



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1997 Volume III: American Maid: Growing Up Female in Life and Literature

A Very American Journey: The Lives and Accomplishments of Six Notable American Women

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My curriculum unit, *A Very American Journey*, will focus on individual American women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, studying the lives of some notable American women: Phillis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Sacagawea, and the lesser known western pioneers Ethel Waxham and Catherine Haun. I believe the study of these women's lives will be meaningful to my students in a number of ways. I teach drama to sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students at Nathan Hale K-8 School. By studying and dramatizing the lives of these women, the students will have the opportunity to gain a more comprehensive view of the lives of these women, the times in which they lived, their hardships and their joys. They will gain insight into the social conditions, conventions, and barriers to advancement that confronted these women and to some extent confront women even today. Many of the students continue to see racial and other barriers in their own futures.

I chose Wheatley, Truth, Tubman, and Sacagawea because I already have some knowledge of them, and I wanted to learn more about them. My students may have heard of the three African-American women, and perhaps Sacagawea. They will, through our dramatization, become more deeply involved with the study of their lives. Catherine Haun and Ethel Waxham are unknown to my students. I chose them for that reason, and also because they typify the white women who went West during the mid nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

This past year my students have completed units on Black Actors in American Cinema, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, and Frank L. Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*. In the last three years these students have produced productions of *A Christmas Carol*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*. Their most recent production was in the spring of 1997. They performed the musical, *The Trial of Goldilocks*. These accomplishments have been extremely labor-intensive, requiring the dedication of many teachers, administrators, and parents. Certainly, we plan to produce a dramatization of *An American Journey* for presentation in the school auditorium.

Objectives:

—To teach drama and acting in ways that will enrich and enlarge my students' lives in meaningful and lasting ways.

—To dramatize the lives of these six women, drawing upon diaries, letters, memoirs, journals, plays, biographies, and autobiographies.

—These dramatizations may be in the form of student playwrighting, improvised scenes, monologues, previously written plays, character analysis, sensory exercises, use of period costumes and properties, and character tableaux from prints of paintings and photographs relating to these women’s lives and times.

Strategies

For each of the women selected I will distill biographical sketches from the resource material that will describe key events, turning points, and accomplishments in their lives. This background material will let the students see how individual classroom activities relate to the lives or achievements of the women.

Each class will select specific events or topics to explore in a dramatic context, e.g. improvised scenes or sensory exercises. This is how students will develop acting skills that will be needed for presentation before other students.

The class will select specific things to present before an audience. These will include monologues or scenes drawn from memoirs, letters, or plays. The class will edit and revise these individual elements so that they contribute to a coherent whole.

Classroom activities

Most classroom activities focus on developing acting skills. Important activities include relaxation and concentration exercises, sensory exercises, improvisation, theatre games, pantomime, reading aloud from plays and other texts, acting scenes and monologues from plays, and writing monologues and dialogue for scenes.

The context for these activities will be the existing resource material on the lives of Phillis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Sacagawea, Catherine Haun, and Ethel Waxham.

Biography Sketches

The biographical information that I have selected from numerous sources will be a starting point for the students. It is expected that they will use our new library at Nathan Hale to discover more information about each subject. In the case of the poetry lesson, they will find other African-American poems and develop a program of poetry readings. Anthologies of Black American poets are numerous, and each student will be expected to find one for interpretation and presentation.

Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784)

Phillis Wheatley, believed to have been born in Senegal, Africa in approximately 1753, was brought to America as a slave at the age of seven or eight. There, in 1761, she was sold to John Wheatley of Boston, Mass. There is some disagreement among scholars as to who purchased Phillis. Some say that it was John Wheatley’s wife, Susannah, who personally chose the little girl there on the Boston docks. An observation from Phillis

Wheatley's biographer, Margaretta Matilda Odell, states that when Mrs. Wheatley saw the child, Phillis was "of slender frame, and evidently suffering from a change of climate..she had no other covering than a quantity of dirty carpet about her."(1) Phillis' own memory of her African birthplace was lost. Her only memory of her home was one image of a sunrise ritual. The vision that stayed with her was "of her mother, prostrating herself before the first golden beam that glanced across her native plains."(2) It is generally believed that she came from Senegal and that the identity of her people was the Fula. The Fula were Moslems and her early memory of her mother's sunrise ceremony is in keeping with the Moslem ritual to welcome the new day with prayer. Also with the Mohammedan religion the Fula had the knowledge of Arabic script. This knowledge may have helped Phillis learn to read and write English so quickly, although in any case she was definitely considered a child prodigy.

The child was given the Christian name Phillis and, as was the custom of slavery, the last name of her master. Mrs. Wheatley took an interest in this frail child. She had purchased the child as a domestic and companion to herself and her daughter, Mary, but she quickly perceived that Phillis was very intelligent. Phillis learned the English language rapidly and also began to make the letters of the alphabet on the walls with chalk or charcoal. All this she learned within sixteen months of arriving in this alien country. She was given special treatment in the Wheatley household. Instead of doing the usual menial domestic labors that were required of a slave child, Phillis was given lessons by Mary, who was 18 at the time Phillis was brought into the household. After learning to read and write, she then began the studies of astronomy, ancient and modern geography, and ancient history. She read English and Latin literature and the Bible. Pencil and paper were at her bedside, so that if she had inspiration during the night, she could write her verse. At fourteen she was a poet, as accomplished in the art as any other poet of her time.

