



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1990 Volume I: The Autobiographical Mode in Latin American Literature

Parallel Studies: The Afro-American and Puerto Rican Experience in America

Guide for Curriculum Unit 90.01.05
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This unit brings together two divergently different cultures: the Afro American and the Puerto Rican. It examines the commonality of experiences in migrating and assimilating in the Northeastern United States, with emphasis on New York because it became the focal point of settlement for both groups.

This unit was written to help students learn about their culture and the culture of others. It has been my observation that only a few teachers teach Puerto Rican students about their culture. More attention is given to the teaching of Black history. Generally most cultural units are taught or presented separately. I feel that while one half of the class maintains interest, the other half turns off because they fail to see any relationship to the other group under study. By instituting a parallel approach that emphasizes similarities and differences, students will gain a more well-rounded curriculum, interest will be maintained, and students will begin to identify with other cultures.

This unit traces the history of the Afro-American from his entry into this country as a slave and proceeds through the twentieth century. This unit traces the history of Puerto Rico from the advent of the Spanish American War, and it examines the history of Puerto Ricans from conquest to becoming a commonwealth. It traces the process of assimilation into the twentieth century. Incorporated in this unit is the economic plight of Blacks and Puerto Ricans before mass migration began, the conditions that influenced them to leave their home, their hopes and dreams of a better life, and the problems encountered once they reached the "promised land." The problems of assimilation will be viewed from three angles: first, from an economic viewpoint; secondly, from a social viewpoint; and finally, it examines the politics of economic autonomy and its effects on economic reformation.

The many subdivisions in this unit allow the teacher the flexibility of extending the unit to include other topics such as: examining the history of work in the United States; or examining prejudice, exclusion, and politics in the structuring of social classes.

This unit is structured for fifth and sixth grade learning disabled students. However, it may be used effectively with students in a regular fifth or sixth grade education program. This unit is designed to be taught over a four to six week period, depending on availability of time and student interest.

(Recommended for History; grades 5-6 learning disabled students; and Social Studies, grades 5-6 regular education)

Key Words

Afro-Americans Race Relations Black Migration South North 1900-1920 History American Puerto Rican New Haven Slavery

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