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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1988 Volume III: Autobiography in America

Reading and Writing the Autobiography with a Study of Zora Neale Hurston

Guide for Curriculum Unit 88.03.03
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This unit is written for junior classes. Much of the lesson plan material is geared to the middle or lower groups who need the greatest structure and guidance in learning the process of writing about themselves.

I plan to select certain autobiographical readings for close reading and class discussion. Also in this unit there is a close reading of Hurston's most famous novel, "Their Eyes Were Watching God." (Questions for the chapters are in the appendix of the unit.) Knowing and discussing what has happened in a book is a stage at the heart of this unit. Learning about others means learning more about ourselves.

The lesson plans reflect incidents from the novel to engage students into writing about the novel and writing about themselves. Certain chapters from Hurston's autobiography "Dust Tracks on The Road" are assigned so that the student can understand the combination of fact and fiction present in the novel. Her hometown of Eatonville is the setting of the novel and the story telling on the porch. Her second husband, Joe Starks, is a combination of two men found in her autobiography. Hopefully, the students will begin to connect what we have read to other experiences, and thus have material to write about.

(Recommended for Autobiography, American Literature, and Junior Year classes at the college and basic grade levels)

Key Words

Hurston Zora Neale Autobiography Afro-American Literature Ethnic Reading Instruction

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