



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1978 Volume II: 20th Century Afro-American Culture

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## **The Black Man in Late Nineteenth-Century Literature: A Comparison of the Short Stories of Page and Cable with Those of Their Black Counterparts, Chesnutt and Dunbar**

Curriculum Unit 78.02.04  
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The popularity of the short story in America has increased significantly in the last two hundred years. Springing from the oral tradition, the short story can have a sharp impact upon the reader because of its brevity and variety. Mirroring the fast pace of American life, the short story offers immediate gratification to the reader. Like the tales told around the campfires, therefore, most stories lack the depth and length necessary for the fuller expositions of philosophical matters found in the novel. The short story did establish a recorded continuum for those American tales handed down from one generation to another; through this personalized approach to history, the glories and disasters of American society can be viewed, if only briefly.

Just as the short story is a distinct product of the various strands of American culture, so, too, all American literature is as distinctly varied and unique as each geographical region and each specific ethnic group. The teacher, therefore, must be aware of background material and important cultural distinctions. As each literary period is encountered by the student, it should be viewed as a transitional state. A working knowledge of the predecessors and historical influences must be presented to the student; this information is of paramount importance.

Nineteenth-century short fiction is an outstanding example of both an expanding, developing national literature and a richly diverse reflection of its own time. Through his readings, the student will begin to see themes that he previously considered only "modern": the horror of war (Ambrose Bierce's "Chickamauga" and "One Officer, One Man"); the diversity in treatment of and response to the black American (Page's "Marse Chan," Kate Chopin's "Nég Créol"); the search for identity (Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener"). However, the impact of each distinct type of story must not be lost in too large an overview of the century's literary growth.

One specific era that has often been overlooked in 20th-century criticism is the literature of the South that emerged after the Civil War. The southern literary movement, as Charles L. James points out in his introduction to *From the Roots*, grew out of a uniquely southern tradition. The contemporary affirmation of a separate black literature has grown out of the strong cultural and social differences that have existed for two hundred years between black and white America. Robert Bone, in his critical study, *The Negro Novel in America*, points out that these differences have nothing to do with "innate racial characteristics." They stem from a combination of factors: a group heritage of slavery, the rich folklore traditions, the existence of separate institutions that reflect an American "caste" mentality. Like their white counterparts, early black

Americans either retold or invented oral narratives that form the backbone of their folklore tradition. However, no substantial number of black prose writings were produced until 1890. Charles Chesnutt's "The Goophered Grapevine" (1887) is an excellent choice for early representation.

After the oral tradition of the 18th century became more formalized, the short story, in its written form, took on the quality of the more widespread romantic movement. The short story became an accurate reflection of the pace and diversity of the American lifestyle; the only limitation for the southern writers, perhaps, was the warping of that reflection to suit the needs of their particular culture during the Reconstruction Era. Thomas Nelson Page, George Washington Cable, and Joel Chandler Harris all endeavored to create and preserve a positive ante-bellum picture that simply did not exist. Historically, however, both the North and South were ripe for a literature that negated the horrors of slavery.

Before the connections between Page and Cable and Dunbar and Chesnutt can be fully explored, two factors must be briefly reviewed. The first is the major impact of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe on the American reading public. The second is the increased availability of reading material because of changes in the American magazine industry.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's major contributions include the attention he paid to realistic detail and regional flavor, the harmony and clarity of his style, and the personification of vices and virtues in his flat characters (a device he commonly employed in his romantic novels). Thus, the importance of symbolism can be readily seen in such stories as "Young Goodman Brown." Subtle social commentary, as seen in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," revealed through characterization and conflict, became a permanent component in the writings of many of the American authors to follow.

Hawthorne's tales often dealt with early New England history or legend. His emphasis on the setting had a tremendous effect on writers like Page and Cable. Hawthorne's superb narrative talent obviously had its influence as well. His ability is most clearly seen in "Young Goodman Brown," where the vivid pictorial descriptions of Brown's journey help to make his ultimate disillusionment with his town believable.

