

Cultural strand: “Four Women, Four Voices” How women writers struggle against the pressure of their societies.

Suffrage Centennial Workshop Curriculum Coversheet

Teacher: Jennifer King
Grade Level: 11

School: Three Springs High School
Classes: American Lit/U.S. History

Learning Objective(s):

- ❖ Students will study writers’ lives (biographies) as well as sample their works to look for how ‘real life’ drives fiction/poetry/journals.
- ❖ Students will look for congruency of historical “culture” and the pressure forced upon a writers’ point of view, and will seek parallels in the writing of fiction to the very real lives of women.
- ❖ Students will see an evolution in topics of American women writers, and inquire/hypothesize on the reasons for changes and types of topics.

Humanities Content: American Literature & American History. Women’s Studies.

Activities: Group students to one author. Have them research author and her works.

- ❖ Group one will focus on Anne Bradstreet. Research her Puritan ideals and history. What were Puritans encouraged to write about? What was taboo? Why does she write about the burning of her house? Why is it so important? Does she seem _____? What? How would you characterize her response? Assign writing to individual writer’s journal: How would you feel if your house and ALL your possessions burned, and they could NEVER be replaced? Do you believe Bradstreet to be as serene as her sonnet would suggest? Why does she write in sonnet format? What’s with that? Group Assignment: write a modern day sonnet about modern issues, with modern vernacular! Stick to the format!
- ❖ Group two will focus Mary Chestnut, Civil War diarist. Show Ken Burns’ Civil War documentary with “Mary” talking about the plantation men, the women slaves, and the blue-eyed children born into slavery, and her out-right disgust for the hypocrisy. Point out her diaries in the American Literature anthology, and the big book from the library of her diaries. Where does she live? With whom? Who is she responsible for? What’s her social standing? Why is this woman so quoted today, so easily? What makes her unique? Are you surprised she wasn’t ‘hushed up’? Do you trust her point of view? Facts? Could you keep a journal during a war? And could you be so ‘honest?’ Group assignment: write a ‘modern day’ diary about an “in crowd” girl who is aware and honest. Yet positive and sweet. What would be some of her issues? And where would she stand on these issues? How would she ‘rebel’, and at the same time, ‘conform’? (One page minimum per student.)

- ❖ Group three will research Louisa May Alcott. Writer's journal (each): What do you think of when you think of Louisa May Alcott? What do you know about her? Activity: research her biography. Answer the following questions thoroughly: What is Transcendentalism? (Try your best on this!) Who was her father? What was their relationship like? Compare *Little Women* with her real life. What genre (other) did she write—and under what name? How were these genres different from each other? Different from today's genres? What was her secret addiction? Was she happy? Does her fiction fit her life? Group project: make a poster or scrapbook of Louisa's life and times, the private vs. public Alcott.

- ❖ Group four will look at Kate Chopin and the cult of domesticity. In writer's journal, discuss women's roles in 19th century:
 - <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/rodriguez/GildedAge/Gilded%20Age%20Site%20Map.html>
 - http://www.literarytraveler.com/literary_articles/kate_chopin_coutierville.aspx
 What was the definition of a good wife? Good mother? What were a woman's duties? Next, got to Chopin's web page, and read in entirety, if possible, but synopses otherwise, "Story of an Hour," "A Pair of Silk Stockings," *The Awakening*, as well as what critics say about her 'breaking barriers'. Each member in group is responsible for the story line of one of her short stories, novella, and bio. Take notes, for each student must contribute one page (minimum) to a 'scrapbook' on her and her work. The title of scrapbook must indicate the unifying theme of her work. Be sure to underscore the cultural pressure in her stories, and address how she was considered 'obscene' by some people of this time. (Copies of primary document pasted in book would be very effective and are highly encouraged.)

Student Outcomes (and how did you measure them): All four groups share the responsibility of learning about not only American literature, but the points of view and voices behind these amazing women writers. After the students present their sonnet (Bradstreet), diary (Chestnut), poster (Alcott), and scrapbook (Chopin), we will have a class discussion. How were the women different? What cultural pressures/confinements/freedoms did they have? Why are they considered essential to the American Literary canon?

Resources:

Bradstreet:

<http://www.annebradstreet.com/Default.htm>

Chestnut:

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chesnut/summary.html> (mary chestnut)

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/victoria/ed/index.html> (victorian age, issues)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanny_Kemble (use with mary chestnut)

http://www.americanwriters.org/classroom/videolesson/vlp13_chesnut.asp (mary chestnut video lessons and questions!)

Alcott:

<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/v> (alcott and chopin)

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/victoria/ed/index.html> (victorian age, issues)

<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/3671357?n=83&s=4> (digitalized biography of Louisa may Alcott)

<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/2574589?n=264&s=4> (Louisa Alcott and her father)

Chopin:

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/victoria/ed/index.html> (victorian age, issues)

<http://www.katechopin.org/>

<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/3289155?n=106&s=4> (biography—digitalized- of am. Women writers)

<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/v> (alcott and chopin)

Additional Information: