Reading Identity: Minority Voices in Theater

KEY VOCABULARY
- Gentrification
- Segregation
- False Narrative

PACING: 1-3 DAYS

ASSESSMENT (Summative): Descriptive OR Argumentative essay on changing the perspective of a narrative based on time or character

ELEMENTS OF THEATER:
- Time (When in history/period of the day)
- Imitation (reproduction of thoughts/ideas)
- Action (Movement of people/story)
- Language (Use of words-written or verbal)

MATERIALS LIST
- Full class texts of both scripts: A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry and Clybourne Park by Bruce Norris
- Copies of two Emily Dickinson poems (attached)

Lesson Objective
By the end of class, students will be able to identify core themes relating to identity politics and the African American experience in 1950s (and 2000s) in Hansberry and Norris’ acclaimed plays.

By the end of the unit, students will be able to apply non-linear narrative structures to works of literature and dramatic literature.

Essential Question
How do different groups of people view the same incident or conflict from different perspectives?

21st CENTURY SKILLS:
- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Collaborating
- Initiative
- Communicating
- Flexibility
- Social Skills
- Tech Literacy
- Leadership
- Productivity

Content Standards
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9
- Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

Arts Standards
TH:Re.9.1.HSIII
- a. Research and synthesize cultural and historical information related to a drama/theatre work to support or evaluate artistic choices.
- b. Analyze and evaluate varied aesthetic interpretations of production elements for the same drama/theatre work.
- c. Compare and debate the connection between a drama/theatre work and contemporary issues that may impact audiences.
LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will investigate identity politics in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* and Bruce Norris’ *Clybourne Park* by analyzing the way that different individuals approach similar conflicts and situations from vastly different perspectives.

After reading both plays, discussing the processes of segregation and gentrification, and viewing how different perspectives of the same situation can yield different (and altering validities of…) perspectives, students will write descriptive essays applying the lens of an alternate perspective on a situation or character from a different play or novel read this year in order to demonstrate growth in their ability to analyze narratives in various ways.

ENGAGEMENT

*Emily Dickinson and False Narratives*

Class begins with a bit of an odd engagement/hook process - but one that should yield plenty of discussion and bridge well into a discussion of the two plays. Start by handing students one of two Emily Dickinson poems:

- “Faith” is a fine invention (Franklin 202)
- Come slowly - Eden (Franklin 205)

Have students take 3 minutes to read the poem, with little other prompting or instructions. When time is up, explain to students that they will be taking a really brief pop quiz, and that the moment you pass one paper out everyone in the room has to be silent. 5 points per question, and 10 points just for taking the quiz silently and without raising their hands or talking.

Pass out “Emily Dickinson Poetry Pop Quiz” - collect after 4 minutes time.
STEP 1

Perspective and Reception

Ask students around the class (after collecting all papers) how the quiz went, and if they were confident in their answers. Now, seeing how the quiz is a surface level engagement with only one of the two poems, about half of the class should be fairly upset and feel like they were cheated.

Field questions and reflections about why students are responding the way that they are to this pop quiz, pointing out that “the name of the quiz is ‘Emily Dickinson Poetry Pop Quiz’ and you all read Emily Dickinson before taking it - what is the problem!”

Reveal that this was all a rouse to force discussion, pointing to the fact that you wanted to create a False Narrative, making it seem like all students should have been able to pass the quiz, though they were not given the tools to.
Gentrification and Segregation
Ideally, this lesson is taking place after having read both plays - or at least read text for *A Raisin in the Sun*, and having talked about Norris’ *Clybourne Park* and Kwame Kwei-Armah’s play *Beneatha’s Place* completing the colloquially referred to “Raisin Cycle.”

If so, this is less important - but if not take a moment to more broadly lecture and discuss on the definitions and process of segregation and gentrification.

- **Segregation**: the separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means
- **Gentrification**: the process of repairing and rebuilding homes and businesses in a deteriorating area (such as an urban neighborhood) accompanied by an influx of middle-class or affluent people and that often results in the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents

Use these terms, accompanied by earlier engagement with the two plays AND the engagement exercise, to discuss the relevance of the Younger family’s position of being segregated and not allowed into an affluent white community in the 1950s VS. Steve and Lindsey attempting to buy and remodel a house in the black neighborhood of Clybourne Park amidst gentrification in the 2000s.

Main Activity

Students will now use the texts of *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Clybourne Park* alongside class discussions to form either a descriptive or argumentative essay relating to various perspectives in the creation of narrative in literature.

**Descriptive Essay Overview**
- Students will take a different story or narrative read this year and - as *Clybourne Park* does with *A Raisin in the Sun* - explore the narrative from the perspective of a character who is not the original character of focus in the text.
- This shouldn’t be a creative essay - but rather them setting up a description of the world of the play/novel from the eyes of the other character
- Examples:
  - *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from the perspective of Jim
  - *Romeo and Juliet* from the perspective of Friar Lawrence
  - *The Giver* from the perspective of The Giver
  - *Fahrenheit 451* from the perspective of Captain Beatty
**Main Activity continued**

**Argumentative Essay Overview**
- Students take a stance on the narratives of *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Clybourne Park* either defending or admonishing the actions of a set of characters.
- Options include:
  - Admonishing/defending Karl Lindner’s actions in *A Raisin in the Sun* as he tries to support the neighborhood in trying to kick out the Youngers
  - Defending/admonishing the Youngers for not selling their house and accepting the segregation imposed on them
  - Admonishing/defending Bev and Russ for selling their house in *Clybourne Park*
  - Defending/admonishing Steve and Lindsey’s plan to buy and remodel a house in the neighborhood of *Clybourne Park*

**ESTIMATED TIME: 1 class period**

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**CLOSURE**

**Presentations**
Have students, after finishing their essays, present their research and writing to the rest of the class in a short 5-8 minute presentation.

This could take a number of shapes, but should highlight three features:
1. Their engagement with the original texts
2. Stance taken in their descriptive/argumentative essay
3. How reading these plays/learning about gentrification and segregation (or more broadly the existence of false narrative and various perspectives) can strengthen our reading of future texts in this class and beyond.
Descriptive Essay

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<th>Vague or Missing</th>
<th>General and incomplete</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Adept and Thoughtful</th>
<th>Profound and Deep</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<td>20 pts.</td>
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<td>10 pts.</td>
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<td>Academic writing and grammar used throughout</td>
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**OVERALL SCORE** /50
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IntegratED Curriculum, 2018.
2 Emily Dickinson Poems

“Faith” is fine invention (202)
BY EMILY DICKINSON
   “Faith” is a fine invention
   For Gentlemen who see!
   But Microscopes are prudent
   In an Emergency!

Come slowly – Eden! (205)
BY EMILY DICKINSON
   Come slowly – Eden!
   Lips unused to Thee –
   Bashful – sip thy Jessamines –
   As the fainting Bee –

   Reaching late his flower,
   Round her chamber hums –
   Counts his nectars –
   Enters – and is lost in Balms.
Emily Dickinson Poetry Pop Quiz

Name: ____________________________________________    Date: _________________

Period: _______

Respond to each question regarding Emily Dickinson's poem ‘Come slowly - Eden!’

• Each question will be worth 5 points
• You will receive an addition 10 points for taking the test completely silently, and without raising your hand to ask any questions
• You must keep your original poem turned over, and cannot reference it for help

1. What animal or insect does Dickinson refer to in the poem’s first stanza?

2. The speaker of the poem references that the male figures “counts his ________________” what?

3. What is the meaning of this poem - literally or figuratively?