

The Awakening of the Black Panther: Shifting the Paradigm of Hollywood's Portrayal of Africa

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Overview

“Until the lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter”

~African Proverb

This curriculum unit will examine the lens Hollywood uses to depict the continent of Africa from both the 20th and 21st century. From the viewing of early films such as *Tarzan* (1918), *Trader Horn* (1931) and *King Solomon's Mines* (1950) to more recent films such as *Tears of the Sun* (2003), *Last King of Scotland* (2006), *Blood Diamond* (2006), *Beasts of No Nation* (2015), *Queen of Katwe* (2016) and *Black Panther* (2018) teachers will guide students as they examine the conceptualization of Africa offered by Hollywood. Students will understand how film is a powerful medium that has the ability to influence society on a local as well as global scale. How significant is Hollywood in helping to shape people's viewpoint of African people and culture? What is the impact of perceptions imposed by Hollywood films with African settings on global audiences? How did the 2018 Marvel Black Panther (a film which profoundly contradicts the common portrait of Hollywood's Africa) become such a blockbuster success throughout the world? How has African cinema countered the typical categories of war, corruption, white heroism and chronic poverty? In what ways can film create or disrupt a social/cultural trend? The discourse following these key questions will encourage the analytical and critical thinking needed to write letters to director/character, film reviews, critiques and re-write/direct/film scenes from popular Hollywood films with African themes. The intention of this unit is to eliminate the harmful misconceptions of the African continent as students begin their journey of discovering the humanity of a people that have been inaccurately and historically represented. This curriculum unit was designed after participating in the TIP seminar; *History of Hollywood* led by University of Pennsylvania Professor of Cinema Studies, Peter Decherney. This seminar was a

thorough resource providing the significant background information of Hollywood's transformations from its inception to the present.

Lessons and activities from this unit will allow teachers the opportunity of guiding their students' innovation as they re-imagine Africa. This unit is intended for grade levels 8-12 (ages 13 and up) in ELA or Social Studies using PA Common Core Standards. My students represent an array of nations throughout the globe. Aside from teaching my students English as a second language, it is my duty to introduce and help interpret a new culture. Educators who have ESL students will find the lessons specifically useful with their students' language acquisition. The significance of using visual aids such as film coupled with the lessons/activities that allow students to deconstruct movie scenes are scaffolding tools that bring excitement and ultimately— a voice. As they become directors or film critics, they will become active participants in their learning process. Clips from films with a PG-13 rating will be included but inappropriate scenes will not be viewed. The unit is designed to be used towards the end of the school year during a three -week period and will incorporate reading, writing and researching. Students will view clips and whole films and give critiques and conduct discussion groups. They will also have the option to attend a film festival and/or select films for their own school film festival. As a culminating activity, students will have the opportunity to create a storyboard of a favorite African children's picture book and film their adaptation. Suggested literature for this activity: *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* (John Steptoe), *A Story, A Story* (Gail E. Haley), *Chike and the River* (Chinua Achebe), and *The Mystery Door* (Deogratias Simba).

Rationale

“ People create stories create people, or rather stories create people create stories.”
~ Chinua Achebe

Do we imitate art or is art merely an imitation of who we truly are? As an ESL teacher in a Philadelphia public middle school, I am aware that the complexity of this age-old question is not something that can be answered immediately. In the 1889 essay *The Decay of the Lying*, Oscar Wilde stated that, “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. The self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms of which it may realize that energy.” When the projected art is not seen as beautiful, individuals held to the unfavorable “imitation” have the cumbersome task of removing their assigned connection to that art. Years ago, I taught high school students from Haiti, China, Nepal, Vietnam, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Venezuela. Some of my students were newcomers to the United States and had minimal to no interaction with people outside of their cultural groups. Towards the end of the school year, one of my Chinese students revealed to me that he was shocked at how “nice ” I was. He further explained that in his country, most of the films or televisions shows depicted African Americans to be a volatile, uneducated and shiftless people. Other students in the class gave similar accounts of what they expected from African-Americans and to my dismay

many of the African students had also considered the stereotypes to be true to life. They disclosed that prior to arriving to the U. S. many of their relatives advised them to be cautious when they encountered African-Americans. Some were even directed to avoid all contact with people who resembled me. According to the social justice communication lab, The Opportunity Agenda, it is rather a common phenomenon for audiences to accept any images projected by media when they have little knowledge of that group. The Opportunity Agenda concludes in the *Social Science Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys*, “media images have the greatest impact on perceptions when viewers have less real world experience with the topic; in other words, the *media world* can be mistaken for the real world, unless audiences have sufficient personal experiences to counteract its effects”(14).

