

## **Who's actually in the Driver's Seat? Diverse views of Media and Literary Perspectives**

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### **Rationale/Introduction**

How many times have we all simply dismissed another's ideas or opinions because we only thought about the issue/problem from our own perspective? In an age where most people consider themselves "enlightened" we have plenty of evidence to prove continuing narrow-mindedness. Since the idea behind understanding and appreciating another's ideas might be the act of gleaning the best from them, without losing your own basic beliefs and ideas, then our logical focus should be on equipping our students to intelligently analyze what they see, hear or read.

In a multicultural society, educators have to consider how multiple viewpoints, or *perspectives*, shape students' interactions with media texts, and how questions of shared and/or competing values and standpoints can complicate their ability to stand up for their own values while still understanding (and perhaps being influenced by) the perspectives of diverse others. Encouraging media literacy among our students requires that they are able to recognize how they experience media texts from their own cultural perspectives (which might include race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious commitments, age, and so on). It also requires recognition that media producers create texts from perspectives that variously support or challenge predominant cultural norms and values. The purpose of this unit is to help students recognize the realities of *perspective* as a starting point for critically thinking through and navigating the challenges and obligations of a multicultural society. One of those obligations is to recognize that we are responsible for critically investigating the perspectival beliefs and values that we hold and advocate for. Perspectives become part of how our students "reason" about media experiences.

Students and educators may be familiar with such ideas of perspective as they relate to prejudice. Although usually negative in connotation, prejudices develop as we acquire social information, and are challenged as we interact with more diversified groups and reconsider our personal "filters." Simon Cottle argues "we constantly revise our expectations of the meaning of the whole text on the basis of our understanding of *parts* of it...the culturally, historically situated set of prejudices also undergo constant revision. To put it another way, we constantly revise our cultural resources as we encounter new experiences in the form of real events and/or textual depictions."<sup>1</sup> In order to present, discuss, review, and apply critical thinking skills related to perspective one must study a

variety of texts, some of which may reinforce existing beliefs, and others which may unsettle students' preconceived notions. This curriculum unit exposes students to diverse texts that allow for experiences of multiple perspectives on issues of race and popular culture.

## **Objectives**

Middle school still includes an element of character-building embedded in the academic curriculum. It is a most tumultuous time for so many young people, their families, and the world they interact with daily. I would like this unit to provide a bridge for students to realize the differences that exist in their cultural contexts. They should also recognize the need for teamwork in order to accomplish goals hand-in-hand with the reality that life presents challenges.

This unit requires a minimum of five to seven days depending on the scholastic level of the class. Due to the extensive research, available materials, and fluid strategies, this unit could be considered for seventh grade to tenth grade. My appendices include specific excerpts, activities, and media opportunities. Perspective will be the foundational component tying in each activity. This anchoring in perspective is needed as a unit with this degree of diversity might find itself "twigging out" as opposed to the normal extension of learning that is a manageable "branching out" into consistent relevancy. Once the basic tenets of perspective are introduced, one might consider presenting an abbreviated version with critical reviews, excerpts from books and videos, news clips, and open discussion. The primary focus is to engage students in the reality of the existence of perspective while helping them develop some analytical skills that will lead to a great deal more depth in their critical thinking skills.

## **Background**

Just over three miles from my residence, on Blueberry Lane, South Charlotte Middle School (SCMS) is located on Strawberry Lane, a "suburb" just below uptown Charlotte Center City within Mecklenburg County. Quoting directly from the School Improvement Plan:

In keeping with the SCMS mission statement, we are committed to maintaining an academically rigorous curriculum with high expectations despite the increasingly changing demographics. Our student population includes: Caucasian (66.0), African-American (16.0), Hispanic (7.2), Asian (5.7), Multi-racial (2.6), and Limited English Proficient (4.2) students as well as children with learning disabilities (6.8) and economic needs (23.3).

In the midst of these changes and challenges, SCMS has demonstrated high growth each year since 1996 and has been named a School of Excellence with

high growth each year since 2000. In 2004/2005, SCMS was identified by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as one of the top 25 schools to show the most improvement from the previous year on their test scores. In 2003, SCMS was the first middle school in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) to be recognized by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform as a National School to Watch. The school was re-designated in 2007 and 2010. In 2007, SCMS was the only middle school in North Carolina to be recognized as an Honor School of Excellence Blue Ribbon School. In 2009, SCMS received the rating of 'High Quality School' from Cambridge Education. The population may shift, the students may have more needs, the district boundary changes may move teachers; however, SCMS continues to demonstrate consistent success.<sup>ii</sup>

### My Students:

I currently teach three classes. One is mixed gender, with twenty-nine (29) students. It is co-taught, and 50% of the students are classified as inclusion, due to Individual Education Plans and 504 plans, stipulating classroom accommodations and modifications. This class will have specific accommodations noted with the strategies, and the other two classes will be considered for planning purposes. I am teaching at the highest possible level in all classes, and differentiating occurs primarily in varied classroom activities, grading exceptions and level of expectation. I find that students will generally rise to the level being presented. The co-taught class will be a delight to instruct because of the simple fact that we have both genders and these students range in academic ability from a level two (below grade level) to low level three. The different perspectives will facilitate diverse and productive discussion.

