



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1993 Volume IV: The Minority Artist in America

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## **Visual Arts, Literary Arts, and Performing Arts: Their Connection and Place in America's Minority Culture**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 93.04.06  
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The purpose of this unit will be to explore the rich, varied, and yet full artistic culture of each of these three minority groups, Native Americans, Chicanos, and African Americans. This study will explore art through dance, music, literature, and many other different mediums. The unit will begin with an exploration of the Native American musical culture as seen through the eyes of the Pueblo Peoples "village dwellers" in particular, the Zunian people of western New Mexico. In the area of literature, I will focus in on a noted female Chicano writer, Sandra Cisneros. This exploration will be conducted using several of her works. Finally, I will explore Afro-American visual art as seen through the eyes and "brush" of Henry Ossawa Tanner.

This unit is specifically designed for the student population of my current teaching assignment at the Roberto Clemente Middle School. In this situation, I currently teach approximately 400 students in grades five through eight. Currently, our student population is approximately fifty-one percent Hispanic, forty-eight percent Afro-American, with one percent falling into the "other" category.

What I would like to accomplish by teaching this unit is to develop pride and self-esteem for each of these groups within our school as well as an appreciation of other cultures by each of these minority groups. It is also anticipated that my students will develop a deeper understanding of visual art, literary art, and performing art, and realize that although these three subjects are currently taught separately, there is an underlying theme or connection within all of the arts. It is further anticipated that, students will become more knowledgeable about the world we live in, the circumstances that "minority groups" have in common and have had to face or overcome, and develop a general tolerance for a different or "foreign" culture group.

It is anticipated that teachers in the following disciplines could benefit from the creation of this unit: Visual Art, Music, English/Literature, and History/Social Studies. Other teachers of middle school students could also successfully initiate lessons based on the material given. Ideally, this unit is geared to the middle school child, but it could easily be adapted for elementary or high school students usage. This unit could be used at anytime of the school year and in any sequence of activities.

The three cultural groups will be discussed individually at first, then through the works or mediums of a representative cultural group or group member. The activities will be both integrated and multicultural in nature. The activities include teaching students skills in writing and communication. Students will be able to communicate to Native Americans by mail and learn significant portions of their culture in this manner.

Students will also be able to explore through music and song other aspects of their culture. Students will also be able to create a “Blues” based on the writings of Sandra Cisneros as well as create paintings based on some of the themes mentioned in her writings. Lastly, students will view slides featuring the works of Henry O. Tanner, and write short stories or essays based on their themes.

The unit includes bibliographies for students, teachers, and research. A discography and slides will also be included.

(Recommended for Visual Arts, Music, Social Studies, Reading or Literature, Grades 5-8 )

**Key Words**

*General Painting Art Culture Native Americans History*

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