



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1996 Volume III: Race and Representation in American Cinema

Using Film and Literature to Examine Uncle Remus: A Comparison and Analysis of the Film—Song Of The South

Curriculum Unit 96.03.02
by Felicia R. McKinnon

Grade level Second-Sixth grade students

Time Eight weeks, 30-40 minutes per day

I am a second grade teacher at L.W. Beecher School in the city of New Haven. The prevailing demographic is that of a predominant African-American culture. Many of the families in the school come from regions with direct links to African culture -the West Indies, Bahamas, West and South Africa and especially the American South. Because of the dominance in African ancestry, I felt that my students would benefit from Black History taught from a different angle. Routinely, we teach Black History every February; during this time we bombard the students with facts, names and dates that they never really are able to internalize. The main cause in this failure to assimilate the required information is a basic lack of foundation for the information to make any real sense to them. Accordingly, in my unit I plan to expose them to the oral tradition of storytelling and provide facts about the contributions of African-Americans to this oral tradition in an attempt to approach the history and dynamics of African-American folklore from a more comprehensive perspective. Additionally, I plan to immerse them in the oral tradition by allowing them to see storytelling in films, experience the story with a professional storyteller, create their own folktales, and even have the opportunity to become the storyteller. Ultimately, I want my students to recognize the African-American and the African storyteller as artists that create foundations for understanding the way life is in America for the displaced African, and also as offering explanations for the sociological issues that African-Americans have had to endure, especially slavery.

In short, I hope that during our Black History studies my students are able to add storytelling to their list of contributions made by African-Americans. This unit will be part of a collaborative effort among a team of teachers to expose the children to films that negatively depict the “others” of the non-dominant American society. Our team will seek to provide students with factual information and analytical tools prior to viewing films so that they may learn to be more conscious and critical of the film industry’s portrayal of minorities.

Many times children simply just receive information without knowing how to successfully apply much of what they learn to their life. Yet when children do make personal connections, especially with films, these images and stereotypes can have negative impacts on their lives. For example, films which contain negative stereotypical behavior can cause groups, in this case children, to copy the depicted behavior. This unit and team’s objectives are to equip our students with tools for deciphering information from film to make positive

connections, even though material may be presented in a negative way.

Storytelling has always been an important part of my African-American family heritage as it was for many African-American families—and slavery was another. The history of storytelling in the African-American culture is rooted in the origination of folktales in Africa. Historically, Africans were known to tell stories for various reasons. Before the institution of slavery, African storytellers told stories for three primary purposes: to inspire young people, to entertain them, and to teach social and moral values. Eventually these intentions began to evolve.

As slavery became inescapable for the African, the storytellers began to adapt these traditional intentions to their new environment and situation.. The oral tradition remained but the attitudes and purposes for the stories or tales were transformed. As these people were enslaved they were not allowed to speak their native language, and instead were forced to speak a language that was foreign and difficult. Their attempt to communicate in their native language as well as the new forced language resulted in the creation of the Gullah dialect better known as Black English. This “Negro Dialect” is the spoken language for most of the original stories or folktales in America, despite the fact that many scholars have attempted to translate the dialect into a more familiar yet artificially constructed written text.

Other changes that were forced to take place were the functions of the folktales themselves. Now on the plantations, African-Americans had a different picture to paint for the young once entertained by tales in native Africa. As slavery was instituted, African-Americans began to tell their tales to create a bond between the old and young on the plantations. In-as-much as slaves were frequently sold and traded, the time spent on plantations was never guaranteed for anyone. Families were often split apart. People would thus use the tales to reduce the hostilities among the community and explain with humor the situation to the young children. People often disappeared, never to return to the planation; therefore the tales shared by these people often secured relationships between the separated and those who remained. Another way that the historical functions of folktales began to change was the need to teach the historical struggles of African-Americans and the enslavement of Africans. Through the use of charm, wit, intelligence, and beauty the tales depicted somber situations involving slaves and events of slavery. Remarkably, storytellers were able to convey the messages of the tales orally with only experience as their teacher because any formal education, especially reading and writing, was denied to them. Lastly, folktales were needed to instill social values as well as provide a paradigm by which the slave community could understand sociological changes affected by the institution of slavery. This particular function endured the changes that slavery brought about, yet in a somewhat evolved state by assisting those conversant in the “language” and symbolism of the tales to understand the African-American’s place in the social system of slavery. For example, storytellers often made effective use of symbolism by relating the “Negro” to the animal character—Br’er Rabbit. In many tales Br’er Rabbit was the character known to be smart, clever, and the one who always outsmarted the other characters. This is a clear representation of Negro behavior and survival techniques on the plantations. This also confirms the relationship that the slave had with the master in that s/he (the slave) would attempt to outsmart the master in order to free her/himself and escape.

