

Language, Memory and Bearing Witness: Morrison as Muse for Modern Musings
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Abstract

Throughout history human beings have used storytelling to recount history. It is through this art that the most sacred beliefs of a culture are recorded and immortalized. From the tongues of ancient griots to Homer's Iliad, the human experience has been chronicled through the myths, legends and folklore of cultures from around the world. In relatively recent history, language, specifically narratives, have been manipulated into both mundane and fantastic stories that have reached beyond the realm of entertainment. This examination of literature produced by contemporary Black and Brown women writers is intended to capture the routine experience of Black and Brown America through the eyes of Black and Brown women writers. In creating a space for Black and Brown women writers, pathways have been made for other women of color who have also been strategically and consistently excluded from the canon as well as academic, social and political discourse.

Keywords: Memoir, Memoir Writing, Literary Analysis, Language, Citing Evidence, Reading Circles, Collaborative Discussion, ELA, Humanities, M.E.A.L. paragraphs, KWLQ charts, Reader Response Journals, Storytelling

Historically, canonical literature in most western cultures was largely accepted as works produced by men prior to the 20th century. While women writers were producing work simultaneously alongside their male counterparts, female voices as well as BIPOC voices were largely marginalized. Consequently, despite a multitude of conversations on the power and necessity of diversity in recent academic discourse, the limited presence of non-White, non-male literature persists.

In April 2022, during the One Book Philadelphia Kickoff event, Bronx-born author Lilliam Rivera in discussion with Philadelphia-born artist Quiara Alegria Hudes stated that it was not until college that she was first able to read works by authors like Toni Morrison and Sandra Cisneros, authors that made her feel like she too could be a writer. This admission suggests that there is a significant deficit in curricula in areas with large Black and Brown populations which necessitates the incorporation of this curriculum unit as a measure for addressing this need and filling this void. Rivera's acknowledgement of the power and precedent present in Morrison's work solidifies the case for focusing on the memory, storytelling and utilization of language in the memoirs selected to give dimension to the Black and Brown experiences.

Throughout history human beings have used storytelling to recount history. It is through this art that the most sacred beliefs of a culture are recorded and immortalized. From the tongues of ancient griots to Homer's Iliad, the human experience has been chronicled through the myths,

legends and folklore of cultures from around the world. In relatively recent history, language, specifically narratives, have been manipulated into both mundane and fantastic stories that have reached beyond the realm of entertainment. This narrative has also served as a powerful tool for promoting social change. From the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass to Letter From a Birmingham Jail, from Narrative of a Slave Girl to Their Eyes were Watching God, writers have served as social activists, employing the use of language/literature in various prosaic and poetic forms to chronicle and ultimately challenge the oppression that Black Americans have experienced, etching their images into the American aesthetic. However this examination of literature produced by contemporary Black and Brown women writers is intended to capture the routine experience of Black and Brown America through the eyes of Black and Brown women writers. In creating a space for Black and Brown women writers, pathways have been made for other women of color who have also been strategically and consistently excluded from the canon as well as academic, social and political discourse.

In a school like George Washington Carver High School for Engineering and Science where the majority of the students are nonwhite, but the staff and the curriculum remains largely white, there is a need for the inclusion of those who have been historically marginalized by race, sex and gender. The critical element that is missing from the widely accepted narrative are the voices of Black and Brown women. Through an exploration of female authors of color, particularly through selected texts by African-American and Latinx women writers, Carver students will study the issues of intersectionality and analyze the dynamics of oppression as they manifest in various traumas and triumphs that are key aspects of not just the Black/Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC) experience but are key components of the human experience. Rooted in Toni Morrison's legacy of attempting to create art without regard for "the white gaze," *On Language, Memory and Bearing Witness: Morrison as Muse for Modern Musings* aims to read and write literature that aimed at defying the scrutiny and judgment of Whiteness. It is through the use of language shaped by Black and Brown women that the complex narrative of the United States of America is reborn, a narrative written in sharp contrast to the master narrative of the western literary tradition. The liberating action of these women telling ordinary stories about their respective cultures in extraordinary ways relates a powerful counter narrative that dispels the myth of America, told from a white perspective, and bears witness to the true spectrum of Americanness.

In recent years some students have expressed explicitly and implicitly the dichotomous nature of educational reform's attempts to curate a more diverse and inclusive curriculum generally speaking. These efforts are categorized as dichotomous in that much of the focus has been on including more Black authors while not specifically focusing on the omission of other people of color who are also omitted from canonical literature and academic discourse. The case for including more diversity in efforts to increase diversity have arisen from students who are members of the Latinx community, a significant demographic in the School District of Philadelphia as well as a significant and powerful presence in the cultural makeup of the city of Philadelphia. The voices of both Black and Brown students, who do not see themselves featured

prominently in the curricula across multiple content areas, are also the people for whom this curriculum unit is intended to serve.

An important aspect of this curriculum unit is its intention to give voice and visibility to people who have been historically marginalized and continue to be marginalized in the present. In an interview with CNN journalist Christine Amanpour, artist, actress and author Janelle Monae describes how her collection of science fiction short stories addresses the current campaign for erasure in the United States that is being fueled in state legislatures. Monae describes the passing of anti-LGBTQ+ laws and restricting how racism is taught in schools. The very premise for her own collection of short stories deals directly with the concept of erasure, memory, storytelling/bearing witness. Dr. Daniel Kahneman suggests that we as beings are split into two selves, an experiencing self that lives in the present and there is a remembering self that “takes score” and remembers “the story of our lives.” Kahneman suggests that these two selves are separate and distinct entities. He states that the remembering self is a storyteller.

