

## LESSON PLAN FOR AARON DOUGLAS, *INTO BONDAGE*, 1936

**TITLE: FORESHADOWING HISTORY**

**GRADE LEVEL: SIXTH**

**ACADEMIC SUBJECT: LANGUAGE ARTS AND SOCIAL STUDIES**

### **GOAL/DESCRIPTION:**

*Into Bondage* was the second work of a four part mural series (the first and third are missing). The other surviving part which is also the final of the series is *Aspiration*, which belongs to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Using *Into Bondage* as well as their knowledge of African American history in the United States as a jumping off point, students will act out scenes of a play using foreshadowing. One group's scene will foreshadow the next group's scene and so on.

### **BIG IDEA:**

Chronological works of art foreshadow one another in the same way that scenes in a play foreshadow one another.

### **OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES:**

Students will learn about the history of slavery using Aaron Douglas' *Into Bondage* as a visual reinforcement. Gathering into groups of 5, students will write a scene for a play that will fill in the historical blanks left by Douglas' missing works of art. Students will work as a class to ensure that each group's scene will use **foreshadowing clues\*** to set up the following group's scene. Students will assign characters to each person in the group and act out the scene they wrote for the class (about 7-10 minutes).

**Foreshadowing Clues:** A writer's use of hints or clues to indicate events that will occur in a story. Foreshadowing creates suspense and at the same time prepares the reader for what is to come.

### **TEACHING PROCEDURE/TIME ALLOTTED: ONE WEEK**

#### **MONDAY**

After studying the history of African Americans in the United States, the teacher will introduce *Into Bondage* and give the class a brief description of the painting. She will then divide the class into groups of 5 and have each group brainstorm about their essential questions. The teacher will then explain that the groups will be writing one-scene plays (about 7-10 minutes) based on their ideas that will be acted out for the class. The group will assign each member to a character.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

Based on your historical knowledge of slavery, what do you think *Into Bondage* is representing?

Why do you think the artist chose the colors he did?

What mood do the colors give the art works?

How is the mood of an art work similar to mood created by acting in a play?

Why do you think Douglas chose this scene to start his series?

Why do you think Douglas chose to make the figures in his works silhouettes instead of distinguishable people?

How do things such as word choice, **volume\***, feeling, **tone\***, posture, gestures, **enunciation\***, **plot\***, mood, and emotion effect the overall performance?

Volume: the loudness of a sound

Tone: An expression of a writer's attitude toward a subject. Unlike mood, which is intended to shape the reader's emotional response, tone reflects the feelings of the writer. Tone can be serious, humorous, sarcastic, ironic, bitter, or objective.

Enunciation: to pronounce or articulate clearly all the syllables of a word.

Plot: The action or sequence of events in a story. Plot is usually a series of related incidents that builds and grows as the story develops. There are five basic elements in a plot line: (a) exposition, (b) rising action), (c) climax, (d) falling action, and (e) resolution or denouement.

**TUESDAY**

Students will get into their groups and create a rough draft of their play, stopping periodically to have class discussions.

**WEDNESDAY**

Students will complete their plays and begin to rehearse.

**HOMEWORK: MEMORIZE LINES**

**THURSDAY**

Students will have all of class time to rehearse and work on memorizing their lines

**HOMEWORK: MEMORIZE LINES**

**FRIDAY**

Class time will be dedicated to the performances and assessment. At the end of class, each group will turn in a written copy of their play along with their classmates' assessment. (The students' assessments are a tool for the teacher and

should be taken into consideration, however, the teacher will decide the ultimate grade based on grammar, spelling, and punctuation of the written play along with her own critique of the performance.)

**ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED DIALOGUE QUESTIONS:**

(also found in poster text)

If you had not studied history and the enslavement of Africans, could you still interpret the narrative of this work?

How do you know the people are to become slaves?

How is the composition affected by the **concentric** circles?

The painting is composed of flat planes with visible brushstrokes and no shading. How does the artist achieve depth?

**EXTENDED DIALOGUE QUESTIONS:**

(also found in poster text)

What do think the gesture of the women on the left signifies? Does it indicate hope or despair?

Why do you think Douglas chose not to depict this scene in a naturalistic manner? How does his style alter the meaning or your impression of the work?

Look at the star and its ray of light shining in the middle of the canvas. Why do you think Johnson included the star? How would the mood change if the star was removed? What other symbols could the artist have included to give a sense of hope to the narrative?

This painting was originally part of a four-painting series. If you had three more canvases to complete the series, what scenes from African American history would you choose to convey?

**PLANS FOR DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION:**

If the number of students in the class does not lend itself to dividing into groups of 5, some students who may be more reserved, could take on more of a director's role, or could be in charge of typing out the written play to keep the workload equitable. Each student could write their own interpretation of the paintings in prose rather than script form, then come together to work on the script. Students could paint their interpretations of the 2 missing paintings.

