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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1980 Volume I: Adolescence and Narrative: Strategies for Teaching Fiction

Parallel Studies in Afro-American/American Literature Part Iii. Womanhood: Profiles in Black and White

Guide for Curriculum Unit 80.01.05

by Robert Johnson Moore

This is the third in a series of units designed to point out parallels in selected writings of white and black American writers who, under the same canopy of creative and humanistic expression, share interests in the same themes, experiment with similar writing styles, and find themselves facing the same artistic conundrums. Writings of women—black and white—reveal the precarious status of women in American culture. Because female aggression meets often with strong censure, women historically have sought passive means of attaining ends. Their actions, to escape public reprimand, must acknowledge their inferior station—their alleged vulnerability. Within this stifling atmosphere, some women have challenged the system openly, while many have found that even within this realm of vulnerability they have power to control, to move, to dominate. For black women, racism compounds the problem of sexism. “If growing up is painful for the Southern black girl,” writes Maya Angelou in “Caged Bird,” “being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor blade that threatens the throat.” Women-on-women writings of selected black and white writers disclose subtle nuances in the portrayal of female characters in this conflict. Students, through this course in Women’s Literature, will explore the meaning of “Sisterhood” in black and white.

(Recommended for 10th and 11th grade American Literature.)

Keywords

Women Authors Literature Comparative American Afro-American

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