

The Struggle to Get a Slice of the American Pie – A Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature

Carla Bray
Sharpstown Middle School

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a story to tell about his or her life and identity here in America. Every ethnic group has history to share that reveals its own unique struggles to possess the freedom and equality that is the fabric of this country's existence. But most of the 6th grade students that I teach at Sharpstown Middle School do not know how to read their lives in a way that reveals this story. In many cases, my students do not have the basic understanding of the history that is necessary for them to realize that every ethnic group has had many obstacles and faced a fair amount of discrimination in pursuit of the illustrious "American dream."

In the brief four years that I have served as a classroom teacher at Sharpstown Middle School, I find that the stories and the texts that are most interesting to my students are those that contain characters that they can identify with on many levels. The demographics of the students at Sharpstown are approximately 70 percent Hispanic, 25 percent African-American, and 5 percent other (mostly students of Asian or Middle-Eastern descent). My students enjoy reading literature that is representative and true to their own experiences as Hispanic, Middle-Eastern, Asian, and African-American youth. I created this unit to provide students with a connection between understanding multi-ethnic literature and understanding the history involved in possessing "freedom and justice for all" in our country. Students will consider how different experiences of various ethnic groups have shaped ethnic identity in America.

OBJECTIVES

TEKS English Language Arts – Grade 6

The TEKS objectives that I intend to focus on in this unit of study include ELA.6.2.26, ELA.6.3.01, ELA.6.3.10, ELA.6.3.17, ELA.6.3.18, and ELA.6.3.03. In this unit, students will engage in learning that will enhance their listening and speaking skills, writing abilities, reading fluency, comprehension, and literary response. While reading, students will understand the major ideas and detailed evidence in spoken messages. They will also have opportunities to take notes, organize, and summarize spoken messages as they listen to and read literature. Students will use critical thinking skills to interpret the author's purpose and message while connecting their own experiences, insights, and ideas with the texts. The literature that is featured in this unit will be challenging but manageable for the students.

After each text read, students will also answer different types of questions in response to the literature written within this unit, including answering open-ended and short-answer prompts, and literal, interpretative, and test-like multiple choice questions. They will offer observations, make connections, react, speculate, interpret, and raise questions about the characters, conflict, and the social issues being presented in the literary works.

As they read, students will also interpret text ideas through journal writing, discussion, enactment, and media. They will be expected to use voice and style appropriate to the audience and purpose in mind. Students will support any response that they make by using textual evidence and their own personal experiences that are related to the issues in question. Finally, students will

figure out the distinctive and common characteristics of cultural experiences in America through a wide selection of reading. Students will be able to articulate and discuss some common themes and connections that are presented in this study of the minority struggle for freedom and equality.

RATIONALE

I want my students to understand that the privileges and freedoms upon which this country was founded have not been automatically extended to people of color in this country. Our ancestors have been forced to fight and some have even had to lay down their lives to enable us to benefit from the basic rights that many minorities take for granted today. And the struggle still continues.

I will strive to help my students come to this realization through discussion, reading articles, viewing segments of relevant movies/videos, and by presenting background information in preparation for moving them into reading novels in book clubs. I will focus on one key struggle for liberty, justice, and equality in America for each ethnic group covered in this unit. I expect my students to notice the commonalities and the differences which exist among the ethnic groups as expressed in the literature of this unit. I will teach the students that differences are to be respected and even celebrated rather than ridiculed or feared. My students will come to the realization that each ethnic group that is portrayed in this unit had to overcome many obstacles and a fair share of discrimination in pursuit of the American dream.

The majority of students will find it fairly easy to connect to the values, frustrations, joys, family and neighborhood dynamics, and the conflicts articulated in this collection of literature. When they relate to a certain text, their interest and their motivation to read will skyrocket. Consequently, they will have an opportunity to grow as learners and as readers. Furthermore, focusing on multi-cultural literature that explores the American struggle for equality through multiple lenses will provide an even stronger message to the students. The message that “I matter” and my frustrations, joys, pains, and life experiences are all worth reading and even writing about will be communicated to the student each time he or she picks up a text written by a minority. Students can then apply what they learn in this unit towards what they see and experience in their own school and neighborhoods. They may come to realize that they can make choices that honor the sacrifices of minorities in the past, which empowers them and generations to come.

UNIT BACKGROUND

During this eight week unit of study, I will expose my students to the experiences of four major ethnic groups represented at Sharpstown Middle School. As the students read, discuss, and complete activities related to these literary studies, the students will develop their own interpretation and ideas about what it means to be an American. The excerpts that I will use in this unit include chapters from *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, *Esperanza Rising*, *Warriors Don't Cry*, *Farewell to Manzanar*, and “By Any Other Name” from the anthology *Multitude: Cross-Cultural Readings for Writers*.

During this two-month unit of study, I plan to read excerpts with my students from various books and articles which portray the Asian, Indian-American (Americans with ancestry tracing back to the country of India), and Mexican-American struggle for acceptance and equality in this country. I will explicitly teach them how to pay attention to various literary devices, hidden meanings, and implications about identity in all of the texts. I will introduce my students to this unit of study by providing them with a brief overview of each selection featured in this unit, some information about each author, and some background information about the historical context, themes, and issues within the text.

