



## **Distance, Location, and Movement in *Sing, Unburied, Sing***

Curriculum Unit 21.03.03  
by Aron Meyer

### **Unit Overview**

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My students, especially those who struggle with reading strategies, frequently express their frustration when the implicit or explicit meaning of a text is not immediately accessible to them. To facilitate understanding, and to assist students in developing strategies for close reading, teachers need to provide tools and methods that can be applied to a wide range of texts. Most learners are accustomed to various kinds of graphic organizers, charts, and diagrams that involve the selection and arrangement of information. Teachers of all content areas employ such tools, which can also be thought of as maps.

Text comprehension is analogous to mapmaking, in that both processes involve identifying relevant, related information, and organizing it so that relationships can be recognized. Grouping and positioning specific types of information from or about a text forces students to recognize distinct layers or elements within that text. Creating a family tree, for example, requires a reader to focus on the relationships between characters, which can then be considered on multiple levels: how do the characters feel toward one another? Between whom does conflict exist, and why? Do any characters subvert their expected familial roles? Using a diagram, or a map, to visualize the relationships between characters sets a foundation upon which these complex questions can be addressed.

This unit introduces learners to several ways that maps can be used to demonstrate connections between various kinds of information in a complex novel, Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. By practicing the methods described in this unit, students will develop skills that will allow them to envision text elements in new ways and chart their own comprehension. Once they have completed these activities, students will be able to apply their textual "cartography" skills to other texts that they encounter later on.

## Rationale

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While it is not considered a canonical text and is not yet widely used in the classroom, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* has gained notoriety since its publication in 2017, and may be recognizable to some readers from its inclusion on Barack Obama's year-end list of favorite books. I believe that it is an ideal novel for high school seniors to read, due to its challenging structure and frank discussion of timely, controversial topics. Racism, trauma, incarceration, police violence, and addiction are each addressed in the novel, making it a useful tool for facilitating meaningful, challenging conversations in the classroom, and for illustrating connections between literature and real life.

Although the complex topics addressed in Ward's novel may be recognizable to students, the narrative structure of the book can be difficult to penetrate. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* incorporates techniques that may be unfamiliar to many students, especially those who do not typically read for pleasure. The events in the book occur over multiple timelines, and transitions between past and present are not always obvious to readers. Narrators in the novel alternate from one chapter to the next, and these abrupt changes can be disorienting for students. Furthermore, one of the book's narrators, Richie, is a ghost who experiences time and space differently from the living characters. These elements, along with the challenging subject matter, can obstruct comprehension for students. Therefore, readers need new strategies to set them up for success and build confidence.

This unit relies on mapping activities to illustrate and clarify some of the more unfamiliar territory (both literal and conceptual) in the book. By treating textual space as a geographic reality, readers can visualize abstract concepts as concrete ones. Distance is pervasive in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, and it impacts many key themes in the novel, which is why mapping is a useful process to facilitate comprehension.

For students, the most familiar application of maps to literature is likely in the literal sense: a visual representation of important locations in a text and the physical, measurable distance between them. While creating this type of map is often a useful activity for students to envision specific spaces in which key plot points take place, the possible uses of maps extend far beyond this. Concept mapping is used by teachers of young children, showing learners that connections can be illustrated and meaning can be found beneath the surface of a text. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* illustrates this particularly well, because it is, on the surface, a travel narrative in which location is constantly changing and can be represented as points on a map. Beyond that, however, metaphysical distance in the novel must be recognized and visualized in order to understand its underlying themes. One of the goals of this unit, then, is to have students progress from mapping tangible places and spaces to diagramming more conceptual, abstract ideas in literature.

Connecting the dots between concrete and theoretical elements of text can be one of the most difficult and frustrating aspects of reading. This unit aims to show readers how to represent and spatialize abstract information in a tangible way, thereby recognizing relationships and connections that may not be immediately apparent.

## Classroom Context

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This unit is designed with a senior English class in mind. My school places a heavy emphasis on STEM classes, and, due to block scheduling, English is often the only humanities class that students attend. For many students, English poses a separate set of challenges from their other classes, because it incorporates abstract ideas and relies on discussion in ways that STEM courses often do not. Additionally, in my school, high school students follow a block schedule, so each class session lasts roughly 90 minutes. Engaging texts and meaningful activities are therefore extremely important, particularly for seniors. This unit offers students an opportunity to connect with a book that is difficult but rewarding.

