

## **Philly Girls Grow Up Through Memoir and Fiction**

*Barbara McDowell Dowdall*

*A. Philip Randolph Career Academy High School*

**Overview**

**Rationale**

**Objectives**

**Strategies**

**Activities**

**Annotated Bibliography**

**Appendix**

*She didn't read books so she didn't know that she was the world and the heavens boiled down to a drop -- Zora Neale Hurston*

### **Overview**

This unit is intended for use as a supplement to an American Literature class in the junior year of high school or to an Advanced Placement Literature and Composition class. Junior year students will read both a memoir and a novel written by Philadelphia African American women writers: Bebe Moore Campbell and Lorene Cary. Students will utilize both historical context and fiction analytical tools to understand how each author navigates growing up, establishes a unique voice and reflects community life in the “First City” at differing times. Advanced Placement Literature students will expand their range to include memoir and fiction by earlier writers Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Jessie Redmon Fauset.

Working in loosely-organized “literature circles,” students will maintain reader’s journals and report on a regular basis both to their small group and to the class via discussions and mini book reviews. The “circles” focus on different writings or portions of a text, with designated roles for each individual, including time keeper, vocabulary searcher, allusion checker, artist, and reporter. Students will also write reflection journals on how the lives and fictional worlds of each writer compare with their own. Timelines and literary maps will amplify their findings.

## Rationale

Students attending A. Philip Randolph Career Academy, a small co-ed comprehensive career and technical high school in Northwest Philadelphia are more than 90% African American, diverse economically and come to us from all across the city. Leisure-reading (any materials not specifically assigned by teachers) content ranges from none at all to newspaper sports stories to Harry Potter to steamy novels. One of the latter, *True to the Game* by Terri Woods, is summarized by one student as "...mainly about a girl being in a relationship with a street pharmacist (drug dealer?). She was in love deeply with him and it was vice versa. The love of her life was murdered, but his legacy will live on through their unborn child." Maya Angelou's *I Know the Caged Bird Sings* is frequently cited as a favorite book. Virtually all students are tuned to MTV, BET, Ipods, video games, television comedy and movies. Many students demonstrate awareness of current events gleaned from television and radio news and the *Metro* newspaper distributed at mass transit sites. A significant number have viewed the independent film "Fahrenheit 9/11," several students have urged me to see "Freedom Writers," a recent film depicting an urban educator's inspirational crusade to raise critical thinking and writing skills through authentic journals.

Although the core curriculum in Philadelphia incorporates a range of writing forms, both nonfiction and fiction, we do not consider our own city in its particularity in both social and literary history. By focusing on selected writers who have produced a range of works, students will gain a footing for expanding their reading horizons using frameworks that can be a help in classifying and clarifying readings over a lifetime.

Many models for a focused approach exist. Temple University conducts a program called Young Scholars. One of their instructors, China Okasi, wrote an account of her experiences in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The instructor, a free lance writer was paying tribute to Campbell following the author's recent untimely death. Okasi emphasized that the curriculum offered was "deliberately rigorous," that her students were "not familiar with the works of prominent African American writers," and that they developed an active rather than a passive approach to literature. Authors mentioned as worth aspiring to read included Toni Cade Bambara, Terry McMillan and Zora Neale Hurston.

While some of my students by their reports on a recent Pennsylvania writing test seemed to focus strongly on books dealing with the struggles of life in the inner city (a female student in conversation vowed that she would never read anything but urban street books), the question brought forth other titles that have resonance for an expansive literary view. In addition to Angelou and A.J. Rowling, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* received an endorsement.

Fiction and history have not universally limited the lives of girls and women. Eons ago, Nancy Drew was a role model of independence and strength for young girls. Margaret Walker Anderson, in *Jubilee* created a powerful epic of a formerly enslaved woman who used amazing survival skills and devotion to family in daunting

circumstances. Marian Anderson, in *My Lord, What a Morning*, thoroughly catalogued her rise to fame by gallantly enduring racism and assiduously rehearsing German lieder.

Although our student body is co-ed, focusing on books by and about women for a limited period of time would allow all students to become aware of societal strictures regarding gender roles, regardless of race or age, and how individual women met, struggled with, and overcame some of those obstacles. Echoing James Baldwin's description of his reason for leaving his native country, as women leave the land of their assigned roles, they may discover not "what" they are, but "who."

