.

Students today are aware of the changing social landscape. The Black Lives Matter movement is a response to the increasing number of murders of unarmed people of color by law enforcement. Building on the history of the Civil Rights Movement, BLM continues the call to action of people to bring about change to systems that are failing their people. Inclusivity is a major tenet of the BLM movement that was not as present in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s. BLM is engaged in not only racial equality, but examining issues related to gender and sexuality.⁶ These are all elements of the world my students grow in.

In the world of education, it is important to learn from history. History provides student a lens to explore how people dealing in different times handled different problems. Examining past historical events, such as the work of the Spiral Group, provides a lens to examine how activists of the time used their voice. In particular, students will be examining how artist activists will used their voices to fight for social change.

Lorraine Hansberry & Politics

“... I energetically suffer the view that, more than anything else, the compelling obligation of the Negro writer, as writer and citizen of life, is participation in the intellectual affairs of all men, everywhere.”⁷

Lorraine Hansberry is an accomplished playwright whose identity, ideology, and art merged together to create several memorable dramas. One of those works is her 1959 work “A Raisin in the Sun.” In the play, Hansberry directly deals with the issues of racism, the evolving identities of men and women, the assimilationist ideology, and abortion among others. Her work very much so is a product of its time.

Writing is a political act. Lorraine Hansberry’s beliefs came through clearly in her writing. Besides fiction, Hansberry also wrote many non-fictional works that fell into the same category as well as representing other sides of her political outlook. One place that this is present is in Hansberry’s work with Paul Robeson’s newspaper, *Freedom*. During this time, Hansberry not only wrote about issues of race, but of gender. Hansberry’s coverage of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, a feminist organization protesting for widespread advancement for women, helped the group’s message reach a broader audience.⁸ These feminist themes would also appear later in her fictional writing as well.

Furthermore, Hansberry’s politics also appeared in the speeches she delivered. In her essay “The Negro Writer and His Roots: Towards a New Romanticism,” Lorraine Hansberry demonstrates she is a writer compelled to enter the conversation about the world in which she was living in because she wanted to do more than just exist. She wanted to fight, in her own words, “the war against the illusions of one’s time and culture.”⁹ Hansberry goes on to speak about how art has a multitude of purposes. While one primary purpose may be entertainment, another significant role that art plays is social statement. It is not enough to just create art which is visually appealing but also ideologically compelling to the viewer. In her writing, Hansberry made it clear that she sees art as a call to arms and that one of the main enemies of the artist is the illusion perpetuated by society.

Illusion is a subject that comes up in the core text of this unit, “A Raisin in the Sun,” in a number of ways. Karl Lindner presents an illusion regarding the reasons why the community doesn’t want the Youngers to move in. Ultimately, Walter is the one to shatter those pretexts after having his own illusion shattered when he learns that his business partner has absconded with the money Walter had used to invest in the company. On a larger level, Hansberry disrupted the societal illusion that “A Raisin in the Sun” was a ‘universal’ work making sure that critics and scholars were aware that her story was one of an African American family, and that their

identity was critical to telling of the story.

Hansberry herself is engaging in a dialogue with the other writers of the time. Her work's title is an allusion to Langston Hughes' work "Dream Deferred," which compared a dream to a dried up raisin drained of all the essence it had when it was still a grape. Hansberry presents the moment where different members of the Younger family are presented a moment where their dreams could explode. Rather than deferring their dream, as Hughes suggests, Hansberry instead suggests that the dream evolves. While Walter may have lost the liquor store, he stands up to Mr. Lindner and joins the dream of his wife and mother by supporting the family's move from the city to the suburbs.