Toni Morrison is one of the most celebrated and impactful members of the modern literary canon. The complexity of Morrison’s use of language in her writing garnered her the much deserved acclaim and accolades obtained over the course of her career and lifetime. Writing specifically for African American readers with superior eloquence and complexity, Morrison’s mastery of storytelling is the bedrock on which many modern women/femme writers have established their own literary voices. Morrison mentions in her 1990 interview with Bill Moyers that Black women and women in general have been “creating, singing, holding, bearing [and] transferring the culture” for generations. In this interview Morrison pays homage to not only the dynamism of modern Black femininity, a marriage of traditional, root centered Black women with the modern markers of a more contemporary “New World Black Woman.” Morrison insists that these two strands of womanhood are intertwined and neither can exist independently of one another. In Claudia Brodsky’s discussion with Morrison at Cornell University, Morrison alludes to the fact that her work explores ordinary periods of time and tells the stories of ordinary people in extraordinary ways, making the lives of often ignored and strategically omitted Black people from critical discourse in the political and artistic worlds or as Cornell West suggests “shattered Black invisibility.” Morrison suggests that race was omitted from art and literature in the traditional canon. In her interview with Torrance Boone as part of the Talks at Google series, Boone summarizes Morrison’s body of work as explorations of love, class, race and politics which are also the driving components of the two memoirs on which this unit is centered.

Terms to Learn

There are three concepts that are important to understand in the context of this unit.

- The Master Narrative is the narrative that is central to the “becoming” of the white male. In this “master narrative,” Morrison proffers that Black people merely serve as a prop in

the action of forming and shaping white maleness. The master narrative is told in relation to and often from the perspective of white maleness. Morrison's work set out to give vision and voice, or in her words language, to Black beings, to tell their stories and bear witness to their existence separate from and in many ways in direct defiance to the white omission from and unyielding oppression of Blackness in the Western literary landscape.

- New World [Black] Woman-The phenomenon of the New World Woman as conceptualized by Morrison is the Black woman who departs from traditional Black femaleness and embodies the values and behaviors of the modern Black woman. This new world woman defies the traditional stereotypes of the submissive and oppressed woman, acted upon by men through violence and coercion. The new world woman is a woman who takes charge of her own fate and steers her own destiny.
- The White Gaze is a term popularized by Morrison regarding writing with the opinions or being concerned with how white society perceives the actions, thoughts or speech of Black people. Morrison aimed to write without regard for this ubiquitous surveillance as rejecting this “gaze” liberates the Black intellect to exist and create more freely and authentically.

Teaching Strategies

In developing this curriculum unit, a variety of instructional strategies have been considered to provide students with a complete and holistic literacy experience: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Below are brief descriptions and rationales for including these strategies in this unit.

- 1) Reading Circles: This instructional strategy is intended to give students the opportunity to read, speak about and listen to each other's ideas about a common text e.g. *Men We Reaped and My Broken Language*. Roles for each circle discussion should be rotated as needed.
- 2) Jigsaw Reading: This instructional strategy allows students to divide up a larger volume of work into a more manageable volume. Each student takes ownership of a portion of the task and teaches their peer how about the portion of the assigned task on which they have now become an expert as a result of their investigation. This strategy also utilizes the power of peer learning as students are often more readily able to learn from each other instead of adults.
- 3) Collaborative Discussions: This instructional strategy allows students the opportunity to practice speaking and listening skills based on their understanding and analysis of a selected text.

- 4) KWLQ Charts: Use of this instructional strategy activates students' prior knowledge about a particular topic as well as challenges them to pose questions on a particular topic and summarize their learning.
- 5) M.E.A.L Paragraph: This writing strategy aids students in identifying the structure for writing a solid paragraph. Remembering the M.E.A.L. acronym helps students remember the components of a paragraph. The "M" reminds students that every solidly written paragraph starts with a main idea sentence. The "E" reminds students to include evidence such as a direct quotation or paraphrase from the text that supports the main idea. The "A" reminds students to analyze the evidence provided. The "L" reminds students to link their idea/ideas to another work, themselves or the larger world. In this unit, a variation of the M.E.A.L. paragraph, called a M.E.A.E.A.L. paragraph, is used to increase the number of evidence and analysis sentences to develop more complex paragraphs for high school students who are writing at a higher level.

***An option for differentiation would be for lower-level students to utilize the M.E.A.L. format while higher-level students utilize the more advanced variations.**

- 6) Gallery Walk: This instructional strategy allows students to share and exchange thoughts and ideas in small groups using both verbal and nonverbal communication. This strategy allows greater opportunity for less vocal students to share their ideas and respond to the ideas of others. It also permits kinesthetic and visual learning for students who learn best via that modality.
- 7) Close Reading: This instructional strategy tasks students with interacting with a text as they read, question and reflect on excerpts of a text. Close reading encourages students to be more active and engaged readers.
- 8) Frayer Model: This instructional strategy is used to investigate vocabulary by asking students to define the word, identify its part of speech, identify synonyms and antonyms as well as practice using the vocabulary word in a sentence.
- 9) Reader Response Journals-This instructional strategy allows students the opportunity to read, question and respond to what they are reading. This strategy can be used for both in-class and out-of-class reading assignments. For this context, reader response journals can be a helpful instructional tool when reading *Men We Reaped* and *My Broken Language*.

Lesson One-Morrison's Nobel Prize Lecture

Student Learning Objective: Students will be able to read and discuss Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize Lecture in order to understand the symbolism of language in Morrison's speech. Students will be able to interpret the meaning of Morrison's lecture as a result of engaging in a collaborative discussion on Morrison's main points of the lecture.

