

What's That You Say, Neighbor?

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Overview

Oral storytelling has been around for many, many generations in many different cultures. This verbal art form was brought to the United States of America in the hearts and minds of the African American peoples enslave against their will. Upon coming to the shores of America, African peoples were forbidden to learn to read and write the language. This would of detriment to the slave owners who often ruled by physical violence and fear. The oral tradition brought to life narratives of the new continent and sustained them through bondage, as a political catalyst, (in) speech that defines freedom and moved ordinary people to extraordinary acts of courage. Upon the freedom found through the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War; African Americans began to live their own lives. This Great Migration of African Americans in the 1880s brought a large population growth to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.¹ As years went on, “white flight” in the early 1960s created a majority population of African Americans in West Philadelphia. From the tales told of past generations, to those yet to be told, oral story telling still weaves its way into the cultures of African Americans.²

To focus completely on authors that are African American is unique. Often we are taught in school about major African American authors such as W.E.B. Dubois, Langston Hughes, and Alice Walker, Pulitzer Prize winner, but rarely are we able to look into the works of lesser known but just as powerful authors such as Edward P. Jones or Charles Chesnutt. This workshop of African American authors entitled, “Mostly I Lie”, focused on lesser known authors whose message resonated deeper to reflect their turbulent times more so that information found in traditional literature or history books.

This curriculum will be used in the English classes of 9th or 10th grades. Classes must

be a minimum of 55 minutes long for an understanding of the importance of oral traditions to take place and for students to see the flow of oral tradition throughout their own lives. Students must constantly be reminded that people who came here and were kept as slaves were absolutely not allowed to learn basic reading and writing skills. The students will be working on learning and sharing oral traditions in their families and neighborhoods which can be applied to history or geography classes as well. This unit flows nicely for students of any skill level with minimal adaptations for a written format to a project or even a PowerPoint presentation because the bulk of the project is learning interviewing techniques and how to share the tales they learn with classmates via videotape. The combination of reading, interviewing, and sharing with classmates will instill a new appreciation of the heritage that is so rich, regardless of background.

Rationale

We have all wondered from time to time, “Where did my family come from? Why did they pick to live in Philadelphia?” With the rich traditions and proud heritage this city has, this is a perfect opportunity for students to ask such questions, listen to answers of their elders, and to receive some valuable information concerning themselves and their family's immersion into Philadelphia, more specifically West Philadelphia. It is my intention to use this in a ninth grade English 1/tenth grade English 2 class to broaden the horizons of students and instill in them the dream to create their own future from their own learned past. I feel that shared perspective from family members or close family friends influences students' choices and can help guide students to a future not realized before sharing such precious information. I will use this lesson about midway through the school year and attach an oral component into it. I teach a ninth grade class and often see students trying to figure out what to do next personally, scholastically, and past high school. As a teacher, I am a big believer in knowing where a family has come from and the struggles they face on a daily basis. This information is invaluable when helping to guide toward a better outcome of choices. It is my goal to instill pride into each student as they learn from where they came and some of the struggles members of their community have faced and conquered to achieve a place in West Philadelphia. The use of the Promethean board will be expected as well as a set time for speaking during this oral presentation of the student's neighborhood. This also fits into the new state of Pennsylvania Goals and Objectives of cross disciplinary approaches to learning.

Focus on major African American authors as well as lesser known African American authors will showcase for students that every contribution to their families and their communities can be everlasting. As students read and explore their backgrounds, they contemplate their futures. With this unit, future focus of how each individual creates his or her neighborhood or community is necessary.

It is interesting how the oral traditions have been maintained for so many years. It

seems that because of the trauma suffered centuries ago, the pain has become engrained into the fabric of African American souls and communities. The slaves during the passage from Africa developed a kinship network to survive. The network shared religious beliefs, family values, and race knowledge. Oral story telling became a rich, expressive culture that articulated the deepest feelings, aspirations, and wishes of those in passage.³ Through the years in urban and in rural communities, Blacks have maintained a widespread vocal verbal art, despite the urbanization of cities and towns. This strong art has been able to be kept so strong because African Americans, for their own protection and sanity, formed a separate culture within the dominant culture in which they lived which remained the oral tradition.⁴

Background

Students will use many skills learned through the many years of school. The students will read, respond, and write about what they see and experience. The new Core Curriculum to be used in the Philadelphia Public Schools as well as the state of Pennsylvania will encourage the use of project-based education. This project will encourage students to look at the geography of where their neighbors are from. They may begin to ask questions and research where they hail from. Students will begin to make the connection that people come from all areas and it is the people who create the peace or chaos in neighborhoods and communities.