Edgar Allan Poe's "single effect" theory tightened the purposiveness of the short story. He produced stories that had an immediate impact on the reader because of his use of imaginative situations and introspective characters. The horrid details and portrayal of emotions, coupled with the elements of suspense and intellect, reveal Poe's overriding concern with his audience. Poe recognized the need for brevity and calculated technique. Students adore the gruesome, gory tales, including "The Black Cat," "The Tell-Tale Heart," or "The Pit and the Pendulum" because their senses are so totally assaulted by the rapid pace of the narrative. The stories have a tight narrative structure and carefully selected details of setting. Everything is calculated to produce a particular reaction; Poe's stories, therefore, became invaluable models for many short fiction writers.

Poe and Hawthorne were, together with Washington Irving (and his emphasis on the telling of mythic tales in an American setting), the triumvirate that firmly established the foundation of the American short story. Their major influence is clearly evident in post-Civil War writings.

After the Civil War, the magazine industry skyrocketed. Because of the population increase, improved reading skills, and the modern printing machinery that made mass distribution both possible and profitable, the magazine business grew rapidly. There were only about 700 periodicals in 1865; by 1885, the number had risen to 3,300.

Already-established magazines flourished after the war as well. *The Atlantic Monthly*, under the editorship of William Dean Howells, incorporated regional pieces that were popular with its reading audience. All of the writers to be discussed were published in the popular northern literary magazines, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner's*, *Harper's*. In 1881, the magazinists broke away from the Scribner house and published *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*. *Century* got off to a spectacular start with a vast number of Civil War pieces written by such distinguished men as General Grant and Mark Twain. When *Scribner's* resurfaced in 1887, it significantly lowered the cost of the magazine, creating an even wider reading audience. Black writers, although utilizing their own magazines, including *The Southern Workman* and *American Church Review*, were drawn to the previously all-white publications as a way to seek wider recognition for their art.

After the Civil War, black writings began to reflect the rich flavor and beauty of Negro folklore. The problem of ignorance for blacks and the nominal citizenship they were granted, made education the primary objective of organizations like the Freedman's Bureau after 1866. Without reading skills, the black audience would have been unable to enjoy a heritage that was finally emerging in print.

The last decade of the 19th century represented the initial period of adjustment to freedom, or rather, limited freedom. Running parallel to the suppression and disfranchisement of blacks during this era was the southern literary misrepresentations of black/white relationships. Unfortunately, passing mention must be made of the work of Thomas Dixon. He, more than any other writer, openly reinforced the ideas of "Negrophobia" and "The Black Peril." His work most directly reflects the feelings of many racist southerners.

Most of the white writers, however, attempted to recreate a lasting impression of the beauty of the ante-bellum southern world. Others tried to depict the reconstruction era as the "tragic era," typified by evil carpetbaggers who abused their power. Writers like Page, Cable, and Harris shared an implicit desire to reconcile the South and the North, and to bury the disasters the slave system had wrought. The black writers of the period, in particular, Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles W. Chesnutt, often followed the traditions established by their white predecessors while moving beyond their limitations to black themes and characterizations. Both men exhibit moments of sensitivity toward and the desire to reveal both the strength of character and the day-to-day struggles of the southern black. Their writings, therefore, deserve careful scrutiny, both in terms of what they adopted from the white writers and how they have influenced their 20th-century brothers.

Finally, then, we have arrived at the major focus of this project. The end of the 19th century marked the birth of two distinct writing cultures. Overlapping, certainly, yet their strength grew out of their separate natures. On the one hand, the regional southern romanticism incorporated an imaginary social structure; the white writers were healing wounds with beauty and sentimentality. The black writers, on the other hand, while drawing from the structure and form of southern traditionalists like Page and Cable, were not glossing over the abuses and demoralization of their people. Social consciousness in these works, although only beginning, was clearly presenting questions that did not leave white audiences with easy solutions.

Joel Chandler Harris was most well-known for his Uncle Remus sketches; his popularity, in fact, led to the establishment of *Uncle Remus's Magazine* in 1907. "The Wonderful Tar Baby Story," which was the most loved of the Negro dialect stories, comprised three chapters in Harris's first book, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1881). Drawing from international folklore, Harris popularized the use of folklore and dialect in the short story. His white narrator hears the slave, Uncle Remus, telling the tales of Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox:

Looking through the window he saw the child sitting by Uncle Remus. His head rested against the old man's arm, and he was gazing with the expression of the most intense interest into the rough, weathery-beaten face that

beamed so kindly upon them.

