

Curriculum Guide

The Farming of Bones

Summary

The story of this historical novel is set in a border town in the Dominican Republic in 1937 at a time when President Rafael Trujillo is organizing a campaign of ethnic cleansing of Haitian immigrants. It tells the story of Amabelle Desir, a young Haitian woman, who works as a maid in the home of a wealthy Dominican family. Amabelle was orphaned as a child and rescued at the river's edge by Don Ignacio, a wealthy Dominican landowner. He brought her home and raised her alongside his daughter, Valencia. Sebastian Onius, Amabelle's lover is the center of her life. Like so many other Haitian immigrants, he cuts sugar cane in an American owned plantation and suffers from the harshest working conditions. When Joel, one of Sebastian's friends, is killed in a car accident, it reveals the racism of Dominican society and the growing tensions as President Trujillo plans his deadly campaign.

When Amabelle and Sebastian plan their escape, they are inadvertently separated. Then, Amabelle embarks on a journey to the border to find Sebastian, traveling through the mountains with a group of others who are fleeing the slaughter. When she arrives at the border city of Dajabon, she comes face to face with violent Dominican mobs who have been fooled into embracing the racist lies told by the Government. Amabelle is beaten and tortured when her pronunciation of a word, perejil (parsley), reveals that she is Haitian. This word was used as a shibboleth by the Dominican mobs.

She crosses the border into Haiti after her friend dies in her arms wading across the river that forms the border between the two countries. After she is nursed to health, Amabelle and her friend Yves, travel to Yves' family's home. Yves and Amabelle have an ambivalent relationship, complicated by Amabelle's ongoing search for Sebastian. She continues to keep alive her hope of finding him even after she finds out about his untimely death in the massacre. The novel explores the destructive long-term consequences of the massacre by delving into the inner lives of Yves and Amabelle as they mature into middle age.

Twenty five years later, after Trujillo is killed, Amabelle travels back to Alegria, the little town in the Dominican Republic where she grew into adulthood. She is searching for some kind of closure as well as news of Sebastian. She reconnects with Senora Valencia, her childhood friend, only to discover that the friendship could never have survived the pressures of race and class division. The visit is a sad disappointment and she stops at the border to reflect on her life, experiencing an event that is open for the reader's interpretation.

What does this novel have to offer students?

Even though most students know nothing about the 1937 massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, they can relate to the historical theme because they are living with the realities of anti-immigrant racism in the U.S. today. By reading about racism with different players (Dominican and Haitian) than those most commonly highlighted in the United States (blacks and whites), students are able to gain perspective and a more objective understanding of racism as a world-wide phenomenon, propagated by rulers with their own political and economic motivations. Students can see how the concept of race is used to build a deep-seated hatred for a minority group and how this plays out between characters in the novel, for example, a Dominican father's attitude toward his dark-skinned infant daughter, and the relationship between a Haitian maid and her Dominican mistress. For students who are of Haitian or Dominican descent, reading this novel can unlock the roots of a social disease that has infected their own families for generations. Furthermore, the novel lends itself to an exploration of Haitian and Dominican history, the 1804 Haitian revolution, the US occupation of Haiti (1915 – 1934), and Dominican Republic (1916 – 1924), the deep-seated historical conflict between Haiti and DR. Minority students in the US, subliminally conscious of the one-sided and superficial history they have been taught, tend to take a sharp interest in Haiti's history, in particular. They derive a sense of pride from the victorious Haitian revolution as a counterbalance to the American high schools' emphasis on US slavery, which (because of the way it is taught) minority students often internalize as shameful and embarrassing.

As all good literature, *The Farming of Bones* evokes a powerful aesthetic response, which can excite students about reading. The novel delves into the universal personal themes of romantic love, the experience of being orphaned at a young age, and how racism and sexism can impact one's life-long development. Its characters are deeply drawn through dialogue and description. Even though it ultimately tells a sad story, there are also uplifting characters who prevail against the odds.

Lastly, the novel's beautiful use of language appeals to students' interest in poetic language. This novel lends itself to a study of description and figurative devices that capture students' imaginations and give them confidence in interpreting and appreciating the symbolic language of poetry.

Some Issues and Topics that could be explored in class

I. Illegal Immigration

The labor of the main characters in the novel, undocumented Haitian immigrants, is exploited to the max. When people have no rights, capitalism works better. Capitalism benefits when a group of workers has a status that weakens their power in society, making them more vulnerable to their employers' power, which drives down the wages for the whole working class. They immigrate to escape poverty and desperation in their own countries, only to face a different set of problems in their new homes. Indeed, immigration from poorer to poor countries, South to South immigration, involves many more people in the world than South to North immigration. The status of illegal immigration can be better understood by comparing it to chattel slavery, which created the ultimate extreme of exploitation. 60 million people around the world today have been made homeless and stateless due to poverty, oppression, and imperialist war, more than any time since WWII.

II. The History of Hispaniola

Why do Haitians speak French (Creole) and Dominicans speak Spanish? That simple question can unleash a flood of curiosity about the history of the island of Hispaniola, the history of which is completely intertwined with colonialism, slavery, the fight against slavery in the new world, and neo-colonialism. The slaughter of Haitians in 1937 has its roots in the early European occupation of the “new world”. After the French were defeated by an uprising of African slaves, this first black republic abolished slavery and occupied the Spanish side of the island to prevent the whole island from being re-enslaved by European colonizers. However, the Spanish planters who settled in the Eastern side of the island (DR) and remained loyal to Spain, turned this history upside down to create a racist identification with their motherland. Exploring this topic can empower students who come from this part of the world to share insiders’ knowledge with their fellow students. Today, the racist scapegoating of Haitian immigrants and Dominicans with Haitian descent continues with a vengeance even though it has been met with an international outcry. Recently, a law was passed in the Dominican Republic stripping tens of thousands of Dominicans with Haitian descent of their right to citizenship. Some have been attacked and killed by lynch mobs, and, as in 1937, dark-skinned Dominicans have also been swept up in the mix. A half a million people now face deportation because of this fascist policy.

III. The Concept of Race

The massacre of 1937, as well as the ongoing marginalization and terror waged against Haitians in the Dominican Republic today is ideologically justified by the concept of race. This pseudo-scientific concept, constructed by American eugenicists and perfected by Adolph Hitler, uses genetics to explain the physical, cultural, and lifestyle differences that exist between ethnicities. Through the character of Father Romain, a Haitian priest, who was tortured in one of Trujillo’s prisons after the massacre, Danticat shows Trujillo’s fascist ideology. The belief in the concept of race lurks in societies throughout the world, evident in a diffuse form in attitudes concerning marriage and children. In times of economic crisis, elites propagate it as a potent tool to divide, mislead, and weaken the working class, as occurred in Nazi Germany, South Africa, the United States, and the Dominican Republic.

IV. Shibboleth

Shibboleth is a powerful concept to understand. During the ethnic cleansing in 1937 in the Dominican Republic, the pronunciation of the Spanish word, perejil, was used to identify Haitians who spoke Spanish as a second language and therefore were unable to trill their r’s. In much the same way, Islamic fundamentalists today ask captured Middle Eastern people to recite the Koran as a way to identify non-Muslims who will be targeted for persecution or slaughter. Shibboleths have been used through the ages, for nefarious as well as innocent purposes. Focusing on this concept helps students understand the way abstractions develop (based on the origin of the word) and provides a challenging writing assignment in which they have to write an extended definition of Shibboleth.

V. Figurative Language

Being able to interpret figurative language is an essential reading skill. Metaphors, similes, personification are in all kinds of texts, including non-fictional expository texts. However, many students have decided that they “can’t understand poetry” and get stumped when they encounter poetic language in any written form. Therefore, they need guidance in the process of interpreting it. The Farming of Bones has stunning examples of figurative language throughout the novel. Teaching this imaginative reading skill, which so many students have decided is beyond their reach, is a wonderful way to inspire and empower them as critical readers and thinkers.

Ideas for introducing the curriculum

1. Ask students to do some informal internet research on the author, Edwidge Danticat, noting important facts about her life. Discuss this in class.
2. Show a youtube video about the status of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. Discuss the DR’s new law that renders tens of thousands of Haitian immigrants stateless and is causing so many to flee racism, police brutality, extortion, and threat of deportation.
3. Watch one of the many youtube interviews of Edwidge Danticat and discuss observations and reactions.
4. Use Google Earth to “go to” the border area between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Discuss how geography impacts history.
5. Play youtube video of ordinary people in Haiti speaking Creole and ordinary people in DR speaking Spanish. Elicit student knowledge of the history of colonialism.
6. Read and discuss a current article written by Danticat about repression against Haitians in the Dominican Republic.

Vocabulary Lists by Chapter

Directions

Write a good “working definition” of each of the following words. Create a working definition by looking the word up in the dictionary, seeing how it is used in context, and then, write a simple definition using every-day language. As you read, use these definitions to better comprehend the sentences that the words appear in.

