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Improving Comprehension in the Content Area of American History through the Use of Poetry versus Content through Prose Form for Fourth-Grade, Urban, African American Students

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IMPROVING COMPREHENSION IN THE CONTENT AREA OF

AMERICAN HISTORY THROUGH THE USE OF POETRY

VERSUS CONTENT THROUGH PROSE FORM

FOR FOURTH-GRADE, URBAN,

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

THESIS

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effects on comprehension of content material taught through poetry as opposed to teaching through prose form. Subjects involved were twenty-two African American students in a fourth grade classroom within a large city school district in Western New York. The researcher placed students into two heterogeneous groupings based on the comprehension levels from the May, 1996 Degrees of Reading Power test administered in that district.

All students involved in the study received instruction through both formats (poetry and prose) over a four day period. Students in both groups were taught content through poetry one day and received instruction through prose form on another. Both groups were asked to complete a journal writing sample for each of the two styles. Rubrics created by the reseacher and subsequent raters were used to assess writing samples. Groups were kept to a limit of eleven participants to insure appropriate time to reflect, reread material or to ask questions before they completed their writing tasks assigned. Two different topics were taught to avoid unfair bias due to prior knowledge of the subject matter.

A two tailed t test was used to determine the effect on comprehension that the varying formats may have had. The results revealed no statistically significant difference between the groups. The

findings neither support or disclaim the use of poetry versus prose in regard to the teaching of content and fostering comprehension of text.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if teaching content material through poetry would be more effective than through prose or text book style instruction within a fourth grade, urban African-American setting.

Need for the Study

The Honorable Augustus F. Hawkins stated, "Black children are the proxy for what ails American education in general. And so, as we fashion solutions which help Black children, we fashion solutions that help all children" (Oakland Unified School District, Jan. 29,1997).

Hillard (1992) stated that diversity in behavioral styles among cultural groups would be meaningful in the search to provide the best delivery of instruction. Many urban students are failing, labeled at-risk or are dropping out of school. As test scores continue to show low academic achievement for poor urban students, research must focus on the problems those students have had in learning, motivation, and interest, and must also coincide within the context of culture and ethnicity.

Teachers are being criticized for the failures of young people. We need to once again enlighten them with the gifts of higher

knowledge and understanding for what we teach, and how it in turn affects their lives. As stated for the purpose of this project, finding alternative means to educate and possibly replace previous practices or to add new energy to them, can only assist educators as we try to educate our young people.

Definitions

In this study, the following terms are defined as followed:

Aesthetic- having a sense of the beautiful; pertaining to fine arts.

At-risk students- Students not promoted one or more times and/or two or more years below grade level in reading or math.

Choral reading- A form of reading that has individuals reading out loud together, which often provides a greater sense of security to its participants.

Cloze procedure- a method of evaluation through a systematic deletion of words from a text passage, followed by students attempting to supply deleted words.

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Echo reading- A reading practice that consists of a teacher or leader reading a sentence or more, followed by the rest of the group repeating what has been read, using as close to the same intonation as possible.

Holistic Scoring- the assignment of a single score to a writing samples on the basis of the adequacy of the overall coverage and presentation (Harris and Hodges, p.108).

Inferential concepts- ideas that are understood as new topics are related to familiar experiences.

Reading fluency- level to which a student can produce fast, accurate and effortless text reading.

Rubric- an assessment chart of categorized criteria for rating journal samples with a numerical value of 0-4.

Story grammar- the elements of a story which include character traits, setting, plot, and outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

Students' comfort level and experiences with poetry along with prior knowledge of the subject matter may impact on findings.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction: The Future for Urban Education

As we enter the Twenty-first Century, demographic projections show that poor urban and racial minorities will dominate our public schools (Gay, 1988). As educators strive to improve teaching practices and meet the needs of the new "majority," new program designs, forms of instruction, and assessments must arise. Gay reported in her research:

> Equality is a precondition and a means for achieving excellence. Excellence finds expression in the common standards and expectations of high achievement for all students, and equality translates into appropriate methodologies and materials according to specific group or individual characteristics. (p. 329)

Poetry Used for Informational Purposes

Information gathering, interpretation, and analysis are important to American education. Because oppression has been a common experience of minority groups (Gay,1988), the selection of meaningful text such as poetry should allow students to observe and experience thoughts through critical thinking skills and to foster academic growth. Also noted in Gay's study was the opinion that because teaching poetry was motivational for all students, teachers should choose material that

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will stimulate minority learners. Because the quality of material used with student must be high, Gay recommended works by such poets as Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes.

