

**Bonnie L. Reddick**  
**San Diego State University**  
**El Cajon, California**  
*English—Reading and Composition*

I teach reading and composition from a Black perspective. The majority of my students do not want to be in my class. They enter my class scared, insecure, and intimidated. They're convinced that they are failures. I am competing with the Internet, television, and their friends for their undivided attention. I am asking them to spend at a minimum four to six hours of their time, outside of the classroom, reading and writing. You see writing is not like math or science where you arrive at a definitive answer. It is tedious and painstaking; however, once you master it, it reaches across the curriculum.

My challenge then is to meet my students where they are. I need to make the material meaningful to them. By coincidence, I was listening to the radio and Kanye West was spitting out some lyrics, "Through the Wire," I really wasn't paying much attention to him until he said, "And just imagine how my girl feel/ On the plane scared as hell that her guy look like Emmet Till." I was immediately angry. I shared my anger with my students. I asked them if they'd heard the song and most of them had; however, they could not discern the source of my anger. I then asked them who is Emmet Till, for which none could respond. I had them read an excerpt of Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi* and I put together a power point about Emmet, the Bryants and lynchings in the south.

Something was still missing. I'm a native Californian and I can read all about the southern "culture" but I did not articulate it well enough for it to represent it to new students. Well, this workshop fills in that space for me. To understand that culture you need to read it in the personal narratives of such warriors as Rev. George W. Lee who encouraged black Mississippians to register and vote and was murdered for his activism three months before Emmet was murdered. Charles Cobb said that as educators we need to help our students articulate their "voice," to demand what they need from our educational institutions. Revisioning history from a different lens is one way we help our students do that. I plan to supplement and expand that lesson to include excerpts from John Dittmer and Charles Payne. Also, Michelle Deardorff provided me with *Look's* article on Bryant and Millan's detailed description of their cowardly deed (Emmet's murder). I had been searching for it for three years. I will use it, as well.

In addition to supplementing my Emmet Till lesson, the workshop discussion on oral history, more specifically the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, has lead me to re-think how I've taught life is so good in the past. Richard Glaubman, a white historian, interviews and writes George Dawson's biography. Dawson is black. Dawson was born in Texas in 1899. He traveled the country in search for work and after our discussions, I realized he had to have experienced the frustration of the Southern laborer. He recalls working in the levee in Memphis, for example. He also worked in a dairy in 1964. He had to have experienced or witnessed organizing efforts. However, it's not mentioned in the book. Dr. Alferdteen Harrison suggested that in soliciting information the interviewer must build trust and must ask the "right" questions. For example, she asked Mrs. Weakly (interviewee) if she had any bad experiences growing up black in Mississippi and Mrs. Weakly said "no." She was later asked when was the first time she voted; she became very animated and shared that she paid poll taxes for ten years before she could register to vote. Mrs. Weakley did not volunteer that information and an unknowledgeable interviewer would have stopped the questioning at "no."

This year I'm going to have my students conduct research what was going on in black communities when Mr. Dawson was there to see if there is an untold story because either Mr. Dawson did not trust Glaubman enough to divulge the information or Glaubman was not knowledgeable enough about black community to ask the right questions.