

AFRICAN DIASPORA RESOURCES FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT & INQUIRY BUILDING

Resistance Rhetoric: Analyzing Activist Texts from Abolition to #BlackLivesMatter

TOPIC DESCRIPTION	<p>Since before the United States was established, Africans in North America have experienced many forms of government-sanctioned oppression, from slavery to Jim Crow to institutional and cultural racism and disproportionate policing and imprisonment.</p> <p>For just as long, Americans of African descent have fought against that oppression through individual and collective action and acts of resistance large and small. Print and non-print texts, both informational and literary, from slave spirituals and Nat Turner’s <i>Confession</i>, to King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and Malcolm X’s “The Ballot or the Bullet,” to Kendrick Lamar’s “Alright” and Beyonce’s “Formation” have long embodied this spirit of protest, activism and resistance.</p> <p>All these texts and many more deserve analysis as important testaments of the African-American Freedom Movement that continues today. This unit overview serves to familiarize educators and students with a) African-American resistance texts from the 1800s to the present, b) the authors’ purposes and rhetorical choices in those texts, and c) common thematic threads in the history and rhetoric of resistance.</p>
STANDARDS ALIGNED TO THIS TOPIC	<p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2</u> Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5</u> Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6</u> Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7</u> Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6</u> Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.</p>
KEY CONCEPTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhetoric • Ethos, Logos, Pathos • Diction • Tone • Syntax • Central Idea • Text Structure • Claim • Evidence • Author’s Purpose
OTHER CONCEPTS TO CONSIDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the meaning of “text” has changed over time • Forms of Resistance and Resilience

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GENERALIZATIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To achieve their purposes, authors make rhetorical choices that impact the effects of their texts. 2. Activist “texts” can take the form of writing, visual art, performance art, poetry, song, symbolic acts, and more. 3. “Resistance” can take many forms and activist texts can have many purposes in the fight against oppression. 4. Despite changes in circumstance and historical context, common themes run through the history of American-American resistance to oppression.
OVERARCHING INQUIRY QUESTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do the oppressed respond to oppression? 2. How can texts cultivate resilience and acts of resistance in the community?
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	<p>Activist Texts:</p> <p>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave by Frederick Douglass (Autobiography) Likely the most famous of the slave narratives written in support of the abolitionist movement, this text, written in 1845, can be effectively excerpted to illustrate the origins and forms of personal resistance. See especially Douglass’s description of the first beating he recalls witnessing (his aunt), his personal revelation of the importance of learning to read, his discussion of the emotional impact of the enslaveds’ songs, and his fight with Covey, during which Douglass began to understand the difference between mental and physical enslavement. http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html</p> <p>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Jacobs (Autobiography) This slave narrative, published in 1861, is unique in perspective as Harriet Jacobs tells her story as a female slave and a mother, including the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her master. http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html</p> <p>“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” by Frederick Douglass (Speech) Frederick Douglass gave this speech on July 5, 1852 to the Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society in Rochester, NY. The speech juxtaposes Independence Day and the American principle of liberty with the plight of enslaved African-Americans, urging white people to fight for abolition. http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/</p> <p>African American Spirituals (Library of Congress) (Article and Songs) This article from the Library of Congress chronicles the history of African American spirituals, their importance during the time of slavery, how they were precursors to protest songs, and their difference from white spirituals, in addition to providing links to example songs. This information pairs well with discussions of spirituals that can be found in slave narratives. https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197495/</p> <p>The Confessions of Nat Turner (Historical Document) Nat Turner was an enslaved African-American who led a revolt in Virginia in 1831. The revolt caused the deaths of about 60 white people. After the rebellion, 55 Black people, including Turner, were executed for their part in the plot, and other uninvolved Blacks were killed by whites in the area. Shortly after the rebellion and executions, Thomas Ruffin Gray published The Confessions, the primary historical document about the revolt, for which Turner was interviewed before his execution, but which may portray Turner and his views inaccurately. http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/turner/turner.html</p>

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The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. Du Bois (Essays)

W.E.B. Du Bois was a scholar, Pan-Africanist, writer, and Civil Rights activist who co-founded the NAACP. He believed civil rights would be brought about by the African-American intellectual elite. *The Souls of Black Folk* (1909) is considered a highly influential work in African-American sociology. Especially recommended are “On Our Spiritual Strivings,” in which Du Bois coins the idea of “double consciousness” and “The Sorrow Songs,” which comments on the importance of African-American spirituals.

