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Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan

Text: "Let America Be America Again" by Langston Hughes

Grade/Subject: Adult

Ideas, Values: Freedom, History, Perseverance, Identity, American Dream

Date of Origin: 3/24/2017

Pre-Seminar Content

Launch Activity:

Write the current year on the board. How will people view our "America" in 10, 50, and 100 years?

Inspectional Read:

Distribute the text and ask learners to anticipate what they expect this reading to be like. How is it organized? How is it similar and different to other poems they know? Number the sentences of the poem making note of the use of dashes. Read the poem aloud as a group, spontaneously pausing at natural sentence breaks for another to begin reading.

Background Information:

Share as appropriate: Langston Hughes was an American poet, novelist, and playwright whose African-American themes made him a primary contributor to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. He was born in 1902 in Joplin, Missouri, and he died in 1967 in New York City. He was raised primarily by his maternal grandmother. Hughes wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture. "Let America Be America Again," was published in *Esquire* in 1936 and in a small collection of Langston Hughes poetry entitled *A New Song*, published by the International Workers' Order in 1938.

Vocabulary:

Discuss symbolism, personification, imagery, tone and anaphora. As a group identify any unfamiliar words or phrases (from the Inspectional Read) until all participants are comfortable with the surface meaning of the text.

6 February 2019

Analytical Read:

Post directions for participants:

Mark phrases of interest and intrigue.

Working independently, consider how the text is organized and why.

Mark any patterns you see.

Note the two most effective uses of metaphor in the poem.

Turn and talk with a neighbor, sharing which metaphor is “strongest” and what you think it means.

Read the poem again in groups of four—two turn and talk pairings.

Pre-Seminar Process:

- ✓ **Define and State the purpose for the seminar.**

“A Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open ended questions.

“The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the textual ideas and values, of ourselves, and of each other.

- ✓ **Describe the responsibilities of facilitator and participants.**

“I am primarily responsible for asking challenging, open-ended questions, and I will take a variety of notes to keep up with the talk turns and flow of ideas. I will help move the discussion along in a productive direction by asking follow-up questions based on my notes. “I am asking you to think, listen and speak candidly about your thoughts, reactions and ideas. You can help each other do this by using each other’s names.

“You do not need to raise your hands in order to speak, rather, the discussion is collaborative in that you try to stay focused on the main speaker and wait your turn to talk.

“You should try to both agree and disagree in a courteous, thoughtful manner. For example, you might say, ‘I disagree with Joanna because...,’ focusing on the ideas involved not the individuals.

- ✓ **Have participants set a Personal Goal.**

“Now, please reflect on how you normally participate in a discussion as a group. What goal can you set for yourself that will help the flow and meaning of the seminar? “Please consider the list of personal participation goals – either on the Speaking and Listening Checklist or on the board.”

- ✓ **To speak at least three times**
- ✓ **To refer to the text**
- ✓ **To ask a question**
- ✓ **To speak out of uncertainty**
- ✓ **To build on others’ comments**

“Is there one that is relevant for you? Please choose one goal from the list or that you feel is best and commit to achieving it during the discussion we are about to have... write down (or circle) your personal goal.”

✓ **Agree on a Group Goal.**

For this seminar, I will suggest our group goal (select display for all to see).

Seminar Questions:

✓ **Opening (Identify main ideas from the text):**

- ❖ What is the one word that comes to mind when describing the tone of this poem? (round-robin response)
- ❖ Why did you choose that word? (spontaneous discussion)

✓ **Core (Analyze textual details):**

- ❖ In sentences 9 and 10 the speaker asks “...who are you that mumbles in the dark... and draws your veil across the stars?” Who is the ‘you’? Why do you think this?
- ❖ What groups does the speaker include in this poem? What is the relationship between these disenfranchised groups?
- ❖ How does Hughes use repetition to reinforce certain ideas? Is that use of repetition effective? Why or why not?
- ❖ Do you hear a shift in tone? If so, at what point in the poem? Refer to the text (a sentence or stanza).
- ❖ Look at first part of sentence 34: “O, let America be America again - The land that never has been yet.” What do you think Hughes means by this?

✓ **Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas):**

- ❖ If you could share this poem with someone you know, who would it be? Why?
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Post-Seminar Process:

“Thank you for your focused and thoughtful participation in our seminar”.

- ✓ **Have participants do a written self-assessment of their personal goal.**

“As part of the post-seminar process, I would first like to ask you to take a few minutes to reflect on your relative success in meeting the personal process goal you set prior to beginning the discussion. Please review the goal you set for yourself and reflect in writing to what extent you met the goal. In addition, note why you think you performed as you did”. (Pause for reflection.)

- ✓ **Do a group assessment of the social and intellectual goals of the seminar.**

“Now I would like us to talk together about how we did in relation to the group goal we set for ourselves (insert your group goal). On a scale of one to five, five being perfect, how would you say we did? Why?” (Pause for discussion.)

“Now, would someone be willing to (volunteer) to share your personal self-assessment and reflection?”

- ✓ **Note reminders for the next seminar.**

Post Seminar Content:

- ✓ **Transition to Writing:**

Have participants discuss the impact of this poem today, and connect initial impressions from the Launch Activity to findings made during the seminar.

- ✓ **Writing Task:**

After reading and discussing “Let America Be America Again” by Langston Hughes, write your own poem or piece of prose from the perspective of someone who is disenfranchised today, addressed specifically to the other educators on your faculty. Use metaphor; include an introduction for your poem/prose and explain how your writing was influenced by Hughes’ poem “Let America Be America Again”.

- ✓ **Brainstorm:**

Ask participants to write one or two lines that describe the mood they would like to pursue in the poem or prose and then list as many details about that mood and their pursuit of it as possible. Then have them write a one or two sentence summary of how they aim to personify this.

✓ **Structure the Writing:**

Allow a few minutes for all to revisit the text and their notes. Keep in the forefront that the prompt requires the writing to include:

- ✓ Perspective of someone who is disenfranchised today
- ✓ Use of metaphor
- ✓ An explanation or caption that connects the work to the text

✓ **First Draft:**

Give participants 20-30 minutes to write the first draft.

✓ **Collaborative Revision:**

Divide the group up into pairs according to style of writing (poem or prose) and have them read their work aloud to their partners while the partners listen and take notes. Have each partner then ask at least one question for clarification and make at least one suggestion for reflection. Switch roles so that each participant reads his or her work and receives feedback. Make revisions resulting in a second draft.

✓ **Edit:**

Once the second draft is complete, have participants work in groups of three-four and this time take turns reading each other's second drafts slowly and silently, marking any spelling or grammar errors they find. (Have dictionaries and grammar handbooks available for reference.) Take this opportunity to clarify/reteach any specific grammar strategies you have identified as a need. Give time for full revisions resulting in a third and final draft.

✓ **Publish:**

Publish digitally or in print, and share accordingly.

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***Text is attached if open sourced.**

***Text is cited if it needs to be procured.**

"Let America Be America Again" by Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed-- Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath, But opportunity is real, and life is free, Equality is in
the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

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I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart, I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek-- And finding only the same old stupid plan

Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope, Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need! Of work the men! Of take the pay!

Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean-- Hungry yet today despite the dream. Beaten yet
today--O, Pioneers!

I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,

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That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home--
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore, And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today? The millions shot down when we strike? The
millions who have nothing for our pay? For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay-- Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again--
The land that never has been yet--
And yet must be--the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME--

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Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain, Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in
the rain, Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose--
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives, We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me, And yet I swear this oath-- America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death, The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers. The mountains and the endless plain--

All, all the stretch of these great green states-- And make America again!

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