“Nat Turner in the Clearing” by Alvin Aubert

**Theme**

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| **History, Witness, and the Struggle for Freedom in African American Poetry** |

**Standards**

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| **Common Core**   * Literature 2) Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. * Literature 3) Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed). * Literature 5) Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact. * Writing 3a) Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.   **Standards of Learning for Virginia**   * 9.4.d) Compare and contrast the use of rhyme, rhythm, sound, imagery, and other literary devices to convey a message and elicit the reader’s emotion. * 9.4.e) Analyze the cultural or social function of a literary text. * 10.3.e) Explain the meaning of literary and classical allusions and figurative language in text. * 10.4. b) Analyze the similarities and differences of techniques and literary forms represented in the literature of different cultures and eras. * 10.4. h) Explain the influence of historical context on the form, style, and point of view of a literary text(s). * 11.4) The student will read, comprehend, and analyze relationships among American literature, history, and culture. * 12.4.b) Analyze how authors use key literary elements to contribute to meaning and interpret how themes are connected across texts. |

**Lesson Body and Sequence:**

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| **STUDENT WILL DO** | **TEACHER WILL DO** |
| **Background Information** | |
| Alvin Aubert was an award-winning poet, playwright, editor, and literary critic. In 1993 he retired from Wayne State University where, as a professor, he taught creative writing and African American literature. As the founder and editor of the journal *Obsidian*, now *Obsidian II*, his aim was to publish works by and about writers of African descent worldwide. After a long life of championing African American culture, he passed away in 2014. | Introduce students to Alvin Aubert.  After students watch the video, discuss his creative inspiration and interaction with Nat Turner. |
| Nat Turner (1800-1831) was an enslaved African American preacher and leader who led the only effective and sustained slave rebellion in United States history. His actions instigated a response of increasingly oppressive legislation which prohibited the education, movement, and assembly of enslaved people and intensified proslavery convictions that persisted in Virginia until the Civil War. | Briefly discuss the history of Nat Turner’s Rebellion (the causes, the result, and the lasting effects on the African American community). |
| **Reader Response Questions** | |
| Have you ever had to step up and be a leader? How did it make you feel? | These questions are designed to help students begin to think about the concepts that will be introduced and discussed throughout the poem. |
| Write about a time when you made a hard decision to do the right thing. Did the results outweigh the consequences? |
| What does faith mean to you? Describe a time when you felt that your faith in someone or something was challenged. |
| Which do you feel is more challenging; to have faith in yourself or in someone else? |
| **History and Culture** | |
| Though Nat Turner’s rebellion was an act of bravery towards the fight for freedom, the consequences of his actions sparked an increase in racial oppression. In the poem, Aubert chooses to write about the aftermath of the rebellion, returning to the clearing where they had all gathered in preparation. What is the significance of this return in relation to the struggle for freedom? How does Aubert bring hope out of defeat? | Review the consequences of Nat Turner’s Rebellion.  Discuss the struggle for freedom and the sacrifices that were made in order to achieve it. |
| Throughout slavery’s existence in America, enslaved Africans were denied many basic human rights such as the ability to practice their own religions. Nat Turner challenged the oppressions he faced by becoming a preacher for his community. Written as a prayer, what affect does this poem have on the reader? How does its religious delivery influence its message and impact? | Discuss the importance of religion in African American culture.  Discuss the efforts of enslaved people to be literate, to marry, to practice their religions.  Optional fun fact: Nat Turner’s personal bible can be found in the National Museum of African American History and Culture. |
| **Poet’s Craft and Structure** | |
| The mood of a poem is a literary element which evokes certain feelings and emotions from the reader. The tone of a poem is how the author feels about what he or she is writing about. Using what we know about the history of Nat Turner’s rebellion, what is significant or surprising about the tone of this poem? What is the emotional atmosphere that it creates for us as readers? | Define mood and tone. |
| An extended metaphor is a figure of speech that runs throughout the entirety of a poem and implies a comparison between two unrelated things. Throughout the poem, Aubert employs an extended metaphor of fire to mirror the speaker’s emotions after returning to the clearing. Describe the different stages of the fire and its significance to the stages of the rebellion. | Define and explain extended metaphor. |
| **Reading and Writing Connections** | |
| Who is a historical figure that you feel society has not done justice to? Write a letter to your principal explaining why you believe this person’s story should be taught in school. | These Reading/Writing Connections are designed to encourage student choice and acts as the formative assessment for the lesson. Students should be able to utilize skills and concepts discussed in the lesson to complete either of the connections. |
| Nat Turner used his gift as a preacher to rally together a movement towards change. Alvin Aubert used his gift as a poet to publish a poem about Nat Turner’s rebellion and his fight for freedom. Describe a unique talent or gift that you have and how you can use it to make the world a better place. |

**Materials**

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| * Printed copy of poem (optional) * Computer/tablet * Paper and pencil (optional – teachers may decide if they want students to complete all activities on their computer or tablet) |