African-American Struggle for School Integration – Literary Commentary on *Warriors Don't Cry*

The first text that I will use to launch this unit of study will be a memoir entitled *Warriors Don't Cry* by Melba Patillo Beals. This novel will allow all of my students to examine the African-American struggle for equality and to consider the legacy of this struggle on African-American identity today.

Beals' memoir will help students to understand the African-Americans' struggle in this country to have equal access and representation on the campuses of schools nationwide. The excerpts from Beals' memoir illustrate how this struggle played out in Little Rock, Arkansas during the late 1950s. I chose this particular struggle because I believe that it will resonate with middle school students. It will force them to question and to evaluate the legacy of integration, particularly in relationship to their experience at Sharpstown Middle School. *Warriors Don't Cry* is a memoir that will also get students to examine what is "American" or perhaps even what is "un-American" about the Little Rock Nine event. Students will easily be able to relate to and understand the key and underlying themes presented in this memoir.

In her literary analysis of *Warriors Don't Cry*, Goldstein describes her impressions of the memoir:

Warriors Don't Cry is...an initiation story – a story of discovery, growth, and change. In an initiation story, a youngster goes through difficult trials to discover something new about himself or herself, people in general, or the world. But unlike most initiation stories, there is no closure to the one Melba Beals tells. At the end of the book, racism still exists. In fact, Little Rock is in many ways a more polarized community than it was before she and the other black students enrolled at Central High. Beals presents her story as one battle in a larger struggle against racism. (13)

Goldstein also addresses the overarching theme of the memoir, which the reader confronts during dialogue between Melba and her grandmother in the book. When Melba breaks down in tears because of all the hardships that she is facing at Central High, her grandmother tells her, "You'll make this your last cry. You're a warrior on the battlefield for your Lord. God's warriors don't cry, 'cause they trust that he's always by their side...we act with courage, and with God's help we ship trouble right on out." (13)

Other literary themes in Beals' memoir include racism, family, faith, obedience and conformity, strength, and friendship (Goldstein 13).

Indeed, my students and other readers of Beals' memoir will be struck by how Beals and the other eight African-American students chosen to desegregate Central High faced hatred, threats, and even physical retaliation from white students and adults of Little Rock, Arkansas. Yet, the memoir remains a testament to the courage and dignity of Beals and the other Little Rock Nine students. *Warriors Don't Cry* has earned many positive reviews since its publication in 1995. David Holmstrom of *The Christian Science Monitor* wrote that Beals' story is "a powerful, chilling account of what it was like to endure howling, redneck mobs, to be attacked physically and verbally, to be shot at, and to be continually hated and threatened" ("Growing Up with the Script of Racial Segregation").

Beals considers the lessons that she learned from the Little Rock experience in the afterword of *Warriors Don't Cry*:

I look back on my Little Rock experience as ultimately a positive force that shaped the course of my life. As Grandma India promised, it taught me to have courage and patience...If my Central High School experience taught me one lesson, it is that we are

not separate. The effort to separate ourselves whether by race, creed, color, religion, or status is as costly to the separator as to those who would be separated... (222)

During the introduction of this portion of the unit, my students will be presented some of this information as well as some background information to prepare them to read and understand Beals' memoir. The students will also view video segments from Episode 4 of the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary. Students will be asked to think of how they can "keep the dream alive" in public schools today.

All students need to be reminded of this painful and shameful chapter in American history. As students remember the Little Rock Nine, they can consider how they can honor the sacrifices of those who suffered to compel America to live up to its high ideals of freedom and equality.

African-American Struggle for School Integration – Historical Context on *Warriors Don't Cry*

In introducing Beals' memoir, it will be important for me to help my students understand the social climate and the historical context of the memoir. Even today's African-American students may be out of touch with what day-to-day life was like for African-Americans in 1957. Students must understand that Melba, the protagonist of *Warriors Don't Cry*, lived during a racially polarized and tumultuous time during American history. Historian Lerone Bennett, Jr. remarked that "America was two nations – one white, one black, separate, and unequal....segregation was a system, a way of separating people from people. That wall did not go up in a single day. It was built brick by brick, bill by bill, fear by fear" (Goldstein 9).

The 14th and 15th Amendments were added to the Constitution to protect the rights of newly freed slaves from 1866-1870. However, despite the Amendments, blacks were still treated as second-class citizens and subjected to separate restrooms, schools, trains, restaurants, churches, and schools (Anand 14). Whites continued to find ways to practice segregation and to justify such practices in spite of the Amendments created to reverse an unequal, discriminatory system. The 1896 case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruled that while all citizens had to be protected from unfair treatment, racial discrimination was not necessarily unfair and discriminatory as long as facilities provided for blacks were equal to those provided for whites (Goldstein 10). *Plessy vs. Ferguson* only enabled the spread of state and local "Jim Crow" laws that segregated practically every aspect of life for blacks and whites. While "Jim Crow" existed in varying degrees nationwide, "Jim Crow" was more rampant and more deeply entrenched in the South where Beals lived during the time of the memoir than in any other part of the nation.

However, NAACP lawyers fought to overturn segregation in America in higher education and in public schools. One groundbreaking victory for the NAACP came in the *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* case in 1954. The Brown case reversed *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and ruled that "separate but equal" was really unequal and unconstitutional (Anand 16-17). In 1957, Melba Patillo Beals became one of the nine African-American students selected by the NAACP to help integrate the all-white Central High School in Little Rock (Goldstein 8). On their first day at school at Central High, the nine students were stopped from entering the school building by Governor Orval Faubus. Faubus had the Arkansas National Guard lined up outside of the school building in an attempt to prevent the black students from even getting into the building. Eventually, President Dwight Eisenhower responded by calling in the 101st Airborne Division to ensure that the students finally entered the building on September 23, 1957 ("The Little Rock Nine").

