



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1997 Volume II: American Children's Literature

---

## **Examining African-American Culture through the Use of Children's Literature**

Curriculum Unit 97.02.05  
by Karen E. Carazo

This unit is designed for a third grade class at a New Haven Public School. The students in the class at L.W. Beecher Elementary School are predominantly African-American and range in age from 8-10. They come from lower to middle-class socioeconomic levels and a variety of home environments. The students are also diverse in academic levels, including students participating in the Talented and Gifted Program as well as those receiving resource services for various learning difficulties.

Teaching about diversity plays an important role in education today. Teachers everywhere are encouraged to raise students' awareness regarding diversity, especially cultural diversity, in an effort to bring people closer together. The L.W. Beecher Team will explore cultural diversity through the use of children's literature with each member focusing on a different ethnic group. My contribution to the team will be to examine the African-American culture as it is depicted in literature for young children.

Since the majority of students at L.W. Beecher School are of African-American descent, the study of African-American history and culture has always been an integral part of our Social Studies curriculum. However, because of the increasing emphasis on developing students' reading skills using more integrated approaches, I will attempt to further expand my students' awareness and understanding of their African-American culture through the use of children's literature, while also focusing on related reading and language arts skills.

Students in this age group are becoming increasingly aware of the differences of others. Therefore, it is imperative that the issue of diversity become an integral part of today's curriculums in an effort to expose students to other races, cultures, religions, and special groups such as gays and lesbians and the handicapped, for the purpose of helping them become more sensitive to others and realize that there really are more similarities than differences between individuals.

In teaching about diversity, hopefully you will increase students awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the groups they are learning about, even if that group happens to be their own. They've often learned many of the stereotypes that the majority and other minority groups may have which are the direct result of ignorance and misunderstanding. Frequently these stereotypes have been passed down from generation to generation. Destroying negative stereotypes about their group helps students feel more pride and self-respect while destroying negative stereotypes about other groups helps them gain respect for others. Providing students with knowledge about their group's achievements helps them build a more positive self-esteem.

Similarly, educating them about other groups helps bridge differences and create an atmosphere for more positive interactions among individuals. It prepares them to live, learn, communicate, and work to achieve common goals in a culturally diverse world by fostering understanding, appreciation, and respect for others.

In 1987, a Social Development curriculum, Project Charlie, was introduced in the New Haven Public School System. Although diversity is not a component of our Social Development curriculum, per se, the issue of diversity certainly ties in nicely with the Project Charlie curriculum, whose main goal is to raise students' self-awareness. Project Charlie's lessons are geared towards increasing students' self-esteem, motivating them to learn, promoting positive decision-making skills, and helping them with conflict resolution in an attempt to bolster more positive exchanges with others. The Project Charlie lessons are divided into three categories: Self-Awareness, Relationships, Decision-Making, and Chemical Use. Similarly, my unit will be divided as follows: Self-Awareness, Relationships with Family, Relationships with Friends, and Relationship to/within a Community.

The aim of the Self-Awareness section will be to expose students to characters' personalities and behavior and other issues with which they can easily relate. Students in this age group are just entering a crucial stage in their development: the awkward stage prior to adolescence when self-esteem is probably at its most fragile. Therefore, books in this section will focus on raising students' self-esteem. In their book, *Building Self-Esteem in Children*, Berne and Savary define a healthy self-esteem as "a capacity to see oneself as valuable and competent, loving and lovable, having certain unique talents and a worthwhile personality to share in relationships with others." 1

The next section will deal with family relationships. Students will explore various types of family structures and relationships and also traditions similar to those celebrated in their own families. Students will learn that there is no one correct type of family but rather that families should be made up of people who love and respect each other. There are traditional families which are made up of a mother, father, and children; single-parent families; extended families in which grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, etc. may live with the core family, etc. A variety of relationships will be examined so all children will have something with which they can identify.

The next section, entitled "Relationships with Friends", will use children's books to examine friendships among peers, interracial and inter-religious friendships, friendships with the handicapped, and friendships with adults.

In the final section, relationships to/within one's community will be explored in an attempt to show students that they really aren't so different from other members of their culture.

I propose to develop a unit in which I will use a variety of children's books, both fiction and non-fiction, to increase students' awareness and appreciation of African-American culture and history. I have also selected collections of poems which were written to evoke feelings about their culture. This unit will focus primarily on the African-American culture as it is today, though it will also expose students to famous African-Americans in history.

