



Language as a Gate Keeper: How It Helps and Hinders Our Place in Society

by Michelle Tufano, 2013 CTI Fellow
West Mecklenburg High School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
English I – IV

Keywords: Word choice, dialect, vernacular, speech, social mobility, language diversity

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix I](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: This investigative grammar unit specifically explores a philosophy that is culturally relevant to high school students: the way you speak dictates how others see you and treat you. Students will explore literature and multi-media in which characters are viewed as either high-society or low-class, based on how they talk (focusing specifically on diction, word choice, vernacular and various sentence structure). They will find that language is both inclusive and exclusive: it brings people together, while also segregating social classes and regional groups: It is essentially a lasting legal form of discrimination. Students will compare both fictional characters and modern celebrities to situations they have experienced, or have witnessed in their own lives. By exploring grammar as a tool of upward social mobility, students will increase the understanding that their *own* speech affects how they are seen and observed by others. Further, the deep reading skills, seminar-style structure, and peer collaboration that drive this unit serve as a pathway for a college-ready scholar. The skills and mindsets built into “Language as a Gate Keeper” are in themselves on an early college level. Through this unit students will practice and utilize writing, communication and grammar skills in a practical and productive way.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 100 students in English II.

I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.

Language as a Gate Keeper: How It Helps and Hinders Our Place in Society

Michelle Tufano

Content Objectives

Introduction

“Language as a Gate Keeper: How It Helps and Hinders Our Place in Society” is an investigative grammar unit in which students explore ramifications—both positive and negative—concerning *how* characters communicate, and how their speech negotiates their place in society. Students will consider how diction, word choice, and vernacular play a crucial role in how characters are perceived by other characters, and by the audience. By exploring grammar as a tool of upward social mobility, I hope to increase students’ understanding that their *own* speech affects how they are seen and observed by others, including: teachers, coaches, college admission counselors, human resource representatives, even their peers competing for coveted spots on college acceptance lists.

The unit will be used in my 10th grade English II classes, ranging from twenty to thirty-five students per block. “Language as a Gate Keeper” will involve both reading literature and engaging in seminar discussions. Students will write on a daily basis, but the writing will serve as planning for discussion, and as a tool for reflection. I’ve found that the population of students I’m serving best articulates their thoughts through discussion, rather than writing. Therefore, organized discussion will put students on a path to deeper understanding the content. However, I want to make the following clear: I recognize the value in writing to improve grammar, and, ultimately, it will be utilized as a supplement to reading and structured discussion.

The school in which I plan to teach my unit is a large, urban public high school of nearly 2,000 students. The high school is predominately African American, and the majority of the student population is on free or reduced lunch. Categorized as Title I, the school is noted as being low-achieving, and in need of additional funds to ensure students have a “fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education.”ⁱ Many of the students are below grade level—due to various factors—putting them at a distinct disadvantage when competing with their peers (at higher quality schools) on state-mandated tests (EOG, EOC and MSL) and college-ready tests like the SAT and ACT.ⁱⁱ Many of the students would be the first in their families to attend college, or perhaps the first to graduate high school; therefore, this population of students is unlikely to practice reading/ writing/ grammar skills outside the constraints of public high school. I know firsthand that my students’ parents want to see their children excel in an academic setting;

however, a general lack of knowledge, deficiency in resources and the reality of the “achievement gap,” create an opportunity gap for students of diverse backgrounds.

Because of the sheer amount of standardized testing the students are exposed to throughout the year, I determined that the best approach would be to make the content practical, possible, and productive.

Practical

The students often feel bombarded with assignments and concepts that don't fit their experiences. This unit specifically explores a philosophy that pertains to their lives: the way you speak dictates how others see you and treat you. Students will explore literature in which characters are viewed as either high-society or low-class, based on how they talk (focusing specifically on diction, word choice, vernacular, and sentence types). They will compare these fictional characters to situations they have experienced, or have witnessed in their own lives.

Possible

So often I hear my students doubting their intelligence because of low test scores, low reading scores, or a general lack of understanding on a particular topic/ standard of focus. While I emphasize culture building in the classroom, that sometimes is not enough. Rigor must not be sacrificed. Rather, students will work with texts that fit their circumstances. Working in an Exceptional Children (EC) inclusion classroom has enabled me to clearly understand this need for differentiation.

While we will read some texts whole group, other texts will be assigned based on reading levels. As of September 2013 my students range from a second grade reading level to a level that is past high school (PHS). By separating students into smaller literature groups, students of all levels will be challenged, but not frustrated or bored with the content.

Productive

In order to maximize our classroom time and to ensure we go for depth, we will focus on one primary text as a whole, and each group (high, high-medium, medium, medium-low, low) will read two to four additional texts, depending on rigor of texts. Texts can be short stories, vignettes and poems. Again, the selected texts will be challenging for each group; however, they should not discourage students' learning, but rather enhance it.ⁱⁱⁱ Reflection questions and seminar preparation questions will build upon Bloom's Taxonomy—students in the higher reading groups would likely be assigned additional questions, and questions ranked higher on Blooms. Sample questions can be found in Appendix II.

