

Background:

This lesson plan is currently being used in my tenth grade “college prep” English classes. This year is my first to teach these tenth grade classes, and I am working (to a large extent) within the framework established by the previous teacher. At our school, tenth grade English is taught either according to genres or by using thematic units. I have the freedom to incorporate new pieces of literature and change the timing of when particular pieces are taught. Each class at our school meets five days a week for 50 minute sessions. In the midst of our literature and writing studies, we will continue a regularly scheduled vocabulary study (a separate workbook) unrelated to the literature.

Required Reading:

Black Boy by Richard Wright is one of three novels already assigned for summer reading.

Night by Elie Wiesel has traditionally been taught at the end of the school year, but it will be moved to this first term unit.

“Where is the Voice Coming From?” by Eudora Welty will be added to this unit.

Selected poems such as “Micah” by Margaret Walker Alexander, “Incident” by Countee Cullen, and a poem in our textbook by Langston Hughes will be added to this unit.

Timeline: Unit will begin in late August

Theme of Unit: Man’s Inhumanity to Man

Unit Goals: Reading, Interpreting, Writing

- 1) **Reading:** Use *Black Boy*, *Night*, “Where is the Voice Coming From?,” and selected poems to explore the unit’s theme, “Man’s Inhumanity to Man.”
- 2) **Reviewing Genre:** Exploring types of “life-writing” such as autobiography and memoir.
- 3) **Interpreting Literature:** Explore the historical background behind these works and use the author’s biographical information to discuss the dangers and virtues inherent in using these types of sources/criticisms to interpret literature.
- 4) **Practicing Research:** Students will research one specific topic relating to either Richard Wright’s experience (Great migration, Jim Crow laws) or Medgar Evers and the Civil Rights Era (White Citizens’ Council, Sovereignty Files). Each student will write a short, documented paper on his or her topic and give a short class presentation with a visual aid (poster). Our major research paper is assigned in the spring.
- 5) **Writing:** Discuss why writers’ write. Use these works to write a comparative essay using two of the 3 main works (*Black Boy*, *Night*, “Where is the Voice Coming From?”).

Notes:

- Since *Black Boy* is a summer reading assignment, an objective test on this novel will be given during the first week of school. This test will cover facts that are obvious to the reader (not interpretation), and the test will assess whether or not the student read the assignment. This summer reading test is completely separate from the current unit.
- *Night* will be assigned at the very beginning of school and will read by September 4th.
- Just before beginning the discussion of *Black Boy*, we finished a unit on bildungsroman using *A Separate Peace*. We will begin *Black Boy* by analyzing it as a “Coming of Age” story.

Assessment:

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- Summer reading test on *Black Boy* – August 12th (first full day of school)
- Objective test on *Night* – September 4th (shortly after Labor Day holiday)
- Journals (2-3 a week during the unit)
- Short reading quizzes
- Comparative essay on themes in the various works
- Research project – due September 12
- Participation in class discussion

Lesson Plans

Day One: Take vocabulary quiz on Unit 2. The class will begin with a discussion of “life-writing” using notes from Peggy Prenshaw’s presentation. We will discuss general characteristics of life-writing such as:

- 1) “It is a TEXT not a LIFE.”
- 2) Finding “themes” in a life
- 3) Omitting incidents that do not fit the writer’s purpose
- 4) Memory – filtered through adult experiences
- 5) Significance of when experience occurred compared to when writer wrote of it
Example: *One Writer’s Beginnings* written when Eudora Welty was 74.

Homework: 1) Read an anecdote from *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston (found in textbook). 2) Write a journal relating *Black Boy* to the 3 characteristics of bildungsroman.

Day Two: The class will begin with a short reading quiz on the excerpt from *Farewell to Manzanar*. Then we will discuss the excerpt in the context of the life-writing notes taken yesterday and add some to the notes. Finally, students will read some of the journals assigned from the night before and the first discussion of *Black Boy* begins.

Homework: Write a journal describing the different types of hunger that Richard Wright experiences in *Black Boy*. Three specific passages from the book must be referenced in the context of the journal.

Day Three: Journals will be checked for completion. The class will take some biographical notes on Richard Wright followed by watching a 25 minute video of his life which also talks about “words as weapons.”

Homework: Complete vocabulary workbook pages – unit 3. Continue reading *Night*.