The activities and strategies described in this unit are designed to show students a new dimension to reading. In my senior classes, there are usually several students who find reading tedious and struggle to see its benefits. My goal is to give these learners a positive experience with literature by approaching a text from a different angle than they may have previously considered.

## Teaching Strategies

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This unit is designed to build comprehension strategies for students by transferring information from one mode of communication to another: students will literally illustrate written and inferred information and ideas. Mapping activities will ask students to represent abstract ideas as physical images and spaces. In this process, students will visualize concepts such as characterization and conflict and present them as places on a map, in order to demonstrate an understanding of the interconnectedness of literary elements.

Throughout the unit, students will study, discuss, and create a variety of maps, which will help them develop a broader understanding of how maps can be used and what they can represent. As they progress through the unit, students will collect their work in an “atlas,” which they can use to reflect on their own learning. At the end of the unit, these atlases will be reviewed, revised, and submitted. In completing this task, students will monitor their own progress and comprehension, reinforcing the effectiveness of the mapping strategies we have used throughout the unit.

To accommodate the needs of various types of learners, this unit incorporates full-group, small-group, and independent, self-directed instructional methods. Instruction begins in a full-class setting to introduce and practice the key concepts of mapping elements of literature. Once those fundamental methods have been established, students will transition to cooperative, small-group activities, in which they will focus on visually representing more abstract concepts. The final stages of the unit give students the opportunity to explore materials and assemble their final projects independently.

## Unit Description

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By the time students reach their senior year in high school, they likely have extensive experience discussing and writing about various literary elements and how they impact the development of significant themes. This unit asks students to consider the relationships between elements of literature using a concrete, visual approach. Even in twelfth grade, many students struggle to articulate abstract concepts in literature, and graphic organizers are often helpful for these students. Conceptually, a graphic organizer is just a map: it does not show the user *everything*, but it demonstrates how specific pieces of information are connected. In this unit, students will go beyond the use of traditional organizers to create actual maps of various literary concepts.

### Enduring Understandings

This unit reinforces the following underlying concepts:

- Maps can be used as a tool to clarify various forms of distance and location in literature.
- Mapping relationships between literary elements can illustrate their importance and reveal implicit ideas in a text.
- The process of mapping involves selection and spatialization, which can reveal important relationships in literature.

### Essential Questions

The following questions are embedded throughout this unit:

- What is a map?
- How can literary elements be represented visually?
- How can a map function as a narrative, analytical, or argumentative statement?
- How do location and distance impact the development of literary themes?
- How do elements of literature interact to develop complex themes?

## Scope and Sequence

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### Introductory Activities

To begin the unit and introduce its central concepts, students will look over a selection of maps: “Poison / Palette” and “Queens and Monarchs” from Rebecca Solnit’s *Infinite City*, John Fulford’s “The Walk to South School 1964 - 1971,” and a map of the London subway system. This selection shows students a variety of maps, each with a separate function and focus, in order to demonstrate that maps can provide and clarify many different kinds of information. In small groups, students will use a set of guiding questions to consider what each map is meant to communicate to the user. After sharing their preliminary thoughts on these maps, students will read Jorge Luis Borges’ “On Exactitude in Science,” a one-paragraph narrative that describes a map equally large as the area it represents, in the interest of “perfect” cartography. After reading the story, students should discuss: is the map in the story a useful one? Why or why not? What would make it more

useful? After reading and discussing the story, the teacher should share Rebecca Solnit's assertion, "A map is in its essence an arbitrary selection of information." Again, students should split into pairs and discuss: is this a valid claim? Is there a way to make the selection of information in a map less arbitrary?

After considering the nature of maps from this perspective, each student will be asked to create a map of a space or route that is significant to them personally, referring back to Fulford's map as an example. Students should be aware that their maps may be small-scale (like a house, apartment, or room map) or larger-scale (like a neighborhood, state, or world map). After creating these maps, students will be asked to reflect on their work: was this an easy or difficult task? What was included in the map? What was left out? Students will share their responses to these questions in a small group before sharing with the entire class. Discussion following this activity should reinforce that mapping is a process of *selection*, in which certain points are determined to be more important to the purpose of the map than others. The four maps from the beginning of this activity should be discussed in this context. Students will then write a brief reflection to accompany this first map and include in their portfolios.

