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The Dream Keeper's Quest

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Introduction

In the sixth century the Greek philosopher Heraclitus “declared that there is no fixed, unchanging truth- ‘Everything flows’-from which his follower, Protagoras, inferred that each person’s point of view is an equally valid description of the state of affairs: ‘Man is the measure of all things’” (Gamwell, 8). Centuries later the African American poet Langston Hughes wrote the poem “A Negro Speaks of Rivers,” which refers to rivers across the globe connecting his perspective as a Black man with the African diaspora far into the ancient past. Similar to the passage of time, rivers and diasporas change and are capable of shifting, expanding and disappearing from view. One of the main topics of the Poetry as Sound and Object seminar was erasure. We explored how erasure can be an intentional use of poetry. I noticed how meaning changes when words disappear during the act of erasure. What does poetry as a format for expression allow writers to do? Poetry perhaps allows writers to say what they cannot necessarily see but what they can feel about the world in words. Poetry enables students to express their emotions before they may know why they feel a certain way about the world around them. It gives them permission to share their ideas in a way that is more generous than standard academic writing. Alternatively, our seminar also analyzed the sonnet form and evaluated how the structure has been broadly used by poets today to express themselves. Like the thought experiment of Albert Einstein riding on a beam of light, the evidence for what was really there before is not as necessary as the imagination to envision or remember what may be there. The idea of the recurrence and obscuring of history symbolized by the changing paths of rivers was a metaphor that I drew inspiration from to create this unit.

During the course of this visual poetics seminar, I went on a tour of New Haven with Paul Sabin, Randolph W. Townsend, Jr. Professor of History and Professor of American Studies at Yale University. I learned that the city of New Haven where I teach, for example, had tributary streams which used to flow through the city, such as what is now the Oak Street Connector. The tour began at the Eli Whitney Museum which is located on a site with a river running past it. The American inventor Eli Whitney chose this location because of the river which he dammed to create a mill to make guns. Whitney is also known for the invention of the cotton gin. The invention of the cotton gin increased the profitability of slavery and drove demand for the importation of people from Africa to be enslaved in the American South and the Caribbean. It is an example of how an action in one area can have an unintended, outsized impact on another place and history far into the future. This unit

begins with a student field trip to the Eli Whitney Museum. At the museum students will begin to learn about the history of American slavery with the cotton gin as a starting point of local Connecticut history.

During seminar discussion I conversed with a fellow named Carolyn Streets who shared a unit she developed about African American soldiers' contributions during World War II. Her unit incorporated a literary link to *Number the Stars*, a book about Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. From her unit I am borrowing the concept of *change agents*. *Change agents* are defined by Streets as people whose identities impact their decision to act with courage in order to resist oppression. Students can develop confidence in the course of the unit. They will develop their ability to communicate ideas through writing, performance and artistic production. Historical figures such as Arturo Schomburg demonstrate confident leadership skills in learning, collaboration and leading with curiosity. Langston Hughes as the narrator of the poem "A Negro Speaks of Rivers" is also a change agent who writes back to the past and alters the river of time's course through his words. He uses his poetic agency to tell a story of Black people far into the past as timeless as the ancient rivers of the world.

The student population at the K-8 magnet school where I teach are primarily bilingual English and Spanish speaking Hispanic students from Mexico and Puerto Rico. The unit begins with reading the children's book *Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library*, by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by Eric Velasquez, aloud to the class. This text describes how a negative childhood experience with an ignorant teacher inspired the self-taught Puerto Rican historian Arturo Schomburg to become a change agent by creating a library about African American culture. When he was in fifth grade a teacher told Schomburg that Africa had no history. Instead of discouraging him this sparked his critical thinking skills to find the history of African people himself. He made it his life's mission like the African American historian W.E.B. DuBois who documented the contributions of African American soldiers during World War I. Schomburg collected hard to find texts such as the poetry of Phillis Wheatley, who in 1773 was "the first African American and third American woman to have a book published" (Weatherford, 9). Schomburg was a friend of Langston Hughes, and at The *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture* in Harlem is a mosaic representing the poem "A Negro Speaks of Rivers" placed over Hughes' ashes, which are contained in an urn shaped like a book. One of the seven basic story forms is the quest. The arc of the quest as an archetypal story is structured as a character called to action to take a journey that is frustrated. Then after overcoming ordeals accomplishes a summative goal (Booker, 83). This story form of the quest is a guide of the unit with students being called to follow Schomburg's journey into the past and then end up with a deeper understanding of African American history, poetry and art by the end of the unit. This spring I visited an exhibition on display from April 3 - July 16, 2023 about the Afro-Hispanic painter Juan de Pareja at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It featured a display of photographs documenting how Schomburg researched the Black diaspora. Schomburg was drawn to look far into the past like the narrator of Hughes's poem "A Negro Speaks of Rivers."