Even within this context, Hansberry appears to be commenting on capitalism. In her article, "To Be a Man: A Re-Assessment of Black Masculinity in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Les Blancs*," writer Julie M. Burrell views "A Raisin in the Sun" as a work that demonstrates progressive view of masculinity that is not only anti-capitalist, but also anti-colonialist. Burrell believes Hansberry is uniting white supremacy and capitalism and thoroughly rejecting them through Walter's action at the end of the play.¹⁰

Some critical scholarship believes that Hansberry's work made her communist beliefs clear, while others felt her work was anti-communist. When considering layers, one critic, John Davis, noted that "Hansberry seems to be aware that writing for a non-black market, which is most often the object of black writers' protest, has to be such that the audiences 'applaud the very protest directed at them.'" ¹¹ The decision to accept or reject the status quo is a form of political action.

In her essay on "The Negro Writer," Hansberry expresses her awareness of the commercial nature of art. ¹² Walter desperately wants to be his own boss and a businessman. He sees this as the sole way he can be a man and support his family. This is in direct contrast to his mother, Lena Younger, who directly calls him out to go to his wife Ruth after Ruth announces she has provided a down payment for an abortion. It is a down payment that has the potential to devastate the family, yet it is another potential down payment, Lena using her husband's insurance money to purchase the family a house, that would suggest that Hansberry recognizes that these are characters that are still acting within a capitalist society. While Lena may recognize the societal acceptance of alcohol, she informs her son that she will not participate in the sale of it. Mrs. Younger makes the choice not to be an agent in that market. In turn, even the purchase of the house, Lena Younger isn't compliant in the capitalist system. She refuses to follow the rules set forth by the market and instead of purchasing a home in a predominantly black neighborhood, she chooses to purchase a home in a predominately white community. Lena recognizes that the rules are stacked against her family (loans for homes in African American neighborhoods are predatory) and instead to recognize the most important rule of the market: money talks. While critical of this economic practice, money over everything else, Lena Younger manages to use this to her advantage by using her husband's insurance money to secure a home for her family, and, in turn, secure their future as she sees it. ¹³

Hansberry was raised to question the status quo. In her youth, Hansberry first hand experienced racism in the real estate market when her parents bought a home in a white neighborhood. ¹⁴ When the neighborhood association tried to use contracts to make life difficult for Hansberry's family, Hansberry's father took his case to the Supreme Court. Lorraine Hansberry's family's struggle for homeownership led to a critical court case. When Carl Hansberry, Lorraine's father, purchased a home in Chicago in 1940, white community tried to evict the family on the basis of housing covenants. The Supreme Court ruled in Hansberry's favor setting a legal precedent. This very significant historical event was deeply personal to Hansberry and acts as the origin of her work, "A Raisin in the Sun." ¹⁵ Experiences like this taught Hansberry that things didn't need to remain as they

were.

Hansberry's family story proceeds the modern era civil rights movement which is typically understood to spring from the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in pursuit of achieving equal rights under the law for African Americans. King's call for peaceful protests, combined with the advent of television, broadcasts the struggle for equality into the homes of people internationally. The footage of those contrasting images, white violence and African American non-violence, was one way the art of television itself was able to escalate social change in a movement.¹⁶

Another way to bring about change is protest literature. In striving to make these significant changes, protest literature has been crafted to enact the social revolution needed to enact equality. Hansberry's work has been described as a form of protest literature.¹⁷ A crucial component of this type of writing is presence of a strong, authentic voice. In her play "A Raisin in the Sun," Hansberry was, at times, accused of pushing a middle class narrative.¹⁸ Alternate scholarship suggests that the Younger family's desire to achieve home ownership is a way of attacking segregation.¹⁹

The Spiral Group

"...What is most important now, and what has great portent for the future, is that Negro artists, of divergent backgrounds and interests, have come together on terms of mutual respect. It is to their credit that they were able to fashion art works lit by beauty, and of such diversity."²⁰

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s sought to achieve several goals. One of those goals was the right for African Americans to vote. Another goal was to achieve a better life through equal job opportunities. The third major goal was desegregation of systems such as schools.²¹ People took different views on the fight for Civil Rights leading to the creation of different groups that discussed significant issues related to social justice for African Americans. One such group was the Spiral Group.

