



American Families: Portraits of African-American Families

Curriculum Unit 90.05.09
by Frances Pierce

Introduction

Understanding and appreciating the African-American culture as a part of this great American “melting pot”. is one of the primary objectives of this unit. In order to understand and appreciate the black culture, students must learn about their ancient, beautiful and significant traditions. Learning about the black heritage, through the study of literature, will enhance the self-image and pride of the African-American students, and will help all students to correct misconceptions, increase the ability to relate to others of the global community’ and especially to better understand and appreciate their own family values and traditions.

The majority of my inner city self-contained sixth grade class is of African heritage. They, as all youth need and benefit from literary experiences that develop self awareness as individuals and awareness of being a member of a larger American family. Therefore, I have designed a unit to be used on a daily basis to supplement the language arts and social studies curricula during Black History month. This unit will focus on the study of the family, specifically the African-American family’ through a historical perspective, focusing on a variety of selections of literature that emphasize African-American family relationships.

Unit Objectives

The student will:

1. Develop a greater understanding and appreciation for their families
2. Increase personal self-esteem and pride as a result of studying about families through literature
3. Understand the importance of family values and traditions
4. Improve basic reading, vocabulary, and writing skills
5. Improve critical thinking skills
6. Understand and appreciate African-American literature oral tradition, poetry and novels
7. Practice the use of such study skills as note taking, interviewing and conducting research
8. Improve classroom interaction skills by working on group projects and participating in classroom discussions
9. Learn about recommended literature such as the Newberry Award winning books

10. Gain a factual historical perspective on the African-American culture

Activities and Strategies

Some of the activities and strategies to aid the students in accomplishing the objectives related to the study of the family through African-American literature are:

1. Reading selected literature
2. Viewing selected television programs and videos
3. Listening to commercial and student-made videos
4. Conducting research on slavery-related topics
5. Interviewing older family members
6. Taking notes as related to the interviewing and doing research
7. Maintaining personal diaries/journals
8. Participating in a variety of creativity oriented activities such as dramatizing, dialoguing, role playing, poetry writing and illustrating creative efforts through art projects
9. Completing individual and group projects such as constructing a family tree, writing a class history, and making a class book of poems or tales
10. Going on field trips

Finally, as a culmination to the study and in celebration of Black History month, the students will invite their parents to the classroom. The students will share the study of the family with their parents through displays and explanations of their projects and activities.

What is a Family?

Families are as different as the individuals that make up the families. On the other hand, families are as alike as are the human beings that make up the families. The purpose of the study of families is to explore likeness and differences in families and to discuss how families change as individuals change.

Through the study of the American family from different perspectives, my major goal is to enable the students to think critically about themselves, their family, their world; and to realize that each family is unique in its own right and is forever changing with time and circumstances; to realize that responsibilities come with the privilege of being a member of that special group called a family.

Through participation in varied activities, each student will develop a greater awareness and appreciation of the family as a basic unit of society. Within the family individuals assume personal roles. The interrelationships of those roles and the effectiveness of the portrayal of those roles affect the functioning of the family, either positively or negatively. This concept of interrelatedness leads to the study of ancestral heritage, development of family values, causes and effects of crises and how to maintain personal identity while being a member of a family.

Some activities for the week study in addition to reading selected books are:

1. Comparing television family life shows to real family situations
2. Interviewing family members
3. Constructing a family tree
4. Maintaining a log of family experiences
5. Describing special family members or situations
6. Role playing family life situations
7. Writing creative stories about family life
8. Discussing family problems in a small group
9. Constructing a family scrapbook
10. Comparing and contrasting living in a family to living in the classroom
11. Formulating rules for families in small groups
12. Predicting how family life will be one hundred years from now
13. Comparing family life today to family life one hundred years ago
14. Reading and researching family life around the world
15. Collecting family-related poetry and stories.

Why Study Literature?

It is my hope that through the study of family related literature the students will consider past and present personal family experiences and their reactions to those experiences. As a result, they will gain insights into their feelings, actions and value system. With this increased awareness of self and greater understanding of others, hopefully will come a greater sense of responsibility to self and to others. The intent of this unit is to serve as a stepping stone to helping students answer such questions as who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?

