



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

Cultural and Personal Identity Through Poetry

Guide for Curriculum Unit 91.04.09
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“Cultural and Personal Identity Through Poetry” is the title of my curriculum unit because as a dance instructor with the Comprehensive Arts Program I realize how useful the arts are in boosting self esteem. The seventh-and-eighth grade students that I teach are adolescents who have many pressures to deal with. They are dealing with sexuality, identity crisis, peer-pressure, racism and sometimes a lack of self-worth. Although I sometimes see it expressed in their actions they have a difficult time expressing themselves verbally. Poetry combined with dance, art, music, and history will be the vehicle used to help the students discover, understand and be proud of who they are.

I will have three classes a day which will meet three times a week for forty minute sessions for approximately four months. I will have to alter some of the lesson plans depending on the reading level of the students. I am unable to determine this in advance because the reading levels vary a great deal. Most of the reading selections are quite simple but some of them might be too complex. In such cases excerpts can be used or I may even rewrite the poem and preserve the theme. At the end of the unit lessons a show will be produced based on the students’ writings, interpretations and experiences to be performed before a school audience.

A great way to introduce students to poetry is by using simple selections that are short, easy and fun to read. This way students won’t feel intimidated by poetry and will see that they are capable of writing poems that are just as valid as the ones they are being introduced to. Suggested poems are “The Rope,” by Eloise Greenfield, “The Creature in the Classroom,” by Jack Brelusky, “Bubble Gum,” by Nina Payn, “Song of Pop Bottlers,” by Morris Bishop, “Batty,” and “Night-Light”. After reading the poems a group discussion will take place about the content of the poem, the plot, interpretations, and definitions. Students would enjoy taking turns reading poetry as choral groups. There are many variations such as line a child where two children alternate each line, unison where the entire group reads together, sound groups where groups are separated by vocal tones, and body chants where movements are done which correspond to the words.

(Recommended for Drama, grades 5-8)

Key Words

Dance Poetry Teaching Pantomime Staging Drama General

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