The Spiral Group was an artist collective who worked to mix activism and art. Among the group members, there was not a common artistic sensibility, but most of them were experimental in their art work.²² Their connection came from their mutual desire to see change. The founding members of Spiral were Romare Bearden, Charles Alston, Hale Woodruff, and Norman Lewis all believed in the power of art to create change. These artists joined together in August, 1963, when they became involved in the March on Washington. The group initially formed to help connect people with rides to and from Washington, D.C. The common civic engagement led to conversations about their personal role in bringing about change as artists. This was the impetus for a much larger, and ongoing, discussion of the role of black artists in social change especially given how the art world was a traditionally white space.²³

Each artist approached this social struggle in a different way just as they each approached art differently. The name of the group reflected these many different styles of the various artist as spiral approaches all directions and continues to move forward.²⁴ For example, Lewis felt there was power in abstraction, while Bearden wanted to do more with figurative and collage. Despite their differences, Lewis and Bearden worked together within the space of the Spiral group. Formed on July 5, 1963, Spiral met weekly in a Christopher Street art space in New York City to discuss art, black identity, and social justice.

The group's only public display was the "First Group Showing: Works in Black and White" from May 14 to June 24 1965 at the space on Christopher Street. The show was a success, but, by the fall, the group had

disbanded.²⁵ Despite the very short time they were together, the Spiral Group's art remains its legacy and provides a source of relevant conversation for today.

Artists and their work

These are a lists of artists who belonged to the Spiral group as well as some art works that I would use with the students. Some of the work chosen from each artist represents the time period that they were writing in before, during, or after they joined the Spiral Group. The work is meant to represent a wide range so that students can access a variety of artistic styles. ²⁶

- 1) Romare Beardon: Strange Land (1959), Untitled – Jungle Scene (c. 1975), Conversation (1979), High Surf Orient Bay, St. Martin (1980) and New Moon II (1981).
- 2) Norm Lewis: Street Musicians (1948) and Reflections (1954)
- 3) Emma Amos: Inside and Outside (1966) Baby (1966)
- 4) Hale Aspacio Woodruff: Portal 2 (1968), The Travelers (1935), and Untitled (1968).
- 5) Merton Simpson: Confrontation (1957/1965)

Film Scholarship

In examining the adaptation of Lorraine Hansberry's work, scholars have considered the impact that racism had on translating the work from a play to a screenplay. Originally, Hansberry wrote a very different treatment for the 1961 film production that included a series of additional scenes that took the characters beyond the apartment and out into the world around them. This was in response to criticism she received that the characters appeared too middle class. As a result, scenes were penned allowing the audience the opportunity to follow the characters into their professional lives which enhanced the relationships between the characters and the people and culture in Chicago. In his review, professor Zachary Ingle sees the cut material as not contributing to character development or plot. On the other hand, director Spike Lee notes that the changes were a result of stifling the voice of an African American writer. Ultimately, it is left to the individual to make a critical decision, but considering the production from a racial view is important to teaching this unit. ²⁷

It is also important to consider capitalism in terms of both film messaging as well as film production and film archivism. Thulani Davis in his article "The Problem of Online Film History" strikes upon the note there is a danger by presenting material that is strictly available via the Internet. By approaching media solely through this method, people are limited in the scope of content, particularly in regards to African American media. In presenting and cultivating material for students, it is important to consider sources that might broaden the range of experiences for students. In limiting the scope of material, personal knowledge becomes limited and alternate voices get lost in the struggle.²⁸ These are all things to be considered when pulling additional material for this unit.

Teaching Strategies

Art Analysis in the Language Arts Classroom

When thinking of a Language Arts class, the emphasis is often placed on reading and writing skills even though there are several other critical areas of textual literacy. In trying to detangle the knots that connect reading skills and those of writing, listening, and speaking, it is important to provide students opportunities to access texts that are less language heavy and still allow students to demonstrate analytical skills without being compounded by language issues. Art analysis is an access point for demonstrating critical thinking skills.