Chapters 6 – 10

bedridden	26
dwarfed	
agony	29
defied	32
ceased	33
coy	36
contemplated	
splendor	
exiled	43
patriot	
omitted	
vibrant	
repelled	46
imperceptibly	
gem	50
levee	
rigid	55
wayfarers	

Chapters 11 – 15

imbecile	58
fleeting	59
veil	
heir	61
toiled	62
shed	63
void	
embellished	69
elaborate	
gestures	
braceros	70
erected	71
terrain	72
creed	73
temperaments	75
conceded	76
inquisitor	77
edible	82

Chapters 16 - 21

bulging	84
wail	86
limply	87
plump	
ransacked	88
shriveled	

eternity	
condolences	95
glimpse	
gracious	96
abundance	
shrill	97
ambush	
menacing	
erect	
cajoling	102
cherished	104
fidgiting	106
murmuring	107
pus	110
posture	111
fragile	112
oozed	113
emples	115
paternal	117

Chapters 22 - 25

doused	119
yanked	
abrupt	
prudent	125
counsel	
brigade	
compound	126
ruffled	132
muzzle	
clasped	
dangling	
eternity	133
mumble	
fragile	134
crouched	
hoarse	135
depleted	
plaques	137
funnels	139
cowering	

Chapter 26 - 27

brow	141
strolling	
bundle	
gap	
lush	
gust	143
masquerade	145
feigned	148

scandalous	149
incline	151
ditches	
harlots	154
macabre	155
beckoned	
trembling	
colliding	156
widows	158
recreants	
quivering	
virgin	159
arouse	
gnawing	
silhouette	162
allegiance	

Chapters 28 – 30

plunge	179
steep	
gorge	
marvel	186
maroons	189
swell (noun)	
dawdlers	195
glided	198
manure	200
wafted	
sandbar	202
boulder	
abundantly	203
supplications	
provocation	

Chapters 31 – 34

Contort	218
Grimacing	
Interred	219
Ambling	
Rash	222
Marred	227
Testament	
Concede	236
Melee	
Edifices	241
Penance	242
Feigned	245
Reveries	
Silhouette	250

Chapter 35 - 39

jest	253
------	-----

alms	254
missive	262
amulets	265
monsoon	267
engulfed	268
nimble	
spry	
throb	269
slither	
reprieve	
prattle	270
solemn	
withered	273
detested	
loathed	
fowls	274
inconsolable	276
attire	278
revenants	
vainglory	279
plunge	
apoplexy	

Chapters 40 – 41

morsel	281
limber	
lint	
shroud	283
fontanel	286
amber	287
furrowed	292
haste	
luminous	
chandeliers	
inevitably	293
worldly	
pensive	
gaunt	294
vacant	295
bashful	
protruding	
stifle	301
traversed	302
jolt	
embellished	305

**Chapter by Chapter
Quizzes/Discussion Questions
Chapters for Reading Assignments
The Farming of Bones**

Pages	Chapters
1 – 25	1 – 5
26 – 56	6 – 10
57 – 83	11 – 15
84 – 117	16 -21
118 – 139	22 – 25
140 – 178	26 – 27
179 – 217	28 – 30
218 – 250	31 – 34
251 – 280	35 – 39
281 – 310	40 - 41

Chapters 1 – 5

Quiz

Directions

Answer 4 out of 5 of the following questions:

1. Describe Senora Valencia's twins.
2. What happened to Senora Valencia's mother?
3. What do you learn about Senor Pico, Senora Valencia's husband?
4. What proposal did Doctor Javier make to Amabelle?
5. Where are Sebastian's parents?

For Homework/Class Discussion

1. There are two different fonts in the book. What does this represent?
2. Keep a log of the different characters and their relationships, so you can keep straight in your mind who is who.
3. What's the setting—the place and time that the action occurs?

Chapters 6 – 10

Quiz

Directions

Answer 4 out of 6 questions.

1. Describe how Amabelle's parents drowned and what happened to her right after they drowned.
2. What do we know about Juana? Why is she sad?
3. Describe the accident that killed Joel.
4. How does Papi feel about the accident?
5. What did Kongo do with Joel's body?
6. How does the accident show the inequalities in the Dominican Republic?

Group Work

Choose a recorder to note and report on the group's ideas. Discuss these questions in your groups. The facilitator will make sure everyone gets a chance to speak and that the group moves through each question.

1. What are your opinions of the accident?
2. What does this passage tell you about Amabelle? P. 45 (top) "Nearly everything...."
3. Both Amabelle and Mimi work in the homes of wealthy Dominicans. P. 63 mid ("your people....") – p. 64 mid ("...dying from hunger.") How do they each view the people they work for? Which view do you identify with? Why?
4. This passage refers to the title of the novel. What meaning do you get from it? P. 55 (bottom) "I knew he considered...."

OR

Group Work

When we read a novel, we learn about the characters by how they are described by the author, what they say, how they respond to other characters, and how they respond to the action. The accident in which Joel was killed is a turning point in the book. Our knowledge of each character is deepened by noticing how they respond to this tragic event.

Directions: Discuss and answer the following questions.

1. Describe (briefly) each character's attitude to the accident when Joel was killed.
 - What are the words in the book (underline them for each character) that you are basing your decisions on? (For Pico, this will be different.)
 - What do you already know about each character that helps explain why they react the way they do?
2. Whose attitude can you most relate to? Why? (You will have different answers here.)
 - Pico
 - Papi p. 44
 - Luis p. 38 - 39
 - Sebastian p. 53 - 56
 - Amabelle p. 53 – 56, p. 66
 - Mimi p. 63, p. 65
 - Felice p. 65 - 66

Chapters 11 – 15

Quiz

Directions

Answer 4 out of 6 of the following questions:

1. Why did Kongo disapprove of Joel's relationship with Felice?
2. What kind of life did the cane cutters live? What details can you draw on from the novel?
3. Why does Mimi want Sebastian and Amabelle to live together?
4. What was Sebastian's plan for his life?
5. Besides cutting sugar cane, what kinds of work did Haitians have in the Dominican Republic?
6. Describe Father Romain? What do you learn about the kind of man/priest he was?

Chapters 16 – 21

Quiz

Directions

Answer 5 out of 7 questions.

1. How did Amabelle come to be the housemaid for Papi and Senora Valencia?
2. What character(s) seems to support Trujillo (the Generalissimo)? Who doesn't seem to support him?
3. What was Senora Valencia's mother like?
4. How and where did Kongo bury Joel?
5. Why do you think Senor Pico smashes the tea set against the cement walls of the latrines? What does that tell you about him?
6. What are the rumors the cane workers are hearing?
7. Why do you think Senora Valencia invites Kongo and the other workers to come into the house for coffee?

Chapters 22 – 25

Quiz

Directions

Answer 3 out of 4 questions.

1. Why did Sebastian send Kongo to talk to Amabelle? What was the purpose?
2. Why did Unel and the other Haitian stonemasons form the night watchman brigade?
3. What is Senor Pico's attitude toward Rosalinda? What is your interpretation of this?
4. Why was Senor Pico making his wife practice shooting a gun?

Chapters 26 – 27

Quiz

Directions

Answer 7 out of 9 questions.

1. How did Amabelle react when Dr. Javier asked her to leave the DR with him?

2. What is the significance of the wood that Sebastian took from Papi?
3. Describe Pico's attitude toward Unel and his brigade.
4. What kind of tactics did the Haitian people use to defend themselves?
5. What happened to Sebastian and Mimi?
6. Why were the two priests arrested?
7. What were the different attitudes among the Dominicans?
8. Describe Yves' and Amabelle's journey to the border.
9. Think of all the characters we have met in *The Farming of Bones*. To what degree are the Dominicans joining with the Generalissimo's campaign of terror against Haitians.

Group Work

1. P. 154 – 155
How did you react to the confrontation between Pico and Unel's brigade? Do you support Unel's defiance?
2. P. 144
"Don Ignacio..." – 145 What is bothering Yves about Kongo's description of his visit with Papi? What is the significance of the wood? What could it be a symbol of?
3. P. 178
What is Tibon's point of view about the plight of the Haitians? What is the connection between racism and poverty?
4. What do you think is going to happen?
(If you've read ahead, please don't spill the beans.)

Chapters 28 – 30

Quiz

Directions

Answer five of the following questions:

1. What happened to the two sisters that Amabelle and Yves were traveling with?
2. What did Amabelle, Yves, and the others experience in the deserted village?
3. How did the crowds in Dajabon respond to Trujillo?
4. What happened to Odette?
5. What was the meaning of the word parsley or "perejil"? How was it being used?
6. What happened to Amabelle and Yves after they crossed the river into Haiti?
7. What did Amabelle learn from talking to other victims?

Group Work

1. p. 183 (last line) – middle of p. 184 What is Amabelle feeling or experiencing in this passage?
2. Do you like Tibon? Why or why not?
3. This chapter shows that ordinary Dominicans were won over to participate in the massacre of innocents. How do you explain this? Do you think something like this could happen here in the U.S.? What could ordinary people do to stop it from happening?

