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Sample

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Literature
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



African-American Literature

(Ed.) Magedah Shabo

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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African American Literature

Note to the Teacher

This Teaching Unit contains material that may be considered controversial for some classrooms. The subject of slavery is prevalent in many of the works. The enslavement of African Americans is not only a part of American history, it is also the source of inspiration for many of the themes, topics, conflicts, and discussions that reappear in the literature of a people in a constant battle to be at peace with their past, accepted in the present, and a full part of the future.

When teaching the works contained in this anthology, we would like to draw your attention to the Toni Morrison quotation located on the back cover. This anthology should be taught just as any other piece of literature would be. The literary merits of the chosen works should be discussed and debated. They should not be overshadowed by the authors' backgrounds. This anthology is not designed to illustrate what artistic achievements can be made by those with a common struggle. It is not a sociological survey. Instead, it is designed to highlight the writers' literary achievements.

In addition, the use of various terms for African Americans may cause some controversy, as this Unit attempts to keep each author's descriptions accurate. Therefore, "colored" might be used for one set of questions, and "African," "Negro," or "black" for others.

African American Literature

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. compare and contrast the writing styles of various African American authors.
2. identify common themes among the works in this anthology.
3. define the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
4. infer details not explicitly stated in the text.
5. discuss a work of literature relative to its historical context
6. discuss literary shifts in subject matter by time period.
7. identify elements of a slave narrative.
8. compare African Americans' perspectives and experiences in slavery.
9. identify the following literary terms, and point out examples of each in the text:
 - allusion
 - apostrophe
 - ballad
 - imagery
 - irony
 - metaphor
 - narrative
 - narrator
 - personification
 - rhyme scheme
 - simile
10. analyze the meanings of the stories and poems in the text.
11. compare and contrast characters from different stories.
12. discuss speeches as literary works.
13. analyze the importance of writers' backgrounds to their works.

African American Literature

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In his narrative, Frederick Douglass chooses to not name the boys who were instrumental in helping him learn to read, stating, “not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country.” What connection is Douglass making between the application of Christian beliefs and slavery? How does his statement reflect the nature of religion during that time period?
2. What similarities in style, plot, motif, and characterization can be found between *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and how are these similarities indicative of the slave narrative genre?
3. Which poem or poems in this anthology most accurately capture the sentiments of W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*? What similarities exist?
4. Using examples from the text, describe some ways in which Charles Chesnutt portrays African Americans in his short stories.
5. How does the subject matter of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poetry compare to that of Phillis Wheatley’s?
6. Explain the significance of the title “Recitatif” and how it relates to the characters’ lives.
7. Discuss the dynamics of Twyla and Roberta’s friendship in “Recitatif.”
8. Examine Charles Chesnutt’s use of dialect in “The Goophered Grapevine.” What is the purpose of using dialect, and what affect does it have on the story?
9. Discuss the similarities between Frederick Douglass and Joshua, the protagonist of “The Ingrate,” in reference to how they each gained their freedom. Cite examples from the text to support your responses.
10. Why might Booker T. Washington’s “The Atlanta Exposition Address” be considered too tolerant of segregation and social inequality?
11. Discuss the importance of labor in Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery*.
12. Compare the topics addressed by Langston Hughes and Paul Laurence Dunbar.
13. How do Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery* and Frederick Douglass’s narrative differ in their depictions of slavery?

African American Literature

“Bars Fight”

by Lucy Terry

Vocabulary

petticoats – skirts worn as undergarments
tommyhawked – cut with an axe-like tool or weapon

1. What is the subject matter of the poem?

2. What characteristics of “Bars Fight” classify it as a ballad?

3. What aspects of the poem might have contributed to the ease in which it was originally orally passed down in history?

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

by Frederick Douglass

Vocabulary

abhor – to regard with disgust
abolitionists – people in favor of ending slavery
blighting – hope defeating
breeder – a female slave whose sole purpose is to reproduce
chattel – a piece of property
cudgel – a club
impertinent – rude; disrespectful
impudence – disrespect
imprudent – unwise
mulatto – a person of both Caucasian and African ancestry
odiousness – offensiveness
offal – animal entrails; waste
pious – highly religious
perdition – hell
pernicious – harmful
prudence – caution; careful thought
sagacity – sound judgment; wisdom
vindicate – to justify

1. What basic information does Frederick Douglass say is typically kept from slaves, but is common knowledge to white children?

2. How does Douglass's knowledge of his parents compare to other slaves' knowledge about their own parents?

11. Why does Linda feel no pressure to join the church?

12. How does Linda's hiding herself in the garret compare to her conditions as a slave?

13. What emotional and physical changes does Linda experience while living in the garret?

14. What acts does Mrs. Flint perform as a display of her Christian charity?

15. Why must Linda hurriedly escape, despite having recently turned down another opportunity?

“The Haunted Oak”

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

Vocabulary

bedight – [archaic] adorned
bough – a tree branch

1. Why is the oak haunted?

2. Who or what are the speakers in the poem?

3. How does the personifying the oak help put forth the theme of the poem? What might the theme be?