Next, students will try mapping a familiar text. In this activity, students may choose any book or short story that they know well, and draw a map of its most important locations. The teacher may provide students with a selection of previously read texts in which location plays an important role. If students have read *The Color Purple*, for example, they may draw the distant settings in the book (rural Georgia and Western Africa) from which Celie and Nettie write their letters to one another. Students who have read *A Raisin in the Sun* may draw out a floor plan of the Youngers' apartment, or a map of Chicago that illustrates the distance between the city's South Side and the Clybourne Park neighborhood. After creating these maps, students will again meet in small groups to share their illustrations and offer feedback and questions to each other. During this portion of the activity, the teacher may request that group members comment on each others' maps before they are presented, in order to provide a wide range of comments for each student. Students will again address questions of selection: what was included, and what was left out? Why?

After students have shared their maps, they will be asked to consider elements of the text in addition to setting: conflict, characterization, point of view, themes. These should be added as icons on students' maps in order to create a fuller visual representation of the text. Students may make creative choices regarding how and where each element should be plotted: where does conflict exist in the story, for example, and how can that be represented in a map? What shape and color is each icon, and why? For example, a map based on *A Raisin in the Sun* may place characters inside or outside the apartment, based on where each spends the most time in search of their dream. Walter Lee might be located outside the space of the apartment, as he attempts to fulfill himself and his perceived familial duties through time with his friends and (doomed) business opportunities. Beneatha, on the other hand, may be placed inside the apartment, as her search for self-actualization is more of an inward one than her brother's. Other icons on the map may indicate between which characters conflict exists, or where important events took place. When this task is complete, students will have created a multidimensional document that shows the "world" of the text at a glance, based on what they consider to be the most important selection of information. This introductory project should also be added to students' portfolios.

Throughout the unit, it will be necessary for students to study real, geographical maps to get a feel for their aesthetics. Maps that serve various purposes and feature different design choices will be helpful to observe and discuss. On one day, the class might look at Walter Crane's Imperial Federation Map and consider how the images and other artistic choices communicate a message beyond simply where places are. A different day might find students discussing the London subway map, which uses color-coding to differentiate separate

tracks. In each case, the students should discuss and take notes on how the maps use visual elements to present and organize information and (when applicable) advance a position with rhetoric.

### **Full-Group Instruction: Mapping Literary Concepts**

To apply the concepts of literary mapping that we have introduced, students will read a short text in which physical spaces and boundaries are especially important. Nadine Gordimer’s short story “Once Upon a Time” lends itself well to this activity. After reading the text, students should consider how distance and separation are important to the events of the story. Students may (individually or in pairs) draw maps to show how they imagine the gated community and its walls. After the maps have been drawn, the class should discuss the ways in which the story focuses on divisions between groups of people, and why setting is so important in this text. When responding to this prompt, some students will likely point out that the literal boundaries described in the story (the walls and locked gates around the community) create more figurative divisions (between the residents of the gated community and the “people of another color”). The maps that students have created for this activity, then, show not only people’s physical locations, but also their positions on a hierarchy of class and race. This can lead into a class discussion of how setting impacts themes in the story dealing with xenophobia and segregation. Engaging in this activity will prepare students to visualize settings as well as elements of text that are more abstract. These “Once Upon a Time” maps and reflections should be added to students’ portfolios (or “atlases”).

Once students have some experience creating maps based on text, they may begin reading the anchor text for the unit, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Because many characters are introduced in the first chapter, most of whom are related (either by law or by blood), it is helpful for students to construct a family tree diagram to keep track of them all. As readers encounter new characters, they can add their names to this diagram, along with brief notes to help remember key characteristics about each. The teacher may choose to provide this to students completely blank, or with some names filled in for reference. Students should add this chart to their atlases, reinforcing that a family tree also functions as a map. As the unit progresses, students can add information to the branches of this diagram, including the nature of the relationships between specific characters and how this can be represented by literal distance or closeness.

In addition to completing the family tree, a useful ongoing activity will be to keep track of important locations in the novel. Most of *Sing, Unburied, Sing* takes place over the course of a road trip to and from Parchman Prison, and as the characters move from one location to the next, it is important for readers to consider how each new setting reveals new information about the characters. Students might use a graphic organizer to chart each chapter’s narrator, key events, and setting (possibly with room for students to create an illustration). This information could be charted on a map of the state of Mississippi, where the locations in the book are all set. Google Maps may be used to plot points for this activity; however, because the locations are fictional, students will have to infer where in the state each place might be.

