

## **Invincibility, or, Just Believe in Yourself: Using Multicultural Drama in a Special Education Classroom**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Life is a continuous process of personal development and self-actualization. However, the achievement of self-actualization can be hindered by many unknown factors. It is my opinion everyone has his own “internal compass” that can guide and supercede external influences in his environment. Unfortunately, those who don’t know how to “play the game” are usually controlled by others through oppression and manipulation and undermining. One of my mother’s favorite mottos to her children has been, “the sooner persons realize who they are and what they are, the sooner they can be on their way to a successful life.” Her implied definition of success was one of completeness and contentment. People are forever evolving to become. We never stop growing and developing while searching for completeness in our lives. One of the three elements of our being, the mind, heart or the soul, is always meandering trying to find a connection for completeness. The socio-economic system has set boundaries of measurement by which an “upper-level” group of people defines success for a “lower-level” group of people, placing them in a constant battle with themselves and the “system.” Many people fight against the system to overcome boundaries and reach a dictated status quo of success.

Renowned author and playwright, Lorraine Hansberry, learned early in life that she did not have to conform to the boundaries set forth by another group of people that was meant to keep her from realizing her innate talents, skills and abilities. This life’s lesson was inculcated in Lorraine Hansberry as a young child by her parents. Beneatha’s character in *A Raisin in the Sun* best illustrates the “mind” of one who is constantly striving and pushing towards higher heights and goals beyond those set by the rulers of the “system.” Beneatha does not conform or succumb to a stereotype as is evident in her response to Asagai: “Assimilationism is so popular in your country,” claims Asagai. “I am not an assimilationist,” exclaims Beneatha. On the other hand, Walter Lee has become an in-grown particle of the product to a system designed to control, undermine and manipulate his life expectations. Only after being down for so long and observing those around him that were outside of this vicious cycle does he becomes enraged with the struggle to pull himself out from under the control of the “system.”

I want so many things that they are driving me kind of crazy...(54) Mama, sometimes when I’m downtown and I pass them cool, quiet looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking ‘bout things...sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars... sometimes I see guys don’t look much older than me. (Hansberry 55)

Like Walter Lee, oftentimes it is only after years of being tossed that people realize that there is a better way of living. Children are often victims of circumstances over which they have no control. Unfortunately, once they are adults, having not been taught how to use the controls of life, they continue to be controlled by their circumstances and the cycle of alienation, isolation and unfulfilled dreams continues. The only way to overcome and break this cycle is through self-preservation and invincibility. Whether it's removing the walls of "isolation," compromising with "double-consciousness," simply accepting "alienation," or trying to fulfill a dream, all of the works we will visit in this unit will address the theme of invincibility.

## **THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM**

Initially, the Special Education classroom was designed to enable children with physical, mental, and/or emotional challenges to develop and maximize whatever abilities they might have possessed. Instead, the Special Education classroom has become a figurative "graveyard" of discouraged, disenchanted, disillusioned minds of young people who have been intimidated by the "system" that purports to help them. The students have been filled with the idea that they are not successful and will never be successful. This concept alienates the students from the regular environment. These children have been robbed of their natural talents and gifts, self-respect and dignity and their ability to exercise their own power of authority. Many oppressed folks lack the wisdom and knowledge to understand their circumstances or situations. They have been harmed by the voices that say, "You are nothing, you can do nothing, and you will forever be nothing, so don't even try."

But anything is possible when the mind is unchained and set free and directed to the path of success - "invincibility" at work. Martin Luther King Jr. realized once he became a man that the injustices he observed throughout childhood were not something he was willing to tolerate as an adult. The "power of authority," that I like to refer to as "invincibility," was born within him, setting his mind free of the set, confined boundaries intended to control and limit his life.

## **BUILDING SELF-WORTH IN SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS**

I want to work with the whole being of my students to build their self-worth. Students feel and act important or, should I say, display a better performance through their knowledge, skills and abilities, when they are allowed and expected to experience success. Success can change their entire perspective and level of productivity. Some may be familiar with the saying, "Little prayer, little power, much prayer, much power, no prayer, no power." The same can be equated with our expectations of our students. "Little expectations, little productivity, much expectations, much productivity, no expectations, no productivity." It has already been noted that students in the Special Education Department (SED) are considered "lower-level" not only in terms of abilities

but also in terms of need and importance. They are the forgotten and least significant students on many campuses. The attitude toward these students is, “Just keep them quiet and get them out of here as soon as possible; put them on the other side, in the back or better yet, get a ‘Temp Building.’” This way of thinking is applied to the instructors as well. I realize this may seem unreal and even a bit harsh, but it is the reality that I have had to deal with for many years. Needless to say, this is not the mind set in school, but anyone and everyone knows who has ever worked in the SED that it is a constant struggle and bitter battle to acquire what one believes and knows will benefit this particular group of students. Since these students are stereotyped and treated as “sub-human,” “academic dummies,” and “social misfits,” many opportunities granted to other students (regular or gifted population) are often withheld from the Special Ed students.

