



A Cultural Outlook on the History of Black American Families in the Rural South

Curriculum Unit 90.05.08

by Mary Ellen Leahy

The goal of my curriculum unit is to teach my students the history, customs, and folkways of rural black families primarily through the literature of Zora Neale Hurston. I want to familiarize my students with her autobiography as well. She was a strong and self confident black woman and hopefully my students will want to emulate her.

This unit is prepared for sixth grade students at a middle school. I think this unit could be used in any grade level of the middle school.

I plan to teach this unit during the month of February, which is Black History Month. Through this unit, the students will gain knowledge of their ancestors' history in the United States. The students will also gain knowledge of their ancestors' folkways. Through this knowledge and understanding of their heritage, the students' self -steem will be raised. The students will also grow in the consciousness of their race.

Through the reading of Zora Neale Hurston's works, the students will become familiar with the folklore and customs of the rural south, in particular of Eatonville, Florida. Eatonville, Florida was Zora Neale Hurston's birthplace. It was, and still is a pure Negro town. It is a proud and independent self governing black community which fostered Zora's self confidence and self acceptance.

Folktales are stories that give people a means for sharing their culture, history, and values. The southern black culture is rich in the oral tradition of storytelling. Zora Neale Hurston retold in her novels many of the folktales she heard in her youth in Eatonville, Florida. As well as familiarizing the students with black history and folklore, this unit will encourage the students to investigate their own family histories.

This unit is divided into three sections. The first section will outline the history of black Americans in the United States. The second section will discuss the life and works of Zora Neale Hurston. The third section will include activities, sample lesson plans and an annotated bibliography for teachers and students.

Black American History

To understand the southern black family, it is important to first look at its roots. For more than two centuries, the majority of black men and women became slaves in Virginia. After the American Revolution, slavery became entrenched in this country.

A majority of the settlers in this country were farmers. In Virginia, England's first permanent colony in the United States prosperity came only after the settlers learned to raise tobacco. Tobacco was grown most profitably on a large plantation with an adequate supply of cheap labor. Land was plentiful. It was difficult, however, to find cheap labor. The settlers were dissatisfied with Indian laborers. "They began to import 'indentured' servants, most of whom were black. An 'indentured' servant was under contract to work for a period of from five to seven years. The Negroes in Virginia were first treated as indentured servants. Beginning in sixteen hundred forty, however, most of the Negro servants brought into Virginia had no indenture and therefore could not look forward to receiving their freedom after a fixed period." ¹ The farmers realized that Negro slavery would be far more economical than the use of white servants. "There were few legal obstacles to the enslavement of the Negroes: The Virginia legislature was the first to legalize Negro slavery." ²

"By the end of the seventeenth century, there were between twenty and twenty five thousand Negroes in English America . . . The Southern colonies, in which labor shortage was the greatest, had the largest portion of the Negro population. In these colonies, the cultivation of tobacco, rice and indigo made slavery profitable. They were grown on large plantations where slaves could be employed. Because of the warm climate in these colonies, the farmers' expenses for clothing and housing slaves were comparatively small." ³ In the eighteenth century, the Negro population in the Southern colonies grew rapidly. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, slavery in the Southern states took on a new strength. The expansion of the slave system in this period was related to the developments in the cotton industry, which made cotton growing a highly profitable business in the South.

In eighteen hundred seven, Congress passed an act to prohibit African slave trade. After that date, over three hundred slaves were smuggled to the United States from Africa. The great profits gained from this unlawful traffic in human lives were shared by New England ship owners, Middle Atlantic merchants and Southern planters.

Besides the enslavement of the Negroes, there were many abhorrent practices among slaveholders and slave traders. One of these practices was slave breeding. Another was kidnapping. "There were a number of companies specializing in domestic slave trade. Many of these slaves were carried to the lower south aboard ships. Most, however, were placed in 'coffles' (slave gangs) and transported over land. To prevent their escape, the slaves were tied together with ropes and chains. They were often handcuffed and forced to wear padlocked iron collars. At the end of the journey the slaves were put up for sale in a market to which farmers or their agents would come to inspect their new arrivals. Slaves offered for sale were displayed on a raised wooden platform while the trader described their traits and abilities. Planters inspected the human merchandise with care, looking into the slaves' mouths, poking at their muscles, or making them jump up and down to gauge their agility and endurance. Many former slaves narrated accounts describing the humiliation endured at the auction and at the terrors of an unknown future. Many foreign visitors traveling through the slave states describe the tragic, unforgettable scenes of the slave market where human beings were bought and sold as if they were cattle. In such a situation both slaves and masters seemed less than human." ⁴