The second class is male, single-gender, with 31 young men that have all scored a level 3 (grade level) or a low level 4 (above grade level) on the prior year End of Grade Test (EOG). My single gender standard-plus class presents a challenge in that they will need some extra stimulation to seek out the linear text's importance, while the visual component should keep them fully engaged. Consistent with the unit's focus, I want to recognize the different perspectival challenges this group might present. I am currently reading Kathleen Palmer Cleveland's *Teaching Boys Who Struggle in School*, with a focus on the chapter *Framing Issues of Underachievement*. The survey responses are proving to be insightful, driving some of my planning with current classes. Many male students would rather simply cruise by the elements of reading literature, focusing on the visuals without really participating in *close readings* -- "Critical close reading is a social and therefore an ethical responsibility"<sup>iii</sup> I simply must consider teaching practices that will address the need for these students to become more engaged.

The final class is also single-gender (male) with 28 students who all scored a level 4 and met other stringent criteria based upon their performance in actual class work, an Accuplacer Test, and teacher recommendation. The guidelines have essentially

established a true “Scholars” class that is working one or two grade levels ahead of my other classes. While I believe this class will be more engaged than my other single-gender class, I must not neglect to consider their potential struggle with close readings. Quite often in this class, I discover that the students are doing a great deal of inferencing, focusing on the big picture, rather than taking time to unlock the details of a passage. I am occasionally called upon to “unlock” basic directions or steps because a student has over-thought the text because of missing key details.

## Strategies

According to Paul Messaris, individuals go through several stages in mastering some degree of authority over the “meaning process.”<sup>iv</sup> For the purposes of this unit I have chosen to focus activities toward better developing what Messaris identifies as “skepticism.” Consider in particular the stage preceding skepticism, which is actually reinforced a great deal as students enter seventh grade and segue from concrete to abstract thought, and the following stage, as these outline this unit’s “road map” for students’ media literacy development:<sup>v</sup>

*Narrative Acquisition* Develop understanding of differences:

*Fiction vs. nonfiction*

*Ads vs. entertainment*

*Real vs. make-believe*

Understand how to connect plot elements:

*By time sequencing*

*By motive-action-consequence*

*Developing Skepticism*

-Discount claims made in ads  
-Sharpen differences between likes and dislikes for shows, characters and actions...

*Intensive Development*

-Strong motivation to seek out information on certain topics  
-Developing a detailed set of information on particular topics (sports, politics, etc.)  
-High awareness of utility of information and quick facility in processing information judged to be useful<sup>vi</sup>

My decision to focus on this stage is well supported by the new requirements for Common Core State Standards as presented in Appendix A. This lesson should begin with brief notes in order to build background, simply placing the definition on the Promethean Board and having students write it down flies in the face of our

technologically savvy proponents. Yet they will not have the last word when it comes to effective education! Students need to process information as many times as possible in order to not only develop a deeper understanding, but also to make the connection a viable one that they will pull from their repertoire of skills. I suggest an initial definition, then an activity that will create a graphic aid much like the bubble map. Once a new term is introduced and students work to develop relevance, the road is open to travel in numerous directions. This unit will allow students to review texts from various sources, actually deconstructing the passages, commentaries, films, prose, and poetry while developing a frame of reference for identifying perspective at work.

While not exhaustive or all required, the following list of materials has been utilized in creating this unit. An educator may certainly add or subtract items in order to expand or diversify the scope of this unit. Our primary focus is upon bringing perspective to the forefront of any text analysis, thereby equipping students to actually intelligently determine the validity, value, or view of most any form of texts they encounter in life. The selections may be modified, in regards to the novels or movie, and the excerpts certainly may be expanded depending on the academic level of a class.

#### Material List

1. *Black and White* by David Macaulay<sup>vii</sup>
2. *Mama Makes Up Her Mind* by Bailey White<sup>viii</sup>
3. *Theme for English B* by Langston Hughes
4. Internet access-You Tube
5. The movie, *Driving Miss Daisy*

#### Excerpts from the following:

1. *Columbia Critical Guides* Mark Twain *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*<sup>ix</sup>
2. *Writing in the Dark* David Grossman<sup>x</sup>
3. “News in regards to the film ‘The Help,’” Association of Black Women Historians
4. *Los Angeles Times* “Stuart Murder Shreds White Myths of Racial Harmony, Revealing Black Reality: Underside: The black view of Charles Stuart’s criminal brilliance is in the way he was able to prey upon white fear and bigotry.”

The materials listed will be utilized in the specific activities designed to enhance narrative acquisition. The selection of *Black and White* allows students to consider a visual connection with four different perspectives of the same story. This will not only open discussion and learning opportunities about the importance of fiction vs. non-fiction in determining and understanding perspective, but it lends itself to numerous interpretations from the perspective of the student. *Mama Makes up Her Mind* is an age appropriate novel that chronicles an emerging viewpoint by the narrator; motive-action-consequences are consistent throughout the novel and provide building blocks for

developing *skepticism*. The diversity of culture, gender, and class become meaningful when presented in a light-hearted text with which students can easily engage.

Stair-stepping up to *Theme for English B* allows students to incorporate some irony, thereby strengthening their capability to analyze text more critically, seeking a deeper or secondary meaning. The text complexity is increasing two-fold with this poem, experiencing a quantum leap with the excerpts noted below. The *You Tube* video clips create a specifically visual representation of perspective, differentiating to such a degree that students should encounter an “Ah-ha” moment. The educator has now introduced a tangible vehicle that will prove to be the major building blocks toward sharpening differences between likes and dislikes, thereby developing skepticism.

