



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

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## **Topic: A View of Three Cultures through the Eyes of Three Contemporary Women Writers**

Curriculum Unit 92.04.10  
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### **Class Descriptions**

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This unit is designed for high school students grades 9-12. Based on a cross section of the present enrollment found in this urban setting, the class consists of a heterogeneous group of students which is 40% African American, 30% Latino, 25% White, and 5% other. This unit is designed for a College Prep. English III course which primarily focuses on American literature from the past to the present. Though this unit is specifically designed for 11th grade students, the unit can be taught in any class at the high school level. First of all, the unit is flexible in that it allows for modification in teaching strategies. Secondly, it presents assignments with varying degrees of difficulty. Thirdly, test questions on specific reading assignments can range from simple to complex depending on the grade level or academic level of the students completing the unit. Lastly, remedial and enrichment activities suggested at the end of the unit are also means of addressing the needs of specific levels or groups.

### **Format of the Unit**

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The unit is designed to be taught in phases or clearly outlined sections. The first section of the unit focuses on introducing the material to be covered. In the introduction I plan to discuss the recent changes that have taken place in the teaching of literature. I plan to share ideas that I have read on multicultural literature and how it came about. I will share viewpoints of educators and experts across the country on this approach and discuss the advantages and/or disadvantages of teaching literature from a multicultural prospective. Tying into this segment, I would talk briefly on the topic of how multiculturalism has also spilled over into the field of art. I would introduce women artists from an excellent test, coincidentally called, *Women Artists Multi-Cultural Visions*. I have selected Yolanda Lopez, of Latino descent, Mine Okubo, of Asian descent, and Elizabeth Catlett, a sculptor of African American descent. We will examine representative slides from each artist. The use of visual stimuli will enhance student interest and give them lasting impressions of the artists words. Next, I will explain the bulletin board project that we will develop throughout the unit. At first I had considered having students bring in reports and pictures of minority women in literature, the arts, and music. Then I decided that this approach may be too limited and difficult to accomplish, so I decided to broaden the range and have them bring in minority women, African American, Latino, and Asian from all fields of endeavor. In the

next phase of the unit, I plan to talk about the importance of attempting to understand other cultures. In this segment students will share their ancestral backgrounds with their peers. In the next phase of the unit I will present brief cultural histories of the African American female, the Latino female, and the Asian female in the United States. This will be followed by an introduction of the three female authors whose selections we are reading and discussing in this unit. Biographical information on Toni Morrison, Denise Chavez, and Maxine Hong Kingston will be shared with students. In the final section of the unit, students will be discussing specific chapters of the three novels. During the daily discussions students will be introduced to the soft lyrics of female singers who are either African American, Latino, or Asian. Also during this section of the unit, students will complete a series of oral and written activities which will include journal writing, letter writing, the predicting of outcomes, creative writing assignments, role playing, critical writing assignments, chapter tests, and a unit exam.

## General Objectives of the Unit

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- a. To teach students to develop an appreciation for ideas, beliefs, and values from other cultures.
- b. To teach students to develop an awareness that will increase their level of acceptance of cultural differences.
- c. To teach students to recognize similarities between cultures.
- d. To teach students to identify characteristics of ethnicity through paintings or other works of art.
- e. To teach students to develop an appreciation for different types of ethnic music.
- f. To teach students to identify ideas, beliefs, customs, traditions, and values in literary works that are peculiar to specific cultures.
- g. To teach students to analyze and critique literary works through oral and written expression.

## Multicultural literature

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In this part of the unit I would introduce the term “multicultural literature” to the students and tell how it came about. Instead of just giving them information, I would prefer to address certain questions that, I think, are relevant questions as a way of explaining what the term means especially with regard to them. The students would have these questions given to them in handout form. As I address each question the students would write responses in the appropriate spaces. Here is a sample of the questions to be addressed.

1. What is multicultural literature?
2. How did it come about?
3. If Johnny can't read, will this help him to learn?
4. Will it increase levels of motivation in students?

5. How will it change the way students learn?
6. Will the classics become passe?
7. What about traditional literature? Didn't we learn more and learn better the old way?
8. Will this prepare students for what's expected from them in college?
9. How will this help students in the long run?
10. How will it affect our school?

Multicultural literature is written and/or spoken material that enlightens, interests, entertains, broadens, and stimulates those who are either listening to or reading it. It is a form of literature which reflects the traditions, values, beliefs, and customs of diverse ethnic cultures.

Students are given reading and comprehension tests in school at the 4th, 6th, and 8th grades. Scores from students in each state are compared across the U.S. Recent scores indicated that students were not progressing in either area. In fact, scores reflecting their aptitude had fallen drastically. Usually teachers are held accountable for every fallacy in the education system. However, this time educators decided to re-examine the texts, literature texts, that were being used to instruct students. They decided that the basal readers used in the elementary grades needed to contain stories which were not only high interest stories to motivate students, but they needed to contain stories with which the students could identify. The new readers now have African American, Latino, and Asian kids sharing common experiences. Behind each lesson there are directed questions which are specifically geared toward increasing levels of comprehension. There are literal, creative, and critical thinking questions. The objective of these units is based on the premise that the students will read more and read analytically because they are reading about people and situations which interest them.

On a more advanced level, the theory behind the whole approach is basically the same. Instead of basals however, the novel can be used to serve the same function. In high school increasing motivation is not an easy task, particularly when the student has already lost his or her desire to read in either elementary or middle school. Educators believe that again if students are reading about characters and situations with which they share a common experience, then they will develop an appreciation for reading and therefore read more extensively.

This approach is also being evidenced in history texts and science texts. Narrative formats are being used in history texts because studies show that students are able to grasp and retain information that is in story format. In science textbooks difficult material is made easy to comprehend by restructuring the format and the language. [At this point we will examine some newer textbooks that the students have in class with them.]

Some proponents argue that if students are taught from this prospective, for example a watered-down version of *The Scarlet Letter*, they are not being exposed to the true beauty of the language used in the original classics. They argue that the very essence of the novel is lost and that this facsimile does not expose students to challenging vocabulary. They also argue that the simplified language lowers levels of expectations. Therefore, levels of performance are also lowered.

In examining the new Prentice Hall anthology which is accompanied by a teacher's edition and a teacher's guide which includes supplemental activities, vocabulary assignments, creative writing assignments, and chapter and unit tests, we see that students are exposed to the traditional format of American literature simply placed in a more contemporary style. Added to this, there are colorful paintings to help students

visualize the theme or message which characterizes the author's work. It's a beautiful, well-organized anthology, but all of the writers are the same as those which appeared in older anthologies. In the last section of the book some contemporary authors have been added like Alice Walker author of *The Color Purple*. Also a sample writing of each author has been included. Though I learned from textbooks which were traditional, time brings forth change. The present generation of students may profit more from a combination of both. What do you think?

Now when you get to college, that's a whole new ball game. I think that most students are not prepared for the college experience with respect to courses in literature. For many of them it's a rude awakening. Students in college have to be able to write intelligently and develop ideas drawn from a wealth of experiences gained through extensive reading. So what happens when you haven't read? That's right! You got it dude! That is why quite a few students drop out after the first year or sometimes even the first semester.

