



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1978 Volume III: 20th Century American History and Literature

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## Woman Emerging in the Twentieth Century

Curriculum Unit 78.03.11  
by Bernice Thompson

### Background Information

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The intent of this eight-week unit is to point out the struggle of women writers to become recognized and included in the literature of this century.

Throughout American history, women have suffered, often without hope of improving their situation. Today they are demanding an end to discrimination. They have organized to gain equal treatment in order that their rights no longer be denied. Laws and practices have changed and women are demanding equal treatment with men.

The early writings of American women began in the late 1700's and the early 1800's with magazine articles containing the latest information on fashions, popular science, household hints, and other domestic matters. According to the contributors to these magazines, piety, purity, and domesticity were the foundations on which to build feminine happiness. By teaching every woman proper standards of behavior, dress, and literary tastes, mass circulation magazines fostered the aspirations of lower-class women who wanted to become ladies just like middle-class women. These periodicals required many writers and naturally women were the ones who could provide the proper tone and approach. Many women writers began to come into their own with the advent of ladies' magazines.

Contributions to these magazines were at first submitted anonymously because society did not approve of women writers or women who worked outside of the home. By the 1830's it was possible for a lady to admit to authorship. Sarah Hale, best known for her "Mary Had A Little Lamb," had a great influence through her forty years as editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, the most important magazine of its type, with a circulation of 150,000. Mrs. Hale used her columns to advocate higher education for women and to advise them to train as doctors and nurses, occupations she considered perfectly compatible with "true womanhood." She published a total of thirty-six volumes during her lifetime and inspired other women to go into journalism.

Women who took up professional literary pursuits had talent, drive, and economic need just as men did. Most of these women came from families that were able to provide them with a good education. Some were single or widowed and many had dependents to support. Their career choices were limited. Except for teaching, writing was the only professional career widely available to women in the nineteenth century.

Some of these pioneer writers were Lydia Marie Child (1802-1880), a novelist; Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), author of *Little Women* and other novels; and Jane Swisshelm (1815-1884), owner and editor of *The St. Cloud Visitor* in Minnesota. One of the most famous of anti-slavery writers was Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

In the early years of the twentieth century women were an important part of reform activity which occurred as a result of problems created by industrialization and territorial expansion. Twentieth century women were impatient with the lack of progress of reform to improve the status of women. The woman's rights movement, for a short while, united women of all social classes in a common cause. During World War I women entered new fields of industry and many people were of the opinion that the long struggle for women's suffrage would be ended. The struggle for suffrage did end when women gained the right to vote in 1920, but the vote turned out to be relatively unimportant in improving women's status.

The Depression had an adverse effect on whatever economic gains women had made because men were given priority for scarce jobs. World War II changed this trend, and once again women were employed in large numbers in industry. But at the end of the war men again replaced women in industrial jobs. Most women returned to their jobs as homemakers and mothers.

In the 1950's there was a dramatic rise in the birth rate, accompanied by earlier marriages and a general acceptance of the old-fashioned view that "woman's place is in the home." However, women's share of the labor market increased at the same time.

The new feminism in the 1960's was a movement composed primarily of middle-class women who wished to revive the struggle of women to achieve equal rights. The struggles of women of previous generations had improved the status of women, although social values, mores, and institutions lagged far behind the material and economic progress that had been made.

In literature some well-known authors were Mary Roberts Rinehart, Edna Ferber, Pearl Buck, Frances Parkinson Keyes, Dorothy Parker, Katherine Ann Porter, and journalist Dorothy Thompson. With less social restraints in the twentieth century, women are now writing plays, television scripts, and newspaper columns. Woman is no longer limited by her ability to take advantage of the many choices open to her. She is no longer faced with the conflict between career and motherhood; she can choose both.