The selection of the 1989 Academy Award winning movie, *Driving Miss Daisy* is an excellent text to utilize in presenting a curriculum unit delving into the importance of “reading” visual clues in order to uncover deeper meanings. The film features cultural differences in terms of class, race, gender, age, and religious commitment that the characters presumably overcome to achieve shared perspectives. At the same time, the film proposes racial harmony from a predominantly white perspective (through the changes undergone by a white protagonist in relationship to an African American employee). Historical fiction contains elements of non-fiction, and the viewer would have the opportunity to focus on the evidence that is real in contrast with the persuasively creative “modifications” made from the perspective of screenwriters, directors, producers, and actors. Evaluating the standpoints of these various agents would demonstrate comprehension of complex material, and would be a tangible way to introduce students to the idea that films are written and performed from culturally powerful perspectives.

Each of the excerpted texts has been selected in order to further diversify the perspectives with which students will interact. The questions of shared and/or competing values and standpoints can complicate students’ ability to stand up for their own values while still understanding (and perhaps being influenced by) the perspectives of diverse others. Studying historical documents that reveal possible racial prejudices can in fact help students create a framework by which to develop their own *less* prejudicial filter. Mark Twain’s novels give an educator the latitude to incorporate parts of his stories, relevant in the fact that the main characters are the same age as our students, while providing a historical foundation that opens up questions of context. David Grossman’s writings bring in a cultural aspect that is currently very relevant. An educator might simply click on the news or access videos posted days or hours ago and controversy, with divergent perspectives relegated to ethnicity and religious commitment, are immediately available. *The Help* is a movie that also chronicles historical events, but looks at them through the eyes of female historians in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century, thereby introducing the relevance of gender and class. The final item is the article from a newspaper -- an excellent summation that combines numerous viewpoints in an exciting and somewhat

titillating manner. The more varied the perspectives and viewpoints presented in this unit, the more frequently individual students will experience an epiphany. When a student understands and believes in the validity of a skill/element they are more likely to embed that in their own personal perspective.

### **Classroom Activities:**

With the elimination of a true pacing guide, no doubt because of the new Common Core adoption, I have constructed my activities to be considered in chronological order. In lieu of delving into the micromanagement of each activity, in the body of this curriculum unit, I am making references to the general information covered by each activity. Specific details and suggestions for utilization will appear on each of the appendices referenced. The key points, addressing Common Core Standards, are referred to in this reference:

Activity 1 -- Using a white board or Promethean Board define “Perspective” and have students engage in an association activity (see Appendix B). This is a 10 to 15 minute activity that will develop initial understanding, allow brainstorming to develop interest, and convey a large degree of information to the educator regarding the need for additional background building depending on the classroom’s level of understanding. The You Tube clips will further enhance students’ grasp of the concept. Illustrated in the appendix are a few more concepts, quotes, or statements that may be introduced in order to generate deeper discussion and better understanding of the elements of perspective. This activity begins the ascent up the staircase of text complexity while refining speaking and listening skills.

Activity 2 -- There are a wide array of scenes and visuals that speak volumes about characters, theme, plot, and conflict without a word being uttered. Often hidden, or simply not considered, are the various perspectives in operation. This activity will introduce students to a skill referred to as “Close Reading” cited by numerous theorists. Students will understand how to connect plot elements while focusing on evidence from the information to support their opinions. Appendix C and D outline the use of excerpts from David Grossman’s book *Writing in the Dark* and the Association of Black Women Historians’ comments on the movie *The Help*. Students should use a current frame of reference in order to bring meaning to the significance of visual messages in *The Help*...what inferences might be drawn and how well would they be supported by our current cultural/societal norms and standards? A dramatic leap should be experienced in sharpening the difference between their likes and dislikes.

Activity 3 -- Utilizing either the entire article or educator selected portions, have students read the Los Angeles Times article regarding the Charles Stuart murder/suicide that took place in 1989. Students will utilize a graphic organizer, noting the facts regarding the events, the individual statements (fact or fiction) from key parties and then seek to establish an identifiable perspective. Students should further discuss the reasons

(rationale) behind the development and use of perspectives, both positive and negative. This article introduces numerous causes, internal and external, for the actual development of varied perspectives. Reference is also made about the murder of Yusef Hawkins, this representing another facet for consideration in focusing on evidence to lay the groundwork for student transition to Messaris's stage of *Intensive Development*<sup>xi</sup> (Appendix E)

Activity 4 -- Using poetry we begin the march through linear text to reach the culminating film event, where media literacy can become not only a reality in the framework of language arts studies, but also generate greater understanding and respect for the power of *perspective*. Noted on Appendix F is an activity that begins with students reading Langston Hughes' *Theme for English*, skipping to excerpts from Bailey White's *Mamma Makes up Her Mind*, and culminating with an excerpt from Columbia Critical Guides reviews of *Mark Twain/Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*. This may very well be the most tedious of activities as students now encroach upon some philosophical aspects of perspective and divergent points of view that may take too much time to fully explain. This unit is designed to be an introductory effort, but it certainly must embody several tenants of critical thinking in order to build the necessary foundation for future studies. These activities reflect an opportunity for students to interact with material that requires judgments about credibility.

Activity 5 -- Using the award winning book *Black and White* by David Macaulay, students will seek to observe the four different perspectives of the "story" being told. Groups of four, as clarified in Appendix G, would best demonstrate the elements of perspective we've utilized in the previous activities, while illustrating the reality of differing perspectives for each of the four stories. Bias is overtly evident in each of the stories thereby allowing students to develop skepticism regarding the validity of the perspective of the narrator/main character. Students should engage in small group discussions in order to evaluate the voices being heard.

