

## **Developing Multicultural and Self Awareness through American Drama**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching reading improvement to high school students can be an exhilarating challenge. My students typically do not enjoy reading because they do not read well. Since they do not read well, they do not read at all, which makes them fall further and further behind as they go through school. Poor readers lack the vocabulary and comprehension skills necessary for academic success. They thus tend to be academically insecure and easily intimidated by any type of lengthy text. My challenge is to teach my students how to overcome these difficulties. I am required to teach the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) reading objectives; however, my primary goal is to foster a love of reading and to create life long readers. I do this by selecting pieces that the students will find enjoyable, valuable, and hopefully enlightening.

All of my students for one reason or another are considered “at risk.” Some are from single parent homes; some have lost one or both parents to death; some live in foster or group homes because their parents have abused them; some have been through the juvenile criminal justice system; some have come from alternative schools where the “bad kids” go. These at risk kids tend to enjoy reading about real life situations. They are in the progress of discovering themselves and look for something to hold on to wherever they can find it. They have many emotional needs yet they all want to do well and succeed in life. I spend a great deal of my planning time trying to figure out which texts will spark their interests and make them want to read. That means the readability of the material needs to match my students’ ability, the interest level needs to be enticing, and the context in which the piece is taught needs to stimulate and maintain their interest.

My students are predominantly African-American. Their experiences, like most teenagers, are limited to their own culture and they are not likely to explore others on their own. They are too busy just trying to grow up. The goal of my curriculum unit is (a) to provide them with multicultural experiences from which they can learn and develop a greater sense of understanding and sensitivity for cultures other than their own and (b) provide them with a framework to consider how they are defined, whether they are self defined, socially and culturally, or a product of many forces. Understanding others will help them understand themselves. They will be able to see that even though appearances, customs, beliefs, celebrations and food might be different, underneath we all have needs, feelings, desires and dreams. I have asked individual students before, “Who defines you? Are you living your life according to some social stereotype or do you define yourself?” In creating this unit I have come to realize that the answer to this question is far more involved and complicated than any simple answer can provide. Before I begin this unit I will post the question, “Who defines you?” on the wall so that my students can always be

considering that question as we go through the unit. I believe a better understanding of self as well as others will make them more prepared to go out into our multicultural world and interact with others in a more productive way. I want to give them a frame of reference from which they can draw upon throughout their lives.

While the focal point in this unit is multi-cultural American drama, each piece of drama is couched in literature which serves as frame of reference for the drama. Before reading *Beautiful Senoritas* by Dolores Prida, students will read *Sisters* by Gary Paulson, excerpts from *Walking Stars* by Victor Villasenor and *Prayer to the Goddesses* by Virginia Ayllon Soria. Before reading *Two Trains Running* by August Wilson, students will read *Malcolm X By Any Means Necessary*, a biography by Walter Dean Myers, followed by excerpts from *Makes Me Want to Holler* by Nathan McCall. Before reading *Paper Angels* by Genny Lim, students will read *Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep and *Island Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* by Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung.

As the students read through the various pieces, they will encounter stereotyping, the issue of double-identity, social injustice and the strength of the human spirit to fight that injustice; also, they will see strong positive images of Chinese-Americans, Latinos and African-Americans. Through the thought-provoking exercises associated with each of the readings, students will have the opportunity to explore their own thoughts and feelings concerning these events and issues. They will ultimately come to explore and examine how their own culture defines them and ultimately have a better understanding of themselves as well as those around them.

## **PART I**

This part of the unit deals with the stereotyping of Latino females. This includes women's definition of self in terms of men: to be physically appealing, a good mother, take care of the man, take care of the family, live for the family. This will lead to many discussions regarding stereotyping where students can consider how they feel stereotyped by others as well as how they stereotype others.