Both memoir and fiction can serve as tangible inspiration for young people. Carmen Rose Marshall, while noting the lack of published work that can be said to "...celebrate the remarkable rise of the black woman," [5] emphasizes the possibility that "...reading about self-actualized persons could help others become autonomous...". [14]

Finally, by delving deeply into literary chronicles of individual lives, students can discover powerful connections with individuals they have never actually met. Mae Henderson, a distinguished professor of English at the University of North Carolina, is able retroactively to experience a kinship with the late Bebe Moore Campbell, a writer she never encountered in their life journeys, but with whom she shared geographical and academic proximity, just by reading Campbell's memoir:

...I met Bebe, in my imagination, two-stepping on a North Philly sidewalk between the ropes of double dutch, chanting "Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack... all dressed in black, black, black...with silver buttons, buttons, buttons...all down her back, back, back..." We also met as admirers of Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Beloved*...[Henderson, 27]

The gift of literature can bring Philly girls (and boys) together across time and space while providing non-Philadelphians unique insight into our history and community.

## **Objectives**

Adhering to state standards is an essential part of any curriculum unit. The first standard in Pennsylvania's arsenal is learning to read independently. Means to this end include the practical, e.g. vocabulary development, comprehension checks and interpretation questions, but the true key is establishing the connection between literature and students' lives. Students will come to see that concern about peer opinions, setting an independent identify from one's family, conflicts with persons in authority, and worries about one's future place in society are elements in a vast number of nonfiction and fiction works.

For girls, in particular, the literature, both nonfiction and fiction, can open a window to the "...tropes and plots familiar since the dawn of novelistic fiction...". [Saxton, xi] Females in current literature, however, need not meet an unfortunate end and can certainly aspire to a professional life in tandem with home and family, matching Carmen

Marshall's description of "...persons, or characters, who are engaged in some activity which provides substantial economic remuneration and which requires academic or specialized training beyond the high school level." [6] In real life, Bebe Moore Campbell, as recorded in *Sweet Summer*, trained as a teacher at the University of Pittsburgh. At the conclusion of *Black Ice*, Lorene Cary's memoir focused on two high school years at a private boarding school in New England, after which she was clearly set on attending the University of Pennsylvania. Campbell's fictional women in *Brothers and Sisters* have a variety of professions, most prominently, banker Esther Jackson. Just as Barbara Jordan crystallized her goal of becoming a lawyer after hearing an African American attorney speak at her school, young women of today can tap directly into the vision of a high achieving future by meeting the determined women in the books of Philadelphia women writers.

Students will come to understand the consistency of theme and place in the development of fiction over time and between writers of similar experience. As far back as the era of Reconstruction, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper struggled with "images of black women," and purposefully designed her fiction to refute them. (Christian, 5) Women writers of the Harlem Renaissance, for their part, were more likely than men to base their stories in urban settings. Further, the conflicts tended to be

...daily, immediate living concerns, such as how to find and keep a job, save enough money, feed, clothe, and educate children, deal with a spouse, and maintain personal dignity in the face of routine oppression and prejudice. (Musser, 29-30)

Move forward 80 to 100 years and present-day African American women writers seem to carry the traditions forward. With the opportunity to read selections and whole works across the decades, students will both appreciate the purposefulness of creativity and develop the skill to analyze likenesses and differences.

Reading current literature in a historical context (the world of today) can provide students with an entry way to the past. Students will see how themes and forms first developed in the 1800's lead to similar treatments in current popular literature. With women more likely to set their stories in urban locales, Philadelphia students can trace the themes of mixed racial heritage, mother and daughter relationships, loyalty to family and community back to Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's 1892 novel, *Iola Leroy*. [Musser 33] Never out of date is a woman's struggle "...to define herself in opposition to and not in imitation of the maternal figure....;" the phenomenon that "Female relationships are an essential aspect of self-definition for African American women..." and that the work continues to "...reject the use of stereotypical depictions of African American women..." [36-38]. Once these themes have been identified and catalogued, students will refer to them as they analyze the works at hand.

