

The African-American Graphic Novel: Discovering, Examining and Creating Graphic Narratives of Racialized Experience

Tara Ann Carter
John Bartram High School

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Overview

After the election of President Barak Obama, many pundits and talking heads proclaimed America to be in a “post-racial” state. To their discredit, as Obama’s first term comes to a close, systematic as well as cultural racism abounds in most areas of American life. The concept of the United States becoming “post-racial” is in itself dubious, but worth some consideration, if only to draw and make easily identifiable areas in need of reform. After Obama’s election, the African America philosopher Cornel West remarked:

There is definitely a white backlash, and I’m sure it’s escalating. The good thing is that those racists don’t speak on behalf on the vast majority of whites. That’s a sign of progress. Of course, the press calls it post-racial. It’s not post-racial, just less racist...One election doesn’t make a difference in that regard. Besides, a black face in the White House doesn’t mean that the fight against racism is over. There’s still white supremacy, police brutality, and discrimination in the workplace, in housing and so forth (quoted in Williams 2008).

This being said, the necessity of this unit becomes glaringly obvious, particularly where “white supremacy” and “discrimination” are still part of the American social landscape (Williams 2008).

The only way that race can come to play a diminishing role of importance in American life is through education about race, racism and Otherness (Wise 2012). Emphasis is placed on education of previous experiences of African-Americans for students to find footing in history in order to inform their own experience, African-American or otherwise.

This unit is intended for a ninth grade Honors Literature course. The students in this course generally read on grade level and are capable of writing on a reasonable level. This unit provides possibilities for any teacher in an empowerment school teaching a non-scripted elective reading course. While the specific students for which this unit is designed are primarily African-American this does not imply that students of any other race or nationality would not benefit from the texts, exercises and activities described herein. In the *Annotated Reading List for Students*, some graphic novels of alternative racial experiences are included, such as *American Born Chinese* or *Arab in America*. For further variety of narrative racial experiences, I suggest perusing any of the curriculum manuals suggests in the *Annotated List of Materials for Classroom Use*, as many of them provided rather exhaustive lists of appropriate graphic novels, often organized by grade level. Needless to say, whether one chooses to focus only on African-American Experience or include experiences of other races, the questions and ideas espoused in this unit are relevant and necessary across all cultures and communities.

Rationale

It is undeniable that the racial policies, attitudes and histories of the United States are complicated and intertwined. However, as Americans we must navigate the politics of race on a daily basis. The Internet and television inundate one with images and knowledge about any culture, race or tribe imaginable, yet ignorance and mis-education abound. Race is a major issue in America. The discussion of race and personal experiences of race is essential to high school understanding, particular in the diverse schools within the School District of Philadelphia. This unit creates an avenue to begin this discussion.

At my Philadelphia high school students are apt to identify a statement or action as racist several times a day. Though the students are very keen to identify injustice or inequality, their personal and cultural definitions of racism are often uninformed or misconstrued. These same students often participate in ridicule or bullying of African immigrant students. When questioned about their prejudices and actions toward another group of people, these students believed their actions were not discriminatory based on race or ethnicity. One scholar, in her discussion of racism, posits: "In general, if racism is defined as race-based prejudice or

discrimination, then it seemingly logically follows that anyone can be racist, including members of both dominant and oppressed groups” (Doane 2006, 267). Even if one does not subscribe to this definition of racism, the reality that racism does exist and racial attitudes inform everyday actions is tangibly undeniable.

Most students leaving the urban high school where I teach go with a sense that the world they live in is just, equitable and colorblind, or at the very least color-neutral. Many students who leave the area experience an extreme culture shock when they realize that the beliefs they held to be firm and true are in fact questionable at best. One scholar remarks: “The most disadvantaged minority individuals, crippled by the cumulative effects of both race and class subjugation, disproportionately lack the resources to compete effectively in a free and open market” (Wilson 2000). This claim is backed up by Desmond King and Rogers Smith study on racial politics, in which they quantitatively show that, while progress has been made in areas such as graduation rates, blacks are under-represented among those holding career-track jobs and political office (2011, 270). All in all, though institutionalized and no longer as blatant, racial difference is still a present reality in the American system. This unit aims to address this issue head-on and early in students’ high school careers to prepare them for the realities of the world they will be entering shortly.

There is a disjuncture between the understanding not only of the ideas and terminology of race in America, but also a disconnect between the students’ perception of actions performed upon them versus actions performed by them upon someone else in terms of race and discrimination. All in all, the need to clearly explore and create definitions of racism, racial identity and racial politics is an important exercise for urban high school students as they come of age to enter a world that can often be cold and littered with preconceived notions and stereotypes.

In addition to the texts, students will take notes and explore readings and slideshows on the historical time periods of pre-abolition and pre-civil rights African American experiences. The first part of this unit will be finalized with the creation of a mini-comic project in which students will share their stories of their first encounters with race/racism. The first part of this unit creates a foundation upon which the second five-week period builds. The second part of the unit focuses students in an inquiry-based project on the idea of “Post-Racial America”. Using a variety of sources, students will explore the question in small cooperative groups and create a definition and explanation in their own words. The second section culminates with the creation of a mini-comic project focusing on sharing of students’ understanding of their own racial identity. As a connecting strain, students will finish out the unit by writing an essay exploring racial politics and identity in America.

Objectives

By the end of this unit, students will be able to

- Define and identify hallmarks of graphic novels
- Differentiate African-American graphic novels as a separate and specific genre
- Read and comprehend varied graphic narrative formats
- Analyze stylistic choices made by authors in the graphic novel genre
- Synthesis multiple sources of African-American graphic novels to increase understanding of the form and genre
- Evaluate African-American graphic novels in comparison with other graphic novels by discussing form, content and genre
- Produce a polished, scholarly essay on the reality of America as a “post-racial” society
- Create two mini-comics in which they express their experiences of race and racism

A Note on Standards

This curriculum unit is designed for an elective credit class that is not tailored to any specific standards. This unit can however be easily adapted to the standards for both History as well as English classes within in High School level core standards.

