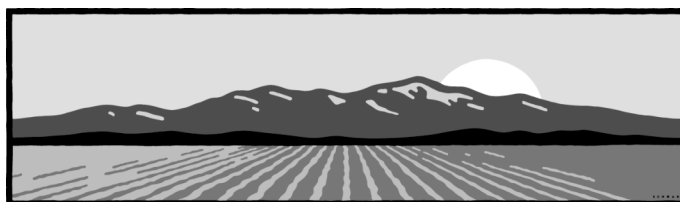


CALIFORNIA WRITING PROJECT
TEACHER-TO-TEACHER CURRICULUM RESOURCES

*CALIFORNIA STORIES UNCOVERED
IN THE CLASSROOM*

WRITING OUR HERITAGE, OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR PROMISE



C A L I F O R N I A
S T O R I E S

The California Council for the Humanities

A JOINT PROJECT OF THE CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES
AND THE CALIFORNIA WRITING PROJECT AND PART OF COUNCIL'S
STATEWIDE *CALIFORNIA STORIES UNCOVERED* CAMPAIGN

UNCOVERING MISPERCEPTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH
LIVING IN AN URBAN COMMUNITY: AN ADAPTATION
OF UNCOVERING MISPERCEPTIONS ASSOCIATED
WITH LIVING IN A SMALL TOWN

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Misperceptions about life in urban communities and about the residents of those communities abound. In this project, students from an urban community respond to issue-based texts and life experiences to write academic essays that analyze the myths and the realities of living in an urban community, the misperceptions of external appearances, and ways of overcoming how people are perceived.

Genre: reflective narratives and analytic, expository essays

Recommended grades: 9-12

Overview

After reading the lesson idea created by California Writing Project teacher consultant, Rochelle Ramay, I was convinced that my students would benefit from a similar lesson. Few people who live outside of “South LA” understand the rich culture and nurturing communities that exist alongside the highly publicized, negative images of violence and urban blight. Writing about their community will help my students inform others of the realities of living in Los Angeles and create appreciation for and pride in this community.

Objectives

My objectives differ slightly from those identified by Rochelle Ramay. I plan to focus more on perceptions of our community as expressed in the local newspapers, including the *Los Angeles Times*. For this reason, we will focus less on informal reflective narratives and more on expository writing.

Application to the California State Standards

I will focus on the same standards identified in Rochelle’s project.

Teaching Sequence

□ Beginning Question:

I will adapt the beginning question to read:

- What perceptions do friends and relatives who do not live in this community have about it? Give specific examples and quotes if possible. Where do you think they got these impressions of our community? How accurate are their perceptions?
- Share and chart responses on chart paper. Hang the chart so that it can be referenced as the sequence continues.

❑ **Read “The House on Mango Street” from *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros**

- I plan to use the teaching sequence for the “House on Mango Street” as Rochelle has written it.

❑ **Writing about “The House on Mango Street”**

- Informal Writing: Reflective Narrative –
I will, however, refocus the writing task. I want students to write about their neighborhood or community rather than their own house. The reworded topic would read:

In Sandra Cisneros’ vignette, “The House on Mango Street,” the narrator describes the house she lives in, how she feels about living there, and how others make assumptions about her based on their impression of her house.

Think about where you live:

If someone who doesn’t know you were to drive by your community, what might he or she assume about the people who live there? Based on the exterior of the buildings, how accurate would that assessment be of the people who live and work inside?

- As we move toward the writing of the formal essay, I find Rochelle’s plan to help students understand how assumptions and perceptions affect people’s judgments valuable. I will use that part of the lesson just as it is written. Then, as we prepare to write the formal essay, we will read:
 - passages from some of Walter Mosely’s novels such as *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Mosely describes sections of Los Angeles as they were five decades ago. We will discuss our perceptions of Los Angeles based on these descriptions.)
 - current articles from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Sentinel*, and *La Opinion* (We will analyze the articles to determine the perceptions or misperceptions the articles communicate.)

❑ **The Analytic Essay Prompt:**

- I will adapt the analytic essay prompt as follows:

Many people have misperceptions of life in South Los Angeles. Write an essay in which you identify misperceptions of your community that are held by those who live outside of that community. Then use specific details and examples to show an accurate representation of your community. Explain why these misperceptions exist and tell what we can do to dispel the myths.

- Students compose an essay that uses:
 - a well-formulated claim
 - sound reasoning
 - *clear, accurate descriptions*
 - multiple sources of evidence
 - an appropriate level of diction
 - MLA formatting.

Recommended Instructional Resources

- ❑ Mosely, Walter. *Devil in a Blue Dress*. New York, Simon and Schuster/Pocket Books, 1995.

Recommended Professional Resources

- ❑ Finn, Patrick J. *Literacy With an Attitude: Educating Working Class Children in Their Own Self Interest*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- ❑ Gadda, George and Faye Peitzman, eds. *Teaching Analytical Writing*. Los Angeles: California Academic Partnership Program, 1988.
- ❑ Harris, Joyce, Alan G. Kamhi, and Karen Pollock, eds. *Literacy in African American Communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2001.
- ❑ Ladson-Billings, Gloria. *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994.
- ❑ Peitzman, Faye and George Gadda. *With Different Eyes: Insights into Teaching Language Minority Students Across the Disciplines*. New York: Longman, 1994.
- ❑ Rose, Mike. *Possible Lives: The Promise of Public Education in America*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

About the Teacher Consultant

Marlene Carter teaches English at Dorsey High School in the Los Angeles Unified School District. She leads a study group on issues of race in the classroom for the UCLA Writing Project and is currently serving as Co-Director of Secondary Literacy for the California Writing Project. Marlene is also a Carnegie Scholar and a National Board certified teacher.