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

The Black American Family in Literature and Art

Guide for Curriculum Unit 90.05.11
by Beverly A. White

This curriculum unit investigates the Black American family unit and its roots to give students a sense of the history of this group in America. Students learn that, for the most part and under extreme difficulties, slaves lived in two-parent homes. Many of the novels included in the unit, such as “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,” by Harriet Jacobs, are satisfying in that they tell stories of real people who were able to pull themselves out of difficult life situations to become accomplished individuals. All of the literature deals with Black family experiences with which students can identify.

Finally, this curriculum unit will teach students how to evaluate a painting or a photograph. They will be able to look at the individuals, their clothing, and their surroundings in a painting or photograph and from that be able to determine, through leading questions, the social status of the individuals, the period in which they lived, and also to make some intelligent speculations about how the pictured individuals relate to each other.

(Recommended for English, grade 11)

Key Words

Afro-American Family Life Literature Art History

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