From that day on, the Little Rock Nine were each appointed a US guardsman to help protect them the rest of the school year. Yet the protection of the guardsman still did not stop unspeakable acts of physical and verbal abuse at the hands of adults and white students lashing

out at the African-American students. Federal intervention did nothing to stop the backlash of whites determined to uphold segregation. In fact, at the end of the 1957-1958 school year, Governor Faubus closed all of Little Rock's high schools to halt continuing efforts to integrate. Beals and many other students were forced to leave the city in order to complete their education (Goldstein 9). It was not until the fall of 1959 that Little Rock was forced once more by federal intervention to reopen all of its schools in 1959 as a desegregated school system ("The Little Rock Nine").

The Experiences of Mexican-American Migrant Workers – Literary Commentary

In this section of the unit, attention will be given to the Mexican migrant workers' struggle for fair wages, decent housing, and humane treatment. This struggle for Mexican-Americans was the catalyst for the Chicano Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. This movement was parallel to the Civil Rights movement championed by African-Americans here on American soil. The literature that I will be studying with my students uses the migrant workers' struggle for fair treatment in the American fields as a backdrop for its fictional stories. I will read excerpts from *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* by Tomás Rivera and *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan.

Rivera's novel *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* is considered a novel that played an integral role in the shaping of the Mexican American community's identity in this country. It is also considered to be an important contribution to the Chicano movement at large. Rivera's novel is imbued with many of the characteristics that mark Chicano literature during the 1960s, which is described as being "...characterized by a questioning of all the commonly accepted truths in...society, foremost of which was the question of equality" (*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* Study Guide 11).

I will also try to lead my students to see Rivera's deliberate way of structuring the anecdotes in his novel in an untraditional manner. I want to see if my students can figure out Rivera's purpose in setting up his novel in such a unique way. The *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* Study Guide provides some insight about the structure of Rivera's novel:

Rather than having a traditional plot with a rising action, climax, and resolution, the novel presents the fragmented memories of a young boy...The structure of the novel seeks to mimic the way in which memory works and to present the feeling of disorientation – of feeling lost – experienced by many of the migrant workers as they struggle to make sense of a culture that is sometimes very different from their own. Together, the anecdotes and stories vividly depict a community's struggle against incredible odds (10).

Rivera purposely structured his novel in an unorthodox manner in order to communicate the ambivalence, confusion, and even the pain that some Mexican-Americans often feel as they try to adjust to their new lives in America. When asked to explain his inspiration for writing *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, Rivera said, "I saw a lot of suffering and much isolation of the people. Yet they lived through the whole thing, perhaps because they had no choice. I saw a lot of heroic people and I wanted to capture their feelings" ("Study Guide" 9).

In addition to reading excerpts from Rivera's novel, I will also have my students read excerpts from *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. In the novel, the Mexican-American workers make attempts to improve their harsh living and working conditions through staging strikes and protests. In the novel, some of the protestors are forced onto buses and dropped off in Mexico even though many of them are U.S. citizens. Mary Ruth Donnelly discusses the historical lessons about migrant life in the book:

Besides the attempts at organizing and the subsequent repatriation of farm laborers, readers see...the segregation of farm workers into different (and by no means identical) camps according to ethnic background...the tension between the former servant class Mexicans and their dreams of bettering themselves in the United States and the reality they encounter. (Donnelly)

I will guide students towards understanding how both black and brown people have had to unite and challenge America to grant them equality and dignity as human beings. Undoubtedly, this history, as expressed in the literature, influences brown and black American identity even today.

The Experiences of Mexican-American Migrant Workers – Historical Context

Before reading any of the excerpts, I intend to provide students with a basic understanding of what life was like for migrant workers from the 1930s to the 1950s. I will pass out handouts about the struggle of this population and show a segment on migrant workers from the PBS documentary *Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* to all of my classes.

I will begin my historical presentation with the students by defining the *bracero* program. During World War II, lots of able-bodied young men were fighting in the war. Without the presence of these men in the workplace, America faced a major labor shortage. Thus, in 1942, the US and Mexican government created a plan to help resolve this problem (Straub 102). Between the years of 1942 to 1947, over 250,000 Mexican workers were allowed into the US to harvest crops and to work on railroads. Once the harvesting was finished, the *braceros* would return to Mexico. While the *bracero* program was in operation, thousands of Mexicans illegally crossed into the US either by swimming or walking across the borders into California, Arizona, and Texas. Many of these illegal immigrants also labored as migrant workers (*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him Study Guide* 10).

The living and working conditions for most migrant workers was dismal. They often had homes that were little more than shacks made of tar paper or sheet metal. These makeshift homes lacked running water, electricity, fuel, and heat to cook. In the fields, where hundreds or even thousands of workers labored, often the most basic sanitary provisions such as toilets, places to wash hands, and water were lacking. Many of the workers were illiterate and unable to write; therefore, they were easily intimidated by the growers who threatened to fire any workers wishing to unionize or strike (Straub 14).