*Sisters* is a short story about two teenage girls who, on the surface, have nothing in common; but, on closer examination their identities are strikingly similar. One girl is an illegal alien from Mexico who makes her living as a prostitute. She has known only extreme poverty and is illiterate. In spite of all her hardship she still dreams of becoming a model like she sees in fashion magazines. Unfortunately, she is dependent on her body and appearance to get by in the world. Her counterpart appears to be totally different. She is Anglo and appears to have everything going for her in that her family seems to be wealthy; she is in high school and trying out for the cheerleader team. She spends hours each day working on her appearance so she can be with the right crowd and ultimately marry a rich husband. She too is dependent on her body and appearance to get by in the world. Both girls define themselves in terms of their bodies.

Through the course of the story the two girls meet for only a split second in a clothing store. One girl is hiding from the police while the other is shopping. When the Mexican girl meets the American girl, the American girl says, “we are the same” but she is not heard (Paulsen 66). The Mexican girl does not speak for she does not know English.

Before my students read I will give them a superficial description of Traci and Rosa so they can come up with their own list of what they think the girls’ lives are like. This will enable them to explore their own stereotypical ideas and bring those ideas into focus. Reading this story will help my students to see how even though two people can come from totally different situations, they can actually be dealing with similar issues. The Mexican girl and the American girl are not only from different countries but they are from different social classes. I will have my students see the similarities between Traci and Rosa by having them list the behaviors of each of the characters on a page by page basis. We will compile the list together so that when we are finished, we can go through it and see all that they do that is the same. We can also do the same thing with the girls’ thoughts and words. We can then compare their original list with what actually occurred in the story. This activity will accomplish many goals. It will enable my students to see how our stereotypes hinder us from seeing people as they really are as well as see how society’s stereotypes of them might affect their own behavior, thoughts and ideas; it will also help them with the TAAS objectives such as finding the main idea, inferring and generalizing.

*Walking Stars* is a “Story of Magic and Power” in which Victor Villasenor relates stories of his family. “Women’s Greatest Power,” the excerpt I plan on using from *Walking Stars*, is about an Indian woman giving birth with the help of a midwife and the people who are present during the event. One of those people was Lupe, Villasenor’s mother when she was a child. The male counterparts in the story have chosen to find some other place to be during the birthing. All of the people present are touched by the experience. In this story the Indian woman is defined by her ability to give birth and the strength of body and spirit that goes with this process.

To teach this story I will have my students write tributes to their mothers, which I would then mail to them. Unfortunately, too many of my students do not have a mother so they could choose to write the tribute without sending it or write a tribute to some other significant female in their lives. As a class we will discuss our own experience with childbirth. I do not expect many of them to have had a personal experience dealing with childbirth so perhaps we could watch a video on the topic and then discuss their responses. From there we could go on line and discover how different cultures regard women in relation to childbirth. The students can then report their findings to the class.

Finally, the students can look at how Lupe responds to childbirth, how they themselves feel about the process and how other cultures view childbirth and then

compare their data. They will be able to compare perceptions, methods and ultimately achieve a greater sensitivity to other cultures and themselves in regard to childbirth.

*Prayer to the Goddesses* is a short story in which the protagonist, a mother and wife, attempts to cope with poverty and an abusive husband. She has exhausted all prayers to the Christian God and resorts to praying to all of the Indian goddesses who have come before. Most of these are forgotten goddesses. Although she has suffered terribly, she has “not lost all hope” (Soria, 5). She goes on to say in her prayers “you know that we women... don’t abandon our dreams even when everything conspires to crush us” (Soria, 6). This story deals with the power of Hispanic women in the face of adversity. From this the students can research powerful women of their own culture who have overcome great obstacles. This might be a family member who has overcome a disease or drug addiction. I know of one student who once, as a child, spent time in a Mexican jail because she was caught with her sister and mother trying to cross the border. She is from Nicaragua. She is now a high school graduate with real plans for college.

*Beautiful Senioritas* will be the main focus for this part of the unit. All the other works before now serve as a preparation for reading this play. It is a coming of age story in which the young girl is trying to find her place in the world and finds her choices limited to the stereotypes presented by the older women. These stereotypes are created by men and do not leave women much opportunity to live for themselves. These older women are all beauty queens from different parts of the Latin community. They tell the young girl how she needs to look, act and talk a certain way in order to get a man. Of course the presumption is that every woman would be incomplete if she did not have a man. They then tell the girl how she will need to live for her family. She is ultimately left with no identity as an autonomous person.

This play will help my students to see a context in which some Latino women live. By understanding this context my students will hopefully have more empathy for Latino women when they deal with them in life, whether it be as friends/neighbors or at work or perhaps just waiting in line at the grocery store. According to Carpenter when students see themselves in text they feel their culture and background affirmed and validated (Carpenter, 2). They “learn respect for other cultures” and are “provided with social confidence” (Carpenter, 3). To make sure I was on the right track in selecting this play I had a couple of my students read it so they could tell me what they thought. Neither one of them finished it because of time constraints; however, they both liked what they read.

In teaching this play, I will have my students create a set for a beauty contest and then have them act it out with as much outlandish make-up as they care to use. This will reflect the idea in the play that a person can never really know the true person underneath the mask of make-up or the male created stereotype in which the Latino women are expected to live. The parts will have to be shared so that all the students get the opportunity to participate. I believe even the male students should participate as beauty contestants so they will really be able to get a feel for what the play is about. This will

ensure fun along with learning, which, as everyone knows, makes learning more personal and real.

## **PART II**

This part of the unit deals primarily with African American males. Often, in popular literature, such as *The Color Purple* and *Waiting to Exhale*, African American males take a backseat to African American females. I would like for my students to read selections that have strong positive male characters.

I will begin the second part of my curriculum by having my students read *Malcolm X By Any Means Necessary*, a biography by Walter Dean Myers. I have selected this version because Myers is young-reader friendly. The vocabulary is not too difficult and the sentences are not too long. I have selected Malcolm X because *Two Trains Running* is set soon after the assassination of Malcolm X and he is mentioned and alluded to in the play several times; also, the play has predominantly male characters and Malcolm X, as a real historical male figure, can provide a genuine context from which my students can view and understand the fictional characters in the play. Malcolm X is also an African American hero and was a great leader in our country. Most of my students know who Malcolm X is and perhaps a quarter of them know about his life in some detail but the other three quarters are unaware of his full story. According to Shannon, “from Spike Lee’s 1992 film Malcolm X. Sweatshirts, caps, and a variety of paraphernalia bearing the familiar ‘X’ have become virtually a uniform for many of the same black youth who appreciate little and know even less about their past” (Shannon, 167). Together my students and I will explore how Malcolm X became the great leader that he was. Perhaps the students who are African American males will be able to identify with some of the various life situations depicted while the others will have a better understanding of what it means to be an African American male in America. *Malcolm X By Any Means Necessary* will also serve as a good foundation for *Two Trains Running*. One picks up where the other leaves off. According to Shannon, “*Two Trains Running* is set in 1969...and blacks are still reacting to the 1965 slaying of Malcolm X” (Shannon, 168).

I will begin *Malcolm X* by running four different videos of Malcolm X speaking at the same time. This is a powerful attention getter. The students will walk around in groups and write down what they hear and see; afterward, we will discuss what they have learned and how Malcolm X came to say what he did. We will discuss how he arrived at the point which he did. I will discuss context with my students and how no one grows up in a vacuum. This will lead the students to talking about what they know about Malcolm X to generate a list of knowledge. They can keep this list so that when we are finished with the novel we can go back to our list and compare. While reading *Malcolm X By Any Means Necessary* the students will make notes about important points in the story. This will keep them reading closely and help them get through any vocabulary that gives them problems. I will have my students write thought-provoking questions that cannot necessarily be answered from the pages of the book. An example of this might be: how

different might Malcolm X's life have been had his father not been killed? These questions can then be used for discussion. The students will also use their notes to see if there are any misconceptions they might have held as truth, which can lead to a discussion about misconceptions and how they cloud our thinking. We can also discuss how reading can lead to truth and dispel erroneous beliefs. The students will also write one to two pages about what they think Malcolm X would say to America if he were alive today. The students can share their thoughts with the class, which might evoke more discussion.

The selection of *Two Trains Running* is the result of a recommendation made by one of my students. I always strive to listen to my students especially when they talk to me about books. This play has six male characters and one female character. It is set in a diner, which is scheduled to be demolished to make way for changes. The city wants to buy the building but Memphis, the owner and proprietor of the diner, does not want to sell his building for anything less than what he thinks it is worth. Risa is the young woman who works in the diner who becomes the love interest for Sterling, a young man who has recently left the penitentiary. Risa has purposely scarred her legs with a razor. When August Wilson was questioned about this he responded "for me the scarring of her legs was an attempt to define herself in her own terms rather than being defined by men" (Shannon, 176). Wolf is the local numbers person. He takes bets for a living. Holloway is a patron of the diner. Hambone is a simpleton who has one line, which he repeats throughout the play: "I want my ham. He gonna give me my ham" (Wilson, 14). As the story progresses Sterling gets, according to Memphis, closer and closer to going back to jail. He also gets closer and closer to Risa who enjoys his attention to a point but is not ready to run off with Sterling and leave what she has. Memphis goes back and forth between the city and the character West, both of whom want to buy his building. West runs the local funeral home and, according to all the other characters, cares only for the "almighty dollar." In the end Memphis gets more than he originally wanted for his building; Hambone dies, but Sterling gets his ham for him and Sterling wins a lot of money playing the numbers.

*Two Trains Running* is important for my students to read because it deals with several African American issues or themes. It is historical in that it is set at the end of the 1960s. The theme picks up the struggle where Martin Luther King and Malcolm X left off. This is apparent when Memphis says, "You got to go back and pick up the ball" (Wilson, 109). In other words, the deaths of these two great leaders left no one to carry the banner for economic/social equality and justice. Wilson explains by saying "the point of the play is that by 1969 nothing has changed for the black man. People talk about King and Malcolm, but by 1968, as it says in the play, both are dead" (Shannon, 169). At the end of the play when Sterling breaks into the butcher's shop to get Hambone's ham for his coffin, Sterling is also picking up the ball (Shannon, 166). Malcolm X and Martin Luther King left black Americans at odds with each other. According to Wilson's play, when both leaders were killed blacks were left with a void in their struggle to achieve economic, social and political equality. Wilson is saying: Keep working toward a goal of

equality- the game is not yet over. This message presented to my students will perhaps help them to understand their parents a little better as well as themselves. Perhaps they will be inspired to work harder on their education so they can continue to help in this endeavor.

Sterling's character represents another African American. A bright young man is repeatedly knocked down and denied participation by the very society in which he is trying to find his place. In spite of all this Sterling continues to have a good attitude: "He still has the warrior spirit needed to challenge the white power structure, no matter what it does to wrong him" (Shannon, 181). Sterling also wants to marry Risa but lacks the economic means to follow through with his plans. Again, white society has denied him the means to achieve this end. Since economic solvency is so closely tied with manhood, Sterling's manhood has been denied him by white society. This is a good place to stop and ask my students how Sterling is defined. How much does his age, his culture, white society, internal/external expectations and other influences impact his sense of self? Sterling is resilient; this can be seen when he is speaking to Risa in Act 2, scene 4 when he asks, "Now why can't I get what I want?" Risa responds, "That's what the problem is," to which Sterling says, "I know that's a problem. I'm trying to solve it" (Wilson, 100).

Hambone raises another issue. He does not say much but his message is loud and clear. He has painted a fence for which he was promised a ham but instead he receives a chicken. For the past nine years he has been demanding that Lutz, the fence owner, give him his ham. African Americans have been asking and demanding true equality from white society and still have yet to receive it. Hambone dies before ever receiving his ham but the warrior Sterling manages to take it from the stingy Lutz. According to Shannon, Sterling's action is reflective of the Black Power movement: "That Sterling does not just talk but acts...makes him kindred to a long line of young black men willing to bleed . . . for the cause" (Shannon, 182).

I will teach this to my students by first getting them to create a set. We will all go to the library to look both in the stacks as well as on the Internet for pictures of diners and of Pittsburgh. While they are there they can look for other visual representations of urban black areas in the late 1960s. They can go back to the classroom and recreate Memphis Lee's diner and perhaps even have visual representations for West's Funeral Home and Lutz's Meat Market. The students can take turns reading the different parts where girls read the parts of the men and perhaps I can get a boy to read the part of Risa. Since my whole class is not African American males this will give the other students an opportunity to try on a different pair of shoes. I believe the reading and analyzing of this play could be a great learning experience for my students.

After my students read *Two Trains Running* I would like for them to read parts of Nathan McCall's autobiography *Makes Me Want To Holler*. It picks up in time where *Two Trains Running* leaves off. I have selected Chapters two through four as well as

chapter 44 (the last chapter). Chapters two through four deal with growing up in the late '60s and '70s. McCall relates painful memories of going to a predominantly Caucasian school and then transferring back to a predominantly Black school. He also talks about how the media made him feel less than his white counterparts. Chapter 44, called "Choices," places McCall back in his old neighborhood looking at the whole scene from a different perspective. I have personally gained a lot of insight from reading this book and I believe my students could too. McCall reveals his thoughts and feelings so that the reader can understand his motives, frustrations and desires. His first up close and personal encounter with white people is at the all-white school where he is beaten up for being black. When he and his friends encounter a white boy riding a bicycle through his neighborhood they beat him up because he is white. The telling of these two events along with the thoughts and feelings accompanying them provide the reader with a dimension of understanding which in turn makes the pieces enlightening.

I would like to help my students connect with this piece by having them interview either their fathers or some other significant male figure in their lives focusing specifically on that time in their lives when they were teenagers. The students can then share their interviews on a voluntary basis. My goal in this exercise will be to help the students connect with their reading, create a meaningful experience between generations, have my students write with a purpose, and develop questioning skills. They will also hopefully develop a greater sense of self as well as a greater appreciation for those who have come before them.

### **PART III**

Part three focuses on Chinese American literature. Chinese Americans have a relatively long history in this country. According to Laurence Yep, Southern Chinese first came here in the 1850s because of troubles at home (Johnson-Feelings, 102). Because of this long history, Chinese Americans have grown up here who do not know how to speak Chinese, don't know Chinese culture and are unaware of their history here in the United States. Addressing this problem Yep writes: "I found that the Chinese-Americans had been a faceless crowd for most writers, providing statistical fodder for historians or abstractions for sociologists" (Johnson-Feelings, 103). This part of the unit will acquaint my students with the historical background of their friends and neighbors who are Chinese-Americans and help them to see the double identity issues associated with being Chinese-American.

*Dragonwings* is an historical novel set in San Francisco in 1903-1910. It is based on a true story of a Chinese-American aviator. In researching the history of Chinese-Americans, Yep discovered that "Fung Joe Guey flew a biplane of his own construction in Oakland in 1909" (Johnson-Feelings, 103). Unfortunately, Yep could find little information on Fung Joe Guey so, Yep writes, "I used his flight as the basis for my novel, *Dragonwings*" (Johnson-Feelings, 103). The main character is Moon Shadow who leaves China to come to America to be with his father. Moon Shadow has never known



his father. The story unfolds with Moon Shadow learning about life in America, about his father, Windrider, and about the demons. Demons are what newly arrived Chinese people of the 1900s call white Americans. In this context demons are not necessarily bad; some of them prove to be quite good but then they are called good demons. Windrider has a dream that in a past life he was a mighty dragon; his dream validates his yearning to fly. Slowly over time Windrider realizes his dream and actually does fly his creation. Near the end of the story, Moon Shadow and Windrider are caught up in the great San Francisco earthquake and the fire that ensued. This event is pre-existing in *Paper Angels*.

Reading *Dragonwings* can help dispel some of the stereotypes associated with Chinese-Americans. According to Johnson-Feeling, this was one of Yep's goals in writing the book (Johnson-Feelings, 41). As a third generation Chinese-American, Yep had a difficult time finding models for his characters. On this difficulty Yep writes: "If I wished to see features on my face, I had to put on different masks that I found scattered about in Hollywood prop rooms" (Johnson-Feelings, 103).