What happens to our students’ self-esteem and learning process when they are affected by portrayals that distort who they are? How do we as educators confront age-old stereotypes and find immunity to the influence of media? As educators of culturally diverse learners, we must first recognize that there is a consistent trend of students coming to the United States public school system from every direction of the globe. Today, one in four children under the age of 18 is the child of an immigrant. Based on the findings of the National Center for Education Statistics,

“ The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners (ELLs) was higher in fall 2015 (9.5 percent, or 4.8 million students) than in the fall 2000 (8.1 percent, or 3.8 million students). In fall 2015, the percentage of public school students who were ELLs ranged from 1.0 percent in West Virginia to 21.0 percent in California.” (2018)

Along with the significant increase of English Language Learners (ELLs), educators are faced with the harsh reality that the achievement gap between cultural groups and ethnicities has also increased. The national average graduation rate in urban school districts is 60 percent, compared to a 75 percent graduation rate in the suburban communities as stated in *Diplomas Count: An Essential Guide to Graduation Policy and Rates* (Olson, 2006). *Diplomas Count* continues by revealing that school systems with high levels of racial segregation have a graduation rate of only 56.2 percent compared to 75.1 percent in school systems with low levels of racial segregation. Before we tackle the multiple factors that contribute to the disparity of learning success amongst *all* learners, it is essential to recognize that students who feel devalued may have little motivation in the public school classroom. Once we acknowledge the multiplicity of cultures, we must begin the process of infusing our learners’ unique backgrounds into relevant classroom lessons. When students realize they are accurately represented in a culturally responsive learning environment, they may find lessons relevant and begin to excel.

Authenticity is paramount when representing any culture. Unfortunately, many teachers struggle with obtaining authentic knowledge of another culture. As noted in *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for African Immigrant Children in U.S. P-12 Schools* (2017),

Many school districts embrace multicultural education in their schools,

but sometimes multicultural education itself is not inclusive enough because teachers are short of balanced information about the minority cultures represented in their schools. (Ndemanu, Jordan 2017)

There is one particular group of children among America's immigration population that have been scarcely researched in the world of education. Children-who originated from a continent of 53 independent countries, 2,000 languages and innumerable ethnicities- African children. Based on the findings of the Migration Policy Institute, there are 1.3 million children in Black immigrant families in the U.S. African children account for 11 percent of all Black children in America. (www.migrationpolicy.org) Contextual factors such as social supports, parenting styles, family dynamics and cultural norms of the African student are somewhat a mystery to many educators. The neglect of research can give the misleading impression that African children immigrants manage to assimilate socially and academically into a dominant culture with limited obstacles. The discrimination of other students with biased views of Africans along with the lack of academic accommodations can make education a conflicted journey. Unlike the immigrants from Spanish-speaking nations who have the option of taking standardized tests in their native language, first generation African students must rely on whatever English they have to take standardized tests. When needs are not realized the supports necessary to helping a student navigate through a brand new educational system successfully will be somewhat non-existent. The fact that the U.S. Census Bureau (2010, 2014) ranks African immigrant as the most educated immigrant group does not coincide with the fact that "their children in U.S. schools continue to suffer from discontinuity in academic culture, communication, and power relations" (Adair, 2015; Dryden Peterson, 2015; McHugh and Sugarman, 2015; Ogbu, 1991). How can educators avoid the trappings of viewing Africa as a monolithic place and begin to recognize Africa as a diversified continent? The African child from Ethiopia and the African child from Mali will have two different sets of cultural, religious and language background that many times are lumped in to one common category. The only way to circumvent such generalizations is for teachers to familiarize themselves with, at least, the macro-history and macro-culture of Africa (Ndemanu, Jordan 2017).

What cross-cultural hurdles do African children face during their school years in the United States? As a woman who was born in Tanzania, East Africa and raised in the United States, I recognized the confusion of my former high school students. Being a victim of another person's "art" was not a new phenomenon for me. Upon learning that I was born in Africa, my classmates would ask me questions that could have easily torn into my self-conscious and shattered my developing self-esteem. Does your family live in huts? Can you speak "African?" Do they wear clothes over there? Can you ride a zebra? The pride of my father and the strength of my mother helped me remain in tact as I responded to the disparaging and shameful questions of my peers. I understood to be true for many of my friends their only points of reference to Africa were National Geographic magazines, Feed the Hungry commercials and a primitive white man swinging through the jungle on a vine named Tarzan.

Background

“This is the house of Tarzan, the killer of beasts and many black men.”

~Tarzan (Tarzan of the Apes, 1914)

The world was introduced to the dynamic of Tarzan when a failed businessman, Edgar Rice Burroughs decided to become an author in 1911. Armed with Henry M. Stanley’s book, *Darkest Africa* (1890) and a dictionary, Burroughs created the plot of an ape-man hero considered to be “the king of the jungle”. The character, Tarzan, was the son of British aristocrats and orphaned in Africa left to be raised by apes. The basic plot of his Tarzan stories was immersed in the action of savage like tribes, wild animals and shipwrecks. Burroughs gave Tarzan, whose name means “white-skin” in “ape language”, a superhero persona, making him more intelligent, athletic and capable of solving problems than any of the native Africans in the story. He had the innate ability to communicate with animals, wrestle deadly crocodiles and tackle voracious lions and tigers with his bare hands. The readers seemed not to question the authenticity of Burroughs’ representation of Africa as they read stories of lions in jungles instead of savannahs and tigers in Africa as opposed to their native habitat in Asia. The “n” word was common to see in Burroughs books along with other elements of racism seen during the colonization period of Africa and the Jim Crow era of the United States. Interestingly, Burroughs had never travelled to Africa and grew up in a small town in Oak Park, Illinois. This particular town was nicknamed the “Sundown Town” because it was established by the residents that Black people were to leave before sundown. Many of Tarzan’s victims were Black and were lynched from the jungle vines when captured. Lynching was practiced heavily in the United States during the period Tarzan stories were written. Readers who enjoyed these stories more than likely found the lynching of Africans justifiable and accepted these killings as a necessary part of the norm in society. After all, Tarzan was the projected protagonist of the story and the Africans were the established antagonists.

