Southwest Philadelphia:  
What it was and how we see it today

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Abstract:

My purpose in writing this unit is for 11th grade students at John Bartram High School to understand the value of learning about the history of their community, analyzing the current status of the community, and processing their observations and reflections. At this juncture in an 11th grader’s life, she must become familiar with this essential thought: Where have we been and where are we going? Because it is virtually impossible to scrutinize an entity if you are missing the context, this unit emphasizes the value of establishing historical frameworks. In creating such an emphasis, I hope to strengthen a skill that is highlighted in the 11th grade American Literature course taught in the School District of Philadelphia.

Through this unit students will gain an understanding of themselves looking through the context of their community. The readings from two works by local author Jack Myers will be paired with personal experiences of adults who grew up in this neighborhood, in order for the students to understand the roots of the neighborhood. We will then analyze poetry by Gwendolyn Brooks and Claude McKay that portrays different members of the African-American community. Students also will collect observations about their neighborhood and gather primary source data through interviews with family and friends. Students will conclude this unit by writing original poetry about their experiences with the people and places in Southwest Philadelphia.