After reading *Dragonwings*, my students can research Chinese immigration in the early 1900s. They can go to the library one day and the computer lab the next. In groups they can focus on different aspects of Chinese immigration, which might include, but are not limited to, art, statistics, events occurring in China at that time, contributions made by Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, laws affecting Chinese immigrants and everyday life of Chinese immigrants. I would also like to give students the opportunity to listen to traditional Chinese music and view videotape on Chinese immigrants in America. Perhaps the groups could report their findings with the traditional Chinese music playing in the background to provide a wider variety of stimuli. If I can find someone in the community to come speak to my students about Chinese immigration or Chinese culture in general I believe it would go a long way to helping my students connect with not only *Dragonwings* but *Paper Angels* as well.

The benefits of these readings and activities will be all inclusive. Primarily, the readings will provide background for the play *Paper Angels*. Also, the students will improve their vocabulary, write for a purpose, develop research skills, develop critical thinking skills, develop presentation skills and develop sensitivity to Chinese Americans. This newly developed sensitivity will replace some of the stereotypes some of my students may believe. Those students of Chinese descent will see themselves and develop a greater sense of self-appreciation. All of my students will learn a little bit of American history that may not be included in their history class.

*Island Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants, 1910-1940* gives personal accounts of the voyage from China to the United States, detainment on Angel Island and Chinese immigrants' perspective of westerners. The poetry presented depicts the tremendous grief and humiliation associated with being an Angel Island detainee. Students will read two or three accounts of the voyage and detainment as well as three or four poems from

both sections. These readings will give students a genuine perspective on what it was like for Chinese immigrants from the early 1900s. These readings will also lead to discussions on why people will attempt to overcome such great obstacles to come to the United States. Students can consider how their ancestors came to the United States and reflect on what their lives might be like if their ancestors had not come here. This will give them yet another perspective from which to examine their own sense of self.

This section will focus on the play *Paper Angels*. It is set in the Angel Island Immigration Detention Center, San Francisco Harbor, 1915. I have chosen these plays because even though *Dragonwings* and *Paper Angels* are both fiction, *Paper Angels* seems more real in that it provides a dialogue associated with the issue of double consciousness. They both evolve around the same time period but one occurs after arrival, while the other involves the process of actual entrance into the United States. In 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted which “kept out the common laborer while permitting the entry of merchants, students, and tourists only” (Uno, 14). In 1906, in San Francisco there was a great earthquake, which in turn burned up a great portion of San Francisco including birth/death records. Many Chinese entered the United States claiming to be citizens by birth or children of citizens (Uno, 14). The characters of *Paper Angels* must prove to immigration officials that they are either citizens of the U.S. or worthy of admission according to the Chinese Exclusion Act. To this end they often use cheat sheets or coaching notes to explain their past to the immigration inquisitors. They must pretend to be somebody they are not. The term “paper sons” (Uno, 14) was used by the Chinese to describe people who were sons of American born Chinese on paper only. Paper is easily destroyed or discarded.

There are seven main characters, four of whom are married couples. Males and females are kept separate whether they are married or not. Chin Gung, a main character in the play, has lived in the United States for the past forty years and only recently has gone back to retrieve his wife Chin Moo. Chin Gung loves the U.S. and considers himself a citizen, yet he is also proud of being Chinese. He struggles with a double identity that is neither wholly Chinese nor wholly American. In the early part of the play Chin Gung is speaking to Lee and Fong. He says, “How dare you call yourself Chinese...Where were you during the Boxer Rebellion? ...We are all Chinese. You help me. I help you” (Lim, 36). Later Chin Gung says “I’m in love with this land. I want to die in America” (Lim, 40). Chin Gung becomes involved in a scuffle with the guard when he attempts to help a fellow detainee who is almost caught with coaching notes, which is grounds for automatic expulsion back to China. Eventually Chin Gung is denied entry into the United States; even though he had previously passed his physical the authorities have now found the parasite liver fluke in his system. This is too much for him to deal with and he hangs himself. Lee also struggles with double identity in that “he very much wants to be western” (Lim, 18). Lee is a “paper son.” His paper identity is that of a merchant’s son, while his real identity is that of a scholar. He is frustrated by having to demean himself in the immigration detention center. This is illustrated when he says “Damn you, damn your country [talking about the U.S.]... I’m ashamed to lift my

