

Sarah Segrest
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Dr. Smagorinsky
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**Working Against Mainstream Culture:
The Voices of Two Female African American Authors from
The Harlem Renaissance to the Present**

Unit Plan Texts:

1. Michael Eric Dyson's "What Would America Be Like Without 50 Years of Black Contributions?"
2. Five Chapters from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
3. TV film version of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
4. Excerpt from Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*.
5. Five poems by Gwendolyn Brooks:

I) Rationale Introduction

African American voices are often overlooked in the classroom, and female writers are often left out as well. The ratio of female to male authors in the traditional literary canon reveals an overwhelming dominance of the male, particularly the white male, voice. In this unit, therefore, we will focus on African American female authors who wrote during and after the Harlem Renaissance, a movement that celebrated black culture and black independence, in reaction to a society dominated by exclusively white values and social mores. We will read a portion of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a portion of Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, and several poems by Gwendolyn Brooks. While these authors are both black and female, they are also often included in the sort of revised, modern canon found in many high schools today and are not likely to present an economic problem of access for the school and its students, as some more contemporary African American literature might.

Critics might argue that reading only Hurston and Brooks in a Harlem Renaissance unit fails to give students a comprehensive understanding of the Harlem Renaissance, which included many important male writers as well. However, the goal of the unit is not to simply expose students to every salient author of the period, giving them a “taste” of each author’s style as though the students are reading through a veritable buffet-line of literature. Neither is the unit’s purpose to fill students with an overwhelming amount of information which they may or may not retain. Instead, I intend to provide a kind of map for exploring some of the literature of the time period in a coherent fashion. The theme of the female voice in a male-dominated society adds another layer to the class’s over-arching theme of cultural imperialism and reaction¹. Further, Hurston and Brooks pair together well because their works lend themselves to productive comparison and contrast, as will be shown below in the remainder of the rationale.

In addition, students will receive a short lecture that includes background information about the period, and they can participate in a discussion of an essay by Michael Eric Dyson that mentions important Harlem Renaissance artists. Students will also have an opportunity to write an essay on a black historical figure or cultural movement of their choosing, and some will likely write on the Harlem Renaissance or its participants. Finally, the Harlem Renaissance unit stretches over three weeks, which is a significant portion of the semester on a 90-minute block schedule². Spending an extended amount of time on one historical period should allow students time to explore, ask questions, and develop a more nuanced picture of the movement, but to do so at their own pace. In short, I believe that students will receive a full understanding of the essence

¹ The class’s over-arching theme lasts the entire semester and is designed to connect all of the units in the semester. This construction of lessons allows students to maintain focus and develop specific skills from the beginning to the end of the semester.

² On this schedule, students meet for an hour and a half every day for one semester instead of for fifty minutes every day for the entire academic year.

of the Harlem Renaissance, even though they might not know the name and works of every black writer during that period. One wonders, though, how well students would remember all the authors and works even if the Harlem Renaissance were taught in a more traditional manner.

As stated above, this unit will begin with a brief background lecture on the setting of the Harlem Renaissance to help students understand what type of cultural imperialism this group of writers reacted against. Although neither Hurston nor Brooks was a central, founding members of the Harlem Renaissance (though both, and Hurston in particular, are usually associated with the movement because of connections with various other Harlem Renaissance writers and because of the time period during which she wrote), an introduction to the movement will set the scene for the rest of the unit, which, with Brooks' poetry, will bring the class forward through history nearly to the present. Moreover, Peter Smagorinsky (2002) writes that the "Harlem Renaissance . . . served to establish African American writers as a significant group in American letters, the first minority group to achieve this stature in the United States" (p. 61). This fact helps justify the unit's beginning with an overview of the Harlem Renaissance.

Because a large percentage of students at the school for which this unit was designed are African American, this unit is an especially important one, so that African American students feel that their culture is represented within the school *and* so that white students, and students representing other cultures, can learn about how black culture influenced American culture. Further, black students need to learn about members of their race who have made great achievements. Too often, African American contributions to American history are ignored. I want to make all my students aware of their capabilities, and my unit on the Harlem Renaissance

is one way I hope to accomplish that. Through teaching about African American role models and through the unit's learning activities and goals, which are designed to engage and encourage all students, I hope that my unit will help students believe in their ability to do quality academic work and understand our society so that they can succeed in it.

Because the texts we will read, the novel in particular, incorporate black vernacular speech, they will aid in what Carol Lee calls cultural modeling. In other words, the novel offers an opportunity for students, particularly African American students, to do what Lee recommends: "reflect on and analyze their own cultural practices, particularly their uses of language" (qtd. in Smagorinsky, 2002, p. 91). Smagorinsky (2002) points to Carol Lee's two suggestions for incorporating cultural modeling, which this unit is designed to incorporate. They are:

- Include more literature by African American writers to allow for clearer connections to the speech and experiences of African American students.
- Explicitly draw attention to figurative properties of African American English to provide students with strategies for understanding literature, not just by African American writers but by any writers who use figurative devices for making social commentary. (p. 91)

Because of the poetic nature of Hurston's as well as Brooks' writing, students will be given ample opportunities to discuss the figurative properties. In addition, using Lee's strategies should also facilitate increased engagement with writing among students and thus eventual improvements in their writing processes.

II) Zora Neale Hurston

In a school with a large African American population, reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God* allows for cultural modeling, during which students can read, interact with, and even critique the vernacular of African American speech. In particular, the function of voice in the novel has been debated and studied extensively. Mary Helen Washington (1990) notes that scholars have asked whether or not Janie ever finds her own voice in the novel, since her voice seems to be defined by "choosing a collective rather than an individual voice, demonstrating her closeness to the collective spirit of the African-American oral tradition" (p. xii). Even if Janie fails to find an "individual voice" in the traditional, masculine sense, though, her words have clearly enthralled readers for decades. Therefore, scholars' debate over the authority of Janie's female voice points to the fact that different ways of speaking can be effective in different situations.

Accordingly, our study of the novel will incorporate Lisa Delpit's (1995) assertion that students are able to not only "understand how arbitrary language standards are, but also how politically charged they are" (p. 44). Delpit notes the importance of being honest with students about the dire consequences of lacking fluency in what the establishment deems "Standard English."

Delpit even cites one high school teacher who has students

compare various pieces written in different styles, discuss the impact of different styles on the message by making translations and back translations across styles, and discuss the history, apparent purpose, and contextual appropriateness of each of the technical writing rules presented by their teacher. (p. 44)

Their Eyes Were Watching God will present the class with opportunities to discuss how

Hurston's writing style and her depiction of the speech of black people may have shaped its initial reception by the black and white communities in the 1930's and 1940's, as well as how those same elements shape the book's reputation today. In addition, the "Vernacular to Standard English Dictionary" assignment will enable students to make the kind of translations that Delpit believes are so essential.

Washington (1990) also writes that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* "represents a woman redefining and revising a male-dominated canon" (p. xiv) and "affirms black cultural traditions while revising them to empower black women" (p. x). Hurston's female hero challenges traditional conceptions of the male hero, even though Janie is not, according to Washington, an "unambiguously heroic female" (p. xiv). Because students will have opportunities at an earlier point in the semester to study the traditional male hero in other works of literature, this unit offers them an opportunity to question that traditional conception.

There is much for students to discuss, explore, and argue about in the novel. Many questions (is Janie clearly the hero? Does Janie find her voice in the novel? Was Hurston justifiably criticized by Wright and others during the Harlem Renaissance for not contributing to the cause?) have been debated by literary critics for decades. Also, Hurston's background as an anthropologist lends veracity to her depictions of black culture in the *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The novel will be especially relevant to local students in Georgia, since it offers a window into black culture in the Southeastern United States during the early 20th century.

As can be seen from the lesson plans, the unit involves reading the first five chapters of the novel

in class. Some critics might object to reading only a portion of a novel instead of the whole piece, arguing that it condones partial readings and fails to give students the full impression of the work. However, reading an entire novel can take many days for young readers, and since the classes for which this unit is designed meet on a daily block schedule for a single semester, the time it would take to read the entire novel might interfere with time needed to cover other important works. Furthermore, students will have time to really absorb the novel, enjoy it, and develop reading skills. James Marshall (1980) supports this idea of careful, slow reading in his comparison of student reading to the process of writing:

coming to terms with a literary text is also a process, one that may move from tentative, incomplete, and perhaps mistaken readings to those that are fuller, more detailed, and more thoroughly reasoned. First readings, like initial drafts, are likely to be personal, unready for public evaluation. Yet like first drafts, first readings are the place where the process begins, the necessary if insufficient first step in discovering what one thinks, even when these early discoveries are later abandoned. (p. 55)

Reading portions of the novel slowly and carefully in class will allow for the kind of progression from “tentative” to “fuller” readings of the text Marshall describes. If, on the other hand, the classes were to read the entire novel, there likely would not be time for this kind of careful, rich reading, especially in a setting where students are not normally assigned significant amounts of at-home reading.

Another goal of reading part of the novel in such a way that the students experience the rich rewards of reading is that the students will be attracted to the act of reading itself and more likely to become life-long readers. Perhaps students will be so interested in the novel that they are

inspired to finish it on their own. In addition, because we are not finishing the text in class, the students will view part of the made for television movie in order to make up for missed plot information.

The basic lesson plan can be differentiated for students accustomed to a faster pace, however. They can engage in more research activities as they read. They may be asked, for example, to engage in research activities that produce a greater understanding of the time period, the landscape, the authors themselves, and so on, and these activities will facilitate their comprehension of the book and make for richer writing about the book.

III) Gwendolyn Brooks

Gwendolyn Brooks grew up in Chicago and was initially influenced by (and is sometimes associated with) the Harlem Renaissance, though she was not a central member of that group. The first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize, Brooks' influence also stretched into the Black Arts movement of the 1960's, and even into the final decades of the twentieth century. Brooks, who more unambiguously writes in protest to the mainstream white culture than Hurston, still employs a kind of subtlety that makes her poetry profound. Williams (1997) attests to this characteristic of Brooks' poetry: "On one level, of course, Brooks is a protest poet; yet her protest evolves through suggestion rather than through a bludgeon. She sets forth the facts without embellishment or interpretation, but the simplicity of the facts makes it impossible for readers to come away unconvinced" (paragraph 13).

In addition, Brooks and Hurston both depict African American characters that clearly come from

underprivileged backgrounds. Brooks' characters will provide a nice contrast to Hurston's, though, because they are primarily city-dwellers, as Williams (1997) confirms: "Brooks' poetry is marked by some unforgettable characters who are drawn from the underclass of the nation's black neighborhoods. Like many urban writers, Brooks has recorded the impact of city life" (paragraph 11). Hopefully, this feature of Brooks' poetry will make the unit particularly relevant for the urban students for whom it was designed.