Overall, the storyteller was the person that validated events with a story. Africans, once settled in America, were denied rights that allowed them to have their own religious practices and education. As these people were striped of their culture and forced to adopt a new and foreign culture, they were also forced into a new way of expressing themselves. Before, their expressions were somewhat naive or innocuous in nature, intended only to invoke laughter and teach lessons; they later became forced to retell and describe events of harsh captivity and a voyage across the ocean into slavery.

To assist the teacher with effective implementation of the unit, I have provided a daily breakdown of activities and lessons in the unit. Each daily activity will require about 30 minutes of instructional time. I suggest this daily method for second to fourth grade teachers because the concepts to be discussed will probably be difficult for this age group to understand in one lesson. In fact, for the second and third grade students, the teacher may want to shorten the length of time spent on each lesson per day; this should be done to prevent the loss of interest in the content of the unit. As for the fifth to sixth grade student, more time could be spent daily on lessons which would reduce the overall length of the unit.

The activities in my unit can be classified as Initiating/Introductory activities, Developmental, and Culminating activities. First, Initiating/Introductory activities will be completed in order to acquaint the students with background information which is necessary for students to internalize or process the nature of the concepts. Next, Developmental activities will be designed to teach a particular concept, for example, defining the stereotypical role in film, or deciding fact from fiction. These lessons may be taught throughout the unit. Lastly, the Culminating activities will attempt to synthesize the various concepts dealt with throughout the unit and are thus designed to summarize and conclude.

To begin the unit, I plan to provide a more accurate perspective of slavery to my students by the use of films like *Roots* and recorded books— *To Be A Slave*, and literature— *Now Let Me Fly: A Slave Family*. At this time, the students will begin an interviewing process with elder members of their family or community. This will enable the students to get information about their family/community history and how it pertains to slavery. These sources will focus the students' attention to the realities of slavery and prepare them to look for the misrepresentations of the slaves and their storytelling depicted in *Song of the South* .

Day 1

<p>The teacher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ access prior knowledge on the subject of slavery in America through the use of a KWL chart; students should be probed for questions like how slaves were treated, who they were, where they lived, etc. ☐ provide time for the students to view <i>Digging for Slaves</i>. 	<p>The student will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ complete K and W of the chart, the L will be completed as part of an evaluation of learning. ☐ view <i>Digging for Slaves</i> background that pertains to slavery. ☐ begin a daily journal for personal reactions to the content of unit (films, and literature).
--	--

Days 2-10

<p>The teacher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ present edited excerpts of <i>Roots</i> . ☐ provide copies of maps of Africa to discuss the setting of <i>Roots : part 1</i> . ☐ provide opportunity for students to discuss personal reactions. (small and whole group settings) ☐ read aloud excerpts from: <i>Now Let Me Fly</i>, and <i>To Be A Slave</i> . 	<p>The student will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ view excerpts of <i>Roots</i> that depict life in Africa and life as a slave. ☐ complete map of Africa. ☐ evaluate film and literature by recording personal reactions. ☐ compare the forms of media that are used to depict slavery.
---	---

After students are familiar with the important facts about slavery, they will critically view the film *Song of the South* and focus on points emphasized in the lessons. This film will provide students with one viewpoint of slavery and storytelling on the plantations, however, throughout the unit I will provide them with other films and literature that will be compared to *Song of the South*. This film is based on the works of Joel Chandler Harris, a white journalist who wrote *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* based on a slave named George Terrell. Harris grew up hearing folktales from this elder slave and attempted to reproduce the tales in his writings. Unfortunately, he received criticism for exaggerating the Negro dialect. Later Disney introduced an important innovation in film making by mixing animation and motion picture in producing *Song of the South* based on Harris' work. In the film, Uncle Remus is a character who is supposed to represent an Old South Negro or the George Terrell of Harris's time. Instead he is an elder on the plantation that tells his tales

(folktales) to a young white boy who lives in the "big house" and charms and entertains the youngster at the expense of African-American culture and folktales. His attitude toward slavery and storytelling is what has received the most criticism. The Uncle Remus character has the ability to teach lessons to the boy through his tales yet uses these tales to improve his master/slave relationship. His attitude to slavery as well as the storytelling antics he uses to comfort the boy have received great criticism. Yet with all this in mind Uncle Remus became one of the most prominent figures to children because of the way he fancifully dances to "Zip e dee do dah" and makes slavery look like fun and games.