Many of the children of the migrant workers did not have the opportunity to get a solid education that might help them improve their lives one day. The nature of the work caused the laborers to move regularly, so few children even attended school. Instead, those who were old enough to work would labor alongside their parents. The young children would either be watched by older family members or left to their own devices. The poor nutrition, poor health care, and environmental dangers adversely affected the health of some of the children (*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him Study Guide* 10 -11).

Civil rights leaders Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez created the National Farm Workers Association (later known as the United Farm Workers) in 1962 to help improve the plight of migrant workers. Based on non-violent strategies, The NFWA organized many successful strikes, boycotts, fasts, and marches during the same time as blacks were engaging in non-violent protests of their own. Finally, the migrant workers had someone to validate them and to pressure the government and the public to recognize their needs.

Japanese Americans Relocation During World War II – Literary Commentary

The purpose of this segment of this unit is get my students to recognize that like African-Americans and Hispanics, Asian-Americans have suffered their fair share of discrimination and indignities in this country. In fact, “the largest forced relocation in American history” was carried out against the Japanese Americans during World War II (Novas, Cao, and Silva 110). Thousands of Japanese Americans were forcefully imprisoned for years by the US government for crimes which they did not commit. In her novel *Farewell to Manzanar*, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston provides a true account of her experience during the three years that she spent in the Manzanar internment camp for the Japanese. Students will read an excerpt from this novel to get an idea about what internment life was like. Ultimately, they will consider how such an experience might negatively impact one’s sense of identity in this country.

U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye had strong critical acclaim for Houston’s novel:

...in *Farewell to Manzanar*, Jeanne Houston re-created her experience with sensitivity, light humor, and strong satirical undertones. The impact of three and a half years at the Manzanar camp on the lives of a previously normal family became vividly clear to me. Throughout her book, I was able to witness the disintegration of a family, the psychological distress, and fear within a Japanese-American child, and the crude isolation of a racial group (Houston iii).

I would like students to be outraged about the unfair treatment of the Japanese-Americans during this time in history. Then, students will see that the struggle to have equality, fairness, and rights and privileges in this country is one that transcends just blacks and Hispanics.

The Houstons (Jeanne’s husband is a co-author) describe *Farewell to Manzanar* as being a “web of stories tracing a few paths, out of the multitude of paths that led to and away from the experience of the internment” (Goldstein xv). In the novel, the reader becomes aware that the internment shatters Houston’s sense of identity. Even years after the internment is over, Houston still struggles to find a sense of ease, belonging, and acceptance in American society. At the beginning of the book, Houston includes two quotations which allude to the theme and central question of the book:

The first quote comes from historian Henry Steele Commager. In 1947, he described internment as an unjust act that caused ‘incalculable’ misery and tragedy. The second is a Vietnamese poem that speaks of life as leaving ‘footprints’ on one’s forehead. Those footprints are wiped away only by the cycle of birth and death. The story the Houstons tell is in effect a journey through pain of false accusations to the healing that time alone can bring (Goldstein xv).

The “footprints” that Houston refers to must be the sentiments and emotions that she internalized as a consequence of Manzanar. It is the legacy of the “shame, guilt, and a sense of unworthiness” that compels a 37-year old woman to confront the wounds of her 10-year-old self in *Farewell to Manzanar*. Thus, students will have to understand the mark that the internment left on Japanese-American identity. It led this group of Americans to view themselves and others against the injustices that they suffered during the internment (Goldstein xiv).

Japanese Americans Relocation During World War II – Historical Context

The catalyst for the Japanese American internment was Japan’s surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, an American naval base, on December 7, 1941 (Houston xiv). America was caught off guard by this attack and feared that it would only be the beginning of more bombings and attacks by the Japanese. In particular, many Americans believed that Japan might target the West Coast because of its large Japanese community in that area (Novas, Cao, and Silva 106). Seized with fear, the Americans blamed the US government and the Japanese Americans for the attacks.

This was not the first time that Japanese Americans were attacked and demeaned by Anglo Americans in this country (Goldstein xi). Inflammatory statements were often published in newspapers and magazines in the 1900s. In these papers, the Japanese immigrants and other Asian immigrants were accused of being a threat to the “American standard of living” and to “the racial integrity of the nation” (Goldstein xi). Japanese businesses were picketed and boycotted by whites who saw them as competition in the job market. In many cases, the Japanese were not allowed to own land, marry whites, live in certain neighborhoods, or work in certain fields after the Pearl Harbor attacks (Goldstein xi-xii).

The Pearl Harbor attacks would signal more discrimination and segregation for the Japanese Americans. In February of 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which began the process of forcing 120,000 Japanese Americans into ten concentration camps in remote areas along the West Coast. In the span of just a few days, many Japanese Americans scrambled to try to sell their homes, businesses, and valuable possessions. Others tried to get non-Japanese friends and neighbors to look after their affairs in their absence. Many were forced to just abandon their property altogether because of the short time frame.

Before being assigned to a camp, each Japanese American had to report to an assembly center carrying nothing more than one duffel bag and two suitcases (Goldstein xiii). Most of the assembly centers were nothing more than racetracks where filthy stables that once housed livestock were converted into meager living quarters with kitchens and toilets (Novas, Cao, and Silva 115). A Japanese American family’s time at these centers could vary from just a few hours, as in the case of Houston’s family, to weeks.

