



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1999 Volume I: Women's Voices in Fiction

Examining the African American Family through the Eyes of Women Authors

Curriculum Unit 99.01.10
by Jean Sutherland

Why Teach This Unit?

In an elementary school where over 90% of the students are African American and the majority of the remaining 10% are Hispanic/Latino, my third grade classroom of approximately twenty-five students reflects these percentages. My students' ages vary from those who have just turned eight to others who may turn ten before the year ends. They come from a variety of social-economic backgrounds and home situations. Their academic ability and the level of their general knowledge also vary considerably. Some are members of families with multiple problems. Few of their lives are without difficulties. Most, though not all, parents or guardians are supportive of school. Most want to be helpful but are not sure of the best way to go about it. Often the struggles of everyday life interfere with their efforts.

At this stage of their educational life, most students enjoy school but not just for the academics. They are just beginning to understand that their school career will have implications beyond the present and they are slowly developing a picture of the historical and personal events which have helped to shape their lives and possibly their future. Due to a variety of factors many of my pupils lack a strong feeling of self-esteem, are deficient in basic skills, and have little confidence, or even awareness of their abilities. Generally, they find it difficult to establish even short term goals. They may want to become a doctor, a lawyer, an artist, or more likely a famous singer or a star player in the National Basketball Association, but they have no idea what is required to achieve those positions. Perhaps of more importance is the fact that they often fail to recognize the positive support and role models already existing in their lives, especially within their own "family." They do not always realize that these individuals can become sources of strength, offering them stories, information, support, and pride which could assist them in formulating and achieving positive goals for now and the future. At the same time, I am well aware that negative role models also exist for some of them, but since I am incapable of judging each situation, I will assume that my unit will point them in a direction which will help them to find the needed support.

General Objectives

With this background information in mind, my unit for the seminar Women's Voices in Literature presents children with a variety of literature by women authors who focus on some aspect of the African American family as it has survived its experience in the United States. In choosing the family as my focus, I gain the opportunity to show the strength and sustaining force which this institution has exerted and continues to exert upon African American life. Though the subject matter revolves about fiction whose primary characters are African Americans and concentrates on the related events of African American history, children of any race or ethnic background can relate to the activities I present. They all have families of some type and all need additional exposure to the history of African Americans. Since, traditionally, the literature and educational materials available to the elementary classroom have under-represented and distorted the lives, history, and contributions of African Americans, it is essential that this gap be closed for all students.

Regarding my use of only women authors, the role of women, all women, and their contributions, generally and specifically, have likewise, been under-represented and often distorted in elementary classroom books and materials. Third grade is not too early to begin making children aware of this failing and to begin informing them of the role which women have played historically in our society.

Through the use of women authors, pupils will learn how these authors have been an important part of a movement which brought African American characters into the elementary classroom, thus, filling that void which had existed much longer than it should have. I can recall when the presence of an African American character in a story was an oddity. Further, by using women authors, most of whom will be black, I will present a perspective which will illustrate and emphasize the importance of both the family unit, in general, and, specifically, the female members whom circumstances often forced to assume the role of maintaining and guiding this family. Naturally, positive male role-models will also be a part of many stories and background material. This approach will require some historical examination of the unique pressures that often strained the African American family unit. Children will learn of the resulting importance assumed by the extended family, which, along with a variety of relatives and friends, included church and community. An understanding of these institutions is essential to gaining an understanding and appreciation of the African American family. The interrelationship of these elements will be stressed, along with the positive influences each has had upon the other and especially upon the individual. As a bonus, the experience of focusing on the strengths of family life in the face of adversity will help to develop a sense of pride in a history which all too often leaves young African American students with a feeling of helplessness---and even shame.

The historical information presented and the stories selected will not ignore relationships with the white community and the many conflicts which existed. It will include material ranging from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement up until more modern times. While some stories will focus on confrontation, many will emphasize the everyday interactions involved within family life and the people its members encounter.