While this unit is planned for an English II classroom, it would work well for any high school English class. The ideas and concepts learned and applied in this unit reflect a culturally relevant classroom. I find it increasingly important for students to have this kind of exposure before leaving high school and attending college, or pursuing a career path. “Language as a Gate Keeper” can be made relevant to any type of student—regardless of race, class, level of course (foundations, honors, AP), or future plans beyond high school. The underlying message is for students to understand the sheer importance of how their words make a lasting impact on audiences.

The unit will last approximately ten days, with one day reserved for introductory material and student-discovery activities and a final Socratic Seminar. However, this can easily be adjusted depending on the level of the course (foundations, honors, AP), and the need for re-teaching and re-looping concepts. Further on you will find a detailed, day-by-day teaching plan for this unit, including teaching strategies and classroom activities. Students will be exposed to this idea (building on prior knowledge and making connections) on day one. Days two and three are designed as whole-group reading and discussion, in order for students to continue building their knowledge of the topic. However, there will be a gradual release of responsibility after day three (through day seven) where students will be reading, analyzing, evaluating, and exploring in small groups. These student-centered days allow students to teach and learn from each other, therefore providing an opportunity for collaboration and self-sufficiency. This unit comes to an end with a Socratic Seminar in which the small group “leaders” (as observed by teacher and students’ peers) will make up the inner circle, and all other students will serve on the outer circle. This unit could be made longer by using a novel as an anchor text, rather than a short story.

Rationale

As a second year teacher working in an urban high school, I’ve realized it is imperative to create lessons that are both engaging and relevant. I thought to myself, how can I make grammar relatable to my students? How can I translate the importance of grammar and its effectiveness in everyday life? At first this seemed like a daunting task, but I began to consider how my students love talking about themselves. This does not necessarily mean they are egotistical, but rather it’s familiar territory. Keeping that in mind, a major driving force behind this unit is its relationship *to* and *with* the students.

“Language as a Gate Keeper” provides life skills transferable to both college-readiness and career-readiness. Whether a student plans to attend college post high school, he or she will be equipped with the skills learned and utilized in this unit. Further, this offers teachers the resources to a unit aligned to Common Core standards and up-to-date research used by well-known teachers and literacy specialists, such as Kelly Gallagher and Kylene Beers.

College Readiness

It is impracticable to argue the incredible benefits that accompany a college-earned education. I've instilled this rationale in each of my students through our classroom vision and goals. Our everyday work reflects this ideology. Regardless if a student is considering college as a full-time path following high school, I believe it is my job to prepare them for this next (logical) step. Therefore, this unit is no different: our work puts students on a path toward college.

In our current economic status, Americans with a college degree are significantly more likely to have and retain jobs. According to current statistics, the median of earning per year for young adults (between the ages of 25-34) with a bachelor's degree is \$45,000, while those with just a high school diploma (or its equivalent) is \$30,000.^{iv} This \$15,000 discrepancy is pretty substantial! As for the things I am certain of, I know this: students are concerned with their financial futures. Something I am constantly trying to drill in their minds is the fact that hard work and commitment will ensure monetary compensation.

Further, the deep reading skills, seminar-style structure, and peer collaboration that drive this unit serve as a pathway for a college-ready scholar. These skills and mindsets built into "Language as a Gate Keeper" are in themselves on an early college level.

Career Readiness

While my classroom vision / big goal encourages a college-ready path, there is a substantial population of students who will go straight to the military or into the work force. Sometimes I struggle to adjust these students' mindsets from being apathetic about school to being engaged and joyful with the content. This unit in particular can be catered to any type of student; however, the underlying message still exists: How you speak and present yourself *matters*, no matter the circumstances. These 21st Century Skills (further information provided below) prepare students for obstacles, related to both college and the work force.

21st Century Skills and Common Core Focus

The 21st Century Skills (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity) learned, utilized, and sharpened in this unit prepare students to be productive and efficient individuals.^v My school's administrative team looks very highly on incorporating 21st Century Skills in daily lesson plans. The combination of 21st Century Skills and Common Core Standards ensure that students are on track to graduate with the knowledge and abilities to be college and career ready.

This unit will focus on all aspects of 21st Century Skills, while narrowing Common Core focus to three standards:

- RL.9-10.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.
- L.9-10.3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- L.9-10.6. Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.

As the norms for teaching, following Common Core is crucial for both teachers and students. Students are held accountable to understand and be able to apply knowledge according to Common Core standards on tests such as EOC and MSL; therefore, it is our duty as educators to present the information in a way that students will best retain the knowledge.

