



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Multi-Cultural Theater: A Reflection of Societal Issues and Ills

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With arms outstretched, the Statue of Liberty beckons the world's tired, hungry, and poor to dine with her at the table of plenty in America. Many have graciously accepted her invitation, only to find that perhaps there was a grave misunderstanding. Upon entry to the great hall, some found that they were not invited to be partakers of, but servants at the feast.

Many "hyphenated" Americans came here to escape the persecution and trials they were forced to endure in other lands. Upon arrival in America, they experienced persecution because their skin was not white enough or because they did not practice the "right" religion. Africans were not invited at all, but were kidnapped and enslaved in America for over two hundred years. Although their modes of entry were not the same, the "hyphenated Americans" have held fast to many of their customs and their culture.

Although America has been heralded as the great melting pot, its people are still very separated. People in America tend to separate themselves down racial and ethnic lines. New Haven, with its very diverse population, has one of the most racially segregated school systems in the country. Because we ascribe to the concept of neighborhood schools in general, whites who live with whites, attend schools with whites. African-Americans and Hispanics generally reside in the inner-city together and consequently attend the same urban schools.

As a teacher in the Talented and Gifted Program, I teach students from schools that are predominantly African-American and Hispanic such as Roberto Clemente, and predominantly white, such as Nathan Hale. Although these are students in the same school system, many of them never interact with children outside of their racial or ethnic group. This segregation promotes the type of ignorance that allows racism to thrive. It has been my experience that when children learn about other people, and gain an appreciation for their contributions and successes, the walls of bigotry and racism are weakened, and eventually crumble.

The T.A.G. program is very unique. There is a different core curriculum for each of our four grade levels. Our seventh graders, who come to our resource room on Mondays, have a core curriculum centered around the future and prejudice reduction. Our students are asked to make future projections, based on their knowledge of the past and the present. Our curriculum is very much literature based. Through the reading of autobiographies, biographies and realistic fiction, students are able to peer into other cultures. Next year's presentation of multi-cultural plays will greatly enhance the present curriculum. My unit, "Multi-cultural Theater: A Reflection of Societal Ills and Issues," will introduce students to the history of African-Americans

and Asian-Americans in the United States.

While discussing the histories of these two groups, I will discuss plays and non-theatrical texts that directly relate to the history of the aforementioned Americans. From the African-American experience, we will explore the screenplay, *One Day When I was Lost*, *The Secret Gifts*, *Freedom Train*, *Abe Lincoln and the Runaway Slaves*, *Umoja Be Proud*, and *Git On Board*.

The culture of Asian-Americans, will be explored through non-theatrical as well as theatrical writings. Students will examine excerpts from, *The Wash*, *And the Soul Shall Dance*, and other plays by Asian-Americans.

My unit will be written with my seventh graders in mind. Next year I will have students from Roberto Clemente, Nathan Hale, Betsy Ross and Fair Haven Middle School in the same classroom. Because these students have very little interaction with people outside of their communities, my unit will serve as a basis for prejudice reduction activities. My unit will include lesson plans that encourage students to move outside of their "group" and to work with students other than those from their homebased school. I will include activities such as "Proudly Presenting", which is both a self-esteem building and getting-to-know-you activity. In "Proudly Presenting", students must interview a student that they do not know. Upon completion, the students switch roles and the other becomes the interviewer. All of the students come together and each child presents the student he or she interviewed to the group. Information about the students' family, outside interests, academic achievements, likes and dislikes are made known to the group. The presenter ends by saying, "proudly presenting . . . Upon hearing his or her name, the student stands and everyone applauds.

All of my students, grades four through seven, have participated in the city-wide play writing contest sponsored by the Yale Children's Dramat. This year, I had four seventh graders who were grand prize winners in that competition. Next year, the increased exposure to plays should improve the quality of their plays.

It is my intention to devote at least six weeks to the exploration of each of the four groups, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans and Jewish Americans. (Please note that only African Americans and Asian Americans will be presented in this unit) I will begin teaching the unit in mid September and will bring it to completion at the end of February. The target group, my seventh graders, attend only on Mondays. Approximately one and one half hour will be devoted to the unit presentation per week. At the unit's end, greater blocks of time will be used to ensure the completion of quality playwriting. Students will learn the country of origin and its location on a world map. Children will be encouraged to write poetry and prose that reflect the information they have acquired about the people being studied.

Students will not only seek to comprehend the plot of selected plays, but will be encouraged to explore the culture and reflections of it in the plays. Students will participate in the acting of the plays. They will toy with accents and posture in a non-offensive way. Students will participate in ongoing discussions about their cultural similarities and differences.

