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Poetry: A View of African American Life,

Curriculum Unit 94.02.11
by Jean Sutherland

I am a fifth grade teacher at L.W. Beecher School in New Haven. At present, my class includes twenty-five students ranging in age from ten to twelve. Only a few are close to thirteen. They come from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds and home situations. Their academic ability and the level of their general knowledge also vary considerably. One child can barely read, while another is part of the city's talented and gifted program. Generally their basic skill level is below average, but many have potential well beyond that point. As in the school as a whole, about ninety percent are African Americans. There are also two Hispanic children and one who is white. Some are members of families with multiple problems. Few of their lives are without difficulties. Though they might be reluctant to admit it, most enjoy school at this stage of their lives, but not just for the academics. Many, although not all, parents or guardians are supportive of the school in particular and education in general. Some want to be helpful but are not sure of the best way to go about it. Often the constant struggles of everyday life thwart their efforts. Right now most of the children have lofty goals in life but soon will be facing the competition of more academically prepared peers, along with meeting the pressures which all teenagers, especially those growing up in inner-city America, encounter. For most, the road ahead appears to be a difficult one.

One of the major topics covered during the social studies curriculum in the fifth grade classroom I have described follows the history of African Americans in the United States. Through a variety of activities, the group travels the historical route, highlighting the periods of slavery, the Civil War,

Reconstruction, world-wide conflict, the Depression, the Civil Rights movement, and pertinent present day problems and accomplishments as they apply to African Americans. I believe that such an approach allows me to present the history of the United States in a manner more relevant and meaningful to all races, especially those who are African American.

I have developed this unit, "Poetry: A View of African American Life", to coordinate primarily with the social studies unit of the history of African Americans. Through my suggested activities, I hope not only to increase my pupils' knowledge of African American life in the United States as it has existed and changed, but also to increase their awareness of African American poets and their poetry. Of equal, and probably greater, value to pupils will be the opportunity to gain a more personal understanding and appreciation of people, places, feelings, and events that mark the course of African American history and intermingle with the present.

Although perhaps this unit is most responsive to the needs of African American pupils, I strongly feel that all

students have something valuable to gain from its content. African American pupils will hopefully feel a personal pride in the poetry of the past as well as that created by more modern poets. The message of courage and survival, along with humor and love, that weaves its way through the poems they will encounter should additionally increase feelings of self-esteem among these pupils. All pupils, however, will increase their understanding of, and, perhaps, their tolerance toward others.

In my present unit, I would like to augment my primarily historical approach with a focus on some aspects of African American daily life as they existed and changed throughout the years, and this is another reason why I am introducing poetry. I hope that it will provide a means of understanding daily existence. For example, a poem relating to the custom of “jumping the broom” during slavery could both increase knowledge and lead pupils to research the ceremony.

Slave Marriage Ceremony Supplement

Be good, go 'long, an' keep up yo' name,

De broomstick's jumped, de worl's not wide,

She's now yo' own. Salute yo' bride!

The poems that I will use are almost exclusively the work of African American poets, beginning with folk poetry and early spirituals and ending with the more recent African American poets, including the pupils themselves. Using the works of African Americans in studying African American life is not only logical but provides the opportunity to highlight outstanding African American poets. Hopefully this will result in the type of increased pride and self-esteem that will motivate pupils positively. Where information is available, biographical material on poets will be included when their work is presented. At times pupils will research these facts themselves. Though important, this information should blend with rather than overshadow the poetry itself. Other than those I cite as examples in my narrative, I decided not to include a list of specific poems for use in this unit. The possibilities are quite numerous, and selection will sometimes be influenced by the particular group of students. An adequate bibliography, containing many excellent anthologies, is appended.

Throughout my unit pupils will be encouraged to write their own poetry. Because the basic elements of much poetry, such as simile and metaphor, are taught in reading, poetic structure need not be emphasized, though it should not be ignored if consideration of it fits naturally with the discussed poem. I hope that by examining a wide variety of poems, pupils will learn by example. Ample opportunity will be given to sharing their works, even across grade levels. A folder of their original poems will be kept by each pupil.

As a general and sustaining framework, I will present at least one poem a week throughout the year. As they become more familiar with African American poetry, pupils may have a voice in selecting the weekly poem. Each pupil will receive a copy of the poem(s) of the week and will compile an ever expanding poetry folder. Each poem will be read silently, orally, and sometimes dramatically. At times information on the poet will be included. Pupil impressions and interpretations will follow where appropriate. If the historical framework seems of importance, it will be integrated into the discussion. Relating the poem to the children's lives may be undertaken, depending upon the poem and classroom circumstances. Though this weekly activity is not the major thrust of the overall unit, it is a very important element.

For the heart of my poetry unit I have attempted to divide poems into a number of loose, general categories.

In some cases, there is considerable overlapping, allowing poems to be easily switched. It is also possible that some sections could be combined. Poems within a category may come from a variety of time periods and poets. Some poets will be represented in most sections. My categories are: Folk Poetry, Spirituals, People (Famous and Family), Problems (and sometimes solutions), and Self-esteem.

I do not plan to develop all of these categories in uninterrupted sequence, but, as I have said, at the rate of at least one poem a week. Generally, the categories will correspond to those of my social studies curriculum. For example, folk poetry and spirituals will integrate with our study of slavery. Poems about famous people primarily will be integrated as they are encountered in our study of United States history. Some will be introduced independently. A poem on Rosa Parks or Dr. King might be presented during the week we are learning about the Montgomery bus boycott. A poem on Satchell Paige could be introduced on its own. Family poems will be connected to our social development curriculum. Those poems centering on problems and self-esteem will relate to both social studies and social development. Outside of those used as weekly poems, I will cover poems from these two categories last. I feel that as pupils' historical knowledge and maturity increases as the year progresses, their understanding and sensitivity to these poems will increase.

As I am continuously introducing material from the broader categories, our poetry activities will be readily integrated with other areas of the curriculum, especially reading, language arts, art and music. There seem to be a variety of sequences which a teacher might follow in using this material. My summary of each category with related teaching suggestions leaves implementation a choice for the individual teacher.

Folk Poetry and Other African American Poetry of the Early 19th Century Besides providing us with insights into the lives and feelings of early African American people, this poetry gives pupils a glimpse at the roots of later African American poetry. Especially when we are studying the period of time which takes us through slavery and the Civil War, these pieces provide us with a picture of lifewhich is not found in traditional text books. Many later poets, especially Dunbar, Hughes, and above all Hurston, studied folk material as sources for their own poems.

In addition to being rich with images that depict the life and feelings of those early times, folk poems also often have a surface humor which most children of this age should enjoy. They usually rhyme and have a beat similar to some popular rap creations. It might be interesting to have children present some of these folk poems in this manner.

Raise a Ruckus To-Night

Two liddle Negroes all dressed in white,

Went to Heaben on de tail of a kite.

De kite string broke; dem Negroes fell;

Where dem Negroes go, I hain't gwineter tell.

As an extension, pupils could both adapt original folk material to hand games or jump rope routines and create their own rhymes to go with similar routines. These could then be demonstrated and taught to children in other classrooms. There are also many established jump rope rhymes and hand game songs which come from both rural and urban settings. A number of interesting possibilities are found in "Talk That Talk".

In other folk poetry the picture presented is not a pleasant one. Here children will be helped to recognize the

anger and resentment which exists beneath the seemingly light-hearted surface in many of these poems. In "Promises of Freedom", a slave discusses the failure of "Mistiss" and "Mosser" to fulfill a long awaited promise of freedom and tells of the revenge the slave may have inflicted.

. . . Yes, my ole Mosser promise me;

But "his papers" didn't leave me free.

