



The Poetry of 20th Century Black America

Curriculum Unit 86.04.09
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This unit will be geared towards a middle school population of emotionally disturbed and learning disabled students for use in a resource classroom. It will be utilized for a 6 week period by students who have abilities ranging between the fourth and sixth grade levels, yet who are between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Since students who are emotionally disturbed and/or have learning disabilities have traits such as hyperactivity, short attention spans, poor organizational skills, low motivation and little overall success in school, the teacher must take these factors into consideration when developing a unit to meet their needs. After working with special education students in a resource classroom, I have found that clear contrasts, such as the ones contained within the two eras of poetry we will be examining, have made it easier for my students to absorb the material.

One of the major goals of this unit is for the students to become self-sufficient in their work habits and therefore to work independently. In order for special education students to be self-motivated, the material must first be meaningful to them and then capture their interests so they want to think and be involved with mental exploration. This task, I have found, is a difficult one even for my most mature and skilled students. Once the student is motivated to work, my hope is for the student to work somewhat independently, without constant teacher intervention, supervision or approval. Some of my students are not capable of this even on a one-to-one basis. This curriculum will be devised in such a way that the student can follow step-by-step instructions, allowing for self-sufficiency. (This is also necessary considering the time element, the wide age-range and ability level, and the various subjects to be taught in one period.) This can only cause a teacher to ask what will motivate my students to become so excited about school. One answer is a feeling of success about material that is motivating in and of itself.

I hope to motivate students to an awareness of their own ideas and feelings, and to become willing to explore and express these ideas and feelings through a study of Black poetry. This study will take students from black slavery and struggle to black independence and freedom. Students will observe that although people of the past have struggled, they were able to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings without a formal education. Despite their social status, living conditions and general being at odds with society, these people saw value in what they thought and felt. We will look specifically at this expression in the form of poetry.

The lesson plans are designed so the students will feel they can relate to the material and express their innermost thoughts and feelings. Because this is hard to do, television jingles will be looked at in the introductory lessons to poetry. Also, the beats of rap music will be played as a motivating tool to being writing

poetry. Audio and visual aids such as pictures, tapes, and (silent) films will provide concrete material for the special education student to refer to. Abstract ideas are particularly difficult for the ED/LD student to absorb since he has difficulties carrying over or connecting previously learned material. As a teacher, I find it necessary and more helpful to use visual aids with most of my lessons. The student can touch, feel, or see the materials and write about them according to your instructions. For example, what is its color? How heavy is it? What else can it be used for? Specific instructions will also be given for beginning and/or ending each poem so that the student does not feel absolutely overwhelmed. I am hoping that these instructions and activities will act as a catalyst for self-motivating my students.

BACKGROUND FOR STUDY

Since a person's cultural experiences in life will undoubtedly affect what he brings to his writing and the manner in which he does so, I am offering students the opportunity to observe the influence a person's experience, as part of a culture, has on his writing. Although there will be singular viewpoints within a culture, a culture as a whole moves together striving to reveal its human condition. In particular, the students will compare and contrast the viewpoints of Twentieth Century Black American Poetry, as represented by various poets from two different eras. I've chosen the periods of 1930-1955 and 1955-80 for a number of reasons; there is a significant difference in the social status of blacks in America in the two periods; and there is a shift in the attitude from passive victim, to a fighter for social change. Since each era has unique characteristics in and of itself, the students will be able to explain why a particular poem was written with the sentiments it owns. Since there is a current of unity within each era, the students will be able to recognize that unity. For example, the tone in poems concerning segregation may change from the period of 1930-55 to the period of 1955-80.

In order for students to have a complete understanding of Twentieth Century Black American Poetry it is important and vital that they understand the social and cultural issues of the times. Questions, such as Where did he get that idea from?, Why does he feel that way?, and What kind of life has he had? can only be answered after students recognize that the black culture, has been experiencing during the time the poetry was written. By understanding the history of the black culture the students will then be aware of poetry as a mirror of a particular era. A study of each era includes an overview of the current social issues affecting the black community, as well as the population in general. I will gear the unit's focus towards important documents, political figures, educational and occupational standings, as well as civil rights, freedom and the many issues which surround the black culture within each time period. In addition to a history of each era, we will look at poems which resound the morals, feelings, movements, struggles and attitudes of the times. Through examining each time period, the students will have a general basis for analyzing, identifying and understanding the coinciding poetry. This examination will allow the students to see a vivid difference between the vocabulary, attitude, writing style and general themes/issues within and between each era. Although the social situation of the times will affect a poet's writing, students will also note an agreement of themes between the eras since a person does not lose his history with the passage of time. Through studying some current poetry, the student will be able to express verbally and written what social messages are being relayed via poetry. The relevance of history plays an important role in the sequence of Twentieth Century Black American Poets. Students will observe the development of the poetry through the history of its culture. It is important for students to see that issues from past eras can continue to be unresolved for some poets, and therefore can affect, cause or change the poet's point of view. It is both this continuance yet vast

individuality of each era that I hope the students will grasp.

The challenge here is to break down the material into understandable units without deleting any major or important events which, in turn, would cheat our students of their access to a more sophisticated material. In my teaching I have found that if the material is too advanced for a student he will either give up immediately, or politely pay lip service to my teaching without understanding a single word. By breaking down the material and relating it to the student so that he can conclude that what he personally feels, experiences and learns in his life will be reflected in his writing, then the student will personally benefit. It is my goal that the student feel successful in examining the poetry and gain confidence in his ability to express himself through poetry.

OBJECTIVES

There are two types of objectives within this unit. Some of the objectives are specifically related to the skills I wish the students to acquire in their study of poetry. That is, identifying and using analogies/similes to express their thoughts, identifying themes in poems and relating them to a specific era, and also, establishing the social moods of an era and then selecting poems belonging to that era. The other set of objectives is concerned with the general skills that special education students and other students as well need to develop and apply. These skills include following directions, completing assignments and working more independently. poetry will be the means for achieving these basic skills.