Historical Background

A Brief History of Racial Politics in the US

After the election of President Barak Obama, the media proclaimed America to be in a state of post-racial reckoning. However, the legitimacy of this claim is debatable. As stated at the opening of this unit, Dr. Cornel West believes that America is indeed still inundated by racism and white supremacy. In another interview, West explains:

“By ‘post-racial’, they really mean ‘less racist’. You’re talking about white brothers and sisters who are now willing to vote for a black man based on qualification as opposed to pigmentation. That’s a beautiful thing. But at the same time, it recognizes that there was a time in which pigmentation would trump qualification” (quoted in Goodman 2008).

As he sees it, Americans, for the first time, let the realities of legitimate personal qualification win over their urges to be less accepting to any group or person appearing to be Other. If what West claims is correct, America is very far away from becoming post-racial. At best, the election of Obama signaled a hallmark triumph of reason over blind ignorance. However, the state of racial affairs in the United States appears to be stagnated since well before the election of Barak Obama. Statistics on the realities of white vs. non-whites seem to support the same conclusion (King and Smith 2011, 269-272). While life is better for African-Americans, it is not made of the same opportunity and quality as those of their fellow white citizens.

Though the Civil Rights Era legislative and cultural victories did allow African-Americans and other minorities to gain some ground, a new issue began to emerge. Systematic racism created an additional barrier against non-white citizens in many arenas of American life (Doane 2006). One sociologist suggests the cause of this additional layer of disenfranchisement is “the preservation of white privilege and the containment of challenging social movements” (Doane 2006, 267). Similarly, Tim Wise in his many essays, books and blog entries discusses these manifestations of white privilege. While the election of Barak Obama does certainly signal significant change in terms of the perceptions of race in America, there still remains the need for substantial reform and rethinking of norms and standards that exclude or disenfranchise minorities, African-American, Latino, Asian-American or otherwise.

One scholar suggests that in order for America to reach a state of racial equality a strategy must be developed that “appeals to a broadened coalition and address the many problems afflicting minorities that originated in racist practices but will not be solved by race-specific remedies” (Wilson 2000, 1). In other words, specific political moves must be made to ensure and help uphold racial equality.

Societal change must follow political change. One entree into the collective consciousness is through the infusing of racial tolerance and equity in education. The necessity to educate students about race is incredibly urgent for two reasons. First, diversity does not equate to tolerance and understanding. In her study on child psychology, Po Bronson explains: “Just throwing kids of different races into a school together isn’t the right way, because they can self-segregate within the school” (2009, 58). Secondly, Bronson has found that the refusal to bring up race in discussion leaves children at a disadvantage for similar reasons of inability to articulate and relate to others with racial experiences different from their own. Bronson goes on to suggest that the most effective way is to begin constant and consistent education about race and difference from a very young

age. Also, of course, is the need for implicit action by educators as role models to encourage these types of discussions within the classroom.

A Brief History and Defense of Graphic Novels as Literature

Since their introduction into society comics have been considered children's reading material. However, in the increasingly multi-sensory world we live in, standard black-and-white typewritten text is not necessarily the best available way to express a concept or narrative. Since 1987, graphic novels have slowly crept into realm of possibility within a mainstream curriculum. Literary devices, theme, plot and other hallmarks of "English Class" are present in the same capacity as a standard novel and often the pictures lend an additional level of complexity that must be deciphered.

The vast array of material in print and on the internet for students to interact and read provides the possibility of finding a text that is relevant to almost any subject, whether a specific life or any specific literary skill.

In recent years, education scholarship has dedicated some time to discussion of the possible benefits of the use of graphic narratives in the classroom. Students enjoy reading graphic novels and comics because "the writing is almost always concise and simple" (Bitz 2010, 17). This allows students to increase comprehension and gain confidence and speed in their reading skills. A study on reading and creating comics in the classroom confirms: "Through comics students investigate the use of dialogue, succinct and dramatic vocabulary and non-verbal communication" (Morrison, Bryan and Chilcoat 2002, 759).

The African-American Graphic Novel: Call and Response

Much tribute is paid to Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis and Art Spiegelman's Maus, which is deserved and earned through and through. However, each of these, as well as other well-known and critically acclaimed graphic novels, serve a particular set of niche markets, i.e. Middle Eastern Voices or the Jewish Experience. One group insufficiently heard is the voices of African-Americans.

With a little research, it is clear to see that graphic novels in which African-Americans are featured prominently do exist: there are histories of black leaders, as well as graphic novels on various subjects authored by African-Americans. After unearthing this wealth of untapped material, the task of unpacking and organizing the bounty looms dauntingly. This unit aims to shed light and help alleviate some of the burden of this very necessary endeavor.

Undertaking this exploration of African-American graphic novels as a genre begins with seeking out and creating a definition and terminology for the categorization. Additionally, it will be necessary to explore and answer the question: What are the tenets of a contemporary African-American graphic novel and how do these compare and relate to the more global spectrum of the graphic novel genre? In his reflection on the course he teaches on African-American graphic novels, Michel Chaney explains that in order to open the discussion of texts, he compels students “to explore the limits mystified in the descriptors such as *literature* and *African-American*” (2007, 69). Only after they have formulated a definition and understanding of these terms for themselves can they begin to unpack the texts provided.

