

The Poet's Message **“The Colored Soldier” by Langston Hughes**

Subject: English Language Arts

Grade level: 9-12

Rationale or Purpose: Students will analyze the poem, “The Colored Soldier” by Langston Hughes to gain greater understanding of how poets use language to create meaning, influence thinking, and thus become pioneers of change in American society.

Materials: Figurative language terms (usually found in glossary of literature book)
Thesaurus (or a list of tone words)
Computer with internet access
Poem- “The Colored Soldier”
Butcher paper
Markers

Lesson Duration: Approximately 2 class blocks. One half block to view *Teaching the American Twenties*, “After the War”. One class block to work in groups on poem analysis, and one half block to share groups’ information with entire class.

Objectives: English III

- 4G Analyze strategies that writers use to compose
- 6B-F Extensive vocabulary through reading, uses context to determine meaning
- 7A-H Analyzes texts and draws inferences using a variety of strategies
- 8A-D Reads to appreciate and be informed
- 9A-B Recognizes shared characteristics of culture
- 10A-B Uses elements of text to respond
- 11A-F Analyze literary elements
- 12A-C Reads critically

Activity:

Step 1: Using computers with internet access, teacher will introduce students to *Teaching the American Twenties* paying particular attention to “After the War”. Students will look at the war posters and discuss popular feelings about the War, prior to the twenties. View and discuss “The Harlem Hellfighters”. What did African Americans expect to happen as a result of World War I? Now look at the poem, “The Colored Soldier” by Langston Hughes. Discuss **in very general terms** what the poem is saying. Have students print a copy of the poem to use during the next class block.

Step 2: As a class, read the poem aloud and review, in general, what the poem is saying. Discuss possible themes for the poem. What is Hughes saying about America, racism,

African Americans, war or violence? Model a theme on the board for them. For example:
African Americans face a greater enemy at home, in America, than they did while on foreign soil.

Step 3: Divide class into smaller groups of 4-5 people. Give each group a large piece of butcher paper, several markers, and a thesaurus (or tone word list). Each group is to do the following:

1. Write the title and author of the poem on the top of the paper
2. Create an original theme about the poem. (Although all themes will be related, each group's theme should be different.)
3. Locate in the poem examples of figurative language that develop that particular group's theme. (metaphors, similes, personification, imagery words, etc.)
4. Identify the tone of the poem and diction that creates the poem.
Do not use angry or sad, use a tone word list.
5. Find symbols Hughes uses to develop his ideas. Create a visual image of these ideas.
6. Write all information on the butcher paper, and be ready to share during the next class block

Step 4: Each group will stand and display their butcher paper analysis and explain how the information it contains develops the theme they created about Hughes' poem.

Modification: The group activity usually serves to assist the slower learner. Have the gifted students contrast the language used by Hughes with that used by W. E. B. Du Bois. Does Hughes only feel betrayed by "white America"? What was the role of African Americans in this "deception"?

Student Product: Butcher paper analysis and oral discussion

Closure: Tape butcher paper analysis to walls and ask class to look at language chosen. Was any of the language used for different purposes? Contrast varying interpretations. Is there only one correct interpretation?

Assessment or evaluation: During the oral discussion, look at the created themes and the support chosen by the groups. Is it valid? How insightful is it? Does every group member participate in the presentation?

Extension: Students can create a PowerPoint presentation of the poem. Place poem on a PowerPoint slide show, using colors, pictures, graphics, sounds, music to create meaning. Find illustrations from the time period.

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