The literature selections will serve as springboards for discussion. Through reading and discussion, the students will compare and contrast characters and situations to their own lives. This approach, hopefully, will offer clarification, encouragement, and knowledge that will aid the students in dealing with the emotional aspects of their conditions of living. Literature can speak to their needs if it is carefully selected and presented. First, the selection must be of interest; then relate to them personally. Finally, the students must be able to articulate their ideas as they relate to the literature. So the techniques used by the teacher are of ultimate importance. For example, the questions that spark the discussion must be given careful consideration to ensure involved participation.

My basic approach to teaching the literature is to first to read, analyze, discuss and evaluate. However, in this unit, we will watch movies of *Souder* and *The Autobiography on Miss Jane Pittman* before reading. The reason for seeing the movies before reading is for the purpose of motivation. Since many of my students are reluctant readers, the movies create an interest in reading the books. From past experience, I have found this approach works well with the students. After viewing the movies, we will analyze and discuss some of the related basic philosophic concepts as these relate to the lives of the students. Then the students will study the books to examine vocabulary, literary devices, comprehension and other skill-related activities.

This unit precludes in-depth structural analyses of all the writings. Students will consider such literary devices as point of view, symbolism and setting. For example, when characterization is of importance in a selection, characterization will be studied. This literary device might be overlooked in the next lesson because the chosen lesson might lend itself better to the study of some other aspect of literary devices. The study of literary device will be used mainly as a means for interpretation of meaning for discussion and extended activities.

Historical Perspective

Prior to studying the African-American literature selections, the students will study a factual historical perspective of the African-Americans. The factual accounts will provide insight into the culture of a people who were brought to this country in bondage and forced into servitude.

It is important that students understand that of all the people who make up the great “mixed salad” of this nation, the African-Americans were the only group to arrive here in chains. This factor alone makes the African-American culture unique. Not only did they come involuntarily, but they were denied opportunities to learn the new language and customs. To further their isolation, they were denied the right to speak their native language and to practice their native customs and traditions. The denial of practicing the customs and speaking the native language was just the opposite for other immigrants.

Other immigrants came here voluntarily in hope of finding a better life and were not forced to abandon their customs. This profusion of differences among immigrants created a singularity or bond that contributed to

making this nation great. It was different for African-American because they were totally disenfranchised, stripped of freedom, rights and dignity.

European slave merchants who first arrived in Africa in the 17th Century eventually brought a total of approximately fifteen million slaves to the New World Colonies in Central and South America, West Indies, and finally to North America.

In 1619 the Colonists in Jamestown, Virginia purchased 20 African-Americans as indentured servants. Then Virginia began importing slaves at a rate of about 1,000 a year. By that time slavery had spread throughout the colonies.

Slavery continued to grow despite opposition and conflict. The Civil War, lasting from 1861-1865, was sparked by bitter controversy about the future of slavery. This war that claimed more lives than any armed conflict in American history centered around State's rights to extend slavery into newly acquired territories.

The Emancipations Proclamation, issued by Abraham Lincoln in 1862, stated that all slaves were free. This Proclamation marked the beginning rather than the ending for the black struggle for freedom. From the late 1800's to the 1960's, black people were treated as second class citizens.

Due to custom and a body of laws referred to as the Jim Crow laws, blacks were robbed of their civil rights. Since white lawmakers, especially in the South, believed in firm control of the blacks, there was no legal recourse for them.

For a short time after the Civil War, the blacks enjoyed a degree of freedom. They established their own schools and began participating in government. It was not long until the white supremacists regained control. Groups such as the Klu Klux Klan began to flourish. Many blacks were terrorized or killed if they attempted to gain economic independence or to assert themselves in any way. There was no justice for blacks in the southern courts. Many people were imprisoned or sentenced to hard labor for minor charges.

Legally, black citizens in the South were no longer slaves. But, they were forced to live in oppression that was really no better than slavery. They were forced to become sharecroppers on land of a former master. The payments for using the land were usually so large that it was virtually impossible to purchase land of their own. Then laws were created to prevent participation in government for those who did not own land. So the conditions led to segregation in living conditions, in churches, in schools, and in all aspects of public life.

