

Nafissa Thompson-Spires: *Heads of the Colored People* – Analysing two short stories

Linda Weiland



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Die Lernenden lesen die beiden Kurzgeschichten *Heads of the Colored People: Four Fancy Sketches, Two Blank Outlines, and No Apology* und *Fatima, the Biloquist: A Transformation Story*. Jede *short story* wird von *pre-reading* sowie diversen *while-* und *post-reading activities* begleitet, die Textverstehen und Kontextualisierung unterstützen. An jeder Kurzgeschichte schließen sich Aufgaben an, die den Schülerinnen und Schülern eine kreative Auseinandersetzung mit dem jeweiligen Text ermöglichen. Abschließend vergleichen und lernen beide *stories* und diskutieren deren Intention vor dem Hintergrund der aktuellen Gesellschaftsstrukturen der USA. Außerdem schreiben sie einen persönlichen Kommentar in Form eines *reviews*.

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Competences and skills:

This unit first and foremost practises **literary competences** such as text comprehension and the analysis of plot structure, character constellations, literary devices and language. **Close reading** as one of the most relevant reading strategies when it comes to literature is trained in each topic. Students repeatedly share their results on analysis, research and creative tasks and discuss certain aspects within the short stories, they train their **speaking skills** in a authentic setting. Students' **creative writing skills** are trained when they write an additional paragraph to *Fatima, the Biloquist: A Transformation Story*. Their **genre writing skills** are trained when they write their own review about the short stories. **Listening/working skills** are practised when students receive input on certain technical terms via video in topics 3 and 4.

Overview:

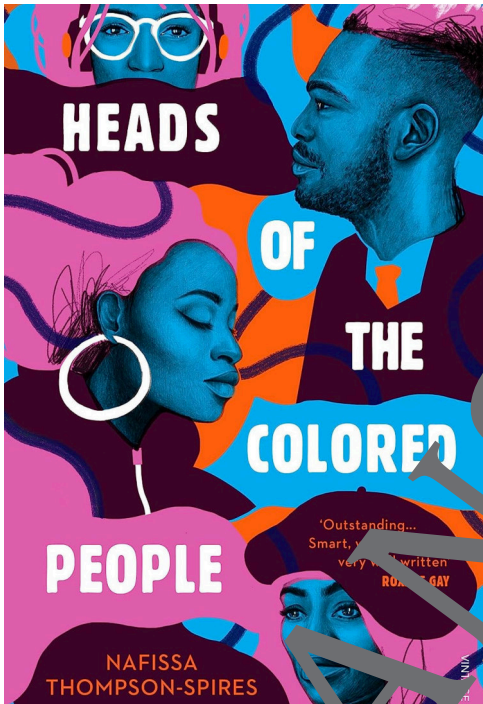
List of abbreviations:

A Analysis**P** Working with the picture**T** Working with the text**W** Writing**CH** Characterisation**R** Research**VI** Working with the video

Topic	Material	Methods, Skills
1: Introducing <i>Heads of the Colored People</i>	M1–M2	P, R, T
2: <i>Heads of the Colored People: Four Fancy Sketches, Two Chalk Outlines, and No Apology</i>	M3–M5	A, R, T, W
3: <i>Fatima, the Biloquist: A Transformation Story</i>	M6–M8	A, CH, R, T, VI, W
4: Concluding <i>Heads of the Colored People</i>	M9	VI, W

Worksheet – Introducing *Heads of the Colored People*

M2



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Working with the book cover

1. Look at the cover of the short story collection *Heads of the Colored People*.
 - a) Describe the cover.
 - b) Considering the title and the cover, what kind of short stories do you expect? Why?
 - c) Find out more about the author Nafissa Thompson-Spires by doing a web search. Use your findings to come up with more expectations.

**Working with the text**

2. Read the interview with Nafissa Thompson-Spires (M1). What does she say about her goals when writing *Heads of the Colored People*? To what extent do her goals match your expectations? Explain.



Worksheet – Working with the text

M4

Reading section I

1. Read parts 1–4 (pp. 1–12) of the short story.
2. Take a sheet of paper and draw four sections. Collect information on each character you meet in one of the sections.
3. Add arrows and symbols that explain the relationships between the individual characters.
4. What happens when? Use your results from tasks 2 and 3 and create a timeline of the events.
5. Check three names/terms on your collective digital bulletin board (see M3) and explain their role within the plot up to this point.



Reading section II

6. Read part 5 (pp. 12/13) of the short story. Outline its content.
7. “And you should fill in for yourself the details of that shooting as long as the constants [...] are included in those details.”
 - a) Explain what the narrator means by this sentence.
 - b) Read the following website and use your findings to add to your analysis of the sentence. Which of the details described on the website are mentioned in part 5? <https://raabe.click/police-brutality> [last access: 21/07/2023]
8. Analyse the author’s language in this section. How does her use of language underline the content and the intention of this section?



Reading section III

9. “How to end such a story, especially one that is this angry, like a black fist?” the narrator asks in the last section of the short story. How would you let the story end? Write the final paragraph. Remember that a short story often does not offer a conclusion, but rather results in an open ending or features an unexpected twist.
10. They read the last section (pp. 13/14) and compare the author’s ending with yours. Discuss your findings.
11. Choose three sentences from this reading section. Analyse and explain their meaning.



Topic 3: *Fatima, the Biloquist: A Transformation Story*

M6 Worksheet – Before reading the short story



1. According to its title, the protagonist of the short story you are going to read is a biloquist. Check the meaning of the term biloquist. What skills does a biloquist need?
2. The term biloquist is ascribed to Charles Brockden Brown. Do a 5-minute research on Charles Brockden Brown. Take notes and be prepared to share your findings.

M7 Worksheet – Working with the text

Reading section I



1. Read pp. 65–70 (“And thus began her transformation”) of *Fatima, the Biloquist: A Transformation Story*.



2. Characterise Fatima.
3. Characterise Violet.
4. Compare Fatima and Violet. Look at the following aspects:
 - a) Their personality
 - b) Their behaviour and coping strategies
 - c) Their names
5. Which function do your findings from M6 have in this section? Analyse and interpret.

Reading section II



6. Read pp. 70–73 (“...only Bastunde Thurston [...]” to “[...] hopeful that the transformation had taken hold”).



7. Describe Fatima’s transformation by tracing the changes she goes through.
8. Examine Violet’s role in Fatima’s transformation. Find a label that fits Violet’s role best. Explain why you chose it.
9. What does the text reveal about the quality and sustainability of Fatima’s transformation? Take notes and comment.
10. At the beginning of the story, Fatima is described as a “colorless gas”. Use your results from tasks 7–9 and find a metaphor to describe her at the end of this section. Explain why you chose it.
11. Analyse how Fatima’s and Violet’s relationship develops along with Fatima’s transformation.

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