The thought process behind the conceptualization of the Tarzan character derives from Burroughs’ firm credence of eugenics. Eugenics, a science influenced by Charles Darwin’s “natural selection” theory, advocated for racial purity and pushed the theory of allowing “more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable” (<https://www.britannica.com/science/eugenics-genetics>) Eugenics was strongly supported by political figures and scientists during the early 1900s. It should be noted that it was also used by the Nazis to support their justification of exterminating entire races of people. “Burroughs’ fascination with eugenics is undoubtedly tied to his strong interest in Darwinism. Tarzan himself is often said to be the end-development of generations of British aristocratic stock, representing what Burroughs seems to have conceived of as the *ne plus ultra* of eugenic perfection” (Erling Holtmark, Edgar Rice Burroughs [Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986] 49). Tarzan quickly became one of the

most celebrated and familiar characters found in comic books, then later radio, television and film.

By 1918, Tarzan came to life on the silver screen influencing millions of people all over the U.S and other parts of the world. Widespread audiences throughout the United States had already readily accepted D.W. Griffith's 1915 silent film, *Birth of a Nation*, which depicted African-Americans in a derogatory and vile way. Therefore, the racial climate of the early 20th century in the U.S. created the atmosphere necessary for Tarzan films. The very first Tarzan film, *Tarzan of the Apes*, remained loyal to Burroughs' stereotypical and derogatory perception of Africa. Viewers are shown Tarzan avenge his adoptive ape mother Kala's death by killing the African hunter responsible. The humanity not recognized in the African man is instead designated to the ape, Kala. After the chief is killed, the African villagers bring Tarzan gifts and prayers. In spite of the villagers' effort, Tarzan has an acrimonious relationship with the Africans. He steals their weapons, raids their village and practices cruel tricks on them. When one of the Africans kidnaps Jane, Tarzan rescues her and burns down the entire village. Throughout the film, Tarzan aids some newcomers and constantly saves Jane from the perils of the African jungle. The Hollywood narrative of Africans being portrayed as violent or imbecile and helpless commenced with *Tarzan of the Apes* and was followed by a steady stream of films with the similar theme.

The early Tarzan movies of the 1900s were even showed in the British colonized Caribbean territories during the "Back to Africa" movement led by Marcus Garvey. Historian and curator of the British Film Institute's African Odysseys Program, Tony Warner, states in his article, "*Racism and Stereotypes: How the Tarzan Dynamic Still Infiltrates Cinema*," the purpose of the mobile cinemas hired by British colonial authorities was to dissuade people from returning to Africa and to justify colonialism (<https://weareorlando.co.uk/page13.php>) According to Warner, the ultimate goal of showing these racist propaganda films was to portray Africa as truly a "Dark Continent", a place full of frightening and uncivilized people. Even through the decades, the Tarzan character has maintained relevance to audiences. As recent as 2016 in *Legend of Tarzan*, Tarzan carries on his role of savior and "king of the jungle". Hollywood actor, Samuel L. Jackson, plays the role of the late George Washington Williams, an African-American lawyer, journalist and politician. The film character George goes to England to request that Tarzan travels to Africa with him to face King Leopold of Belgium who has enslaved Africans in the Congo. Once more, the message is profound and deliberate. Although educated, a Black man is incapable of handling the task of rescuing African people from exploitation and genocide without Tarzan; the character reared by apes and deemed the expert of Africa. The legacy and resilience of a real life man who condemned King Leopold for his brutality of African people in an open letter titled, *An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Independent State of Congo* in 1890 has been reduced to the sidekick rogue character played by Samuel L. Jackson. The pervasive Hollywood stereotype of African people incapable of saving themselves without the assistance of a fictitious white hero has been preserved over the decades. This notion of helplessness leaves audience with a distorted understanding of an entire continent of people.