An Integrated Approach

The unit will be presented through an integrated approach, involving primarily the areas of reading, language arts, and social studies. In all activities, the underlying academic focus of most material will be on developing reading and writing skills. Comprehension and related reading skill lessons will be developed from stories we cover. Writing activities will revolve around summarizing, conveying impressions, recognizing parallels from their own families, and imagining themselves in similar situations. I will develop individual worksheets which will focus on the skills developed in Degrees of Reading Power, a system which develops the use of context clues and is an important part of New Haven's reading skills program. I have included an example in my section on specific lesson plans.

On a regular basis, I will read to students and students will read to me, to each other, to students in other classrooms, and to their parents, guardians, and other family members. Initially, I will read stories to the class during our daily oral reading time. As material with historical connections appears, appropriate factual material will be presented. In order to widen my students' knowledge of African American culture and history, I will call upon elements of previous units I have written. These include: "Poetry: A Mirror in Which to See Myself" (1989), "The Family That Endured" (1990), "Building Dreams--Who is There to Help You?" (1991), and "Poetry: A View of African American Life" (1994). These, together with material which arises from stories being read or current events with relevant references, will be used to make the setting and plot of various stories more meaningful to the student. The manner in which such historical information is integrated by the individual teacher should vary to suit the circumstances, but it should not be omitted.

The historical periods from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement will be covered more systematically during social studies and the events centering around African American history month. In turn, stories set in different time periods will supplement historical facts we cover in social studies. Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, which shared the spotlight with James Comer's *Maggie's American Dream* in my 1991 unit, "Building Dreams," is an outstanding example of a book capable of achieving many of this unit's goals. Though set in the Depression, this story guides the reader through slavery, reconstruction, and the migration of some African Americans to the North. It has strong family members of both sexes and different ages who are at the same time quite human in their weaknesses. Its white characters range from the despicable to those whom we sympathize with and even admire. Extended family, community, and church are all woven together in this novel which I will use, at least in part, to strengthen my student's understanding of the African American family. Shorter works by Mildred Taylor which are generally easier to present to a third grade include *The Friendship*, *Song of the Trees*, and *Mississippi Bridge*. I plan to use individual copies of one or more of these titles for independent reading, depending on the ability of my students. If not read independently, they will be read orally and discussed with the entire class.

Though it is not the primary focus of my unit, I will also use the lives and accomplishment of the women who authored the books we read as a means of initiating discussion and some investigation into the forces which have influenced, often adversely, the roles women play in our society. Both the struggles faced by Faith Ringgold as she fought to be accepted as a legitimate artist and author of children's books and the positive influence played by Mildred Taylor's father and other family members are appropriate examples. As with our study of the African American family, historical connections will be made to the Women's Movement, with the strength and survival of women being emphasized.

Along with Mildred Taylor, whom I have mentioned, the three other authors I will focus on are Virginia Hamilton, Faith Ringgold, and Connie Porter. I select them because of their personal story and those which they created. I will use additional authors as I am sure other teachers will. There is considerable material available about all four, especially Taylor, Hamilton and Ringgold. I will include a brief summary on each and something of how I will integrate their lives and their works into my unit. Most of the material in these summaries has come from a compilation of information from the internet site, "Voices from the Gaps--Women Writers of Color," biographical information presented in each book, and facts I gained while writing some of my previous units.

Mildred Taylor

Background Information

Though she was born in Jackson, Mississippi in 1943, Mildred Taylor was raised in Toledo, Ohio where her father believed the family could live a better life. As she grew up, she gained her knowledge of the South through frequent visits and the stories told by her family, especially her father. In the dedication Taylor includes in *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, you can sense the influence he had upon her life and writing.

Taylor attended the University of Toledo, joined the Peace Corps, and eventually earned an M.A. from the University of Colorado. Her writings for young adults have earned her numerous awards.

Appropriate Texts and Related Activities

Since I have already discussed Taylor and the works I will use, this section will be brief. Portions of *Roll of Thunder* along with *The Friendship*, *The Well*, *Song of the Trees*, and *Mississippi Bridge* will be read to the class and discussed together. Unlike *Roll of Thunder*, the last four are relatively short stories involving many of the same characters found in the novel.

