



## **Celebrate a People!**

Curriculum Unit 97.02.08  
by Waltrina Kirkland-Mullins

### **INTRODUCTION**

---

The development of socialization and language arts skills is an integral part of the K-2 curriculum. Discovering and making effective use of the components of reading, writing and language arts skills; learning to get along with peers; getting in touch with one's feelings; sharing everyday life experiences and discovering that many of us have similar backgrounds and experiences; understanding what it means to be part of a community and recognizing that community exists in our homes, our classrooms, our surrounding neighborhoods and beyond; understanding that diversity exists in our world and that each of us contributes to the world community all constitute crucial components of growth and development in both areas.

African-American children's literature can be used as an integral building block in empowering all students in these areas. It too can be used as a productive Social Studies device to foster a better understanding of that large group of Americans too often under-recognized for their achievements, contributions, and rich heritage overall. This type of literature can also serve as a stimulative springboard in developing creative writers, for it encompasses all the genres: Non-fiction, contemporary stories, fables, rhymes, poems, biographies . . . the range is endless.

Throughout my teaching career, I have noticed that many teachers and parents have been conditioned to rely upon stories created by picture book authors with whom we are most familiar: Arnold Lobel, Margaret Wise Brown, Dr. Seuss, Charlotte Zolotow, Maurice Sendak, et. al.—primarily Eurocentric authors. We often overlook equally wonderful and creative works by children's book authors of non-Eurocentric backgrounds. In general, it is essential that children be exposed to diverse literature, not limited solely to Afrocentric or Eurocentric titles, but from all cultural and ethnic origins.

My years in the teaching profession have also revealed that children who see themselves and their experiences in literature are often empowered in the areas of self-esteem and self-discovery. Literature, when chosen with a child's interest and developmental level in mind, motivates youngsters and helps them recognize that they too are part of a larger community. By exposing children to multiculturally diverse literature, we create an enticing and inclusive learning environment. Through this medium, we can help children embrace the philosophy of celebrating cultural similarities and developing a better understanding of ourselves, our people and others.

In order to meet the Institutes' allotted page requirement, I have narrowed my subject matter to African-American children's literature in picture book form. I have also developed this unit because I recognize that although a wealth of children's literature regarding black culture and common experiences exists, a large number of teachers, parents and students are unfamiliar with the endless number of children's titles created by and/or written about people of African descent, particularly for beginning readers.

My curriculum unit is divided into three sections: The first provides a listing of Afrocentric picture book titles to be used in the classroom setting. (They can be recommended to parents for shared reading at home as well.) The importance of introducing the author is noted, and four of my students' favorite authors are briefly highlighted. Section 2 suggests ways in which these titles can be used to develop writing skills. The writing framework is based on Lucy McCormick Calkins' Writing Process. It is one that I have modified and used at targeted times throughout the school year. Section 3 provides additional ways in which the recommended books can be incorporated into year-round classroom activities.

## OBJECTIVES

---

It is my hope that the curriculum unit serves as a catalyst for teachers to

- \* incorporate Black children's literature into overall classroom curriculum (Grades K through 2 in particular) on a year-round basis;
- \* use a wide variety of Afrocentric literary genres as a springboard to Social Studies (including the study of community, family, self-awareness and self-esteem, the African Diaspora . . .); and
- \* spark enthusiasm in each child to read and write, and awaken each student's overall love of language arts expression.

Through this unit, I will

- \* introduce students, teachers and parents to literature created by and/or about Black people.
- \* stimulate students to become creative writers by introducing them to different genres (non-fiction and fiction literature [past and present], poetry, narratives, folk tales, and short stories in the African-American tradition).
- \* allow students to see and experience the interconnectedness of story writing and human experience, and help children recognize that all cultures have something valuable, exciting, and special to share!
- \* spark enthusiasm in each youngster's love of literature created by people of diverse cultures
- \* bring the study of African-American Heritage to life through shared readings and Writing Process-based journal-writing activities.

## SECTION 1: PICTURE BOOK RESOURCES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

---

I have created a categorical listing of African-American children's books for use in noted areas throughout the school year. A brief description of each book is contained herein, making information readily available for teachers, parents, and school administrators. Although targeted at students in Grades K - 2, students in grades 3-5 are often intrigued by this literary form—primarily because they have had extremely limited exposure to it. Many of the picture books itemized herein, and duly noted with an asterisk, may be read by upper-grade elementary school students.

### BOOKS FOR SELF-EMPOWERMENT/SELF-ESTEEM

---

At the beginning of the school year, teachers in Grades K - 1 play a major part in helping children feel comfortable in their new classroom environment. Although off to a good start, educators face a challenge in that we inherit a diverse group of students: Some students have never experienced the joys of being read to one-on-one or being a participant in a cozy group storytelling setting. Others, in general, may never have had interactive shared learning classroom experiences. Some children are apprehensive about meeting their new instructor and/or have not yet internalized the reason for coming to school. Quite a few come from single-parent homes and non-traditional families. Some have latch-key lifestyles or rely on babysitters and caretakers to provide care and supervision while parents are off at work. Many find it difficult to let go of Mommy's or Daddy's apron strings. Sibling rivalry, jealousy, disappointment, fear, successes, failures, disillusionment, and growing pains are not unfamiliar to even our littlest people. Children's literature can be used as a healing mechanism in these areas: The following picture books can be used as empowering language arts and social development tools.

#### Short Stories/Fiction

***Amazing Grace*** , Mary Hoffman, *Dial Books for Young Readers*.\* Grace attends a multi-culturally diverse elementary school. Students are auditioning for the part of Peter Pan in the school play. A few students assert that Grace cannot portray Peter because she is "black" and "a girl." This contemporary work reveals that nothing is impossible if you put your mind to it.

***The Black Snow Man*** , Phil Mendez, *Scholastic Books*.\* Jacob and Pee Wee are the main characters in this modern-day fairy tale. Pee Wee is the optimistic younger brother. Jacob, the older sibling, is a pessimist who asserts " *everything black is bad* ." The two discover a tattered Kente cloth strewn in a garbage can, and later learn that this African shawl has magical powers. Jacob miraculously recognizes that his is a rich heritage, and Black is beautiful.

***Jamal's Busy Day*** , Wade Hudson, *Just Us Books* . A parent's role is to provide for, nurture, and take care of each member of the family. Jamal, the central character of this book, recognizes that he too has important duties to fulfill. This book serves as a terrific opener for the school year, empowering children to recognize how they fit in—that despite being small, they too have major responsibilities to assume.

***Me and Neesie*** , Eloise Greenfield, *Thomas Y. Crowell Company* . Janell, an only child, has an imaginary friend, Neesie. Janell's relationship is very real, but it's driving her parents batty. The last straw occurs when Grandma comes to visit and Janell is frenzied because Grandma almost sits on and squashes her invisible playmate. You'll find many children relating to the storyline. Perfect book for shared reading!

**Nancy No-Size** , Mary Hoffman, Oxford University Press . It's difficult being the middle child. You're not big enough to ride a 10-speed bike, but you're too big to sleep in your baby sister's crib. That's Nancy's dilemma, and she doesn't like being in middle-ground. This rhythmically patterned story is an easy read for beginning readers. This book can be used as a follow up to Math and Language Arts lessons to reinforce visual discrimination and logical thinking skills.

**I Can Do It By Myself** , Thomas Y. Crowell Company.\* Donny is sick and tired of his older brother telling him "you're too little." He's going to prove he's old enough to handle tasks all by himself—including purchasing a beautiful birthday gift for Mommy from the neighborhood plant shop. His mother reluctantly agrees, and allows her youngest son to go make his short journey without sibling supervision. Donny achieves his goal, but soon learns that taking a stand for one's independence has its terrifying moments.

Short Story - Non-Fiction

**Colors Around Me** , Vivian Church, Afro-Am Publishing Company . *Some African-Americans are as dark as licorice; others are as light as vanilla ice-cream* . This work portrays the spectrum of skin tones found among black people, revealing that despite color variations, many people of African descent are classified as *black* . This book can serve as an empowering tool to diffuse namecalling based on physical attributes (that sometimes occur in the classroom and in other social settings). I have found that many children question why a rainbow of people sometimes exist in black families. If tastefully presented, **Colors Around Me** can be used to address this inquiry: incorporate it into a Social Studies lesson on the miscegenation of black people during their trek from Africa to the Americas to Europe.