Chapters 31 – 34

Quiz

Directions

Answer 6 out of 8 questions

1. Where did Yves and Amabelle go after they left the clinic on the Haitian/Dominican border, and what kind of reception did they get?
2. Describe Yves and Amabelle's relationship.
3. How did Yves spend most of his time after they returned to Haiti?
4. What did the government do for the victims of the massacre?
5. How did the people respond when the soldiers announced there was no more money for the victims and their families?
6. Why did Man Denise name her son Sebastian?
7. Why did Amabelle tell Man Denise that she didn't believe the story about Mimi's and Sebastian's death and why did Amabelle really believe it?
8. When they finally started talking to each other, what did Yves reveal to Amabelle about Joel's death?

Group Work

Directions

Read each passage either aloud or silently; then, discuss the questions. One person in the group should take notes on the group's response.

p. 242 Read Man Denise's words that start with "Those who die young...."

What do her words mean? What are her associations with bones?

p. 246 "Will you go yourself...." to p. 247 "... if only for brief moments, from the past."

What theme is Danticat exploring here? What do you think about it?

p. 249 bottom "His body immediately leaped...."

When Amabelle and Yves were making love, what happened to him and why?

Chapters 35 – 39

Quiz

Directions

Answer 6 out of 8 of the following questions:

1. Where did Man Denise (Sebastian's mother) go and why?
2. What had happened to Father Romain and in what condition did Amabelle find him?
3. What happened to the Generalissimo?
4. How did the survivors of the massacre respond to the news of the Generalissimo's death?
5. What was Father Romain's life like 24 years later?
6. What was Yves life like 24 years later?
7. What was Amabelle's life like 24 years later?
8. How did Yves father really die?

Chapters 40 – 41

Quiz

Directions

Answer 4 out of 6 questions:

1. How did Amabelle cross the border into the Dominican Republic?
2. How had Alegria changed?
3. How did Amabelle prove her identity to Senora Valencia?
4. What did Amabelle learn about Senora Valencia and her family?
5. Why did Amabelle come back to the Dominican Republic?
6. How do you interpret the very end, when Amabelle went into the Massacre River?

Group Work

1. Choose one of the metaphors or similes in the first three short paragraphs on p. 281 and explain what it means.
2. How had Amabelle's relationship with Senora Valencia changed? How do you explain the change? P. 300
3. What did Amabelle see in Sylvie's eyes? P. 305 (bot) – 306
4. Why does Danticat create the Professor character? What does he represent?

Writing Assignments

I. "A Little While"—Summary and Response

(Danticat's essay about the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti was published in the New Yorker Magazine 2/1/2010)

A. To write your summary, select the key points in the essay so your readers will understand what the essay is about as well as Danticat's purpose for writing it. Don't include any of your own comments or opinions. Focus entirely on what Danticat is saying. Start with an introductory sentence (two sentences is OK too) that includes the following information:

- Title of what it is you're summarizing
- Author
- Date
- What kind of reading it is (Essay? Poem? Short story? News article?)
- Where published
- Main Idea or Topic

You should be able to write a summary of this essay in one paragraph.

B. Your response will be your reaction, your opinion of the essay. Think back to how you felt when you read the essay for the first time. What were your thoughts and feelings? Think about where your mind took you. Rather than jump around

giving different impressions, make one point and develop it. Your response should be at least one paragraph. Please type your summary and response according to the “College Format that I gave out in class.

II. Shibboleth and its use in the Dominican Republic

In this composition you will discuss the concept of Shibboleth and how it was used in the Dominican Republic in 1937. From a writing/research perspective you will learn how to summarize, paraphrase, and use direct quotations.

- First, define and explain the term Shibboleth. You may include a quotation from a dictionary but the explanation of this concept should be completely in your own words. Part of this should be an explanation of the origin of the word, Shibboleth. As part of your definition, please paraphrase the biblical passage that Danticat includes as the preface to *The Farming of Bones*.
- Second, summarize chapter 29, the events in Dajabon. Include one direct quotation in your summary. Make sure you establish a smooth transition between this paragraph and the first one that explains Shibboleth.
- Lastly, draw a conclusion about what you’ve written so far. Why does it matter? Why should we care? Develop your point of view fully.

You could discuss how the characters in *Farming* have been impacted by the events in the novel and/or your own experiences that led you to think the way you do. Your composition should be at least three well-developed paragraphs and typed according to the College Format (class handout).

III. Haitian-Dominican Relations

- Summarize and explain (in your own words) Samuel Martinez’s point about Haitian-Dominican relations. (1 paragraph)
- What does *The Farming of Bones* reveal about Haitian-Dominican relations? Use at least three specific examples to support your point. (2 – 3 paragraphs)
- Taking into account what you have learned from the article, the novel, and your own life experience, write your opinion about the conflict between Dominicans and Haitians and what can be done about it. (1 paragraph)

IV. Critical Review

Write a critical review of *The Farming of Bones* that focuses on Edwidge Danticat’s purpose for writing the book. In Part II, you will integrate 3 – 5 direct quotations from: *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat’s on-line interviews, “The Theories of Racism”, “The River Massacre”.

Part I

1. Begin with a summary of the plot, including only the key events. Write it as though the audience were people who hadn’t read the book.
2. In a second paragraph discuss the concept of Shibboleth and how it relates to novel (summarizing and quoting from *The Farming of Bones*). (The biblical quotation at the beginning of novel is one way that Edwidge Danticat focuses our attention on her purpose for writing it.)
3. In a third and possibly fourth paragraph draw a conclusion about why you think Danticat wrote the book. What did she want her readers to walk away with? What did she want us to learn? To feel? To think about? Support your point by discussing your own experience reading the novel.

Part II

For Part II you will not be writing any new paragraphs. You will be adding quotations from the following three sources into the 3 paragraphs (Critical Review) you wrote for Part I.

1. Weave into your critical review some thoughts you have about either River Massacre or Theories of Racism. Make it clear how this article deepened your understanding of *The Farming of Bones*.
2. Read two out of three of on-line interviews with Edwidge Danticat. Choose one or two quotes from the interviews to support your point about Danticat’s purpose.

http://www.progressive.org/mag_intvdanticat

http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/farming_of_bones.html

<http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2006/10/27/18323801.php>

V. Reaction Paper: The Price of Sugar

Write a paper about your reaction to film, *The Price of Sugar*. It should be at 1 - 2 pages long, so make sure you explain how you feel and why. If you need help developing your ideas, answer one or more of the following questions: What surprised you about the film? What other emotional reactions did you have? What are your experiences or beliefs that led you to react the way you did? Explain. Who do you think needs to see this film? Why?

OR

- Describe a part of the film that you had a strong reaction to: the priest (his motivation and life work), the conditions of sugar cane cutters, the racist movement against Haitians, the strike and the workers’ movement, the Viccini family, the role of politicians, the role of the media.
- Describe your reaction.
- Explain why you reacted as you did. Your explanation should reveal what you believe in and what influenced (people and experiences) the formation of your beliefs.

VI. Aesthetic Response to The Farming of Bones

“An aesthetic response is a unique, creative, imaginative, and personal transaction that occurs between the reader and the text...” Louise Rosenblatt

Directions

You have lived this story and gotten inside the hearts and minds of Haitian immigrants, Dominican elites, a woman orphaned as a young girl, a man traumatized by a campaign of terror. In this assignment, you will explore your very personal response to the novel. Choose one of the following to write about. If you choose 1, 2, or 5, try to achieve the character’s authentic voice. (You should read over parts of the novel in which he or she is speaking as a model for your writing.) It should be at least one typewritten page. Edit well.

1. Imagine you are Father Romain writing a letter to Amabelle giving her advice at the point in her life when the book ends.
2. In Amabelle’s voice, explain her inner experience when she disrobes and enters the Massacre River at the end of the novel.
3. Write a letter to Edwidge Danticat explaining what you learned and experienced while reading her novel, *The Farming of Bones*.
4. Write a letter to a friend or family member in which you convince them to read the novel, *The Farming of Bones*. Address the specific aspects of their lives/experiences that make you think they will be able to relate to the novel.
5. Imagine you are Man Rapadou revealing to her son how his father died and what she wishes for Yves.
6. Imagine you are Senora Valencia writing in her journal after Amabelle’s visit.

Other Kinds of Assignments: Research based, Expressive

I. Oral Report on Immigrants to Poor Countries from Poorer Ones

A. Sources: Use at least 3 sources which you have in hand on the day of the report.

- You may use Wikipedia or another encyclopedia for background information.
- Find at least two news sources, preferably with different points of view.

B. Present the situation: Plan a report that addresses the following questions:

- Where is the country you are researching and the country/countries people immigrate from?
(Distribute a map to class)
- When did the immigration begin and what are the reasons people immigrate there?
- What kind of work do the immigrants do?
- What living and working conditions do they face?
- Is there racism against them? What form does it take?
- What role are both governments playing (the government in the poor country and the government in the poorer country)?

C. Critical Reading: your report should show critical reading and thinking:

- Point of View:
What phrases, examples, quotes, choice of words help you “hear” the writer’s point of view?
- Drawing Conclusions:
By comparing the situation in the country you’ve researched to the Dominican Republic, what conclusions can you draw?
- Research Questions:
If you were going to continue to research this situation, what questions (2 – 3) would you try to answer?