I think in most cases levels of achievement and success are directly proportional to levels of education. In the past you could have made it with only a high school education. You could end up making good money in a factory or a big company. You could pass a civil service test and get a descent paying job in the post office or the phone company right after graduation. These jobs are drastically being cut today. People with 15, 20, and 25 years of service are being terminated. So what will the future hold for you? You will have to be able to compete for the limited jobs that are out there. In order to be competitive, you will need more than the minimum requirement, a high school diploma. You will need a degree or a minimum of two degrees.

Right now, we are in the process of planning curriculum for next year, and it's an ongoing battle. Some teachers want to stick with only the classics, while others want to develop units based on themes from the contemporary novels that have found their way into our bookroom. In addition to the two factions mentioned, there are some teachers who are straddling the fence. They say why can't we do both? The argument will continue, the year will soon come to a close, and when the fall rolls around, each teacher will do exactly what he or she has done in the past, and life will go on at Wilbur Cross High.

## **Art from a Multicultural Prospective**

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In the works of the three women we will be viewing and discussing, though they come from diverse cultural heritages as do our writers, we will discover that they share a common bond . . . the use of the feminine form as a significant theme in their art. The women being introduced here are breaking boundaries as they portray ordinary women with pride and dignity.

Yolanda Lopez resides in San Francisco with her husband and son. Her small apartment is filled with ceramic knickknacks of sleepy Mexicans. She does drawings, graphic designs and paintings. She is the educational director for the Mission District Culture Center and visiting instructor at the California College of Arts and Crafts. She has taught Ethnic Studies at U. C. Berkeley. What she has mainly tried to do is raise public consciousness of the misrepresentation of Latinos in mainstream American culture.

[Examine fig. 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,& 10]

Mine Okubo was born in 1912 in Riverside, California. This woman has a very interesting life. After the outbreak of World War II the loyalty of (nisei) first generation and (sansei) second generation Japanese was

questioned. Ms. Okubo was given the number 13,660 and sent to a relocation camp. Finding herself in these circumstances, she took out pen and ink and began to sketch her “American Experience.” These works of art told the story of camp life. These powerful images now serve as a unique historical documentation of a people’s suffering, endurance, and ability to survive with dignity. <sup>1</sup>

Okubo was one of seven children. Her mother graduated from the Tokyo Art Institute, and her father owned a confectionery store though he later worked as a gardener. Okubo graduated in 1936 with a Master’s Degree in Art from U. C. Berkeley and in 1938 was the winner of the Bertha Taussig traveling scholarship, the University’s highest honor. She also won the Anonymous Donor Prize in 1941, an Honorable Mention in 1942, the Arts Fund Prize in 1943, and the Art Association Prize in 1944, and the Museum Annual Prize in 1948. Let us now view some of her works. [Examine fig. 3,4,7,11,16, & 17]

Elizabeth Catlett is an outstanding African American sculptor. Catlett was born in Washington D. C. in 1919. Catlett became aware of art in high school. After high school she tried to enter Carnegie Institute but was rejected because of her color. Encouraged by her mother, she enrolled in Howard University. It was here that she met Alain Locke, a philosopher who encouraged African Americans to reclaim their ancestral heritage through art.

In 1941 she won first prize for her thesis project, Mother and Child. Later in New Orleans at Dillard University, she became actively involved in the civil rights movement. From this period of her life she developed works which captured the emotional appeal of the decade. After marrying another artist, Charles White, the couple moved to New York and mingled with such intellectuals as Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, and Jacob Lawrence. Though she was part of this elite group, she never received the recognition that they experienced.

In 1945 after receiving a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship, she participated in a printshop in which she completed her portfolio entitled The Negro Woman. Through the years she has participated in exhibits in Belgrade, Berlin, Havana, Tokyo, Peking, and the U.S. She has had 37 one person exhibits.

Catlett has also been commissioned to complete both private and public works. She completed Embrace for the 25th anniversary of Bill Cosby and his wife Camille. It is a 3 ft. sculpture of an embracing couple done in black onyx. She completed another called Dancing for the Stevie Wonder Foundation. She is also the talent behind the 10 foot bronze statue of Louis Armstrong in the city of New Orleans. A major bronze sculpture, The People of Atlanta, measuring 9 X 34 was commissioned by the city of Atlanta. It shows the diversity of the culture including a tragic figure of a homeless person. She is truly a master.

[Examine fig. 4,5,8,10,15,18,& 19]

## Celebration of Excellence

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### Minority Women in the Spotlight

This section of the unit will be based on an ongoing activity. Each student in the class will on a rotating basis, research and share information on a minority female who has gained recognition in some field be it education, literature, science, government, medicine, history, law, music or entertainment. The segments should not exceed one minute and should be accompanied by a picture of the outstanding person. After each student

completes his or her presentation, the student will place the candidate for the day on the bulletin board. By the time the unit has been completed, the bulletin board should also have been completed.

\* During the course of the unit each student is responsible for introducing three outstanding females: One must be African American, one Latino, and one Asian.

\* All biographical sketches should be typed.

### **Where Are You From?**

In this part of the discussion I would ask students where they were originally born and ask them what it is like to live there. I would ask them to describe the city and tell us about great landmarks or places of interest. I would ask them to tell us about the people, their livelihoods, and what they engage in as pasttimes. Next, I would ask students to share some traditions with us that are representative of their culture. I would ask them to tell us how their lives have changed since their arrival in the U. S. I would ask them to compare and contrast their homelands and the U. S. Lastly, I would ask them how they have been received by the people in this country.

### **The Changing Role of African American Women**

To introduce the students to this segment of the unit I would first read Langston Hughes' poem which begins:

"Well son I'll tell you.

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair."

This poem typifies the life of African-American women throughout history from a period in time when we first meet Phillis Wheatley to sit-ins on the trials of Anita Hill. Strong African-American women have played a major role in history throughout the course of time.

If we go back to the very beginning of the first settlement in the colonial period we find in 1611 records from the secretary of the colony which show that a pirate ship manned by an English crew carried 20 African Americans to the new country. Of this number quite a few were women. Immediately, some important questions come to mind. Who came to the colony? What happened to them? Who were some of the African-American women? One woman was Isabell. Isabell married Anthony who was also on board ship. Their union produced Baby Williams, the first African-American child produced in America in 1624. <sup>2</sup> Would you believe they were free? Another African-American woman, Mary Johnson married an Anthony, arrived from England, moved to North Hampton County in 1651, paid for 5 servants, some of which were white, and established America, second African-American community. I guess you can see why we have so many Johnsons. They started raising little Johnsons a long time ago. Also the first African-American settlement in Greenwich Village was established when a group of African Americans staged their first legal protest after serving 17 years with the council of New Netherlands.

During the 1660's African-American slavery, instituted as a form of mass labor, was most prominent in Virginia where there were large plantations. In 1662 legislation was passed which, in essence, stated that a child born of an African-American woman and an Englishman would be classified as the same status as the mother. It also stated that if caught in the act of committing with an African American, the person would pay double the existing fine. So you see this law further perpetuated the slavery system. As you can plainly see, African-American women had no social status whatsoever. In 1691, if an Englishman married an African American, or

a Native American his punishment was banishment from the colony. If a white woman had a child by an African-American male, she would be fined or handed over to the church for servitude for five years.