In 1931, Hollywood gave audiences the very first non- documentary film directed and shot mostly in Africa, *Trader Horn*. Based on the memoir of ivory and hides trader, Aloysius “Trader” Horn, film director W.S. Van Dyke continues what the Tarzan films started. As the story unfolds, the trader fools the native Africans by exchanging salt and copper wire for expensive animal fur and ivory. The film suggests the African people lack the intellect or discernment to realize they are being cheated. Horn and his late partner’s son, Peru, lead an expedition to search for Nina, the daughter of missionary, Olive Trent. The Africans who travel in Horn’s party have little dialogue and merely follow orders given to them. They become part of Africa’s “background” and similar to shadows they lack substance and significance. The men locate Trent’s daughter, Nina, with a mysterious, remote East African tribe. Unsurprisingly, she is the chief of this tribe and the Africans readily answer to her orders. Dressed scantily, she is seen as a goddess by the “savage” tribe. In one scene, Nina whips a native cowering on the floor. Bare breasted African women are commonly shown however; Nina’s breasts are concealed in this pre-code film. Throughout the film *Trader Horn* and his safari protégé’, Peru, vie for her attention and she becomes the center of their romantic interest. The plot device of having the white woman play a dual role is an element that is revisited in the early jungle safari genre. The natives see her as a being with special magical powers, while she represents the tension between the two white men willing to display their heroism for her sake.

Another scene, Peru states, “Horn, you’re mistaken about these people. They’re not savages! They’re just happy, ignorant children.” Peru’s sentiment of the Africans being childlike is enhanced through the character Rencharo, Horn’s African guide. He is considered trustworthy but lacks strength. He does not make his own decisions unless it is to sacrifice his life for Horn and the rest of the White men. As the faithful and trusty servant, Rencharo takes a spear, which was intended for Horn, we see Horn shed a tear and hold his hand as he takes his final breath. In contrast to Rencharo’s character all the other Africans in the film are portrayed as savage antagonists given grisly deaths, killed off in a dishonorable fashion by either a vicious lion, snapping crocodile or stomping elephant. They die screaming in agony and terror as Horn puffs his pipe and shrugs. The audience is expected to have no sympathy for the projected antagonists as they meet their fateful end.

By the late 20th century, Hollywood’s approach of depicting Africa changed considerably. Instead of the excessive promotion of the African “savage” role as seen in earlier films, Hollywood focused its attention on Africa’s plight of post-colonialism in regards to war/ political corruption and poverty. The humanity of the African people has been omitted and instead the focus of most Hollywood films about Africa is the suffering or the cruelty of one group to another. Along with the depiction of the underdeveloped Africa came the reemergence of the white savior narrative. According to American sociologist and University of Connecticut professor, Matthew W. Hughey, he considers the “white savior” film to “feature a nonwhite group or person who experiences conflict and struggle with others that is particularly dangerous or threatening to their life and

livelihood.” Hughey clarifies in his article “The Whiteness of Oscar Night” by stating:

The White person (savior) enters the milieu and through his or her sacrifices as a teacher, mentor, lawyer, military hero, aspiring writer, or wannabe Native American warrior, is able to physically save- or at least morally redeem- the person or community of folks of color by the film’s end. (<https://contexts.org/blog/the-whiteness-of-oscar-night/>)

When we fast-forward to present-day Africa, Hollywood films such as *Tears of the Sun* and *Blood Diamond* representing the genre of political thriller/ action have become the extent as to how Africa is depicted to audiences worldwide. The Hollywood film, *Tears of The Sun*, produced in 2003 shows US Navy Seal, Lieutenant Waters (Bruce Willis) and his squadron go to Nigeria following a military coup to rescue an American woman working as a physician for Doctors Without Borders. During the mission, Waters encounters ruthless rebels and bears witnesses to brutal murders of villagers. Once Lt. Waters reaches the Catholic mission with his men and locate the doctor, Dr. Lena Kendricks, refuses to leave the group of innocent refugees she has been caring for. Dr. Kendricks persuades Lt. Waters to disobey his orders of not engaging in the civil war conflict and promises to rescue the refugees and help them obtain political asylum. Lt. Waters and his small band of Special Forces soldiers place their lives at risk when they lead the Christian villagers through the dense rain forest filled with peril. The audience is shown scenes of gory bloodshed as Lt. Waters transforms from the hardcore soldier into a compassionate humanitarian. In spite of their Navy SEAL expertise, the rebels are aggressive and determined in their pursuit of the American soldiers and refugees. It is later discovered that one of the villagers is actually the sole surviving son of the previous ruling family and the rebel soldiers are following orders to execute him. Lt. Waters is shown grappling with his conscious as he tries to make the decision of risking his life and the lives of his men and the refugees, for this one man.

There are particular quotes from the film that signify how weakness is ascribed to the African not being portrayed as a murderous rebel and reinforces the image of Africa as a hopeless place of despair. “ Listen to me,” Lt. Waters shouts to, Arthur Azuka, the distraught son of the assassinated president. “This man is dead. If you don’t want his death to be meaningless, it’s time for you to become a f---n’ man and get your people into Cameroon! Now cowboy the f--- up! Got it?” Here the audience is shown the “white savior” helping the “frightened African” assert himself and take on the leadership expected of a political ruler’s son. “God has already left Africa,” Lt. Waters says to the white Catholic missionary, adding to the sentiment of Africa being a cursed land. The cinematography captures dark clouds moving across clear white skies in the day and consuming the moonlit skies in the night, creating an ominous mood of good verses evil. Audience members are never given the true role of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa and how it is the root cause of much of the political conflict in Nigeria, similar to Rwanda, Sierra Leone and several other African nations. There is no implication of the British colonizers who forced ethnic groups who did not share the same religion,

language or practices to live in one area named Nigeria by the British. The civil war in the film is fictitious (unlike the actual Nigeria-Biafra civil war of 1967) causing confusion to those who are genuinely attempting to gain insight on the country's history. The rebels in *Tears of the Sun* do not have speaking parts and are therefore looked upon as sub-human men who are murderous and sadistic by nature. The refugees are not given their own unique stories, making it difficult to connect to their plight. A native woman's bare breasts are exposed in a scene whereas Dr. Kendrick maintains her dignity with her shirt carefully concealing her breasts. The refugees are seen at the end of the film rejoicing- dancing and singing their praises to the Americans who risked their lives to bring them to their salvation.

In *Blood Diamond* (2006), the recurring theme of political unrest and heroism are the foundation. Set against the backdrop of a chaotic Sierra Leone in the midst of a 1999 civil war, we meet two African men. One is Black, Salomon Vandy (Djimon Hounsou) and the other is White, Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio). Vandy is a Mende fisherman from Sierra Leone who loves his wife and children dearly. He has aspirations of his only son, Dia Vandy, becoming a doctor. Archer is a racist ex-mercenary, diamond smuggler from Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) who trades arms for conflict diamonds. Vandy's peace is destroyed when Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels invade his village, Shenge. He is kidnapped and forced to work in the diamond mines. His son Dia has been recruited by the rebel forces and is quickly brainwashed into becoming a soulless killer. Fate changes once Vandy finds an unusually large pink diamond that he chooses to hide from the RUF commandant, Captain Poison. Captain Poison witnesses Vandy hide the diamond but within moments government troops attack the rebels' camp and arrest the commandant and Vandy.

In jail, Vandy encounters Archer who was arrested for smuggling diamonds into Liberia. The diamond smuggler's interest is piqued when Captain Poison passes the rumor of Vandy possessing a huge diamond to the other prisoners. Once Archer is released, he arranges for Vandy to also be released. He makes a business deal with Vandy to give him the diamond in exchange for finding his family. An American journalist, Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connely), researching conflict diamonds, joins Vandy and Archer on a quest as they search for the hidden diamond and the Vandy family. Bowen is a character with an idealistic commitment to helping Africa similar to Dr. Kendrick in *Tears of the Sun*.

The film takes the viewer on the well-worn Hollywood path of showing the African either meek or brutal. The speaking parts of the Black women are reduced to few utterances, which lack significance. Maddy Bowen's has a speaking role, which proves her to be savvy and incredibly knowledgeable as she goes after powerful diamond corporations of the world. There are no Black saviors found in the film with the exception of the schoolteacher who attempts to rehabilitate child soldiers. The schoolteacher is killed within the first five minutes of his introduction. In contrast to his strong physical stature, Vandy is portrayed as a feeble man who cowers in the presence of Archer. There is only one instance in the film when Vandy appears to stand up to Archer. When Vandy wants to infiltrate the rebel camp in search of his indoctrinated son, Archer pulls a gun on

him worried that Vandy will ruin his plans of smuggling the diamond out of Africa. In this fleeting moment we see manhood and valor in Vandy. "He is my son. I am his father. I must go find him. Go ahead, shoot me if you want, but I will go find him." Although he is in the land of his birth, Salomon Vandy relies on Danny Archer for guidance and protection similar to a tourist on foreign land. In one scene we see Vandy running carelessly towards gunfire until Archer directs him to safety. Vandy refers to Archer as 'Boss' and Archer calls Vandy a 'kaffir' (the Afrikaans derogatory term for Black people). As seen in *Tears of the Sun*, the savior/hero calls Africa "God-forsaken" yet still manages to redeem his conniving ways by the story's end. He allows Vandy to have the diamond and we watch a man consumed by greed the entire film appear compassionate before taking his final breaths. The humanity, strength and intelligence are placed solely on the Europeans of the film leaving audiences to embrace a sketchy one-dimensional view of African people.

The Last King of Scotland (2005) and *Beasts of No Nation* (2015) similarly show Hollywood's cliché of evil, sadistic African men that enjoy the power of invoking fear. One film shows Ugandan dictator/president Idi Amin (Forest Whitaker) arrange executions of countless people including one of his wives Kay (Kerry Washington). Amin's story, however, is told from the perspective of his young Scottish doctor, Dr. Nicolas Garrigan. The stereotype of Africans being incapable of solving their problems is promoted, when Amin relies on Dr. Garrigan for daily assistance throughout the movie until he learns of his betrayal. The African women portrayed in the film are sexually promiscuous beings who are readily available and willing to have sex. Within the first scene of Dr. Garrigan arriving in Africa, he meets a local woman on a bus. Seconds later, we witness Dr. Garrigan and the African woman naked in her bed. He is able to bed Amin's third wife with the same ease causing her pregnancy and later her demise.