A crucial part of this unit will be the creation and analysis of works as it relates to social issues. The National Arts Education Association published an open letter speaking of the need to work towards an educational environment that is more inclusive and embraces diversity, while also acting to be anti-racist. In the letter, the association discusses how racist systems produce racist ideologists, and, as such, it is important to dismantle the practices in education that produce that sort of limited environment. The letter basically calls on educators to do better and one way to do that is through looking at art through social movement learning and critical race theory.²⁹

Across the world, and in various industries, the significance of understanding art in relation to social movements is increasing. Jeremy W. Bohonos, Kimberly D. Otchere, and Yoon Pak did their research specifically on how art education and social movement learning were being used in human resource development courses in order to better prepare HR departments. In their work, they deemed it important that organizations teach social justice learning in relation to art in order to humanize the issues and to make sometimes intangible concepts more relatable to those who would be entering the workforce. Art has a way of building empathy as well as pushing oppressors towards evolution and helping to free the oppressed.

Social movement learning can be done using the social justice critical reflection model that encourages learners to consider the descriptive and dialogical thinking, critical reflection and consciousness, and praxis. Understanding the literal meaning of the work is only one aspect of this process (descriptive thinking). Learners are also asked to consider points of view and bias (dialogical thinking) as well as considering the historical, political, and social contexts of a work (critical reflection). When considering bias, learners are asked to understand the origin of the point of view and why it is problematic. In the final step, learners are asked to consider what can be done to enact change (praxis).³⁰

This lens lends itself very well to the six hats model.

The Six Hats

In this unit, students will be asked to examine art. Examining art is a way for students to build analytical skills without needing word-rich material to do so. One way of examining art is through the six hats technique. In this technique, students will be asked to examine art through various lenses (or hats). This is a procedure that can also be duplicated with written works. Throughout the unit, students will be given multiple opportunities to use this skill in various print and visual texts.

In the six hat strategy, students will be asked to examine a text using one of six hats. Those six hats include

the white, yellow, red, green, black, and blue. Each of those hats looks at a different aspect of a text as explained below:

With the white hat, students are looking for information. They are just looking for facts. In a visual text, they will say what they see. In a written text, they would state what is written.

Using the yellow hat, students are asked to consider the possibilities and to ask questions. These questions are meant to be open-ended with the other students able to consider all possible solutions to said inquiry.

While engaging with the red hat, students are expected to examine their feelings. What emotion is evoked from viewing the piece of art? What mood are they in after they read the piece of text?

When wearing the green hat, students think creatively about the subject. With this hat, I would also like my students to consider what art of their own that could be inspired by the art or writing they are viewing or reading.

The black hat asks the students to look critically at a piece of art or writing. The student is asked to see what doesn't work or what negatives are there about the text.

Using the blue hat, students will be asked to think about their thinking. They will be involved in a more metacognition. They will begin to cultivate a mindset where they consider their thought process and how to focus and hone in on ideas for further development.³¹

When used with multilingual students, the six hats strategy was shown to improve student's responses to literary texts.³²

Activities

The main point of the unit is to engage kids using the same analytical skills they would use on a written text that they would on a visual text. My hope is by having students hone these skills using a visual text that is less language rich, the students will be able to focus mostly on their ability to decipher the texts without the language barriers.

Lesson One: Introduction to the Six Hats

This activity can be approached in several different ways. For my students, they are more productive when they are provided the opportunity to do something over multiple days. I would present the first part of the activity on Day 1, but then do each additional part over several days, combined with reading the text, *A Raisin in the Sun*. It could also be presented all at once without some of the reinforcement pieces that are designed to reactivate prior knowledge given that time will have passed between different parts of the lesson.

To begin with, I would give students a limited amount of time to respond to the journal prompt: describe a time you had to make a difficult decision and explain how you made it. After giving students time to just write, students would then be provided the opportunity to share with the class what they wrote.

After the journal prompt, students would be provided a copy of a diagram of the six thinking hats with questions to keep in the binders. Students will give it a specific page number so they will be able to refer back to it throughout the unit. The teacher will briefly review the key points of each hat on the worksheet having the students highlight critical words to develop understanding of the definition of each hat.³³

After completing this, students will then have an opportunity to watch a small section of Bill Duke's 1989 production of *A Raisin in the Sun* and practice using the six hats technique.