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/duboissouls/dubois.html>

“I, Too” and other works by Langston Hughes (Poem)

Langston Hughes was an African-American poet and leader of the Harlem Renaissance. Much of his work speaks to the American Dream and the African-American experience. The speaker in “I, Too” faces oppression but believes in a better, more equal future. Many critics believe that this poem was written in response to Walt Whitman’s “I Hear America Singing.”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/47558>

Audio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiCWngPt-L4>

“Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and other works by Martin Luther King Jr. (Historical Document)

King wrote this open letter, addressed to clergy who thought the fight for civil rights should occur only in the courts, in April 1963. In the letter, King responded to criticisms of nonviolent resistance and penned the famous line “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail>

The Inspiring Force of “We Shall Overcome” (NPR) (Article and Song)

This article addresses the history of the “We Shall Overcome” protest song, born out of a Methodist church and for so many years a hopeful promise of victories to come.

<http://www.npr.org/2013/08/28/216482943/the-inspiring-force-of-we-shall-overcome>

“We Shall Overcome” performed by the Morehouse College Glee Club:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aor6-DkzBJ0>

“Strange Fruit” as performed by Billie Holiday and Nina Simone (Song)

The lyrics to “Strange Fruit” were written by Abel Meeropol in 1937. The song was performed most famously by jazz singer Billie Holiday in 1939 and was later covered by Nina Simone, among others. The song protests the lynching of African-Americans; the title refers to lynched bodies hanging from trees.

Lyrics: <https://genius.com/Billie-holiday-strange-fruit-lyrics>

Holiday performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4ZyuULy9zs>

Simone performance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcCm_ySBslk

Mississippi Goddam and other works by Nina Simone (Song)

“Mississippi Goddam” (1964) is one of jazz singer and pianist Nina Simone’s most famous protest songs. It was written in response to the murder of Medgar Evers and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church which killed four girls. The song laments the violence as well as calls from leaders for the Civil Rights movement to “take it slow” and declares “You don’t have to live next to me/Just give me my equality.”

Lyrics: <https://genius.com/Nina-simone-mississippi-goddam-annotated>

Performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghhaREDM3X8>

“The Ballot or the Bullet” and other works by Malcolm X (Speech)

Black Nationalist and Nation of Islam leader Malcolm X gave this speech in April 1964. The speech encouraged African-Americans to vote, but argued that it might not be enough and there were logical reasons for Black people to take up arms. The

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link below contains historical information about the speech as well as audio and a transcript.

<http://www.blacklivesmattersyllabus.com/malcolm-speaks-the-ballot-or-the-bullet/>

“Notes of a Native Son” and other works by James Baldwin (Essay)

James Baldwin was an African-American novelist, essayist, and Civil Rights leader whose works delivered critique around race, class, and sexuality in the United States and abroad during the mid-20th century. “Notes of a Native Son” (1955) is just one essay in a collection of the same name. The essay discusses Baldwin’s difficult relationship with his father and places it in the context of American racial strife. Baldwin inspired Ta-Nehesi Coates (mentioned below) to write *Between the World and Me*, which offers a similar tone and social critique.

<http://www.csudh.edu/ccauthen/570f15/baldwin.pdf>

The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni (Poetry)

Nikki Giovanni is a contemporary African-American poet who has been publishing since the late 1960s and is considered part of the Black Arts Movement. Much of her work, especially poems from *Black Feeling*, *Black Talk* and *Black Judgment*, early poetry collections that are out of print, deals with African-American life, Black feminism, and response to racial oppression. Some suggested poems are “Nikki Rosa,” “Ego Tripping,” “For Sandra,” “Adulthood,” “Poem (No Name No. 3),” and “Reflections on April 4, 1968.”

PDF: <http://library.globalchalet.net/Authors/Poetry%20Books%20Collection/The%20Collected%20Poetry%20of%20Nikki%20Giovanni%201968-1998.pdf>

Link to Purchase: <https://www.amazon.com/Collected-Poetry-Nikki-Giovanni-1968-1998/dp/0060724293/>

The Bluest Eye, Beloved, and other works by Toni Morrison (Novel)

Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison has published many novels that address themes of violence, oppression, and personal relationships. Two of her best known novels are *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is the story of Pecola, an African-American girl growing up in the 1940s, who is teased for her dark skin color and who equates “whiteness” with beauty. The novel also deals with incest and child molestation. *Beloved* (1987) is inspired by the true story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who killed her own child rather than sending her into slavery. In the novel, the protagonist Sethe is haunted by the ghost of her child, Beloved. It is a complex story about the mental effects of oppression.

Link to Purchase The Bluest Eye: <https://www.amazon.com/Bluest-Eye-Vintage-International/dp/0307278441/>

Link to Purchase Beloved: <https://www.amazon.com/Beloved-Toni-Morrison/dp/1400033411/>

Kindred and other works by Octavia Butler (Novel)

Octavia Butler was an African-American science fiction writer whose work frequently integrated racial, feminist, and political critique. In *Kindred* (1979), the Black female protagonist time-travels back to the antebellum South where she is enslaved.