West Philadelphia, commonly known as West Philly, which includes Cedar Park, Mantua, Overbrook, Parkside, Powelton Village, and Spruce Hill, is a rather large part of the city of Philadelphia.⁵ The actual reference points for Overbrook in West Philadelphia are north of Cobbs Creek, West of Carroll Park and Haddington neighborhoods. It is encased by Woodbine Avenue, Lancaster Avenue, Landsowne Avenue, 63rd Street and Haverford Avenue.⁶

The racial demographics of West Philly are a mix with 76.2% African American. The balance of the equation is: non-Hispanic white/European -- 17.1%, Hispanic/Latino --2%, American Indian—1.9%, Asian—1.5%, and community members listed as others as 1.3%. The last category might be people of Jamaica, Barbados, or other Caribbean islands or those from The West Indies or African immigrants.

We have all wondered from time to time, “Where did my family come from? Why did they pick here to live?” With the rich traditions and proud heritage this city has, this is a perfect opportunity for students to ask questions, listen to answers, and receive some valuable information concerning themselves and their family's immersion into Philadelphia, more specifically West Philadelphia. The goal of using this in a ninth grade English 1 class is to broaden the horizons of students and instill in them the dream to create their own future from their own learned past. I will use this lesson about midway through the school year and attach an oral component into it. The use of the Promethean

board will be expected as well as a set time for speaking. This will also fit into the new state of Pennsylvania Goals and Objectives of cross disciplinary approaches to learning.

The actual history of the oral tradition comes from the hallowed days of American slavery in the 17th century. Slave owners wanted to excise such control over the African slaves; often isolation or little social interaction was used as a way to break the African culture. Many slave owners deliberately tried to repress any ties slaves had to their culture, which began rebellions. The oral tradition carried African narratives to a new continent and helped sustain slaves in their bondage.⁶ Slaves were denied basic education, as the slave owners felt threatened by an educated slave. Legislation of the United States that denied formal training or education of slaves was ultimately passed. This ultimately pushed oral tradition to the forefront, thus allowing slaves to maintain their pride and share knowledge with other African cultures, sharing of rich, diverse African American experiences. Oral history was an institution of slavery that helped to maintain the identity and share survival techniques as well as share stories of heritage and strength, trials and tribulations brought on by enslavement. The voices testified to that strong African American oral tradition, “as a way of remembering, a way of enduring, a way of mourning, a way of celebration, a way of protesting and subverting, and ultimately, a way of triumphing.”⁷

It is interesting how the oral traditions have been maintained for so many years from so many cultures. The slaves during the passage from Africa developed a kinship network to survive. The network shared religious beliefs, family values, and race knowledge. Oral storytelling became a rich, expressive culture that articulated the deepest feelings, aspirations, and wishes of those in passage,⁸ through the years in urban and in rural communities, Blacks have kept a widespread vocal verbal art alive and well, despite the urbanization of cities and towns. This strong art has been able to be kept so strong because African Americans, for their own protection and sanity, formed a separate culture within the dominant culture in which they lived which remained the oral tradition.⁹

Focus on major African American authors as well as lesser known African American authors will showcase for students that every contribution to their families and their communities can be everlasting. As students read and explore their backgrounds, they contemplate their futures. With this unit, future focus of how each individual creates his or her neighborhood or community is necessary.

Objectives

Through this unit, students deal with reaching out to other people, beginning with the people students see each day, their neighbors. Students will learn that people can come from very different places and still come together to form a cohesive bond in the

neighborhood.

This curriculum would be used in a high school setting at about the 9th or 10th grade. The classes ideally would be 60-75 minutes long, however a shorter class time would just lengthen the unit time. This unit will emphasize the importance of homework and follow up activities based on homework. As students complete interviews and collect data from their neighborhoods, they report back to the group and share out.