Cultural anthropologist Helán Enoch Page sees a dualism in the representations of African-American males. Black males historically and often still today are either demonized as irredeemable criminals or alienated as sexual deviants (Page 1997, 101-102). If they show any redeemable qualities or gain preference in the eyes of black audiences, those figures are “deemed negative and unembraceable from a mainstream perspective” (Page 1997, 106). This negativity has been systematically disseminated by primarily white owned and operated media outlets. Page believes that “African Americans are locked out of the media production process to such an extent that their own self-representational aesthetic is only just starting to reemerge from its last repression after the groundbreaking work of black artists during the 1920s and 1930s” (107). Thus Page ends with a call for a refocusing of the image of the black male in American Media and the dropping of protection of white privilege (107). He believes there is hope for this project as “not all members of the mass audience are duped” (107).

The creation of the genre of the graphic novel has provided an outlet for which the imagery of the black male could be redeemed. African-American graphic novel scholar, Michael Chaney sees graphic novels as a place where “these visual narratives by black graphic novelists signify on and reconstitute the political past to intervene in the enduring legacies of slavery, minstrelsy, apartheid, and commodification that haunt the present” (2007, 176). In other words, some of the misconceptions and wrongs against blacks in American can be rectified through this emerging medium. It seems that Page’s call has been answered in the form of the two graphic novels upon which this unit is founded: Nat Turner and King.

In the Preface to Nat Turner, artist and writer Kyle Baker explains: “I first learned the name Nat Turner as a child in school...Over the years I would encounter the name Nat Turner in various books. None of the entries was longer than few sentences mentioning the name, the date and that it was important” (2005, 6). This inspired Baker, himself African-American, to provide a proper

treatment of the story of Nat Turner and the Slave Rebellion. Baker's treatment of history "gives context and flesh to this influential figure in American and African American history whose story is often ironically relegated to 'just a few sentences'" (Francis 2012, 114). Beginning with a silent (read here: wordless, strictly visual panels) recounting of slaves trapped into slavery and the grueling voyage of the Middle Passage, Baker sets up the historical background that leads the reader into Nat Turner's reality.

Highly visual images, primarily the picturesque panels interspersed with related source document excerpts, primarily borrowed from "The Confessions of Nat Turner", drive the narrative. This text is simple, easily read and digested, as the pictures themselves give voice to the story that is only sometimes augmented with the historical confession of Turner himself. As one critic contends, perhaps Baker's treatment of Turner is more realistic and historically appropriate because instead of demanding that "the enslaved/oppressed demonstrate their moral superiority at every turn" (Francis 2012, 117), Nat Turner chooses to effectively use brute force to drive home his point. The graphic novel provides a revision/addition to the history books that not only contextualizes the feelings and backlash of white oppression, but also can be extended out to relate to the racial oppression that is still maintained presently in many ways in American society. Though the character of Turner is a far-cry from the stoic King, he effectively provides the reader with a black male figure that provides some positive representation, if only for his revolutionary tactics.

Correspondingly, in his discussion of King, African-American graphic novel scholar, Michel Chaney sees Anderson's depiction of King as an "alternative methodology that posits value based on a fundamental codependence between the archival images comprising King's life and the graphic novel's mechanics" (2007, 176). Martin Luther King, Jr. is by far the most recognized African-American male figure. Anderson's takes the images already imbedded in the public consciousness and intersperses them with eyewitness testimony, narrative framing and factual events. This results in the reader experiencing the reformation of the history of MLK in a more nuanced light. In his elevation of Martin Luther King, Jr. to graphic novel form, Anderson is able to mold the portrayal of his subject away from the strictly benevolent, non-violent figure and into a real person, with a home life, a career and his own flaws. Chaney remarks, "Informed by historical structures of spectacle, the display of black bodies undergoes a process of media negotiation in graphic novels by black authors and writers" (176). Finally, in this moment of the publication of King, readers are given yet another positive and realistic black male figure to consider.

King is a visually bold, primarily black and white graphic novel. Faces are flattened, ambiguous, sometimes blacked out and sometimes overly highlighted to

extreme white, leaving the reader to constantly check their understanding and grasp of who is saying what to whom. Though it does take some adjustment to become comfortable with the artist's style, that adjustment is a worthy labor. The author uses the deep contrast of the imagery to draw the reader in aesthetically, but one quickly gets lost in the story of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his struggles to rectify the racial situation of his contemporary America.

Anderson does not portray an idolized King, but rather a realistic person, warts and all. In fact, in his reflections on the making of the graphic novel, Anderson comments on his Canadian heritage and his ability to accurately represent the United States beloved civil rights leader and the idea that "perhaps that kind of objectivity is exactly what this endeavor needs. Being an outsider may afford me a slightly different perspective on America" (2010, 236). One review describes King as going "beyond history to examine life's complications, particularly pertaining to racial relations. King the character becomes the personification of these complications" (Arnold 2002). This description is beyond accurate. While this is a biography, it's also an interpretation. King should be taught after Nat Turner both because it comes chronologically after, but also because Nat Turner provides a point of entry into the graphic novel genre and allows students to navigate the simpler stylistic hallmark present before delving into the much more complex flow and narrative style of King. King itself is not inaccessible to students, but rather needs some prefacing and careful teaching in terms of style and comic theory before leaving them to embark upon the narrative unguided.

While these two graphic novels are only the start to what is quickly becoming a burgeoning genre of representation, there is at least now a satisfaction for the need of both stories of African-American experience and also positive portrayals of black males. The onus now lies on students to take up these new narratives, relate to them and find avenues to rectify and express their own stories of racial experience.

Strategies

Text to Self/Text to World Connections

Every lesson taught in this unit asks students to compare some elements of the graphic novel, character, setting or events to their own lives. By creating these moments in the curriculum, students are more willing to participate and share because it involves their own lives and experiences. They also are then able to produce a closer, more personal reading of the text being used. These connections

create a classroom environment in which students feel they are autonomous and have a validated opinion and viewpoint.