One of the first unconventional aspects of the novel that students will notice is its use of multiple narrators. As Jojo and his mother, Leonie, each relate their experiences in alternating chapters, students should begin constructing maps to document the characters’ journeys. As these two characters disagree with each other, encounter obstacles, and react differently to the same situations, their maps may begin to look very different from one another, which will prompt students to make predictions about the text. Where are the characters heading, literally and figuratively? Who or what motivates them?

As students begin reading, it will also be necessary to discuss the multiple timelines that exist in the novel. Jojo and Leonie each narrate their chapters in the present, although flashback sequences are interspersed

throughout both characters' accounts. For the most part, these scenes set in the past are not conspicuously marked, except by a change in verb tense. It can be helpful, then, for students to watch carefully for these flashbacks and document them on separate timelines. As they read, students may keep track of Jojo's present narration and his flashbacks (which gradually reveal more about River's experience while incarcerated at Parchman) on one map, and Leonie's present and past on another. As a point of reference during this activity, students may refer to character timelines from previously studied texts.

The maps that students have created during this portion of the unit should remain in their atlases, where they can be revised and developed further throughout the remainder of the unit.

### **Small-Group Focus: Mapping Progressions and Relationships**

As readers progress further into the text, the unit will shift from full-class instruction to emphasize cooperative, small-group work. During this portion of the unit, students will begin to focus on mapping more abstract concepts and themes that are emerging in the novel. As they collaborate to design and assemble the maps described in this section, student groups may focus on different concepts and characters, allowing for the teacher to differentiate as necessary.

As they continue to consider the setting of each chapter, students should discuss in their groups what important events happen at each location, how the setting contributes to those advancements in plot, and how it facilitates character development. Once readers have completed a substantial portion of the novel, the teacher may assign each group a different location and scene to revisit and map out. Learners in one group, for example, might work together to construct a map of Al's house in Chapter 5, showing the physical locations of the characters. In this particular scene, students may identify how the literal distance between the adults and children aligns with the strained relationship between Leonie and her children, Jojo and Kayla. The physical closeness in this scene (all the characters are in the same house) mirrors the ideal emotional closeness between a parent and their children, while the physical distance (Leonie is in a separate room, using drugs with the other adults, while Jojo tends to a sick Kayla) more accurately depicts the children's estrangement from their mother. Students may emulate the style shown in the "Architectural Maps" section of Helen Cann's *How to Make Hand-Drawn Maps* to create a realistic-looking floor plan for this activity.

### **Concept Mapping: Race**

As students read, they should be mindful of the ways that race impacts different characters' experiences throughout the novel. Students may be asked to document specific situations in which race affects characters' decisions or behavior. This evidence could be placed on a timeline, revealing patterns of discrimination and marginalization. This is most clearly evident near the beginning of the book, when Leonie describes the circumstances of Given's death and its subsequent cover-up. Some instances in the book that are impacted by race may not be immediately obvious to students, however, so it may be helpful to introduce discussion questions that will allow students to discover on their own why race matters in these moments. For example, after the car carrying Leonie, Michael, Jojo, Kayla, and Misty is stopped by the police, students may be asked to discuss how concerned they were for each character's safety. Students should recognize that, in a group with three adults, one of whom has just been released from prison, the only person who has a gun pointed at them is 13-year-old Jojo, a Black child. Both of these events exemplify real-life injustices against people of color, and should be addressed in class conversations.

In a separate activity, students might create a map that categorizes characters according to racial identity, positioning events in the book that indicate relative advantage or disadvantage around the characters' names.

A map of this sort may focus on “criminal” activity, possibly featuring the mapmaker’s vision of what Parchman Prison looks like. Illustrations or names of characters could be positioned in or around the prison yard, including a brief description of the actions that resulted (or did not result) in their incarceration. The characters’ locations around the prison could correspond to the severity of their experiences there. For example, Richie, sent to Parchman as a child, could be placed deep inside the prison yard with a mention of his “crime” (literally stealing food to feed his starving family). Near the outer edges of the prison, the mapmaker might place Michael’s cousin, who murdered Given but received a light sentence. Big Joseph, who orchestrated the cover-up of the murder but was never arrested for any crime, could be placed outside the prison completely. A student may use a map like this to illustrate the unjust, dehumanizing treatment of the Black characters, like Richie, as well as the preferential treatment of the white characters (like Michael’s cousin and Big Joseph). A map of this kind reveals the racial inequity depicted in the novel, which, while prevalent, is never explicitly described.