D. Delivery:

- You may not read your report, but you should have notes on notecards that you glance down at when you speak.
- Work as a team by dividing down the information between you.

II. Express Yourself!

Choose one of the following ways of expressing your view of Christopher Columbus:

- Write an °acrostic poem using his name
- Write a poem or rap about Columbus or the holiday Columbus Day
- Rewrite 1492 or Columbus Day Song
- Create a °collage or drawing of: The °Legacy of Christopher Columbus, or Columbus Day
- Design a Tattoo for Christopher Columbus, accompanied by a narrative that explains the choices you made. Also explain where you would place the tattoo on his body and why.

Tips and Definitions

If you search on the internet for Christopher Columbus images, you’ll find hundreds of images that you could use or may give you ideas.

- ° Legacy: something that is handed down or remains from a previous generation or time
- ° Collage: a picture made by sticking cloth, pieces of paper, photographs, and other objects onto a surface
- ° Acrostic poem: a number of lines of writing in which a combination of letters from each line spells a word or phrase.

Here is an example:

Mother
My world starts with you,
On a hospital bed at night.
The doctor gives me to you.
Hands hold me tight.
Ever so close, you
Rock me through my fright.

Supplementary Readings and Resources

1. “A Little While” (New Yorker Magazine 2/1/2010)
A personal narrative essay written by Danticat after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010.
2. “Haitian-Dominican Relations,” Samuel Martinez
A short essay that “suggests that Dominican politicians have used anti-Haitian feeling for political gain.”
Adaptation from “Not a Cockfight: Rethinking Haitian-Dominican Relations”, Latin American Perspective 30, No. 3 80 – 101
Reprinted in The Dominican Republic (Resource Book) Teaching for Change
3. “The River Massacre: The Real and Imagine Borders of Hispaniola”, Michelle Wucker
An historical essay that describes the causes and effects of the 1937 massacre in the DR.
<http://www.windowsonhaiti.com/windowsonhaiti/wucker1.shtml> (Shortened version in Handouts section)
4. Teaching About Haiti (Resource Book)
<http://www.teachingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/cchaiti.pdf>
5. “Theories of Racism”
An analytical piece on the political economy of racism/a class analysis of racism
Excerpted from Fight Racism: A Fighter’s Manual (2008), a Progressive Labor Party pamphlet
6. “United Front in U.S. Labor Struggle: How the Exploitation of Illegal Immigrants and Lower Class People Affects All Workers”, Grover Furr, Posted 10/19/06
An essay that compares illegal immigrant status to the status of slaves and explains why this powerless status helps employers and hurts all workers.
<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/pol/misc/gfundocworkers1006.pdf>
7. “Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress” excerpted from A Peoples History of the United States, Howard Zinn
(Shortened with questions embedded in Handouts section)
A chapter (shortened) that presents an anti-racist history of Columbus’ “discovery of the New World”.

News articles:

- “In landmark case, 500 Haitian workers sue Dominican sugar mill” (2009) clavedigital.com
- “Racist Imperialists Looted Haiti for 500 Years: Capitalism+Earthquake = Mass Murder” posted by Challenge Newspaper 1/22/10 plp.org
- “A Global Trek to Poor Nations—from Poorer Ones” New York Times
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/27/world/americas/27migration.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0

Video

The Price of Sugar (Complete video available on youtube www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmtfjFxt-Iw)

Summary:

In the Dominican Republic, a tropical island-nation, tourists flock to pristine beaches unaware that a few miles away thousands of dispossessed Haitians have toiled under armed-guard on plantations harvesting sugarcane, much of which ends up in U.S. kitchens. They work grueling hours and frequently lack decent housing, clean water, electricity, education or healthcare. Narrated by Paul Newman, "The Price of Sugar" follows Father Christopher Hartley, a charismatic Spanish priest, as he organizes some of this hemisphere's poorest people to fight for their basic human rights. This film raises key questions about where the products we consume originate and at what human cost they are produced.

Miscellaneous Handouts

Full-text readings, other useful handouts related to readings

I. Writing a summary—“A Global Trek to Poor Nations, from Poorer Ones”

1. Think about the process of writing a summary (both a reading and writing skill!) What do you need to do as you read “A Global Trek...” for the second time to prepare for writing a summary? What is the thinking process involved? What strategies can you use?

2. Read the article annotating, marking key points, making marginal notes that identify topic and paraphrase key points.
3. Now write the main idea of the article in your own words.
4. Craft your introductory sentence for the summary:
5. Now, you're ready to write the rest of the summary (10 – 15 sentences). Include key points and leave out the description, details and examples (which is most of the article).

**II. Questions embedded in Christopher Columbus
(People's History of the United States by Howard Zinn)**

1. Where do you think this reading selection came from?
2. Who do you think the Arawaks were?
3. Who wrote this? What's a log? Why might he have kept a log?
4. What kind of people were the Arawaks?
5. What kind of man was Christopher Columbus?
6. What are the two societies being compared? How do they compare?
7. Why were the King and Queen of Spain interested in funding Columbus' exploration?
8. Look on the map. Where did Christopher Columbus come from? Where did he meet the Arawaks? What does it mean "...sail west in order to get to the Far East."
9. Where does Columbus think he'll find the gold?
10. What are timbers? What is the Santa Maria? What happened to it?
11. What are the Nina and Pinta?
12. Why was he talking about religion?
13. Why did Columbus report to the Court in Madrid? What country do you think Madrid is in?
14. Why did he exaggerate? What were his promises?
15. Why were the villages empty?
16. Who killed the sailors?
17. What is the interior?
18. What is a dividend?
19. What does it mean—"five hundred best specimens"?
20. What is Columbus implying about the Indians?
21. Who might have invested in Columbus' expedition?
22. Why would an Indian wear a copper token? Why would an Indian not wear a copper token?
23. Why did the Arawaks lose the fight with the Spanish?
24. Why might de Las Casas have changed his position about Spanish cruelty?
25. How did the Spanish view the Indians?
26. What was Las Casas point of view (how did he feel about the Indians)? What words tell you this?
27. What do you think procreate means? (Use context and word analysis clues)
28. Why is there no bloodshed in the history books?

III. Answer Sheet: "Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress" from The Peoples History of the United States, Zinn

Directions: Write the answers to the questions Name _____

1. _____

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IV. GLOSSARY—THE RIVER MASSACRE

1. Absurd—ridiculous
 Virtually—almost completely
 Shallow—little water (opposite of deep)
2. Deceptively—misleading
3. Odd—weird, unusual
 Distorted—misrepresented , not truly or completely representing the facts
 Dissent—disagreement
 Deployed—used
 Propaganda—ideas deliberately spread to convince people of something
 Portraying—showing
 Mania—hysteria, excessive excitement
 Paternal—fatherly
4. Juncture—a point of time that is critical because of circumstances
 Transform—change completely
5. Myth—legend, fantasy
 Ascent—rise
 Relative—comparing to other times
 Toppled—overthrew
 Embellished—decorated
 Snubbed—rejected
 Exploits—notable actions
6. Turmoil—disorder, confusion
 Resonated—understood, received a sympathetic response
 Obsessions—domination of one’s thoughts or feelings on one thing
 Status—the position of an individual in relation to others
 Embraced—believed
7. Alluding—referring to
 Carnage—massacre
8. Exploited—took advantage of
9. Protégé—someone who follows in someone’s footsteps
 Crystallization—to give a definite form or expression to
 Sentiment—feeling
 Depredations—preying on someone, total attack including robbery
 Elegant—excellent, superior
 Exile—forced to leave one’s country
 Triumphantly—victoriously, having won
 Hordes—mob
10. Buccaneers—pirate adventurers
 Socialization—ways to control people
 Criollo—mixed Europeans and Africans
 Collaboration—working together

Fortified—strengthened
Dwindling—getting smaller
Perpetrated—committed crimes
Expelled—kicked out
Foothold—way in
Chafing—irritated or annoyed
Inept—unskillful
Re-annexed—took back over

11. Nebulous—not well defined
Intermingling—mixing
12. Taint—spoil, stain, pollute
13. Diaspora—when a group immigrates out of their country to other countries
Articulates—expresses with clarity

V. Read the opinion piece: “United Front in U.S. Labor Struggle”

Answer the following questions:

1. In what way can illegal immigration be compared to slavery?
2. Why is this comparison important?
3. Who benefits from laws that make some immigrants “illegal”? How?
4. Who is hurt by these laws? How?
5. A sentence is repeated in this opinion piece: cheap labor anywhere is a threat to labor everywhere. In your own words explain what it means.
6. What does the writer see as the solution to the problem?