The focus of my research for this unit was Langston Hughes's poetry and his recording of Black life during World War I and World War II. Hughes is one of the major figures in the Harlem Renaissance, which was the result of the Great Migration. Another figure that features prominently is W.E.B. Du Bois. Significant archives of Du Bois and Hughes are located at the Yale Beinecke Rare Book Library. I visited the Langston Hughes archives in April. I saw his draft revisions of poems about war, such as "Trumpeter," "Wisdom and War", "Young Sailor", "World War II Night Edition", "Youth", and "Without Benefit of Declaration". Excerpts of these poems inspired the selection of poems within the unit lessons. These excerpts refer to the history of enslavement in America and foreshadow the marches of the Civil Rights Movement. Repetition of history echoes through these poems. Direct references to violence make these poems less accessible for teaching at the middle school level. I noticed that Hughes frequently refers to youth in poem titles. He emphasizes the

past's impact on present and future events. He implies that failure to reflect on the past has negative implications for the future. For example, the "Trumpeter" drafts drew my attention because in research I learned that the Harlem Hellfighters brought Jazz music to Paris during World War I. I learned from visiting a multimedia exhibition at the Jazz Museum in Harlem this spring that the band leader James Reese Europe recruited forty musicians and paved the way for musicians like Duke Ellington. The African American photographer Morgan Smith described his first impression of Harlem as shaped foremost by music. Smith describes how places like the Cotton Club and the Apollo were inspiration for his photographic subjects (Smith, 7). *Olio* by Tyehimba Jess was a foundational text for our Poetry as Sound and Object seminar. In it I found a description of music in a poem "Carmen Ledieux, 544 West 123rd Street, Harlem, NY: Jan. 26, 1926", that captures the feeling of sound that hangs around after the notes have been played. Sounds that are "ancient" and sound "new" while also "waitin there to be heard all the time and how could it have been missed before now?" (Jess, 126). The poem refers to the holds of slave ships in a metaphor of the trumpeter's eyes. The poem "Wisdom and War" drew my attention because of the title and the purpose of this unit to teach students from the lessons of war. "Young Sailor" is a poem which refers to youth, a central concern of Hughes and this unit. In the poem the young sailor is concerned with himself and today. The poem "World War II Night Edition" directly refers to World War II and demonstrates the totality of the impact of war worldwide from Manhattan to Japan. The poem "Youth" is another example of Hughes having an interest in the possibility presented by the next generation and yet he refers to the youth marching down the path from which they came. "Without Benefit of Declaration" is a poem that has great emotional weight. The imagery of snow as heavy as bullets and bullets as numerous as snowflakes is haunting imagery.

The institutions that I visited for research this spring were the Yale Beinecke Rare Book Library, The Jazz Museum, The Cooper Hewitt Museum, The Metropolitan Museum, and The *Schomburg Center* for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. I did a walking tour of Harlem with a guide and it had a stop at the Schomburg where I saw a mosaic of Langston Hughes's "Negro Speaks of Rivers," which he wrote at 19 and which began his career as a poet. Hughes and Schomburg had travel experiences that were formative. Arturo Schomburg, who was Afro-Puerto Rican, came to New York City from Puerto Rico when he was seventeen years old and learned English at night (Weatherford, 4-6). According to an interview of Langston Hughes, the poem "Negro Speaks of Rivers" was written while Hughes was travelling to Mexico. Hughes was inspired by crossing the Mississippi River and his knowledge of history as a teenager. Hughes went to Harlem following this trip (Blue, 1). His free-verse poem was inspired by both the enslavement of his grandmother and the role of President Abraham Lincoln in the abolition of slavery years after visiting the slave markets of New Orleans (The Morgan Library, 2022).