The final week of each six week mini-unit, will allow students an opportunity to put closure on the things they have learned. Students will have an opportunity to compare and contrast writers from the same racial or ethnic group. Students will also use evaluative skills to determine their favorite play. Students will be asked to draw a poster advertising their favorite play, to make a protest sign reflective of the issues of the group studied, to write a campaign speech for a key political figure from the group studied, to write a letter to the editor of a fictitious newspaper to express the concerns of the group, or to write a diamante poem comparing the group to others in the United States. This format will be used for each of the following groups; African-

Americans, Jewish-Americans , Asian-Americans and Hispanic-Americans.

The culmination of the entire unit will be the actual writing of plays. Students will be challenged to write from the experience of a person in an ethnic or racial group other than his or her own. Students must check for historical accuracy while avoiding negative stereotypes. A student who feels uncomfortable participating in this activity may write a play that reflects his or her culture. Selected plays will be performed by the group and presented at an open house for parents. This playwriting will take approximately eight morning sessions , at one and a half hours per session.

If successful, my unit will help students embrace their similarities while celebrating their differences. Through this non-threatening medium called playwriting, students will understand that regardless of mode of entry, “hyphenated Americans” are Americans just the same. It is my hope that this introduction to multi-cultural theater will help them embrace a multi-cultural world.

The first day will begin with all students seated before a world map. I will start by explaining their core curriculum for the year, and explaining that prejudice reduction will be a large part of that curriculum. Students will be asked to define prejudice as it pertains to gender and race. We will explore the student’s views of prejudice and its possible effects on a people, a nation and the world.

Next, students will be given a small post-it note , and asked to place it on their family’s country or continent of origin. Once all post-it notes are in place, I will ask for a volunteer to explain what we see. Students will notice that we have come from all over the world, but have come to a common place, the U.S. and more particularly, New Haven. Students will be asked to share stories about early ancestors in this country. Those students who have stories to share, will find that their stories are very similar and yet different.

Students will be presented with the task of describing their ancestor’s homeland. What is it like visually? What is the economy like ? Is it modern or primitive? What type of clothing is worn? Is there a system of government? What would it be like to live there? Would you like to live there? Would life be better for you and your family there?

Upon completing these brainstorming activities, students will participate in the writing of an alphabet poem. Students will draw the shape of their country, and place the alphabet poem within that shape. For each letter of the alphabet, students will write a descriptive word about their land of origin. For example:

Africa, Beautiful, Courageous, Dancing, Endurance, Fortune, Gracious, Hippos, Industrious, Joyous, Kindred, Lonely, Motherland, Nurturing, Oneness, Purpose, Quiet, Revolts, Strong, Terrain, Unique, Vivacious, Waiting, Xcellent, Yearning, Zealous

Students will be asked to share their poems and to explain them. This should complete our unit introduction.

During the second class, we will begin to explore the history and culture of African Americans. A major flaw in the teaching of African-American history is that those who take this to task, usually begin discussing this history with slavery or with the jungles of Africa. I recall very vividly being told by a white elementary school teacher , that all negroes had come from Africa. This earth shattering news was shared after the showing of a film that depicted tribal life in Africa, with bare-breasted women dancing and men running through jungles. The film shown was so far removed from my experience, that I remember feeling so ashamed and denying any link to such a place. I did not know anything about Africa, except that I did not want any part of it. Had I been shown “ The Two Worlds Of Musembe”, a film about village and city life in Africa, I would not have

experienced the shame. It was so refreshing to discover that Africa was not a continent void of knowledge and development, but a land of many firsts and possibly the motherland of all nations.

It is with this recollection that I have purposed to teach all of my students about the wonderful continent we call Africa. Students will be given a copy of a play I wrote titled, “ Umoja be Proud. “ After reading this play, students will discuss the information they learned about Africa, more particularly, pre-slavery Africa.

“Umoja Be Proud”

Characters:

Mrs. Williams / Elissa /Doron / Brian / Makeda / Peter / Umoja / James / Kenneth / Joseph / Matthew

Scene I

Time: Monday morning, 8:15 a.m.

Setting: Classroom at Thurgood Marshall Middle School

The scene opens with students entering nervously on the first day of school. A few students joke with each other . They walk in and are seated. In walks a new student. The teacher walks in almost simultaneously.

Mrs. Williams: Good morning, I’m your teacher Mrs. Williams. Before I tell you about myself, we’re going to play a name game that will help us get to know each other better. Alright, this is the way it works; each person in the class must state their name and something they like that begins with the same letter as their first name. The next person must state their name, what they like, and the names and likes of everyone who proceeded them.

