



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2021 Volume I: The Social Struggles of Contemporary Black Art

Historical Allusions and Art in Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming*

Curriculum Unit 21.01.09
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Overview

This unit revolves around the National Book Award winning memoir in verse, *Brown Girl Dreaming*¹, by Jacqueline Woodson. Supplementary texts include fiction and nonfiction poetry, picture books and articles by and about Woodson and the topics alluded to in her memoir, including brief biographies of figures from the Civil Rights Movement such as Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, and James Baldwin and artists that influenced her and that connect to the time period. The unit explores analysis of visual art pieces such as photographs from the era (1960s and 1970s) and works depicting black youth as well as the settings she writes about (Ohio; Greenville, South Carolina; and Brooklyn). Music that Jacqueline Woodson mentions in her memoir can be listened to and responded to. Artwork and music that reflect the black social movements of the period has been selected for students to view and react to. Students learn how to analyze visual art in a manner that is appropriate to middle school. In addition to responding to the various texts, students will have an opportunity to engage in creative writing. To engage in the theme of identity, students can write their own brief memoirs in verse, as well as creating works of art.

This unit was designed for seventh grade students at a small, highly diverse middle school, where most of the teachers including myself are white, but could easily be taught to a grade higher or lower. Our school is diverse socioeconomically, ethnically, and culturally. In the current seventh grade, 5% of the students are Asian American; 5% of the students are Latinx; 30% of the students are African American and 46% are Caucasian. In terms of ability there is a bimodal distribution of abilities and a noted achievement gap with the White and Asian American students earning significantly higher grades and test scores than many of the Brown-skinned students. The school is zoned by neighborhood with some children who live outside the area admitted when there is room, which frequently occurs in the middle grades. There is also a transient sub-group of the children or parents who come to the area for graduate studies at a local Ivy league university.

Background

In recent times the need for diverse books in classrooms has been increasingly recognized. Books read and available in the classroom should reflect the makeup of the student population so that students see themselves in the pages of at least some of the books read in school. Obviously, it is also desirable for students to read about other subcultures that make up their community and their country to decrease ignorance. Over the past year, we have become aware that there is a need for students to study and become aware of systemic racism and Critical Race Theory. In a study of how schools commemorate Black History Month, cited in *American Educator*, it was noted that schools use one of two sanitizing strategies which either “Highlight individual Black American achievement...while minimizing the historical barriers that these individuals faced”², or discuss multicultural tolerance and diversity at the expense of discussing race or history. When Black Americans view their identity positively, they are more likely to recognize racism. Thus, Jacqueline Woodson’s memoir *Brown Girl Dreaming* makes an ideal whole class read in our school and others like it. It is a true story, told by the author, about growing up during the Civil Rights era from a renowned and unapologetic Black woman. To be sure, all of Woodson’s work facilitates the important goal of “maintaining an inclusive and complicated view of blackness.”³

Teachers do their students a disservice when they ignore volatile current events which influence their students’ lives. Ibram X. Kendi, among others, have noted that we are now in a third cultural revival of Black Americans. According to Kendi, during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, Black Americans learned to see themselves; in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s they learned to love themselves; and now we have a Black Renaissance - where Black Americans are being themselves completely and without regard to white gaze, a term coined by Toni Morrison to describe the concern with white people’s opinions⁴. Amanda Gorman, the hugely popular youth Poet Laureate of the United States, has noted that “We’re living in an important moment in Black Art because we’re living in an important moment in Black life... [and that] Poetry and language are often at the heartbeat of movements for change.”⁵ What better time is there for young adolescents to read a memoir written in verse? And Woodson herself wants to be known by the youth who look like her, who grew up like her. The winner of the National Book Award and numerous children’s literature awards, she recently said “I’m tired of explaining to white people.”⁶ She is an extraordinary role model for the children growing up in these times, and as the core book of the unit is a memoir it will be a natural extension to read other texts by Woodson as well as view interviews with her. Woodson’s formation of her own identity as a writer over the course of the text also provides a forum for students to write about and explore their own identities.

Jacqueline Woodson

Jacqueline Woodson was born on February 12, 1963, in Ohio, and moved to Greenville, South Carolina when very young, where she grew up in her grandparents' home until she was about seven, at which time her mother took her and her brother to live in Brooklyn. She writes about living in both South Carolina and Brooklyn in *Brown Girl Dreaming* and most of her other books are set in Brooklyn. It will be interesting for students to explore the differences between these places, which she describes. This would also be a chance

to discuss the Great Migration, the ties that many black families - including, possibly, some of the students themselves, have to the South, as well as a current trend for Black people to move back to the South. Woodson's own picture book, *This is the Rope: A Story of the Great Migration* would serve the dual functions of covering subject matter as well as broadening the study of this important author. Gorgeously illustrated by James Ransome, with rich pictures of family life, *This is the Rope* explores the connection between Southern and Northern life for a multigenerational Black family.⁷ Woodson has named Virginia Hamilton and James Baldwin as two of the most influential authors to her⁸, so the class can explore those writers and their positions in history.