Most slaves were owned by large farmers. Most white Southerners owned no slaves. Only one slaveowner in ten had as many as twenty slaves. The ten thousand farmers who owned fifty or more slaves represented a very small part of the slaveholding population. The work of the slave depended on whether he was owned by a small farmer or a large plantation owner. On a small plantation or on a farm, a slave was usually given several kinds of work to do. On the large plantations slaves performed only one type of work. These slaves were either house hands or field hands. The majority of slaves did heavy field work. The working conditions varied from

place to place. "Slaves received the worse treatment on the sugar, rice and cotton plantations of the Old South . . . On larger plantations where hired overseers gave direction to the work, slaves were subjected to the harshest discipline."

The slave 'quarters' usually consisted of crude windowless cabins with dirt floors. Overcrowding was the rule rather than the exception. Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist and statesman, thus recalled his youth: 'The men and women on Colonel Lloyd's farm received as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pickled pork, or its equivalent in fish. The pork was often tainted and the fish of poorest quality. With their pork or fish, they had given them one bushel of Indian meal, unbolted (still on the cob) of which . . . fifteen per cent was more fit for pigs than for men. With this one pint of salt was given, and this was the entire monthly allowance for a full grown slave, working constantly in an open field from morning 'til night every day except Sunday . . .

A normal family life was impossible among slaves. Masters did not regard slave marriages as binding. They did not hesitate to break up family members of slaves when a profitable sale of one or more members of a slave-family could be made. The master, rather than the slave father, was the sole authority within the slave cabin. Few slaves know the security of a wholesome family life, a happy childhood, or a serene old age. Slaves too old or too ill to work in the field were given lighter tasks or made to tend the younger slave children. Even as children, the slaves could be given regular tasks to perform . . . Slave owners has almost absolute authority over their slaves . . . Slaves were not allowed to leave the plantations without passes, or to work with whites . . . Slaves were made to obey rules and regulations by punishments, especially whippings, and by threats of being sold. Though laws were passed against killing or crippling of slaves, such cruel acts were not unknown . . . Laws enacted by the Southern state legislatures strengthened the slaveholders power over the slave.. All civil and political rights were denied to the slaves . . . Under the slave codes, it was legal for slaves to be awarded as prizes in raffles, wagered in gambling, offered as security for loans, and transferred as gifts from one person to another. The basic purpose of the slave codes was to protect masters from the slaves by setting up rigid rules governing the slaves' activities. Slaves were required to carry passes and show them on demand to any white man. To prevent rebellion, the codes prohibited slaves from preaching or from assembling in groups except in the presence of whites. It was strictly forbidden to teach slaves to read or write or to give them books or pamphlets . . . All whites were empowered to arrest runaway slaves . . . No Negro, free or slave, could testify against a white person accused of cruelty towards slaves. Under the slave codes, Negroes convicted of crimes received much heavier punishment than white men convicted of the same crime would get under 'white' law." ⁵

Few slaves were content with their lives. Their resentment took many forms, such as, careless work, theft, deliberate destruction of their master's property, or running away. In desperation, some slaves killed their overseer or master, or committed suicide.

There were also free blacks in the South from the seventeenth century. By eighteen hundred sixty, there were about half a million free Negroes. Their existence was a threat to the basic premise of slavery, that Negroes, as a race, were by nature fit for slavery. Free Negroes were always in danger of losing the few freedoms they had. Southern states restricted the movement of free Negroes. Free Negroes were forbidden to assemble, bear arms, or hold church services without a reputable white person present. Free Negroes were forbidden to visit slaves, hold certain jobs, or have a business that would compete with a white man's business. Negroes' children were barred from public schools.