Rosenblatt (1978) stated that poetry, being a literary work of art, became a live circuit between the reader and the text. Its words and phrases only received meaning as it interacted within the reader's mind. She went on to say that as it aroused one's expectations, it guided the reader, through practice, to organize and to memorize and to wonder what would happen next. Rosenblatt (1978) and Shapiro (1985) stated that as the reader would also draw on experiences or knowledge and feelings, the reader would further analyze the meaning of text.

Shapiro (1985) felt that poetry should be taught with meaningful text and should follow readiness experiences.The researcher stated that poetry should be orally presented by the teacher. Students should experience the words rather than decoding the text. Such instruction should include active participation, small group discussions, and the allowances for free expression of feelings and idea generating practices.

McClure and Zitlow (1991) felt that within the content areas, the drive for factual knowledge has caused a neglect for connecting facts with students' lives. They stated that "adding the aesthetic dimension, through poetry, can help students look beyond the facts to discover the beauty, and richness that lies within a subject" (p.30). Their qualitative research was gathered from their classrooms over an undisclosed time

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period. Students were allowed to interact with poetry, as readers and writers. They made decisions about reading selection, and explored personal ideas in reference to the text. The authors stated that poetry is not meant to be done in addition to classwork, but as a primary form of experience. The researchers noted increased comprehension and retention to scientific information through the use of poetry, which also led to heightened scientific investigation into areas such as the butterfly life cycle.

Shelden (1982) and Shapiro (1985) agreed that students should be allowed to hear poetry first and then allowed to hear their own voices shape the words. Shelden felt sentiment and moral teaching should be avoided; students should enjoy and interpret meaning on their own. In regard to to the appreciation of poetry, Shelden (1982) also stated:

> Let us, in other words, keep a place for the sound of the human voice speaking at its best. Let us celebrate the beauty of language with our students; let us give them a reason to respect language, to think of it as something more that words, words, words. (p.3)

Haught (as cited in Shapiro,1989) discovered that as teachers led discussions in regard to poetry, they only allowed for 2.14 verbalizations per minute. Student led discussions produced 15.85 responses per minute. Greater expression and individual identification also occured within smaller groups.

Hillard (1992) stated that diversity in behavioral style among cultural groups would be meaningful in the search for providing the best delivery of instruction. Hillard also stated, "...not so important are the learning styles but one of style influencing teaching than teaching influencing learning" (p. 373).

Alternative Educational Practices for At-Risk Students

Alexander (1981) studied how New York City high students evaluated their reading and content programs. In a portion of the study, 126 students said they liked to read and to discuss material as opposed to 46 students who preferred only to read in such classes. They also requested that school libraries be expanded, and that prescribed activities such as worksheets for skill deficiencies be avoided. They wanted teachers to look for a variety of activities that would build on content, vocabulary, comprehension, and free reading time.

In a study conducted in Austin, Texas (Frazier & Nichols, 1991), it was found that 44% of all high school enrollment was at-risk. More Hispanic and African Americans (59.5%) were at-risk. Of the at-risk total, 47% were Hispanic or African American males and 39.5 % were Hispanic or African American females. Frazer and Nichols also found that the majority of at-risk students were identified in the elementary

grades. At the first grade level, researchers found 33.2% were at-risk (12,514 students). The level was felt to have increased because of the introduction of the Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT) as a criterion based test.