Brian : I’m sorry Mrs. Williams. I don’t get it.

Mrs. Williams: For example: I’m Mrs. Williams and I like windows. What’s your name? (looks at Doron)

Doron: Doron, but they call me Ronnie for short.

Mrs. Williams: Alright Doron, what do you like that begins with the letter D?

Doron: I guess I’d have to say donuts.

Mrs. Williams: Then Doron would say, My name is Doron, and I like donuts; her name is Mrs. Williams, and she likes windows. Young man with the yellow X shirt, what is your name. (talking to the new student)

Umoja: (nervously) Umoja Monk! (with effort to sound unafraid) (The class bursts into laughter)

Kenneth: (laughing hysterically) What are you some kind of African or something? Umoja . . .

Umoja (making fun of the name. The more he says it , the funnier it becomes to him. Others join in while Mrs. Williams is trying desperately to regain control of the class.)

Doron: What’s wrong with you? (angrily) Why do you always feel the need to “dis” other people? If you had a little knowledge, you wouldn’t be putting him down because of his name. (Umoja looks at him appreciatively)

Kenneth: Oh shut up, Doron. You’re just sticking up for him because your name’s not much better. (he and David laugh and give each other a high five)

Doron: I’m not ashamed of my name, It means gift of God! What does Kenneth mean, He who stepped in doggie doo?

Mrs. Williams: (very calmly) I will not ask for your attention again. I want everyone in this class to

listen very closely to what I'm about to say. It was my intention to get to know a little bit about you before you learned about me. Your actions here today have told me that you have a lot to learn about Africa and how to treat others. What you have forced me to teach you in a hurry, is that I despise ignorance and strive to eradicate it at any cost. Does anyone know what eradicate means? (all look at each other)

Doron: Eradicate, as defined by Webster, is a verb that means to uproot or remove completely; get rid of, or to wipe out. (very briskly, and self assuredly)

Matthew: Nerd! (sneering)

Doron: No, smart! (points to his head, not quite bragging, but confident and proud)

Mrs. Williams : That's right, we are going to get rid of these negative attitudes by getting to the root of the problem, ignorance. Your homework assignment tonight is to research a segment of African history. You may choose an area of interest, and designate it on the sheet that is now being circulated. I expect everyone to come in tomorrow prepared with an oral presentation. Class is dismissed.

(students begin to exit the class)

Elissa: It's all your fault Kenny! It's the first day of school and we have homework. I don't understand why you always get into trouble.

Makeda: You mean get us into trouble. So what, he doesn't have a name like Kenneth or Matthew, does that make him less of a person?

Kenneth: Here goes another funny-named person, trying to come to the brother's defense.

Makeda: Funny-named? (indignantly) My dear Kenny, I am named after the Queen of Sheba.

Joseph: Your name's not Sheba! Do you think we're stupid or something?

Matthew: Yeah! (the boys begin to laugh)

Doron: Stupid, no; ignorant, yes.

Joseph: Well, enlighten us, oh great, intelligent one! (facetiously)

Doron: Sheba was not the queen's name, it was the name of her country.

Makeda: Makeda was her name; Queen Makeda. She was one of King Solomon's wives and was known throughout the world for her great wealth and beauty. He loved her so much, that she is recorded in the Bible. " She is black, but comely," he wrote.

Doron: My father said, when he was in college, one of his professors told him that in the original Hebrew says; "She is Black, and beautiful."

Makeda: I hear that! One of the richest queens in the world, intelligent, beautiful and black.

Matthew: I never knew that. (apologetically)

Kenneth: You know, Doron and Makeda are right. We're not stupid, we just don't know a lot about Africa.

Joseph: Although I'm not black, I'd still like to learn more about it.

Peter: Yeah me too! Let's surprise Mrs. Williams tomorrow with the best oral presentations she's ever heard.

Doron: Bet! See you tomorrow. (students say good-bye and exit)

Scene 2: Students enter the classroom the next day. When Mrs. Williams walks in, everyone is seated and attentive.

Mrs. Williams: Good morning. Are you guys always this quiet, or are you up to something?

Makeda: You see Mrs. Williams, we're sorry that you saw our worst side yesterday, you too, Umoja. We have been taught by our families and teachers that education is important. Our school is named after the first African-American Supreme Court Justice, Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Thurgood Marshall was born in New Haven just like most of us , and grew up to be one of the

most influential men in this country.

Kenneth: We pride ourselves in being achievers and we never back down from an academic challenge. Here's our welcome to Thurgood Marshall Middle School.

