



GREAT HOOSIERS

6-8 | Lesson 4



LESSON 4

TEXT TITLE

***"Status Symbol, I Am A Black Woman"* by Mari Evans**

TEXT MAIN IDEA

In *"Status Symbol, I am a Black Woman"*, Evans takes the reader through the journey of the African American who was enslaved upon arrival of Affirmative Action. While a status symbol typically represents an admirable social or professional position, Evans used the common use of a public restroom to signify African Americans' symbol of success during this time period. Evans uses text structure with short lines and ellipsis to cause the reader to pause and pay attention to each proud moment as she offers a derisive culmination of status as a result of the historic struggles.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

The unit essential questions developed in this lesson are...

- Who is Mari Evans?
- How does culture influence the voice of a poet?

CONTENT OBJECTIVE

By engaging in this lesson, students will know/understand that...

There have been significant moments in history that have shaped African American culture. These events, while seemingly progressive, have sometimes offered small changes at an undesirable pace. This poem expresses Evans' voice through the imagery she creates as she reflects on the culmination of events African Americans have faced.

LITERACY OBJECTIVE

By engaging in this lesson, students will strengthen their ability to...

- Differentiate between literary nonfiction and nonfiction text and establish the purpose for writing each one.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

- Compare and contrast the structure of two or more related works of literature (e.g., similar topic or theme) and analyze and evaluate how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style. (8.RL.3.1)

LAUNCH (5 MINUTES)

Teacher Notes:

- Continue using the anchor chart to keep track of the key understandings for the essential questions.
- Remind students to track their thoughts and ideas in their Reflection Journal.

As we continue getting to know Mari Evans, we will read a short nonfiction biography about her life. Much of what we read is considered nonfiction. When you hear nonfiction, what do you think of?

Students will create a list in their journal under the heading “Nonfiction Details.” After one minute, poll the class to see how many details they were able to write. They will have a list similar to this:

- Facts
- Details
- Ideas
- People
- Events
- Text features

In our reading today we will be focused on the details. The author’s purpose for writing can be found in the details highlighted throughout the text.

READ ALOUD / ENGAGE (15 MINUTES)

Read “Status Symbol, I Am A Black Woman” by Mari Evans.

Tell your students a person’s status is their position or rank in life compared to other people. Have them make a prediction about the title in their journal and then read the poem silently without making any additional notes.

Read the poem to the class. Begin to model making a prediction about the title and your initial analysis of the poem for the class.

Hmmm...the title says “Status Symbol.” This might be about something that represents where a person ranks in society, like a big house, a sports car or fancy clothes. People usually have a lot of money when they have those things. People with a lot of money are usually considered important. Also, I see each line in her poem is short, only a few words.

This must mean she wants me to stop and take in each line. Each line is important.

*Evans repeats the word “i” at the beginning of the poem. Why do you think it is in lowercase? **Ask scaffolding questions to help students make the connection that the author is using irony. By using a lowercase “i,” she is emphasizing society’s view on who she is as a Black woman.***

Read the poem again to the class.

Evans references nine historical events in Status Symbol. With your table group, identify as many of these events as you can and underline them. In the margin of the poem, write down what you know about each event.

Bring the class back together. Have each group share what they discovered. Have the class underline the nine significant events once everyone has had a chance to speak. Discuss in detail some of the events below.

- New Negro - Harlem Renaissance
- Lincoln - Emancipation
- WWI - Black Soldiers in France (Hell Fighters)
- Red Ball Express - WWII Black Soldiers driving military supplies
- White drinking fountains - Jim Crow laws (separate but equal)
- Sit downs - Rosa Parks
- Sit-ins - Greensboro lunch counter
- Federal Troops - Little Rock Nine
- Marches on Washington - Martin Luther King

*What do these events have in common? **(MRS).***

Listen for students to identify they all represented the struggle for civil rights. Choose 2-3 students to share their response.

Extension: Have students research one of the historical events in the poem.

DISCUSS (10 MINUTES)

What imagery does the speaker reveal as she lists the events in American History? What tone does the speaker express by the end of the poem with her use of the words, “white...locked...john?”

Exemplary Responses:

- The events the speaker lists in the poem are significant to the journey of African Americans in the United States. With her repeated use of the word “i,” the speaker reveals she is proud of every struggle that has helped to define the African American experience.
- The speaker reveals a sense of pride as she uses short lines and repetition to highlight some of the major struggles African Americans have endured. She repeatedly uses the word “i” on one line causing the reader to pause as if to emphasize each proud moment.
- Although the poem reveals many obstacles that African Americans have overcome, by the end of the poem the tone seems to be one of defeat. With her use of ellipses, Evans expresses a pause between each word emphasizing her disappointment.
- Despite overcoming many obstacles, the speaker reveals African American achievement had only produced the ability to have basic rights. Her use of imagery using the major events to allude to progress, yet using the restroom as the “status symbol” shows the speaker’s tone is unenthusiastic.

Supporting Questions:

- *What are some examples of status in today’s culture?*
- *Why does the speaker use repetition in this poem?*
- *What is revealed by the short lines in the poem?*
- *What is the significance of listing so many historical events?*
- *What is the irony of the historical events and the status symbol?*
- *Does the speaker believe her status symbol is something to be proud of?*
- *What is the speaker’s voice?*

WRITE (10 MINUTES)

Well done class! Now you will each take a moment to see yourself in the future 20 years from now. Where do you want to be? What do you want to be doing? What do you want to have achieved? Then, list something that would be an appropriate symbol to represent your accomplishments. Explain why that symbol adequately represents all you will have done through poem form. I am looking to hear your voice in the poem. This means I will learn more about you, what motivates you and what you are passionate about. Determine what will be the tone of your poem. Will you express irony as Evans has done with "Status Symbol", or do you wish to express a different emotion? It will be clear by the symbol and imagery you use.



EXIT TICKET

1. What is the significance of the ellipsis (...) in the last two lines of the poem?

- a. It allows the reader to know there is more to the poem.
- b. By causing the reader to slow down and emphasize each word, it shows the speaker's disapproval of the status she has earned.
- c. It helps the speaker relay the message of the poem.
- d. The ellipsis helps to provide clarity to what had actually become the status symbol.

2. How does Evans' use of historical events contribute to the central message of the poem?

3. What is the most likely reason the author used repetition at the beginning of the poem?