SUMMARY OF OBJECTIVES

1. The students will be able to communicate their thoughts, ideas, and feelings in their own creative poetic style.
2. The students will be able to identify some basic components and vocabulary related to a more complete understanding of writing and analyzing poetry.
3. The students will be able to identify themes within the poem and relate them to the mood and/or social issues and concerns of each era studied.
4. The students will be able to use poetry as a means of positive creative release of energy, be it positive or negative experiences.
5. The students will be able to follow the teacher's directions, rules, and guidelines in the writing of their beginning poems.
6. The students will be able to complete the assignments with minimal teacher instruction, thereby becoming more self-sufficient.
7. The students will be able to identify the general social climate of the times towards the black culture within each era, and pick out the poems that belong to that era.
8. The students will be able to recognize analogies, similes, and the mood of the poem, and to incorporate these in their own writing.
9. The students will be able to compare the tones and themes of poems from 2 different eras, writing how they have changed.

INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

This section will be utilized to get the students used to the idea of poetry. Since some special ed. students have difficulty with changes or with learning new concepts, an introduction to poetry will be most helpful. Once they have familiarized themselves with poetry, successfully written some of their own poetry and have learned some terms, then they will be more prepared to investigate others' poetry.

In order to begin understanding poetry or the components of poetry, the student must first know what a poem is. A working definition I have come up with from my knowledge is as follows;

A poem is a group of words which expresses a specific emotion or a myriad of emotions through particular and sharp images. It recreates a single moment or experience with only a few well-chosen, exact words.

A list of questions of identifying what a poem is *not* will be available in the lesson plans. It may be easier for a student to answer questions concerning why a poem is not a paragraph, or a long story, and doesn't always have capitals, complete sentences, or a period at the end of each train of thought. At this point it will be helpful to have the student visually dissect the poem. Then the number of words, verses or stanzas can be pointed out. Any poem in Koch's *WISHES LIES AND DREAMS* can be used as examples of this. Poems such as *Miles Delight* by Ted Jones and Countee Cullen's *The Wise* are two poems filled with rhyme which can be used with students for recognition of rhyme. Visually, *The Wise* and Gwendolyn Brooks' *The Tapestry Rug* are good clear examples of recognizing stanzas. Lucy Smith's *Face of Poverty* has both analogies and similes that can be observed and examined by the student. This introduction, which touches on some different aspects of poetry will have fostered a better knowledge of poetry and will have prepared the students to look at black poetry from twentieth century America. Once the definition and visual recognition has been identified by the student, you can pose the important question of why people write poetry. Stress the creative expression of feelings, the playing with words and the means used to get the point across of what you are trying to say; this poetry allows. Then move the students towards thinking about the mood of the poem or the picture it creates. Since poems are basically feelings or events expressed through images, the students can now draw pictures or designs reflecting the moods of poems, and therefore reinforce this idea.

STRATEGIES FOR AN INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

The students will be spending two weeks or ten teaching days getting familiar with some terms, components and formats for poetry writing. After you have defined what a poem is and how it looks different from prose, the students can now begin their own poetry writing. All of the writing will have paths for the student to follow. They will have room to remain creative, but a direction can reduce the chances of their getting frustrated or feeling inadequate from the very start. As an introductory lesson, Kenneth Koch in his *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* suggests providing an incentive for the student to begin writing. For instance, have the students close their eyes as you bang two objects together. Ask them what kind of animal noise, size, shape or color the sound made. Various noises and sounds or rules may be employed according to the student's maturity and interest level. A rule such as beginning and ending each line of poetry with, 'That sounds like a (animal) in a (color) (object)', can help the student feel secure, especially in his first writings. Koch also suggests that poems written on a particular subject should be read to the students at the same time they are writing their poems since this can be a real incentive for generating creativity from the students. The children will see the

variety of ideas that students their own age have created and will be less inhibited to write off the top of their heads. (Examples can be found in Koch's books.)

In addition to following rules the students will be learning the components contained within poems and then learn these components themselves. For instance, after telling the students what an analogy is and giving the students examples, you can hold up a pen and say 'This pen looks like a ___.' or 'This pen is shaped like a ___.' Don't forget to use examples such as 'He is as ugly as ___.' or 'Her hands were as rough as ___.' The more concrete the examples, the better the chance of the student using these images in their own writing. Using body parts for analogies is a great concrete way to help students remember imaging. Also, analogies used in T.V. commercials will directly relate to our students since we know how much of the dreaded tube they do enjoy. After working on analogies the students will write some poems on their own lies, wishes and dreams. Koch found that students who wrote poems on these topics were particularly uninhibited. They can say what they really feel without being threatened by having to own their words. phrases such as 'I wish I could, but I can't because, and 'It only, have worked well in my classroom. If more specific rules are needs; 'If only I was (name a person, place or thing), then, might be helpful. Now the students can move to recognizing and writing similes. The poem *By Myself* by Eloise Greenfield has good examples of similes. After explaining similes to your students they can write their own by using such phrases as 'I'm a ___ on a ___.' or 'I'm a ___ in a ___.' Then have them write in a color in the second half of their sentence. For example, I'm a car in a blue bottle. On any given day you can put the students' poetry together and read it as a group poem. According to Kerber in his *The Teaching of Creative Poetry* reading poetry aloud, to and by your students, is an excellent way to build vocabulary and make the connection between reading, writing and speaking. It is a good way to reinforce how all three aspects of our language effect one another.

Now I would like my students to recognize the general mood of a poem. *A Prayer* by Yolanda Zealy is an outright example of being black and proud. A list of specific questions allows and directs the student to conclude how the poet feels about the subject he is writing about. Next, the student will count stanzas and lines, learning that a line is also called a verse and that a stanza is a bunch of words grouped together and separated from another group of words. The poem *Midway* by Naomi Long Madgett contains a few stanzas and has an easily recognizable mood, the fight for freedom and perseverance. Many of the previously used terms and concepts can be reused with new poems and therefore reinforce old concepts.