## RELATIONSHIP TITLES

---

### Fiction

**Just Us Women** , Jeanette Caines, Harbor . Aunt Martha and her niece are taking a trip to North Carolina in Aunt Martha's brand new car—and they are doing it unaccompanied by any of the men in the family. This rhythmic short story reinforces that women can be self-reliant comrades dependent solely upon themselves. A *Reading Rainbow* favorite, it can be incorporated with a geography unit concerning the northern and southern regions of the United States.

**Daddy Is A Monster Sometimes** , John Steptoe, Harper Trophy.\* Bweela and Javaka are two energetic youngsters who believe their Daddy is a monster, particularly when they're just making a *little bit* of noise while he's on the phone, or when they choose to fiddle with their food *just a little* instead of eating dinner. This empowering tale helps students recognize that parents are not the only ones who can be *monsters* .

**Creativity** , John Steptoe, Clarion Books . Charles questions why the new boy in class, Hector, speaks fluent Spanish even though Hector has a chocolate-brown complexion just like Charles. This book, convincingly illustrated by E. B. Lewis, was the last of Steptoe's works prior to his death in 1989: it emphasizes the ancestral commonality found among blacks and those of Hispanic ancestry—particularly people of Puerto Rican descent. **Creativity** reaffirms that if people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds take time to learn about one another, we will discover that truly we have common bonds.

***She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl*** , Eloise Greenfield, J. P. Lippincott. Kevin really wanted a baby brother, but when his mother comes home from the hospital, she brings a baby wrapped in a pink blanket. How can he play football with a little sister, and why is everyone paying so much attention to that wrinkled, dried up old baby!? Kevin is by no means pleased with the new arrival, but nurturing parents help their son recognize that he too is an important part of the family.

***The Stories Julian Tells*** , Ann Cameron, Bullseye Books/Alfred A. Knopf.\* You will find yourself reading this short story collection to your students over and over again. Julian, a mischievous youngster who often weaves a tale to get out of any trying situation, and his naive little brother Huey are characters with whom all children readily identify. Ms. Cameron, a Euro-American author, capably steps into the shoes of her characters, bringing their escapades and solutions hilariously to life. "The Pudding Like a Night on the Sea" (great for encouraging children to follow directions) and "My Very Strange Tooth" (a perfect read for students shedding their front teeth) keep boys and girls clamoring for more! Note that although this work may not be considered a true picture book, each story contained therein is accompanied by convincing illustrations, and the text itself is so wonderfully descriptive, children see the words come to life.

***Eat Up Gemma*** , Sarah Hayes, Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books . Gemma is a finicky eater. Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa . . . no one seems to be able to get her to eat her meals. Just when it seems everyone is about to give up, little brother comes to the rescue with an ingenious problem-solving strategy. This story helps young people recognize that children have valuable input to share and are often a big help to other family members.

***What Kind of Baby Sitter Is This*** , Delores Johnson, MacMillan Publishing Company . It's not easy being a latchkey child, and parents often remedy this situation by hiring a baby sitter. So holds true for Kenny's mother. Her son is by no means pleased with the babysitting scene, nor Miss Lovey Pritchard, the senior citizen hired to be his evening caretaker. But Ms. Pritchard is unlike any sitter he's ever had. This realistically humorous book is a highly recommended resource for students and parents: It reveals that our elders have a lot of wisdom to share, and that productive relationships often exist between seniors and children. Quite a few behavior modification strategies are contained herein that will prove invaluable.

***Stevie*** , John Steptoe, Harper & Row . Robert is used to getting a lot of attention from Mommy: He's an only child. A friend of Robert's mother asks that she babysit her young son, Stevie. Robert's mother complies, and Robert now has a new playmate who *breaks up his toys, messes up his room, and hogs up his mother's warm embraces* . Robert's life is miserable, until the day comes when Stevie and his Mom move away. This comically sensitive story emphasizes the importance of sharing—especially love.

***Grandpa's Face*** , Eloise Greenfield, Philomel Books.\* Tamika adores her grandfather. They have an honest relationship and can talk about anything. Grandpa is also an actor. One day, while rehearsing at home, Tamika peeks through Grandpa's bedroom door and sees an unusually hateful side of her Grandfather that she has never experienced before. *Perhaps he was insincere regarding their relationship!* A heartwarming tale, this work helps children understand that love is unconditional, and to never judge a situation based on what it may appear to be on the surface.

A Letter To Amy, Ezra Jack Keats, Harper Crest. Peter is having a birthday party, and he wants to invite all of his friends—including Amy. But his cronies, all boys, have been comrades forever, and Amy joining in may break the code. Should Peter invite her? This delightfully realistic story encourages youngsters to understand the importance of friendship—regardless of gender.

**Three Wishes** , *Lucille Clifton, Doubleday* . Zenobia finds a penny on New Year's Day, and her birth year is imprinted on it. That's no ordinary penny: with it, she can make three wishes! Nobi tests that penny, and her first wish miraculously comes true. She shares this event with Victor, her very best friend, but he has doubts about that old belief. The two have a heated debate until she shouts, " *Man, I wish you would get out of here!* " Something happens that Zenobia doesn't seem able to undo—and she only has one wish left! Upon hearing this portion of the story, students are eager to know what happens next. This is a terrific book to read during the first week of January. Through it, children learn the importance of having faith and cherishing friendship. **Three Wishes** also serves as an effective prelude to an African-American Heritage Social Studies unit. Note that this book embraces a few African-American customs, i.e., many black families—particularly those with elders who hailed from the South—hold on to the belief that "a man should be the first person to enter your home on New Year's Day so you will have good luck throughout the year" or "you should always make three carefully chosen wishes whenever you find a birth-year penny because each wish will come true." **Three Wishes** serves as a wonderful springboard for students to learn about customs embraced and handed down over the ages within their families.

### Poetry

**Everett Anderson's Goodbye** , *Lucille Clifton, Henry Holt and Company* . It's not easy losing someone who's been an integral part of your life. Everett comes to grips with the loss of his father through this poetic work. This is a truly empowering resource for children who have lost a loved one or someone close and special in their lives.

## CULTURE, HERITAGE AND HISTORY TITLES

---

### Informational Fiction

**Corn Rows** , *Camille Yarrow, Coward Books*.\* Tightly curled, thick textured hair—Sister's getting her hair braided, and Great Grandma and Mama pass down their family's history and cultural traditions in griot form with the twisting of each strand. (Throughout Africa, the griot—usually an elder—retains and passes down ancestral information, historic and cultural events, and moral traditions of their people through storytelling.) Through **Corn Rows** , children learn about the oral tradition of black folk and the importance of transferring one's cultural heritage from one generation to the next.

**Moja Means One** , *Muriel Feelings, Puffin Pied Piper* . Swahili, a language widely spoken throughout Africa, is introduced in this Caldecott-award-winning work. More than a basic counting book, **Moja Means One** helps children understand that Africa is the original homeland for millions of Blacks who live in the United States, Europe, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. A great complement to a counting lesson and Social Studies Unit.

**Masai and I** , *Virginia Kroll, Four Winds Press* \*. Linda, an elementary school student, learns about the beautiful Masai people of East Africa. The classroom lesson leaves an indelible impression, for even while fast asleep, Linda envisions what it would be like to be a Masai child. A bonding develops. Linda awakens, marveling at the possibility that a trace of Masai ancestry runs through her veins. **Masai and I** awakens readers to understand and celebrate the kinship of black folk throughout the world, and sheds light on why many black people in America embrace the classification African-American.

***Kofi and His Magic*** , Maya Angelou, Clarkson Potter Book Publishers . Kofi, a seven-year old weaver's apprentice, resides in Bonwire, a West African city renowned for its creation of Kente cloth. With his magical powers, Kofi introduces young readers to Ghanaian culture, the scenic beauty of his homeland and other portions of West Africa. Eye-catching photos serve as a rich accompaniment to the storyline (and many children see a bit of themselves in the people depicted). *Kofi and His Magic* is an outstanding Social Studies/Geography resource, empowering children to *envision their dreams and make magic!*

***My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken and Me*** , Maya Angelou, Clarkson Potter Book Publishers . Thandi, a Ndebele girl from South Africa, shares the simplistic beauty of her culture in this photographically-illustrated narrative. Through this work, children experience a contrast between African lifestyles and traditions past and present. The book encourages youngsters to take pride in family traditions, passing them down through generations. A terrific Social Studies/Geography resource, this story can be used as a springboard to help youngsters identify cultural traditions within their own family circles.