The SED population, including the faculty, is at the lowest end of the educational pole. Therefore, it has become the teachers’ of SED’s personal role and mission to “grab the gusto” in trying to provide a well-rounded educational experience for our students. The “grab” race begins from acquiring necessary materials and tools to being recipients of technology, by interacting with on-campus activities to being included in off-campus educational opportunities; from just being spectators to being participators; from being looked down on to being looked up to. We enter this winding road of unexpected bumps and curves and potholes with the hope that we can, and will, make a difference. It’s time for a change and that change begins with me. Through this curriculum unit, I will lead my students to a changed way of thinking.

My professional goal is to expose my students to an array of literature that will allow them to observe, interact and reiterate language learned as we delve into the purposes and need for reading and writing. I will use literary excerpts that will help children see that learning is not an option; it is a must! The students will be allowed and expected to express their feelings and personal opinions about familiar topics of concern. Students will be expected to write a paper (according to their abilities) revealing their thoughts and opinions on a given topic related to this unit. For example, one of the most controversial issues in our society is that of abortion. This is brought to our attention in a very subtle manner in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Students will first share their personal thoughts in oral discussion. Then students will list what they believe are the advantages and disadvantages of abortion and list reasons an individual would consider having an abortion. Finally, students will develop a persuasive paper for or against abortion with researched facts and statistics and include whether the character in the book Ruth had grounds for an abortion, and what are grounds, if any, to even consider such an act? Through campaigning for or against abortion, consequences and choices that are available before acting on such a decision, other considerations or options, will be laid out before them in a manner they may not have seen or heard before. We will keep in mind that the goal is to break a chain--a process of thinking of defeatedness—and grow into invincibility.

## READING TO LEARN

Teenage girls 13 to 18 years of ages seem to be overtaken by this pregnancy epidemic. With this issue, I will be able to influence their critical thinking skills through reading. No, it may not prevent sexual activity and unexpected pregnancies, but, I believe, the decisions and consequences will lay heavily on their minds in such a manner that precautions will be considered in their future. If the grown, married woman in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Ruth, would consider abortion the only way out, how would a young and frightened teenager?

Reading is a wonderful learning experience that will reward the students with a wealth of knowledge and skills. Outside the classroom and in the immediate environment, many of our students are unaware of what else exists in this world and all of the working elements that cause things or situations to be. Through this unit, I will bridge the gap between what they think they know and what they know. I will break chains and shackles limiting their beliefs and their way of thinking or not thinking. As I bring the books in this unit before them and expose them to the plights of these figures, they will be able to mirror themselves and realize that they too can believe in themselves and be successful in their endeavors. They will be empowered with “invincibility,” the ability not to succumb to the social barriers that the dominating “system” has engaged to control their destiny.

This particular population of students has been short-changed when it comes to exposure to cultural enrichment or reading materials. The District provides a reading list of books students are expected to have read by a certain grade level. However, this is not the expectation of the Special Education student. I realize we have some students who need to learn how to read. We call this “Learning to Read.” We also have students we identify as those who “Read to Learn.” These are the fluent readers, who are ready and able to read for informational purposes. These are the significant ones who feel like misfits and become disenchanting, disillusioned and discouraged by the system.

I have begun to recognize the aroma that lurks about and has become a part of our students’ innate existence of “learned helplessness,” defeatedness due to their uniform life-style or lack of prior educational experiences. I can feel the presence of the “Spirit of Oppression” that veils the lives of these students. This spirit of oppression is manifested in their oppositional conduct, early pregnancy, explosion of violence and drug use, and total deterioration of mind, body and soul. The system considers it much a waste of time and money to provide a quality educational experience for these students, but they will give thousands of dollars for teachers to babysit these students in a secluded and barren classroom and give millions of dollars to states to build prisons and billions of dollars to a welfare system, all of which are controlling mechanisms.

The ninth grader by this time and age has no interest in learning. What little skills they had were not tapped into and were therefore lost as they were shoveled along the

“educational assembly line.” This makes my job more challenging. I have to arouse their interest to become motivated to embark upon new ideas, concepts of reading to which they have never been exposed.

My students don't even like the word reading. They avoid and have avoided reading at all costs, especially those who need to learn the basic phonics of reading. One reason is because they have never been expected to read, at home or at school. This unit will close the gap between what they don't know and what they do know. This unit will provide fun, excitement and motivation to such a degree that as the reading load increases they will be ready and prepared to grasp the concepts presented.

### **REALITY VS. EXPECTATION**

Having worked in inner-city schools for 13 years and having walked with them in their neighborhood and communities, and listened to their cries, “Ah, Ms. McDaniel, you don't know how hard it is out there. I just try to stay alive everyday; money rules, it's everything. As long as a N---r got money, he can do anything, don't need no education. I'm just here 'cause I gotta be here - you know I gotta report to my P.O. when I get out of here. (As if school is a place of confinement or a jail.) I'm just gonna get me a J and bank me some money, get me some fly wheels, have my honeys and that's it. All this other stuff is 'bonked.' I'm going pro.” (This is one who is not even playing high school ball now.)