A Federal government, now eager to repair the damages to a country split apart by the war ignored the plight of the blacks. With no political or economic base, and subject to the terror of the white supremacists, the blacks remained for nearly a century barely better off than they were before the War. Then in the 1950's changes began to improve the lot of the blacks. The historic moment came when the Civil Rights bill was signed in 1964, almost one century after Lincoln declared freedom for the slaves in the Emancipation Proclamation.

Also, the students will do research and present oral and written reports on topics such as slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Civil Rights. They will look at such important related historical documents as the Emancipation Proclamation and the United States Constitution, and the related amendments. Through research and study of the factual accounts of African-American heritage, the students will gain insights that will provide basic understandings for and increased appreciation of the study of African-American family-related literature.

Oral Literature

The tradition of oral literature is an integral feature of African-American literature. The oral tradition takes us back to the beginning of people's lives, their hopes and dreams and defeats.

The story of the African-American begins not on this continent but on another. Africa, almost 5,000 miles away, a vast land mass of 12 million square miles, a highly diverse population that spoke more than 250 languages. Most of the African-Americans were brought to this country against their will. These people were torn from their individual cultures, forcibly suppressed from speaking their own language, compelled to speak American English, yet forbidden to read or write it. Out of the contacts the slaves made in the new world came a variety of expressions, songs and tales about their experiences that passed from generation to generation in the oral tradition.

Religion was an important aspect of the lives of these people who were forced to serve as slaves to white masters. In essence, African-American religion blended Christianity with the faith indigenous to West Africa. This hybrid creed taught that the law of God was superior to the law of man and thus gave the slaves spiritual independence from the whites who controlled their lives.

Before the Civil War most black literature was oral: poems, songs, and tales produced by slave to help them cope with plantation life. In their oppressive atmosphere songs like "Go Down Moses" or "Steal Away to Jesus" might have signaled that a secret meeting was to be held in a graveyard or swamp. Often their simple sounding songs masked complex and revolutionary meetings. The black genius for the singing word goes back hundreds of years.

In 1880, Joel Chandler Harris collected some of this oral literature in *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*. These tales expressed the slaves' own aspirations for a better life by describing how small seemingly weak creatures, representative of the slaves defeat the larger beasts, the hated slave owners. The most popular stories centered around either the adventures of the small but sly Brer Rabbit or the triumph of a slave named John or Jack, who always outwitted his daft white masters. Three beautifully illustrated adaptations of the Uncle Remus tales are truly an enjoyable experience. The adaptations by Van Dyke Parks are *Jump*, *Jump Again*, and *Jump on Over!*.

One of the very best contemporary collections of literature in the oral tradition is *The People Could Fly* by Virginia Hamilton. It's a beautifully illustrated collection of old tales that has been handed down through generations. Virginia Hamilton's grandfather, Perry, was a slave who escaped bondage. She grew up in Yellow Springs, Ohio, which was at one time one of the strongest stations of the Underground Railroad. This slave ancestry enhances the authentic, cultural perspective of this prolific writer.

In this study of oral literature, the students will hear and read folk tales from *The People Could Fly* and the *Jump* trilogy, share stories that have been passed down in their families, create folk tales and read other selected tales. In the reading and discussions the students will note the use of dialect and colloquial expression and try to interpret the use of symbolism.

One special project that will be assigned is to interview older relatives using selected interviewing questions and to record the responses on audio cassettes. Before the students attempt this project the students would formulate the questions in a brainstorming session. At this time, they will discuss procedures and techniques for interviewing. As a part of this preparation the class will view the movie, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. This movie illustrates the technique of interviewing, in addition to giving an account of an older

person recounting her memories of growing up as a slave. After the students have collected their stories, they will pursue other related creative efforts such as dramatizing, role playing, or illustrating of these oral accounts.

Poetry

To develop an understanding and appreciation of African-American literature, the students must first study the oral tradition of literature because this is the beginning of their literature. Much of the oral literature was later published in the form of poetry. Jupiter Harmon’s writing around 1750 marked the beginning of the first efforts of African-American literary emergence into the European movement. The extension from the oral tradition to the published did not come easily because of the opportunities denied African-American writers. Paul Lawrence Dunbar was one widely read writer who published the oral literature form. Many of his poems, both dialect and non dialect, depict a warm loving relationship with parents. *The Complete Poems of Paul Lawrence Dunbar* is an excellent collection of his poetry. These short poems, many of which are humorous, offer pleasurable reading and illustrate the use of literary devices such as: rhyme, repetition, simile, metaphor, imagery, consonance, and assonance.