Around the mid 1700's, 1739 to be exact, the most famous conspiracy, the Cato conspiracy, took place outside of Charleston. It resulted in the deaths of 44 African Americans and 30 Whites. During this time not many white voices were speaking out against slavery. They were more concerned with establishing their own independence. There was however, one citizen who did recognize the irony of the situation, and this was Abigail Adams. She wrote to her husband: "It always appears a most iniquitous scheme to me to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have." <sup>3</sup> Also during this period another significant event took place which set a precedence in the history of African Americans. "This was the case of Jenny Slew of Ipewich, Mass. who sued her master for keeping her as a slave for three years. The master based his defense on the premise that no such person existed, and he won in a lower court. On appeal, in a higher court, the decision was reversed and the plaintiff was awarded four pounds in damages plus expenses." <sup>4</sup> One giant step for African-American women. This was only the beginning of a long hard struggle.

By December of 1775 the Continental Congress had consented to not import any more slaves. Good move on their part, but slavery was not yet abolished. Also in December of '75 Washington, George that is, decided to accept African Americans into his forces because the British were going to attract African Americans into their forces with the promise of freedom in exchange for military service. It was right about this time that Washington wrote a letter to Phillis Wheatley, an African American who had written a poem in his honor. [Here I would tell students about Phillis' life.]

"In 1776 there were about 120,156 African Americans compared to 173,316 Whites." <sup>5</sup> Strict and harsh measures were taken to insure control held by the ruling class. Slaves couldn't leave the plantations without permission from their masters. Murder and rape were punishable by execution. Major offenses resulted in lashes and amputations of body parts. Lesser offenses resulted in branding, maiming, and whipping.

During the revolution approximately 5,000 African Americans fought for Independence. "In fact, an African-American woman enlisted in the company under a Captain Wells and registered in the name of Robert Shurliffe. Her real name was Deborah Gannet. At the end of her service she was awarded 34 pounds in the form of a pension. Even though African Americans fought for independence, they did not gain it at the conclusion of the war, for the Declaration of Independence did not include an end to slavery. Thomas Jefferson's proposal which included anti-slavery articles was firmly rejected by the Continental Congress. So now it was up to the courts to recognize "inalienable rights" to freedom, liberty, and equality as guaranteed by the Constitution.

A case in point was that of Elizabeth Freeman also known as Mum Bett of Stockbridge, Mass. After being struck by her mistress, she left the house never to return. When her master appealed to the courts, Freeman asked her lawyer to defend her on the basis that she had the right under law to claim her liberty. When asked where she had gotten such an idea, Freeman responded that she had heard some men talking about the Bill of Rights and the Massachusetts Constitution. The document said that all men were born free and equal under the law and since she was not a dumb beast, but a person, the bill applied to her too.

"Her case was heard in Great Barrington in 1781. Freeman, the widow of a man who had died in the Revolutionary War, was set free from her master who was also ordered to pay 30 shillings in damages. With her victory, the legal fact was established, the Bill of Rights in Massachusetts at least, had indeed abolished

slavery.”<sup>6</sup>

By the 1800's, though slavery had somewhat diminished in the North, it was still alive and well in the South. In fact, in South Carolina and Georgia 20,000 slaves arrived in 1803. Of those slaves who were free, this was a difficult period for them. What kinds of jobs could they now acquire . . . especially those who were gifted artistically? What would happen to these great talents? I'm sure quite a few of them ended up like the tragic figure of Phillis Wheatley who was forced to take a job as a maid in a boarding house. She died in abject poverty, living in squalor, at the tender age of 31. Even when factories opened up, the unskilled African Americans, especially the women, couldn't get jobs because of race discrimination. So we went from slavery directly to race discrimination. African Americans were excluded from the "Industrial Revolution." In addition to this, they were often on the receiving end of physical assaults. "In Philadelphia, in 1819, three white women stoned an African-American woman to death."<sup>7</sup>

Forms of resistance were initiated by African-American women. They set fires to plantations, buildings, and warehouses. In 1708 an African-American woman was burned for participating in a revolt which resulted in the killing of 7 whites. Another was hanged in Louisiana in 1732 for participating in slave conspiracy.

Another form of resistance, though not as popular thank God, was infanticide. This was practiced by women who held the belief that death was better than being subjected to a lifetime of slavery. Perhaps the most outstanding case which serves as an unforgettable example would be the one of Margaret Garner. Garner, in an attempt to escape with her four children, was caught. Before her capture she slit the throat of one daughter and tried to kill the others. Then, when placed on board a ship en route to return to Kentucky, she jumped overboard with one of her infants. She was saved, but the child was never recovered. African-American women also faked sickness, worked slow downs, and employed devious tactics to alter measures of productivity.

The most successful means of undermining the institution of slavery was achieved through carefully planned and executed methods of escape. We finally get to meet great African-American women such as Ellen Craft, the renowned Harriet Tubman, and courageous Sojourner Truth. Ellen Craft, a woman of fair skin, posed as a master accompanied by her husband, disguised as her devoted servant, and escaped to freedom. Harriet Tubman, at age 6 was sent from home to learn weaving. Later, she was sent to work in a swamp trapping muskrats. At times she was beaten mercilessly. She experienced the horrors of slavery from an early age. Also while a slave, she suffered a severe blow to the head from an overseer which resulted in a sleeping sickness. This, however, did not deter her from achieving countless successes in her life's work. With a bounty of \$40,000 at one point hanging over her head, she never lost a passenger on the Underground Railroad. She was heralded as "the Moses of her people."

It would take a special kind of African-American woman to further the movement. This came in the form of a 6 ft., big-boned, uneducated, imposing figure of a woman with the name Isabella Baumfree who came to be known as the great emancipator, Sojourner Truth. Though she could neither read or write, she was the most outstanding orator of her time. At this point I think I would share that great speech made by Sojourner when she uninvitedly attended a convention in 1852 in Akron, Ohio. It begins like this: "Well, I think twixt de [Negroes] of the South and de women's of the North all a talkn' 'bout rights, de white mens'll be in a fix pretty soon."

Around the 1860's the struggle continued. In 1866 Charlotte Brown Pleasant staged a sit-in in San Francisco which was front page news. Around this same time Sojourner Truth forced her way onto a Washington



streetcar when she noticed that the transit system refused to carry African Americans. One conductor shoved her so hard, he dislocated her shoulder. Later he was arrested after she filed suit against the company.

Also the 1860's was a period which evidenced the rise in power of the Ku Klux Klan. This brought an onslaught of riots. One which comes to mind is the Memphis riot of 1866 where 46 African Americans were killed and 80 wounded. These numbers included women and children. Churches, schools, and countless homes were destroyed.

Ida B. Wells {Barnett} born in Mississippi, was a great civil activist of the 60's. While on a train bound for Memphis from Woodstock, she was asked to leave the "white section" of the train. She refused and it took three conductors to escort her from the train. She did, however, sink her teeth into one of them before she was overtaken. When her case was tried, under the Bill of Rights of 1875, the judge ruled in her favor and awarded her \$500 in damages. Later the decision was reversed. Something good did come out of this. When she wrote about her plight in a church publication, an editor read it and was impressed with her writing. She was asked to write a weekly column, and she became known as the "princess of the press." Wells was also instrumental in waging a war against lynchings of African Americans.