Though students may have read at least a half dozen or so complete texts outside of anthologies in their high school years, they may not be aware that works of fiction especially can be classified according to the emphasis of their plot lines. Examples of

these, as described by Norman Friedman in *The Theory of the Novel* [Stevick, 157-165], include the action plot (an immediate draw, perhaps, for the boys) where the focus is on “what happens next”; the tragic plot, where a sympathetic character with some strength still suffers destruction; the sentimental plot, pervasive in films, where the hero/heroine suffers yet prevails; the maturing plot, inclusive of all coming-of-age stories; the testing plot in which the main character meets but ultimately resists temptation; the education plot, now a television staple and a variation on the maturing plot, where a change in thought saves the day, but with a truncated ending ; the revelation plot, providing relief to the reader when the protagonist learns something in time to save the day; and the disillusionment plot, in contrast to the education plot, where learning leads to sadness and even death . Students can carry these categories into each reading adventure and become literary critics as a matter of routine. Friedman argues that allowing for classroom discussion and debate on these and other categories, students can develop their own sense of authority and understanding of a plots “significance” and “point.” [166]

## Strategies

Strategies in reading the works of Campbell and Cary are consonant with those used in assignments year-round. These will reference the Philadelphia High School Plan strategies: preview vocabulary; preview/analyze/connect; reciprocal teaching; summarize and synthesize through writing; use of comprehension constructors; and structured note-taking; along with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening. (See Appendix)

In initiating the unit, the KWL process of identifying student prior knowledge will be put into place. Have the students heard of the authors or titles? What other African American women writers have they heard of? What are some of the story types they are familiar with? From these beginnings the students will generate questions to be kept in mind throughout the reading.

Anticipation questions in advance of reading will pique student interest and invest them in finding out whether their initial surmises are on target. Maintaining a journal in response to reading and sharing selected passages with classmates will be routine practice.

In advance of reading memoirs, students will be asked to create their own, beginning possibly with the severely truncated parameter of 100 words. They will be offered the opportunity to submit these to the Washington Post life story project. As we read on through *Sweet Summer* and *Black Ice*, students will create memoir entries that parallel those of the writers. Bebe Moore Campbell’s experience in trouble with authority in second grade (61-68) might evoke student memories. Lorene Cary’s adventures and misadventures facing peer pressure both near to and far from home could do the same.

Research opportunities will be three-fold: inquiry into the lives of the authors from sources outside their memoirs, investigation of literary precursors, and setting literature

in the context of American and African American history. With a rich treasure trove of African American writers, largely unknown to the average student, each can follow the accomplishments of a different individual.

With information gained through research over time, students can then develop displays and presentations for sharing the results of their investigations. A classroom timeline will allow students to place their individual author along the continuum. Additional projects can include simulated interviews with individual authors or a “Meeting of the Minds” where several join in a conversation brings their creations and viewpoints dramatically to their classmates’ awareness.

We will conclude with each student creating a memoir and short story for publication in the school literary magazine. Students will be encouraged to attend the Celebration of Black Writing in May, along with any other lecture opportunities found in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* Weekend section on Friday and the editorial section on Sunday.

# # #

## Activities

### Lesson Plan # 1

Day One. Literary Text: *Sweet Summer* by Bebe Moore Campbell, Chapter 5

As an initial get-acquainted activity, students are invited to move about the classroom and collect the following data from each classmate: name, neighborhood in elementary years, name of elementary school. Each student would then have a handy reference to place classmates relative to their early lives and a basis for ease of conversation as the year progresses. Pins or flags indicating geographical locations of elementary schools could be placed on a city, state or United States Map.

In a whole group discussion sparked by the data gathering, students are invited to think about, pair with a classmate to exchange, then share with the class, powerful memories, good or bad, from elementary school years.

In journals, students will be asked to write an account of an early elementary school experience, a period of time in kindergarten, first or second grade. They should include the name of their school, a physical description of the building and as much as possible of their classroom. Sketching the layout will be encouraged. The account would record the name and description of the teacher, several classmates, and possibly the principal. Add, then as part of the story, memories of getting to school, a particular tradition like assemblies, and finally, one powerful memory of a day or incident. Depending on time and resources, students can share their stories in small groups, solicit suggestions for clarification or corrections from classmates, then read aloud to the whole class or post around the room for a gallery walk. Overnight, students should develop a title for a

memoir they might write one day, and additional parts of their lives that could later be developed as individual chapters.

