

Philly Girls Grow Up Through Memoir and Fiction

Barbara McDowell Dowdall

A. Philip Randolph Career Academy High School

Abstract

This unit is intended for use as a supplement to an American Literature class in the junior year of high school or to an Advanced Placement Literature and Composition class. Junior year students will read both a memoir and a novel written by Philadelphia African American women writers: Bebe Moore Campbell and Lorene Cary. Students will utilize both historical context and fiction analytical tools to understand how each author navigates growing up, establishes a unique voice and reflects community life in the “First City” at differing times. Advanced Placement Literature students will expand their range to include memoir and fiction by earlier writers Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Jessie Redmon Fauset.

Working in loosely-organized “literature circles,” students will maintain reader’s journals and report on a regular basis both to their small group and to the class via discussions and mini book reviews. Students will also write reflection journals on how the lives and fictional worlds of each writer compare with their own. Timelines and literary maps will amplify their findings.