Activity 6 -- Perspective will be the foundational component tying in each activity. An anchor is needed as that a unit with this degree of diversity might find itself "twigging out" as opposed to the normal extension of learning that is a manageable "branching out" to provide relevancy. Utilizing a movie full of interesting, creative, and often comical visuals is just the ticket to actively engage middle school students that are age 11 to 14 while fulfilling each of the required transitions of Common Core. From the comical visual of the missing salmon can in Miss Daisy's pantry to her daughter-in-law's festive Santa Claus decorated front yard (with the hilarious quip, from Miss Daisy about her daughter-in-law, "If old man Fryer could see this he'd rise up out of the grave and snatch her baldheaded") students will be engaged with a series of visuals that practically scream ethnic diversity, racial tension, and, ultimately, *perspective* amidst the series of obvious cultural differences. *Driving Miss Daisy* is the most comprehensive vehicle to finalize this unit. It embodies each of the Common Core Standards in a delightfully



engaging way. This movie will allow students to slow down, look for visual clues, unlock several doors of meaning, and generally feel confident about their grasp of perspective.

In Appendix H several activities will be presented -- most all are group efforts. In one activity, Setting, Characterization and Theme might be the specific vehicle to focus upon when making connections. For example, one group will analyze the importance of Hoke Colburn helping start the service elevator at the Werthan Manufacturing Plant (Characterization). Another group would review the significance of the racist officers portrayed on the side of the road with their motorcycles and Hoke leaning against the new 1959 Cadillac finishing his lunch (Theme). Finally, a group would have the joy of analyzing Boolie's front yard at Christmas time (setting) while reflecting on Miss Daisy's quip.

**Summation:**

Life may not be a cruise in the backseat of a chauffeur driven automobile for 99% of the world, but could it be a "nicer ride" for most of us that are equipped to not only "read" obvious verbal and non-verbal communication prevalent in all societies, but reach consensus in some of the shared needs and fulfillments by understanding that we all see, experience, and relay information with a specific *perspective*. Knowing how to identify and understand different perspectives may well launch the first steps toward a "Global Society."

## **Appendix A- Implementing Common Core Standards**

The state of North Carolina recently adopted Common Core as the new path to educating students in a cross curricular, vertical planned education system spanning the mandatory twelve years of public schooling. Author Robert Rothman, a senior fellow at the Alliance for Excellent Education, has succinctly organized and explained the key points that this Curriculum Unit seeks to fulfill.<sup>xii</sup>

***More Nonfiction*** -- Reflecting the fact that students will read primarily expository texts after high school, the Standards call for a much greater emphasis on nonfiction. The document proposes that about half the reading in elementary school and 75 percent in high school should be nonfiction.

***Focus on Evidence*** -- In reading, students will be expected to use evidence to demonstrate their comprehension of texts and to read closely in order to make evidence-based claims. To prepare them to do so, teachers will need to take time to read carefully with their students and in many cases reread texts several times. In writing, students are expected to cite evidence to justify statements rather than rely on opinions or personal feelings.

***“Staircase” of Text Complexity*** -- Students will be expected to read and comprehend increasingly complex texts in order to reach the level of complexity required for success in college courses and the workplace...teachers will have to choose materials that are appropriate for their grade level...

***Speaking and Listening*** -- The Standards expect students to be able to demonstrate that they can speak and listen effectively -- two aspects of literacy rarely included in state standards. One of the consortia developing assessments to measure student performance against the Standards will create a speaking and listening assessment. Expect to see teachers asking students to engage in small-group and whole-class discussions and evaluating them on how well they understand the speakers' points.

***Literacy in the Content Areas*** -- The Standards include criteria for literacy in history/social science, science, and technical subjects. This reflects a recognition that understanding texts in each of these subject areas requires a unique set of skills and that instruction in understanding, say, a historical document is an integral part of teaching history. This means that history teachers will need to spend time making sure that students are able to glean information from a document and make judgments about its credibility. Science teachers will need to do the same with materials in that discipline.<sup>xiii</sup>



## Appendix C

“You Tube” clips will build background so that students, in groups of two (I create A/B partners within the first 20 days of school, trying to match personalities initially, then progressing to partnerships that work cohesively for the benefit of both learners.) You may also conduct an informed “close reading” of the excerpts noted after the film clips.

“Set in Mississippi during the civil rights movement of the early 1960s, *The Help* is about ‘a southern society girl who returns from college determined to become a writer, but turns her friends’ lives—and a small Mississippi town—upside down when she decides to interview the black women who have spent their lives taking care of prominent southern families.’”<sup>xv</sup>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVTMkINRChk> Official Trailer

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHie49y6Fwc&feature=relmfu> Official Featurette

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orLFKUH2AFU&feature=relmfu> Characterization of Aibileen

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaEJxGsP8rY&feature=fvwrel> Characterization of Skeeter

Place one each, of the three following quotes, from the Association of Black Women Historians commentary “An Open Statement to the Fans of *The Help*,” on individual sheets of paper with the following questions after each:

- Summarize/paraphrase the quote.
  - How is this quote instrumental in determining the perspective of the writer(s)? Give a specific reference from the quote to justify your conjecture (opinion).
  - What are the author’s specific reasons/goals for making these assertions (comments) about the book/movie?
  - Do you agree or disagree with the comment? Support your position by noting the facts from the quote that support your inference.
1. “Both versions of *The Help* also misrepresent African American speech and culture. Set in the South, the appropriate regional accent gives way to a child-like, over-exaggerated, “black” dialect. In the film, for example, the primary character, Aibileen, reassures a young white child that, “You is smat, you is kind, you is important.” In the book, black women refer to the Lord as the “Law,” an

irreverent depiction of black vernacular. For centuries, black women and men have drawn strength from their community institutions. The black family, in particular provided support and the validation of personhood necessary to stand against adversity. We do not recognize the black community described in *The Help* where most of the black male characters are depicted as drunkards, abusive, or absent. Such distorted images are misleading and do not represent the historical realities of black masculinity and manhood.<sup>»xvi</sup>

2. “We respect the stellar performances of the African American actresses in this film. Indeed, this statement is in no way a criticism of their talent. It is, however, an attempt to provide context for this popular rendition of black life in the Jim Crow South. In the end, *The Help* is not a story about the millions of hardworking and dignified black women who laboured in white homes to support their families and communities. Rather, it is the coming-of-age story of a white protagonist, who uses myths about the lives of black women to make sense of her own. The Association of Black Women Historians finds it unacceptable for either this book or this film to strip black women’s lives of historical accuracy for the sake of entertainment.<sup>»xvii</sup>
  
3. “During the 1960s, the era covered in *The Help*, legal segregation and economic inequalities limited black women's employment opportunities. Up to 90 percent of working black women in the South laboured as domestic servants in white homes. *The Help*’s representation of these women is a disappointing resurrection of Mammy—a mythical stereotype of black women who were compelled, either by slavery or segregation, to serve white families. Portrayed as asexual, loyal, and contented caretakers of whites, the caricature of Mammy allowed mainstream America to ignore the systemic racism that bound black women to back-breaking, low paying jobs where employers routinely exploited them. The popularity of this most recent iteration is troubling because it reveals a contemporary nostalgia for the days when a black woman could only hope to clean the White House rather than reside in it...<sup>»xviii</sup>

## Appendix D

While it is not necessary that students know the specific details regarding the Israel/Palestinian conflict, it would be ideal to give a brief tutorial to outline the living conditions/conflict in the region. The students at South Charlotte Middle School have some background knowledge gained in preparation for second quarter novels dealing with the issues.

Using the “Deconstruction” model shown below, students with partners or in small groups will “unlock” the following excerpt.

### Deconstruction

The following is an outline for breaking down information within your text/passage:

1. Write down at least 3 unfamiliar words. This may include new words or words that you’ve not previously seen used in this context.
2. Develop at least one (1) question after reading the text.
3. Write down an example for each of the following that you discover:
  - a. Theme
  - b. Symbolism
  - c. Figurative Language (figure of speech)
  - d. Characterization
  - e. Point of view
  - f. Main idea
  - g. clues for Tone and Mood
4. In sentence form, write down anything you deem important to the overall story line, anything that may be confusing or something that makes you go AHA!
5. Finally, CONNECT with this/these page(s). What information, scenario or lesson can you apply to your own world?<sup>xix</sup>

Excerpt from David Grossman’s book *Writing in the Dark*<sup>xx</sup>

“The word of the mouse from Kafka’s short story ‘A Little Fable’ comes to mind. As the trap closes in on the mouse and the cat prowls beyond, he says, ‘Alas the world is growing smaller every day.’ After many years of living in an extreme and violent state of political, military, and religious conflict, I am sad to report that Kafka’s mouse was right: the world is indeed growing narrower, every day. I can also tell you about the void that slowly emerges between the individual and the violent, chaotic state that encompasses practically every aspect of life.”<sup>xxi</sup>

## Appendix E

Using a graphic organizer, students will note the facts regarding the events, the individual statements (fact or fiction) from key parties and then seek to establish an identifiable perspective. Students should further discuss the reasons (rationale) behind the development and use of perspectives -- both positive and negative. Ultimately, students are seeking Cause/Effect relationships that are present in order to better understand the *need* for understanding of perspective before a problem/perception can be changed.<sup>xxii</sup>

EVENT	CAUSE EFFECT	STATED OPINION(S)	INFERENCE
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1.

# Los Angeles Times

Stuart Murder Shreds White Myths of Racial Harmony, Revealing Black Reality : Underside: The black view of Charles Stuart's criminal brilliance is in the way he was able to prey upon white fear and bigotry. **January 21, 1990** | David Dante Troutt | *David Dante Troutt, a writer who grew up in Harlem, is a student at Harvard Law School*

BOSTON — Following the endless ripples of Charles Stuart's dive into the Mystic River, there remain two views to a kill--mainstream society's portrayals on the one hand and the undercurrent of black community perspectives on the other. The bizarre sequence of events split all Boston: the point-blank murder of a pregnant white woman and the wounding of her husband as they drove from a birthing class; the sweeping manhunt through the city's mean streets for an anonymous black killer, and the dramatic suicide that brought Stuart's criminal hoax to the surface.

But there is an underside to the myths that masked Stuart's plot, a quiet and terrible understanding that many urban blacks know all too well will not die with him. The feeding frenzy that sent white politicians railing, the police rampaging and the press ravaging relied on a diet of myths about good and evil, rich and poor and white and black.

For many blacks, the perspective is different. The view from down under revealed a reality in which our lives, losses and communities once again meant less than those of the mainstream white Establishment. Yet in the eternal damnation of American race relations, it is critical that the views coalesce if ever we are to see the way out of these crises.