During the latter part of the 1800's organizations founded by African-American women rose up to address the needs of the people and the social ills which existed and still exist in society. The National Association of Colored Women held a conference in 1895. The Women's Christian Temperance Union was founded in 1874. The National Federation of Afro-American Women headed by Margaret Murray Washington, wife of Booker T., was founded in 1895. Melnea Cass started the Mother's Club, which became the model for day cares. Girl Friend Inc. was formed in New York in 1927. It focused primarily on civic, cultural, and social issues. African-American women formed sororities to address social and educational needs of their race. [Delta Sigma Theta, Sigma Gamma Rho, Alpha Kappa Alpha, and Iota Pi Lambda.]

The 1900's are characterized by movers and shakers. African-American women began to take a more active role in politics. Courageous women like Modjeska Monteith Simkins was a civil rights activist who played a major role in forming the South Carolina branch of the NAACP in 1917. She was active in voter registration, integration of schools, and public accommodations. She fought until the ripe, young age of 81. Mary McLeod Bethune was an educator and activist during the early 1900's. Under Roosevelt's administration, she was appointed a member of the Advisory Board of the National Youth Administration. Less known heroines of this period were Lillie Mae Jackson who organized a "Buy Where You Can Work" campaign in 1935 and Charlotte Bass who staged a similar campaign.

By mid 1900's, around the 50,'s and 60's, the African-American movement began to peak. In 1947 a young student, Ada Sipuel, sued the state of Oklahoma for refusing her admittance into the state's university. A year later in the case of Sweatt vs. Painter, a young African-American woman helped to prepare the briefs that would allow an African-American student to be admitted to the University of Texas. Her name was Constance Baker. She later became the first African-American woman to be elected to the New York State Legislature, the first woman to be Manhattan Borough President, and the first African-American woman judge. Pauli Murray also gained prominence in the movement. She fought for admittance to each university which she attended. She earned three law degrees: one each from Howard, the University of California, and Yale.

Let us not forget Rosa Parks. She said no to the bus driver who wanted her to relinquish her seat to a white man. This was December 1st, 1955. This marked the beginning of sit-ins, and protests, and non-violent marches. Many of these marches were led by none other than the great Martin Luther King himself.

The 1960's was a period in the lives of African Americans which marked the turning point not just in the lives of the African Americans of that decade but also in the lives of generations to come. During this decade we learned about great women who were bold and willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of equality. One of these outstanding figures is Angela Davis. Today she lives on the west coast where she is a college professor. During the 60's she was an activist and a militant. Another outstanding figure, Daisy Bates, was instrumental in Little Rock, Arkansas where the national guard had to be called in by President Eisenhower to ensure the safety of the nine African-American children who integrated Central High. By the way, six of these children were girls. Charlayne Hunter stood her ground at the University of Georgia at Athens and became the first African American to receive a degree from that university. Fannie Lou Hamer, a civil rights activist, is another mover and shaker. Find out what she did. Find out about Septima Poinsett Clark, and Marion Wright Edelman. These women laid the groundwork for our present day heroines.

Our present day heroines include women such as Shirley Chisolm, Barbara Jordan, Marva Collins, Ethel D. Allen, M.D., Vivian Pinn. All of these women are outstanding role models and shining examples not just for African-American youth but for all young people around the world.

This year, 1992, Essence magazine paid tribute to seven remarkable African-American women for their years of hard work and dedication not to mention their monumental accomplishments. These women were Debbie Allen, [director, dancer, and actor] Dr. Betty Shabazz, [widow of Malcolm X] Nancy Wilson, [singer and stylist] Maya Angelou, [poet and novelist] Bertha Gilkey, [innovator and community activist] Marion Wright Edelman, [founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund] Dr. Georgia L. McMurray [activist and educator].

The African-American woman is still climbing and spiraling upward, and as Mari Evans would say . . .

“beyond all definition she is still  
defying place and time  
and circumstance  
assailed  
impervious  
indestructible . . .

### **The Changing Pole of Latino Women**

To examine the role of the Latino female in the United States, three separate cultures need to be discussed. One of these cultures has its original homeland established in Puerto Rico while the others have their roots planted in Mexico and Cuba. Though there are similarities with respect to tradition, beliefs, and language, their histories are quite different. For all practical purposes let's first examine the historical background of each ethnic group. \*[Focus will be confined to these three groups because they comprise the larger segment of the population]

Going back in history, we see that Columbus discovered Puerto Rico during his second voyage on November 1493. By 1508 a colony had been established by Ponce de Leon. Did you know that Puerto Rico was originally named the Island of San Juan? During this time the island was located at the eastern end of the Spanish colonial empire, and it was a heavily fortified military outpost. It remained a Spanish colony for 400, years.

On December 10, 1898, as a result of the Spanish-American War, the United States gained possession of Puerto Rico. By 1900 the first civil government was established in Puerto Rico under United States sovereignty. By 1917 under the Jones Act the island's status was modified and U. S. citizenship was guaranteed to Puerto Ricans. In 1947, this act was amended, and it granted Puerto Ricans the right to elect their own governor. This governor was allowed to appoint all officials except the auditor and members of the Supreme Court. In 1949 Luis Munoz Marin became the first governor elected by popular vote.

In the Southwest the Latino population is mainly composed of people of Mexican ancestry. In examining the history of Mexican Americans, it becomes clearly evident that they became a minority not by migrating or being brought into this country as a subordinate people but by conquest. The process was different in each of the border states (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California) but nonetheless, it was conquest that set the stage for large-scale immigration.

"In the early 19th century, there were perhaps 5,000 Mexicans in Texas, 60,000 in New Mexico, not more than 1,000 in Arizona, and 7,500 along the length of California. <sup>8</sup> Imperial Spain and later the Nation of Mexico gave these isolated areas little or no protection. They were constantly at war with the Native Americans. Anglo-American settlers began to appear on the scene. Mexican Americans were impressed with the American troops and began to feel secure. They were successful in driving out the Apache tribe from the state of Arizona.

In the 1820's friction developed between the Mexicans and the Anglo settlers thus culminating in a war. By 1836 the Anglo settlers declared a Republic in Texas which caused resentment in the Mexicans which culminated in a second war. Next, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was drawn up to settle the ongoing dispute. Unfortunately, the line of demarcation, the Rio Grande was not clear enough, and this caused another war. James Gadsden was sent to Mexico city to negotiate new terms which established the Gadsden Purchase which took place in 1853.

After the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, a treaty which guaranteed the rights of Mexicans in Texas and all other ceded territories, there was a rapid loss of Mexican property interest. In fact, between 1840-1860 all Mexican owned land in one particular county, Nueces county, except one ranch was passed into the hands of the Anglo settlers.

In New Mexico, where the mainstay were agriculture and livestock, the relationship between Anglo Americans and Mexicans was not as yet characterized by violence and warfare. By 1900 the area was beginning to undergo some change. Overgrazing, the arrival of the railroad, the consolidation of small holdings into larger ranches, and other exploitative interest began to take its toll. The Mexican traditional village was fighting a losing battle. When the railroad lines broke the isolation that had existed between the east and the remote sections of the Southwest, it spelled economic opportunity for large Anglo enterprises and at the same time forced a large portion of the resident Mexicans into the status of a dependent minority.

The situation which developed in California was a bit complex. In northern California there were rich land owners called rancheros. No one bothered them in fact, Mexico generally ignored them. In 1848 during the Gold Rush quite a few different ethnic groups flooded the country. Anglo miners, about 100,000 a year flooded

the area annually. These Anglo miners had no regard for the rancheros and simply regarded them as inferior. When the gold mines became less profitable, the new arrivals turned to agriculture. Within a few years the rancheros lost all economic power in northern California.