Beasts of No Nation is set in an unnamed African country. The protagonist is Agu (Abraham Attah), an innocent boy turned child soldier in the midst of a senseless, unsubstantiated war. His father and older brother are slain before his eyes, leaving Agu to survive in the "bush". Agu meets the villain, Commandant (Idris Elba), and is quickly forced into joining a rebel group. Commandant uses constant abuse of his young charges to maintain control and terror. The images are gruesome and difficult to watch. By the end of the film, Agu has transformed from the carefree boy playing in the opening scene to a sullen shell of a boy who has murdered to survive. He sits in an orphanage with a social worker, but it appears too late. The bleak ending of the film does not give hope of Africa to the viewer, but instead it tells the typical tale of chronic devastation.

Hollywood began to make notable changes in its depiction of Africa with Disney's *Queen of Katwe* in 2016. The first difference between this film and its predecessors is the genre. Instead of the war/political thriller genre that saturated many of the African theme films, *Queen of Katwe* is considered a biographical sports drama. The story is based on the real life experiences of Ugandan chess champion, Phiona Mutesi. Katwe is a slum in Kapala, Uganda where Phiona and her siblings live with their single mother, Nakku Harriet (Lupita Nyong'o). Phiona (Madina Nalwanga) and her little brother help their mother vend in the marketplace. With responsibilities that surpass her 10 years, Phiona is

shown taking care of her newborn brother and scavenging for food and water. One fateful day she meets soccer and chess coach Robert Katende (David Oyelowo) at a local missionary program. She watches the children play chess with intense curiosity. Her fascination leads her to learn the game and become one of Katende's most celebrated players. Under Katende's careful guidance, Phiona finds success in high-level competitions and tournaments. Over the next several years, Phiona continues her education and discovers the world beyond Katwe. As she struggles with self-identity in her new world, Phiona maintains her focus on education and dreams of taking her family out of poverty. Unlike many Hollywood films, *Queen of Katwe* portrays an African girl as intelligent and independent. As the title suggests, Phiona is not limited to her circumstances and takes on her obstacles with the grace and dignity of a queen.

In 2018, Hollywood made history with the Marvel film, *Black Panther*; completely abandoning the stereotypical images of the silent or over sexualized African woman and the meek or senselessly vicious African man. The superhero/ science fiction genre of *Black Panther* allows the viewer to imagine Africa in a technologically advanced state as we enter the mythic land of Wakanda. The characters are multifaceted and possess a strength and pride of being African. In one profound scene at Warrior Falls, audiences can see a juxtaposition of various aspects of Africa's multiple ethnicities. There are elaborate headdresses, hairstyles, colorful patterned prints, kente cloth, elaborate jewelry, lip plates and more. The main-character, T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) is the newly crowned king following his beloved father's untimely death. He is powerful yet humble and kind. He has a group of women warriors who are skilled at protecting him and their nation. T'Challa's ex-girlfriend/ love interest, Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o) and T'Challa have a harmonious and respectful friendship. His sister, Shuri (Letitia Wright) is an innovative scientist who ingeniously creates weapons and inventions out of Wakanda's most precious resource- vibranium. Wakanda is completely fueled by the impenetrable vibranium as it provides energy and can be even used in clothing. T'Challa and other Wakandans find it necessary to remain secluded from the outside world in order to maintain their traditions and resources. The villain, Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan) is an outsider who has intentions of taking the throne and becoming the ruler of Wakanda. It is not until later that we discover T'Challa's father was Killmonger's uncle and was ultimately responsible for his brother's death in the United States. Furthermore, the late king did not bring the orphaned Killmonger to Wakanda leaving him to fend for himself in Oakland, California. Armed with a vengeance, Killmonger's purpose is to take the vibranium out of Wakanda and arm Black people all over the world with the purpose of fighting against White supremacy.

Black Panther obliterates the re-visited stereotypes of African people needing the outside world to save it from doom and destruction. The women in the film have major speaking parts and appear wise and intellectual when speaking. They are seen as scientists and warriors instead of bedmates. T'Challa is the sovereign ruler, but does not abuse his power and cause suffering among his people. He is not weak or feeble in his humility. Killmonger is the villain with a tragic storyline causing audiences to both pity and fear him. He is given humanity. When children of the African diaspora see these images on

the screen, there is a sense of true pride that previous Hollywood movies have never given them. Each time a child in the schoolyard shouts out, “Wakanda Forever!” they are saying, “I am strong, smart and beautiful.” Finally.

Objectives

This unit is intended for Grade 8 English/ Language Arts. The objectives will include the following:

- View, analyze and critique African-theme films of different genres
- Develop critical thinking and writing skills
- Understand film as a medium which can influence audiences worldwide
- Identify, understand and use film techniques and terminologies
- Create a film script with realistic dialogue
- Read portions of a film script
- Read and write film reviews and critiques
- Film an adaptation of an African children’s book
- Create a film festival

Strategies:

Graphic Organizers

- (K-W-L Chart/ What do you Know, Want to know, and Learned)
- Venn Diagram

(At the start of the unit, students will be asked to explain how they view Africa based on their prior knowledge and images they’ve seen on television and film. Students will also give their expectations of the subject.