This unit will be interdisciplinary in approach, lending itself to various reading, writing, history, social development, art, music, and drama activities. As a culminating activity, students will perform an adaptation of Faith Ringgold's *Dinner At Aunt Connie's House*, written by two former students, Brittney Talley and Jaala Johnson, during the 1995-1996 school year, which combines family tradition with a dose of history. A copy of the script is included with this unit. Because the play calls for girls primarily, the boys will be employed to create portraits of the famous African-American women depicted in this moving story. This unit will be

developed and activities will be shared with other members of the Beecher Team throughout the 1997-1998 school year in an effort to increase students' awareness, understanding, and appreciation of other cultures besides their own.

***Self-Awareness @Text:* I will kick off this section of my unit by reading the book *Bein'This Way With You* by W. Nikola-Lisa. Written in rap, this story celebrates our diversity. The story takes place one sunny day at the park where a group of friends discover that despite people's physical differences, we really are very much alike.**

---

"Brown eyes.

Blue eyes.  
Big nose.  
Little nose.  
Straight hair.  
Curly hair.  
Different-  
Mm-mmm,  
but the same,

Ah-ha!" 2 I will follow this book with three short poems from Eloise Greenfield's *Honey, I Love and other love poems* : "I Look Pretty", "Honey, I Love", and "By Myself". In the poem "I Look Pretty", a little girl plays dress-up in her mother's clothes. "Honey, I Love" is about all the things the main character loves. "By Myself" is about a girl's realization that she can be whatever she wants to be. It lists different things she likes to be, such as a twin, a gospel song, a leaf turning red, and ends " I'm whatever I want to be/ An anything I care to be/ And when I open my eyes/ What I care to be/ Is me." 3

Mari Evans' poem "I Can"from *Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children* will be used next to further demonstrate that children can be whatever they want to be.

I CAN

"I can

be anything  
I can  
do anything  
I can  
think  
anything  
...  
because I  
CAN  
and  
I  
WANT

TO!"<sup>4</sup> We will then read the book, *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman whose main character shows students that with determination and hard work, they can be or do anything they put their mind to. This is the story of a little girl named Grace. Grace loves stories and often acts out the stories she's told. Of course, Grace always gives herself the best parts. Grace is finally able to show her talents when she plays the role of Peter Pan in the school play.

The book *Life Doesn't Frighten Me At All* written by Maya Angelou celebrates the courage within each of us. It challenges us to fight our fears. Once our fears have been overcome, we can achieve anything in life. The book reinforces once again that children can be whatever they want to be if they believe in themselves.

Nikki Grimes' poem, "Sweet Blackberry", from the book *Meet Danitra Brown*, is about a young girl who is teased because her skin is so dark and the advice given to her by her mother about how to handle the constant teasing. I've chosen this poem because my students are at an age where their bodies are beginning to change and physical appearance is becoming more important to many of them. At this age, students may be quite self-conscious both about their appearance and performance. During this stage, children often judge themselves and others as too fat or too thin, too tall or too short, too pale or too dark. Bloch states that "during the elementary years, children often compare themselves with peers in order to evaluate abilities. In the process, they learn about ways in which physical appearances differ. All too often these differences are put-down and ridiculed by other children and/or adults."<sup>5</sup>

Possible activities for this section include drawing a portrait of a fellow classmate, creating "Wanted" posters where students identify a special quality, writing "Personality Poems" (see Lesson Plan#1) as well as writing essays entitled "What I Want To Be When I Grow Up". This section will also tie in nicely with the following Project Charlie lessons from the Primary Self-Awareness section: #1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 23.

## ***Relationships With Family***

---

I will begin this section with three contrasting poems about motherhood since mothers are at the core of every family: Nikki Giovanni's "Mommies" from her book *Spin a Soft Black Song* , which for the most part describes a traditional mom who is very loving and nurturing; Nikki Grimes' "Mom and Me Only" from *Meet Danitra Brown* , which addresses single-parenthood; and a poem, "She Sent Me Out To Play Again", written by Nikki Grimes from her book *Something On My Mind* , which depicts a less traditional mom who for whatever reason would rather not deal with her children and therefore sends them away. Although it's sad to say, many children are living with adults who instead of dealing with their children, send them away like the mother in the poem.