head. I'm ashamed to be Chinese" (Lim, 36). Lee seems to be walking a line between two places, neither of which makes him comfortable. This issue is one that is prevalent even today. I have a student from Vietnam; she has been in this country for five years now. When I asked her what it was like to go back to Vietnam she said it was difficult because her old friends and relatives saw her differently and she felt different. For this student and students like her the character of Lee may be one they can identify with.

There are three main female characters. Chin Moo is the wife of Chin Gung. She is an older woman with no children and upon her husband's death she has no ties to the U.S. She has been a dutiful wife in that she waited for her husband for 40 years and of course when he re-appears she goes with him to San Francisco. For 40 years she does not start anything new in her life. She ceases to be a person as a wife with an absent husband. Mei Lai is also a devoted, proper wife. She tells her husband Lee, "As a daughter, I have never questioned the wisdom of my father; as a wife, I am prepared to follow my husband; and as a mother, I will abide by my sons wishes" (Lim, 37). Both of these women represent what Chinese women are supposed to be. Neither would second-guess their role in society as being less than their male counterparts. This idea is illustrated by Chin Moo's statement "You know a good son is the backbone of a family. More precious than jade. But a daughter is an empty rice sack. She exhausts the family reserves" (Lim, 13).

The lives of these characters will show my students what it was like to be a woman in Chinese culture. From a western cultural perspective these women seem to have no free will. They seem to be like leaves blowing in the wind where males operate with the force of the wind. They are defined by the stereotype set up by men.

In the end, all the characters are "paper angels." They believe they are coming to the land of milk and honey. They do not know how hard life will be for them in the U.S. The prejudice and disregard they encounter at the detention center is merely a glimpse of what is to come.

Before my students begin reading *Paper Angels* they will each make their own paper angel. We will hang these up around the room to help the students have a constant reminder of how fragile the characters in the play are. After they read, each student can make up a story to go with their angel. The angel would be an immigrant coming to the United States from a country of the students' choosing. As a class we can brainstorm what kind of person their angel represents, what their circumstances are, what their dreams are, where have they been and where are they going, what kind of hardships their angels might come across and how will they deal with these problems. Before reading we can also create a detention center in the room along with a "preferred" section of the room. Students can trade off sitting in the "detention" area so they can develop an understanding of what it might be like to be detained for superficial reasons. Each student can write a poem on the wall of the "center" to either represent themselves or their paper angel. All of these activities will bring the students closer to having a real purpose for

reading which will in turn help them to read more carefully and increase their comprehension.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson Plan Number One**

This lesson will apply to *Sisters*. Students will work in groups as well as a whole class.

#### ***Pre-Reading:***

*Objective:* The student will develop a reason for reading, write with a purpose, and share written work with other class members.

*Materials needed:* pictures of young people of various ethnicities, paper, pen/pencil

*Lesson:* In groups of two students will be given a picture and instructed to write a four page biography of the person in the picture. Before writing class will brainstorm what biographies should include. This means a description of the person's family members, person's first time for \_\_\_\_\_, a major life event, regrets, school events, and dreams and goals for the future. When each group is finished we will share biographies and then post them for others to read and enjoy.

#### ***During Reading:***

*Objective:* The student will practice questioning and summarization skills.

*Materials needed:* copy of *Sisters*, paper, pen/pencil

*Lesson:* Class will read the selection stopping after every page to write one "why..." question and the main idea of the page. After each chapter, students will review main idea statements to develop and a summary for the whole chapter. When we have finished reading the whole story we will look at our chapter summaries to determine a summary for the whole book.