Prerequisite Knowledge: Students must understand the definitions of the terms "white gaze" "New World Woman"

Materials: lecture transcript, guiding questions handout, writing utensil or electronic mechanism for highlighting/annotating the text, dictionary, thesaurus, Frayer Model [worksheet](#) (see Appendix).

Vocabulary: moribund, despot, fiat, nefarious, ineffable, griot, reprimand, imperiled, thwarts, demagogue, obscure, fascist, cataclysmic, detract, miasma

**Vocabulary can be taught explicitly or organically as students annotate the text or be assigned as homework.*

Lesson Duration: The duration of this lesson would span a 90-minute class period or 2 45-minute class periods.

The textual anchor for this curriculum unit is Morrison's 1993 Nobel Prize speech. In this lecture Morrison echoes the adage that is signature to her career--language fosters a certain power.

Directions: Read the following speech. As you read, highlight/annotate the passages, phrases or words that relate to the guiding questions. After you finish reading, write a written response to the lecture by answering the guiding questions. Your responses to the guiding questions will be used to engage in a small or whole group collaborative discussion.

Toni Morrison

Nobel Lecture December 7, 1993

[Listen to an audio recording of Toni Morrison's Nobel Lecture](#)

"Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind but wise." Or was it an old man? A guru, perhaps. Or a griot soothing restless children. I have heard this story, or one exactly like it, in the lore of several cultures.

"Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind. Wise."

In the version I know the woman is the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town. Her reputation for wisdom is without peer and without question. Among her people she is both the law and its transgression. The honor she is paid and the awe in which she is held reach beyond her neighborhood to places far away; to the city where the intelligence of rural prophets is the source of much amusement.

One day the woman is visited by some young people who seem to be bent on disproving her clairvoyance and showing her up for the fraud they believe she is. Their plan is simple: they enter her house and ask the one question the answer to which rides solely on her difference from them, a difference they regard as a profound disability: her blindness. They stand before her, and one of them says, "Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead." She does not answer, and the question is repeated. "Is the bird I am holding living or dead?" Still she doesn't answer. She is blind and cannot see her visitors, let alone what is in their hands. She does not know their color, gender or homeland. She only knows their motive.

The old woman's silence is so long, the young people have trouble holding their laughter. Finally she speaks and her voice is soft but stern. "I don't know", she says. "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands."

Her answer can be taken to mean: if it is dead, you have either found it that way or you have killed it. If it is alive, you can still kill it. Whether it is to stay alive, it is your decision. Whatever the case, it is your responsibility.

For parading their power and her helplessness, the young visitors are reprimanded, told they are responsible not only for the act of mockery but also for the small bundle of life sacrificed to achieve its aims. The blind woman shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised.

Speculation on what (other than its own frail body) that bird-in-the-hand might signify has always been attractive to me, but especially so now thinking, as I have been, about the work I do that has brought me to this company. So I choose to read the bird as language and the woman as a practiced writer. She is worried about how the language she dreams in, given to her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency – as an act with consequences. So the question the children put to her: "Is it living or dead?" is not unreal because she thinks of language as susceptible to death, erasure; certainly imperiled and salvageable only by an effort of the will. She believes that if the bird in the hands of her visitors is dead the custodians are responsible for the corpse. For her a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire

its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However moribund, it is not without effect for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential. Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, fill baffling silences. Official language smitheryed to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege is a suit of armor polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago. Yet there it is: dumb, predatory, sentimental. Exciting reverence in schoolchildren, providing shelter for despots, summoning false memories of stability, harmony among the public.

She is convinced that when language dies, out of carelessness, disuse, indifference and absence of esteem, or killed by fiat, not only she herself, but all users and makers are accountable for its demise. In her country children have bitten their tongues off and use bullets instead to iterate the voice of speechlessness, of disabled and disabling language, of language adults have abandoned altogether as a device for grappling with meaning, providing guidance, or expressing love. But she knows tongue-suicide is not only the choice of children. It is common among the infantile heads of state and power merchants whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts for they speak only to those who obey, or in order to force obedience.

The systematic looting of language can be recognized by the tendency of its users to forgo its nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties for menace and subjugation. Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek – it must be rejected, altered and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind. Sexist language, racist language, theistic language – all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas.

The old woman is keenly aware that no intellectual mercenary, nor insatiable dictator, no paid-for politician or demagogue; no counterfeit journalist would be persuaded by her thoughts. There is and will be rousing language to keep citizens armed and arming; slaughtered and slaughtering in the malls, courthouses, post offices, playgrounds, bedrooms and boulevards; stirring, memorializing language to mask the pity and waste of needless death. There will be more

diplomatic language to countenance rape, torture, assassination. There is and will be more seductive, mutant language designed to throttle women, to pack their throats like paté-producing geese with their own unsayable, transgressive words; there will be more of the language of surveillance disguised as research; of politics and history calculated to render the suffering of millions mute; language glamorized to thrill the dissatisfied and bereft into assaulting their neighbors; arrogant pseudo-empirical language crafted to lock creative people into cages of inferiority and hopelessness.

Underneath the eloquence, the glamor, the scholarly associations, however stirring or seductive, the heart of such language is languishing, or perhaps not beating at all – if the bird is already dead.

She has thought about what could have been the intellectual history of any discipline if it had not insisted upon, or been forced into, the waste of time and life that rationalizations for and representations of dominance required – lethal discourses of exclusion blocking access to cognition for both the excluder and the excluded.