Another topic Woodson has connected to art and black history is that of freedom quilts, covered in her picture book *Show Way*. This picture book memoir shows the importance of quilts in assisting escaped slaves in finding the way to freedom, in addition to illustrating the skills of sewing and quilting as essential tools passed down from woman to woman in extended families.⁹ A contemporary connection can be made by exploring Amy Sherald's portrait of Michelle Obama hanging in the National Portrait Gallery¹⁰, in which her dress was influenced by quilts of women in Gee's Bend. A gorgeous nonfiction picture book, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, by Susan Goldman Rubin, explores these historic quilters and their connection to the Civil Rights movement. Furthermore, the 1991 painting by Faith Ringold, "The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Artles,"¹¹ is a great connection to modern art signifying the importance of quilting in the Black community as well as the legitimacy of their work as art. The production of a class quilt would be a beautiful community project as part of the culmination of this unit. *Show Way*, expertly illustrated by Hudson Talbott, illustrates the types of quilting blocks used in freedom quilts which can be used or modified by students for their own purposes. I love the family "tree" which is drawn as a river of quilting blocks interspersed with Jacqueline Woodson's female ancestors. This would be a great project for students to complete regarding their own heritages.

Ms. Woodson has written 36 books, most of them for children and young adults. Her writing had been noted for the vivid description of physical settings as well as boundaries which her strong characters then cross over. All her books have poetic language, and as has been noted *Brown Girl Dreaming* is written in verse. Her books favor hope in the face of adversity and she has said more than once that she does not like books that do not offer hope.¹² She has won the National Book Award (for *Brown Girl Dreaming*), the Newbery Honor Award four times, and been Young People's Poet Laureate in 2015 - 2016 and National Ambassador for Young People's Literature in 2018-2019. The important topics she addresses in her writing include foster care, homosexuality, drug abuse, gun violence, teenage pregnancy, race, and class differences. Notably, though she deals with these grown-up topics she stays away from illicit language giving people less of a reason to censor her books and optimize the chance they will fall into the hands of those that need them. Furthermore, it has been noted Woodson's "sympathetic characters make the big questions more accessible for teens to examine".¹³ Many readers find it impossible to read any of her books without being drawn into the story completely. As part of the unit students will be encouraged to choose another one of Woodson's middle grade or young adult novels to connect with *Brown Girl Dreaming*.

In addition to writing about her growing up years, Ms. Woodson has also written openly about her adult life in "Motherhood My Way". Here she describes her lifelong desire to be a mother, decision not to let her identity as a lesbian affect this, and search for a sperm donor - eventually settling on the husband of a close friend. She describes her joy in breastfeeding and watching her child's first steps.¹⁴ This kind of information about an esteemed writer can be comforting to students with LGBTQ+ identities who wonder about their own futures.

Brown Girl Dreaming

The memoir in verse 'Brown Girl Dreaming' begins with a family tree and the Langston Hughes poem "Dream Deferred." It is divided into five parts. The first part, "i am born^[15]," begins in 1963 and introduces the topics of segregation, and differences between North and South, right from the start, "*I am born Negro here and colored there*".¹⁶ She was born to a Southern mother and Northern father, in Ohio, with her father's highly educated and professional family close by. Woodson also mentions the titles of the subsequent sections of her memoir in the first few poems, and notes the major influences of the times also influenced her identity,

I do not know if these hands will become

Malcolm's- raised and fist-ed

or Martin's - open and asking

or James's - curled around a pen¹⁷

Before she is 1 year old her mother takes her and her brother and sister to her own family's home in Greenville, South Carolina. In the South, her first actual memories of racism, in the form of sitting in the back of the bus take place, yet at the same time she is told by her grandmother "we're as good as anybody".¹⁸

Part II of the memoir, "the stories of south carolina run like rivers," explore in depth Woodson's happy childhood growing up in the rural South. Her grandmother, descendent of enslaved people, is strong and loving, and an active member of the Jehovah's Witness church, which she has the children all participate in while Jacqueline's mother moves to New York City where her sister is to start a new life, eventually planning on bringing her children there. In the poem "south carolina at war," she reports, "We can't go to downtown Greenville without seeing the teenagers walking into stores, sittin where brown people aren't allowed to sit and getting carried out, their bodies limp, their faces calm".¹⁹ She also sees political meetings, marchers, and hears about the training the sit-in demonstrators go through. Her upbringing is both loving and strict, and she is not allowed to use words such as ain't, huh, y'all, git, gonna or even Ma'am. Throughout the book Woodson interspersed a series of "how to listen" poems which are only three lines each but explore some of the most important influences of her youth. Her writing style is clean, sparse, with only rare forays into figurative language. Her older sister is seen as brilliant, while she herself is a slow reader though she very much loves stories. Toward the end of this section the children receive a letter from their mother informing them she is coming to get them, and that she has a new baby on the way. Jacqueline's days as a Southern child and the baby of the family are over, and she is clearly regretful about both.

Part III is set up as analogous to earlier moves of brown-skinned people North with the title "followed the sky's mirrored constellation to freedom. Now she experiences a rich urban childhood in Brooklyn with its own influence on her racial identity, brought to light by people's comments about her brother, "Our baby brother Roman, was born pale as dust, *His soft brown curls and eyelashes stop people on the street. Whose angel child is this? They want to know*".²⁰ And most importantly, her identity as a writer begins to form. She loves school right from the beginning though she is often compared to her sister and falls up short. She is fascinated by her first notebook and begins to make up stories. Their life in Brooklyn is not a privileged one, and her younger brother develops pica, eating lead paint, and ends up hospitalized for an extended period.

Her mother's brother Robert, a big influence on her, ends up in Rikers Island and the state prison Dannemora, where they visit him, and he becomes a Muslim. It seems like he is one of the first to recognize her talent, evident in the poem "believing," while her own mother is more skeptical. "Keep making up stories, my uncle says. You're lying, my mother says".²¹ While they have lost touch with her biological father and their Ohio family, summers are spent in Greenville, and her bond with Gunnar, her maternal grandfather whom they call Daddy, is strong. However, the siblings are laughed at there for being different, and they do not clearly belong to either the North or the South.