In southern California, a generation after the Gold Rush, Mexican rancheros owned the land. The labor force was made up of Native Americans. There were few Anglo settlers, so they were unimportant. About 50 men and their families owned this territory. Meanwhile, racial tension was growing in Los Angeles between Asians, Anglos, Native Americans and Mexicans. The rancheros wanted to split from this segment where tensions were beginning to soar, but questions of sectionalism and slavery arose. Then a flood followed by a two year drought, taxes, and low cattle prices completed the ruin of the area. The final blow however, was the arrival of the railroad. All of these facets contributed to the decline of the Latino-American holdings in the Southwest. By 1900 the Mexican-American majority had become the impoverished minority.

After 1900 it was difficult to ascertain the number of immigrants entering the U. S. because of the great number entering illegally. Because of starvation during the reign of General Diaz, many immigrants were forced to come to the U. S. Immigration continued steadily until about 1929. Basically, this was due to two factors: disruption in Mexico and the expanding demand for agricultural labor in the U.S.

During World War II Mexican Americans were afforded new opportunities. Between 300,000, and 500,000 served in the armed forces. This brought about a renewed sense of political awareness. Labor organizations were active in west coast fields and mines. Consciousness of minority status was exacerbated by the famous "zoot suit" riots of the early 40's. The struggle for full participation in American life continued throughout the 50's and 60's. "Operation Wetback" in the mid 50's deported hundreds of thousands of Mexican Americans. During this time there were segregated bowling alleys, municipal facilities, and housing for Mexican Americans. The never ending battle continues to this day.

Cuban Americans are the third largest national origin group of Latino descent. Cuba was acquired by the U.S. as a consequence of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Cigar manufacturing brought many Cubans to Key West, Florida and later Tampa. By 1930, there were 18-19,000, Cuban Americans in the U. S. and by 1960, there were approximately 79,000. When Fidel Castro took power in 1959 this number escalated to the point whereby it had reached a total of 273,000 by 1973. The total estimate by now has probably exceeded 800,000.

In the Latino culture there have been women who have overcome adversity and achieved success in all fields. Grace Soto and Virginia Maese, cofounders of the new English-language magazine for Latino women, *Latina*, established in 1982 are just two of the forerunners. Denise Chavez is also a noted writer, author, and playwright in this contemporary arena.

In the field of entertainment musicians such as Charo, Vicki Carr, and Gloria Estavan are well known and respected artists. In the field of classical music the name Graciela Moreno demands respect.

In the sports arena and in a class by herself, there's Rosemary Casals.

In Hollywood, home of the silver screen, the name of Rita Moreno is legendary.

The Role of the Asian American Female in the U.S.

When did Asian Americans first arrive in the United States? Well, in the 1770's the U. S. wanted to strengthen

its economic base, so they turned to China following the lead of other European nations. China had silk, tea, furniture, and many other goods. In 1784 the Empress of China set sail en route to China to trade for various commodities. Turning a lucrative profit, other vessels soon followed suit. Between 1794 and 1812 American ships made 400 voyages to China. Asian crewmen were hired for return voyages, so as early as 1785 we see the arrival of Asians in America. These men lived in Maryland and Philadelphia for a year. "There names were Ashing, Achun, and Accun." <sup>9</sup>

As time passed, trading ships took Asian Americans to various parts of the Pacific coast of North America. Carpenters and smiths settled on Vancouver Island as early as 1788. Trading ran smoothly for a number of years because all parties were satisfied with their new found increased wealth. At times the Emperor of China insisted that trading countries pay tribute to him. All countries involved in the lucrative trading acquiesced and the Manchu Emperor was happy.

In the mid 19th century however, a series of events culminated in China's defeat in the Opium War. Britain tried to use opium to offset a trade imbalance which had developed to their disadvantage. Therefore, to gain the silver Britain was transferring into the Chinese economy, it increased Chinese import of the habit-forming drug by only accepting silver as payment. In 1839 shots were fired and the war began.

The Manchu rulers who had controlled China since 1644 were losing power over the empire. The Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty Manchu ruler was disgraced and humiliated with the loss of the Opium War. "This early negative image would later affect American attitudes toward Asian-American immigrants." <sup>10</sup>

During the 1840's China suffered a number of crises. Crops were ruined by drought and floods, and the people suffered massive starvation and poverty. The Manchu leader sent in militia to squeeze money out of land owners. Because the peasants were hungry and in dire need, they revolted. The most famous of these revolts was the Taiping Rebellion. The leader of the rebellion was Hung Hsiuch'uan, and he felt inspired to lead a fight for what translates as the Heavenly Kingdom. Hung gathered an army of half a million and for 13 years he raised havoc throughout the country. Between 1851 and 1864 20 million Chinese were killed. Because of all the strife which existed in the country, thousands enlisted for work as unskilled laborers and were sent abroad. Some mortgaged farms while others borrowed money from relatives to secure passage to places such as Canada, Mexico, Hawaii, and California. These immigrants accepted one of two labor agreements. The first one was an indentured laborer where the immigrant was placed under contract in a nation which was in need of cheap labor. Some of them were tricked and sold by brokers and fell victim to a system called "pig-selling." The second agreement was based on the credit-ticket system whereby an immigrant's ticket was paid by the merchant or company in need of mass labor.

News of the California Gold Rush increased the flow of Asian immigrants into the United States. All of them after arriving in San Francisco, the point of disembarkment, were anxious to see Gam San or the Mountain of Gold. These Asian Americans worked the mines until they were exhausted. Then the immigrants moved to the cities and began to pursue other lines of work.

By the mid 1860's Asian laborers began to construct the Continental Railroad. Irish crews of the Union Pacific built westward. The Central Pacific which had only a limited number of workers was to build towards the east. With the onslaught of the Civil War there was a major shortage of workers, so the company decided to hire Asians. By the time the railroad was completed 12,000 Asian workers had played a major part in its construction.

Throughout the 1870's and 1880's Asian Americans worked diligently and completed projects such as a 6 ft.

levee around Shuman Island. They excelled in the fields of agriculture and farming. They increased productivity in factories. Asian Americans boosted the cigar industry thereby making California the fourth largest state in productivity. On the down side, the Anti-Chinese movement also began to spread throughout the U. S. during this time.

An anti-Chinese convention was held in California and all kinds of ordinances directed at this particular group were drawn up. Violence broke out and many Asians were attacked and murdered. "The most violent of these clashes was the Snake River Massacre of 1877. Ten miners who were working on a claim in the Snake River in Wallowa County were attacked and murdered by 7 white men, who then took flight with a reported \$5,000 to \$10,000 in gold dust. The three bandits who were brought to trial were acquitted." <sup>11</sup> In the end the unions won with the passing of the "Chinese Exclusion Act." Basically, this act suspended immigration.

Between the years 1910-1940 the American government continued to enforce the anti-Chinese policies by detaining them on Angel Island, a small island in the San Francisco Bay. Here they were given lengthy medical exams and then denied admission for some reason or another while other minorities were permitted to enter the country. Because fire destroyed records during the great earthquake of 1906, some Asians were able to get into the country by claiming American citizenship. Once admitted, most immigrants had but one place to live . . . Chinatown. Asian culture began to flourish. Asian Americans formed their own secret societies, district associations, and merchant guilds.