After the Civil War, President Lincoln passed a law that freed all slaves in Washington D. C. Soon after, a law

was passed that freed all runaway slaves. However, Lincoln did not interfere with slavery in states where it legally existed. A couple of years later, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared “all slaves held by owners who were in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”⁶

This law had no immediate effect, however, it did encourage many slaves to run away. Eventually, southern leaders came to accept emancipation. They did not, however, feel any obligation to confer citizenship on the freed men. Negroes were unable to vote or hold office. They passed many laws to keep Negroes “in their place.” New “black codes” were enacted to deny Negroes equal rights.

During the next ten years, from eighteen hundred sixty seven to eighteen hundred seventy seven, many laws were passed that gave Negroes equal rights. Beginning in eighteen hundred eighty seven and continuing throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, most of the Negroes’ gains in terms of equal rights had been lost. This was an era of racial discrimination, injustice and brutality.

In the early nineteenth century, racial segregation became firmly established. The federal government failed to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution and in doing so failed to protect the civil rights of the Negro. This enabled Southern whites to keep black voters from the polls. Under all white Democratic rule, the South drew a curtain of silence around the Negro question. “Southern writers and reporters promoted an image of the South as a land of charm and chivalry, of magnolia blossoms, white lace and mint juleps. Their description of happy childlike Negroes being cared for by generous and heroic whites hid the harsh realities of a South bent on keeping Negroes in subjugation.”⁷ Southern whites kept education of Negroes minimal. They were concerned that improved education would increase the number of Negro voters. Slavery was replaced by tenant farmers and sharecropping.

The Negroes’ loss of political rights permitted whites to assume almost complete control over the “southern way of life.”⁸ “White supremacy was constantly being defended in terms of the supposed inferiority of Negroes. This widely held racist view had prepared the South, if not the entire nation, to accept the curbs placed on Negro voting and office holding: it was next used to justify strict segregation of the races in almost all public places. ‘Jim Crow,’ or segregation laws were enacted to legalize and perpetuate this pattern throughout the southern states . . . A wall of segregation soon confined Negroes to separate hospitals, separate schools, separate neighborhoods, separate train and theater accommodations, separate restrooms and drinking fountains, and separate cemeteries. These measures actually encouraged lawlessness against Negroes. ‘The Jim Crow Laws’ put the authority of the state or city in the voice of the street car conductor, the railway brakeman, the bus driver, the theater usher, and also in the voice of the hoodlum of the public park and playground. They gave free reign and the majesty to mass aggressions that might otherwise have been curbed. In eighteen hundred ninety six in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson, the United States Supreme Court gave its consent to the system of strict racial segregation. Homer A. Plessy, a Negro, challenged a Louisiana law requiring railroads to provide ‘equal but separate accommodations’ for whites and Negroes. The Court, following an earlier Massachusetts case, upheld Louisiana’s statute and approved the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine. By this decision, the ‘Jim Crow’ system gained constitutional support not only with respect to travel but in all areas of public life.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the vast majority of Negroes continued to live in the South and to earn their living as farmers. Although a few Negroes were able to purchase land, most Negro farmers lacked the capital to buy land and tools. The typical rural Negro was therefore a landless tenant or sharecropper. High rentals and interest rates worsened the plight of these farm workers. Poverty and the loss

of political rights made farm life in the South increasingly unattractive to many Negroes. As a result, they began to migrate from the rural to the urban south.”⁹ This has been the plight of black Americans throughout the history of the United States.

Zora Neale Hurston

At the turn of the century, one of the most renowned black authors of our time, Zora Neale Hurston, was born in Eatonville, Florida.

Eatonville, Florida was the first incorporated Negro community in America. It was, and still is, a pure Negro town. “It was the first Negro town to attempt self government on the part of Negroes in American. The mayor, town council and entire population was made up of Negroes.”¹⁰

The history of the founding of Eatonville is very interesting. The founding fathers of this town were three officers in the Union Army, Captain Eaton, Captain Lawrence, and another officer. After the Civil War, these three men decided to leave this country and settle in South America. During the course of their sea voyage, the three officers decided against settling in South America. They changed course and returned to the United States and settled, instead in Florida.