A dose of pizin he'ped 'em along,

May the Devil preach 'is funer'l song.

In "We Raise de Wheat", there is no pretense of humor.

We raise de wheat,

Dey gib us de corn: . . .

We skim de pot,

Dey gib us de liquor,

And say dat's good enough for nigger.

The white population is not always the target of early African American poems. Folk poetry also presents some of the universal character flaws that African Americans recognized in themselves as well as in others. Apart from the fun to be had while reading them, these poems should help to humanize the African American people of this time, helping today's children see them and thus their lives as real, something history books often fail to do. Pupils are all familiar with hypocrites, know-it-alls, and flirts.

That Hypocrite

. . . He talk about me, an' he talk about you;

An' dat's da way dat hypocrite do . . .

Old Man Know-All

. . . Ole man Know-All's tongue, it run;

He jus know'd ev'rything under de sun . . .

She Hugged Me and She Kissed Me

Den I axed her w'en she'd have me,

An she jes say "Go long!"

The more formalized poetry of later poets will sharpen the pupil's image of both the everyday struggles endured and the joys salvaged by African American slaves. In "The Slave Auction", Frances E. Harper's words vividly depict the humiliation occurring when African Americans were displayed for public sale. On a lighter

note, in dialect, Paul Laurence Dunbar gives us the turkey's view of the upcoming Christmas holiday in his poem, "Soliloquy of a Turkey".

In her poem "Bar Fight", Lucy Terry, a slave living in Massachusetts during King George's War, vividly tells us of an Indian raid on the settlers of the town in 1746.

Though he was a slave from his birth in 1797 until the War ended in 1865, George Moses Horton's life, like that of Phillis Wheatley, provided him with an education, which is readily reflected in his poem "On Liberty and Slavery" where he expresses the anguish of slavery and his longing for freedom.

In "To The Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth", Wheatley eloquently pleads for an end to slavery, speaking of the "pangs excruciating" that must have been experienced by her parents when she was stolen into slavery.

Besides the intrinsic value of their poems, these poets, especially Harper, Horton, and Wheatley, provide pupils with an interesting contrast to the less formal folk poetry they have read and should provide fertile ground for discussion. A brief study of their lives will help to show the varied routes a slave could travel and illustrate the influence and importance of education.

The legendary John Henry is the topic of both folk poetry and more modern poets. Although parts of some versions are not appropriate for children of this age, it is a story they should readily enjoy. There are also a number of musical versions that could be used.

Spirituals The words of early Negro spirituals praise God and speak of the rewards to come after death. They also spread the message of hope and the value of endurance. Their melodies are beautiful. Their primary message is a religious one, but many covertly express the desire for social freedom.

Go down Moses,
'Way down in Egypt land;
Tell old Pharaoh,
Let my people go.

Obviously African American slaves could read much more into these words than just freeing the people of Israel in Egypt from bondage. Certainly the words of "Go Down Moses", "Swing Low Sweet Chariot", "Get On Board Little Children", and "Steal Away to Jesus" were at times signals of a future escape or just the wistful longing for one.

Besides reading the lyrics of these songs, one can easily integrate them into the music curriculum. Listening to recordings might encourage pupil renditions. Pupils who attend church might seek permission to tape their choir's performance of a spiritual which contains these messages. Appropriate discussion would follow. In every case, an attempt should be made to appreciate all elements of the piece: lyrics, melody, and message — overt and possibly covert.

People — Famous and Family This category will explore a variety of famous people who played an important role in African American history, along with highlighting tributes made to family members. By "family members", I mean anyone playing a significant role in a person's life.

Some poems on famous people will be introduced as a weekly poem

when that person is the subject of our social studies curriculum. Harriet Tubman poems fit naturally when studying the Underground Railroad. Some versions of “John Henry” could complement facts on railroad expansion in the United States.