Integrating Writing

Students will write an essay comparing literary and graphic elements in two biographies as the culmination to this unit. Writing, however, does not happen merely in isolation solely as part of this final essay. Students will also answer constructed responses, short answer questions, and homework response questions on a weekly and daily basis, contributing to a curriculum infused with many opportunities to write at various lengths.

High-Interest Material Maximizes Student Engagement

Student engagement and interest in the subject being shared is tantamount to the success of any teacher or unit. While good teachers can make dry material engaging, engaging material can help even the most struggling classroom educators find their way to a student's mind. Graphic novels have proven to be successful in my Literature classroom. I feel that graphic novels in which my students see characters like themselves involved will be even more engaging and have a greater impact.

Lesson Plan Format

The lessons provided in this curriculum unit follow the seven-step lesson plan mandated by the agreement between the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. The seven steps are: Do Now (Warm-up or Anticipation Set); Direction Instruction; Guided Practice; Independent Practice; Closing (including Exit Ticket); Homework and Assessment. This format provides a cyclical feedback between student and teacher that ensures understanding and proper comprehension of given material. Lessons can build on one another using the Do Now as a recall of the previous lesson or Independent Practice as a synthesis activity, combining concepts from a previous lesson with the current day's topic.

Before, During and After Reading Strategies

Before, During and After Reading Strategies (BDA) are extremely useful for constant feedback while students are studying *King* and *Nat Turner*. "Before" strategies include KWL (know/wonder/learned) charts, historical context introductory lessons, identifying and defining terms and vocabulary, and anticipation guides; "During" strategies include comprehension questions, double-column journals, making predictions while reading and character trait/action

tracking. “After” strategies range from a simple multiple-choice post-reading assessments to a research paper or debate speech. It is important to note through each of these stages of the reading process students are constantly reading, writing and thinking about reading and writing. BDA strategies check-in and monitor students’ progress throughout the entirety of the text and provide pause in order for the teacher to interject, suggest and discuss elements of previously introduced historical and cultural contexts.

Notes and Information Organization

The nature of this topic lends to a rather lengthy accumulation of information. In order to prevent classroom fatigue, students will record, connect and organize what they have learned in a variety of ways. Graphic organizers are an exceedingly popular method for students to visually layout and align what they learn. These organizers can be provided by the teacher as a photocopy, drawn on a board for a class creation or students can copy a template into their notebooks. Additionally, the two-column note format, sometimes called Cornell Notes, is an easy way for the teacher to lecture while students take notes in a guided and systematic manner. Throughout the course of this unit students will take this style of notes on specific topics as an initial introduction to a subject. Then students will use the notes to assist their learning and reactivate their knowledge as they explore each topic more in depth through participation in the extension activities. All sets of Cornell Notes will be kept in their notebooks creating a reference library for their personal perusal.

Collaborative Student Learning

At several points throughout the unit, students will be invited to work with one another during classroom activities. A prominent idea behind collaborative student learning is that it allows for students to interact on a peer-to-peer level and potentially communicate ideas about the subject of study in a manner different from that of the teacher. For low-level learners the benefit lies in direct and specific feedback that is sustainably longer and more intense than a teacher could give any single student in a normal period. For higher-level learners, understanding and synthesis is encouraged when they are “teaching” another student information that they have comprehended. Teaching someone else is the number one activity that encourages thought synthesis and idea analysis.

Jigsaws take information, spilt it up in three to ten groups and require the students in each group to become experts on their bit of knowledge and teach it back to the class. Students who are watching each presentation take notes or fill out a worksheet to retain and record all of the “pieces” with the idea that when

students have all information the puzzle will become clear. Jigsaws are useful in a variety of settings.

Another variation of a grouping or “information chunking” activity that requires collaboration amongst students is the more traditional station rotation. In this exercise, student groups travel between multiple stations, each with a piece or specific topic of information related to the whole. The exercise is summarized by individually answering a writing prompt which ties together the elements of the different stations to gauge student understanding and mastery of the material.

Previewing Vocabulary

Anticipation activities or other preview sets are an important element of teaching vocabulary. In order for a student to remember and understand the meaning of a word, they must engage with each word multiple times and in multiple ways. In addition to making a prediction about the words, followed by copying down and understanding the definition of a word, students must know how to properly use it and each of its variations in a proper sentence. This can be done in a number of ways. Students can individually create sentences and check one another’s work. The class can create sentences or a paragraph story as a class or in groups with the teacher circulating and checking for proper usage. Lastly, after vocabulary has been previewed and is understood, when students interact with it in the text they will understand and glean a deeper understanding of what they are reading.

Classroom Activities/Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan One: Experiences of Race Mini-Comic #1

Objective (SWBAT: Students Will Be Able To):

Identify and relate the experience of personal racial identity realization through the creation and assembly of a narrative Mini-Comic

Do Now:

7-Minute Quick Write - Jot down the first experience you can recall where you were aware of either your race or some of a race different than you. Give as many descriptive details as possible and describe the events, people and place this event occurred.

Direct Instruction:

Notes on Narrative Structure, Sequencing and Comic Panel Stylistics (Cornell Style)

Guided Practice:

Teacher guides class discussion on personal experience, race, identity and narrative. Rubric for Mini-Comic (available in appendix) distribute and walkthrough expectations.

Independent Practice:

Students create draft storyboard and assemble a 9-panel comic. Simple template can be created as a 3x3 chart in Microsoft Word. Teacher assists students pare down stories and add details in panels as necessary

Closing:

Why do we record personal narrative? Purpose and Outcome.

Exit Ticket:

3 highlights of your comic (things you did the best)
2 ways you wish you could improve your comic
1 opinion of the lesson

Assessment:

Mini-Comic Book evaluated by rubric

*Note: The same lesson format is used for the second mini-comic assessment, in which students create a mini-comic on their attitudes about their racial identity. Alternate rubric provided in Appendix.