The final activities to be used in the two weeks of writing poetry will be clustering, as suggested by Rico in her *Writing the Natural Way* . The students will focus on one word, circle it and write all of the things they associate with it. This is a good way for students to see that a poem involves feelings that you relate to the subject. A group activity will work well here to help students who are shy. If, for example, you cluster the word noise on the board, questions such as When do you hear that noise? and How does it make you feel? can facilitate many varied answers. At this point you can introduce prepositions and prepositional phrases as a way of extending and stretching the student's imagination. For example, you can say or write on the board, 'It's fun to ___(on, in, around) a ___', substituting the prepositions and creating new ideas or views on something. Since a lot of poetry contains phrases rather than full sentences this will reinforce that idea. See lesson plans.

There is no need for my students to memorize the above terms. I want them to be able to recognize when they are used, and to use them in their poetry. However, you may find it to your advantage if they find, identify and memorize the definitions of the terms all at the same time. This material will be too much for my students to digest all at once. If the students cannot get past the language they will be frustrated once again. When they read a poem, I want them to be able to tell the general mood of a poem; anger, happiness, sorrow,

etc. If there are additional words that need to be defined, they will look them up in the dictionary, or I will give them a synonym for the word. This will keep the students' interest (because of their short attention span) by avoiding numerous steps to get to the end result.

LESSON PLANS FOR THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF STUDY

In the first week of studying poetry the students will be mainly working as a group. Gradually during the second week, and continuing weeks, the students will begin working more independently. The following lesson plans can be written in the form of directives on dittos. That will allow the student to work silently. Use whichever strategy would be most beneficial to your students.

DAY ONE

1. Read a few poems from Langston Hughes *Don't You Turn Back* , and write them on the board.
2. Ask the students how they know it's a poem—verbal responses.
3. Ask the students what a poem is not—verbal responses.
4. Ask the students what a poem is—verbal responses.
5. Pass out and write the definition of a poem on the board.
6. List the components of a poem on the board. Point these out in the poems on the board.
7. Discuss poems as creative writing and the images they make. A follow up activity of drawing pictures after reading some poetry can be helpful.

DAY TWO

1. play rap music from the *Run DMC* album, no words.
2. Ask students to make associations with the music—sound, color animal, what the animal might be doing and how the music made them feel.
3. Play another selection from *Run DMC* .
4. The students will now make a list of their associations. Animal—(), color—(), object-(), etc.
5. Next, have the student write analogies, but don't tell them they are analogies. "That sounds *like* a (fill in animal) in a (color) (object)."

DAY THREE

1. Read day two's poetry as a collective poem.
2. Tell students what they wrote is called analogies.
3. Give examples: He laughed like a hyena. She whistled like a teapot. The baby cried like a siren.
4. Students will then write an analogy about a pen or desk, 'this pen looks like a ____.'
5. Now do the same thing using *as*. He is as fat as a house, or She looks as sad as a drippy candle.
6. Have the students write analogies about the blackboard, a crinkled piece of paper, etc. For example, The blackboard is as (flat) (black) (smooth) as ____ . The student will be filling in all of the missing words.

DAY FOUR

1. Discuss T.V. commercials. Ask students to think about things they compare on T.V.
2. Write the comparisons on the board.
3. Have students circle the word that connects the comparing things.
4. Now, the students will write the sentence over, eliminating the key word that allows for the comparison.
5. Ask students how this change gives us a whole different image of the product being sold.

DAY FIVE

1. Read some of the wish poems from Koch's *Wishes, Lies and Dreams* .
2. The student will write three separate sentences, first filling the blank with a person, then a place and finally a thing—I wish I could . . . , but I can't because . . .
3. Then write 'If only I was ____, then . . .'
4. The students will now fill in the next sentence filling it in with a person, place or thing, creating three sentences. 'If only I was (person, place, thing), then I could'

DAY SIX

1. Read the poem *By Myself*, by Eloise Greenfield.
2. The student will list the eight things that she says she *is*.
3. Explain a simile to your students.
4. The students will fill in the blanks:
I'm a 1 in a 5 .
I'm a 2 in a 6 .
I'm a 3 on a 7 .
I'm a 4 on a 8 .
5. Then they will fill in these blanks:
I'm a 1
2
3
4 on a 5
6
7
8 .

DAY SEVEN

1. Write the poem *A prayer* by Yolanda Zealy on the board.
2. Read it collectively and ask the students what she is talking about.
3. Now the students will write the answers to the following questions.
How does she feel about being black?
What is the subject of the poem?

What lines tell you she feels this way?

Write them here ____.

4. How a poet feels throughout a poem is called the MOOD.
5. Write some of your own words telling how the poet feels.
6. What is the mood of this poem?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BLACKS IN AMERICA

Slavery was growing in America in the 1700's and by 1776, the time of the American Revolution, there were slaves in all 13 colonies. In 1807 a law was passed allowing slaves to be brought to America from abroad. This, along with the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793 prolonged and preserved slavery. By 1830 abolitionists were protesting that slavery was morally wrong and some slave revolts were simultaneously being organized. In 1857 the Dred Scott Case revealed that slaves were property and could be taken anywhere in the north or south by their owners. In September of 1862, Lincoln issued the Emancipation proclamation which went into effect in January, 1863. This stated that slaves were to be freed, but actually only acted as a symbol to appease the abolitionists. At the end of the Civil War, the Negro was no longer a slave, yet not a citizen and not prepared for the world, having no skills, money, or property. The period of time bringing order and peace to America is known as Reconstruction. In 1868 the 14th amendment gave the Negro citizenship, and the 15th amendment ratified in 1870 stated his right to vote. Many of these laws were put on the books but continued to be unacceptable and unpracticed by the white population. It was also during this time that Negro schools and colleges such as Howard U., Atlanta U., and Fisk University were established. A Federal Bureau known as the Freedman's Bureau was supposed to help the Negro, but was actually a facade used by the white man for political purposes, and was eventually closed in 1872. In the Reconstruction period a small number of Negroes were voting citizens, and began to hold certain offices. In the late 1870's the 'return to white supremacy' had begun as an effort by the white population to gain control of the heavy population of blacks in the South. This popular view among whites reinforced the belief that the Negro was an inferior being.