In Part IV, "deep in my heart, i do believe," Jacqueline struggles to write down the stories she makes up, and it does not come easily to her at first. Her exposure to poetry and literature begins and she falls in love with the poets they study in school such as Robert Frost and Langston Hughes. Her talent as a storyteller and writer becomes evident in school when she can retell Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant" verbatim in front of the class and writes a book of seven poems about Butterflies. She catalogues the music of the times, life as a child in the streets of Brooklyn, and as a Jehovah's Witness with the atheistic influences of her mother and grandfather. When Gunnar dies her grandmother sells the house in Greenville and they no longer return to the South.

Part V, the final section of the memoir, is aptly titled "ready to change the world." The teenage Woodson is clearly impacted by the chaotic times, and she mentions Angela Davis, the Black Panthers, and the Vietnam War. The clarity of the brown girl's dream has solidified by the closing poems of the book. In "every wish, one dream" she finally confesses what it always was and is, and the fact that she has achieved this and more in her career as a writer is one of life's greatest inspirations.

Further Exploring Art and History

Students may be familiar with some of the historical figures alluded to in *Brown Girl Dreaming* but may only have a superficial knowledge of them. Certainly, they have studied Martin Luther King Jr. and may have read the "I Have a Dream" speech and possibly even "Letter from Birmingham Jail." However, they would clearly benefit from reading about and selections by Malcom X, James Baldwin, Huey Newton, Angela Davis, and the Black Panthers and Black Power movement in general. Other topics important in the memoir which can be studied in nonfiction accompanying texts include the *Negro Motorist Green Book*, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Muslim religion.

Since the Civil Rights movement goes on in the background of Ms. Woodson's childhood, it will be important for students to examine and interpret the photographs which have become icons. The National Gallery of Art has a "Civil Rights Movement" page on the *Uncovering America* section of their website which will be very useful for this. According to John Lewis, "[These images] are a testament to the ability of a committed, determined people to transform a nation, even the most powerful nation on earth, and bring it more in line with the call for justice".²² In addition to a curated collection of fourteen photographs, each photo has detailed information as well as pointed questions about the photos. One of them is a photograph of Norman Lewis' painting which his wife said he called "Alabama."²³ This would be an interesting piece of art for the whole class to describe and analyze. Then the class could move on to use a system to describe and analyze a photograph, followed by small groups of students each choosing one of the photographs to do the same with and then write a journal entry on. Artwork reflecting the social movements of the period which is not

mentioned in Ms. Woodson's memoir can and should be folded in. For example, from the Africobra movement there is "Homage to a Giant," the notorious painting by Wadsworth Jarell reflecting Malcom X. This painting is so appealing with its bright colors and various facial expressions could be accompanied by a biographical text about Malcolm X, whose life is so important to many students of color.²⁴ Another painting by a co-founder of Africobra is "I Am Somebody," painted by Gerald Williams in 1969, which provides students with an opportunity to study painting alongside poetry, and also is useful for helping students see connections across media and historical figures. According to kavigupta.com,

This painting pays homage to the poem "I Am Somebody," written by an Atlanta-based Baptist pastor and civil rights activist named Reverend William Holmes Borders, Sr. The poem states, "I am Somebody! I am Somebody! I may be poor, But I am Somebody. I may be young, But I am Somebody. I may be on welfare, But I am Somebody. I may be small, But I am Somebody. I may have made mistakes, But I am Somebody. My clothes are different, My face is different, My hair is different, But I am Somebody. I am Black, Brown, or White. I speak a different language, But I must be respected, protected, never rejected. I am God's child!" Two years after Williams painted this canvas, the Reverend Jesse Jackson recited "I Am Somebody" on an episode of Sesame Street in front of a multi-racial group of children, who together repeatedly recited the chorus of "I Am Somebody."²⁵

Artwork can also be used to explore connections to the current time and Black Lives Matter. For example, the 1972 painting by Betye Saar, "The Liberation of Aunt Jemima,"²⁶ can be used to illustrate the long process of social change with a current article about how her image was finally removed from syrup bottles in 2020.²⁷ This can be interpreted alongside the more peaceful but equally powerful image of another mature Black woman drawn by Emory Douglas for the *Black Panther* magazine.²⁸

In *Brown Girl Dreaming* Woodson mentions quite a few musical pieces which played in the background of her youth. Early in the story Jacqueline's grandmother tells her "Colored folks used to stay where they belonged. But times are changing",²⁹ and Bob Dylan's "Times They Are A-Changin'",³⁰ can let students know it was not only people of color who thought so. This song could be paired with "A Change is Gonna Come" by Sam Cooke.³¹ As listening to music from different eras adds energy, depth and richness to the classroom, the students will benefit from listening to upbeat works mentioned in the poem "music" such as "ABC" by the Jackson Five,³² "O-O-H CHILD" by the Five Stairsteps,³³ "Funky Worm" by the Ohio Players,³⁴ "Everyday People" by Sly and the Family Stone, and the melancholy "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" by the Hollies.³⁵ The memoir also mentions "Twistin' the Night Away" by Sam Cooke.³⁶ The darker "Family Affair",³⁷ also by Sly and the Family Stone, is mentioned later in the book as her mother's favorite song may also be something that students can relate to. Students can pick their favorite out of these well-known works of art to write about in verse or prose. The title of Part IV, "deep in my heart I do believe" could provide an opportunity to listen to "We Shall Overcome",³⁸ and discuss the many occasions on which that song is played as well as begin an exploration on the theme of the book.