Lesson Plan Two: Text and Self - Narrative Synthesis Activity

Objective (SWBAT):

Compare and contrast their experiences of racism and racial identity with the experiences related in *Nat Turner* and *King* by completing a Triple Venn Diagram

Do Now:

- 1) Summarize in 3 to 5 sentences the experiences of race described in *Nat Turner*
- 2) Summarize in 3 to 5 sentences the experiences of race described in *King*

Direct Instruction:

Kloze Notes on Racial Experience. Teacher gives students copy of their notes on race in America with key words blanked out. Students fill in blank while teacher dictates notes (to be formulated from readings suggested in Annotated Bibliography for teachers). Teacher explains group work, rubric and expectations for participation/roles within each group

Guided Practice:

Teacher guides class through completion of plot triangle for both narratives as preparation for group activity.

Independent Practice:

Students work in groups of 3 to 5 to create a Triple Venn Diagram for each story as well as personal experiences they have had that are similar or different. Groups follow rubric for completion of project.

Closing:

Groups share their findings with the class

Exit Ticket:

Student Vote: Best Venn diagram. (Students cannot vote for their own group and must provide a small paragraph with rationale for their vote).

Teacher collects and collates the results to announce the next class period.

Assessment:

Individual participation in-group work evaluated by teacher circulation and letter grade evaluation; Venn diagram evaluated by rubric

Lesson Plan Three: “Post-Racial (?)” Case Study

Objectives (SWBAT):

Examine instances of racial profiling, share experiences of race and discuss with classmates issues and solutions to race-related problems.

Do Now:

Have you ever seen someone be treated unfairly based on an external feature (skin color, handicap, age, etc.)? Explain with detail.

Direct Instruction:

Review of Terms and Definitions: Post-Racial, Racism, Racial Politics

Guided Practice:

Teacher walks students through various media clips, ranging from Rodney King to Trayvon Martin (available via simple Google search, tailored to specific student demographics and needs). Short Segments from Cornel West and Tim Wise will also be shared (resources for these provided in annotated bibliography below).

Independent Practice:

Students read Chapter from *The Pact*: “D.W.B” and answer thought and discussion questions (questions direct students toward forming their own opinion about racial vs. “post-racial” America). Selections from Tim Wise’s blog would also be appropriate here.

Closing:

Is America *REALLY* Post-Racial? Students present their findings/informed opinions to their classmates

Exit Ticket:

3 Ws (1 – *What did we learn today?* 2 – *So What? Why is it important?* 3 – *Now What? How can this be applied to your life and your learning?*).

Assessment:

Student will be assessed based on their informal presentation of their findings and also on the information provided on 3 Ws exit ticket.

Annotated Bibliography/Works Cited/Resources

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

Arnold, Andrew. "The Man Who Would Draw King." May 14 2002. Web. <<http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,237679,00.html>>.

The graphic novel King was originally released in three separate parts. On the eve of the release of the final installation Arnold recaps and reviews the previous two volumes and provides a review and critique of the then upcoming release of the final segment. His assessment is fair and the analysis of Anderson's style and purpose is a great preface for one about to embark upon reading the series in its entirety.

Bakis, Maureen. *The Graphic Novel Classroom: Powerful Teaching and Learning with Images*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2012. Print.

Stuffed with sample lesson plans, writing prompts and activities for a variety of specific graphic novels, this handbook is a must have for any classroom educator using the graphic novel medium. Bakis connects graphic novels with various other texts and mediums to help create a diverse and engaging learn environment.

Bronson, Po, and Ashley Merryman. "Chapter 3 - Why White Parents Don't Talk About Race." *NurtureShock: New Thinking about Children*. New York: Twelve, 2009. Print.

The main idea behind this very readable study is that some of the most well meant parenting techniques are backfiring. In particular, the chapter "Why White Parents Don't Talk About Race" explores the misguided notion that not discussing race with young children will result in a "colorblind" child, whereas what actually results is children incapable of navigating and participating in meaningful relationships with people not of their own race. This outcome was true of both white and black groups of students, pointing to the issue at hand as being societal rather than strictly attributable to white or non-white cultural issues.

Chaney, Michael. "Drawing on History in Recent African American Graphic Novels." *MELUS* 32.3 (2007): 175-200. Print.

Michael Chaney is a scholar who has written many articles on various elements of African-American graphic novels. This particular article focuses on the choices Ho Che Anderson made in his historical depiction of King and similar considerations for Lance Took's Narcissa as well as "Boondocks" author Aaron McGruder.

Cobb, William Jelani. *"The Devil & Dave Chappelle" & Other Essays*. New York: Thunder's Mouth, 2007. Print.

Cobb's collection of essays provides a scholarly assessment of topics pertaining to popular culture and historical events. He specifically discusses Rodney King, Black Community Culture as well as specific icons such as Oprah and Dave Chappelle. While too heady for direct use in a high school classroom, the opinions and concepts propounded are excellent food for thought that educators can turnaround into an informed lecture or controversial class seminar-style discussion

Doane, Ashley. "What Is Racism? Racial Discourse and Racial Politics." *Critical Sociology* 32.2 (2006): 255-74. Print.

Doane discusses definitions of racism in this study. Elements of racial discourse are examined. Specifically, the ideologies of "color-blind" and "systematic racism" are fleshed out in this article. Useful to gain a solid understanding of the layered nuances of how/why racism still abounds in American Society.

Francis, Consuela. "'Drawing the Unspeakable: Kyle Baker's Slave Narrative'." Comics and the U.S. South. Eds. Brannon Costello and Qiana J. Whitted. University of Mississippi Press, 2012. 113. Print.

Francis argues that Kyle Baker's Nat Turner gives voice and vision to a new approximation of the slave narrative. Allowing the reader to move beyond the words of Nat Turner, which are interpreted through the pen of a white man, the pictures provide a new depth and arguable empathy to a seemingly horrific but revolutionarily important historical event.