In 1770 she wrote a poem that was an elegy to Reverend George Whitefield, and it was this verse that elevated her reputation from a local celebrity to a poet known throughout the colonies and in England. The poem was published with this notation "By Phillis, a Servant Girl of 17 Years of Age, belonging to Mr. J. Wheatley, of Boston:- And has been but 9 Years in this Country from Africa."(3) The poem soon appeared in several editions in Boston, Newport, Philadelphia, and New York, and in at least two editions in London. This elegy for the preacher was a natural vehicle for Phillis' religious sentiments and at seventeen shows her poetic line to be firm and vigorous. The following is an excerpt from the poem.

Take him, ye Wretched, for your only Good;
Take him, ye hungry Souls, to be your Food;
Take him ye Thirsty,for your cooling Stream;
Ye Preachers, take him for your joyful Theme;
Take him, my dear Americans, he said,
Be your complaints on his kind Bosom laid;
Take him, ye Africans, he longs for you;
Impartial Saviour is his Title due.
If you will walk in Grace's heavenly Road,
He'll make you free, and Kings, and Priests to God.(4)

The above is the London version of the poem, the only one that includes the deliberate use of the word “free”. This elegy served as her passport to England and to the publication of a volume of her verse. The year of Whitefield’s death, 1770, was the year of the Boston Massacre. The first fatal shots by English troops against American colonists were fired on King Street, not far from the Wheatley residence. Phillis Wheatley must have known that among the five colonists killed was a fugitive slave who had changed his slave name from Michael Johnson to Crispus Attucks. One wonders if she had him in mind when she penned the word “free”?

In the spring of her twentieth year she made a trip to England. She was always in frail health and the sea air was believed to have healing value. The legacy of the poet’s trip to London was a volume of her verse. This was the first book by a black woman ever published. Its title was *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. This volume appeared more than a century and a half after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. It was among the first volumes of verse by a colonist to ever be published. For Phillis Wheatley, a woman and a slave, barely twenty, it was indeed an extraordinary accomplishment.

William H. Robinson in his book *Phillis Wheatley in the Black American Beginnings* states:

When properly read, in the context of her times, the available data—poems, letters, a memoir, accounts of the times—go far toward documenting the engaging story of how she encountered and dealt with various obstacles to her finding and asserting her Black and poetic worth. There is indeed evidence enough to sustain the belief that Phillis Wheatley did survive those raw Black American beginnings to endure as Christian, as woman, and as Black American poet. Phillis Wheatley not only belongs squarely in the Black American literary tradition; she, almost single handedly, succeeded in creating that tradition. (5)

When she returned to America, she found that her mistress, Mrs. Wheatley, had died on March 3, 1773. On March 12, 1778, her master, John Wheatley died, and then in September, Mary Wheatley died. Phillis was free, but she was no longer sheltered and she had to fend for herself in a time of revolutionary fervor. She struggled as a poet and seamstress to make a living. It is recorded that on April 1, 1778 Phillis Wheatley and John Peters, both free negroes, married. Little is known of her husband or her life after her marriage, although she did as Mrs. John Peters still write and publish poems. She lived in dire poverty and was separated from her husband for some time. A relative of Mrs. Wheatley discovered that Phillis was ill and found her.

She was also visited by several other members of that family. They found her in a situation of extreme misery. Two of her children were dead, and the third was sick unto death. She was herself suffering for want of attention, for many comforts, and that greatest of all comforts in sickness—cleanliness. She was reduced to a condition too loathsome to describe. In a filthy apartment, in an obscure part of the metropolis, lay dying the mother, and the wasting child. The woman who had stood honored and respected in the presence of the wise and good of that country which was hers by adoption, or rather compulsion, who had graced the ancient hall of Old England, and rolled about in the splendid equippages of the proud nobles of Britain, was numbering the last hours of life in a state of abject misery, surrounded by all the emblems of poverty! . . . (6)

At the age of thirty-one, on December 5, 1784, Phillis Wheatley Peters died in Boston. Many newspapers published her obituary. To this day no one knows exactly where Phillis and her children are buried.

Lesson Plan / Phillis Wheatley

I. Two of Phillis Wheatley's poems will be included in a study of poems by African-Americans. This will be undertaken after our study of her life. II. Phillis Wheatley's most outspoken piece of Black protest occurs in the following excerpt from To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth.

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from Africa's fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway? (7)

III. Excerpts from "On The Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield". The London version contains a reference not found in a single one of the many American versions: the word "free." The excerpt of this poem is included in the biographical sketch on Phillis Wheatley. IV. The following is a list of poets the students will be encouraged to study. Poems may be selected for the oratorical competition and also for a staged presentation of poetry for a special school program.

James Weldon Johnson	Paul Laurence Dunbar
Langston Hughes	Claude McKay
Arna Bontemps	Countee Cullen
Dudley Randall	Margaret Danner

Margaret Walker	Gwendolyn Brooks
Imamu Amiri Baraka	Sonia Sanchez
June Jordan	Lucille Clifton
Carolyn M. Rodgers	Larry Neal
James A. Randall, Jr.	Welton Smith
Ishmael Reed	Don L. Lee
Nikki Giovanni	Stephany
Derek Walcott	Maya Angelou
Robert Hayden	Mari Evans

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)

She was born Isabella about 1797 in the town of Rosendale, Ulster County, New York. At that time no one wrote down and kept information concerning her birth. No one anticipated that this child of slaves would become an American legend.

Her parents were the slaves of Colonel Hardenbergh, a Revolutionary War colonel. Their names were James and Elizabeth. James was tall and straight, as Isabella would become. He was known as “Bomefree,” which meant tree. Elizabeth and James had ten or twelve children. All of their children had been sold except for Isabella, the youngest, and her older brother Peter. The loss of their children left her parents in grief and chronic depression. Her earliest memories were of her parents’ stories of the cruel loss of their other children. She feared impending disaster.