The curriculum will work on the standards for speaking and listening (PA 11.1.6A, PA 11.1.6C). Each student will construct questions and learn interview techniques to achieve knowledge for a presentation to the class of their own neighborhood. Students will share in class discussions and small group discussions explaining the similarities and differences in their unique neighborhoods (PA 11.1.6D/PA 11.1.6E).

Students will sit down with planned and scripted questions for an interview with a neighbor who has been on the block the longest and shortest amount of time. They will record or carefully document answers they hear to learn to listen and respond appropriately with others. Students will speak using skills appropriate to formal speech situations—Questions from students will be created in class and edited by teacher and peers for grammar and proper tone. The class will contribute to Discussions/Participate in small group discussion. Discussions will occur in class before the interview, during the interview, and in class after the interview takes place. Students will learn to use media for learning processes. A videotaped interview will be shared with the class, using the smart board, in addition to a writing assignment (PA 11.1.6F). The writing assignment will research the background of students' heritage and the place of origin of the interviewee.

These standards and the skills they provide can be used with the new state of Pennsylvania education standards. A cross disciplinary approach to learning is to take place. This assignment can be a stand-alone project for the English class or be utilized at the end of a teaching semester to showcase goals of the term. The project bridges gaps in English and history or geography and therefore, might be utilized as an end of term grade for both areas.

Strategies

This unit will include proper speaking and listening techniques. Students will create questions with techniques that involve the 4 W's and H (who, what, when, where, and how). We will delve into receiving additional information by rephrasing the questions. Students will interview each other, family members for practice, and eventually neighbors to learn about the block on which they live.

Students will eventually video tape an interview with a neighbor and ask questions for

background information about the person, their culture, and why they chose that location to live. These video tapes will be presented to the class using Smart board technologies and the class will use a map of the world to indicate place people have traveled from.

Students will write journals sharing bias they may have about people in their neighborhood, cultural differences or celebrations unique to their block, or fears they may have as they move forward to speak candidly to another person living so close to them but so far away in similarities. Students will culminate their work with an essay that has a synopsis of the interview, thoughts they had before the interview and after the interview, research to the area of the country or world their neighbor came from, as well as the video or PowerPoint presentation.

Students will read a short story to pull into the forefront of their mind their bias about people in their lives. They will complete short answer questions and complete writings comparing their own thoughts with those of the passage. In addition, students will view a film/documentary of other students engaging with people in their lives and videotaping their daily lives. This will serve as a model for their own interviews that will be completed on a smaller scale.

Lesson Plans

Day 1

Do Now: What kind of neighbors do you have? Are you a good neighbor? Make a list of qualities you like to have in your neighbors. Please list five (5) characteristics.

Students will get five minutes to complete this section. Time will be kept on the Promethean Board along with the prompt. Answers for individual work will be in each student's journal and soon to be shared with a partner to create a larger list. The prompt, date and list will be on one sheet of the journal.

Upon completion of the five minutes, journals will be shut. Students will turn to the right and this will become their "Think-Pair-Share" partner. Again, time will be kept for three minutes for each student to present their list to the other and create a single list from both individual lists. Each quality will be placed on a colored post-it and attached to the board, as a parking lot. These will be addressed after the reading.

Objective: By the end of the lesson, students will be able to define what makes a good neighbor and give three examples of why the Bennington's were thought to be bad neighbors.

Materials:

Promethean Board
Journal books
Post-its (large size) in different colors
Markers
Class copies of Edward P. Jones, “Bad Neighbors”

Procedure:

1. Quickly glance and list aloud reasons people listed for good, quality neighbors.
2. Discuss a little of the neighborhood the Bennington’s are moving into. Would you move into this area? What would make someone want to be in the neighborhood?
3. Hand out copies of “Bad Neighbors”
4. Move seats so a Fish-Bowl is created in the classroom. Students in the small ring will share the reading and those on the outside will be called upon for summary of paragraphs, questions, or main ideas brought to light.
5. Teacher will stop class reading as character or setting appears to impact the neighborhood. Can these two groups mix?

Exit ticket/assessment: Did your prediction of the Bennington’s moving into the neighborhood hold true? Why or why not?

Day 2

Do Now: Who are you? Where did you come from? Where will you go? How will you get there?

Students will get 5 minutes to complete this section. Students are expected to read the prompt silently, write the prompt in their journal book, and write answers in complete sentences. A timer on the Promethean Board or kitchen timer will be used. At the completion of the time, each student will close their notebook and prepare to share the ideas they have. Ideas will be placed onto Newsprint sheets to be posted for further use in the next week’s lessons.