Day Four: Check vocabulary workbook pages and review pronunciation. I will review biographical information on Wright and a short lecture will follow on the dangers and benefits of using this information in the reading of this novel. During this discussion, I will be using the notes on biographical criticism and a sense of “place” from the Welty workshop. Thematic discussion will then begin with the focus on the father-son relationship in the early chapters. In particular, the incident where Richard kills the kitten will be discussed.

Homework: There will be a vocabulary quiz tomorrow. Students will write a journal article power of words in *Black Boy*. Three passages from the book must be used.

Day Five: Take vocabulary quiz on Unit 3. Thematic discussion continues. Wright presents violence as a product of racism and as an inescapable part of life for black people. Richard has been exposed to violence at an early age (beatings from his parents, Granny, the boys in Memphis). The class will continue discussing *Black Boy* with the discussion focusing on the theme of “violence” in the novel.

Discuss idea that victims may become victimizers (the Jews in West Helena).

Homework: Review *Night* for reading test tomorrow.

Day Six: An objective test will be given on *Night* which was assigned at the beginning of school. After the test, the class will read aloud short excerpts from biographical information on Elie Wiesel and will take notes on the time period. Students are encouraged to examine this background material as it relates to the novel.

Homework: Discuss the fact that Elie Wiesel remained silent about his experience for ten years after the Holocaust. Do you think the narrator’s point of view might have been different if Wiesel had written the book in 1945? Why or why not?

Day Seven: Check journal. Read aloud a few journals to stimulate discussion. Watch excerpts of Elie Wiesel’s appearance on the Oprah Winfrey television show. No homework assigned because we will be going to library to begin research projects.

Day Eight: Go to the library to begin research.

Homework: Complete vocabulary workbook pages. Write a journal contrasting the father-son relationship in *Night* with the father-son relationship in *Black Boy*.

Day Nine: Check vocabulary workbook pages. Check journals and read a few to stimulate discussion. Discussion centers on how the book’s title functions as imagery. Discuss other imagery from the book.

Homework: Study for vocabulary quiz. Write journal on how humanity was lost in the concentration camps. Discuss acts of kindness and signs of hope in the midst of the horror, giving at least 3 examples through passages in the book.

Day Ten: Take vocabulary quiz on Unit 4. Check journals. Review the essentials of writing a research paper. Give the specifications of the research project assigned for this unit.

Homework: Begin work on research paper and poster.

Day Eleven: I will give a short lecture on Eudora Welty’s biographical information and use the Welty website on a projector for a tour of her house. This lecture will include a historical perspective on how Welty’s early experiences in Jackson differed from Richard Wright’s and why each one turned to writing. This discussion will include passages from *Black Boy* and *One Writer’s Beginnings*. Address the “power of language” as it relates to hate speech and racial slurs.

Day Twelve: Discuss the murder of Medgar Evers and provide handout on chronology. I will also provide handouts on the short story “Where is the Voice Coming From?” and selected poems. Research projects are due and presentations will begin today.

Homework: Complete vocabulary workbook pages Unit 5.

Day Thirteen: Check vocabulary workbook pages Unit 5. Finish oral presentations of research projects.

Day Fourteen: We will listen to an audio of Eudora Welty reading her story, first making clear that Welty is purposefully using the narrator as the voice of the killer.

Homework: Why would Welty choose to tell the story from this perspective?
Study for vocabulary quiz on Unit 5.

Day Fifteen: Take vocabulary quiz on Unit 5. Begin discussion on the “voices” in the story and why Welty chose the title. Discuss the actual media coverage of the murder and trial of Beckwith (using notes from Minrose Gwin). Have students underline the references to television and newspaper media in the story and then discuss them.

Day Sixteen: Read and discuss poetry. Assign an in-class free-writing exercise on whether or not this type of “man’s inhumanity to man” still exists and why. Turn this assignment in by the end of class.

Day Seventeen: Read some of the free-writes aloud (with students’ permission). Conclude unit with excerpts from A &E video *The New Face of Terrorism* (1996) and encourage students to provide other current examples of oppression throughout the world.

Homework: Complete vocabulary workbook pages unit 6.

Day Eighteen: Check vocabulary workbook pages – unit 6. Discuss comparative paper. Students will be required to write a compare/contrast paper using 2 of the 3 major works – *Black Boy*, *Night*, or “Where is the Voice Coming From?”.