Then there are those who are sincere in heart, “I want to go to college but I can't; I'm not smart enough.” “Who told you that?” “Nobody, I just know. We can't afford no college. Ms. McDaniel, all this stuff you trying to teach us, ain't nobody ever told us this before; ‘I before E except after C, the first one talks, the second one walks, closed and open syllables.’” “*A Tale of Two Cities, Dante's Inferno, Antigone*, and who is Shakespeare?” “Oh yeah, I know Malcolm X, he was some kind of leader, the Black Panthers, the KKK didn't like him. Is he still living?” “Martin L. King, helped the people fight slavery, didn't he?” “Beethoven, Aretha Franklin, Duke Ellington, that's 'ganked,' we don't want to be hearing all of that. Ain't nobody ever taught us all this stuff you're talking about. Did you forget, ‘This is Resource.’”

It is important to me that this way of thinking is altered or totally eliminated. The process of thinking must be re-established. This way of thinking, feeling defeated, alienated and helpless, can lead the students to this road of “nowhere” and self-destruction. This road must be torn down and a new road to success must be constructed. My mission is to bring to light their own and other cultures. The objective of this unit will be to increase reading inventory, enhance social skills, demonstrate standard grammar and vocabulary usage while at the same time developing character and self-confidence in themselves as productive individuals.

I have already begun to see the results of the implementation of this unit. Now my students come to me asking, “Ms. McDaniel, have you ever heard of...? Did you read or hear about...? Do you have information on...? I have to do a report for History, may I use your....? I need some help with my project for.... Guess what, we talked about the same thing in my ... class. We enjoyed going to that play. When can we go to another one? After we read this play are we going to perform it? Can we write our own play? May I go to the library to get more information to write my paper? Can we read some more today?”

### **THE UNIT: HOW I PLAN TO DO IT**

We begin this unit with a share time. Students are paired to get to know one another through an interview process. Each student is given an index card to record information about his or her partner, such as favorite color; best, weakest, or least liked subject; name; nickname; future career goals, etc. Then the students must stand near the desk area and introduce their partners or new friends. This is the beginning for breaking the ice for many oral presentations that will follow. We will discuss body posture, eye contact, voice projection and pronunciation. This type of activity will be presented at least three to four times on different topics or articles until it is understood as the expected behavior when giving a short oral report, presentation or simply communicating information. After such, the student will be ready for the next level of exercise. A more elaborate article by a well-known author, performer or composer is chosen. Each student will be given the same article. As a class, we will read the article and highlight significant information, words, names dates and places, etc. Again, students will record a selected and limited amount of information on the card that is interesting to them and again they must stand and introduce the individual on that card.

The aim is to allow students to have four to five opportunities to read, highlight, share notes, transcribe notes and give impromptu introductions. The effect and purpose of these activities is to build self-confidence and establish an expected pattern of oral presentation, even in daily conversation. With each student’s presentation, the presenter is critiqued by his or her peer(s) using a score sheet to evaluate his or her performance on a scale of one to five with one being the lowest and five being the highest. Each score is worth one to 20 points in increments of five. There are initially a total of five areas in which the student will be judged: appearance, which is the most important for making an impression; voice intonation is the next attention-getter for any speaker; third is posture. Nonverbal communication can make or break a speech. Next is eye contact, which in our culture is an expected necessity to show respect; finally, assertiveness, though it is not the least important, I believe that as the other four fall in line, assertiveness will increase as self-confidence increases.

## READERS MAKE LEADERS

Now, the students have been put in leadership and decision-making roles and in a position where they must justify their actions or opinions. Here, their actions and opinions now have value; it's important to themselves and others. They will have developed a partnership where they learn to work together, depend on one another and will be able to fulfill an expected responsibility of positive interactions. This activity allows the students to critique their classmates and to accept constructive criticism as they are critiqued by their classmates. The score sheet used will serve as a visual to reinforce the factors by which they as individuals are viewed by society, by the way they express themselves, dress, talk and use vocabulary and grammar, as well as their posture. They will have to make an intelligent and fair decision based on their observation and be prepared to support their decisions if a conflict arises from the score(s) given or received. Already, I can see and feel the change of the aroma in my classroom. "I'm important and what I have to say is important" is the new spice of aroma soaring in the class.

Children need confirmation that their ideas, opinions and dreams are significant, acceptable and respected usually from some form of authority in their lives. Vy Higginsen points this out so beautifully in *Mama, I Want To Sing*. Doris first receives the permission and encouragement from her father to dream but he also instructs her to make sure her dream follows the path of God. "So you see, pumpkin, everything I am, and everything I have, started with a dream. And that's why I say go ahead and dream...Just make sure you let the Lord direct the path your dreaming should follow" (34).

When the opposite occurs, the child's thought processes can be severely altered in the worst way. Because Doris' mother from *Mama, I Want to Sing*, did not approve of her dream, she sought ways in her mind to defy her mother in order to pursue her dream. What I want my students to understand, at this point, is that they must speak with respect and authority so that what is said will be definitively heard and understood. Knowing her mother was in opposition to her dream, Doris still defended her plea, "Mama I want to sing...I want to sing...But, Mama I want to be a singer, a real singer and this is where I have to be if I'm going to learn anything."

