



## **I Hate to Read! An Assortment of Young Adult Literature**

Curriculum Unit 80.01.06  
by Carol Ann Petuch

### **Introduction**

Young adult literature, a high-interest topic in books written in the last 10 years or so, has been looked upon by the classroom teacher as inferior in quality in one way or another. We, as teachers, tend to choose books for our students because of their literary value and forget what teenagers *enjoy* reading about.

Therefore, we find students not reading or reading only because they are being graded. Thus, many students will say they HATE to read. I don't feel they hate to read; instead, they have not been excited by what they've read in the past. We must present, on a regular basis, a variety of high-interest young adult novels to be read as a class, in small groups, or during free reading periods.

This unit is specifically designed with low-level readers in mind; therefore, it was imperative that I chose novels which were "readable" and interesting. Only by reading, reading, **READING** will these students improve their reading skills and find the joy of reading a truly good book.

In the preceding paragraph, I said that this unit is designed for high school students who read at the third to sixth grade reading levels. I realized after reading my selected book list that this unit could be used at any grade level, either high school or junior high. (Teachers may find it necessary to upgrade some activities depending on their students' reading levels and maturity.)

This unit can cover a full school year or can be used as a mini-course for better readers.

### **Objectives**

My unit seeks to achieve many objectives. First, and most important, I will increase the amount of reading students do in class. Many teachers find that the only time our students read is during school. Whether it is the lack of reading materials in their homes or the lack of interest in leisure time reading, students are not reading as much as they should.

Secondly, I seek to develop a new selection of books for the teacher of low-level readers to utilize. I have found the selection of books available in the school system to be lacking. Many book companies who manufacture materials for remedial reading classes produce books, workbooks, etc., that look like children's books. When we deal with young adults, we must be very careful not to bruise their egos. If the materials

being used look babyish, it turns the students off. They feel insulted. Keeping this in mind, I chose books not only for their content but also the image they project. They must resemble adult novels.

I have also tried to present literature in different ways. Sometimes teachers get bogged down with questions, quizzes, and discussions when reading a novel. Students enjoy doing activities which break up the humdrum question and answer sessions. The activities in this unit were developed with the intention that these kinds of activities could be used as a master plan for the teaching of other young adult novels.

Another objective of this unit is to do the footwork for other teachers by previewing a list of new young adult novels. The summaries of the novels in the unit and the annotated bibliographies will give teachers a good idea of whether the book is something their students would enjoy.

Finally this unit seeks to show students that reading can be an enjoyable and worthwhile pastime. If we can keep “dangling the carrot” in front of their noses by choosing books that are of interest to teenagers, we can lead them down the road to reading.

### **Strategies**

I previewed 20 new young adult books. From this list I chose five for extensive study. These novels were chosen for their adaptability to a variety of activities. They also contain subject matter to which high school students can relate. (See the annotated supplemental reading list for other novels that could be used.)

The amount of time spent on a novel will vary from one novel to another. I have found that a novel works better when you do only the novel and suspend other assignments for a while. Young adult novels tend to be rather short in length; therefore, spending a maximum of three weeks on one novel should be plenty of time. This unit includes ideas for the teaching of novels such as: role playing, panel discussions, artwork, debates, creative and essay writing, skills involving problem solving, reference skills, following directions, grammar study, etc.

### **Course of Study**

**NOVEL 1: *His Own Where* , June Jordan, Dell Publishing Co., New York, NY: 1971.**

***Summary Written in Black English, His Own Where is the story of the relationship of 16 year old Buddy and 14 year old Angela. Both have problems with their families. Buddy's father is sick and near death in a hospital. Angela's parents abuse her emotionally, verbally, and physically. Buddy and Angela are determined to find a place where they can be together; thus, the title, His Own Where .***

***Comment This book, even though the content would interest students, lacks many of the elements of a good novel. Therefore, the book will be used to illustrate how not to write. During the reading of His Own Where , you will find opportune time to teach sequence in writing, descriptive narrative writing, character development, and story line. Since it is written in Black English, it also affords an excellent exercise in translating paragraphs into proper grammar.***

***Activities Grammar study, character, and plot development.***

1. Choose one of the many poorly written sentences to show correct verb tense, double

negatives, possessives, etc.

ex: "Angela mother explain how Angela run out on her because she wouldn't hardly leave . . .  
.."<sup>1</sup>

2. Read an application letter for an after school job, written in Black English by Buddy, to the class. Use this letter as a springboard for a discussion of the merits of Black English vs. standard English. Ask students if they would hire Buddy or not. This should start the discussion. The discussion can be fostered by asking the following questions:

a. What is Black English?

b. What is standard English?

c. Should we allow students to use Black English in their school compositions and when speaking in class?

d. Should we allow students, such as yourselves, to read books using Black English?