VI. Discussion of questions: Grover Furr—United Front in U.S. Labor Struggle

1. In what way can illegal immigration be compared to slavery? They have no legal rights, like slaves had no legal rights, and therefore they can be exploited to the max.
2. Why is this comparison important? It is important to see that we are all workers with different amounts of rights. They are only slaves and “illegal aliens” because of laws that are passed to create a division among us.
3. Who benefits from laws that make some immigrants “illegal”? How? The employers and politicians—They get cheap labor. They get a labor force too afraid to fight back. They get a divided labor force. They can blame undocumented immigrants for everything.
4. Who is hurt by these laws? How? All workers because their wages are all lowered and they are too divided to fight back.
5. A sentence is repeated in this opinion piece: cheap labor anywhere is a threat to labor everywhere. In your own words explain what it means. When the bosses can get some workers to work for less, it pulls down the wages of all workers and divides them so they can’t fight back.
6. What does the writer see as the solution to the problem? We have to do away with the category of “illegal” workers.
 - Examples when people didn’t accept these divisions? Older French workers protesting attacks on younger workers
American Trade Unionists who fought slavery
 - What does it mean to Blame the Victim? Any examples in Farming? Juana/Kongo
 - How do they fool white or the American-born to blame the victim?
 - How does this relate to The Farming of Bones? To our life today?
 - Minutemen/Tea Party/Secure Communities

VII. Shibboleth(From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

A shibboleth (pronounced /ʃɪbəlɪθ/[1] or /ʃɪbəlθ/[2]) is any distinguishing practice that is indicative of one's social or regional origin. It usually refers to features of language, and particularly to a word whose pronunciation identifies its speaker as being a member or not a member of a particular group.

Origin

The term originates from the Hebrew word "shibbóleth" (שִׁבְּוֹלֶת), which literally means the part of a plant containing grains, such as an ear of corn or a stalk of grain[3] or, in different contexts, "stream, torrent".[4][5] It derives from an account in the Hebrew Bible, in which pronunciation of this word was used to distinguish Ephraimites, whose dialect lacked a /ʃ/ sound (as in shoe), from Gileadites whose dialect did include such a sound.

In the Book of Judges, chapter 12, after the inhabitants of Gilead inflicted a military defeat upon the tribe of Ephraim (around 1370–1070 BC), the surviving Ephraimites tried to cross the Jordan River back into their home territory and the Gileadites secured the river's fords to stop them. In order to identify and kill these refugees, the Gileadites put each refugee to a simple test:

“Gilead then cut Ephraim off from the fords of the Jordan, and whenever Ephraimite fugitives said, 'Let me cross,' the men of Gilead would ask, 'Are you an Ephraimite?' If he said, 'No,' they then said, 'Very well, say "Shibboleth" (שיבולת).' If anyone said, "Sibboleth" (סיבולת), because he could not pronounce it, then they would seize him and kill him by the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites fell on this occasion. —Judges 12:5-6, NJB

Modern usage

In numerous cases of conflict between groups speaking different languages or dialects, one side used shibboleths in a way similar to the above-mentioned Biblical use, i.e., to discover hiding members of the opposing group. Modern researchers use the term "Shibboleth" for all such usages, whether or not the people involved were using it themselves.

Today, in the English language, a shibboleth also has a wider meaning, referring to any "in-crowd" word or phrase that can be used to distinguish members of a group from outsiders - even when not used by a hostile other group. The word is also sometimes used in a broader sense to mean jargon, the proper use of which identifies speakers as members of a particular group or subculture.

Shibboleths can also be customs or practices, such as male circumcision, or a signifier, such as a semiotic.

Cultural touchstones and shared experience can also be shibboleths of a sort. For example, people about the same age who are from the same nation tend to have the same memories of popular songs, television shows, and events from their formative years. Discussing such memories is a common way of bonding. In-jokes can be a similar type of shared-experience shibboleth.

Notable shibboleths

- During the Battle of the Bulge, American soldiers used knowledge of baseball to determine if others were fellow Americans or if they were German infiltrators in American uniform.
- The Dutch famously used the name of the port town Scheveningen as a shibboleth to tell Germans from the Dutch (the Dutch pronounce the S separately from the ch).
- Prior to the Guldensporenslag, the Flemish slaughtered every Frenchman they could find in the city of Bruges. They are said to have identified Frenchmen based on their inability to pronounce the phrase "Schild ende Vriend" ("Shield and Friend"), or possibly "'s Gilden vriend" ("Friend of the Guilds").

VIII. Summary of “A Little While”

“A Little While”, written by Edwidge Danticat, was published in The New Yorker Magazine on Feb. 1, 2010, only a few weeks after the earthquake hit Haiti in January. The article focuses on Maxo, the author’s cousin who was killed during the earthquake. The article is a memorial to this big-hearted man who was always raising money to help people in Haiti. The earthquake buried in his house along with his family, and students, and their parents who he was tutoring on that day. When his neighbors dug out his body many days later, they were relieved that he could now be buried. Others in Danticat’s family were also suffering terribly. The article ends conveying a fatalistic attitude about how little control people have over their lives. Danticat implies that that may be one way that Haitians deal with the misery that the catastrophe has caused.

IX. The River Massacre: The Real and Imagined Borders of Hispaniola, by Michele Wucker

Sending letters directly between the Dominican Republic and Haiti has only recently become possible. For most of the last sixty years, their postal services routed the mail ninety miles north to Miami as if the two countries had decided that they no longer shared the island of Hispaniola. This is absurd at best; a flight between their capital cities, Santo Domingo and Port-au-Prince, takes only half an hour. Deep in the Cordillera Central mountain range, the border is virtually irrelevant to peasants who cross it easily on market days and switch rapidly between Dominican Spanish and Haitian Kreyol. In the north, the river that separates the two countries is so shallow that in it women wash clothes and children play.

Tragedy, not geography, forms the real border. Its name, as any Dominican or Haitian can tell you, is the same as that of the deceptively calm northern river: The Massacre. During just a few weeks in October 1937, Dominican soldiers killed 30,000 Haitians along the border because the victims' skin was dark, even though Dominicans were just a few shades lighter. The events still divide the Dominican Republic and Haiti so deeply that there may as well be an ocean not only around them but between them.

Dominicans typically do not describe the massacre as the result of popular hatred against Haitians, but instead imply that Dominicans dislike Haitians because of the massacre. This sounds odd but is not far from the truth, which is that for six decades nationalist Dominican governments distorted history and promoted dissent to defend the madman dictator Rafael Trujillo. Trujillo was openly inspired by Hitler's racial theories and ordered the massacre as a way of "whitening" his country. To quiet critics, Trujillo deployed an intense "Dominicanization" propaganda campaign portraying his racist mania as a paternal act to save his people from Haiti.

Today the two nations are at a historical juncture, the end of an era dominated by two powerful Dominican leaders who were shaped by the massacre -- Joaquín Balaguer, its greatest defender, and José Francisco Peña Gómez, an orphan left behind. Their successors now have a chance to transform the memory of the massacre from one used to justify the past into one with the power to keep such a thing from happening again. To do so, they must replace the myth of the protective strongman with the stories of his victims.

A former sugar cane plantation guard, Rafael Trujillo began his ascent to power in the National Guard, where he was trained by American Marines occupying the Dominican Republic. He quickly rose through the ranks, becoming head of the armed forces when the American troops left in 1924, a time of relative prosperity. It was not long before he toppled an aging caretaker president, and in 1930 he began a thirty-one-year dictatorship during which he renamed mountains and cities after himself and embellished his own name with the honorific Great Benefactor of the Nation and Father of the New Dominion.

He wore pancake make-up to lighten the traces of color his Haitian grandmother's blood had left in his skin. Yet Dominican society still snubbed him for his working-class family origins, and for his youthful exploits as a petty thief.

Turmoil in Europe resonated both with the Dominican Republic's growing economic difficulties and with Trujillo's own obsessions with race and status. By 1937 the Dominican Republic was practically broke, its sugar exports fetching only a penny a pound, one twentieth of the price during the boom a decade earlier. In late September of that year, weeks before the massacre, the Dominican president publicly accepted a gift of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, whose racial theories he clearly embraced. A visiting Nazi delegation was welcomed by glowing newspaper editorials: "Long live our illustrious leaders, the Honorable President, Doctor Trujillo, and the Führer of the German Reich, Adolf Hitler."

Hitler's ideas gave Trujillo a racist and nationalist plan to distract Dominicans from their empty stomachs. Reminding Dominicans that they could not afford to feed foreigners too, Trujillo cracked down on migration from Haiti. But powerful American sugar cane plantation owners, who brought in Haitians to cut cane because, unlike Dominicans, they worked for practically nothing, forced him to make huge exceptions. He resorted to deporting Haitians and tightening border patrols, but the Haitians kept coming. On October 2, 1937, while Trujillo was drunk at a party in his honor not far from the Massacre River, he gave orders for the "solution" to the Haitian problem.

In the Book of Judges, forty thousand Ephraimites were killed at the River Jordan because their inability to pronounce "Shibboleth" identified them as foreigners. On the Dominican border, Trujillo's men asked anyone with dark skin to identify the sprigs of parsley they held up. Haitians, whose Kreyol uses a wide, flat "R", could not pronounce the trilled "R" in the Spanish word for parsley, "perejil." Dominicans still refer to the massacre as El Corte, the cutting, alluding to the machetes the Dominican soldiers used so they could say the carnage was the work of peasants defending themselves; only the government could afford to kill with bullets. El Corte also suggested to the Haitians' work of harvesting sugar cane (ironically, soldiers did not touch the Haitians who stayed on the Americans' sugar plantations).

