

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Slave's Dream"

Lesson Plan

A resource developed through Longfellow and the Forging of American Identity

Author: Gail Roller, Gifted/Talented Coordinator and Teacher, Grades 6-12

Suggested Grade Level: Middle School

Subject Area: English, Language Arts, Social Studies, History

Main Learning Results:

English Language Arts:

Process of Reading: A1, A2, A3, A4, A6, A7, A9

Literature and Culture: B1, B6, B8, B10

Language and Images: C1, C2, C3

Processes of Writing and Speaking: E1, E2, E3

Standard English Conventions: F1, F2

Social Studies:

History: B2

Time Required:

Depending on the student's familiarity with poetic terms and technicalities, and their knowledge of how to write a critique, the number of sessions will vary. Some pre-teaching may be necessary.

Learning Objectives:

Students will read and analyze the poem for its poetic attributes. Students will learn about Longfellow's contribution to the anti-slavery movement. Students will write a critique of the poem – discussing the overall impact (sound, language, meaning and form), specifically commenting on favorite stanzas and/or technical attributes.

Materials and Resources Required:

Copies of the poem "The Slave's Dream," dictionaries, copies of "Abolitionists, Anti-Slavery and Popular Authors of the 19th Century," and "Poetry – Some Terms and Techniques for reference."

Preparation:

Students will need to have an understanding of poetic terms and techniques, and they must know how to write a critique. To appreciate and understand the poem, students must learn the unfamiliar vocabulary (smite, scabbard, martial, fetter, tamarind, tempestuous).

Lesson Outline:

1. Oral reading of the poem
2. Close examination and discussion of each stanza
3. Discuss the 'story' that Longfellow is telling and the poet's message; identify the use of imagery, simile and other techniques, which make the poem so vivid and moving.

4. Re-read the poem (have students read individual stanzas) for enjoyment and emphasis.
5. Students will write a critique of the poem to be shared at the next class.

Assessment Summary:

The written critiques should exhibit understanding of the poem's literary strengths and an understanding of the poem's intent and impact. A writing rubric should be used to evaluate technical aspects of the critique. The finished copy should be filed in the student's portfolio.

Extension:

Read and discuss additional *Slavery Poems*.

The Slave's Dream

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Beside the ungathered rice he lay,
His sickle in his hand;
His breast was bare, his matted hair
Was buried in the sand.
Again, in the mist and shadow of sleep,
He saw his Native Land.

Wide through the landscape of his dreams
The lordly Niger flowed;
Beneath the palm-trees on the plain
Once more a king he strode;
And heard the tinkling caravans
Descend the mountain-road.

He saw once more his dark-eyed queen
Among her children stand;
They clasped his neck, they kissed his cheeks,
They held him by the hand!--
A tear burst from the sleeper's lids
And fell into the sand.

And then at furious speed he rode
Along the Niger's bank;
His bridle-reins were golden chains,
And, with a martial clank,
At each leap he could feel his scabbard of steel
Smiting his stallion's flank.

Before him, like a blood-red flag,
The bright flamingoes flew;
From morn till night he followed their flight,
O'er plains where the tamarind grew,
Till he saw the roofs of Caffre huts,
And the ocean rose to view.

At night he heard the lion roar,
And the hyena scream,
And the river-horse, as he crushed the reeds
Beside some hidden stream;
And it passed, like a glorious roll of drums,
Through the triumph of his dream.

The forests, with their myriad tongues,
Shouted of liberty;
And the Blast of the Desert cried aloud,
With a voice so wild and free,
That he started in his sleep and smiled
At their tempestuous glee.

He did not feel the driver's whip,
Nor the burning heat of day;
For Death had illumined the Land of Sleep,
And his lifeless body lay
A worn-out fetter, that the soul
Had broken and thrown away!