(Students are aware of their special reading class.)

e. If *His Own Where* were written in standard English, would it be as "good"?

Other points to touch on are the values of Black English as a dialect and the unappropriateness of its usage in some situations. Students will hopefully understand that the language they use outside of school is special; but, they need to become, in a sense, bilingual.

3. Students will chose a paragraph to translate into standard English as a homework assignment.

4. O.E.D. assignment: If the original meanings of words and names interest your group, perhaps an assignment using the O.E.D. would be interesting.

ex: Look up the following words:

buddy

grave (or words of their choice)

kiss

5. Introduce Buddy and Angela by telling little bit about them before the novel is actually read. As a homework assignment, ask students to find a picture of what they feel the main characters might look like. Each student will be asked to show his pictures the next day and to tell what kind of personality the person in the picture transmits. Needless to say, this could lead to a discussion on formulating opinions on first meeting someone.

6. Make a collage of all of the Buddys and Angelas and display while the book is being read. As a finishing touch to the novel, the class could take a vote, after reading the book, on which pictures came closest to what Buddy and Angela might look like.

7. Ask students to write a character sketch in dialogue form with a choice of the following:

a. a conversation between Angela and her mother

b. a conversation between Buddy and Angela's mother

8. The novel ends with Buddy and Angela greeting a new morning in "their own where" which is a shack in a cemetery. Ask students if they are disappointed in the ending. Encourage those who are to write a new ending.

**NOVEL 2: *North Town* , Lorenz Graham, Signet, The New American Library, Inc., New York, NY: 1965.**

**Summary** *North Town* is a sequel to Lorenz Graham's *South Town* . The novel follows the Williams family to the "Land of Opportunity", the North. The story centers around 16 year old David Williams. David brings his attitudes about whites to his new neighborhood and learns that not all of what he has been told about the North is true.

**Activities** Role playing, language study, reference skills, writing, and discussions.

1. Choose students who are "hams" and have them role play the following scenes from the novel:
  - a. the principal of the high school asking, at an assembly, for the student responsible for pulling the fire alarm to stand and take responsibility.
  - b. Hap, Head and David being stopped by the police for driving a stolen car. The scene could start with the boys' comments when they see the red light flashing in their mirror.
  - c. The conversation between David and his father driving home from the police station.
  - d. Head giving his "Version" of what happened at the hearing in juvenile court.
2. Interview David for the school newspaper to get his feelings about being a new student at Central High School.
3. Explain euphemisms to the class using the example of the way the Williams family use the euphemism "the trouble".
4. Ask students to research and compile a list of prohibitions for blacks in the Old South. Students will be required to use a minimum of three sources and to include a bibliography in their research project.
5. Ask students to write their feelings, in a minimum of two good sentences, about each of the following questions. The students will discuss their ideas after the writing exercise is completed. The discussion could be developed into a debate or panel discussion.
  - a. How would you feel if you were one of a few blacks in a high school? How would you choose your friends?
  - b. If you were David, how would you have handled the incident with Alonzo and Kirinski?
  - c. Do you feel any one person's vote in an election makes a difference? (Note: Father Abraham Hamilton in the book felt his vote was one of the ways in which he felt equal to everyone else.)
  - d. In the novel, Jeannette makes a comment to David about how fathers want their sons to do the things they didn't and their girls don't have to be so ambitious. What does Jeannette mean and do you agree?
6. Ask students to write a paragraph or more about each of the following:
  - a. Compare/Contrast Buck Taylor and Andy Crutchfield. Give examples from the book to support your views. Quotes from the book should be footnoted.
  - b. David feels he knows what Ralph Ellison meant in his book, *The Invisible Man* . Do you ever feel invisible in this way? When and How? How do you become "visible"?

**NOVEL 3: *He's My Baby Now* , Jeannette Eyerly Arch Pocket Books, New York, NY: 1977**

**Summary** Charles Elderbury finds out (his mother sees the birth announcement in the newspaper) that his ex-steady girl friend has had his baby. He has not seen Daisy for months and had choked up the money for her abortion. Now that he finds he's a father, he wants to see his son grow up. Daisy, who was hoping that Charles would never find out about the baby, has arranged for the baby to be adopted. Charles makes plans to keep the baby himself. Little does he know what's involved in caring for a baby.