By the turn of the century a few voices were being heard in the black population. In 1908 the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) was established by W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois believed that the Negro needed to be treated equally and the organization helped the Negro find jobs, housing and helped reduce prejudice. Simultaneously, by 1910 90 percent of the population lived in the South, only 25% owned land, and about 70% were illiterate. In 1920 membership of the Ku Klux Klan was at its peak with an estimated

5 million members. The KKK was reinforcing the idea of white supremacy. They were an organized group that burned, beaten and threatened and discriminated against minorities, primarily blacks. Also, 'black laws' came about denying the Negro the right to vote or testify in court, to name a few things. The Negroes still received lower wages than the whites, were discriminated in housing choice and were segregated from whites in public facilities. Simultaneously, thousands of blacks left the South in search of a better way of life. In 1929, with the collapse of the stock market bringing on the Great Depression, there was a positive note for the black worker. In 1929 Asa Phillip Randolph organized and was the head of the Sleeping Car Porters, which helped the Negroes keep steady jobs on the railroad during the depression. Considering all of these factors, the beginning of the century was not a positive one for the Negro.

In the 1930's the black population was still in a state of limbo, with each step forward two steps were taken backwards. In the 1930's the NAACP was fighting discrimination in education, and coordinated a legal campaign against segregation and discrimination, the case for education not ending in a victory. In 1935 the Swing Age began and many black performers such as Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway and Count Basie were popular. Also in 1935, Mary McLeod Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women. In 1938 a suit filed by the NAACP for black and white teachers to make the same wages led to a series of suits which reached this goal. In 1937, Joe Louis became the heavyweight champion of the world. In 1938, the Supreme Court ruled that states must provide equal education opportunities for Negroes, although this was not actually practiced. In 1939, Jane Matilda Bolin became the first Negro woman judge in the U.S. The decade ended with Benjamin Oliver Davis being appointed the first Negro general in the history of the armed forces.

In the 1940's the Negroes were still grasping at the idea of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It had not yet become a reality. The New Deal period directed by FDR provided the Negro with equal opportunity to work in government jobs, no longer requiring you to state your race on the employment application. Although this was a step forward, it did not apply to other areas of public employment. This milestone led to protest in 1941 with the beginning of WWII. The Negroes protested being segregated from white troops, yet having white commanding officers. As a result of pressure, Negroes were put in higher positions and eventually accepted to all parts of the armed service in 1945. In 1943, a series of racial riots began in which many blacks were killed with few positive results. In 1944, the United Negro College Fund was incorporated and in 1947 Jackie Robinson became the first Negro accepted into organized baseball. In 1948 Truman integrated the armed forces and segregation ceased in this area. In 1949 WERD, the first Negro radio station was established in Atlanta and in 1950 Gwendolyn Brooks was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. This decade showed more equal opportunities for the black population, but a struggle was still ahead.

The 1950's began as controversially as they ended. At the same time that the New York City Council passed a bill which prohibited racial discrimination in city housing developments, a South Carolina court ruled that segregation was not discrimination and that this had no ill effects on Negro children. Then, in 1954 in the Brown vs. Topeka case, the Supreme Court declared that segregation in public school was unconstitutional. This case is regarded by many as the beginning of the catalyst for the civil rights movement. In 1955, the first of many protests against discrimination occurred in Montgomery, Alabama, when Mrs. Rosa Parks refused to move to the rear of a segregated bus. This event, led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and lasting 11 months, was the turning point in the fight for equal rights.

This non-violent protest acted as a model for most of the subsequent civil right activity. Bus boycotts broke out throughout the states as a result of the Supreme Court's refusal to ban segregation in intrastate bus routes. Finally, on December 21, 1956, the Supreme Court's decision prohibiting segregation on buses went into effect. Simultaneously unbelievably in the same year of Rosa Parks protesting (1955) Emmett Till, 14, was

brutally murdered for whistling at a white woman in a public store. In 1957, a Prayer Pilgrimage in Washington, the biggest civil rights demonstration took place. As race riots continued throughout the states, Mack Parker was lynched in 1959. That same year, the first black woman to write a Broadway play was Lorraine Hansberry. Her *'Raisin In The Sun'* opened at the Barrymore Theater in March. Although the decade is filled with positive efforts towards equal rights, the regular forces are equally weighed and change for action isn't taken or gotten until the following decade.

In the 1960's we see the most action even taken by the Negro population and led by Martin Luther King Jr.'s non-violent policies. The 1960's began with sit-ins in white libraries, beaches, and hotels. As a result, many stores, lunch counters and public facilities were desegregated. In 1961, the bus containing the first of the Freedom Riders was bombed and burned in Alabama. Simultaneously, the Commerce Commission issued a regulation prohibiting segregation on buses and in terminal facilities. In 1962, demonstrations continued throughout the country concerning segregation in public facilities and housing. In the same year Martin Luther King Jr. was jailed and although Negro churches were burned in the South, President Kennedy actively denounced this and supported the Negro voter registration drive in the South. On November 22, 1963, JFK, a positive leader for black equal rights, was assassinated. In 1963, the march in Birmingham marked the passing of the Negroes' fight for civil rights and taking matters into their own hands. In 1964 King, who led the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) won the Nobel Peace Prize for his advocacy in working against discrimination and using passive resistance in his work.

