

Prosser – Project
NEH Institute
26 July 2005

Struggling For Visibility

Rationale for Topic Selection

Marquette University High School is an all-male, Jesuit, college-preparatory program of 1050 students in the heart of the city of Milwaukee. Its young men come from both the city and the Greater Milwaukee community of surrounding counties and include African American students numbering close to 15%. The majority of its freshmen have had little contact with African American culture or history, so I feel mandated to build upon awareness and knowledge of that fundamental part of our nation's story for our students as they get to know each other and move out into the world. I listen to my wife discuss her work with employees in diversity training and I know how desperately America's students deserve to know as much as they can be taught of the writers who have articulated how we have come to be the people(s) we are. More specifically, in Advanced Placement English senior year, I have decided not to relegate African American literature to a one-only novel choice for study, or a block unit, or it's February so we're reading Claude McKay Week. I have always found Ellison's Invisible Man amazingly rich for teaching a broad range of African American issues, and stick with it because it is such a marvelous example of American literature, connecting to literary agenda since its foundations. The included works here from the Slavery, Literacy & Freedom Institute I am confident will fit the arching theme of invisibility as we study the novel. Kids look at "the other" and often imagine that anyone who connects to that other thinks alike. The works I have selected communicate the important understanding that the struggle to be free expresses itself through a rich variety of voices.

Challenges

I feel very fortunate because the main challenge I face is not one of lack of support from either my department or administration. As I keep adding to my understanding of literature, my credibility only strengthens. As I see it, the main challenge comes from those students, typically white, who need convincing that the black experience has significance for him, and as I like to argue, is essential to know well – for the sake of both his and his children’s future, let alone the quest for a sane society. The challenges America faces in the years ahead are as yet undiscovered, and unless we are willing to engage each other talk and work together, could some trials be avoided. Knowing our stories gives us a head start.

Course: Advanced Placement English – Seniors

Goals:

Students will eventually:

1. articulate through examples from texts some mastery of the story of the African American struggle to achieve “visibility;”
2. demonstrate that they comprehend that within the struggle, voices both unite and diverge.

Objectives:

1. Achieve familiarity with various expressions regarding race, literacy and freedom including those of the spiritual, Jupiter Hammon, Wheatley, Walker, Douglass and Jacobs.
2. Perceive a modern work (Invisible Man) in light of one’s own culture(s).
3. Explore the historical relationship of past to present.
4. Employ LIST technique.
5. Encourage close reading of text.
6. Explore some websites that introduce slavery and its related issues.

Time Frame: 5 days

Day 1: 42 minutes

1. Pose “approach question” to the novel Invisible Man. What might you either enjoy or disdain about being invisible? Discuss.
2. Frame the question: In our study of the novel, looking at the title character, we want to know, how did I become invisible? “Explode” the question...Implies a process...time relationship (past to present)...focuses on self...feelings attached to the process...feelings attached to the “product” (invisibility)
3. Demo: Pantomime being invisible, “bumping” into another. Consider: nobody saw you...how you might react...what it’s like
4. Questions: Are there people you fail to see? How do we demonstrate failure to acknowledge one another?
5. Pass out lyrics & play Louis’ Armstrong “Black and Blue.” Explore for tone, sympathetic contract, imagery, and musicality. How is speaker “invisible”? Assign homework: Read Prologue.
6. Set some context for novel’s release in 1952 relative to pre-Civil Rights era.
7. Wind the clock: Read/listen to a few spirituals. Ask: What is the message regarding freedom?

Day 2: 48 minutes

1. Re-intro spirituals...Read Douglass on “Sorrow Songs.”
2. Read Wheatley: “On Being Brought from Africa to America;” “To the University of Cambridge, in New England;” Horton’s “George Moses Horton, Myself.”
3. 10-minute writing as basis for discussion: What is the self-concept within each voice? What stylistic devices influence that self that the poem manifests?
4. More context re: Douglass, Wheatley and Horton
5. Assign homework: Chapter 1. Take questions re: Prologue.

Day 3: 48 minutes

1. Hand out reprints of passages from Walker and Garnett. Read selections and discuss. What do the voices share?
2. Hand out Jupiter Hammon’s “An Address to Miss Phyllis Wheatley.” Discuss: What has happened in transition? What are the roles and values of the writings?
3. Hand out lyrics and play Bob Dylan’s “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll.”
4. 10 minute reflective writing: “What have you seen so far this week?”
5. Homework for Day 5: Chapter 2/ quiz . Optional: Visit Guardian and pdx websites for song’s back story.

Day 4: 31 minutes

1. Brief lecture & hand-outs on accommodation v. assimilation as strategy for “visibility”
 - a. landmark court cases (Dred Scott, Plessy, Brown)
 - b. Delany v. Douglass
 - c. DuBois v. Washington
 - d. Hand out info on The Great Migration, esp. labor stats.
2. Remind: Quiz through Ch. 2 for tomorrow

Day 5: 42 minutes

1. Reading check quiz: 10-15 points
2. Discuss Prologue – Ch. 2.
3. Organizers for day's thinking: How does history choose to remember? Is it possible to consider one's history apart from the personal?
4. Show picture of Booker T. Washington's statue at Tuskegee (UCLA website). Break it down.
5. Read Robert Hayden's "Frederick Douglass;" Michael Harper's "American History;" Ishmael Reed's "Dualism" (Norton 2058). Re-visit self-concept. Analyze & comment.
6. Read Michelle Cliff's "Within the Veil" (Norton 2505). Connect to Washington's statue.
7. Hand out 1-page sampling reprint of Freire's ideas as reported in Martha Cutter's article on critical literacy.
8. Assign homework: Audre Lord's "Poetry is Not a Luxury" (1924 Norton) and IM, ch. 3.
9. Ask: So, who has still been invisible to you this week?

Resources:

<http://thwt.org/writingandlit.htm> (Frederick Douglass and links)

<http://lyrics007.com> (Louis Armstrong's "Black and Blue" lyrics)

<http://bobdylan.com/songs/hattie.html>

(Bob Dylan's "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" lyrics)

<http://www.english.ucla.edu/marathonreading/mr1998/era.html>

(Ellison and His Era and links, incl. Harlem Renaissance photos, jazz primer)

<http://www.inmotionaame.org> (bibliography re: Great Migration)

<http://bsob.jcu.edu/econamer/econamer/Migration.htm>

(Assignments & links re: Great Migration)

<http://guardian.co.uk/arts/fridayreview/story/0,12102,1424244,00.html>

(Back story re: Hattie Carroll's murder)

<http://www.cs.pdx.edu/~trent/ochs/hattie-carroll.html>

(Phil Ochs' analysis of Dylan's song)

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