Thus, the benevolent, obedient slave became a reality. The loving master, the adoring children, the humane conditions were all part of the fabric created by Harris and his followers. Harris did present other pictures of slave life. "Free Joe and the Rest of the World" depicts the plight of a freed slave in 1850. He becomes, essentially, a man "without a country"; he is suspected by the blacks and looked down upon by the whites. Thus, he is left with nothing. Albion W. Tourgée did attempt to cross the sentimental barriers in *A Fool's Errand* (1879); he was completely rejected by the predominantly white reading audience. The already familiar sentimental fables prevailed and continued to flourish.

In an article in *The Forum* (1888), Tourgée stated that there were only two types of Negroes:.

The devoted slave, happy if the scene was laid in the days of slavery and the guardian of his white folks if the grimmer post-war South was the period of the story, and the confused freedman who usually was rescued from semi-ludicrous predicaments by the white people to whom he had once belonged.

Thomas Nelson Page and George Washington Cable portrayed such stereotypes in their stories. Although Page became more political in later years {*Red Rock* (1898)}, his popular stories are about "Plantation Life" in aristocratic Virginia and Kentucky. Page stood out as the chief advocate of the charm of the Old South. While adopting a condescending attitude, Page created an appealing plantation scene. Like Harris's characters, the slaves are all devoted, loving, and inferior. Both Cable and Page insisted on portraying a loving relationship between master and slave. Both also relied heavily on picturesque settings and colorful characterization. The situations are thinly outlined vehicles that serve to enhance the attractive scene. In page's story "Marse Chan," a northern narrator, who is new to the decaying beauty of the South, introduces the inner tale. This outside frame created an artistic distance necessary in a tale of such unrealistic proportions. The actual history of the character, Marse Chan, is told by Page's familiar narrator, an old ex-slave, Sam, who is typically lamenting the loss of beauty "befoah de wah." In dialect, he relives his idyllic condition; the story he relates is filled with the closeness he and his master, Marse Chan, shared. "Marse Chan" is typical of many Page stories; the newly freed slave recalls and mourns the loss of intimacy and safety he knew. Page used the classic formula for the southern romantic tale: the loyal Darky, his benevolent "Mastuh," the beautiful southern belle. Sam understands the importance of family pride to his master but still desires to reunite him with his love, Miss Anne, a member of the offended family. Sam's only concern, however, is to insure the total happiness of his master. He plots and schemes in his own simple, ingenuous way until the lovers are together. An important element in the teaching of such stories is the endeavor to make each student see beyond the sentimental attachment Sam feels for his master (who dies a noble officer's death). Sam is overwhelmed with grief, even though his master fought against Sam's right to freedom. (The irony involved here does not escape the modern reader.) The blind loyalty of the slave, even after the war, may have soothed the conscience of a nation determined to forget the recent atrocities of the slave system, but today's reader must not forget.

Sam's simple intelligence undergoes vast improvements in the characters created in Chesnutt's collection, *The Conjure Woman*. While on the surface very similar to Page's in style and flavor, it will be seen that Chesnutt's work has a deeper intention: through detailed characterization he is able to create a more realistic composite of the black slave's personality, including the exposure of his wit, his shrewdness, and his innate ability to survive.

Cable's stories become more socially aware earlier in his writing career. He was dedicated to moral improvement and the idealization of the human character. Cable captured a more distinct flavor than did Page through the use of mystification and Negro folklore. As a writer, he was constantly under pressure to remove

unpleasant details and soften disquieting aspects of the black experience. But Cable saw the moral wrongs and social dangers built into the reconstruction era. The mulatto struggle appeared in his Creole stories, where once again, the servants of mixed parentage found the greatest difficulty in attempting to join one society or the other.

Stories in the “‘Sieur George” school, while touching upon the mulatto question, deal mainly with the recreation of Creole society in Louisiana. Here, social injustices are evident in white society as well. Cable’s novel, *Les Grandissimes* (1880), deals more directly with black issues. Chapters 28 and 29 comprise “The Story of Bras-Coupé,” a work that met with countless rejections as a separate piece. The novel, as a whole, deals with the irony in the existence of two Honoré des Grandissimes: one white, the other a colored freedman, with all the appropriate stigmata.