Other poems on a given person will be presented in clusters after either the person has been investigated or the period in which he or she lived has been covered. These poems will be used both as a review of material previously covered and to motivate further investigation of the particular individual or the historical setting. Naturally, silent, oral, and sometimes dramatic reading of these poems will continue, as well as pupil discussion of their content. Besides motivating further research, the poems could serve as motivation for pupils to write their own tributes, possibly accompanied by appropriate art work.

There are many poems about famous people that might be used, but I shall mention one that, to some, honors a less familiar figure. “American Gothic”, or “To Satch”, is a short poem written by Samuel Allen honoring Satchell Paige, a legendary pitching star from the Negro leagues who after many years of exclusion finally was admitted to the Majors. He pitched effectively well past the age of fifty and, according to some, he said he would die on the mound.

. . . I’m gonna reach up and grab me a handfulla stars . . .

And whip three hot strikes burnin’ down the heavens . . .

Besides the heartache and joy of his story, this poem leads naturally into discussion and possible poetry about Jackie Robinson, Arthur Ashe, and other African American athletes who overcame the barriers of prejudice. (A more detailed lesson plan is included.)

Turning to poems about family, there are numerous works to draw from. Many, but not all, come from anthologies written specifically for children. Many are written especially for mothers, but others are for fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and people who might not be blood relatives but certainly can be considered family members.

In “Aunt Jane Allen”, Fenton Johnson asks, upon the death of an eighty-year-old neighborhood fixture:

. . . Have those who bore her dust to the last resting

place buried with her the gentle Son that she

gave to each of the seed of Ethiopia?

Discussion of this poem could focus on appreciating those who touch our lives positively but whose value often goes unnoticed.

(A more detailed lesson plan is included.)

In “To P.J.” by Sonia Sanchez, pupils will see a very different style and mood.

. . . if i cud ever write a poem as beautiful

as u, little 1/yr/old/brotha

poetry would go out of bizness.

Besides speculating who P.J. really is and perhaps what his initials stand for, pupils can examine how this poem is written. What is different? Why do you think she writes this way? Do you approve? Would you like to write a poem like this?

Placing family poems in a separate category provides the opportunity to examine the role which family has played in African American history. Despite social circumstances that have conspired to destroy it and in spite of the scars these depredations have left, the family has proven itself a vital sustaining force throughout the years. Though pupils may have individual family problems, these poems highlight some of the positives in family members that might go unnoticed or unappreciated and could help the child to expand her/his perception of the family's scope. This could be true for all children.

Problems . . . and Sometimes Hope It would be ridiculous to imply that the lives of African Americans were or are without problems, major problems. Many poems are available to spell this out quite clearly. From the times depicted by Robert Hayden in "Middle Passage", a poem which presents the agonies of "passage", including the Amisted Mutiny (written as though Hayden's words were those of white crew members), up until the twentieth century "S.O.S." of Imamu Amiri Baraka "calling all black people", poets have described the sometimes seemingly insurmountable obstacles faced by African Americans throughout history.

In examining this type of poetry, the same general procedure will be followed. Some poems will be part of my weekly presentations. Others will be grouped together as a category, read silently, orally, and sometimes dramatically, discussed, and sometimes used as motivation for historical research and as encouragement for pupil poetry.

Some poems in this category present a harsh picture but contain material which must be dealt with if reality is to be understood. The brutality of a group torture by a white mob is vividly presented in Richard Wright's "Between the World and Me".

. . . And a thousand faces swirled around me,

clamoring that my life be burned . . .

When such a poem is covered, I think it is important to balance it with a poem offering some promise for the future, as in Langston Hughes's "I, Too Sing America". (A more detailed lesson plan is included.)

. . . Besides,

They'll see how beautiful I am

And be ashamed . . .