Teacher Benefits

As mentioned previously, this unit follows Common Core standards for 9-10th grade English. These standards are relatively new to teachers; therefore, many of us are still wrapping our heads around the expectations and criteria to be mastered. This curriculum unit is aligned to the Common Core and utilizes best teaching practices from the AVID curriculum and by nationally known teachers such as Kelly Gallagher and Kyleene Beers. AVID's mission is "to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society"^{vi} and therefore aligns well to the vision I have for my classroom and my students. I've used strategies from Gallagher's "Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts," and "Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading" by Kyleene Beers and Robert E. Probst. Through these teachers I've learned how to better connect with my students and to get them on a path to loving reading rather than dreading it.

Objectives

The primary objective of "Language as a Gate Keeper" is to have students explore language and its function through literature. Language is both inclusive and exclusive: It brings people together, while also segregating social classes and regional groups. It is essentially a legal form of discrimination—we are being judged based on our usage of "proper" Standard English.

Students will read, explore, evaluate, analyze and deconstruct content that helps them recognize grammar and language as a tool of upward social mobility. From this they will find that the way you speak, write, and interact is all perceived as a testament to your character. Multi-media interviews with current day celebrities will be particularly of interest to watch because these men and women are most notable for their fame and wealth whereas audiences still judge them based on their public speaking abilities.

Students should seek to understand how characters throughout literature of the last century faced significant challenges, or were granted unique privileges, based on the *way* they spoke. It is assumed that those with formal and articulate speech are well educated and well off, while those with informal, shortened/slang, and language deemed unacceptable are ignorant, underprivileged, and undesirable.

Students will have the opportunity to explore points of view from characters on both ends of the spectrum, in several styles of writing (short stories, poetry and non-fiction articles). Through a variety of texts, students will explore the importance of language as connected to diction, word choice, and vernacular.

Students are expected to use academic vocabulary during classroom discussion, in their writing, and during the final end-of-unit Socratic Seminar. Using this academic vocabulary is crucial to understanding the content and enhances their academic experience by actually practicing this ideology that *how* you speak affects how others perceive you.

Teaching Strategies

I've found the following strategies to be the best practices working with high school students who are often below grade level in reading and struggle using standard grammar features and formal writing skills.

Chunking the text

When working with challenging and rigorous texts, it is important for students (especially if they are struggling readers) to break down larger texts into more manageable pieces. "Dividing content into smaller pieces helps students identify key words and ideas, develop students' ability to paraphrase, and makes it easier for students to organize and synthesize."^{vii} This strategy is especially helpful with annotating texts, identifying the main idea of smaller sections as related to the whole text, and understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words in the context of a phrase, sentence, or paragraph. Once students have broken the larger text into these smaller portions, annotated and pulled out the main idea of the sections, and identified unfamiliar meanings, they should paraphrase the reading to which they can refer later in the analytical process.

Annotation

This strategy enables students to take a close-reading approach and to gain a deeper understanding of the text. These notes or comments help students to really grasp what they are reading, rather than simply skimming the piece. I use annotation in conjunction with “chunking the text” so students will be well prepared to answer analysis questions and to engage in rigorous discussion.

Think-Pair-Share

I use this strategy to start discussion or to breakup days where students are doing mostly independent work. First students “think” about their response to a question or reflection on a topic, then they “pair” with someone nearby to discuss the response / reflection, and finally students share these thoughts in a whole-group discussion. Think-pair-share is especially useful to use with resistant and shy students because it helps them share their ideas without the discomfort of talking in front of a large group. From my experiences, teenagers do not want to be embarrassed by an incorrect answer or false response; think-pair-share often provides that extra comfort to share aloud if they share the same opinion as another classmate.

Whole group discussion

This strategy is most effective in a classroom setting where there is already an environment of mutual respect so teacher and students know the appropriate time to chime in with their ideas without offending or over-stepping boundaries. In my classroom it is imperative that I do not speak for longer than 5-10 minutes, otherwise I will have completely lost my class’ attention. Having a discussion, rather than lecture, allows me to hit key points/ topics, while engaging students in the open conversation.

Using multi-media during this type of discussion also works well because students are able to build connections to anchor text(s) or increase their understanding of the main topic. For example, in this unit, I will be using photographs, artwork, videos, and music to supplement whole-group discussion because it keeps the conversation moving along and provides keen opportunities to relate to students’ baselines of knowledge.

Rather than students taking notes from lecture slides and “taking my word for it,” they have the opportunity to learn with me by engaging in conversation and building personal experiences to the content.

Small group discussion

When utilizing small group discussion, I create groups based on students’ strengths and their specific learning styles. In any given class I generally have 4-5 students who stand

out as genuine leaders; they will function as the group “facilitators.” The facilitator keeps the conversation moving along and encourages students to participate in the discussion. Having small group facilitators allows me to move around the classroom and help struggling students, rather than managing the entire class.

