“Alabama Landscape” by Mari Evans

**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 4) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.) * 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 3) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.   **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. * 10.4. 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** | |
| As an educator, writer, and musician, Mari Evans’ (1923-2017) work has been anthologized and translated for her audiences around the world. Evans played a major role in influencing the Black Arts Movement and is known for having spoken the truth and saying that which is difficult. Through her statements about what she saw and how she reacted, she captured a wide range of tones and emotions through her work. One such work, “Alabama Landscape,” was written in response to state violence against unarmed people of color. As an artist and activist for social change, Evans used her talents to provide a voice for the voiceless in her community. | Introduce students to Mari Evans.  Briefly discuss the past and present attacks on the Civil Rights of African Americans (slavery, Jim Crow, voting and marriage laws, systematic racism, police brutality). |
| **Reader Response Questions** | |
| What is something you see happening in your school or community that needs to be addressed but is overlooked by the adults in charge? Describe the situation. | These questions are designed to help students begin to think about the concepts that will be introduced and discussed throughout the poem. |
| Think about an issue that you care deeply about that affects your community or the world at large. If failure were not an option, how would you use your voice for change to call people to take action? |
| **History and Culture** | |
| Through its history of slavery and systematic racism, Alabama has historically been considered one of the most dangerous states in the country for the safety and rights of African Americans. What is the significance of time in this poem? How is the speaker running through time? | Briefly explain systematic racism.  Discuss the history of Alabama throughout slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. |
| In her introduction to the reading, Evans mentioned police brutality, specifically the murdering of a young Black man. Evans described this incident as the catalyst that caused her to use her voice and talents to make a change. What is the obligation of society to speak out against injustice? What are the consequences of staying silent in the face of injustice? | Discuss catalysts for social change (Emmett Till in *Jet Magazine*, Nat Turner’s Rebellion, Nipsey Hussle’s murder).  Discuss actions and consequences. |
| Throughout the Civil Rights Era, the African American community shared a complex relationship with journalism— stories related to the movement were often ignored or reported inaccurately. In response to these injustices, other magazines, such as *Jet*, worked tirelessly to use their platforms to provide factual news to the community. What do you feel is the role of writing in social movements? How do you feel that writing can be a source of truth? Does a journalist or author have an obligation to tell the truth in his or her writing? Explain. | Discuss the murder of Emmett Till and the publication of his photograph in *Jet Magazine.*  Discuss the importance of truth in reporting and our role in questioning the validity of sources. |
| **Poet’s Craft and Structure** | |
| Mari Evans uses vivid imagery to paint a picture of the fight for survival in Alabama. Describe the Alabama that Mari Evans presents through her poem. What is the effect of using such a treacherous landscape as the setting for this poem? | Review imagery and its role in poetry.  Revisit the relevant history of Alabama. |
| Evans states that the past is “still swollen, still unhealed.” This line is an example of personification, giving human characteristics to something nonhuman. What is the significance of giving time human qualities? How does this represent the past and present of the fight for freedom in African American history and culture? | Discuss personification.  Ask students to identify other examples of personification based in the poem. Explain answers. |
| In her poem, Evans emphasizes the significance of time and the repetition of history. She states that the subject of the poem, the Black man running, is “at once both / past and present, history repeated / history relearned.” How does this influence of time affect the way we view the subjects of justice and freedom? How can someone represent both the past and the present? | Discuss the role of time in the history of America.  Ask students to explain how time changes perspective.  How has history repeated itself? How can we try to prevent it? |
| Mari Evans made intentional choices when crafting the structure of “Alabama Landscape.” The lines of the poem weave and wind to form a zig-zagging motion, mimicking the frantic movements of someone running for their life. Identify the person running in the poem and describe 2-3 ways in which the structure of the poem embodies their movement. | Discuss the importance of visual structure in regards to the meaning of a poem. |
| **Reading and Writing Connections** | |
| Throughout history, artists have stood up to use their voices against injustice when they feel that the government has turned it's back on their community. Music has often been a major proponent for social change. Write a poem or song, or draw/paint a picture that stands up for something you believe in. | 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. |
| Throughout the Black Arts Movement, Mari Evans wrote poetry to create social change. Think of something in your school or community that you feel passionate about changing. Write a letter, speech, or a poem through your own perspective, that explains what you see and your reaction to it. |

**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) |