In Selma, Alabama, in 1965 there was protest concerning voter registration which kept Negroes out of the voting population. With the crisis in 1968 many programs aiding the poor were drastically cut, effecting the status black had wholeheartedly fought to gain. The idea of Black power promoted by Stokely Carmichael became popular in 1966 because the civil rights legislation and poverty programs were failing to work. Although with this slogan and movement came the conviction of black pride and the wish to control the major institutions affecting the Black community, it also contained questionable overtones suggesting racial segregation. As a result of unchanging race relations many riots took place in hundreds of cities throughout the country in the summers of 1963-1967. One of the first major happenings was in Watts, a Black section of Los Angeles. In Detroit during July of 1967, the bloodiest racial riot in America's history took the lives of 43 people in 5 days. In April of 1968, King was assassinated and widespread rioting was at its peak. Within a week of King's death the Civil Rights Act of 1968 was passed prohibiting discrimination in the sale and rental of housing. However, this act did not include 1/5 of the housing facilities, so discrimination continued to exist in this area. In 1969, although the U.S. Justice Department revealed that rioting was down at least 50% from the previous year, mass racial uprisings continued to occur in Springfield, MA, Hartford, CT, and Jacksonville, FL. Although the 1960's proved that action by a people working together can produce positive results, Negroes were not yet fully integrated in American society; prejudiced and unpracticed and unwritten laws all being the culprits.

In the 1970's a swaying dichotomy of Negro status in American society remained prevalent. On the one hand elected black officials doubled from 1964 to 1967 and blacks in better white collar craftsmen position with an approximate increase of 3 to 5 million people from 1960 to 1971. It was in 1971 that the Supreme Court ruled busing as an acceptable method to integrate public schools. On the other hand, statistics from 1982 speak for themselves concerning the milestones that remain to be accomplished for Black Americans. The energies and hopes of the Black Revolution were dying out, unemployment was extremely high and with the Nixon administration came negative policies affecting the poor and supporting forces which opposed segregation. Hence, the economic and social achievements of the 60's took a plunge downward. At this time (1982), the average Black American earned approximately 1/2 of what America earned with unemployment being twice as

high for blacks. One half of the Negro population lived in slum housing and most blacks continued their education in segregated public schools having inferior facilities to white schools. Although the most changes for the Black American occurred from 1962-1972 than in the hundred years since the Reconstruction, Blacks were still underclass citizens. In 1973, the median income for Black families was just 58% of white families' incomes with the percentage of Black families on welfare increasing. On a positive note there was a 56% increase in Black college enrollment between 1970 and 1974. With the election of President Jimmy Carter in 1976 came a glimmer of hope with the recognition of individual Blacks as seen in Carter's appointment of more Black federal judges than all the other presidents combined. In 1978 3 black astronauts, Gregory, Blinford, and McNair embodied the advancement Negroes had made since the 1st era. In June of that same year Allan P. Bakke was admitted into the University of California Medical School at Davies in a reverse discrimination suit. This ruling put boundaries in the use of affirmative action in previous injustices.

In 1979, the Ku Klux Klan membership was on the rise and simultaneously 200 Black leaders were speaking out and supporting Andrew Young as UN Ambassador, demanding that blacks be heard in American foreign policy affairs. Although Carter renewed the recognition of individual blacks, high inflation and unemployment rates sparked the first major riot since the 60's, in Miami during the month of May. A series of racial uprisings followed in a number of cities and while the beginning of the 70's brought improvement in job status for some Negroes, unemployment was rampant throughout the black community. By the mid-70's, college enrollment was up and so was black recognition. This was countered by race riots in 1980. So, the 70's was a time of disenchantment for blacks with positive and negative forces in constant fluctuation.

With the 1980's came the election of President Reagan and his policies disregarding those of the New Deal period. (In the 1930's FDR promoted social reform and economic recovery.) Reagan supported programs which intensified the economic problems of Black America and widened racial splits. In 1980 a number of racial riots and incidents broke out, and in 1981 over 300,000 people from labor and civil rights organizations protested the Reagan administration's social policies. Black Americans bitterly felt that although things seemed to have changed fundamentally they remained the same; pacified and oppressed.

This historical background should act as a guideline for your students in their study of the negative and positive forces affecting the American Black community. The contrasting events are expressed in the poetry through feelings which include anger, hope, despair, joy and confusion in self in regards to society. If you wish the students to concentrate more heavily on the historical background the resources I listed in the above pages are excellent for both the teacher and the more advanced student. If you present the historical events as the cause for poets to write and their poetry as their response to these events, than your students will see that the poetry cannot exist without the historical events. The feelings, attitudes and subject matters of the poetry are all provoked by the events of history. This historical account contains both the uppers and the downers for the American Negro throughout both eras. These ups and downs are reflected in the poetry throughout both eras.

STRATEGIES/BLACK AMERICAN POETRY

The study of 20th Century Black American Poetry

(1930-1980) will coincide with a historical study of the progress of the American Negro throughout these years. The Black strugglings began years before black acceptance had been considered. Although only

negative events affected the Black American in the early years of the 20th Century, these events were slowly more heavily outweighed by positive events in the second half of the 20th Century. However, it is this constant overlapping of positive/negative events throughout the 20th Century which, in effect, caused a change in the actions and attitudes taken by the blacks during these times of changes, that the students will be looking at. While you present to the students the chronology of the Black strugglings and simultaneously the chronology of Black Acceptance, the students will be examining poetry that mirrors both of these opposite movements. In presenting these two vastly different concepts at the same time to your students, it will account for first the passivity, then the anger, and finally the actions taken by the blacks to secure their rights in American society. It will also act as a guide and rationale for picking out themes both within the eras and within the poems themselves. Then, it is this changing and shaping of the Negroes from struggling to freedom from passivity to action and how they expressed the feelings surrounding these events in their poetry that the students will be examining. The following people/acts/events will act as a guide for this historical movement.

The following account was made possible by a number of sources. These include: *Before the Mayflower A History of Black America* by Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Black Americans* by Alphonso Pickney, *Blacks in America* with essays by McPherson, Holland, Banner, Weiss and Bell and *American History: A Survey* by Current, Williams, and Freidel.