"Mommies" tells of the different things traditional moms do like making children clean their rooms, making them put old clothes on before going out to play, making them brush their teeth, tucking them in and kissing them good-night. In "Mom and Me Only", a girl complains that she only has "a mom and me only" while others have a mom and dad, until a friend points out that it really isn't so bad. " 'You've got it good,' Danitra says when I am sad. 'Your mama loves you twice as much. Is that so bad?' " 6 "She Sent Me Out to Play Again" describes a young child's desire for the love and attention of his mother. "She sent me out to play again . . . I wanted to talk/about school, about how much I like to read,/ about how scared I am of the big boy down the block,/ about what I want to be . . ./ just talk. / Or to sit, just sit in the same room/ and watch her watch TV." 7

Another poem that addresses this issue is Eloise Greenfield's "Aunt Roberta" from her book *Honey, I Love and other love poems* . In this poem, a young girl is not seen or heard until she slams a door. Again, showing how children are often ignored by adults. This poem also depicts one way children attempt to get someone's attention.

Nikki Grimes' poem "Seems I'm Never Old Enough" from *Something On My Mind* further illustrates this point. The adults in the poem ignore the young girl because they say she wouldn't understand. " But when I'm wrong,/ you hear them shout,/ Girl, you should have known!"<sup>8</sup>

We will then read *Daddy* by Jeanette Caines. This is the story of a little girl and the special bond she shares with her father despite the fact that they don't live together. I chose this book because fathers, especially African-American fathers, are often viewed by society as irresponsible when it comes to caring for and raising their children. I think it's important for children to realize that this is not true of all fathers.

Eloise Greenfield's "Fambly Time" from her book *Night on Neighborhood Street* is a poem about a family spending some quality time together in what the youngest refers to as "Fambly time!" Again, I feel it's important for students to realize that families should be made up of people who love each other and do special things together.

This poem will be followed by *Dinner At Aunt Connie's House* by Faith Ringgold, which celebrates family unity. It's the story of Melody, who visits her Aunt Connie and Uncle Bates and cousin Lonnie at their home on Long

Island every year with her parents, and the special "treat" they receive at this year's family gathering. This book combines family tradition with a dose of history and an adaptation of the book will be performed as part of the culminating activity. This book lends itself nicely to discussions of family traditions, adoption, and a more in-depth study of the famous African-American women depicted in the story as well as others.

The issue of sibling rivalry will be examined using *She Come Bringing Me This Little Baby Girl* by Eloise Greenfield, *Peter's Chair* by Ezra Jack Keats, *Two and Too Much* by Mildred Pitts Walter, and *My Brother Fine With Me* by Lucille Clifton. Each of these books tells the story of an older sibling who feels jealous of a younger sibling at first but eventually learns to love their brother or sister.

We'll explore children's relationships to their grandparents and other extended family members in *The Patchwork Quilt* by Valerie Flournoy, *Grandmama's Joy* and *Grandpa's Face* by Eloise Greenfield, *When I'm Old With You* by Angela Johnson, and *The Hundred Penny Box* by Sharon Bell Mathis. All of these books, with the exception of *The Hundred Penny Box*, which shows a boy's love for his great-aunt, portray the special love a child feels for a grandparent. Grandparents are so important to the family because of the strength, wisdom, and love they bring to the family unit.

Possible activities for this section include creating Family Portraits, writing essays and poems about family or specific family members, a "Family Tea" in which families will be invited in to hear the essays/poems written by the students and afterwards "tea" and cookies will be served, "Adopt-a-Grandparent" in which students will be paired with senior citizens at a local home, and a performance of "Dinner At Aunt Connie's House". The following Project Charlie lessons from the Primary Relationship section will complement this section: # 1, 2, 3.

## ***Relationships with Friends***

---

We all crave love and acceptance from our families first and foremost and later from our friends. This point is clearly made in Nikki Grimes' poem "Outside" from her book *Something On My Mind*. It depicts a young girl standing outside a fence wanting to play with the other children, to belong, to be friends. " I want a friend to whisper to,/ to keep my secrets/ and to tell me hers./ I want to be/ Inside."9

We all want and need friends to play with, laugh with, share secrets with, or even to share a popsicle with. Nikki Grimes' poems, "The Secret" and "Summertime Sharing" from *Meet Danitra Brown*, explore friendships. "The Secret" illustrates the importance of forgiveness. It begins when a secret is revealed and ends,

"What kind of friend are you?" she yelled before she stomped away./ She wouldn't hardly say a word to me the whole next day. She finally forgave me, but not until I swore to never, ever give away a secret anymore." 10

"Summertime Sharing" depicts the value of sharing in a friendship. Danitra would like something from the ice cream man but unfortunately she has no money, so her friend, the speaker of the poem, buys an ice and shares it with Danitra.