It is also quite important that, through other activities, pupils become aware that negative, prejudiced behavior was and is not universal among the white population. Appropriately reminding the class of this seems necessary for a balanced presentation. I have found that reading Mildred Taylor's "Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry" and showing the film "Mississippi Burning", accompanied by adequate discussion, are two helpful steps in this process. Both works fit well with this category.

There are also a variety of light, often humorous, poems about very human problems. In "one of the problems

of play”, Nikki Giovanni discusses a universal problem encountered by children.

. . . i play hard and have to

go and i don’t like to

go in when i’m out

so i go out

side when i’m out

There should be no difficulty motivating pupils to discuss and write about similar problems.

Self-esteem Hopefully all of the activities which grow from this unit will contribute to developing each pupil’s self-esteem. Many pieces of poetry could probably be placed in all categories and would develop feelings of self-esteem no matter where they were placed. Some, however, deal more directly with subjects that often bring forth conflicting feelings about oneself. These I would place in this category.

In “Sam’s World”, Sam Cornish shows his mother’s pride in wearing her hair natural.

. . . she leaves it

the way the lord

intended . . .

The merits of cornrows are presented in “Willimae’s Cornrows”, by Nanette Mellage. She also indirectly illustrates the bonding that often takes place between the braider, in this case her grandmother, and the recipient.

A discussion of contemporary hair styles could easily follow. Magazines offer visual examples. Old photographs might illustrate styles that have changed. I have found that talking directly about negative comments which pupils have heard regarding hair style, texture, and color create the possibility of developing more positive attitudes.

As a related activity, pupils might design hairstyles and colors for the future. What about having a “Wear Your Hair a Different Way” day?

During our study of African American history, the role of skin color will have been discussed. Since Slavery, skin coloring of a lighter hue has historically been in favor. The general negative connotation given to blackness, not only in skin color, has been well documented. Counteracting this view were the earlier development of Black Pride and the more modern Afrocentric movements. As with pupils’ emotional responses to hair, I feel that a direct but enlightened discussion is the best route. A number of poems could serve as motivators.

“Color” - Langston Hughes

Wear it

Like a banner . . .

“Black Is Best” - Larry Thompson

Black is best.

My Mother forgot to tell me . . .

“Black Is Beautiful” - Useni Eugeni Perkins

Black is beautiful and so am I . . .

In a more indirect approach, Dudley Randall’s “Memorial Wreath”, honoring the memory of African American soldiers who served in the Civil War, should bring forth feelings of pride.

. . . American earth is richer for your bones.

Our hearts beat prouder for the blood we inherit.

Many other poems fit appropriately into this category. Where they are used is not as important as how. If they add to pupil understanding and appreciation of self and others, they are probably building self-esteem.

This unit, along with three others from this seminar, has been designed to provide opportunities for cooperative teaching across grade levels. The units of Geraldine Martin, Francine Coss, Patrice Flynn, and Jean Sutherland contain elements that will be shared among our four classrooms. Throughout the Institute we have met to develop ways in which our units can be integrated. Some are mentioned in our individual units. Others are larger group activities which we continue to develop. They include a cultural festival involving our four classrooms and an assembly for the entire school. We are also applying for grant money to facilitate our plans. We are also planning to involve parents.

All shared activities will revolve around the particular people or cultural group focused on in our individual units and will grow from the poetry being studied by each class.

A similar cooperative effort among teachers in other schools could be adapted in varying forms by those who might use these units.

Suggested Lessons The three lessons I have included attempt to show three slightly different ways in which the poetry from this unit can be integrated into the curriculum.

Lesson 1

Poem:

“Aunt Jane Allen”

Poet:

Fenton Johnson

Vocabulary:

parched, satchel, scanned, bore, Ethiopia Subjects Involved: Reading, creative writing

Summary:

Eighty year old Aunt Jane Allen has just died. She appears to have been a neighborhood fixture on State Street. The poet recalls her elderly form as she hobbled along the street trying to sell aprons from a basket she carried. He wonders if they have buried with her this basket of aprons which was so much a part of her. Of more importance, he asks if they have “buried/ with her the gentle worn Son that she gave to each of the/ seed of Ethiopia”.

