



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

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## **Beauty is More Than Skin Deep: Examining the Positive & Negative Depictions of Physical Appearance in Children's Films**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 96.03.03

by Karen E. Carazo

Adults as well as children are often influenced by the media, especially in the area of television and film. A primary message conveyed by the media relative to physical appearance is that if you are young, thin, “beautiful”, and the right color, you are considered acceptable to society. On the other hand, however, if you are old, fat, “ugly”, and the wrong color, you are viewed as unacceptable. Television and film for children are no exception. They often send the message that if an individual is perceived as physically attractive, he or she will be successful. Conversely, if society perceives an individual as unattractive physically, he or she will not be successful. Due to the influence media has on my students, I intend to use it to motivate discussion with regard to this issue of beauty and what truly makes a person “beautiful”.

My unit will use various children's films, especially Disney Productions such as Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, The Jungle Book, and The Big Green as well as a variety of children's literature to expose my students to the positive and negative depictions of physical appearance in an attempt to show them that “Beauty is More Than Skin Deep”: that true beauty comes from within. The purpose of this unit is to increase students' awareness of how physical characteristics influence their perception of various characters. We will view and observe all of the films in their entirety and discuss the following story elements of each: the setting, the main and minor characters, the plot, etc. with special emphasis on the characters in the film and the way in which they are portrayed. Activities dealing primarily with the characters and their depictions will accompany each film. As a culminating activity, we will create an original film centered around this topic of what constitutes beauty.

(Recommended for Social , Creative Writing, Reading, and Language Arts, grades 2-4)

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