Langston Hughes and W.E.B. Du Bois saw the effect of combat on Black soldiers firsthand. During the Spanish Civil War, Hughes was a correspondent and reported for six months. During World War I, Du Bois was invited to meet Black soldiers in France and spent time interviewing them. World War I opened up opportunities for integration into society for Black soldiers who were fighting in segregated units and after the war suffered terrible violence. There are parallels between the combat courage of the Japanese American soldiers and African American soldiers during World War II. They experienced tremendous discrimination during the war and as veterans. I was looking through a book of photographs by the African American artist Gordon Parks and I saw a picture of returning soldiers opposite a photo of people living in a tenement house. The mood of the images could not be more different. Pausing between the juxtaposition, I reflected on the dissonance in mood between them. It recalled the May 1919 publication by Du Bois about returning soldiers after World War One that dismantled stereotypes about Black soldiers by highlighting the racialized violence, ignorance and disenfranchisement they faced when they returned from war (Williams, 171). Langston Hughes wrote critically of the impact of Jim Crow segregation and racial violence in the United States. His concern about the rise of

fascism in Spain mirrors the concern Du Bois had about the rise of Nazism in Germany.

Throughout the World Wars both figures were involved in the documentation of the historical contributions of Black people internationally. I found a book concerning a telegram Du Bois sent in the post-World War II period when he was denied permission to travel to Africa for a conference, a period that he felt was politically motivated. In the post-WWII era, Langston Hughes was also interested in political independence and artistic movements in Africa. In Yale's Beinecke Rare Book Library I found a letter dated August 19, 1959 in which Mrs. Miriam Singer writes to Hughes that: "This latest attempt on the part of the South African government to stifle opposition to its Apartheid policy by attacking the freedom of the press in the person of Ronald Segal - is particularly shocking. It is interesting to see the concerns of Hughes and Du Bois expand internationally throughout the century." Ronald Segal was the Editor of the international quarterly *Africa South*. In another letter from 17 August 1959 there is a memo from The American Committee on Africa, Inc. that wrote that Segal was banned from attending any meetings for five years and that "The magazine has consistently opposed the government's apartheid program of total racial segregation."

Langston Hughes wrote the book of poetry *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* for children. The poems from the text that anchor the lessons in this unit are "I Too", "Color", "Stars" and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." I chose these poems based on direct and oblique inferred references to race and patriotism symbolized by the American flag. When introducing each poem from the text, I will pair the poems by Langston Hughes with the prints in the book of Pickney and the colorful collages by the children's book author and artist Ashley Bryant from the book *Sail Away*. Students will also read an excerpt from Langston Hughes's poem "Without Benefit of Declaration," from the Yale Beinecke Rare Book Library. Comparison between the artworks will teach students about different approaches to signifying poetic ideas particularly well when they were made in response to the same poems. Carolyn Streets, a fellow in my seminar shared a project she taught concerning primary sources from soldiers that I also plan to incorporate into the unit. Through the poetry students will be introduced to the historical contributions of African Americans who fought during World War I and World War II, such as the Harlem Hellfighters during World War I and the Tuskegee Airmen during WWII. The unit will conclude with a field trip to The *Schomburg Center* for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. There students will visit the mosaic by the artist Houston Conwill commemorating the life of Langston Hughes that intersects with diasporic traditions of burial and cosmology. The mosaic is an artwork that covers the burial of Langston Hughes' ashes symbolically contained in a book shaped urn.

Lesson Plans with Strategies and Objectives

Unit Summary:

These four lessons are unified by poems in the unit's core text written for children by Langston Hughes, *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*. The teacher will translate the vocabulary and written materials into Spanish and English to be accessible to all students and provide hands-on demonstrations with one-on-one checking for understanding. In addition to creating my own essential questions I also will employ those developed by the National Common Core Standards for Visual Arts in the areas of Creating, Responding, Performing/Presenting/Producing and Connecting.