We will read some earlier and some later poetry of Brooks, including "We Real Cool," "The Boy Died in My Alley," "Of De Witt Williams on His Way to Lincoln Cemetery," "Sadie and Maud," and "A Song in the Front Yard." The poetry "sub-unit" will be well-placed if it follows the novel and autobiography. Not only will students have lighter in-class reading assignments during the poetry piece, they will also be able to read the poetry with background knowledge about the Harlem Renaissance, which will provide a nice segue into studying Brooks' poetry of the 1940's, the Black Arts movement in the 1960's, and later her poems in the 1980's. Brooks' urban settings will also provide a nice contrast with the rural landscapes in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In all, this unit offers both variety (through the different styles and characters of the works of Brooks and Hurston) and continuity (through the study of African American female voices and black responses to mainstream white culture).

Finally, this unit will take place within a related, coherent, over-arching semester objective to think about how, when, and why "cultural imperialism" has occurred and has been challenged at different points in American history, from the beginnings of our nation (Puritan literature, documents of founding fathers) to the present.

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Goals and Rubrics

Goal 1: Dialogue Journal

As we read or watch the texts in this unit, everyone will be required to keep a dialogue journal that contains their reflections about the texts. At least twice per week, you will write an entry in your journals that is at least one page in length. When possible, you will be given time during class to write in your journals. Because it is a dialogue journal, I the teacher will write responses to what you have written in your journal each week

The dialogue journal will be kept in a separate notebook, and each entry will begin with a quotation, passage, or paraphrase of a passage that you will write at the top of the page. Underneath the quote, passage, or paraphrased passage, you will write a response. The response can take on one or more of the following forms:

- Describe your personal reaction to the quote or passage. For example, you may describe why you approve or disprove of the actions of a particular character, or you may describe how you would react if you were put in a similar situation as one of the characters.
- Provide an interpretation of the quote or passage (describe what the quote or passage means or symbolizes in the context of the novel).
- Ask and attempt to answer a question about the quote or passage. If the quote or passage does not make sense to you, ask a question about it and then attempt to answer your own question. Your own answer may not satisfy you, but you should at least give it a try and guess at the meaning if you have to. These entries make great questions to ask during class!
- Continue a class discussion. If a class discussion about the reading grabs your interest, and you have more to say about that particular topic, your journal entry can continue your thoughts about that discussion.

Do not worry about making your journal entries grammatically correct. They are primarily to show me that you are reading and thinking about the literature. I will not grade them for grammar.

Be sure to leave room (about half a page) at the bottom of each entry. I will respond to your writing in that space, and thus we will have a "dialogue" within each journal!

A journal will receive a grade of "A" if:

- The quote, passage, or paraphrase is clearly stated at the top of the page.
- The response clearly relates to the identified quote or passage.
- The response demonstrates that you have read the assigned piece and thought about what it means to you.
- The response is written legibly.
- The journal is turned in on time (journals are collected on Friday).
- The journal contains two entries per week.
- Each entry is at least one page long.

A journal will receive a grade of "**B**" if:

- It meets 6 of the 7 requirements listed above

A journal will receive a grade of "**C**" if:

- It meets 4-5 of the 7 requirements listed above

A journal will receive a grade of "**D**" if:

- It meets 3 of the 7 requirements listed above

A journal will receive a grade of "**F**" if:

- It meets 2 or fewer of the requirements listed above

Goal 2: Dictionary of Vernacular to Standard English

You will work on this project in self-selected groups of 4-5 students each. You will create a dictionary that includes 20 entries that translate some type of vernacular English to Standard English. You do not have to use Black English in this project. You can use, for example, Spanglish, or any other category of speech that is not normally included in Standard English. This might include words and phrases particular to your generation, your geographical location, your group of friends, your family, your neighborhood, your church, or any other group of people of which you are a member. Most importantly, be creative! Have fun! Teach your teacher and the rest of the class about some words and phrases we are not familiar with!

Your dictionary will receive a grade of "**A**" if:

- It is creatively and colorfully presented.
- It is neatly composed.
- It has a title that clearly states the vernacular being translated (i.e. "Dictionary of Spanglish to English").
- It contains all 20 required entries (these can be words or phrases).
- All entries present words or phrases that are NOT normally found in standard English dictionaries.
- It contains clear translations to Standard English.
- It does not use entries that are offensive or inappropriate for the school setting.

Your dictionary will receive a grade of "**B**" if:

- It is neatly composed.
- It has a title that clearly states the vernacular being translated (i.e. "Dictionary of Spanglish to English")
- It contains all 20 required entries (these can be words or phrases).
- All entries present words or phrases that are NOT normally found in standard English dictionaries.
- It contains clear translations to Standard English.
- It does not use entries that are offensive or inappropriate for the school setting.

Your dictionary will receive a grade of "**C**" if:

- It is somewhat neatly composed.
- It has a title that clearly states the vernacular being translated (i.e. "Dictionary of Spanglish to English")
- It contains all 20 required entries (these can be words or phrases).
- It presents only some entries that contain words or phrases that are NOT normally found in standard English dictionaries.
- It presents translations that are usually clear but sometimes vague
- It does not use entries that are offensive or inappropriate for the school setting.

Your dictionary will receive a grade of "**D**" if:

- It is somewhat neatly composed.
- It contains between 15 and 20 entries.

- Many of the entries contain words or phrases that ARE normally found in standard English dictionaries.
- Translations are vague.
- It does not use entries that are offensive or inappropriate for the school setting.

Your dictionary will receive a grade of "**F**" if:

- It is messily composed.
- It does not contain at least 15 entries.
- Translations are vague and/or hard to understand
- Any kind of offensive language is used.