The short story, however, revolves around Bras-Coupé, a captured African prince whose nobility cannot be tamed, even by the middle passage. As in Page’s fiction, the horrible details are missing. The middle passage is hastily drawn without sensitivity. Although Bras-Coupé “became a commodity,” his grandeur remains. The woman he loves, the mulatto slave Palmyre, does not love him (there is the obvious fear of his blackness) but admires him fiercely, feeling her own power surge whenever she is near him. Again, there is the theme of trust and affection between Palmyre and her mistress. Bras-Coupé becomes a slave on “La Renaissance,” an ironic name for a place of enslavement and, because of the curse Bras-Coupé casts, a place of death for humans and crops. The student has a tiny exposure to the impact of conjuring in this story. Deeply rooted in black culture, the power of the conjurer receives much greater attention in Chesnutt’s work.

Strong imagery suggests Cable’s heightened concern, which is so obviously lacking in Page, with the demoralization of the black man. Bras-Coupé literally means “arm cut off.” The character is physically cut off from his tribe, his personal source of identity and, conversely, the tribe has been cut off from its leader. The slave refuses to use his arm, his strength for slave labor: “He made himself a type of all slavery, turning into flesh and blood the truth that all slavery is maiming.” Bras-Coupé attempts to escape and faces physical maiming on top of his emotional castration. Yet, in the final moments, he lifts his deadly curse and finds his humanity through the innocent tears of his former master’s child. Just before the moment of his death, Bras-Coupé calls out to Africa as his personal heaven; he would, in death at least, be free to return home.

Charles Chesnutt created most of his fictional material from his experiences and observations in the South. His first work of public importance was “The Goophered Grapevine,” which also marked the first appearance of a piece of fiction by a black artist in a northern all-white publication ( *Atlantic Monthly* , 1887). Here we meet Uncle Julius, much wiser and more carefully developed than Uncle Remus or Sam. He is capable of telling his dialect tales of mysticism to his northern employers in whatever way necessary to best suit his personal needs. The first intelligent black character was on the literary horizon. *The Conjure Woman* (1889), a collection adopting the usual plantation motif, has a similar structure to the Uncle Remus tales and Page’s stories in *In Ole Virginia* . A northerner journeys South and experiences at first hand what remains of the decaying culture. Again, the pervasive theme of beauty “befoah de wah” persists. However, Uncle Julius is an individual, *not* an imitation of a type. This is a major departure from Page and Cable. While he seems to be an old-fashioned southern Negro, he is able to quickly discern differences in interest and motivation that separate his northern employers from his former masters. All the stories deal, in some way, with a conjurer; in his descriptions of these conjurings, Julius is able to use his impressive imaginative skills.

Chesnutt turned away from the plantation tradition in his second volume, *The Wife of His Youth* (1889) to what became a primary concern of his—the role of the “tragic mulatto.” “The Sheriff’s Children” stands out as an

obvious example of blind discrimination. Here, the Colonel (Sheriff) is a fair, law-abiding man who has unknowingly fathered and ruined a mulatto son. The lives of these two men become entwined as a result of a murder the son did not commit; the town wants a lynching because Tom is half-black. The Sheriff attempts to protect Tom's rights, not realizing he is the boy's father.

Locked away from the world in the prison (of white values), the son confronts the father saying, "that in order to save myself I must kill you." (This line will echo in black literature in the words of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*.) There is no love between these two; when the father justifies himself by claiming to have given his son life, the son responds indignantly:

"Life?" said the prisoner, with a sarcastic laugh. "What kind of a life? You gave me your own blood, your own feathers—no man need look at us together twice to see that—and you gave me a poor black mother... and you made me a slave."

Tom's life is only a tortured existence. This dilemma became a serious theme in a great deal of black literature. The regrets of the father, while sincere, do not help the son. At the last moment, the Sheriff's white daughter shoots Tom and all is safely as it was. White society triumphs. The hidden truth, however, is that Tom does not die from the wound, but, like Bras-Coupé, from too many inner wounds that he can no longer bear. Tom simply gives up the fight for identity and for life. Here, we see the seeds of the literature that was to emerge with Toomer, who created characters like Kabnis in *Cane*.