**Activities** Panel discussion, writing exercise, catalogue and math skills.

1. Discuss the following questions:
  - a. Should the teenage father be allowed to keep his baby? Argue the advantages and disadvantages to both father and baby.
  - b. Should the teenage mother have been legally forced to tell the boy about the baby and her plans for the baby?
2. Using a catalogue, (Sears, Penneys, etc.) students will "purchase" the necessary items for a new baby,(clothes, furniture, etc.). This will be a learning experience for both the young men and women in the class. The teacher should put a limit on the amount of money to be spent. The students will fill out order blanks for the merchandise, figure out the total and the tax, shipping, etc.
3. At one point in the novel, Charles brings out his baby album. A fun thing to do at the end of the reading could be to have the students bring in a baby picture of themselves for display. If the teacher is brave, he or she will bring in a picture, too.
4. Write a paragraph telling what you would have done differently if you were Charles.

**NOVEL 4: *Are You in the House Alone ?*, Richard Peck, Dell Publishing Co., Hew York, NY: 1976**

**Summary** Gail Osburne is tormented by strange notes in her locker in school, letters in the mail, and phone calls. The notes say that the person is watching her and will sooner or later get her. She is babysitting one night and becomes careless about opening the door without asking who is there. Gail is raped and nearly killed by the son of the most influential family in town and nobody will bring charges against the boy.

**Activities** Journal writing and discussion.

1. Ask students to keep a journal while they read this book. They will jot down any information or clues they feel might solve the mystery of who is threatening Gail. They will date each entry.

When they think they know who is making the threats, they will write it in their journal.

2. Discuss the following topics from the novel:

- a. the treatment of Gail after the rape by her family, the police, and her best friend, Alison.
- b. the steps Gail should have taken when she first started receiving the threats.

**NOVEL 5: Short Story Anthology— *The Roar of the Sneakers* , Robert S. Gold, editor, Bantam Books, Inc., New York, NY: 1977. A collection of sports stories about heroes, losers, and has-beens. Here are activities for three of the stories.**

“A Non Contact Sport” by Larry McMurty

**Summary This is an excerpt from *The Last Picture Show* . Coach Popper is the essence of jock mentality. He forces his players to play when hurt and tired. The Thalia basketball players play Paducah and all hell breaks loose during the very physical game. The ref is a male home ec teacher who referees by standing at center court because he can't run up and down the court fast enough.**

**Activities Newspaper article writing, speech writing and deliverance, radio broadcasting techniques.**

1. Ask students to write an article about the game for the Thalia High School newspaper. Stress form, details, chronological order of events, etc.
2. Ask students to write a pep talk Coach Popper would give his players during halftime. The best ones could be given orally and taped recorded for a speech lesson.
3. Write a radio broadcast script of the game. Give a future Howard Cosell his break and let him “broadcast” the best one.

**“Manhood” by John Wain**

**Summary This is the story of an athletic father who is disappointed in his unathletic son. He forces the boy to participate in a variety of sports. The disappointment he receives at the end of the story is just what he deserves.**

**Activities**

1. The story ends with the father finding out that his son has lied about being on the boxing team at his school. He climbs the stairs to his son's room with a funny look on his face. Ask students to continue the story to include what he says to his son.

2. Students will imagine they are trying out for a sport at school. They will, in chart form, make a schedule of activities to get into shape for the try-out. In addition, they will imagine the night before the try-out and write a journal entry including their feelings about the try-outs, their competition, etc.

### ***“The Cinderella Kid” by Henry H. Roth***

***Summary This is the story of the “Cinderella Kid”; a bonus baby, whose pitching arm goes bad at the beginning of his career, alá Mark Fidyrich. The “Kid” has lived in an orphanage since he was a child. He has learned his speech pattern by listening to newscasters on TV such as Walter Cronkite, David Brinkley, etc. This, though, is as far as his intelligent veneer goes. The story gives an accounting of his ups and downs in the major and minor leagues.***

### ***Activity***

1. Discuss the following questions brought out in this story:
  - a. Are athletes worth the big money they receive?
  - b. Are athletes, such as Mark Fidyrich, being used by owners of clubs?
  - c. Should there be more women’s professional sports? Could they “draw” as well as men’s sports?
  - d. Should women be given the chance to play on professional men’s teams? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

## **Notes**

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1. *His Own Where* , June Jordan, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., New York, NY: 1971, Chapter Six, p.32.

## Supplemental Reading List for Students

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Dizenzo, Patricia, *Phoebe* , Bantam Books, New York, NY: 1970. This novel is based on a famous sex-education film by the National Film Board of Canada. Phoebe is sixteen and pregnant. She finds she can tell no one and must face adulthood alone.