In addition to contextualizing the film with a discussion of slavery, I plan to introduce the students to the original African folktales and show the evolution of the storyteller from the Pre-Slavery to Slavery era. First, my students will complete a semantic map about folktales. Then, the students will develop a definition of folktales and the storyteller. With teacher input, the students' definition will involve the functions of the original folktales. Students will also refer to the map of Africa to discuss the setting of the original tales. At this time, I will conduct a reading lesson that would require them to listen to authentic African Folktales. The students will also make drums and rattles to aid in the art of storytelling of *Mimosa*, *Her Stories*, and *The People Could Fly*. In addition to participation in storytelling, the students will be responsible for recording information about the tales (characters, events, setting, favorite part, and lesson learned). After the exposure to the original tales, the student will read and listen to tales that were recorded after Africans reached America as slaves. Material used will be *Her Stories*, *The People Could Fly* and most importantly *The Complete Works of Uncle Remus* and *More Adventures of Br'er Rabbit and His Friends* by Julius Lester . In each of these works only the tales of Br'er Rabbit will be used. The purpose of reviewing this material is to compare the content of each form of folktale. At this time, the students will develop new functions for folktales as well as see the symbolism between Br'er Rabbit and the Negro on the plantation. A semantic feature analysis will be used to compare the slaves and Br'er Rabbit. In these tales Br'er Rabbit is shown to be witty, clever, and always outsmarting the other characters. By the end of the "evolution of the storyteller and folktales" focus, the students will describe the changes in the functions of folktales as well as notice the differences between folktales recorded in Africa and folktales recorded in America by African-Americans.

Days 11-20

The teacher will:

• assess student knowledge by the use of semantic mapping strategies to determine what is known about storytellers and folktales.

• encourage discussion about why

The student will:

• refer to maps of Africa to visualize the different countries in Africa and the tales associated with that country

• develop and discuss intentions of folktales.

Africans and African Americans told stories. They make drums for participation in daily storytelling and with the professional storyteller. They provide materials for making drums and rattles that will integrate music with choral read parts of the story and the art of storytelling. utilize instruments.

They invite a professional storyteller to perform They locate the setting of the film *Song*

traditional African/African American folktales. *of the South*.

Storytellers can be found by contacting the local Arts Council. In New Haven, teachers may contact the ECA for perspectives. They interpret the behaviors of the animals that appear in the literature and visualize them in animated form.

They define the genre that includes folktales as traditional fantasy. They create own animated versions of the *Song of the South* based on

They define, then read aloud trickster and *pour-quoi* tales. the literature; then compare to

Disney's version.

They provide opportunity to view the film *Song of the South* . They evaluate Disney's use of animation and live action.

They encourage discussion about Disney's animated depiction of the tales. -compare *Song of the South* to other films that depict slavery and

They provide copies of a map that show the south plantation life by completing a

eastern states of America to determine the Venn Diagram (give at least 3

setting of the film. examples of how the films are -read aloud from the literature that inspired similar and different).

the making of *Song of the South* ,

The Favorite Uncle Remus by

Joel Chandler Harris.

They relate biographical information on the author

and the person in his life that fit the model of

Uncle Remus.

They encourage discussion about slavery/life on the

plantation as it is depicted in the films as well as

the literature.

After viewing of the film, I will conduct film studies lessons with the students on the process of making films (animation and motion picture), the roles of the actor and director, and evaluative measures to critique a film.

The purpose of this is to build background knowledge about films and the different jobs and responsibilities that are involved in making films so that the students will be able to focus on various points that will be emphasized at a later time in the unit. Also, I felt it necessary to focus on film studies so that the students can appreciate this film for being the first Disney film to mix animation and motion picture; and, so that the students will recognize James Baskett (Uncle Remus) as the first actor hired by Disney. At this point in the unit, the students will be introduced to the term stereotypes and recognize how these stereotypes are used in film to negatively depict certain groups of people. In addition to discussing these roles, the students will examine *Song of the South* for its portrayals of African Americans in film.

