



**Nurturing Our Future As African American Females:
*A Courageous Conversation***

September 26, 2008

Curriculum Packet

Sonia Sanchez

Hosted by Eastern Michigan University's College of Education and
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Introducing Sonia Sanchez

**This is the time for the creative
Man. Woman. Who must decide**




**that She. He. Can live in peace.
Racial and sexual justice on
this earth.**

**This is the time for you and me.
African American. Whites. Latinos.
Gays. Asians. Jews. Native
Americans. Lesbians. Muslims.
All of us must finally bury**

**the elitism of race superiority
the elitism of sexual superiority
the elitism of economic superiority
the elitism of religious superiority.**

--"Poem for July 4, 1994"



citizens called themselves "MOVE." In retaliation to the uncooperative members, the police dropped a bomb on the residential building. The drastic and catastrophic actions of the police resulted in fires that grew from the explosion and wiped out an entire city block. Many MOVE members, including children, were killed. In the midst of all the chaos, Sanchez recalls that others forgot that the victims of this violent act were people:

"Are you saying to me that we are at war with each other in this country? Is the message to be given to people that if we speak out and become non-conformists that certainly we can be killed? Or are you saying that in a black neighborhood anything goes?" (**A Moveable Feast**)

In response to this unforgettable tragedy Sanchez wrote "Elegy: For Move and Philadelphia." Sanchez wanted people to see the horrible significance of this tragedy and to never forget that it happened. She waited three years to present this poem to the people of Philadelphia. She believed they needed time to heal in order to understand the poem and realize it wasn't a personal attack. Sanchez took on the heavy responsibility of this elegy because she believes "we must never let this happen again."

Sonia Sanchez's poetry includes a variety of styles, languages, and dialects. Mixed in with poems are short stories, short works of prose, and personal reflections. She fills pages with powerful images through haiku, tanka, and sonku. Her poetry is free, neither structured by punctuation nor the censorship of society's close-mindedness. Through the characters in her poems and through her words Sanchez brings the tragedies and truths of life to her readers.

Wounded in the House of a Friend, her thirteenth and most recent book, is her first book of poems in eight years. In **Wounded in the House of a Friend** Sanchez explores and portrays a brutal rape scene, the murder of a woman by her granddaughter, an unfaithful spouse, a mother who sells her young daughter for drugs, racism, anger, self doubt, and other serious issues. Yet the book is also a journey towards healing, hope, and a newfound strength within the human spirit. Here and in other books, she reaches from the villages of Africa to the ghettos of America, from the violated slaves of the past to the victims of the 1985 MOVE tragedy.

Sonia Sanchez has been recognized as one of the most important figures in African-American literature. In support of **homegirls & handgrenades** Margaret Walker states, "The book is another expression of the continuing creativity of Sonia Sanchez. Some pieces are plaintive and poignant, others are tough and militant, but all are significant, brilliant and original. Here again is another example of Black speech, a vernacular familiar to all who know and love this author's previous work."

Donna Seaman of Booklist wrote a short review of **Wounded in the House of a Friend** in the March 1, 1995 issue:

Her ringing voice gives voice to the emotions of many; she is compassionate, proud, angry, and determined as she writes about betrayals both private and public...Sanchez forces us to



* *I've Been a Woman: New and Selected Poems*

*Some of her poems have been published previously; many have been published in *Ebony* magazine.

Works about the Author

* Baker, Jr., Houston A. "Our Lady: Sonia Sanchez and the Writing of a Black Renaissance." *Black Feminist Criticism and Critical Theory*. ed. Joe Weixlmann and Houston A. Baker, Jr. Greenwood, FL: Penkevill, 1988. 169-202.

* De Lancey, Frenzella Elaine. "Refusing to Be Boxed In: Sonia Sanchez's Transformation of The Haiku Form." *Language and Literature in the African American Imagination*. ed. Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992. 21-36.

* Gabbin, Joan Veal. "The Southern Imagination of Sonia Sanchez." *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*. ed. Tonette Bond Inge and Doris Betts. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1990. 180-203.

* Jennings, Regina B. "The Blue/Black Poetics of Sonia Sanchez." *Language and Literature in the African American Imagination*. ed. Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992. 119-32.