Their responses will be used for the closing of the unit in order to review the variations of stereotypes used in film. They will use Venn Diagrams to compare and contrast films from African cinema to Hollywood’s representation of Africa)

Students Use Digital Tools:

Students will use their cell phones, laptops/computers (Internet), and cameras to research and create a digital storyboard and film scenes

Students will present ideas as dramatic performances:

Students will use their films in a school film festival

Anticipatory Guide:

Students will use the teacher made guide before viewing any of the films.

Film Viewing Log:

Students will keep a log as they view all films.

Quickwrite:

Students will respond to a question provided by the teacher at the beginning of each lesson

Storyboarding:

Students will give a graphic representation of their script

Journal:

Students will journal their emotions and views of films in “Deep Thoughts” book (cover designed by student)

Letters to Author/Director/Character:

Students will write letters or postcards to characters from viewed films

Character Analysis File/ Mind Mirror

Students will independently write down background and personality traits of selected characters. They will collaboratively create an image of the character and fill in the image with quotes and thoughts of the character

Collaborative Movie Poster:

Students will collaboratively design their own movie poster, highlighting elements of their film

Collaborative Comic Strip:

Students will work in small groups to create a graphic comic of a student made superhero

Clarifying Movie Ticket:

Students will respond to teacher made questions on a teacher created movie ticket.

Soundtrack

Students pretend to be a producer of a film viewed in class and choose a an African song to add to their movie

Classroom Lessons/Activities

Queen of Katwe/ Akeelah and the Bee (6 days)

Note: Students will view 15-20 minute clips of both films. Teacher should preview films to determine which scenes to use to support the theme of overcoming obstacles. Although characters from each film come from humble backgrounds of single parent homes and low income, their humanity, sharp intellect and inner beauty remains the focus of the lens.

Materials:

Chart Paper
Markers
Notebooks
Interactive Board
Pens/Pencils
Film Viewing Guide
Index Cards
World Map
Post It Notes
Laptop/Computers

- 1) **Preparing Learners-** “The Power of Images” Teacher hands out color photographs of images of Kampala, Uganda to groups of four. The images should be of school children in uniform, people selling items at the marketplace, people using various forms of transportation, people in traditional clothing, buildings in Kampala, residential areas, types of homes. (**Appendix A**) They are to discuss what they see in the pictures in detail. One group member will write down the responses of the group. Teacher will jot all responses on a chart paper titled “Uganda” and lead a class discussion about the images.
- 2) Using their responses, students are going to interpret the images and give a statement of what they infer regarding Uganda. They will use five minutes to share their statement with a partner (Think-Pair-Share). Select five students to report what a partner said about Uganda based on their inferences.
- 3) Student groups will take turns guessing where Uganda is on the map. They will be given 30 seconds to locate the country with their Post-It. The group who is the closest to locating the country will have the opportunity to lead the first discussion after viewing films.
- 4) Teacher will hand out anticipatory guides for *Queen of Katwe*, and have students take turns asking their partner the questions on the guide. (**Appendix B**)
- 5) Teacher will ask the question: How do directors communicate their ideas to the audience? Students will be introduced to film terms and will use terms in context when writing or discussing scenes of the film for class and homework
http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/30683_definitions.pdf
- 6) **Interacting With The Text-** Students will use two days to view two separate 15-20 minute clips of *Queen of Katwe*. After the final viewing, have students respond to the question in their Double-Entry Journal using at least five film terms. (**Appendix C**)

- 7) Teacher will find a familiar scene in *Akeelah and the Bee*. Students will view for 20 minutes and respond in their Double-Entry Journal. One group will lead a discussion about each film (emotional appeal, camera angles and shots, dialogue, director's purpose, etc.)
- 8) **Extending Understanding**- Students will get in groups of four and take turns completing a Venn-Diagram (graphic organizer) after class discussion of both characters (10 year-old Phiona and 11 year-old Akeelah). Following the Venn Diagrams, split class in half. Have two or three groups of four create a Mind Mirror of Akeelah and the other half of the class will create a Mind Mirror of Phiona. Allow students time to present and explain Mind Mirrors.
- 9) Students will create a storyboard of their favorite scene. They will be expected to use the film terminology taught in class. Students will use cellphones to film as they recreate scenes. In preparation of writing film critiques, students should read examples of film critiques. <https://custom-writing.org/blog/how-to-write-a-movie-critique-top-tips> They will write film critiques of a classmate's film.
- 10) Students will conduct research on the two places the characters are from: Crenshaw, Los Angeles, California and Kampala, Uganda, E. Africa. They will take note of the films accuracy

Homework- Students should write a realistic letter to Phiona, Akeelah and one of the mothers. Part of the research during the Extended Understanding can be done as a homework assignment if time is limited.

Tarzan vs. T'Challa: The Awakening of the Black Panther (8 Days)

Note: Student will compare two films: *Legend of Tarzan* and *Black Panther*. For the sake of time, students should only view each of the films for 25 minutes periods with "commercials" in between for clarity and discussion.. Teacher should preview films to determine which scenes to use to support the theme of positive vs. negative portrayals of Africa. It is important to bear in mind the powerful dynamics of stereotypes. There are times when people are not aware of their limited views and children are no exception.