## Course Objectives

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This will be an eight-week unit on women writers. One objective is to make students aware of how women became involved as writers in the twentieth century, and also to point out the success of women in the field of literature. However, the main objective is to continue to improve the reading skills of students and to help them read for enjoyment and gain information about some of the main literary types. The major focus is on the concept of narrative form. Students should have a thorough understanding of plot, climax, conflict, and the use of details and causal connections in building narrative. They are given the opportunity to discern and enjoy variety in plot development.

As students relate to their own experiences the thoughts and feelings of characters in fiction, they will be able to evaluate the truth or falsity of the author's presentation. A deepening awareness of the interpretation of

character and of personal reactions comes as students evaluate characters according to what they say and how they say it, what they do, and what others in the story say about them.

If students are to have adequate awareness of a writer's accomplishments, if they are to respect a work and see reasons for its inclusion in a course of study or on a reading list, they should be helped to see the full formal nature of the literary achievement. The teacher should show the problems raised by the writing of a particular work and the strategies applied by the author.

The first decision facing anyone who teaches a literary work is the amount of time to spend on it. Teachers usually spend more time than necessary on a full-length piece of fiction. It then becomes boring to the students. With fiction the question, "What are we doing this for?" must be repeatedly asked, and the answers must direct the nature of class activities, the length of assignments, the kinds of testing, and the extent to which supplementary activities (writing, word study, further reading on a similar theme) will be used. The class discussion itself can be a means of clarifying details in the story. The teacher should constantly associate the material with what students already know— with other stories, motion pictures, television programs, plays.

Throughout the discussion, reference should be made to the text. Students should not be permitted to make assertions about idea, theme, or character unless they can support what they say with specific passages in the book. Furthermore, close attention to the text makes possible a constant analysis of its language.

## COURSE OUTLINE

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Historical background information will be given to students concerning American I. women writers. Film strip entitled "Women In America" will be shown at the beginning of the unit.

A. This eight-week unit will be concerned with women writers in the twentieth century. Authors used will be women only. It is hoped that the seminar and discussion method can be utilized so that the maximum degree of student-teacher dialogue may be achieved. The unit is designed for eleventh and twelfth grade students.

B. Texts to be used:

1. *To Kill a Mockingbird*  
Harper Lee
2. *About Women*

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|    | 3.                    | Edited by Berg and Marks<br><i>Short Stories</i>                            |
|    | 4.                    | Edited by Christ & Shostak<br><i>Stories to Enjoy</i>                       |
|    | 5.                    | Edited by Ned Hoopes<br><i>A Raisin in the Sun</i><br>by Lorraine Hansberry |
| C. | Materials to be used: |   |
|    | 1.                    | Film strips   |
|    | 2.                    | Magazine  |
|    | 3.                    | Records   |
|    | 4.                    | Newspaper articles  |
| D. | Activities:           |   |
|    | 1.                    | Role playing  |
|    | 2.                    | Oral and written composition  |

## To Kill a Mockingbird

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### Lesson Plan #1

The author, Miss Harper Lee, was born on April 28, 1926, in Monroeville, Alabama. She attended the local public schools, then Huntington College. Later she studied law at the University of Alabama but never completed work for the law degree. Her study of the law may be reflected in the simplicity of her style. Every event is narrated with a straightforward, simple approach. In her first novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a lawyer is the main character. For this work she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the best novel of 1960. The book has been made into a successful movie.

- Students will be given
- I. two weeks to read the novel outside of class.

II. Chapter I

- A. Vocabulary
- B. Discussion questions:

1. Who is telling the story and from what point of view? (It should be pointed out to students that there are two sides to every argument. Actually there are many sides to a situation, depending upon who is looking at it and why. The different "sides" taken by different people are their points of view.)

2. What is the setting?
3. What kind of person is Atticus Finch?

III. Writing assignment:

The technique of this first chapter is like that of a mystery story in which the author mentions certain things and gives hints about facts which are not fully revealed until much later. The incident about Jem getting his arm broken is not reported until the last chapters of the novel. Can you think of some incident from your own experiences which seemed mysterious to you at the time? Recall the incident by writing about it.