Her foreboding of separation came true when she was sold as a slave. When Isabella was about nine years old she was sold for \$100 and taken away from her beloved father, mother, and brother. Colonel Hardenbergh had died and all his property, which included Isabella, was auctioned. Her parents were too old and sick to get any price so they were consigned to live in a hut belonging to a family who had no slaves of their own. Isabella is supposed to have said that her trials in life dated from this sale to a family named Neely. With this family she began working as a slave.

Truth was freed in 1827 by the New York State Emancipation Act. As a result of a religious vision, Truth left her home in New York City in 1843 with a new dress, 25 cents, and her new name—Sojourner Truth. Why did Isabella leave New York City and become “Sojourner Truth?” Why did she choose this name? Some accounts say that she chose “Sojourner” because she thought of herself as a wanderer among people. Many times she said that the Lord’s name is truth and that she took that as her last name after her greatest and only master. She felt that the city was a place of drama and robbery. There was a depression in the country after the Panic of 1837 and Truth, like many poor people, was working very hard and making very little money.

Truth joined a utopian community, the Northampton Association for Education and Industry. During the nineteenth century there was a great utopian movement. Many individuals joined idealized socialist communities, with resources and property held in common for the common good. The Northampton community believed in and practiced cooperation (they believed competition was evil). They believed in women’s rights, freedom of expression, liberal education, and the abolition of slavery.(8) One of the basic

tenets of the Northampton Association was that slavery was evil and was the greatest contributor to the class conflicts of society. Many people visited the community because of its unusual intellectual and ideological bent, and it was there that Truth met Frederick Douglass in 1843.

“Truth,” Douglass said, was a “strange compound of wit and wisdom, of wild enthusiasm and flint-like common sense,” who “seemed to please herself and others best when she put her ideas in the oddest forms,” “Her quaint speeches,” he noted, “easily gave her an audience.”(9)

Truth traveled to the Midwest, New England, and the Middle Atlantic states attending abolitionist rallies. She spoke out against slavery, becoming the first African-American woman to make public speeches detailing the evil institution. From all accounts she was an eloquent speaker with great oratorical abilities. It made no difference that she could not read or write; the people who heard her were moved by her appearance and her speeches.

After the Civil War Truth became an advocate for the equal treatment of African-Americans, especially in education. She spoke on behalf of woman’s suffrage. At the second National Woman’s Suffrage Convention that was held in Akron, Ohio, in 1852 she made the famous address known as “Ain’t I a Woman.”

Well, children, where there’s so much racket, there must be something out of kilter. I think that twixt the Negroes of the South and the women of the North all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what’s all this here talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place—and aren’t I a women? I could work as much as a man, and eat as much, too, when I could get it, and bear the lash as well—and aren’t I a woman? I have borne children and seen them sold into slavery and when I cried out with a mother’s grief, none but the Lord heard me —and aren’t I a woman?(10)

Sojourner Truth died on November 26, 1883, aged about 86. Her funeral in Battle Creek, Michigan, was one of the largest ever. She and her family are buried there in Oak Hill Cemetery.

Lesson Plan / Sojourner Truth

I. Sandra Fenichel Asher’s prize winning play, *A Woman Called Truth*, will be studied and performed. The one act version will be perfect for my students. II. Vocabulary: suffrage, sojourner, chronic, foreboding, emancipation, utopian, liberal, oratorical, advocate. III. Selected students will find information on Frederick Douglass to present to the class.

Harriet Tubman (1821-1913)

Like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman could neither read nor write, yet she was a woman of uncommon courage, cleverness and focus. Called “Moses of Her People,” she led more than 300 people out of the bondage of slavery to freedom. She was born to Harriet Greene and Benjamin Ross, who as slaves were not allowed to marry. Marriage for slaves was illegal under the laws of slavery in Dorchester County, Maryland where Harriet was born in 1821.

Tubman suffered under the terrible brutality of slavery. As a child she was considered “stupid” and was whipped repeatedly. She hated working in the house near the mistress and did whatever she could to seem unfit for house work. Even as a young child she longed to be outside, as far from the eyes of the slave owners as possible. She developed enormous physical strength and endurance by working as a fieldhand, although she was only five feet two inches tall.

When Harriet was about sixteen years old an incident occurred that is said to be a key to the later Harriet Tubman. She had been hired out as a field hand. While she and the other slaves were husking corn, a slave of a farmer named Barrett stood aside from the others and ran away. The overseer followed him and so did Harriet. The overseer trapped the slave in a village store. As he began to tie him up, he called on Harriet to help by holding the slave. Harriet refused and the slave escaped, running past Harriet and out the door. At the same time that she placed herself in the door to stop the pursuit, the overseer picked up a two-pound weight from the store counter and threw it at the fugitive. It fell short and struck Harriet. It was a devastating blow to the head. She now had a symbol of bondage literally stamped on her head. The concave dent in her skull was a mark that remained with her for the rest of her life.

It took her almost a year to recover. No doctor was sent to help. For months she lay on a bundle of rags in her parents’ cabin, trying not to cry out in pain. She lay there sleeping and dreaming. Before she was well her owner tried to sell her. He would bring potential buyers down the dirt path to the cabin. The prospective buyers shook their heads. After one look at the wounded girl and her scrawny body, they turned away. Harriet later stated that no one would give a sixpence for her.

She finally did recover her strength when she was about nineteen years old, but she developed what was called “spells of sleep”.(11) At any time, whether she was in the midst of conversation or working in the fields she would suddenly fall into a deep sleep. This was clearly a residue from the terrible blow she had received. Because of these periods of what was perceived as a stupor by her owners, they now found her totally uncommunicative.

