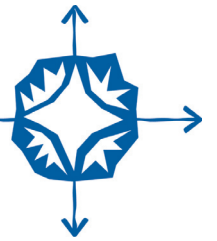


NORTH STAR



NORTH STAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

INTRODUCTORY LESSON IDEAS

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this curriculum is to expose students to the stories of African Americans in Minnesota and to help students see that the struggles, triumphs, and tragedies experienced by Minnesota's black pioneers reflect the central dream that all Minnesotans share:

- The instinct to establish and maintain a place to call home (Making a Home)
- The desire to change our communities for the better (Making a Change)

Though many students may have been previously exposed to Minnesotan or African-American history, we hope that this documentary film and curriculum will challenge them to further develop their understanding of the complex history of African Americans in Minnesota. These introductory lesson ideas seek to encourage the development of emotionally supportive and intellectually open classrooms where students are best able to learn about some of the challenging ideas that this film and curriculum address.

For suggested resources on the teaching about diversity and tolerance, see the *North Star* website's Resources section at <http://www.tpt.org/northstar/Resources.html>

IDEA 1: SETTING UP THE UNIT

Whether you choose to teach all of the lessons available for your grade level, or pick and choose the ones that best suit you, we encourage you to help your students see the broader connections between the different stories in the curriculum and in their own lives.

To help students see the broader picture, you may want to introduce these unit learning goals:

1. To become familiar with the history and influence of some of the leaders in Minnesota's African-American community.
2. To understand how the primary goals of African Americans (to "Make a Home" and "Make a Change") reflect universal goals that all Minnesotans share.
3. To use the lessons of African Americans' past actions to inspire us individually today.
4. To develop a shared knowledge and appreciation of African American history.

After introducing these goals, ask students to come up with four personal goals that connect to these shared goals, i.e.; "I'd like to know who the first black legislator was," or "I'd like to know when African Americans first arrived in my town."

IDEA 2: REVIEWING RACE, ETHNICITY, NATIONALITY, AND CULTURE WITH STUDENTS

Younger students may understand the concept of race, but it takes more sophistication to understand ethnicity, nationality, culture, and how the four relate. Reviewing these concepts may help students understand the film and lessons better. To do this, ask students to define these words, and discuss what your own races, ethnicities, nationalities, and cultures are. With younger students, use magazines such as National Geographic to model examples of different races, ethnicities, nationalities, and cultures. Older students might be interested to learn how concepts of race have changed over time.

Race: A group defined by genetic, physical characteristics (examples: white, black, Asian, Native American).

Ethnicity: A group that is defined by shared religious, racial, national, or cultural heritage (examples: Hispanic, Creole, Italian-American, Jewish)

Nationality: The country to which you have citizenship, through birth or naturalization (examples: French, Egyptian, Pakistani)

Culture: The behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, and institutions characteristic of a group (examples: French, Jewish, Creole, Dakota)

IDEA 3: INTRODUCING THE TOPIC OF RACE AND RACISM IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Because of the topic, many parts of this film and curriculum connect to themes of race and racism. As students mature, their understandings of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences develop. By the middle grades, students will have been exposed to historical examples of racism, and, if of minority backgrounds, may have experienced racism personally. By high school, most students will be knowledgeable in the history of slavery and racism in our past, but may not be sophisticated enough to understand the origins of their own attitudes or assumptions.

As you teach this unit, be prepared to deal with students who are at different levels of development in their understanding of race and racism. While it may be difficult for you personally to deal with students who are either less sophisticated or even negative in their assumptions about racial issues, try to maintain a sense of calmness while listening carefully to them. By modeling deliberateness and respectfulness, you will help establish a classroom where students can pose difficult questions (and learn!) without the fear of being socially ostracized.

However, should students show discriminatory behaviors or use inappropriate language, do not ignore it. Ignoring behavior only implies permission of that behavior. Instead, use that moment to explain how that behavior is not acceptable in your classroom, and how such behavior or words immediately shut down the entire class' ability to learn. Do not be afraid to confront students about such misbehaviors, as it is far better to deal with the issue immediately (even if you are not eloquent!) than to allow inappropriate comments or behaviors to stand unattested.

Based on your own teaching style, classroom culture, and students, some classes will be very comfortable talking about difficult issues, and others will be more reticent. The following statements may offer a way to introduce this topic. Ask students to write “true” or “false” to these statements, then discuss them as a class.

- 1) Talking about race and racism makes me uncomfortable.
- 2) Using racial slurs is okay in some situations.*
- 3) If people think differently than me, it is okay to challenge them.
- 4) All opinions and ideas are welcome in our classroom.
- 5) I know what is “safe” or “unsafe” to discuss.
- 6) I think learning about black history is boring, since it never affected me.

(*For almost all classrooms, the correct answer to this questions is “no.” Explain that you want students to openly discuss issues, and that words such as the N-word or other slurs really stop the process of learning for everyone.)

Throughout the unit, remind students that you, too, are learning—that no one person is always or completely “right” about the topic of race and racism. Throughout life, we are all learning more about ourselves, each other, and our society.