Another activity that may be used to emphasize the role of race in the novel is for students to create mind maps or heart maps for various characters. After studying examples of these kinds of diagrams, students may create a set of them to visually represent the thoughts, feelings, hopes, and fears of characters in the novel. To indicate how race impacts the characters, students should select a set of characters of different racial identities, showing how each experiences and perceives the world differently. For example, portions of Leonie’s heart map would likely be dedicated to her murdered brother, who continues to haunt her, and to her fear of and animosity toward Big Joseph, who despises her (and Jojo and Kayla, too) because of his racial prejudice toward Black people. It will be helpful to compare such a map to one made for Michael, a white character, in order to show the contrasts between the characters’ experiences: Michael and Big Joseph have a conflicted relationship, too, but the source of this is Big Joseph’s disapproval of his son’s decisions, rather than who he is (as in Leonie’s case).

### **Concept Mapping: Trauma**

Many underlying themes in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* have to do with the lasting effects of trauma. Richie, River, Leonie, and Michael have each experienced some unresolved, catastrophic event that has wounded them deeply, and that continues to impact their behavior. To consider how this affects each character (as well as the people around them), students may review the website for the Claudia Black Young Adult Center, which provides a clear, student-friendly overview of the impact of trauma on individuals. After exploring this resource, separate groups may each be assigned a character from the novel who has undergone a traumatic event. Working collaboratively, students can identify the traumatic event that has marked their character, as well as behavior that might be the result of the character processing, repressing, or coping with the event. Once this information has been compiled and organized, students may diagram the character’s progression through their trauma on a map resembling a timeline, including illustrations and written explanations at each stage.

### **Independent Focus: Performance Task**

Students’ final project for this unit includes both written and visual components. By the end of the unit, each student will have compiled a unique portfolio, featuring maps that represent time, space, character growth, and more. For their final task, students should select four or five of these maps that they feel best represent their understanding of the novel’s complexities. Students may take time to revise these maps, adding color and more detail as they see fit. To accompany the maps, each student should submit a written reflection that explains the design choices that were made in the creation of these maps. What is the significance of distance



and location in the novel? How does each map represent those concepts?

Rebecca Solnit writes, “An atlas may represent many places the same way or the same place in many ways.” This is a useful quote for students to consider as they choose the maps that will comprise their atlases. What story do these maps tell? What do they reveal or clarify about the text? Do they show “many places in the same way” by illustrating different characters’ timelines or various settings in the novel? Or, do they show “the same place in many ways,” by presenting multiple maps of one character, showing their development over the course of the novel and their relationships to others?

Regardless of which maps are selected, students should clarify the important information illustrated by each map with a title or caption. For example, if the aforementioned map of Al’s house is included, it might include a title or a caption reading *Same house, different worlds* (or something similar). Such a statement could be clarified in the written reflection to explain that, although the map depicts the characters within the same, relatively small space, it also illustrates how distant they are from one another, which connects to a larger theme in the novel: family bonds do not necessarily mean emotional closeness or connection.

In addition to illustrating a theme of the novel, each map should include color and illustrations to coincide with its intended function. If, for example, a map depicts the relationship between Leonie and Jojo as timelines that grow increasingly distant from each other, it might show two paths through a wooded area, with symbols of comfort and support for each character alongside each road. Leonie’s path might be framed by items connected to Michael and Misty (drug paraphernalia, for example), while Jojo’s path might show symbols of his relationships with Kayla and River (a gris-gris bag, possibly, or lollipops). Students’ maps will likely look wildly different to begin with, but this step in the revision process will ensure that they take on a new dimension and show each cartographer’s unique stylistic choices.