Below you will find a list of small group roles:

- Facilitator: student functions as the manager or leader of the discussion. He / she should ensure that all students are participating in the conversation and have equal opportunities to voice their opinions.
- Recorder: student keeps track of group’s comments on the topic to share during whole-group discussion.
- Time keeper: student holds group accountable to teacher’s pre-set time limit for discussion and gives group a 1-minute warning to close discussion.
- Citation chair: student goes back to the text to find appropriate examples that support group’s comments.
- Participation chair: student keeps track of how many times each group member contributes to conversation.

Literature Circles

At the beginning of the school year I used the Gates MacGinitie Reading Diagnostic to find a baseline for my students’ reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. This information has allowed me to pinpoint my students’ strengths and areas for growth. It is particularly useful when creating literature circles because it allows students to work with peers at similar reading levels and communicational skills. From teaching EC inclusion classes I’ve realized the overwhelming importance of using differentiation on a daily basis because it keeps all levels of students engaged and willing to participate in some capacity.

Below you will find a list of literature circle roles:

- Discussion Director: The group’s facilitator should lead conversation and ensure that all members have a voice in discussion.
- Illustrator: This role is best for artistic students and for those who have the most inhibitions to writing. This student will capture the key scenes / main ideas in a drawing.
- Literary Luminary: This student is in charge of drawing group’s attention to the most important and interesting lines / quotes from the text. The literary luminary should pay close attention to detail and take a close-reading approach.
- Vocabulary Enricher: This student will look up definitions for unfamiliar and challenging words in the text. This role would best serve a student with irregular attendance.

- Connector: In this role the student focuses on making connections between the text and real-world experiences. This student should consider personal experiences, current events in the news and around the community, and considering topics previously discussed in class.
- Summarizer: The summarizer should be a strong reader and exceptional critical thinker with the ability to extract key details and be able to see the overall picture of the text.
- Investigator: This student will investigate background information to help the group better understand the context of the reading. They may bring supplemental information (including pictures and/or other readings) to share with the rest of the group.^{viii}

Socratic Seminar

My students love Socratic Seminars because they provide them with the opportunity to drive the discussion and showcase the knowledge they've gained throughout the unit. The National Paideia Center describes the purpose as a platform "to achieve deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a text... participants systematically question and examine issues and principles related to a particular content, and articulate different points-of-view. The group conversation assists participants in constructing meaning through disciplined analysis, interpretation, listening, and participation."^{ix} Students bear the burden of responsibility through conversation (something most teenagers love to do), while the teacher plays a minimal role in managing behavior.

The most important thing to remember is that discussion is not a debate, but rather an open forum to share ideas and examine texts in a manner that is most rigorous and thoughtful. I've found Socratic Seminars to work best as a culminating activity so students have ample texts to refer to, to pull ideas from, and to gain a wide perspective of a topic. Since students take full control of the conversation, they become more invested in this activity than in a traditional whole-group, teacher-led discussion.

Another way to keep students on track and to minimize any behavioral issues during the activity is to have students complete a peer evaluation as well as a post-seminar personal reflection on their own effectiveness in the discussion.

There are variations to this type of discussion, however. Because of the number of students in my class I use the "fishbowl" approach, in which students are divided into two groups: one inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle takes the lead in discussing the topic, while the outer circle can take notes and evaluate a "partner" in the inner circle. I separate the class based on student strengths, especially considering pre-work responses and willingness to partake in discussion.

Philosopher Chairs

This activity gives students the opportunity to engage in a discussion rooted in debate. This is another activity my students love because they are able to “argue” their personal beliefs and convince classmates of their opinion using rhetorical skills. A controversial topic is introduced so students are “divided” by their differing opinions and literally divided in the proximity of the classroom. Students may also choose to be neutral; however, they are given specific tasks to stay involved in the discussion. Such roles include keeping track of speakers, keeping track of time, and choosing a side they believe argued their point effectively.

The most exciting aspect of this discussion is that students literally get up out of their seats and move when they are convinced of an opposing argument. Philosopher Chairs works well as an introductory tool because it gets students excited about learning the content and further shaping their opinions based on the diverse opinions of their peers.

One-Pager

This AVID strategy provides students with an opportunity to respond to a text in an open-ended manner. A one-page assignment is literally to be completed on a single sheet of paper and should represent the student’s personal interpretation of the reading. There are three required elements students should follow: There must be two or more excerpts / quotes taken from the text (and should be cited using page number, paragraph number or line number) that the student finds particularly interesting or engaging; there must be a graphic representation that illustrates and relates to the chosen excerpt / quote; and the student must include a personal response to what they’ve read. Questions to consider for the response include: Why did you choose the quote? How does the quote relate to the characters, plot and conflict of the story? How does the quote relate to the overall theme of the text? How does the quote connect to my own experiences or something else I have read?