"Danitra breaks the Popsicle in two and gives me half.

The purple ice trickles down her chin. I start to laugh.

Her teeth flash in one humongous grin,

telling me she's glad that I'm her friend without even saying a word." 11

This will be followed by two books that further examine the ups and downs of friendships among peers: *My Best Friend* by P. Mignon Hinds and *Matthew and Tilly* by Rebecca C. Jones. In *My Best Friend* a young boy questions his friendship with his friend, Omar when his favorite model airplane gets broken. Suddenly he's wondering how they ever became friends in the first place. Whenever they race, Omar always says he came in first even though he didn't. At his birthday party, Omar took the biggest piece of cake and he always takes the seat by the window on the bus. Then he recalls his first day in a new school when his pencil broke and Omar gave him one of his. He remembers other positive things Omar has done for him and special times they've shared. He realizes that the good times outweigh the bad and decides to continue being best friends with Omar after all.

*Matthew and Tilly* is the story of an interracial friendship between a young boy, Matthew, and a young girl, Tilly, who experience some ups and downs of their own. Omar and his best friend's problems started with a broken possession—a model airplane. Similarly, Matthew and Tilly's problems begin when Tilly's crayon is broken. Suddenly, they're not sure if they even want to be friends anymore. They decide to go their separate ways but soon realize that doing the things they would've normally done together alone is no fun at all. The story ends happily when the two apologize and go out to play together.

*Black Like Kyra, White Like Me* by Judith Vigna is the story of an interracial friendship between a young white girl, Christa, and her African-American friend, Kyra, whose friendship is tested when Kyra and her family move into Christa's all-white neighborhood. Christa can't understand how the people in her neighborhood can dislike Kyra and her family just because of their skin color. Even when she begins to feel the effect of their dislike, she sticks by Kyra.

*Apt 3* by Ezra Jack Keats is the story of Sam and his little brother, Ben, who roam through their apartment building one rainy day in search of a harmonica player. They soon find that the man in Apt. 3 is the mystery musician. He invites them in and the two soon realize that the man is blind. The boys spend the afternoon enjoying the beautiful music flowing from his harmonica.

*Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco and *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting both explore special friendships between young children and an adult as well as interracial and inter-religious relationships. *Chicken Sunday* is the story of Patricia, a young Jewish girl, and her neighbors, Winston and Stewart, and their grandmother, Miss Eula, who are African-American. Patricia often accompanies them to church on Sundays and then joins them for fried chicken afterwards. Miss Eula nicknames these special Sundays "Chicken Sunday".

The book *Smoky Night* tells the story of another interracial friendship between a young boy, Daniel and a Korean woman, Mrs. Kim. Their special friendship begins in the wake of a tragic event. People are rioting in the street below Daniel's window, setting fires and stealing everything they can. Daniel doesn't understand why people would do such a thing to other people and then he thinks about how his cat and Mrs. Kim's cat fight with each other. Eventually, a fire breaks out in his building and he and his mom must leave for a shelter. Daniel's distraught when he discovers that his cat, Jasmine, is missing. He meets up with Mrs. Kim at the shelter where he learns that her cat has disappeared as well. The two bond as they pray for their cat's safe return. A fire fighter appears carrying a cat in each arm and says that he found them hiding together holding paws! Daniel's mother remarks at how strange that is considering the two don't like each other. Daniel says that maybe it's because they didn't know each other.

I will conclude this section with a poem from Langston Hughes' *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* entitled "Poem". "The poem ends,/ Soft as it began—/ I loved my friend." 12

Possible activities for this section include webbing the characteristics of friendships, daily "Put-Ups" in which students select a different classmate's name each day and give them a "Put-Up", U.I. Company Pen Pals as well as pen pals from a neighboring school, and writing original stories and poems about friendship or a specific friend. The following Project Charlie lessons from the Primary Relationship section can be used in conjunction with this section: #3, 4, 5, 6.