The Oakland Unified School District (Oakland Unified Shool District, Jan. 29, 1997) conducted a similar study as the previous Austin,Texas study. Their focus arose from the facts that follow:

-53% of the total Oakland Unified District's enrollment of 51,706 was African American.
-71% of the students enrolled in special education were African American
-64% of students retained were African American
-67% of students classified as truant were African American
-71% of African American males attended school on a regular basis
-19% of 12th grade African American students did not graduate
-80% of suspended students were African American
-1.80 average GPA of African American students represent the lowest GPA in the district (p.2).

To combat these disturbing facts, it became necessary to re-examine their programs. The school board for the Oakland Unified District had decided to adopt an English-language development program to assist in the educational growth of African American

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students. A task force group felt it was primrily important to strengthen language skills to form a foundation for competency in all academic areas.

In regard to a more common test, as stated by Glasser and Zimmerman (1967), the WISC was found to be most effective with white, mainly middle class children. It was reported that African and Hispanic Americans were excluded in the design scope, and test results were often inaccurate because of that fact. They also were the group most frequently given the test.

Some other researchers (Hall, 1975; Quay,1974; Wofford, 1970) discussed the disadvantages evidenced in standardsized tests. Language and content factors for students whose primary language was Ebonics contribute to test unfairness in the areas of story recall, use of language in various settings, and code-switching which is considered as the ability to change between Mainstream American English (MAE) and Ebonics.

Hall (1975) conducted research within the area of dialect variations in regard to preschool black and white children's recall. In this study, Hall told four stories, two stories were told in MAE and two in Ebonics (Black English). The results indicated that "White children did significantly better with certain standard English forms, whereas black children did significantly better with certain forms restricted to their own dialect" (p.443).

In support of the previous findings, Boykin (1986) stated that African American students learned best through cooperative, informal, affective, and highly interactive instruction. He also noted that students continue to be expected to perform well on standardized tests under time constraints, which is not the most effective assessment for that learning style.

Ebonics

Ebonics is defined as a system of oral communication used by Americans of African American ancestry and consists of phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics, lexicon, rate, rhythm, stress, and nonverbal communication (Wofford, 1979, p. 368).

Smith (1979) discussed the frustration and dificulties educators experience as they attempt to teach MAE to students whose primary language was Ebonics. She stated that because Ebonics is a fully formed system of oral communication, young children are not aware of the subtle differences in their language and the language of mainstream society. She felt that by attempting to teach MAE before a child was about sixth grade age, teachers create confusion and frustration for students.

Empowering Students

Researchers had differing views about the most beneficial way to empower minority students.

Cummings (1986) studied practices that empower minority students. A major finding was that as teachers allowed students to use self expression and their primary language, be it Spanish or Black English, both languages were reinforced. In regard to that study, by adding rhythm and more aesthetic materials, students would become empowered. In support of the previous statement, Larrick (1991) stated that a poem suggested an idea and would lead the reader and the listener to experience and interpret the mood and the meaning of a poem by himself.

Hall (1975) stated that cultural and linguistic facts should not be ignored in the educational process for black children. Using three hundred sixty subjects, the researcher conducted a study that focused on the materials used to teach rather than to focus on changing the child. Instruction specifically designed to assist with the phonological, semantic and syntactical differences allowed black students to progress at the same rate as white students.

In a similar respect, Delpit (1996) noted that minority teachers, when working with minority students say, " I've heard your song loud and clear. Now I want to teach you to harmonize with the rest of the world" (p.11). She stated that once the child had been validated for strengths, then teachers may build on skills. Delpit (1988) felt it was

extremely important to teach minority youths the skills needed to read,
to write, and to communicate in order for them to succeed within the
"culture of power." Teachers were to provide safeguards to allow
children to internalize the "codes" that a given society may hold. Delpit
explained her position by stating:

> But parents who don't function within that culture, often want
> something else. It's not that they disagree with the former aim,
> it's just that they want something more. They want to insure that
> the school provides their children with discourse patterns,
> interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that
> will allow them success in a larger society. (p.285)

Delpit also discussed the negative outcry in regard to the dialect
readers (textbooks designed to use Black English), because parents
wanted their children to "be successful in a white man's world" (p. 285).