They believed that she was now a “half-wit”.(12) All this time she was, as she later said, thinking faster and clearer than ever. She knew slavery must change. Slaves from near and far would meet under cover of night to talk about the stories that were circulating throughout the land. There was information about the slave uprisings of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner. All this was not lost on the young Harriet, who began to plan her escape.

When Harriet had made her plans to escape she went to the big house to tell her sister. She had to tell someone who could be trusted. She drew her sister out of doors to tell her, but at that moment the master rode up. To keep him from becoming suspicious, Harriet broke into song. This melody was sung in church, but it was also sung by escaping slaves. The song was to let her sister know that she was escaping.

I’m sorry I’m going to leave you,
Farewell, oh farewell,
But I’ll meet you in the morning,
Farewell, oh farewell.
I’ll meet you in the morning,
I’m bound for the promised land,
On the other side of Jordan,

Bound for the promised land.
I'll meet you in the morning,
 Safe in the promised land,
On the other side of Jordan,
 Bound for the promised land.(13)

There was a white woman in the region whom Harriet had seen many times. Each time she saw her the woman would tell her that if she ever needed help to come to her house. Many whites in the South helped slaves to escape to the North. Usually they were Quakers; some were Southern abolitionists.

Harriet had made a bed quilt which she prized. She gave this bed quilt to the white woman. The woman gave her a paper with names on it, and directions. The directions guided her to the first house where she would receive help. When Harriet reached the first house, she showed a woman there the paper. Harriet was given a broom and told to sweep the yard. At first Harriet was surprised, but she did as she was told. She soon realized that no one would suspect her of being a runaway slave. Any passerby would simply see a usual sight, a Negro girl working in the yard. The woman's husband was a farmer who came home in the early evening. After dark, he loaded a wagon, put her in it, covered her, and drove to another town, giving her directions to the next station.

Harriet became a "conductor" for the Underground Railroad. She escaped from slavery when she was twenty-five years old. She said when she touched the free soil of Pennsylvania she was overcome by emotion.

When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything: the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.(14)

Harriet was thrilled to be free, but she could not forget her mother, father, sisters, and brothers still cruelly enslaved. She was free, and she vowed that her relatives in Maryland would be free. Here as a free person she could choose her employer, and earn wages. She did menial labor, cooking, cleaning, laundering in hotels and clubhouses. She changed employment often to gain more income and better working conditions. Even on her small wages she saved her money, determined to find a way to free her loved ones.

Not long after she arrived in Philadelphia she met a black man named William Still. He was called the chief "brakeman" on the Underground Railroad. William Still was the director of the Vigilance Committee. This was a group of blacks and whites who helped fugitive slaves to get to the North. He kept records of the slaves that

came through that city, records that we have to this day. The Quakers and others in this Abolitionist group raised funds for the Underground Railroad, employed black people, boycotted Southern made products, and wrote anti-slavery literature. From them Harriet learned that hundreds of blacks were passing back and forth from the North and South bringing groups of fugitives to freedom. Now Harriet began her great accomplishments. She became a “conductor “ on the Underground Railroad.

Harriet Tubman brought over 300 slaves to freedom. When the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850 she made sure most of the former slaves got to Canada. She said that she no longer trusted that they would be safe in America. Harriet was so effective in eluding capture that her enemies put a bounty on her head of \$40,000. All the while she was aided by Northern abolitionists. She successfully brought her family to freedom. In 1857 she was given property in Auburn, New York; it was there that she brought her old parents to live. She concentrated her efforts in freeing slaves from Maryland. She knew the region so well and she felt that by helping liberate so many slaves from that one region she would make a strong impact on ridding Maryland of contented slaveholders.

Harriet was first a cook for the Union soldiers during the Civil War, and then became a scout. She wore many hats during the Civil War. She did service as a spy and then near the end of the war she served as a nurse.

After the War she gave her enormous energy to caring for indigent African-Americans, establishing a home for those in need on her property in Auburn. She died there on March 10, 1913 and was given military last rites.

At a meeting of suffragists in a church in Rochester, New York sometime in the late eighteen nineties Harriet Tubman was honored for her work in the Underground Railroad. This is part of what she said to the assembly.

“Yes, ladies, I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can’t say—I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”(15)

LESSON PLAN / HARRIET TUBMAN

I. Students will write a play about Harriet Tubman. They may begin by improvising a scene of Harriet leading fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad. The following are ideas for scenes from Harriet Tubman’s life.

1. Time: mid nineteenth Century. Place: Maryland, the marsh land on the Eastern Shore. Scene: Early evening
As the curtain rises, we hear the mournful cry of a loon. In the dark shadows of a tall spanish moss covered tree we begin to make out the figures of three people.

The figures are Harriet and her brother, Henry Ross and another male fugitive slave. She has come to lead them to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

2. The above scene may be improvised by the students or written by them. They may develop different characters who help Harriet and the fugitives. These characters may be the “station masters” along the way and William Still. The actor portraying William Still may record the names and stories of the fugitive slaves.

II. The students may want to develop a map of the Underground Railroad from where Harriet came from, the eastern shore of Maryland to Philadelphia. Developing character, place, and sensory elements as they map the “stations” along the way to freedom.

1. Ideas for improvisation or scene writing.

a. The fugitives and their “conductor” had to travel at night. How does that make you feel?

Perhaps having the fugitives wear blindfolds would be an interesting, helpful exercise. Harriet, having made the trip many times would not wear a blindfold.

Sacagawea (1790-1884)

Sacagawea (sometimes spelled Sacajawea) was born before 1790, but the exact date is unknown. Shoshone was her Native American tribe. This tribe lived in what is now western Montana, between the headwaters of the Missouri River and the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. In the Shoshone language her name meant “Bird Woman.”