On the second day, students would begin students will view a video from the Big Ideas Growing Minds channel on YouTube called "Six Thinking Hats by Edward De Bono: Animated Summary." During the video, the students will be asked to take additional notes on the six hats.

Students would then take a short assessment asking them to identify the meaning of the six hats while also rating their comfort with the hats. Based on this information, I would spend more time reviewing and providing opportunities for students to work on a balance of hats they felt most comfortable with as well as well as ones they didn't. In whole group opportunities, I would limit the hats to 2 to 3 hats per discussion initially. Later, in smaller group assignments, students would be provided individual hats and they would rotate.

Lesson Two: Comparing Multiple Versions of a Film

Throughout the unit, students will be reading the text in a mix of whole class situations, listening to audio, and watching video productions of the play. It will be important for students to understand that plays can be interpreted different ways and that no one way is right or wrong. The main purpose of this activity is for students to not only notice how different directors approach material, but to realize that there are often no right and wrong answers when it comes to literature. Students should feel comfortable interpreting things their own way as long as they can support their interpretation (red hat) with facts (white hat) while also thinking critically (black and yellow hats).

To start the activity, students would be provided several movie / theatrical posters advertising different versions of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Students will use the six hats technique to look at what specifically is being brought to the forefront in order to entice an audience. As part of the process, students will be asked to consider who the audience for these movies is. As a final reflection, students will be asked to compare the movie art based on the time period (1960s vs. 1980s vs. 2000s) and react to any similarities or differences they notice in the art. Individually, students will then be asked to design a theatre / movie poster for a modern day representation of the play and consider the audience they are trying to target.

Activity Three: The Spiral Group- Art as Protest

Students will be asked to explain what role art plays in bringing about change in the world? After giving them some time to write and respond, the teacher will then provide some brief background information about the Spiral Group before providing the students the opportunity to read "'Why Spiral?': Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, and Others on the 'Contradictions Facing Them in Modern America,' in 1966." Students will be asked to identify the main idea of the article.

Afterwards, students will examine art work using the six hat method. Examples of art by the Spiral Group artists can be found in the Content section. It may be helpful to start with some of the more concrete images before moving to the abstract. Still allow students the opportunity to explain their thoughts on the abstract pieces.

As a final part of this assignment, students will create a piece of art in the style of one of the artists about a topic of their choice. This could be used later in the final project.

Lesson Four: Lorraine Hansberry- Activist

A critical piece of this unit asks the students to understand that there is a link between art and protest. Often, when students are studying writers, they are provided any background information on the writer. For this activity, students will not only get background knowledge, but they will also dig deeper into who Hansberry is as a person before studying her larger fictional text *A Raisin in the Sun*.

For the first activity, students will be asked to make a book jacket biography for Lorraine Hansberry's work. The students will determine what they think belongs in a biography by looking at several examples from book jackets. Students will then be provided a longer biography about Lorraine Hansberry and asked to determine what should go in that biography. In small groups, students will be asked to write said biography.

On the second day, students will be provided a checklist based on what they deemed was appropriate for a biography. In their small groups, they will rate the example biographies and be asked to give suggestions on how to improve those biographies or explain why those biographies are well written. In the second half of the assignment, students will be asked to rate their own biographies and look to make improvements before turning them in.

Now that they have the author's biographical information, the students would begin to look at her thoughts about issues.

Students will listen to Lorraine Hansberry's speech "The Black Revolution and the White Backlash." Students will listen to the speech once as a class, and then read it again in small groups to determine the main idea and how she goes about supporting this. After working in small groups, students will be asked to share as a class to determine as a class what Hansberry's message.

After completing this, students will be asked to write a short letter 1-2 paragraphs in response to Hansberry's speech.

As a homework assignment, students would be asked to watch Michael Schultz's 1972 production of *To Be Young, Black, and Gifted* independently. Like in the theatrical poster activity, students would be asked to make a movie poster for the film using details from their viewing.

