



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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The City and The Family

Curriculum Unit 81.01.04
by Edward D. Cohen

Plutarch said it this way, "The city is the teacher of the man." Jesus Rivera, age 11, of P.S. 15 said it this way, "In my city on the streets at night I hear the people yelling and I hear fights. And the police have to come and break up fights on the streets. And in the halls of my block some people are taking LSD and pills and so on. And again in my house you can hear my mother yelling and screaming at me telling me to do this and to do that back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And then it gets so that I can't stand it." ¹

Over many centuries man has developed his civilization to its highest form in metropolitan centers. Playing a major role in this development has been the family unit. It has been, for the most part, a stabilizing force, the foundation upon which cities have built. The city is also a deceptive battleground, where everyday conflicts are waged by individuals and families trying to maintain dignity while fighting the haunting specter of poverty, loneliness, powerlessness and isolation. It is deceptive because to a few, the city offers untold opportunities but to most it offers little and takes all it can get. The family unit in an urban setting will be one of the major units we will study. The major objective of this unit will be to show the role of the family in the urban battleground. Family structure, conflicts and unity will be stressed and students will be using their own families as role models as we study the city they live in. Most high school students are not aware of the roles played by their city and their family in shaping their values, and I would like to share with them some insights into what living in an urban setting means and how they and their families function as part of that scene.

This curriculum unit is being designed for a specific group of students. The students are not college bound. They are enrolled in the Modern English component of the Vocational Improvement Program. The students are either eleventh or twelfth graders, students with below average skills in English including reading, writing and speech. These students spend three periods a day in one of the vocational schools which includes drafting, auto mechanics, graphics, carpentry and electronics. Reading levels, according to the Stanford Reading Tests, lie between second and eleventh grade, the average being between fifth and sixth grade. It can be adapted to any high school student who falls within the general guidelines.

One very unique fact about the students this curriculum is being designed for is that about 90% of them were not born in New Haven. They have moved from tiny rural communities and small towns in the South at a very early age and they do not have many memories of life there. They also do not identify readily with New Haven proper, but with their respective neighborhoods such as Dixwell, Dwight and Newhallville. They are familiar with these neighborhoods and spend much of their time there. They occasionally go into other neighborhoods or down to central city but they enjoy their own turf. They have little awareness or understanding of the

resources that their city offers and know less about the background or history of the city or about the black community roots in New Haven. My students live in the present, with some thoughts about the future, but they are not concerned with the past. I would hope that their interest could be perked a little so that they get to know and use the resources that are offered by the city.

Beside their lack of knowledge or interest in their adopted home, most of the students served by this unit really do not know and speak much about their own families and their migration from the South. I would hope that they will gain some insight into both of these matters. Also I would like them to have the self-realization that all students at the same stage of development are facing and have faced the same basic needs of affection, acceptance and achievement, and that the city and family do play important roles in fulfilling these needs. The unit would also assist the students in achieving one of the goals set by the students themselves. This goal is to acquire an appreciation of their intrinsic worth and latent potential² by stimulating and challenging them as they learn about their own family roots and study other impressions of urban living as seen through the eyes and minds of others.

I have set four major objectives. First, I want my students to be familiar with New Haven. I want them to know its history, its resources and liabilities. They will explore its beginnings, experience its pleasures, understand its capabilities and determine their place in its present and future. The second objective is to have my students gain a better understanding of their families. I want them to know they belong to a family unit and how that unit operates in the urban setting. I want them to investigate their own families, trace them back over as many generations as they can. I want them to discover their roots. I want them to think about how the city has influenced their lives and the lives of their immediate family. My third objective is to have my students try to understand their own feelings about themselves and their peers. Lastly, we will discuss, read and write about their feelings comparing them with adolescents in other larger urban settings.

This curriculum unit will run for twelve weeks. It will cover a broad range of language skills. It will emphasize reading, including short stories, poems, essays, plays and for extra credit independent study of short novels about family life and growing up in the city. I want the student to get the idea that he is not alone when he gets feelings about himself and his growing up. Novels such as *Daddy was A Number Runner* by Louise Meriwether will capture the life of a twelve year old girl growing up in Harlem. *The Contender* by Robert Lipsyte will give a picture of the male adolescent growing up in the big city ghetto. These novels will serve as a comparison between living life in the big city and my students living in a much smaller one. It should show that some goals and aspirations are the same everywhere but the paths to achieving them are very different.

