



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume I: Regions and Regionalism in the United States: Studies in the History and Cultures of the South,
The Northeast and the American Southwest

The South in Literature

Guide for Curriculum Unit 91.01.05
by Lystra Moore Richardson

Using literary works such as Harper Lee’s “To Kill A Mocking Bird,” Mark Twain’s “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” and William Armstrong’s “Sounder,” this unit focuses on the issues of race, class and gender as they are portrayed in the literature of the South.

The research includes how social, economic and political history has shaped the culture of the South establishing norms of behavior that have come to be recognized as almost a separate civilization from the rest of the United States. This valuable information provides, for students, a frame of reference from which to critically analyze and interpret the literary works. The background knowledge will help students to better comprehend the author’s and characters’ attitudes and attributes as well as the author’s and characters’ beliefs, knowledge, needs, goals and motives. This in turn will help students to go beyond the text to infer setting, plot, characters’ actions and author’s intention.

Additionally, the unit is aimed at helping students see how literature is created—particularly the connections between society and literature. To achieve this goal, the unit integrates reading and writing in which students create short stories that reflect some aspects of their own culture. In so doing, students will learn that constructing the meaning of texts and constructing their own texts involves many of the same processes of generating ideas, planning, reviewing and revising. They learn literary conventions such as the fact that writers deliberately use techniques to imply meaning. By developing a sense of what’s involved in writing a story, they are likely to develop some appreciation for literature as an art.

The unit also focuses on critical thinking skills associated with reading. Students learn literal reading skills, as well as inferential and evaluative thinking skills. They regularly use the ten critical thinking skills associated with reading: context and word meaning, sequence, remembering detail, identifying main ideas, judging adequacy of information, citing evidence, drawing opinions, author’s purpose and point of view. A didactic approach toward reading instruction will be utilized to enable students to be active readers by maintaining a dialogue with what they read, while relating to their own experiences, opinions and backgrounds.

Cooperative learning, a highly effective instructional strategy to use in multicultural education, will be used extensively. Students will work in cooperative groups to discuss and analyze the literary works. With cooperative learning, students get the opportunity to acquire good human relation skills, solve problems, evaluate new ideas, and build bridges from what they know to new information. This will help them to become

active participants in their own learning as they acquire skills needed to function effectively in their adult lives.

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

Key Words

South American History Literature

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>