Matthew: I'd like to begin with a brief report on the land in Africa. West Africa is believed to be the birthplace of most ancestors of African-Americans. West Africa is about five-sixths the size of the United States but, it is only twenty percent of the continent. Africa is the second largest continent in the world, and has over 2,000 miles of beaches. There are many rainforests there, and the average rainfall is from thirty to over one hundred inches per year.

James: (stands) Many early West-Africans lived in the forest regions. Because there are so many people, tribes and countries in Africa, many find it difficult to classify its people. Some have tried unsuccessfully to group people according to their social or political beliefs. Some have even tried to classify the people according to their physical attributes. Others yet feel the best way to classify Africans, is through their language. In the forest region, one would find the Mande-speaking people. On the east coast of West Africa, known as the gold coast, live the Fanti and Ashanti, who are Akan-speaking people. In the forest region of Nigeria, one would find the powerful Yoruba in the west and the Ibo in the east. The most interesting thing I learned is that well before the fifteenth century, there were well established trading going on between the Gold Coast and the great trading centers in the Sudan. I never knew the Gold Coast was called that because Africa is rich in gold.

Makeda: (stands) I have come to share my research about kings and queens of Africa. Prior to slavery, there existed great kingdoms in Africa. These kingdoms or “queendoms”, as I like to call them, were ruled by great African kings and queens. An astute diplomat and military leader, was Queen Nzingha, the Queen of Matamba, West Africa. Queen Amina of Zaria had a queendom that covered most of Nigeria and expanded southward to the Niger River. My favorite queen was the Queen of Sheba; Queen Makeda. She is credited with introducing judist philosophy to Africans long before the appearance of white missionaries on African soil. King Mansa Musa, reigned as king of Mali from about 1307-1332. He was said to have made a pilgrimage to Mecca, the Muslims’ holy land in 1324. On this pilgrimage, his entourage included hundreds of servants, thousands of soldiers and eighty camels carrying about twenty-four thousand pounds of gold, most of which he gave to strangers.

Doron: That brother was really rich!

Joseph: You got that right!

Peter: Listen to Joseph trying to sound like a brother. (mildly teasing)

Joseph: We are brothers, we’re just a little lighter skinned that’s all. (they all laugh comfortably, reflective of their close bond of friendship)

Kenneth: (turns to Umoja) You know Umoja , I’m glad you moved into our neighborhood. If you hadn’t come to our school we probably would not have learned all the things we have about Africa. Because I started all of this with my negative attitude, I personally researched your name. Umoja means one, or unity. I guess when your parents named you, they knew that someday you would embrace the concepts of unity and brotherhood. Umoja, be proud. You have a wonderful name , from a wonderful continent, Africa.

Mrs. Williams: Well so much for ignorance! You have given me the education of my life. In two short days, you have shown me such an array of feelings and behaviors and yet you’ve taught me what pride is. As a group you have decided to stand tall. You are the best students any teacher could ever have. Because you are such a “together” group, we will place the word Umoja above our classroom door to serve as a reminder of what we’ve learned, and the spirit of this class.

(Students begin to chant, “ Umoja means unity, togetherness for you and me!” All eyes focus on Umoja, who is beaming with pride.)

Lesson Plan 1:

Objective:

Students will role-play life in Africa prior to and at the time of the slave trade.

Students will be asked to discuss the information presented in “Umoja Be Proud”. A selected group of students will be asked to arrange themselves around the classroom. Students will be asked to act out the following scenarios:

- A) You are a prosperous African. All is well with you and your family. Walk as you would into a governmental meeting to discuss village concerns.
- B) You are a member of the Yuroba, a proud and powerful people. Walk as you would into a trading center where your African brothers and sisters have come to trade corn, manioc, yams and bananas.
- C) You are a great king or queen of Africa. Walk out to meet your loyal subjects.
- D) You are an African child playing outdoors with your friends. You are being kidnapped by white men carrying smoking sticks. Try to get away!

After role-playing the above scenarios, I would ask the children to share what they felt in each role. I would ask them to try to relate to the pride and sense of control one has in scenes A-C, and to compare those feelings with the feelings of despair and desperation one feels in scene D.

The next activity would require the children to make posters warning Africans about the selling of Africans to white slave traders, and of the kidnapping of Africans by white men. Students would be asked to be as emphatic as possible, and to produce a visual presentation for the sake of their countrymen who may speak one of the many West African dialects.

During the next class session, I would begin a discussion about slavery. Students would be given the following handout to read.