Days 21-25

<p>The teacher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • issue projects to be completed by students • recreate versions of Uncle Remus’s folktales or African tales and create a 3-D model of the setting of the tale; versions may be created in the form of plays, stories, short skits and puppets. (Strategies to develop writing skills should be approached from a language arts perspective) • conduct a study of film to show the different jobs and responsibilities involved in making <i>Song of the South</i>. • encourage students to discuss their comparisons of <i>Song of the South</i> to other films in order to develop definitions for stereotypes, misrepresentations, and negative images on film. • expose the students to the public reactions to the film through the use of newspaper articles, film reviews, and magazine articles. • determine, if any, misrepresentations of facts in the film. 	<p>The student will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critique the making of <i>Song of the South</i> for effective representation of the facts as well as the use of story elements, developing plot, and characterization. • develop definitions for stereotypes, misrepresentations, and negative images on film. • demonstrate understanding of how to recognize stereotypes by naming examples of characters that fit the Uncle Tom and Mammy stereotype. (characters in the film <i>Song of the South</i> should be classified as stereotypical) • notice the differences in the folktales of Uncle Remus and those associated with Africa. • develop a timeline that shows how the intent of folktales evolved from African to African American.
--	--

To continue with Developmental activities, I plan to integrate the film’s (*Song of the South*) content and folktales into other curricular areas such as reading, writing, language arts and science. By this time, the students would have seen the film which is the central focus of my unit so that the comparisons of other films, books and videos will allow my students to decide which of the productions displays a more accurate and realistic presentation of slavery and storytelling on plantations. With the use of various deviations of Uncle Remus’s tales (*Br’er Rabbit Tales*), all found on home video, I will focus on the similarities between the video animated 1990’s version with Julius Lester’s most recent account of Uncle Remus’s tales.

The language arts focus will be developed by the use poetry, writing plays, and writing stories. In addition, the

linguistics of the folktales will be studied to understand the language the tales were written and spoken. Also, the students will write their own versions of folktales as though they were storytellers in their families; journals will be kept by the students where they will express their personal feelings about the material encountered on a daily basis. As mentioned before, poetry will be a focal point in the language arts component; the students will write poems about the animals in the tales based on the cinquain, biopoem, couplet rhymes, and diamante style of poetry. Science will be used to further integrate the curriculum in that the students will generalize animal behaviors and analyze the personification of the animals in the tales.

At the culmination of this unit the students will have the opportunity to put on a production with puppets, make a mural of a forest placing the animals in their individual homes, assign character traits to each animal based on the actions of these animals in the tales, and invite a professional storyteller to perform and involve the students in the process of storytelling. Lastly, music will be a focus by incorporating the original soundtrack of the film. The students will learn the soundtrack songs as well as native African songs to use with the puppets created as well as use the instruments to perform the tales.

Days 26-35

<p>The teacher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide information that supports the use of animals in the tales and their (animals) African counterparts. • encourage students to recognize the symbolism between the slaves and the Br'er Rabbit. • provide students with the opportunity to view the 1990's version of Br'er Rabbits adventures through the use of recent animated versions of the tales (available on home video) and through the use of Julius Lester's "Favorite Adventures of Br'er recent literary work. Rabbit". • read aloud Lester's tales in conjunction with the viewing of the video. • in language arts, the students should learn the styles of poetry; continue to write poetry in the form of cinquain, biopoem, diamante, and couplet rhymes compile a mini book of own version of a tale. semantics feature analysis of each animal; this will determine characteristic, and include all the animals from and traits of each animal. the tales. • begin a study of rabbits (Science) 	<p>The student will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • list animals in <i>Song of the South</i> and complete a "now and then" activity that shows how each animal is represented in Africa and African American tales. • compare the animals to people by their behaviors and characteristics. • view video and read literature in order to choose favorite tales to include in their own • write poems about favorite animals in the tales using one of the styles of poetry; continue to write poetry in the form of cinquain, biopoem, diamante, and couplet rhymes compile a mini book of own • complete a mural of a forest
---	--

1. Rabbit life cycle

2. Forest habitat
3. Nutrition of rabbits
4. Class Pet—study behaviors of rabbits.
5. Classification of Animals
 - a. Mammals—characteristics of mammals, and what makes an animal a mammal.