Though Taylor's works are geared for slightly older children, I have found that, with strong teacher guidance, they are successful with third graders. Discussion will stress family relationships, the importance of church and community, relationships with the white community, and the historical setting in which events take place.

Virginia Hamilton

Background Information

Virginia Hamilton was born into a big family on a small farm near Yellow Springs, Ohio in the 1940's. She had two older brothers and two older sisters and a variety of relatives who lived in the surrounding area. Her father worked both as a farmer and a dining hall service manager at nearby Antioch College, the school she attended on a full scholarship for three years before transferring to Ohio State University. She also attended the New School for Social Research in New York where she continued to study writing.

She claims that she always knew she was going to be a writer. Her parents were both storytellers and came

from a line of storytellers themselves. From them, she learned a sense of her history and culture, something she attempts to pass on in her works. The fact that her grandfather, Levi Perry, had escaped slavery in Virginia (the source of Virginia's name) by crossing the Ohio River into the area where Virginia lived as a child, added to the tales her parents told her and ultimately is reflected in *The House of Dies Drear*.

Appropriate Texts and Related Activities

Hamilton's first book, *Zeely*, was published in 1967. I have used this book with fifth graders and will try it with third. The narrator's often antagonistic relationship with her younger brother should be easy for them to understand. *Zeely*, the object of our narrator's attention, will be used to motivate discussion and research into the history of African kings and queens.

I will use the retold folktales from *The People Could Fly* both for pure enjoyment and to emphasize the existence and importance of the family in oral tradition. Some will be read independently and some I will read to the class. Appropriate discussion will be involved with each. Discussion questions might include: "Is there a moral in the story?" "What is it?" "Do any of the animal characters represent humans?" "Do you know people who are like the characters?" "Why do you think Virginia Hamilton bothered to collect and write these tales?"

I will then assign students the task of asking parents and relatives, the older the better, to tell them stories, fictitious or based upon fact. They will either tape-record these stories or write enough so that they can retell them to the class. If a story can be remembered without writing or recording, they will truly be carrying on the oral tradition. Eventually, all stories will be in written form and will become part of a class book of retold tales. As part of my involvement in a school "team", these stories will be read to other participating classrooms.

Relationships, negative and positive, will be explored in *Cousins* and *Second Cousins*. When the main character, Cammy Coleman, has mixed feelings about her cousins, the class will be engaged in a discussion on whether people always like their relatives. The books also focuses on other family members, an ailing grandmother and a variety of relatives at a family reunion. Making a list of whom to invite to a family reunion will include a discussion about whether it is acceptable to ask non-family members to attend. Questions might include: "What activities would you plan for the reunion?" "What could be done to help people remember the reunion and each other?" The issue of older, sometimes ailing, relatives will also be discussed when we read *The Hundred Penny Box* by Sharon Bell Mathis. (See "Other Selections.")

Plain City, a book in which a young girl, Buhlaire Sims, searches for her missing father, whom she finds among the homeless living under a bridge, will be used to address the issue of absent fathers. This book will be used toward the end of the year, since it is geared toward young teenagers. Despite its older target, it contains a number of relevant issues which are beginning to become meaningful to slightly younger children.

The book *Drylongso*, and the title character, get their name from an African word meaning "drought." In this story, we encounter a family: father, mother (Mamalou), and young daughter, Lindy. They are trying to survive on their farm during the 1975 drought. *Drylongso* is blown into their lives in the midst of a dust storm. Using a dowser to find water, a pocket full of seeds, and some farming advice learned from his father, he works with them to restore their land. There are issues of environment, family unity, and survival to be discussed. Some children will research drought in the United States and the related methods of farming which help and hinder soil conservation: overuse of the land, crop rotation, plants which help prevent erosion, irrigation, and appropriate water control and use.

Faith Ringgold

Background Information

Though many recognize Faith Ringgold as a renowned artist whose audience is primarily adult, generally, children recognize her as the author of beautifully illustrated stories which they have heard or read. Her "story quilts" which combine painting, quilted fabric, and story telling have brought her international fame. She is also known for her fight to eliminate discrimination against women artist. She led others in putting pressure on museums to include women artists, especially African Americans, in their collections, and through these efforts she was able to help all women artists.