Goal 3: Persuasive Essay on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

This essay should be at least five paragraphs in length and should answer **one** of the following questions:

- Does Janie have a powerful voice in the novel/movie?
- Is Janie clearly the hero of the novel/movie?
- Was Hurston justifiably criticized by Richard Wright and other Harlem Renaissance writers for not contributing to the African American cause?
- You may also answer a question of your choice. Just be sure to discuss it with me first.

Your paper will receive a grade of "A" if you:

- write a paper that uses textual evidence to persuade your reader to take on your point of view about a particular issue in the novel.
- write 3-5 pages.
- provide evidence of having written at least one draft which you revise before turning in for a final grade.
- conference with me at least once during the in-class writing process.
- use standard English grammar (surface errors are few).
- turn your paper in on time.
- have a clear thesis.
- have a clear introductory paragraph, at least three body paragraphs, and a clear concluding paragraph.
- provide examples from the text to support your thesis.
- Support your thesis in some way in each body paragraph.
- Provide transitions from paragraph to paragraph.

Your paper will receive a grade of "B" if you:

- meet 8 of the 9 requirements listed above.

Your paper will receive a grade of "C" if you:

- meet 6-7 of the 9 requirements listed above.

Your paper will receive a grade of "D" if you:

- meet 4-5 of the 9 requirements listed above.

Your paper will receive a grade of "F" if you:

- meet fewer than 4 of the 9 requirements listed above.

Goal 4: Cultural Influence Essay

This essay will describe how some aspect of African American culture has influenced your life. The essay has few guidelines, as there are many forms the content might take. For example, you might write about:

- your appreciation for a particular black person's life or work, such as a black musician's music or a black actor's performance(s) in film. You might express appreciation or admiration for the artist, political leader, community member, or other figure that you choose, or you might describe the impact that the person's work has had on your own culture or life experience. Look again at the essay by Michael Eric Dyson if you are having trouble deciding who to write about. He mentions many important black cultural leaders.
- how a more general aspect of African American culture, such as rap music, or jazz music, or the civil rights movement of the 1960's, has influenced main-stream culture.

There will time to research and write this essay in class, and there will be a peer review session.

Your paper will receive a grade of **"A"** if you:

- write 3-5 pages.
- provide evidence of having written at least one draft which you revise before turning in for a final grade. (You should satisfy this requirement during the writing workshop.)
- use standard English grammar (surface errors are few).
- turn your paper in on time.
- provide interesting, detailed examples of how African American culture has shaped or influenced you or your culture.
- give your personal view on some aspect of African American culture, instead of merely stating facts about a person (this is not a biography paper).
- avoid derogatory terms and offensive opinions.

Your paper will receive a grade of **"B"** if you:

- meet 6 of the 7 requirements listed above

Your paper will receive a grade of **"C"** if you:

- meet 4-5 of the 7 requirements listed above

Your paper will receive a grade of **"D"** if you:

- meet 3 of the 7 requirements listed above

Your paper will receive a grade of **"F"** if you:

- meet 2 or fewer of the requirements listed above

Lesson Plans

Week 1

Day 1 (Monday)

5 Min: Attendance and Housekeeping

Begin Introductory Activity

- 10 min.** Explain to students that they are getting a questionnaire (see Appendix A) that they will fill out according to the 1-5 scale of disagreement or agreement. (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.) Tell the students that their responses should reflect their opinions and that there are NO right or wrong answers. Pass out questionnaires and let students begin working individually.
- 20 min:** Have students arrange themselves in groups of 4, turning desks around to facilitate discussion. Pass out instructions for group work (see Appendix A). Circulate among groups as they work to monitor progress.
- 10 min:** Begin large-group discussion of each item. Solicit responses from each group and create a bulleted list for each group on the board. Make sure each group gives at least one response for the board for each item.
- 25 min:** Discuss items and introduce the idea of cultural imperialism and revolt at the most natural point in the conversation. Also introduce the idea of contextual rules of speech and writing (codes), which are determined by whichever culture "rules" a particular setting.
- 18 min:** Explain to students that for the next several weeks we will be examining the Harlem Renaissance (HR), the period during which African American artists of all kinds (literary, musical, etc.) began to forcefully assert the values and codes and express the difficulties and beauty of their own culture, as a response to the mainstream, White-American culture that had for so long oppressed them. Explain the following key points, and advise students to take a few notes. (This is the only "lecture and note" activity in this unit. Notes may be referred to later, during the last week of the unit, when students are formulating questions about poetry.)

Key points*:

- During the Harlem Renaissance, for the first time ever, "mainstream publishers and critics took African American literature seriously, and it was the first time that African American literature and the arts attracted significant attention from the nation at large" (Wintz, 2003, p. 2).

- The Harlem Renaissance began in the mid 1920's and lasted until the mid 1930's, but its influence can still be seen today.
- Harlem Renaissance writers "rejected the old stereotypes" of African Americans and instead "strongly asserted their racial pride" (Wintz, 2003, p.5). Even so, because many HR writers wrote about the positive and negative aspects of being black, they were accused of "reinforcing negative African American stereotypes" (Wintz, 2003, p. 11)
- Three themes of HR literature include:
 1. Exploration of blacks' cultural background, including African roots and the Southern black experience in America (Wintz, 2003, p.9).
 2. Examination of "life in Harlem and other urban centers" (Wintz, 2003, p. 9).
 3. Race and racial injustice (Wintz, 2003, p.9).
- The HR opened the door for later black writers to be published and recognized. This includes poet Gwendolyn Brooks, who in 1950 received a Pulitzer Prize. The HR also influenced later African American movements, including the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement (Wintz, 2003, p. 15).