The atlases and reflection that students submit in this unit are documents of the comprehension process. Because they are tools created by the readers, rather than given to them, the maps show the progression of each cartographer’s journey through a text by identifying important landmarks and illustrating the relationship between them. Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker explain that “[a] map becomes obsolete as you become oriented. The map is no longer on paper in front of you but inside you.” By the time they have created and assembled their atlases, students likely no longer need them to understand the novel; they are able to navigate many aspects of this complex and layered text without consulting a guidebook. More importantly, they will have developed a new set of cartographic strategies that may be transposed to other texts in the future.

### **Extension Texts**

For students who read at an accelerated pace, supplemental texts may be provided, which may be linked to classroom discussions about *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, or addressed in reading circles. Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is well-suited to similar mapping activities as those previously described: Danticat’s novel moves between physical settings in the United States and Haiti, each of which is important to character development. Furthermore, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* addresses the lasting effects of trauma, and these processes may be diagrammed similarly to the trauma maps created for *Sing, Unburied, Sing*.

Students are also encouraged to independently pursue supplemental texts that can be mapped in a similar fashion.

## Classroom Activities

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### Lesson One: Introduction to Maps

These activities should take place at the beginning of the unit (no prior reading required).

#### Activity 1

The teacher will first ask students, “What is a map?” Students will spend a minute or two writing a response to this question and sharing their ideas. The teacher will then distribute a selection of maps to small groups of students. Each group will receive one of the following maps:

- London subway map (available online)
- “Queens and Monarchs” (from Solnit’s *Infinite City*)
- “Poison / Palette” (from *Infinite City*)
- “The Walk to South School 1964 - 1971” (from Harmon’s *You Are Here*)

Students will first look over the maps silently for 2-3 minutes and write down what they notice. They will then share ideas and questions in a brief small-group discussion. The teacher will then introduce the following guiding questions for “reading” a map:

- What is being shown or represented in the map?
- Do you notice anything that is left out of the map?
- Does the map show a real, physical place, or something else?
- What text is used in the map? What does it tell the user?
- How is the map decorated? What do the decorative elements seem to say?
- What story does the map tell? What is the user supposed to learn?

In their groups, students will address these questions, discuss, and share their ideas to the entire class.

#### Activity 2

The teacher will distribute copies of Jorge Luis Borges’ “On Exactitude in Science.” Students will take a few minutes to read the short story and discuss it in their groups. The teacher will then provide discussion questions:

- Is a map like the one described in Borges’ story a useful one?
- Why or why not?
- What would make it more useful?

The teacher will then introduce the Rebecca Solnit quote, “A map is in its essence an arbitrary selection of information.” Students will take a minute or two to respond to this claim and share out. Guiding questions may be provided: is this a reasonable statement? Does the information on a map need to be arbitrary? Why or why not?

#### Activity 3

Students will draw a map of a place or route that is important to them personally. This may be a small-scale

map, such as a desktop or a room in a house, or a larger-scale one, like a city or a country. Students may look to the hand-drawn maps used in the first activity as a point of reference. After they have completed their maps, students should write a brief reflection, addressing the same guiding questions from the first activity. This first map and reflection will be the first contribution to students' portfolios (or "atlases"), to which they will continue adding the maps they create throughout the unit.

## **Lesson Two: Mapping Literary Concepts**

This set of activities should take place early in the unit, after students have mapped important locations and elements of a familiar text, but before they begin reading *Sing, Unburied, Sing*.

### **Activity 1**

The teacher will ask students to refer back to the maps they created of a familiar text, and to consider how and why the location(s) of the story was so important. How does it connect to other text elements, such as theme? For example, if a student created a map that shows important locations in *The Color Purple*, they might write about how the physical distance between Celie and Nettie forces both sisters to persevere in hopes of being reunited one day. After students have spent a few minutes reflecting and writing down their ideas, the teacher will ask for volunteers to share.

Throughout the discussion, the teacher should reinforce that visualizing and illustrating the location of the characters and events in a text can help reveal underlying ideas and meaning.

### **Activity 2**

Students will read the short story "Once Upon a Time" by Nadine Gordimer. If an audio recording of the text is available, it may be offered to students to use for support. As students read, they should annotate the text by highlighting lines that specifically call attention to location (as well as barriers between locations). At the end of the story, readers should respond to the following guiding questions:

- What are the important locations in the story?
- How are these locations different from one another?
- Why are these separate locations important to the story?