I plan to stress oral communication and listening skills. One of my objectives deals with my students getting to know about their family history. I will set up and ask the class to assist in designing a set of questionnaires concerning the family and the city. Each student in my class will be given the assignment to come up with one question for the sampling. With a roster of over one hundred and forty students I should come up with at least fifty good questions. The class will vote on the best questions and complete the questionnaire. Sample questions will include: What is your full name? (Mothers and married women will be asked for maiden names.) Do you know what your first name means? or whom you were named after? Does your family name have a special meaning?

Where were you born? at home?, in a hospital?, what city and state? If from another state what brought you to New Haven? How many of the family came with you? What was life like back home? Any stories they remember? Where did they first settle when they reached New Haven? Why there? Do you remember any stories about your grandparents that would tell you about what life was like for them? What were your parents

like? Did you have any aunts or uncles? What were their names and what do you remember about them? Did you have brothers and sisters? Where are they now? Do they have families? Where? Where did you live as a child? What was your home town like? What was life like when you were growing up? Who did you look like? Were you happy or sad? Serious? Did you get into trouble? Who were your best friends? Where are they now? What were your teen-age years like? How did you meet my mother or father (students to parents)? What was the happiest time of your life? Saddest? What was your biggest problem? The questions will be asked of family and friends, teachers, clergy, neighborhood and city leaders. It will trace family backgrounds, reasons for migration from the South and from foreign lands, gathering places of past generations of New Haveners into Fair Haven, Westville and Dixwell neighborhoods. I hope that the students will learn about the diverse ethnic make-up of the city and about their own family origin. I would also hope to invite different New Haven residents to come into class and speak with my students. They would come to talk about their neighborhoods and their impressions of the city. These could include Eugene Fargeorge, the Fair Haven historian, talking about his area, State Senator John Daniels talking about growing up in New Haven and attending the same schools as most of the students in my class. Henry Townsend could talk about early New Haven and Fort Hale. I would like representatives of Yale, Southern and other city schools to come and speak about their institutions. These schools offer the students excellent opportunities to explore their resources which include libraries, museums, art galleries, gyms and theaters. These schools can increase the students' knowledge of the city and the world around them.

I would also take my students on field trips so that they could examine first hand the locations we study and hear about. My students would also be expected to travel the city alone and in small groups so that they will become familiar with other areas beside their own.

The students will also write a great deal in this unit. They will be asked to write their specific impressions of the city, points of interest, people they met, places they liked and did not like and new or odd things they did. They will write of visits to other cities, New York in particular. They will write about their families, their neighborhoods, friends, enemies and their feelings about themselves. They will be asked to write their impressions of the literary works they will study. They will be asked to write poems in the styles of the writers we will work with. They will write a short history of New Haven, and they will tell of their favorite places in the city. They will write about places they do not like or fear. They will write about the sights, sounds and smells they encounter. I hope that through their writing I will accomplish the following goals. I would like the students to develop good sentence and paragraph structure. They will work at developing a theme and following it through to conclusion. I will work on punctuation which gives most of my students fits and we will continue to work on correct spelling. The class will express their feelings in prose about themselves and their families in different kinds of writing assignments including interviews, poetry, first impressions and other different kinds of assignments rather than the same essay compositions they are used to.

This curriculum unit will be divided into mini units. I would expect to have mini units on New Haven, two literary units on large urban centers, concentrating on New York and Chicago as comparison cities. I would have a mini unit on the family in the urban setting, and finally a unit on adolescent feelings in the city. I feel that by treating each unit separately as part of the whole I will be able to spend as much time as needed to reach the goals the class will set, and I will know if the unit is successful.

