

# ***Black Boy* by Richard Wright (Published by Harper Perennial, 1945)**

Approved for use in Advanced Placement Communication Arts III and Communication Arts III

## **Summary**

*Black Boy* is the autobiographical story of Richard Wright's childhood growing up in the Jim Crow South. Part I begins when Wright is four years old in 1912 and follows his struggle for acceptance and respect within his family and Southern society until he leaves for Chicago in 1925 at age twenty. Part II tells of Wright's life in slightly less segregated Chicago, his struggle to survive and provide for his mother during the Depression, his brief period of writing for and eventual disillusionment with the Communist Party, and his determination to become a writer, regardless of the roadblocks. Part I is often published without Part II.

## **Connection to the Curriculum**

In *Black Boy*, Richard Wright, generally acknowledged to be one of America's greatest black writers, expressed the tragedy, sadness, and despair of being black in America in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From early in his life, he was "different" in his intelligence and his unwillingness to accept his subservient "place" as a Negro. The book is an eloquent portrayal of Wright's alienation from his family and society and his struggle to be accepted by both. He conveys his struggle to survive physical hunger and emotional isolation as he realizes he is "different" from almost everyone he knows. As a respected piece of the American canon, the autobiography is important because it historically portrays the life of a black man in the South and universally portrays an individual in conflict with several different societies. Wright's style, in particular, his use of rhetoric, is an excellent model for students to examine.

## **Standards**

### **Course Objectives (Benchmarks)**

**Reading:** 1.2- The students read fluently.

**Literature:** 2.1-The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text.

**Writing:** 3.1- The students use writing as a tool for learning throughout the curriculum. 3.2- The students use the six-trait writing process.

**Research:** 4.1- The students use effective research practices.

### **Possible Skills Taught (Indicators):**

#### **Reading:**

1.2- The student adjusts reading rate when fluently reading narrative and expository text.

1.4- The student comprehends narrative and expository texts.

#### **Literature:**

2.1.1- The student analyzes the development of characters.

2.1.2- The student analyzes the historical, social, and cultural contextual aspects of the setting and its influence on characters and events in the story.

#### **Writing:**

3.1.1- The student uses the writing process in formats such as journal entries, reaction papers, essay, and critical reaction of current events.

3.2.1- The student uses the writing process to produce a well-developed paper.

#### **Research:**

4.1.3- The student researches (the Jim Crow era) and verifies the accuracy, relevance, and completeness of (Wright's) information.

**A Note on the Text:** (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.) *Due to its honest portrayal of Wright's troubled childhood in the Jim Crow South, the text contains some mature situations including the killing of a cat, enduring brutal treatment as a result of racism, and questioning of his religious and political beliefs during his darker times. There is also some profanity (including the "n" word) as a result of Wright's frustrations. These scenes are limited but enhance the reader's understanding of the oppression Wright suffered. Upon completion of the book, readers should realize Wright's voice should not be silenced as his writing revealed the need for change.*

## **AP Connections**

While *Black Boy* can be easily read for its historical value and its presentation of character development, Wright's writing style provides numerous opportunities to analyze his use of rhetoric, the subject of the AP III examination. Wright appears on the recommended author list produced by the College Board.

## **Additional Unit Design Connections**

Coming soon