***The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo*** , Tom Feelings, Dial Books.\* Tom Feelings worked closely with a world-renowned African History scholar, Professor John Henrik Clarke, to create this beautifully illustrated text. His powerful sketches portray the trek of black people from West African shores across the Atlantic to the Caribbean. The gruesome journey, known as the Middle Passage, is an often unhighlighted aspect of the slave trade: Explicit details of the horrendous journey, provided by Dr. Clarke in the Introduction, are "must-read items," particularly for those unfamiliar with this segment of the slave trade. Because Feelings' artistic work speaks for itself, no text accompanies the illustrations. One finds, however, that children provide the storyline as each page is turned. (This year was the first time I've every introduced this work to young readers. I was spellbound by the sense of humanity stirred among little ones when they experienced it.) This is an invaluable resource for the classroom and school library.

***More Than Anything Else*** , Marie Bradby, Orchard Books.\* At one time in America's past, blacks were not allowed to read. This story appears to take place during the end of slavery, a time when southern blacks were still not allowed the privilege of deciphering words on paper. Booker, its main character, is in actuality young author/educator/vocational advocate Booker T. Washington. (The scene is set in the salt mines of West Virginia, where during the slave era, young Washington labored with his family. History notes that while he was still a small boy, a group of slaves—among them young Booker—were gathered together by their master to listen to the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation. Booker was moved by the reading and the reaction of his people; he marveled at how words could stir the soul. Although this aspect of history is not included in ***More Than Anything Else*** , those who have learned about the life of this famous American, know that after working long hours in those mines, Booker assiduously attempted and successfully learned to read!) The use of this book in classroom settings is self-explanatory. Truly an asset to the classroom and school library collection.

***Follow The Drinking Gourd*** , Jeanette Winter, Alfred J. Knopf . Many people abhorred the dehumanizing institution of slavery, and not all who battled against its injustices were of African descent. ***Follow The Drinking Gourd*** , a suspense-filled tale grounded in historic truth, is about Peg Leg Joe, a legendary conductor of the Underground Railroad. The conductor lends a hand to Molly and James, two enslaved blacks whose family members are about to be sold at a slave auction. He teaches them a song, "Follow The Drinking Gourd," that sounds like a simple folk tune often sung by those in bondage. (A song sheet is contained in this book, so those who capably play a piano or use their vocal chords can create an unforgettable Music/Language Arts/Social Studies experience for young people!) The medley actually contained hidden lyrics that serve as a road map to freedom. Those who adhere to its lyrics may escape! Will Molly, James, and their

family, with the help of this freedom fighter, be successful in their journey Canadian shores? Your children will want to find out! (This book is perfect for inclusion in an African-American Heritage Social Studies Unit and/or for shared reading during Kwanzaa.)

**Black Like Kyra, White Like Me** , *Judith Vigna, Albert Whitman and Company* . Christy, an elementary school aged youngster, befriends Kyra and learns that her new friend's family wants to move out of their neighborhood. Christy informs Kyra that there are homes for sale in her community. Kyra's parents learn of the housing availability, and shortly thereafter purchase a new home a few doors down from Christy. But something unexpected happens, and the two girls discover that racism is a contagious social ill too often perpetuated by adults. Despite race prejudice, their friendship prevails. (This year, I included **Black Like Kyra, White Like Me** as one of our shared readings during a Social Studies unit on Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his dream. It was refreshing and hopeful to see that children have no qualms asserting their feelings about race prejudice. One of my students, Shadaria, asserted, "We should learn to "hug-another." Shadaria and her classmates clarified and agreed that "we should learn to love one another, respect one another, and get to know one another for who we are, not because of how we look on the outside or because of what some silly people say!")

**Pink and Say** , *Patricia Polacco, Philomel Press* . This story takes place during the Civil War. Sheldon Russell Curtis (Say), a 15-year old white union soldier originally from Ohio, lies wounded and alone on a Southern battlefield. Pincus Aylee (Pink), a young black man and union soldier of about the same age, comes to his aid. Pink's original Georgia home, once a slave plantation, is nearby. The two reach Pink's battle-scarred abode to find temporary shelter in the welcoming arms of Pink's mother, Moe Moe Bey. The two's encounter becomes a cultural learning exchange and treasured friendship, that despite the story's unanticipated ending, stands the test of time. "Remembering the past and those who have touched our lives" and "recognizing the oneness of mankind to create a positive tomorrow for us all" are the moving themes that permeate this work. **Pink and Say** is a must-have item for the classroom and school library collection.

**Black Misery** , *Langston Hughes, Oxford Norton Press* . \* *Misery is sitting on the front of the bus because it is the first available seat and you want to watch the driver shift gears, but the driver refuses to drive because, big as day, the sign reads "COLOREDS SIT IN THE REAR . . ."* This book takes an emotional look at the 50s-60s era through the eyes of a child. Although many students' parents may not have experienced episodes such as those depicted herein, certainly their grandparents or some other family member may have. This book is wonderful for inclusion in a Social Studies unit, with the brotherhood of man as a central focus.

**The Old, Old Man and the Very Little Boy** , *Kristine L. Franklin, Atheneum Books* . \* In African culture, wisdom and history are handed down orally by the elder. Although young people listen to those 70 and older, first-hand experience often brings their reality to the forefront. A very old man and a very little boy who daily stops to visit are the main characters of this story. Their melodically heartwarming tale—set in a quaint West African village—presents the reality that each of us, from the littlest child to the oldest family member, is part of a rhythmic circle of life.

Non-Fiction

**Black Heroes From A to Z** , *Wade Hudson, Scholastic* . \* Black people from all walks of life have contributed greatly to American society and America's history overall. This encyclopedic-type resource highlights 26 contributors to History, Science and the Arts.

## Poetry

***Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing*** , James Weldon Johnson, Scholastic, Inc . This poetic work is better known in song as the Negro National Anthem. Its author was a well-respected civil rights leader, lawyer, teacher and principal, and journalist during the late 1800s to the early 1900s. He and his brother created ***Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing*** as a testimonial to the trials and triumphs of Black Americans, past, present and future. Through vivid illustrations, the reason for its creation is brought to life. This book can be readily incorporated into Social Studies, Language Arts and Music-related activities.

***Brown Angels*** , Walter Dean Myers, Harper Collins .\* Accompanied by lithographic photos, this work depicts the lifestyle of black families during the early 1900s. ***Brown Angels*** provides children with an opportunity to pinpoint similarities between lifestyles past and present. A perfect read for Social Studies and Language Arts units.

***Brown Honey in Broomwheat Tea*** , Joyce Carol Thomas, Harper Collins .\* This extraordinary poetry collection, beautifully illustrated by Floyd Cooper, empowers students to cherish our past, our families, and where we come from, and to affirm ourselves, our dreams and goals, and our place in the world.

***Black Is Beautiful*** , Ann McGovern, Scholastic Books \*. Beautiful black and white photography brings this poetic work to life and symbolically depicts why black is beautiful.

***Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children*** , Selected by Wade Hudson, Scholastic, Inc .\* The Harlem Renaissance produced great writers, and the 60's and 70's movement sparked a resurgence of powerful literary works from black authors. The works of quite a few poets of these periods are included in this beautifully illustrated book. ***Daddy's Girl*** by Linda Michelle Baron, ***Midway*** by Naomi Long Madgett, ***Passenger*** by Countee Cullen, ***Harriet Tubman*** by Eloise Greenfield, ***The Dream Keeper, Dream Variation*** and ***My People*** by Langston Hughes, and ***Listen Children*** by Lucille Clifton are selected favorites.

***Honey, I Love*** , Eloise Greenfield, Thomas Y. Crowell . A series of catchy, rhythmic verses, and touching prose depicting excerpts in life from one little girl's point of view are contained in this collection. Ms. Greenfield, as always, captures the interest of her readers through life experiences with which any child can relate.

***Nathaniel Talking*** , Eloise Greenfield, Black Butterfly Children's Books . A projection of life experiences from a nine year old's point of view, I consider this a wonderful complement to ***Honey, I Love*** . Each poem captures the interest of readers not only because of the subject matter, but because of the motif. Hip Hop (Nathaniel Talking) and jazz (Daddy's Blues) are among the favorites in this poetry collection. (This year, a first-grade colleague and I videotaped our students' role-played version of these two works, performed in a jazz /rap motif: the language arts activity was hilariously exciting for all participants. You can really get creative with this book!)