In the New Haven unit I will use as a supplementary text *Black New Haven 1920-1977* by Daniel Y. Stewart. This is an essay by a local man on personal observations involving the black community. The book covers business, churches, education, employment, housing, music, social organizations, politics, population, recreation and sports. I would like the class to contrast the past with the present as they are experiencing it. I

would have Mr. Stewart speak to my class about his experiences researching the material and how he sees the black community changing in the eighties. While the class is researching the black community we will also be looking at the overall history of the city. We will read excerpts from *Three Centuries of New Haven 1638-1938*, and *The New Haven Green and the American Bicentennial*, both by Rollin Osterweis. This will give the class some background on the early history of the Elm City. I will also lecture on parts of the books the class will not cover by themselves. I will also tie in black migration to the city. The students will use the questionnaire discussed earlier to get a first hand picture of their own family's place in the city and they will question others. Some other questions they could ask are: Did your family change its name when they came to the city or country? Who were the first family members to settle in the city? How did they get the money to come? I will introduce these and the other questions from *Instant Oral Biographies* by William Zimmerman. As an aide in this assignment the class will also collect old family photographs and documents, letters, an old family Bible and anything from family members that can elicit memories. The class will record their interviews using V.I.P. recorders. This will allow ten to twelve students to record conversations at the same time. Through this exercise I hope that the students' oral communication and listening skills can be improved. I would schedule a field trip to the New Haven Register and ask the class to find newspaper stories that were featured on the day they were born. This research assignment would tie in some of the events taking place in the city at the time of their birth and also give them an overview of how a city newspaper functions.

The class will also read an excerpt from *A Walker In The City* by Alfred Kazin. In this selection, Kazin talks about walking through his neighborhood. He recreates sensory images of that area using impressions of sound, smell and sight. I will have the class try to do the same thing with areas of New Haven. I would like the class to write or orally describe the images in a pizza restaurant, a fried chicken shack on the Avenue, New Haven Hospital, the inside of a church, the welfare office, a bank on food stamp or welfare check day. I want the students to experience the sights, sounds and smells of the city. They would, I hope get both pleasant and unpleasant impressions of their city.

This exercise could lead into my second mini unit on big cities. At this time the students should have an understanding of the city they live in. I would like to contrast this small city setting with two great cities; New York and Chicago. I would introduce the Carl Sandburg poem *Chicago*. We will discuss both the good and bad qualities of the city, talking about its "wicked, crooked and brutal ways and contrasting it with its good qualities of being proud, alive, coarse, cunning, full of fight, fierce and full of laughter and hard work". We may write a poem about New Haven following the Sandburg format. I would read aloud to the class Nelson Algren's *A Bottle of Milk for Mother*, which gives a picture of white street gangs in Chicago. The class would discuss crime in New Haven, street gangs, the police, the language in the street, and compare it with being white, young, and Polish in Chicago. They would discuss growing up in that environment. The class will discuss their attitudes toward the police and the police attitudes toward the students. Our major literary undertaking will be the reading aloud of *A Raisin In The Sun* by Lorraine Hansbury. I will stress the development of the characters and the dreams of the Younger family. We will look at the role the city plays in the setting of the play, how living in the ghetto affects the dreams and aspirations of the family. We will discuss the reaction of the white neighborhood association to the news that a black family is moving in. We will analyze the strong family feelings fostered by Mrs. Younger, the restless feelings of Walter and how he is held back from being the man of the house. We will look at the opposite philosophies on life echoed by Beneatha's two suitors. Most students enjoy reading this play aloud. It is not difficult and the students lose some of their inhibitions when they assume a role different from their own. Male students (which predominate the V.I.P. program) do not mind taking female roles and the few girls I usually get like to play the male roles. The play is an excellent learning tool and testing shows that the students retain more of this play than any other I teach.

I would now introduce my unit on New York. The students would read a few essays from the text *Man in the Expository Mode*. These would include *From the Subway to the Synagogue*, again by Alfred Kazin. This short piece, like *A Walker In The City*, tells of the author's early life in a five block area. His turf and his feelings about school, not unlike my students, echo the same sentiments. "He lived for the blessed sound of the dismissal gong at three o'clock on Friday afternoon." We will discuss his feelings about the school system and also the class's feelings toward that same system, pointing out that they are all not that different. Harlem will be discussed as the class reads *Cold, Hurt and Sorrow: Streets of Despair* by Leroi Jones. This view of Harlem will be contrasted with Langston Hughes *When the Negro Was in Vogue*. Hughes writes of Harlem in the twenties and the class will discuss similarities and contrasts as these writers saw them as young men. My class will be asked their impressions of Harlem now, and change for the better or worse will be noted.