Objectives:

To develop an appreciation of Aunt Jane Allen’s life as a positive neighborhood force.

To relate this understanding to neighborhood people who actually exist.

To speculate orally and/or in writing on Aunt Jane’s background.

Procedure:

The teacher will read the poem to the class. Discussion will bring out the meaning of vocabulary where necessary. Pupils will be given an opportunity to read the poem orally. Discussion will revolve around questions such as: Who was Aunt Jane Allen? What did she look like? What did she do? Does the poet like Aunt Jane? How do you know? Is she really his Aunt? Why is “Son” capitalized? What does “seed of Ethiopia” mean? Do you think there were many people at Aunt Jane’s funeral? Why? Will people remember her? Do you know or have you seen anyone who reminds you of Aunt Jane? Tell us about them. What do they give to you or to the neighborhood? What might Aunt Jane’s life have been like before she grew old? (A number of more specific questions could be used to motivate more detailed discussion here.) Is there anything people might do to give something positive back to people like Aunt Jane?

Pupils may then be given an opportunity to read the poem again.

Further Suggestions:

Pupils might be asked to write a brief biography of Aunt Jane Allen, providing their own facts and dates.

Pupils could write a piece, pretending that Aunt Jane was telling people what it was like living in the neighborhood.

Reading the poem “Old Black Men”, by Georgia Douglas Johnson, could motivate pupils to think more deeply about how the backgrounds of old men from the neighborhood might be decidedly different from what they are now. Pupils might further speculate on the forces which influenced their lives.

Lesson 2

Poem:

“To Satch: or American Gothic”

Poet:

Samuel Allen

Vocabulary:

Gothic

Subjects Involved:

Reading, art, social studies

Summary:

The subject of this poem, Satchell Paige, was a pitcher in the Negro leagues during the same time that Babe Ruth played in the Majors. Until Jackie Robinson broke the “color line”, Paige was barred from joining teams in this all-white organization. Finally, in 1948, he was admitted to the American League when he joined the Cleveland Indians as the first black pitcher in the Majors. Though well past his prime, he pitched for the St. Louis Browns from 1951-1953. His exact age is subject to debate, and some say, though it might be an exaggeration, that he was close to seventy at the time. In 1971, he was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

This poem presents a vivid picture of Satchell’s final strikeout in front of God.

Objectives:

To develop an appreciation of Satchell Paige’s life.

To understand the obstacles faced by players in the Negro Leagues and to appreciate their skills and fortitude.

To provide pupils with the opportunity to illustrate the images presented in “To Satch”.

Procedure:

Pupils will either be provided with information or will research facts on the Negro leagues in general and Satchell Paige in particular. Pertinent discussion will follow, with appropriate reference made to Jackie Robinson, with whom students are more familiar.

The teacher will then read “To Satch”, after informing them that some said that Paige believed he would die while pitching. Pupils will then be given an opportunity to read the poem orally. There will not be much discussion of the poem’s content, because it is hoped that repeated oral readings will emphasize the visual images presented in the poem. Pupils will then be asked to provide an illustration, or possibly illustrations, to go with the poem. Upon completion of these pictures, pupils will be given a chance to share them, possibly with explanations and/or accompanied by an oral reading of the poem, depending upon pupil preference. These activities would probably best be accomplished in two separate sessions.

Further Suggestions:

Pupils might be shown a copy of the painting, “American Gothic” by Grant Wood, and asked to discuss any connections they see between the poem’s alternative title “American Gothic” and the picture. It will also be necessary to develop the meaning of the word Gothic.

Lesson 3

Poem:

“I, Too Sing America”

Poet:

Langston Hughes

Vocabulary:

None

Subjects Involved:

Reading, oral expression, social studies

Objectives:

Ability to understand and appreciate the message of this poem, then and now.