When she was about twelve years old she was taken captive in a raid by the Hidatsa Indians. She was taken as a slave to their territory, now North Dakota. When she was still in her early teens she was sold to a French-Canadian fur trapper, Toussaint Charbonneau. She became one of his wives.

The Hidatsa and the Mandan Indians were allies, and it was there in the fall of 1804 that Meriwether Lewis and William Clark came with their expedition. These explorers had been sent by President Thomas Jefferson to explore the territory (report on its geography and resources) of the Northwest between the Missouri River and the Pacific Ocean.

The expedition spent the winter of 1804-05 with the Mandan and Hidatsa people. Sacagawea was sixteen or seventeen when Lewis and Clark asked Charbonneau to come along as an interpreter. He insisted that Sacagawea come also. They would be going into Shoshone territory. She would be an asset since she could speak their language. She gave birth to her son that winter and named him Jean Baptiste Charbonneau. She traveled with her baby strapped to her back in a cradle board. It was known that any Indian tribes that might be hostile to the white men would know that the expedition came in peace since they had an Indian woman with a baby traveling with them. Few Native American tribes went to war with women and children in the war party.

Sacagawea was not a guide for the expedition. She was important as an interpreter. She was an expert woodsman who could find and identify edible roots and all other manner of wild plants. The journals of Lewis and Clark describe one particular incident that also shows how indispensable Sacagawea was to the expedition. One day a sudden squall of wind keeled the boat over, and much of its cargo, including medicines, books, and the journals floated out. Sacagawea was the only one with the presence of mind to collect almost everything that had gone overboard. Much of the journals would have been lost had it not been for her foresight.

Later on the trip, Sacagawea recognized the countryside. She related the story of how at that very spot she had been captured by the Minnetarees (Hidatsa tribe). She realized that her people must be nearby. When they did meet the Shoshone Indians, Sacagawea was the interpreter. The story goes that she recognized Chief Cameahwait as her brother! Finn Burnett, a frontiersman, many years later told this of their reunion:

Finally, when they had managed to contact the Shoshones, Sacagawea was overjoyed to discover her brother, Chief Cameahwait, among them. After a joyful reunion, she began to talk the language of her childhood again, and told him that the white men wished to cross the mountains. She explained that Lewis and Clark needed Shoshones for guides, and a sufficient number of ponies to transport their provisions and equipment to the headwaters of the Columbia River.(16)

The expedition needed horses to continue over the Rocky Mountains. Chief Cameahwait and the Shoshones provided them with the horses. They met many different Indian tribes after their trip across the mountains as they continued on toward their destination, the Pacific Ocean. Sacagawea was eager to see the huge ocean, after all the hardships of the journey. They were told of the big fish (a whale) by the Indians, and Sacagawea traveled a long way on the beach to eventually see only the skeleton of the whale, all else having been used by the Indians. The expedition planned to camp near the ocean for the winter, before heading back and completing their journey.

The return journey was just as dangerous as the outward journey. As they took their last look at the Rocky Mountains, they saw a view afforded very few white men. They were sometimes stopped by huge herds of buffalo crossing the Yellowstone River. Wolves were heard barking at both the many elk and the buffalo herds. Fierce grizzly bears were everywhere. There were large rattlesnakes, but no one was bitten.

In the journal on August 17, 1806 at the end of their return journey Captain Clark says of Sacagawea: “she was particularly useful among the Shoshones. Indeed, she has borne with a patience truly admirable the fatigues of so long a route encumbered with the charge of an infant, who is even now only 19 months old. We therefore paid Charbonneau wages, amounting to \$500.33, including the price of a horse and a lodge (tent) purchased of him.”(17) No wages were paid to Sacagawea. Captain Clark thought that the child, who was nicknamed “Pomp,” was a beautiful, promising child and he offered to take him and send him to school. From the written accounts both parents were willing if the child had been weaned. They wanted the child to be raised in the way that Clark thought was proper, if they could bring him later to St. Louis. In 1808 the boy was taken to be raised by Clark, and Sacagawea remained there with her young son for some time.

Sacagawea is mentioned thirty-two times in the journals and footnotes. The first footnote clearly draws attention to her. It mentions that Charbonneau, who “would have been a minus function . . . in comparison with his wife, Sacagawea, the wonderful ‘Bird woman,’ who contributed a full man’s share to the success of the expedition, besides taking care of her baby.”(18)

Sacagawea, with her infant son strapped to her back most of the time, was a member of the main party of the expedition from April 7, 1805, until August 14, 1806. This remarkable woman shared the many hardships and the few pleasures of the explorers. She died on the Wind River Reservation on April 9, 1884, a very old woman. She had lived with her children and her grandchildren on the reservation in Wyoming.

Indian Pronunciation (19)

Sacagawea: Sacajawea had been the spelling of her name since it first appeared in print in 1884.

Later it was decided that the “j” should be “g” because “g” is found in eight spellings of the name in the Lewis and Clark Journals. Sah-cah-gah- wee’- ah is the accepted pronunciation. The first three syllables mean “Bird,” and wea means “woman.”

Mandan (Man-dan): When Whites first knew them, the Mandan were on the same part of the Missouri River as the Hidatsa, between Heart and Little Missouri Rivers. When the expedition camped near them in the winter of 1804-1805 the Mandan were very helpful to them.

Minnetaree (Min-ne-tah-ree): one of several names given to the Hidatsa tribe. The word means “they crossed the water.” They helped the expedition in the winter of 1804-1805.

Nez Perce (Nez Purse): French meaning “pierced noses.” The Nez Perce lived in central Idaho, parts of southeast Washington, and northeast Oregon.