Born and raised in Harlem, Ringgold experienced racism and sexism first hand, during her youth and as she developed as an artist. She graduated with a Masters from New York's City College in 1959. In her "French Collection," "Dancing at the Louvre," and "American Collection," her story quilts depict the life of Willia Marie Simone, a black female artist living in Paris, struggling for her place in the community. The quilt traces her, life up to the "American Collection" which focuses on her daughter. Simone is clearly based on Ringgold.

Appropriate Texts and Related Activities

Her quilts along with her other art work will form a part of this unit. If the teacher does not have any collections of Ringgold's work, there are a number of sites on the web containing pictures and information. (See bibliography.) I particularly will use the "Crown Heights Children's Story Quilt" which depicts various folktales. This piece will relate well to the folktale collections of Virginia Hamilton. Children will be asked to make a quilt related to the family story they have collected while reading *The People Could Fly* or to show events in their own family history.

Tar Beach, both the book and the art work, will be used to show the beauty of the paintings and the relevance of eight year old Cassie's imaginary flight from the roof of the Harlem tenement where she and her family go to escape the hot summer heat. Her dream of freedom has been answered as she glides over the city of New York where she claims various sights, including the union building which her father helped to build. The fact that he is now out of work, because he lacks a union card, will motivate a discussion on the existence of prejudice and discrimination in job hiring. This relates neatly to the discrimination Ringgold encountered as a black, female artist.

Cassie flies again, this time with her brother Be Be, in *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*. While gliding amongst the stars, they encounter a dilapidated old train which Be Be boards along with hundreds of other silent people. It is going North and the conductor is Harriet Tubman. While the train moves ahead, Aunt Harriet directs Cassie along the route taken by African Americans during the time of slavery. Cassie's experience brings her a vivid understanding of the horrors these individuals had to endure as well as showing her the kind and gentle ways in which others made their passage possible. At the end, Cassie and Be Be are reunited, both having gained a new understanding of their great-great grandparents' survival. Throughout the story brilliantly colored illustrations accompany the text helping it to come alive. These alone recommend the book. Besides the many historical facts and significance of the Underground Railroad which students will discuss and research, the caring relationship between Cassie and Be Be will be explored. A brief section on Harriet Tubman's life and a map showing the route of the Underground Railroad is included at the end.

Based on her quilt story "Dinner Quilt," in *Dinner at Aunt Connie's House* Ringgold takes us on another fanciful historical adventure in which cousins, Melody and Lonnie, meet and converse with twelve African American women who come to life from the portraits their cousin Aunt Connie has painted. Each woman relates a small bit of biographical information, enough to motivate students to discover more. The women we meet are Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Mary McCleod Bethune, Augusta Savage, Dorothy Dandridge, Zora Neale Hurston, Maria W. Stewart, Bessie Smith, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Marian Anderson, and Madame C. J. Walker. I will have students examine pictures noting differences between the story and the "Dinner Quilt." The importance of the annual family dinner and art show will be discussed and contrasted and compared to the students' own experiences and those we have read about.

Connie Rose Porter.....The American Girl Series: Addy Walker

Background Information

It is interesting that I have been able to find an abundance of material on The American Girl Series in general and the Addy books in particular, but I have been able to find very little information on the Addy author, Connie Rose Porter. I do know that she come from a large family. She had four brothers and four sisters and she became serious about writing when she was in high school. A small amount of additional information should explain why Ms. Porter shrinks in importance when compared to the series.

At this point there are five American Girl characters each starring in six different stories. Admirers may purchase a doll and assorted accessories for each. Along with that, you may order a cookbook, a craft book, a craft kit, a theater kit, and a paper doll kit to go with your favorite character. You may visit a variety of web sites and join a number of clubs. There are magazines, newsletters, and connections to other books and related material which you also may purchase at the going price.....and I'm sure there is more. No wonder we hardly notice Connie Porter.

The commercial value of the American Girl Series cannot be ignored. Children are well aware of a multitude of products which have been spawned by popular movies and television shows. Most own at least a few. The implications of the advertising which brings about sales and the resulting pressure this puts on families will provide a worthy discussion.

