



***Take on the South* is a series of eight one-hour, live-to-tape debates, produced by ETV for the University of South Carolina's Institute for Southern Studies (ISS) under a grant provided by Watson-Brown Foundation, Inc. The Foundation's mission is, "to improve education in the American South by funding its schools and students, preserving its history, encouraging responsible scholarship, and promoting the memory and values of our spiritual founders."**

"What Was the Most Influential 20th Century Southern Novel?"

**Dr. Walter Edgar
Moderator**

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Teacher's Guide by Dianne L. Gregory

Take on the South

“What Was the Most Influential 20th Century Southern Novel?”

Description of Program

The second program in the series of eight one-hour, live-to-tape debates, produced by ETV for the University of South Carolina’s Institute for Southern Studies (ISS) under a grant provided by Watson-Brown Foundation, Inc. is “What Was the Most Influential 20th Century Southern Novel?” Dr. Walter Edgar, Director of the Institute for Southern Studies at the University of South Carolina, is the moderator for the debate. Restoring the time-honored tradition of debating, the program will provide thought-provoking positions to encourage inquiry and discernment. Two distinguished scholars will present different positions with compelling arguments on Southern literature. The topic of the debate is the “most influential Southern novel of the 20th century.”

The first scholar to debate his choice of the most influential novel of the 20th century is Dr. Noel Polk, Professor Emeritus from Mississippi State University. Dr. Polk was an English Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi for 27 years before moving to Mississippi State University to teach and edit *The Mississippi Quarterly*. Dr. Polk has published and lectured widely on Faulkner, Welty, and other Southern writers throughout the country, Europe, Japan, and the former Soviet Union. He is the author of several works: *William Faulkner’s Requiem for a Nun: A Textual and Critical Study*; *Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner*; *Eudora Welty, A Bibliography of Her work*; *Outside the Southern Myth*; and *Faulkner and Welty and the Southern Literary Tradition*.

Dr. Trudier Harris, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is the second debate scholar. Dr. Harris is the J. Carlyle Sitterson Professor at UNC Chapel Hill where she teaches African American literature and folklore. She taught at William and Mary before joining the faculty at the University of North Carolina. Her books include the following: *From Mammies to Militants: Domesticity in Black American Literature*; *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*; *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*; *Saints, Sinners, Saviors: Strong Black Women in African American Literature*, as well as others. Dr. Harris’ memoir, *Summer Snow: Reflections from a Black Daughter of the South* was published in 2003 and *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South* was published in 2009.

Both scholars presented compelling arguments to support their selection of the most influential novel of the 20th century. Dr. Harris selected Harper Lee’s novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, because of its key role in shaping attitudes of the South. As a cultural work, Dr. Harris emphasized its vision and hope for the future of the south. Dr. Polk’s argument for William Faulkner’s novel, *Absalom, Absalom!*, was equally inspiring. By combining history and memory, Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* was presented by Dr. Polk for consideration as not only the most influential novel of the 20th century, but the greatest American novel. Dr. Polk and Dr. Harris give convincing arguments on each author’s behalf. Both agree that civil rights were the connecting factors of many Southern writers of the 20th century. As the discussion of writers continued, each scholar supported the other argument. Although retired from their positions, both continue to be actively involved in the literary field.

The entire focus of *Take on the South* is to provoke thought and discussion. The debate on the topic of “the most influential Southern novel” succeeded in providing a thoughtful dialogue.

Guide Components:

- **Description of Program**
- **Vocabulary**
- **Classroom Activities**
- **Discussion Topics**
- **National Social Studies Standards**
- **Selected Internet Resources**
- **Selected Literature**

Grade Level:

The program is recommended to support the National Social Studies Standards for High School. The program is also suitable for viewing in middle grades.

Vocabulary:

Encarta Dictionary

Ameliorate - improve; to make something better

Anthology - collection of different writers' works

Benign - kindly; not life-threatening; harmless; favorable

Capitulation - giving up; terms of surrender; summary, an outline or summary in document form

Coherent - logically or aesthetically consistent; speaking logically

Conventionality - adherence to social conventions in behavior, tastes, or methods; a socially accepted way of behaving or of doing something

Criteria - standard for judging things

Debate - to talk about something at length and in detail, especially as part of a formal exchange of opinion.

Domestication - tame animal; accustom somebody to household life

Gothic - of medieval artistic style; of Middle Ages

Ideology - system of social beliefs; a closely organized system of beliefs, values, and ideas forming the basis of a social, economic, or political philosophy or program; meaningful belief system;

Influence - effect on something; the power that somebody has to affect other people's thinking or actions by means of argument, example, or force of personality

Inquiry - official review; act of asking

Institutionalized - established as normal; dependent on routine of institution

Irony - something humorous based on contradiction; incongruity between what actually happens and what might be expected to happen

Lineage - line of descent; related group of people

Linear - developed sequentially from the obvious without in-depth understanding

Narrator - somebody who tells a story or gives an account; a character in a work of fiction who is presented as telling the story and who refers to himself or herself as "I".

Nobel Prize - international award for achievement

Parameters - limiting factor; variable quantity determining outcome; notable characteristic

Persuade - get somebody to do something; convince somebody of something

Syllabus - outline of course of study

Transformation - complete change, usually into something with an improved appearance of usefulness

Classroom Activities: Activities should be simplified or enriched based on the level of the student.

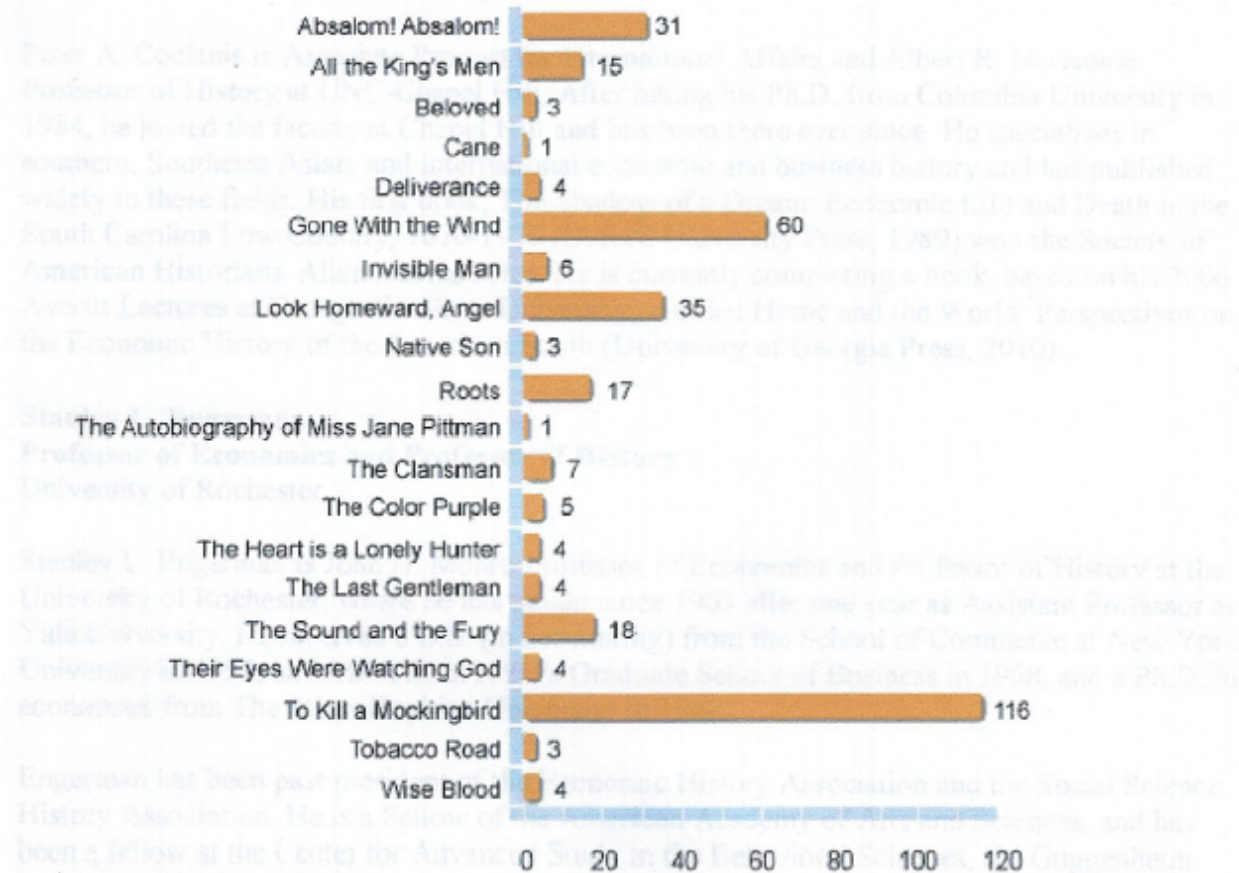
1. **Book Summary or Reviews: Individual or Small Group**
Each student or small group will select a book from the listing of the 20 Southern authors to review and discuss the impact and influence of the author on the 20th century. Author's perspective and character persuasiveness are topics to consider.
2. **Book Summary or Reviews: Individual or Small Group**
Select a current book and author to read. How has this author/book influenced your opinion or perspective in the 21st century?
3. **Classroom or School Poll: Class**
Conduct a classroom or school-wide poll to find the most popular or most influential book/author of the students.
4. **Debate: Class**
After conducting the poll of most popular or influential authors, select students to research and debate the reasons the author was chosen. What impact has the author had on the students? How has the author caused the students' opinion to change about a school or cultural issue?
5. **Reflection: Individual**
Using family interviews, each student will select his/her favorite childhood book. The selection should be based on positive childhood memories and parental input on bedtime story requests. What impact or influence did the book have on the student? Student discussion or short essay could be used to share with the class. What are the similarities of the books selected?
6. **Analysis: Individual or Small Group**
Individual students examine his/her criteria for selecting reading material. Who or what persuades the student to read a particular book or author for recreational reading? What genre is most popular with students?
7. **Research: Class**
Visit the school media center. Interview the media specialist to determine what authors and books are the most read in the collection. What popular trend does the media specialist see in the selection of books? What genre types are most read by students?
8. **Persuasive Writing: Individual, Small Group or Class**
Select a class or school issue to write a persuasive argument for or against an issue. What factors are involved in determining how to influence others? What media can make the most impact?
9. **Resource Speaker: Class**
Invite a local writer to the class to speak to students. Possible topics: What influenced the author to begin writing? What type of writing does the author enjoy? How does the writer develop the characters and plot? What is the purpose of the author's books/poetry?
10. **Field Trip: Class or Individual**
Contact your local public library to attend a writer's conference. Libraries host authors as well as conferences on the writing process.