Paul Laurence Dunbar did less to show the roots of a separate Negro literature than did Chesnutt. He produced four volumes of short stories that imitated the plantation motifs of Harris and Page. Stories like "The Strength of Gideon" and "Viney's Free Papers" are once again located on the plantation. In "The Strength of Gideon," the devotion of a black house servant is pathetically misplaced. Although quite similar in style to Page's stories, there is an increased sense of loss over Gideon's refusal to take his freedom. The girl he loves, Martha, chooses freedom over love, and the reader can see that she has chosen correctly. In "Viney's Free Papers" the main character, Ben Raymond, labors joyously to buy his young wife's freedom. Viney, however, abuses the meaning of such a gift. Once she gains insight, the papers become meaningless; she selects the freedom of choice and opts to stay with Ben. On a subtle level, the burning of the papers leads to a greater freedom for both of them.

Less frequently in Dunbar, the black characters are able to outwit both white society and other black hypocrites. In "The Scapegoat," Asbury sets up an "Equal Rights Barbershop" in an all-black district. Here, too, the irony is touching. The characters know that no whites will journey into their community, and yet, in this small gesture, they do not opt to exclude them. Asbury's popularity is used and then abused; as he gains power he becomes a threat to both the black and white establishments and he is unfairly imprisoned as a result. When he returns, his revenge takes on a mysterious tone as he plots to undermine those who destroyed him. Social commentary is painfully obvious in this particular piece; Asbury is openly confronted with the reality that, had he been born white, his abilities would have led him to the Senate rather than to prison.

Embittered, Asbury triumphs not for himself, but for his people. He destroys his enemies and, in the process, unleashes a positive social movement:

On the morning of the election a cloud no bigger than a man's hand appeared upon the horizon. It came from the direction of the black district. It grew and the managers of the party looked at it, fascinated by ominous dread. Finally, it began to rain Negro voters, and as one man they voted against their former candidates. Their



organization was perfect. They simply came, voted, and left, but they overwhelmed everything.

The metaphor of a dark cloud rising on the morning of the election represented much more than Asbury's personal revenge. Once "it began to rain Negro voters," freedom of choice was finally in the hands of the common people.

"The Ingrate" is a lighter, more humorous tale of one slave's awakening to the hypocrisy of both blacks and whites. Josh uses the knowledge that his owner, Mr. Leckler, gives him to escape to Canada. The slave in this piece is no longer the possessor of a second-rate mentality. As soon as Josh can read and write, his chances for success are unlimited. Unfortunately, the white American society is ever present to thwart his efforts. Therefore, Josh walks out of America, taking his freedom literally into his own hands.

Thomas Nelson Page maintained the plantation motif and his belief in white supremacy throughout most of his writing career. Cable, although dedicated to a similar flavor in his characterizations and settings, was obviously making the attempt to incorporate his awareness of social problems in his later works. Chesnutt worked through his plantation stories and arrived at a more socially aware group of short stories. Dunbar, however, maintained a fairly consistent imitation of the plantation tradition in most of his stories. The seeds of a higher consciousness are there, however, and particular pieces do elevate Dunbar's work to a higher thematic level.

This overview has been superficial at best. It is to be hoped that the teacher of the American short story will view these artists as both part of the American tradition and the originators of their own interpretation of that tradition. By doing so, the student will be better prepared to understand the reasons for the distinct Afro-American literature that emerges in the first part of the 20th century, a literature which springs from the works of Chesnutt and Dunbar. By definition, Americans flourish when their cultures and traditions blend, while retaining the uniqueness of their separate identities. Certainly, no less can be said of the American writers discussed in this narrative.

## Suggested Student Reading List

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Note: The stories listed below are available in the anthologies listed in the Student Bibliography. Individual copies of representative stories by Page, Cable, Chesnutt, and Dunbar are available through the Yale Teachers' Institute and/or Sterling Library, Yale University. All stories should be assigned as required reading before beginning the unit. Individual pieces can then be analyzed separately or comparatively with a greater degree of familiarity by the group as a whole.