There were, at that time, Negroes who had been brought to Florida by the Seminole and the Cherokee Indians. The Seminole Indians, along with the Cherokee Indians, had raided the plantations in Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina and stolen the Negro slaves. The Indians brought the slaves to Florida. The Negroes were used by the Indians as warriors in the Indians’ battles against the white plantation owners. Through the years, the Indians and the plantation owners negotiated most of their differences. One point remained unsettled. That was the return of the stolen Negro slaves. After many years passed most of the Cherokee Indians and some of the Seminole Indians, along with most of the escaped slaves moved west. Most of the Seminole Indians and some of the escaped slaves remained in Florida. Many of the Seminole Indians and Negroes lived in Central Florida in Seminole County, just west of Orlando, Florida.

When Captain Eaton and the other two officers landed in Florida, they found the land in central Florida particularly inviting and suitable for development. They began to develop the land surrounding Lake Maitland. Today this land is a picturesque town called Maitland. It is on the outskirts of Orlando, Florida bordering Seminole County. The Negroes who had remained in Central Florida were used by the new settlers to clear the lands surrounding Lake Maitland. A black community, where the workers lived sprung up beside Maitland.

When Maitland was developed and had grown into a beautiful and wealthy town, a government was elected. Because the founders of Maitland had been officers in the Civil War and were committed to the freedom of Negroes, they did not even dream of excluding Negroes from participating in the election of town officials. The black candidate for mayor of Maitland, Tony Taylor, was elected the first mayor. Another black man, Joe Clarke, was elected town marshal.

Joe Clarke had a vision of an all black town. He discussed his idea with Captain Eaton and Captain Lawrence, who liked the idea. One year after their discussions, Captain Lawrence and Captain Eaton bought a tract of land adjacent to the west side of Maitland. Captain Lawrence built a church for the new town and Captain Eaton built a hall for the general assembly. In August of eighteen hundred eight six, the Negro town, called Eatonville after Captain Eaton, received its charter of incorporation from the state capital, Tallahassee, Florida.

Zora Neale Hurston grew up in this community of Negroes who had enormous respect for themselves and for

their ability to govern themselves. Her own father had written some of the Eatonville town laws. "This community affirmed Zora Hurston's right to exist and loved her as an extension of itself." ¹¹

Zora Neale Hurston was a woman who believed in herself. She wrote and spoke her own mind. A series of misfortunes befell her health and throughout her lifetime. She was married twice. She died penniless in nineteen hundred sixty. "Zora Neale Hurston, Billy Holiday and Bessie Smith form a sort of unholy trinity. There were extreme highs and lows in her life. Like Billy Holiday and Bessie Smith, she followed her own road, believed in her own gods and pursued her own dreams and refused to separate herself from 'common people'."

Her first article, "Drenched in Light" was published in New York City's National Urban League magazine, "Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life." It is the story of a day in the life of Issie Watts, a little girl from Eatonville, Florida who likes to race up and down the road to Orlando greeting travelers. As a result, everyone knows Issie. Eventually she was given a ride by a passing white traveler. "Issie's white benefactor ends the story by saying, 'I want a little of her sunshine to sink into my soul—I need it.' The point of the story is that Issie, poor and black, is far from tragic, she is "drenched in light," a condition which endears her to everyone, although it presents her grandmother with a discipline problem." ¹³ In May, nineteen hundred twenty eight, another of her autobiographical stories, "How It Feels To Be a Colored Me" was published in "World Tomorrow". She said, "I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow damned up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes . . . I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature has somehow given them a lowdown dirty deal." In this article she addresses white paternalism and black self pity. It is a belligerent, combative statement of independence. It portrays the value of an Eatonville memory." ¹⁴

