**Leona’s Story (Gee, 1996; 2004)**

*The following vignette is from a book on literacy by James Gee, a sociolinguist. Gee recorded children in classrooms during “sharing time.” This story told by Leona, an African-American 2nd grader. Leona’s teacher considered her to be deficient in verbal/literacy abilities, that her stories had no point and were rambling. Gee observed that the teacher provided less instructional time to Leona than to children who presented stories in a more traditional topic style (beginning-middle-end). Note that the division into stanzas is part of Gee’s analysis. The teacher did not have the benefit of a transcribed story or the opportunity to engage in extended analysis.*

*Gee wrote about the story as--*

* *highly coherent and very sophisticated;*
* *utilizing humor, and language play including a repetition of words in patterns;*
* *showing parallel constructions;*
* *Leona’s attempt to make sense of her grandmother’s behavior;*
* *using a story format common among many African-American teenagers (Labov 1972).*

*Please discuss in a group of 4 whether you agree with Gee’s analysis. Find those parts of the story which demonstrate these points, and be prepared to share them. How could a teacher incorporate Leona’s strengths into literacy instruction?*

FRAME: STANZA 1

1. Today
2. It’s Friday the 13th
3. an’ it’s bad luck day
4. an’ my grandmother’s birthday is on bad luck day

EPISODE 1: MAKING CAKES (5-14) STANZA 2

1. an my mother’s baking’ a cake
2. an’ I went up my grandmother’s house while my mother’s bakin’ a cake
3. an’ my mother was bakin’ a cheese cake
4. my grandmother was bakin’ a whipped cream cup cakes

STANZA 3

1. an’ we both went over my mother’s house
2. an’ then my grandmother had made a chocolate cake
3. an’ then we went over my aunt’s house
4. an’ she had make a cake

STANZA 4

1. an’ everybody had made a cake for nana
2. so we came out with six cakes

EPISODE 2: GRANDMOTHER EATS CAKES (15-34): STANZA 5

1. last night
2. my grandmother snuck out
3. an’ she ate all the cake
4. an’ we hadda make more

STANZA 6

1. an’ we was sleepin’
2. an’ she went in the room
3. an’ gobbled ‘em up
4. an’ we hadda bake a whole bunch more

STANZA 7

1. she said mmmm
2. she had all chocolate on her face, cream, strawberries
3. she said mmmm
4. that was good

STANZA 8

1. an’ then an’ then all came out
2. an’ my grandmother had ate all of it
3. she said, “what’s this cheese cake doin’ here” – she didn’t like cheese cakes
4. an’ she told everybody that she didn’t like cheese cakes

STANZA 9

1. an’ we kept makin’ cakes
2. an’ she kept eatin’ ‘em
3. an’ we finally got tired of makin’ cakes
4. an’ so we all ate ‘em

EPISODE 3: GRANDMOTHER GOES OUTSIDE THE HOME (35-47). NON-NARRATIVE SECTION (35-41)

1. an’ now
2. today’s my grandmother’s birthday
3. an’ a lot o’ people’s makin’ a cake again
4. but my grandmother is going’ t’get her own cake at her bakery
5. an’ she’s gonna come out with a cake
6. that we didn’t make
7. cause she likes chocolate cream

ENDING: STANZA 11

1. an’ I went t’the bakery with her
2. an my grandmother ate cup cakes
3. an’ an’ she finally got sick on today
4. an’ she was growling like a dog ‘cause she ate so many cakes

FRAME: STANZA 12

1. an’ I finally told her that it was
2. it was Friday the thirteenth bad luck day