Day Two. Ask students to sketch a possible book cover with title for their projected memoir, first in pencil, then with markers. Post results on classroom walls to demonstrate the creativity of the class.

The class would be presented with a list of words within phrases from Chapter Five of *Sweet Summer*. Guesses based on context would be checked against dictionary definitions. To save time, the list can be divided among students within assigner groups. Definitions found would be shared within the group. A suggested list could include: 16<sup>th</sup> street melded into ...uniformity; brownstone steps; snores that emanated from the bedroom; sweet allure of Dixie Peach; (choir leader) sisters cajoled and screeched in distaff tongues; pittance they collected from the Philadelphia Board of Education; one of those evil old spinsters; spitting the phlegm into fluffy white tissues; marched down the aisle like a storm trooper. Students would then be asked to imagine the kind of story that would include these phrases and do quick-write version of what that story might be.

Day Three. Students are presented with an anticipatory set of questions based on Chapter Five:

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Bebe's mother transferred her to another elementary school so she could have music lessons. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. At the age of seven, Bebe could ride the subway. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Bebe probably got into trouble for passing notes. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Bebe's mother and grandmother sided with the teacher. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ e. Bebe appreciated not having a yelling dad like her near neighbor friends had. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ f. Bebe's father wrote a comforting letter to his daughter. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ g. Bebe's mother showed her that legal action was her preferred way of dealing with racial discrimination. \_\_\_\_\_

In their groups students will be encouraged to come to an agreement on what they expect the answers to be, then share their decisions with the class. Either reading silently, or listening while the teacher and select volunteers read aloud, students note whether their surmises are confirmed or contradicted. Next to each statement, the page and paragraph number(s) of the pertinent information is noted. Conclude with a metacognitive exercise requiring students to complete the questions "I was interested to learn..." and "I was surprised to learn..." with three specific facts for each. In a "circle whip" go around the room and have each student share one of each with the class. At home, students will outline a plan for an individual account from their own lives that includes some of the elements from Moore's story and specific detailed phrases that could be included.

Day Four. Writing in class, students incorporate the previous evening's notes into a rough draft of this chapter from their memoir. Peer editing teams will review one another's drafts for needed technical changes (spelling, capitalization), clarity, and specificity of

detail. When students are confident that a first draft is ready to share with the class, they may read them aloud for constructive comments. Moving to computers, the class will type their chapters, utilize spell and grammar check, and print out for classroom display. Covers may be attached to the typed chapters and the final products may be shared with other classes.

## Lesson Plan #2

This activity, based on Bebe Moore Campbell's novel, *Brothers and Sisters*, can involve three to five days of class time, spread out over the course of the reading over several weeks. Although all students will be expected to read the entire book, the class focus will be on the theme of interracial friendship, in this case between banker Esther Jackson and co-worker Mallory Post.

In approaching the reading of the novel, students will be alerted to focus their reader's journal notes on three aspects of the fictional rendition: a. the two characters, their interactions, interior monologues, areas of agreement, areas of misunderstanding or cultural difference, upbringing, career goals and romantic entanglements; b. the trajectory of events in the plot, sketched on a drama continuum: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution; c. a catalogue of literary devices including metaphor, simile, personification, and allusion.

On the first meeting with distribution of the novel, students will be asked to do a quick write on the topic of "Friendship Across Differences." They may consider categories that include age, gender, race, religion, geography, ethnicity, politics or sexual orientation; specific problems differences may engender; and their own experiences in this regard. Students will be asked to predict how the friendship portrayed in the novel will play out given two or three clues: Esther, an African American bank manager and Mallory Post, an executive in the bank's lending department share common concerns about women's career paths and need for family life; Mallory Post's family moved out of the neighborhood where Esther now lives in an effort to avoid black residents moving in years ago; Los Angeles, the setting for the story, has recently experienced riots in response to the acquittal of police officers in the Rodney King beating case (1992).

In preparation for the second in-class meeting/discussion of *Brothers and Sisters*, students will be asked to be alert for and make note of situations where Esther perceives racism and others do not. A comprehension constructor (graphic organizer) called "Open Mind" will be distributed – an outline drawing of a human head. Referencing the incidents recorded in their homework log, students will print three of Esther's silent thoughts during the events in the interior of the drawing and record her outward statements or actions for each of the three. In small groups, students can compare their choices and in wrapping up, write a process log synthesizing the three events and predicting how they may affect the conclusion of the novel. Predictions will be put aside for later viewing after students have finished the book.