* Key Points taken from:

Wintz, C.D. (Ed.). (2003). *The Harlem Renaissance: A History and an Anthology*.
Maplecrest: Brandywine.

2 min: Prepare to depart.

Day 2 (Tuesday)

3 min: Attendance, housekeeping

10 min: Read aloud "What Would America Be Like Without 60 Years of Black Contributions?" by Michael Eric Dyson.

10 min: Briefly highlight the Harlem Renaissance artists cited by Michael Eric Dyson, so students can see how many individuals from the period had a lasting influence on American culture. Discuss the Harlem Renaissance artists' contributions. Invite students to share information they may know about any of the artists Dyson mentions.

20 min: Introduce "Dialogue Journal" assignment. Pass out instructions and rubric (see Goal 1 under "Goals and Rubrics" above) and go over them with students, writing a sample entry on the overhead.

30 min: Have students practice writing in the journals by writing a response to the Dyson article. Float around the room to assist students with the dialogue journal

assignment. All students should turn their journals in today for a response. That way, you can ensure that all students are fulfilling the expectations. Conference with those who are not.

- 5 min:** Assign copies of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, or pass out copies of Chapters 1 and 2 of the novel if books are not available.
- 10 min:** Begin reading Chapter 1 aloud, then call on a willing student to read.
- 1 min:** Assign remainder of Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 for homework; tell students that this week they will only have one journal entry due (the one they worked on and turned in today), but that in the future they will have two journal entries due each Friday at the end of the period.
- 1 min:** Prepare to depart.

Day 3 (Wednesday)

- 3 min:** Attendance and housekeeping.
- 27 min:** Begin discussion of Chapter 1 of *TEWWG*. Ask students, "in the first chapter, how does Janie challenge the traditional idea of how a woman should behave? What about how a black woman should behave? Are these two stereotypes the same or different?" Summarize various student comments on the board. Remind students that well-developed black female characters are an important achievement of HR literature.

(The above questions and ensuing discussion will help students by introducing them to ways in which women react against and/or accept the cultural impositions or "power code" of both men and other women.)

Discuss Chapter 2 of *TEWWG*. What do we learn about Janie's heritage from Granny? How are the women from the three generations (Nanny, Janie's mother, and Janie) alike? How are they different? (These questions are designed to help students think about the different "cultures" of the old and young.)

- 40 min:** (Pass out and) read aloud Chapters 3 and 4. Discuss Joe Stark's dress and speech. What does Stark's represent? (Power, excitement, mystery.) Why does he appeal to Janie? Compare Logan's speech, dress, and appearance to Stark's. Also compare the aspirations of the two men.
- 18 min:** Divide students into groups of three and remind them of previous discussion about how speech changes according to different contexts, such as urban, rural, domestic, professional, formal, familiar, etc.). Ask groups to identify the contexts that best fit the speech of the characters they have met thus far, including the narrator. Then, let groups report on their findings to the class.

Point out how rich and beautiful is the language of all the characters, in case students begin to assume that one type of speech is superior to another. Still, invite students to state whether or not they agree with that statement and why.

2 min: (Pass out and) assign Chapter 5 of *TEWWG* for homework. Prepare to depart.

Day 4 (Thursday)

3 min: Attendance and housekeeping.

20 min: Discussion of Chapter 5 -- Ask students about the different rules of speech that emerge in Eatonville in this chapter. (Hicks brags about his "co-talkin;" Jody Starks uses language skills to impress the citizens and attract more people to move to Eatonville, and he refers to himself as a "big voice;" Lige informs Tony that his welcome speech to Jody and Janie does not follow the standards for such a speech. What other evidence can you find that folks in Eatonville have particular ways of speaking and showing manners?)

10 min: Segue the conversation into an introduction of the dictionary assignment. Remind students of yesterday's conversation about the way we speak at different times and places, and the way society associates certain kinds of speech with different contexts. Introduce the term *vernacular*. Be sure to present the assignment in a way that affirms all languages/ways of speaking and that does not present "Standard English" or any other mode of speaking as inherently better than another. Use the following information to introduce the assignment:

At the end of Chapter 4, as Janie rides off with Joe Starks, she knows that "her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them" (p. 31). Then, when the couple arrives in the all-black town of Eatonville, Coker says of Joe Starks, "Dat man talks like a section foreman." We've even heard Hicks tell about his "co-talkin'" and the effect it has on the opposite sex. We have discussed for the past couple of days the appropriateness of different language for different situations.

Now, you are going to have a chance to translate pieces of vernacular that are particular to you (or your family or your close group of friends) into the language of Standard English, which is most often used in the workplace and other professional settings, like high school and college classrooms. This is your opportunity to teach me and the rest of the class something about language that we don't know. You will have an opportunity to present the highlights of your dictionary to the class next Monday, when it is due. All the dictionaries will also be in the classroom and available for reference for the remainder of the semester. This assignment is due this coming Monday.

Pass out Vernacular - Standard English dictionary instructions and rubric (see

Goal 2 under “Goals and Rubrics” above). Give examples on the board if necessary.

- 55 min:** Students must use this time to work on their dictionaries in groups. Rotate among groups to answer questions and ensure that students stay on task. Show students where they can find supplies (construction paper, markers, etc.) to improve the presentation of their dictionaries.
- 2 min:** Tell students that tomorrow we will watch the movie version of *TEWWG* since we will not have time to read the entire novel. Prepare to depart.