Materials:

Poster Paper

Markers/Color Pencils

Notebooks

Interactive Board

Pens/Pencils

Index Cards

Tri-Fold Board

Post It Notes

Laptop/Computers

- 1) **Preparing the Learner-** Teacher will hand out old and new Tarzan movie pictures to groups of four. They will be given five to seven minutes to explain what they see in the pictures. They are to discuss what they see in the pictures in detail. One group member will write down the responses of the group. All group members will present their observations. Teacher will jot all responses on a chart paper titled “Tarzan” and lead a class discussion about the images. Big Questions: *How is the continent of Africa and its people depicted through these images? Based on these images, is Tarzan a protagonist or antagonist? Why?*
- 2) Students will do a Quickwrite and respond to the prompt: I think Africa is _____. Movies and television show Africa in a _____ (Students should write a short paragraph and share with members of their group) Teacher should begin a discussion about stereotypes.
- 3) Student groups will be given images of T’Challa from the *Black Panther* movie. They are to discuss what they see in the pictures in detail. One group member will write down the responses of the group. All group members will present their observations. Teacher will jot all responses on a chart paper titled “T’Challa” and lead a class discussion about the images. Big Question: *What does the director want the audience to feel and think about T’Challa? What is your evidence?*
- 4) Students will do a Quickwrite and respond to the prompt: *What is a Superhero? If you had superhero powers what would you use them for? Why?* (Students should write one to two paragraphs)
- 5) **Interacting With The Text-** Students will use two days to view two separate 20-minute clips of *Legend of Tarzan* and *Tarzan of the Apes*. (Students will use their Film Viewing Log each day they view clips of movies). After viewing clips, have students respond to the question in their Double-Entry Journal using at least five film terms in the evidence portion. What message is the director giving the audience about Africa and African people? Evidence? Allow time for in-depth discussion of feelings and thoughts.
- 6) Students will use two days to view two separate 20- minute clips of *Black Panther*. After viewing clips, have students respond to the question in their Double-Entry Journal using at least five film terms in the evidence portion. What message is the director giving the audience about Africa and African people? Evidence? Allow time for in-depth discussion of feelings and thoughts.
- 7) Quickwrite. What would happen if T’Challa met Tarzan? Have students use the quickwrite as a basis for a short one -page script using film terms.
- 8) **Extending Understanding-** Students in dyads or groups of four will choose any African country to research region, culture, languages, music, ethnic groups,

animals and minerals/resources. Provide students with a chart to organize their information. Once charts are completed, students must choose how they want their superhero to look. Students will work together to design their superhero on a poster. They must all agree on the power and mineral of that country. **Accuracy is important! Big Question: How will the superhero help his/her country?**

- 9) Students will work in their collaborative groups and create a comic strip of their superhero using his or her special powers. They will write a script of one scene based on the comic strip using film terms. Give students a whole class period to act out and film one scene using their cellphones and handmade tripods. All members must participate!

- 10) Students will use the tri-fold board to create a New Release Movie Poster of their film in preparation for the school film festival.

Standards: The Core Curriculum of the School District of Philadelphia is aligned to the PA Common Core Standards of Reading and Literature. www.pdesas.org

CC.1.2.8.A Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text. E08.B-K.1.1.2

CC.1.2.8.B Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences, conclusions, and/or generalizations drawn from the text. E08.B-K.1.1.1

CC.1.2.8.C Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events. E08.B-K.1.1.3

CC.1.2.8.F Analyze the influence of the words and phrases in a text including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings, and how they shape meaning and tone. E08.B-V.4.1.1

Annotated Bibliography

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This article gives a strong analysis of the challenges African immigrant children face.

The Opportunity Agenda. (October 2011) *"Social Science Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys"* retrieved from www.racialequitytools.org April, 2018.

This article gives an in-depth analysis of stereotypes found in the media and how it affects African-Americans.

Warner, Tony. *"Racism and Stereotypes: How the Tarzan Dynamic Still Infiltrates Cinema,"* Retrieved from <https://weareorlando.co.uk/page13.php> March, 2018.

This article gives the historical background of Tarzan and his creator.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Decay of Lying.* New York: Brentann, 1905 [1889].

A philosophical essay written in a dialogue format which claims life imitates art.

Diplomas Count: An Essential Guide to Graduation Policy and Rates
https://www.edweek.org/media/ew/dc/2006/ia_SGB06.pdf

A statistical guide which gives information on the national average graduation rate in urban schools compared to suburban schools.

NCES- National Center for Education Statistics. (April 2018) *"The Condition of Education"* retrieved from www.nces.ed.gov May, 2018.

A statistical guide of students in the United States.

Appendix A

Anticipatory Guide for *Queen of Katwe*

	Agree	Disagree	Explain
1) Children will be as successful as their parents.			
2) Good parents always know what's best for their children.			
3) Children living in poverty give up faster than wealthy children.			
4) Boys tend to do better in chess than girls.			

Appendix B

Double-Entry Journal

What did you learn about the main character's life?	What is the evidence?