Reflection Title: A Divided Island: Haiti and the Dominican Republic
Learning Activity: Symbols of Oppression by Juliet Armerding
Subject Area: Language Arts
Focus Area: Symbolism, Oppression, Poetry
Grades: 9-12
Duration: 3-4 class periods (135-180 mins)
Common Core State Standards:
Writing: 3, 4, 9, 10
Reading: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10
Speaking and Listening: 1, 2, 3, 4

Learning Activity Overview:
Students will use understanding of symbolism and oppression in order to identify symbols of oppression in their own lives, poetry, and Andre’s One World Reflection.

Objectives: (LW – Learner Will)
1. LW be able to define and interpret the meaning of oppression
2. LW analyze texts in order to assess how language and ethnicity is used to oppress others.
3. LW research and present findings on another political or historical symbol of oppression.

Preparation:
Students should have completed the following Unit Resources:
• Previewing the Experience
• Checking for Understanding
• Reviewing the Experience
• Additionally, teacher should have ready the following materials:
  o Copies of Rita Dove’s poem, Parsley
  o Access to internet OR pre-printed materials covering symbols of oppression

Reflection Prompt:
In the tenth paragraph of his One World Reflection, Andre writes, “Towards the end of my stay, the sugar cane fields do not seem as vibrant. They didn’t wave at me but instead I felt like they were desperately trying to hide their secrets.”

Essential Question:
How and where do symbols of oppression against minorities exist in our world, and how do people react to them?

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Procedure:

**Step 1: Class Discussion: Oppression and Prejudice** (20 - 25 minutes)

Begin with creating a concept web as a class using the guiding question: What is oppression? Have students engage in a think-pair-share before the class share out so that all students have an opportunity to brainstorm and share their thoughts. Once the concept web is completed as a class, ask the students to make observations about the types of things they have listed in their web. What is their understanding of oppression based on? (History, current events, personal experience, etc)

Foster a rich class discussion by using some of the facts or starter thoughts below concerning oppression/prejudice. Teacher may want to provide students with each comment/statement to respond to individually and then share out as a class, have them posted around the room as a gallery walk, or just have them posted on the board in large letters.

**Discussion Statements:**

* Over 12 million people are trapped in forced (slave) labor across the world - some estimates are as high as 30 million people
* Many of the goods we consume have been produced or harvested using unjust/forced labor methods
* Slavery is just one form of oppression that is often supported by governments
* Oppression can occur based on one’s race, ethnicity, language, gender, religion, sexual orientation, family background, etc.


**Step 2: Student Response** (10-20 minutes)

Ask students to respond to Andre’s Reflection with a short reflection of their own focusing on their personal experience with or knowledge of oppression. Use the following questions as writing prompts (project writing prompts onto board or have pre-printed for students). *(Another way teachers could use this - also to build more structure for certain students or classes - is to be given one question at a time, about 3-5 minutes.)*

- Where have you witnessed – or been a victim – of oppression in your life?
- Where do you see oppression as a social/cultural institution?
- In your opinion, is oppression more pervasive in our culture than we readily accept? Why/why not? *(This initial response may be used as a jumping board for their final product)*

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Step 3: A Close Reading of the Reflection (30-40 minutes)
Provide students with a copy of Andre’s Reflection, An Island Divided. Before reading, ask students what their background knowledge is concerning the divide – physically, emotionally, economically, mentally – between the two nations.

- To go even further, provide students with a visual of the physical divide between the two nations (photo from NASA available here: http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Features/Haiti2004/)
- Another great picture showing the literal divide: (http://www.dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/haiti_special/2010/04/01/feature-02)

Read the story once as a class (using whatever group reading method your class style prefers). Next, have students re-read the One World Reflection, this time looking specifically for places where they notice Andre mentioning the cruelties enacted on one group from another.

As a class, discuss the importance of the sugar cane fields. Andre book-ends his reflection with his initial and his final reactions to these fields of the Dominican Republic. What is the symbolism behind these fields? For the people of the DR, what do they represent? For the Haitians that work there, what do they represent?