Slavery:

From Brazil to southern United States, there was a need for people to harvest sugar, tobacco, coffee, cotton and rice crops. These countries were looking for cheap labor. Because they had traded with Africans, they knew that they were used to working in hot weather and would be readily identifiable as slaves. Slave ships were built to transport Africans to the Americas. Slave ships were specially built to hold large shipments of slaves. During the month long passage from Africa to their new home, there was no standing room for slaves.

During their daily exercise period, they were made to jump around on deck and had sea water thrown on them. Below deck, where slaves were kept most of the time, there was crawling space only. Because of the horrible conditions of this “Middle Passage”, one out of every six or eight slaves forced onto the slave ship in Africa, died before reaching America.

During the early years of the slave trade, the Portuguese, Dutch and the Spanish were the greatest transporters of slaves. The English became the greatest slave carriers in the latter years of the slave trade. Between the years 1451-1870, over 9,560,000 Africans had been kidnapped or sold into slavery. On the average, there were about 23,000 Africans kidnapped per year. Much of the slave trade was triangular, between the Americas, Africa and the West Indies. This trading involved rum, slaves and sugar.

African slaves were brought to British North America, Spain, British Caribbean, French Caribbean, Dutch Caribbean, Danish Caribbean, Brazil, and the Old World, this also includes Europe. This is one of the reasons there are people of color all over the world.

The first slaves in the United States were seen in 1619. The Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863. This document was signed by President Lincoln to end slavery in the United States. In a land that prided itself on being the land of the free, slavery was embraced for over two hundred years. This information was drawn from the book, *Historical And Cultural Atlas Of African Americans* .

Lesson Plan 2

Objective:

Students will examine the effects of slavery on the people of Africa and America. Because of the number of plays that fit nicely with this topic, this lesson will take two class sessions.

- A) After a discussion about the middle passage and the numbers of slaves brought to the various parts of the world, students will be asked to find the slaves’ destinations on world maps.
- B) Students will be asked to silently read “Freedom Train” by Craig Sodaro, and “Abe Lincoln and the Runaways” by Wenta Jean Watson. Upon their completion, students will select speaking parts, and will participate in the oral reading of the plays. Students will also read, “Git On Board” from The Colored Museum by George C. Wolfe and “W.E.B.Du Bois, Black Educator” by Mary Satchell.
- C) Students will be asked to write letters to the editor of a fictitious, eighteenth century newspaper. Students should impart facts about the hardships and injustice of slavery. They should include reasons why it should be abolished and offer remedies to bring about a just and racially harmonic country.
- D) Students will produce the editorial page of their fictitious newspaper, with their letter as the main feature. The newspaper page must be complete with a historically accurate date, name of the paper, city, state and volume number.

The next class session will be devoted to the discussion of post-slavery conditions for African-Americans. Students will be given the following handout

Freedom?

After the end of institutionalized slavery, many white Southerners proceeded with institutionalized racism. Jim Crow laws made separate public facilities, separate schools, segregated movie theaters, and back entrances, for African-Americans, to restaurants legal.

While America embraced foreigners with white skin, African-Americans continued to be treated as an underclass. Hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, were formed to ensure the oppression of the African-American people. Dressed in white robes and hoods, they dragged African-American men from their homes, and often shot, burned or hung them in front of their screaming wives and children. Their burned bodies were left dangling from trees to serve as reminders to those who might have ideas about their right to freedoms guaranteed them under the Constitution of the United States. Although many whites were hate-mongers, there were numerous white people who hated slavery, and fought violently against it. These people were known as abolitionists. They helped runaway slaves make it north to freedom, and participated in great debates fighting for laws to abolish slavery.

Lesson Plan 3

Objective:

Students will vicariously experience “freedom” for blacks nearly one hundred years after the abolition of slavery.

A) Students will be asked to read excerpts from “One Day When I Was Lost”, a screenplay by James Baldwin. Most of the text in pages 1-25 will be used. Certain dialogues are not age appropriate, and will be deleted to make the reading more suitable for children.

In the aforementioned pages, the play graphically shows the desire of Malcolm’s father to support the “back to Africa movement” led by Marcus Garvey. It shows the terror of the KKK, and the lack of protection for African-Americans. Furthermore, it shows the demise of the family at the hands of a racist system that allows the insurance company not to fulfill its duty to Mrs. Little and her children, and of white social workers who have deemed her “crazy” because she will not bow to the “powers that be.”

B) Students will openly discuss their feelings about the hardships Malcolm X and his family endured. Students will be asked to share family stories about hardship or injustice.

C) Students will participate in a mock trial, “Louise Little v Omaha, Nebraska”. Students will select roles as in a traditional mock trial. The facts of the case will be presented and a fair verdict decided by a jury, will be handed down.