### More on Strategy

You have to sneak learning in on the students rather than allow them to sneak by learning. In this phase, students become writers or critics. This should take you to the second week of the Unit. As students enter the class, they enter to the sounds of Aretha Franklin. The room is decorated with posters, CDs, album covers, articles and of course the word for today is *respect* for their journal writing activity. The same procedures of reading, highlighting, recording significant information and oral presentations are followed, after reading through Franklin's short biography. I will provide a guided outline for the interview questions. The students are prepared now and know the routine.

But the added flavor is that this time they become a writer of poetry, songs, fables or short stories about an experience in their lives or on the word of the day, *respect*. The next day, using the same article, we begin looking at literary elements in the article and complete a story map. From that, now students can give a more detailed report about Aretha Franklin. We will identify and discuss her social and or inner conflicts. We know she battled with her weight and as a result of her parents' separation, she went to live with her father. Here is a grand opportunity for students to mirror many of their own experiences. Once through this exercise, students will be surprised to discover just how much they have done and learned. They will know how to ask interview questions, research for important information, organize notes in a report form, write a creative response, present a persuasive issue, (critical thinking) and present it all in a public speech.

The real eye-opener is when the point system (for a grade) is explained to the students. In my classroom, the students receive 100 points for participation in each activity. They are not judged on length, structure, or grammar or just effort. Remember the goal is to raise the students' self-worth. However, throughout each activity the academic areas are corrected and revised until the written or oral presentation is perfect with minimal errors. My students understand I don't accept anything (work) unless it's 80 percent accurate. This gives them a goal of expectation and makes them work to reach it on the first two or three tries, because they don't want to keep doing it over and over again. By the end of the lesson or activities, the students realize this was an easy 100; it was fun and exciting and that they actually learned something. In addition, all off-task behaviors have just about diminished if not totally disappeared. Students come to class looking forward for the next activity and receive whatever is next with a more opened mind. Phase II ends with an R & B day of music and snacks. In their own language, "Chill Day." What I also propose as the students are being made aware of the purpose of reading/writing is to correlate with the composers' purpose and message in the lyrics. It may be a little to "stomach" but even I have learned to tolerate and respect some of our rap artists. I chose one of Tupac's more tasteful pieces for the students to critique. Just the title alone *Me Against the World* is enough to discuss the theme, invincibility. Of course, this activity ended with the students composing their own rap message and presenting it or performing before the class.

Now after putting their minds in the writer's mode and while literary terms are still fresh in their heads, the class is ready for just a little bit more, raising the bar of expectation. I will provide the interview question guide, and students will research information to answer the questions from the biography of a well-known figure in our culture. Following the expected structure of the given assignment( read, highlight, record selected information, complete graphic organizer, and write the first draft - all of which is worth 100 points) the revised draft is completed with the expected 80 percent accuracy. The students have had several opportunities to experience success and success is expected and anything less than 80 percent is not acceptable. Students have been given a reachable goal and rewarded graciously for their efforts. The students are not harshly

criticized and have not received repeated failing grades for incomplete tasks. While we continue along this path of evaluating and assessing printed materials that mirror many of their own social and inner-conflicts and the accomplished challenges, students are being made aware that they too are “over-comers” and “achievers.” The first time a recycled failing student receives an 80, 90, or 100 on his or her report card, they become overpowered with energy, excitement and a force that’s bursting inside of them, “Oh yeah I can do this!” Oops, not only has invincibility been taught but it has been “caught” like a contagious virus by the unbelieving student. Invincibility has now taken possession of the mind, body and soul of the once unbelieving student and empowered him or her with the ability and belief that h is an over-comer and an achiever.

### ***Addressing the Needs of the Poorest Readers***

In order to address the needs of the very poor readers, approximately 10 or more, maybe less, sentences are chosen from the selected class reading that will provide important and related information, which will be used in isolation to teach grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure subject-verb agreement, and sequence of events. It can be presented to the whole class for an assignment, but the concentration is for the non-fluent reader/s. This is an example of sneaking learning in on the students. From these exercises, these students will be able to participate in the oral discussion of the reading material. Yes, it means a little extra homework for the teacher-but it’s a necessity if we want all children to learn which should be every educator’s mission. Having done this, the very student we may not ever expect to pick up a book such as *A Raisin in The Sun*, will be caught browsing through the book trying to pick up a word here and there. As a matter of fact, some students will insist on being allowed to attempt to participate in the assignments of the entire class, including reading the same material on the same level. Bingo, again. Mission almost accomplished. Students are learning to show some initiative and responsibilities to change their situation and circumstances.

The message intended for my students is that the people we are studying and learning about are real people, with real problems, like themselves, but the choices in life make all the difference in the world. The students are building their reading inventory, developing an interest in reading; grammar skills are being enforced and writing is taking a whole new level because many of their writing skills are in a more deficit arena than reading. This phase is continued with selections chosen from the American Heritage Society, all of which have a correlating junction, easy to sequence and to complete a story-mapping chart. Story mapping encourages the students to read and find the main idea, specific supporting details (facts) and yet involves the students in critical thinking to problem resolutions and eliminates the emotional-barrier of “learned-helplessness.” Students can give a brief oral summary directly from the story-mapping chart. It also serves as a visual aid to key in on the problem and solution in a story and equips them with the ability to write a well-organized paper or paragraph in summary. Since *A Raisin in The Sun* is the center of my unit, the last biography will be Lorraine Hansberry and out of that to my next thematic unit – the Civil Rights Movement.

