

# Workshop Session 3

## Inquiry: Rudolfo Anaya and James Baldwin

### Video Program Overview

Part I: In Houston, Texas, Jorge Arredondo's students explore Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* and make connections with a mural depicting the struggles of Mexican Americans. Part II: In New York City, the students in Bo Wu's classroom read three works by James Baldwin. Sparked by their personal interests, the students research topics related to James Baldwin's works and collaborate to produce group Web sites.

### Theory Overview

Based on ideas about thinking, teaching, and learning articulated more than a century ago by philosopher John Dewey, **inquiry** is grounded in readers' natural curiosity about the real world and how it works. Beginning with their questions about a problem or subject, inquiry guides readers through a cycle of investigation, discussion, presentation, and reflection. Inquiry shares key characteristics with the other theories detailed in this workshop and puts great importance on initial reactions, intertextual readings, and student's political empowerment. In a sense, the method formalizes in the classroom the process a learner of any age would naturally go through in exploring a complex issue, problem, or question.

# Workshop Session (On-Site)

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## Getting Ready—Part I (15 minutes)

- Divide into small groups.
- Share the questions that came up for you as you read the novel (or chapters of the novel) and the online materials about Rudolfo Anaya and *Bless Me, Ultima*.

## Watch Part I: Rudolfo Anaya (approximately 30 minutes)

## Going Further—Part I (15 minutes)

Discuss as many questions as time permits. You may want to answer more of the questions in your journals at home and share ideas on Channel-Talk.

- What do you think about Part I and the way in which the teacher used the inquiry approach?
- How might you create an experience for your students similar to the mural visit?
- What are some possible next steps to this lesson?

## Getting Ready—Part II (15 minutes)

- Divide into small groups.
- Share the questions that arose as you read *The Fire Next Time*, "The Rockpile," "Sonny's Blues," and the online materials about James Baldwin and his works.

## Watch Part II: James Baldwin (approximately 30 minutes)

## Going Further—Part II (15 minutes)

Discuss as many questions as time permits. You may want to answer more of the questions in your journals at home and share ideas on Channel-Talk.

People often ask me, 'Well what does it mean to set up an inquiry based classroom.' And the simple answer to that question is it means building curriculum from the inquiry questions of learners. Now there are a lot of other things you can add to that definition. But the thing that you have to keep in mind is that you are inviting an open structure where students can find their way into literature, where they can take ownership of that process. —Jerome Harste, *Distinguished Professor of Language Education at Indiana University and Chair of the Diversity Task Force, NCTE.*

- What do you think about Part II and the way in which the teacher used the inquiry approach?
- What are the challenges you might face in using an inquiry approach? How can you address them?
- How might you incorporate or adapt the strategies for use in your classroom?
- What are some possible next steps to this lesson?

# Between Sessions (On Your Own)

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## Homework Assignment

Go to the Web site at [www.learner.org/channel/workshops/hslit](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/hslit) and:

- Review Workshop Session 3: read the theory overview and information about authors and literature, teaching strategies, lesson plans, and resources.
- Prepare for Workshop Session 4: preview the theory overview and information about the authors and literature (biographies, synopses of works, audio clips, Q&As, key references, and resources).

In the texts from the Reading List following Workshop Session 4:

- Read: Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*, and Tomás Rivera's *...y no se lo tragó la tierra (...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him)* (if you are unable to read the entire works, read the first three chapters of each novel).
- As you read the novels or chapters from the novels and the online information about the authors and literature, make note of any questions that arise. Also note:
  - What sparked your interest?
  - What more would you like to know about the author and the literature?
  - If you were going to do a research project on this author, what question/topic might you choose to research?
- Bring your list of questions to the next workshop session.