☐ take students to an African American museum, artifacts center, etc.

Days 35-40

<p>The teacher will:</p> <p>☐ allow students to form groups that will dramatize a tale from the adventures of Br'er Rabbit.</p> <p>☐ provide students with music (original soundtrack of <i>Song of the South</i>) to use in the dramatization of a tale.</p> <p>☐ read and dramatize a tale.</p> <p>-learn songs to sing while dramatizing</p>	<p>The student will:</p> <p>☐ dramatize one of Br'er Rabbits adventures.</p> <p>☐ learn the songs on the original soundtrack to sing while dramatizing the tales.</p> <p>☐ perform the tales with the use of songs, drums, rattles, actors, props and narrators.</p>
--	--

the tales.

☐ perform the tales with the use of music- drums and rattles—original soundtrack, actors, narrators, and props.

Criteria for evaluating progress of my students will be the completion of activities and the participation in each lesson. The students will be responsible for note-taking from films, writing in personal journals, and discussion in small / whole groups. In addition, my unit will be part of a collaborative effort among a team of teachers trying to overcome the use of negative images and stereotypes in film. Our hope is to encourage inner city children to produce quality art and writing that counteract the stereotypes they learn about. The team will make effective use of team teaching, cooperative learning, and the community (historians and speakers) to enhance our goal as well as strengthening the relationship between the school and the community.

Sample Lessons and Graphic Organizers

Sample 1—KWL chart: used to access prior knowledge of students, based on a particular subject; helps students organize and categorize information about a subject. Each student should have their own copy of a chart. For younger students, this may have to be a guided process. Yet with the older students, this could be an independent process.

K—What I know W—What I want to know L—What I learned

Focus and Review

1. To determine what the students know about slavery, the teacher should ask questions to generate a list for “what I know” about slavery. Sample questions are:

What did slavery mean?

Who were slaves?

How did slaves look?

How did slaves live?

2. After listing the “what I know”, the students will begin to formulate questions about “what I want to know”. This strategy sets the purpose for learning by allowing the students to look out for important information in the film or literature.

3. Lastly in this stage the teacher should motivate the students by giving a brief synopsis of the film and literature to be seen.

Statement of Objectives:

At this time the teacher should explicitly announce the purpose of lesson:

“This week we will view *Digging for Slaves* and *Roots* so that we may get an understanding of slavery. By viewing the films, you will gain insight to the architecture, tools and working and living habits of the slaves. This possibly will affirm some of the questions you formulated about slavery.

Teacher Input

1. Teacher will provide edited versions of the films.
2. Teacher will provide student maps of Africa to gather evidence of the setting of *Roots*.
3. References should be made also to geographical locations of *Digging for Slaves* (North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia).

Guided Practice/Independent Practice

1. Students will view films while periodically stopping for questions and comments.
2. Students will take daily notes on films while keeping a daily journal.
3. Read aloud excerpts from *Now Let Me Fly*, and *To Be a Slave* .
4. Assign interviewing projects in which students should inquire about slavery in their family history.

Closure

Closure for this introductory part of the unit, should occur on the tenth day. On this day the should reveal their sources of family history, as well as refer to their KWL chart to complete the “L” column. Students should continue to keep a daily journal of events as well.

Sample 2—Venn Diagram: used to show the relationship between two subjects (books, films, people, animals, etc.). In this unit, this strategy should be used to compare the films *Song of the South* and *Roots*. The purpose of comparing these two films is to determine how they are similar and different in their portrayals of slavery. This strategy can be used in cooperative groups for comparing these two films; or this strategy can be used whole group discussions.

(figure available in print form)

Focus and Review

The teacher should direct the students’ attention to the previously viewed films, particularly *Roots* . The students should review notes taken from the film *Song of the South* .

Statement of Objectives

State to the students today’s lesson: To compare the films *Roots* and *Song of the South* for similarities and differences in their portrayals of slavery.

Teacher Input

1. Reread any excerpts or replay film parts if necessary.
2. Direct students to facts presented in both films. Generate discussions about feelings about films’ content.
3. Provide Venn Diagram and explain it’s uses-A list of events or facts that are similar should be recorded in the intersecting circles, and the different events should be recorded in the appropriately labeled circle.

