



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1990 Volume IV: American Family Portraits (Section I)

Portrait of the African-American Family

Guide for Curriculum Unit 90.04.07
by Lystra M. Richardson

This curriculum unit is a literature-based reading and writing program using African-American literature that portrays the evolution of African-American family life from the time Africans first arrived in America. The unit also includes some background information on African life prior to their arrival in America, as well as current popular media portrayal of African-Americans. A whole language approach will be used to integrate all facets of the unit. Throughout the unit students will watch historical videos, read African-American literature, write book reports, write poetry, keep journals, discuss racial issues, critique media portrayal of African-Americans, and write stories on the theme of tolerance.

Cooperative learning is an integral part of this unit. With our culturally divergent student body, many students do not know how to work cooperatively with others—a skill they will need to be successful adults. Students tend to disregard the past. They often see in it no relevance to their lives. They need to develop an appreciation of the past and see value in literary works that can help them understand their present lives better. Students also need to become more skillful in communication, building and maintaining trust, providing leadership, and managing conflict.

The purpose of this unit, then, is three-fold: to help develop racial tolerance, to help minimize the isolation and alienation among students by developing social skills, and to show the relevance of history to their lives. Students will learn to cooperate in their lives while studying how people have or have not cooperated in the past. In so doing, students develop skills such as leadership, ability to communicate better, ability to trust one another and manage conflict, as well as a sense of history and its relevance to their lives.

(Recommended for Language Arts, Social Studies, and Humanities, grades 7-12)

Key Words

Afro-Americans Family Life History Literature

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