



The Poetry of the Twentieth Century Black American

Guide for Curriculum Unit 86.04.09
by Alicia Anne Koziol

The materials in this unit are devised to meet the needs of the middle-school-age special education student whose abilities range between the fourth and sixth grade levels. The study of Twentieth Century Black American Poetry is introduced in conjunction with the historical events involving the black community. As students become progressively more familiar with terms and concepts used in others' poetry, simultaneously these techniques are incorporated into their own writing. By studying history and poetry together the student can justify not only a poem's content and/or mood, but also the changed "attitudes" in poetry due to a course of events. For special education students this course of study needs to be made concrete to keep them interested.

A number of strategies are used to build the students' independent work skills and creative poetry writing skills. The lesson plans begin with group activities and move towards directives the students follow individually. Audio and visual aids are concrete materials that work well with special education students. Historical time lines, for example, are quick and easy-to-read overviews used to study particular events. Following this with correlated poetry reading, journal writing to explore new ideas, and then clustering a particular idea to expand it leaves the student with sufficient means for creating his own poetry. Picture books and/or films reinforce and act as a base for the tone of the history and therefore for the tone of the poems. Pictures and films are also used as sources for writing reaction poems and art activities, depicting various issues or symbols of the times. Using African rhythms and modern music spark instant creativity in student writing. Following rules such as naming the people, the places or the events in black history that the music best represents and then following this by clustering, modeling and/or journal writing often leads to imaginative written expression. Using these activities along with time lines presented on paper or on overhead projectors are excellent modes of studying Twentieth Century American Poets.

(Recommended for English and Reading classes, grades 4-6)

Key Words

Poetry Afro-American Literature Special Education Reading Instruction Writing Instruction

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