My negative comments on the commercialization of the American Girl Series will not stop me from finding value in it and using the Addy books as part of my unit. Addy is the one African American girl in the series. Depending on my class's reading ability, I have found that third graders, especially, but not exclusively, girls, adore them. It is the only series I have seen African American students at this level read independently. They have an initial interest in the "Goosebumps" but seldom follow-through with the actual reading. Though I am sure that the doll and related products add a certain allure, the children genuinely enjoy the books.

Appropriate Texts and Related Activities

Addy, as is the case with the other girls, lives during a specific period in American history. Addy's time begins during the Civil War as a slave and continues to the time of freedom after the War when her family has been reunited and is living in Philadelphia. The events of the stories relate accurately to the experiences history tell us occurred during these time periods. In *Meet Addy--Escape from Slavery*, we follow Addy and her mother on

the road to freedom. Poppa and her brother have been sold to another plantation and Addy's baby sister along with other relatives have to be left behind. Many opportunities for pupils to make predictions and voice opinions are available as the story moves along. Later books, listed in my bibliography, develop themes of racism and prejudice, personal conflict and resolution, and feelings and other situations to which third graders can relate. These will be discussed and related to other stories we read. Though the Logan children and their family from *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* lived on a farm during the depression, they will be contrasted with Addy and her family and friends.

Finally, I plan to have pupils make their own simplified version of an Addy doll, without the adorable face and impeccable wardrobe. We will use a plain gingerbread pattern for the body which will be sewn together with a simple stitch. Students will be given some choice in creating Addy's features, hair, and wardrobe. Children who have a reluctance to make a doll will be convinced to give it to a deserving relative or friend. We will discuss the relative merits of their dolls and the commercially manufactured ones. At the very least, theirs will be less expensive.

Other Selections

I have been pleasantly surprised with the variety and number of books by women authors which in some way touch upon the African American family. I have narrowed those which I will use down to the four female authors whom I have discussed, because generally their work is exemplary, and because they allow me to develop my focus on women. I have two more stories which I will use, because they relate well to my unit and carry messages which are important to my students. I will not focus as much attention on the author of these books, primarily because of time constraints. Any others which I discover will be used. Teachers who follow my general objectives will have their own favorites to include.

Grandpa's Face is a short picture book by Eloise Greenfield which can be read early in the year. Most students will be able to read it independently, after I read it orally. In the story, Tamika and Grandpa often take talk-walks together and talk about things they see and feel and remember. The rest of the story is relatively unimportant. The illustrations are great, but the beauty of the story lies in the relationship between Tamika and Grandpa as expressed in their talk-walks. I will ask students to take a talk-walk with an adult member of their family. They will be asked to write or retell any part of the talk-walk they wish to share with the rest of us. Perhaps, they will be inspired to do it again. (Eloise Greenfield also has written a number of poems which focus on family members.)

Michael's great-great-aunt Dew is a hundred years old. She has a hundred penny box given to her by her late husband. It contains a penny for every year she has lived. Michael loves to count the pennies and, as he stops at a specific penny, listens to the stories she tells about herself and her family, his family. She declares that the box is "her" and anyone who takes her hundred penny box takes her. That is exactly where the problem in *The Hundred Penny Box* by Sharon Bell Mathis arises. Michael's mother does not understand or appreciate Aunt Dew. She is burdened with caring for her and views her possessions as clutter which she often throws out. Michael, who seems to understand Aunt Dew's need to hold on to the past, hides some of her things so his mother will not dispose of them. He realizes the gravity of the situation when Mother says the penny box must go. The problem is never truly resolved. At the end it is difficult to tell if Aunt Dew will live to one hundred and one, the year when Michael will provide the penny, or even to the next day. Though an atmosphere of sadness hangs over this story, it illustrates the kindness and caring, in the form of Michael, that students need to recognize. It also emphasizes the importance of past and those who convey and preserve it. Michael is aware of this, his mother is not.