As with the visual art, it is ideal to expand the musical selections beyond the allusions from the memoir into protest songs of the Civil Rights movement, as outlined on the TeachRock website. For example, "Respect" as recorded by Aretha Franklin³⁹ is a song that will be familiar to many and is appealing to marginalized groups such as African Americans as well as women, and of course the intersectionality of the two. Interestingly, the song was actually written by Otis Redding. James Brown is another fascinating figure. A celebrity with a crossover audience before he became involved in the Civil Rights movement, following the assassination of

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., he toured with the message of encouragement to young Black people of “learn, don’t burn.” Shortly after this he recorded “Say it Loud: I’m Black and I’m Proud”.⁴⁰ The 1971 hit by Marvin Gaye ‘What’s Goin’ On,” was originally written by Motown staff songwriter Al Cleveland about a clash between the police and anti-Vietnam War demonstrators. It was later adopted and adapted by Marvin Gaye to communicate both despair and hope, the honest duality that is so important to communicate to young people learning about historical and present systemic racism.⁴¹

Regarding the exploration of works of art in the classroom, the Artful Thinking website has several routines which are designed to support thoughtful thinking and the integration of works of art into the classroom that will be extremely helpful. These are mini activities that support various levels of learning such as comparing and contrasting, observing and describing, questioning and investigating, and reasoning.⁴² Overall, it will be important to give students plenty of time to observe works of art, base their interpretations on evidence from the artwork/text, and for the teacher to facilitate the appreciation of multiple perspectives, encouraging the understanding of art as a process rather than product. In the Language Arts classroom, this connects strongly to yearlong learning goals for texts (substituting the piece of art for written text) such as using evidence from the text as a basis for inquiry, using evidence to form and support an argument, seeing a text in the context of a historical moment, assessing the author/artist's choices in craft, and analyzing multiple perspectives. It will be helpful to coordinate with the art teacher to establish who will review basic terms such as medium, background, foreground, and print. Creative assignments may also be used in conjunction with art class to process current/historical events, communicate and converse with those around them, and increase self-awareness.

Contemporary art exploration will be an enjoyable aspect of the unit that students will likely be surprised by and eager to engage in. For example, the work of Hebru Brantley found on hebrubranley.com could provide material for a student choice project. Jumping off points could be works such as “Untitled” with its multi fabric quilt-like head wrap, and “Lord of the Flies Part 2”⁴³ with its reference to the classic text possibly familiar to students because of their reading of *Damselfly* by Chandra Prasad, which is a modern multicultural and intergender take on the classic text. The topic of hair is addressed in “afros”⁴⁴ and is a motif in *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Here the class can look at the 2012 Ebony collages of Lorna Simpson,⁴⁵ and perhaps also analyze the way her portrayal of hair changed over the years. Film can be integrated as well, with the contemporary Oscar winning short film “Hair Love.”⁴⁶ Other artists we may want to explore include Monica Ahanonu, Kehinde Wiley, Jean Michel Basquiat, and Augusta Savage. Basquiat’s illustrations in the picture book version of *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me*⁴⁷ is another great poetry visual art connection. All these connections will be incorporated into a study of identity throughout the unit, which will provide a way for students to reflect on their own identity. While the class is still reading the book, students can begin to write short poems with accompanying artwork relating to their own identity, a collection of which will be completed as the culminating project for the unit. At the same time, in art class they can work on a montage or other piece of art that will be suitable as a cover for their very own memoirs.

Throughout the unit students can be exploring and expressing their own identities. It will be important for the teacher to be able to have frank discussions about systemic racism and the current Black Lives Matter movement. However, like Jacqueline Woodson this author believes it is important to focus on a message of hope. This can be accomplished by folding in a presentation of anti-racist ideas and positive role models. Students could read and analyze a speech by Barack Obama such as the one he gave following the murder of George Floyd which directly transmits a message of hope to young Black Americans.⁴⁸ On addition, the speech given by Michelle Obama while she was first lady on the power of education⁴⁹ would also add an

important dimension. Overall, the possibilities for enrichment with this unit in the areas of literary analysis, historical context, and connection to current events along with the visual art and music are limitless, and the unit can easily be adjusted to fit individual teachers' goals and objectives.

Sample Lesson Plan One: Introduction

Objective

- To introduce students to the theme of how culture and dreams influence identity.
- To practice responding to poetry and connecting text to the circumstances and culture of the author's life.

Activities

1. Ask students to write definitions of the words "identity" and "culture" in their journals, and to respond to the prompt, how do you believe culture influences identity? Is this always a positive thing?
2. Spend some time discussing student responses. The teacher may want to give examples from his or her own life of how cultural influences may not always be positive. It is important to set a tone of mutual trust in the classroom.
3. After allowing students a few minutes to peruse the book, have them open to the poem at the beginning, "Dreams" by Langston Hughes. Ask students what they know about Langston Hughes. If they do not have sufficient background information, the teacher may provide some background information on Langston Hughes and his role in the Harlem Renaissance.
4. Read the poem one aloud, call on a student to read it, and then have everyone read it to themselves. Ask students which word they find most significant in the poem and explain why they chose that word. Follow up with a discussion of possible interpretations of the poem and ask students why they think Woodson chose it to start her memoir with.
5. Watch an author video of Jacqueline Woodson that was created for the book launch. Ask students what stands out for them from the video. Point out that her dream of writing and growing up Black in the 1960s and 1970s in both the South and North were important influences on Woodson's identity.
6. Let students know that in addition to studying the historical and art associated with this period in history they will also have a chance to explore their own identities by writing poetry and creating art.