## Ongoing Activities

- In your journal, include thoughts, ideas, or questions you might have as you review the online materials and reflect on the workshop session. Make note of whether your participation in the session influenced any experiences in your classroom.
- Online, click on Reflection/Interactive Forum, an activity that you can use to interpret poems using the pedagogical approaches covered in this workshop. Read one of the two poems featured and respond to the *inquiry* questions. Share your answers on the discussion board.
- Share ideas on Channel-Talkhslit@learner.org.

# Workshop Session 3 Readings

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## The Fire Next Time

**I** UNDERWENT, during the summer that I became fourteen, a prolonged religious crisis. I use the word “religious” in the common, and arbitrary, sense, meaning that I then discovered

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*James Baldwin*

God, His saints and angels, and His blazing Hell. And since I had been born in a Christian nation, I accepted this Deity as the only one. I supposed Him to exist only within the walls of a church—in fact, of *our* church—and I also supposed that God and safety were synonymous. The word “safety” brings us to the real meaning of the word “religious” as we use it. Therefore, to state it in another, more accurate way, I became, during my fourteenth year, for the first time in my life, afraid—afraid of the evil within me and afraid of the evil without. What I saw around me that summer in Harlem was what I had always seen; nothing had changed. But now, without any warning, the whores and pimps and racketeers on the Avenue had become a personal menace. It had not before occurred to me that I could become one of them, but now I realized that we had been produced by the same circumstances. Many of my comrades were clearly headed for the Avenue, and my father said that I was headed that way, too. My friends began to drink and smoke, and embarked—at first avid, then groaning—on their sexual careers. Girls, only slightly older than I was, who sang in the choir or taught Sunday school, the children of holy parents, underwent, before my eyes, their incredible metamorphosis, of which the most bewildering aspect was not their budding

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*James Baldwin*

breasts or their rounding behinds but something deeper and more subtle, in their eyes, their heat, their odor, and the inflection of their voices. Like the strangers on the Avenue, they became, in the twinkling of an eye, unutterably different and fantastically *present*. Owing to the way I had been raised, the abrupt discomfort that all this aroused in me and the fact that I had no idea what my voice or my mind or my body was likely to do next caused me to consider myself one of the most depraved people on earth. Matters were not helped by the fact that these holy girls seemed rather to enjoy my terrified lapses, our grim, guilty, tormented experiments, which were at once as chill and joyless as the Russian steppes and hotter, by far, than all the fires of Hell.

Yet there was something deeper than these changes, and less definable, that frightened me. It was real in both the boys and the girls, but it was, somehow, more vivid in the boys. In the case of the girls, one watched them turning into matrons before they had become women. They began to manifest a curious and really rather terrifying single-mindedness. It is hard to say exactly how this was conveyed: something implacable in the set of the lips, something farseeing (seeing what?) in the eyes, some new and crushing determination in the

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Excerpted from “Down at the Cross: Letter From a Region in My Mind,” originally published in *The New Yorker*. © 1962 by James Baldwin. Copyright renewed. Collected in *The Fire Next Time*, published by Vintage Books. Used by arrangement with the James Baldwin Estate.

# Workshop Session 3 Readings, cont'd.

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*James Baldwin*

walk, something peremptory in the voice. They did not tease us, the boys, any more; they reprimanded us sharply, saying, "You better be thinking about your soul!" For the girls also saw the evidence on the Avenue, knew what the price would be, for them, of one misstep, knew that they had to be protected and that we were the only protection there was. They understood that they must act as God's decoys, saving the souls of the boys for Jesus and binding the bodies of the boys in marriage. For this was the beginning of our burning time, and "It is better," said St. Paul—who elsewhere, with a most unusual and stunning exactness, described himself as a "wretched man"—"to marry than to burn." And I began to feel in the boys a curious, wary, bewildered despair, as though they were now settling in for the long, hard winter of life. I did not know then what it was that I was reacting to; I put it to myself that they were letting themselves go. In the same way that the girls were destined to gain as much weight as their mothers, the boys, it was clear, would rise no higher than their fathers. School began to reveal itself, therefore, as a child's game that one could not win, and boys dropped out of school and went to work. My father wanted me to do the same. I refused, even though I no longer had any illusions about what an