* Joyce, A. Ijala : *Sonia Sanchez and the African Poetic Tradition*. Chicago : Third World Press, 1996.

* Saunders, James Robert. "Sonia Sanchez's Homegirls and Handgrenades: recalling Toomer's Cane." *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 15.1 (Spring 1988). 73-82.

* Seaman, Donna, "Sanchez, Sonia," *Booklist*, March 1, 1995.

Related Links

Biography:

Provides a short summary about Sanchez.

Sonia Sanchez Speaks, November 1995

Contains digital audio files of Sanchez speaking about Martin Luther King, Jr.

Audio Links

- www.jcu.edu/pubaff/eyeonjcu/sanchez_audio.htm
Sanchez reads her own poetry which includes:
 - “Just Never Give Up on Love”
 - “Ballad After the Spanish”
 - “Sweet Honey in the Rock”
 - “Does Your House Have Lions”
 - “The Blues”
 - “Middle Passage”

•^aOn YouTube—Sanchez reading her following work:
-“Peace”

-“Love Poems and Haiku”
-“Keeping Company with the Layaway Man”
-“Poem for Some Women”
“Just Don’t Ever Give Up On Love”

Sanchez-Leading Female Voice of Black Activism



An Anthem

(for the ANC and Brandywine
Peace Community)

Our vision is our voice
we cut through the country
where madmen goose step in tune to Guernica.

we are people made o fire
we walk with ceremonial breaths
we have condemned talking mouths.

we run without legs
we see without eyes
loud laughter breaks over our heads.

give me courage so I can spread
it over my face and mouth.

we are secret rivers
with shaking hips and rests
come awake in our thunder
so that our eyes can see behind trees.



Blues Haiku

let me be yo wilderness
let me be yo wind
blowing you all day.

Lesson Plans

Sample lesson plans are available at the following web sites:

- <http://www.academy.agnesscott.edu/~jking/unitplan.htm>
The language of the Civil Rights Movement: A unit in history, English and technology literacies for 10th grade (includes works of Mari Evans, A. B. Spellman, Nikki Giovanni and Gwendolyn Brooks.)
- <http://www.rockhall.com/exhibitpast.lesson-proud-black-women>
“And Still I Rise” Proud Black Women for grades 7-12
- <http://www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org>
Type in Sonia Sanchez—The Kennedy Center has a wonderful lesson (Including objectives assessment, rubric, and extensions) that teaches students to listen to and analyze jazz music and the jazz characteristics in Sanchez’s and Langston Hughes’ poetry. The lesson then helps students to incorporate these same techniques into an original poem.



Getting to Know Each Other Through a Biographical Poem

I (Your first name)
Four adjectives (that describe you)
Daughter of
Lover of (three things or people or ideas)
Who feels (up to three items)
Who needs (up to three things)
Who fears (up to three things)
Who would like to see (up to three people, ideas, or places)
Am a resident of (city, state)
Welcome to my poem.

Physical Identity

Gwine find a beauty shop
cause I ain't a lovely belle.
The boys pass me by,
They say I's not so swell ...
I hate that ironed hair
And dat bleaching skin ...
But I'll be all alone
If I don't fall in.
Una Marston

My blackness is a beautiful cloak
of selfhood that permeates the soul
Maud Sulter



Historical View-African American Poets

1700-1800	Phyllis Wheatley & Jupiter Hamon
1800-1860	“Struggle against Racism”—George Moses, Horton & Frances Harper
1861-1865	“The Black Man in Civil War” no poets
1865-1915	Reconstruction— Paul Laurence Dunbar W.E. B. DuBois, Wm. S. Braithwaite Fenton Johnson
1915-1945	Renaissance & Radicalism—James Weldon Johnson Claude McKay Gwendolyn Brooks Ima Mu Baraka (LeRoi Jones) Owen Dodson Samuel Allen Mari Evans Etheridge Knight Don Lee Sonia Sanchez Nikki Giovanni
1945-Present	Gwendolyn Brooks, Sonia Sanchez, Maya Angelou, Zora Neale Hurston, Nikki Giovanni Audre Lorde