Discussion Topics:

- What changes have you noticed in communication systems in your lifetime? In your parents' lifetime?
- What form of media has influenced your belief system and how?
- Who or what has had the most influence over the way you think? Why?
- What criteria do you use in order to consider another individual's perspective or opinion as valid?

Poll

Thanks for voting in our online poll, and letting us know which Southern novel you felt was the most influential. Please see the final results below:



How were the top 20 novels selected?

Profs. Polk, Harris and six faculty members from USC's Institute for Southern Studies were asked to submit fifteen Southern novels they considered to be the most influential. This poll lists the 20 novels mentioned the most times.

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies
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High School

- 1. CULTURE:** Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

Knowledge: Learners will understand:

- That culture is an integrated whole that explains the functions and interactions of language, literature, the arts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behavior patterns;
- How people from different cultures develop diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference;
- That awareness and knowledge of other cultures is important in a connected society and an interdependent world;

Processes: Learners will be able to:

- Give examples of the value of cultural unity and cultural diversity, within and across groups;
- Evaluate how data and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference;
- Interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding;
- Analyze historic and current issues to determine the role that culture has played.

- 2. TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE:** Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.

Knowledge: Learners will understand:

- Different interpretations of the history of societies, cultures, and humankind;
- Different interpretations of the influences of social, geographic, economic, and cultural factors on the history of local areas, states, nations, and the world;
- The importance of knowledge of the past to an understanding of the present and to informed decision-making about the future.

Processes: Learners will be able to:

- Compare historiographical interpretations of a period or event by explaining differences among historians in their purpose, perspective, and use of evidence.

- 4. INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY:** Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

Knowledge: Learners will understand:

- Concepts drawn from the behavioral sciences of psychology, sociology, and anthropology, such as: identity, development, personality, motivation, perception, and group membership;
- That complex and varied interactions among individuals, groups, cultures, and nations contribute to the dynamic nature of personal identity;

Processes: Learners will be able to:

- Ask and find answers to questions about how individual identity forms and changes across the life span;
- Discuss the nature of stereotyping, bias, altruism, and conformity in societies, and their implications for personal, group, and national relationships;
- Discuss the relative importance of peer and parental influence in different cultural groups.

- 5. INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS:** Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

Knowledge: Learners will understand:

- The influence of individuals, groups, and institutions on people and events in historical and contemporary settings;
- How the various forms of groups and institutions change over time;
- How the beliefs of dominant groups tend to become norms in a society;
- How groups and institutions work to meet individual needs, and can promote the common good and address persistent social issues.

Processes: Learners will be able to:

- Evaluate different interpretations of the influence of groups and institutions on people and events in historical and contemporary settings;

- 10. CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES:** Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

Knowledge: Learners will understand:

- The origins, functions, evolution, and outcomes of major institutions and practices designed to sustain and more fully realize democratic ideals;
- The importance of becoming informed as the basis for thoughtful and positive contributions through civic action.

Processes: Learners will be able to:

- Identify assumptions, misconceptions, and biases in sources, evidence, and arguments used in presenting issues and positions;
- Identify, seek, describe, and evaluate multiple points of view about selected issues, noting the strengths, weaknesses, and consequences associated with holding each position;
- Participate in the process of persuading, compromising, debating, and negotiating in the resolution of conflicts and differences.