Zora Neale Hurston lived in Eatonville, Florida till she was nine years old. Her mother died when she was nine. Shortly after, her father remarried and she was sent to school in Jacksonville, Florida. As a teenager, she became a wardrobe girl in a Gilbert and Sullivan theater repertory company touring the south. This position lasted eighteen months. In nineteen hundred seventeen she was admitted to Morgan Academy, a high school in Baltimore, Maryland. After graduating from high school, she attended Howard University in Washington D. C. as an English major and earned an Associates Degree in nineteen hundred twenty. In nineteen hundred twenty five, she moved to New York City to pursue her career as a writer. She attended Barnard College at Columbia University on a scholarship. Writing was her major interest when she entered Barnard, however, she became fascinated with anthropology while she was a student at Barnard College. She left Barnard as a serious social scientist. "She acquired the relatively rare opportunity to confront her culture both emotionally and analytically both as a subject and an object. She had lived in Afro-American culture: before she knew that such a thing existed as a scientific concept or had special value as evidence of the adaptive creativity of a unique subculture. Hurston come to know that her parents and their neighbors perpetuated rich oral literature without self consciousness, a literature illustrating a creativity seldom recognized and often misunderstood . . . Zora Hurston was an extraordinary woman, and she acquired an instant reputation in New York City for her high spirit and side splitting tales of Eatonville life . . . She was a perfect mimic, and she displayed a wide range of storytelling techniques learned from the masters of Joe Clarke's store porch." ¹⁵ Joe Clarke was the owner of the general store in Eatonville, Florida where the men of the community would gather and tell stories, or "lies."

Zora Neale Hurston also familiarizes her readers with the traditional superstitions in her black subculture. Some of these are very interesting. Zora Hurston wrote about the superstitions surrounding death that she experienced when her mother died. "Near death Lucy (her mother) called Zora into the room and gave her solemn instructions that no one was to take a pillow from under her head as she was dying, and neither the

clock nor the looking glass in the room was to be covered with cloth . . . Eatonville, like many other rural communities, believed that a person's dying hard was a bad sign, since the spirit might haunt the survivors; everything must be done to alleviate suffering. It was understood that a pillow under one's head prolonged the dying, and that the looking glass should be covered because a reflection of the corpse might attach itself to the mirror . One covered the clock because it would be forever ruined if it was functioning when time ran out and the spirit looked upon the clock's face." ¹⁶

Zora Hurston also wrote about hoodoo and conjure. Hoodoo and conjure are the traditional beliefs in black culture in the power of a hoodoo doctor or the power of roots to alter situations with magical powers. "At its most basic level it is sympathetic magic; at its most complex, a highly complicated religion. Many scholars believe that some practices are of African origin. Conjure has historically provided an access to power for a powerless people, and many of its traditions are ancient . . . One resorts to hoodoo for many things, most commonly the healing of various ailments, especially when the patient believes that science can not help and that an enemy is responsible for the illness by placing a hex. Other common supplications are for resolving tangled love affairs and insuring favorable legal decisions; occasionally, the hoodoo doctor is asked to cause the death of an enemy. Synonymous terms are conjure, gopher, tricking, hexing, and fixing. A 'hand' or 'mojo' is a magic charm that wards off a hex. Supernatural effects are produced in a variety of ways, depending on the power of the practitioner, and formulas are myriad: an egg in a murdered man's hand causes the murderer to wander around the death scene; nine needles, each broken into three pieces, can help break up a love affair, a special hot-foot powder sprinkled under a doorstep will cause an enemy to leave the vicinity. Although many hoodoo people are also 'root doctors, some root workers have nothing to do with hoodoo. Root doctors have received the traditional legacy of Afro-American folk medicine that identifies certain roots as capable of curing certain diseases, and root work in its strictest interpretation is fundamentally different from hoodoo or conjuring, although they are often intermingled. A root doctor's prescription for a venereal disease might be a concoction of blackberry root, sheep weed, bluing, and laundry soap; no incantation endows the medicine with its healing effects. Roots are intended to have a specific medicinal function; hoodoo is sympathetic magic used to alter psychic and physical conditions . . . Hurston saw very soon that this complex of beliefs was a serious religious practice that has only a distant connection with notions of superstition. Modern interest in psychic phenomena has confirmed her feeling that the power of this belief could produce events unexplainable by rational means. An index of the faith's efficacy was the tenacity of its believers: 'Nobody knows for sure how many thousands in America are warmed by the fire of hoodoo, because the worship is bound in secrecy. It is not accepted theology of the Nation and so believers conceal their faith.'" ¹⁷

Zora Neale Hurston's first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* was published in nineteen hundred thirty four. While writing this book, Zora had no means of support. She lived in a one room house in Sanford, Florida. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is an autobiographical novel. It is a fictionalization of her parents' marriage. The main characters are John, her father, and Lucy, her mother. The plot takes John from life on an Alabama plantation to life as a minister in Eatonville, Florida. John was a Baptist minister who had a weakness for other women. Eventually, his congregation rejected him and he met his demise. Zora's novel is a very humanistic portrait of her father. John is not all good and not all bad.