Day 5 (Friday)

- 3 min:** Attendance and housekeeping. Return Dialogue Journals.
- 85 min:** Begin watching movie version of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Pass out “Movie Analysis” sheet, which has specific questions for students to answer as they watch the movie (see appendix B).
- 1 min:** Remind students that their dictionaries are due Monday. Invite groups to work on them with you after school today if necessary.
- 1 min:** Pack up and prepare to depart.

Week 2

Day 6 (Monday)

- 3 min:** Attendance and housekeeping.
- 30 min:** Finish watching movie version of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.
- 15 min:** Go over “Movie Analysis” as a whole class. Allow the questions from the “Movie Analysis” to stimulate class discussion about cultural imperialism in the contexts of the following cultures: black and white, male and female, majority and minority, and old and young. Also be sure to discuss the cultural imperialism and reaction in terms of “standard” and “vernacular” speech codes.
- Collect student answers to “Movie Analysis” questions.
- 25 min:** Students will present their dictionary projects (approximately 5 minutes per group). Collect dictionaries.
- 15 min:** Pass out “Persuasive Essay” instructions and rubric (see Goal 3). Explain to students that they will have time to write the essay in class but that they are encouraged to also work on it at home if possible. The essay is due this Thursday.

2 min: Pack up and prepare to depart

Day 7 (Tuesday)

3 min: Attendance and Housekeeping

45 min: Students will use this time to write the first draft of their persuasive essays. Tell students that they may come to your desk and conference with you at any time during the periods of class devoted to writing the essay. They should come to the conference with at least one concern about their paper in mind.

Tell students that they will have two more 45-minute periods, in addition to this one, to write the essay. Collect first drafts at the end of the writing period if any are available.

3 min: Explain to students that we will now begin reading an autobiographical piece by Zora Neale Hurston, the author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Prepare students for the piece by telling them that in the section we will read, Hurston describes a childhood experience with two white women who take a special interest in her. Ask students to think about the following issues during the reading (write them on the board):

1. What pieces of the white women's culture does young Hurston *accept* and what pieces does she *reject*?
2. What effect do you think Hurston's experiences with the white women might have had on Hurston's life?
3. Do you see similarities between Zora Neale Hurston the person and Janie Crawford the character?

(The questions are designed to be models for the students' future formulations of their own questions. In addition, the questions should help the students think about cultural imperialism and reaction, as well as the means by which Zora Neale Hurston gained access to the "power code.")

37 min: Read textbook selection from *Dust Tracks on a Road* aloud, allowing students to "popcorn read" the piece.

2 min: Prepare to depart.

Day 8 (Wednesday)

3 min: Attendance and housekeeping. Return first drafts of Analytical/Persuasive Essay.

45 min: In-class writing of persuasive essay. Tell students that you are again available for individual conferencing and that they must conference with you at least once

during their writing process to receive an “A.”

Also tell students that they are welcome to include information from *Dust Tracks on Road*, Hurston’s autobiography, in their papers about *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, if the information helps prove their argument or deepen their analysis.

- 5 min:** Direct students to take out their textbooks and turn to *Dust Tracks on a Road*. Remind them of the three questions raised yesterday (they should still be on the board; re-write them if they are not). Ask a student to summarize what has happened in the autobiographical piece thus far. Then, ask students if they have any questions they would like to add to the list on the board.
- 10 min:** Continue reading selection from *Dust Tracks on a Road*.
- 15 min:** Discuss as a class the questions on the board, including those that were generated in class today.
- 10 min:** Allow time for dialogue journals.
- 2 min:** Remind students that the persuasive essays are due tomorrow. Prepare to depart.

Day 9 (Thursday)

- 3 min:** Attendance and housekeeping
- 45 min:** Final in-class writing and teacher conferencing session on persuasive essays. Collect essays at the end of the 45-minute writing period.
- 10 min:** Direct students to take out their textbooks, and remind them of the questions raised Wednesday (they should still be on the board; re-write them if they are not). Ask a student to summarize what has happened in the autobiographical piece thus far. Then, ask students if they have any questions they would like to add to the list on the board.
- 10 min:** Finish reading selection from *Dust Tracks on a Road*.
- 10 min:** Discuss as a class the questions (on the board) that were generated during the reading of *Dust Tracks*.
- 10 min:** Allow time for students to write in dialogue journals.
- 2 min:** Remind students that dialogue journals are due tomorrow (Friday). Prepare to depart.

Day 10 (Friday)

3 min: Attendance and housekeeping.

5 min: Mini-lecture on Gwendolyn Brooks. Tell students who she was, when she lived, and that her poetry contains some themes that are similar to Hurston's (racial struggle, women's issues, and other themes found in Harlem Renaissance literature) but that Brooks often writes mainly about city life, instead of rural life. Students are not required to take notes.

30 min: Pass out copies of and read Gwendolyn Brooks' "A Song in the Front Yard." Read it several times, allowing different students to read each time. Pose the following questions:

1. What happens in this poem?
2. The speaker talks about different activities that occur in the "front yard" and the "back yard." What are some characteristics of each of these two locations?
3. What else could those two terms ("front yard" and "back yard") refer to in the poem?

Then, read "Sadie and Maud." Read it several times as well, asking different students to read each time. Discuss the following question:

1. Who do you like better? Sadie or Maud? Why?
2. The speaker says that Sadie "scraped life with a fine tooth comb," and then she says that Sadie leaves the comb to her daughters when she dies. What does this mean? Is the speaker talking about a literal comb, or something symbolic?