There are enough copies in our library for each student to read the story independently before I read it to them orally. Most can handle its content by early spring. As I read it orally, I will direct discussion around themes I have mentioned, asking students to relate various elements to their own experiences and to stories we have read, most of which show an understanding and respect for older members of the family.

Dedications

One final way in which I will connect my book selections to the importance of family is to have pupils read the dedications on each book. Most relate to family and tradition, especially oral tradition. We will keep a written list of these dedications on display. When students finish their retold family story, each will be asked to place a dedication on their story. The same will be done with each "story quilt."

The Beecher School Team

I am part of a team of four teachers from Beecher School who have taken part in this seminar. Our team is focusing on the presentation of family life by women authors. Though our general goals are similar, each unit looks at the family in a different manner. The teaching of the units will involve collaboration and a culminating assembly. The other three units may be found in this volume. The authors are Francine Coss, Geraldine Martin, and Jean Gallogly.

Lesson Plans

Lesson One: Examining and Creating Dedications

After an initial introduction familiarizing students with the existence and purpose of dedications, the following general procedure will be repeated with each book the class reads. Pupils will also be urged to present dedication from books read independently which relate to our general theme and authorship.

Subject Matter Areas: Reading and language arts

Vocabulary: dedication, acknowledgment

Objectives:

Students will understand the purpose of a dedication.

Students will examine any relationship between the author's dedication and her life.

Students will look for reflections of an author's dedication within her work.

Students will create a meaningful dedication for work of their own.

Procedure

After the students have a general picture of the author as a person, the dedication, in each of her books we have covered, will be read and discussed. "Can we see a connection between the dedication and what we know about the author?" "Does the dedication give us any additional information about the author?" "Does the dedication tell us anything about the person to whom the story was dedicated?" "Do you think we might see the dedication reflected in the story?" "How?"

After reading the story, students will return to the dedication discussing any additional insights into the dedication which were gained from the author's work. For example, after reading *Roll of Thunder*, we certainly have a clearer picture of what Mildred Taylor's father and brother must have been like as people.

When students get to the point where they have gathered and written their own family stories, each will create a dedication for her/his work. The same will be done for each "story quilt" the students have made. Dedications will be added to the existing class list which is mentioned in my narrative section.

Lesson Two: Using Unit Content to Develop Degrees of Reading Power

Subject Matter Areas: Reading, Social Studies

Vocabulary: Will vary with each lesson developed.

Objectives :

Students will develop skill at using various context clues to identify unknown words and as a result develop greater reading power.

Students will reinforce their understanding of information related to the unit's content.

Procedure:

The goal of developing independent readers is a primary objective of the elementary school. One means of achieving this goal is through an approach which teaches pupils to look for various clues within the context of the material being read as a means of recognizing and understanding unfamiliar words which the student may encounter. Besides teaching these techniques for unlocking unfamiliar words, this approach trains pupils to read more carefully, resulting in an overall improvement in comprehension. All New Haven elementary teachers are familiar with this program designed to increase pupil's "degrees of reading power."

There is a variety of materials available to use while working with students in such a program. Basically, these materials provide paragraphs where key words have been omitted. Students are asked to find the appropriate word from among four choices, all of which could "fit" within the sentence's structure, but only one makes sense within the context of the larger piece. Students learn to explore the context before and after the missing word in order to find clues which will help in identifying the missing word. The important skills developed here are the procedures used to explore the context for clues and developing the ability to recognize and utilize these clues.

In this lesson plan, I provide an example of using material related to this unit's content to create original worksheets which will be used to develop the skills discussed above. This sheet and others I will create will have the advantage of serving as reading instruction material as well as a source or a review of information related to the unit. Its primary function, however, will be to improve the student's reading ability. Initially, the procedure to follow will focus on the context that leads one to the appropriate missing word. Discussion relative to content will follow. It is best to use material with information that pupils have not yet encountered, since this will eliminate the use of previous knowledge to identify the word. If, however, this happens to be the case, the experience of finding the context clues which unlock the missing word is still of considerable value. The completed worksheets will be saved in a folder for future reference related to this unit's content.