Shoshone (sho-sho-nee): The Northern Shoshones lived in eastern Idaho, western Wyoming, and northeastern Utah. They were known by many names. Five of the names mean “grass lodges” or “people that use grass or bark for their houses or huts.” There were at least eight other names for “snake people”, “serpents”, or “rattlesnake people.” They were called “the snake Indians” because of a misunderstanding of their name in their sign language. The first reference to them in the journals said that the members of the expedition were very anxious to see the Snake Indians. The next day there is a reference to Sacagawea as being one of the Snake Indians.

ROUTE OF LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION 1804-1806

(Figure available in print form)

Catherine Haun

As a young bride, Catherine Haun and her lawyer husband caught the gold fever early in 1849. This was a period of national hard times and the young couple longed to go West and “pick up “ gold with which to return to their native Iowa and pay off their debts. The story of her journey across the Great Plains was written as a reminiscence for her daughter.

About 25 of their neighbors made up the wagon party. Beside all the necessary provisions for the journey, there were two wagons filled with merchandise to sell when they arrived at their destination. This turned out to be impractical as they never got these goods across the first mountain. Their necessary provisions consisted of freshly ground flour, home-cured bacon, cooking utensils, dried or salted meats, and dried vegetables and fruit.

In her clothes trunk Catherine had two blue checkered gingham dresses, aprons, underclothes, and some “dress up” colorful bonnets for Sundays.

When we started from Iowa I wore a dark woolen dress which served me almost constantly during the whole trip. Never without a three-cornered kerchief, similar to those worn in those days I presented a comfortable, neat appearance. The wool protected me from the sun’s rays and penetrating prairie winds. Besides it economized in

laundrying which was a matter of no small importance when one considers how limited, and often utterly wanting were our “wash day” conveniences. The chief requisite, water, being sometimes brought from miles.(20)

It took three months for all the wagons to be equipped for the April 24th, 1849 departure. The trunks that were packed held what were considered treasures, a bible and medicines. The medicines were quinine, opium, whiskey, hartshorn for snake bites, and citric acid. The citric acid was used as an antidote for scurvy. The acid would be mixed with sugar and water and a few drops of lemon essence making it a substitute for lemonade. Matches were also very precious and were kept in a large-mouthed bottle and placed carefully in the trunk.

Catherine Haun describes some of the families in their caravan. The Lomore family from Canada were a man, his wife, and two small girls. Their large express wagon was drawn by four mules. They had traveled from Canada to Iowa and had a well supplied wagon with a roll of bedding strapped to the side of the wagon. Baggage, bundles, pans and other kitchen utensils, and bags of feed for their horse and mules were attached to the back of the wagon. There was Mr. West with his wife, his son Clay who was about 20 years old, and his daughter, America, who was eighteen. He also had a man traveling with them. He had a very heavy wagon that tended to stall when the roads were bad, but since he was a wagon maker and his companion a blacksmith they were key to the caravan.

There were many memorable events on this cross country trek. One was Catherine’s first encounter with Native American women with their babies.

The squaws carried their papooses in queer little canopied baskets suspended upon their backs by a band around their heads and across their foreheads. The infant was snugly bound, mummy-fashion with only its head free. It was here that I first saw a bit of remarkable maternal discipline, peculiar to most of the Indian tribes. The child cried whereupon the mother took it, basket and all, from her back and nursed it. It still fretted and whimpered apparently uncomfortable or ill. The mother then stood it up against a tree and dashed water in the poor little creature’s face. By the time that it recovered its breath it stopped crying.(21)

Haun describes seeing herds of buffalo on the land. She described them as “ a great black cloud, a threatening moving mountain advancing toward us very swiftly and with wild snorts, noses almost to the ground and tails flying in midair.”(22) She had no idea how many animals were in the stampeding herd and she describes the sound as deafening and terrible. The herd demolished some of their wagons, but luckily no one was killed, although people were injured.

Haun describes the shooting of two of the buffalos and using the humps and tongues as fresh meat. “The large bone of the hind leg, after being stripped of the flesh, was buried in coals of buffalo chips and in an hour the baked marrow was served. I have never tasted such a rich, delicious food!”(23) They also made jerky out of some of the hump, after cutting it into strips an inch wide. It was then strung on ropes and hung from the wagon cover to cure. Afterwards it was packed in a bag and eaten when rations were low. Dried buffalo chips were also very useful as fuel. Since there were no trees on the plains, each person that walked along side the wagons carried bags to pick up the chips.

On the fourth of July they reached the Laramie River, and it was a time of celebration. They sang patriotic songs, fired off guns, and gave cheers for the United States and the California Territory. The children made up costumes, mostly of Indian characters. Everyone danced around the campfire to violin music, and celebrated until midnight. At the height of the party, a strange white woman with her small daughter rushed into the gathering. Haun describes the following scene:

She was trembling with terror, tottering with hunger. Her clothing was badly torn and her hair disheveled. The child crouched with fear and hid her face within the folds of her mother's tattered skirt. After she had partaken of food and was refreshed by a safe night's rest she recovered and the next day told us that her husband and sister had contracted cholera on account of which her family consisting of husband, brother, sister, herself and two children had stayed behind their train. The sick ones died and while burying the sister the survivors were attacked by Indians, who, as she supposed, killed her brother and little son. She was obliged to flee for her life dragging with her the little five year old daughter. (24)

The woman, Martha, and her child stayed with the wagon train. Martha helped Haun with the cooking. She and her little son were soon reunited. The child had been traded for a horse by Indians to other emigrants and was traveling only a few days behind the Haun party.

At that time cholera was epidemic on the plains. Haun's party was very lucky since they did not have a single case of the disease. All along the way they found graves testifying to the lives taken by smallpox and cholera.

