

African American Literature

Full Year

Prerequisites:

Course Overview:

Students will be exposed to various African American writers from different time periods. Students will analyze the styles of literature, influences and contributions that each writer has made to literature and the African American community as a whole. Students will wrestle with the cultural struggles, differences and successes of each writer. Because literature is so closely connected with historical events, students will explore those connections while looking at themes and ideals that are relevant today which will include, but aren't limited to equality, freedom and social justice.

Course content:

In each unit, students will study literature with a focus on historical content. Although, prior knowledge and learning from past history and literature courses will be accessed students will also focus on new content that will help in analyzing and making connections in this course. Each unit contains reading, writing, listening and speaking, which will be pertinent in developing the skills necessary for college and career.

Most of the selections will come from the Anthology and anything marked with a (*) will represent a piece that is a supplementary text.

Unit 1: African American Vernacular

Students look closely at the vernacular history of African Americans. Students will ask themselves why traditions of slaves were important. What traditions did slaves created? How did the message, style and inspiration become a focus in the written literature? Listening to oral literature will help students develop reading and analytical skills with regards to vernacular.

- African American folktales (i.e., "The Flying Man.")
- Spirituals (i.e., Go Down Moses)
- Blues (i.e., Backwater Blues by Bessie Smith)

Sample Lesson/Activity

Students will be led in a discussion about slavery. Students will record on the whiteboard all that they remember. Student will then be given a spiritual. They will analyze through the use of annotations each spiritual on their own. Students will then be given the opportunity to find a modern spiritual that reflects modern society. They will then be challenged to compare the vernacular of modern society to the past. How have things changed? What traditions have been brought over to modern society? How do things differ?

Unit 2: Slavery and Freedom (1746-1865)

Thinking about slavery in America, students will read and analyze literature that is inspired by the lives of slaves and their fight for freedom. The focus will be on themes of race and ethnicity and how that shaped not only the experience of African Americans, but the literature as well. Students will read various narratives from this time period, students will write an analysis that looks closely at the characteristics of slave/freedom narrative.

Sample Readings/selections

- Sojourner Truth: Ar'n't I a Woman?
- Harriet Jacobs: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
- Frederick Douglass: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
- Reading Literature 1-7
- Reading Information text 1-7
- Writing 1-10
- Language 1-6

Sample Lesson/Activity:

After looking at a few slave narratives and how they begin students are asked to write a narrative of one experience of their life using MLA style and various descriptive techniques. Students will focus on the importance of telling and passing down life stories and how impactful those stories can be to their future family members.

Unit 3: Reconstruction and the Black Renaissance (1865-1919)

Reconstructions brought about change for most of American society which included the African American community. This brought about a very important part of African American literature, the autobiography. Students will analyze non-fiction texts by using inference, comparison and analysis to determine how literature of the reconstruction and Black Renaissance period fit with vernacular and the narratives of slavery and freedom. Building from the details of slave/freedom narrative, students will analyze the shift to the autobiography, the similarities to the previous and the message(s) contained within the text.

Sample Readings/Sections

- Booker T. Washington: Up From Slavery
- W.E.B. Du Bois: The Souls of Black Folk
- Anna Julia Cooper

- Alice Moore Dunbar Nelson Correlated CCSS
- Reading Literature 1-7
- Reading Informational Text 1-7
- Writing 1-10
- Language 1-6

Sample Lesson/Activity:

After reading WEB Du Bois, *The Soul of Black Folks*, students will reflect in a free write about. What life must have been like for African Americans. How was their cultural and American identity shaped and what emotions would they have had about themselves? Students will discuss their ideas with other students in a guided class discussion. Students MUST use evidence (verbally) when offering up answers. The discussion will then turn to another free write where students answer the following questions, in what area of your life can you see Double Consciousness? Do you live behind a veil?

Unit 4: That Harlem Renaissance (1919-1940)

Students will focus on the events of the Harlem Renaissance which include, social, economic, and political events that affected African Americans in the first decades of the twentieth century. Students will describe and analyze the artistic and cultural development of African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance and discuss the historical impact of the Harlem Renaissance. Students will complete an assignment that will allow them to explore different perspectives and place themselves within the work they are reading about.

Sample readings/selections

- Zora Neale Hurston: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- Isabel Wilkerson: *The Warmth of Other Suns*
- Nella Larsen: *Passing*
- Langston Hughes: *Afro-American Fragment*, *Deal Lovely Death*, *Mulatto*, *Song for Billie Holiday*, *Not Without Laughter*
- Correlated CCSS:
- Reading Literature 1-7
- Reading Informational Text 1-7
- Speaking and Listening 1-6

Sample Lesson/Activity

After reading *Not Without Laughter*, students will discuss coming of age during the 1920's for African American children. Students will focus on the cultural/artistic experiences of the Harlem Renaissance. Students are asked to compare and contrast coming of age in the 20s and now. The reflection is done both in written form and through oral discussion, then students discuss in class. Students will then

Research an aspect of the Harlem Renaissance. Share your findings with the class in a brief 2-3 min presentation.