Link to Purchase Kindred: <https://www.amazon.com/Kindred-Octavia-E-Butler/dp/0807083690/>

Do the Right Thing by Spike Lee (Film)

1989’s *Do The Right Thing*, written and directed by Spike Lee, is arguably the greatest of Lee’s many films about race, racism, and contemporary African-American life. The film focuses on a hot summer day in Brooklyn during which racial tensions brew and culminate in tragedy. It raises questions around how African-Americans should respond to racial violence, quoting both Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X.

Screenplay: https://sfy.ru/?script=do_the_right_thing

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Link to Purchase Film: <https://www.amazon.com/Do-Right-Thing-Ossie-Davis/dp/B000ICXQTC/>

“The Blacker the Berry,” “Alright,” and other works by Kendrick Lamar (Song)

Kendrick Lamar is a contemporary African-American hip hop artist. His work, especially his 2015 album *To Pimp a Butterfly*, frequently speaks to the African-American male experience in the United States. The video for his song “Alright” invokes imagery related to police brutality and the chorus of the song (“we gonna be alright”) has become a common chant at Black Lives Matter and other protests. Also see below for an excellent blog post from a teacher who connects *To Pimp a Butterfly* to Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*.

The Blacker the Berry Lyrics: <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-the-blacker-the-berry-lyrics>

Alright Lyrics: <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-alright-lyrics>

Alright Music Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-48u_uWMHY

Kendrick Lamar 2016 Grammys Performance:

http://www.theverge.com/2016/2/15/11004624/grammys-2016-watch-kendrick-lamar-perform-alright-the-blacker-the-berry#oid=trOW14MDE6gCowO43SPHW0Wdr_Ehb2Xy

“Why I Dropped Everything and Started Teaching Kendrick Lamar’s New Album” by Brian Mooney: <https://bemoons.wordpress.com/2015/03/27/why-i-dropped-everything-and-started-teaching-kendrick-lamars-new-album/>

“Formation” and other works by Beyoncé (Song)

Beyoncé Knowles Carter is a contemporary R&B and pop musical artist. In 2016 she released the album *Lemonade*, her most critically-acclaimed album to date. This most recent work is arguably also her most political. Beyoncé’s first public performance of “Formation,” at the 2016 Super Bowl, referenced the Black Panthers, and the film version of *Lemonade* features the mothers of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown during the song “Freedom.” The video for “Formation” comments on the intersections of race, class, and gender in many interesting ways, including references to Hurricane Katrina and southern plantation imagery.

Formation Music Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDZJPJV_bQ

Beyoncé 2016 BET Awards Performance of “Freedom”:

<https://vimeo.com/173992190>

“Hell Ya Talmbout” and other works by Janelle Monae and Wondaland (Song)

Janelle Monae is a contemporary Afrofuturist, musical artist, and actor. Her music frequently addresses themes of feminism and “otherness.” In 2015, shortly after the death of Sandra Bland, she and the members of her artist collective, the Wondaland Arts Society, released the protest song “Hell Ya Talmbout,” which speaks the names of many African-Americans killed by police and in other interracial conflicts, begging the listeners to “say his name” and “say her name.”

Lyrics: <https://genius.com/Janelle-monae-and-wondaland-records-hell-you-talmbout-lyrics>

Article that includes link to song:

<http://www.npr.org/sections/allsongs/2015/08/18/385202798/janelle-mon-e-releases-visceral-protest-song-hell-you-talmbout>

“Now is the Time for True Courage” by Bree Newsome (Article)

On June 27, 2015, Bree Newsome was arrested for climbing the flagpole in front of the South Carolina state house in order to remove the Confederate flag that flew there. Her efforts helped lead to the permanent removal of the flag a few weeks later. This writing is the statement she released shortly after her arrest. In it, Newsome discusses her reasons for her act of civil disobedience. This text pairs especially well with King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

<http://archives.blunationreview.com/exclusive-bree-newsome-speaks-for-the->

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[first-time-after-courageous-act-of-civil-disobedience/](#)

Video of Newsome's Confederate flag takedown:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gr-mt1P94cQ>

Art by Kehinde Wiley (Visual Art)

Kehinde Wiley is a contemporary African-American portraitist whose work frequently places Black and Brown people, especially men, in heroic and powerful positions reminiscent of the Old Masters. His paintings evoke a commentary on the image and status of African-Americans in contemporary society.