Assessment

Students will read Part 1 of the memoir, "i am born" and select a poem to respond to which demonstrates how culture is impacting Woodson's developing identity and connect this to something from their family of origin or early history that has influenced their own identities.

Sample Lesson Plan Two: Music Analysis

Objectives

- To listen closely to music and identify the instruments, rhythm, and feelings it evokes.
- To analyze lyrics as poetry for literary devices, theme, and connection to the core text.

Note - This lesson should take place while students are reading Part II of the memoir, "the stories of south carolina run like rivers." On page 54 in the poem "at the end of the day" Jacqueline's grandmother tells her "Colored folks used to stay where they were told they belonged. But times are changing. And people are itching to go where they want." This quote is the inspiration for this lesson.

Activities

1. Present students with a graphic organizer they will use for analyzing the songs for this lesson and other lessons in the unit. The organizer can have columns for music (instruments, rhythm) lyrics (poetic devices, theme, connection to text) and biographical information on the artist.
2. Play the song "A Change is Gonna Come" by Sam Cooke, while students follow along with the lyrics. Provide biographical information on Sam Cooke from a video or short text. Provide some time for students to fill in the row of their organizer and then encourage several students to share their reactions.
3. Follow the same procedure with the song "The Times They Are A-Changin'" by Bob Dylan.
4. Ask students which song speaks to them more closely and to explain why. Pose the question on whether they are influenced more by the musical style, lyrics, or race of the artists.
5. Ask students about their familiarity with the song "We Shall Overcome." Where have they heard it? Do they know where it comes from?
6. Have students read the webpage "We Shall Overcome: The Story Behind the Song," and then watch a music video created with photos of the Civil Rights Movement. Ask students which images from the video had the biggest impact on them.

Assessment

Have students find their own songs about change that inspire them. They should use the questions on the graphic organizer to write a response to the song and turn it in with a link to the song for the teacher to listen to.

Sample Lesson Plan Three: Art Analysis

Objectives

- To think critically about the power of visual images and how artists can use historical images to make a statement regarding social progress.
- To look carefully at details and develop elaborated verbal descriptions before interpreting or elaborating.

Note - This lesson should take place following readings or discussion about the Black Panthers and Black Power social progress movements.

Activities

1. Ask students what they know about “Aunt Jemima” to assess whether anyone is familiar with it as a brand, has used it, or knows that Quaker Foods has retired the image from its packaging as of June 2021.
2. Show students a slide of “The Liberation of Aunt Jemima” by Betye Saar (1972).
3. Tell students that the first step in analyzing this work of art is to observe and describe it, without making any interpretations about what it might mean or how it connects to history.
4. Use “The Elaboration Game” from the Artful Thinking website or any routine that encourages students to describe what they see one segment at a time and other students to elaborate on that description without interpreting it.
5. After the physical attributes have been described, allow them to interpret the meaning of the piece. Then tell them it was a painting for a show about Black heroes at the peak of the Black Panther movement by a female artist and look at the artist’s statement accompanying the piece on the Berkeley website.
6. Project or distribute the short article from National Public Radio’s “Updates: The Fight Against Racial Injustice” page describing how Quakers Oats, owned by Pepsico, has finally decided to take Aunt Jemima and other offensive images off their products.

Assessment

Students will write a brief essay in response to the questions “How did Betye Saar take a stereotype and reverse its meaning, and why did it take so long for the world to hear her?”

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

English Language Arts Standards » Anchor Standards » College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading⁵⁰

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. *Students will be doing this throughout the unit when they read the Woodson memoir and other ancillary texts.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. *Students will be doing this throughout the unit when they read the Woodson memoir and other ancillary texts.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. *Students will be doing this throughout the unit when they read the Woodson memoir.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. *Students will be doing this throughout the unit when they read the Woodson memoir which is written in verse.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. *Students will be doing this throughout the unit when they read the Woodson memoir and other ancillary texts.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. *Students will be doing this throughout the unit when they read the Woodson memoir and other ancillary texts, especially connecting visual artwork and music to the text.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. *Students will be doing this throughout the unit when they read the Woodson memoir and other ancillary texts.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10

Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. *Students will be doing this throughout the unit when they read the Woodson memoir and other ancillary texts.*

Bibliography for Teachers

"English Language Arts Standards." English Language Arts Standards | Common Core State Standards Initiative. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>. These are the standards used in the district for which this unit was written.

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Ghazi, Rheema, Trinkely, Rachel, and Tobin, Jon. "Painting a Just Picture: Art and Activism." Presentation by the *National Gallery of Art* on March 15, 2021. The author attended the virtual professional development session where this information was presented and was able to download a slide deck.

"Kavi Gupta Gallery." Kavi Gupta Gallery. Accessed 3 23, 2021 <http://kavigupta.com/>.

This Chicago based gallery has the mission of showcasing diverse art, and their website is a great place to see artwork from artists of the Africobra movement such as Gerald Williams.

Kendi, Ibram X. 2021. "The Renaissance is Black." *Time* 197, no. 5-6 (Feb): 68-71.

