Blacks In Nature...Oxymoron or Paradox?

Guide for Curriculum Unit 21.01.04
by Cheryl Canino

How do we help African American students connect with nature? How do we frame the narrative, so we don't further victimize students but still acknowledge the historic relationships of involuntary servitude, sharecropping, barred or segregated entry in public parks, "picnics" where black flesh was on the menu, or the invisibility of ancestors by European Americans? This unit seeks to empower students to develop agency to forge relations with nature not restricted by fear or exclusion and reframe their narrative to be included too as stewards of nature?

This unit aims to provide a framework for exploring the fluid construct of nature and environment and its intersectionality with race as an instructional strategy supporting English Language Arts student discussion and comprehension skills. The unit uses visual art reflective of a nonwhite cultural point of view as a launchpad to commence class discussions buttressed by reframed visual images and written literary and nonfiction texts, involving small and whole groups about the construction and deconstruction of the concepts of race and nature. The unit seeks to maximize student assets (how students interact with the text) while minimizing student costs (mandating scripted discussion protocols) before such discussion protocols are learned.

Keywords: Nature, Environment, African American, Black, Black Arts Movement, Landscape, Critical Race Theory, Latinx/Critical Race, TribalCrit, AsianCrit, Western, Discussion Literature Analysis

(Developed for English 2 and English Honors, grade 10; recommended for English Language Arts, grades 7-8; American History, grade 10; and Law, grades 11-12)