## Lesson Plan #2

### Chapters 2-3

I. Vocabulary

II. Discussion:

These two chapters present the first aspect of Scout's education.

- A. What are some of her learning experiences?
- (1. The Cunninghams are poor but honest people.
  2. She must treat Walter with courtesy even though he is poor.
  3. A guest must always be treated with respect regardless of his/her station in life.
  4. She must try to see things from others' points of view.)
- B. Compare the Cunninghams with the Ewells.

III. Writing assignment:

Describe the relationship between Scout and Atticus. Think about whether you would like to have the same type of relationship with your parents.

## Lesson Plan #3

### Chapters 4-6

I. Vocabulary

II. Discussion:

- A. In Chapter 4 the Radley place becomes more mysterious. Discuss the attitude of Scout and Jem toward Boo Radley.
- B. What does Atticus think of Boo?

- C. What kind of person is Miss Maudie? Is she typical of the white people in this community?
- D. Contrast Miss Maudie's function with that of Miss Stephanie.

III. Writing assignment:

In these chapters the children are frightened by the firing of a gun after their attempt to peek into the Radley house. Can you remember a time when you were very frightened? Write about what happened, how you felt, and the outcome of the situation.

## Lesson Plan #4

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### Chapter 7-8

I. Vocabulary

II. Discussion:

Scout's learning experience continues. As the narrator, Scout observes and reports, but the reader often comes to a conclusion that Scout herself is not aware of.

- A. What does Jem finally realize about Boo Radley and why?
- B. When does Scout realize that although Boo may seem peculiar, he is really a kind and friendly person?

III. Writing assignment:

In Chapter 8 the emphasis of the novel shifts to the Tom Robinson case.

What are the two themes running through the book?

## Lesson Plan #5

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### Chapters 9-11

I. Vocabulary

II. Discussion:

- A. What are some of the problems that Jem and Scout encounter as a result of their father's (Atticus) defending a Black man accused of rape?

- B. What would you consider as basic differences between social and race relations at the present time and those described in the novel?
- C. How are the Boo Radley and the Tom Robinson episodes similar?  
How does each reflect something about the title of the novel?

III. Writing assignment:

Why is it, do you think, that young people and their parents sometimes have conflicts of one kind or another? Write an article giving your answer to this question. You might expand your answer to include a discussion of the reasons why young people as a group and adults as a group do not always understand and like each other. Is there a way in which mutual understanding and respect between these two groups can be achieved?

## Lesson Plan #6

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*Chapters 12-15*

- I. Vocabulary
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Chapter 12 presents additional views of the social situation in Maycomb. Discuss this situation as it pertains to Blacks and Whites.
  - B. What is Aunt Alexandra's role and what is her attitude concerning Atticus' involvement with Tom Robinson's case?
  - C. What effect does the Robinson case have on the Finch household?
  - D. Do you think that what happened to Tom Robinson in this novel could happen today? Why or why not?
- III. Writing assignment:

In your own words, tell what you think is meant by "prejudice."

## Lesson Plan #7

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*Chapters 16-18*

- I. Vocabulary
- II. Discussion:

- A. Describe the courthouse scene.
  - B. What is the general atmosphere in the courtroom?
  - C. During the trial, how does Atticus destroy Ewell's story?
- III. Writing assignment:

Atticus brings out in the trial that the Ewells live in a broken-down house behind the garbage dump. Mayella is seen to be a terribly lonely, isolated person without any friends or companions. As you read this part of the story, did you sympathize with Mayella? Tell how you felt about her and why.

## Lesson Plan #8

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*Chapters 19-22*

- I. Vocabulary
- II. Discussion:  
Chapters 19 and 20 are important in Scout's learning experiences
  - A. What does she understand about Mayella's character?
  - B. What does she understand about Tom Robinson?  
Chapter 21 presents the suspense as to what the verdict will be. Jem feels confident that Tom Robinson will be set free. Rev. Sykes explains to him that it would be against tradition to decide in favor of a Black person. In light of the attitudes of all concerned, why do you suppose Atticus put so much effort into defending Tom?
  - C.
- III. Writing assignment:

Bob Ewell was embarrassed by Atticus in court and planned to get revenge. What are your feelings about "getting revenge," or "getting back at people"? Express your thoughts on this subject by giving an example to illustrate your point.