In the last meeting following completion of home reading, the class will meet to evaluate the resolution of the friendship and whether the ending of the story makes sense (is believable) to the students as readers. Working in groups of four, students will record their conclusions along with at least three specific details in support of each of the two conclusions. As each group presents their findings, the other students will be offered opportunities to respond. The wrap-up assignment for the novel will have two parts: students will evaluate the success or failure of the friendship painted by Campbell and then write a two-page alternate ending or extension of the story. Reference to specific words and deeds from the concluding chapter will help validate each student's creation. Typed and revised writing will be posted on the classroom bulletin board.

### Lesson Plan # 3: Text: *Black Ice*

At the first class meeting to distribute the book, students will be asked to imagine receiving a scholarship to a prestigious boarding school 300 miles from home. Assuming they accept the offer, using think/pair/share, (think about the question, exchange responses verbally with another student, report reactions to the class as a whole) make a list of challenges and opportunities that might come with such an award. As they begin reading at home, students will be asked to keep a double entry journal: record the three to five main events from each chapter and for each record a speculation on what he/she might have done in Lorene's place.

On a weekly basis, the class will gather in a circle to share their summaries and reactions. Following completion of Chapter Six, students will be asked to create a chapter of their own school memoir, selecting one aspect of school life covered by Cary in the book up to that point. Attention to detail will be the primary criterion for assessment. Following completion of the memoir portion, students will be asked to write a letter to the student Cary with offerings of encouragement and advice with specific references to both her and their experiences. Consideration will be given to sharing the most effective letters with the author.

Prior to reading Chapter 7, students will be asked to make a memoir entry in their reader's journal telling about a time they were faced with peer pressure, particularly on an occasion when the clear reward would have been acceptance with "in" group, but where the consequences clearly had negative potential. If students have difficulty with remembering such a time, a brief brainstorming session to create a sampling of situations may help. For those still struggling, the option of reporting on an imaginary situation would be acceptable. We would conclude the class with a collective prediction regarding the potential effect of the peer pressure occurring at a far distance from home. At home, students may create their own interior monologue for Lorene as she makes her decisions and experiences the consequences.

At our final meeting to discuss *Black Ice*, students will be asked to reflect in speaking and in writing the portion of the book which spoke most powerfully to them. Each will be asked to respond to Lorene Cary's experience in going back to St. Paul's as a board member. Would each of them have accepted the invitation? What would be the

arguments for and against be? As a concluding activity, students will be asked to write an account of their visit back to Randolph ten years hence. Where will they be coming from? What will they want to say to the students? What might they be willing or able to do to support the school? Would they be willing to have their own child accept the kind of offer described in the book?

Lesson Plan # 4 Text: *The Price of a Child*

*The Price of a Child* is a required reading in junior English classes in Philadelphia. Prescribed lesson plans provide activities and assessments for a multi-week reading of the work. The angle I would take for this lesson, however, focuses on two issues. We would be reading the book with *Black Ice* in mind, i.e. considering the novel as the extension of Lorene Cary's experiences in high school and second, we would be seeing *The Price of a Child* as a window into the hidden history of Philadelphia, most particularly the history of the African American community. The option would be to introduce this activity prior to reading the book as a whole, or waiting until we come upon the pages (17-22) where Philadelphia 1855 comes to life. Using an Anticipation Guide (Appendix B), students will be asked to visualize First City life as it existed at that time. When they have entered their speculations regarding people, places and things, we will read the text and identify the accurate imaginings and misapprehensions – without penalty. The traditional “I was interested to learn...” and “I was surprised to learn...” will complete this activity. As an extension, students may do a brief web search to see whether they can locate confirming portraits of antebellum Philadelphia.