The students would briefly review the short definitions of some of the literary devices that is used in poetry. If a selected poem illustrates a poetic device, the students would look at it. But the poetry will be read and heard primarily for enjoyment, not for in-depth study of the use of literary devices.

The students will review the following terms and note examples of the use of:

rhyme—repetition of a sound in words at the end of lines

repetition—repeated use of words or groups of words

simile—comparison of things or persons, using the words as and like

metaphor—a comparison that states how a thing or person is like another

consonance —frequent use of the same consonant sound

assonance—frequent use of the same vowel sound

alliteration—repeated use of the same initial sound in several words within the poem

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Claude McKay, Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Gwendolyn Brooks are some of the most prolific African-American poets. *Black Out Loud* , *I am the Darker Brother* , *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* , *Golden Slippers* , *A Dream Keeper* , *Listen Children* , and *Little Brown Baby* are some of the collections and anthologies available in most middle school libraries.

In the study of poetry, the students will hear and read a variety of family-related poems such as “Mother to the Son”, “My People”, and “Brothers” by Langston Hughes, “Mothers” by William Dunbar, and “My Pa was Never a Slave” by Phyllis Wheatley. The students would the select favorite poems for “My Own Collection of

Favorite Family Poems". The students would practice reading and recording favorite poetry. After classroom reading and discussion they will participate in selected writing activities such as comparing and contrasting, imitating the style, answering questions, and composing original poetry. Finally, they would participate in such creative expression opportunities as illustrating, dramatizing, and role playing.

African-American Family-Related Literature

The Newberry Award, sponsored by the American Library Association, is the highest acclaim that a book can be awarded. For more than fifty years, a book has been chosen annually for its excellence in children's literature. Other regional and national book awards come and go dependent on the fates of book sellers and critics. But the permanence and stature of the American Library Association invests the Newberry Medals with continuing prestige.

Three other Newberry Award winning books that tell of the plight of the blacks are: *Roll of Thunder , Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor, tells of the Logan family facing pressure and prejudice while living in Mississippi during the Great Depression. *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* is a sequel to this book told through Cassie Logan, a nine year old girl who learned about prejudice and how her family was forced to deal with it amidst poverty in the desolate South.

The 1973 Newberry Award winning book was *Slave Dancer* by Paula Fox. She gives a view of slavery as seen through the eyes of a young boy who was forced to make music and dance after being entrapped on a ship for transporting human cargo destined for slavery.

Virginia Hamilton, a prolific writer of African-American family related fiction won the Newberry Award for *M. C. Higgins. the Great* in 1975. In this book, past and present daydreams and reality meet in conflict as M.C. comes to terms with his family heritage and his own desires.

The Planet of Junior Brown , Arilla , and Zeely are three of Virginia Hamilton's books that deal with the identity crises facing youngsters in minority families. *Her House of Dries Drear* and the sequel, *The Mystery of the Drear House* tell of the history and legend that surround the house of the Small family that once was an Underground Railroad Station.

After reading many African-American family-related selections, the Newberry Award winning book *Sounder* was selected for middle school students. It was difficult to make selections because of the great profusion of African-American literature with a family-related theme. *Sounder* was selected because of the theme, universal appeal and primarily because of its excellence as recognized by being selected as the 1970 Newberry Award winning book.

Sounder: A Synopsis

Sounder , translated into eight languages is a tragic story about a black sharecropper and his family who live in the rural South in the 1930's.

In an indirect way, *Sounder* , is a good example of the oral tradition of literature. It is a story that was told to the author, in his childhood, by a black man who taught in a one room school.

Despite the harshness of their lives, the family feels a great closeness and warmth. The title comes from the name of the family hunting dog, but it is symbolic of the themes that the book presents. *Sounder* is not only the family hunting dog but also the family pet and best friend of the boy.