#### ***After Reading:***

*Objective:* The student will use critical thinking skills to determine similarities and differences between two seemingly unrelated situations.

*Material needed:* copy of *Sisters*, summarizations and questions from during reading activity, paper, pen/pencil, chalk board

*Lesson:* Class will use notes from the story as well as the story itself to compile a list of attributes for each character in the story. The lists will be compared to determine similarities between characters. After similarities have been noted students will be asked to make conclusive statements based on the information gathered as a class.

## **Lesson Plan Number Two**

This lesson applies to *Beautiful Senioritas*. It will be multi-sensory and fun. It is designed to help students see life from another person's shoes. It will also get the students out of their seats and moving about.

### ***Pre-Reading :***

*Objective:* The student will develop a reason for reading, use the Internet for research and use research in a meaningful way.

*Materials needed:* computers with Internet access, video of beauty contest, TV/VCR, set material for a beauty contest (flowers, banners, background/backdrop etc.)

*Lesson:* Class will first view 20 to 30 minutes of a beauty contest to insure everyone has a background from which to do their research. Class will then go to computer lab to research set design for a beauty contest. Two students can be on one computer so they can discuss their findings as they proceed. Once students have compiled a list we will return to class to discuss our findings and determine who can bring what or what materials we need to acquire to create a modified set for a beauty contest. The next class period or two students can put together their sets in preparation for the reading of the play. Also, make-up will have to be acquired.

### ***During Reading:***

*Objective:* The student will practice comprehension skill of re-reading.

*Materials needed:* copy of *Beautiful Senioritas*, paper, pen/pencil

*Lesson:* Class will read play in its entirety and take notes as we read on important points. Then, in groups of three or four, students will select a section of the play to act out for the class. Male students will be encouraged to act out the parts of females. Students will use as much make up as they wish to create a mask-like effect.

### ***After Reading:***

*Objective:* The student will draw conclusions and make judgments based on multiple readings, watching others act out part of a play, and performing part of a play.

*Materials Needed:* copy of *Beautiful Senioritas*, paper, pen/pencil

*Lesson:* Students will be asked to write a one page essay on (1) how the play made them feel, (2) how it felt to put on make-up and pretend to be someone other than themselves, (3) how it felt to watch others in a similar situation, (4) how do they think the main character in the play felt and (5) why do they have the feelings

they do. Before students are asked to write their essay we will compile a list on the board of words to describe different feelings. This can serve to assist with vocabulary and provide the students with a list if they are at a loss for words.

### **Lesson Plan Number Three:**

This lesson will ask students to address the question “Who defines you?” or “How are you defined?”

*Objective:* The student will use critical thinking skills to synthesize and evaluate information to reach conclusions.

*Materials needed:* all of the work compiled from the unit, blackboard, chalk, paper, pen/pencil, poster board, markers/colored pencils

*Lesson:* Class will briefly re-examine the various characters from the various works we have experienced throughout the unit. We will consider how we define the various characters. What measuring stick do we use? We will look at internal vs. external forces. External forces would be society, culture, economics, geography while internal forces would be biology, age, gender, dreams, hopes, perspective. The students will compile a list of the ways in which they express themselves including food, music, how they like to spend their time, what is valuable to them. From all of this students will be asked to create a poster, poem, short story, song, videotape or letter to express who defines them and or how they are defined.

*Assessment:* A rubric will be used to assess the students’ work. Attention will be paid to how much thought and consideration went into their final work. Their work will have to show where they reflected back on all that we have covered and considered all the various aspects of identity that we have discussed.

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- Myers, Walter Dean. *Malcolm X By Any Means Necessary*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 1993.

Paulsen, Gary. *Sisters*. Prince Frederick, MD: Recorded Books, 1993.

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This book reveals the power of the family when there is plenty of love to go around.

Wilson, August. *Two Trains Running*. New York, NY: Plume, 1993.

The characters in this play illustrate the need to continue to fight for equality in all aspects of life.

Yep, Laurence. *Dragonwings*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 1975.

This text is based on historical fact.