Guided Practice/Independent Practice

1. Set up groups for cooperative or whole group discussion.
2. Instruct students to list three similar events that occurred in the films.
3. Then list three different events and label them accordingly.
4. After completing diagram, the students should reconvene and share responses.

Closure

Before concluding this lesson, the students should have a general understanding of the misrepresentations of slavery that occurred in *Song of the South* by comparing other factual situations to this fact. At this point of the unit, the students are prepared to criticize the film's use of stereotypes which in the sequence of lessons, should be the next lesson.

Sample 3—Semantic Map: organizes information through the use of circles or webs that are labeled into categories.

(figure available in print form)

Focus and Review:

The teacher should review the tales told by Uncle Remus in the film *Song of the South* by asking:

1. Name a title of a tale told in the film. Inquire about story elements of the tales (characters, time, setting).
2. What were some of Uncle Remus's responsibilities on the plantation?
3. What did most of the children seem to enjoying doing the most?
4. What was the meaning of the folktales?

To begin this lesson the students' attention should be focused on kinds of folktales, who told, who listened and why folktales were told. In doing so the teacher should prepare a semantic map.

Statement of Objectives

State today's objective which is to create a semantic map by adding information that we know about folktales.

Teacher Input

1. Start a large map on white butcher paper. This map should remain visible to the class for the

remainder of the unit.

2. Give definitions for the two kinds of folktales presented on the semantic map.

pourquoi—explains how things came to be trickster—involves the use of clever, tricky, characters able to trick their predators in order to escape harm.

3. Record answers to questions in the appropriate categories. Allow students to complete and create new categories for the map.

Guided Practice/Independent Practice

1. After map is completed, the teacher should read an example of each kind of tale. As tales are read aloud students may need to refine maps' contents.

2. Make instruments for storytelling.

Making a drum materials-coffee can, can opener, duct tape, colored paper, scissors, masking tape, and colorful yarn.

1. Remove the top and bottom of the can with the can opener.

2. Cover the center of the can with the duct tape.

3. Cover the outside of the can with the colored paper secure the paper with tape.

4. Fasten a piece of yarn to one side of the can, wind yarn around the can until covered with yarn. Use different colors of yarn. Make a knot to tie the ends of the yarn together. Be sure all loose pieces of yarn are secured in the strands already covering the can.

Closure

Closure should occur the following day after the students have had an opportunity to experience the art of storytelling. This activity should involve a professional storyteller. This will allow the students to become active participants in the process. The use of drums should be used to add to the storytelling experience.

Sample 4—Semantic Feature Analysis: a grid used to organize information about characters from a story or film, or other items of a subject based on characteristics or traits.

(figure available in print form)

Focus and Review

Review animals from the tales and their behaviors. To begin the semantic feature analysis, asked the students to state words that describe the animals in the tales.

Statement of Objectives

In today's lesson we are going to decide character traits for animals. Then analyze traits as they are shared by animals in the tales and record these findings on a Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA).

Teacher Input/Guided Practice/Independent Practice

1. Define the word trait.
2. Discuss the personification of animals (a characteristic of folktale).
3. Encourage students to assign traits. These should be recorded on the top of the SFA grid.
4. Then instruct students to recall the animals from the tales. These should be recorded on the left of the SFA grid.
5. Discuss each animal by describing the events of the tales. Mark a plus sign if the trait applies and a minus sign if the trait does not apply.
6. Encourage the students to make connections between the animals and people (personification). This will allow the students to see the symbolism of the slave and Br'er Rabbit.

Closure

To close this lesson it would be appropriate to relate this lesson to poetry lessons. This analysis of each animal will provide details for all styles of poetry highlighted in this unit.

Sample 5—Poetry: the following poetry formats can be used to describe characters in literature or film. The format used will depend on the grade level of the students. Both poems can be used for second to eighth grade students, however, the biopoem may be more suitable for upper elementary and middle grades students. Both poems can be used for whole group, paired group, or individual activities. These poetry formats should be used in association with an activity that analyzes characters. My suggestion is the use of the SFA especially with lower elementary students. However, any character analysis may be used to prepare students to use these formats.

