



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1992 Volume IV: The National Experience: American Art and Culture

Crisis Times for African-Americans

Guide for Curriculum Unit 92.04.03
by Frances Pierce

This unit focuses on the slavery era and life during the Great Depression, from the African-American perspective. Emphasis is placed on social studies, reading, and language arts. In the first phase, the students will study slavery by participating in selected activities from the “Afro-American in United States History” and study factual accounts of Jullus Lester’s “To Be A Slave.” By studying slavery through a social studies perspective, the students will gain the necessary understanding of the concept of slavery, a prerequisite to studying any African-American literature. In addition to developing the conceptual understanding of slavery, the students will briefly learn about the geography and cultures of the South.

The literature-based selections, chosen for my eighth grade reluctant readers, are set during the Great Depression. This perspective seems especially appropriate during today’s economic times. Since many of the students have expressed concerns about financial hardships, hopefully the literature selections will be of value because they would gain insights into how others coped during hard times.

“Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry,” a Newberry award winning book by Mildred Taylor, is a fictional account of survival during the Great Depression in the rural South. This book set in the thirties is an unforgettable story of Black pride and heritage. The sequel, “Let the Circle Be Unbroken,” gives further details of the Logan family and their struggle against prejudice and poverty. It is important that the students understand what life was like for Americans, especially African-Americans, during the Great Depression—a time of crisis for most people. The student will need a factual background of this era prior to studying the literature. The “Afro-American in U.S. History” and Katz’s “An Album of the Great Depression” provide excellent reference sources about this era in our history.

By studying the African-American culture from crucial historical perspectives and reading related literature selections, the students will gain insight and understanding that will enhance their perceptions of themselves and their heritage as Americans.

(Recommended for Social Studies and Reading, grades 6-8)

Key Words

Afro-American Slavery History General Literature

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>