Objective: By the end of the class period (55 minutes), students will be able to identify 3 Philadelphia neighborhoods that people of this city call “home”.

Materials:

Map handouts of Philadelphia
Colored pencils/crayons

Promethean Board
Student notebooks/folders

Procedure:

1. Discuss why people might choose Philadelphia to live. List 5 good points or benefits to living in Philadelphia. Place on Newsprint and hang.
2. Discuss and list 5 reasons people might not live in the city but work or play in Philadelphia. Place on Newsprint and hang.
3. Students will find the “Overbrook” section of the city on their handout. Color/shade in orange. What smaller subsections exist in the Overbrook neighborhood? Where is “the Bottom”? What makes that section what it is? What are the characteristics of “the Bottom”?
4. In pairs, students will identify and shade other sections of the city that were discussed, such as Frankford, Olney, Southwest, etc. What defines these sections? What are landmarks used to delineate each section?
5. Identify other sections of the city on overhead Promethean Board image of Philadelphia.
6. Students will put city handouts into notebook for future use.

Exit ticket/assessment: What part of the city would you move to for raising your family? List two reasons why. Students would respond on index cards and hand them to the teacher as they left at the end of class.

Day 3

Do Now: Who is your best friend? Do you see this friendship lasting past high school? What are three qualities that make this friendship so special?

Students will be encouraged to use a Mind Web for their ideas on their best friend. This will help them think about qualities as well as places and things the two have in common. Again they will have 5 minutes somehow indicated by either the Promethean board or a kitchen timer. Answers will be placed into journals and dated. The answers will be shared generically and the teacher will read and respond to work individually. Teacher will draw conclusions to characteristics like honesty, integrity, knowledge, etc. to introduce LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman in “Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago.

Objective: By the end of the period, students will be able to identify similarities between their own friendships and that of LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman.

Materials:

Class set of “Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago”
Video “Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago”
Student notebooks/folders

Procedure:

1. Read excerpts of the projects LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman are from.
2. On Newsprint, create parallels in Chicago and Philadelphia—Lists
3. Refer back to *Do Now* and identify a trait LeAlan and Lloyd have the same as students.
4. Read “The Fourteen Stories of Eric Morse” aloud—popcorn style. Each student reads for a while then announces, “Popcorn” to “pop” reading duties to another student. Students can read a paragraph or page. Reading a paragraph is a minimum.
5. Cue video to watch section on Eric Morse.

Exit ticket/assessment: What is your reaction to the death of Eric Morse? Does this happen in Philadelphia? What should young people take from this event?

Day 4

Do Now: What is a documentary? What topics might be used for a documentary? Have you ever seen one?

Students will put prompt and date in journal as they attempt to answer the question. Some might have some knowledge. Others will be prompted as teacher rounds the class to break down word into pieces. At the three minute mark, ask “Who watched the evening news last night?” This question will be posed for the students who might be on the edge of successfully completing the question in their journal. After five minutes, the class will be asked to share aloud what they think a documentary is and in what instance they have seen one. Remind students that the film they watched the prior day was an example of a documentary of a neighborhood.

Objective: By the end of class, students will be able to define what a documentary is, commonly seen documentaries, and what the focus of one might look like in their own words.

Materials:

Class set of dictionaries
Primary source materials familiar to students

Secondary sources familiar to students
Journal books
Different colored pens or highlighters
Promethean Board
Recording device

Procedures:

1. Review primary sources. Create mind maps on the Promethean Board with students writing in primary sources they are familiar with.
2. Review secondary sources. Encourage students to add onto the mind map of primary sources but use a different color.
3. Discuss neighborhoods. Ask students to compare and contrast the neighborhood in “Bad Neighbors” by Edward P. Jones and the neighborhood of LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman. Create a Venn diagram in notebooks to illustrate similarities and differences.
4. Review question words—how, when, what, where, why, and who. What makes these words so powerful? Why do they force the questioner/interviewer to be specific?
5. In pairs, create ten questions you would ask the person who has lived on your block the longest. Use all of the questioning words at least twice.
6. Compare lists with another pair of students. Which questions are similar or different?
7. List strong questions for students to see and use. Ask for input for more questions.
8. Students copy ten to twelve questions into their journals to be used for a homework assignment of interviewing the person who has lived on their block the longest.

