

Text Pairings: Identity and Voice
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Texts Used:

“A House of My Own” Sandra Cisneros (from *House on Mango Street*), fiction
Excerpt from “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: The Creativity of Black Women in the South” Alice Walker, focusing on the section about the narrator’s mother’s work in her garden (available online: <http://www.msmagazine.com/spring2002/walker.asp>), nonfiction

Overview:

After reading *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimimanda Adichie, students have spent time analyzing how a complex character develops. They have also looked at the author’s use of imagery, diction, and tone. One of the essential questions we used to read the book was What does it take to find one’s voice? More specifically, in this instance, we wondered what does it take to find one’s voice when faced with all sorts of obstacles that work against that independence? I wanted to introduce students to synthesis, of being able to look at different texts and think about how that essential question translates across the Cisneros and Walker texts.

Students will be able to determine how each writer answers the essential question through the text, what that helps us to know about character, and then use that understanding in writing assignments of varying complexity: short, evidence-based writing that could advance to thesis statements and fully-developed papers if the teacher desires.

Classroom Demographics:

10th grade college-prep students, varying reading level (primarily close to grade level on average), 20 students, diverse in terms of race and ethnicity

Ideas for Teaching the Texts:

Beginning with the Cisneros, lead students through a close reading of the text.

- Areas of focus: point-of-view, characterization, diction, repetition, imagery, alliteration and how that helps to understand the text. Students will practice annotation, supporting their reasoning with evidence from the text, etc. (Close Reading resource: http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/reading_lit.html)
- At the conclusion of the close reading, students will first write a concise summary of the text. Then, they will respond to the essential question, using the text as evidence to support their response.
- Students will complete a Venn diagram in which they record similarities and differences between Adichie and Cisneros

Repeat the same procedure with the Walker piece, handing over to students more of the responsibility for determining point-of-view, characterization, diction, etc. through structured questioning. Students can be asked, again, to respond to the essential question, then to look at the three texts in relation to answering that question (adding another circle to the Venn diagram).

Note: Given that the Walker piece is difficult, and based on students' readiness, a teacher might use the Walker piece for students who have a firm grasp on working with two texts and are ready for a third. Working with the Cisneros, however, offers plenty of potential on its own.

Writing:

- Students can be asked to respond to the essential question based on two texts or three texts, noting how the question can be answered with regard to the close reading questions (i.e., characterization, point-of-view, imagery, etc.).
- Students can also be asked to generate their own questions about the text using Costa's Level of Questions. With some practice, students can be encouraged to look closely at texts and create their own higher-order questions that they can then answer. Teachers can suggest lengths for these responses, either a short paragraph or a longer paper given the objectives of the task (Resource: <http://blog.adambabcock.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Costa-House-Levels-of-Questions.pdf>)