30 min: Discuss the following questions:

1. In each poem, what is the child's view of life, and what is adult's view of life?
2. How do both of these poems portray cultural influence on the young and old?
3. How do both of these poems portray young and old persons of color reacting against or going along with the culture of the establishment?

(The above questions are designed to help students engage with the poems and think about how/if the poems portray different kinds of cultural influence and reaction. The questions are also designed to help students understand the figurative language of poetry.)

10 min: Allow time for students to write in dialogue journals.

10 min: Pass out instructions and rubric for "Cultural Influence Essay" (see Goal 4 above). Explain the assignment to students, and tell them that again they will have time in class to research and write the essay. Ask them to think about who or what they would like to write about this weekend and to come to class Monday with a topic.

2 min: Collect dialogue journals. Prepare to depart.

Week 3

Day 11 (Monday)

3 min: Attendance and housekeeping. Return persuasive essays.

10 min: Whole-class brainstorming session on student selections for the cultural influence essay. Students who have ideas of who they want to write about can go ahead and make their selections known and, if possible, tell the class why they are interested in the subject. (This should provide some modeling for the students who are having difficulty choosing a topic.) All students should have a topic in mind by the end of the brainstorming session. If not, they will be assigned a topic. Revisit Dyson's article, and assign students historical figures that he mentions if necessary.

75 min: Students spend time in the library researching the figures they have chosen for the cultural influence essay. Depending on ability level of students, either I or a librarian may offer an instructional session on research. Students will be instructed on exactly what citation information from their sources they should write down. (Write several sample MLA citations on the board before leaving the classroom, and have students copy them.)

2 min: Prepare to depart.

Day 12 (Tuesday)

3 min: Attendance and housekeeping.

5 min: Pass out copies of and read Gwendolyn Brooks' "We Real Cool." Read it a couple of times, with different student readers.

15 min: Discuss the following questions:

1. Gwendolyn Brooks once said in an interview that she wrote this poem to convey the way she thought some boys she observed once in a pool hall thought of themselves. She said she saw them during school hours, and she imagined they probably thought of themselves as contemptuous of the "establishment." What evidence can you find in the poem that the kids are contemptuous of the establishment?

15 min: Students will use this time to make entries in their dialogue journals.

50 min: Students spend time in the library researching and writing about the figures they have chosen for the cultural influence essay.

2 min: Prepare to depart

Day 13 (Wednesday)

3 min: Attendance and housekeeping.

10 min: Pass out copies of and read Gwendolyn Brooks' "Of De Witt Williams on His Way to Lincoln Cemetery." Read it a couple of times, with different student readers.

15 min: Discuss the following questions:

1. Do you think the poem describes Williams well? What do you know about him from the poem?
2. What do you make of this "Plain black boy?" Why is he called "plain?" Is he plain?
3. Speculate on what kind of life you think this man (young man?) might have had.
4. The poem has a refrain of "Born in Alabama. / Bred in Illinois." Why do you think the speaker specifically mention the geographic locations in which Williams lived? How does that help the reader understand better the kind of person Williams was?
5. Do you have any questions about the poem?

25 min: Have students divide into groups and sketch out a pictorial representation of the life of De Witt Williams, reconstructing the character from what they know of the poem and filling in the gaps with their own speculations. Tell them to think about the way black children are portrayed in Brooks' other poems and to decide whether or not they think Williams was a similar young person. Provide students with 8x10 sheets of white paper and markers, colored pencils, etc.

(The above questions and drawing activity are designed to help students engage with the poem via a method other than writing. These activities should help students make sense of the figurative language, much as they made sense of figurative language in their Standard to Vernacular English dictionaries. The fifth question, which asks students if *they* have questions is asked so that students will begin to formulate, as a class, helpful questions about poetry. Hopefully, the modeling that I have done during the previous days will assist with this. Eventually, students will be asked to formulate questions in small groups, then as individuals.)

35 min: Students spend time in the library writing (and researching if necessary) about the figures they have chosen for the Cultural Influence Essay.

2 min: Tell students that tomorrow the class will engage in some peer reviewing of each other's essays, so they should bring complete rough drafts of their paper (written

or typed) that they will feel comfortable with others reading. Prepare to depart.

Day 14 (Thursday)

3 min: Attendance and housekeeping.

85 min: Writing workshop. Divide students into groups of 3 or 4. Tell them that the purpose of today's activity is for them to help each other with their writing. They will have the full class period to conference with *each other* (instead of with me as they did for the persuasive essay) and then, if they still have time, to work on revising the paper. Pass out the writing workshop "Response Sheets" (see Appendix C), and tell students that they will each read the papers of the other people in the group, filling out a response sheet on each paper that they read. (Each person should have 2-3 response sheets.) After all the papers have been read silently, the group should discuss, as a whole, each paper with the respective author.

Quickly model the workshop process with three students. Do not actually read all the essays, but go through the motions of reading and responding to each essay and then discussing each essay as a group in a "fast-forward" way so that students understand how the process works. Tell them to also refer to the instructions on the help sheet. Float among groups as they work to monitor process and provide feedback when necessary.

Students may use any extra time to work on the cultural influence essay or complete dialogue journal Entries

2 min: Remind students that dialogue journal entries and final drafts of the cultural influence essay are due at the end of class tomorrow. Prepare to depart.

Day 15 (Friday)

2 min: Attendance and housekeeping.

10 min: Pass out copies of and read Gwendolyn Brooks' "The Boy Died in My Alley." Read it a couple of times, with different student readers.