Lesson Plan I: “I, Too”

In this lesson students will learn about society, culture and history through their poetry analysis and production of art. The title of the first lesson of the unit is “I, Too,” based on the poem of the same title by Langston Hughes from the book *The Dream Keeper and other Poems* illustrated by the artist Brian Pickney. Other instructional resources include a vocabulary list and a handout of the poem (Hughes, 63). Students will compare the artwork next to the poem in the text with artwork collage by the artist Ashley Bryant for the poem dedication by Langston Hughes at the beginning of the book *Sail Away*. (Hughes, 24) This four-line poem is an excellent introduction for students to how repetition creates rhyme and is displayed on a collage of a sailing boat which fits the theme of the unit of a quest. Students will read an excerpt from Langston Hughes’s poem “The Young Sailor,” from the Yale Beinecke Rare Book Library, as well. The seminar “Poetry as Sound and Object,” engaged us in discussions about poetry as dramatic speech and about Black music and aesthetics. In this dedication Hughes describes how “words sing” and can last longer than the utterance of them. In the book *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois begins every chapter with a phrase of music. At the end of the book his dedication is an afterthought. Du Bois asks the readers to hear his words so “the ears of the guilty people tingle with truth” (Du Bois, 217). Students will discuss how the poem “I, Too” can be read as dramatic speech and will be encouraged to read it aloud to explore the sound and emotion of the words. The big idea of the lesson is creating an archive. Students can also look at examples of data visualization by Du Bois about Black America as inspiration for their design process (Battle-Baptiste, 34). Eighth grade students will spend four class sessions completing the objectives. Materials include inks, drawing paper, Styrofoam plates, tape, brayers, inking trays, pencils, erasers, mixed media, adhesive, white heavyweight paper. The objective is that students will be making a record of the passage of time through layering mark making using the printing process. After discussion of the essential questions following oral and silent reading of the poem, the class will brainstorm ten unique things about themselves in the first class. In the next class students will create their print design. In the 3rd and 4th classes students will collaborate to make a large format print together. New vocabulary will include: artist, poet, cotton gin, slavery, Harlem Renaissance, poem, print, repetition, ashamed, dare, beautiful, layering and collaborative. Instructional strategies for this lesson include lecture, discussion, demonstration, spaced repetition and a field trip to the Eli Whitney Museum & Workshop in Hamden, Connecticut. The Visual Arts Standard for this lesson is Connecting: Va: Cn11.1.8, Process Component: Relate, Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding. The essential questions are: What is printing? How does the poet Langston Hughes use repetition in the writing of this poem? What is a motif? What is pattern? How does art help us understand the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures? How is art used to impact the views of society? How does art preserve aspects of life?

Procedures

1. The lesson will be introduced by the instructor using a smartboard.
2. Group learning will follow with discussion of the poem.
3. The instructor will do a demonstration of printmaking using mixed media.
4. Students will have independent design practice before the class creates an artwork as a group.

Evaluation

The learning targets are that students participate in class discussion about the poem, create their own print design individually and then collaborate to create an artwork as a class.

Extension

Advanced students can distinguish how art can represent, establish, reinforce or reflect group identity. (Va: Cn11.1.8)

Lesson Plan II: “Color”

The title of the second lesson of the unit is “Color,” based on the poem of the same title from the book *The Dream Keeper and other Poems* (Hughes, 76). Instructional resources include a vocabulary list and a handout of the poem. Students will read an illustrator’s note on the artwork collages by the artist Ashley Bryant in the book *Sail Away* that accompany poems by Langston Hughes (Hughes, 4). In this section the illustrator describes his artistic process. Bryant explains how he used color, materials and inspiration from his mother’s sewing to create the artworks for the book (Hughes, 4). Students will also read in the book *Schomburg: The Man Who Built A Library* by Carole Boston Weatherford about how Arturo Schomburg personalized every book in his library collection with a personal bookplate (Weatherford, 48). Students will be encouraged to personalize their artworks with poetry as artistic statements throughout the unit. Students will additionally read an excerpt of the archival poem “Trumpeter” from the Yale Beinecke Rare Book Library. During the Poetry as Sound and Object seminar was read an article, “The Poet Writing on Prison Underwear,” by Adam Iscoe from May 8, 2023 about an artist who transformed prison t-shirts and underwear into handmade paper. Using a cotton garment as the base of an artwork is opportunity to talk with students about his artistic process and why he chooses to make paper this way. During the Poetry as Sound and Object seminar fellows kept commonplace books. I used a commonplace book with cotton pages. I used the commonplace book for drawings, such as copies of artists like Leonardo Da Vinci or Michaelangelo. One of the texts that I copied out was an excerpt from *The Golden Thread* by Kassia St. Claire. It described the wealth accumulated in Britain from the processing of cotton during the height of American slavery. The class can begin by having a discussion of favorite items of clothing and whether they have ever had an item of clothing customized with embroidering a name, patch or color on to it. The big idea of the lesson is exploring the expressiveness of color. Eighth-grade students will spend three class sessions completing the objectives. Materials include ink of various colors, rulers, scissors, acrylic paint, cardboard, rolling trays, brayers, white cotton t-shirts, tape, pencils and erasers, drawing paper. The objective is that students will be designing and screen-printing a shirt inspired by the poem. Vocabulary will include: World War I, Harlem Hellfighters, collagraph print, color, design, shroud, banner, soaring, proud. Instructional strategies for this lesson include didactic questioning and concept mapping. Students will practice innovative thinking during their design process. The teacher will check for understanding by doing a word bank quiz the class following discussion of the poem using the new vocabulary in the first and second lesson of the unit. The Visual Arts Standard for this lesson is Creating: Va: Cr1.1, Process Component: Investigate-Plan-Make, Anchor Standard 1: Generate, conceptualize artistic ideas and work. The essential questions are: What is color? How is color described in the poem? How does the title of the poem influence the students’ interpretation of the poem? How can students symbolize color in the design of their shirt?