Here is a brief sample, related to the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad

Read each of these paragraphs about the Underground Railroad. Where there is a missing word, select the most appropriate word from those listed after the blank. Be ready to identify the clues which led to your selection. You may underline those word which helped you make your choice.

In Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad, Cassie takes a trip along the railroad's route to Canada and freedom. Along the way she encounters many _____.

(a. people b. dangers c. relatives d. trains) She could be captured or even lose her life. Harriet tells her that being a slave can _____ (a. introduce

b. compare c. show d. suck) you to the ground like quicksand.

During the _____ (a. morning b. night c. day d. afternoon), she should follow the North Star. In daylight, follow the moss growing on sides of _____

(a. dogs b. people c. stars d. trees) facing north. They give you directions more valuable than their shade. Remember that if you are _____ (a. caught

b. finished c. dirty d. running), you will be severely punished.

There will be people along the way to _____ (a. see b. help c. capture

d. hear) you. Look for them. You will need their assistance. They will _____

(a. feed b. hide c. locate d. locate) you, so that you will keep your strength. They will _____ (a. feed b. hide c. locate d. answer) you, so that you will not be discovered. Keep going forward and don't turn _____ (a. aside

b. over c. under d. back).

When students complete the worksheet, there will be a discussion to determine what word is the most appropriate selection. Students must justify their choices by referring to context clues from the story. Similar exercises will be included for other stories we read.

Lesson Three: Creating Your Own "Story Quilt"

Subject Matter Areas: Reading, social studies, language arts, and art

Vocabulary: quilt, "story quilt, oral tradition, dedication

Objectives:

Students will gain an understanding and appreciation of oral tradition.

Students will gain an understanding and appreciation of "story quilts."

Students will visually depict a written piece of their oral history on a quilt panel.

Students will create an appropriate dedication for their story quilt.

Procedure:

This activity brings together lessons focusing on Virginia Hamilton's *The People Could Fly* and the "story quilts" of Faith Ringgold, as well as the growing list of story dedications. The creation of these quilts will follow lessons in which students gathered, wrote, and dedicated pieces of personal history gathered from some family member. In my class, there will be a time period of three or four weeks between the writing of the tale and the creation of the quilt, but teachers could easily do each element consecutively.

The family tales will be reread and considered with the quilt work of Faith Ringgold in mind. Students will be given paper on which they will plan a visual representation of their tale. Using fabric crayon, the students will place the final representation on paper the same size as the quilt panels. Their images will be transferred to the cloth by ironing the reverse side of the crayon drawing. Pupils will then create an appropriate dedication which will be written on cloth and glued to the back of the panel. A parent or parents will be recruited to connect the panels with colorful cloth. Students will determine the sequence of the panels. The degree of their participation in the sewing will be determined by the assisting parent.

If the teacher prefers, panels can be made of paper and glued together with paper strips. Using wallpaper strips can provide a quilt-like connection.

After appropriate sharing and display, the section will be separated and taken home.

Bibliography

Books

Books marked with an asterisk are discussed in greater detail within my unit.

*Greenfield, Eloise. *Grandpa's Face*. New York: Philomel Books, 1988.

This story explores the warm relationship between a young girl and her

grandfather. Provides motivation for "walk-talks" with older person.

33*Hamilton Virginia. Cousins. New York: Philomel Books, 1990.

Examines both negative and positive relationships involved in a large extended family.

*Hamilton, Virginia. Drylongso. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997.

A young boy helps a "dust bowl" family fight against the devastation of drought.

*Hamilton Virginia. The People Could Fly. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1985.

Retold African American folk tales. Use to emphasize oral tradition.

*Virginia, Hamilton. Plain City. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1998.

Follows a young girls search for the father who abandoned her. Though geared for slightly older students, third graders can relate to the issues involved.

*Hamilton, Virginia. Second Cousins. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1993.

Continuation of issues raised in Cousins.

*Mathis, Sharon Bell. The Hundred Penny Box. New York: Puffin Books, 1975.

A wonderfully warm story of a young boy's relationship with his great, great aunt.

*Porter, Connie. Meet Addy: An American Girl. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Co.

Publication, 1994.