In the haunting sparse prose the characters are never given names. This approach puts such a focus on the boy, the father, and the mother, that it causes their suffering, staunchness, and their stubborn standing-up to injustices to take on a universal quality. The novel tells of their bleak exhaustive life as sharecroppers, white brutality, the long search by the boy for his father who was sentenced to a chain gang for stealing food for his starving family. Sounder, cruelly maimed by a gun shot when his master was captured disappears so the boy has a threefold search—search for his father, his dog and a way to survive. The survival forced him to become the man of the family to find food, a job and to earn an education in an environment where blacks were not supposed to be educated. Throughout the story the boy never wavers in his quest for an education, even though he is never privileged to attend school. His first book was a classic retrieved from a trash heap.

The novel shows how the love and warmth in a family can hold a family together in times of great adversity. Family responsibilities and obligations are interwoven in the theme throughout the story.

It is simple sparse prose enhanced by simple black and white illustrations, because the life represented in the story is so harsh. The story is tremendously moving because it is unequivocal in emotions and so eloquent in atmosphere and understanding.

Suggestions for using Sounder in the Classroom

The materials needed are: the film, audio cassette version of the book, and classroom copies of the novel.

The activities for teaching *Sounder* will begin with viewing the film and discussing the following issues:

1. Why were names not used by the author?
2. Why was the dog such an important character?
3. Was the father right in stealing food for his family who was starving?
4. How were they treated with prejudice?
5. How does a sharecropper differ from a landowner?
6. How did the members of the family communicate with one another?
7. How did the dog communicate with them?
8. Why was an education important to him?
9. How did each family member respond to family responsibilities and obligations?
10. How did the boy show such strength of character?

After viewing and discussing the film, the students will read classroom copies of the book in class or for

homework. The oral and silent reading week-long sessions will promote more discussion. The students will do vocabulary activities that relate to the eight chapters of the book, study the use of literary devices when appropriate, answer comprehension questions, and participate in various related creative writing activities. For example, since Armstrong is a master of description, they would write descriptions of physical settings after rereading the first two pages of chapter two, where he has evoked all the senses in bringing the landscape alive. Finally, the class would listen to the audio version and respond to questions related to figures of speech, colloquialism and dialectal expressions.

Sour Land, by William Armstrong is a sequel to *Souder*. The boy of *Souder* is now grown to manhood. The book tells of how he shares his love and knowledge of all living things with a white farmer and his children. In the face of cruelty and injustice, he teaches dignity and hope, instead of despair. *Sour Land* provides inspirational reading. It is a powerful moving parable on the hypocrisy inherent in human beings.

Teacher's Bibliography

Adoff, Arnold, Editor. *Brothers and Sisters*. New York MacMillan, 1970.

This collection of twenty short stories by black American writers that begins with writing of Langston Hughes and Richard Wright includes works of more contemporary writers such as John A. Williams and Niki Giovanni.

Cavan, Ruth, S. *The American Family*. New York: Crowell, 1969.

This book explores all aspects of the family as the basic unit of society, the functions of the family and the forces that change a family.

Chapman, Abraham. Editor. *Black Voices*. New York: The New American Library, Inc. 1968.

This is a good collection of Negro literature with biographical information.

David, Jay, Editor. *Black Roots*. New York: Morrow, 1971.

Twenty black Americans recall their childhood experiences in this anthology. Excerpts such as *The Black Boy* by Richard Wright and *My Life in the South* by Jacob Stroyer relate details of growing up as a slave in the South.

Da Silva, Benjamin. *The Afro-American in the United States History*. New York Globe, 1972. This is an account of the struggle for civil rights.

Gibson, Donald. *Modern Black Poets*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973.

This reference provides information on black poets and critical essay about the poetry.

Goldman, Peter. *Report From Black America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970. The book tells how members of the black rank and file feel about the impact of the events of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's.

Jemie, Onwucheka. *Langston Hughes: An Introduction to Poetry*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976. This book provides a commentary of Hughes, poetry as well as a life chronology of the poet.

Koch, Kenneth. *Sleeping on the Wing* . New York: Vintage Books, 1982.

This is a good reference source for teaching poetry writing.

Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes, Lies and Dream* . New York: Chelsea House, 1970.

This is another of Koch's books that describes methods of teaching poetry.