Selected Internet Resources:

Supervision of student use of Web sites is recommended. Other site resources are available. The sites were active at the time of publication.

- Genres of Southern Literature/Southern Spaces
<http://www.southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature>
- Know Southern History/Literature
<http://www.knowsouthernhistory.net/Culture/Literature/>
- Library of Southern Literature
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/>
- Mississippi Writers Information/Noel Polk
http://www.olemiss.edu/mwp/dir/polk_noel/
- Southern Literary Review: A Magazine for Literature of the American South
<http://southernlitreview.com/>
- Trudier Harris/English and Comparative Literature UNC
<http://englishcomplit.unc.edu/people/harrist>
- William Faulkner Biographical Summary
http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/faulkner-bio.html/

Selected Literature:

Davis, Thadious M. and Harris, Trudier, eds. *Afro-American Poets Since 1955*. Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research Co., c. 1985.

Davis, Thadious M. and Harris, Trudier, eds. *Afro-American Writers After 1955*. Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1985.

Faulkner, William, 1897-1962. *Absalom, Absalom!* Thorndike, Me.: G. K. Hall, 1997.

Faulkner, William, 1897-1962. *Absalom, Absalom!: The Corrected Text*. ed. by Noel Polk. New York: Random House, 1986.

Harris, Trudier, ed. *Afro-American Writers, 1940-1955*. assoc. ed. Thadious M. Davis. Detroit, Mich.: Gale, 1988.

Harris, Trudier. *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, c. 2009.

Holliday, Carl. *A History of Southern Literature*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969.

Inge, Tonette Bond, ed. *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.

Mitchell, Margaret, 1900-1949. *Gone With The Wind*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1992.

Payne, Ladell. *Black Novelists and the Southern Literary Tradition*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, c.1981.

Polk, Noel. *Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, c.1996.

Polk, Noel. *Outside the Southern Myth*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, c. 1997.

Prenshaw, Peggy Whitman, ed. *Women Writers of the Contemporary South*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, c. 1984.

Rubin, Louis Decimus, ed. *A Bibliographical Guide to the Study of Southern Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969.

Rubin, Louis Decimus, general ed. *The History of Southern Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985.

Simonini, R. C., Jr. *Southern Writers: Appraisals in Our Time*. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969, c.1961.

Wolfe, Thomas, 1900-1938. *Look Homeward, Angel: A Story of the Buried Life with an introduction by Maxwell E. Perkins*. New York: Scribner, 1957.



About South Carolina ETV

South Carolina ETV is the state's public educational broadcasting network with 11 television and eight radio transmitters, and a multi-media educational system in more than 2,500 schools, colleges, businesses and government agencies. Using television, radio and the web, SCETV's mission is to enrich lives by educating children, informing and connecting citizens, celebrating our culture and environment and instilling the joy of learning.

Additional programming available through South Carolina Educational Television:

www.scetv.org Descriptions and information found on the SCETV website.

Carolina Stories weekly series highlights the rich cultural and historical landscape that is South Carolina. From the Upstate to the Lowcountry, the stories are as geographically diverse as their subject matter and they are all produced by ETV's production teams.

Connections is SCETV's weekly public affairs program and online discussion about issues that affect the South Carolina minority population. The host is P. A. Bennett.

ETV Shorts is a weekly web series of stories gathered from around the state. From the mountains to the sea, South Carolina has so much to offer residents and visitors alike. **ETV Shorts** will spotlight our beautiful state and highlight our amazing people!

NatureNotes Webisodes – Naturalist Rudy Mancke shares his knowledge, as well as his fascination, with the amazing variety of plants and animals found all around us on NatureNotes.

Riverbanks Roundup – ITV is working with the outstanding Riverbanks Zoo and Garden to feature educational aspects of the many zoo animals and their habitats. Each themed-program, which is designed to support elementary science standards, is produced on site at Riverbanks, allowing viewers to go behind-the-scenes with host Katie Mixon to meet the amazing animals and the zoo experts who take care of them.

The ***S.C. Hall of Fame*** was founded in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in 1973 to recognize and honor contemporary and past citizens who have made outstanding contributions to South Carolina's heritage, history and progress.

Southern Lens is a showcase for independent film from and about the South, culled from film festivals and presented by South Carolina ETV. By turns warm, humorous, compelling, and heart-breaking, each film presents a place and time in Southern culture as seen through the eyes of one filmmaker. Watch films on **Thursdays at 9:00 pm**. Southern Lens follows ETV's **Carolina Stories** series.

The Big Picture is a weekly program designed to inform, entertain and enlighten viewers by providing an in-depth look at the issues and topics of interest to South Carolinians.