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*James Baldwin*

education could do for me; I had already encountered too many college-graduate handymen. My friends were now "downtown," busy, as they put it, "fighting the man." They began to care less about the way they looked, the way they dressed, the things they did; presently, one found them in twos and threes and fours, in a hallway, sharing a jug of wine or a bottle of whiskey, talking, cursing, fighting, sometimes weeping: lost, and unable to say what it was that oppressed them, except that they knew it was "the man"—the white man. And there seemed to be no way whatever to remove this cloud that stood between them and the sun, between them and love and life and power, between them and whatever it was that they wanted. One did not have to be very bright to realize how little one could do to change one's situation; one did not have to be abnormally sensitive to be worn down to a cutting edge by the incessant and gratuitous humiliation and danger one encountered every working day, all day long. The humiliation did not apply merely to working days, or workers; I was thirteen and was crossing Fifth Avenue on my way to the Forty-second Street library, and the cop in the middle of the street muttered as I passed him, "Why don't you niggers stay uptown where you belong?" When I was ten, and didn't

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# Workshop Session 3 Readings, cont'd.

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*James Baldwin*

look, certainly, any older, two policemen amused themselves with me by frisking me, making comic (and terrifying) speculations concerning my ancestry and probable sexual prowess, and for good measure, leaving me flat on my back in one of Harlem's empty lots. Just before and then during the Second World War, many of my friends fled into the service, all to be changed there, and rarely for the better, many to be ruined, and many to die. Others fled to other states and cities—that is, to other ghettos. Some went on wine or whiskey or the needle, and are still on it. And others, like me, fled into the church.

For the wages of sin were visible everywhere, in every wine-stained and urine-splashed hallway, in every clanging ambulance bell, in every scar on the faces of the pimps and their whores, in every helpless, newborn baby being brought into this danger, in every knife and pistol fight on the Avenue, and in every disastrous bulletin: a cousin, mother of six, suddenly gone mad, the children parcelled out here and there; an indestructible aunt rewarded for years of hard labor by a slow, agonizing death in a terrible small room; someone's bright son blown into eternity by his own hand; another turned robber and carried off to jail. It was a summer of dreadful speculations and discoveries, of which

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*James Baldwin*

these were not the worst. Crime became real, for example—for the first time—not as a possibility but as *the* possibility. One would never defeat one's circumstances by working and saving one's pennies; one would never, by working, acquire that many pennies, and, besides, the social treatment accorded even the most successful Negroes proved that one needed, in order to be free, something more than a bank account. One needed a handle, a lever, a means of inspiring fear. It was absolutely clear that the police would whip you and take you in as long as they could get away with it, and that everyone else—housewives, taxi-drivers, elevator boys, dishwashers, bartenders, lawyers, judges, doctors, and grocers—would never, by the operation of any generous human feeling, cease to use you as an outlet for his frustrations and hostilities. Neither civilized reason nor Christian love would cause any of those people to treat you as they presumably wanted to be treated; only the fear of your power to retaliate would cause them to do that, or to seem to do it, which was (and is) good enough. There appears to be a vast amount of confusion on this point, but I do not know many Negroes who are eager to be “accepted” by white people, still less to be loved by them; they, the blacks, simply don't wish to be beaten over the head by the whites every

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# Workshop Session 3 Readings, cont'd.

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*James Baldwin*

instant of our brief passage on this planet. White people in this country will have quite enough to do in learning how to accept and love themselves and each other, and when they have achieved this—which will not be tomorrow and may very well be never—the Negro problem will no longer exist, for it will no longer be needed.

