

Workshop 3

Social History

Introduction

This workshop session introduces the analysis of social history artifacts as a tool in the literature classroom. Pancho Savery, literature professor at Reed College, uses the example of a bill of sale for a slave to help teachers enhance their reading of American literature texts.

By looking at two intellectual products from the same culture—the bill of sale and an excerpt from Frederick Douglass’s autobiography—you will better understand the beliefs and values of mid-nineteenth century slave-holding culture.

During the course of the session, you will learn how to search for social history artifacts to help teach American literature. In the onscreen classroom, Pancho discusses how he uses social history artifacts to illuminate the discipline of literature in his own classroom. He provides high school teachers with ideas about how to read two social history artifacts; he also suggests specific lesson plans.

We then follow the onscreen teachers into the computer lab where they work with Pancho, Laura Arnold Leibman (Reed College English professor), and each other to find artifacts that supplement the themes and context of the literature they are currently teaching.

Next, we follow Virginia King—a teacher at The Catlin Gable School in Portland, Oregon—into her own high school classroom. We watch as she models a similar lesson with her students. Finally we hear Virginia’s reflections on her own teaching practices.

Before the Session

Before watching the “Social History” video, be sure to:

- Guide: Read the Social History Reading.
- Video: Watch the *American Passages* episode “Slavery and Freedom.” (The episode can be viewed on the *American Passages* Web site at www.learner.org. Click on “Video on Demand” or go to <http://www.learner.org/resources/series164.html> and click on the VoD icon next to the appropriate program title.)
- Web: Download the *Bill of sale for a three-year-old named William* (serial #8161) from the *American Passages* archive site at http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php.
- Literature: Read “Chapter I. The Author’s Childhood” from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*.

As you read, consider the following close reading questions. See the Teacher Resources section in the Appendix for instructions on effective close reading.

- What does Frederick Douglass say about the influence of literacy in his early childhood?
- Why is the addition of “Written by Himself” to the title of Douglass’s autobiography an important one?

Synopsis of Pancho Savery’s Presentation

- Pancho informs the teachers about social history and the effectiveness it has in his own literature classes. He discusses how looking at literature within the social, political, and historical contexts where it originated can help students better understand the culture and literary meaning of the work.
- Next, Pancho looks at the social history artifact. He points out the ironic discrepancy between the grammatically incorrect and poorly written bill of sale and the eloquent and clear writing of Frederick Douglass. Also considering a woodcarving entitled *The Inspection and Sale of a Negro*, he and the teachers discuss the obvious connecting themes of dehumanization in both the text and the artifacts.
- Pancho concludes his discussion by illuminating other ways to pair social history artifacts with different types of American literature in the classroom. Additionally, he emphasizes the importance of looking at all authors within their social and historical contexts in order to fully appreciate their texts.

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts

Facilitators:

- Before this workshop session, you will need to download the *Bill of sale for a three-year-old named William* (serial #8161) from the *American Passages* archive and print out copies for all your participants. Be sure to print and copy the descriptive information that accompanies the image. (For further information on how to navigate the archive, see instructions in the front matter.)
- Begin the workshop by watching program 3: “Social History” through the *American Passages* excerpted clip. Watch for approximately 11:30 minutes.
- Follow up with the discussion activity below. The discussion should take approximately 10 minutes.

Activity 1: Discussion of the Literary Movement

1. As a whole group, discuss what literature you have taught or are currently teaching from this literary movement. If you don't currently teach anything from this movement, how might you add it to your curriculum?

Other authors from *American Passages*’ “Slavery and Freedom” for potential discussion:

- **Harriet Jacobs** (1813–1897) Wrote the story of her life, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, under the pseudonym Linda Brent.
- **Harriet Beecher Stowe** (1811–1896) Author of the sentimental novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an anti-slavery novel that sold 300,000 copies within a year of publication.
- **Briton Hammon** (birth and death dates unknown) Author of an early slave narrative* published in 1790. The full title is: *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man,—Servant to General Winslow, of Marshfield, in New-England; Who Returned to Boston, After Having Been Absent Almost Thirteen Years. Containing an Account of the Many Hardships He Underwent from the Time He Left his Master's House, in the Year 1747, to the Time of His Return to Boston. How He Was Cast Away in the Capes of Florida; The Horrid Cruelty and Inhuman Barbarity of the Indians in Murdering the Whole Ship's Crew; The Manner of His Being Carry'd by them Into Captivity. Also, an Account of His Being Confined Four Years and Seven Months in a Close Dungeon, and the Remarkable Manner in Which He Met with His Good Old Master in London; Who Returned to New-England, a Passenger in the Same Ship.*
- **Lydia Maria Child** (1802–1880) Pioneer and advocate for women's suffrage and sex education; she wrote the first monthly for children called *Juvenile Miscellany*.
- **Abraham Lincoln** (1809–1865) The 16th president of the United States; most famous for his *Gettysburg Address* and *The Emancipation Proclamation*.
- **Lorenzo Asisara** (1819–unknown) Born and raised at Mission Santa Cruz; in 1877 was interviewed by a historian gathering information for Bancroft's *History of California*.
- **William Crafts** (1787–1826) Lawyer, public official, essayist, and poet, William Crafts wrote for *The Charleston Courier* and published poetry.
- **Helen Hunt Jackson** (1830–1885) Friend of Emily Dickinson. Poet, novelist, and essayist who later in life wrote about the U.S. government's injustices towards the Native Americans.

For more information on these authors, visit the *American Passages* Web site at www.learner.org.

2. How did the Social History Reading change or enhance your view of Frederick Douglass's autobiography?

* indicates a reference in the Glossary.

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts, cont'd.

Facilitators:

- Continue watching the video until the point where Pancho Savery finishes reading the first artifact (*Bill of sale for a three-year-old named William*, serial #8161) and making connections to the literature. Begin at the title First Artifact Reading and watch for approximately 9:30 minutes.
- Divide the session participants into groups of three and hand out the previously downloaded social history artifact. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Activity 2: Reading the First Artifact

1. In your group, analyze the political document that your facilitator provides for you. First, make some initial observations about the artifact:

- What details do you notice about the syntax and grammar of this document?
- What wording strikes you as specific to this time period?

2. Next, read the artifact more closely; use the **CAATS** acronym below, along with the Social History Reading and synopsis of Pancho Savery's lesson.

CAATS

Creator: Who created this artifact? What do we know about the person(s) who created it? How did it influence his/her life at the time it was created? Would the creator find relevant connections to the literature you are pairing with this artifact?

Assumptions: What do you know about the context of this artifact? What assumptions can you make based on prior information that you bring to this analysis?

Audience/User: Who was the audience for this object when it was originally created? What leads you to this assumption?

Time and Place: When and where was this artifact created?

Significance: Why is this artifact important? How does it help explain the literature you are teaching with it? Does the context of the artifact parallel the context of your literature?

Facilitators:

- After discussing the *Bill of sale* artifact, spend five to seven minutes discussing the first chapter of Frederick Douglass's autobiography. Use the close reading questions from the Before the Session section as a starting point for discussion.
- Continue watching the video of the session participants reading and making connections to the second artifact, the engraving titled *Inspection and Sale of a Negro*. Begin at the title Second Artifact Reading and watch for approximately 8:30 minutes. Stop the video after this second artifact reading, before the title Lesson Planning.
- Then do the following activity. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts, cont'd.

Activity 3: Connecting Literature to the Artifact

1. Whole-Group Discussion Questions:

- What is the first step that Pancho Savery takes with the onscreen teachers to discuss the social history artifacts and their history?
- How does he move the teachers' discussion from the artifact analysis to connecting the artifact with the literature they are reading?
- What techniques does Pancho use on-screen that help you as a viewer? Could you use these techniques in your own classroom?

2. Return to small groups. Begin to draw connections between the bill of sale document and Douglass's text. Use the following guiding questions:

- What important cultural metaphors do the language in the text and the images on the artifacts provide about the institution of slavery?
- How do the artifacts help to highlight the theme of literacy in Douglass's text?

Facilitators:

- Watch the Lesson Planning and In the Classroom portions of the video. Begin at the title Lesson Planning and watch for approximately 34:30 minutes.
- Then do the next activity. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Activity 4: Classroom Strategies Discussion/Create Lesson Plan

1. Whole-Group Discussion Questions: You just watched Virginia King apply what she had learned about connecting artifacts and literature to her own classroom. Take 10–15 minutes to discuss the following questions:

- Virginia teaches at a private school with a smaller class size. How does class size make a difference in planning your lesson? What would you do differently considering the size of your own English literature classes?
- What questioning techniques does Virginia use to elicit responses from her students?
- Using the same literature and the same artifacts that Virginia used, what other activities could you use with your own students?