The second and concluding activity for an enhanced consideration of Cary's novel is a brief survey of newspaper articles chronicling the excavations at the President's House by Independence Square in Philadelphia. Starting with Stephan Salisbury's *Philadelphia Inquirer* article in the city section on Sunday, May 20, 2007, “Slavery laid bare: A historic platform for dialogue on race.” As we create a timeline along one wall of our classroom, students will record the dates, beginning with the presidency of George Washington and the presence of enslaved persons in the chief executive's residence, and then the series of events over the last several years leading first to the acknowledgement, then to a promise of commemoration, and then to the dig currently going on. Students will be asked to write either diary entries by both Washington and his servants describing their contrasting view of life in Philadelphia at that time, a description of the panorama of downtown in 1790 similar to Cary's 1855 vista, or an op-ed piece arguing for how the foundations of the slave quarters should be preserved and displayed. A visit to the site can be arranged so that students can see for themselves.

Lesson Plan # 5 Texts: “Women's Political Future” [Gates et al 436-39]; *Plum Bun* [Gates et al 952-960]

“The true aim of female education should be, not a development of one or two, but all the faculties of the human soul...” Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Advanced Placement students will be invited to consider in what ways a speech can be considered a memoir. They will then be asked to summarize Frances Harper's position vis a vis the vote for women, where her argument places her on the political spectrum, and to investigate through print and web research, the relationship of suffragists to voting rights advocates and, in turn, to temperance militants. What other tragically serious issue does Harper raise in the context her franchise discussion? Identify and characterize (as successful, archaic, etc.) the figurative language utilized for political argument. Create a list of questions that Oprah would ask if Harper could return. Compare Harper's prose to that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Utilize the internet to find out how can we argue that Frances Harper is a "Philly Girl" if she was neither born nor raised in the City of Brotherly and Sisterly Love.?

"For years the Caucasian in America has persisted in dragging to the limelight merely one aspect of Negro characteristics, by which the whole race has been glimpsed, through which it has been judged." *The Gift of Laughter*

The stunningly accomplished life of Jessie Redmon Fauset, Girls' High, Cornell and University of Pennsylvania graduate, teacher, writer, editor, social critic, Harlem Renaissance anchor would be answer enough to the travesty of limitations placed on people of color. Students will begin with biographical research, combining book, journal and internet sources to establish an annotated timeline and two maps, one national to document her places of residence and work and the other, a map of Philadelphia combining her biographical data and real-life/fictive addresses: Opal Street, Wanamaker's, the Academy of Music, the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. More adventurous students might journey to the Free Library on Logan Square to view ward maps from the early 1900's for views of the buildings that are not there anymore. A comparative study of *Plum Bun*, *Passing*, *Quicksand* and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* would yield rich data on the interplay between judicial (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) and literary history. We can conclude with a walking tour sponsored by the Black Heritage Society that includes in its path setting at least one Fauset family address.

# # #

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Badikian-Gartier, Beatriz. "I Hear You/I Hear You Sister: Women of Color Speak (to Each Other)." Chicago: ASCI Atlantic Scholarly Communication Initiative. Accessed February 17, 2007.

Scholars speak in conversational mode, bringing literary analysis closer to the everyday high school student. Badikian-Gartier considers the common concerns of African and American and Latina women in dealing with day-to-day vestiges of racism in the United States.

Banks, Leslie. *Minion*. New York: St. Martin's, 2003.

Banks' African American fanged protagonist can appeal to a teen's love of horror stories. Yet Banks is relatively young and Philadelphia born and bred.

Campbell, Bebe Moore. *Brothers and Sisters*. New York: Berkley, 1994.

Contemporary career women seek job and personal satisfaction in the era of Rodney King. (Fiction) Lauded by critics for its portrayal of a Black professional woman shown functioning with agency in the workplace.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Sweet Summer – Growing Up With and Without My Dad*. New York: Putnam, 1989  
From early childhood through and beyond college, Campbell recounts family and school memories based in Philadelphia, North Carolina and Pittsburgh. Informative and affecting. (Memoir)

\_\_\_\_\_. *What You Owe Me*. New York: Putnam, 2001.

Two unlikely friends, Holocaust survivor and hotel maid, form and lose a friendship. Years of misunderstanding and resentment lead to resolution while illuminating families, race relations, business, rural Texas and modern-day L.A. (Fiction)

Christian, Barbara. *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976*. Westport CN: Greenwood, 1980.

Christian makes it clear that the African American literary tradition is well-established and fascinating in its development over the years. Philadelphians Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Jessie Redmon Fauset laid the groundwork for the woman writers who followed them in the First City.

Douglas, Susan J. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. New York: Times Books, 1995.

