



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **From Remus to Rap: A History in Theory and Practice of African-American Storytelling**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 92.04.06  
by Joshua Perlstein

This unit is intended to expose the junior and senior high school student to the storytelling tradition in African-American culture. There are two components to the unit. The first is historical and theoretical, and the second is practical. These two components would intertwine.

The unit traces the development, in form and content, of the African-American storytelling tradition. Beginning with the folktales told by the slaves and continuing through to the contemporary phenomena of Rap, a close examination will be made as to why these stories were told and what they hoped to achieve.

Three predominant times in the tradition are stressed and an effort has been made to find a common thread to connect them. After completing the unit, the student should have a greater appreciation of African mythology, slave tradition and its connection to African mythology, the urban poetry of the Harlem Renaissance and its cruder rural counterpart, the toast, and the popular forms of comedy and Rap of the 1980s and '90s. It is my hope that by seeing the past in the work of their favorite entertainers students would discover and become empowered by this rich tradition.

Each phase of the unit would require students to apply what they have learned by creating their own stories. In-class exercises have been developed to facilitate the students' creative expression and to encourage honest and provocative work. The unit stresses the story as an overt political act, in which the teller is not merely trying to entertain his audience, or divert them, but rather to give them a way to cope with and overcome the terrible oppression that they encounter. I would hope students would turn their own lives into powerful statements about the future and through them find hope.

(Recommended for Theatre/English, grades 6-12)

### **Key Words**

*Theater Afro-American Short Story Literature Music Rap*

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