I would like my students to see New York through the eyes and minds of various adolescent ethnic groups. A young Jewish boy's idea New York seems totally different from the New York of a newly-arrived teenager from Puerto Rico. But is it? My class will decide and explore what themes are similar and how they differ, and what makes them appear as they do. We will use two texts. From *Ethnic American Short Stories* we will read *Raymonds Run* by Toni Cade Bambara and from *Cities* we will read *Saudin Speaks* by Agnes Newton Keith, *The Wise and the Weak* by Philip Aponte, *The Romance of Art and Natural History* by Herman Wouk, an episode in life of Herbie Bookbinder, one of my favorite adolescents in literature. We will also read *Night Game* by William Melvin Kelly. From *City Streets*, an anthology of poems, we will read *Subway Rush Hour*, *Harlem Night Song* and *Harlem* by Langston Hughes. *We Real Cool* by Gwendolyn Brooks, *The Mouth of the Hudson* by Robert Lowell and *When Dawn Comes to the City: New York* by Claude Mckey. These poems all evoke different images of New York and I want the class to see the city in various moods depending on who is viewing it.

My final mini units will be combined. The family in the city and adolescent feelings in the city fit together well and will be taught in that manner. I would like to show that regardless of time or place, man's social needs are essentially the same. I will try to have the class recognize that the basic human needs for affection, acceptance and achievement are universal needs. Also the universality of experiences for the family including daily life, love and marriage, conflicts and death, which are shaped and shared in urban living. I would like them to understand that cities are composed of individuals who customarily live in family groups and who encounter the same problems in daily life; that families are really very much alike and that families and young people share similar experiences.

One of the texts we will use is *A Family Is A Way Of Feeling*, a Macmillan Gateway English Book. This book tries to bring out the special feeling shared by each person in a family. The stories and poems in this book try to emphasize that a family is a way of feeling. I will try to show the feeling consists of love, trust, and caring for each member. We will also explore the feelings of hate, not being loved and conflicts that also occur in family living. We will read *Brown Baby* by Oscar Brown Jr., *Anita's Gift* by Carol Morgan, and *Thank You Mam* by Langston Hughes. We will discuss growing up in the city using *Coming Up Black* by David A. Schulz as our text. This study traces patterns of ghetto socialization of young boys and girls. It will serve as a basis of comparison with the feelings my students share. We will review the literature we have read for the past weeks and reread at this time my students will have new insights and will be better equipped to understand and handle their own feelings.

At the conclusion of this unit I would hope that the students would know the role that the city and family plays in their growing up and in molding their present values and shaping their future goals.

I would like the students to understand the opportunities the city offers them for pleasant living. I hope they

will understand that city living sharpens both the pleasure and unpleasantness of family living.

Lesson Plan 1

Objectives

1. To prepare an oral biography of the student's family.
2. To develop and improve student's listening and verbal skills.
3. To give the students a better understanding of their families' background and history.

Explanation This mini unit will help the student communicate with other adult members of his family, and it will enable the student to find out about family history. The students will ask and record the answers to fifty questions. They will tape record these instant biographies and use them to trace their roots.

Materials Tape Recorder

Text How To Tape Instant Oral Biographies by William Zimmerman.

Week 1—We will discuss the interview process and the rationale behind the unit. We will discuss the fact that every person has a story to tell, a family history worth telling and saving. We will stress the point that the student's family can be drawn together in a more meaningful way. That students can reach back and trace family history and preserve family traditions. We will discuss how to interview people.

An interview is a way to talk with someone with the help of questions for the purpose of obtaining information.

Think of an interview as having a conversation with someone in which you are asking most of the questions to keep the talk going and to keep it interesting.

The most effective interviewers listen and give as much as they take. An interview can take more than one sitting.

Homework Each student is to bring in three sample questions which will be discussed in class. The class will discuss and select questions to be used in sampling.

