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

Amazing Grace

Guide for Curriculum Unit 91.03.10
by Ruth M. Wilson

The unit which I have prepared can be taught in a remedial reading course to seventh and eighth graders preferably during February (Black Awareness Month). Of course, this will be at the teacher's discretion when to use the unit.

The unit presents specific events in the lives of Maya Angelou, famous author, and James Comer, renowned social psychiatrist. Specific individuals are highlighted who made a particular impact on each author's life. The individuals are Mrs. Annie Henderson, May's grandmother, and Mrs. Maggie Comer, James' mother and other individuals who also acted as role models. These individuals gave the authors strength and endurance during the pre-civil rights era. Hence the title, "Amazing Grace!"

The term "Jim Crow" will be discussed, so that students will have background knowledge for understanding the materials that will be presented. Specific lessons have been prepared to reinforce skills being taught. Religion and church are discussed with an emphasis on a strong family support system which proved beneficial to both families. Excerpts from both books are in the appendix of the unit. There are numerous passages in both books, "Maggie's American Dream" (Comer) and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (Angelou), which are excellent for reading and discussion purposes. These books can be located in most school libraries.

(Recommended for Remedial Reading, Grade 7-8)

Key Words

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