



MATERIALS

- *Sugar Changed the World* by Marc Aronson and Marina Budhos
- Copies of the poem *Sugar Cane* by Grace Nichols
- Digital image of *Cane Cutting Scene* folk art painting (circa 1860–1880)
- Smartboard or projector
- Notebooks or paper
- Pens/ pencils / Markers
- Observation Boxes?
- Whiteboard / Chart Paper
- Access to the school garden



GRADE 8

SCHOOL PARTNER
LESSON PLAN

OVERVIEW

There are two resources and three activities that will introduce the students to the unit curriculum. The subject of sugar is complex as it ties into not only botany, but also economics and civil rights. The goal is to spark a conversation on these topics while enhancing literacy skills.

Prior to delving into the full text of ‘Sugar Changed the World’ by Aronson and Budhos, student interest can be built by using resources #1, a folk-art painting of a sugar cane farm from 1860–1890.

Next, the class can use the school garden as resource #2.

Lastly, a poem by Grace Nichols, ‘Sugar Cane,’ will be read and analyzed for new vocabulary and imagery. Each of these resources will help the students to build an “active comprehension” to begin thinking about the role and impact of sugar cane, to begin the process of building questions, and to develop increased vocabulary.

ACTIVITY #1

Use Smartboard to display folk art image of ‘Cane Cutting Scene’ circa 1860–1880. This painting portrays African American men cutting sugar cane. Students are instructed to spend 2 minutes recording as many observations as possible about the image in a brainstorming session. Next, students are asked to consider what questions are not being answered in this image. Use a whiteboard or other format to record students’ inquiries.



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ACTIVITY #2

Students are tasked to create 3 Observation Boxes. Label the boxes, “1) texture, 2) appearance, 3) size/shape.” Each student is challenged to fill in each of the boxes with literary descriptors (minimum 3 observations per box). Next, time for a mini field trip out to the school garden to visit the sugar cane. Students are given 10–15 minutes for this activity.

	School Garden Trip	‘Sugar Cane’ by Grace Nichols
Texture	Ex. rough texture like a cat’s tongue	
Appearance	Ex. looks like corn or large grass	
Size/Shape	Ex. over 6 feet tall, straight leaves	

ACTIVITY #3

For this activity, students are given a copy of the poem ‘Sugar Cane’ by Grace Nichols. They are then tasked to find the descriptive vocabulary that the author uses to create visual imagery of the sugar cane plant and match it to the category that fits.

	School Garden Trip	‘Sugar Cane’ by Grace Nichols
Texture		Ex. skin thick
Appearance		Ex. shiver like ague when it rain, jaundice when he ripe
Size/Shape		Ex. growing tall

CONCLUSION

Each of the activities builds student’s ability to comprehend text through analysis, discussion, comparison, and descriptive exercises:

- The first activity opens the door to the larger lesson on the importance of sugar cane with reflective thinking exercise that moves into a discussion web format so that students can compare perspectives and learn from their classmates.
- The second stretches the student’s imaginations to begin to see the dynamic nature of a plant and to use their vocabulary and writing skills to bring the living being onto the page.
- The third activity is the first reading activity, and it builds on the second activity with compare and contrast techniques that challenge students to take their written work and lay it side by side with an author’s.



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All of these activities help to bring animation and interest into the topic prior to diving headfirst into the main text. For the main lessons of this unit, the text ‘Sugar Changed the World’ will be studied. As the topic of sugar cane is relative to its growing conditions and the politics of its production during the preindustrial period, a comprehension of the weight, height, density, and general toughness of the plant will give the coming discussions and written reflections a real meaning to the students.

Future lessons will include a map charting the spread of the plant along the routes taken during the European colonization of the New World. There will be a reflective essay on the lives of the people who worked to grow and harvest the plant. There will also be a persuasive perspective assignment in which students either create an advertisement selling the usefulness of or an argument explaining the danger of using sugar. Each of these lesson approaches will require students to use the information and vocabulary gained from the reading but will also challenge them to think creatively about the power that a single plant can have on the impact of an individual, a time, or a political power. This is designed to empower the students to see the influence of a seemingly small factor and to engage constructively in reasoning skills to analyze and evaluate the influences of a factor that has impacted their way of life.

REFERENCES

Aronson, Marc. (2010). *Sugar changed the world: a story of magic, spice, slavery, freedom, and science*. Clarion Books, Boston, Ma.

[Sugar Cane—The Children’s Poetry Archive](#)



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