Procedures

1. In the first class after reading the poem together and discussion as a class. Students will reflect on how to represent color using design of a printed shirt.
2. Students will analyze the artwork accompanying the poem by the artist Brian Pickney using the elements and principles of design to describe what they observe.
3. They will do a preliminary drawing of their design in the first class.

4. In the 2nd class students will print the first layer of the shirt.
5. In the final class students will add another layer of color to their shirt and take their work home.

Evaluation

The learning target is that the students learn how color can be represented symbolically and expressively in design. Students can create an artwork with personal meaning based on their interpretation of the poem. Students will receive two in-class participation scores for the class discussion and contribution to the collaborative artwork comprising of multiple layers.

Extension Advanced students can document the progression of their creative process. (Va: Cr1.1.8)

Lesson Plan III: “Stars”

The title of the third lesson of the unit is “Stars,” based on the poem of the same title from the book *The Dream Keeper and other Poems* (Hughes, 75). Instructional resources include a vocabulary list and a handout of the poem. The big idea of the lesson is creating a symbolic motif. Students will compare the print artwork next to the poem in the text with artwork collage by the artist Ashley Bryant for the poem “Fulfillment,” in the book *Sail Away*. (Hughes, 24) The poem fulfillment contains a stanza that describes the qualities of “a bright ball of light,” that can be used to help students visualize stars for this lesson. The lesson will also include a reading of an excerpt of the poem “World War II Night Edition” from the Yale Beinecke Rare Book Library. Students can explore ways in which visual art motifs can be representative of words and ideas. Eighth grade students will spend four class sessions completing the objectives. Materials include inks, tape, pencils, erasers, heavyweight white paper, drawing paper, brayers, rulers, rolling trays. The objective is that students will be designing and printing posters inspired by the poem. Vocabulary will also include: World War II, Tuskegee Airmen, reduction print, stars, dreaming, oblivion, dark, Harlem, song, lullaby, typography and poster. The Visual Arts Standard for this lesson is Responding: Va: Re7.1.8, Process Component: Perceive, Anchor Standard 1: Perceive and analyze artistic work. The essential questions are: What do stars symbolize and where do you find stars? Where is Harlem? Is there action happening in this poem? How do life experiences influence the way you relate to art? How does learning about art impact how we perceive the world? What can we learn from our responses to art? What conditions, attitudes, and behaviors support creativity and innovative thinking? What factors prevent or encourage people to take creative risks? How does collaboration expand the creative process?

Procedures

1. Students will analyze the artwork accompanying the poem by the artist Brian Pickney using the elements and principles of design to describe what they observe.
2. After discussion of the poem in the 1st class students can look at examples of stars in space and art in order to create prints in the following classes.
3. Students will be able to answer aesthetic questions about their design using the elements of art such as color, form, and space, and principles of art such as repetition, harmony and unity.

Evaluation

The learning target is that students learn how to create visually impactful signs that have a symbolic message. Instructional strategies for this lesson include reading for meaning and think-pair-share. The teacher will check for understanding by using a self-assessment rubric to measure the learning target of the third

lesson.