In Confucian China, a well ordered government was sustained by a rigid social order in which everyone had an established role. The masculine (yin) and feminine (yang) roles at first evenly divided in time placed the woman in a position subservient to the man. She was to serve her father when young, serve her husband when married, and serve her son when widowed.

Different treatment of the two sexes began at birth. The Chinese adage, "A boy is born facing in, a girl is born facing out," meant that sons preserved the sacred family lineage while daughters would be chief benefit to the family into which they married." <sup>12</sup> By the way marriages were arranged by parents, and the bride met the groom for the first time on the wedding day.

During the years when the Asian men worked in the mining camps prostitution and the use of slave girls was at an all time high. One woman known as "Lo Mo" or Cameron fought tirelessly to liberate these young women. She was the Harriet Tubman of her people.

During the 1920's Asian American men were able to send for their wives. Once here, the wives ventured into the work force and helped to supplement the family income. They worked in laundries, factories, hotels, and fish markets. They worked long hours and usually 6 days a week. Sometimes even the children were put to work.

In examining the role of contemporary Asian American women we find quite a few outstanding role models. During the silent movie era as far back as 1920 and up to 1960 Anna May Wong, born in Los Angeles Chinatown, was a successful box office star who appeared in over 100 films. Her first role was "The Thief of Baghdad" in 1924. Another actress of great prominence was Pilar Seurat. She was cast in numerous polynesian roles during the early 60's. Another popular actress was and still is Nancy Kwan. She is most noted for her role opposite William Holden in "The World of Suzie Wong."

In the field of literature Sui Sin Fah was the first writer to express the true voices of early Asian pioneers. In her Exclusion Era writing, she wrote short stories with realistic characters. Her work was published by the

California magazine *Land of Sunshine*. Other noted authors are Jade Snow Wong, author of *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945), and Virginia Lee, author of *The House That Tai Minq Built* (1963). Diana Chang, a New York novelist and poet, teaches at Barnard College and is one of the most widely published Asian writers. She is the author of *The Frontier of Love* (1956) *A Woman of Thirty*, *A Passion for Life*, *The Only Game in Town*, and *Eye to Eye*. Nellie Wong, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Fay Chiang, Lauren Mar, and Kitty Tsui can be added to the ranks of Asian poets which continues to grow.

In the field of art Dora Fugh Lee began to display her talent at the tender age of 11. She lives in Bethesda, Maryland with her family and has received over 30 awards for watercolors and sculpture.

In the field of dance Yen Lu Wong presented her *Golden Mountain* in Jolla, California.

Chien-Shiun Wu won the Nobel prize for proving the Yang-Lee theory. She was also the first woman to receive the Cyrus B. Comstock Award of the National Academy of Sciences.

In mass media Suzanne Joe and Connie Chung have gained recognition and prominence. Chung was the first Asian to anchor regional network news.

Seattle tennis pro, Amy Yee, earned a large number of titles including number one rankings in women's singles in 1951 and 1954.

Introducing Toni, Denise, and Maxine

Let's now focus on the lives of the three women authors. The first author is Toni Morrison. She was born in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio and was named Chloe Anthony Wofford. She was married to Harold Morrison in 1958 and divorced in 1964. She has two sons.

Ms. Morrison received a B.A. from Howard University in 1953 and a M.A. from Cornell University in 1955. She has taught at a number of universities including Texas Southern, Howard, State University of New York at Purchase, at Albany, and Princeton.

Morrison has received numerous awards and honors. In 1975 for *Sula* she received the National Book Award nomination and the Ohioana Book Award. For *Song of Solomon* she received the National Book Critics Circle Award and American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award. For *Beloved* she received the National Book Award nomination, the National Book Critics Circle Award nomination, the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, and the Robert F. Kennedy Award.

Her works include *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *The Black Book*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, *Beloved*, and a play "Dreaming Emmett."

Denise Chavez was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico on August 15, 1948. Her father, E.E., was an attorney, and her mother, Delfina, was a teacher. She married Daniel Zolinsky, a photographer and sculptor in 1984.

Chavez received a B.A. from New Mexico State University 1971. In 1974 she received a M.F.A. from Trinity University in San Antonio Texas. She also received a M.A. in Politics in 1984 from the University of New Mexico.

Chavez has taught at Northern New Mexico Community College, the University of Houston, and has been an instructor at the American School of Paris. She has also been involved in a number of theatre projects and

workshops.

Denise Chavez has received numerous awards for her contributions. She received the New Mexican State University Best Play Award in 1970 for “The Wait.” She received the Steele Jones Fiction Award in 1986 for *The Last of the Menu Girls* In 1979-80, 1981, and 1988 she received grants from New Mexico Art Division. In 1981 she received an award from Donna Ana Human Services Consortium. In 1981 & 82 she received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1984 she was given a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

Chavez ’s writings include *The Last of the Menu Girls* , *Face of an Angel* , *Dear Juanita* , *Rio Grande* , *Family* , *The Red Dress* , and *Life is a Two-Way Street* , a poetry anthology. In addition to these words she has written about 20 plays.

Maxine Hong Kingston was born in Stockton, California in 1940. Maxine was the first of six children born to Tom and Ying Lan {Chew} Hong. Maxine’s namesake was a lucky blond who frequented a gambling establishment where her father worked.

Maxine experienced difficulty in school in her earlier years, but she soon triumphed and began to earn straight A’s. As a result of her resilience she received 11 scholarships. She attended the University of California at Berkeley. She graduated with a B.A. in 1962 in English literature.

One of Maxine’s classmates at the university was Earl Kingston who was an actor. They both shared an enjoyment for the theatre. They married in 1962. They taught at various high schools throughout the 60’s and 70’s. With the success of *The Woman Warrior* however, Maxine was finally able to give up her teaching career.

Maxine’s tributes include the Mademoiselle Magazine Award for *The Woman Warrior* (1977), the National Education Association Award (1977), the Anisfield-Wolf Race Relations Award (1978), the American Book Award for general nonfiction for *China Men* (1981), the Stockton Arts Commission Award (1981), the Asian/Pacific Women’s Network Woman of the Year Award (1981), and the Hawaii Writers Award (1983).

Maxine’s works include *Tripmaster Monkey* , *Woman Warrior* , and *China Men* .

## Lesson Plans

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### ***The Bluest Eye***

Daily discussions will be based on the questions listed below. Try to incorporate some of the activities and assignments in the structure of the daily routine. Softly in the background students will be listening to the voices of Lena Home, Billie Holliday, Dinah Washington, Ella Fitzgerald, and the incomparable Alberta Hunter.

*Autumn*

1. When we first meet the speaker even before we know the speaker’s name, what are we able to tell about this person?

Cite specific lines from the text to support your claims.