During this class period, students will learn about the civil rights movement and the continuing unity between blacks and many whites. The following handout will be presented.

The Civil Rights Movement:

During the 1960's the civil rights movement was born. African-Americans grew tired of the horrible injustices they suffered. In August of 1963, approximately a quarter of a million black and white demonstrators, assembled peaceably near the Washington Monument. These demonstrators marched to show their intolerance for a nation that promised life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all its people except black people. The major complaints were, 1) white police brutality against blacks 2) terrorist activities against blacks with no police protection 3) lack of redress for African-Americans in the courts 4) racist pressures from southern, white politicians 5) the economic deprivation and reprisals against African-Americans who dared to cry out for change 6) the continued interference with the right of African-Americans to vote.

One of the most prominent leaders in the civil rights movement was, Dr Martin Luther King Jr.. Although Dr. King headed the nonviolent SCLC -Southern Christian Leadership Conference, there were other organizations such as CORE—Congress of Racial Equality, SNCC—Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, NAACP—National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and The Black Panther Party.

Lesson Plan 4

Objective:

Students will roleplay civil-rights activists.

- A) Black and white students will ad lib an encounter during a sit in at a “whites only” lunch counter.
- B) Students will make protest signs showing their views of segregation laws.
- C) Students will roleplay being a white civil rights activist. How are you viewed by your family, friends, peers? What type of danger do you face?
- D) Students will participate in a congressional debate over the issue of passing a comprehensive civil rights act. This debate takes place after the death of President John F. Kennedy. President Johnson is commander in chief.

During this class period, students will discuss the meaning of the Civil Rights Act and its impact on America. Students will read and discuss the following handout.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964:

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed under the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson. This act contained 11 titles or sections that strengthened provisions made in former civil rights acts. Title 1 addressed the right to

vote, Title 2 outlawed the exclusion of African-Americans from restaurant, hotels and other public accommodations. Title 3 guaranteed African Americans full access to public parks and beaches, and Title 4 provided federal funding to target the end of school segregation. The remaining seven titles addressed issues pertaining to the judicial system and discrimination by employers and unions. These titles also prohibited the funding of institutions that practice segregation, and the gathering of the census based on race in areas other than those designated by the Civil Rights Commission. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was said to be the most far reaching legislation passed since Reconstruction.

After discussing the civil rights act and its impact on African-Americans, students will discuss what life in America would be without it. Students will have an open dialogue concerning the need for such legislation in 1993.

Upon completion of the class discussion, students will read, "The Secret Gifts" by Mary Satchell. In this play, Frederick Douglass, Mary McLeod Bethune, Phyllis Wheatley, Booker T. Washington, and Martin Luther King Jr., visit a group of high school students who are working on a Black History Week program. The youngsters are having a difficult time seeing the relevancy of such a program. The visitations by these famous African-Americans leave them with a sense of their history, and a greater appreciation for the accomplishments of their forefathers and foremothers. The youngsters go on to plan a program that is second to none.

Students will participate in a discussion about people they know who have made it in spite of the odds. I will ask students if they know of any other groups of people who have suffered persecution in America or another country for reasons of race, nationality or religion. I am sure that the Jewish holocaust will be mentioned, but I will use this as a segue to discuss the history of the Japanese people, and the plight of Japanese-Americans before and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Japanese-Americans

By the time Japan began to trade with the Europeans, Japan had become a police state under the rule of Shoguns or military dictators. In the year 1867, Emperor Meiji opened up trade to Westerners, and ended the 250 year isolation that kept Japan basically isolated from the world. The first Japanese who left their country went to Hawaii to work on sugar cane plantations. They went to Hawaii, agreeing to stay for three years. The work and treatment was so cruel, that many Japanese complained to their government about their landlords or overseers. These complaints were investigated and the Japanese government was so appalled by what they found, that they were able to secure the safe return of sixty of the original immigrants. Despite the hardship, many of the remaining immigrants stayed in Hawaii until their three year contract was up. These immigrants stayed to escape the increased military control in Japan, and to escape the strict class system that locked people into the social class into which they were born.

The conditions under which the Japanese laborers lived have similarities to those of African-American slaves. The Japanese worked on plantations in deplorable conditions. They were subject to overseers who monitored their work in the fields. They were viewed simply as a cheap form of labor.

Japanese in Mainland America:

As America became more industrialized, they began looking for a new and less expensive form of labor. Because of this need, the Japanese were invited to come to mainland America. When they arrived in North America, they were met with great suspicion because Japan's new military power was seen as a threat to the Western nations. Most Japanese immigrants came to America between 1890 and 1907. By 1920, there were

more than 111,000 Japanese immigrants in mainland America.