The conventional wisdom of the Tower of Babel story is that the collapse was a misfortune. That it was the distraction, or the weight of many languages that precipitated the tower's failed architecture. That one monolithic language would have expedited the building and heaven would have been reached. Whose heaven, she wonders? And what kind? Perhaps the achievement of Paradise was premature, a little hasty if no one could take the time to understand other languages, other views, other narratives period. Had they, the heaven they imagined might have been found at their feet. Complicated, demanding, yes, but a view of heaven as life; not heaven as post-life.

She would not want to leave her young visitors with the impression that language should be forced to stay alive merely to be. The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience it is not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie. When a President of the United States thought about the graveyard his country had become, and said, "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here. But it will never forget what they did here," his simple words are exhilarating in their life-sustaining properties because they refused to encapsulate the reality of 600,000 dead men in a cataclysmic race war. Refusing to monumentalize, disdaining the "final word", the precise "summing up", acknowledging their "poor power to add or detract", his words signal deference to the uncapturability of the life it mourns. It is the deference that moves her, that recognition that language can never live up to life once and for all. Nor should it. Language can never "pin down" slavery, genocide, war. Nor

should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable.

Be it grand or slender, burrowing, blasting, or refusing to sanctify; whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word, the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction. But who does not know of literature banned because it is interrogative; discredited because it is critical; erased because alternate? And how many are outraged by the thought of a self-ravaged tongue?

Word-work is sublime, she thinks, because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference – the way in which we are like no other life.

We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.

“Once upon a time, ...” visitors ask an old woman a question. Who are they, these children? What did they make of that encounter? What did they hear in those final words: “The bird is in your hands”? A sentence that gestures towards possibility or one that drops a latch? Perhaps what the children heard was “It’s not my problem. I am old, female, black, blind. What wisdom I have now is in knowing I cannot help you. The future of language is yours.”

They stand there. Suppose nothing was in their hands? Suppose the visit was only a ruse, a trick to get to be spoken to, taken seriously as they have not been before? A chance to interrupt, to violate the adult world, its miasma of discourse about them, for them, but never to them? Urgent questions are at stake, including the one they have asked: “Is the bird we hold living or dead?” Perhaps the question meant: “Could someone tell us what is life? What is death?” No trick at all; no silliness. A straightforward question worthy of the attention of a wise one. An old one. And if the old and wise who have lived life and faced death cannot describe either, who can?

But she does not; she keeps her secret; her good opinion of herself; her gnomic pronouncements; her art without commitment. She keeps her distance, enforces it and retreats into the singularity of isolation, in sophisticated, privileged space.

Nothing, no word follows her declaration of transfer. That silence is deep, deeper than the meaning available in the words she has spoken. It shivers, this silence, and the children, annoyed, fill it with language invented on the spot.

“Is there no speech,” they ask her, “no words you can give us that helps us break through your dossier of failures? Through the education you have just given us that is no education at all because we are paying close attention to what you have done as well as to what you have said? To the barrier you have erected between generosity and wisdom?”

“We have no bird in our hands, living or dead. We have only you and our important question. Is the nothing in our hands something you could not bear to contemplate, to even guess? Don’t you

remember being young when language was magic without meaning? When what you could say, could not mean? When the invisible was what imagination strove to see? When questions and demands for answers burned so brightly you trembled with fury at not knowing?

“Do we have to begin consciousness with a battle heroines and heroes like you have already fought and lost leaving us with nothing in our hands except what you have imagined is there? Your answer is artful, but its artfulness embarrasses us and ought to embarrass you. Your answer is indecent in its self-congratulation. A made-for-television script that makes no sense if there is nothing in our hands.

“Why didn’t you reach out, touch us with your soft fingers, delay the sound bite, the lesson, until you knew who we were? Did you so despise our trick, our modus operandi you could not see that we were baffled about how to get your attention? We are young. Unripe. We have heard all our short lives that we have to be responsible. What could that possibly mean in the catastrophe this world has become; where, as a poet said, “nothing needs to be exposed since it is already barefaced.” Our inheritance is an affront. You want us to have your old, blank eyes and see only cruelty and mediocrity. Do you think we are stupid enough to perjure ourselves again and again with the fiction of nationhood? How dare you talk to us of duty when we stand waist deep in the toxin of your past?

“You trivialize us and trivialize the bird that is not in our hands. Is there no context for our lives? No song, no literature, no poem full of vitamins, no history connected to experience that you can pass along to help us start strong? You are an adult. The old one, the wise one. Stop thinking about saving your face. Think of our lives and tell us your particularized world. Make up a story. Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created. We will not blame you if your reach exceeds your grasp; if love so ignites your words they go down in flames and nothing is left but their scald. Or if, with the reticence of a surgeon’s hands, your words suture only the places where blood might flow. We know you can never do it properly – once and for all.

Passion is never enough; neither is skill. But try. For our sake and yours forget your name in the street; tell us what the world has been to you in the dark places and in the light. Don’t tell us what to believe, what to fear. Show us belief’s wide skirt and the stitch that unravels fear’s caul. You, old woman, blessed with blindness, can speak the language that tells us what only language can: how to see without pictures. Language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. Language alone is meditation.

“Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin. What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company.

