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Benjamin Hughes

Know Yourself: Oratory

Classroom photo by Rich Sofranko

Study Guide

Written by Benjamin Hughes

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Artists on Tour

Know Yourself: Oratory

Length of Lesson: One or two class periods

Subject Areas: History, Cultural Diversity, Literary Arts, Inspiration

Agenda:

I. Introduction

II. Through the use of poetry and speaking a discussion will be lead on Racial, Cultural and Social Identity

III. The audience will be asked questions about their experiences in the hopes that they to understand what it means to truly be comfortable in your own skin.

V. Q & A

Procedure & Objectives

Students will:

1. be introduced to Benjamin Hughes through his story and poetry
2. invoke discussion and conversation with each other on social, cultural and racial issues
3. become more confident with their own identity
4. realize that there is more to people then perception and our peer's judgment of us

Materials

Internet access: www.iambenjaminhughes.com

Paper, pencil, pen and an open mind

Works By Benjamin Hughes

- *Alchemist*. Cincinnati, 2004
- *No Frills*. Compact Disc – 2005

Summary

Born in the infamous International Hotel in San Francisco, Benjamin Hughes—the son of a Filipino father and a multi-racial mother—he was later adopted into a typical middle class family but grew up uneasily among ethnic contradictions. He faced many questions from himself and others as a “mixed-race” man in the social, cultural and racially charged atmosphere of America. Benjamin Hughes discusses his own uncertainties and triumphs as questions of identity exacerbated his experiences of adolescence and early adulthood. With great candor and honesty about his insecurities and personal dilemmas he tells you just what it means to grow to know yourself and stand tall as an individual!

HIS…sTORY

A San Francisco native who currently resides in the city of Cincinnati, the poet known as Benjamin Hughes was transplanted then later adopted into a Caucasian family. Later moving to Indiana he lived out his teenage years facing situations and experiences that tested his endurance and personal character. Names can be a virtue or a curse and throughout his young life Benjamin was called every derogatory term that you can imagine only to excel in sports and in his education. Overcoming many obstacles Benjamin later attended college, after only submitting one application, where he received his undergraduate degree.

He moved to Cincinnati in the fall of 1998 where he took a position in sales and marketing. After attending an open mic, he began writing in the fall of 1999. He was rigorously inspired to tell his story through poetry and daily journals that he kept.

Benjamin Hughes is proof that working with yourself through poetry and short stories is not only a creative end in itself but a powerful tool for raising standards in literacy, developing language skills, increasing confidence and improving individual communication across age and cultural barriers. More frequently it can release untapped potential amongst individuals who are not confident in traditional narratives, essay writing and other forms of communication. Benjamin learned this first hand when living in Cincinnati, where racial identity, social and economic hardships were no stranger to him.

A determined artist, Benjamin draws from his social, economic and cultural surroundings as well as his rich multi-racial background (Black, Filipino, Hawaiian, Italian, and Cherokee). Pulling from his environment, he has been blessed to perform and present on the same stages as Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Ursula Rucker, Talib Kweli, M1 [Dead Prez], Patricia Smith, Susan Taylor, Benjamin Carson and many other. He has been an individual competitor in the National Poetry Slam as well as presented and performed to educators, students and open mics across Canada, the United States and overseas. He is a freelance writer and web-designer in his free time and currently works on a university level in the field of Training and Development.

Notes

Benjamin feels that the measure of achievement cannot be defined by the stages a person may grace, number of people you perform for, accolades received or competitions won; but by the number of hearts you change, minds moved and people you encourage to express their own beliefs.

In addition it is hoped that you will find this presentation allows students to access a variety of forms for valuable discussion within an ever changing cultural and social environment.

The success of these programs will largely depend on participant involvement and their willingness to engage themselves in the program!

Identity

We often shape our identity in relation to other people.

- Self-identity is molded by how we believe others see us.
- We create our identity by emulating others (siblings, parents, friends, famous people, etc.).
- We create an identity to please or irritate someone else.
- Significant events can challenged or reinforce our self-identity.

Adolescents are in the process of developing their identities ("who they are"). Although adults may be more secured in their identity, they can still experience an identity-crisis (most notably the "mid-life crisis").

Discussion

- Read some of Benjamin Hughes poetry and writings.
- Prior to the Oratory discuss what issues you face in today's society. After, compare and discuss your views of Benjamin Hughes presentation and compare on how it may be the same or different from your own.
- Examine your own behavior in relation to the points in the Identity section.
- Re-examine your family tree, look at it from a socio-cultrual perspective.

Learning Standards:

- Standard: Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.
- Standard: Students will respond critically to works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.
- Standard: Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Standards Outside the Arts

- English Language Arts Standard: Language for Literary Response and Expression
  Students will read and listen to oral, written, and electronically produced texts and performances from American and world literature; relate texts and performances to their own lives, and develop an understanding of the diverse social, historical, and cultural dimensions the texts and performances represent.
- English Language Arts Standards: Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation
  Students will listen, speak, read, and write for critical analysis and evaluation, ideas, information, and issues presented by others using a variety of established criteria.
- English Language Arts Standard: Language for Social Interaction
  Students will listen, speak, read, and write for social interaction. Students will use oral and written language that follows the accepted conventions of the English language for effective social communication with a wide variety of people.