



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

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## **Women of Color: A Fight for Change Through Literature**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 97.03.07  
by Cynthia Roberts

The 19th and 20th centuries have brought forth a group of dynamic African American woman writers and poets. Those writers joined their elders in the struggle for justice and equality to chart strategies and work for change in the conditions of all African Americans. Cultural messages to and for the people expressed black pride, strength, power and beauty, despite oppression, along with the call for freedom for all African Americans.

In this unit, students will become familiar with such writers as Phillis Wheatley, Alice Walker, Sonia Sanchez, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Lorraine Hainberry, Nikki Giovanni, Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelou, and Paule Marshall. These writers represented one of the strongest literary movements in the history of African creativity. These poets not only helped to shape a contemporary literature but they also helped to recapture and reshape a culture.

This unit will be divided into three general areas: one will attempt to have a historical approach, the second a more personal focus on each author; in the third, students will read, identify, respond to, recite, research, and evaluate poetry and novels by famous individuals. Famous works will be discussed with a view towards their context and the intent of the poet. Through these writings, we will attempt to focus upon the author's life and work, individual strength, the role each played and the struggle each writer had to overcome. Although this unit will be most responsive to the needs of African American students, all students have something to gain from the content.

This unit will give students an opportunity to gain a more personal understanding and appreciation of women, feelings, heritage, and events that mark the course of African American History. This unit will also offer students the strength of diversity to flourish, the history and literature that have shaped our country and society. Students will be provided with "hands-on" activities.

(Recommended for Literature and History, grades 9-12)

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