



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1997 Volume V: The Blues Impulse

The Blues Impulse in Drama: Lessons on Racial Pain

Guide for Curriculum Unit 97.05.10
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An interesting problem discussed in the seminar “The Blues Impulse” at The Yale-New Haven Teacher’s Institute dealt with the treatment of teaching and protecting students from pain. To what extent do teachers bear a responsibility to expose young people to the harsh realities of the modern world? What are the effects that violence and hate have on our students, and should education provide shelter to the harsh and cruel environment that children live with on a daily basis? While this unit does not necessarily take on the weight of finding solutions to the problem, it can act as an important class which provides awareness to a centuries-long problem of ignorance and prejudice.

While the unit is primarily a course in drama, it is also multidisciplinary, making use of material more common to courses in art, music, and social studies. The drama of racial tension, prejudice, and pain is examined through the screening of Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the reading of Edward Albee’s *The Death of Bessie Smith* and James Baldwin’s *Blues for Mr. Charlie*. The language of this latter play, which is quite strong and graphic, may require some editing for use in younger grades.

(Recommended for Drama, grades 8-12)

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