“Tell us about ships turned away from shorelines at Easter, placenta in a field. Tell us about a wagonload of slaves, how they sang so softly their breath was indistinguishable from the falling snow. How they knew from the hunch of the nearest shoulder that the next stop would be their last. How, with hands prayered in their sex, they thought of heat, then sun. Lifting their faces as though it was there for the taking. Turning as though there for the taking. They stop at an inn. The driver and his mate go in with the lamp leaving them humming in the dark. The horse’s void steams into the snow beneath its hooves and its hiss and melt are the envy of the freezing slaves. “The inn door opens: a girl and a boy step away from its light. They climb into the wagon bed. The boy will have a gun in three years, but now he carries a lamp and a jug of warm cider. They pass it from mouth to mouth. The girl offers bread, pieces of meat and something more: a glance into the eyes of the one she serves. One helping for each man, two for each woman. And a look. They look back. The next stop will be their last. But not this one. This one is warmed.” It’s quiet again when the children finish speaking, until the woman breaks into the silence. “Finally”, she says, “I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together.”

Name _____

Toni Morrison Nobel Prize Lecture Questions

Directions: After you finish reading, write a written response to the lecture by answering the guiding questions. Be sure to cite evidence by paraphrasing or quoting Morrison's speech.

- 1) Who is the subject of Morrison's speech? In other words, what do we know about her through the speaker's narration?

- 2) What does the old woman's blindness symbolize?

- 3) What do the younger women symbolize?

- 4) What does the old woman mean when she says to the younger women, "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands."?

Lesson Two: About the Mississippi Delta Region

Student Learning Objective: Students will be able to identify main ideas from the Mississippi Delta region videos in order to better understand the context for reading Jesmyn Ward's Men We Reaped.

Essential Questions- What knowledge have you acquired about the Mississippi Delta region of the United States of America?

Lesson Duration: One 45-minute class period

Materials: videos, handouts, chart paper, markers

Step 1 (Warm Up): Please complete the first column of the KWLQ chart (Column "K") by writing down what you know about the Mississippi Delta. Please be prepared to share at least ONE thing that you wrote.

Step 2: After sharing ONE thing you wrote in the "K" column, Then write down at least 2 things in the "W " column of the KWLQ chart.

Step 3: Watch the videos about the Mississippi Delta Region.

[Video One](#)

[Video Two](#)

[Video Three](#)

Step 4: Complete the "L" and "Q" columns of the KWLQ chart.

Step 5: As a whole group/class, identify and capture the major/recurrent "Big Ideas" that surfaced in the videos. After generating this list, write one "Big Idea" on a sheet of chart paper then hang each sheet on a designated space on the classroom wall to use in future lessons while reading Men We Reaped.

Name _____

KWLQ Chart

<i>K</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>Q</i>
<i>What I already know about the Mississippi Delta Region.</i>	<i>What I already want to know about the Mississippi Delta Region.</i>	<i>What I learned about the Mississippi Delta Region.</i>	<i>Questions I still have about the Mississippi Delta Region.</i>

Lesson Three: Language and Agency in Jesmyn Ward's Essays

Student Learning Objective: Students will be able to analyze a nonfiction text as a result of writing a well structured paragraph.

Lesson Duration: One 45-minute class period

Materials: Copies of essays by Jesmyn Ward, MEAEAL Paragraph template

[Essay One](#)

[Essay Two](#)

[Essay Three](#)

Step 1: Divide students into equal rows of six to the greatest extent possible.

Step 2: Assign each row one of the articles to read so that each row is reading only one article.

Step 3: Recreate groups so that one student reads each essay into groups of 3 to share the ideas conveyed in the essay each of them read in a small group discussion (jigsaw activity).

Step 4: Write a MEAEAL paragraph that responds to the question: Does the essay you read or the essays discussed in your small groups by Jesmyn Ward relate to Morrison's Nobel Lecture?

Please explain your answer and cite evidence from the text.

Name _____

M.E.A.E.A.L. Paragraph Template

Directions: Use the template below to write a M.E.A.E.A.L. paragraph about one or more of Ward's essays and how its themes connect to the points made in Morrison's Nobel Prize Lecture.

<i>Main Idea Sentence</i>
<i>Evidence (an integrated direct or paraphrased quote from the text)</i>
<i>Analysis Sentence (explains your perspective on the evidence)</i>
<i>Evidence (an integrated direct or paraphrased quote from the text)</i>
<i>Analysis Sentence (explains your perspective on the evidence)</i>
<i>Link Sentence (connects the ideas conveyed in the paragraph to the larger world or another work)</i>

Lesson Four: Reading Men We Reaped

Student Learning Objectives: Students will be able to read and interpret nonfiction texts as a result of engaging in small group discussions.

Lesson Duration: Varies according to chapters being read in or out of class.

Materials: Reader Response Journal, “Big Ideas” charts, copies of Men We Reaped, Reading Circles handout (multiple copies), markers

**Readings can be completed in class or at home with reading circles being run until the book is completed.*

4.

Discussion Director

Discussion Director-For this role you will develop a list of 4-5 questions to guide the group in discussing today's reading. You will also take care to make sure that each group member has a chance to participate in the discussion.

Discussion Question 1

Discussion Question 2

Discussion Question 3

Discussion Question 4

Discussion Question 5

Connector

Directions: Your role for today's reading is to make connections to the outside world or other texts studied in this unit. Please be sure to make at least ONE connection to the essays that we read by the author as well as ONE connection to the ideas conveyed in Morrison's Nobel Prize lecture. Other connections can be to other others, events, etc.

Connection 1

Connection 2

Connection 3

Connection 4

Word Master

Directions: Your role is to identify 5 words or phrases from today's reading and explain the meaning of these words or phrases and why these selected words or phrases are significant to the reading. Be sure to write the selected word/phrase on the line along with the rationale for your selection.