Next, have students delve deeper. The sugar cane fields are just one symbol in the story - what are others? The teacher can have students come up with them on their own, or assign a particular example to groups to do a share-out, or do a chalk-talk/gallery walk activity. Some examples from which to choose:
- The bayetes
- Fires in the fields
- Inability to make eye contact
- Ethnic slurs
- Machetes
- Birth certificates

Step 4: Connection to poetry. (50-60 minutes)
Connect to a core understanding: language is a powerful tool – it is used to hold people back and cause a divide, and it is also used to empower by giving people a voice.
Before analyzing the selected poem, refer students back to Andre’s 5th paragraph where he refers to the Parsley Massacre of 1937. Provide students with additional background on this (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parsley_Massacre) before reading the selected poem.
After a check for understanding, students will read Rita Dove’s poem, Parsley. (see attached document)
Refer to poetry guides to help guide your students through the explication of this poem, noting especially the symbolism of the parrot, parsley, the sugar cane fields, and maternity. Teachers may decide to split students into groups to study in depth one of those four categories, and then do a share-out as a class.


Step 5: Application and Creation (time frame varies - possible HW or 1 class period)
After the study of symbols of oppression, students will create their own poetic response. Using one of the specific examples of symbolic oppression in our lives, students will write a poem in response. Poem can take any form desired, but must capture the essence of a type of modern-day oppression.

Students Demonstrate Understanding by:

- Actively participating in class discussions
- Ability to define and provide examples of oppression
- Ability to make accurate and clear connects of the theme to their own lives
- Ability to analyze poem and identify the symbolism of oppression
- Craft a poem utilizing symbolism to describe modern day oppression

Global Extension Activities:

- Research the historical background of Haiti/DR tensions
- Research the role of forced/slave labor in DR provided by Haitians. Students can also extend to investigate other places in the world where forced labor – determined on the basis of ethnicity – is condoned by governments.
Parsley, By Rita Dove  b. 1952 (from http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172128)

1. The Cane Fields

There is a parrot imitating spring
in the palace, its feathers parsley green.
Out of the swamp the cane appears
to haunt us, and we cut it down. El General
searches for a word; he is all the world
there is. Like a parrot imitating spring,

we lie down screaming as rain punches through
and we come up green. We cannot speak an R—
out of the swamp, the cane appears

and then the mountain we call in whispers Katalina.
The children gnaw their teeth to arrowheads.
There is a parrot imitating spring.

El General has found his word: perejil.
Who says it, lives. He laughs, teeth shining
out of the swamp. The cane appears

in our dreams, lashed by wind and streaming.
And we lie down. For every drop of blood
there is a parrot imitating spring.
Out of the swamp the cane appears.

2. The Palace

The word the general’s chosen is parsley.
It is fall, when thoughts turn
to love and death; the general thinks
of his mother, how she died in the fall
and he planted her walking cane at the grave
and it flowered, each spring stolidly forming
four-star blossoms. The general
pulls on his boots, he stomps to her room in the palace, the one without curtains, the one with a parrot in a brass ring. As he paces he wonders Who can I kill today. And for a moment the little knot of screams is still. The parrot, who has traveled all the way from Australia in an ivory cage, is, coy as a widow, practising spring. Ever since the morning his mother collapsed in the kitchen while baking skull-shaped candies for the Day of the Dead, the general has hated sweets. He orders pastries brought up for the bird; they arrive dusted with sugar on a bed of lace. The knot in his throat starts to twitch; he sees his boots the first day in battle splashed with mud and urine as a soldier falls at his feet amazed—how stupid he looked!—at the sound of artillery. *I never thought it would sing* the soldier said, and died. Now the general sees the fields of sugar cane, lashed by rain and streaming. He sees his mother’s smile, the teeth gnawed to arrowheads. He hears the Haitians sing without R’s as they swing the great machetes: *Katalina, they sing, Katalina,*

*mi madle, mi amol en muelte.* God knows his mother was no stupid woman; she could roll an R like a queen. Even
a parrot can roll an R! In the bare room
the bright feathers arch in a parody
of greenery, as the last pale crumbs
disappear under the blackened tongue. Someone
calls out his name in a voice
so like his mother’s, a startled tear
splashes the tip of his right boot.
My mother, my love in death.
The general remembers the tiny green sprigs
men of his village wore in their capes
to honor the birth of a son. He will
order many, this time, to be killed
for a single, beautiful word.

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