## FOLK TALES

---

***The Talking Eggs*** , Robert D. San Souci, Scholastic Inc . \* Blanche, one of the main characters of this enchanting folk tale, represents kindness, charity, love. Her sister, Rose, and mother are, in contrast, conspiring, mean-spirited and selfish. A mysterious elder helps young readers discover the former qualities are the best to embrace. This Cinderella-type tale, popular among the Cajun and Creole people of Louisiana and within many black communities throughout the American South, has been handed down through oral tradition. It's a great prelude to a Social Development unit on moral values.

***Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale*** , John Steptoe, Scholastic Inc . \* This African folk tale is beautifully retold and illustrated by a master artist, and it is one that children clamor to hear repeatedly. Steptoe illustrated this book based on learning about the ruins of an ancient city in Zimbabwe, South Africa. Recognizing that in African tradition, children are named based on their personalities, physical traits and/or life circumstances into which they are born, he befittingly names his characters: *Nyasha* ( *mercy* ) is the friendly, nurturing child in this story. *Manyara* , Nyasha's sister, means ashamed, and readers soon learn why this title has been bestowed on her. *Mufaro* , translated in Shona language of South Africa, means *happy man* , as truly the father of these two children is. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" and "goodness reaps reward" are morals that undergird this story.

***Two Ways to Count to Ten*** , A Liberian Folk tale Retold by Ruby Dee, Henry Holt and Company . \* The Mighty Leopard, once king of the jungle, decides to name a successor to rule his kingdom. He holds a contest, challenging all the animals in the jungle to throw a spear high into the sky, count to ten, and catch the spear before it lands. All fail but one who uses ingenuity to win the challenge. Your children will enthusiastically use Math know-how to deduce the winner!

***Talk, Talk*** , Retold by Deborah Newton-Chocolate, Troll Associates\*. This story is based on an Asante (pronounced "Ashante") legend in what is today known as Ghana, West Africa. It is based on an Asante belief that all living things, inanimate objects and places have a life of their own. The Asante Stool depicted in the story is believed to house the spirit of the Asante people. The book also provides background information about Ghana. Another great Social Studies resource!

***Many Thousands Gone*** , Told by Virginia Hamilton (Alfred A. Knopf) \* A journey through American history unfolds upon reading this work. It profiles major figures in the history of slavery in America. Of particular interest to young readers is the story of Araminta, better known as Harriet Tubman. This dynamically written work helps children recognize those who paved the way to freedom during slavery times. Some stories may have to be paraphrased so youngsters can get the meat of the text. But, when read aloud with fervor, the children are eager to learn more about many of the unsung heroes noted within.

***The People Could Fly*** : *American Black Folk Tales* (Virginia Hamilton) . \* Black folk lore comes to life on the pages of this invaluable anthology. Trickster tales, supernatural stories, and stirring slave narratives total 24 in this selection. Ms. Hamilton provides a brief history behind each story contained therein, which enriches the storyline of each tale. A must-have item!

## HOLIDAY SELECTIONS

---

### Biography

***Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Birthday*** , *Jacqueline Woodson, Silver Press* . A glimpse of Martin's childhood and adult life is beautifully depicted in this work. The bus boycott, a solid explanation of Jim Crow Laws, and people working together in solidarity to combat race prejudice are tastefully depicted. This work, beautifully illustrated by Floyd Cooper, comes highly recommended for shared reading before the Dr. King holiday celebration.

***Coming Home*** , *Floyd Cooper, Philomel Books* . This is the author's first attempt as a writer, and he does it well. Better known for his masterful illustrations, Cooper has researched and provided a beautiful brief look at the life of Langston Hughes. He explains how Langston incorporated the rhythms of people and places he experienced in his poetry and writing overall. This book serves as a terrific prelude to the reading of Langston's Hughes works in class.

### Fiction

***Don't Be My Valentine*** , *Joan M. Lexau, Harper Trophy* . Amy Lou always wants to help Sam out when Sam doesn't want to be bothered. She also wants Sam to be her valentine! Sam knows just what to do to change her mind! Albert, his good friend, goes along with the plan—or does he?! The sequence of events that follow results in hysterical laughter from eager listeners. This book motivates children to treat people nicely—and to create rhymed verses and zany messages for weeks thereafter!

***Chicken Sunday*** , *Patricia Polacco, Scholastic Inc., NY (1988)* . Patricia, Stewart, and Winston are accused by a neighborhood milliner of pelting his hat-shop door with raw eggs. The threesome did not perpetrate the unspeakable act of vandalism, but it's hard to convince that store owner otherwise. When the three explain their dilemma to Grandma Eula Mae Walker, she has doubts. But Grandma steps out on faith and trust, encouraging the youngsters to defend their reputation. The outcome is unexpectedly triumphant, and children cheer at the end of this heartwarming Easter story.

***Miss Tizzy*** , *Libba Moore Gray, Simon and Schuster* . Neighborhood residents think elderly Miss Tizzy is somewhat peculiar, but like a child at play, she embraces and savors every moment of life. She shares her exuberance with the neighborhood children, who love her dearly. Miss Tizzy takes ill, and the beautiful interaction that transpires between her and the children epitomizes the meaning of giving. This book warms the heart, and lets us know you're never too young or too old to give a bit of yourself and share love! This book is a wonderful read for Valentine's Day, Grandparents Day, and in a Social Studies unit on relationships; it can also be incorporated into the teaching of pattern/calendar skills, for it emphasizes the days of the week.

***The Magic Guinea Pig*** , *Tricia Springstubb, Morrow Junior Books* . This wonderful short story gives Halloween characters a new twist! Mark, a little boy, can't get anything right. Just once, he wishes things could work out the way he wants them to. Coincidentally, he encounters a witch who happens to have the same lot. Their zany encounter results in a delightfully hilarious sequence of events that empower Mark to recognize, "giving your best is often good enough!" Get ready for encore requests from every student.

***Chita's Christmas*** , *Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard, Bradbury Press* . This book, based on the recollection of the author's Baltimorian childhood and stories shared by family members over the years, takes a glimpse at the

spirit of Christmas as celebrated long ago. The reading of this work can spin off into hands-on Math (making waffles and cookies from scratch), Art (creating holiday ornaments), and Social Studies (comparing life past and present) activities.

***Imani's Gift at Kwanzaa*** , Denise Burden Patmon, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers . Imani has a dilemma. The karamu (a feast and family gathering held on the last day of Kwanzaa) is about to be held, and a family friend—Enna, a little girl with whom she does not get along—has been invited to the celebration. Loving oneself and reaching out to others is a value fostered by those who embrace the Nguzo Saba (the seven principles of Kwanzaa). Will Imani? This book also provides background information on the meaning and significance of Kwanzaa in the lives of African-Americans.

### **Informational Fiction**

***Kwanzaa*** , A. P. Porter. Carolrhoda Books . This book takes a detailed look at a major African-American cultural holiday. Created in 1966 by an Urban Studies and African American Heritage Professor and scholar, Dr. Malauna Ron Karenga, Kwanzaa is celebrated for seven days, from December 25 - January 1 and is grounded in the Nguzo Saba. This book highlights those principles, symbols, terminologies and activities held during each day. A great Social Studies inclusion resource.

***Kwanzaa*** , Deborah M. Newton-Chocolate, Children's Press . This book provides a simplified overview of the Kwanzaa celebration and is perfect for beginning readers.

## **REMEMBER THE AUTHORS**

---

It is important that youngsters learn not only the themes, elements and styles of literature, but about the authors themselves. Before beginning shared reading selections, make it a habit of introducing tidbits about the author. (I sometimes have xeroxed photos on hand so the children get a true sense of the individual and his or her work.) By introducing the author, children learn that much of what is shared in literature is the result of acquired views, interpreted observations, and/or experiences encountered during an author's lifetime. Most important, children internalize that they too can be writers.

Among my and my students' favorites are John Steptoe, Patricia Polacco, Eloise Greenfield, and Langston Hughes. These authors bring a lot of culturally interactive, personal experience into their writing which perhaps makes their works so enticingly wonderful for all children.