Because of laws written for the “protection” of white Americans, Japanese people were only allowed to own 4 percent of the farmland in California. The Japanese immigrants made rice-growing a profitable venture and converted swamps into farms that produced celery, flowers and strawberries. Many racist Americans were angered by their success, in fact, their success helped to fuel anti-Asian sentiments that already existed.

Upon completion of this handout, students will read, “Botchan” a short story about life in Japan for a young boy. Both of his parents die, and he and his brother must decide what to do with the property left behind. This story addresses the class system, and various Japanese customs. After the reading, students will draw pictures of a scene in the story.

The next class period will be devoted to a discussion of religion in Japanese culture. The following information will be read to students.

Religion:

Religion played a major role in the development of Japanese character. Early Japanese religions presented their emperors as gods. Japanese were taught that all events were dictated by destiny, and would work out for the person’s good. The Japanese sought to possess endurance, honor, patience and acceptance.

Although there were three main religions in Japan, Buddhism, Shinto and Christianity, most Japanese homes had a Shinto shrine, dedicated to the spirits of their ancestors, and a Buddhist altar. Because Christianity was seen as a plot to destroy Japan, Christian missionaries were kept out of Japan until the end of the Tokugawa Shogun rule in 1867.

Two class periods will be devoted to the reading and discussion of three plays, “Sotoba Komachi” by Kan’ami Kiyotsugu, “Birds of Sorrow” by Seami Motokiyo, and “The Madman on the Roof” by Kikuchi Kan.

Students will be asked to compare and contrast these three plays that deal with religious customs, everyday living, and death. As a follow up activity, students will write a letter to a friend explaining the role of religion in the writing of Japanese plays. These letters will be shared with the class.

During the next class session, students will be given the following handout:

Anti-Asian Legislation:

To prevent Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens, the First United States Congress set a provision that said only free, white people were eligible for citizenship. When the Japanese immigrants came to America, they applied this legal tactic to them also. In 1924, an immigration act was passed making aliens ineligible for citizenship. Because they were afraid they could not return to America if they traveled back to Japan, many Japanese who had homes businesses and families in America felt trapped. They were denied citizenship in America but yet were unable to return to their native land for fear of not being allowed back into the U.S.

Yellow Peril:

Emperor Meiji, who ruled until 1912, was afraid that western powers would try to take over Japan like they had taken over China. To strengthen Japan’s military forces, he hired the French to restructure the army, the British to restructure the navy, and Dutch engineers to oversee construction in Japan. He patterned the

government cabinet after the Germans and abolished the samurai class in 1876.

Because of Japanese military aggression against China, Americans began to distrust Japan. When Japanese immigrants came here, they were met with a great suspicion. Politicians and Journalists were telling the public that the Japanese immigrants were being planted in the U.S. to help prepare a secret attack. This is what the newspapers referred to as the “Yellow Peril”. Anti-Asian groups called for greater restrictions on Japanese immigrants. Rumors that Japanese farmers sprayed vegetables with arsenic to poison white Americans helped to increase the hatred for Japanese—Americans.

The Internment:

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed the United States Naval Fleet at Pearl Harbor. It was at this point that Japanese Americans began to experience true hatred, suspicion and injustice. Japanese-Americans were taken from their homes and held in detention camps for three years. Despite the fact that most of them were American citizens, over 110,000 Japanese-Americans were imprisoned from 1942 -1945. Although their businesses went under and they lost their homes, they held fast to their religious belief that it was destiny that brought their perils about, and that everything would work out for them. They used this time of imprisonment for reflection, and emerged stronger and more determined. The information on Japanese-Americans was taken from, *The Japanese Americans*, by Harry Kitano.

The follow-up activities will take two class periods. Students will participate in a mock town meeting. Students will debate the need for anti-Asian legislature and will try to put themselves in the shoes of the Japanese Americans affected. Students will use the facts presented to argue their respective cases. Furthermore, students will be asked to determine the possible application of such laws to other groups in the U.S.

The second part of the lesson will be the reading of excerpts from, “The Wash” by Philip Kan Gotanda and “And the Soul Shall Dance” by Wakako Yamauchi. Both plays are filled with information about Japanese culture and relationships.

Playwriting:

At the completion of our investigation of various cultures, students will begin the task of playwriting. The first week will be devoted to brainstorming ideas. Students will be required to synthesize the information they have acquired. Students will begin to try to create a play that has the same basic tone of the plays they have read by members of a particular group. Students may chose to write a play that reflects their own culture, or may try their hand at a play about a group other than their own. Students will be encouraged to research material to ensure historical accuracy.