## **READING *A RAISIN IN THE SUN***

Now students are ready to read the play, *A Raisin in The Sun*. Before opening the book, we must discuss the title. The class is then led into a science project by placing a raisin in a jar to be left in the sun for the duration of this unit. The class will share their prediction and by the end of this unit students will be able to delve into some critical thinking skills to discuss the final results and compare. I believe the teacher should model the expected reading by at least reading aloud through the first scene or until all the characters have been introduced. Students should also be allowed to read aloud voluntarily, after which the more tedious work begins. Students should complete a character analysis, graphic organizer or chart by the end of Scene I, if not before. Another oral discussion should occur to predict some expected behaviors or outcomes. Discussion of symbolism should occur here also, especially as it relates to the title. Depending on the reading ability and levels of the students, the film video can be used to complete the story, or used as a visual aide or as a read along. After each scene or act, open-ended questions should be presented and discussed as well as detailed, or factual questions. This teaches students to recall, infer and search for information. The ultimate questions to always put before the students is: “How would you have handled this?” or “What other alternatives did the character have?” All of this, with the video included, allows students to reflect and add meaning to their lives. Students will be able to compare print to video/film and truly absorb the concept of bringing words to life. The reader or the speaker is the source of life and meaning given to literature. Meanings of words are not just in the denotative sense but in the sense that is spoken or implied. In other words, emotions, attitudes, and intonation affect the receptive comprehension of any message; even the poor readers or non-readers will be able to grasp and infer the author’s messages. Students will experience how words are brought to life not just by what is said but how it is said to captivate the attention of the audience.

## **OTHER READINGS THAT SHOW INVINCIBILITY**

Hopefully, one can see this unit seeks to teach self-respect and increase self-esteem as well as dive into the academic essential elements and state mandated objectives that equip the students with the required competitive skills and knowledge. However, most importantly, I want to convey to students that their destiny in life is determined by their decisions they make in life; not by the “detachable” barriers, and stereotypes placed on them by the environment, community or social systems. Students will take on new character traits of invincibility as they begin to break barriers of defeat in the classroom by experiencing success and a raised level of self-worth. The lyrics of Michael Jackson’s song, “the change begins with the man in the mirror” might be a good way to get this message over to the students. *Mama, I Want to Sing*, by Vy Higginsen with Tonya Bolder, is another piece of material to be used to illustrate that sometimes we have to defy the systems and prove that we are better than what others may think. The authors vividly illustrate with accelerating emotions a little girl (Doris) oppressed by her mother’s

drowning religious barriers or beliefs. The mother tries relentlessly to keep her daughter from singing “worldly” music; but she fails because Doris ignores her mother’s words of disapproval by defying her authority and going to sing in the Apollo in order to fulfill her dream. The American dream fulfilled is only through self-preservation. Self-preservation is that deep-rooted inner desire that gives “you” that driven power of “invincibility.”

Oftentimes, when one is driven by inner desires and emotions, one feels isolated into believing that no one understands. Sometimes, this feeling of isolation is exhibited through behaviors that are not easily comprehended by others. Doctor Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, while imprisoned for over 18 years, learns how to make shoes in his spare time. The hammering of shoes becomes his. After his release from prison, he resorts to this hammering behavior when he becomes troubled. Doctor Manette was not only alienated by and isolated from others, but in times of trouble, he did it to himself; he would close himself in his room and hammer. This became a clue signaling to his family that his mind was not at ease.

When the doctor thought about the Bastille, he would close himself in his room. Lucie would then hear her father tapping with his hammer again (Dickens, 33). Without a word, the doctor went to his room and closed the door. Soon Mr. Lorry heard a tapping sound (Dickens, 48-49).

Many people have had to deal with isolation and the invincibility to overcome it. Such is discussed in the following materials to be used in this unit. The authors of *Farewell to Manzanar*, Houston & Houston, paint a perfect picture of double-consciousness and invincibility. As a matter of fact they give the illusion of a “wheel in the middle of a wheel.” The camp prisoners’ desire not to be there met continuously with their struggle to make or find some sense of their situation. Many were not able to find peace and accomplishment or success in their state of being, so they reluctantly became complacent. Inevitably, however, a few others realized that there was still a degree of dignity to maintain in spite of their confinement: “some of the men who had been professional gardeners built a small park with mossy hooks, ponds, waterfalls and curved wooden bridges...you can face away from the barracks...and for awhile not be a prisoner at all” (Houston, 89- 90).

The SED is a type of prison for many of our students. It appears, the more I encourage students to fulfill the requirements to get out of the SED, the more they seem to want to stay. According to Houston and Houston, “You could hang suspended in some odd, almost lovely land you could not escape from yet almost didn’t want to leave” (90).