2. Who is Mr. Henry? Under what circumstances is he coming to live with the speaker's family? How did he immediately win them (the girls) over?
3. According to our speaker how is "outdoors" defined? What is the difference between being "out" and being "outdoors"?
4. Who is Pecola? Why did the girls take to her immediately?
5. How did the speaker feel about dolls? Was the same view held by the grown-ups?
6. What would have been an ideal Christmas for the speaker?
7. Read the two paragraphs found at the beginning of page 22 which starts with "But the dismembering . . . without improvement." Look particularly at the last line. What does it mean?  
What was Claudia's mother's reaction upon discovering the missing milk? Do you think she knew what happened to it? Were the girls used to their mother's reaction? How could you tell?
8. How did the girls decide to handle Pecola's dilemma? What was their mom's reaction? After being enlightened did it change?
9. How was Pecola regarded after this incident?
10. Describe the history behind the Breedlove's house?
11. How did the new sofa become so well suited to the Breedlove's house?
12. Why did the Breedloves live in the storefront?
13. What was unique about the Breedloves? Explain in detail.
14. Analyze the relationship that existed between Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove.
15. How did the children cope with the stressful situations at home?
16. How was Pecola regarded at school?
17. How did Pecola feel once she had left the store? Can you relate to her anger?
18. Why did Pecola love China, Poland, and Miss Marie?
19. Describe these women by sayings and actions. How do you suppose they ended up in "the business"?
20. What is the story behind each woman's life?

### *Winter*

1. Who is Maureen Peel? Why was she so well received by everyone?
2. How did Frieda and Claudia feel towards Maureen?
3. How did the argument between Frieda, Claudia, and Maureen evolve on the way home from school?
4. Why was Mr. Henry anxious to get rid of the girls when they arrived home?
5. Why did the girls decide not to tell on Mr. Henry?
6. Geraldine's background was described extensively. Why do you think it was so important to get a view of her life?
7. Why do you think Pecola let Junior talk her into entering his house?
8. What did Geraldine assume when she took one look at Pecola?

### *Spring*

1. Why was Frieda crying at the beginning of this section?
2. Why did the girls seek out Pecola? Explain the logic behind their actions.
3. Contrast the views held by Frieda and Claudia with that of Pecola in respect to "The Maginot Line."
4. Why was Claudia so angry when hearing the little white girl refer to Mrs. Breedlove as Polly?
5. Were you surprised at Mrs. Breedlove's reaction when Pecola accidentally tipped the pot over? Why or why not?
6. Describe Pauline's childhood? How did her parent's regard her?
7. How did Pauline and Cholly first meet? (Read bottom of 91-92)
8. What traumatic incident shocked Pauline shortly after she met Cholly?
9. As time passed what happened to Pauline and Cholly's relationship?
10. When Cholly was told of Pauline's pregnancy how did he react? Were you surprised or not? Explain your answer.
11. When was Pauline truly happy? (Orally read from page 97 to the top of page 100)
12. What was the one thing that Pauline taught her children?
13. Does Pauline regard sex with her husband as a pleasurable experience? Cite specific instances from the text to support your statements.
14. What was Cholly's childhood like?
15. How did the loss of Aunt Jimmy affect Cholly?
16. Describe the incident which took place at the picnic. How did Cholly feel towards the young lady (Darlene)? How did Cholly feel towards the men?
17. Compare and contrast how Cholly was treated on the day of Aunt Jimmy's funeral with the day after.
18. Instead of going with Uncle O.V. Cholly decided to find his father. What was Cholly's reasoning behind this move?
19. Describe the encounter between Cholly and Samson Fuller, his father.
20. How did Cholly feel after he saw his father's reaction?
21. At this moment what were your feelings toward Cholly? Did you better understand him?
22. What aspect of married life dumbfounded Cholly and rendered him totally dysfunctional?
23. As a result of this disfunction, what ultimately happened?
24. Who was this Reader, Advisor, and Interpreter of Dreams? Describe in detail his upbringing. How did he end up in Lorain?
25. Why did Pecola seek out Soaphead Church? What was his response to her request?
26. How did Soaphead Church ingeniously satisfy a personal whim through the pretense of justifying Pecola's request?
27. To whom did Soaphead address his letter, and why do you suppose he wrote to this particular person?
28. What analogy did Soaphead use in his letter?
29. What is he questioning?
30. Does he view his behavior as bad, or wrong, or in any respect evil?

*Summer*

1. As the summer rolls around in what lucrative venture, ironically speaking, do we find Frieda and Claudia engaged?
2. Read the section of dialogue found on pages 147 & 148. What was your reaction after reading this section?
3. What sacrificial offering did the girl render to procure the miracle, and what was the reasoning behind it?
4. Read orally pages 150-158. Who is the speaker? What has happened to the speaker? Explain the tragedy.

## Activities and Assignments

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### Journal entries

1. Who is your favorite or most interesting character?
2. What predictions are you willing to make at this time?
3. After reading the first segment of the book how would you describe the mood?
4. Is this the way you had envisioned the ending of the novel?

### Assignments

1. Create a two minute monologue taken from pages 97-100 which expresses all of the thoughts of the character in relation to how she felt about herself in respect to what she saw on the screen. Show facial expressions and then show the horror she felt when the tooth fell out and reality slapped her in the face?
2. Repeat the assignment using the final section of the book written into dialogue.
3. Create a scene with three young women using the dialogue found on pages 24-27 when Pecola makes the transition into womanhood.
4. Write a friendly letter to young Pecola and encourage her to develop confidence in herself.
5. Type an honest critique of the book. Select three specifics on which to base your critique.
6. Read another novel written by Toni Morrison, *Sula*, and compare and contrast the two main characters found in each work in a 500 word essay.
7. Visualize the scene in the book which most impressed you and sketch or paint the scene. The picture should speak for itself.
8. Gather five or six critiques and analyze them in essay format.

## Lesson plans

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### ***The Woman Warrior***

Daily discussions will be based on the following questions or statements. In the background the soft lyrics of the following Asian singers will help create an atmosphere which will enhance the discussion: Thuy Vi, Linda Trang Dai, Nhu Mai, Kieu Nga, and Nhat Ha.

#### *No Name Woman*

1. What unspoken story is revealed in this segment?
2. Describe in detail the behavior of the villagers. Explain the behavior according to the text.
3. Based on Chinese tradition were there any other alternatives for the aunt?
4. What was the role of women in Chinese society? Select specific instances from the text to support your statements.
5. What according to the speaker was the real punishment inflicted upon the aunt?
6. Why does this aunt haunt the speaker?

#### *White Tiger*

1. What would "talk story" be equivalent to in American tradition? Point out similarities and/or differences.
2. Relate the story of Fa Mu Lan. Place emphasis on the dream-like description of the setting.
3. What was the significance of the gourd? When was it used and why?
4. When was the warrior's level of tolerance for pain severely tested and why?
5. How did the warrior meet her husband?
6. What was the outcome of the woman warrior?
7. Is there any American or English tale that comes to mind which parallels the woman warrior?
8. How have childhood experiences affected the adult life of the speaker?
9. What has the speaker learned from fairy tales? Cite specific examples from the text.
10. Discuss the speaker's view towards communism?

#### *Shaman*

1. Discuss the speaker's mother's life after her husband's departure for America.
2. Why doesn't the mother talk more about the loss of the two children?
3. Describe her experiences in medical school.

a)

academic  
life

b) dormitory  
life

4. Recount in detail the encounter with the ghost.
5. Upon graduation how was the mother received in the countryside?
6. Slavery? Were you surprised?
7. Discuss the circumstances surrounding the stoning of the crazy lady.
8. How did the move to America affect the mother's life?

### *At the Western Palace*

1. Describe the setting and mood which characterized the scene prior to the arrival of Moon Orchid.
2. How were Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid similar, and how were they different?
3. Describe the relationship between Moon Orchid and her nieces and nephews.
4. What particular scene shows the "Americanization" of Brave Orchid?
5. How did Brave Orchid deal with the mental deterioration of her sister?