Benefits from Poetry

In the area of reading and language arts, it is felt that poetry
should be taught for two reasons. The first reason is to share of sheer
pleasure and the second is to lead students to self discover language
and their world (Ford, 1992 ; Shapiro, 1989). Shapiro agreed with Ford
in her research and found that poetry leads students to self discovery.
The benefits for such use would be to improve sequencing, recalling

detail, the identifying of word patterns, participation of choral and echo reading, fluency, vocabulary building, cloze through the removal of meaningful content, and also for stengthening story grammar.

Shelden (1982) stated, "Poetry can keep students aware of the music of the English language" (p. 3). The author also stated that reading could not insure that students would write poetry, but it did lead them to listen more attentively. In regard to writing, students could hear the rhythmic patterns in poetry while keeping reading assignments short to avoid interference with written tasks.

Of importance to the teaching of poetry to all children was the fact that teachers leave an impression, be it positive or negative. Therefore the selections teachers make must be appropriately introduced with enthusiasm (Ford, 1992). Because poetry is rhythmic, has rhyming and repetition, Ford felt that the understanding of content could be gained through its use. As students enjoyed, and then repeated readings without teacher input, the author felt that content would be reinforced.

An Artist in Residence for a large Western New York urban school district, C.Testa (personal communication, November 20, 1996) stated that over the past 20 years, she has observed that teachers have strayed from using poetry in content areas where in fact it should have increased. She noted that with its use, reading and writing are effectively put together. As she used aesthetic forms in teaching , the

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whole child was in fact taught. Areas of noted improvements from such practices were in cooperation, motivation, risk taking, responsibility, self direction, and pride.

Kochman (1981) studied the different forms of communication between African Americans and European Americans when debating material of importance. African Americans presented their opinions, while the latter group quoted authority. As the African Americans challenged their counterparts, they would not accept the responses that referred to the quoted authority because they viewed the responses as irresponsible and evasive.

In a more controversal but related study, Banks (1988) observed that European Americans learned through hypothesis and analysis, while African Americans learned through interactions with people. The findings stressed that European Americans learners were strongest at analytical concepts and African Americans benefitted when concepts were inferential or relational.

Rosa (1994) challenged the findings of Banks (1988). He found that in comparison, African American children were both abstract and concrete learners, but the author did support the idea that children do have different learning styles.

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if teaching content material through poetry would be more effective than through textbook instruction within a fourth grade urban, African-American setting.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant mean score difference on a test of content comprehension between the poetry group's scores and the prose group's scores using the holistically scored rubric.

Methodology

Materials and Resources

-The researcher (teacher) needed enough copies of both poems and their coresponding prose. This allowed children in their respective groups to have their own copies.

-The researcher-created rubric was used to assess learning for each form of instruction.

-Student journals were needed for the free writing assessment.

Subjects

The total subject group consisted of twenty-two students in a fourth grade classroom within a large city school district in Western New York. Special attention was paid to create two heterogeneous groupings of eleven students in each group. The researcher placed students into two heterogeneous groupings based on the district's DRP (Degrees of Reading Power) test score from May, 1996 exam.

Procedures

The researcher placed students into two heterogeneous groupings. Both groups were made up of eleven students, and each group was the only group present in the classroom during instruction. It was felt that by using two heterogeneous groups for instruction, information could be taught and gathered in a more comfortable fashion.

The teacher (researcher) taught both the prose form and poems to the respective groups. Due to the need for repeated readings and exposure to poetry (and to remove bias created by repeated exposure), each set of materials was first read aloud by the teacher, followed by a silent reading by students and lastly read chorally as a large group.

Both groups were allowed to take notes or to ask questions in regard to the content, and then lessons were ended. On the following day, students were asked to free write about the previous day's history lesson. All response journals were collected after approximately fifteen

minutes. On the following day, the groups received instruction in the opposing format and a second free writing was gathered using the same evaluative process.

Table 1

Counterbalanced Organizaton for Instruction and Testing

	Group A	Group B
Day 1	Harriett Tubman through poetry	Harriett Tubman through prose
Day 2	Journal writing for assessment	Journal writing for assessment
Day 3	Rosa Parks through prose	Rosa Parks through poetry
Day 4	Journal writing for assessment	Journal writing for assessment

The research was conducted over a four day period. Students were taught content about Harriett Tubman on the first day of this study. Instruction occured during two forty minute time blocks that are used for reading instruction. Members of Group A were taught about Harriett Tubman through poetry and Group B received the information through the prose form.