Dizenzo, Patricia, *Why Me? The Story of Jenny* , Avon Books, New York, NY: 1976. This is an honest portrayal of a high school girl who is raped and finds her life shattered by unexpected stresses.

Holman, Felice, *Slake's Limbo* , Dell Publishing Co., Inc., New York NY: 1974. Aramis Slake, at the age of thirteen is abused and misunderstood. He decides to go underground to make a life for himself in the subway tunnels of New York City.

Klein, Norma, *It's OK If You Don't Love Me*, Fawcett Crest Books, New York, NY: 1977. A touching and funny story that deals with the confusion between first love and sex.

Lipsyte, Robert, *The Contender* , Bantam Books, New York, NY: 1967. This novel is about a young black's struggle to grow up in Harlem and become a fighter.

Mathis, Sharon Bell, *Teacup Full of Roses* , Avon Books, New York, NY: 1972. The story of three black brothers who find living hard in the ghetto. One of the brothers, Joe, tries to create a magical place for himself and his girl friend, Ellie. He works full time and spends two years in night school to get his high school diploma; but, the realities of ghetto life threaten to destroy his dream.

Samuels, Gertrude, *Run Shelley Run* , Signet Books, New York, NY: 1974. The story of Shelley Clark who has an uncaring alcoholic mother. Shelley is forced to run away many times because of her situation at home. She runs until she finds someone who cares.

Sleator, William, *Blackbriar* , Avon Books, New York, NY: 1972. Danny and his guardian, Phillipa, move from their city apartment in London to a mysterious stone cottage in the country. Danny is intrigued by the strange tales about the house being haunted by Bubonic Plague victims who have died in the cottage. Strange fires and other happenings prepare Danny for the most horrifying night of his life.

Taylor, Mildred D., *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* , Bantam Books, New York, NY: 1976. This is the story of a Southern black family who is determined to maintain their pride and independence against hard times and racial injustices.

Thompson, Thomas, *Richie* , Bantam Books, New York, NY: 1973. This is a true story about the emotionally gripping drama of a family and the drug-related tragedy that shattered them.

Wersba, Barbara, *Tunes for a Small Harmonica* , Dell Publishing Co., New York, NY: 1978. J.F. McAllister, who dresses like a boy and could pass for Steve McQueen's double, lives in a state of misery until she falls in love with her high school poetry teacher.



## Recommended Books For Teachers

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Christenbury, Leila, "On Becoming an Urban English Teacher", *The English Journal* , November, 1979, p.31-33. A good article for first year teachers to read *during* their initial year to get some perspective on what they've experienced so far.

Decker, Sunny, *An Empty Spoon* , Perennial Library, Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., New York, NY: 1969. This is the story of a white woman just out of teaching college who starts to teach in an all black high school in Philadelphia. It is one of the truest accounts of teaching in the city I've read in a while. All of us have met students exactly like the ones she describes.

Fader, Daniel N. Ph.D. and McNeil, Elton B., Ph.D., *Hooked on Books* , Berkeley Publishing Corp., New York, NY: 1966. Even though this book was printed in 1966, I think most teachers would agree, that the Hooked on Books program still has many elements which teachers should be using to get students to read more.

Fader, Daniel, *The New Hooked on Books* , Berkeley Publishing Corp., Mr. Fader continues his Hooked on Books program. This book is not exclusively for junior high and high school teachers. He includes books and ideas for elementary teachers and parents of young children to use to get their children hooked on books early in life. Very readable as the original *Hooked on Books* is.

NCTE Publications, *High-Interest-Easy Reading for Junior and Senior High School Students* . This is the new edition of the NCTE's booklist. It features 432 novels concisely annotated. Arranged in subject categories, it is easy for teachers to select fiction for hard-to-please readers.

Schur, Jane Brodsky, English Journal Workshop Column, "Helping Students to Visualize What They Read", *The English Journal* , February, 1980, p. 64-65. This column gives 16 ideas for helping students visualize what they are reading. For example, asking the students to draw or paint a picture of the wallpaper described by William Carlos Williams in "On Gay Wallpaper" or mapping out a real place as in Johnny Tremain. Ms. Schur has some very interesting ideas for giving students a variety of experiences while reading.

Gross, Beatrice, *Teaching Under Pressure* , Goodyear Publishing Co., 1979. This is a collection of statements and teaching ideas. Topics covered include avoiding "burnout", student behavior problems, and teaching basics in humane ways.

Small, Robert, Jr. "The Young Adult Novel in the Composition Program" Part 1, *The English Journal* , September 1979 and Part 2 October 1979. Gives some good ideas for composition writing related to young adult novels.

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