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:**

Aaron Douglas' series of chronological works foreshadow one another through color, theme, and historical events. Scenes in a play foreshadow one another through events that advance plot, giving rise to the next event. The subjects in Douglas' pieces are meant to represent the past in a way that helps all who see them understand the present African American culture. In contrast to portraits, these figures cannot be identified as a distinguished societal member.

Playwrights get inspiration from various sources. Often, they look to historical

events or the everyday lives of individuals to base their stories on.

**KEY KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS:**

(Declarative) Chronological works of art foreshadow one another in the same way that scenes in a play foreshadow one another. (Procedural) Playwrights must execute their writing using such things as **imagery\***, **foreshadowing clues\***, **narration\***, and **suspense\*** so that the audience get a taste of what to expect, and is also excited to see what will happen.

Imagery: Mental pictures, or the idea of a picture that forms in one's head about a specific topic or selection of reading.

Foreshadowing Clues: A writer's use of hints or clues to indicate events that will occur in a story. Foreshadowing creates suspense and at the same time prepares the reader for what is to come.

Narration: the act of telling a story or giving an account of something.

Suspense: a feeling of tense excitement about how something such as a mystery novel will end.

**EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT:**

(Summative) Students will assess one-another's performances based on their ability to work with foreshadowing of the previous scene as well as their ability to set up the scene for the following group. (Formative) As students work in class, the teacher will walk around, stopping to ask each group about their idea and offer suggestions on improving their play.

**MATERIALS/TEACHER RESOURCES:**

Large scale reproduction of Aaron Douglas' *Into Bondage* (Projected digital images would work fine, so that all groups can see it as they work on their scenes)

[http://www.corcoran.org/collection/highlights\\_main\\_results.asp?ID=54](http://www.corcoran.org/collection/highlights_main_results.asp?ID=54)

<http://www.aarondouglas.ku.edu/exhibition/aspiration.shtml>

**TEACHER REFLECTION:**

This assignment gives students the opportunity to put themselves into the artist's shoes and imagine how he would have represented the events captured by the missing paintings. It also allows students to take creative liberties with the figures represented in the painting and act them out in a short play. It brings their attention to how an audience perceives their work while working to improve writing skills (this assignment would be especially good for students whose writing skills might not be on par with their classmates but can really shine while acting. Students should enjoy the script writing aspect as well as working with a friend throughout the process.

### **DEVELOPMENT RATIONALE:**

Most 6th grade students are in the emerging expertise stage of artistic development. In this stage, students become very aware of the difference between themselves and their peers and look to separate themselves from adults. They are drawn to art that can be connected to a specific situation or person rather than something more broad. There is a tendency for students to be self-critical and compare their work to that of other students so it is important for teachers to be sensitive to that possibility. Because of this, teachers may want to pre-assign groups of students who will be more at ease with their peers. If they are assigned to a partner that they are uncomfortable with, the student may be less likely to want to participate.

### **STANDARDS:**

#### LANGUAGE ARTS

- **6.LD-O.6.** Give oral presentations with focus, organization, and point of view, matching purpose, message, occasion, voice modulation, and nonverbal elements to the audience. **6.LT-T.3.** Apply knowledge that theme, whether stated or implied, refers to the basic meaning of a literary text. **6.LT-F.4.** Describe incidents that advance plot in a story or novel, explaining how each incident gives rise to the next or foreshadows a future event.

#### SOCIAL STUDIES

- Places and Regions: Students acquire a framework for thinking geographically, including the location and unique characteristics of places
  - **6.2.2** Give examples and analyze ways in which people's changing views of places and regions reflect cultural change.
  - **6.2.4** Give examples of critical issues that may be region-specific and others that cross regional boundaries within the United States
- Human Systems: Students identify and analyze the human activities that shape Earth's surface, including population numbers, distribution and growth rates, and cultural factors
  - **6.3.1** Explain key migrations patterns and interrelationships among migration, settlement, population distribution patterns, landforms, and climates (e.g., East Indian-Polynesian).
  - **6.3.2** Explain the concept of population dynamics and, through maps, establish current world patterns of population distribution, density, and growth.
  - **6.3.3** Identify the demographic structure of a population and reasons for variations between places, including developing and developed nations.
  - **6.3.4** Relate population growth rates to health statistics, food supply, or other measures of well-being.

- Physical Systems: Students acquire a framework for thinking about Earth's physical systems: Earth-sun relationships, climate and related ecosystems, and land forms.
  - **6.5.5** Describe distinct patterns of natural vegetation and biodiversity and their relations to world climate patterns.