Life at the camps, which were really just glorified prisons, was not much better. The camps accommodated anywhere from 8,000 to 18,000 people in a very overcrowded situation (Goldstein xiii). There were wood and tar paper barracks, mess halls, communal showers, laundries, and administration and recreation buildings. In the internment camps, family members (men and women for instance) could be split up (Novas, Cao, and Silva 115). In the novel, Houston’s father spent a year in a separate camp from the rest of the family. The separation and camp life itself had a negative impact on the father’s body and on his relationship and headship in the family.

The internment camps were scheduled to close in December of 1945. The departing evacuees endured another insult when they were provided with only very basic assistance in rebuilding their lives. Single Japanese Americans received \$25 and families received \$50 plus transportation costs. When the Japanese returned to their homes, they found that many of their properties were either in ruins or were stolen. Even family graves were desecrated (Novas, Cao, and Silva 128). Many Japanese Americans were forced to rebuild their lives from scratch. *Farewell to Manzanar* makes this aspect of history come alive for my students by providing them with a glimpse of how life in the internment camp forever changed the families and identities of Japanese Americans.

Indian-American Perspective – Literary Commentary

In order to expose my students to an Indian-American perspective in literature, we will read the short excerpt entitled “By Any Other Name,” which is included in the anthology *Multitude: Cross-Cultural Readings for Writers*, edited by Chitra B. Divakaruni. In this story, an Indian woman reflects on her first few days of school as a little girl within a predominantly Anglo environment. The excerpt will lend itself to discussing the unique elements of Indian-American identity. This memoir will allow students to draw connections between the discrimination experienced by the characters in “By Any Other Name” to the discrimination against characters in *Warriors Don’t Cry*. The settings for both texts happen to be schools where few minorities exist amidst a majority Anglo environment.

Santha, the protagonist, and her older sister, Premila, both experience subtle and blatant forms of racism from their British teacher. On the first day of school, the teacher wants to change Santha and Premila's names to "lovely" English names, which confuses the young Santha (Rau 260). I would like to discuss how names are integral to our personal identity and may even be a vital link to our cultures with my students. Then, students will be able to understand that the teacher's actions in this story violated the pride, esteem, and value of the main character. Thus, in this case, Fairclough's assertion about the pitfalls of integration proves to be true. For many ethnic groups, "school offers...nothing to inspire them, nothing with which they could identify, nothing to evoke loyalty, affection, and pride (397).

Premila, Santha's older sister, is a character who refuses to cave in to attacks on her esteem from the white adults at her school. Her teacher forces the few Indian students in her classroom to sit in the very back area with one seat between each girl to prevent the "Indian propensity to cheat" (Rau 264). However, at that moment, Premila decides that she will no longer attend a school that insults her ethnicity and views her as inferior. She gets Santha out of class and departs before the school day ends (Rau 263-264).

A theme of resilience despite adversity and a theme of maintaining one's dignity is present in "By Any Other Name" and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. In his essay, Craig Wilson expresses what struck him the most about Angelou's book was "the fact that though the blacks...were constantly humiliated and harassed by whites...they refused to give up their self-respect. Instead, they discovered ingenious ways of holding on to their humanity and hope..." (574). Premila is like the characters in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* that fight to hold on to their identities and esteem no matter what others may think of them.

Premila gains her pride and refusal to accept the attacks on her ethnic identity from her family. When Premila's mother assumed responsibility for the girls' education, she taught them lessons about Indian culture (Rau 261). Thus, Premila and Santha were not being raised to be ashamed of their heritage. Like Premila, Angelou is able to resist the prejudice that she faces in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* due to her mother's influence. "Maya is able to boost her low self-esteem by finding black women role models to identify with and admire...From Momma she gets the indomitable spirit that will not allow her white employer...to change her name to "Mary" for the sake of convenience" (Wilson 575).

In comparing the Indian girls' experience to Beals' experience in *Warriors Don't Cry*, I would like the students to consider the different reactions of the characters to racism in their schools. In "By Any Other Name," the characters permanently removed themselves from a racially intense environment to avoid further injury and insult to their dignity. However, in *Warriors Don't Cry*, some members of the Little Rock Nine chose to endure the racism to attain dignity for themselves and others. I will ask the students to list the benefits and the drawbacks attached to each decision.

Indian American Perspective – Historical Context

Immigrants from the country of India began experiencing haughty, discriminatory treatment from whites not long after their arrival in America in the early 1900s. Many whites in America looked down on Indians in this country because of their religious beliefs, appearance, clothing, customs, and dark skin color. Thus, like Blacks, Hispanics, and other minority groups, Indian Americans could not escape the fear and hatred of others.

Many whites resented the Indian presence in the workplace. This resentment culminated in an attack in 1907 in Bellingham, Washington. In this attack, an estimated 750 Indians that worked in town mills were driven out of the Pacific Coast by violent mobs. The mobs destroyed the homes of Indians and beat Indians in the streets (Ingram 23).

During this same time period, many Indians who came to America in pursuit of a higher education faced rejection because of their dark skin color and ethnicity. These students often had a hard time finding places to live or even to eat (Ingram 29).

The 1960s Civil Rights Movement paved the way for more minorities than just blacks to gain equal rights and opportunities in the United States. Indian Americans benefited from the movement. In fact, it is widely known that Indian civil rights activist Mohandas Gandhi's nonviolent protesting methods against British oppression in India were adopted by Chicano and African-American activists here in America. For Indians, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 meant that legally, no one could discriminate against them due to their race, religion, or nationality. Jobs or service restaurants could no longer deny them service because of their skin color, clothing, or beliefs.