A look at the contemporary Black art and social progress movements.

National Gallery of Art. n.d. "Uncovering America: Civil Rights Movement." National Gallery of Art. Accessed 3 23, 2021. <https://www.nga.gov/education/teachers/lessons-activities/uncovering-america/civil-rights.html>. A great source of photographs and lesson plans covering the Civil Rights movement with an inspiration quote from John Lewis.

Phia, Salter S. 2021. "Learning History: Facing Reality: How Knowledge Increases Awareness of Systemic Racism." *American Educator* 45, no. 1 (Spring): 26-31. This article in a publication for American Federation of Teacher members emphasizes the need to and benefits of educating students in systemic racism.

Project Muse, ed. 2019. "Jacqueline Woodson." *Bookbird* 57 (4): 75. In an interview cited in the article Ms. Woodson discusses her writing and the goals of her life work.

Project Zero. n.d. "Thinking Palette." *Artful Thinking*. Accessed 3 24, 2021.

http://pzartfulthinking.org/?page_id=2. A website with numerous thinking routines that teachers may use in their classroom to promote all types of text analysis.

TeachRock. October 21, 2020. <https://teachrock.org/>. A source for a unit on music of the Civil Rights Era along with protest songs.

Time, ed. 2021. "Unity with Purpose." *Time* 197, no. 5-6 (Feb): 76. An interview by Michelle Obama with Amanda Gorman which is helpful for making connections to the contemporary Black art and social progress movements.

Time, ed. 2021. "We Have Always Been Storytellers." *Time* 197, no. 5-6 (February): 82-83.

A multi-author interview which Jacqueline Woodson participated in.

Wilder, Craig Steven. *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn*. Columbia University Press, 2000. This text is a great overview of race interactions and relations in Brooklyn dating from 1636 to 1990.

Woodson, Jacqueline. 2003. "Motherhood my way." *Essence* 34, no. 8 (December): 178-182.

Ms. Woodson describes the choices she made to conceive a child and parent in the context of a lesbian relationship.

Reading List for Students and Materials for Classroom Use

Angelou, Maya, Jean Michel Basquiat, and Paul Zakris. *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*. Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1993. In this striking picture book, Basquiat has illustrated the poetry of Maya Angelou. It is a great example for students of how poetry and virtual art can work together.

Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son*. Penguin Books, 2018. While the book is above the comprehension level for most middle school students, excerpts from it, particularly pertaining to Baldwin's relationship with his father, may be relatable particularly with help from the teacher.

Baldwin, James. "The Giver (for Berdis) by James Baldwin." Poetry Foundation. Accessed 5 1 2001. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/88930/the-giver-for-berdis>. This poem would be interesting for students to read when studying the importance of James Baldwin to the Black Panther movement.

BiographyChannel. "Langston Hughes: Leading Voice of the Harlem Renaissance | Biography." YouTube. February 04, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inP76rkYUso>. This is a good concise video for providing middle school students with biographical information on Langston Hughs.

"Bob Dylan The Times They Are A Changin' 1964." YouTube. December 27, 2013. Bob Dylan The Times They Are A Changin' 1964. This song is used as part of a lesson plan which connects to Woodson's recollections of her grandmother's noticing of changes coming to the South during the 1960s.

"Civil Rights Music Video "We Shall Overcome" by Peter Seeger." YouTube. January 18, 2016. Civil Rights Music Video "We Shall overcome" by Peter Seeger. This was chosen out of all the available videos of the classic song because it is accompanied by photos of the Civil Rights Movement.

Czikes. "The Jackson 5 - ABC." YouTube. July 20, 2009. The Jackson 5 - ABC. One of the songs Woodson mentions as part of the soundtrack of her upbringing in Brooklyn during the 1970s.

SisumD. "Michelle Obama." National Portrait Gallery. September 12, 2019. <https://npg.si.edu/learn/classroom-resource/michelle-obama>. A lesson plan related to the famous portrait.

"East 149th Street (Symphony for a Black Girl)." CommonLit. <https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/east-149th-street-symphony-for-a-black-girl>. This poem is used in the unit to connect to what life was like for Jacqueline Woodson growing up in Brooklyn.

"Emory Douglas." Emory Douglas - 31 Artworks, Bio & Shows on Artsy. Accessed 5 12 2021. <https://www.artsy.net/artist/emory-douglas>. The artwork of Emory Douglas was essential to the Black Panther movement and demonstrates the power of visual art in social progress movements.

"Gerald Williams, I Am Somebody, 1969." Kavi Gupta Gallery. Accessed 5 12 2021 <https://kavigupta.com/content/feature/136/artworks-6180-gerald-williams-i-am-somebody-1969/>. The famous work of art along with a poem that inspired it is available at this website. This can also be connected to the Black Panther and Black Power movements.

Erica Gonzales Erica Gonzales Is the Culture and Content Strategy Senior Editor for BAZAAR.com. "Obama to Young Black Americans: "I Want You to Know That You Matter"." Harper's BAZAAR. June 04, 2020.

<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/politics/a32759234/barack-obama-george-floyd-speech/>. This wonderful speech conveys a message of hope to young Black Americans.

"The First Lady on the Power of Education." National Archives and Records Administration. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2013/11/12/first-lady-power-education-12>. Michelle Obama's speech to young people of Washington D.C.

"Hebru Brantley." Artnet. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/hebru-brantley/>. Brantley is a great example of a highly successful contemporary Black artist whose works can be viewed while discussing the Black Lives Matter movement.