## ***Relationship To/Within Community***

---

Eloise Greenfield's "Neighborhood Street" and "The Meeting" from the book *Night on Neighborhood Street* will be used to introduce this part of my unit. "Neighborhood Street" describes the events that take place on a street in the community. It begins with the waking up of the children and spans a whole day until night falls on the neighborhood street. "The Meeting" depicts a Neighborhood Block Watch Meeting that gets heated when one man tries to start a fight. It demonstrates conflict resolution which again ties in nicely with our social development curriculum.

"There Is A Wading Pool in Our Park" from Arnold Adoff's *Street Music* illustrates a hot summer day when the fire hydrants are opened for the children in the neighborhood. This poem is one which many of my children should be able to relate with since they live in the city where hydrants are often opened for children on very hot days.

Faith Ringgold's *Tar Beach* follows a young girl as she flies over New York City. She describes various points of interest on her journey such as the George Washington Bridge, the new Union Building her father's working on, etc.

We will then read two poems from Langston Hughes' *Dream Keepers and Other Poems* entitled "My People" and "I, Too" and Lucille Clifton's "Listen Children" from *Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children*, all of which speak about African-Americans' feelings about their heritage. "My People" describes the beauty of the African-American people, as does "I, Too" in which the speaker is sent to eat in the kitchen when company comes because of his dark skin; he looks to "Tomorrow", when no one will dare send him away: "They'll see how beautiful I am/ And be ashamed—/I, too, am America." 13 "Listen Children" urges African-Americans to remember that despite all they have had to endure, they have always loved each other.

"we have been ashamed

hopeless tired mad  
but always  
all ways  
we loved us



We have always loved each other

children all ways

pass it on" 14

I will wrap up this section with Eloise Greenfield's *Daydreamers* which talks about growing up and how our daydreams change as we grow and learn. I thought this would be a good way to end because it's my hope that as I teach this unit my children too will grow and change and develop new attitudes about their culture as well as others.

Possible activities for this section include field trips in and around New Haven to expose students to what their community has to offer; invite people from the community to come in and speak to the class i.e. a fireman, a police officer, etc.; some type of community service in the "Beecher School Community" i.e. cleaning up the school grounds, planting flowers around the school, creating artwork for display around school, etc.; study of famous African-American women in *Dinner At Aunt Connie's House* as well as other famous African-Americans; create portraits of famous African-American women for our performance; write reports on famous African-Americans; choral readings of poems in unit; design a quilt of books and authors read throughout this unit; and celebrate "Eloise Greenfield Day!" on which students will share favorite poems written by the author.

## Lesson Plan

---

### **Objectives:**

1. To recognize our likenesses and differences.
2. To identify qualities that make us special and unique individuals.
3. To write "Personality Poems".
4. To draw self-portraits.

### **Materials:**

-Guide for writing "Personality Poems" on chart.

-paper

-pencil

-crayons

**Procedures:**

1. Explain to students that we're going to write "Personality Poems".
2. Tell students to write their first names on Line 1.
3. On Line 2, have students write two words to describe themselves.
4. Have students write three words that name things they like to do on Line 3.
5. On Line 4, have students write two more words to describe themselves.
6. Tell students write their last names on Line 5.
7. Have students draw self-portraits to go along with their poems.
8. Mount on colored construction paper and display.

## Lesson Plan

---

**Objectives:**

1. To understand and appreciate the elements of a play.
2. To perform the play "Dinner At Aunt Connie's House".

**Materials:**

- copies of script for Cast of Characters
- Props:
  - portraits of famous African-American women depicted in play
  - costumes for famous African-American women portrayed
  - objects typically found in an attic

**Procedures:**

1. Explain to students that a play is a story written for the purpose of being performed. The conversations between characters tell the story.
2. Discuss the following elements of a play:
  - The people who act and speak in a play are called characters.  
Every time a character speaks his or her name is written. However, only the lines written after their name are spoken for the audience.
  - The author often provides instructions as to how characters are to move or speak. These instructions, or stage directions, are placed in brackets or parentheses.
  - Plays are often divided into scenes, or acts. This play, however, consists of a single scene, or act.
  - Plays also have a setting, or place where the play takes place.
3. Display an excerpt from the play on the board and then model for students how to act and speak the line(s) shown.
4. Assign roles, or parts, and have students practice reading their lines through several times.
5. Once students have gotten a handle on reading/speaking their lines, begin practicing the actions in the play.