However, in recent years, Indian Americans have been experiencing some unwarranted fear and discrimination because of the September 11th terrorist attacks on America. The turban wearing Sikhs have been harassed and even attacked by Americans who have confused this particular Indian population with the Al Qaeda group of Afghanistan. Because of this fear on the part of some Americans, it has become difficult for Indian Sikhs and Muslims to continue wearing their turbans. Some have even abandoned the tradition, which is a sacred symbol of their religious beliefs. This action is an example of how misplaced fear is changing the identity and cultural practices of many Indian Americans.

Also, many Indian students in recent times have begun to feel that Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are safer environments for them to study than the US. As Nisha Ganatra, an Indian American student puts it, "For every person who thinks I'm smarter and better, there's someone else who thinks...I'm about to blow up a building" (Ingram 38). Insecurity and fear is taking hold of many Indian Americans even in these "progressive" times.

CONCLUSION

This unit will get students to notice America's failure to uphold the civil rights and liberties of four distinctive ethnic groups in this country. At its conclusion, students should begin to see the glaring truth in this statement: "America preserves an ideal of freedom, although it denies freedom in scores of instances" (Crew 562). This truth resonates within each excerpt covered in this unit.

However, my aim in covering this unit is not for students to develop a cynical, hardened view of the world or of American identity. I will do all that I can to ensure that my students don't give in to the temptation to rest at a place of embitterment after reading this literature. My aim in showing students the struggles and the hardships of four different ethnic groups is to get them to see how fear of "the other" has led to prejudice and discrimination in this country. Fear has wounded far too many souls in this country for too long. It has shattered the families, identities, and dreams of people belonging to many different ethnic groups. Fear is at the root of many hardships and injustices in this country

Yet, my students should also see light at the end of the tunnel in the literature that we read. "Everyone faces a different choice: accept the world the way that you find it, or change it" (Crew 561). The pathway to changing the conflicts presented in the literature and the key to preventing the repetition of history is a simple one. It involves developing empathy and respect for others, which is an underlying purpose of this unit.

Thus it is particularly important for us in America today to study the causes of racism, learn from its history, and work against our tendency toward it consciously. We are a multiethnic, interdependent community living in an increasingly global world...If we are

to live in harmony, without which long-term economic prosperity cannot occur for any of us, we must reteach our country about ethnic relations” (Polhemus 334).

Teaching our youth about the shared and unique struggles of ethnic groups through literature is my contribution to the solution to reconcile ethnic relations in our country.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: The Struggle for School Integration in *Warriors Don't Cry*

Objectives: The students will understand the indignities and discrimination suffered by the Little Rock Nine during the desegregation of Central High School. Students will be asked to consider what it was like to be an African-American during this tumultuous era in history. They will also formulate their own conclusions about the legacy of school integration in another lesson. The students will interpret, represent, and compare ideas, issues, and cross-cultural themes in this text. They will also write in a personal, creative, and academic form to address specific audiences and purposes using standard organizational structures. [TEKS Objectives: ELA.6.2.26, ELA.6.3.01, ELA.6.3.10, ELA.6.3.17, ELA.6.3.18, and ELA.6.3.03.]

Materials: KWL chart, a class set of the book *Warriors Don't Cry* by Melba Patillo Beals or a class set of copied handouts of pp 69-89 of Chapter 7 and pp. 117-123 of Chapter 10 of the book, PowerPoint presentation, Episode 4 of *Eyes on the Prize*

Introduction: I will begin this study by asking the students if they know what segregation, integration, and the Civil Rights Movement mean. After I hear and discuss student responses, I will instruct students to complete a KWL chart in pairs. They should list what they know and want to learn about the civil rights movement. It should take no more than 5 minutes for students to complete this activity. I will then inform the class that we will be reading some short excerpts from a memoir that was written by a real teenage girl who made history and helped to further the Civil Rights Movement. I will tell my students that this teenage girl is famous because in 1957, she and eight other African-American students were the first ones to integrate an all white high school in Arkansas.

Guided Instruction: After the pre-reading activity, I will present a 5 minute PowerPoint presentation that provides a historical synopsis of the Little Rock Nine. Students will be provided with a template to take notes on the necessary information. Next, I will show a 10 minute clip from Episode 4 of the *Eyes on the Prize* video. The video shows live footage of the Little Rock Nine entering Central High School. We will briefly discuss the video. I anticipate dedicating an entire class period to these two activities.

Group Instruction: My students and I will take turns reading and discussing aloud the selected excerpts from *Warriors Don't Cry*.

Student Activity: After reading Chapter 7, I will have students answer the following questions on their own:

- 1) How were Melba and the other members of the Little Rock Nine treated by the whites in this chapter? Give two specific examples of how they were treated by white peers and the white adults.
- 2) How did Melba react to the way that she was treated by the whites around her? How was she able to endure what she experience in this chapter?
- 3) Why do you think that Melba was willing to continue attending Central High School every day?
- 4) What do you think that you would have done if you were in Melba's shoes? How would you have reacted to the racial taunts? Would you have stayed at Central High or would you have returned to your old school? Explain the reason behind your choice.

- 5) Based on what you have read, what was it like to be an African-American in 1957?
- 6) How is life for African-Americans different in 2008 than it was in 1957? Are African-Americans still discriminated against today?

Assessment: The responses to the questions will be graded and a writing activity. Students will be instructed to write a letter to the Little Rock school authorities and the governor of Arkansas from the perspective of Melba's mother or father. In the letter, students will need to explain their feelings as parents about the racism and hatred that their daughter is facing at school every day. They will need to explain the changes that they expect to happen in order for Central High to become a safe and acceptable environment for Melba to learn.

Lesson Plan 2: The Experiences of Mexican-American Migrant Workers

Objectives: The students will understand the hardships and discrimination suffered by Mexican-Americans as they attempted to gain equality, freedom, and dignity for themselves as migrant workers. [TEKS objectives – See Lesson 1]

Materials: Class set of the novel *Esperanza Rising* or photocopies of pages 125-138, "Las Almendras," and pages 165-172, "Las Papas," from the novel, PBS video *Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, PowerPoint presentation

Introduction: I will begin by asking the students to discuss the following questions in pairs:

- 1) What are some struggles that Mexican Americans face in this country?
- 2) What was the Chicano Movement?

I will listen to their discussions for a few minutes and then discuss their responses as a class. I will then inform the students that we will be looking at the Mexican American migrant workers' struggle for fairness and equality in this country over the next week.

Guided Instruction: I will present a 5 minute PowerPoint presentation defining what a migrant worker is, the working conditions, and historical context as articulated in the Unit Background. Next, I will show a brief 15 minute segment of the PBS video *Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. The video and power point will prepare students to be able to read and understand the literature in this segment of the unit.

Group Instruction: As a class, we will read the excerpts and I will periodically interrupt the students' reading to ask questions to check their comprehension

Student Activities: In one of the excerpts from *Esperanza Rising*, a group of migrant workers hold differing viewpoints about going on strike to improve their living and working conditions. I will split the entire class in half. One half of the class will be in favor of going on strike, and the other half will be against the strike. In groups of twos or threes, the students will have to use the arguments that they read in the text and what they know about the lives of migrant workers to create one poster or one flyer reflecting the reasons for their assigned viewpoint.

Assessment: The student activity will be graded.

Lesson Plan 3: The Relocation of Japanese-Americans during World War II and *Farewell to Manzanar*

Objective: The students will understand how widespread wartime panic during World War II led to the forced imprisonment of an entire ethnic group in America. Students will be asked to consider what it was like to be a Japanese American stripped of the freedom to live, work, and go where they pleased by the American government and forced to reside in a guarded, fenced in area for years. [TEKS objectives – See Lesson 1]

Materials: power point presentation, class set of the memoir *Farewell to Manzanar* or photocopies of Chapter 5, “Almost a Family” (pp. 35-46), KWL chart

Introduction: I will open up this segment of the unit by asking students if they believe that Asian Americans face discrimination in this country and to explain the reason behind their answer. Students will respond to this question in partnerships. I will also ask the students if they know what the phrase “Japanese internment” meant for Japanese people. If many students are unfamiliar with this phrase, then I will assure them that they will understand the meaning of that phrase in this lesson. I will explain to the students that we will be reading a true story called *Farewell to Manzanar*. It is about a Japanese American girl who lived through the Japanese internment in America during the 1940s.

Guided Instruction: I will define the phrase “Japanese internment” for my students in a PowerPoint presentation and explain the events that caused the internment to my class. This should take about 10-15 minutes because students will be prompted to take short notes about the presentation.

Group Instruction: The class will read and discuss Chapter 6 of Houston’s memoir orally.

Student Activities: After reading this chapter, the students will be asked a series of questions.

- 1) What were mealtimes like for the narrator and her family before living in the camp? How did the narrator feel about these mealtimes?
- 2) What were mealtimes like for the narrator and her family after living in the camp? What does the change say about the closeness of her family while living in the camp?
- 3) What effect did the camp have on the narrator’s father? What do you think led to this change?
- 4) Do you think that the government could force an entire ethnic group of people to live in an internment camp today? Why or why not?

Assessment: Students’ responses to the questions

Lesson 4: The Indian American Experience

Objective: The students will understand the hardships and discrimination suffered by Indian Americans in the workplace and in the school system. [TEKS objectives – See Lesson 1]

Materials: PowerPoint presentation, photocopies of “By Any Other Name”

Introduction: I will have a class discussion with the students where I ask them to consider if they believe that Indian-Americans can face discrimination that may be specific to this particular ethnic group. I will let the students know that we will be reading a short story where an Indian girl describes the unfair treatment that she experienced on her first day of school.

Guided Instruction: I will present a PowerPoint presentation featuring much of the information provided in the Unit Background about Indian Americans, so that my students have some background knowledge about the struggles and the experiences that this ethnic group has faced in this country.

Group Instruction: As students read the short excerpt “By Any Other Name” on their own, they will be instructed to compare and contrast the experience of the Indian student who narrates this text to the experience of Melba Patillo Beals in *Warriors Don’t Cry*.

Student Activity: I would like my students to answer the following questions that have been taken from the Questions for Critical Thinking, Reading, Thinking, Discussion, and Writing section of *Multitude: Cross-Cultural Readings for Writers*, edited by Chitra Divakaruni (264-265):

- 1) How does the headmistress react to the children on the first day of school? What does her reaction symbolize?
- 2) How would you describe the narrator's family? What kinds of values do the narrator's parents have?
- 3) How have the parents' values influenced Premila, the narrator's older sister?
- 4) What does Santha think about her "new name"? When asked to introduce herself to her classmates, why does she say that she does not know her name?
- 5) What do you think that Santha learned from her experience at school?

