

Deborah Stence, July 16, 2009

Delta State University
NEH Landmarks Workshop
The Most Southern Place on Earth

Subject and Grade: Harlem Renaissance Class, 11th and 12th grades

Unit Plan:

Sense of Place, Purpose and Making Peace with Past from Here to There:

Using Literary Constructs as Devices for Interpretation of The Great Migration

I. Main ideas for this unit are application of:

- the two literary formulas that provide foundation for interpreting texts throughout our full year course: *the migration narrative product* and *the literary quest*.
- the *use of song* as another literary construct and a *bridge from past to present and South to North*

II. Specific objectives for the unit are the reading and study of August Wilson's play "The Piano Lesson"

Analytical applications will be to interpret text through Migration Narrative and Literary Quest formulas

- remedial objective will involve the review of:

- the four elements of migration narrative formula
- the five elements of literary quest

-enrichment objectives will involve:

- application of the four elements of migration narrative to the study of character experience (Bernice and Doaker) and motivation within the reading and interpretation of this play
- application of the five elements of literary quest to the study of character experience and motivation (Boy Willie) within the play

-enrichment objectives involve song analysis:

- the purpose of work song to the southern prisoner and a recurring purpose to collective memory of former convicts
- the purpose of the same song within the context of the play and collective social memory of the northern migrant

-enrichment objectives include writing from a model: students will construct their own contemporary "work songs"

The Five Elements of the Literary Quest Formula:

- 1) character has new purpose, mission
- 2) character crosses the threshold into the unknown(s)
- 3) character faces many conflicts, trials, obstacles
- 4) character receives a reward (never about money)
- 5) character returns home or to community from which he began the quest

The Four Elements of the Migration Narrative:

- 1) an event propels the forward motion to leave the south headed in new direction (may be north, east, west or even south)
 - 2) migrant undergoes initial encounter with the new (usually urban) landscape
 - 3) migrant considers limitations and possibilities of the new environment
 - 4) migrant negotiates his way through the new landscape
- * most often in the African American migration narrative there is presence of and influence from ancestral connections

Materials:

copies of the script of "The Piano Lesson" / DVD of film adaptation of the play

cd download of the worksong/ copies of lyrics used in the film

Prison Songs (Historical Recordings From Parchman Farm 1947-48), Vol. 2: Don'tcha Hear Poor Mother Calling? - Various Artists

Handout of:

- The Four Elements of Migration Narrative Formula as set forth in "Who Set You Flowin?" text
- The five elements of literary quest
- Mac laptop for recording student songs and blank cds for their recordings

***The Piano Lesson* Study Guide: directions:**

Use these guiding questions for responsive journal writing

1. Discuss the events that have propelled action northward for both Berniece and Uncle Doaker.
2. Boy Willie and Lyman have been motivated by other events—what has caused their motivation?
3. What have been the possibilities and limitations in the urban setting for Berniece?
4. What are the actions she has taken to negotiate her way to success in the new landscape?
5. How have the family ties---both ancestral and live kin- been a help to her?
6. How have ancestral ties been a hindrance or an obstacle to Berniece's ability to achieve fulfillment in the new landscape?
7. Willie's arrival becomes an education into those ancestral issues. How does that encounter with the past bring about a major change in his plans? Which elements of the quest are demonstrated here?
8. The past and the present do a face-off which ultimately sets the members of this family free. Explain.
9. The piano itself is the symbol around which the play is built. Explain its historic significance. Analyze it as a central character or symbol within both migration narrative and quest.
10. The end result of the play is that Berniece's experience has fulfilled the four elements of a migration narrative product while Boy Willie's experience turns out to be a true literary quest. Interpret her journey through the migration formula and his experience using the five elements of the quest. You may opt to construct two separate five paragraph essays on this assignment or contain them both in a single paper that addresses both formulas together.

Teacher actions:

- Introduce historic background of life back in the Delta for the family now in Pittsburgh
- Guide discussion: historic migration toward Pittsburgh and specifics of industrial opportunity in the region
- Share handout covering how family gravitated toward family or toward other re-located community
- Assign students parts for group read aloud of play
- show the film adaptation of the play

Student actions: -read play as a group- render character parts

- complete study guide-use driving questions- interpret play using two literary construct formulas
- study the film adaptation- deconstruct the content as evidenced by the two literary constructs
- participate in class discussion of the above
- write an exposition of the interpretation using the two formulas as your guiding objective
- interpret the use of the piano and work songs as both expressions of present and past: journal entry
- work with a partner- write/record your own contemporary "work song" Live Performance extra credit!

Vocabulary to be defined:

ghosts of the yellow dog

Parchman Farm

Mississippi State Penitentiary

The Great Migration

the Pullman Porters' Union

This unit will meet Danbury district content standards:

THE ENGLISH PROGRAM

(Danbury High)

Standard 1: Reading and Responding

Students read, comprehend and respond in individual, literal, critical and evaluative ways to literary, informational and persuasive texts in multimedia=2 0formats.

- 1.4 Students communicate with others to create interpretations of written, oral and visual texts.

Standard 2: Exploring and Responding to Literature

Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.

- 2.1 Students recognize how literary devices and conventions engage the reader.
2.2 Students explore multiple responses to literature.
2.4 Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts

Standard 3: Communicating with Others

Students produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.

- 3.1 Students use descriptive, narrative, expository, persuasive and poetic modes.
3.2 Students prepare, publish and/or present work appropriate to audience, purpose and task.

Standard 4: Applying English Language Conventions

Students apply the conventions of standard English in oral, written and visual communication.

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- 4.3 Students use standard English for composing and revising written text.