Though they were forced to leave her brother and sister behind, Addy escapes from slavery with her mother after her father is sold to another plantation.

Porter, Connie. Addy Learns a Lesson: A School Story. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Co. Publication, 1993.

Free in Philadelphia, Addy goes to school where she learn about life away from slavery.

Porter, Connie. Addy's Surprise: A Christmas Story. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Co.

Publication, 1993.

Addy and her Mother celebrate Christmas with generosity and the return of her father.

Porter, Connie. Happy Birthday, Addy!: A Springtime Story. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Co. Publications, 1994.

Addy chooses Independence Day as the day of her birth as the family continues working for the reunion of all its members.

Porter, Connie. Changes for Addy: A Winter Story. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Co. Publications, 1994.

Mixed with sadness, this story tells us how Addy's mother, father, brother, and sister are finally reunited.

*Ringgold, Faith. Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1992.

Cassie's imaginary flight connects her with Harriet Tubman and a first hand tour of the Underground Railroad.

*Ringgold, Faith. Dinner at Aunt Connie's House. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1993.

Melony and her cousin Lonnie meet twelve famous African American woman who come to life from the paintings of Aunt Connie.

*Ringgold, Faith. Tar Beach, New York: Dragonfly Books, 1996.

Cassie again flies, this time escaping from the summer heat. There is a related "story quilt" with the same title. Taylor, Mildred. The Friendship. New York: Bantam Skylark, 1987.

Involves characters from Roll of Thunder. Spurred on by his racist friends, white store

owner, Mr. Wallace, shoots an older African American friend for calling him by his first name. Shows deep anger and hatred. Taylor, Mildred. The Gold Cadillac. New York: Bantam Skylark, 1987.

An African American family driving from Chicago to Mississippi in a fancy new

Cadillac get face the anger and hatred which their new car attracts from much of the rural population.

Taylor, Mildred. Mississippi Bridge. New York: Bantam Skylark, 1990.

Involves characters from Roll of Thunder. Brief encounters among blacks and whites as they wait for the bus at Wallace's store tell us much about life in Mississippi during

the
early
1930's.
Fate
causes
a conclusion.
strange
twist in
this
story's

*Taylor, Mildred. Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry. New York: Puffin Books, 1976.

Through the eyes of a nine year old girl, we gain a vivid picture of black-white relations in rural Mississippi during the early 1930's. Illustrates strengths in an extended family.

Hamilton, Virginia. Song of the Trees. New York: Bantam Skylark, 1988.

Chronicles the Logan's fight to save some trees on their land which an unscrupulous lumber attempts to remove.

Hamilton Virginia. The Well: David's Story. New York: Dial Books, 1995.

Cassie's father David is a young boy in this story. During a drought, the Logan family has the only functioning well. Though they share with both their black and white neighbors, Charlie Simms's hatred of African Americans puts the family in danger.

This hatred from the Simms family is seen again in Roll of Thunder, with the exception of Jeremy Simm's sincere friendship with the Logan children.

Internet Sites

The sites listed here are only a few of those available on topics related to this unit. I have listed them because they were valuable or interesting.

"The American Girl Collection." Pleasant Company. (american.girl.com/catalogue/agcollection.htm).

It is amazing how much commercial American Girl information is available here. There are magazines, cafes, birthday parties, luncheons and teas, a musical you can see, and more, all available at American Girl Place in Chicago or by making a simple phone call or linking to the correct page.

"The Best of Young Adult Literature" Netscape Navigator Gold.

(<http://mcia.com/~mayer/indexroft.htm>).

Contains a great deal of information on Mildred Taylor's Roll of Thunder. Material talks about author, setting, historical background,

discussion questions, and other topics. There are links to other sites.

"Faith Ringgold." (1997-98). Art in Context Center for Communications and Faith Ringgold. (artincontext.com/artist/ringgold).

You can find images of many of her "story quilts," biographical material, a song with words and music ("Any1CanFly"), and a story to print out.

"Voices from the Gaps: Women Writers of Color." University of Minnesota. (voices.cla.umn.edu).

Though not all authors I used were listed, those that were contained useful information. There are also links which lead to more information on women writers.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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