Only one death occurred during their trip and that was during their crossing of the desert. Mrs. Lamore, a Canadian woman, "suddenly sickened and died, leaving her two little girls and grief stricken husband." (25) Haun does not say that Mrs. Lamore died in childbirth; there was a taboo around the facts of pregnancy and birth at this time among emigrant women.

After traveling 2400 miles the Hauns reached Sacramento on November 4, 1849. They had traveled for six months and ten days from Clinton, Iowa. On the last page of her diary, Catherine Haun says:

Upon the whole I enjoyed the trip, spite of its hardships and dangers and the fear and dread that hung as a pall over every hour. Although not so thrilling as were the experiences of many who suffered in reality what we feared, but escaped, I like every other pioneer, love to live over again, in memory the romantic months, and revisit, in fancy, the scenes of the journey. (26)

Ethel Waxham

On October 20, 1905, the twenty-three-year-old Ethel Waxham was traveling on a stagecoach on her way to the remote center of Wyoming. Ethel, the daughter of a Denver physician, had just recently graduated from Wellesley College. At Wellesley she earned a Phi Beta Kappa key, learned four languages, and studied classical literature. She wrote poetry, played in amateur theater productions, and did volunteer social work in New York City.

This was her first full-time job. She looked forward to teaching and described her first impressions of the school.

At last we saw the little school house of logs, fourteen by sixteen with a good (sod) roof, almost flat coming low over the sides . . . The whole was put up, I believe, at an original expenditure of seventy-five dollars . . . We soon had the place swept out and arranged, brought in the books that we had carried over, and set the traps for the mountain rats that had left traces of themselves over the place . . . The door has had some passerby's six shooter emptied into it. (27)

She taught seven students in this schoolhouse while living with a ranch family. The nearest neighbor lived far

away, and the closest town was Lander. Lander had a population of 1,000 and Ethel visited it only once that year. People did come visiting, especially suitors.

One suitor came visiting quite often even though he had to ride eleven hours from his home. He was a sheep rancher, John Galloway Love. Ethel describes him in this way.

Mr. Love is a Scotchman about thirty-five years old. At first sight he made me think of a hired man, as he lounged stiffly on the couch, in overalls, his feet covered with enormous red and black-striped stockings edged with blue around the top, that reached to his knees . . . His face was kindly, with shrewd blue twinkling eyes. A moustache grew over his mouth, like willows bending over a brook. But his voice was most peculiar and characteristic. Close analysis fails to find the charm in it. A little Scotch dialect, a little slow drawl, a little nasal quality, a bit of falsetto once in a while, and a tone as if he were speaking out of doors. There is a kind of twinkle in his voice as well as in his eyes, and he is full of quaint turns of speech, and unusual expressions. For he is not a common shepherd, (it is said,) but a mutton-aire, or sheep baron. (28)

John Love dreamed of raising thousands of sheep and cattle on his land. Under Theodore Roosevelt and the new Desert Land Act he had ownership of 640 acres of land in Wyoming and because of the water on his acreage, control of 1000 square miles. He dreamed of irrigating grain fields and fruit orchards. Now he also dreamed of making Ethel Waxham his wife.

John asked Ethel to marry him, but she had other suitors and ambition and she turned him down. Ethel decided that when the school year ended she would go to the University of Colorado for her master's degree. She had spent seven months teaching in Wyoming. Her poem reveals that the beauty of the land seldom left her thoughts.

I know a land where the gray hills lie
Eternally still, under the sky,
Where all the might of suns and moons
That pass in the quiet of nights and noons
Leave never a sign of the flight of time
On the long sublime horizon line—(29)

Love continued to court Edith by keeping their relationships alive through letters. Edith received her degree in literature and took a job teaching Latin for a year in Wisconsin. In 1909 she went to Pueblo, Colorado, to teach in a high school. (In the lesson plan on Edith Waxham excerpts from their letters are included.) In 1910, Ethel Waxham agreed to marry John Love and begin a new life in the country she had grown to appreciate in the seven months she had lived in Wyoming. Years later David Love, their son, gave this remembrance of the stories of his parents honeymoon.

When my father was sure that my mother was going to marry him he had a sheep wagon built especially to his

order. And that was to be the honeymoon sheep wagon . . . They were married on June 20th, 1910 and it was pretty hot, so they started out for the mountains and from then on there is a blank in our knowledge. Mother rarely discussed it. But apparently it rained a great deal. The horses got away and they were marooned and never got to the mountains. So the honeymoon was not a romantic success. (30)

LESSON PLAN ONE / ETHEL WAXHAM

I. Staging “The Letters of Ethel Waxham and John Love.”

The following is only an outline of the work. Each student must be engaged fully in this process; everything is subject to change during the rehearsal period. This is above all a time of exploration. Character and line analysis are employed all through this process.

1. The actor portraying Ethel is downstage left. The actor portraying John is downstage right. Both are in period costume, with facsimile props. Students will research costumes through the use of books on costumes and books of photography of the West.

Acting Terms

1. downstage—that part of the stage closest to the audience.
2. upstage—that part of the stage furthest from the audience.
3. stage right—right from the actor’s point of view (actor facing the audience).
4. stage left—left from the actor’s point of view.
5. facsimile—an exact copy of any object
6. props or properties—The furniture and hand-held objects (hand props) used in play productions.

II. Behavioral possibilities for staging. Explore the text of each letter, making special note of the dates. What season of the year is indicated? In staging the play slight costume changes can be used to designate the passing of time. Actors will explore behavior through sensory work on heat and cold.

1. Ethel—Desk with books, pen, stationery; potbelly stove.
2. Ethel—teapot, cup of hot tea in winter.
3. Ethel—glass of water or tea for warmer months.