Opportunity to evaluate progress that has been made since poem was written.

Ability to apply message of poem to themselves.

Ability to present poem orally, perhaps as part of a group presentation.

Summary:

On the surface, this poem tells us that the darker brother is forced to eat in the kitchen when company comes. Rather than being discouraged, he laughs, eats and prepares for “tomorrow” when he will take his rightful place at the table where others will realize his worth and be ashamed.

Pupils will be guided to see that the poem delivers a powerful, yet positive message to African Americans of the 1920’s to strive toward achieving the power that will give them their rightful place in America. In varying degrees, the message is still applicable today.

Procedure:

The teacher will read the poem orally. Discussion will follow, revolving around questions such as the following: Why was the brother sent to the kitchen? How did he react? How else might he have reacted? Why will he be able to sit at the table in the future? Why won’t people dare reject him then? What will allow them to see how beautiful he is? Why will they be ashamed? Will all people feel this way? Why? This poem was written in the 1920’s. What was life like for African Americans then? How has it changed in the years since then? What is Langston Hughes saying to the African Americans of this time? Why does the poem begin and end with “I, Too Sing America”? Does the poem address people of today? Could it speak to people other than African Americans?

Pupils will then be given the opportunity to attempt a dramatic reading of the poem. The word “brother” can

easily be switched to “sister” to accommodate female readers. In combination a boy and girl can say, “We, Too Sing America”, with each repeating the second line making appropriate gender changes. They then can divide the other sections, making all pronouns plural, ending with the last line said in unison. This makes a very effective piece for public presentation.

Bibliography All of the books listed in this bibliography contain some poems which are appropriate for use in this unit. Those marked with an asterisk are designed specifically for children.

Adoff, Arnold. “I Am the Darker Brother”. New York: Macmillan, 1968. Poems covering a wide range of subjects. Contains well-known poems and those less famous. Biographies on authors and information on poems included.

*Adoff, Arnold. “My Black Me”. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1974. Contains biographies and information on some poems. Poems appropriate for all races but particularly capture people and experiences pertinent to African American youth.

Bontemps, Arna. “American Negro Poetry”. New York: Hill and Wagner, 1974.

Cooners, Orde. “We Speak as Liberators: Young Black Poets”. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1970.

*Giovanni, Nikki. “Spin a Soft Black Song”. New York: Harper Collins, 1985. Short poems. Easy to read and understand. Should appeal to children.

*Greenfield, Eloise. “Honey, I Love”. New York: Harper Trophy, 1978. Everyday events and joys of life from the eyes of a child.

*Gross, Linda and Barnes, Marian. “Talk That Talk”. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989. Primarily a book of African American stories, it also contains an excellent section on “rhymes”.

*Hudson, Wade. “Pass It On-African American Poetry for Children”. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1993. Wide variety of poets. Information on authors. Excellent illustrations.

Hughes, Langston and Bontemps, Arna. “The Poetry of the Negro”. New York: Doubleday, 1970. Contains many poems including Tribute poems written by non-African Americans.

Hughes, Langston. “Selected Poems”. New York: Vintage, 1974. Excellent selection of poems by Langston Hughes.

Johnson, James Weldon. “The Book of American Negro Poetry”. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, 1931. Contains biographical notes.

King, Woodie. “The Forerunners-Black Poets in America”. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1975. Contains poets bridging the gap between 20’s and 60’s.

Larrick, Nancy. “I Heard a Scream in the Street”. New York: M. Evans and Co., 1970. City poems from young people from twenty-three American cities.

Randall, Dudley. “The Black Poets”. New York: Bantam Books, 1971. Poems from folk poetry to 1960’s. Covers time span well.

*Slier, Deborah. “Make a Joyful Sound”. New York: Checkerboard Press, 1991. Poems for children by African American poets. Colorful illustrations. Biographical notes on poets.

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