John Steptoe, for example, began as a painter/illustrator and was better-known for his innovative artistic know-how. Steptoe, however, loved to draw pictures and jot down stories ever since he was a child. By age 16, he had begun working on his first picture book, ***Stevie*** . The book was published by Harper and Row in 1969 and continues to captivate young readers today. A graduate of the New York School of Art and Design, he also worked as a teacher in the Brooklyn area. Steptoe took particular pride in his cultural heritage and the original homeland of Black people, Africa, as is reflected in ***Mufaro 's Beautiful Daughters*** . (As previously noted in Section 1, Steptoe illustrated this book based his studies about the ruins of an ancient city in Zimbabwe, South Africa.) Bweela and Javaka, his two children, are included in ***My Special Best Words*** and ***Daddy Is A Monster Sometimes*** . John often noted that one of the incentives for getting into writing children's books was the great and disastrous need for books that Black children could honestly relate to. He also indicated he was amazed to find that during his lifetime, no one had successfully created books written in the dialect that

many black children speak. That view is revealed in many of his short story creations, for over the years, Steptoe interchangeably used colloquial language and formal English in many of his books. Born in Brooklyn, New York on September 14, 1950, John passed away in 1988, but his works continue to brighten and inspire the lives of many.

Patricia Polacco will readily share that she recalls sitting around with family and friends, listening to the old ones tell stories of their past. The legacy continues, for Patricia knows well how to weave a story. Born to parents of Russian ancestry, she bases many of her books on family history and life experience. Two of my student's favorites are ***Chicken Sunday*** and ***Pink and Say*** (background information concerning these titles is contained in Section 1). The first was based on a family friendship during her childhood days in Oakland, California; the latter resulted from Civil War memories shared by her great-great-grandfather and passed down through the ages, leaving an indelible impression on the author. The holder of Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Fine Art from Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, and a Ph.D. in Russian and Greek iconographic history from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Patricia embraces people across cultures on a global scale, and that attribute is masterfully depicted in her work. The recipient of numerous awards, all of Polacco's books are heartwarming and beautifully illustrated by the author herself.

Eloise Greenfield, a resident and teacher of creative writing in Washington, D.C. schools, recognized the desperate need for more black literature for children. The recipient of numerous literary awards for excellence in children's literature, she is the author of over 20 children's book titles. Early on in her career, Ms. Greenfield set a goal: to create literature in which black children see themselves, and their lives and history reflected. The author notes that "reading generates a special kind of excitement, and she always writes books that children will want to live with and live in for as long as it takes them to read it, hoping that some part of the book will stay inside them for the rest of their lives." Eloise has adhered to her commitment, as evidenced in such works as ***Me and Neesie***, ***Nathaniel Talking***, and ***She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl***. The creator of over 20 children book titles, children of all ages are drawn to her literary creations which include biographies, fiction and poetry.

Langston Hughes was a phenomenal poet and writer from the Harlem Renaissance era. A world traveler, poet laureate, and Columbia University graduate, his works are based on his love of black people and experiences encountered throughout his lifetime. Hughes' literary works—in many instances suitable for children—are not often presented in picture book form. Nevertheless, his poems and short stories are often contained in children's book anthologies and poetry collections. (My students thoroughly enjoyed three of his poems featured in ***Pass It On*** [see Section 1: Picture Book Resources].) Rather than elaborate further on the author herein, I recommend reading ***The Langston Hughes Reader***. It provides an in-depth view of his life, along with excerpts of his literary creations over the years. Additionally, before introducing your students to his Hughes' works, read Floyd Cooper's ***Coming Home***, noted in Section 1.

## **SECTION 2: SHARED READING AND THE WRITING PROCESS—A DYNAMIC DUO**

---

Years of teaching and personal journal writing have helped me recognize that putting words and thoughts on paper is no easy task. In June of 1992, I had the privilege of participating in the Writing Process, a program developed by and still maturing under the adept, creative energy of Lucy McCormick Calkins and associates at Columbia University's Teachers' College in New York City. The program aids teachers in seeing the process of

writing through a child's eyes.

The Writing Process is a motivating approach to writing: At a young age, children are taught to draft, revise, and share their texts with one another as they write. Time is set aside each day (or a minimum of three days a week) to craft their work. Through interactive involvement, children begin to internalize that they can be authors.

Being involved in Lucy Calkins' program helped me step into a youngster's shoes and understand the anxiety that often occurs when writing in accordance with traditional, structured teaching methodologies. Since 1991, I have implemented the Writing Process in my classroom setting. It is a time-consuming task, but the result of its implementation has been that my children are empowered to use shared reading, critiquing and open discussion, and journal writing as readily accessible tools in the development of their own writing skills. Each child's progress is observed from the first day they begin writing in their journals to the last. Through interactive involvement, children begin to internalize that they can be authors.

What follows is a 16-week lesson plan showing how I implement the Writing Process in my classroom. Note that the process can be modified for use in all elementary grade levels at designated start-up times throughout the school year. (Based on your children's demonstrated readiness, you establish the start-up date for implementing the process). Many of the picture books highlighted in Section 1 can be used as springboards for journal writing throughout the process.

Composition notebooks and a writing tool box (we use children-size decorated shoe boxes containing pencils, markers, and crayons) are required supplies. At the beginning of the school year, I ask parents to provide their children with these items for classroom use. (I also recommend that, in general, they keep a set of these supplies on hand at home to help reinforce our classroom writing activities.) They are stored away until the Writing Process officially begins in our classroom. If your school is financially endowed, you can provide the supplies.

Throughout the process, children are encouraged to make use of words found in their classroom environment. One's classroom should, therefore, be inundated with words. Word walls should be strategically placed in center areas. Furniture, objects, supplies, etc. should be clearly labeled in highly visible, strategic places. Children should be encouraged to refer to readers, previously read storybooks, and other reading materials when they need help in spelling a word. The use of inventive spelling, where children really listen to letter sounds contained in a word and subsequently write words based on what they hear, is also encouraged. (When using the Writing Process, correct spelling is not a top priority; a child's ability to formulate thought and share those ideas and feelings on paper is the focus. Growth in these areas is visibly demonstrated as the process progresses.)

Shared reading should be frequently used as a prelude to journal writing. How books are put together, how illustrations play an integral part in conveying the story, how words appear on each page, and the overall patterns and elements of writing are highlighted and constantly revisited. Shared reading serves as a foundation for understanding the dynamics of writing.

Additionally, motivate your students to make use of oral language. Help them become engaged in discussion during morning meetings. Through open dialogue, children are given the opportunity to express their views, knowledge, concerns and/or their interest. You can get a feel for a child's overall use of language and expression of thought. At strategic moments, record their shared ideas on oversized lined paper. Through this interaction, children begin to recognize that spoken and written words are connected, that there's a definite

pattern to writing. Keeping all of these points in mind, we can begin.

### **Weeks 1-5: Setting The Tone**

The day begins with a story emphasizing a particular theme. (As time and the continued implementation of the process progresses, you will find students will automatically select their own themes.)

Through shared reading, students are given the opportunity to

\*examine the components of a book and how it was put together

\*make note of how the illustrations relate to the text

\*think about why the author created this book

\*discuss the portions of the book they like best

\*talk about whether it makes them think of something personal

After shared reading has ended, the journal writing activity begins. When creating their stories, the children are reminded to make use of inventive spelling and words contained in the classroom environment—wherever possible, minimally relying on classmates and the teacher as a spelling resource. (Note: During the Writing Process, students are asked to write their thoughts unaccompanied by illustrations. For grades K and 1, where many students are still in the precommunicative writing stage, illustrations are acceptable. Have the child explain the story to you, and record his/her sentences.)

Allot a scheduled time for children to journal write. Journal writing should take place a minimum of three days a week, for a period of at least 30 to 45 minutes. I have found that early morning hours or immediately after lunch have proven effective and perfect times for my first graders.

Be prepared! Some children will assert, "I dont know what to write!" Although a specific theme may result from the shared reading, be flexible. Allow your children to write about whatever thought comes to mind. Perhaps, for example, the shared reading makes them think of how they wish their parent would read stories to them at bedtime—something totally isolated from the story theme itself. Encourage your student to write about that unrelated thought. Specify that the feelings inside of you are the focus. Simply let the words flow.

During this period, helping children begin to feel comfortable with putting words on paper is the goal. Each year, I am constantly flabbergasted by the results of implementing the process and the written works of my first graders! This year, for example, I began a February shared reading session using Eloise Greenfield's poetic anthology, **HONEY, I LOVE** . I hadn't realized it, but a fire was ignited in many of my students. One was Lamar, a youngster who at the beginning of the school year was unable to phonetically identify several letters in the alphabet and a child initially repelled by reading and writing.

