Title of lesson: Paideia Seminar on Maya Angelou’s “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”

Suggested grade/age: Secondary

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: 60-90 minute class period, or extended to 3 class hours (or day 1 guided reading, day 2 seminar in class, day 3 writing).

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:
Students will demonstrate the ability to maintain their own conversation on a common text, moving from in-depth analysis of the text to application to their own lives. This lesson incorporates using student voice and coaching them to be critical questioners of poetry and interpretation. The guided reading and question-based philosophy evens the playing ground for students of all abilities. Seminar offers students who excel in an oral capacity the chance to showcase to their peers (or teachers) who sometimes value the written word more.

Standards addressed for focus:
- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Brief summary/outline of lesson:
This lesson can be used to establish better relationships with students in the classroom, maybe in the late fall of the school year. The end of the seminar can lead to personal story sharing that could make students vulnerable, so a safe and respectful classroom needs to be maintained (and often is through the process of seminar). It could be used as a summative assessment to a poetry unit. I’ve done Socratic seminars in class and then used the same text as the main text in a summative poetry assessment (students perform higher when they are not doing a cold read of a text in a test).

Homework for Seminar Prep: Reading Guide for Angelou’s Poem, including to draw or digitally submit a visual that goes along with a line from the text. Write the quote from the poem, along with the line, on the visual.

Pre-Seminar Activities:
1. Give students AVID Reading Response Guide. Number off 1-6 for another close reading, asking students to mark what they notice in the text.
2. Reading of Caged Bird (digital audio or reading in class)
3. Seminar Rules Reminders (choral reading by students)
Seminar:
1. Round Robin of what students visualized from the text. After all have shared, ask who has a question for someone.
2. Progress through seminar. AVID sequence parallels Paideia progression:
   - Explore the text: Visualize, Summarize
   - Examine the text: Respond, Question, Clarify
   - Extend the text: Make Connections

Post-Seminar: Debrief on the Process. Assign post-seminar written or creative piece.

Related Resources:
- Mortimer Alder (Philosophy and Great Ideas)
- Augsburg College's Summer Paideia Institute for Teachers (24th year 2013)
- AVID or other reading strategies for guided reading
- Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem, "Sympathy," has the same concept of the caged bird singing (Angelou borrowed Dunbar's words in writing her own autobiography).
- Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" or her poem written for Clinton's 1993 Inauguration, "On the Pulse of Morning"
- Target's PDF for teachers "Dream in Color." It states that it is for elementary teachers, but it is usable at many levels.
- World geography and map work? Nikki Giovanni's "Ego Trippin: there may be a reason why"
- For American history, pair Walt Whitman "I Hear America Singing" and Langston Hughes "I Too, Sing America"
- Also look at poets.org and poetryoutloud.org
- See the MWP Wiki for additional uploaded sources.

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

Adaptation:
- Be mindful to assign students who need more processing time the #1 visualization in AVID strategies, that they already reviewed for homework.
- Give special education staff the reading guide and text to review with students ahead of time.

Extensions:
- Write about another analogy, metaphor, or simile you could use for freedom or being caged.
- Draw your own picture from the poem and add a line or two for context (if it wasn't the pre-activity).
- Use the same AVID Reading Strategies in another poem or prose piece.
- Write a literary analysis as a reflection, using lines from text to support your point.

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