Trujillo's deed became a footnote to a much larger crime against humanity, and he exploited events in Europe as a way to clear his own name. At the time of El Corte, the world had its eyes on Hitler and on refugees desperate for a country to take them in. In an effort to find a home for them, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt met with world leaders at Evian-les-Bains, France in July 1938. Of the many attendees, the only president to respond was Trujillo, who offered a vast expanse of farm land and 100,000 visas. This offer not only repaired his relations with the rest of the world, but also fit into his "whitening" plan. While it saved lives, the plan failed as a social engineering project. Most of the 5,000 or so refugees who acquired visas soon left for other countries. And it turned out that only about half of the 700 people who eventually settled in the new community of Sosúa were unmarried; very few of the rest married Dominicans.

Meanwhile, Trujillo's men were revising history to justify what he had done. His protégé, Joaquín Balaguer, wrote that the massacre was "the crystallization in the heart of our country of a sentiment of protest and defense against four centuries of Haitian depredations." Grateful for this elegant defense, Trujillo made him, in 1960, the last of three puppet presidents.

Driven into exile after Trujillo's assassination in 1961, Balaguer returned triumphantly, with U.S. support, to the nation's highest office in 1966. During seven presidential terms, Balaguer repeated one pledge above all others: to defend the country from the Haitian hordes.

History gives a far more complex version of Dominican-Haitian relations. The Massacre River got its name from a colonial-era Spanish slaughter of French pirate buccaneers. As a result of different socialization strategies on the part of these European rivals, Dominicans are mostly mulattos (of mixed African and European race) while Haitians have much darker skin. Spanish Santo Domingo encouraged its criollo descendants of European settlers and African slaves to intermarry. This was good for cattle ranching, which required close collaboration of workers and masters. It also fortified the Spanish-speaking population, which was dwindling as adventurers abandoned Santo Domingo to search for gold in South America. By contrast, in French Saint-Domingue, brutal masters perpetrated unspeakable cruelties on the African slaves of coffee and sugar plantations. In 1804, rebellious slaves expelled the French and created Haiti, the world's first Black republic. The Haitians then backed Dominican independence from Spain, though they soon occupied Spanish Santo Domingo to make sure neither Spain nor France would find an easy foothold. Slavery was abolished across the island. But Dominicans, chafing from twenty-two years of inept Haitian rule, won back freedom in 1844. Spain soon re-annexed Santo Domingo for a few unhappy years until the colony again resorted to Haitian help to cast off European rule. Official Dominican history, however, downplays its neighbor's contribution: Independence Day celebrates freedom not from Spain, but from Haiti.

The border remained nebulous well into this century. Intermingling of Dominicans and Haitians had gone on for so long that in many cases it was (and still is) impossible to identify someone as fully one or the other. A clear line between the countries was not drawn until 1930, when the two governments signed a treaty at the urging of American troops, who were preparing to end a nineteen-year occupation of Haiti. At the time of the massacre, most of the residents of the border were bilingual, so could indeed pronounce perejil. Some scholars even suggest that Dominicans exaggerated the parsley story as a way to reassure themselves that only Haitians were killed, that the line was clearly drawn between those who were meant to live and die....

This past June, President Fernández traveled to Port-au-Prince for two days; it had been more than sixty years since a Dominican president slept in Haiti. The last time that happened, as the Haitian press did not fail to recall, Trujillo had traveled to Port-au-Prince in the spring of 1936, just a year before the massacre. Then, Haitian leaders re-named Grande Rue as "Avenue Trujillo." During Fernández's trip, the two countries agreed to cooperate with the United States to fight drug trafficking. But Dominican officials kept themselves busy blaming much of the drug problem on Haiti. Afraid that Haiti's image would taint them, Dominican tourism industry leaders refused to entertain the possibility of joint tourism efforts.

Still, as small an achievement as it may seem, there are now letters going back and forth from one side of the island to the other. More concretely, the two presidents do meet regularly. For the first time ever, both leaders have been elected democratically. History is no longer only in the hands of dictators who distort it to justify evil. Finally, the forgotten are being heard, given a voice by Dominican and Haitian novelists, many of them from Hispaniola's huge diaspora. The Farming of Bones, a new novel by the acclaimed Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, articulates this new cry for healing in the words of a young Haitian man frustrated by a Dominican youth: "He won't say what I want him to say, that we're the same, me and him, flesh like flesh, blood like blood." Shortly after his lament, he is killed by a mob during the massacre. Right now, reviving the memory of the massacre may be exactly what is needed so its story can be re-told: not in the words of strongmen but in the words of the ones who for so long have been silent.

This article, sent to Windows on Haiti by its distinguished author, originally appeared in the November 1998 issue of *Tikkun magazine*. Michele Wucker is the author of *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians and the Struggle for Hispaniola* (Hill & Wang: 1999).

X. Theories of Racism (Excerpted from *Fight Racism: A Fighter's Manual* (2008), a Progressive Labor Party pamphlet)

History shows us that racism has not always existed and that it did not develop from ideas. It developed from the need for cheap labor in the earliest stages of capitalism, and from the need to divide and conquer workers in order to control them.

Slavery in the Ancient World

Racism in the United States emerged along with slavery, in the 1600s and 1700s. But slavery existed in the world long before that. Ancient societies were based on slavery; however slavery in these societies, was not based on "race". A person became a slave by being defeated in war, or sometimes because of bankruptcy or punishment for certain crimes. Slaves in Rome came from what is now England, France, eastern Europe, north Africa -- wherever the Roman Empire had conquered. (In fact, the word "slave" comes from Slav -- the name given to people from eastern Europe.) Roman slaves came in all colors, from the palest to the darkest. In north Africa, black Africans were the largest group of slaves, but there were also white, Christian slaves. In those days, slaves could sometimes be set free, and if they were, they would be equal to the other free people. Racism as we know it did not exist. During the "Middle Ages" in Europe, there was a good deal of contact with African societies. At that time, Africa was more advanced than Europe: it had large cities, universities, huge armies and a lively trade with Asia and the Mediterranean. Africa was admired as a continent of gold and riches. European churches dating back to those days have statues and paintings of black saints in them. Racism as we know it did not exist in those times, either.

Race and Racism Were Created by Capitalism

When slavery developed in the "New World" in the sixteen and seventeen hundreds, it was a new type of slavery. It was slavery within the capitalist economy. But slave labor is not the usual form of labor under capitalism: wage labor is. So why did slavery develop in the Americas? And why is it that the slaves were Africans?

When the British began to develop profitable plantations in their American colonies they faced a serious shortage of workers. They also faced the problem of labor discipline because it was easy for workers to leave the plantations or escape to the Indians.

The British tried several ways of dealing with the labor shortage. The main one, at first, was indentured servitude. Under this system, unemployed people from England were convinced to come to America or were kidnapped. They were forced to work without wages to pay off their passage to America from England, usually for seven years. People were packed like sardines into the holds of ships for two to three months. Sometimes, fewer than half of them survived the trip. When people died, they were tossed overboard. Once they arrived in America, they were auctioned off to buyers. Husbands, wives and children were separated. These were white, English people: racism had nothing to do with it. It was just plain capitalist greed.

Indentured servants were brutally exploited. The plantation owners and the colonial government violently disciplined these workers. Runaways were punished by hanging, burning, being staked in the sun or shot. It was also legal to increase their seven-year contract as punishment for various misdeeds. At this stage, most indentured servants did not even live until the end of their seven year contract.

The shipmasters and merchants who brought white laborers to the colonies also went to Africa to get laborers. Slavery of the early, pre-capitalist type existed in west Africa at that time. When different groups went to war, people who were captured became slaves -- not for life, and not without rights, but still slaves. British and other European merchants offered money to purchase captured slaves, and they found the African slave owning rulers willing to sell. "Africans joined whites as indentured servants and went through the same hell..."

For several decades, the Africans brought to North America joined whites as indentured servants. They went through the same hell, from the boat passage to the auction block to the beatings and harsh conditions. In the colonies, they worked and lived alongside the whites. There was no barrier between white and black servants: their common enemy created an intense solidarity, which overcame the superficial differences in language and cultural habits. They lived, worked, and married together. They often ran away together, and on several occasions they rebelled together.

In the 1660s all this began to change -- drastically. England cut back on white emigration. The industrial revolution was beginning so more workers were needed in the factories at home. British capitalists also gave massive support to the African slave trade. They had made a decision to base the American economic system on human slavery, and the supply of labor from Africa was cheap and plentiful.

"British capitalists made a conscious decision to base the American economic system on human slavery." The slave trade was immensely profitable. The profits from buying and selling African workers, combined with the rape of gold and silver from

South and Central America, provided the capital to drive the engine of the industrial revolution. Europe became the top dog in the world based on the enslavement of American Indians and Africans.