## **Faith Ringgold's "Dinner At Aunt Connie's House" as retold by Brittney Talley and Jaala Johnson**

---

*Introduction* : Room 9 will now perform Faith Ringgold's "Dinner At Aunt Connie's House" as retold by Brittney Talley and Jaala Johnson.

*Narrator* : Every year Melody and her parents would visit Aunt Connie and Uncle Bates and their son Lonnie at their home on Long Island. They'd always have a delicious dinner and afterwards Aunt Connie would show everyone her new artwork. This year, however, Melody and Lonnie went up to the attic for a sneak peak at Aunt Connie's latest artwork. As they approached the attic, they heard strange voices and grew suspicious. And weren't they surprised when they walked in and found the portraits TALKING!! Yes, you heard right- I said TALKING!! Listen carefully to what they had to say.

*Rosa Parks*: Hello, children! My name is Rosa Parks. I was born in Alabama in 1913. I am often called "the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement". In 1955, I was arrested for refusing to sit in the back of the bus. That incident started the Montgomery Bus Boycott and inspired Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to devote his life to the

Civil Rights Movement.

*Lonnie:* But how can you speak? Paintings don't talk?!\*

*Rosa Parks:* Your mother created us to tell you the history of our struggle. Would you like to hear more?

*Lonnie and Melody:* YES!!

*Rosa Parks:* Well, listen carefully.

*Fannie Lou Hamer:* Hello. My name is Fannie Lou Hamer. I was born in 1917 in Mississippi. I was a civil rights activist and public speaker. I worked with Martin Luther King, Jr. for voters' rights in the South. I helped thousands of people register to vote.

*Melody* (pointing to the portrait of Mary McLeod Bethune): I know who you are! You're Mary McLeod Bethune!

*Mary McLeod Bethune:* That's right, Melody, I am! I was born in 1875 in South Carolina. I founded Bethune-Cookman College. I was also a special adviser to Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman. I founded the National Council of Negro Women, an organization that has more than one million members.

*Augusta Savage:* Hello, children. My name is Augusta Savage. I was a sculptor. I was born in Florida in 1892. I founded The Savage Studio of Arts and Crafts in Harlem. I taught many artists to paint, draw, and sculpt. Maybe you've heard of one of my students, the famous painter Jacob Lawrence?

*Lonnie:* Wow, you're beautiful!

*Dorothy Dandridge:* Why, thank you, Lonnie. My name is Dorothy Dandridge and I was born in 1922 in Ohio. I was the first African-American actress to become a Hollywood star. I was nominated for an Academy Award in 1954 for Best Actress for the film "Carmen Jones". I starred in many other films with such famous actors as James Mason and Joan Fontaine.

*Zora Neale Hurston:* Hi, I'm Zora Neale Hurston. I was born in Florida in 1901.

*Melody:* Weren't you a famous writer?

*Zora Neale Hurston:* Yes, Melody, in the 1930's I was the most prolific African-American writer. My books, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Moses*, *Man of the Mountain*, and *Mules and Men*, are considered among the best examples of American writing.

*Maria W. Stewart:* Hello. I'm Maria W. Stewart. I was born in 1803 in Connecticut. Back then, women could not be public speakers, yet I spoke out for the human rights of oppressed blacks. I was also the first African-American to lecture in defense of women's rights.

*Bessie Smith:* Hey there, kids! I'm Bessie Smith. I was born in 1894. I was known as "Empress of the Blues". I was once the highest paid African-American artist in the world. The great jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong was one of my accompanists. I inspired many singers with my soul and spirit.

*Harriet Tubman:* Hello, children. I'm Harriet Tubman. I was born in 1820 in Maryland. I brought more than three hundred slaves to freedom in the North in nineteen trips on The Underground Railroad and never lost a passenger either! Among them were my mother and father and my ten brothers and sisters.

*Sojourner Truth:* Hi. I'm Sojourner Truth. I was born in 1797 in New York. I was an itinerant preacher and an abolitionist with Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison. I spoke out for women's rights during slavery, when no American woman had the right to vote. I met and spoke with President Abraham Lincoln.

*Lonnie* (pointing to the portrait of Marian Anderson): Hey, aren't you Marian Anderson? We studied about you in school!