Following the 1989 murder of Yusef Hawkins in Bensonhurst, David Dinkins, campaigning for mayor of New York, said a mayor sets the tone for a city. The tone in Boston was set on Oct. 23 as viewers watched Mayor Raymond L. Flynn, in a sweat suit, pacing the halls of the intensive-care unit with late-night camera crews. By morning, Carol Stuart was dead. The news in Boston was that Flynn might declare a state of emergency. Republican legislators had already called for reinstatement of the death penalty, and Democratic gubernatorial candidate Frank Belotti promised to pull the switch himself. Within weeks of William Bennett's arrest for the murder, it seemed Belotti might get his chance.

While politicians and the media eagerly accepted Stuart's tale, many from down under hungered for answers to our questions. What yuppie couple drives through an unsafe neighborhood without locking their doors? How often does a crazed crack addict scheme to hijack a car stopped at a busy intersection? If

Bennett's fear was that Stuart, watching him in the rear-view mirror, was a cop, why didn't he shoot him? Why would a felon brag aloud about his crimes during one of Boston's greatest manhunts?

But such inquiries could barely come up from down under in the immediate aftermath of the murder. Mainstream Boston was engrossed in pages upon pages of Stuart family lore, infinite press angles on the human sides of loss. We met their friends. We took long looks through their photo albums. We cried over Stuart's love letter read at his wife's funeral. Every fantasy was indulged. The you-and-me couple from Revere epitomized everything up-and-coming, the American dream snuffed out by a black savage on a dark detour through hell.

But back underground, the reality that the Stuarts were "them," not "us," struck hard. While Mission Hill residents held candlelight vigils for Carol at neighborhood churches, their mourning was accompanied by stop-and-frisk sweeps outside. Constitution be damned: A black man was responsible, so Flynn called out 100 additional cops and all available detectives. Even the dogs were out. Like Washington Heights in New York and South-Central Los Angeles, Mission Hill was on the list of urban war zones.

Somehow, in logic of the mainstream, Greater Roxbury and Mission Hill were responsible. James Moody, a black man who died of gunshot wounds just hours before Carol Stuart, was responsible. Alan Swanson, a black, homeless man who spent three weeks as a suspect in jail because he wore a black sweat suit and squatted in the Mission Hill projects, was responsible.

Nightsticks at our back, asphalt to our lips, "nigger" in our ears: We would all go down with Willie Bennett.

Of course there is no united black "underground" opinion--only what is forced on us as unwilling adversaries in crime-waves-turned-race-wars. Whatever our individual differences, blacks are all rounded up with the usual suspects when the crime is right--as I have learned from experience.

Locked into race by pride and accident, we are compelled toward the natural comparisons of public pain. Like the black woman in the Bronx, raped and thrown down an elevator shaft the night the Central Park jogger was attacked. Like the black grandmother in Los Angeles, killed by gang gunfire days after an Asian woman's death in Westwood touched off the first million-dollar police sweeps.

Even our fictional public pain hails from the underside. Discussions following Spike Lee's movie, "Do the Right Thing," often revealed that white viewers saw the crisis peak in Mookie's destruction of Sal's pizza window, while most blacks saw the climax in Radio Raheem's death at the hands of police.



## Appendix F

Students will individually read Langston Hughes' *Theme for English B*, then an excerpt from Bailey White's *Mamma Makes up Her Mind*, culminating with an excerpt from Columbia Critical Guides reviews of *Mark Twain/Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*. This unit is designed to be an introductory effort, but it certainly must embody several tenants of critical thinking in order to build the necessary foundation for future studies. Using a modified Venn diagram or other graphic organizer, students will need to determine the intended audience, support their decision with facts from the text(s), and identifying the overlap between the three items. This exercise strengthens the ability for students to determine perspective based upon intended audience.

### Audience Analysis/ Types of Audiences

#### 1. Audience (analysis)/Types of Audiences-

- Who is the intended or target audience?
- Who is the text/film written for?
- What signs, images, language or social practices are present that imply that audience?
- Am I being “positioned” to think or feel a certain way while reading
- How would this have value or importance?

## THEME FOR ENGLISH B

By Langston Hughes

The instructor said,  
Go home and write  
a page tonight.  
And let that page come out of you---  
Then, it will be true.  
I wonder if it's that simple?  
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.  
I went to school there, then Durham, then here  
to this college on the hill above Harlem.  
I am the only colored student in my class.  
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem  
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,  
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,  
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator  
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me  
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what  
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:  
hear you, hear me---we two---you, me, talk on this page.  
(I hear New York too.) Me---who?  
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.  
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.  
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,  
or records---Bessie, bop, or Bach.  
I guess being colored doesn't make me NOT like  
the same things other folks like who are other races.  
So will my page be colored that I write?  
Being me, it will not be white.  
But it will be  
a part of you, instructor.  
You are white---  
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.  
That's American.  
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.  
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.  
But we are, that's true!  
As I learn from you,  
I guess you learn from me---  
although you're older---and white---  
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

## Appendix F (continued)

**Excerpt from “Mama Makes up Her Mind”<sup>xxiv</sup>** And there.’ She told me, ‘we saw the most exciting thing one can see while on board a ship at sea-another ship!’ The night was dark, and the only sound was the lapping of the waves. Mrs. Bierce says she doesn’t remember whether it was warm or cold-only the sight of the magnificent ship lit up from bow to stern, silently gliding past in the night. The silence, the blackness of the water, and the remoteness of the passing ship made her think of great depth and the mysteries of things she did not know. The captain’s voice startled her when he finally spoke.”