Because my students have participated in the Yale Dramat’s city-wide playwriting contest, they are familiar with the playwriting process. We will begin by deciding on the major components of the play; the setting, era, potential characters and plot. Students will be encouraged to develop each of these areas carefully.

Upon deciding the setting and era, students will be asked to name their characters and to write a short description of them. Students will identify the role of each character in the play. Students must be sure that the character remains true to his/her purpose. (An antagonist should not suddenly begin giving candy to the neighborhood children, unless the play shows that he has had a change of heart.)

Once students have worked through the aforementioned, they may begin to develop the plot. Students should be reminded to develop a beginning, middle and ending. I will also remind students that the climax of their

play may be easily attained by trying to place themselves in the place of one of the people we read about in the plays.

At the completion of the playwriting process, which will take approximately six morning sessions, selected plays will be rehearsed and performed for parents.

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Baldwin, J. *One Day When I Was Lost* . New York: Dell Publishing, 1972. A screenplay written about the life of Malcolm X.

Berson, M., ed. *Between Worlds* . New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990. A collection of plays written by Asian-American playwrights.

Boyd, H. *African History For Beginners* . New York: Writers And Readers Publishing, Inc., 1991. An easy-reading paperback containing important information about pre-slavery Africa and its royalty.

Branch, W. B., ed. *Black Thunder* . New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1992. A collection of plays written by African-American playwrights.

Foley, K.U., Lud, M., Power, C. *The Good Apple Guide to Creative Drama* . IL: Good Apple, Inc., 1981. This book contains games and exercises that encourage children to express themselves creatively.

Hudson, W., and Wesley, V.W. *Afro-Bets Book of Black Heroes From A To Z* . New Jersey: Just Us Books, 1988. An encyclopedia of African and African-Americans and their accomplishments.

Kitano, H. *The Japanese Americans* . New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988. A thorough historical account of Japanese and Japanese Americans.

Levine, E. *If You Lived At The Time Of Martin Luther King* . New York: Scholastic Inc., 1990. An in depth study of the 1960's and the Civil Rights Movement.

Low, W.A., and Clift, V.A. *Encyclopedia of Black America* . New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1981. An exhaustive account of noteworthy African-Americans and their accomplishments.

Suggested Reading List For Students

Baldwin, J. *One Day When I Was Lost* . New York: Dell Publishing, 1972. A screenplay written about the life of Malcolm X.

Kan, K. "The Madman On The Roof." In *Modern Japanese Literature* edited by Donald Keene, 278-287. New York : Grove Press, Inc., 1956. A play about a man who sits on a roof and hallucinates all day. This play has strong reflections of Japanese religious traditions and beliefs.

Kiyotsugu, K. "Sotoba Komachi." In *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, edited by Donald Keene, 264-270. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1955. This is a play about a man's love for a woman that he may never marry. Just prior to completing a task that would make her his, he dies. His spirit comes back to visit her when she is old.

Motokiyo, S. "Birds of Sorrow." In *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, edited by Donald Keene, 271-285. New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1955. In this play a traveling monk is confronted by the ghost of a man who wishes him to take a message to his wife. The monk must convince her through his knowledge of her and the dead husband's life, that he in fact has a message from the world beyond. This play shows religious traditions and beliefs.

Satchell, M. "The Secret Gifts." In *Plays, The Drama Magazine for Young People*, Jan./ Feb. 1993, Vol. 52, No. 4. : 1-9. Young people unable to see the relevance of a Black history assembly are visited by famous African-Americans such as Frederick Douglas, and Martin Luther King.

Satchell, M. "W.E.B. Du Bois, Black Educator." In *Plays, The Drama Magazine for Young People* Jan./ Feb. 1993, Vol. 52, No. 4. : 1-9. A play about the trials and triumphs in the life of W.E.B. Du Bois who was a famous African-American educator.

Sodaro, C. "Freedom Train." In *Plays, The Drama Magazine for Young People* Jan./Feb., 1992, Vol. 51, No. 4. : 61-69. A play about the underground railroad.

Soseki, N. "Botchan." In *Modern Japanese Literature* edited by Donald Keene, 124-133. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1956. A short story about the life of an orphaned boy in Japan.

Watson, W.J. "Abe Lincoln and the Runaways." In *Plays, The Drama Magazine for Young People* Jan./ Feb., 1993, Vol. 52, No 4: 67-73. A play about how young Abraham Lincoln helped runaway slaves escape north to freedom.

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