## Lesson Plan #9

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*Chapters 23-27*

- I. Vocabulary
- II. Discussion:



- A. Atticus attempts to explain to Jem and Scout about the trial and why Ewell has acted the way he did. Does Atticus really understand the lengths that a man like Ewell will go to get revenge?
- B. Scout confronts a type of prejudice in the schoolroom. What happened in school that she could not understand?

III. Writing assignment:

Have you ever felt that everybody else had the wrong idea about someone or something? Did you tell them how you felt, or did you wait to see what the outcome would be before stating your opinion? Write a composition about the situation and how it turned out.

### **Lesson Plan #10**

*Chapters 28-31*

- I. Vocabulary
- II. Discussion:
  - A. In these final chapters Boo Radley makes his first physical appearance. Would you consider him the hero of the novel? If so, why?
  - B. What is Scout's final learning experience in this novel?
  - C. In what way has Scout matured?
- III. Writing assignment:

Discuss the limitations of using Scout as the narrator. What are the advantages?

## **SHORT STORIES "The Frill" by Pearl Buck**

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Students are to read the story outside of class.

- I. Questions for discussion:
  - 1. This story is about a personal conflict between two people. Who are the two people? What is the conflict? What causes it?
  - 2. Why does Mrs. Lowe act as she does? What are your reactions to her? What was your reaction to the tailor?
  - 3. What emotions did you experience as you read the story?
  - 4. What comments about people and their conduct toward or treatment of each other could one make as a result of having read this story?
  - 5. This story is set in a foreign country. Have you ever seen or heard of something like this happening in this country?
  - 6. What is the significance of the title, "The Frill"?

II. Vocabulary

III. Writing assignment:

- A. Write a character sketch of Mrs. Lowe as she would look to herself, to Mrs. Newman, to the Chinese tailor, and to you, the reader of this story.
- B. Write a sketch of an American in a foreign country (either a real person or a fictitious character) showing how he or she looks to the people of that country.

## “Beauty Is Truth” by Anna Guest

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I. Questions for discussion:

1. Jeanie’s home in Harlem is the setting for much of the action in this story. As you were reading the story, did you notice the details the author used to describe Jeanie’s environment?
- a. What was Jeanie’s neighborhood like?
- b. What kind of building did she live in?
- c. What was the inside of her apartment like?  
How could you tell that Jeanie’s mother had a hard time making a living?
2. Was Harlem the setting throughout the story? Or did the action shift to a different locale?  
The setting of a story is not only the place where a story happens. The setting is also the time when a story
3. happens. Approximately when do you think this story took place: one hundred years ago, during the present, or in the future?
4. The people in the story make the setting come alive. How did Jeanie’s school friends and the people in her neighborhood and building liven up the beginning of this story?
5. What kind of mood was Jeanie in that afternoon when she arrived home from school? What, do you think, caused this mood?

6. How did Jeanie feel about her brother?  
Do you think Jeanie knew how hard her mother had to
7. work? Why didn't she start getting supper ready before her mother arrived home?
8. What were Jeanie's thoughts about the subjects taught in her school, about the other students, and about Miss Lowy?
9. What kind of person is the mother in this story? How do you think she felt about her son and daughter? Support your answers with evidence from the story.
10. How do you suppose Billy felt about Jeanie and about his mother? What kind of person do you think Billy might grow up to be
11. Miss Lowy had told the students to write about beauty and truth. Did you see "beauty" and "truth" in what Jeanie chose to write about?
12. Why was Jeanie eager to see her brother when she returned from school

II. Vocabulary

III. Writing assignment:

Jeanie wrote about an everyday experience which had great importance to her. Following Jeanie's example, write about an important experience which you have had. Describe the details of the experience, and reveal how you and the other people involved felt about it.

