

The Great Migration
Paul Finucan, James Ford Rhodes High School
Grade Level: 4th English
Summer 2003
Title: The Great Migration: An Oral History
Author/School: Paul Finucan, James Ford Rhodes High School
Course: English IV/KAP and AP English IV
Grade Level: 4th
Standard Met:

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A guide to implementing the oral history unit

The term “The Great Migration” refers to the mass population shift of African-Americans from the south to the north beginning with the onset of WW I around 1913 and continuing through the thirties and forties. During this time, many major northern cities, chief among them New York and Chicago, experienced exponential growth in their African-American populations.

Many factors contributed to The Great Migration. The cruelties and hardships caused by the sharecropping system under which many African-Americans labored in the south following the Civil War coupled with Jim Crow laws caused many to move north in search of a better life. The North was perceived as a place where racism was muted and where African-Americans could find economic success and more social equality. With the onset of World War I and the need for cheap labor the war created in the North, northern industries began to actively recruit African-Americans in Southern papers. While the South enacted many laws, both on and off the books, which restricted the movement of African –Americans in order to protect their labor base, they could ultimately do little to stop the flow of African-Americans to the North.

This unit is designed to bring this history to life by allowing students to couple oral history with historical research. By first researching the reasons for the great migration and then conducting oral interviews with family or community members with

knowledge of the migration students can give voice to an underserved aspect of the history of this country. At the same time, they will grow in the understanding of a personal and/or shared history.

There are a variety of sources which instructors and students can go to in order to obtain necessary background information on The Great Migration. One good place to start is at Kenyon College's northbysouth website. An internet search, under the heading, northbysouth, all one word, will get you there. Another good starting point is to search the internet for The Avery Research Center. The Avery, located on the University of Charleston Campus, in South Carolina, is both an African American history and cultural center with a wealth of archived primary documentation. Their web site will provide instructors and students with many valuable sources of information.

When preparing students for their oral interviews, start with issues of courtesy and common sense. Students should not interrupt the person they are interviewing or be too concerned with adhering to a pre-conceived script. Following the lead of the interviewee will often lead to unexpected and important knowledge. There is always time when the conversation lags to steer them back towards a particular topic. It is also very important to ensure that all audio and video recording equipment is in good working order. There may very well not be a second chance to secure an interview. Two good sources for information on the art and pitfalls of oral interviewing which you may want to share with your class are *Evidence, Empathy and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan* by Kathleen M. Blee and *Oral History: Playing by the Rules* by David M. Oshinsky.

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I recommend this lesson for Senior Honors English or History classes. I have used it with great success. However, you may very well wish to use this unit, modified to suit your needs, in a variety of high school classes.

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CMSD Language Arts Standards: Expectations and Performance Indicators Met By Unit

Expectation 11-12:R2.1 Student will comprehend fiction, non-fiction, poetry and drama using interpretive using interpretive, critical, and evaluative processes.

Performance Indicators: Make inferences and draw conclusions about fictional and non-fictional contexts, events, characters, settings, themes, and styles.

Expectation 11-12:W2.2 Inform others through reports and informational writing.

Performance Indicators: Develop a controlling idea/thesis that conveys a perspective on the subject.

Use clear research questions and creative and critical research strategies, such as field studies, oral histories, interviews, experiments, electronic sources.

Create an organizing structure appropriate to purpose, audience and context.

Include information derived from both primary and secondary sources to support or enhance the presentation.

Document sources using accepted format, MLA or APA.

Include a formal bibliography.

11-12:W2.7 Generate functional documents.

Performance Indicators: Report, organize and convey information and ideas accurately.

11-12:S1.2 Participate in group activities.

Performance Indicators: Use and evaluate group processes to achieve results.

11-12:S1.3 Prepare and deliver individual and group presentations.

Performance Indicators: Shape content and organization according to criteria for importance and impact rather than according to availability of information in resource materials.

Develop several main points relating to a single thesis, using exposition, narration, description, persuasion, or some combination of those to support the thesis.

Scope: This unit varies in length of time spent on each of the three parts depending on technology available to the teacher implementing the unit as well as how he or she decides to adapt the lessons. I will present this unit in three parts and leave it to the teacher to determine the scope of the unit.

Part I: Migration Research Paper

Goals: Students will research the factors which contributed to the great migration and write a well organized research paper using multiple sources which organizes, conveys and expands upon these factors and utilizes multiple sources.

Students will incorporate quotations into their paper, both direct and paraphrased, in accordance with MLA standards.

Students will create a properly formatted works cited page in accordance with MLA standards.