During our journal writing time, he wrote:

*Honey I love*

*I love a lot of things  
a whole lot of things*

like a toy  
a car toy  
like playing outside.  
Honey I love  
I love a whole lot of things

*like a friend!* The above is the six year old's work exactly as he wrote it. Lamar had been given the flexibility to refer back to books in which he remembered seeing the words (he recalled reading an excerpt of this poem in his HBJ Reader, one of the text we use for daily reading in class). Well, Lamar referred to that page, and took advantage of it! He also used graphophonic, semantic and syntactic know-how . . . Lamar made effective use of all the strategies offered by the Process!

Once the Process begins, children become excited about writing, reading, and sharing! Camaraderie, social interaction, and an acceptance that each of us has the ability to be creative in written form takes place. Lamar eagerly shared his creation with fellow classmates, who gave him rousing applause and enthusiastically raised their hands so they too could share "their masterpieces"!

### **Weeks 5-12: Mini Lessons.**

Teaching the formal elements of writing are not excluded from the Writing Process, perhaps simply presented in a more interactive and meaningful manner. Mini lessons are used to highlight areas where children demonstrate they are having difficulty. For example, for beginning writers, capitalizing formal names or words found at the beginning of a sentence and placing periods at the end of a sentence can be a difficult to remember. To empower children in this area, an interactive mini lesson (lasting no more than 15 minutes) can be conducted as follows:

Without letting your students recognize your intentional mistakes, write a few itemized sentences on the blackboard:

pat went to the store

she bought some cookies for her friend, ann.

she ate all of the cookies on way home

she had no more cookies left to give to Ann.

You will begin to marvel that many of your students will immediately notice the errors. Randomly select students to come up to the board and to make the necessary corrections. As your children master these skills, you can revisit and modify previously used sentences. Again, using the previously itemized sentences, rewrite

them to emphasize that periods do not always appear at the end of a specific line:

pat went to the store She bought some cookies for her friend, Ann on the way home, she ate all of the cookies on her way home She had no more cookies left to give to ann. The children have fun reading these unpunctuated sentences, and are eager to make the corrections. They also internalize the use of punctuation and begin to apply this know-how in their personal writings.

Mini-lessons do not always have to be presented in written form, but they can be strategically used to address any language arts concern. One day, for example, during our classroom morning discussion, I shared, "Make sure you tell you parents we is going on our trip next Friday." Laughter filled the room. One of my students, Shadaria exclaimed, "Mrs. Mullins, you made a mistake! It's we are going on a trip." Through this type of sporadically interactive exercise, children begin to focus in on and embrace inflections and syntactic cues.

### **Weeks 8 through 14: Peer and Teacher Conferencing**

By this time, each student's journal is overflowing with "completed" literary creations. At this point, children are asked to review their entire journal. By revisiting their work, children experience the evolution of their writing and make note of how they have progressed over the months. During this time, they are also asked to contemplate selecting ONE journal insert they would like to craft further to make into book form. (Note: The creation of the book serves as one of many culminating projects to conclude the process. Poetry pages, big book/group story writing, etc. can conclude a session.)

During allotted times, children are given an opportunity to read their chosen selection aloud to the class. Constructive criticism is the focus. Questioning guidelines are established and adhered to by each student, and through this activity, children learn to distinguish questions from statements and comments. Through this activity, the young writer gains valuable insight: *Is the story actually finished? What, if anything, is missing? What would the reader like to know more about? Is the depiction of characters clear? Does the story flow? If it doesn't, what seems to be missing?* All of these inquiries are initiated by the children. Through this interactive discussion and critique, children begin to fine-tune and focus on areas where they need to become stronger. They go back to their journal and make changes that they believe are needed.

Teachers also hold individual conferences with children. One-on-one conferencing provides additional support and objective feedback and helps children recognize that editing is part of developing a well-written work. Appointments should be scheduled with each child for individual conferencing. It is a time-consuming process, but it can be achieved particularly when held during center time or while others are engaged in journal-writing activities.

### **Weeks 14-15: Layout and Design**

Manila folders, 8 1/2 x 11 sheets of lined and plain, and the writing tool box are needed to begin this final phase of The Process.

By now, students should have selected one work for transformation into book form. Children will recopy their piece onto a lined sheet of paper: that sheet and other subsequently edited versions will be placed in the manila folders and referred to when actual book layout begins. (Journals are put away until this project is completed.) Restructuring and general editing of the selected story take place during this time. Each student will also envision the layout and design of their book.

Plain sheets of paper are laid horizontally (11 x 8 1/2-wise), center-folded, and stapled at the fold to form a

booklet: with it, children will determine the number of pages needed to create their finished product; where wording and illustration will be situated on the cover page; whether a dedication and/or "About The Author" page will be included; sentence placement; and the type of media to be used to create illustrations. (The children really get into this phase! One of my first graders, for example, decided to write about the human skeleton: she cut out each page to look like the shape of a bone, and formatted the pages strategically so that text appeared on the bottom of the page and corresponding illustrations spaciouly appeared on the top.)

### **Week 16: The Authors' Tea**

Authors' teas can be held whenever children create a final product. So that they do not become commonplace and remain a rip-roaring event, I choose to conduct them only three to four times, at the completion of the major book writing and subsequent writing projects in which short stories, poetry, etc. are the highlight.

Authors' teas are quite a big to do. Groups of children, usually selected by table number, are designated to bring in fruit punch, paper goods and plastic utensils, fruits, cookies and cakes. Invitations are created by the students, and parents, fellow grade-level classes, and school administrators are invited to experience works created by budding new authors. Sometimes we dress up for the occasion. The classroom is rearranged to accommodate all of our visitors, and a special chair is decorated from which all authors will have an opportunity to read!

A sense of pride and accomplishment is the result of this culminating activity. Get ready to begin again, for the children are eager to get started on their next writing effort.

## **SECTION 3: ADDITIONAL TIDBITS FOR YEAR-ROUND USE**

---

The following activities are suggested for inclusion with ongoing related monthly classroom themes. It is assumed that themes and objectives noted are somewhat generic for Grades K through 1.

### **Unit 1: Getting to Know Ourselves and Others**

#### ***Duration: September-Mid October***

*During the first weeks of school, children begin to learn about themselves and others. Through shared reading, interactive dialogue, role play, and journal writing, students will be able to*

- \* understand their place in the home and school family*
- \* highlight and recognize their responsibilities as students and family members*
- \* have faith in themselves and to give their best*
- \* make full use of logical thinking and language arts skills*

## **Suggested Readings:Section 1—Relationship Titles**

### **Needed Supplies:**

Tape Recorder or Video Camera

Paper Supplies, pencils, markers, and crayons

Book-binding

Composition notebooks for journal writing

### **Related Activities:**

As an ice-breaker, bring your students to group to discuss a bit about themselves and their families. Use a cam corder or tape recorder during the talks. Children usually have a lot to share about their family units. Through open discussion—and seeing and hearing themselves—young children exchange ideas and recognize that they have something in common. They also discover that the term family can encompass a broad range of people.

Encourage children to discuss how they feel about being part of the classroom family unit. Talk about the responsibilities they must carry out at school and at home, whether they enjoy carrying out those responsibilities and why? Discuss interactive relationships with family members, and where they think they fit in. Shared readings and group discussions can be followed by independent journal writing. Depending upon the ability of each child, encourage students to use inventive spelling and/or illustrations to highlight their responsibilities at home and in school.

## **Unit 2: Holidays! Holidays!**

### **Duration: October-December**

*Several major holidays occur during this time of year. Halloween, Thanksgiving, and those celebrated in December. The objectives herein are to*

- \* empower children to take pride in who they are, have faith in themselves, and strive to give their best*
- \* help children recognize that people celebrate holidays in many different ways*
- \* develop each student's creative know-how and language arts skills through hands-on Art and Language Arts activities*

**October** is readily associated with Halloween, witches, goblins, and black cats. Over the years, I have found that many parents shy away from the Halloween celebration primarily because of its negative connotation. Being sensitive to this view, I have attempted to offer a new twist for this month-end holiday.