Jonah's Gourd Vine also gives a very real picture of the folkways of Eatonville, Florida. A statement of one's independence is "Ahm three times seven and uh button." At parting, 'See yuh later, tell yuh straighter.' At the birth of a child's 'nable string' is buried under a chinaberry tree. A game of 'Hide and Seek' is accompanied by a standard rhyme, probably from jump rope chants:

'Ah got up 'bout half-past fo'

Forty fo' robbers wuz' round my do'

Ah got up and let 'em in

Hit 'em over de head wid uh rollin' pin

All hid? All hid?'

In critical speeches of the novel, characters express themselves in the traditional metaphors of the culture. An enemy of Lucy's announces, 'Ah means tuh beat her 'til she rope lak okra, and den again. Ah'll stomp her 'til she slack lak lime'." ¹⁸

The next novel Zora Hurston wrote was *Mules and Men* . It was published in nineteen hundred thirty five. It is a book of seventy folk tales. *Mules and Men* begins with old time folktales of Eatonville, Florida and ends with hoodoo and conjure stories of New Orleans, Louisiana. The title of the book has a twofold meaning. "The phrase meant not only that black people were treated as mules, but also that they were defiantly human—mules and men. It is a valuable picture of life of the unsophisticated Negro in small towns and backwoods. In the preface of this novel, Zora Neale Hurston promises the reader access to the interior of the black mind. After she left Eatonville she was able to step back and look at Brer Rabbit and other folktales as exciting local color fiction. *Mules and Men* really refers to an idealized Eatonville of Zora Hurston's childhood."

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Her next novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* , was published in nineteen hundred thirty seven. This novel is a love story. The main character of the story, Janie Crawford, was raised by her grandmother to marry for wealth and to be spared the fate of most black women as beasts of burden. She married a wealthy man, but the marriage proved loveless. She divorced and married a wealthy politician who considered Janie to be his subordinate. She publicly questioned his manhood, shortly after which, he died. She then falls in love with a younger man named Vergible "Tea Cakes" Woods, a free spirited laborer. Their love was strong enough to make both parties open and giving. They traveled together from job to job. When they were working together in the bean fields of Lake Okeechobee they narrowly escaped a hurricane. Shortly afterwards, Tea Cakes is bitten by a rabid dog and contracts rabies. He becomes delirious and tries to shoot Janie. Janie shoots and kills him in self defense. She is brought to trial and is acquitted by a white jury. The basic theme of this novel is that of a black woman's liberation from degradation.

Zora Hurston's next novel, *Tell My Horse* , was published in nineteen hundred thirty eight. She had intended this book to be a study of voodoo. She was granted a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation to pursue the study of voodoo. She went to Haiti to study the ritual of the gods. Haitian friends warned her of the dangers of studying the rituals of Petro (good) gods rather than the Rada (evil) gods. She did not take these warnings seriously. Months later she became violently ill and returned to the United States. Zora was convinced that her illness and her voodoo studies were related. She ceased her research. *Tell My Horse* , in its completion, was a book of West Indian customs with some voodoo sections. This book did not sell well.

Zora Hurston's next novel, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* was published in nineteen hundred thirty nine. In this book Zora claims that Moses was an African, specifically an Egyptian. Moses appears wherever Africans have been oppressed or enslaved. Moses is a powerful and mystical man. In *Moses, Man of the Mountain* Zora made an analogy between biblical history and black American history. The major theme of this book is emancipation. Like in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* when she humanized her father, in this book, she humanizes Moses. She reinforces his human qualities, such as, an impulsive temper, boastful righteousness, a shrewd political

consciousness and exasperation over the ingratitude of the people he saved.

Hurston's next book, *Dust Tracks on a Road* was published in nineteen hundred forty two. This is Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography. The focal point of her book is Joe Clarke's Eatonville general store with its storefront talkers. The book begins with Zora as she enters adulthood. She reminisces about her childhood in Eatonville. The book encompasses her loves, her religion, and her friendships. The chief value of this book is its documentation of Eatonville's way of life.