Word/Phrase 1

Word/Phrase 2

Word/Phrase 3

Word/Phrase 4

Word/Phrase 5

Passage Person

Directions: Your role for today's reading is to identify at least THREE significant passages from the reading and share them with the group. Then pose 1-2 questions about each passage to discuss with the group.

Passage 1

Question

Passage 2

Question

Passage 3

Question

Culture Collector

Directions: Your role is to compare and contrast the culture--language, speech, style of dress, cuisine, dance, belief systems, etc--in the story and your own culture. Select THREE cultural references from the reading that demonstrates similarities and differences.

Cultural Connection 1

Cultural Connection 2

Cultural Connection 3

Name _____

READER RESPONSE JOURNAL

Directions: For this reading assignment you will keep a Reader Response Journal. The purpose of this task is to capture your ideas and thoughts about the text you are reading. Here are some ideas to consider for completing your Reader Response journal entries.

As you read, identify excerpts from the text and note them in the box on the left. Then write a reaction to what the text says. As you read, identify a particular character or characters that speak to you in the reading and write a response to that particular character's thoughts, words or actions.

Passage One	Response One
Passage Two	Response Two

Lesson Five: A Snapshot of Puerto Rican Culture

Student Learning Objectives: Students will be able to understand and identify aspects of Puerto Rican culture in order to increase their comprehension of Quiara Alegria Hudes' memoir My Broken Language.

Lesson Duration: One 45- minute class period

Materials: videos, article, chart paper, markers, Post-It notes

What are the Orisha? Why are they important to Puerto Rican culture? How is the practice of this traditional belief system an act of resistance? What is Bomba and why does its origin and expression represent resistance?

*Step 1: As a whole group, the class will view this short video on the roots of Orisha found [here](#).
Step 2: Separate students into even groups to investigate texts and videos on selected aspects of Puerto Rican culture. Each designated group should use the links below. Each group will take notes on the major themes of their investigation.*

[Group 1](#)

[Group 2](#)

[Group 3](#)

[Group 4](#)

[Group 5](#)

[Group 6](#)

[Group 7](#)

Step 3: Allow students to share the main ideas from each video watched or text read in discussion by allowing them to create a main ideas chart on chart paper. Post the chart paper created by each group at various places in the classroom. Then allow each group 1-2 minutes to visit each poster to read what their classmates have captured (gallery walk). Allow students comment, respond to or question the information contained in the charts by writing their thoughts on Post-It notes. Keep the charts up for the duration of reading Quiara Alegria Hudes' My Broken Language. These charts can be revisited and revised as needed in future lessons.

Lesson Six: Language, Agency and Power in the Essays of Quiara Alegria Hudes

Student Learning Objective: Students will be able to analyze a nonfiction text as a result of writing a well structured paragraph.

Lesson Duration: One 45-minute class period

Materials: M.E.A.E.A.L. paragraph template, copies of the essays, chart paper, markers

[Essay One](#)

[Essay Two](#)

[Essay Three](#)

Step 1: Separate students into even rows or groups

Step 2: Assign each group ONE of Hudes' essays.

Step 3: Regroup students to share the main ideas from each essay read in a small group discussion.

Step 4: Capture the themes of the reading on chart paper then post them around the room for reference later.

Step 5: Write a M.E.A.E.A.L. paragraph that explains how Hudes' work as an artist connects to the ideas related in Morrison's Nobel Prize lecture. Please cite evidence from the texts that support your response.

Name _____

M.E.A.E.A.L. Paragraph Template

Directions: Use the template below to write a M.E.A.E.A.L. paragraph about one or more of Ward's essays and how its themes connect to the points made in Morrison's Nobel Prize Lecture.

<i>Main Idea Sentence</i>
<i>Evidence (an integrated direct or paraphrased quote from the text)</i>
<i>Analysis Sentence (explains your perspective on the evidence)</i>
<i>Evidence (an integrated direct or paraphrased quote from the text)</i>
<i>Analysis Sentence (explains your perspective on the evidence)</i>
<i>Link Sentence (connects the ideas conveyed in the paragraph to the larger world or another work)</i>

Lesson Seven-Reading My Broken Language

Student Learning Objective: Students will be able to read and interpret nonfiction texts as a result of engaging in small group discussions.

Lesson Duration: Varies according to chapters being read in or out of class.

Materials: Reader Response Journal, “Big Ideas” charts, copies of My Broken Language, Reading Circles handout (see appendix), markers

**Readings can be completed in class or at home with reading circles being run until the book is completed.*

Name _____

4. _____

Discussion Director

Discussion Director-For this role you will develop a list of 4-5 questions to guide the group in discussing today's reading. You will also take care to make sure that each group member has a chance to participate in the discussion.

Discussion Question 1

Discussion Question 2

Discussion Question 3

Discussion Question 4

Discussion Question 5

Connector

Directions: Your role for today's reading is to make connections to the outside world or other texts studied in this unit. Please be sure to make at least ONE connection to the essays that we read by the author as well as ONE connection to the ideas conveyed in Morrison's Nobel Prize lecture. Other connections can be to other others, events, etc.

Connection 1

Connection 2

Connection 3

Connection 4

Directions: Your role is to identify 5 words or phrases from today's reading and explain the meaning of these words or phrases and why these selected words or phrases are significant to the reading. Be sure to write the selected word/phrase on the line along with the rationale for your selection.

Word/Phrase 1

Word/Phrase 2

Word/Phrase 3

Word/Phrase 4

Word/Phrase 5

Directions: Your role for today's reading is to identify at least THREE significant passages from the reading and share them with the group. Then pose 1-2 questions about each passage to discuss with the group.