People more advantageously placed than we in Harlem were, and are, will no doubt find the psychology and the view of human nature sketched above dismal and shocking in the extreme. But the Negro's experience of the white world cannot possibly create in him any respect for the standards by which the white world claims to live. His own condition is overwhelming proof that white people do not live by these standards. Negro servants have been smuggling odds and ends out of white homes for generations, and white people have been delighted to have them do it, because it has assuaged a dim guilt and testified to the intrinsic superiority of white people. Even the most doltish and servile Negro could scarcely fail to be impressed by the disparity between his situation and that of the people for whom he worked; Negroes who were neither doltish nor servile did not feel that they were doing anything wrong when they robbed white people. In spite of the Puritan-Yankee equa-

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*James Baldwin*

tion of virtue with well-being, Negroes had excellent reasons for doubting that money was made or kept by any very striking adherence to the Christian virtues; it certainly did not work that way for black Christians. In any case, white people, who had robbed black people of their liberty and who profited by this theft every hour that they lived, had no moral ground on which to stand. They had the judges, the juries, the shotguns, the law—in a word, power. But it was a criminal power, to be feared but not respected, and to be outwitted in any way whatever. And those virtues preached but not practiced by the white world were merely another means of holding Negroes in subjection.

It turned out, then, that summer, that the moral barriers that I had supposed to exist between me and the dangers of a criminal career were so tenuous as to be nearly nonexistent. I certainly could not discover any principled reason for not becoming a criminal, and it is not my poor, God-fearing parents who are to be indicted for the lack but this society. I was icily determined—more determined, really, than I then knew—never to make my peace with the ghetto but to die and go to Hell before I would let any white man spit on me, before I would accept my “place” in this republic. I did not intend to allow the white people of this country to tell

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# Workshop Session 3 Readings, cont'd.

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*James Baldwin*

me who I was, and limit me that way, and polish me off that way. And yet, of course, at the same time, I *was* being spat on and defined and described and limited, and could have been polished off with no effort whatever. Every Negro boy—in my situation during those years, at least—who reaches this point realizes, at once, profoundly, because he wants to live, that he stands in great peril and must find, with speed, a “thing,” a gimmick, to lift him out, to start him on his way. *And it does not matter what the gimmick is.* It was this last realization that terrified me and—since it revealed that the door opened on so many dangers—helped to hurl me into the church. And, by an unforeseeable paradox, it was my career in the church that turned out, precisely, to be my gimmick.

For when I tried to assess my capabilities, I realized that I had almost none. In order to achieve the life I wanted, I had been dealt, it seemed to me, the worst possible hand. I could not become a prizefighter—many of us tried but very few succeeded. I could not sing. I could not dance. I had been well conditioned by the world in which I grew up, so I did not yet dare take the idea of becoming a writer seriously. The only other possibility seemed to involve my becoming one of the sordid people on the Avenue, who were not really as sordid as I

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*James Baldwin*

then imagined but who frightened me terribly, both because I did not want to live that life and because of what they made me feel. Everything inflamed me, and that was bad enough, but I myself had also become a source of fire and temptation. I had been far too well raised, alas, to suppose that any of the extremely explicit overtures made to me that summer, sometimes by boys and girls but also, more alarmingly, by older men and women, had anything to do with my attractiveness. On the contrary, since the Harlem idea of seduction is, to put it mildly, blunt, whatever these people saw in me merely confirmed my sense of my depravity.

It is certainly sad that the awakening of one's senses should lead to such a merciless judgment of oneself—to say nothing of the time and anguish one spends in the effort to arrive at any other—but it is also inevitable that a literal attempt to mortify the flesh should be made among black people like those with whom I grew up. Negroes in this country—and Negroes do not, strictly or legally speaking, exist in any other—are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world. This world is white and they are black. White people hold the power, which means that they are superior to blacks (intrinsicly, that is: God decreed it so), and the world has innumerable

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# Workshop Session 3 Readings, cont'd.

