Linda Garey

NEH: Sailing to Freedom, Lesson Plan

**Slave Narrative and Historical Methodology**

Can history be learned from historical fiction? To what extent is historical fiction reliable? How do the best authors in this genre guarantee factual integrity? What sort of research goes into the composition of these pieces? The purpose is to introduce TAofMJP, clarifying that it is a novel, but one that is built on a solid foundation.

**Selections:** William Carlos William’s *Red Wheelbarrow,* poem*; The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* by Ernest J. Gaines, novel*; The Forgotten Man Behind William Carlos William’s ‘Red Wheelbarrow’* article*.*

**Essential Question**

What does an individual have that society cannot take away?

**Day One**

**Warm Up:** William Carlos William’s *Red Wheelbarrow poem.* Read individually*.*

**Homework**: students watch one of the following on any format including Youtube – *History Detectives, Who Do You Think You Are, Finding Your Roots.*

**Day Two**

**Warm Up:** Quick Write & Pair Share your TV episode. What did you watch? What did you learn? What specifically did the researchers do (e.g. “They walked around a cemetery.”) What were their sources.

**Read Individually**: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/07/books/the-secret-of-william-carlos-williamss-the-red-wheelbarrow.html?emc=eta1> *The Forgotten Man Behind William Carlos William’s ‘Red Wheelbarrow’ article.* Material – Xerox class set.

**Whole Group:** Highlight the article identifying research methods – clues- and historic facts about Thaddeus Marshall (e.g. “ A detailed 1917 fire insurance map of the neighborhood showed that a large chicken coop stood at the rear of the property.”) Teacher models with document camera & projector.

**Essential Question:** What did Thaddeus Marshall have that society could not take away? (Possible answer: He has been immortalized through literature.)

**Day 3**

**Read:** Introduction to *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* by Ernest J. Gaines. Stress that this work is a fiction, but an historically reliable fiction. Remind students of the factual details that went into the *Red Wheelbarrow* poem.

**The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman by Ernest J. Gaines**; historical fiction, slavery, civil war. Oldie But Goodie! This novel and film were extremely popular in the 1970’s, but may be entirely unknown to younger educators. I’ve seen reluctant learners thoroughly enjoy the book. Can be independent reading, or whole class.

**Background** Although *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* is a work of fiction, it reads like an authentic slave narrative, partly due to Ernest J. Gaines’s in-depth research, use of detail, and use of regional dialect. The novel captures key moments in United States history: slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction, and the civil rights movement. It was Gaines’s intention to take all the information he found and filter it through the mind and speech of an illiterate former slave from Louisiana. In 1974, the novel was made into a successful television movie.

**Book Summary** This story follows the odyssey of Ticey, a young slave, as she becomes Jane Brown and then Jane Pittman. After the Emancipation Proclamation frees Jane and her fellow slaves, she travels north toward freedom. Over 100 years of life are chronicled by Miss Pittman, who raised an orphan as her own and saw much death throughout her long life. Her story is a testament to the strength and courage of the human spirit.

**Edge Library Student Journal**, copyrighted material – a self-paced packet providing accountability for a student reading the novel at his own pace. Other teacher resources, such as assessments.

**Video** *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, perhaps omit “modern” sections from 1970’s. Cicely Tyson stars.

YouTube: Cicely Tyson **“Ain’t I a Woman”**