Gates, Henry Louis. *"Race," Writing, and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986. Print.

A hallmark theoretical text discussing racial issues in literature, Gates has collected heavy-hitters such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak in a useful reference for perspectives on narratives of the Other.

Williams, Kam. "Cornel West: The Hope on a Tightrope Interview." The African American Literature Book Club. Int. Cornel West. 2008. <<http://aalbc.com/reviews/kam.htm>>.

In his interview with Williams, renounced scholar Cornel West discusses the status of racial relations in the United States. Topics include his upcoming book, Barak Obama, Hilary Clinton and other political issues.

King, Desmond S., and Rogers M. Smith. "Chapter 9 - Prospects of a House Divided." *Still a House Divided: Race and Politics in Obama's America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2011, 253-348. Print.

The culminating chapter to King and Smith's study of racial politics during the Obama administration is teeming with useful charts showing the realities of racial difference in plain black and white. The chapter itself discusses the inequalities and provides possible tasks and solutions for moving America toward a less inequitable state.

Massey, Douglas S., and Nancy A. Denton. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994. Print.

This text discusses the institutionalization of racism in post-Civil Rights America. Drawing their research from national research throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Massey and Denton posit that while segregation disappeared from the vocabulary of American media and society it took on a new form in the deliberate oppression of the urban poor.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper Paperbacks, 1994. Print.

The seminal discussion of "comics" in a scholarly manner. Written as a comic, McCloud uses direct example and visualization to identify and define a common set of terms from which most informed discussion of the particulars of comic storytelling. This is the premier text for foundational research and understanding concepts critical to teaching the medium.

Morrison, Timothy, Gregory Bryan, and George W. Chilcoat. "Using Student-Generated Comic Books in the Classroom." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 45.8 (2002): 758-67. Print.

This article provided justification for using and student creation of graphic novels. Additionally, there are excellent charts and images that can inform the classroom teacher on practice application of the concepts. Step by step instructions of topics and elements of comics are discussed in a way that will aid in the dissemination and instruction of classroom students.

Nama, Adilifu. *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes*. Austin: University of Texas, 2011. Print.

Nama traces the history of the Black Super hero throughout popular American life. After providing a deep breadth of history, Nama turns analytical, discussing the signification of racial and political imagery in the portrayal of African-American superheroes. This slim volume provides a great deal of information about the history of African-Americans in comics and is ideal for the non-academic reader.

Page, Helán E. "'Black Male' Imagery and Media Containment of African American Men." *American Anthropologist* 99.1 (1997): 99-111. Print.

Page argues that African-American struggle to find sources of positive images of black males in the media, largely because “the racialized and gendered information inscribed in contemporary black male imagery is racially filtered through the whiteness of our national seeing I/eye” (106). In other words, America media is dominated by the cultural attitudes and preferences of white Americans, thus leaving no space for positive and culturally relevant black males.

Sabin, Roger. *Adult Comics: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
Sabin provides one of the first comprehensive, chronological scholarly discussions of comic as form and comic as literary genre. He devotes the majority of the book to British and American comic strips and book, as the “graphic novel” was only in its very quiet moment of Genesis at the time Sabin published his study. An excellent perspective for anyone with a mind for the drawn medium.

Tabachnick, Stephen Ely. *Teaching the Graphic Novel*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.
The Modern Language Association’s compilation of scholarship on graphic novels. Of specific note is Michael Chaney’s “Is There an African-American Graphic Novel?”, in which he explores the notion and provides commentary on his experience teaching the content to students at the post-secondary level. Additionally, numerous well-written and thoughtful essays on a multitude of topics related all literary elements pertaining to the genre.

Wilson, William. "Race-Neutral Policies and the Democratic Coalition." *The American Prospect* (2000). Print.
In this article, Wilson discusses the use of race-neutral policies and their political appeal, while acknowledging the potentially disparaging negative effects African-Americans experience from the institution of said policies. Wilson supported race-neutral policies at the time but has recently come to support some affirmative action policies.

Wise, Tim. "Tim Wise: Anti-Racist Essayist, Author and Educator." June 12 2012. Web. <<http://www.timwise.org/>>.
Time Wise’s website can be used for both general education on racism and the anti-racist movement or could possibly be explored by students for perspective and alternative viewpoints on everyday issues. The blog entries in particular are accessible to older students and could be used as the foundation for a research paper.

Annotated Reading List for Students

Anderson, Ho Che. *King: A Comics Biography*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2010. Print.

King is a visually bold, primarily black and white graphic novel. Faces are flattened, ambiguous, sometimes blacked out and sometimes overly highlighted to extreme white, leaving the reader to constantly check their understanding and grasp of who is saying what to whom. Though it does take some adjustment to become comfortable with the artist's style, that adjustment is a worthy labor. The author uses the deep contrast of the imagery to draw the reader in aesthetically but one quickly gets lost in the story of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his struggles to rectify the racial situation of his contemporary America. Anderson does not portray an idolized King, but rather a realistic person, warts and all. While this is a biography, it's also an interpretation.

Baker, Kyle. *Nat Turner*. New York, NY: Abrams, 2005. Print.

In the Preface to his graphic novel, artist and writer Kyle Baker explains: "I first learned the name Nat Turner as a child in school...Over the years I would encounter the name Nat Turner in various books. None of the entries was longer than few sentences mentioning the name, the date and that is was important" (6). This inspired Baker, himself African-American, to provide a proper treatment of the story of Nat Turner and the Slave Rebellion. Beginning with a silent (read hear: wordless, strictly visual panels) recounting of slaves trapped into slavery and the grueling voyage of the Middle Passage, Baker sets up the historical background that leads the reader into Nat Turner's reality. Highly visual, the narrative is driven primarily by the picturesque panels interspersed with related source document excerpts, primarily borrowed from "The Confessions of Nat Turner" by William Styron.