Extension

Advanced students can explain how aesthetic choices are shaped by culture and environment and impact visual images conveyed to others. (Va: Re7.1.8)

Lesson Plan IV: “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”

In this lesson students can learn how artists and museums protect artworks for display. The title of the fourth lesson of the unit is “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” based on the poem of the same title from the book *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Hughes, 62). Students will compare the print artwork next to the poem in the text with artwork collage by the artist Ashley Bryant for the same poem “Negro Speaks of Rivers,” in the book *Sail Away* (Hughes, 39). Instructional resources include a vocabulary list and a handout of the poem. Students will also read an excerpt of the poem “Youth” from the Yale Beinecke Rare Book Library. The big idea of this lesson is going on a quest. Eighth grade students will spend four class sessions completing the objectives. Materials include adhesive, black matting paper, acrylic paint, rulers, pencils, inks, brayers, rolling trays, tape, erasers, scissors, and white heavyweight paper. Vocabulary will include: matting, analyze, presentation and curation. Instructional strategies for this lesson include storytelling, research and a field trip to The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, New York City, New York. The Visual Arts Standard for this lesson is Presenting: Va: Pr5.1.8, Process Component: Analyze, Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic work for presentation. The essential questions are: What does the author compare the rivers he describes to? Where are the rivers that are mentioned in the poem located in the world and what direction do they flow in? Does the author describe the past? What images can students use to make a print inspired by the poem? What methods and processes are considered when preparing artwork for presentation or preservation? How does refining artwork affect its meaning to the viewer? What criteria are considered when selecting work for presentation, a portfolio, or a collection?

Procedures

1. Students will analyze the artwork accompanying the poem by the artist Brian Pickney using the elements and principles of design to describe what they observe.
2. The objective is that students will be printing images of rivers and the final works will be matted for display.
3. After creating their final print each student will mat their final artwork for display in the district art show.

Evaluation

The learning target is that students learn workmanship and it will be assessed by a formal rubric by the instructor. The teacher will assess understanding by the completion of a final project as a capstone of the unit. Each artwork will have a written reflection with a title in prose or poetry.

Extension

Advanced students can collaboratively assist in the curation of the artwork for the final exhibition. (Va: Pr5.1.8)

Conclusion

I suggest that teachers answer the questions to the Reading Guide of the book *The Logbooks: Connecticut's Slave Ships and Human Memory* prior to teaching the lesson. It is helpful for teachers to examine the history of slavery not just in the American South, but also in places like Connecticut. A primary text that I am aware of is *The Anti-Slavery Alphabet*, published in 1847 in Philadelphia for the Anti-Slavery Fair by Merrihew & Thompson, Printers that I purchased at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center. It is an alphabet that was written prior to the abolition of slavery to assist children in learning how to read, and also educating them about the horrific violence of slavery in terms that they could understand. It is a resource that could be helpful for teachers in understanding the longstanding impact of slavery in simple terms. To take the lesson further, instructors can also expand into learning about the Black soldiers such as Venture Smith who fought in the Revolutionary War in Connecticut or the Haitian Revolution's implication for the Western Hemisphere's response to the contributions of black soldiers throughout history. "Venture was building on his past, not erasing it" (Saint, 68). Like Arturo Schomburg, Venture Smith chose not to obliterate his past but used it to build his future upon. After having been enslaved instead of choosing a new name he liberated his family, as well as other Black men and bought land as an investment (Saint, 71-73). According to The Rhode Island Slave Enlistment Act of February 14, 1778, "every able-bodied negro, mulatto, or Indian man slave, in this State, may enlist into either of the said two battalions to serve during the continuance of the present war with Great Britain" (Lanning, 205). The historical impacts of the African diaspora are profound, especially in the history of nations such as the United States of America, as dramatically echoed in Langston Hughes's poem "I, Too". In fact, Rhode Island "was colonial America's largest transporter of slaves to the Caribbean and the colonies" (Farrow, 22). In the book *The Logbooks: Connecticut's Slave Ships and Human Memory*, the author Anne Farrow describes how this historical fact was something she realized she was not readily aware of because it was not something that occurred to her in her earlier research based on her sources. One of the topics Arturo Schomburg researched was the Haitian Revolution and his library collection reflects his interest in that historical event's impact on the world (Weatherford, 14). The unit is a quest inviting students to travel through time with Arturo Schomburg as a guide. While Arturo "Digs up His Past," students also learn about the history of the African diaspora through the poetry of Langston Hughes (Weatherford, 29). Schomburg was motivated to dig into the past like Farrow because he felt there was more to discover than was readily apparent, that there was more that was not seen because it was unlooked for (Farrow, 22).