## **"Charles" by Shirley Jackson**

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I. Questions for discussion:

1. Why did Laurie behave as he did at school? Why did he say that it was Charles who was guilty of all this unacceptable behavior? Have you ever seen this sort of thing happen to people, not only little people like Laurie or Charles but people of high-school age? What is the cure for this sort of behavior?
2. Did you suspect the outcome of the story? Look for the clue given you very early in the story.
3. Notice that Laurie describes Charles as being bigger than he, as wearing no rubbers or jacket. What does this tell you about Laurie?
4. Did you like the way the story ended or would you rather have had the whole thing spelled out to you?
5. What do you think was going on in the kindergarten teacher's mind as she was talking to Laurie's mother? What do you think was going on in the mind of Laurie's mother as she spoke with the teacher?

- II. Vocabulary
- III. Writing assignment:

Laurie’s parents were very eager to meet Charles’ mother. Part of the fun of the story lies in their surprise at the end. Write a narrative account of a great surprise that you or someone you know has had.

## **A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry**

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The play will be read in class with students reading assigned parts. Discussion will follow the reading of scenes

### **Act I—Scene I**

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- I. Discussion questions:
  1. What is the setting of the play?
  2. Who, in your opinion, makes all the major decisions in the family?
  3. What kind of person is Walter and what are his ambitions in life?
  4. What important event is the whole Younger family looking forward to?
  5. What plans for the \$10,000 does each member of the family have in mind?
- II. Vocabulary

### **Act I—Scene II**

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- I. Discussion questions:
  1. In this scene Ruth has discovered that she is pregnant. She is considering an abortion. In your opinion, why does she want to do this? Do you feel that this is a solution to her problems?
  2. What is revealed about the character of Beneatha in this scene?
  3. How does her African friend view American Blacks?
  4. The \$10,000 check finally arrives in the mail. What impact does this event have on each member of the family?
- II. Vocabulary

## Act II—Scene I

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I. Discussion questions:

1. Compare the personalities of Walter and George Murchison. How are they different?
2. Do you think Lena was right in spending the money the way she wanted to? Should she have considered the wishes of Walter?
3. As a Black person or member of some other ethnic group, how would you feel about moving into a neighborhood where you are not welcome?
4. What are some of the causes of racial prejudice?
5. What are some of the things we can do to eliminate prejudice?

II. Vocabulary

## Act II—Scene II

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I. Discussion questions:

1. Ruth finds out that Walter has not been reporting to his job as a chauffeur. What caused this rebellious attitude in Walter?
2. Lena has a change of heart and turns over to Walter the \$6,500 she has left after making a deposit on a house. What causes her to make this decision?
3. Describe the change in Walter after he gets his hands on the money.
4. What would you do if you suddenly fell heir to \$10,000?
5. Do you think that money is all that you need to be happy?

II. Vocabulary

## Act II—Scene III

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I. Discussion questions:

1. Can you imagine some of the feelings the Younger family had when they found out why Mr. Lindner paid them a visit?

2. What kind of person was Mr. Lindner?
  3. Can you picture the kind of neighborhood the Youngers are planning to move into?
  4. What are some of the problems they will face?
  5. How do you think Walter feels after hearing from Bobo that Willy has disappeared with the money?
  6. How do you think Lena feels after having trusted Walter with the money?
- II. Vocabulary

## Act III

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- I. Discussion questions:
    1. With the loss of the money Beneatha will not be able to go to medical school. Describe her reaction to her brother and the change in her attitude toward life itself.
    2. How has Walter changed since he lost the money?
    3. What is his plan to rectify his mistake?
    4. Why does Lena disapprove of his plan?
    5. The play ends as the Younger family is leaving their old house. What kind of reception do you think is in store for them when they arrive at their new residence?
- II. Vocabulary

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