Hurston's last novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, was published in nineteen hundred forty eight. It is a story of southern whites, otherwise known as "Florida crackers." The novel's main character is a woman named Arvay Hensen Meserve. She is a woman whose life is defined by her marriage to Jim. The couple's first son, Earl, is retarded. Earl's father, Jim, rejects him. Arvay protects Earl. As a teenager, Earl attempts to kill his father and is shot and killed in this attempt. After Earl's death Arvay withdraws from the family. Eventually, she tries to find security in the mothering of her two other children. However, they are grown and no longer need her. The novel ends with a middle aged Jim and Arvay. Arvay has realized that Jim, too, needs her mothering love.

Late in nineteen hundred forty eight, Zora Hurston was falsely charged and arrested for sodomizing a ten year old boy in New York City. The boy was the son of a woman she had rented a room from in the winter of the previous year. The boy was found to be disturbed and the accusations were proved false. The charges were dropped. Zora's arrest was reported in the newspapers. She was ravaged by this ordeal. This was the beginning of the end for Zora Neale Hurston. The remainder of her life was a sad series of erratic acts, irrational wanderings and personal incompetence. She lived the remainder of her life in Eau Gallie, Florida. She survived on welfare payments, unemployment compensation and substitute teaching. She spent the last months of her life in a county poor house. She died in nineteen hundred sixty. She is buried in a segregated cemetery in Fort Pierce, Florida.

I think that Zora Neale Hurston is a fine example of black womanhood for the youth of today. She was confident, courageous, strong, independent and fun loving. She was dedicated to showing the literate world the culture and folkways of her hometown, Eatonville, Florida. She helped her readers to learn about and to appreciate black culture.

Lesson Plans

Lesson 1

Objective

1. Students will become familiar with folktales written by Zora Neale Hurston in *Mules and Men* .
2. Students will gain a sense of pride and appreciation of their black heritage.

Material Hurston, Zora Neale. Mules and Men . Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1934.

Procedure

1. Students will read three folktales of their choice from Hurston's book *Mules and Men* .
2. Students will write a brief summary of each folktale they have read. This summary will include:
 - a. title of folktale
 - b. main characters in each folktale
 - c. theme of each folktale

Lesson 2

Objective

1. Students will gain knowledge of Zora Neale Hurston's life.
2. Students will gain an appreciation of black culture and folklore of the south, and in particular, of Eatonville, Florida.

Material

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Dust Tracks on a Road* . Philadelphia; J. B. Lippincott, 1942.

Procedure

1. Students will read Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* . (Allow twenty minutes per day for silent reading of the book. Following the reading period, allow ten minutes per day for class discussion of the book.)
2. Students will write a book report on *Dust Tracks on a Road* .
3. Students will form small groups of approximately six students each. Each group will choose a chapter or story from *Dust Tracks on a Road* and produce a short play to be performed for the class.

Lesson 3

Objective

1. Students will raise their self esteem.
2. Students will grow in the knowledge of their family history .
3. Students will create a living family history.

Procedure

1. Students will interview family members to gain knowledge of their family history.
2. Students will collect past and present photographs of their family.
3. Students will make a booklet of their family history which will include:
 - a. a family tree
 - b. family photographs
 - c. a written family history
 - d. stories and “sayings” passed down through the generations in their family.

Lesson 4

Objective

1. Students will gain an appreciation of Zora Neale Hurston’s “Collection of Harlem Slang.”
2. Students will compare present day slang with that of the past.

Material

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Spunk, The Selected Stories of Zora Neale Hurston* . California: Turtle Island Foundation, 1985.

Procedure .

1. Students will read “Glossary of Harlem Slang” found on page eighty two of *Spunk, the Selected Short Stories of Zora Neale Hurston* .
2. Students will each choose three words from the glossary. Students will each quiz classmates on the three slang terms that they have chosen.
3. Students will make a list of twenty five slang words from “Glossary of Harlem Slang”. Students will list slang term, definition, and present day slang term, or terms, that have the same meaning as Harlem slang term.

Notes

1. Cohen, Irving, Hogan, Raynard, *The American Negro* , Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970. p. 42.
2. *The American Negro* . p. 43.
3. *The American Negro* . p. 44.
4. *The American Negro* . p. 71.
5. *The American Negro* . p. 73.
6. *The American Negro* . p. 93.
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