I. Day One

Introductory activity: Give students a brief overview of the great migration (What it was and when it occurred) and outline the expectations for their research paper. They are to write a research paper in which they define the great migration and identify, organize and convey the factors which contributed to the migration utilizing a minimum of five sources, three texts and two electronic sources. They should use MLA documentation and include a properly formatted works cited page. Time: 60 minutes.

Allow students to begin research in media center utilizing both text and internet sources. Time: 20 minutes.

II. Day Two

Introduce criteria for proper incorporation of quotations into student writing and proper citation of quotations. Be sure to discuss both direct and paraphrased quotations and proper use of transitions. Time: 40 minutes

Student research in media center. Time 40 minutes

III. Day Three

Introduce criteria for properly formatted works cited page according to MLA format. Time 40 minutes.

Student research in media center. Time 40 minutes.

After these three days, allow students an appropriate amount of time to complete their research paper on their own and assign your first due date.

Part Two: Oral Interviews

Goals: Utilizing knowledge gained during their research, students will draft questions for an oral interview with an African-American with either firsthand (ideally) or secondhand knowledge of their family migration from the south to the north.

Students will identify and interview an appropriate candidate and will audiotape and/or videotape their interview.

Students will type a three to five page overview transcript of their interview which highlights key points of their interview.

I. Day One

Aid students in generating a list of the factors which contributed to the great migration. Once the list has been created, help them to generate a list of appropriate interview questions which will lead the person interviewed to respond to the role these factors may have played in their own experiences. Each student should have at least six to eight questions prepared which they can modify once they know whom they will interview. Suggest places to secure a good interview; families, friends, neighbors, urban churches etc. Discuss appropriate interview techniques and assign method or methods by which you want the interview recorded. Finally, discuss guidelines for the typed overview transcript. Time: 60-80 minutes.

I will leave it to you to create an appropriate timeframe and set a due date for the recorded interview and the typed overview transcript.

Part Three: Groupwork and Presentation

In groups of four to six, students will organize key quotations from their interviews according to key migration contributing factors previously identified.

Students will incorporate these organized quotations and the multiple voices they represent into a powerpoint presentation which will include audio and/or video from their interviews.

I. Day One

Organize the students into groups of at least four to six. Have them identify any migration contributing factors that are addressed in their oral interviews. Once this has been done, each student should add their quotations to a list organized according to these factors. For example, each student who has interview quotations which address economic reasons for their subjects migration should list them under this heading. Once all factors contained in each groups transcripts have been identified

and key quotations have been organized, the final product can take on a variety of forms. I suggest one of the following:

A powerpoint presentation which presents these quotations organized by key migration factors. While this may simply contain each typed quotation, audio and/or video from the interviews will greatly enhance this presentation.

An oral presentation in which students from the group introduce contributing migration factors they have identified and then read quotations from their interviews which reflect these factors. I suggest you videotape this.

A group paper containing these organized quotations.

Again, I leave it to the teacher to determine the best culminating activity and design an appropriate time frame for his or her students.

KAP/AP English Syllabus
Mr. Finucan

Week One

Hamlet Pre-test
Themes/class discussion
Group Work

Week Two

Group Work continued
Group Presentations/Tableaus
Essay #1

Week Three

Dubliners Pre-test
Themes/class discussion
Short story assignments/group work

Week Four

Group Work continued
Group presentations
Essay #2

Week Five

Week Nine

Existentialism –background
Garden of Forking Paths
reading/discussion

Week Ten

That in Aleppo Once
Reading/discussion
Essay #5

Week Eleven

A Prayer for Owen Meaney Pre-test
themes/class discussion
group work

Week Twelve

Group Work continued
Group Presentations
Essay #6

Week Thirteen

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Angela's Ashes Pre-test
 Themes/class discussion
 Thematic ties to *Dubliners*'s
 Group Work

Week Six

Group Work continued
 Group Presentations
 Essay #3

Week Seven

Winesburg, OH Pre-test
 Themes/class discussion
 Short story assignments/group work

Week Eight

Group Work continued
 Presentations
 Essay #4

Week Seventeen

Thoreau/selected readings
 Reading/discussion
 AP prompt responses

Week Eighteen

The Bluest Eye Pre-test
 Themes/class discussion
 Group Work

Week Nineteen

Group Work continued
 Group presentations
 Essay #8

Week Twenty

Selected readings/discussion
 AP prompt responses

Intro to Poetry/terms
Best American Poetry Anthology
 reading/discussion
 AP prep questions 1-9

Week Fourteen

Poetry continued
 AP prompt response format
 AP prompt responses

Week Fifteen

The Things They Carried Pre-test
 Themes/class discussion
 Group Work

Week Sixteen

Group Work continued
 Group presentations
 Essay #7

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