

The **Literary Freedom Project** develops literary arts lesson plans and workshops for educators based on the content of each issue of *Mosaic*. Each uses the work by writers of African descent as a connective tool to a variety of subjects: history, social studies, and English. Our goal is to increase self awareness while promoting reading and strengthening literacy.

Paule Marshall ★ Thomas Glave ★ Sandra Cisneros ★ Chicano Movement ★ Essex Hemphill ★ The Bronx ★ Robert Moses ★ Bedford Stuyvesant ★ Lawrence Hill ★ Gentrification ★ **MOSAIC'S LESSON PLANS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATORS** ★ **SUMMER 2009** ★ Documenting Hate ★ LGBT Movement ★ The Civil Rights Movement ★ Matthew Shepard ★ James Byrd, Jr. ★ Alice Walker's Definition of Womanism ★ Coming of Age ★ Nelly Rosario ★ Tayari Jones ★ Edwidge Danticat ★ Reading List



Lesson Plans for Secondary School Educators

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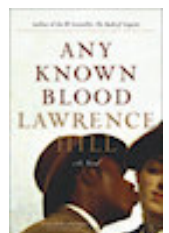
Theme One: **Urban Studies**

Narratives Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*
Thomas Glave's "Baychester: A Memory" and "These Blocks, Not Square"
Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

Topics for Discussion

- 1) Outsider / Insider: Immigrants and Others in Urban America - How do the authors describe life for Mexican Americans, Bajan Americans, and Gay Americans?
- 2) Identity and Home – How do home and community shape the identities of characters? How does the nun's perspective of Esperanza's home influence her perception of Esperanza? Who, exactly, are "these people" in Glave's essay? Why does Selina throw her bangle at the row of brownstones at the end of Marshall's novel?
- 3) Seen and Unseen – What does each author reveal? What does each author veil?
- 4) "Beautiful Ugly" – Is Esperanza's crumbling house beautiful? Is Selina's Victorian brownstone ugly? Is Glave's Baychester community beautiful or ugly? What does each author make the reader see? What does "beautiful ugly" mean?
- 5) Setting – Do characters ever leave their urban neighborhoods in these narratives? Who leaves, why, and where do they go? Are the settings small, constricted spaces or large, open areas? Are the characters confined or free in these communities?

Essay Idea: Write a personal essay that describes where you live. Start with the corner of your neighborhood block, and write in detail about what you see, smell, and hear as you walk home. Are there any people you can always count on to be outside in your neighborhood? How old are they and what do they do while they are outside? What does your front door look like? How many doors must you pass through to get to your home? How many keys do you use to get inside your home? How many sets of steps must you walk, starting with any steps outside your building or house, to get to your home? Do you have an elevator outside your home? Do you have an elevator inside your home?



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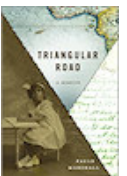
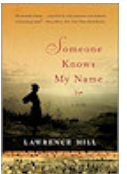
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Provide as many details as possible so the reader of your personal essay can “see” where you live by reading what you write.

Additional Activities

- 1) Use maps of The Bronx and Brooklyn and discuss the 20th century migration patterns of West Indian immigrants to New York City. Read about Robert Moses and discuss his influence on communities in The Bronx. Where is Bedford Stuyvesant and what kinds of changes are happening in that neighborhood because of gentrification today?
- 2) Discuss the title of each narrative and what it might mean.
- 3) Read the work of the writers Glave references in “Baychester: A Memory.”
- 4) Study and discuss the Chicano Movement in the United States. Talk about the place where Esperanza’s father works and the activism of Cesar Chavez. What prevents her family from moving to a bigger house? Why does Esperanza think they will never leave Mango Street?
- 5) Discuss form: the novel, the vignette, the essay. Which form of writing did you most enjoy reading? Why? Which form do you think you’d most enjoy writing? Try to write an original work in the form you most admire.