Assessment: The questions will be graded. The students will also be instructed to complete an extension activity to be graded. Students will be asked to compare Beals' reaction to racism in *Warriors Don't Cry* to Premila's reaction to it in "By Any Other Name." Students will be asked to explain in a written response whether they believe that it is best to endure a racist environment to help future generations or to refuse to tolerate racial insults and to leave a hostile environment.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

- Anand, Bernadette, et al. *Keeping the Struggle Alive: Studying Desegregation in Our Town*. New York: Teacher's College Press, 2002.
Useful teaching tools and information about desegregation in American schools.
- Beals, Melba Patillo. *Warriors Don't Cry*. Washington: Pocket Books, 1994.
The primary sourced or the African-American section.
- Crew, Louie. "Thriving as an Outsider Even an Outcast in Smalltown America." In *Multitude: Cross-Cultural Readings for Writers*. Second Ed. Chitra Divakaruni. The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997: 556-562.
A gay man gives his personal views on being feared and ostracized as "the other."
- Donnelly, Mary Ruth. "Review of Esperanza Rising." 2 March 2008.
<<http://www.aiue.edu/MLTE/LA%Modules%20DONE/index.htm#reciprocal%20teaching.com>>.
A review on the themes and historical lessons in *Esperanza Rising*.
- Eyes on the Prize*. "Episode 4." Narr. Julian Bond. Dir. Judith Vecchione. Blackside. 1986.
Contains live footage of the Little Rock Nine entering Central High.
- Fairclough, Adam. *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*. Cambridge : The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Goldstein, Phyllis. *A Teacher's Resource for Farewell to Manzanar*. Boston: Voices of Love and Freedom, Inc. and Facing History and Ourselves Foundation, 1999.
A valuable resource for anyone who intends to teach this book.
- . *A Teacher's Resource for Warriors Don't Cry*. Boston: Voices of Love and Freedom, Inc. and Facing History and Ourselves Foundation, 1999.
A resource complete with the context, vocabulary, analysis, and activities.
- Holmstrom, David. "Growing up with the Script of Racial Segregation." 7 June 1994 *The Christian Science Monitor*. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/1994/0607/07131.html>>.
- Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki and James D. Houston. *Farewell to Manzanar*. New York: Dell-Laurel Leaf, 1973.
The primary text for the Japanese American section.

- Ingram, Scott. *South Asian Americans*. Fox Point: World Almanac Library, 2007.
Information about the history of Indians in America.
- “Little Rock Nine.” *Wikipedia.org*. 29 February 2008 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Rock_Nine>.
- Novas, Himilce, Lan Cao, and Rosemary Silva. *Everything You Need to Know About Asian-American History*. New York: Pkume Penguin Group, 2004.
Describes the history and the plight of several different Asian American groups.
- Polhemus, Andromeda. “The Economics of Hate.” In *Multitude: Cross-Cultural Readings for Writers*. Second Ed. Chitra Divakaruni. The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997. 330-334.
A look at how the fear of job stability has instigated racism in America.
- Rau, Santha Rama. “By Any Other Name.” In *Multitude: Cross-Cultural Readings for Writers*. Second Ed. Chitra Divakaruni. The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997: 330-334.
Primary text used to present prejudices affecting Indians in America.
- Rivera, Tomás. *Y no se lo tragó la tierra / And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*. Evangelina Vigil-Piñon, trans. Houston Arte Publico Press, 1987.
Depicts the poverty, discrimination, and harsh labor plaguing migrant workers.
- Ryan, Pam Muñoz. *Esperanza Rising*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2000.
An easy to read novel about the lives of migrant workers.
- Straub, Deborah. *Hispanic American Voices*. Detroit: UXL Imprint of Gale, 1997.
Contains historical information as well as the speeches of Hispanic leaders.
- “*Study Guide for And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*.” The Glencoe Literature Library. New York : Glencoe McGraw-Hill Companies. 2 May 2008. <http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/earth_did_not_devour.pdf>.
- “The Struggle in the Fields.” *Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Dir. Henry Cisneros, Hector Galán, and Jose Luis Ruiz. National Latino Communications Center, 2007.
Live footage, interviews, and images of migrant workers
- “Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).” Texas Education Agency. 3 March 2008
<<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/>>.
- Wilson, Craig. “Mostly Scared: Handling Prejudice in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. In *Multitude: Cross-Cultural Readings for Writers*. Second Ed. Chitra Divakaruni. The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997: 574-576.

Supplemental Sources

- Aalgarrd, Wendy. *East Indians in America*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 2005.
This book gives useful information about Indian American history and culture.
- Bates, Daisy. *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*. Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1986.
An activist and mentor for the Little Rock Nine writes about desegregation.
- “*Esperanza Rising: Learning not to be Afraid to Start Over*.” 6 August 2007. *Edsitement*. 30 January 2008.
<http://www.edsitement.neh.gov/viewlessonsplans?Id+739>
Useful lessons, activities, and teaching points for the novel.
- L, Deanne. “*Warriors Don’t Cry* Review.” *TeenInk*. 2001 February. Print Magazine. 2 March 2008
<<http://www.teenink.com/Poerty/article.php?link=Past/2001/February/Books?WarriorsDon'txml>>.
This is a useful review by a teenage girl.