



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1993 Volume III: Twentieth-Century Multicultural Theater

Introduction

Introduction

This seminar was “multicultural” in several respects. It dealt explicitly with some examples of Asian-American, African-American, Cuban-American, Caribbean, Nigerian, and South African drama. We read scripts by Laurence Yep, David Henry Hwang, Philip Kan Gotanda, Wakako Yamauchi, August Wilson, George C. Wolfe, Eduardo Machado, Derek Walcott, Wole Soyinka, and Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon. We analyzed scenes, discussed themes and styles, prepared directors’ notes, and developed some improvisations. And then we selected portions of four plays—Lorraine Hansberry’s “A Raisin in the Sun,” Machado’s “Broken Eggs,” Walcott’s “Dream on Monkey Mountain,” and Wolfe’s “The Colored Museum”—for more extended exercises in rehearsal and performance.

The seminar was also, of course, a multicultural experience for its participants, as we recognized now and then in our discussions and more often in our improvisations and rehearsals, where blacks could play whites, and whites blacks, and both blacks and whites played Asians and Hispanics.

In writing their curriculum units, moreover, the Fellows engaged this theatrical diversity in appropriate ways while paying close attention to the needs of the often uneasily multicultural classes they teach in the New Haven schools. Geraldine Martin has shaped a unit that brings to students in the early grades exercises in creative dramatics based upon tales from many parts of the world. Carolyn Williams proposes to expose gifted fourth-grade students to dramatizations of African and Latin American myths. Iris Davis has brought African and Asian drama into her fourth-and fifth-grade music classes. Toni Cates explores the use of African-American folktales for performance pieces in the fifth grade. Trisha Turner has developed a unit on family values for sixth graders that relies on Marques’ “The Oxcart,” Yamauchi’s “And the Soul Shall Dance,” and Hansberry’s “A Raisin in the Sun.” Marcella Flake approaches the teaching of history and prejudice reduction in the seventh grade through plays that will be taught in collaboration with a drama teacher. Jeffry Farrell offers a playwriting project for eighth grade that incorporates theater exercises and narratives of inner-city adolescence. Gerene Freeman brings to a high-school creative-writing class an immersion in work by playwrights of African descent. And Nicolette Perrault has developed for her advanced high-school English course a unit on the history of drama that incorporates Shakespeare’s “Much Ado About Nothing,” Wolfe’s “The Colored Museum,” and Athel Fugard’s “My Children! My Africa!”

Thomas R. Whitaker

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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

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