

MINNESOTA WRITING PROJECT
DEMONSTRATION LESSON TEMPLATE

Title: When I Set My Hat at a Certain Angle:
Trying on Zora Neale Hurston's Voice to Dress-up Prose

Grade appropriate: 9-12

Approximate length of time to complete lesson: 1-5 days

Objective (s) to be covered:

Know: identify figurative language in prose nonfiction text.

Do: write a personal reflective essay rich in figurative language.

Comprehend: how use of figurative language shapes voice.

Value/ appreciate: the artistry of prose nonfiction by Zora Neale Hurston and others.

Specific standards addressed:

MN, grades 9-12, I.C.4. Analyze a variety of nonfiction materials selected from journals, essays, speeches, biographies and autobiographies.

MN, grades 9-12, I. D.4. Evaluate the impact of an author's decisions regarding word choice, point of view, style and literary elements.

MN, grades 9-12, I. D. 5. Analyze, interpret and evaluate the use of figurative language and imagery in fiction and nonfiction selections, including symbolism, tone, irony and satire.

Brief summary/outline:

This process would work for many prose selections. Some of the information below applies directly to "How It Feels To Be Colored Me" by Zora Neale Hurston.

1. Take apart a piece of prose into 3-4 sections and identify the writer's purpose and choices in each section.
2. Use those notes to draft brainstorming or journal questions, or to create sentence stems to spur writing.
3. Use those questions or stems to do a guided in-class writing that acts both as a pre-reading activity and a first draft.

Guided In-Class Writing for “How It Feels To Be Colored Me”

- ✓ What stereotype could be or has been applied to you?
- ✓ Describe a place where that stereotype has felt uncomfortable, even painful for you.
- ✓ Tell about a time you relied on that stereotype for safety, work avoidance, comfort, winning an argument, etc.
- ✓ Describe a comfortable setting where the stereotype doesn't seem to matter.
- ✓ Brainstorm a list of concrete ways you belong in this comfortable setting (ex: I belong standing on the porch screened in for the summer, bare feet on wood worn smooth from the shuffling of other children's feet.).
- ✓ Take yourself out of these contexts—both comfortable and uncomfortable. Who are you? Write 2 or 3 sentences beginning with “I am...” Make one of those sentences into a metaphor. Extend it if you can.
- ✓ Take a person from your uncomfortable place and put her into your comfortable place. What happens?
- ✓ Give this writing a title: How It Feels To Be _____ Me.

Sentence Stems for “How It Feels To Be Colored Me”

- ✓ I used to be _____, but now I am _____.
- ✓ I belong _____; I don't belong _____.
- ✓ I am _____ (a stereotype), but _____.

4. After sharing and discussing student writings, read and analyze the essay. Cut the essay into 3-4 parts and direct students to analyze one section in groups, focusing on whatever element you chose in step 1. Groups will then present their findings to the class.

5. Assign students to draft a reflective essay that imitates the author's voice by using the elements they discovered in step 4.

Resources:

I Love Myself When I Am Laughing. ed. Alice Walker (a Hurston anthology with insightful introductions)

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