### **Suggested Reading:**

The Magic Guinea Pig

**Related Activity:**

The "I Can" Collage

**Needed Supplies:**

9 x 12 sheets of construction paper

Construction paper and/or wall paper remnants cut into assorted geometric shapes, widths and lengths (preferably triangles, squares, rectangles, trapezoids, parallelogram shapes that the children will have already covered in class [for body parts, cut out dark and light brown, tan, off white, beige . . . strips in circles, ovals, rectangles and squares])

Magic markers, crayons, colored pencils

Glue sticks and Scissors

The Magic Guinea Pig should be read as a prelude to this activity. Before sharing this hilariously empowering story, have your children talk about something they have tried to accomplish but may or may not have achieved. Despite the outcome, how did they feel? Immediately following the shared reading, ask your children to think of ONE THING they can do all by themselves. Have your children use the geometric cuttings to create a piece of art—a collage, depicting themselves and that one thing at which they have been successful. (When this project begins, I first show an example of a previously finished work, then demonstrate how to create the picture—encouraging students to lay their pieces out before gluing, and to make use of the entire page: I strategically place the geometric shapes on the 9 x 12 sheet to form the body and clothing. Background scenes [e.g., a playground, houses, trees..] can be created in collage form and/or drawn and colored in. Students are encouraged to let their imaginations soar.) After the collage has been completed, introduce a sentence using the words " *I can* " as the opener. Have each child complete the sentence. (If computers are available in your classroom, have your student type out his/her sentence. Typing in bold typeface using an 18-point font adds an impressive touch.) Affix the child's sentence to the finished masterpieces, and put them on display!

**Suggested Reading:**

The Talking Eggs

**Related Activity:**

What's in the What Bag?

**Needed Supplies:**

a 12 x 14 lined writing pad (for interactive writing)

a dark magic marker

a medium-sized brown paper bag colorfully and mysteriously decorated with the words "What's In Here?" (The bag is hereinafter known as THE WHAT BAG.)

a mysterious item (a stuffed rabbit, an egg, a huge rubber or paper mache bone; these items are

contained in The Talking Eggs)

Before reading the story, get your materials strategically in place. Place your mystery item selection in the bag, and make sure none of the children see it. (I made a 12-inch bone using aluminum foil molded into the shape of a femur wrapped entirely with moistened plaster gauze. After drying, I painted it lightly, using brown and beige tempera paints to make it look realistic.) Call the children to group, and begin setting the tone. *"I've something in this bag. It may be alive—I don't know. For certain I know that it won't hurt you. It may, however, move. One thing! Don't look in the bag as you put your hand in to feel it. I don't know what might happen if you do. Who wants to go first . . ."* By this time, the children are wide-eyed and curious. A few courageous hands will go up, and the description/language arts/discovery activity begins. I do not force anyone to put their hands in the bag if they do not want to: for those who do, I encourage them to describe how the "mystery item" feels, what it is doing, and what they think it might be. Record their responses on the lined pad. At the end of this segment, guide your students in reading the observations aloud. Watch the fun begin as you finally open the bag and reveal what's inside. At this point, introduce *The Talking Eggs*, and highlight the fact that just like our language arts activity, sometimes, things in life are not always what they seem. (Note that The What Bag is a terrific way of teaching parts of speech [since statements made by children concerning the mystery object are recorded and read aloud] and grammar [because words used by children to describe the unidentified object are classified and recorded as adjectives and adverbs, and actual guesses about the object itself are categorized and noted as nouns]. The What Bag activity can be implemented in isolation any time throughout the school year.)

**November** : Being thankful for family, friends and the things we have is a common theme shared during November and to be embraced throughout our lives.

***Suggested Readings:***

***Honey, I Love***

Nathaniel Talking

What Kind of Baby Sitter Is This

The Old, Old Man and The Very, Very Little Boy

Grandpa's Face

Miss Tilly

She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl

Daddy Is A Monster Sometimes

Just Us Women

***Related Activity:***

## Have A Heart Thanksgiving Day Messages

### **Needed Supplies:**

- \*Scissors
- \*Pre-folded 9 x 12 Construction Paper in assorted colors stenciled with semi-heart shape along the fold
- \*Pre-folded 11 x 8 1/2 Lined Writing Paper with semi-heart shape along the fold
- \*Magic markers, pencils, crayons
- \*Multi-cultural crayons
- \*Elmer's glue and glue sticks
- \*Gold and Silver Glitter

Any of the titles noted above can be used as a prelude to creating beautiful Thanksgiving Day keepsakes. Who has made a difference in your life, and why are you thankful for that person is the theme of this Language Arts/Craft making. Keeping the theme in mind, have your children write about that special someone and why they are thankful for the individual in their journal. (Although inventive spelling is encouraged, for this activity, you will help them rewrite their sentences accurately spelled.) Next, have them make their construction paper hearts, cutting the paper carefully along the guide lines. Have pre-cut heart shaped writing paper on hand. Your children will carefully rewrite their messages hereon. Children will use Glue sticks to adhere the final messages onto the construction paper hearts. They will decorate their hearts with hand drawn pictures, and put on the finishing touches with a thin line of Elmer's glue tracing the border of the heart, sprinkled with glitter.

**December** : Chanukkah and Christmas are readily associated with the month of December. Kwanzaa too is celebrated during December, from 12/26 to 1/1. Incorporate this holiday into your December classroom celebrations.

### **Suggested Readings:**

#### ***The Black Snowman***

Kwanzaa

She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl

Imani's Gift at Kwanzaa

## Chita's Christmas

### **Related Activity:**

#### *Zawadi Wall Hangings*

During Kwanzaa, children are the recipient of presents for having fulfilled goals set during the course of the preceding year. Zawadi (gifts) are not provided for the sake of gift giving, but for a purpose. Guns or toys with negative images are a no-no during the Kwanzaa celebration. Zawadi can, however, include hand-made crafts and clothing, black dolls, erector sets, microscopes, other educational-type toys, and Afro-centric literature or clothing.

Your students will use Kuumba (creativity) to create zawadi for their family: African Print Wall Hangings. (Note: This activity not only promotes the joy of giving; it serves as a reinforcement exercise for students who have learned about geometric shapes.)

### **Needed Supplies:**

a 12" straw

red, black, green or yellow yarn, cut into 20" pieces

two rolls of white Bounty towels, one sheet per student

newspaper

red, black, green, yellow, and brown tempera paints

25 7-ounce paper cups

water

Cover each table completely with newspaper. Five paper cups will be needed per table grouping of four. Half fill each cup with tempera paints; add 1/4 to 1/3 of water to dilute paint to a consistency of melted ice-cream blended slightly with milk. Set the paint cups strategically in the middle of the grouped desk, so they are easily reached by each child.

Give each child a Bounty Towel sheet. Demonstrate folding the sheet in half so that it looks like a rectangle. Fold it over again so that it looks like a square. Fold it repeatedly in this manner until it looks like a 2-inch square. (Before reaching this point, you can have your students fold the paper towel over into the shape of a triangle instead of another square.) Demonstrate clasping the folded paper towel firmly in its center. Then, dip one corner about an inch deep into a paint cup. Allow the color to be absorbed quickly, but not oversaturated. Immediately remove the towel, turn it around to another corner. Repeat the dipping process, allowing students to use the colors of their choice. Remove the paper towel. Again, make sure it is not oversaturated, or the "cloth" will be damaged. Slowly and carefully open the paper towel, using the reverse folding process with which you started. Voila! A wonderful African-print pattern appears.

Lay the work on the newspaper, and print the child's name beneath the work. Set it to the side (near a radiator) and allow it to dry for approximately an hour. After the towel has dried, mount it onto the straw. This is achieved by completely rubbing the straw with a glue stick, then laying the straw along the upper edge of

the sheet. Roll the straw so that the paper towel edge is completely affixed thereto. Run an 20-inch piece of yarn through the straw, tie it in a bow. The zawadi is ready for gift-giving.

## Unit 3: African American Heritage

---

### **Duration:**

Ongoing, with particular emphasis in January-March

### **Suggested Readings:**

**See Section 1: Culture, Heritage and History Titles**

*Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Birthday*

Coming Home

Kwanzaa

African-American heritage is usually introduced as an isolated part of the curriculum during February with the simple highlighting of blacks in American history. I contend that this study can be expanded and tastefully presented during the course of the school year, Kwanzaa as the springboard, followed by the introduction of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during his holiday celebration in January. Titles included in Section 1 can be strategically used to create a dynamic language arts Social Studies Unit. To accompany shared readings and journal writing exercises, include hands-on Music, Art and Math Activities. (Note: embracing this type of Social Studies format can be used for the study of any group of people.)

