



Tales from the City

Guide for Curriculum Unit 92.03.02
by Bill Coden

Some city-dwellers are native born, intimately conversant with the stories of the streets; others are migrants, bringing with them the stories, folklore and folk wisdom of small towns and villages. Both contribute elements which comprise tales from the city. Langston Hughes has given us Simple and Cousin Minnie; Richard Wright has given us Bigger Thomas, as well as his own autobiographical experiences; Gwendolyn Brooks has given us the bean-eaters and other poetic characters. All these creations have things to share about life in the city and about aspects of the Great Migration.

“Tales from the City” is intended for use with tenth grade college track students. The unit combines black history and literature through a study of the Great Migration and stories and poems, written by black authors, which take place in the city.

The Great Migration of blacks from the Deep South to the North had a profound impact on our country. Labor and housing markets changed; economic improvement for blacks was often met by racial prejudice and restrictive laws. Life in the large cities where migrants tended to settle was more often than not viewed as better than “back home,” despite its drawbacks.

Stories and poems for reading and discussion are by the authors mentioned in the first paragraph, as well as “human interest” stories from the newspaper. It is intended that each reading and discussion be followed by a writing assignment.

(Recommended for College Track English, grade 10)

Key Words

Harlem Renaissance Literature Black History Biography American

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