“A Raisin in the Sun”
Pre-Reading Lesson

Prior to the class beginning to read the play “A Raisin in the Sun”, we will use two outside texts to discuss a few of the larger themes in the reading as well as to connect the play to the rest of the unit. First, the class will read and discuss the Langston Hughes poem, “A Dream Deferred” and then they will read and discuss Martin Luther King Jr’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Both of these texts will introduce the theme of having a dream and the way in which the characters in the play as well as all African Americans during this time period have to struggle to reach their dreams.

A. “A Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes

"What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?"
- Langston Hughes

Activity:
1. Teacher: Black Americans, much like the characters in the play “A Raisin the Sun” that we will be reading during the next few weeks, were forced to endure many struggles during the Civil Rights Movement. They are searching for freedom, equality and justice and this is their hope for the future. The play we will be reading, is essentially about dreams, and the struggle to reach one’s dreams. The title of this play comes from a poem written by Langston Hughes.
2. Ask for a volunteer to read the poem on the board.
3. Discuss Langston Hughes and his significance as an African American poet and civil rights leader.
4. The class will discuss what they think the poem means and talk about their answers.
5. Then, on a loose-leaf sheet of paper, the students will be prompted to write for 10 minutes about what dreams they have had, what hopes for the future, that didn’t come true. They should reflect back on how they felt when they realized their dreams were not going to come true.
6. Volunteers can share their work with the class.
B. “I Have a Dream” Speech by Martin Luther King Jr.
   1. Play a recording of the speech for the class to listen. Hand out a copy of the written speech for the class to follow along.
   2. Discuss what the class believes what Dr. King’s dream. Next, discuss what has happened over the past 20 years since he made his speech, has it come true?
   3. Preview – We will be reading a play that discusses an ordinary man with a dream for a better life for his family. As we read, keep in mind your own dreams and the way you felt when those dreams were not realized. Also, keep in mind the words of Langston Hughes and Dr. King, about their perspective on dreams. In this play, each character has their own dreams, and as a family they struggle to reach their goals. Much of their happiness is related to their attainment or failure to attain these dreams.

Discussion: Do you believe that all individuals have the same ability to reach their dreams? If not, what groups of people do you feel have a more difficult time and which do you feel have an easier time reaching their goals? If yes, defend yourself. What things get in the way of reaching one’s dreams? How can we combat these roadblocks?

Writing Assignment: You must select one of these two choices to complete as a writing assignment that will be included in your final portfolio.

1. Poem (30 points)
   Write a poem using the theme of “Dreams”. You can talk about personal dreams of your own, or the American Dream. Your poem must be at least twelve to fifteen lines. Focus less on the form or structure of the poem and more so on using a language and style that is compatible with the theme. You will be sharing this with the class. Be creative!

2. Speech (30 Points)
   Imagine you are a civil rights leader and you have been asked to give a speech to a group of people. Write a speech no shorter than a page in length single spaced, twelve point font. You can choose to make this inspirational, persuasive or informative. You can also select your audience. (You can choose to speak to a group of like minded people or those you must convince). Consider the way in which Dr. King influenced so many people with this one speech. You will be sharing your speech with the class. Be brilliant!

Assessment
We will be assessing the students ability to take the knowledge gained from reading the poem and hearing the speech and then to create their own piece of creative work. They will be evaluated for effort and creativity and also for completion. Because we believe that poetry and speeches are meant to be read, the students will be reading their poem or speech to the class on the day it is due. No official grade will be assigned to this part of the assignment, but it will serve more so for students to share their work and to hear the rest of their classmates work. The poem or speech will be included in their final portfolio.
"I Have a Dream" – Martin Luther King Jr.

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize an shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's Capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check; a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.

Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.
And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?"

We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.

We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.

We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one.

We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "for whites only."

We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, that one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exhalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.
This is our hope. This is the faith that I will go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning, "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrims' pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that; let freedom ring from the Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"