Activity Five: Writers in Conversation - Hansberry and Hughes

A critical understanding in this unit is the student's recognition of themselves as not just readers, but writers. That the purpose of reading is not just to study how someone else works, but to improve their own communication by improving their own writing. To this purpose, students will analyze Langston Hughes' poem *Harlem* and consider its relationship to the work *A Raisin in the Sun*.

To start off with, students will examine the poem *Harlem* through the lens of the six hats. In particular, it will be important for students to consider the white hat, the red hat, and the yellow and black hats. When initially examining the poem, the student's purpose will be to understand what Hughes is trying to get across. Students should also consider the imagery evoked by Langston Hughes words.

After examining the poem, students will be asked to create an artistic representation of the poem in a medium

of their choice: colored pencils, markers, crayons, craft supplies, electronic media, or video. Students will be given a period to plan and then to execute their art project. Upon completion, students will briefly explain in a well-developed paragraph why this represents the art.

After they are completed, students will go around and use the white hats to explain what they see in different people's work. This is to build to a larger activity where the students are examining each other's work more deeply. Given my students haven't had a chance to interact much due to the pandemic, I would keep this to just white hats at first, but feel free to make adjustments based on your own classes.

Activity Six: Conflict Resolution & the Six Hats

Social emotional learning has become incredibly important in the last few years and has continued to be pushed to the forefront with the pandemic. It is important that students are being opportunities to consider their emotional well-being. One of those areas is conflict resolution. With this lesson, students will be provided the opportunity to use the six hats technique to consider conflicts that different characters face in the book and to help them come to a decision that may be similar or different based on the six hats process.

The teacher should model this process using an example from the text. It would be my suggestion that the teacher direct students to the confrontation between Mama and Walter Lee regarding the money. The teacher will take the students through the hats (white, red, yellow, and black). Regarding the blue hat, students will be asked to think about what the thought process is of both Mama and Walter Lee in that scene. With the green hat, students will determine what they feel is an appropriate action for both Mama and Walter to make based on the chart.

Students will then be provided four separate conflicts from the text from a part they already read. They will then take the opportunity to use the six hats to come up with a solution.

This activity, once introduced, could be broken up over several days as a way to start class and monitor student understanding of the six hats.

Activity Seven: Green Hat Artists

In the culminating project, students will be given the opportunity to be the artist and create art that is based on something they feel is important to them.

In the first activity, students will be asked what causes might be important to them. The teacher will then pull four pro / con articles based on student interest. This should be catered to your group of students. Based on my current population, the eighth graders are impacted by things like racial discrimination, immigration, LGBTQ rights, and gender equality among others.

After students have read the articles, students will be asked to consider their thoughts on the article in the form of either a formal reflection, a letter to the writer, or an artistic response to the work which would include a brief explanation of how the work represents their reaction to the article. Students will be made aware that they will be expected to create an art piece at some point and they will be able to use any of the pieces they create in this assignment as part of their final project.

For the art project, students will be asked to choose a mode of artistic expression (drawing, painting, photography, video, etc.) and to create a work that represents what they feel about the issue. For the first part, students will be asked to generate a list of three topics they might be interested in based on what they

have already read in class or things from their own life. Students who are choosing a new topic will be encouraged to do additional research to develop their understanding of the issue.

Students will then be given several class sessions to develop their work of art following the steps often used in writing (pre-writing, planning, drafting, revising/editing, publishing). For the revising and editing stage, students will be asked to conference with the teacher about their work and to explain how their work is reflective of their messaging. Teacher will provide feedback on the art's message.

Once the students have completed their art, the art will be hung in the classroom. In the final stage of this assignment, students will be asked to examine each other's art using the 6 hats. The teacher will then facilitate discussion and the artist will learn if the meaning of their work is accurate.

After completing the discussion, students will reflect on this process as both a consumer and producer of art.

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3

Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5

Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.7

Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.3

Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1

Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.5

With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by

planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 8 here.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7

Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.8

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.2

Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.5

Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

End Notes

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