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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1986 Volume I: The Family in Literature

Sociology Through Five Plays

Guide for Curriculum Unit 86.01.08
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I have selected five plays, “A Raisin in the Sun,” “The Blood Knot,” “Death of a Salesman,” “The Glass Menagerie,” and “The Oxcart,” to deal with the family and such themes as pride, racism, brotherhood, isolation, illusion, self-delusion, cultural identity, personal identity, migration, upward social mobility and the success ethic. Activities include acting out the plays, listening to one play on a record while following the text, role playing through hypothetical conversations between characters, panel discussion, discussion through the use of structured questions. Although the course was designed as a Sociology course intended to replace and to supplement certain parts of the texts, this unit could just as easily be used in an English course. Although designed for inner city children, I see no reason why suburban children could not benefit from the readings and discussions.

Many students are natural hams and will enjoy a chance to read and act a part. In addition to this fun aspect of the unit, students are being introduced to five fine pieces of literature. Moreover, they are further developing their interpretive skills, making inferences, identifying irony, and improving their own communication skills in speech and writing.

Most importantly, they are learning to put themselves in someone else’s position.

(Recommended for English classes, grades 8-12; and Sociology classes grades 11-12)

Key Words

Drama Literature Marques Rene Miller Arthur Death of a Salesman Family Life The Oxcart

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