



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2019 Volume II: Teaching about Race and Racism Across the Disciplines

Teaching “The Outsiders” from a Critical Race Perspective

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Introduction and Rationale

Although this unit is meant to augment a reading of *The Outsiders* for my 7th grade ELA classroom, it should be utilized in many classrooms of differing subjects and grade levels. Here, a brief background study on inequality in America will lead up to a reading of *The Outsiders* from a different perspective, a perspective that we explored in our seminar and can be applied to subjects and topics ranging from Art to Architecture, from music to film, and to a multitude of other subjects and topics that make up the thread of our country’s character. This unit explores what Toni Morrison points out are the “strategies for maintaining the silence and strategies for breaking it” in literature with the myth of the “melting pot” and the plight of “outsiders” at our side, looking over our shoulder, prodding and questioning us along the way.

By approaching the work from this perspective, I believe my students will begin to see racism and inequality from a deeper perspective and recognize connections and causes that they may not otherwise see. Similarly, I believe that my investigation into colorblindness, eugenics, and institutionalized racism will make me a better teacher and allow me to introduce this and other literature to my students from a more informed and educated standpoint in regards to systematic inequality in our country.

Since I am a middle school teacher, teaching 7th grade Language Arts students, I do believe that introducing this topic in a tactful and sensitive manner is vital to the unit’s success. Racism is an ugly aspect of America that makes all of us reflect and struggle with what sort of people we really are as a nation.

At the root of this unit will be the goal of educating students to look beyond the text or work of art in order to discover and hopefully better understand the roots and histories of the problems that authors and we as a nation grapple with as we continue to strive to create a “more perfect union.”

Written over forty years ago, *The Outsiders* is a novel that has been examined and taught countless times in classrooms throughout our country. While the novel lends itself to the introduction of numerous literary devices such as first person narration, conflict, flashback, foreshadowing, symbolism and theme, topics which I will also review with my students while working through the novel, this unit will take a different approach to the concept of being an outsider while I lead students on an exploration of our American history of creating and maintaining “outsiders” through institutionalized racism through such accepted practices as Native

American re-education, eugenics, and the continuous battle on immigration.

My unit utilizes restorative circles in order to invite students to discuss not only the characters' struggles, but also their own personal struggles and the struggles of others both historically and currently.

Students will keep a written response journal specifically for the exploration of this novel in not just its own literacy, but as a part of a larger history of American outsiders. Examining themes of isolation and belonging are often explored on a personal/individual character level. I will challenge students to explore not only isolation and "fitting in" in our neighborhoods and as friends, but also how we fit in as a nation, exploring the plight of immigrants, the Native American, and victims of the eugenics movement. Students will not only examine themes of isolation and belonging in the novel, but on a broader scale include consideration of uprooted Native Americans and the persecution and sterilization of thousands. Response journals for this project will explore isolation, fitting in and colorblindness through written responses to texts such as letters written by Carrie Buck, photos of "Fitter Families" or uprooted Native American children.

While many units focus on the interpretation of Robert Frost's poem, *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, used in the novel, I will challenge students to find a modern replacement for the poem that will emphasize our discussions of fitting in and making it in America

Finally while most units find some way to get students to compare and contrast characters in essays or write character analyses of the members or the Socs or the Greasers, I will challenge students to examine characters and create groups of characters that may not belong in a "Fitter Family" photo, but in groups of the "anti" or "un" Fitter Family in a culminating group activity that I will call the "Un-fitter Family Group Project." Students will be challenged to dismantle the rules of the "Fitter Family" fitter contest of the eugenics movement and rethink what a modern American "Fitter Family" would look like utilizing characters from the book, celebrities as well as their friends and classmates.

