



#9565

SPIRIT TO SPIRIT: NIKKI GIOVANNI

DIRECT CINEMA, 1987

Grade Levels: 9-12

28 minutes

DESCRIPTION

African American poet Nikki Giovanni highlights her life and work against the background of her times--the civil rights movement, Vietnam, and the women's movement. Personal photos and archival footage add impact.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: Language Arts - Reading

- ★ Standard: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
 - Benchmark: Understands writing techniques used to influence the reader and accomplish an author's purpose (e.g., organizational patterns, such as cause-and-effect or chronological order; imagery, personification, figures of speech, sounds in poetry; literary and technical language; formal and informal language; point of view; characterization; irony; narrator) (See Instructional Goal #1.)

Subject Area: History of the United States, K-4 – Topic 3 - Democratic Principles and Values and the People from Many Cultures who Contributed to its Cultural, Economic, and Political Heritage

- ★ Standard: Understands how democratic values came to be, and how they have been exemplified by people, events, and symbols
 - Benchmark: Understands how songs, symbols, and slogans demonstrate freedom of expression and the role of protest in a democracy (e.g., the Boston Tea Party, the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, labor movements, the civil rights movement) (See Instructional Goal #3.)

Subject Area: United States History – Era 9 – Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

- ★ Standard: Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties
 - Benchmark: Understands the development of the civil rights movement (e.g., the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* and its significance in advancing civil rights; the resistance to civil rights in the South between 1954 and 1965; how the "freedom ride," "civil disobedience," and "non-violent resistance" were important to the civil rights movement; Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech in the context of major events) (See Instructional Goal #2.)

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To introduce the poetry and life of Nikki Giovanni.
2. To depict the influence of the civil rights movement on Nikki Giovanni's life and poetry.
3. To show Nikki Giovanni as a voice representing black American women.

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. materially rich | 7. exploitation |
| 2. legacy | 8. picket |
| 3. territorial | 9. segregation |
| 4. practicality | 10. vernacular |
| 5. misery | 11. integrity |
| 6. oppression | |

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Brainstorm what you know about poetry. List questions that you have about poetry.
2. Review American history from 1943 to 1969, from when Giovanni was born until she graduated from college. Consider what life was like for a black woman in Tennessee during this time.

AFTER SHOWING

► Discussion Items and Questions

1. What was the legacy that Nikki Giovanni's family gave to her? What legacy is she giving to her child?
2. Why does Giovanni hope that no white person will ever have cause to write about her? Why does she say all black autobiography is misery?
3. What was the inspiration for and the message of the following poems from the video? How does she make use of imagery, personification, and figures of speech?
 - a. "Poem for Black Boys"
 - b. "Seduction"
 - c. "Don't look now . . ."
 - d. Her poem about becoming a mother
 - e. Her poem about "my house"
 - f. "I was born . . ."
4. How did the 1960s influence Giovanni and her poetry? What does she believe about the 60s?
5. What is the significance of Giovanni saying that she could write a first person singular poem about anyone? How does this contradict her hope that a white person will never write about her life?

► Applications and Activities

1. Review what you knew about poetry before the viewing the video. (See Before Showing #1.)
 - a. Make changes and additions to what you know about poetry based on information from the video.
 - b. Answer as many of your pre-viewing questions as possible with information from the video.

2. Write a poem about your legacy. Consider what you've received spiritually and materially from your family, friends, community, and country.
3. Recite from memory one of Nikki Giovanni's poems. Consider using one of the following anthologies.
 - a. *Gemini*
 - b. *My House*
 - c. *The Women and the Men*
 - d. *Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day*
 - e. *Those Who Ride the Night Wind*
4. Create a biography of Nikki Giovanni. Consider using a dramatic presentation, a poem, or artwork to depict her life.

RELATED RESOURCES



- [Langston Hughes: The Dream Keeper #3625](#)

World Wide Web

The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **NIKKI GIOVANNI** <http://nikki-giovanni.com/>

This official website includes a biography, timeline, and photographs in addition to a complete listing of her works and related links.



- **THE HISTORY MAKERS: NIKKI GIOVANNI**

<http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/biography.asp?bioindex=398>

This page is a hyperlinked biography that puts Giovanni's life in historical context.