



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1981 Volume I: The "City" in American Literature and Culture

The Janus-Faced Phenomenon of the City

Guide for Curriculum Unit 81.01.01
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The unit on “The Janus-Faced Phenomenon of the City” would be most appropriately taught to an advanced sophomore class, or as part of the junior course of American Literature (to all levels), or to a basic senior English class. The literature of the city elaborates on and exemplifies major themes of American Literature such as: The Individual in the City, Displaced Persons, The American Dream, Ethnic Diversity, Grandeur of the City, The Beleaguered City and Visions of Future Cities.

The first part of the unit will discuss why and how cities grow, great and famous cities of America and functions of cities in modern life. Second, the two faces of the city will include literature exemplifying the creative face: the emotional and imaginative appeal of the city; the beauty, majesty and grandeur of city architecture; ethnic diversity, and the fulfillment of economic possibilities for some people in the city. The other face—the destructive city—will emphasize literature dealing with the themes of disintegration, pollution, violence, loneliness, impersonality and disconnectedness. In addition, some time will be spent on ways of improving or solving some of these problems. The final part of the unit will focus on visions of future cities in America such as endangered and technological ones and will include several short stories from science fiction anthologies.

(Recommended for 10th grade General English, 11th grade American Literature, and 11th and 12th grade Basic English.)

Key Words

Urban Themes American Literature Research Skills Application Life Writing Instruction Composition General Narrative

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