STRATEGIES FOR STUDY

Through poetry the students will look at the struggles encompassing the Negro's history over a 60 year period. In particular students will be examining an evolution of the poems, the people and how their attitudes, over time, have changed and shaped the tone of the poems. The students will observe that certain events and people may have provoked anger, hope, despair and therefore caused the poem's moral. These events directly correlate and effect changes in the poems tone over the two eras. Since the special education students have poor organizational skills and become confused and overwhelmed with too much material, only one theme is to be examined at a time and taken through the course of history. In this way your students will clearly see that history is reflected in the Negroes' poetry. They will sense that the first era was basically a desperate passive individual defeat for the Negro humanity. Hopelessness and black pride was minimal. Yes, individual rights were being taken against discrimination and segregation, but these were sparse, spreadout and resisted individually. In the second era there is a unifying force, a collective hopeful action taken as a group, rather than in individual spurts. Although there is positive hope in this era there was also an anger at being suppressed for such a long period of time and at civil rights laws that continued to be unpracticed. Black pride has also taken a positive swing upward, ringing happiness for their race (color). The themes your students will be comparing and examining are; *black pride, discrimination, and equal rights* . In the first era there are conflicting events effecting the Negro population and confusion with who am I? Where do I belong? and Am I worthy? Are some of the issues that can be read in the poems. In the second era although conflicting issues exist (positive/negative) there is a sense of this is me, I am proud, and I'm going to fight for my rights! These feelings are resounded in the themes of the poetry.

As you are presenting your students with the poetry, also present a time line of the historical events affecting the Negro population. Make 2 time lines for each era; one containing the positive events of the era and one containing the negative events of the era. If you are doing a poem concerned with separated public facilities, for example, you may want to make one focused time line containing only the events surrounding these

issues. One line may contain the positive events and one may contain the negative events. Present the positive or negative time lines separately and briefly discuss what was happening at the time. Then present them together. An overhead projector would be an excellent visual method to emphasize this overlapping of events. A time line is a concise, consolidated whole. It is brief, yet sufficiently serves your purposes. This easy to read tool is beneficial to the special education student with a short attention span and poor organizational skills. A time line is a simplified history and a handy reference to use in conjunction with the poetry. As the teacher, you will be the one doing the 'research' for the historical background and 'feeding' it to the students. Although their concentration is geared towards reading and writing poetry the history you present is an important and integral part towards achieving the goals of this unit.

(figure available in print form)

The poems that I have chosen for the students to use with this curriculum are poems written with children as their audience. The vocabulary and the meaning of the poems are at an understandable level for the special education student. However, poems geared more towards adults with simplistic language are also used so that the student receives a broadened view of the poetry. Selecting and maneuvering the amount of poems to use has been a difficult task, since there are a tremendous number of feelings so beautifully expressed. Poems which reflect the obvious themes of black pride, discrimination and equal rights were the ones I selected. The students will be looking for the tense the poem is written in. This way they can decide if the author is talking about past, present or future events or/and feelings. By looking at descriptive key words, the students can deduce what the status of the Negro is at that present time. This will be made easier for the students since they will simultaneously be learning about people and events of that time period. This leads the students to identify the tone of the poems. They will pick out angry, happy, sullen words in the poems to help this identification process. You can implement any of the strategies used in the first two weeks of study whenever it would enhance the students understanding of poetry. Also, ask your students to look at the title of the poem since this often gives insight to what the poem is about. The students will also circle nouns in the poem to help them identify the author of the poem; a mother, a child, a slave, M. L. King, an authority. While circling nouns, studying the Negro history the students will also identify the events being discussed. The special education student needs this concrete process of reinforcing ideas for the material to get in his mind. While studying this poetry the students will also write their own poetry. They will pretend they are a certain person such as M.L.K. (KKK) in the midst of the segregation issue, or they can pretend they were a slave and are looking back, writing in past tense about how life used to be. And again, they can be a college bound Negro during the 50's searching for equal opportunities and dreaming about a future when he will be recognized as an equal. This will give the student not only a sense of the time element, but also a chance to recognize the different points of view/experience people have on the same issue.

According to Peter Elbow in his *Writing With Power* if you write all of the prejudices someone has on an issue, from their point of view, you may get new insights into an unclear, confusing situation. The students will write a poem on the way a white person feels riding side by side with blacks on buses, or sitting seat by seat with blacks in classrooms. Elbow also suggests writing non-stop for a period of time to get used to the habit of writing in general. Although he suggests that no specific topic is needed, special education students definitely need a direction. Before writing a poem on Martin L. King, Jr., for example, the students will write in their journals for 5-10 minutes (whatever is appropriate) about how they think he felt about his race, humanity or equal rights. If they get stuck they can write 'I'm stuck and not sure what I want to write next.' By doing this writing ideas are concretely on paper and the students can refer to it as a reference. Another activity I have set up, the idea coming from Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors & Expectations* is to have the students pick (3) nouns, (3) adjectives, and (3) verbs from a chart to use in their poems. To do this the student has to identify their subject (by circling it) as singular or plural and then correlate it with the correct verb tense. Hopefully,

this will aid the students in using subject-verb agreement in their other subjects.

LESSON PLAN

(Discrimination)

- I.
 1. Read *Strong Men* by Sterling A. Brown.
 2. Circle all of the verbs in the poem.
 3. What 2 letters do most of the verbs end in?
 4. Is the author talking about something in the past that already happened, or about something that is going to happen? Are the words happy or angry words?
 5. The word 'they' is seen over and over again in the poem. Who is 'they'?
 6. Who is 'you' in the poem?
 7. What phrase is repeated 4 times and shows that the Negro will *not* give up?
 8. Pretend you are a white slave owner describing how you treated your slaves.
 9. Cluster the word Slave Owner.
 10. In your journal you are a white slave owner, How do you feel about black people, why do you feel this way? (Write for 5 minutes)
 11. Write the phrase/sentence telling how you treated your slaves.
 12. From the chart pick 2 verbs, 2 nouns, and 2 adjectives to be used in your poem.
 13. Start each sentence with the word I.

14. End the poem with your 1st. sentence.

II.