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*James Baldwin*

ways of making this difference known and felt and feared. Long before the Negro child perceives this difference, and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it. Every effort made by the child's elders to prepare him for a fate from which they cannot protect him causes him secretly, in terror, to begin to await, without knowing that he is doing so, his mysterious and inexorable punishment. He must be "good" not only in order to please his parents and not only to avoid being punished by them; behind their authority stands another, nameless and impersonal, infinitely harder to please, and bottomlessly cruel. And this filters into the child's consciousness through his parents' tone of voice as he is being exhorted, punished, or loved; in the sudden, uncontrollable note of fear heard in his mother's or his father's voice when he has strayed beyond some particular boundary. He does not know what the boundary is, and he can get no explanation of it, which is frightening enough, but the fear he hears in the voices of his elders is more frightening still. The fear that I heard in my father's voice, for example, when he realized that I really *believed* I could do anything a white boy could do, and had every intention of proving it, was not at all like the fear I heard when one of us

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*James Baldwin*

was ill or had fallen down the stairs or strayed too far from the house. It was another fear, a fear that the child, in challenging the white world's assumptions, was putting himself in the path of destruction. A child cannot, thank Heaven, know how vast and how merciless is the nature of power, with what unbelievable cruelty people treat each other. He reacts to the fear in his parents' voices because his parents hold up the world for him and he has no protection without them. I defended myself, as I imagined, against the fear my father made me feel by remembering that he was very old-fashioned. Also, I prided myself on the fact that I already knew how to outwit him. To defend oneself against a fear is simply to insure that one will, one day, be conquered by it; fears must be faced. As for one's wits, it is just not true that one can live by them—not, that is, if one wishes really to live. That summer, in any case, all the fears with which I had grown up, and which were now a part of me and controlled my vision of the world, rose up like a wall between the world and me, and drove me into the church.

As I look back, everything I did seems curiously deliberate, though it certainly did not seem deliberate then. For example, I did not join the church of which my father was a member and in which he

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# Workshop Session 3 Readings, cont'd.

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*James Baldwin*

preached. My best friend in school, who attended a different church, had already “surrendered his life to the Lord,” and he was very anxious about my soul’s salvation. (I wasn’t, but any human attention was better than none.) One Saturday afternoon, he took me to his church. There were no services that day, and the church was empty, except for some women cleaning and some other women praying. My friend took me into the back room to meet his pastor—a woman. There she sat, in her robes, smiling, an extremely proud and handsome woman, with Africa, Europe, and the America of the American Indian blended in her face. She was perhaps forty-five or fifty at this time, and in our world she was a very celebrated woman. My friend was about to introduce me when she looked at me and smiled and said, “Whose little boy are you?” Now this, unbelievably, was precisely the phrase used by pimps and racketeers on the Avenue when they suggested, both humorously and intensely, that I “hang out” with them. Perhaps part of the terror they had caused me to feel came from the fact that I unquestionably wanted to be *somebody’s* little boy. I was so frightened, and at the mercy of so many conundrums, that inevitably, that summer, *someone* would have taken me over; one doesn’t, in Harlem, long remain standing on any auction block.

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*James Baldwin*

It was my good luck—perhaps—that I found myself in the church racket instead of some other, and surrendered to a spiritual seduction long before I came to any carnal knowledge. For when the pastor asked me, with that marvellous smile, “Whose little boy are you?” my heart replied at once, “Why, yours.”

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# Workshop Session 3 Reading List

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Works marked with \* are required texts for this workshop that do not appear within the Readings in this guide. Other works are the sources for excerpted materials in the Readings or are recommended for additional study.

\* Anaya, Rudolfo. *Bless Me, Ultima*. New York: Warner Books, 1999. ISBN 0446675369

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage International, 1993. ISBN 067974472X

\* \_\_\_\_\_. "The Rockpile" and "Sonny's Blues," from *Going To Meet the Man*. New York: Vintage, 1995. ISBN 0-679-76179-9

# Notes

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