At this time, the colonial ruling class (plantation owning families like the Washingtons, Jeffersons, Mathers and Byrds: the "fathers of our country") began to legalize slavery. At first, some plantation owners began to hold certain Africans for life, rather than for seven years. Then lifetime servitude for black servants became law. In 1662 came the "principal of heredity," which declared that, legally, if the mother was a black slave, the child would also be a slave from birth. But in a society which until then had paid almost no attention to skin color, a number of questions had to be answered: what was a black person? What was a white person? What was a child whose parents were different colors? At this stage, the concept of race needed to be made up. To do this, more laws were passed. The Virginia legislature, in 1672, defined a black person: anyone with one black grandparent. (Hitler used a parallel law to define a "Jew".) This was very significant: if it was necessary to pass a law to define a "race," it is obvious that at that time, people did not think of each other as belonging to separate "races."

These laws represent the beginning of the idea of racism. The idea was that whites were superior to blacks. This idea was very profitable, so it didn't bother the capitalist rulers of the colonies that it was a blatant lie. They used the idea to justify all past, present and future exploitation and abuse of black people, Indians, and later, other "people of color." The final step in this process was that black people lost all their rights and became the property of the slave owners. Every aspect of the trade and of slavery became even more brutal. Millions of black people were murdered by capitalism in this process.

But the colonial rulers still faced a big problem: both whites and blacks resisted the new system. Although most historians today say that racism came about because Europeans were "naturally" prejudiced against Africans because of their skin color, the truth is that skin color was an excuse for racism, not the cause of it. "The truth is that skin color was an excuse for racism, not the cause of it."

Blacks and whites did not view each other as different races. They had to be trained to. This training was ruthless and carefully planned, and continues to this day! The legislatures, the churches, the courts and the press were all used in the campaign. The purpose was to separate whites and blacks in order to control both. This made slavery possible. It also made it possible for the ruling class to make huge profits off the backs of poor white workers and farmers who were divided from their black brothers and sisters, and confused by racism about the cause of their poverty.

Laws were passed to punish whites who had black friends, or who ran away with black people, and vice versa. Laws were passed against interracial dating and marriage -- which people ignored for more than a century. Black and white people were punished by torture, maiming and death for breaking these laws. Opponents of the system were branded, castrated, starved to death, roasted to death over fires. White and black rebels were beheaded, and their heads put on poles along the roads as warnings. Despite all this, rebellion and unity continued. Whites in general still had not learned to be racist. They openly disobeyed the laws.

The ruling class began to offer rewards to each group to betray the other: Indians were offered bounties for betraying black runaways, blacks were given minor rewards for helping to fight Indians, whites were used against both. The bosses eventually "persuaded" many white workers to identify with their masters instead of their black brothers and sisters. As racism came to be more accepted, conditions for whites got even worse. The plantations system grew, forcing them off any land they might farm, and out of any jobs they might get.

The truth, hidden by the bosses, is that racist ideas and practices were forced on the working class by one hundred years of violence, laws and propaganda. White workers as well as black slaves became victims of it. The capitalists who devised racism clearly knew what they were doing.

"Racist ideas were forced on the working class by one hundred years of violence and propaganda." The capitalists made racism an essential part of their system, but they never succeeded in squashing the opposition to it. Because racism (then and now) is against the direct interests of the working class, many workers, both slave and "free," continued to unite in rebellions against slavery. Although they were defeated by the overwhelmingly superior force of the government, there were hundreds of slave revolts in the United States, a great many of which involved white workers and farmers. The event which touched off the Civil War was the Harper's Ferry raid. This carefully planned raid was intended to be the beginning of an army of escaped slaves and a guerrilla war in the south. It was an integrated raid, and one of the main organizers was John Brown, who was white.

There is No Such Thing as Race

If you watch how young children act, you will realize that we learned our ideas about race and nationality -- we weren't born with them. Two and three year old children usually do not think skin color is very significant. If they are in an integrated day care situation, they are as likely to say, "hey look at that purple kid," identifying another child by the color of a shirt rather than by skin color. It's not that the children don't see each other's skin color, it's just that it means no more than the color of their eyes, or the color of their clothes. As they grow older, they soon learn how significant skin color is in capitalist society. As much as the capitalists want to force us to believe in race, however, there is no such thing as a race of humans. All humans are part of the same species. There are variations in the physical appearance of humans, but they are insignificant. There is no medical test that will show what so-called "race" a person belongs to. The physical differences between humans are much smaller than you would find in many other species. Think of all the distinct breeds of dogs, horses or cows, for instance.

Many people think that the differences in appearance between people is inherited -- that it's "in the genes." This is a very small part of the story. After all, somewhere between 95% and 98% of human genetic makeup is the same as chimpanzees'. If

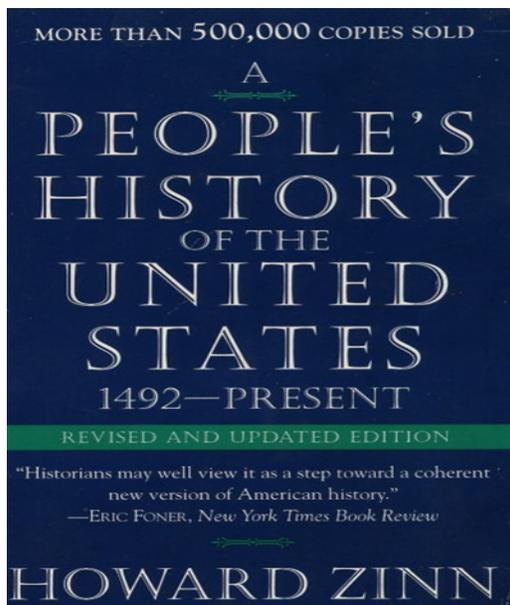
only 3% to 5% of our genes account for the huge differences between us and chimps, imagine what a tiny amount goes into the small variations in human appearance.

In fact, genes cannot code for race. Many genes code for most human physical characteristics, not just one. There is no such thing as a "black" gene or a "white" gene. All human genes exist in all populations of humans, from all parts of the world. Some appear more frequently in one area than another. There is actually more genetic variation within any given population than there is between groups of so called "races".

The average human being is brown. A smaller number of people are black or white. This is similar to other traits: for example, height. Most people fall in a middle range of height, with a smaller number very tall or very short. There are a few physical traits controlled by only one gene. They are, for example, the ability to curl your tongue, or whether your ear lobes are attached. Those traits don't correspond to the capitalists' needs to divide people into races, however. So nobody even notices them.

XI. Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress (A People's History)

Abridged by me and with questions embedded



Chapter 1 Columbus, The Indians, and Human Progress

Arawak men and women, naked, tawny, and full of wonder, emerged from their villages onto the island's beaches and swam out to get a closer look at the strange big boat. When Columbus and his sailors came ashore, carrying swords, speaking oddly, the Arawaks ran to greet them, brought them food, water, gifts. He later wrote of this in his log:

They ... brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks' bells. They willingly traded everything they owned... They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features... They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane... They would make fine servants... With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want. These Arawaks of the Bahama Islands were much like Indians on the mainland, who were remarkable (European observers were to say again and again) for their hospitality, their belief in sharing. These traits did not stand out in the Europe of the Renaissance, dominated as it was by the religion of popes, the government of kings, the frenzy for money that marked Western civilization and its first messenger to the Americas, Christopher Columbus. Columbus wrote:

As soon as I arrived in the Indies, on the first Island which I found, I took some of the natives by force in order that they might learn and might give me information of whatever there is in these parts.

The information that Columbus wanted most was: Where is the gold? He had persuaded the king and queen of Spain to finance an expedition to the lands, the wealth, he expected would be on the other side of the Atlantic-the Indies and Asia, gold and spices. For, like other informed people of his time, he knew the world was round and he could sail west in order to get to the Far East.

1. Where do you think this reading selection came from?
2. Who do you think the Arawaks were?
3. Who wrote this? What's a log? Why might he have kept a log?
4. What kind of people were the Arawaks?
5. What kind of man was Christopher Columbus?
6. What are the two societies being compared? How do they compare?
7. Why were the King and Queen of Spain interested in funding Columbus' exploration?

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8. Look on the map. Where did Christopher Columbus come from? Where did he meet the Arawaks? What does it mean "...sail west in order to get to the Far East."

9. Where does Columbus think he'll find the gold?

10. What are timbers? What is the Santa Maria? What happened to it?

11. What are the Nina and Pinta?

12. Why was he talking about religion?

13. Why did Columbus report to the Court in Madrid? What country do you think Madrid is in?

14. Why did he exaggerate? What were his promises?

other informed people of his time, he knew the world was round and he could sail west in order to get to the Far East.

So, approaching land, they were met by the Arawak Indians, who swam out to greet them. The Arawaks lived in village communes, had a developed agriculture of corn, yams, cassava. They could spin and weave, but they had no horses or work animals. They had no iron, but they wore tiny gold ornaments in their ears. This was to have enormous consequences: it led Columbus to take some of them aboard ship as prisoners because he insisted that they guide him to the source of the gold. He then sailed to what is now Cuba, then to Hispaniola (the island which today consists of Haiti and the Dominican Republic). There, bits of visible gold in the rivers, and a gold mask presented to Columbus by a local Indian chief, led to wild visions of gold fields.

On Hispaniola, out of timbers from the Santa Maria, which had run aground, Columbus built a fort, the first European military base in the Western Hemisphere. He called it Navidad (Christmas) and left thirty-nine crewmembers there, with instructions to find and store the gold. He took more Indian prisoners and put them aboard his two remaining ships. At one part of the island he got into a fight with Indians who refused to trade as many bows and arrows as he and his men wanted. Two were run through with swords and bled to death. Then the Nina and the Pinta set sail for the Azores and Spain. When the weather turned cold, the Indian prisoners began to die.

Columbus's report to the Court in Madrid was extravagant. He insisted he had reached Asia (it was Cuba) and an island off the coast of China (Hispaniola). His descriptions were part fact, part fiction:

Hispaniola is a miracle. Mountains and hills, plains and pastures, are both fertile and beautiful ... the harbors are unbelievably good and there are many wide rivers of which the majority contain gold. . . . There are many spices, and great mines of gold and other metals....

The Indians, Columbus reported, "are so naive and so free with their possessions that no one who has not witnessed them would believe it. When you ask for something they have, they never say no. To the contrary, they offer to share with anyone...." He concluded his report by asking for a little help from their Majesties, and in return he would bring them from his next voyage "as much gold as they need ... and as many slaves as they ask." He was full of religious talk: "Thus the eternal God, our Lord, gives victory to those who follow His way over apparent impossibilities."

Because of Columbus's exaggerated report and promises, his second expedition was given seventeen ships and more than twelve hundred men. The aim was clear: slaves and gold. They went from island to island in the Caribbean, taking Indians as captives. But as word spread

15. Why were the villages empty?

16. Who killed the sailors?

17. What is the interior?

18. What is a dividend?

19. What does it mean - five hundred best specimens?

20. What is Columbus implying about the Indians?

21. Who might have invested in Columbus' expedition?

22. Why would an Indian wear a copper token?

23. Why would an Indian not wear a copper token?

of the Europeans' intent they found more and more empty villages. On Haiti, they found that the sailors left behind at Fort Navidad had been killed in a battle with the Indians, after they had roamed the island in gangs looking for gold, taking women and children as slaves for sex and labor.

Now, from his base on Haiti, Columbus sent expedition after expedition into the interior. They found no gold fields, but had to fill up the ships returning to Spain with some kind of dividend. In the year 1495, they went on a great slave raid, rounded up fifteen hundred Arawak men, women, and children, put them in pens guarded by Spaniards and dogs, then picked the five hundred best specimens to load onto ships. Of those five hundred, two hundred died en route. The rest arrived alive in Spain and were put up for sale by the archdeacon of the town, who reported that, although the slaves were "naked as the day they were born," they showed "no more embarrassment than animals." Columbus later wrote: "Let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold." But too many of the slaves died in captivity. And so Columbus, desperate to pay back dividends to those who had invested, had to make good his promise to fill the ships with gold. In the province of Cicao on Haiti, where he and his men imagined huge gold fields to exist, they ordered all persons fourteen years or older to collect a certain quantity of gold every three months. When they brought it, they were given copper tokens to hang around their necks. Indians found without a copper token had their hands cut off and bled to death.

The Indians had been given an impossible task. The only gold around was bits of dust garnered from the streams. So they fled, were hunted down with dogs, and were killed.

Trying to put together an army of resistance, the Arawaks faced Spaniards who had armor, muskets, swords, horses. When the Spaniards took prisoners they hanged them or burned them to death. Among the Arawaks, mass suicides began, with cassava poison. Infants were killed to save them from the Spaniards. In two years, through murder, mutilation, or suicide, half of the 250,000 Indians on Haiti were dead.

When it became clear that there was no gold left, the Indians were taken as slave labor on huge estates, known later as *encomiendas*. They were worked at a ferocious pace, and died by the thousands. By the year 1515, there were perhaps fifty thousand Indians left. By 1550, there were five hundred. A report of the year 1650 shows none of the original Arawaks or their descendants left on the island.

24. Why might de Las Casas have changed his position

of the original Arawaks or their descendants left on the island.

about Spanish cruelty?

25. How did the Spanish view the Indians?
26. What was Las Casas point of view (how did he feel about the Indians)? What words tell you this?

The chief source-and, on many matters the only source-of information about what happened on the islands after Columbus came is Bartolome de las Casas, who, as a young priest, participated in the conquest of Cuba. For a time he owned a plantation on which Indian slaves worked, but he gave that up and became a vehement critic of Spanish cruelty. Las Casas transcribed Columbus's journal and, in his fifties, began a multivolume History of the Indies.

Las Casas tells how the Spaniards "grew more conceited every day" and after a while refused to walk any distance. They "rode the backs of Indians if they were in a hurry" or were carried on hammocks by Indians running in relays. "In this case they also had Indians carry large leaves to shade them from the sun and others to fan them with goose wings."

Total control led to total cruelty. The Spaniards "thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades." Las Casas tells how "two of these so-called Christians met two Indian boys one day, each carrying a parrot; they took the parrots and for fun beheaded the boys."

The Indians' attempts to defend themselves failed. And when they ran off into the hills they were found and killed. So, Las Casas reports, "they suffered and died in the mines and other labors in desperate silence, knowing not a soul in the world to whom they could turn for help." He describes their work in the mines:

... mountains are stripped from top to bottom and bottom to top a thousand times; they dig, split rocks, move stones, and carry dirt on their backs to wash it in the rivers, while those who wash gold stay in the water all the time with their backs bent so constantly it breaks them; and when water invades the mines, the most arduous task of all is to dry the mines by scooping up pansful of water and throwing it up outside....

After each six or eight months' work in the mines, which was the time required of each crew to dig enough gold for melting, up to a third of the men died.

While the men were sent many miles away to the mines, the wives remained to work the soil, forced into the excruciating job of digging

23. Why is there no bloodshed in the history books?

and for this reason, while I was in Cuba, 7000 children died in three months. Some mothers even drowned their babies from sheer desperation.... in this way, husbands died in the mines, wives died at work, and children died from lack of milk ... and in a short time this land which was so great, so powerful and fertile ... was depopulated. ... My eyes have seen these acts so foreign to human nature, and now I tremble as I write. ...

When he arrived on Hispaniola in 1508, Las Casas says, "there were 60,000 people living on this island, including the Indians; so that from 1494 to 1508, over three million people had perished from war, slavery, and the mines. Who in future generations will believe this? I myself writing it as a knowledgeable eyewitness can hardly believe it...."

Thus began the history, five hundred years ago, of the European invasion of the Indian settlements in the Americas. That beginning, when you read Las Casas-even if his figures are exaggerations (were there 3 million Indians to begin with, as he says, or less than a million, as some historians have calculated, or 8 million as others now believe?-)is conquest, slavery, death. When we read the history books given to children in the United States, it all starts with heroic adventure-there is no bloodshed-and Columbus Day is a celebration.

Handouts

Teaching Figurative Language

I. Introduction to Figurative Language

Look at an example of figurative language: p. 56

- Who is saying "...we are the burnt crud at the bottom of the pot."
- What do they mean by this?
- Why does Sebastian disagree with this? What does he think about the cane-cutters?
- What are undocumented workers called in the U.S.?
- What is the connotation? Of cane cutters as "burnt crud"? as "a group of vwayaje, wayfarers"?

Steps to understand figurative language:

1. What words are figurative? Underline them.
2. Are they an example of a simile, a metaphor, or personification?
3. What is being compared (in the case of simile or metaphor)?
4. Visualize the figurative language? What do you see?
5. What is the writer's meaning?

Practice using figurative language:

Find the figurative language within each of the following paragraphs. Working with your partner, go through the steps listed above and be prepared to present your explanation to the class.

A.

p. 111 "Sebastian rose...."

p. 11 "Senora Valencia motioned

B.

p. 108 last paragraph

p. 37 "While the senor visited...."

C.

p. 70 “ I thought of my own situation.....”

p. 63 “A few more people arrived....”

D.

p. 89 “Once the coffin was built....”

p. 82 “I am always curious as to what is boiling”

II. Figurative Language: A Process for Understanding it

Metaphor

an implied comparison between two unlike things that actually have something important in common

Simile

a stated comparison between two unlike things that actually have something important in common

P. 119

First paragraph

“The children, with the dust like a flying rug at their heels.....”

• Metaphor or Simile? _____

(1) _____ is being compared to

(2) _____.

• Think about (2). What do you see/hear?

• How is this like (1)? Or, what is it saying about (1)?

p. 139

First paragraph

“The dust rises in funnels from the ground and sweeps down the road. Like a sheet come undone from the clothesline, it makes its own shadow, along with the birds that circle above....”

• Metaphor or Simile? _____

(1) _____ is being compared to

(2) _____.

• Think about (2). What do you see/hear?

• How is this like (1)? Or, what is it saying about (1)?



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