I, Too, Sing: 
Hearing African-American Voices 
at a Predominantly White 
Private School

Clarice Moran, English instructor 
Karsten Tyson, Spanish instructor and African-American Affinity Group coordinator
Who We Are:

- We are an independent, Episcopal, college-preparatory, boarding and day school for girls in grades 9-12.
- Founded in 1842, we have an historic, residential 23-acre campus near downtown Raleigh, NC.
- The school's 246 students represent 12 states and five foreign countries - China, Grand Cayman, Korea, Spain, and the UK.
We have 14 students who are self-identified as “African American,” which represents 6% of the student population (total enrollment = 246).

About 10% of the population are “students of color.”

Our Interim Head of School for 2012-13 is an African-American man.
I, Too, Sing

Theoretical frameworks and scholarly research that guide us:


- The work of Gloria Ladson-Billings, particularly:
We aim for “cultural relevance”:

“Culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one’s history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture, or background distorted.”

-- Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The Dream Keepers*
I, Too, Sing

- **Our African-American Affinity Program:**
  - A cross-curricular initiative that aims to support African-American students.
  - Involves English, Humanities, World Languages, and Art departments, as well as chapel and library.
  - Provides affinity group for students to find each other, share common experiences.
  - An “affinity” group (Gee, 2003) is a group of people with a common culture.
Saint Mary's School

You are invited to

Saint Mary's School's Observance of

The Twenty-Third National African American Read-In

Student, Faculty, and Staff Celebrating
The Significance of African American Authors to Our Literary Heritage

Thursday, February 16, 2012
Kenan Library
Program begins at 4:45 in the main library
Refreshments served

Sponsored by Kenan Library, the Student Library Council, the African American Community at SMS, the English Department and the Visual and Performing Arts Department

Parking behind Kenan Library, 201 St. Mary's Street – Questions? Call Diana Williams at 919-424-4040 or email dwilliams@sms.edu
I, Too, Sing – African-American Read-in

- African-American Read-In involves entire school – students, staff, and teachers
- Self-select poems or excerpts from literature by African-Americans
- After school
- Refreshments provided
- Advertised heavily around campus
- Tremendously successful
I, Too, Sing – Heritage Chapel

* Planned and conducted by African-American students or other students of color
* Readings by students
* Songs reflect heritage, such as “Lift Every Voice”
* Guest speaker
I, Too, Sing
Black History Lecture Series

• Held during Black History Month in February
• After school
• Lectures given by faculty
• “A Sensory Journey through the Harlem Renaissance”
• “Saint Mary’s and Civil War Slaves”
• “The History of Black History”
• “The Legacy of Malcolm X”
I, Too, Sing – Summer reading program

- Summer reading books keyed to a theme
- Always at least one selection that features a race-related topic
- Past choices:
  - The Color of Water - McBride
  - The Help - Stockett
  - The Confessions of Nat Turner - Styron
  - The Secret Life of Bees – Kidd
  - Black Like Me - Griffin
  - Having Our Say – the Delaney sisters
Curricular Initiatives – English

- The voices of African-American poets emphasized, including Hughes, Cullen, Dunbar, Angelou, Brooks, Dove
- All 11th graders read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* – Hurston
- All 11th graders read *Huck Finn* and race implications/critical view emphasized
- Advanced Placement English classes spend 12 weeks on “marginalized voices” and read works by King, Walker, Shelby Steele, Hurston, and others; students view race-themed film “The Color of Fear”
- Bulletin board on African-American writers every February
Curricular Initiatives – U.S. History

Special focus on Civil War-era conflicts, including:

- *Interracial* – between David Walker, a black abolitionist Christian, and Thornton Stringfellow, a white pro-slavery minister
- *Intraracial* -- the classic debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois
- *The Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*
- A research paper on an aspect of black history using primary sources provided by the teacher
I, Too, Sing – World Languages

Curricular Initiatives – World Languages

- **Latin:**
  - Comparing and contrasting American slavery with ancient slavery
  - The complexities of race in the ancient world
  - The 12 Black Classicists traveling exhibit

- **French:**
  - Cultural activities and readings outside of France
  - The Afro-Francophone

- **Spanish:**
  - Lectures on the African diaspora and Afro-Caribbean studies
  - Race and social relationships between Cuban, Dominicans, Haitians, and Puerto Ricans
  - Julia Alvarez’s biographical essay “A White Woman of Color” and novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*
  - Poetry by Nicolás Guillén
  - Music and songs by Celia Cruz, Juan Luis Guerra, Tito Puente and Pedro Knight
  - Topics on racial identity: What does it mean to be LatiNegro or Blatino?
Curricular Initiatives – Art

* Students design quilts after ones created by Faith Ringold

* The quilts hang in the chapel as altar decorations
Art Initiative

Students also work on a cultural identity project.

This involves research and reflection on where they came from.

Artwork is displayed in the library.
I, Too, Sing

Two short videos that recognize the voices of our school
I, Too, Sing – Candid Talk
I, Too, Sing – More Talk
In a small group, construct a PLUS-DELTA sticky note

PLUS: What is working in your school to recognize students of color?
DELTA: What could be improved?
QUESTION: What questions do you have?
Contact Us

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