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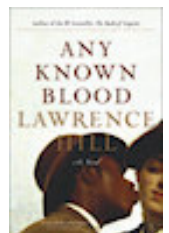
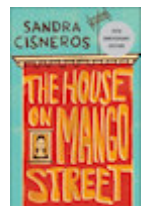
Theme Two: Documenting Hate

Narratives Paule Marshall's *Triangular Road*
Thomas Glaves's "Baychester: A Memory," "(Re-) Recalling Essex Hemphill," and "Re-membering Steen Fenrich"
Lawrence Hill's *Someone Knows My Name*
Sandra Cisneros' "Geraldito No Last Name"

Additional Narrative: Ida B Wells Barnett's *The Red Record* and *Southern Horrors*

Topics for Discussion

- 1) Describe your reaction to the documentation at work in each of these narratives. What did you feel as each writer documented various hate crimes, including lynching, slavery, and the slave trade.
- 2) Think about Glave's title, "Re-membering Steen Fenrich." What does "dismemberment" mean? Does his essay "Re-member" Steen Fenrich?
- 3) How are the portraits of murdered African Americans similar to Glave's portraits of murdered gay men? How are the portraits different? Are the differences significant?
- 4) Is the lynching of African Americans worse than the hate crimes against gay men in these works? Should we even compare the pain and loss of people who are attacked and killed because they are different? Does it matter that one person is killed for being Black and another is killed for being gay? Is this one way the LGBT Movement is similar to the Civil Rights Movement?
- 5) Why does Marshall's book document atrocities committed against Black people in North America and Africa? Why does Glave document the atrocities committed against gays and lesbians in different parts of the world? Why is this international perspective important?



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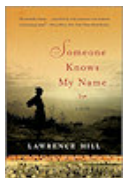
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- 6) In what ways is Cisneros's vignette describing Geraldo, about whom so little is known, like the Wells-Barnett and Glave essays? Is this vignette stronger or weaker because Geraldo has no last name? How is his death similar to the hate crimes in the other narratives? How is his death different?

Essay Idea: Pull articles related to a contemporary hate crime from your local newspaper or pull articles documenting a well-known hate crime victim like Matthew Shepard or James Byrd, Jr. Write about one of these victims in a way that is similar to Thomas Glave's style, Ida B Wells Barnett's voice, or Paule Marshall's structure.

Additional Activities

- 1) Debate the issue of gay marriage in your classroom. Research the issue and form a team that is "pro" gay marriage and another that is "anti-". Let students vote in a secret ballot after the debate. Would gay marriage become legal in your state if the decision was up to you?
- 2) Debate slavery. Make a "pro-slavery" and an "anti-slavery" team. What kinds of issues come up when the "pro" team presents their side of the debate? How does the discussion make you feel?
- 3) Research the penalties for hate crimes in your state. Should stiffer penalties be in place to protect the victims of physical violence who are targeted because of their race or ethnicity? What about their sexual orientation? Who, if anyone, should receive extra legal protection and why?
- 4) Make a timeline of the anti-lynching campaign and the Civil Rights Movement. Make a timeline of the LGBT Movement. Are any of the important dates in these struggles the same or very close to each other? What about a timeline to chart the progress of the Women's Movement from Suffrage to Third Wave Feminism?
- 5) Read Alice Walker's definition of Womanism and discuss the intersections of race, gender, and sexual orientation in her definition.



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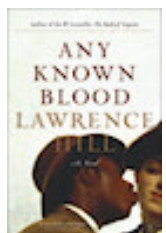
Theme Three: **Coming of Age**

Narratives Lawrence Hill's *Someone Knows My Name*
 Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*
 Sandra Cisneros', *The House on Mango Street*

Topics for Discussion

- 1) Implicit and Explicit Meanings – Look at Cisneros' "Alicia Who Sees Mice." Why do you think Alicia is afraid of her father? Read the last line of Cisneros' "There Was an Old Woman..." What does the last sentence of this vignette imply? How do these vignettes about Mango Street neighbors help the reader understand the struggles Esperanza experiences as she grows up there?
- 2) In what ways is Aminata's shift from girlhood to adulthood impacted by her slave identity? What were her parents doing to help her become a woman before she was stolen from her homeland? Does anyone help her finish that process of becoming a woman once she is sold into slavery?
- 3) What does Selina do in Marshall's novel that would shock her mother the most? Why does Selina rebel against her mother's teachings and demands? How does she rebel, and does Selina's rebellion help or hurt her coming-of-age?
- 4) In all three narratives, girls are becoming women. How do men and boys impact these young characters as they grow up?
- 5) Which of the female protagonists is strongest? Which is weakest? What makes each character weak or strong? How do you define strength and weakness on Mango Street, in Bedford Stuyvesant, in the village of Bayo, and on a slave plantation?