Through both data and anecdote, Douglas shows that girls growing up in America, regardless of race or geography, have received negative and potentially limiting messages from an often effective media.

Dowd, Maureen. "Heels Over Hemingway." *New York Times*, February 9, 2007, A15.

In Dowd's usual ironic but telling tone, the plethora of pink flooding women's literature sections in bookstores calls into question the long-term confidence building for woman of all ages that the Feminist movement was advertised as sure to accomplish.

Fauset, Jessie Redmon. *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*. Boston: Beacon, 1990, 1929.

Philadelphia High School for Girls and Cornell graduate (refused by Bryn Mawr) Fauset addresses the somewhat antiquated issue of passing while maintaining focus on concerns that are still with us, e.g. objectification of women, difficulties in romantic relationships, ethnic pride and women's friendships, and carried throughout, the allure and ills of "passing."

Ferguson, Mary Anne. *Images of women in literature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973.

Ferguson provides not just a cogent introduction, but brings together actual selections from a wide range of literature to illustrate her premise that though drawn from quality fiction, portrayals often limit women's options rather than expand them.

Gates, Henry Louis and Nellie Y. McKay, General Editors. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. New York: Norton, 1997.

Though one might not always agree with Gates' and McKay's selections or background information, this is an invaluable compendium of African American literature from the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the era of rap. An extensive timeline aids in orienting students to the depth, breadth, and chronology of the subject. Though Harper's novel is not included, an excerpt from *Plum Bun* is provided.

Hansberry, Lorraine. *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Though raised in Chicago, Hansberry candidly and eloquently addresses the issues that face young women, particularly African American young women as they strive to discover who they are and how they will make an impact on the world.

Henderson, Mae. "Bebe Moore Campbell: 'Literature as Equipment for Living.'" Philadelphia High School for Girls: *Alumnae News*, Spring 2007.

Dr. Henderson, a Girls' High graduate from the same era as Ms. Campbell provides a touching portrait of the common experiences she and Campbell shared although unbeknownst to one another. An overview of six of Campbell's works is included in the tribute that followed Campbell's untimely death in November of 2006.

Hughes, Langston, ed. *Best Black Short Stories*.

Names well known to students of today (Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker) and not so well known (Dorothy West and Alice Dunbar) are included in this collection. Short stories provide easy access for analysis of theme, characterization and historical context.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Harper, 2006 (1937). Though completely lacking in a Philadelphia connection, Hurston nevertheless considers traditional views of women's roles in conflict with an individual woman's aspirations and strivings.

Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. New York: Penguin, 1997, 1929.

This novel compellingly presents proof of the powerful motivation to take a place in the majority culture in spite of one's minority roots. The contortions required to "spy" in this manner take a tragic toll. Elegantly and poignantly written.

Marshall, Carmen Rose. *Black Professional Women in Recent American Fiction*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004.

This is an up-to-date assessment of how successful African American career women are portrayed in commercial (Terry McMillan) and canonical (Toni Cade Bambara and Toni Morrison) and what readers are looking for.

McKinney-Whetstone, Diane. *Blues Dancing*. New York: Morrow, 1999.  
McKinney-Whetstone is a Philadelphia writer who sets the majority of her novels in her home town. Philadelphia students will recognize the geography and non-Philadelphians can learn of clearly delineated characters and city life in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Musser, Judith. "African American Women's Short Stories in the Harlem Renaissance: Bridging a Tradition." MELUS: Vol. 23,2 (Summer 1998).  
Thoroughgoing establishment of links among African American woman writers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century through current times.

Okasi, China. "Author an inspiration for black girls." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2007.

Okasi describes a reading and writing program for high school girls based at Temple University in Philadelphia. She pays tribute to Bebe Moore Campbell both for her output as a writer and her social activism.

Paslay, Christopher. "Trashy teen novels glorify bad behavior." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 30, 2007, B2.

Paslay decries the recent flood of books portraying teens as super sexually active and immoral and worries that the prime readers are middle school students.

Patton, Venetria K. *Background Readings for Teachers of American Literature*. Boston: Bedford, 2006.