Classroom Activities

Day 1: Introduction to “Language As a Gate Keeper”

To start the unit I will propose a simplistic version of the unit’s culminating question: “Does it really matter *how* you talk and *what* you say?” Students will be invited to write responses in their journals, share their thoughts through “think-pair-share,” and articulate their ideas in a whole-group discussion. This is an ambiguous question, so students will be able to answer it according to their personal interpretation; however, if students are struggling, I might ask: “Would you talk to your best friend, your grandmother and your teacher all the same? Or how would you change the language you are using?” This discussion will function as a framing tool to introduce the idea of “language as a gate

keeper.” Language can be both inclusive and exclusive: it brings people together, while also segregating social classes and regional groups based on usage of proper English.

To really hook my students and sell the idea that language is a gatekeeper and how we speak affects how we are perceived by others, I will show videos of celebrities such as Kanye West, Ryan Lochte, Tiger Woods, and Chris Paul. Many of my students aspire to be professional athletes and headliner musicians; however, they neglect to understand that these celebrities are required and expected to address the public and therefore need to have superior public speaking skills. The above list reflects celebrities who are recognized as having exemplary communication skills and others with poor speaking skills.

After watching press interviews with these celebrities, I will pose the following open-ended questions students should consider when creating their compare/contrast charts: How does language impact our view of the celebrity? How do you know if someone is “well spoken” vs. “poorly spoken”? What public speaking mistakes did the celebrity make? What did the celebrity do/say that was particularly good? Students will then look at the “pros” and “cons” of each celebrity’s speech. Finally, students will be given a transcribed version for two of the interviews: one exemplary interview and one non-exemplary interview. Using the exemplary model, they will rewrite the non-exemplary one so it reflects successful English and formal skill when addressing a public audience.

Day 2: Philosopher Chairs: Put Your Opinions in the Hot Seat!

Before reading texts that support the idea that language is a gatekeeper, students will have the opportunity to debate based on personal opinion and past experience. As mentioned in the “Teaching Strategies” portion of the Unit Plan, Philosopher Chairs is a great introductory tool that gets students excited about learning the content and further shapes their opinions based on the diverse opinions of their peers. Day 2 will focus on how the younger generation communicates with different audiences. Something I find very concerning is the fact that my students claim to speak to their friends, bosses, and parents in the same manner. This debate should get them to consider that their language has an impact on how they are perceived by these different audiences. I will use multimedia (interviews, video clips, pictures on the web) that addresses this topic to enhance and drive the debate.

A worksheet with specific directions, debate questions, note-taking graphic organizers, and final reflection questions can be found in Appendix II.

Day 3: Let’s Try It Together: Teacher and Students Working in Collaboration

To model specific strategies and to get a grasp on the unit’s key purpose, I will work through the reading, analyzing, and reflecting processes with my students. We will begin

reading “Story in Harlem Slang” by Zora Neale Hurston and consider her extensive use of slang and southern dialect. This text should be pre-chunked so students can focus on the larger concept without the imposition of reading a long text. We will frequently stop reading to discuss reactions to Hurston’s story and will use the glossary at the end of the text to better understand the context of the writing. Specific questions to consider during and after reading include: How does the language used affect the reading of the story? Would the story be as authentic without the conversational dialect? How is the richness of African-American oral tradition captured in Hurston’s writing? How do you perceive the characters in the story based on the language used?

It will likely take 15-20 minutes to complete this teacher-lead reading and discussion; however, the largest chunk of class should be reserved for students working together in partners or triads to continue reading and annotating the text and to analyze the use of dialect and slang through the use of a graphic organizer. Ultimately, this will all loop back to the unit’s essential question: How does the way I talk affect the way I am perceived by others? Students will consider characters’ reactions as well as their own opinion in response to this question.

Finally, students will create a one-pager based on the day’s reading and should consider the following questions when completing the assignment: How does the language affect the reading of the story? Would the story be as authentic without the conversational dialect?

Days 4-7: Literature Circles: Students Finding Understanding Through Group Roles

During the next segment of the unit, students will work in small groups through literature circles. I will preview six texts with the class by presenting the texts (actually showing students the length and font size) and providing a brief summary. As a cohesive unit, each group will choose 2-3 texts to focus on throughout the week. As mentioned previously, students will be grouped based on reading levels and overall strengths. Each member will take on one role while engaging with the texts, thereby giving everyone responsibility beyond themselves. Students less motivated to work will be encouraged by their teammates to complete their tasks because it affects everyone’s understanding of the reading.

There will be two parts to each text’s reading: literature circle task sheets and discussion guides. Specific literature circle tasks can be found in the classroom strategies section of this unit. These specific tasks help keep students engaged, motivated, and equally responsible for the group’s work. Discussion questions should reflect the overall unit topic, and should build off connections made to self and to the world around them. After this three-day activity, students will reflect on their own involvement as well as on group members’ participation.

I will play a minor role in this part of the unit, as students will facilitate group discussions and guide each other's understanding of the texts. Instead, I will monitor student involvement, assist lower-level readers, and take note of students who are showcasing skills most suitable for the final Socratic Seminar.

