



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume III: Afro-American Autobiography

African-American Autobiography for the Middle School Student

Guide for Curriculum Unit 91.03.07
by Delores Marshall

This unit will present to the students an introduction of African-American autobiography. Reading an African-American autobiography such as Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* is a splendid way of exposing students, culturally and intellectually, to ethnic literature. Students should also be able to read about positive role models, geographical areas, and a sense of their history. Other ethnic autobiographies may be substituted in place of *The Big Sea*, such as "Maggie's American Dream," "Black Boy," "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," "Memories of a Monticello Slave," and "The Life of Isaac Jefferson."

The scope of this unit will not be confined to just reading African-American autobiography orally, but will also include creative writing skills, reading African-American poetry and improving oral expression. By reading an African-American autobiography, students will observe elements of language different from what may be found in other types of literature. A problem of cultural awareness may arise with some of the reading selections, but this problem may be dealt with through discussing cultural differences. Teachers must provide students with necessary author background information, cultural vocabulary, preparing for reading and establishing the purpose for reading African-American autobiography.

I am writing this unit for eighth-grade Language Arts students. For some students, this may be a first-time experience reading African-American autobiography. The objective of this unit is to teach the appreciation of African-American autobiography from a cultural perspective.

(Recommended for Language Arts, grade 8)

Key Words

Autobiography Afro-Americans Langston Hughes

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