Davis, Sampson Dr., George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt. "Chapter 15 - D.W.B." *The Pact*. New York: Berkely Group, 2002. 199-206. Print.

The Pact is the inspiring tale of three friends from the inner-city who support each other through the long and sometimes difficult road through medical school. Specifically, Chapter 15, "D.W.B.," recounts an experience of discrimination, from which the title acronym (Driving While Black) is derived. In the classroom this short anecdotal chapter works well in isolation to both inform students of the realities of racism in America as well as the relation of an important type of narrative on race.

El, Rassi Toufic. *Arab in America*. San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 2007. Print.

Arab in America is the tale of Rassi El and his experiences in pre- and post-9/11 American society. He explores questions of identity, Otherness

and prejudice in this slim volume. Due to some of content this novel may not be ideal for low-level or younger readers.

Heller, Andrew, and Randy DuBurke. *Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006. Print.

Thought valiant in its efforts, this graphic novel does not quite do the eloquent and readable original “Autobiography,” written with the help of Alex Haley, justice. The epic and sprawling nineteen-chapter narrative is condensed into eleven mini-chapters that provide a snapshot of the scenes more fully developed in the original text. This could be useful for a brief overview of Malcolm X’s life and career in a history classroom, or as a factual piece for introducing some element of civil rights to younger children. However, if dealing with a high school audience it cannot be stressed enough that a thorough reading of the actual source text will provide a much deeper breadth and understanding, as well as a more colorful and meaningful reading experience.

Johnson, James Weldon, Florence Lewis Bentley, Langston Hughes, Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Robert W. Bagnall, Jean Toomer, Lance Toombs, and Afua Richardson. *African-American Classics*. Vol. 22. Mount Horeb, WI: Eureka, 2011. Print.

African-American illustrators and writers come together in this skillfully drawn and colored collection of classic poems and short stories of historical African-American experience.

O'Connor, George, and Hilary Sycamore. *Journey into Mohawk County*. London: First Second, 2006. Print.

Based on the journals of Dutchmen in 1634, the story of Mohawk Country is a view of Native American life through the eyes of the conqueror. While trite at some instances, the graphic novel does reflect the style of writing and influences of journal writing during the time period. This graphic novel could be successfully used in the classroom as an example of the differences in perspective between the conquered and the conquering people, and possibly allow for a large discussion of Otherness.

McGruder, Aaron. *A Right to Be Hostile: The Boondocks Treasury*. New York: Three Rivers, 2003. Print.

Brutally honest, the characters of the Boondocks are notorious in American popular culture as the voice of multiple generations of African-Americans. Presenting perspectives both young and old, the comics presented are funny, poignant and filled with truth. While some content may not be suitable for younger students, any educator with a discerning

eye can select appropriate material from the wide range of content provided.

McGruder, Aaron. *All the Rage: The Boondocks Past and Present*. New York: Three Rivers, 2007. Print.

A second anthology of The Boondocks well worth perusing in addition to A Right to Be Hostile, however, the same caveat about preview and screening of content applies.

Satrapı, Marjane. *The Complete Persepolis*. New York: Pantheon, 2004. Print.

A graphic novel about a young girl growing up in Iran during the 1979 Revolution. The novel seeks to provide insight into what it means to be Iranian, what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a woman in Iran and what it means to be Iranian in the world.

"Stories Beyond Black and White: 25 Graphic Novels for African American History Month." *Library Journal Reviews*. *Library Journal*, 30 Jan. 2012. <<http://reviews.libraryjournal.com/2012/01/collection-development/stories-beyond-black-and-white-25-graphic-novels-for-african-american-history-month/>>.

This review provides a more extensive list and description of both the graphic novels listed in this section as well as quite a few others. The review also provides a breakdown of appropriate age groups for each of the graphic novels reviewed.

Tooks, Lance. *Narcissa*. New York: Doubleday, 2002. Print.

Tooks gives voice and image to self-possessed filmmaker Narcissa on the verge of breakdown, when she discovered she has a week to live. Her journey of breakneck self-discovery is beautifully illustrated and more often than not poignant and candid about the realities of perceptions of race and gender. While some panels may be too graphic for young students, mature secondary students and adults will glean a specific viewpoint through the exploration of this narrative. Specifically, the drawn out investigation of particular racial stereotypes such as "Nurturin' Negro Nanny", "Da Mystikal Magic-Negro" and "Self-Sacrificin' Sambo-Sucka" provides an excellent visual and written analysis of Hollywood's standard African-American tropes.

Van Peebles, Melvin. *Confessions of an Ex Doofus Itchy Footed Mutha*. New York: Akashic, 2009. Print.

Best known as a filmmaker, Van Peebles brings his peculiar form of racial commentary to the printed (and drawn) page in this semi-autobiographical narrative of a "Doofus" as he travels through the world.

Yang, Gene Luen, and Lark Pien. *American Born Chinese*. New York: First Second, 2006. Print.

Weaving folklore with adolescent problems of assimilation, this graphic novel is relatable to students on two levels. Most obviously, students of Asian (specifically Chinese) descent could possibly find solace in the story of Jim Wang. On a more abstract level, students can find meaning in the narrative as a tale of being Other. Great for struggling readers, but is easily adaptable to scaffolded analysis activity for higher-level readers.

Annotated List of Materials of Classroom Use

Bitz, Michael. "Comic Book Project." *Comic Book Project*. Center for Educational Pathways. Web. 08 Apr. 2012. <<http://comicbookproject.org/>>.

The Comic Book Project uses three tenets to engage and educate learners of all ages. They believe in academic engagement, community building and character improvement as a successful formula for encouraging "social awareness" as well as "literary reinforcement". The CBP has found that students engaged in experiences that are relevant and meaningful to their own lives gain academic and personal benefit.