Day 8: Small Group Discussion/ Socratic Seminar Pre-work

On this day, students will consider all texts we have discussed and read up to this point including: video interviews, pictures/illustrations, and texts by Hurston, Chesnutt, and Ellison. In preparation for the following day's Socratic Seminar it is imperative that students have adequate time to look over annotated texts, to reflect on previous discussion questions and graphic organizers, and to spend time talking to group members about seminar questions. While every student will write and submit individual responses, having small group discussions will serve as a brainstorming tool and will further encourage all students (especially those generally unsure of their responses). Socratic Seminar pre-work – including brainstorming templates and question stems that students will use to formulate their own questions – can be found in Appendix II.

While students are working independently to complete the Seminar pre-work, I will walk around the classroom and begin creating a map for the following day's seminar. Students with exceptional responses that showcase a deep understanding of the text and its connection to the larger topic will make up the inner circle (the leaders of the discussion). Students struggling to make connections will sit in the outer circle and will take extensive notes based on the inner circle's discussion. However, there will be a "hot seat" reserved for students in the outer circle to join when they have a comment to make in connection to the discussion. This provides all students with an outlet to showcase their knowledge and to utilize their individual skills.

Day 9: Socratic Seminar: "Is Language a Gate Keeper?"

Utilizing their responses from the previous day's pre-work, students will engage in a seminar discussion. As outlined in the "Teaching Strategies" portion of the unit plan, this seminar is designed to be an open forum to share ideas and to examine texts in a manner that is both rigorous and thoughtful. Specific requirements for inner-circle and outer-circle participants are included below. This list will help maintain order in the classroom and will hold students accountable for their roles' responsibilities.

Inner circle participants will:

- Voice their opinions and opposing viewpoints
- Read aloud excerpts of the text to support or make a point, drawing close attention to an author's specific word choice

- Paraphrase what the speaker before has said in order to respond appropriately and keep fluid conversation
- Connect the issues in the material to previous assignments and discussion in order to discern broader themes, concepts, and compare/ contrast diverse opinions

Outer circle participants will:

- Be silent
- Report the comments of an assigned partner from the inner circle
- Track partner's comments
- Complete a rubric and grade their partner at the end of discussion

Inner-circle participants will use pre-work responses to guide the discussion. As long as the conversation stays grounded in textual evidence, students are in control of the discussion's movement. Ultimately, students will consider our culminating question: Is language a gatekeeper? How has language helped or hindered a character's societal status?

Members of the outer circle will work fervently to record responses from the inner circle, while also tracking their partner's contributions to the discussion. Those in the outer circle will keep track of the number of times their partner speaks during discussion and will further rate the effectiveness of their responses. This process holds outer circle members equally responsible for staying on task and focused on the discussion.

The day's seminar will be recorded, further providing students with the unique opportunity to see how they talk, how their language affects their credibility in the discussion, and what language they are specifically using that is appropriate / inappropriate depending on their audience (scholarly peer conversation) and role.

Day 10: Transcribing and Reflecting on Seminar + How it Applies to US!

Today we will watch portions of the previous day's Socratic Seminar to allow students to hear how they communicate with their peers in a scholarly discussion. They should use this opportunity to transcribe what they hear, and they should consider how they could improve the speech when recorded in written form. They will use the Socratic Seminar rubric to further analyze their participation and speech, and they should create a list of personal "glows" and "grows" to consider for future seminars.

To conclude the unit, students will reflect heavily on how the idea of language as a gatekeeper applies to their own lives. As discussed in the unit's introduction, students were to consider the following: How does the way I speak (dialect) and what I say (vernacular, word choice) affect how I am perceived by others? This includes teachers,

coaches, college admission counselors, human resource representatives, and peers competing for coveted spots on college acceptance lists. I will invite a teacher, a sports coach, and a college counselor into the classroom for a panel discussion. The panelists will be prompted to share information with the students regarding the unit's major topic. Three students will be invited to conduct mock interviews with each of the panelists. During the mock interview, the rest of the class will rate the student's language and communication skills using a rubric. The panelists will also provide feedback to their interviewees, allowing students to further understand how their language affects their college and career opportunities.

Resources

Bibliography for Teachers

Beers, Kylene and Robert E. Probst. *Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2013. This teaching resource book introduces significant methods to encourage students to read closely and provides strategies to tackle rigorous texts through critical reading habits.

Gallagher, Kelly. *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts*. Portland, MA: Stenhouse Publishers, 2004. Kelly Gallagher focuses on strategies to help students read challenging and rigorous texts with a deeper level of understanding. This is especially important with the increased challenge students will face when taking district, state and college-ready tests.

Crain, Hilary, Michelle Mullen and Mary Catherine Swanson. *The Write Path: Teacher Guide for English Language Arts*. AVID, 2002. This book provides several teaching and learning strategies that promote college-readiness in the English Language Arts classroom.