4. Ethel—palm fan for summer, shawl for winter, fingerless gloves for winter.
5. John—interior of sheep wagon; picture of Ethel.
6. John—blanket to wrap around his shoulders, stool.
7. John—food, imaginary dog.
8. John—writing materials.

III. Sound Effects

1. Ethel—clock striking, children at play under her window, train sounds, singing from nearby church.
2. John—howling wind, rain, sheep bleating, dog barking, coyote howling.

IV. Exercise on composing the letters

1. In this exercise each actor as the character will take time in composing the letters. Each will come up with words not in the letters; after looking for different words to express the character's thoughts the actor will discard these words for the words in the factual text of the letters. This exercise helps young actors learn to think on the spot and to trust that they can think on stage.

LESSON PLAN / ETHEL WAXHAM

I. The letters of Ethel Waxham and John Love. (31)

Muskrat, Wyoming

September 12, 1906

Dear Miss Waxham,

. . . When I received your letter I lay awake . . . out in the sagebrush curled up in my buggy robes and thought and studied astronomy . . . You have no idea how pleased I was to hear from you and it is beyond my pencil to express the

satisfaction I felt. Thank you very much for the picture. It does not flatter you any, but at the same time it is very lifelike . . . Of course it will cause many a sharp twinge and heartache to have to take “no” for an answer, but I will never blame you for it in the least and I will never be sorry that I met you . . . I know the folly of hoping that your “no” is not final, but in spite of that knowledge, in spite of my better judgment, and in spite of all I can do to the contrary, I know that I will hope until the day that you are married. Only then I will know that the sentence is irrevocable . . .

Yours Sincerely,

John G. Love

November 12, 1906

Dear Miss Waxham,

. . . I know that you have not been brought up to cook and labor. I have never been on the lookout for a slave and would not utter a word of censure if you never learned or if you got ambitious and make a “batch” of biscuits that proved fatal to my favorite dog. I honestly believe that I could idolize you to such an extent as to not utter a harsh word. “Little girl,” I will do my level best to win you and will be the happiest mortal on earth if I can see the ring that I wear on my watch chain flash on your finger. It has never been worn by or offered to another . . .

We had one very hard storm and several herders lost their lives but that I think was their own fault.

February 15, 1907

Dear Mr Love,

I am fortunate in having two letters from you to answer in one . . . The days have been comparatively dull . . . I am too busy for dances here, if I care to go, which I do not. They are prosaic affairs in the boys’ fraternity houses—not at all like the “Hailey Ball!” . . . The seven months I spent at the ranch I would not exchange for any other seven months in my life. They seem shorter than seven weeks, even seven days, here.

Dear Miss Waxham,

. . . I for one am glad that your curiosity led you to drift up here to Wyoming and now my supreme desire in life is to persuade you to come back . . .

April 3, 1909

Dear Mr. Love—

There are reasons galore why I should not write so often. I’m a beast to write at all. It makes you—(maybe?)—think that “no” is not “no,” but “perhaps,” or “yes,” or anything else . . .

Good wishes for your busy season from E.W.

P.S. I like you very much.

October 12th, 1909

Dear Miss Waxham,

. . . I am once more in debt, but if my season of bad luck has come to an end and the winter is not too severe, I will come out with flying colors in the springYour picture nicely framed now adorns the wagon . . .

October 25th, 1909

Dear Miss Waxham,

. . . There is no use in my fixing up the house anymore, papering, etc., until I know how it should be done and I won't know that until you see it and say how it ought to be fixed.. If you never see it, I don't want it fixed, for I won't live here. We could live very comfortably in the wagon while our house was being fixed up to suit you if you only would say yes.

January 1, 1910

Dear Mr. Love,

. . . Suppose that you lost everything that you have and a little more; and suppose that for the best reason in the world I wanted you to ask me to say "yes." What would you do?

January 11,1910

Dear Miss Waxham,

. . . Hope is far far from being dead yet, "little girl." I have lost over twenty thousand dollars in the last forty days. If I lose another twenty thousand, hope will still live and not even be very feeble . . . If I were with you, I would throw my arms around you and kiss you and wait eagerly for the kiss that I have waited over four years for.

Notes

1. M.A.K. Richmond, *BID THE VASSAL SOAR*, 11.
2. *Ibid*, 12.
3. *Ibid*, 24.
4. William A. Robinson, *PHILLIS WHEATLEY IN THE BLACK AMERICAN BEGINNINGS*, 40.
5. *Ibid*, 72.
6. *Ibid*, 21.
7. *Ibid*, 41.
8. Nell Irvin Painter, *SOJOURNER TRUTH: A LIFE, A SYMBOL*, 92.
9. *Ibid*, 98.
10. Sandra Fenichel Asher, *A WOMAN CALLED TRUTH*, 48.
11. Earl Conrad, *HARRIET TUBMAN*, 18.
12. *Ibid*, 18.
13. *Ibid*, 37.
14. *Ibid*, 38.
15. *Ibid*, 214.

16. Ella E. Clark & Margot Edmonds, SACAGAWEA OF THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION, 29.
17. Ibid, 82.
18. Ibid, 89.
19. Ibid, 147-149.
20. Lillian Schlissel, WOMEN'S DIARIES OF THE WESTERN JOURNEY, 168.
21. Ibid, 175.
22. Ibid, 176.
23. Ibid, 176.
24. Ibid, 181.
25. Ibid, 183.
26. Ibid, 185.
27. Geoffrey C. Ward, THE WEST: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY, 411.
28. Ibid, 411.
29. Ibid, 411.
30. Ibid, 416.
31. Ibid, 414-416.

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