### *Song For A Barbarian Reed Pipe*

1. Describe the speaker's early school life.
2. How did the speaker's mother react when the delivery boy arrived at the laundry?
3. What did you think about the entire taunting ordeal?
4. What affect do you think the river pilot great uncle had on the speaker?
5. Analyze the speaker's relationship with her mother. Why had she come up with the list of things about herself that she wanted to share?
6. What is the significance of the two talk stories at the end of the novel?

### *Journal entries*

1. Is the story easy or difficult to read?
2. Predict the ending of the "talk story."
3. Do you know of anyone who has suffered from the same disease as Moon Orchid?
4. How are women regarded in American society

## **Assignments**

1. Research some aspect of Chinese tradition and create an unusual “talk story” based on this age old custom.
2. Write an essay comparing and contrasting the role of Chinese women from the past to those of the present. Which customs are still practiced today?  
Go to a museum and view Chinese art. Find commonalities in the art work. Get books on
3. Chinese art and read about the form and style. Select a scene from the “talk story” of the woman warrior and bring it to life on silk screen.  
Write a composition which identifies at least three outstanding characteristics of the speaker
4. in her early stages of development and support each one with at least two specific excerpts from the book.
5. Read another work written by Maxine Hong Kingston. Write a critical analysis on the style, character development, and emotional appeal of the work.

## Lesson Plans

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### ***The Last of the Menu Girls***

Questions listed below will be used in daily discussions. Soft listening will be provided by the following artists: Celia Cruz, Lola Bertran, Rocio Dular, Lucha Villa, and Gloria Estavan.

#### *The Last of the Menu Girls*

1. In the section where we learn about Dona Mercedes and her daughter Corina, there was a scene that was described so vividly. How did you feel when you read that scene?
2. From her description of Mr. Smith, how did the speaker feel towards him?
3. Why do you suppose it was upsetting for Eutilia to imagine Mr. Smith fathering Norma and Bardwell?
4. Why did Elizabeth Rainey leave such a lasting impression on Rocio?
5. Did she resent Mrs. Daniels for the abusive way she was treated especially in the absence of Mr. Daniels?
6. What is the significance of the title? Explain.
7. Was the hospital experience a positive one? Explain.
8. How did Rocio mature over that summer? What did she learn?
9. Did she regard Mr. Smith the same as when she had originally encountered him?

#### *Willow Game*

1. Explain the trinity of trees and the significance of each.
2. How did the loss of the willow tree affect Rocio?

3. Was there the same connection between Rocio and the new willow planted by her mother?  
How do you know this?
4. Was the tree symbolic . . . if so what did it symbolize?

### *Shooting Stars*

1. What flawed the view that Rocio had of Eloisa?
2. Look back through this segment. Which paragraph best sums up Rocio's summer in Texas?
3. Describe Diana's beauty as seen through Rocio's eyes.
4. What happened to Diana in later years?
5. In forming relationships with young women for what was Rocio looking? (61)

### *Evening in Paris*

1. Was Paris the way she had envisioned it? Describe your Paris. What sensual images come to mind?
2. When Rocio gave her mother the gift was she disappointed by her mother's reaction? Explain through personal example.
3. What important lesson did Rocio learn following the Christmas of 1960?

### *The Closet*

1. The Closet is a unique section of the novel. What in your estimation makes it unique?

### *Space is a Solid*

1. What can you tell about Keri Lee's mom from her statements?
2. Mr. Wembley doesn't say much at all. Can you characterize him?
3. What affect do you think Mrs. Wembley will have on Keri Lee?
4. Describe the relationship between Rocio and Loudon.
5. Do you think Nita Wembley had a right to enter Rocio's apartment?
6. What factors contributed to the deterioration of the relationship between Rocio and Keri Lee?

### *Compadre*

1. The opening section of this part of the novel revealed Rocio's impression of her home. Describe that impression.
2. Speculate on compadre Regino's life. Does he appear to be a happy or content person? Support your findings with evidence from the text.
3. How would you characterize the area where Regino lived?
4. At age 16 Rosio viewed the world from a new perspective . . . "adolescence." How did she feel about herself at this time?
5. In chapter three of this section were you astonished to hear the news that comadre Braulia told comadre Nuieves? Why or why not?
6. What do you think Eleiterio must have been thinking and feeling as they drove to 815 Baca Street?
7. What was Rocio's mother's reply when she asked her why she continued to rely on Regino? Explain. (168-69)
8. Salvador returns on the fourth of July. What's his relationship with his ex-wife and his children particularly, Rocio?
9. What type of relationship does Regino have with his family? Why is he so content?
10. How does the last page so completely acknowledge the entire book?

### *Journal entries*

1. After meeting and getting a little insight into the speaker's life what observations are you willing to make at this point?
2. Did you ever study the layout of your neighborhood? What feature particularly stands out in your memory and why?
3. What do you know about life in the 60's? What was it like back then?
4. "Space is a Solid". . . What does this imply?

### **Assignments**

1. Write an essay which describes the three women who have had a profound influence in your life and tell which particular phase of your life they affected.  
Selecting a Christmas gift for mother with limited funds can be very challenging. You want a
2. gift which expresses how you feel about her. Be creative in selecting a gift of about \$3.00 and tell how it will suit her perfectly.  
In section II of the chapter entitled "The Closet Rocio" describes what is in her bathroom, mainly the shelves and then relates specific scenes which reflect on these items. Examine
3. your own bathroom at home and without getting too personal recount an incident or incidents much the same way as Rocio has.
4. Scan section 5 and get the names of the plays and works mentioned. Research them in reviews and write a brief synopsis of each. Ex. "The Crucible", "War Games", etc.
5. Compare the lives of the two mothers (comadre Nieves & comadre Braulia) in the novel. In essay format describe the similarities that you find.
6. Write an honest critique of Chavez's novel.



## Supplemental Activities

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- View the classic film entitled "The Imitation of Life." Trace the development of the maid's daughter from the beginning of the film to the end. Compare and contrast her to Pauline in *The Bluest Eye*. How did their denial of reality bring about their demise.
1. Write a poem dedicated to the heroic woman warrior. It should be written in the form of an ode or a ballad. It should allegorically praise her valor and courage.
  2. Through animation depict the legend of the woman warrior. Each colorful frame should clearly show a significant episode taken from the plot of the "talk story."
  3. Read a play written by Denise Chavez. Analyze the play depicting the conflict underlying the plot of the work.
  4. In a 350-500 word essay, analyze the style of the three women writers.
  5. Write an essay which elaborates on the commonalities found in the three novels. Find aspects in each which appear to transcend cultures.
  - 6.

## Notes

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1. Betty La Duke, *Women Artists Multi-Cultural Visions* (Trenton, New Jersey: The Read Sea Press, Inc., 1992) 113.
2. Marianna W. Davis, *Contributions of Black Women to America* (Columbia, S.C.: Kenday Press Inc., 1981) 3.
3. Davis 10.
4. Davis 10.
5. Davis 6.
6. Davis 12.
7. Davis 38.
8. L.H. Gann, *Hispanics in the United States* (Boulder, Peter Duignan Colorado: Westview Press, 1986) 28.
9. Diane Mellin Mark, *A Place Called Chinese America* Ginger Chih (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1982) 1.
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11. Mark & Chic 25.
12. Mark & Chic 62.

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