Essay Idea: Write a vignette, poem, or short story about a young person coming-of-age. If you are a young woman, write a boy growing up. If you are a young man, write about a girl. Be prepared to share your work with the class. After each student share his or her story, talk about the content. Do the male students understand what young women ex-



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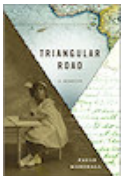
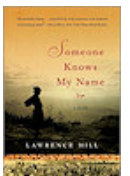
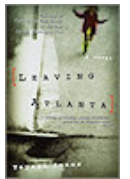
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perience as they become women? Do the female students understand the experiences of young men? Talk about what really goes on, and then free-write an answer to this question: What can men and women learn from each other as they talk about their coming-of-age experiences?

Additional Activities

- 1) Read Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints* and discuss the ways three generations of women come-of-age in her novel.
- 2) Read Tayari Jones' *Leaving Atlanta*. Read old newspaper articles about the Atlanta Child Murders. How is Jones' novel different from those news reports? Which form of writing makes you feel more emotion, fiction or journalism?
- 3) Read Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!*. Which of the short stories are coming-of-age narratives? How does violence impact the protagonists in her work as they mature?
- 4) What is the most significant event in your life that helped you come-of-age? Write about that experience in any form you'd like (short story, graphic novel, poem, song, rap, journal entry, letter).
- 5) Interview a grandparent about his or her childhood. What was different for your grandparent when she or he became an adult? Where did they live and what was expected of them in the community where they grew up? Share the results of your interview with others in a small group. What does documenting the coming-of-age experiences of our elders teach us about world events, music, language, immigration, culture, religion, and/or other topics that emerge from your discussion?



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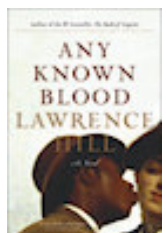
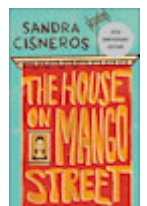
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Reading List

- 1) Calvin Baker's *Once Two Heroes* (lynchings, WWII, race relations)
- 2) Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (water and The Middle Passage in African American literature, 20th century America, migrations, the slave trade)
- 3) Langston Hughes' "I've Known Rivers" (water and The Middle Passage in African American literature)
- 4) Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (slavery and The Middle Passage)
- 5) Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (the slave narrative)
- 6) Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (the slave narrative)
- 7) Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (the slave narrative)
- 8) Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (coming-of-age)
- 9) Catherine McKinley's *The Book of Sarahs* (coming-of-age)
- 10) Bruce Morrow's *Shade* (anthology of work by gay men of African descent)
- 11) Bridgett Davis' *Shifting Through Neutral* (coming-of-age)
- 12) Martha Southgate's *The Fall of Rome* (coming-of-age)
- 13) Junot Diaz's *Drown* (coming-of-age, immigrant narratives)
- 14) Willie Perdomo's *Where a Nickel Costs a Dime* (urban settings, poems of immigrant experiences)
- 15) Lois Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging* (coming-of-age in Hawaii)



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Lesson Plan Designer

Eisa Nefertari Ulen is the author of *Crystelle Mourning*, a novel described by *The Washington Post* as “a call for healing in the African American community from generations of hurt and neglect.” She is the recipient of a Frederick Douglass Creative Arts Center Fellowship for Young African American Fiction Writers and a Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center Fellowship. Her essays, exploring topics ranging from Hip Hop to Muslim life in America post-9/11 to contemporary Black literature to the gap between the Civil Rights generation and Generation X, have been widely anthologized. Nominated by *Essence* magazine for a National Association of Black Journalists Award, she has contributed to numerous other publications, including *The Washington Post*, *Ms.*, *Health*, *Heart & Soul*, *Vibe*, *The Source*, *Black Issues Book Review*, *Quarterly Black Review of Books*, and *CreativeNonfiction.org*. Ulen graduated from Sarah Lawrence College and earned a master’s degree from Columbia University. A founding member of Ringshout: A Place for Black Literature, she teaches English at Hunter College in New York City and lives with her husband and son in Brooklyn. You can reach Eisa online and read her blog at: www.EisaUlen.com.

The Literary Freedom Project is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt not-for-profit arts organization, established in 2004, that supports the literary arts through education, creative thinking, and new media. Towards this goal, The Literary Freedom Project publishes *Mosaic Literary Magazine*; develops literature-based lesson plans and workshops; and hosts the *Mosaic Literary Conference & Festival*, an annual literature-education conference.

Launched in 1998, *Mosaic* is a quarterly magazine exploring the literary arts by writers of African descent. Each issue contains a unique blend of essays, profiles, and reviews.

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