Washington Irving:	"Rip Van Winkle"
Nathaniel Hawthorne:	"Young Goodman Brown"
	"My Kinsman, Major Molineux"
Edgar Allan Poe:	"The Black Cat"
	"The Tell-Tale Heart"
Joel Chandler Harris:	"The Wonderful Tar Baby Story"
Thomas Nelson Page:	"Marse Chan"
	"Meh Lady: A Story of the Old War"
George Washington Cable:	"Sieur George"

	"The Story of Bras-Coupé"
	"Salome Miller"
Charles W. Chesnutt:	"The Goophered Grapevine"
	"The Wife of His Youth"
	"The Sheriff's Children"
	"A Matter of Principal"
Paul Laurence Dunbar:	"The Strength of Gideon"
	"Viney's Free Papers"
	"The Scapegoat"
	"The Ingrate"

## Sample Lesson Plans

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Note: At the beginning of this unit, assign the Student Reading List and Independent Research Projects. Written note-taking must be stressed and, if necessary, graded. Students should be encouraged to draw from both written and oral commentary.

### Section I: Technical Analysis of the Short Story (3-4 days)

(A) Review the major elements of the short story.

Each student must have a working knowledge of the "parts" of the short story before he/she can begin to analyze the stories. The following terms should be reviewed and defined, refining and expanding these definitions as the stories are discussed:

Point of View/Narration

Characterization

Setting

Theme

Plot

Tone

Climax

Conflict

*Sample Exercise* : Select a *familiar* short story (e.g. Poe's "The Black Cat" or Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"). Encourage oral reading, using your own "dramatic" sense to highlight important passages. In writing, each student must identify and explain the elements of the selection using specific examples from the text.

(B) Introduce important literary devices that are of particular interest in the required reading. Again, definitions and examples should be generated through discussion:.



Dialect	Stereotype
Symbolism	Humor
Irony/dramatic irony	Local color
Metaphor	Simile
Dialogue	Scapegoat

*Sample Exercise : Using a passage from a Chesnutt story, give the students an opportunity to work through written dialect together. An accurate recording would be very helpful. Students must begin to feel comfortable with dialect in order to fully appreciate the stories.*

*Sample Exercise : Contemporary Dialect:* Have your students compose a list of currently popular phrases that may not be understood by adults or peers outside of their environment. Give examples from *your* high school years and then discuss the differences and *value* of subdivisions in our rich language.

## Section II: Independent Research Projects (One Week)

Objective: Each student must contribute information to the class on one subject from each area. The class then becomes a group of “authorities,” which can in turn create self-motivation within the class.

Note: This is a perfect opportunity to get students to go to the school or public library if you have not already done so. Familiarize students with both Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress catalog systems. Review available reference materials.

Strategy: Distribute a list of topic areas at the beginning of the unit (with deadlines). Allow 2-3 nights for each mini-paper (250-300 words). The limited length forces students to select only those points of information that will be of greatest significance to the class. Be sure all topics are assigned.

*Topics* (Suggestions only-add and delete topics as needed)

### A. Biographies of Writers

Joel Chandler Harris  
George Washington Cable  
Thomas Nelson Page  
Nathaniel Hawthorne  
Edgar Allan Poe  
Paul Laurence Dunbar  
Charles W. Chesnutt  
Washington Irving  
Thomas Dixon

### B. Literary History of the Period

Plantation Tradition  
Magazine Expansion  
Romanticism  
William Dean Howells, editor  
Regionalism and the Local Colorists  
Creole social structure

Poe's "Single Effect" theory  
Images of the Negro (1850-1900)  
Disfranchisement and education

### Section III: Literary and Historical Background Leading into the Post-Reconstruction Era (2Ð3 days)

Note: These lectures should be presented at the beginning of the unit if it is an isolated short story analysis. An example of each type of writing should accompany each lecture.

## Suggested Lessons:

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- I. Oral Tradition
- II. Magazine expansion and William Dean Howells
- III. Harris, Poe, and Hawthorne—the Romantic School
- IV. Thomas Dixon and "Negrophobia"
- V. Reconstruction: Idealism vs. Southern Backlash
  - a. Jim Crow Legislation
  - b. Freedman's Bureau
  - c. Ku Klux Klan
- VI. Bret Harte and the Local Colorists
  - a. Growth of Regionalism
  - b. Use of Dialect

### *Sample Exercise* : Hawthorne's Impact on the Short Story

- I. Background Information: Biographical and historical
- II. Analysis: "My Kinsman, Major Molineux"

### Introductory Information:

Boston as a revolutionary hotbed

American desire to overthrow British domination

Treatment of Tories; tar-and-feathering

"Initiation" tale—main character achieving maturity

Procedure: Read the story aloud in class; students should be encouraged to participate. Allow III: students time to answer the following questions on paper before beginning the general discussion. Go over unfamiliar vocabulary words.