Cinquain

Line 1—One word to describe the subject of the poem (noun) _____

Line 2—Two words that describe the subject (adjectives) _____

Line 3—Three words that show the action of the subject (verbs) _____

Line 4—Four words that tell how you feel about the subject (sentence) _____

Line 5—One word that is another word for the subject (synonym) _____

Biopoem

First name

Relative of . . .

Lover of . . . (three items that the character loves)

Who feels . . . (three items that explain how the character feels)

Who needs . . . (three items to explain what the character needs)

Who fears . . . (three items that explain what the character fears)

Who gives . . . (three items that explain what the character gives to others)

Who would like to see . . . (three items explain what the character hopes to see)

Resident of . . .

Last name

Teacher Bibliography

Andrews, William *To Tell A Free Story : the first century of Afro American biography, 1760-1865* Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1986. The biographies of former slaves in the United States.//

Carter, George E. and James R. Parker. *Afro-American Folklore : A Unique American Experience*. Selected Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Minority Studies. Wisconsin University, La Crosse, 1975. Excerpts used will be Marcella Howell's examination of Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus figure. She examines the figure in the context of black folklore; Frank Suggs, Jr. describes a strategy for introducing black folklore and black music into the elementary school; and Etta Moten Barnett responds to the changes that in African

folklore and music since the new geographical and cultural influences in America (since slavery).

Del Negro, Janice. "The Book List Interview". *Booklist* . vol. 91 no.12: 1995. This article features an interview with Julius Lester on retelling tales of Uncle Remus, his approach to writing and retelling the traditional tales, and his intentions in the storytelling process.

Harris, Joel Chandler. *The Favorite Uncle Remus*. Illustrated by A.B. Frost selected selected, arranged, and edited by G.Van Santvoord and A.C. Coolidge. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1976. Favorite stories from many Uncle Remus books.

———. *Uncle Remus : His Songs, his sayings*. Illustrated by A.B.//

Frost. New York: D. Appleton. 1925. Legends and stories of Afro-American songs and folklore.

Joyner, Charles W. *Down By the Riverside: A South Carolina slave community* . Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984. Describes the lives of African American in the New World.

Katz, William Loren. *Breaking the Chains: African-American slave resistance*. New York, Atheneum, 1990. Describes the harsh conditions under which slaves lived.

Lester, Julius. *Black Folktales*. Illustrated by Tom Feelings. New York: R.W. Baron, 1969. Twelve tales of African and Afro-American origin.

———. *The Storytellers Voice: Reflections on the rewritings of Uncle Remus Tales*. *New Advocate* vol. 1 no 3, 1988.//

———. *The Tales of Uncle Remus. The Adventures of Br'er Rabbit*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial Books, 1987. Tales of Br'er Rabbit retold based on the Uncle Remus tales.

———. *More Tales of Uncle Remus : further adventures of Br'er Rabbit, his friends, enemies and others*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial Books, 1988. A continuation of the Br'er Rabbit tales.

———. *The Last Tales of Uncle Remus*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial Books, 1994. Retells the final adventures of Br'er Rabbit.

———. *To Be A Slave* . Narrated by Peter Francis James, Lynne Thigpen, Michelle Denise Woods. Prince Frederick, MD: Recorded Books, 1995. A compilation of facts, experiences, and situations of slaves and ex-slaves from the time of leaving Africa through the Civil War.

Levine, Lawrence. *Black Culture and Consciousness : Afro-American folk thought from slavery to freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. A historical perspective of folklore in the United States and the attitudes toward the changes that took place during the Emancipation era.

Logan, C.A. " Books in the Classroom" . *Horn Book Magazine* vol. 66 issue 6, 1990. An evaluation of the theme 'friendship' and refers to Julius Lester's reviving of Br'er Rabbit as a good source for teaching this theme.

Long, Richard A. *The Uncle Remus Dialect : A preliminary linguistic view*. Southeastern Conference on Linguistics, Florida State University, 1969. An examination of the 'creolized' variety of southern speech—the middle Georgia dialect that Harris wrote the tales of Uncle Remus, and the representation of a popular dialect

in the southern states.

Mixon, W. "The Ultimate Irrelevance of Race: Joel C. Harris and Uncle Remus of their time ". *Journal of Southern History* vol. 56 issue 3, 1990. A profile of the believed relationship Harris had with an Uncle Remus figure in his life.