On the second day of the study, both groups were again separated and asked to write about the previous day's history lesson in their writing journals. Journals were collected after approximately fifteen minutes and assessments were scored using the corresponding rubric.

On day three, students were again placed into their instructional groups and taught content concerning Rosa Parks. The instructional form was switched and Group A was taught through the prose form and Group B was taught content through the use of poetry.

During the final day the study, both groups were again separated and asked to write about the previous day's history lesson in their writing journals. Journals were collected after approximately fifteen minutes and assessments were scored using the corresponding rubric.

During the use of differing instructional formats, their counterparts were not in the classroom. Both groups received instruction through poetry and prose styles over the four day period. The writing journals were used due to the fact that students were comfortable with this form of assessment, and it also most effectively met the researcher's needs in regard to information gathering.

To provide reliable, unbiased results for this study, two raters distinct from the researcher were used. Both raters had assisted in the creating of the rubric and were familiar with its use prior to assessing samples. Scores were then tallied to provide a final score for each sample. When descepancies occurred in scoring, the researcher and the raters reread, discussed and produced an agreed upon score.

The data were obtained using a rubric to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the students' results in regard to comprehension and recall within their written assessments. Two rubrics were formulated to account for each of the two topics. For the topic of Rosa Parks, there was a total of ten major ideas possible. Within the pieces regarding Harriett Tubman, there was a possibility of eight important facts found. The criteria are located in Appendix B. The criteria for both rubrics were reflected in a scoring system of zero points at the lowest end to the highest rating of four.

Two separate topics were used to avoid prior exposure to materials and to insure credible results. Copies of the two poems and the two prose selections are located in Appendix A.

Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed with the use of a 2 tailed t test. Qualitative analysis of students' behaviors during the assesment was also included.

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CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if teaching content material through poetry would be more effective than through textbook instruction within a fourth grade urban, African-American setting.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant mean score difference on a test of content comprehension between the poetry group's scores and the prose group's scores using the holistically scored rubric.

Results

The difference between the journal samples for the instructional formats of poetry versus prose were compared with a t test to see if there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two forms of instruction. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean and t Test Differences Between Content Instruction Through
Poetry and Prose Scores.

	Poetry	Prose
Mean	2.36	2.45
Variance	0.91	1.40
Observations	22	22
Pearson Correlation	0.52	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	21	
t Statistic	-0.40	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.69	
t Critical two-tal	2.08	

A calculated t score of -0.40 was the result of the analysis. Since
the critical value of t with 21 degrees of freedom at the 95% confidence
level is 2.08, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, concluding that
there was no significant difference between the mean scores of
students' use of poetry versus prose for gathering content material. The
mean score of the poetry format was 2.36 and the mean score for
samples derived from the prose format was 2.45.

Qualitative Analysis

As findings were noted as inconclusive, it became necessary to
analyze material further through a qualitative process. The researcher
noted that while there was no significant difference in overall mean

scores, individual students did respond to the task at hand differently in regard to the format used.

During poetry instuction, students were louder and expressed more global responses. During the questioning period of the study, students were more likely to discuss their beliefs rather than to ask for the concise meaning of material. During the journal writing, the researcher needed to redirect and instruct students to provide an individual response rather than a group collaboration.

In regard to one specific student who struggled with writing, he refused to participate in the response for the prose form, yet asked the researcher to write down his reponses for the poem. Because responses were graded holistically for content rather than the writing prossess, the researcher obliged and the student scored a rubric score of 2 rather than a 0 which he received for the prose assessment.

During the prose instruction, students asked for clarification in literal meanings and were less likely to relate to peers. Students finished their journals more quickly and often were anxious to hand them in. Two students who scored higher with the prose format, stated that they were not comfortable learning from poems. They liked the paragraph format better because that was the way they were used to learning.