2. In your same small groups, brainstorm different literary movements/pieces of literature that you could use with the bill of sale document. What are some other social history artifacts that would supplement the literature you are currently teaching?

Facilitators:

- Watch Virginia King's reflective interview. Begin at the title Reflection and watch for approximately three minutes.
- Ask session participants to comment on what Virginia felt worked in her classroom. Did this parallel what they thought worked as they were watching?

Building a Lesson Plan and Teaching With Artifacts

For the detailed six-step process for artifact selection, see the Teacher Resources section in the Appendix.

Homework

1. Create a lesson plan using a social history artifact with a piece of literature you are currently teaching.

For example: If you are teaching the short story *Everyday Use* by Alice Walker, good social history pairings would be images of quilts and a butter churn from the 1930s. The story looks at the cultural differences between mother and daughter; the daughter, Dee, can never quite appreciate her mother's heritage. Looking at the quilts will give students a sense of the culture that Dee's mother is so tied to. Perhaps the quilts will also impart a better understanding of why she refuses to give these items to her daughter.

Share this lesson with fellow teachers at the next workshop session.

2. See next week's Before the Session section.

Artifacts and Literature Pairings: Social History Artifacts

The following social history artifacts can be found in the *American Passages* archive at http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php. Enter the serial number to view a picture of the item and a detailed description.

Artifact and Serial

Kiowa Girls
(1890) (#4185)

A Fair Puritan
(1897) (#1544)

Mexican Independence Day
(1968) (#6129)

Literary Movement and Literature

Native Voices:
N. Scott Momaday's
The Way To Rainy Mountain

Gothic Undercurrents:
Nathaniel Hawthorne's
The Scarlet Letter

Exploring Borderlands:
Americo Paredes's
With a Pistol in His Hands

Teaching Tips

- One teaching method that Virginia uses is incorporating technology into her larger lesson plan. Since each of her students has a computer, it is easy for them to closely read the artifact while simultaneously connecting it to the literature.
- Another helpful close reading skill that Pancho uses is to pay close attention to the level of literacy in the *Bill of sale* artifact and in Frederick Douglass's autobiography. By analyzing the word choice, grammar, sentence structure, and content of each document, Pancho and the teachers arrive at interesting observations regarding race, class, and literacy during the mid-nineteenth century.

Session Reading

Social History Reading

What do we mean by social history artifacts?

Social history artifacts are items that convey the histories of ordinary people's everyday experiences and beliefs. These items include diaries, letters, songs, census information, clothing and tools, photographs, and public records such as birth, marriage, and death certificates. These artifacts deal with issues such as gender, economic status, and ethnicity; they illustrate the different ways that people lived together and related to one another.

Why are they useful to bring into a literature classroom?

For many years, high school English teachers have been pairing the disciplines of history and English with great success; however, much of the focus has centered on political or military history. Bringing social history artifacts into the English classroom allows students to analyze items produced by a more diverse group of people. When students understand how these people's daily activities are history, they can see how this history influences literature.

When students analyze social history artifacts created during the same time period as the literature they are reading, they will glean a deeper understanding of the cultural influences on the text. This cross-referencing will reinforce the notion that nothing is created in isolation, and that all disciplines have an impact on one another. Further, by exposing students to the ways that ordinary working people have shaped history, students can begin to understand how their own actions shape their contemporary society.

Contextualizing social artifacts and literary texts: The case of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in or around 1817. By his early teens, he had taught himself to read and write, understanding that literacy was the only way to free himself. In 1838, Douglass escaped slavery; only three years later he began lecturing on his experience as a slave. In 1845, with the help of William Lloyd Garrison and the American Anti-Slavery Society, he published the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, and just two years later he founded *The North Star*, an abolitionist* newspaper. In 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act* was passed. It stated that any runaway slave must be returned to his/her owners, and that any federal marshal who did not arrest an alleged runaway slave could be fined \$1,000. Moreover, any person aiding a runaway slave could be imprisoned for six months and fined \$1,000. Douglass was one of the leaders in the fight against this unjust law, and in his speech against it he states, "Under this law, the oaths of any two villains (the capturer and the claimant) are sufficient to confine a free man to slavery for life."

* indicates a reference in the Glossary.

Social History Reading, cont'd.