Levitan, Star. *What's Happening to the American Family*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981.

This book explores changes and resulting problems that impact the family today.

Smead F Howard. *The Afro-Americans* . New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989.

A good reference on the African-American history and culture for teachers and students.

Vlachos, Olivia. *African Beginning* . New York: Viking Press, 1967.

The book tells about the diverse cultures that emerged from Africa.

Winch, Robert F. *The Modern Family* . New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1961.

This book provides analysis of the different role interactions within the family.

Student's Bibliography

Adoff, Arnold E. *Black Out Loud* . New York: MacMillan, 1970.

This is an illustrated anthology of black poetry.

Adoff, Arnold. Editor. *I am the Darker Brother: An Anthology of Modern Poems by Negro Americans* . New York: MacMillan, 1968.

This is an excellent illustrated anthology.

Armstrong, William H.. *Souder* . New York: Harper & Rowe, 1969.

A Newberry Award winning book that tells of the life of a poor black sharecropper and his family. It is a story of courage about a boy and a dog. The sequel *A Sour Land* , tells about the boy when he reaches manhood.

Bontemps, Anna. Editor. *American Negro Poetry* . New York: Hilland Wang, 1974.

This is an anthology of black poetry.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* . New York: Harper & Row, 1956. This book provides a collection of poetry by the author.

Cullen, Countee. *On Thee I Stand* . New York: Harper & Row, 1947.

This book offers a collection of Cullen's poetry.

Drescher, Joan. *Your Family, My Family* . New York: Walker, 1980.

The illustrated book describes several kinds of families and cites strengths of family life.

Fox, Paula; *The Slave Dancer* . Boston: Bradbury Press, 1973.

This Newberry Award winning novel describes how a thirteen year old boy was kidnapped to make music on a slave ship. It gives depictions of living on a slave ship.

Hamilton, Virginia. *The House of Dries Drear* and the sequel *The Mystery of the Drear House* . New York: Greenwillow Press, 1987.

A black family living in the house of Dries Drear, long dead abolitionist, must decide what to do with his treasure hidden for one hundred years.

Hamilton, Virginia. *M. C. Higgins. The Great* . New York: MacMillan, 1974.

Mayo Cornelius Higgins must decide whether to do what he wants to do or what is best for his family.

Hamilton, Virginia. *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

The book contains a selection of retold African-American folktales of animals, fantasy and the sorrow and hope of the slaves.

Hamilton, Virginia. *The Planet of Junior Brown* . New York: MacMillan, 1971.

A story about Junior Brown, who lives with his mother, and how Junior takes care of a friend who has no family. A 1972 Newberry Honor Book.

Hamilton, Virginia. *Arilla Sun Down* , *The Gathering*, *Zeely* , *The Time Ago Tales of Jadhu* , *Paul Robeson: The Life and Times of a Free Black Man* , *The Writings of W. E. B. DuBoise* . These titles are excellent suggested books for middle school students who are interested in reading more literature about African-Americans.

Harris, Joel Chandler. *Jump, Jump Again,, Jump on Over* , . New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986, 1987 and 1989.

A series of three books of the adventures of Brer Rabbit adapted by Van Dyke Parks. Each of the books tells the tales with such beautiful watercolor illustrations.

Hughes, Langston. *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932.

This book has a good collection of poetry by Hughes.

Lester, Julius. *To Be a Slave* . New York: Dial, 1968.

The book provides first hand accounts of life as a slave.

Randall, Dudley. Editor. *The Black Poets* . Detroit: The Broadside Press, 1971.

Rodgers, Berta. Editor. *Little Brown Baby* . New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940.

This is a collection of poetry by William Dunbar.

Smiley, Majorie. Editor. *A Family is a Way of Feeling* . New York: MacMillan, 1966.

This book is a collection of short stories and poetry about family life.

Strickland, Dorthy. Editor. *Listen Children* . New York: Bantam, 1982.

The paperback read-a-loud anthology is a collection of various, short African-American writings. It includes folktales, poetry, a play, excerpts from essays and novels by known authors, and gives short biographical sketches of the writers.

Taylor, Milfred D. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* . New York: Dial Press, 1976.

