

GROUP RESEARCH:

A series of questions is provided as a **FOCUS For MEDIA INTERACTION** with each Web site.

Group 1

"I heard the voices...of my Louisiana people"

A Conversation with Ernest Gaines

<http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/1998-07/gaines.html>

Leaving the South

- Why did Gaines leave the South?
- How did he have part of Louisiana with him?
- Does leaving Louisiana mean that he has abandoned his past?

The Camera and the Mind's Eye

- When Gaines takes pictures of Louisiana, what does he take pictures of and what might those scenes represent?
- Of what scene can he never get a really good picture?
- How does Gaines compare still photographs to the mind's eye?

Discuss with the children how difficult it would be to leave your family and friends and move. Would they have a "mind's eye" of where they grew up? Would those memories become more valuable to them than if they had stayed?

Answers will vary.

Group 2

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Writing about the Unexpressed

- At what age did Gaines leave the South?
- What is the "unexpressed"?
- Why did he want to write about his family members?
- What steps led him further and further into the past?

The Saga of Miss Jane

- What was the purpose of the forward of the book?
- Explain the steps in research Gaines took before writing ***The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman***.
- Why do you think he chose Miss Jane as the protagonist?

Did Gaines want to read books about the South because he missed his family?

Did he realized for the first time how little people actually knew about the lives of black people?

Do you have a family member that you have lived the past through?

Answers will vary.

Group 3**American Slavery: A Composite Autobiography**

<http://www.slavenarratives.com/narr/samp.html>

Slave Narratives

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/crocket1.html>

Find two slave interviews to present and be ready to lead a class discussion.

Read the parts of the interviews that deal with the following:

- What was their life like as a slave?
- How did the slaves feel about being freed?
- What did they do following the end of the war?

What new things did we find out about the slaves by reading their narratives?

Do they seem resentful about their life?

Were their families important to them?

Answers will vary.

Group 4*"I heard the voices...of my Louisiana people"***A Conversation with Ernest Gaines**<http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/1998-07/gaines.html>**History as a Backdrop**

- A. How does Gaines feel about written history?
- B. If Gaines was not trying to rewrite history, what was he showing with Miss Jane's life?
- C. Which character in the novel was real?

Whose Story was it?

- A. How did he approach the telling Miss Jane's story in the beginning?
- B. What had Gaines read in the past that showed him how to narrate? through one character?

What does Gaines feel about the truth? History recounts events, but not always the feelings and living conditions of the people.

Why do you think that the monologue was a better idea than a group discussion?

Who do you know that talks at length about another time?

Parents, Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents

Group 5*"I heard the voices...of my Louisiana people"***A Conversation with Ernest Gaines**<http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/1998-07/gaines.html>**The Art of Storytelling**

- A. How does Gaines write and what audience is he writing for?
- B. Storytelling is done in the first person. What country does Gaines give credit to for the best storytelling?

Writers Black and White

- A. Who invented the novel form?
- B. What does he bring into his own work?

Who do you know that is a good storyteller? What makes the stories come alive? Why would a person be a good writer and not a good storyteller?

Group 6*"I heard the voices...of my Louisiana people"***A Conversation with Ernest Gaines**<http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/1998-07/gaines.html>**Searching for the Edges**

- A. What writing technique does Gaines use to bring contrast to his work?
- B. How does he use nature to reflect the mood of the character?
- C. How many major events does Gaines use in one book?
- D. Does he compare his characters to actual people that existed as heroes?

Rules of the Racial Game

- A. Explain the rules of the racial game and what Gaines felt would happen when blacks and whites live closely with each other.

Why is nature so important to a story? Would a baseball game be the same on a cool spring day as it would on a blistering hot July afternoon?

Why would Gaines not compare his characters to heroes?

The character would lose his individuality. No person is exactly the same as another.

Do you believe that the rules of the racial game still exist?

Answers will vary.

Group 7***The African American Journey***

<http://www2.worldbook.com/features/aajourney/html/bh004.htm>

Find four African American heroes that were born into or immediately following slavery. Write a short summary to explain how they became heroes.

Did all these heroes have the same opinion on the best course for blacks following slavery? What did they all have in common?

They differed on the best course for the black man (Washington thought they would be better off with a skills education and Dubois felt that they should be receiving as high an education as possible), but all were working for the betterment of the black community.

Group 8***American Colonization Society***

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/printablenew/00424.html>

- A. Why was Liberia founded?
- B. Who opposed the Back to Africa Movement?
- C. When did the movement stop?
- D. Would Miss Jane Pittman have been happier going back to Africa and why?

Post civil war reconstruction and confederate immigration to Brazil

http://mi.essortment.com/postcivilwarr_rrid.htm

- A. Why did 9,000 white people from the southern states immigrate to Brazil? after the end of the Civil War?
- B. What did they bring to Brazilian agriculture?
- C. Have they stayed separate or assimilated into the Brazilian culture?
- D. Do any of the ancestors exist and acknowledge their white American roots today?

What would you have done? Would you have gone back to Africa where the majority of the people were black? Would you go north, hoping that white people there were fairer? If you were white, would you have stayed or taken the offer from the Brazilian Emperor?

Answers will vary.

Step 8. Have the students present the research. Discuss each section and fill in where the group did not gather all the information required.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY:

The students will write a monologue putting himself or herself in the place of a slave just set free. The student may choose to stay on the plantation and work for the owner for shares or leave. The written piece should be no longer than seventy-five to one hundred words. The characteristics of Gaines' writing style will be included.

1. Use the "mind's eye" to recall your own rural scenes.
2. Remember that rivers, roads, railroad tracks, and bayous are all symbolic of traveling.
3. Discuss the inner feelings that would not necessarily be found in literature (part of the family is leaving, there is no money, and nothing has changed just because of being set free, what if they get sick, what about the patrol?).
4. Center the monologue on one important event that occurred as a result of freedom.
5. Use some form of high contrast (heat versus cold, weak character versus strong character.
6. Use nature to reflect the mood of your character.