The notion that every man deserves to be free and has the ability to achieve this right on his own pervades Douglass's abolitionist writings. This romantic notion of the self-made man can be seen in the writings of Douglass's contemporaries, Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882). In Thoreau's famous *Civil Disobedience* (1849), he urges the citizen not to comply totally with the government when its laws and policies go against his own conscience. It is this theme of moral independence and self-reflection that can be seen in Douglass's work as well. Like Thoreau and Douglass, Emerson believed in "self-reliance," which is the title of his 1841 essay; however, unlike Douglass's fairly conventional view of God and the direct influence the Bible had on Douglass's writing, Emerson urged his readers to love God without the conventions or conformity of the church.

Unlike the male abolitionist writers of the nineteenth century, who relied on self-sufficiency and truth to appeal to their readers, female abolitionist writers like Harriet Jacobs (1813–1897) and Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896) relied on sentimentality and emotions to evoke empathy in their readers. Jacobs, the first black woman known to write the experience of a black woman in slavery, wrote the autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In this text, she writes about her slave master's insistent sexual advances and the seven years she spent hiding in her grandmother's home. The challenge for Jacobs as a nineteenth-century black female author was how to tell her story without disgracing her name. A black woman at that time had no legal right to marry; therefore, sharing the intimate details of her relationships and subsequent children placed her in what was considered the "impure" faction of nineteenth-century women.

Just ten years before Jacobs published her autobiography, Harriet Beecher Stowe, a white abolitionist writer, published the sentimental novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Like Harriet Jacobs, Stowe preferred the emotional rather than intellectual style of writing to gain audience sympathy. Unlike Jacobs, however, she did not have first-hand experience with slavery; Stowe thus based her stories and characters on slave narratives that she had read. The influence of her 1852 novel was such that President Lincoln was said to have stated, "So this is the little lady who made this big war," when they met in 1862. It is safe to say that the biggest social and political event of the nineteenth century was the American Civil War, which spanned the years 1861–1865. Douglass himself was a Radical Republican who tried to persuade President Lincoln that slaves should be allowed to join the Union army. He was in good company, as Walt Whitman (1819–1892) was also a Radical Republican. Whitman used his literary talent to write war poems, several of which were in praise of Abraham Lincoln.

The connection between abolitionist writing and the Civil War does not go unheeded in political and military history, but the influences of social history are often overlooked. Items such as quilts, cooking utensils, wills, bills of sale, and diaries all tell stories in their own rights; such stories enlarge the way literature and the characters therein can be understood. For example, a lady's etiquette book from the mid-nineteenth century, such as *Godey's Lady's Book*, is a social history artifact that could help students understand what types of behavior were considered proper during this time. Knowing what defined social propriety in Jacobs's time will enhance readers' understanding of her moral and physical struggles in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Contextualizing social artifacts and literary texts: The case of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*

In response to the workshop session on Douglass and social artifacts, Virginia King creates a similar lesson for her high school American literature class. Her lesson focuses on Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, a World War I novel set in Italy. By looking at recruitment posters as social history artifacts, Virginia's class focuses on the anti-war sentiment and the male and female roles in Hemingway's 1929 novel. This same year, America began its descent into the Great Depression when the stock market crashed on October 13th, the infamous "Black Thursday." However, it was well before the crash of the stock market that Hemingway and many other American authors expressed their disenchantment with America. Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ezra Pound are a few of the "lost generation" who moved to Paris in an attempt to denounce false ideas of patriotism which made war seem glamorous for young people.

Social History Reading, cont'd.

Willa Cather, though she did not venture away from America, expresses the same sense of futility about WWI as other expatriate Modernist writers in her 1922 novel *One of Ours*. Unlike Hemingway's portrayal of female characters, Cather gives her women strong, Western survivalist characteristics. In such novels as *My Antonia*, Cather mirrors issues related to the many women's rights movements of the time. Susan Glaspell presents a microcosm of the world of men and women in a small farming community in *A Jury of Her Peers* and the play version *Trifles*. Also unlike Hemingway, Glaspell makes stereotypical characters work in unique ways. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway's Catherine appears to cross the conventional gender boundaries at times, yet her willing submission to domesticity at the novel's end makes her a far less complicated character. Catherine typifies Hemingway's treatment of female characters.

Virginia's students analyze World War I enlistment posters to show the different ways that men and women are represented through clothing, hair styles, and slogans. The class also focuses on the ways the posters glamorize the war; they reflect on how the posters influence the reading of Hemingway's novel. Virginia helps her students see how, through these posters, propaganda reveals vital information about gender, class, and the social climate of a given period of time.

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