A Newberry Award winning book that tells how Cassie Logan, a black girl, learned about prejudice during the Great Depression. The sequel, *Let the Circle be Unbroken* , tells more about her experiences in later years.

Overview of Sample Lesson Plans for *Souder*

Introduction *These suggested lesson plans are to be used for the eight chapters in Souder . For the purpose of studying the book, the plans are in five parts. First, chapter one, second the class would study chapters two and three, then four, next chapters five and six and finally study chapters seven and eight.*

Objectives *The student will improve reading vocabulary and comprehension skills, improve critical thinking skills, learn about good literature, gain a historical perspective on the African-American culture, practice creative writing skills, and improve classroom interaction skills through classroom discussions.*

Pre-reading Activities *The students will participate in activities that serve to create an awareness of the concept of the family, since this selected novel focuses on the life of an African-American family. In order to gain a historical perspective for the study of Souder, the students will participate in varied activities related to slavery, the Civil War era, and study important related historical documents such as the Emancipation Proclamation and the Constitution.*

Procedure *The students will follow the same procedure for the study of selected chapters. First, the students will study the new vocabulary introduced in selections. Next, they will answer comprehension questions, participate in classroom discussions, study literary techniques, and respond to related creative writing opportunities.*

Lesson Plan I (chapter one)

Vocabulary

quarry

heritage

scrapple

stern

ajar

precision

The students will copy the words from the chalkboard. Next, they will find the sentences that contain the words in the chapter. Then, they will find the vocabulary word in the dictionary and write the selected definition as it was used in the context of the sentence.

Comprehension Questions

Why was “Sounder” a good name for the dog?

How did “Sounder” help the family?

What did being lonely mean to the boy?

Describe how the breakfast smells, were different from the usual morning smells.

Give evidence of the boy’s love and respect for his father.

List two descriptions of the mother’s behavior that tell about her personality.

Classroom Discussion

Compare and contrast the lives of the sharecropper and the landowner.

Literary Technique—Simile

Explain and give examples of similes.

“The white man who owned the vast endless fields had scattered the cabins of his Negro sharecroppers far apart, like fly specks on a whitewashed ceiling.”

What is being compared in this sentence from chapter one?

Writing Activity

What would you have done if you had been a child in that family?

Lesson Plan II (chapters two and three)

Vocabulary

saddled plaintive draft
overalls kindling faint
constrained mumur beam

Follow the same procedure as directed for chapter one.

Comprehension Questions

Why did the three white men come to the cabin?

Why did Sounder go off by himself?

Tell about the boy's search under the porch for Sounder.

Why did the boy continue to put food out for the dog each day?

Describe the mother's reaction after the father was taken away.

How did the boy disobey his mother? Why?

Classroom Discussion

What was the father's crime? Why did he do it? Was he justified? What would happen if everyone disobeyed unjust laws?

Literary Technique—Description/Simile

"The dry dust in his mouth tasted like ____."

"Under the cabin it smelled stale and dead, like ____."

Locate these passages in chapter three and complete with the author's language. Then, rewrite the same passages with your words.

Writing Activity

The author is a master of descriptive language. The first two pages of chapter two describe the landscape around the cabin. Read these pages again. Notice how the senses are evoked as you read. Describe the landscape around your house. Try to evoke your senses, seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting, as you write.

Lesson Plan III (chapter four)

Vocabulary

slacked

clutch

peered

spell

bullnecked

fetch

jab

addled

grieved

Follow the same procedure as directed in lesson one.

Comprehension Questions

Why did the boy tell the children not to ask the mother if she brought anything for them?

How did the mother say that animals healed themselves?

Why did the mother buy the vanilla flavoring at the store?

What did the mother mean when she said, "You must learn to lose."

Why did the boy wish that someone would give him an old book?

How did the boy feel when the deputy sheriff damaged the cake?

Why did the father tell the boy not to visit him again?

Classroom Discussion

Twice in the chapter the mother says, "Whatever you do, child, act perkish and don't grieve your father." Why did the mother tell her son this?

How did he respond to her directive?

Literary Technique—Analogy

How did the boy compare the deputy sheriff to a bull?

Writing Activity

The author describes the boy's Christmas memories. Write a paragraph describing memories of a past holiday celebration, using descriptive sensory language.

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