Passage 1

Question

Passage 2

Question

Passage 3

Question

Directions: Your role is to compare and contrast the culture--language, speech, style of dress, cuisine, dance, belief systems, etc--in the story and your own culture. Select THREE cultural references from the reading that demonstrates similarities and differences.

Cultural Connection 1

Cultural Connection 2

Cultural Connection 3

Directions: For this reading assignment you will keep a Reader Response Journal. The purpose of this task is to capture your ideas and thoughts about the text you are reading. Here are some ideas to consider for completing your Reader Response journal entries.

As you read, identify excerpts from the text and note them in the box on the left. Then write a reaction to what the text says. As you read, identify a particular character or characters that speak to you in the reading and write a response to that particular character’s thoughts, words or actions.

Passage One	Response One
Passage Two	Response Two

Lesson Eight-Is it a Memoir? Write a Six-Word Memoir

Student Learning Objective: Students will be able to identify the criteria for memoir and practice the self reflection that is the genre by creating a six-word memoir.

Essential Question-What constitutes a memoir? What are its main components?

[Whole Group Video 1](#)

[Whole Group Video 2](#)

[Whole Group Video 3](#)

[Whole Group Video 4](#)

Name _____

Directions: Please complete the following steps to creating your six-word memoir. Please use the videos to help guide this practice. I am not looking for perfection but thoughtfulness about the information given in the videos to help you better understand what a memoir is.

Write 40 words that describe you (**I will count so make it 40!!**). Who are you? What are you good at? What do you want to be good at? What are your vices (struggles)? What are your virtues (strengths)?

Using your list of 40, write a 20-word story about yourself (**Again, I will count**).

Reduce your 20-word story to 6 words. That six-word memoir should still reflect your central message or theme.

The culminating activities for this unit will be for students to write their own memoirs as well as write a literary analysis of one of the memoirs.

Lesson Nine: Writing a Mini Memoir

The collection in whole should have a distinct title. Students should complete 5-7 sections as part of the collection. Each chapter should have a distinct title. Sections of the student memoirs can be developed using teacher-directed or student-selected topics. Section topics can be person, event or concept-centered. Some potential topics students could write about are:

- Neighborhood or a particular point of origin
- Identity
- Love
- Friendship
- Family member(s)/lineage
- Spirituality

Once students have selected their subjects to write about, students can create a timeline of the events that they wish to communicate to their readers in order to help organize/plan their writing. Students could also turn their memoirs into media projects using video applications/sites to turn their memoirs into mini films/media pieces [Making Videos in Google Slides](#).

MEMOIR TIMELINE WORKSHEET

Directions: Use this timeline worksheet to identify the events that you plan to write about in your memoir. Write a brief description of the event. Please add additional spaces if necessary.

WHERE IT ALL BEGINS...

NEXT STAGE BEGINS HERE...

MY JOURNEY CONTINUES WHEN...

MY LIFE CONTINUED CHANGING BECAUSE...

REFLECTIONS ON WHERE I HAVE BEEN AND WHERE I AIM TO BE...

Memoir Rubric

Name _____

In addition to what is outlined in the rubric, all sections of your memoir need:

***a title (a title for each subsection and the collection itself)**

***be double spaced**

*** written in 12 point, Arial or Times New Roman font**

Structure -Events <i>before</i>	Author clearly “shows” attitudes and feelings numerous times through the thoughts, action and dialogue of the characters.	Author’s attitudes and feelings before are evident & occur numerous times through the thoughts and actions of the character.	Direct statements indicate the author’s feelings and attitudes and/or some events are not necessarily significant.	Memoir includes irrelevant events that cause the reader confusion in trying to determine the <i>before feelings</i> and attitudes.
Structure - Events <i>after</i>	The memoir clearly “shows” how the learning changed the author’s life.	Although word choice does not always “show”, it is clear to the reader how the learning changed the author’s life.	Change is evident; but is “told” to the reader through direct statements.	Memoir includes irrelevant events that cause confusion when noticing the change in the author’s life.
Style & Technique	Author consistently “shows” the significance of the events through engaging details i.e figurative language, compelling language, and a balance of action, thoughts, and dialogue.	Author sometimes “shows” the significance of the events through details, compelling language, and a balance of action, thoughts, and dialogue.	Author “tells” the significance of the events through direct statements.	No effort is made to reveal the significance of the events to the reader.
Format	There is a main character for the reader to follow and connect with The story has a central focus. Details and information deal with the main theme.	There is a main character but the reader feels little connection to them The story has a general focus but contains unnecessary details or information	Difficult to identify the main character. The story contains large amounts of unnecessary information.	There is not a main character or the use of first-person voice. No main focus or theme.
Conventions	Memoir is error-free. The collection has a creative and astutely selected title as does each section of the memoir.	Memoir contains minimal mistakes that do not interfere with meaning. The collection has a creative title as does each section of the memoir.	Numerous minor errors often make memoir difficult to read. The collection has a title that is generally connected to the writer’s subject matter as does each section of the memoir.	Many errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation often interfere with meaning. The collection is missing a title or a section of the memoir remains untitled.
Memorable Moment	Memoir focuses on a single moment that seems significant to the author’s life.	Memoir focuses on a single moment that seems kind of significant to the author’s life.	Memoir focuses on a single moment that does not seem significant to the author’s life.	Author does not seem to be aware of the significance of the moment.