Week 2—We will practice using the tape recorders and rehearse the questions as we conduct sample interviews in class.

Each night five different students will conduct interviews at home.

We will discuss techniques and start a family tree for each student.

Lesson Plan 2

Objective To introduce the students to the sights, sounds and smells, resources and liabilities of the urban setting of New Haven.

Explanation Most of the students know very little about the city they live in. We will explore its history, we

will visit places of interest, we will have guest lecturers and we shall put together a comprehensive picture of New Haven.

Text *Black New Haven 1920-1977* by Daniel Y. Stewart

Three Centuries of New Haven 1638-1938 by Rollin Osterweis

The New Haven Green and the American Bicentennial by Rollin Osterweis

Week 1—We will begin with a short history of the city. I will lecture about its early beginnings and the class will be assigned library readings on the different areas of the city including Dixwell, Newhallville and Fair Haven, Westville and the Hill. We will invite leaders from the different neighborhoods to speak to the class about their New Haven. (A list of speakers appears in the prose section.)

Week 2—We will begin to visit some of the resource centers of the city. Yale New Haven Hospital, City Hall, the police station, fire department, Long Wharf market, and Tweed Airport. We will write and discuss the impressions of the places we visit as *Homework*.

Guest speakers from the various colleges and technical schools in New Haven will tell the class how their facilities can be utilized. The class will visit the New Haven Register and find papers that were published on the day they were born. The class will write their reactions to what they see, hear, and experience.

Lesson Plan 3

Objectives To read aloud *Raisin In The Sun* .

To increase students reading and listening skills.

To help students interpret the dramatic genre.

To introduce students to life in a large urban ghetto.

Explanation As part of the unit on the family in the urban ghetto the class will read Lorraine Hansbury's wonderful drama about a ghetto family in Chicago. The class will discuss the elements that make the play an excellent vehicle for the study of family relationships and the conflicts and dreams of this family. The setting, the development of the characters, their dreams and aspirations, the conflicts of blacks living in a white society, the old and new ways of living highlight this drama.

Text *Raisin In The Sun* by Lorraine Hansbury

Week 1—We will introduce the characters and the setting of the play. We will contrast the setting with the homes of the students. We will meet the younger family and try to draw some conclusions about them before we really get to know them. We will save these papers and reread them at the conclusion of the story. We will read aloud the first few pages.

Homework The class will answer five study guide questions about the setting, the Langston Hughes quotation and the early family relationships. We will continue to read aloud with each student taking a role. As we get into the story, I will select twenty words for a spelling, vocabulary test. The class will copy the passage which contains the spelling vocabulary word.

Notes

1. Reprinted by permission from *Can't You Hear Me Talking To You?* by Caroline Mirthes, 1971, Bantam Books.
2. Reprinted by permission from *Hillhouse High School Student Handbook* , 1980-81.

Reading List for Students

Adams, William and Peter Conn and Barry Slepian. *Afro-American Drama* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970.

Algren, Nelson. *The Neon Wilderness* . New York: Doubleday & Co., 1947.

Anselment, Carol and Donald B. Gibson. *Black and White: Stories of American Life* . New York: Pocket Books, 1976.

Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It On The Mountain* . New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1953.

Brooks, Charlotte K. *Cities*. New York: Holt Impact Series, Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1977.

Chapman, Abraham. *Black Voices*. New York: Mentor Books, 1968.

Freedman, Florance, Marjorie B. Smily and John J. Marcatante, *A Family Is A Way Of Feeling* . New York: Macmillan Co., 1966.

Gregory, Dick. *The Shadow That Scares Me* . New York: Pocket Books, 1968.

Herndon, James. *The Way It Spozed To Be* . New York:. Bantam Books, 1965.

Kazin, Alfred. *A Walker In The City* . New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951.

Larric, Nancy. *On City Streets* . New York: Bantam Books, 1971.

Lipsyte, Robert. *The Contender* . New York: Bantam Books, 1969.

Meriwether, Louise. *Daddy Was A Number Runner* . New York: Pyramid Books, 1971.

Mirthes, Caroline. *Can't You Hear Me Talking To You?* New York: Bantam Books, 1971.