1. Read *I, Too* by Langston Hughes.
2. Third line underline the subject and circle the verb.
3. Who is 'they' in line 3?
4. Underline the last 3 lines in the first stanza. Change laugh, eat & grow to past tense. I L ____, and a ____, and g ____.
5. The second stanza begins with what word? (tomorrow)
6. The 2nd. and 4th. Lines of the 2nd. stanza begin with what words?
7. Write the full form of I'll ____
Nobody'll ____.
8. Now, is the poet talking about the past, present, or future.
9. What is the verb in the 2nd stanza, line 4?
10. Does this word show anger, strength, or sadness?
11. Which era is this poem in?

III.

1. Read *Her Story* by Naomi Long Madgett.
2. The first 4 lines tell us that the author was given a name. What is it?
3. Why is it the wrong name? (read line 4). What 2 adjectives describe her?
4. The next line tells us her dream. What did she want to do?
5. Circle the verbs that tell us this.
6. Was she talented?
7. Why didn't she get the part?
8. What was her solution to her problems? (Last stanza)
9. The last line tells us her solution didn't work. What will she do the next time?
10. In your own words describe the mood, or how the poet feels in this poem.

LESSON PLANS

(Black Pride)

- I.
 1. Read Yolanda Zealy's *A Prayer* .
 2. How many lines are there?
 3. In the 2nd line she uses a metaphor to describe her skin. Write it here ____.
 4. What 2 words describe her hair?
 5. What 2 words describe her lips?
 6. Write the last line here.
 7. What is the author thanking God for?
 8. Why do you think this wasn't written in 1920?
 9. Next, play a musical selection from *Man & His Music: Africa* , a keyboard publication.

10. When it is finished, ask the students to list the colors it sounded like. Then the animal it was.
List words describing how this animal feels to touch.
11. Fill in the blanks:

I am a *color animal* .

I live in a ____

and eat ____.

I am a *color animal* .

I play like a (the) (*adjective*) ____

and eat as ____ as a ____ .

I am a *color animal* .

II

1. Read Claude McKay's *If We Must Die* .
2. What was happening in the Army in the 1930's and 40's?
3. The fifth line says we must die *how* ?
4. Who is 'We'?
5. In line 3 how is the man described?
6. Does the author like the white man?
7. In line 7 and 13 what words describe the white man?
8. Why does this poem belong in the 1st era?
9. Now, rewrite the poem. Drop 'not' from line one.
10. Write the opposite of how the author feels. Change the word 'nobly' in line 5.
11. Change the word 'monsters' in line 7.
12. Change the word 'brave' in line 10.
13. Change the 13th line to positive descriptions.
14. Add the word 'not' in front of the word fighting.
15. Discuss with your students how the entire meaning of the poems changes with the new words.

Compare with *A Prayer*

16. Both authors are proud of their blackness.
17. How does the mood differ from *If we must die* ?
18. In 'A Prayer' how do we know the author isn't fighting for her blackness?
19. What are the first words of line 2, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13?

20. These words tell us she is asking to be black and doesn't have to fight because she is black as in *If we must die*.

III.

1. Read *Me, Colored* by Peter Abrahams
2. Only read the poem on the left hand side of the page.
3. What are the 3 kinds of people?
4. Who comes first?
comes second?
comes third?
5. What does the author say he is?
6. This means he comes ____.
7. The 6th line tells us what the boy he met was. What was he? ____
8. Is Zulu a color?

Activity

1. Read the poem on the right side of the page.
2. Read lines 26 & 27. Did Joseph believe there were black kings before the white man?
3. Who is 'I' in the poem? A man, A boy, A dog?
4. Did Aunt Liza think there were colored kinds before the white man. (Read the last 10 lines)
5. What does Aunt Liza do that tells us she wasn't taking him seriously?
6. Was Joseph proud of his color?
7. Was Aunt Liza proud of her color?
8. Do you think the author will be?
9. Change the last 2 lines of the poem with a different answer so we know that Aunt Liza is proud

of her culture. For example. ___ing and ___ ing Aunt Liza said:

LESSONS PLANS

(Equal Rights)

I.

1. Read *A Note of Humility* by Arna Bontemps.
2. Look up humility in the dictionary. Write the definition here. ____
3. Look up the word yield. Write the definition here. ____
4. Circle the phrases in the first stanza in lines 2 & 4 that are sad.
5. Circle all the verbs in the second stanza.
6. The last 2 lines of the poem are very important? How will the black man come back?
7. Look up the word triumph in the dictionary. What does it mean?
8. In the last line of the 1st. 2 stanzas and in the 3rd. Line of the last stanza, we see the same word.
9. What is this word?
10. What is a word that would be more definite, more positive? (Answer: will)
11. How does the author feel about the future?
12. Read the last line. If triumph comes when will it be?

Write in your journal for 10 minutes, no stopping. Write about how you would feel not being allowed to vote, go to school, or being treated terribly by white people. Pretend the President will be reading this.

II.

1. *Status Symbol* by Mari Evans
2. What are the ten things this author says he is the result of?
3. In the last stanza 'they' is another word for who?
4. What is the S. Symbol he go?
5. What was it for?
6. When do you think this poem was written?
 1. Look at pictures in book showing separate facilities.
 2. Write in your journal about a time you felt different. What happened? How did it happen? Were you asked to do anything about it? what would you do about it if you could?
3. Cluster the word different.
4. Write a sentence describing how it felt being different.
5. I felt as *adjective A* as a (*animal*).
I felt *adjective adjective* about *noun* and it was because (*write anything*) .
I felt as *adjective B* as a (*noun*) .
I felt *adjective A adjective B* .

III.

1. Read *As I Grew Older* by Langston Hughes.
2. The title tells us something. What does it tell us?
3. Read the 1st stanza. What was in front of the author?
4. What does he compare his dream to? Write the metaphor here.
5. What do you think is another word for the 'wall'?
6. What happened to the sky when the wall went up?
7. What happened to the dream?
8. What is the shadow?

9. Read the 4th stanza. Where is his dream?
10. In the 6th stanza what does he want his hands to do?
11. If he can break the shadow how many dreams will he have?

IV.