Jaggme. "Family Affair - Sly & Family Stone (UK#15 USA#01) 1972." YouTube. August 20, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNQpYz1ztx8&ab_channel=jagg

"KEHINDE WILEY STUDIO KW STUDIO." Kehinde Wiley Studio. <https://kehindewiley.com/>. Wiley is another excellent example of a highly successful contemporary Black artist whose works can be viewed while discussing the Black Lives Matter movement.

LegacyRecordingsVEVO. "The Five Stairsteps - O-o-h Child (Audio)." YouTube. July 28, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dguz0IsCuKU&ab_channel=LegacyRecordingsVEVO. This song is also part of the soundtrack of Woodson's childhood.

"The Liberation of Aunt Jemima." The Berkeley Revolution. January 10, 2021. <https://revolution.berkeley.edu/liberation-aunt-jemima/>. This striking painting by Betye Saar shows how a stereotyped racist icon can be repurposed for the Black Power change movement, and further connected to the recent decision to finally rid our grocery aisles of this racist propaganda.

MarvinGayeVEVO. "Marvin Gaye - What's Going On (Official Video 2019)." YouTube. September 13, 2019. Marvin Gaye - What's Going On (Official Video 2019). Classic version of this song.

"MONICA AHANONU." MONICA AHANONU. Accessed 6 26 2021. <https://www.mahanonu.com/>. Ahanonu is an example of a commercially successful Black female artist whose work with Disney will be familiar to students.

Penguin Middle School. "Jacqueline Woodson Brown Girl Dreaming Author Video." YouTube. August 01, 2014. Jacqueline Woodson Brown Girl Dreaming Author Video. This short video was produced as part of the book launch of Brown Girl Dreaming and is used in this unit in the first lesson to introduce the book and learn a bit about the author.

"Photographic Works - Lorna Simpson Studio." Photographic Works - Lorna Simpson Studio. <https://lsimpsonstudio.com/photographic-works>. There are multiple works on this preeminent photographer's website that can be explored by students.

Poppalarge18. "Sam Cooke-Twistin' the Night Away." YouTube. September 01, 2009. Sam Cooke-Twistin' the Night Away. The upbeat video of the King of Soul singing, and dancing is a good one to use in a lesson introducing students to the concept of analyzing music.

Reynolds, Jason, and Ibram X. Kendi. Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You: A Remix of the National Book Award-winning "Stamped from the Beginning". Little, Brown, and Company, 2020. An excellent, accessible text for students to read more about this history of racism and social progress movements in the United

States.

SamCookeVEVO. "Sam Cooke - A Change Is Gonna Come (Official Lyric Video)." YouTube. January 22, 2016. Sam Cooke - A Change Is Gonna Come (Official Lyric Video) One of the anthems of the Civil Rights Movement.

"Say It Loud- I'm Black and Proud James Brown." YouTube. April 18, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hj1iWqoYEc&ab_channel=HarleyAmbrose.

The video of this popular mantra can be used in conjunction with the Gerald Williams painting and poem that inspired it.

"School Colors." School Colors. <https://www.schoolcolorspodcast.com/>. This notable podcast produced by Brooklyn Deep follows multiple generations of Brooklynites attempting to obtain quality public education for the children in the context of the New York City teachers strike and other political considerations.

Selyukh, Alina. "Aunt Jemima Will Change Name, Image As Brands Confront Racial Stereotypes." NPR. June 17, 2020.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/06/17/879104818/acknowledging-racial-stereotype-aunt-jemima-will-change-brand-name-and-image>. This is an updated article on the National Public Radio website that describes the recent decision to remove the names and images of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben from their products, finally admitting that they are racial stereotypes.

"The Sit-In Movement." CommonLit. <https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/the-sit-in-movement>. An article at the appropriate reading level with accompanying text-based questions that is used in this unit when Woodson describes witnessing portions of the Sit-In Movement in Greenville.

"The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles." Philadelphia Museum of Art. <https://www.philamuseum.org/collection/object/90056>. A perfect image of the great painting.

SlyATFamilyStoneVEVO. "Sly & The Family Stone - Everyday People (Official Video)." YouTube. October 02, 2013. Sly & The Family Stone - Everyday People (Official Video)

. This song was also part of the soundtrack of Woodson's childhood and makes an important commentary on cultural life during that time.

SonyAnimation. "Hair Love | Oscar®-Winning Short Film (Full) | Sony Pictures Animation." YouTube. December 05, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNw8V_Fkw28&ab_channel=SonyPicturesAnimation. Hair is one of the motifs on *Brown Girl Dreaming* and this highly relatable short movie bring the concern many African Americans have about their hair up to the present day.

Supercanadian4. "Sam Cooke Live Twistin' the Night Away 1963." YouTube. June 04, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yIMt-aZjCo&ab_channel=supercanadian. The legendary singer, songwriter dancing and performing live.

TatanBrown. "Aretha Franklin - Respect [1967] (Aretha's Original Version)." YouTube. October 17, 2008. Aretha Franklin - Respect [1967] (Aretha's Original Version). Classic version of the well-known song.

"The Times They Are A-Changin': The Official Bob Dylan Site." The Times They Are A-Changin' | The Official Bob Dylan Site. Accessed 6 29 2021. <https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/times-they-are-changin/>. This website

has the lyrics to the song used in conjunction with music analysis.

"Untitled (Alabama)." Art Object Page. <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.143140.html>. The famous image by Norman Lewis is used to illustrate how visual art can reflect social issues.

