

Dream Deferred

The Basics

Time Required

2-3 class periods

Subject Areas

Middle School US History and Language Arts
Civil War and Reconstruction, 1860-1876

Common Core Standards Addressed:

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12
Writing Standards for English Language Arts 6-12

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The Lesson

Introduction

Following the Civil War, the nation faced a new challenge—integrating African Americans within the whole of society, while *at the same time* regaining order of the Southern states. This period of time, known as the Reconstruction proved to be a second war. On the one hand, it was a war fought within the courts, with the federal government left to ensure that certain amendments and regulations be carried out in the segregated, shattered south. This was a task that proved to be beyond daunting, filled with violent and brutal rejections to comply. Racism that had so long fueled a society intent on justifying actions that began centuries ago would not be something easily left behind. Therefore, there were mobs (not just in the south) taking “justice” into their own hands. Resistance in the form of Black Codes, Jim Crow Laws, the Ku Klux Klan, miscegenation laws, sharecropping, etc., developed in the South to keep a permanent class of second hand citizens despite the passage of such legislation as the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. The law was an inconsistent thing, as seen with Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896. How could you on one hand be considered a legal citizen of the United States, yet on the other, be forced to have separate facilities? It was not until 1954 that ‘separate but equal’ was ruled to be inherently unequal. That is almost 100 years after the Civil War, and the decision of Brown v. Board of Education was only the beginning of the twentieth century Civil Rights Movement. The end of the Civil War was only the beginning a long, slow, painful process of emancipation.

Guiding Questions

- In what ways are poetry and music similar?
- What were the experiences of African Americans during the period of Reconstruction?

Learning Objectives

- Students will read and listen to “Dream Deferred” to prepare them for discussion on expectations/hopes vs. realities. Although “Dream Deferred” was written in 1951, the theme relates to this topic of inner strength battling defeat.
- Students will listen to “Dream Montages” by Langston Hughes accompanied by Charles Mingus in order to experience how music and sounds can change the way one perceives poetry/art.
- Students will have an understanding of the aims and goals of the Radical Reconstruction.
- Students will read lyrics and listen to the tune of “Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel” to have an understanding of the hopes and expectations of African Americans following the Civil War.

Preparation Instructions

Works used in this lesson:

“Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes

“Dream Montages” from the album, Weary Blues by Langston Hughes, accompanied by Charles Mingus.

“Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel”

Lesson Activities

1. Students will read “Dream Deferred” without audio and discuss literary devices, theme, and mood.
2. Students will then listen to the recording, “Dream Montages” where Langston Hughes reads his poetry accompanied by jazz musician, Charles Mingus.
3. Students will re-evaluate the work based on the mood and tone the music creates/adds. Ask: Why do you think Langston Hughes chose to read his work to music? Why this type of music?
4. Play short video clip of the poem being read accompanied by music with images of Harlem.
5. Students will be challenged to answer the question of what happens to a dream deferred? After some general discussion, a PowerPoint lecture on the aims of Reconstruction will follow.
6. Students will be given background information on the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, Freedmen’s Bureau, Special Fields Order, 15 (40 acres and a mule).
7. Students will listen to “Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel”

Discussion Questions:

What is paradise a metaphor for?

Answer: A land free of slavery and racism

What can we compare the ‘tree of life’ to?

Answer: Tree of liberty, Liberty Tree – symbol of resistance

Knowing that, according to the New Testament, Gabriel’s trumpet signaled a Day of Judgment, what do you think it signals in this context?

Answer: Americans to recognize their responsibility in the institution of slavery, retributions to be made, civil rights to be granted, etc...

How does this reflect the hope and trust of the time? Sum up the dreams of the African American men and women.

Assessment

1. Read other poems by Langston Hughes and set them to music. Explain each choice.
2. Take another Spiritual sung during the Civil War, and discuss meanings it had during Antebellum South and Reconstruction. Use the following website to choose from:
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/TWH/Higg.html>

Resources

“A Dream Deferred”

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

“Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel”

De talles' tree in Paradise

De Christian call de tree of life

And I hope dat trump might blow me home

To the new Jerusalem

Blow your trumpet, Gabriel

Blow louder, louder

And I hope dat trump might blow me home

To the new Jerusalem

Paul and Silas, bound in jail,

Sing God's praise both night and day

And I hope dat trump might blow me home

To the new Jerusalem