Murray, Alma and Robert Thomas. *Major Black Writers* . Los Angeles Scholastic Black Literature Series. Scholastic Book Service, 1971.

Newman, Katherine D. *Ethnic American Short Stories* . New York: Washington Square Press, 1975.

Osterweis, Rollin. *Three Centuries of New Haven 1638-1938* . New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947.

Osterweis, Rollin. *The New Haven Green and the American Bicentennial* . New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

Schulz, David A. *Coming Up Black* . Patterns of Ghetto Socialization. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969.

Sheffey, Ruth and Eugenia Collier. *Impressions in Asphalt* . New York: Charles Scribners & Sons, 1969.

Shoenfeld, Oscar and Helene MacLean. *City Life* . New York: McDougal, Littell & Co., 1970.

Spiegler, Charles G. *People Like You* . New York: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1968.

Steward, Daniel Y. *Black New Haven 1920-1977* . New Haven: Wain Press, 1977.

Zimmerman, William. *How To Tape Instant Oral Biographies* . New York: Guarionex Press, Ltd., 1979.

Teacher Bibliography

Adams, William, Peter Conn and Barry Slepian. *Afro-American Literature: Drama* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970. Three Afro-American contemporary plays dealing with family, integration. "Raisin In The Sun" is included.

Adams, William, Peter Conn and Barry Slepian. *Afro-American Literature: Non-Fiction* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970. An excellent source of excerpts and essays from black writers including Martin Luther King and Booker T. Washington.

Anselment, Carol and Donald B. Gibson. *Black and White: Stories of American Life* . New York: Pocket Books, 1976. This book reveals the common attitudes and experiences which shape the American way of life.

Brooks, Charlotte K. *Cities* . New York: Holt Impact Series, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977. A collection of poems, stories and photographs concerned with the urban experience.

Fader, Daniel N. and Elton B. McNeil, eds. *Hooked on Books: Programs and Proof* . New York: Berkley Publishing Corp., 1968. A teacher's guide to general circulation magazines available in classrooms dealing with articles and stories related to urban living.

Gehlman, John and Mary Rives Bowman, eds. *Adventures in American Literature* . New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958. A good textbook containing plays and short stories on urban themes.

Harrington, Michael. *The Other America* . Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963. A study of the invisible poor and inner-city poverty, and its effect on people and urban institutions.

Sheffey, Ruth and Eugenia Collier. *Impressions in Asphalt* . New York: Charles Scribners & Sons, 1969. A literary anthology which stresses the use of urban materials for the culturally diverse ethnic groups in the inner core of America's cities.

Solotaroff, Sarah. *Man in the Expository Mode* . New York: McDougal, Littell & Co., 1970. An anthology containing stories and essays from a range of authors including Malcolm X, Art Buchwald, James Thurber. Most have urban theme.

Spring, Michael, ed. *How We Live* . New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1977. Three themes of American contemporary life are explored. Some good writing ideas are offered.

Zimmerman, William. *How To Tape Instant Oral Biographies* . New York: Guarionex Press, Ltd., 1979. A question by question guide for recording family history.

Resources for Teachers

Films

New York, New York . Museum of Modern Art Film Library. 15 minutes. Black and white. A look at New York through the camera's eye.

Raisin In The Sun . Hollywood Films, Inc. 96 minutes. Black and white. Feature film of Lorraine Hansbury's play with Sidney Poitier, Claudia McNeil.

Recordings/Cassettes

Baldwin, James. "Go Tell It On The Mountain", *Cities* . Holt, Rinehart, Winston, Inc. Excerpts from the novel read by the author.

Clark, Petula. *Downtown* . RCA Records. A top hit record of years ago telling of the pleasures of going downtown.

Hughes, Langston. "A Dream Deferred", *Cities* . Holt, Rinehart, Winston, Inc. The poem is read aloud.

Hansbury, Lorraine. *A Raisin In The Sun* . Decca Records. A three-record set of the reading of the play featuring Ossie Davis, Claudia McNeil, Ruby Dee.

Magazines

Talking Book Topics. Library of Congress. A magazine of book, library, and related news designed for sight handicapped students. It contains titles of books in the urban setting that are read aloud.

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