*Souder*, by James Barkley, portrays a family filled with anguish and frustration due to economic social injustice inflicted upon them. The father resorts to stealing to provide for his family. After the father’s arrests, the family pulls together with some degree of dignity to endure the continuous hardships they suffered.

Impromptu activity: when is doing something “wrong” the right thing to do? This is an opportunity to have an open discussion and have students to share personal experiences or ideas about the concepts of “right” and “wrong.” Many of our students are faced with this dilemma daily. This grants them the opportunity to put in place a thinking strategy and generate a thought process, “Wrong is never right.”

*Wanderling Girl*, by Glynnes Ward, is a collection of reviews that reflects, “Invincibility” overhauling “Injustices.” It is a true story of a spirited Aboriginal girl who triumphs over her brutal life as a servant in Australia. Excerpts from this story are significant to this unit, because students will be able to make the connection to the idea of spirit (attitude), which is vital to survival.

*Taking Sides*, by Gary Soto is an example of being locked in and locked out at the same time- a double consciousness situation where a little Hispanic boy struggles to maintain friendship with his friends from the old neighborhood and be accepted by those from his new neighborhood. Because there is such a vast social difference, Gary is pulled between the two, a classic case of double-consciousness.

I’ve been caught in the crossfire of students clashing over neighborhoods, apparel and yes, academic abilities. I was totally shaken when a student asked me privately not to call his name to give him any special recognition for his achievements. It makes him feel uncomfortable. “I don’t want them (the classmates) to think that I am smart or something.” Others have come through with the same request out of fear of not being accepted or not having friends.

Midred D. Taylor says it well in *Roll Of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, as the Logan family’s struggle is just slightly different than that of Soto’s in *Taking Sides*. Taylor allows the Logans to continuously encounter humiliation by those in the community who didn’t want them there. No matter how much others degraded them, the Logans possessed something no one could seem to take away from them, determination and dignity. I call it “invincibility.” They did not allow the barriers and social inflictions to kill their inner drive to exist and exist successfully. The Logan’s thrived by their own terms and definition of success - not others’ defined concept of success.

This unit would not be complete without James Weldon Johnson’s *God’s Trombones*, Langston Hughes’ “A Dream Deferred,” and of course, Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Dream for a Nation” and “PeaceMaker.” All exemplify these individuals as “Road Warriors” in laying the pavement and setting the standards so people of all races and cultures can walk the streets of “Gold,” success, and the American Dream and live the life set by their expectations and not by the controls set by others: **INVINCIBILITY**. “I think so I AM.”

My educational experiences both as a student and as a teacher have aroused my concerns for the predominantly black population of schools and students’ lack of exposure to cultural experiences.

## INVINCIBILITY IN VIDEOS

Repetition is very important to the learning process especially with this group of students. There should be no time restraints but total flexibility. The teacher should pull in appropriate materials, tools, and technology as the need arises or opportunity presents itself. The incorporation of the videos such as *Eyes on the Prize*, *Equal Justice*, *Excaliber* and, of course, *A Raisin in the Sun*. All of these serve to reinforce the theme(s) and, most importantly, to address the attention of the poor readers or non-readers. Students will actually see the connections between print and visual media.

## EXPECTATIONS / OBJECTIVES

Students will develop positive self-esteem (character) and acceptable social skills, give considerable consideration to future choices, become independent thinkers (self-leaders), accept challenges as an opportunity to achieve, learn to appreciate works, become familiar with authors, and become motivated readers. This unit will encourage and reinforce the correct usage of the English language, grammar, sentence structure and oral presentation for public speech. Most importantly students will be transformed.

I would like to emphasize two things we should live by that a personal friend shared with me in bringing this unit to a close: “As changes come and go, after all has been said and done, in the end the hardest thing about life is living in it. It is up to individuals to make the best of their situations.” Houston and Houston argue that, “In such a narrowed world, in order to survive, you learn to contain your rage and your despair and try to re-create, as well as you can, your normality, some sense of things continuing” (91).

## LESSON PLANS

### Plan I:

OBJECTIVE: Students will gather data to organize in summary oral report with 100% participation.

### MATERIALS

NEEDED: Index cards,

ACTIVITIES: Pair students.

Copy interview questions from board on index card.

Students interview partner.

Write short answers of the other student as each question is answered.

Each student stands present or introduces his or her partner.

### **Plan II:**

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will demonstrate command of the English language in oral presentations with 100 percent participation.

#### **MATERIALS**

**NEEDED:** Index cards

**ACTIVITIES:** Regroup students with new partner.  
Copy interview questions three to five.  
Record answers on back of card (not in complete sentences).  
Paraphrase information in oral presentation.  
Impromptu presentation

### **Plan III:**

**OBJECTIVE:** Given a variety of materials, students will read a short passage/biography using highlighting strategies.

#### **MATERIALS**

**NEEDED:** Copies of a short biography (Aretha Franklin, Malcolm X, Langston Hughes, George Carver, Madame C. J. Walker, Benjamin Banneker, Oprah Winfrey, Maya Angelou, President Lincoln & Clinton, the Mayor or governor, state representative) All should reflect one or more of the themes of this unit.  
Highlighter, CD, album/cover, poster, CD player, index cards, interview question guide

**ACTIVITIES:** Read and highlight information related to questions  
Record short answers on index cards  
Oral presentation  
Write a paper to compare and contrast  
Write your definition for Respect  
Journal: What does *respect* mean? Or how do you show or receive respect?