1. Read *Martin's Blues* by Michael S. Harper.
2. After reading the title who do you think this poem is about?
3. What are the 5 words he said that the author calls a melody?
4. Who is 'we' in the poem?
5. The last 2 lines are repeated. Why do you think they are repeated?
6. Since the verb 'do' is in the past tense, how does the author feel?
7. When do you think it was written? Compare this poem to Arna Bontemps's *A Note of Humility* .

Activity

1. Write in your journal. Pretend it is the 1960's and you have just had a hard day at school. You go to a lunch counter that says 'for whites only'. How are you feeling? What are you going to do? Who will you call for help? Will anything change?
2. Write a poem to anyone about how you are feeling—not being able to eat at the 'white counter'.

Annotated Teacher Bibliography

Bennett, Lerone JR., *Before the Mayflower A History of Black America* . Chicago: Johnson Pub., 1982.

An excellent prose account of black history from 1619-1981. Also lists by month and year the achievements and accomplishments by and affecting blacks over a 360 year period.

An edited collection: Chapman, Abraham, ed., *Black Voices* , New York, The New American Library, Inc., 1968.

A varied collection of poetry, fiction, literary criticism and autobiographies provides you with a rounded perspective of Negro writing.

Current, Williams & Freidel, *American History: A Survey* . New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

A general history of America containing some good articles concerning events effecting black America.

Elbow, Peter, *Writing with Power Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process* . New York: Oxford, 1981. Contains various techniques for motivating the writer, for focusing on mainpoints and for completing writing tasks, to name a few areas.

A Selected Collection: Hopkins, Bennett Lee, *Don't Your Turn Back* , New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1969.

A children's book with poetry by Langston Hughes on black pride, dreams and struggles.

A Selected Collection: Hopkins, Bennett Lee, *On Our Way Poems of Pride and Love* , New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1974.

A book geared towards children containing poems on Blackness, feelings, remembrances and love.

Hughes, Langston, *A Pictorial History of Black Americans* . New York: Crown Publishers, 1973.

An excellent visual aid containing documents, sketches, written description and photographs depicting black history from 1619 to the beginning of the 1970's.

An edited collection: Hughes & Bontemps, eds., *The Poetry of the Negro 1746-1970* , New York, Doubleday & Co., 1970.

A good comprehensive collection of well-known Negro poets.

Kerber & Jett, *The Teaching of Creative Poetry* . New York: The Waldemar Press, 1956.

Good book stressing the connectedness of writing, speaking, and reading.

Koch, Kenneth: *Wishes, Lies and Dreams Teaching Children to Write Poetry* . New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Contains many examples of children's poetry as directed by Koch's motivating activities.

Meier & Rudwick: *From Plantation to Ghetto* . New York: Hill & Wang, 1976.

A Historical account of the Negro movement from Africa to the mid-70's. Many bibliographical suggestions.

Ravenel III, William B.: *English Reference Book* . Charleston Walker, Evans & Cogswell Co., 1974.

Contains grammatical and compositional rules and exercises, a dictionary of literary terms and outlines of study from short stories to

poems.

Rico, Garieluser: *Writing the Natural Way* . New York: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983.

Contains step by step instructions for writing poetry creatively.

Shaughnessy, Mina P.: *Errors and Expectations A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* : Oxford Press, 1979.

Contains various activities for reducing errors in vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and syntax.

Annotated Student Bibliography

A Selected Collection: Breman, Paul, *Sixes and Sevens, An Anthology of New Poetry* , London, Paul Breman Ltd., 1962.

For the more mature student, an excellent depiction of modern day living.

Clifton, Lucille, *The Black B's C's* . New York: E.P. Dulton & Co., 1970.

The book goes through the alphabet telling how various black people have been an important part throughout America's history.

Feelings, Tom *Something on my Mind* . New York: Dial Press, 1978.

An illustrated book with poems about life and love.

Giovanni, Nikki, *Spin A Soft Black Song* . New York: Hill & Wang, 1971.

A beautiful expression of the black experience.

Greenfield, Eloise, *Daydreams* . New York: Dial Press, 1981.

An illustrated book for the younger student.

A Selected Collection: Hopkins, Bennett Lee, *Don't You Turn Back* , New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1969.

A children's book with poetry by Langston Hughes on black pride, dreams & struggles.

A Selected Collection: Hopkins Bennett Lee, *On Our Way Poems of Pride & Love* , New York, Adolf A. Knopf, 1974.

A children's book containing poems on blackness, feelings, remembrances and love.

Jackson, Bruce, *Get Your Ass in the Water & Swim Like Me* . Narrative Poetry from Black Oral Tradition. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Press, 1974.

'Vulgar' Language & some 'taboo' issues are openly discussed. An excellent book for the mature high school student containing insights, explanations and background in oral tradition.

A Selected Collection by: Larrick Nancy, *I Heard A Scream In The Street Poetry By Young People In The City* , New York, M. Evans Co., 1970.

Poetry concerned with living as a poor, young black American.

McKissack, Patricia; *Martin Luther King, Jr., A Man to Remember* . Chicago: Regensteiner Pub., 1984.

An account of Martin L. King's accomplishments—contains pictures.

An edited collection: Weisman & Wright, eds., *Black Poetry for All Americans* , New York, Globe book Co., 1971.

An excellent book comprised of pictures, a vocabulary section & comprehension questions concerning a wide variety of poets and poetry.

Classroom Materials

Movies (16mm)

African Soul Music: Past & Present

Follows African rhythms as a base of current jazz, blues, soul music, and spirituals.

Black & White: Uptight

Discusses the effects of racial prejudice on the black community and the efforts to relieve this tension.

Legacy of A Dream

Struggles of the 50's and 60's, Martin Luther King, and the impact of these events in today's world.

Slave's Story: Running a Thousand Miles color—29 min.

An escaped slave crosses the Mason-Dixon line to freedom. Introduced by great granddaughter.

Albums

Africa Man and Hiss Music , (CBS, 1972)

Run DMC King of Rock , (Profile, 1985)

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