

The Newberry Library
Picturing America School Collaboration Conference (April 2010)
Lesson Plan

SUBMITTED BY:

Christie Wicks, Language Arts teacher
Valley Southwoods Freshman High School, West Des Moines, Iowa
email: wicksc@wdmcs.org

OBJECTIVES:

As an extension to the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students will learn about the Harlem Renaissance, the poetry of Langston Hughes, and Romare Bearden's *The Dove*. This lesson will broaden students' understanding of the cultural landscape in America beyond fictitious Maycomb in the 1930's, up through the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, when Harper Lee actually penned her novel.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- 1.) How does the scene in *The Dove* contrast sharply with life in Maycomb, Alabama?
- 2.) What connections can you make between the symbolism of the dove and the mockingbird?
- 3.) Describe the mood and energy of the collage. What are the people in the scene doing?
- 4.) Jazz music, which rose in popularity during the Harlem Renaissance, is known for its upbeat, yet fragmented rhythms and melodies. How is jazz music similar to this collage?
- 5.) What 3 animals do you see in the collage? Why do you think Bearden placed these animals in the scene and what might they represent?
- 6.) When reading Langston Hughes' poems, "Harlem" (A Dream Deferred); "Theme for English B," and "Mother to Son" (Life Ain't Been No Crystal Stair) what connections do you make to *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Dove*?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is a classic American novel set in Maycomb, Alabama, during the 1930's. The story, told through the childhood memories of narrator Scout Finch, explores the issues of poverty, intolerance, friendship, and hope. Characters Tom Robinson and Boo Radley serve as symbolic "mockingbirds" of the novel, while lawyer Atticus Finch fulfills the role as the moral conscience of the book.
- Romare Bearden was an artist who lived in New York City during the Harlem Renaissance. His mixed-media collage entitled *The Dove* was created out of cut-up photos, magazine and newspaper clippings, colored paper, and cardboard. Bearden wanted to depict popular culture from an African-American point of view. This collage, in particular, depicts urban life in Harlem.
- Langston Hughes is a well-known American poet and the most recognized poet of the Harlem Renaissance. His poetry depicts both the struggles and triumphs of African-American life.

KEY VOCABULARY AND DEFINITIONS:

The Great Depression	The longest and most severe economic slump in American history. The Great Depression lasted from 1929-1939.
The Harlem Renaissance	A period of literary growth in the African-American community, centered in Harlem, New York, in the 1920's and 1930's.
Jim Crow Laws	A series of rigid laws existing primarily in the South between 1877 and the mid-1960's that created a sort of racial caste system for African-Americans. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s work for Civil Rights helped to bring an end to these unfair laws.
Jazz	A style of music characterized by a strong but flexible rhythmic understructure with solo and ensemble improvisations on basic tunes and chord patterns.
Theme	The central idea or message of a literary work, musical composition, or a piece of art.
Tone	The author's attitude toward the subject in a piece of literature (i.e. <i>melancholy, sarcastic, respectful, playful</i>)
Mixed Media	In visual art, "mixed media" refers to an artwork in the making of which more than one medium has been employed. For example, a work on canvas that combines paint, ink, and collage could be called a "mixed media" work.

PERFORMANCE TASKS / ACTIVITIES:

- 1.) After an extensive study of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students will be introduced to the poetry of Langston Hughes and will be given information about the Harlem Renaissance. Students will also observe the **Picturing America** reproduction of Romare Bearden's *The Dove*.
- 2.) Using Guiding Questions #1-5, students will journal about *The Dove*, and then share their thoughts through a whole-class discussion. The instructor may play samples of jazz music, especially from the period of the Harlem Renaissance, during the journaling process.
- 3.) The instructor will divide the students into small groups (3-4 per group), to read the three Langston Hughes poems. Using Guiding Question #6, students will discuss each poem and make connections to both the novel and the artwork. Students may then work as a group or individually to write their own poems that may have been inspired by the novel, the artwork, or the jazz music.

ASSESSMENT:

Assessment will vary based upon the preferences of the instructor. Options may include:

- Anecdotal data recorded during whole class or small group discussions
- Checking each student's journal entry for understanding and insight
- A graphic organizer to compare and contrast the various pieces
- Rubrics to assess original poems or essays that may be written
- Rubrics to assess other possible student work: original jazz pieces, collages made in Bearden's style, and so forth

ADDITIONAL IDEAS:

I also use a number of the other **Picturing America** reproductions in connection with *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Pieces that work very well with this unit include: *The Migration Series, no. 57*, Jacob Lawrence; *Migrant Mother*, Dorothea Lange; *Ladder for Booker T. Washington*, Martin Puryear; *Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965*, James Karales; *The Sources of Country Music*, Thomas Hart Benton.