### **Suggested Activity:**

*Kokusi Tatari (Coconut Cakes) Via America*

Many Black people throughout the world enjoy coconut candy. Whether in Africa, the Caribbean, or the southern and northern portions of the United States, coconut cakes are scrumptiously sweet and delightful! And they're easy to make, and depending upon the portion of the world you are in, take on a different flair. The version presented herein is adapted from Ghana West Africa.

### **Needed Ingredients:**

1 1/4 cups of sugar

1/4 cup of water

2 cups of grated coconut

### **Optional\***

for a true Ghanaian flair, include 1 piece (about 2" long) of grated ginger

for a Caribbean flair, add 1/4 cup of roasted peanuts

for a taste of the south, add a 1/4 cup of chopped pecans

Mix sugar and water in a heavy saucepan. Stir over moderate heat until sugar is completely dissolved. Cook without stirring until the sugar mixture lightly browns and slightly thickens. Add grated coconut and stir until mixture is thoroughly combined. Remove from heat and allow it to cool until the mixture can be handled. Using an ungreased cookie sheet or aluminum tray, scoop a heaping teaspoon, and shape it into a ball. Continue the process, placing the rounded cakes one inch apart on the sheet. Press lightly to flatten. Let set until completely cooled. This recipe yields 30—save some for me!

### **Suggested Activity:**

*"From Whence We Came" Family Album*

Children will use interviewing, writing, drawing and/or photography skills to complete this project. (I have effectively used this activity to get parents involved with their children's school work, and they really come through for their youngsters). For a week-long homework assignment, have your students gather information from their family members to establish where their mothers, fathers, and grandparents were born. Children should highlight each family member represented. Note that this will by no means be an in-depth study of the family tree, but it will give students a sense of family (both extended and nuclear) and family origins. Gathered information will be compiled in class into individual works depicting the families of each student, and will be shared in class.

Thus concludes ***Celebrate A People!*** I hope my curriculum unit proves useful and, most importantly, inspires you to investigate and utilize children's picture books that are reflective of our multi-culturally diverse environment!

## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

---

### *CHILDREN'S BOOK RESOURCES*

Most books noted herein are listed in Section 1: Picture Book Resources At Your Fingertips. Books unnoted in the Picture Book Resource are listed herein accompanied by a brief comment; they too are highly recommended for classroom use and school library inclusion.

Angelou, Maya. *Kofi and His Magic* . New York, Clarkson Potter, 1996.

Angelou, Maya. *My Friendly Chicken and Me*, New York, Clarkson Potter, 1996.

Bradby, Mary. *More Than Anything Else*. New York, Orchard, 1995.

Burden-Patmon, Denise. *Imani's Gift at Kwanzaa* . New York, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1992.

Caines, Jeanette. *Just Us Women* . New York, Harbor, 1982.

Cameron, Ann. *The Stories Julian Tells* . New York, Bullseye Books/Alfred A. Knopf, 1981.

Church, Vivian. *Colors Around Me* . Illinois, Afro-Am Publishing Company, 1971.

Clifton, Lucille. *Everett Anderson's Goodbye* . New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1983.

———. *Three Penny Wishes* . New York, Doubleday, 1976.

Cooper, Floyd. *Coming Home* . New York, Philomel Books, 1994.

Dee, Ruby. *Two Ways To Count To Ten* . New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1988.

Feelings, Muriel. *Moja Means One* . New York, Puffin Pied Piper, 1972.

Feelings, Tom. *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo* . New York, Dial Books, 1995.

Franklin, Kristine L. *The Old, Old Man and the Very Little Boy* . New York, Antheneum, 1992.

Gray, Libba More. *Miss Tizzy* . New York, Simon and Shuster (Undated).

Greenfield, Eloise. *Grandpa's Face*. New York, Philomel Books, 1978.

———. *Honey, I Love* . New York, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972.

———. *I Can Do It By Myself* . New York, Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1978.

———. *Me and Neesie* . New York, Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1975.

———. *Nathaniel Talking* . New York, Black Butterfully Children's Books, 1988.

———. *She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl* . New York, J. P. Lippincott, 1974.

Hamilton, Virginia. *Her Stories* . New York, The Blue Sky Press, 1995. (Ms. Hamilton does it again, this time presenting traditional Afro-centric folk tales with female characters as the focus.)

———. *When Birds Could Talk and Bats Could Sing* . New York, Blue Sky Press, 1996. (Impressive folk tales with animals that bring each meaningful story to life.)

———. *Many Thousands Gone* . New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

———. *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* . New York, Alfred J. Knopf, 1985.

Hayes, Sarah. *Eat Up Gemma* . New York, Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1988.

Hoffman, Mary. *Amazing Grace* . New York, Dial Books for Young Readers, 1991.

———. *Nancy No-Size* . New York, Oxford University Press, 1987.

Howard, Elizabeth Fitzgerald. *Chita's Christmas* . New York, Bradbury Press,

Hudson, Wade. *Black Heroes From A to Z* . New York, Scholastic, Inc., 1988.

———. *Jamal's Busy Day* . New York, Just Us Books, 1989.

——, ed. *Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children* . New York, Scholastic, Inc., 1993.

Hughes, Langston. *Black Misery* . New York, Oxford University Press, 1954.

Johnson, Delores. *What Kind of Baby Sitter Is This* . New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991.

Johnson, James Weldon. *Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing* . New York, Scholastic, Inc., 1995.

Keats, Ezra Jack. *A Letter for Amy* . Harper Crest, 1968.

Kroll, Virginia. *Masai and I* . New York, Four Winds Press, 1992.

Lexau, Joan M. *Don't Be My Valentine* . New York, Harper Trophy, 1985.

Polacco, Patricia. *Chicken Sunday* . New York, Scholastic Inc., 1988.

———. *Pink and Say* . New York, Scholastic, Inc., 1996.

Porter, A. P. *Kwanzaa* . New York, Children's Press, 1991.

McGovern, Ann. *Black is Beautiful* . New York, Scholastic, Inc., 1974.

Mendez, Phil. *The Black Snow Man* . New York, Scholastic Books, 1989.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Brown Angels* . New York, Harper Collins, 1993

Newton-Chocolate, Deborah. *Kwanzaa* . New York, Children's Press, 1990.

———. *Talk, Talk: An Ashanti Legend* . New York, Troll Associates, 1993.

San Souci, Robert D. *The Hired Hand* . New York, Scholastic, Inc., 1997. (This book is based on an African-American folk tale told in the southern portion of the United States.)———. *Talking Eggs*. New York, Scholastic, Inc., 1989.

Springstubb, Patricia. *The Magic Guinea Pig*. New York, Morrow Junior Books, 1982.

Step toe, John. *Creativity* . New York, Clarion Books, 1997.

———. *Daddy Is A Monster Sometimes* . New York, Harper Trophy, 1980.

———. *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale* . New York, Scholastic Inc., 1987.

——— *Stevie* . New York, Harper & Row, 1969.

Thomas, Joyce Carol. *Brown Honey in Broomwheat Tea* . New York, Harper Collins, 1993.

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

Winter, Jeanette. *Follow The Drinking Gourd* . New York, Alfred J. Knopf, 1988.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Birthday* . New York, Silver Press, 1990.

Yarborough, Camile. *Corn Rows* . New York, Coward, 1979.

## TEACHER RESOURCES

---

Bennett, Jr., Lerone. *Before The Mayflower* . Maryland, Penguin Books, 1966, 1992.

Courlander, Harold. *A Treasury of Afro-American Folk Tales* . New York, Marlowe & Company, 1996.

Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom* . New York, Vintage Press, 1966.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis and McKay, Nellie Y. *General Editors. The Norton Anthology on African-American Literature* . New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1997.

Huck, Charlotte S. *Children's Literature in the Elementary School* . Third Edition, New York, 1976.

Hughes, Langston. *The Langston Hughes Reader: Selected Writings of Langston Hughes* . New York, George Brazillieur, Inc., 1958.

Rollock, Barbara. *Black Authors and Illustrators of Children's Books, A Biographical Dictionary* . Garland Publishing, Inc., New York and London, 1988.

Manna, Anthony and Brodie, Carolyn, eds. *Many Faces, Many Voices: Multi-Cultural Literary Experiences for Youth* . The Virginia Hamilton Conference. Fort Atkinson, WI, 1992.

McCormick-Calkins, Lucy. *The Art of Teaching Writing* . Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Teachers College/Columbia University, Heinemann Press, 1986.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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

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