"Framework for 21st Century Learning." *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*. Accessed Sept. 20, 2013. <http://www.p21.org/our-work/p21-framework>. This web source offers links to further resources on transforming the classroom into a 21st century laboratory. The 21st century skills encourage college and career readiness through readings, writing, and communication abilities.

"Title I- Improving The Academic Achievement of The Disadvantaged." *U.S. Department of Education*. Accessed September 20, 2013. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html>. This website offers valuable information on the specifications of Title I schools, including its purpose, funding allotments, and a nation-wide school improvement plan. It is especially important for teachers in Title I schools to familiarize themselves with this national improvement plan by the U.S. Department of Education.

NC School Report Cards. Accessed September 20, 2013.

<http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/>. District information and specific school information can be found using the NC School Report Card system. Such information includes student demographics, proficiency scores for state testing, and a comparison amongst other schools in your district. This is especially important in understanding the population of students in your classroom, and provides teachers with knowledge of the potential achievement gap in your school district.

“Fact Facts.” *National Center for Education Statistics*. Accessed September 20, 2013.

<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=77>. This website provides important data and statistics regarding education in our nation.

“What is AVID?” *AVID Decades of College Dreams*. Accessed October 20, 2013.

http://www.avid.org/abo_whatisavid.html. AVID is a college-readiness program utilized in schools across the nation. As a teacher at an AVID pilot school, these strategies and classroom activities are utilized in everyday lessons and assignments. AVID provides specifics on seminars, debates, one-pagers, and written responses for a college-ready scholar.

“Chunking.” *Facing History and Ourselves*. Accessed October 20, 2013.

<http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/strategies/chunking>. As mentioned in classroom strategies, this website provides specific information on the importance of students using chunking to comprehend challenging texts. State common exams have become increasingly more rigorous in the last year; therefore, students must be prepared to work with challenging texts and higher-level questioning in order to demonstrate their understanding of grade-level standards.

DaLie, Sandra Okura. "Students becoming real readers: Literature circles in high school English classes." *Teaching reading in high school English classes* (2001): 84-100. This book excerpt provides information regarding best practices when utilizing literature circles in a high school classroom. Specific literature circles roles can be found in the classroom activities section of this unit plan.

Paideia: Active Learning. Accessed October 20, 2013. <http://www.paideia.org>. This website offers a concrete understanding of the benefits of using Socratic Seminars in a classroom setting, and how to structure such discussion in way that all participants are utilized and valued equally.

Reading List for Students

Chesnutt, Charles W. *The Wife of His Youth*. 1899. A fictional tale of a handsome and prominent biracial man named Mr. Ryder who heads a social organization, the “Blue

Veins Society” and plans to propose to a beautiful mulatto woman at an upcoming ball. Mr. Ryder is faced with an extraordinary challenge as he is reacquainted with his wife, a plain looking black woman, from before the Civil War

Chesnutt, Charles W. *Uncle Wellington’s Wives*. 1899. A fictional tale of a mulatto man who leaves his negro wife and friends in the South for a new start in the North, where he hopes to find happiness passing as a white man.

Ellison, Ralph. *A Party Down at the Square*. 1997. A young boy watches on as a negro boy is lynched and burned to death in the old South. Through the bystander, the audience experiences the disturbing scenery and overwhelming racism.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Drenched in Light*. 1924. The story of a young African American girl, Isis, with an infectious spirit that her strict grandmother cannot subdue. Isis provides joy and entertainment to everyone, and even catches the attention of a wealthy white woman.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Story in Harlem Slang*. 1942. This story focuses on wordplay and banter between old friends, and has an authentic vocabulary evocative of the old South.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *The Gilded Six Bits*. 1933. A story of newlyweds in Eatonville, FL, with a focus on the rich tradition of the community and harmonious dialect of the their people.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Sweat*. 1932. A fictional tale of washerwoman Dalia and her abusive, deadbeat husband Sykes. In the end, Sykes gets what he deserves and fatally dies as a result of trick he tried to play on his once beautiful wife.

Materials for Classroom Use

Reading Materials

Once students have been given the opportunity to explore how language affects their own lives, and investigated its significance in the world around them, they will analyze the positive and negative ramifications of language diversity throughout literature. The specific readings for students and teachers can be found in the annotated bibliographies above. The readings for teachers provides a comprehensive list in which teachers should utilize before teaching “Language as a Gate Keeper” to further understand best teaching practices when working with high school-aged students on track for college and career futures.

Worksheets for Students

Worksheets with directions and necessary rubrics can be found in Appendix II. The majority of this unit includes discussion, reading and reflecting; the pre-created worksheets should best serve students through this process. Specifically you will find worksheets for Philosophers Chairs, and Socratic Seminar pre/ post work. It may also be necessary for students to have folders, binders or interactive notebooks to keep worksheets organized.