The study validates theories for multiple learning styles and findings should be noted as equally useful. Poetry assisted some students as the prose form was more beneficial to others. Most of the participants in the study did equally as well with the two formats.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if teaching content material through poetry would be more effective than through textbook (prose) instruction within fourth grade urban, African-American setting.

Conclusion

The researcher found that the mean scores between the poetry and prose content pieces were consistent and showed that they were equally beneficial.

Through further observation and qualitative analysis of the research, it was concluded that by varying methods of presenting content, students were able to gain insight, use critical thinking skills and work within their personal comfort level as content was gathered. As previously stated by Shapiro (1985), by using poetry, you are allowing for greater participation, group discussions and allowing for free expression.

Of further importance were the students' ability to express their needs and to discuss their strengths with the researcher. The results from this study are consistent with the findings and beliefs of Alexander (1981), Shelden (1982) and Hillard (1992) who all supported a more aesthetic approach toward instruction.

These findings are important to consider as we develop new ways of teaching to meet the needs of all our students. Hall (1975) stated that it is important to focus on materials used rather than on changing the child. As we learn what works with at-risk learners or areas with a high concentration of at-risk students, we can only benefit all students.

Implication for Further Research

Many researchers have conducted studies that search for the most useful means for gathering and interpreting text. As we continue to strive for success in all academic areas, researchers must continue to assess, to evaluate and to determine which practices are deemed helpful and to identify those practices that are not.

The research to date indicates that poetry has a positive qualitative effect on comprehension. It would be interesting to conduct longitudinal studies comparing students' comprehension levels after a longer period of instruction of poetry and how it relates to other areas of education. As students become more comfortable with this form of instruction, would growth occur in areas such as writing poetry, reading fluency (due to the repeated reading practices), and a heightened comprehension for other academic areas like the sciences and math?

The results of this research support the need for further study in regard to teaching content through poetry and other aesthetic forms of literature. Other questions to consider are:

1. Would further investigation of aesthetic expression for teaching content provide favorable results in districts with a smaller at-risk population?

2. Would those students less comfortable with poetry experience improved results through continued instruction using this format?

3. As students become comfortable with poetry, will they also become more willing to engage in reading other genre?

4. Could the writing of poetry be used as a means to improve descriptive writing?

Implications for the Classroom

Researchers continue to search for the best way to teach the students within our classrooms. As educators, we often feel overwhelmed and feel that we do not have time for one more "new" approach without sacrificing other practices. In light of this study, because students learned at the same rate with poetry as with prose, fostering and creating a stronger relationship between areas of content and language arts would appear to challenge the belief that teaching skills in isolation is more beneficial.

Poetry should be used to introduce, to practice and to solidify comprehension skills. It also enourages students to practice material. Students of all ages should be encouraged to read and to write poetry. This will allow students see a positive connection between self discovery, reading and writing.

Poetry, because of its aesthetic dimension, allows students to take risks and to discover the beauty and richness within a subject (McCure & Zitlow, 1991). As noted previously in Chapter Two, students working in small groups to recite, to discuss, to dissect or to write poetry naturally increased skills in content areas. As a springboard for discussions, poetry increased verbalization (Haught as cited in Shapiro, 1989). Imagine a classroom where critical thinking, problem solving, and other social discoveries were improved because students increased responses due to poetic usage.

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Appendix A

The Protest Poem from Rosa Parks (Slier, 1991)

Every day for a long time now
I've been riding in the back
of the bus
sometimes I'm sitting
most times I'm standing
but if you look at my face
You can see my disgust
riding in the back of the bus
Now, today I'm really tired
just too tired to move
I done scrubbed floors
washed windows
I've even polished ole Missy's shoes
the bus driver tells me
I got to give up my seat
'cause a white man wants it
and he just too good
to stand on his feet.