Students may work independently to respond to these questions and then discuss their ideas in a small group before reporting out to the entire class. The teacher should direct the conversation for students to recognize that, by placing the events of the story in a segregated community, Gordimer is suggesting to the reader that xenophobia, paranoia, and segregation in the name of security have catastrophic consequences.

### **Activity 3**

After discussing the story, students will work individually to create maps of the areas described in the story. Students' maps should contain the following:

- Illustration of important sites in the community
- Illustration of barriers between the gated community and the rest of the world
- Caption summarizing what the map suggests (eight words or fewer)

After completing their maps, students should compose a short piece of writing that explains how the diagram

and caption reflect underlying themes in the short story, including specific information from the text. This explanation, along with the map, should be added to students' atlases.

### **Lesson Three: Beginning the Novel**

This set of activities should take place as students begin reading *Sing, Unburied, Sing*.

#### **Activity 1**

To introduce students to one of the kinds of maps that will be used in this unit, the teacher should display a family tree (either from their own life or based on a familiar text) and open a discussion: is this a map? Why or why not? The teacher should direct the conversation for students to recognize that a family tree functions as a map, because it illustrates connections between specific pieces of information of the same type. If time permits, each student should complete a family tree of their own (again, either based on their own lives or a familiar text).

#### **Activity 2**

The teacher will distribute two organizers for mapping important information in the novel: a family tree (see Figure 1) and a chart with three rows, labeled *Present*, *Recent Past*, and *Distant Past*. One or more names on the family tree diagram may be written in advance to give students a point of reference. The teacher should also clarify for students that a timeline is also a map, as it shows the relationship between selected pieces of the same kind of information (in this case, important events in the text).

Students will begin reading the novel together. The teacher may ask for a volunteer to read or play the first section of the audiobook (if available). After the first paragraph (ending in "Today's my birthday"), readers will pause. The teacher will ask the students whether this part of the story is taking place in the past, present, or future, and how we, as readers, can tell. Students should recognize that, because the writing is in present tense, this part of the story is set in the present. The teacher should alert students to the fact that, when the verb tense changes, we should recognize that the novel's timeline has shifted as well. It may be helpful to let students know that there are clues in the writing to tell the reader when the timeline changes: writing in the present tense indicates that the events are taking place in the present, events told in past tense are taking place in the recent past, and events told in past tense in italics are taking place in the distant past.

#### **Activity 3**

Students should continue reading on their own, or in small groups if desired. The teacher should clarify two objectives for readers as the progress through the first chapter:

- Add as many names to the family tree as possible
- Begin filling out the parallel timelines with important events on each row

If students finish before the end of the class period, they may share and discuss their responses on both organizers.