Nash, Evelyn. "Beyond Humor in Joel C. Harris's "Nights with Uncle Remus". *Western Journal of Black Studies* vol. 14 no 4, 1990. Questions the authenticity of Joel C. Harris's folklore. Refers to the tales as fakelore. Reacts to the stereotypes and degradations of slavery.

Siegelson, Kim. *The Terrible, Wonderful, Telling at Hog Hammock*. Illustrated by Eric Velasquez. New York: Harper Collins, 1994. Oree's grandmother encourages him to compete in the local storytelling contest. He has his grandfather's gift for storytelling. Set on Sapelo Island-in a Gullah community.

Torrence, Jackie. *Storytelling* . Horn Book Magazine vol. 59 no 3, 1983.This professional storyteller encourages the use of Harris's tales to introduce the art of storytelling.

Films

Br'er Rabbit Tales. Warner/Elektra/Atlantic Corporation, Family Home Entertainment, 1991. Story collection includes recent versions of Joel C. Harris's *Uncle Remus Tales* . (48m) *Digging for Slaves: The Excavation of American Slaves*. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1992. Documentary that describes the ways of life for slaves in the south. Provides opportunity to understand slavery's impact on architecture and agriculture on prominent plantations in South and North Carolina and Virginia. (60m)

Roots, vols.1 and 2. Warner Home Video, Inc., 1977. A docudrama of the captivation of Africans to become slaves in America. Highlights the plight of Alex Haley's ancestors as they were forced to leave their village in Gambia, West Africa. (180m)

Song of the South. Walt Disney Films, 1946. Disney's re-creation of Harris's Uncle Remus tales. The movie takes place on a Southern plantation (Georgia) where the main character, a slave Uncle Remus, is often seen singing and telling his tales to young white boy. (94m)

* all suggested films for the unit are available in the Yale Film Studies Library.

Student Bibliography

Aardema, Verna. *Behind the Back of the Mountains: Black folktales from South Africa*. Illustrated by Leo and Dianne Dillon. New York: Dial Press, 1973. Tales that have original African origins. These depict the functions of folktales before the institute of slavery.

———. *Mimosa: Once upon a time tales from Africa*. illustrated by Reynolds Puffins. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1994. Early recordings of tales from Africa that teach lessons and entertain.

African-American Folktales for Young Readers. Collected and edited by Richard Alan Young and Judy Dockery Young. Little Rock: August House Publishers, Inc., 1993. A collection of folktales retold by professional storytellers. Some reflect the somberness of slavery while some reflect African-American's contributions.

Apples on a Stick: the folklore of black children. collected and edited by Barbara Michels and Bettye White. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Coward-McCann, 1993. Playground rhymes, hand clap songs, and verse for children.

Bryan, Ashley. *Beat the Story Drum, Pum Pum*. New York: Macmillan, 1980. An African tale that humorously depicts the use of drums during the art of storytelling.

Goss, Linda and Clay. *Jump up and Say! A collection of Black Storytelling*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. New versions of classic folktales. Featured storytellers are Rex Ellis and Jackie Torrence.

Hamilton, Virginia. *Her Stories. African-American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales*. Illustrated by Leo and Dianne Dillon. New York: The Blue Sky Press, 1995. A collection of folktales that consist of women as the symbolic character in the animal folktales, and the trickster tales of African origin.

Hamilton, Virginia. *The People Could Fly*. Illustrated by Leo and Dianne Dillon. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1994. Recounts of folktales told during the time of slavery. These folktales reflect the desire for freedom, and the sorrow of slavery. Haugaard, Erik Christian *A Slaves Tale*. Illustrated by Leo and Dianne Dillon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965. A historical fictional account of a slave families traditions, and experiences.

Johnson, Delores. *Now Let Me Fly: The Story of a Slave Family*. New York: MacMillan, 1960. Based on a true story, a family history involving three generations of slavery. The families endure the pain of a system that continues to weaken the family structure with the fleeing and selling of family members.

Kids Explore African-American Heritage. Westridge Young Writers Workshop. New Mexico: John Muir Publications, 1993. A complete guide to informing students of Black Americans and their contributions including inventions, authors, and government officials. This guide also allows readers to examine present day contributors to America.

McKissack, Patricia and Frederick. *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters*. Illustrated by John Thompson. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1994. Describes the customs and songs used to celebrate Christmas in the big plantation house and in the slave quarters.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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

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