25 min: Explain to students that they have, for the last few days, been asked questions about poetry, and that on Wednesday they came up with questions as a class, but that today they will formulate their own questions in groups about Brooks' "The Boy Died in My Alley."

Divide students into groups of 4-5 students. Ask them to come up with three questions that they have about the poem and that they think would stimulate class discussion. Tell them that if they need help, they can refer back to their notes on the Harlem Renaissance, since Brooks' poetry has much in common with those

themes.

(Questioning is an important part of this unit, since the theme of the unit is to examine how minority cultures question majority cultures, as well as what effect that questioning has. Questioning skills will continue to be developed in future units.)

43 min: Have students take turn leading class discussion on the poem, posing the questions they formulated as a group.

(“The Boy Died in My Alley” is a 41-line narrative poem rich with action, meaning, and figurative language, yet without much difficult vocabulary. It is long enough to allow for extended discussion without overwhelming students with confusing language.)

10 min: Collect dialogue journals and cultural influence essays. Congratulate students on a job well done in this unit. Ask them what they thought of the unit and if they have recommendations on how it should be presented in the future. Prepare to depart.

Appendix A

Introductory Activity

As an introductory activity for my unit on the Harlem Renaissance, I will first have students fill out and discuss the following opinionnaire. Because a major purpose of the unit is to get students to consider how minority cultures work against mainstream culture and for what purpose, the opinionnaire requires students to consider their own beliefs about their own culture in relation to other cultures. A few of the questions are also designed to allow students to think about how the rules of speaking and writing vary according to context, since the other major purpose of the unit is to teach code-switching skills. Because the codes of writing, speaking, behaving, and so on are defined by the cultures that correspond to different contexts, the connection should between code-switching and culture should be a useful one to make at this point.

Opinionnaire:

Each of the following statements expresses an opinion. Rate each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1. _____ At any given social event, there is always one proper way to conduct oneself. In other words, a universal code of proper behavior exists.
2. _____ I think the United States is better described as a "salad bowl" (individual cultures retain their individuality) than a "melting pot" (individual cultures adjust to represent mainstream American culture).
3. _____ The way I would speak in a job interview is the same way I would speak at home or among my closest group of friends.
4. _____ I tend to act how the people around me act, regardless of whether I agree with their behavior.
5. _____ If you move to a new country, you should adapt to the new culture as quickly as possible so that you can fit in.
6. _____ A personal letter I would write to a close friend would read pretty much read the same (use similar words and phrases and organization strategies) as a letter I would write to the principal describing problems with a new school policy.
7. _____ It's harmless to tell jokes about people in which they appear stupid because of their race, hair color, nationality, and so on.
8. _____ I think it is important for every person to know what it feels like to be in

the "minority" at some point in his or her life.

9. _____ I enjoy listening to music by artists from different races and cultural backgrounds (rap, country, jazz, classical, and so on).
10. _____ I think it is important for people to learn about cultures other than the one in which they grew up.
11. _____ I think it is important for each culture to preserve its traditions and teach its heritage to every new generation.
12. _____ I think it is important that every culture receive respect in our society.

Instructions for Group Work: Each of you should share your responses to the questionnaire with the rest of your group. Then, select a group member to record which items the whole group agreed upon and which items caused disagreement. Next to each item number, record whether or not you were mostly in agreement or disagreement, and then give at least one reason why each person selected agree or disagree (these can be anonymous). Example:

9. Agree. Reasons: one kind of music gets boring after a while; listening to different kinds of music can teach you about different cultures; some kinds of music are good for dancing (rap) and other kinds are good for studying (classical); listening to different kinds of music can show you how different musicians and genres of music influence other musicians and genres of music.

* The opinionnaire format and some of the questions used above are adapted or taken from Smagorinsky's opinionnaire/survey example for a unit on discrimination on p. 158 (Smagorinsky, 2002). The plans for filling out and discussing the opinionnaire, as well as the instructions for group work, are adapted from Teresa McDaniel's unit on "Individual Liberty" at the Virtual Library of Conceptual Units website.

Appendix B

Movie Analysis Questions for *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

1. In what ways is Janie different from Logan Killicks?
2. Why is Janie so unhappy with her marriage to Logan Killicks?
3. What does Joe Starks represent to Janie? In other words, why does she run away with him?
4. Does Joe Starks succeed in imposing his “culture” on Janie? How can you tell?
5. What makes Janie different from the other women in Eatonville?
6. How do you think Janie’s differences from the other women make Janie feel? What about the feelings of the other women?
7. What do the residents of Eatonville think about the actions of Jody Starks (think about the way he dresses, speaks, and treats others)?
8. How does Janie act after Jody Starks dies? Does the rest of Eatonville approve of her actions?
9. What makes Janie’s relationship with Tea Cake so incredibly interesting and unusual to the rest of the town?
10. How does the way Janie looks when she returns to town effect what the townspeople say about her?
11. Do you think Janie has done the two things she says everyone has to do for themselves (“go tuh God” and “find out about livin’ fuh theyselves”)? Why?

Appendix C

Writing Workshop Response Sheet

Instructions: Everyone in the group should read the papers of the other members in the group. As you read silently, answer the following questions. After you have read the papers of the other members in your group and filled out a response sheet for each one, then take turns discussing each paper (as a group) with the author. Go over the responses that you wrote and make sure the author understands what each person meant on their response sheets. When you finish discussing the papers, you may work on revising your paper. They are due tomorrow.

One thing I like about this paper is:

One thing I found confusing about this paper is:

I think this paper could be improved if: (Refer to your rubrics to make sure the paper meets the standards laid out there.)