### Study Questions:

1. Hawthorne was a writer who liked to use symbols in his stories and there were a number of symbols in this one. Can you find several? What do you think Robin's *cudgel* might stand for?
2. Notice how laughter grows in this story, until at the very end the whole community is laughing. Why does Robin laugh when he sees his kinsman in disgrace?
3. Why does the stranger insist that Robin stay in town for a few days?
4. The *deseccration* of an individual by an entire community is a common theme in literature. Can you think of other works in which a person is disgraced and brutalized like Molineux?\*

\*Refer back to this question during your discussions of Dunbar's "The Scapegoat" and Chesnutt's "Bras-Coupé."

Discuss: Third-person narration, climax, importance of setting.

Section IV: The Short Stories of Cable, Page, Chesnutt, and Dunbar. Using the literary terms already defined, organize discussions of specific stories around the similar and different uses of the literary terms. Give detailed biographical information for each writer before his work is discussed. (1-3 weeks)

### Sample Lesson : The Use of Stereotypes in Southern Literature

Stereotype: a character used to represent qualities that typify a particular group or class of people.

Activity: Have students discuss modern stereotypes:

a policeman

a politician

ethnic personalities

a teacher

a "cool" person

Writing Assignment: Students are to create a stereotype without identifying him/her. Individuals will then share their descriptions with the class to see if the stereotype can easily be identified from the details.

Drawing from the assigned stories, discuss each author's use of and attitude toward:

the tragic mulatto (Chesnutt, Cable)

the devoted slave (Dunbar, Page, Harris)

the loving master (Page, Dunbar)

suspicious freedman (Dunbar, Chesnutt)

suspicious primitive (Cable)

Activity: Compare the various devoted Negro servants in the following stories:

Sam in Page's "Marse Chan"

Uncle Julius in Chesnutt's "The Goophered Grapevine"

Gideon in Dunbar's "The Strength of Gideon"

Uncle Remus in Harris's "The Wonderful Tar Baby Story"

**Suggested Questions:**

What feelings do these characters share?

How are their roles similar?

How is Julius different from Sam or Remus?

What makes Gideon pathetic (and the weakest of the four characters)?

**Further Suggestions for Discussion and Comparison:**

Irony: Unexpected twist of fate

Chesnutt's "A Matter of Principal"

Dunbar's "The Scapegoat"

Activity: Dramatize "A Matter of Principal"; have students attempt to put on the "airs" of the Claytons and then discuss their feelings as participants and observers.

*Problems of the color line:*

Chesnutt's "The Sheriff's Children"

Cable's "The Story of Bras-Coupé"

*Social Commentary and the Awakening of Modern Themes:*

Dunbar's "The Lynching of Jube Benson"; "The Ingrate".

Chesnutt's "The Sheriff's Children"; "Cicely's Dream".

**Further Suggested Activities:**

*Creative Writing:*

1. In 2-3 paragraphs, create a southern plantation setting similar in style to Page's settings.
2. Describe a lynching from a black character's perspective. Characterization through dialogue:

Select two or three ex-slaves and have them meet.

Create a dialogue that reveals differences in their characters.

Suggestions: Gideon, Josh, Sam, Julius.

Act out the dialogues in class.

*Television vs. the Short Stories:*

- Show the Auction and Middle Passage scenes (and the symbolic escape/castration scene)
1. from *Roots* (video-tapes available at Lee High School). Contrast the use of realistic detail with the minimum of detail in Cable's "Bras-Coupé."
  2. Compare the effects of Kizzie's ability to write (in *Roots*) with Josh's use of the same ability in Dunbar's "The Ingrate."

Final Note: Emphasis on vocabulary and reading skills should be reinforced throughout the course of the entire unit.

## Student Bibliography

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Chesnutt, Charles W. *The Wife of His Youth*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968.

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