"Wadsworth Jarrell, Homage to a Giant, 1970." Kavi Gupta Gallery. <https://kavigupta.com/artists/31-wadsworth-jarrell/works/6579-wadsworth-jarrell-homage-to-a-giant-1970/>. The extraordinary painting of Malcolm X may be used as part of a text set studying the legendary leader of the Black Panther movement, often misunderstood by those unfamiliar with his history.

"We Shall Overcome." We Shall Overcome. <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactive-media/music/story-behind-the-song/the-story-behind-the-song/we-shall-overcome/>. The Kennedy Center webpage reviews the history of its origins as a spiritual through its publication by Pete Seeger and its use by the Freedom Singers during the Civil Rights movement.

Webmaster. "Jean-Michel Basquiat." The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. July 28, 2018. <https://www.basquiat.com/>. A source to view paintings by the iconic cultural hero as inspiration for students' own artistic creations.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Puffin, 2020. The core text for this unit, it is a memoir in verse divided into five parts.

Thecatkeaton. "The Hollies - He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother." YouTube. August 26, 2009. The Hollies - He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother. This song was referred to in the memoir and connects to Woodson's experience with her half-brother who suffered from lead poisoning.

Wtf95ify. "Ohio Players - Funky Worm." YouTube. November 21, 2009. Ohio Players - Funky Worm. Referred to as a song that Woodson was not supposed to listen to during her childhood, it is also a cultural icon the meaning of which can be hotly debated by students.

Notes

¹ Woodson, Jacqueline, *Brown Girl Dreaming*.

² Salter Phia, "Learning History, Facing Reality," in *American Educator*, 28.

³ Ibram X. Kendi, "The Renaissance is Black," in *Time*, 72.

⁴ Ibram X. Kendi, "The Renaissance in Black," in *Time*.

⁵ Amanda Gorman, in "Unity with Purpose," in *Time*, 76.

⁶ Jacqueline Woodson, in "We Have Always Been Storytellers," in *Time*, 82.

⁷ Jacqueline Woodson, *This is the Rope*.

⁸ Jacqueline Woodson in "Project Muse," in *Bookbird*, 75.

⁹ Jacqueline Woodson, *Show Way*.

¹⁰ Sisum, Michelle Obama, *National Portrait Gallery*.

¹¹ Located at the Philadelphia Art Museum and available on their website listed in the Bibliography.

¹² Jacqueline Woodson in "Project Muse," in *Bookbird*, 75.

¹³ "From Outsider to Insider," in *Publishers Weekly*.

¹⁴ Jacqueline Woodson in "Motherhood My Way," in *Essence*, 180.

[15] In the text, upper case letters are not used for section or poem titles, and that choice is followed in this paper.

¹⁶ Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, 7.

¹⁷ Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, 7.

¹⁸ Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, 31.

¹⁹ Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, 71.

²⁰ Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, 148.

²¹ Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, 176.

²² John Lewis, in "Uncovering America: Civil Rights Movement," National Gallery of Art.

²³ "Untitled (Alabama)."

²⁴ Wadsworth Jarrel, "Homage to a Giant," in Kavigupta.

²⁵ See Gerald Williams, "I Am Somebody" in Kavi Gupta Gallery.

²⁶ Betya Saar, "The Liberation of Aunt Jemima," on *The Berkely Revolution* webpage.

²⁷ Alina Selukh in "Aunt Jemima" on the National Public Radio website.

²⁸ Emory Douglas, Artsy.

²⁹ Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, 53.

³⁰ "Bob Dylan The Times They Are A Changin'," YouTube.

- ³¹ SamCookeVEVO, YouTube.
- ³² See Czikes," The Jackson 5 -ABC," YouTube.
- ³³ LegacyRecordingsVEVO, "The Five Stairsteps - O—o-h Child (audio), YouTube.
- ³⁴ Wtf95ify, "Ohio Players - Funky Worm", YouTube.
- ³⁵ Thecatkeaton, "The Hollies - He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother," YouTube.
- ³⁶ Supercanadian4,"Sam Cooke Live Twistin' the Night Away 1963," YouTube.
- ³⁷ Jaggme, "Family Affair - Sly & Family Stone (UK#15 USA#01) 1972," YouTube.
- ³⁸ "Civil Rights Music Video" We Shall Overcome" by Pete Seeger." YouTube.
- ³⁹ TatanBrown, "Aretha Franklin - Respect [1967] (Aretha's Original Version)," YouTube.
- ⁴⁰ "Say it Loud I'm Black and I'm Proud," YouTube.
- ⁴¹ MarvinGayeVEVO, "Marvin Gaye - What's Going On (Official Video 2019)," YouTube.
- ⁴² Project Zero, "Thinking Palette," Artful Thinking.
- ⁴³ "Herbu Brantley," Artnet.
- ⁴⁴ Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, 259.
- ⁴⁵ "Photographic Works - Lorna Simpson Studio," Photographic Works - Lorna Simpson Studio.
- ⁴⁶ Sony Animation, "Hair Love," YouTube.
- ⁴⁷ Maya Angelou, Jean Michel Basquiat, and Paul Zakris, *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*.
- ⁴⁸ Obama, Barak. "Obama to Young Black Americans: "I Want You to Know That You Matter," in Harper's BAZAAR.
- ⁴⁹ "The First Lady on the Power of Education," National Archives and Records Administration.
- ⁵⁰ "English Language Arts Standards." English Language Arts Standards | Common Core State Standards Initiative. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>

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