Essays pertinent to the study of African American woman writers (not all from Philadelphia) include "Revisioning the Harlem Renaissance," Interrogating 'Whiteness,'" "African-American Literature: A Survey," "Treason Our Text: Feminist challenges to the Literary Canon," and "Liberating Students through Reader-Response Pedagogy in the Introductory Literature Course."

Saxton, Ruth O., Ed. *The Girl: Constructions of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women*. New York: St. Martin's, 1998.

Saxton notes that girls in fiction have elements of consistency and change. Recent additions of multi-cultural texts are analyzed, among them, Toni Morrison's portrayals of the "space of girlhood" and Jamaica Kincaid's relations with her mother in *Annie John* and of colonial racism in "A Small Place."

Stevens, Elaine C. and Jean E. Brown. *A Handbook of Content Literacy Strategies: 75 Practical Reading and Writing Ideas*. Norwood MA: Christopher-Gordon, 2000.

Fun and effective strategies for all stages of learning from initiation to utilization.

Stevick, Philip, ed. *The Theory of the Novel*. New York: Free, 1967.

A collection of essays that provide frameworks for analyzing fiction from every era.

Town, Caren J. *The New Southern Girl. Female Adolescence in the Works of 12 Women Authors*. Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2004.

This book carries a message of hope in the context of current worries over teenage girls. Recent fiction focusing on girls in the South, both black and white, shows their strengths and individuality as the “keep on asking questions’ and [resisting] gender stereotyping. Includes Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Cassie from *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

Witham, W. Tasker. *The Adolescent in the American Novel: 1920-1960*. New York, Unger, 1964.

Unintentionally powerful dose of antiquated views of women, including African American women.

Woods, Terri. *True to the Game*.

An oft-cited favorite of African American Philadelphia teens.

Zane. *Afterburn*. New York: Atria, 2005.

Another favorite of youth that adults may feel “too young” to handle. Deals with the same issues: women’s bodies, mother-daughter relations, and society’s limitations as more staid and mainstream works.

Zane, Peder J. *34 Writers and Their Adventures in Reading*. New York: Norton, 2004. Includes choices by Bebe Moore Campbell.

# # #

## Appendix A

### **Pennsylvania Standards for English and Language Arts**

#### **Academic Standards for Writing, Speaking and Listening: Grade 11**

##### **1.1.D. Identify, describe, evaluate and synthesize the essential ideas in text. Assess those reading strategies that were most effective in learning from a variety of texts.**

Reading both nonfiction in the form of news and journal articles, biography and history, along with works of literature, especially poetry, students will adjust their strategies accordingly.

**1.1.F. Understand the meaning of and apply key vocabulary across the various subject areas.** Investigations of Native American culture cover language arts, history, art history, science, mathematics, health, architecture and social science. Vocabulary from all areas will be encountered and learned.

##### **1.2 Reading Critically in All Content Areas**

**A. Read and understand essential content of informational texts and documents in all academic areas.** Most notably news articles, biographical excerpts, government documents, historical, archaeological tracts, and literary criticism.

##### **1.3. Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature**

**1.3.C. Analyze the effectiveness, in terms of literary quality, of the author’s use of literary devices.** With special emphasis on voice, point of view and tone, students will encounter numerous examples of alliteration, imagery, irony, onomatopoeia and ellipsis.

##### **1.4 Types of Writing**

**1.4.B. Write complex informational pieces (e.g. research papers, analyses, evaluations, essays)** Students will read and research individual authors, analyze images of Native Americans in art and literature, evaluate texts and write essays on their findings, both informational and persuasive

**1.5 Quality of Writing**

**1.5.B. Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic.**

Practice in viewing models, pre-writing, peer editing, revision and publication.

**Assessment**

**1.2.C. Produce work in at least one literary genre that follows the conventions of the genre.** Essay, poem, short story, and novella.

<http://www.pde.state.pa.us/k12/lib/k12/Reading.pdf>

**Appendix B**

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Name

*The Price of a Child*

Anticipation Guide

\_\_\_\_\_

Book

Think back to 1855 (six years before the beginning of the Civil War). For each topic, write a brief description of what you imagine Philadelphia was like (downtown) in that year. All answers written in complete sentences with specific details count for a full point.

1. The buildings \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Changes in the last 30 years \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Ethnic groups in the population \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Population size \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Transportation and vehicles \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. The homes \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



7. The streets \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Sanitation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. The people \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. The food \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# # #