Something in my gut
says I just don't give a damn
this seat I ain't givin' up
to hell with the white man
the white man he's waiting
for me to get up
and go to the back
I told him my feet hurt
and the back is already packed
You might as well
sound the alarm
and call the cops
this colored woman has gone mad
and she must be stopped
I don't mind the handcuffs
or being in jail overnight
I still felt pretty strong
I guess I know I was right

Early that morning
revealed a brand new day
a man named Martin Luther King
was on his way
to see about me
and help blacks get equality
I felt good and started to sing.
give praise to the Lord
for the Reverend Martin Luther King
when we first met
I'll never forget
the light in his eyes
and the love on his face
he was our sunrise
to wake us up and win the race
no matter how long
no matter how blue
Martin was on a mission
to make our dreams come true

We started the Montgomery Bus Boycott
and scared all the white folks in town
with Martin as our leader
we knew we would turn this thing around
we walked
used car pools
and worked together
with victory in mind
having faith that we'd win this battle
it was just a matter of time

The bus company went out of business
'cause We didn't ride the bus
we discovered for the first time
the Power we had in Us
Now when I look back
on that eventful day
I thank God and I pray
to never again
let anyone treat us like a slave
(Abiodun Oyewole, p.56)

Harriet Tubman (Slier,1991)

Harriet Tubman didn't take no stuff
Wasn't scared of nothing neither
Didn't come in this world as a slave
And wasn't going to stay one either

"Farewell!" she sang to her friends one night
She was mighty sad to leave 'em
But she ran away that dark, hot night
Ran looking for freedom

She ran to the woods and ran through the woods
With slave catchers right behind her
And she kept on going till she got to the North
Where those mean men couldn't find her

Nineteen times she went back South
To get three hundred others
She ran for her freedom nineteen times
To save Black sisters and brothers

Harriet Tubman didn't take no stuff
wasn't scared of nothing neither
Didn't come in this world to be no slave
and didn't stay one either.

And didn't stay one either
(Eloise Greenfield p.52)

Prose Form

Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman was a determined woman who refused to remain a slave. After saying goodbye, she left her family one night. As she ran from the southern slave catchers, she ran north to freedom. They did not catch her and she returned south nineteen times to help others become free. Never being caught, she was credited for saving the lives of three hundred slaves

Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was a hard working African American woman who worked as a maid. One day after a long day at work, a bus driver for a Montgomery public bus system, asked her to move to the back of the bus. It was overcrowded and the driver wanted her to stand so that a white man could sit down.

She felt that it was an unfair request and refused to move. Because of her refusal, Rosa Parks was later handcuffed and placed in jail overnight. The next day, Martin Luther King Jr. visited her in jail. Together, they decided to boycott the Montgomery Bus System by forming car pools and refusing to use the public system. The boycott lead to the company going out of business.

African Americans felt empowered by their victory as they won the right to sit anywhere on public buses. They felt that in time, they would win the battle against unfair laws if they worked together.

Appendix B

Raters looked for the following fact with in writing samples for the Harriett Tubman section of this research:

1. Her name

2. She was a slave who ran north to freedom

3. Harriett left her family behind

4. She ran at night

5. She was a determined or persistant woman

6. She reached the north

7. She returned nineteen more times

8. She is given credit for freeing three hundred slaves

In regard to the Rosa Park's section of the study, ten facts were highlighted as important to include in the writing responses. They were as follows:

1. Her name

2. She was a hard working woman

3. She was asked give up her seat and to stand in the back of a public bus

4. The driver wanted her seat so a white man could sit in it

5. Rosa refused to move

6. She was arrested and spent a night in jail

7. Martin Luther King Jr. visited her in jail

8. They organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott

9. The company (Montgomery Bus Company) went out of business because of the strike

10. African Americans felt empowered by the victory

Rubric for Harriett Tubman

4= Able to identify 7 or more major facts
3= Able to identify 5-6 major facts
2= Able to identify 3-4 major facts
1= Able to identify 2 major facts
0= Able to identify 0-1 major facts or
   blank paper

Rubric for Rosa Parks

4= Able to identify 9 or more major facts
3= Able to identify 7-8 major facts
2= Able to identify 5-6 major facts
1= Able to identify 2-4 major facts
0= Able to identify 0-1 major facts or
   blank paper

Criteria for acceptable comprehension would be a rubric score of 3 of 4.