In the course of the Poetry as Sound and Object seminar we discussed the legal and pedagogical significance of the banning of the watershed poetry book *Howl*, by Allen Ginsberg. This lesson is timely in the context of national debate concerning how African American history is taught in schools. The word "Negro" appears in two books written for youth used in the unit by Langston Hughes within his lifetime. In a June 1926 publication of *The Nation* Langston Hughes declared that the role of the young Negro artist to be unafraid of saying "I am a Negro-and beautiful!" (Shapiro, 374). According to Hughes it is ridiculous to reject African American vernacular traditions. Langston Hughes emphasizes the importance of music for the Black aesthetics of the Blues in his poetry. Using two texts written specifically for children during Langston Hughes's lifetime can help ensure that the intent of the author is not lost during instruction and also that it is appropriate for students. Langston Hughes lived at a time the word "Negro" was not uncommon. This is an opportunity for thoughtful instructors to engage students in discussion about how to use critical thinking to understand how the social usage of words can change over time when looking at primary or secondary documents in research. The use of this word can potentially be an issue for some school instructors. It is advisable that the instructor discuss the unit with the principal and send home a letter to parents prior to instruction. Because it is a poem Hughes

wrote as a young man that is foundational to his career, this unit concludes with an important opportunity for students to discuss the power of words and freedom of expression in poetry and art. Students will also learn what context means and that the meaning of words can change depending on how and when they are used.

Students may be inspired to become authors by learning Hughes became an author as a teenager. This unit prepares eighth-grade students to enter high school by encouraging them to practice critical thinking and social-emotional learning skills modelled by the poet Langston Hughes with other artists through reflection, production and collaboration. Students will learn to support their visual art ideas with observed evidence they analyze in the poem texts. The final resting place of Hughes symbolized by this mosaic is the end of the unit's quest. It is also an invitation for students to continue learning through experience interrogating their positions with curiosity about how history shapes our world. A Yale-New Haven Unit written by the fellow Medria Blue connects the life of Langston Hughes to the Japanese-American experience during WWII and can be used as a resource by instructors for further explorations of the topic. When introducing how Arturo Schomburg's life was shaped by his collection of books instructors can expand the scope of the unit to include the picture book *Love in the Library*. It is based on the experience of Maggie Tokuda-Hall's grandparents and the impact access to a library at the Minidoka incarceration camp had on her family during World War II. This unit concludes with a poem transformed into an artwork representing the cultural legacy of the poet Langston Hughes that intersects with Arturo Schomburg who was the *Change Agent* whose life's mission to create a great repository of knowledge began the unit's quest.

Reading List for Teachers

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Reading List for Students

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Materials for Classroom Use

Acrylic Paint

Adhesive

Brayers

Bristol Paper

Cardboard

Cotton T-Shirts

Erasers

Inks

Inking Trays

Kneaded Erasers

Matting Paper

Mixed Media

Newsprint Drawing Paper

Painter's Tape

Pencils

Scissors

Styrofoam Plates

Tape

Rolling Trays

Rulers

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

This visual art unit meaningfully implements the school district’s academic standards because students will be engaged in reading comprehension, critical thinking and creating visual design. With instructions provided in English and Spanish, students will deepen their understanding of history by reflecting on questions set by academic standards. Students will have formative learning experiences through field trips to the Eli Whitney Museum and The *Schomburg Center* for Research in Black Culture in Harlem which will bring the history they learn to life, so that when they read about Harlem in Langston Hughes’s poetry they can envision the place themselves from their own memories. Students will be encouraged to take creative risks and develop social skills as they follow the example of group collaboration modelled by the poet Langston Hughes and peers such as Arturo Schomburg, Brian Pickney and Ashley Bryant. Students will reflect on essential questions about history, art and poetry. They will learn about the lives of other people throughout history and respond with their own ideas about the world around them through printmaking and poetry. Students will be empowered to express their view of the world in Spanish and English by reading and responding to the text *Schomburg: The Man Who Built A Library* by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by Eric Velasquez. This unit actively engage students in their learning through creating and connecting to poetry.

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