

Poem
A Holocaust Survivors Account
“My Black Messiah”

Author of Lesson: Maureen Silver, Retired Educator - m.silv2@verizon.net

Grade Levels for Lesson: High School

Time Needed: 2 Class Sessions

Goals:

This lesson plan for high school students needs two (2) class sessions with extended activities. The poem allows the students to study the following content standards:

- Primary Sources
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Main Idea
- Characters & Setting
- Compare/Contrast

Lesson Plan:

Each student should be given a copy of the poem. Read aloud to the students then have them read silently and on the reverse side write their initial reaction.

Classroom Discussion:

Questions to be utilized after the students initiate their written reaction:

1. Who is the narrator or "I" in the poem? Who is the Black Messiah? Does it make any difference if the narrator is male or female? Why do you think the poet chose to write “messiah” with a lower case “m” and not capitalize it?
2. What do you think is the initial reaction of the black GI as he stood in the doorway?
3. Why do you think the prisoner or victim feel the soldier "stare with eyes he didn't see"? Could he comprehend what he was witnessing? Why or why not?
4. In lines 7 and 8, did the narrator try to communicate with the GI? Explain what the poet meant by "Not a single word which hung absurd upon my tongue".
5. Describe what you think was the GI's reaction, emotional pain, and its effect on him.
6. How is time and setting expressed? What do you think the poet meant by "another dawn"?
7. Summarize the last six (6) lines of the poem.

Evidence of Understanding

1. Compare/Contrast:
 - a. Use a Venn Diagram on the board, overhead, or a large sheet of paper. (Two very large circles that intersect or overlap in the middle). Label GI or liberator over one circle and victim (prisoner) over the other.
 - b. Have students turn to a neighbor and work together to fill in the two circles as they compare and contrast these two.
 - c. Discuss the information that the pairs have recorded and the completed diagram.
 - d. How are they similar and different?
 - e. Make a relationship between the armed forces in 1945 and the civil rights movement.

Extension Activities:

There have been some meetings arranged between survivors and liberators of the camps.

1. Make a list of words that you think appropriately express those emotions and reactions.
2. Create a poem in which you include the use of some of the terms you have listed. Write a poem describing the emotions and reactions they share with each other at such a reunion.
3. Research the role of liberators in WWII.
4. Research a Holocaust survivor.
5. Time to create your own poem perhaps about someone who was your messiah. This is to be done as a homework assignment and/or as alone time in class. Students are to share their poems with a neighbor in class. Call on people (or ask for volunteers if you prefer) to share with the entire class.

My Black Messiah
by
Sonia Scheiber Weitz

**A black GI stood by the door
(I never saw a black before)
He will set me free before I die
I thought he must be the messiah.**

**A black messiah came for me.
He stared with eyes that didn't see.**

**He never heard a single word
which hung absurd upon my tongue.**

**And then he simply froze in place
the shock the horror on his face.**

**He didn't weep, he didn't cry
but deep within his gentle eyes
a flood of devastating pain,
his innocence forever slain.**

**For me with yet another dawn
I found my black messiah gone.**

**And on we went our separate ways
for many years without a trace
but there's a special bond we share
which has grown strong because we dare
to live, to hope, to smile, and yet
we vow not ever to forget.**

Vocabulary

1. GI

A noun used to describe soldiers in the United States Army and airmen in the United States Army Air Force. The origin of the term “GI” comes from “government issued”, used to describe everything produced for the war effort in WWII.

2. Messiah

A leader or savior of a particular group or causes, also Jesus Christ in New Testament, the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible, a spiritual servant of God, (in Islam) the last prophet specially AKA prophet Jesus who was chosen by Allah just like all His other prophets.

3. Liberator

A person who frees someone or something from being controlled by another person or group.

4. Concentration Camp

A place for assembling and confining political prisoners and enemies of a nation. Concentration camps are particularly associated with the rule of the Nazis in Germany, who used them to confine millions of Jews as a group to be purged from the German nation. Communists, Gypsies, homosexuals, and other persons considered undesirable according to Nazi principles, or who opposed the government, were also placed in concentration camps and eventually executed in large groups. (See Holocaust.)

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5. Victim

A person who suffers from a destructive or injurious action or agents.

6. Absurd

Strange