Please note\* These activities should also be done for the word **SUCCESS**  
Write *success* on the board.  
Essay: How do you define success?  
Define success and compare to student's definition.

\* This can take three to four days if each biography is done in the same manner.

## OPTIONAL

Music Idea: On five index cards, write: *who, what, when, where, how, and why*.  
(Students will record related answers on each card.)

\* Next day opening activities use the music of Beethoven and follow the same procedures with biographies of Aretha Franklin, Tupac, Duke Ellington, etc.

### Plan IV

OBJECTIVE: Students will demonstrate how to use graphic organizer / character analysis chart.

#### MATERIALS

NEEDED: Short biographies on related authors (see Bibliography) or their works  
copies of graphic organizer  
highlighter

ACTIVITIES: Students read and highlight information related to graphic organizer such as setting, place, time, conflict and resolution (Story Mapping)  
Students complete a personality organizer about themselves  
Students stand and read their own profiles

### Plan V

OBJECTIVE: Students will draw conclusions and inferences through their interpretations of story titles.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry; "A Dream Deferred,"  
Langston Hughes.  
Jar with top, a raisin.

ACTIVITIES: Class discussion (title interpretations)  
Group students (each group their personal opinions about  
What the titles mean and give supporting facts.  
Class Activity:  
Place raisin in jar in window for duration of unit  
Discuss and write what changes will the raisin make and why?  
Do the same with a seed or bean. Place a bean in a dry jar and place one in a jar with soil and water.

### Plan VI

OBJECTIVE: Students demonstrate use of graphic organizer / character analysis with 100 percent participation.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** Ability to recall information/Graphic organizer/Overhead Projector.

**ACTIVITIES:** Class discussion of childhood stories, fairy tales (Little Red Riding Hood, The Little Red Hen, Three Little Pigs, Dr. Seuss characters). Complete a personality chart with class for one to model expected behavior and identify conflict or oppositional character.

### **Plan VII**

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will read orally with 100% participation

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** *A Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry

**ACTIVITIES:** Teacher read aloud the first scene to demonstrate how parts should be read.  
Complete personality chart analysis after Scene I is completely read.  
Assign parts to students to read.  
Group students for reading sections.  
\*Two to five students to read before class, stress characterization.  
Identify possibilities conflict in characters based on their attitudes (refer to character analysis).

### **Plan VIII**

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will compare and discuss affects of literary terms in media printed materials with 100% participation.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** Video - *A Raisin in the Sun*, and the play.

**ACTIVITIES:** Students read along in book along with the video.  
Students write summary of their perception of any character of their choice.  
Discuss possible solution for conflicts in character's relationships.  
Share real life experiences with similar people or situations.  
Teacher list social conflicts shared by students.  
Discuss ways to overcome.

The Unit continues as the class continues to complete the novel at their own rate. Class discussion follows after the first 30 minutes of the reading period. Students may be called

upon individually to give an overview of what was read during that class time.

Use Score Card, to insure reading has taken place to address areas to be graded.

### **Plan IX: Moods In Music (Attitude)**

REMEMBER: Music selected should be age-appropriate or provide a message to the student that relates to the purpose and/or themes of this unit. I chose *respect* because the only rule I've always had for my classroom is *RESPECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS WILL RESPECT YOU*. Sometimes when asked, "What are the classroom rules," the students usually reiterate, "Respect yourself, respect others, or just respect." The habit of disruptive behavior is the biggest obstacle most of these students have to overcome, and I have found that soft music always alters the student mood to bring a serene calmness to the classroom's atmosphere. Music sets the tone and dictates the mood. This is also an opportunity to introduce the students to classical, symphonic, contemporary and soft R & B and the intended message given in every song. A word analysis chart can be developed during this stage of the unit to identify the type of music and the music's purpose.

OBJECTIVE: To learn descriptive words to describe music sounds and lyrics for comprehension.

#### **MATERIALS**

NEEDED: Music Selections (no music videos)

ACTIVITIES: Listen to music.  
List words to describe mood or purpose (i.e. soft, romantic, loud, dull, boring, sad, interesting, motivating, uplifting, exciting, exhilarating, inspiring, comforting, noisy, distractive, irritating).  
Make a chart to categorize these words to show how relationships are opposite or similar.  
Discuss the difference between music and noise.  
Select word(s) in lyrics that underscores the message in the music (main idea).  
Identify conflict and resolution (if any).  
Use the Graphic Organizer to show work; rewrite in paragraph form.

\* Poetry can be used in a similar manner.

