

ED 398 601

CS 215 463

AUTHOR Grayson, Sandra M.
 TITLE Transcending the Lamentations of Non-Identification: Approaches to Teaching Students Ways To Write about 19th Century Black Literature.
 PUB DATE Mar 96
 NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (47th, Milwaukee, WI, March 27-30, 1996).
 PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Black Literature; Higher Education; *Literature Appreciation; *Nineteenth Century Literature; Student Attitudes; Teaching Methods; *Writing Assignments; *Writing Instruction; Writing Strategies
 IDENTIFIERS *Composition Literature Relationship; Slave Narratives

ABSTRACT

Most college students are not accustomed to writing about, reading, analyzing, or discussing 19th-century Black literature, especially slave narratives. As many educators try to include more Black literature in their curriculums, there is a growing need to develop successful methods to approach the texts so that students are prepared to write quality papers about Black literature. Some successful techniques for helping students move away from the "lamentations of non-identification" are: (1) remind students, by example, that they do not have to identify with the text to write about it; (2) use a structure moving students from background information about the text to an analysis of writing about the work; (3) incorporate multidimensional techniques to the study of the literature, such as using music; (4) use an interdisciplinary approach to texts; and (5) use a structure of modules for courses, moving students from one theme to another with continuity. (CR)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Grayson

**Transcending the Lamentations of Non-Identification:
Approaches to Teaching Students Ways to Write
About 19th Century Black Literature¹**

by Sandra M. Grayson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The Scene:

Empty handed, Student X entered the room. The most noticeable thing on his face was a pained look. "I'm sorry--I can't write the paper. I'm having problems relating to this text," he said, paused, then sighed. "After all, I was never a Black person in antebellum America," he lamented as he explained what he perceived as an insurmountable barrier between him and a writing assignment about Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.

Although this scene was rarely (if ever) performed in my courses when students studied and wrote about "traditional" canonical texts, I often saw repeat performances when we reached the point in the syllabus dealing with nineteenth century slave narratives and novels by Blacks. The fact that most students are not accustomed to writing about, reading, analyzing, nor discussing nineteenth century Black literature probably

¹I presented this paper at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 27-30, 1996.

helped create this drama. As many educators try more and more to include Black literature in their curriculums, there is a growing need to develop successful methods to approach the texts so that students are prepared to write quality papers about Black literature. In this paper, I outline techniques that I have had success with to help students move away from what I call the "lamentations of non-identification" and toward a serious study and analysis of nineteenth century Black literature.

I. Before beginning a study of Black literature, I inform the students that they do not have to "identify with" the text to write about it; remind them that they were never 18th century white men, yet they effectively wrote about The Algerine Captive; and advise them that the same depth and skill that they used to study and write about works by such people as Thomas Jefferson and Royall Tyler should be applied to the study of Black literature.

II. I use a structure that moves students from background information about the text (giving them a foundation on which to build) to analysis of then writing about the work.

III. I incorporate multidimensional techniques to the study of the literature. For instance, when dealing with the issue of slave song in slave narratives, I give a lecture about slave music then have the students:

A. volunteer to read and discuss the following excerpts from:

1. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl:

The congregation struck up a hymn, and sung as though they were as free as the birds that warbled round us,--

**Ole Satan thought he had a mighty aim;
He missed my soul, and caught my sins.
Cry Amen, cry Amen, cry Amen to God!**

**He took my sins upon his back;
Went muttering and grumbling down to hell.
Cry Amen, cry Amen, cry Amen to God!**

**Ole Satan's church is here below.
Up to God's free church I hope to go.
Cry Amen, cry Amen, cry Amen to God!**

Precious are such moments to the poor slaves. If you were to hear them at such times, you might think they were happy. But can that hour of singing and shouting sustain them through the deary week, toiling without wages, under constant dread of the lash?²

2. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass:

[Slave songs] told a tale of woe. . .they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. . . I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slaves represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only

²Harriet, Jacobs. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Edited by Jean Fagan Yellin. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987.

as an aching heart is relieved by its tears.³

3. My Bondage and My Freedom:

A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of "Canaan, sweet Canaan, I am bound for the land of Canaan," something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the *north*--and the north was our Canaan

**I thought I heard them say,
There were lions in the way,
I don't expect to stay
Much longer here.**

**Run to Jesus--shun the danger--
I don't expect to stay
Much longer here,"**

Was a favorite air, and had a double meaning. In the lips of some, it meant the expectation of a speedy summons to a world of spirits; but, in the lips of *our* company, it simply meant, a speedy pilgrimage toward a free state, and deliverance from all the evils and dangers of slavery.⁴

B. discuss (in small groups) the imagery, symbols, and multiple meanings in three spirituals then make connections back to the passages from the slave narratives.

C. watch a video from the Georgia Sea Islands in which the spirituals are performed. (Thus, the students hear the songs and see people singing--the presentation of the song is also

³Douglass, Frederick. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

⁴Douglass, Frederick. My Bondage and My Freedom. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969.

important in terms of adding dimensions to the text.)

D. discuss the three spirituals and the passages in the slave narratives in connection with the performance of the songs in the video.

Hence, the students experience a multidimensional approach, rather than the one dimensional dynamic that occurs from just reading the text.

IV. Since most Black literature incorporates the subject matters of multiple disciplines, I have found that an interdisciplinary approach to the texts that takes into account literature, history, music, and folklore is extremely helpful.

V. I designed a structure of modules for my courses from which the students move from one theme to another as well as through history and literature, giving them continuity. For example, the structure for my American Literature course is a three part format:

A. FREEDOM (religious and political--Puritan texts and Thomas Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence," using Jefferson and race as a transition into the second module);

B. SLAVERY (Algeria and America--Royall Tyler's The Algerine Captive, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a

Slave Girl, and Frances Harper's poems "The Slave Auction" and "The Slave Mother," using Jacobs, Harper, and the issue of the treatment of female slaves as a transition into the last module);

C. GENDER (circling back to Puritan writing with Anne Bradstreet's "The Prologue" then moving to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Kate Chopin's "The Storm," and Pauline Hopkins' Contending Forces).

These are some of the techniques that I use to help students overcome the "lamentations of non-identification" and write quality papers about Black literature.



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Paper presented at the 1996 4 C's Meeting (Milwaukee) "Transcending the Lamentations of Non-Identification: Approaches to Teaching Students Ways to Write About 19th Century Black Literature"	
Author(s): Dr. Sandra M. Grayson	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: March 27-30, 1996

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following two options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2 documents



Check here
For Level 1 Release:
Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical) and paper copy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 1



Check here
For Level 2 Release:
Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical), but *not* in paper copy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 2

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Sign here → please

Signature: <i>Sandra M. Grayson</i>	Printed Name/Position/Title: Dr. Sandra M. Grayson Assistant Professor	
Organization/Address: Bentley College English Department, 175 Forest Street Waltham, MA 02154	Telephone: 617-891-2875	FAX: 617-891-2896
	E-Mail Address: sgrayson@bentley.edu	Date: 9-17-96

sgrayson@bentley.edu



III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor: N/A
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name: N/A
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:	<i>Acquisitions</i> ERIC/REC 2805 E. Tenth Street Smith Research Center, 150 Indiana University Bloomington, IN 47408
---	--

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

~~ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
1301 Piccard Drive, Suite 100
Rockville, Maryland 20850-4305~~

Telephone: 301-258-5500
FAX: 301-648-3695
Toll-Free: 800-700-3742
e-mail: eriefac@inet.ed.gov