Score:

Lesson Ten: Writing a Literary Analysis

For this assignment students will write a literary analysis of one or both memoirs read in this unit. Students should draw on the “Big Ideas” charts for each book, *Men We Reaped* and *My Broken Language*, as well as the mentor text for the unit and the essays read by Ward and Hudes. The MEAEAL paragraphs written in Lessons Three and Six.

Analytical Essay Rubric

Criteria	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Below Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
Introduction Paragraph	Original hook engages the reader's curiosity Background info is relevant; clearly develops into thesis Thesis/claim is strong clearly stated; correct location	Hook is somewhat interesting Background info is relevant; partially develops into thesis Thesis/claim is stated in the correct location	Hook restates the prompt; unoriginal Background info leaves reader with questions Thesis/claim is evident but is not in the incorrect location	Hook does not engage the reader Background info is missing important topics for clarity Thesis/claim is confusing and in the incorrect location	Hook missing Back- ground info missing Thesis missing
Organization & Transitions	Ideas are coherently organized into separate body paragraphs; topic sentences are complete Transitions are used correctly/sufficiently; essay flows logical	Ideas are somewhat organized into separate body paragraphs; topic sentences are complete Transitions are used correctly at the beginning of each body paragraph & conclusion; sometimes used within body paragraphs	Ideas do not begin and end when they should; topic sentences are incomplete or are in incorrect locations Missing 1 body paragraph or conclusion transition; occasionally used within body paragraphs	Ideas are disorganized; topic sentences do not control the paragraph Missing 2+ body paragraph or conclusion transitions; rarely used within body paragraphs; lacks flow	Paragraphing is not used Transitions are not used
Conclusion Paragraph	Conclusion stays on topic; provides closure.	Conclusion mostly stays on topic; somewhat provides closure.	Conclusion strays from topic.	Conclusion excessively strays from topic.	Conclusion is missing.
Evidence & Elaboration	All evidence is relevant & clearly connects to the thesis All evidence is cited correctly; minimum #	Most evidence is relevant and connects to the thesis Some citation mistakes exist;	Missing 1 piece of evidence or half are irrelevant Major citation issues exist or missing a required	Missing 2+ pieces of evidence or 3+ pieces of evidence are irrelevant Evidence is cited incorrectly or some	Evidence is missing Citations are missing; ample plagiarism

	<p>sources present; plagiarism is not present</p> <p>All explanation & elaboration sentences clarify and extend ideas; context is present</p>	<p>minimum # sources present; plagiarism is not present</p> <p>Most explanation & elaboration sentences clarify and extend ideas; context is mostly present</p>	<p>source; plagiarism is not present</p> <p>Explanation & elaboration sentences clarify but do not extend ideas; context is sometimes present</p>	<p>plagiarism is present</p> <p>Explanation & elaboration sentences are insufficient; context is rarely or not present</p>	<p>E/E missing or mostly missing</p>
<p>Tone, Word Choice, & Conventions</p>	<p>Tone is formal; no personal pronouns; no slang</p> <p>Strong words appropriate to stance are used; no repetition of major words</p> <p>Punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and usage are correct; no or few errors</p> <p>MLA format is evident and implemented correctly.</p>	<p>Tone is mostly formal; 1 use of personal pronoun; 1 use of slang</p> <p>Word choice is mostly appropriate to stance; few repetitions of major words.</p> <p>Punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and usage are mostly correct; some errors</p> <p>MLA format is evident and implemented correctly.</p>	<p>Tone is somewhat formal; 2-3 uses of personal pronouns; 2-3 uses of slang</p> <p>Word choice is somewhat appropriate to stance; some repetitions of major words</p> <p>Punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and usage are sometimes correct; several errors</p> <p>MLA format is evident and implemented almost correctly with 1-2 errors.</p>	<p>Lacks formality; 4+ uses of personal pronouns; 4+ uses of slang</p> <p>Word choice is basic and unrelated to stance; several repetitions of major words.</p> <p>Punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and usage are frequently incorrect; frequent errors</p> <p>MLA format is evident and implemented almost correctly with 3-4 errors.</p>	<p>Tone is informal; personal pronouns used throughout.</p> <p>Word choice is very repetitive.</p> <p>MLA format is evident and implemented with more than 5 errors.</p>

Name:

Score:

Appendix
Common Core Standards

CC.1.3.11–12.A

Determine and analyze the relationship between two or more themes or central ideas of a text, including the development and interaction of the themes; provide an objective summary of the text.

CC.1.3.11–12.B

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author's implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

CC.1.3.11–12.C

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.

CC.1.3.11–12.D

Evaluate how an author's point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CC.1.3.11–12.J

Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college- and career- readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

CC.1.3.11–12.K

Read and comprehend literary fiction on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.

CC.1.4.11–12.O

Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, reflection, multiple plotlines, and pacing to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.

CC.1.4.11–12.P

Create a smooth progression of experiences or events using a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome; provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CC.1.4.11–12.S

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and literary nonfiction.

CC.1.4.11–12.T

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CC.1.5.11–12.A

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CC.1.5.11–12.A

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CC.1.5.11–12.D

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective; organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

FRAYER MODEL

Directions: Use this worksheet to investigate some of the vocabulary words that have come up in the class reading. Please fill each box with the designated information.

Vocabulary Word (word assigned from list)

<u>Definition and Part of Speech</u>	<u>Sentence 1</u> <u>Sentence 2</u>
<u>Synonyms (list at least 3)</u>	<u>Antonyms (list at least 3)</u>

Incomplete

Works Cited

“Interview with Toni Morrison on her life and career (1990).” *YouTube*, uploaded by Manufacturing Intellect. 19 August 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=53F0IFMSwpc.

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