I used the works of poets Paul L. Dunbar, Maya Angelou, and Langston Hughes. Biographies should also be provided as a reading exercise in the above lessons/activities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The ultimate purpose of this unit is to raise the students' consciousness about themselves. This should teach them that their destiny in life is determined by their decisions—not the decisions of others (unless they give up that right to make that decision). Students will be able to mirror an image that now reflects a mature thinking and productive student. They should realize now that success is not measured by material possessions or a bursting banking account but it is defined by them for themselves. In addition these students have added an enormous amount of reading to their personal reading inventory list. They are now familiar with some significant and well-known writing, authors and composers. My mother teaches an elementary life-skills class and they got a big kick out of this unit when I served as a class speaker. Therefore, you as the teacher, must implement these ideas and concepts as you determine what is necessary for your particular group of students. This is adaptable for the general educational population.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who or what had the greatest and positive influence in your life?
2. What are your views about the Civil Rights Movement? Do you believe it united the races?
3. What was the greatest challenge in your childhood that you had to overcome?
4. What challenges do you face as an adult?
5. Why did you choose (not) to go to college?
6. What were your childhood dreams?
7. What advice can you give you people today who are also facing hardships and challenges in their lives?
8. What are you doing to improve the community?
9. If you could change anything about the Constitution, what would it be? Why?
10. What contributions have you made to improve the situation?
11. As a student, how can you make a difference?
12. What plans do you have in place to reach your goals?
13. What vicious social cycle would you like to end?
14. How do you overcome the limitations in your life?

## PRESENTATION SCORE SHEET

APPEARANCE	1	2	3	4	5
VOICE & DICTION	1	2	3	4	5
POSTURE	1	2	3	4	5
EYE CONTACT	1	2	3	4	5
ASSERTIVENESS	1	2	3	4	5

TOTAL  
SCORE \_\_\_\_\_

The Point System:

1=0

2=5

3=10

4=15

5=20

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anaya, Rudolfo. *Bless Me Ultima*: New York, NY: Warner Books, 1972.  
A six year old discovers himself as he journeys with a curandera, one who cures with herbs and magic.
- Armstrong, William H. *Souder*: New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969.  
Souder and his master are pursued by a fate of destruction, and in the face of cruelty and injustice, Armstrong teaches dignity and hope, instead of despair, through the eyes of a young boy.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*: New York, NY: Vintage Book, 1984.  
The story of Esperanza, a young girl who finds it within herself to rise above the social barriers that have encompassed her and becomes self-empowered to reach her determined destiny.
- Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. Belmont, CA. 1973.  
Sydney Carton finds the true meaning of love when he forfeits his so the woman he loves can be with the man she loves. This is his final act to justify or triumph over his ill-fated past. Doctor Manette vividly illustrates invincibility triumphing through long-term alienation.
- Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*. IL: McDougal Littell, 1997.  
Hansberry gives a personal illustration of the trials and triumphs of a black family as they fight against the odds of racial injustice in a prejudiced society.
- Higgins, Vy. *Mama I Want to Sing*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc., 1992.  
A little girl defies her mother's wishes and follows the words of wisdom of her dying father to pursue her inner-most desired dream to sing.
- Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki and James D. Houston. *Farewell to Manzanar*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 1973.  
Prisoners of war struggle within themselves to try to improve their physical environment in an effort to escape the discomforts of their confinement in prison.
- Lazo, Caroline. Martin Luther King, Jr. *Peacemaker*. New York, NY: Dillion Press, 1994.  
This book gives an account of King's childhood struggles against injustice and the fulfilling of those desires in overcoming man-made obstacles as an adult.
- Quayle, Louise. Martin Luther King, Jr. *Dreams for A Nation*. New York, NY: Fawcett Columbine, 1989.  
Describes the endeavors, sufferings and successes in overcoming social inequalities.

- Soto, Gary. *Taking Sides*. Harcourt Brace & Company. San Diego, CA: 1991.  
Soto illustrates the pain and frustrations and fears of a young boy as he struggles to bridge a gap within himself between his old friends and old neighborhood and his new upper-class friends and new neighborhood.
- Sterling, Dorothy. *The Story of Harriet Tubman, Freedom Train*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc., 1954.  
Sterling guides us through the life journey of Harriet as she fights against slavery to lead a number of people to freedom.
- Taylor, Mildred. *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc. 1976.  
A black family must endure hardships and injustices inflicted upon them by their neighbors--as if being poor and needy wasn't enough suffering.
- Ward, Glenyse. *Wandering Girl*. New York, NY: Fawcett Juniper, 1988.  
An Aboriginal girl suffers through a cruel and brutal life as a servant who is in the end ultimately triumphant.

### **Teacher Resources**

- Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. New York, NY: Random House, 1970.
- Bringham, W. Parks. *Senseless Misconceptions*. Texas: Pha Green Printing, 1997.
- Johnson, James Weldon. *God's Trombones*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969.
- McGeady, Mary Rose, Sr. "Does God Still Love Me?" Houston, TX: Covenant House, 1995.
- Kunjufu, Jawanza. *Countering The Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*. Twenty-third Publishing, 1985.
- Wilson, August. *Fences*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Wynn, Michal . *Ten Steps to Helping Your Child Succeed in School*. Vol. 1. Georgia: Rising Sun Publishing Inc., 1999.
- Wynn, Mychal. *Empowering African-American Males to Succeed*. Georgia: Rising Sun Publishing Inc., 1992.
- The Willie Lynch Letter & The Making of A Slave*. Illinois: Lushena Books, 1999.