Exit ticket/assessment: What type of information do you predict the oldest resident of your block to share?

Homework: Interview the oldest person on the block for information on from where and when they came to your block. Why this block? What has changed since their arrival?

Day 5

Do now: Who did you interview? Did your prediction of information actually reflect what you and your neighbor spoke about? How was it similar or different? List three ways it matched up or did not match up.

This prompt makes students realize that the work of the week has culminated into this interview with their neighbor .They are to reflect on the manners of meeting new and old neighbors and to realize everyone has a story. Students will respond in their journal books with the date and prompt indicated. Students will be given five minutes to complete this task then asked to share with a partner what was learned.

Objective: By the end of class, Students will be able to identify reasons people live in certain areas, such as West Philadelphia, and be ready to verbally share their project with others.

Materials:

- Recording device
- Recorded interview
- Journal books
- List of interview questions

Procedures:

1. Place students together in pairs reflective of neighborhoods. Ask students to share questions for original interview.
2. Allow students 10 minutes to share and show recorded video to partner.
3. After 10 minutes, partners agree to share with the class one video and what was learned from this interview.
4. Reasons are placed onto bulletin board entitled, “Our West Philadelphia: Why we are here”. Each child then contributes a reason they found in their interview and shares it with the class.

Exit ticket: Has your feeling about living in Philadelphia changed? Will you stay here and possibly raise a family in your West Philadelphia neighborhood? Why or why not?

Annotated Bibliography

Teacher Resources

www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/wphila/index.html Great for data on shifts in population, defining actual West Philadelphia neighborhoods. Very data packed.

www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/wphila/stats/kang/kang.pdf Excellent website for illustrating and describing the exact location of West Philadelphia. Very interesting.

www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/state_academic_standard/19721. This is the state website that outlines all the standards that are to be met with each activity.

http://www.folklife.si.edu/explore/resources/interviewguide/interviewguide_home.html
An outline for ways to introduce students to forming questions and conducting an interview.

http://folkways.si.edu/explore_folkways/spoken_word.asp In a section entitled, “Say It Loud”, emphasis is placed on the African American spoken word. Easily read and able to draw conclusions to heritage and history of African Americans.

www.homes.point2.com/neighborhoods/us/pennsylvania/philadelphiacounty/west_philadelphia_demographics.aspx Broke demographics into tangible pieces to examine dynamics of each home for age, sex, marital status, children, etc.. Interesting to the teacher teaching in the neighborhood.

[Http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/creole_art_toast_tradition.html](http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/creole_art_toast_tradition.html). Mona Lisa Saloy. Discusses how African Americans are embedded into cultures within their own culture. Explains the reason of perseverance of the history of African Americans.

www.philadelphia.areaconnect.com/statistics/hmlt Shares 2000 census data reflective of the area.

www.learner.org/workshops/tml/workshop8/authors3b.html A unit from Social Justice in Action by Joseph Bruchac and Francisco Jimenez outlining the book, Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago. Shares perspectives of Chicago at the time of the book writing.

www.studyblue.com/notes/b/our-america-life-and-death-on-the-south-side-of-chicago/8874/0 A study guide of to the book referenced in the unit

Student Resources

Jones, Edward P., *Bad Neighbors*. New Yorker Magazine. Aug. 7, 2006. p 72.

Jones, LeAlan, Newman, Lloyd. *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago*. New York, NY: Washington Square Publications, 1998.

Urdang, Laurence. *The American Century Dictionary*. New York, NY. Oxford University Press. 1996.

Content Standards

Learning to Read Independently (1.1)

- Purpose for reading
- Word Recognition Skills
- Vocabulary Development
- Comprehension and Interpretation

Listening and Speaking

- Listening Skills
- Speaking Skills
- Discussions
- Presentations

End Notes

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- 1 Smithsonian Folkways
 - 2 Kang and Kang
 - 3 Saloy, Mona Lisa, Louisiana Folk Life
 - 4 Ibid
 - 5 Upenn archives/West Philadelphia statistics
 - 6 Kang and Kang
 - 7 Smithsonian Folkways
 - 8 Saloy, Mona Lisa, Louisiana Folk Life
 - 9 Ibid