*Marian Anderson:* Yes, that's right, Lonnie. I am Marian Anderson. I was born in 1902 in Pennsylvania. Arturo Toscanini, the great conductor, said a voice such as mine is heard only once in a hundred years. I was denied the right to sing at Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution in Washington, D.C. In protest, I sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to a crowd of 75,000. I was known as the world's greatest living contralto and was the first African-American to perform with the Metropolitan Opera Company!

*Madame C.J. Walker:* Hello. My name is Madame C.J. Walker. I was born in Louisiana. I was the first self-made American woman millionaire. I employed more than three thousand people in my cosmetics company. My invention, the hair straightening comb, changed the appearance of millions of people.

*All Portraits:* So, children, what do you think of us?

*Melody:* I think I'm proud to be an African-American woman. Who knows-maybe some day Aunt Connie will hang my portrait on the same wall with all these great women!! (extends arm out to encompass all portraits as she says last line)

*Ending:* We hope you enjoyed our play. Thank you for being such a good audience. Thank you to the boys who reproduced Faith Ringgold's portraits of these African-American women and thanks to the girls who portrayed them!

(figure available in print form)

## Lesson Plan

---

**Objectives:** *To compare and contrast two books about friendship using a Venn Diagram*

**Materials:**

-books: *Matthew and Tilly* by Rebecca C. Jones

*My Best Friend* by P. Mignon Hinds

-transparency or chart with Venn Diagram

-blank copy of Venn Diagram for students

**Procedures:**

1. Read *Matthew and Tilly* and discuss.
2. Read *My Best Friend* and discuss.

3. Complete a Venn Diagram similar to the one below comparing and contrasting both stories.

## Notes

---

1. Berne, Patricia H. & Louis M. Savary. *Building Self-Esteem in Children* .
2. Nikola-Lisa, W. *Bein' This Way With You* .
3. Greenfield, Eloise. "By Myself." *Honey, I Love and other love poems* .
4. Evans, Mari. "I Can." *Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children* .
5. Bloch, Douglas with Jon Merritt. *Positive Self-Talk for Children: Teaching Self-Esteem through Affirmations: A Guide for Parents, Teachers, and Counselors* .
6. Grimes, Nikki. "Mom and Me Only." *Meet Danitra Brown* .
7. Grimes, Nikki. "She Sent Me Out To Play Again." *Something On My Mind* .
8. Grimes, Nikki. "Seems I'm Never Old Enough." *Something On My Mind* .
9. Grimes, Nikki. "Outside." *Something On My Mind* .
10. Grimes, Nikki. "The Secret." *Meet Danitra Brown* .
11. Grimes, Nikki. "Summertime Sharing." *Meet Danitra Brown* .
12. Hughes, Langston. "Poem." *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* .
13. Hughes, Langston. "I, Too." *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* .
14. Clifton, Lucille. "Listen Children." *Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children* .

## Teacher Bibliography

---

Berne, Patricia H. and Louis M. Savary. *Building Self-Esteem in Children* .

New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1981.

An excellent guide for building self-esteem in children.

Bloch, Douglas with Jon Merritt. *Positive Self-Talk for Children: Teaching Self-Esteem through Affirmations: A Guide for Parents, Teachers, and Counselors* . New York: Bantam Books, 1993.

An excellent guide for anyone who deals with children on a regular basis.

Rollock, Barbara. *Black Authors and Illustrators of Children's Books* . New York and London, 1988.

A collection of 115 brief biographies of black authors and illustrators.

## Student Bibliography

---

Adoff, Arnold. *Street Music* . New York: Harper-Collins Publishing, 1995.

A collection of poems about life on a city street.

Angelou, Maya. *Life Doesn't Frighten Me* . New York: Stewart, Tabori, & Chang, 1978.

A poem celebrating the courage within each of us.

Bunting, Eve. *Smoky Night* . New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994.

When the Los Angeles riots break out in their neighborhood, a young boy and his mother learn the value of getting along with others no matter what their background or nationality.

Caines, Jeanette Franklin. *Daddy* . New York: Harper, 1977.

A child of separated parents describes the special activities she shares with her father on Saturdays.

Caines, Jeanette Franklin. *Just Us Women* . New York: Harper-Collins, 1982.

The story of a young girl and the special trip she takes with her aunt.

