



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume IV: Recent American Poetry: Expanding the Canon

African-American Poets Past and Present: A Historical View

Guide for Curriculum Unit 91.04.04
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This unit addresses African-American poets and the poetry they wrote throughout the course of history. They will be listed in chronological order as they appear in history. "The Eighteenth Century Beginnings" (1700-1800) brought us Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon. "The Struggle Against Slavery and Racism" (1800-1860) brought us George Moses Horton and Frances W. Harper. "The Black Man in the Civil War" (1861-1865). There were not any poets that came to us in this time frame. "Reconstruction and Reaction" (1865-1915) brought us Paul Laurence Dunbar, W.E.B. DuBois, William S. Braithwaite, and Fenton Johnson. "Renaissance and Radicalism" (1915-1945) brought us James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Contee Cullen, Agelina Grimke, Arna Bontemps, and Sterling Brown. "The Present Generation" brought us Robert Hayden, Gwendolyn Brooks, Imamu Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Owen Dodson, Samuel Allen, Mari E. Evans, Etheridge Knight, Don L. Lee, Sonia Sanchez and Nikki Giovanni. These poets have written poems that express the feelings of African-Americans from slavery to the present. Poems were not the only things written during these times. There were folk literature, prison songs, spirituals, the blues, work songs, pop chart music, and rap music the craze of today, plus sermons delivered by ministers.

The objectives of this unit are to teach children about the poets, the poems written expressing their feelings, and how to write poetry. The final goal of this unit is to help students develop an appreciation for poetry, to read and analyze poetry. This unit is being written for students in grades second through fifth. This unit can be used throughout the school year. However, this unit will be used mainly during Black History Month.

(Recommended for Language Arts, Black History, and Social Studies, grades 2-5)

Key Words

Poetry Afro-American History General

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