‘Take a good look, my child,’ he told her, ‘You are seeing history in the making, for that ship is no ordinary one, but the greatest ship ever built. It is the RMS *Titanic* on her maiden voyage.’

The ice tinkles in our glasses. I don’t eat the last cheese wafer. Mrs. Bierce’s eye wanders of somewhere. It certainly has been an interesting life.”

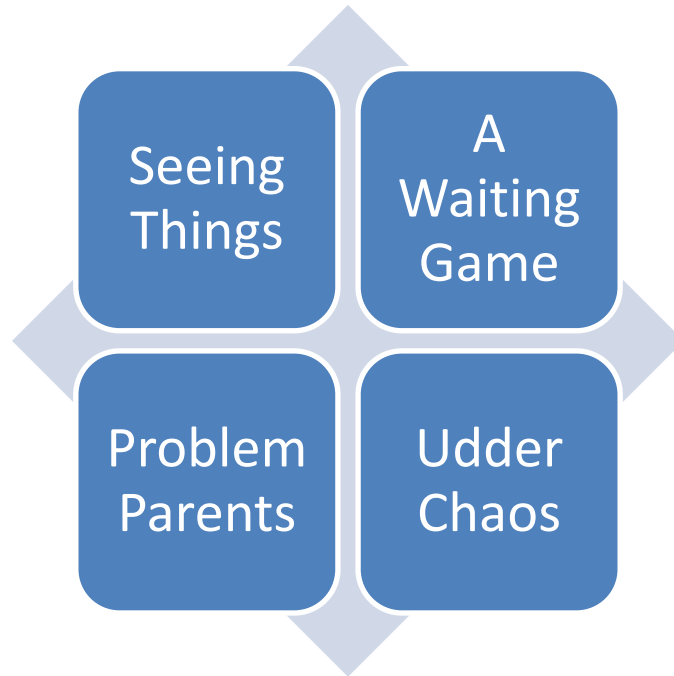
## **Excerpt from Columbia Critical Guides *Mark Twain*<sup>xxv</sup>**

“In July of 1876, exactly one century after the American Declaration of Independence, Mark Twain began writing *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: a novel which illustrates trenchantly the social imitations which American ‘civilisation’ imposes upon individual freedom. The book takes special note of ways in which racism impinges upon the lives of Afro-Americans, even when they are legally ‘free’. It is therefore ironic that *Huckleberry Finn* has often been attacked and even censored as a racist work. I would argue, on the contrary...*Huckleberry Finn* is without peers among major Euro-American novels for its explicitly anti-racist stance. Those who brand the book ‘racist’ generally do so without having considered the specific form of racial discourse to which the novel responds.”

## Appendix G

### **Black and White** by David Macauley

The four “different” stories are laid out top to bottom and left to right, with each story maintaining its “location” on subsequent pages:



Each group will segregate their specific story, as assigned, and identify the following

#### **-Characters**

**-Plot Diagram (noting key events and resolutions)**

**-Theme or message**

**-Point of View, who is the speaker in each story?**

**-Audience, who specifically is the story “talking to”?**

**-Characterization (details in the illustrations)**

#### **-Perspective...support with details to validate your opinion/conjecture**

**-Unified Message of the stories (this should have a great deal of variance)**

**-Illustration that best symbolizes the story’s plot**

**-specific line or illustration that gave a clue for perspective**

## Appendix H

Various activities, to accompany viewing of the film, include the following. Each activity should illicit responses regarding the perspective of which the scene/scenes are filmed, who the intended audience is and finally, the desired response. Students should be able to answer the “why” of perspective at this juncture.

**Compare and Contrast:** There are a wide array of scenes and visuals that speak volumes about characters, theme, plot and conflict without a word being uttered. A *close reading* by students would illicit volumes of information to support their opinions. For example,

- Why the specific brand of salmon and did the label have a hidden meaning?
- The choice of automobiles...why were her cars “dynamic characters”?
- What message was sent when Hoke would purchase the used vehicles from a third party when Miss Daisy made a new purchase -- was it just a great deal?
- How about the television shows Idella watched -- specifically the one that was on when she fell over with a probable heart attack?

Students should use a current frame of reference in order to bring meaning to the significance of visual messages. What inferences might be drawn and how well would they be supported by our current cultural/societal norms and standards?

**Historical Fiction Relevancy:** Since a great many of the historical references utilized in the movie may have limited impact on students in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, at great loss for a deeper appreciation of their significance and value in determining *perspective*, a more current connection should be sought. Via limited research, with the educator providing a series of web sites, students will draw upon current events to substitute for the scenes in the movie. For example, the 9/11 crisis may have more weight than the bombing of the synagogue and lynching...vitriolic opposing views are evidenced without resolved unity currently being experienced. The use of domestics and chauffeurs may need to be replaced with Nannies or personal trainers/secretaries. The virtually defunct manufacturing plant might need to be a designer clothing manufacturer or computer store. Instead of Piggly-Wiggly, what about Trader Joes or the “Teeter”?

Once different, more relevant connections are created, students need to gauge the actual changes to the story line and offer new visuals (settings). Is Hoke now a “Ms. Doubtfire” of sorts with Miss Daisy the “Miranda” of said film? Is the ever changing dinner table going to replace the automobile and the title “Feeding Miss Daisy” (no pun referencing the original movie’s ending!)? The possibilities are endless and would represent a fun and inventive way of extending the lesson.