Bitz, Michael. *When Commas Meet Kryptonite: Classroom Lessons from the Comic Book Project*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2010. Print.

Michel Bitz provides practical advice as well as thoughtful lesson plans in this book. Bitz is founder of The Comic Book Project, which encourages students to explore different ways to engage with literacy by reading and creating comics. This slim volume contains a well-argued and research back defense of comics in the classroom as well as several useful lesson plans. The mass of "Classroom Resources" provided at the end of the each chapter gives a tremendous amount of teacher resources, suggest comics for student use and web links galore! This book is invaluable fingertip resource for teaching any topic in literacy, including writing.

"Comics in the Classroom as an Introduction to Narrative Structure." Readwritethink.org. NCTE. Web. 08 May 2012. <<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/comics-classroom-introduction-narrative-223.html>>.

Useful website providing suggestions for beginning to teach students about comics as an education medium.

"Cornel West on the Election of Barack Obama." Interview by Amy Goodman. Democracy Now! 19 Nov. 2008. Web. 07 May 2012. <http://www.democracynow.org/2008/11/19/cornel_west_on_the_election_of>.

Dr. Cornel West discusses the idea of “post-raciality” after the election of President Barak Obama. The video available on this link is rather long but the discussion is accessible and students find the debate engaging. Ideal for viewing clips or short sections, a seminar style discussion (with established expectations and norms) is a nice complement to the use of this interview in the high-school classroom.

Gavigan, Karen W., and Mindy Tomasevich. *Connecting Comics to Curriculum: Strategies for Grades 6-12*. Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2011. Print.

A nicely organized toolbox of resources, *Connecting Comics to Curriculum* is parceled into chapters on different comic genres and types of teaching objectives to be achieved through use of the comics. Topics include Teaching Political Science, Teaching Literature and Teaching Math. All in all teachers of any subject imaginable can benefit from perusal of this incredibly useful and informative manual.

Kan, Katharine. *Graphic Novels and Comic Books*. New York: H.W. Wilson, 2010. Print.

A collection of publications on graphic novels and comic books ranging from the legitimacy of comics as literature to using graphic novels to increase literary.

Monnin, Katie. *Teaching Graphic Novels: Practical Strategies for the Secondary ELA Classroom*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House Pub. 2010. Print.

Invaluable as a teacher’s resource. This book provides both strategies for teaching any graphic novel as well as specific activities that can be used to enrich and compliment any educator’s toolbox. Monnin focuses on laying down the foundational aspects of graphic novels as a genre (vocabulary, design, etc.), then provides suggestions (and reproducible graphic organizers!) for teaching the narrative, themes and other literary elements found within any given text.

Appendix

Suggested Vocabulary for King: A Comics Biography

acrimonious

Bay of Pigs

ad hoc

blight

boycott
 candid
 clergy
 compromise
 desegregation/desegregate
 dignity
 eloquence
 enmity
 escapades
 impugning
 injunction
 maudlin
nolo contondere

obstruction/obstructionism/obstruct
 oratorical/oratory
 orchestrate
 postpone
 Reconstruction
 rife
 sanctioned
 semantics
 subjugated
 unison
 vexed
 wane

Mini-Comic Assignment Rubrics

Student Name: _____

Mini-Comic #1: Experiences of Race Rubric

Your Score: _____ / 400

Letter Grade:

	25	50	75	100
Format (Follow directions!)	Did not follow assignment guidelines	Little knowledge is demonstrated. Conventions are disregarded. 50% or less of assignment is properly completed.	Conventions of comics are sometimes followed; some knowledge of comic format is demonstrated. 80% or more of assignment is properly completed.	Conventions of comics are followed; Knowledge of comic format and reading flow. Assignment is properly completed.
Content (Do you know what you're talking about?)	Little detail given, poorly organized or off-topic	Story is disorganized or difficult to follow. Some details are vague or confusing.	Story is well organized and sequential. More detail or explanation could be given.	Story is well organized and sequential. Appropriate details and full explanation of events and their impact in your

				life.
Mechanics (Spelling, Punctuation, Capitalization, Grammar)	All areas are all lacking	Two out of four are present	Three out of four are present	All four mechanical elements are present and correct.
Style (Show off your smarts with FLAIR)	Style is lacking or not present. Not visually appealing.	Difficult to read. Lack of effort is obvious. No color.	Lettered, colored and designed. Readable and visually appealing.	Well colored, lettered and designed. Look is appealing and readable.

Student Name: _____

Mini-Comic #2: Attitudes of Racial Identity Rubric

Your Score: _____ / 400

Letter Grade: _____

	25	50	75	100
Format (Follow directions!)	Did not follow assignment guidelines	Little knowledge is demonstrated. Conventions are disregarded. 50% or less of assignment is properly completed.	Conventions of comics are sometimes followed; some knowledge of comic format is demonstrated. 80% or more of assignment is properly completed.	Conventions of comics are followed; Knowledge of comic format and reading flow. Assignment is properly completed.
Content (Do you know what you're talking about?)	Little detail given, poorly organized or off-topic	Story is disorganized or difficult to follow. Some details are vague or confusing.	Story is well organized and sequential. More detail or explanation could be given.	Story is well organized and sequential. Appropriate details and full explanation of events and their impact in your life.
Mechanics (Spelling, Punctuation, Capitalization,	All areas are all lacking	Two out of four are present	Three out of four are present	All four mechanical elements are present and

Grammar)				correct.
Style (Show off your smarts with FLAIR)	Style is lacking or not present. Not visually appealing.	Difficult to read. Lack of effort is obvious. No color.	Lettered, colored and designed. Readable and visually appealing.	Well colored, lettered and designed. Look is appealing and readable.