Clifton, Lucille. *My Brother Fine With Me* . New York: Holt, 1970.

The story of sibling rivalry between an older sister and her younger brother.

Flournoy, Valerie. *The Patchwork Quilt* . New York: Scholastic, 1985.

In this story, Tanya's grandmother is making a special quilt with pieces of clothes from the whole family.

Greenfield, Eloise. *Daydreamers* . Dial, 1981.

Greenfield, Eloise. *Grandmama's Joy* . New York: Collins, 1980.

A little girl tries to cheer up her grandmother by reminding her of some important things.

Greenfield, Eloise. *Grandpa's Face* . New York: Philomel Books, 1989.

The story of a young girl's fear of losing her grandpa's love.

Greenfield, Eloise. *Honey, I Love and Other Poems* . New York: Harper Trophy, 1978.

A collection of poems that tell about love and the simple joys of everyday life as seen through the eyes of a child.

Greenfield, Eloise. *Night on Neighborhood Street* . New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

A collection of poems about a night on Neighborhood Street.

Greenfield, Eloise. *She Come Bringing Me that Little Baby Girl* . New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1974.

This is the story of a child's disappointment and jealousy over a new baby sister which are soon dissipated as he becomes aware of the importance of being a big brother.

Giovanni, Nikki. *Spin a Soft Black Song* . Canada: Harper Collins, 1985.

A collection of poems about life as experienced by black children.

Grimes, Nikki. *Come Sunday* . Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

A collection of poems celebrating a day of worship through the eyes of a child.

Grimes, Nikki. *Meet Danitra Brown* . New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1994.

A collection of poems about friendship.

Grimes, Nikki. *Something on My Mind* . New York: Penguin Books, 1978.

A collection of poems about life from a black child's perspective.

Hinds, Mignon P. *My Best Friend* . New York: Golden Books Publishing Company, 1996.

The story of the ups and downs often experienced in friendships.

Hoffman, Mary. *Amazing Grace* . New York: Scholastic, Incorporated, 1991.

The story of Grace, a young girl who shows that you can do anything you put your mind to.

Howard, Elizabeth Fitzgerald. *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)* .

New York: Clarion Books, 1990.

The story of Sarah and Susan and special Sundays spent with their Aunt Flossie and her hats.



Hughes, Langston. *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* . New York: Scholastic, Incorporated, 1994.

A collection of poems for children.

Johnson, Angela. *When I am Old with You* . New York: Orchard Books, 1990.

A child imagines being old with her grandfather and doing various activities with him.

Jones, Rebecca. *Matthew and Tilly* . New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

The story of the trials and tribulations of an inter-racial friendship.

Keats, Ezra Jack. *Apt. 3* . New York: MacMillan, 1971.

On a rainy day two brothers try to discover who is playing the harmonica they hear in their apartment building.

Keats, Ezra Jack. *Peter's Chair* . New York: Harper and Row Publishing, 1967.

The story of a young boy's adjustment to his new baby sister.

Mathis, Sharon Bell. *The Hundred Penny Box* . New York: Puffin, 1986.

Michael's love for his great-great-aunt who lives with them leads him to intercede with his mother who wants to toss out all her old things.

Nikola-Lisa, W. *Bein' with You This Way* . New York: Lee and Low Books, 1994.

This story celebrates our diversity.

Polacco, Patricia. *Chicken Sunday* . New York: Scholastic Incorporated, 1992.

The story of a young Jewish girl, Patricia, and her special friendship with her neighbors, Winston and Stewart who are African-American.

Ringgold, Faith. *Dinner at Aunt Connie's House* . New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1993.

The story of special family dinners at Aunt Connie's house.

Ringgold, Faith. *Tar Beach* . New York: Scholastic Incorporated, 1991.

The story of a young girl's "flight" over New York City.

Selections by Wade Hudson. *Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children* .

New York: Scholastic Incorporated, 1993.

A collection of poetry written for children by famous African-American poets.

Vigna, Judith. *Black Like Kyra, White Like Me* . Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman and Company, 1992.

When a black family moves to an all-white neighborhood, prejudice rears its ugly head as the adults behave rudely and children's

friendships break up.

Walter, Mildred Pitts. *Two and Too Much* . New York: Bradbury Press, 1990.

Seven year old Brandon's attempt to take care of his two year old sister Gina results in one disaster after another.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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

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