## Appendix H (continued)

**Movie Poster:** Our right brain creative students will leap for joy as this opportunity is introduced. Students would have the opportunity to include themselves in a movie poster advertising a new version (or for differentiating purposes the original) selecting the character they would most like to change places with. The transition would also allow the students to choose their own scenes, venue and specifically, characterization elements that would add a personal touch. The males would be excited about “burning rubber” -- we might have a new \$160,000 Bugatti and Miss Daisy hanging on for dear life as they hit I-485 early one weekend morning.

The prospects are endless as we entertain the world of a teenager struggling through the normal angst of maturing, with physiological, emotional and academic “change”... Clearasil meets American Eagle or Android hits the books... Who has the “correct” perspective?

Students should be able to understand, appreciate and replicate scenes, shots and settings that lend credence to the reality of *perspective*: What should an encouraging and motivating movie, trailer, or instructional video include to arouse the interest of a teenager? What visuals will really capture their attention and speak volumes across a multi-cultural gathering? How could we portray deeper sensitivity and effort toward bridging the differences in our society to a point of greater harmony? How do we avoid being stalled on the side of the road, eliminated from the race toward greater understanding, if the reality of *perspective* is not a key component for all learning?

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## End Notes

<sup>i</sup>Cottle, Simon. "A Rock and a Hard Place: Making Ethnic Minority Television." In *Ethnic Minorities and the Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000.

<sup>ii</sup>Bailes, Lisa, comp. *South Charlotte Middle School -School Improvement Plan*. Report. Accessed November 12, 2012.

<sup>iii</sup>Brummett, Barry. "Chapter 2 Theories, Methods, Techniques." In *Techniques of Close Reading*, 36. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010.

<sup>iv</sup>Messaris, P. "Visual Aspects of Media Literacy." *Journal of Communication* 48, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 70-80. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1998.tb02738.x.

<sup>v</sup> *ibid*

<sup>vi</sup> *ibid*

<sup>vii</sup> *Black and White* David Macaulay Houghton Mifflin Company Boston 1990

<sup>viii</sup> *Mamma Makes Up Her Mind and other Dangers of Southern Living* Bailey White Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Reading, Massachusetts 1993

<sup>ix</sup> *Columbia Critical Guides Mark Twain Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn* Edited by Stuart Hutchinson Columbia University Press New York 1998

<sup>x</sup> *Writing in the Dark* David Grossman translated from the Hebrew by Jessica Cohen Farrar, Straus and Giroux New York 2008

<sup>xi</sup>Messaris, P. "Visual Aspects of Media Literacy." *Journal of Communication* 48, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 70-80. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1998.tb02738.x.

<sup>xii</sup>Rothman, Robert. "Nine Ways the Common Core Will Change Classroom Practice." *Harvard Education Letter*. 2011. Accessed November 16, 2012. <http://www.hepg.org/hel/article/543>.

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xiii *ibid*

xiv "Stock Photos and Royalty Free Image Subscription from 123RF Stock Photography." 123RF Stock Photos. November 24, 2012. Accessed November 26, 2012.  
<http://www.123rf.com/similar-images/7356829>.

xv "The Help." IMDb. Accessed November 26, 2012.  
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1454029/plotsummary>.

xvi Black Women, Historians. "An Open Statement to the Fans of The Help." News in Regards to the Film 'The Help' Accessed November 26, 2012.  
<http://40acres.com/news/50-news-in-regards-to-the-film-the-help>.

xvii *Ibid*

xviii *Ibid*

xix *Brooke Blaylock*. October 12, 2004. Fellow Educator, South Charlotte Middle School, Charlotte.

xx *Writing in the Dark* David Grossman translated from the Hebrew by Jessica Cohen Farrar, Straus and Giroux New York 2008

xxi *Ibid*

xxii Troutt, David D. "Stuart Murder Shreds White Myths of Racial Harmony, Revealing Black Reality." *Los Angeles Times* (Boston), January 21, 1990.

xxiii "Langston Hughes: Theme for English B." Langston Hughes: Theme for English B. Accessed November 26, 2012.  
[http://www.eecs.harvard.edu/~keith/poems/English\\_B.html](http://www.eecs.harvard.edu/~keith/poems/English_B.html).

xxiv *Mamma Makes Up Her Mind and other Dangers of Southern Living* Bailey White Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Reading, Massachusetts 1993 pg 147

xxv *Columbia Critical Guides Mark Twain Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn* Edited by Stuart Hutchinson Columbia University Press New York 1998 page 13



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## **Annotated Resources**

Macaulay, David. *Black and White*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.

This award winning publication is both colorful and creative. Four stories are told, on two pages open side by side so that the reader can follow all of the various plots with each turn of the page. One story begins with two children at home awaiting their parents' normal return from work. The next is from the perspective of a crowd waiting for a commuter train bringing them home from a day at work. The third story captures a passenger's view- a young boy who is on an adventure of his life. The final perspective, probably the most difficult to understand, is from the cows' perspective -- they are blocking the tracks and have a criminal element. Lexile: 600+

White, Bailey. *Mamma Makes Up Her Mind and other Dangers of Southern Living*. Reading, Massachusetts, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993.

This light-hearted novelette is just the thing to provide easy reading with lots of laughter and perspective galore. It is valuable in helping middle school students grasp the "motive-action-consequence" component of literacy development. A daughter chronicles her mother's zany acts and choices. In one memorable scene the narrator's sister delays the family leaving for church because she does not like the way her new "pencil thin" dress fits. Their delay causes them to take a short cut which can be muddy and sure enough, they land stuck right smack in the middle of the road and are delayed further as they get help. The sticky mess is just one of the many laughs and perspectives clearly illustrated.