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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

Guide for Curriculum Unit 99.01.10
by Jean E. Sutherland

Designed primarily for third grade students, this unit was written for the seminar "Women's Voices in Literature." It presents students 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 authors are all women and the subject matter revolves around 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 in the United States. Since traditionally the literature and educational materials available for use in 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 contribution, 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 women have played in our society.

This unit can easily be adapted for use in a fourth or fifth grade and in some middle school classrooms. The unit also is part of a school team focusing on the family through the use of women authors. These other units are found in this volume. They are written by Francine Coss, Jean Gallogly, and Geraldine Martin.

(Recommended for Language Arts and Social Studies, grades 3-5.)

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