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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1989 Volume II: Poetry

Poetry: A Mirror in Which to See Myself

Guide for Curriculum Unit 89.02.08
by Jean Sutherland

Through the use of poetry, this unit attempts to develop a greater understanding of self, along with an increased feeling of self-esteem. It is written with a self-contained fifth grade classroom in mind, but could easily be modified to fit other grade levels. Though specifically designed to meet the needs of a class of mostly Black students, I feel its objectives and strategies are appropriate for any classroom.

The unit contains two general sections which could be integrated or presented independently. One section focuses upon a poetic reinforcement to the study of Black history in America, while the other emphasizes more personal themes such as physical characteristics, emotional needs, and an appreciation of others. There is also some attention paid to understanding the basic elements and techniques of poetry. I base my approach on the conclusion that my pupils lack a clear picture of Black history in America and that achieving a better understanding of that history will open the way to discover a clearer understanding of themselves.

Lessons emphasize pupils reading, interpreting, and relating poetry to themselves and events in history. Vocabulary development, oral reading, and the writing and sharing of their original poetry will also be stressed.

(Recommended for Reading, Language Arts, and Social Studies, self contained grade 5)

Key Words

Poetry History Afro-American Psychology Self-Discovery

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