Multi-media Clips

Before engaging in literature discussion, students will explore “Language as a Gate Keeper” through interview clips with modern-day celebrities. Students are likely to understand and internalize the concept that “how you speak affects how others perceive you” by using such characters because these athletes, musicians and actors possess qualities today’s youth desire and aspire to have in the future. These clips will serve as a hook to the unit, and will help students make further connections to the literary texts.

Technology

I have planned to use a Promethean Board and document camera during this unit to show multi-media clips, model annotation skills while reading, model how to answer discussion questions in complete sentences, and appeal to visual learners throughout the process. However, a projector with audio capabilities will work for multi-media clips. All other technological use is optional.

Implementing Common Core Standards

Michelle Tufano

RL.9-10.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

This is the central standard of focus for the unit. Students will work intimately with texts to examine how an author uses specific language to reinforce a major concept or idea. Students will notice how an author's explicit word choice emphasizes the text's overall message; therefore, proving the power of word choice on the overall tone and mood of a text.

L.9-10.3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Throughout this unit students will interact with a variety of texts by reading, writing, and communicating with peers in text-based discussion. Students' understanding of language is essential to their ability to make connections and apply this knowledge in their own writing and speech. Overall, this standard allows students to practice their comprehension and build vocabulary.

L.9-10.6. Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.

Students are expected to use unit vocabulary in their writing and discussion throughout. College and career readiness plays a large role in the classroom setting; therefore, in preparation, students will be graded (through the use of writing, speaking and listening rubrics) based on their adherence to this standard.

Appendix II

Human Barometer: Read the following statements. Consider to what extent you agree or disagree with the following questions. Explain your thoughts in 2-3 sentences using the blank boxes in preparation for Philosopher's Chairs.

1. Does the way you talk affect how other people see you?

←-----→
Not at all Absolutely

2. Do you think you should change the way you talk depending on your audience?
For example, do you think you should talk to your best friend, teacher,
grandmother, and principle in different ways?

←-----→
Not at all Absolutely

3. Do celebrities (including athletes, musicians, and actors) need to have exceptional public speaking skills?

←-----→
Not at all Absolutely

Philosopher's Chairs: Considering your "gut reaction" to the three questions above we will engage in a Philosopher's Chairs discussion. You will get up and move to the side of the classroom which best reflects your response to each question. If you are persuaded by a classmate's opposing argument you may move positions, and join their side of the argument. Once the facilitator asks for closing arguments on each side, you must solidify your opinion and take a final stance. You must record one note per round of the debate in the space provided.

Note #1: Topic: _____ Who said it? _____

Note #2: Topic: _____ Who said it? _____

Note #3: Topic: _____ Who said it? _____

Post-debate Reflection: Based on the diverse opinions of your classmates and your own views, how does language and the way you talk affect how others perceive you? Explain in 3-5 complete sentences.

Socratic Seminar Pre-Work: The following questions will be asked during the end-of-unit Socratic Seminar. Now is your time to prepare to be an effective participant in the seminar. Look over your notes, graphic organizers, and annotated texts from throughout the unit to complete the questions. You may work with a partner, or in a small group, to brainstorm ideas. However, you are responsible for submitting your own work before we begin the Socratic Seminar. Use the space provided to articulate your opinions and provide textual evidence as support.

Discussion Questions	
<i>According to our readings, does language have a direct correlation to how characters are perceived by other characters?</i>	
My Opinion:	Textual Evidence:
<i>According to our readings, how does diction, vernacular and sentence structure in speech dictate social hierarchy?</i>	
My Opinion:	Textual Evidence:
<i>Do you think people should be judged on their speech, specifically those in the public eye?</i>	
My Opinion:	Textual Evidence:
<i>How is language a gatekeeper in today's society?</i>	
My Opinion:	Textual Evidence:

-
- ⁱ “Title I- Improving The Academic Achievement of The Disadvantaged,” *U.S. Department of Education*, Accessed September 20, 2013, <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html>
- ⁱⁱ *NC School Report Cards*, Accessed September 20, 2013, <http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Kyleene Beers and Robert E. Probst, *Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2013), page.
- ^{iv} “Fact Facts,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, Accessed September 20, 2013, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=77>
- ^v “Framework for 21st Century Learning,” *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*, Accessed Sept. 20, 2013, <http://www.p21.org/our-work/p21-framework>.
- ^{vi} “What is AVID?” *AVID Decades of College Dreams*, Accessed October 20, 2013, http://www.avid.org/abo_whatisavid.html
- ^{vii} “Chunking,” *Facing History and Ourselves*, Accessed October 20, 2013, <http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/strategies/chunking>
- ^{viii} Sandra Okura DaLie, "Students becoming real readers: Literature circles in high school English classes," *Teaching reading in high school English classes* (2001): 84-100.
- ^{ix} *Paideia: Active Learning*, Accessed October 20, 2013, <http://www.paideia.org>