Unit 5: Realism, Naturalism, and Modernism (1940-1960)

Students will focus on realism, naturalism and modernism from the African America perspective. Looking at the most influential authors of the time through various texts, including poetry and drama, students will analyze and explore the connections between the ideals expressed, how it is present within the texts read, the historical events at the time and the strategies used by the writers analyzed.

Sample reading/selections

- Toni Morrison: *The Bluest Eye*
- Gwendolyn Brooks (poetry)
- James Baldwin (i.e., *Everybody's Protest Novel*, *Princes and Powers*)
- Richard Wright (i.e., *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow*, and *Autobiographical Sketch*)
- Correlated CCSS:
- Reading Literature 1-7
- Reading Informational Text 1-7
- Language 1-6

Sample Lesson/Activity:

Students will watch James Baldwin: *The Price of the Ticket*. When looking at James Baldwin's life (growing up to being an activist in the Civil Rights Movement) analyze the connections between two pieces of Baldwin's work (novels or essays) to one of the focuses of this unit (realism, naturalism and/or modernism). Do you think Baldwin was aware of his influence on American society? Write a 1 ½-2 page essay analyzing the literature and connection of Baldwin's work to today.

Unit 6: Black Arts and the Contemporary Period (1960-Present)

The final unit of the year will have students look at African American writers from the sixties to present. Students will look at well-known writers as well as the written text of musical lyrics to determine how literature has changed from the vernacular texts and slave narratives to the works we see today. The focus is to gain a holistic perspective of the themes, messages and tactics used by writers to communicate. In addition to communication, students will determine the many purposes of writing today, and compare that with the purpose of writing in the past.

Sample Reading/Selections

- Malcolm X (*The Autobiography*)
- Martin Luther King (*Letter from Birmingham Jail*)

- Audre Lorde (i.e., Poetry is not a Luxury, Walking Our Boundaries)
- Amiri Baraka
- Toni Morrison *Sula*
- Lucille Clifton (Poetry)
- Alice Walker (i.e., Everyday Use, Outcast, Women)
- Jamaica Kincaid: Annie Jon (selection)
- Barack Obama: A More Perfect Union
- The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness
- Correlated CCSS: (some aspects from all CCSS categories-cumulative unit/project)
- Reading Literature 1-7
- Reading Information Text 1-7
- Writing 1-10
- Language 1-6
- Speaking and Listening 1-6

Sample Lesson/Activity

In order to gain holistic perspective of African America literature and how it has developed, students need to recognize where the origins of this literature can be found in contemporary texts. Students are presented with the question: where do we see evidence of African American vernacular, slave and freedom narratives in contemporary texts? Looking at the autobiography of Malcolm X, students begin by analyzing the beginning of the text to determine similarities to originating texts. Students are asked to answer the question using evidence in order to demonstrate their ability to recognize elements initially studied.

Final Assessment

The final assessment of this unit (and the year) will have students look at their own family and/or nationality and trace the history. The aim is to both share experiences from different perspectives, but also to show how other cultures/backgrounds are similar to the African American perspectives that we experienced throughout the year.

In order for students to complete this unit, they will be required to demonstrate mastery of skills embedded in the following anchor standards:

- Reading
- Key Ideas and Details 1-3
- Craft and Structure 4
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7 & 9
- Range of Reading
- Writing

- Text Types and Purposes 2 & 3
- Production of Distribution of Writing 4-6
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7-9

In addition to the anchor standards above, students will orally present their findings in front of class.

*Includes a Final Project: Students use reading, writing, speaking and listening skills to complete the project.

Oral History Project:

Students will create a project using one of the following multimedia forms (Prezi, historypin, glogster, etc.)

- Students will draw a connection between something we've read in class to their family history/ethnicity/heritage
- Students will interview the oldest member of their family for information

Note: The project has different options as to ensure that students with various backgrounds can still complete the project, such as researching.

Personal ethnicity/heritage

Example: Research your personal ethnicity/heritage. What connections can you make between your ethnicity and African Americans? If you are researching African American heritage, integrate any experiences you have been exposed to that would relate to the information covered in class.

Family history

Example: What is your family history? Interview family members and review any documents you have access to. Begin as far back as possible, thinking about where your family comes from in terms of geographical location as well as your nationality. Also, try to make connections between your own family history and some of the events and themes covered in class.

Race in America

Example: Thinking about the difference between race and ethnicity, research the development of race in America and how that has influenced/shaped American culture. Finally, discuss the specific influence race has on African Americans as well as your own ethnicity.

History of certain race/nationality/minority during a specific time period

Example: Research the history of Japanese individuals during the 1900s. Are there any connections to the history of African Americans during that time period? Think about both historical events and hardships/achievements that both groups experienced.

Personal Identity

Example: Think about your own identity and the 'markers' that make you who you are; these markers, or identities often are beyond the scope of race and ethnicity.

Your task is to research the history of one particular identity that you hold/identify with.

This project will be presented using multimedia platform such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, Prezi, etc.

Course Materials

Textbooks

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, Third Edition (Volume 1 and Volume 2) Henry Louse Gates, Valerie Smith, William L. Andrews, et al.

Author: Henry Louse Gates, Valerie Smith, William L. Andrews, et al.

Publisher: Norton

Edition: 2014