



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1998 Volume V: Reading Across the Cultures

Introduction

In *Reading Across the Cultures* we engaged contemporary American writing by authors from several ethnic or racial groups: Latino, African American, Native American, Jewish, and Asian American. We began with Sandra Cisneros' *The House On Mango Street*, turned then to short fiction in *The Latino Reader*, edited by Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernandos Olimos, and then to Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, Louise Erdich's *Love Medicine*, Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*, and - at least for a preliminary skirmish with its complexities - Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*. After returning to *The Latino Reader* for some essays and poetry, we read in two works that exemplify certain of the challenges of inhabiting a multicultural community: Gary Snyder's *No Nature* and Jonathan Kozol's *Amazing Grace*. We paid attention to the distinctive aspects of minority cultures but also, and more importantly, to matters that seemed to underlie or transcend any ethnic or racial orientation: similar social and psychological problems, a common tool-kit of artistic strategies, and complementary visions of the larger national community. Indeed, as more than one Fellow remarked, the multi-ethnic constitution of our seminar and its wide-ranging and sometimes impassioned discussions made our own meetings an adventure in the subject we were studying.

The curriculum units illustrate the adaptability of our topic to various settings. Kathleen Ware's "Multicultural Achievers A to Z" offers the kindergarten teacher an array of subjects and activities that can link social studies to other aspects of a whole curriculum. Yolanda Trapp, who works in bilingual and special education, provides many suggestions from various cultures for reading aloud to children from kindergarten to fourth grade. Nancy Taylor Skolozdra will use children's literature in third grade to explore the Inuit, African American, Hispanic, and Chinese American cultures. Gwendolyn Robinson will use holidays and festivals to introduce her fourth grade children to a variety of culturally distinctive foods, activities, and objects. And Carolyn Williams, who teaches fourth grade in New Haven's Talented and Gifted Program, will open up communication among a multi-ethnic classroom population by way of a story about Vietnamese refugees.

Two fifth-grade teachers offer complementary approaches to cultural diversity. Carol S. Heidecker, focusing on the Holocaust and our need to respect human differences, will lead her students through four books that "exemplify the beauty of the human spirit from culturally diverse perspectives." Sequella H. Coleman, seeking to encourage a greater interest in reading, will lead her students through three books that engage issues of "growing up" in different cultures.

Three Fellows who teach in secondary school have also adapted our topic to different settings. Bonnie Bielen Osborne, who teaches special education at a school for pregnant teens and young mothers, will use American holidays and related children's books to lead her students into an understanding of our cultural diversity and important aspects of child-rearing. Genoveva T. Palmieri, who teaches eleventh and twelfth grade students in

a high school for the fine arts, will emphasize the language-learning experience of three bilingual writers whose first language was Spanish. And George Peterman, who teaches Honors and Advanced Placement English, will introduce his students - through poems, stories, essays, and a play - to the complex role of language in the quest of Puerto Ricans in the United States for self-definition.

Thomas R. Whitaker

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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

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