<http://kehindewiley.com/>

Art by Nina Chanel Abney (Visual Art)

Nina Chanel Abney is a contemporary African-American visual artist whose work has been said to champion the Black Lives Matter movement, though the artist herself strives for ambiguity in her work. Through large-scale, brightly-colored work, she poses difficult questions around race, homophobia, consumerism, police brutality, and more.

<http://www.ninachanel.com/>

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehesi Coates (Memoir)

Published in 2015, this book is written as a letter from the author to his teenaged son, reflecting on his experiences as a Black man in the United States. It is a highly accessible text with lots easily excerpted sections that pair well with other texts related to race, racism, modern American history, masculinity and more.

Link to Purchase: <https://www.amazon.com/Between-World-Me-Ta-Nehesi-Coates/dp/0812993543/>

I Am Not Your Negro by Raoul Peck and James Baldwin (Documentary Film)

This 2016 Oscar-nominated documentary pairs the words of James Baldwin, taken from an unfinished manuscript, with images related to the history and current state of racism in the United States, adding up to a scathing social critique of America.

Film Review: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/movies/review-i-am-not-your-negro-review-james-baldwin.html>

Official Site and Educational Materials:

<http://www.magpictures.com/iamnotyournegro/share/>

Link to Purchase Film: <https://www.amazon.com/I-Am-Not-Your-Negro/dp/B01N6Q00JM/>

13th by Ava DuVernay (Documentary Film)

The title of this 2016 Oscar-nominated documentary refers to the 13th Amendment, which prohibited slavery. The film explores issues of race and mass incarceration in the United States, asserting that the effects of slavery in the US have been perpetuated through disenfranchisement, Jim Crow, the war on drugs, and mass incarceration. This film is only available on Netflix.

Official Site: <http://www.avaduvernay.com/13th/>

Rhetorical Analysis Tools:

Slave Narrative Overview and Characteristics (Web Page)

College-level webpages that address the history and characteristics of Slave Narratives. Useful information not only for the analysis of traditional narratives, but also for comparison to other texts that might be considered neo-slave narratives because their purposes and characteristics mirror those of traditional narratives (e.g. *Kindred* by Octavia Butler, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison).

<http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/slave.htm>

<http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/narrativelist.htm>

“Redefining the Word” in the Washington Post (Article)

An expansive article that addresses multiple perspectives on the use of the “N

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Word” while referencing history, context, reappropriation, and more.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/11/09/the-n-word-an-entrenched-racial-slur-now-more-prevalent-than-ever/>

“Straight Talk about the N-Word” in Teaching Tolerance (Article)

A blog post/interview with a professor who discussed the complexities of the “N Word” and gives suggestions for how teachers of different races and grade levels should handle teaching about it.

<http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-40-fall-2011/feature/straight-talk-about-n-word>

The Art of Rhetoric: Persuasive Techniques in Advertising (Video)

A video that uses television advertisements to define and give examples of ethos, pathos, and logos. A great introduction to rhetoric that can easily be connected to looking for rhetorical devices in more complex and varied texts.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/video/persuasive-techniques-advertising-1166.html>

Rhetorical Analysis Overview (Handout)

College-level handout that addresses questions to ask when completing rhetorical analysis, as well as sample theses and a suggested essay organizational structure.

<http://writingcenter.kennesaw.edu/resources/RHETORICAL%20ANALYSIS.pdf>

Rhetorical Analysis Breakdown (Handout)

A categorized list of devices for students to consider when completing rhetorical analysis.

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=cHlscXNkLm9yZ3xmZXJyaXMtYXA0bGFuZ3xneDo1YjY0ZGUzYjA4ZTNiNTA4>

Documentary Film Analysis (Handout)

A detailed handout for students focused on the analysis of rhetorical devices used in documentary film.

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=cHlscXNkLm9yZ3xmZXJyaXMtYXA0bGFuZ3xneDoyY2M3ZTk0MjlyMzZhMTFl>

Teach Argument: Music Videos (Videos)

A sub-category of a website dedicated to helping teachers teach argument. The category contains rhetorical analysis videos of popular music videos. While many of the supplemental materials and lesson plans on this site require a paid subscription, these useful videos do not.

<http://teachargument.com/category/music-video/>

Teaching Rhetorical Analysis with Music Videos (Web Page)

A blog post from a college rhetoric professor explaining how he uses hip hop videos to teach analysis. Includes example analytical responses.

<https://wsuteaching.wordpress.com/2011/12/04/teaching-rhetorical-analysis-with-music-videos/>

Genius (Website)

Excellent website that uses a “wiki” style approach to rhetorical analysis, where contributors can write analysis which is then edited and approved before it is made official on the website. Primarily contains analysis of modern music, but also addresses poetry and other styles of text. Perhaps especially useful for teachers who are less familiar with the cultural mores of their students.

<https://genius.com/>

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