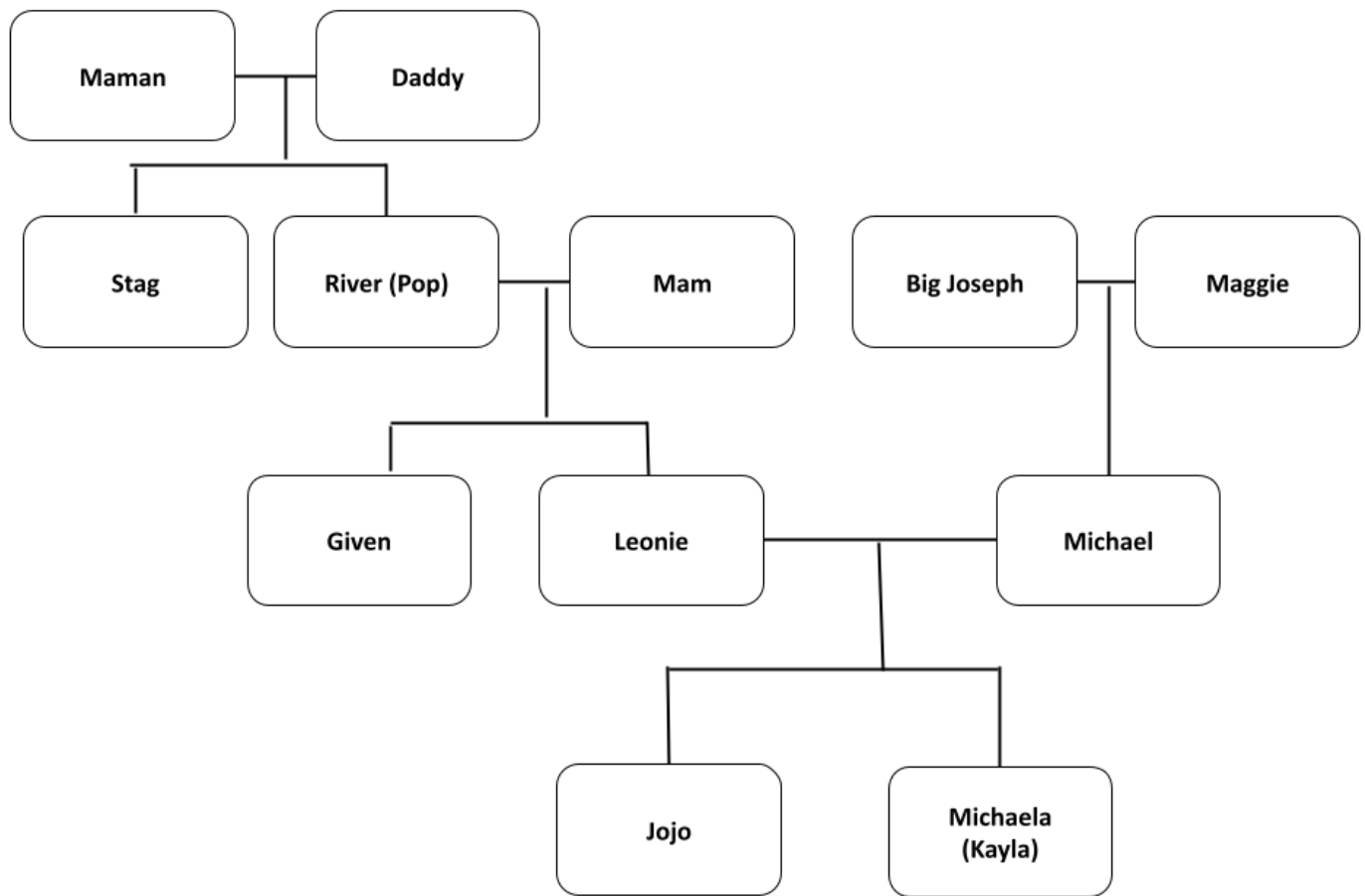


Figure 1: *Sing, Unburied, Sing* Family Tree (Completed)

## Teacher's Resources

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Cann, Helen. *How to Make Hand-Drawn Maps*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2018. This is a helpful resource for showing students step-by-step instructions on how to create many different kinds of maps (architectural, sensory, mind, and many more), and is especially useful for introducing students to techniques for making dynamic, colorful maps.

Harmon, Katharine. *You Are Here*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004. This book includes many unconventional types of maps, including memory maps, body maps, emotional maps, and many more useful tools for exposing students to the endless possibilities of mapping concepts as well as locations.

Monmonier, Mark. *How to Lie with Maps*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. This is a detailed overview of how maps are created by a process of selection and organization of information, and how they can be used to advance a specific perspective or argument.

Solnit, Rebecca. *Infinite City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. This book features a variety of essays and maps, each focusing on separate aspects of San Francisco (butterfly habitats, queer spaces, restaurants, and sources of extreme pollution) in order to suggest hidden truths about the city.

Solnit, Rebecca, and Rebecca Snedeker. *Unfathomable City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. This book provides themed maps of New Orleans, including the city's historical connections to slavery, contemporary music scenes, and displaced dead people.

Harzinski, Kris. *From Here to There*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010. This book includes a massive collection of hand-drawn maps, many of which can be useful examples for students to consider while creating their own maps and diagrams.

## Student Reading List

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Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science"

Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (suggested extension text)

Nadine Gordimer, "Once Upon a Time"

Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*

## Appendix on Implementing District Standards

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed). Students will create visual representations of text elements to demonstrate inferences made using specific evidence from *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and supplemental texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Students will analyze the use of multiple timelines and points of view used in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and explain how these elements contribute to underlying themes in the novel.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of

content.

Students will create maps that analyze and explain implicit information from *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and supplemental texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.D Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

Students will create visual maps that function as visual analogies of character development, intertwining plotlines, and multiple timelines in texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Students will work over multiple class sessions to create and revise maps and reflective statements that demonstrate their understanding and interpretation of various literary elements in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. They will also compose brief reflections during single class sessions to monitor their understanding of the core unit concepts.

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