Background

Below I will briefly review some of the topics that I will discuss with my students before, during and after the reading of the SE Hinton novel, *The Outsiders*. I introduce the topics in a chronological order that I believe will make sense to them and to other students and teachers

Terminology

There is a host of terminology that was introduced to us and was vital to our understanding of the material presented in Teaching about Race and Racism across the Disciplines. I believe that teachers considering utilizing our units will benefit from a review of some of the terminology for their own benefit as they introduce the material to students. We began our seminar this year with a discussion of colorblindness and how important it is to understand and recognize colorblindness as teachers. Being colorblind is not paying attention to race and other culture's needs. A colorblind teacher might barely touch on the implications of racism and injustice in their subject matter, choosing to glaze over it and give it a nod, so to speak. In his essay, "Pedagogical Interventions in Colorblind Teaching Practices," teacher/educator Milton Reynolds comments that:

“The dominant culture’s misperception that ‘colorblindness equals justice, encourages many teachers to feel they are effective in their job if they pretend not to notice color and make no explicit mention of race in their course lessons and curricular goals.”¹

In other words, colorblindness in education makes teachers less likely to rock the boat, to confront the difficult questions and to face the subtle, modern, silent racism that has seeped into the very fabric of our society. Reynolds goes on to assert that colorblind teachers tend to overlook or skip over “troubling moments” in our country’s history and rather than face the challenging and sometimes awkward discussion of race and racism, to just blow through the era or overlook the blatant racism that existed and in many cases does still exist. Understanding and recognizing our own colorblindness makes us better educators and helps our students to understand why many modern misunderstandings regarding race continue to be an issue in our country.

Another term that we learned early in the seminar was Critical Race Theory. This term was vital to our understanding as we used a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens to examine many disciplines through reading and observation. In “Rethinking Pedagogy to Re-center Race: Some Reflections,” the authors point out that, “The primary aim of CRT scholarship is to make structures of racial privilege visible.²” The authors, Caitlan L. Ryan and Adrienne D. Dixon, point out how important it is for teachers to understand CRT as “educators should use critical reflection to help teachers think about how ‘they come to terms with some of their own issues around race.’”³

In his article “The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, “Post-Racial” America,” sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva discusses two terms that I believe are vital for teachers and students exploring the units from this seminar; racism and new racism. I believe a discussion of the term “racism” must take place at the beginning of the unit. Have a discussion with students and try to come up with an answer questions about the term racism; what is it? What does it look like? Why does it exist? Bonilla-Silva introduces the term “new racism,” defined as “the set of mostly subtle, institutional, and seemingly nonracial mechanisms and practices that comprise the racial regime of “post racial” America.”⁴ This term is also worth bringing up early in the discussion of the unit as it is vital to students’ understanding of the subject matter. This “new racism” refers to the somewhat hidden, institutionalized racism that permeates American culture and can be recognized utilizing a CRT lens.

The Notion of a Melting Pot

For much of the 20th century, many Americans understood the country as a “Melting Pot,” a nation of immigrants from all over the world coming together to melt into or become a new culture, a new society. In this narrative, the United States would take in the “huddled masses” and transform them into someone’s vision of an American, a vision with its roots in the very “founding” of our country. But what is to become of those who make up the melting pot? What must be given up to be a part of the stew? And what are the standards that determine what a citizen of the melting pot looks like and acts like? Author Amy Tan comments, “There is this myth that America is a melting pot, but what happens in assimilation is that we end up deliberately choosing the American things-hot dogs and apple pie-and ignoring the Chinese offerings.⁵” Tan is pointing out that even in the melting pot, there seems to be a dominant ingredient, an ingredient that the other ingredients must heed to in order to be a part of the dish. This is really what I want my students to see as they take another look at race and inequality through this unit.

The Text

SE Hinton’s classic novel *The Outsiders* is a story of inequality told from the perspective of a narrator named

Pony Boy. Set in Oklahoma in the 1960s, the novel focuses on two gangs (the Greasers and the Socs) who epitomize two separate classes of American children. The gangs live on opposite sides of a river and are opposite in so many ways; the Greasers' long hair and unkempt ways of dressing and acting are juxtaposed with the preppy Socs who ride around in fast cars and get all the pretty girls. Perhaps Pony Boy himself describes the difference the best as he comments to the reader what makes a Greaser and Greaser and what makes a Soc a Soc.

“We’re poorer than the Socs and the middle class. I reckon we’re wilder too. Not like the Socs, who jump greasers and wreck houses and throw beer blasts for kicks, and get editorials in the paper for being a public disgrace one day and an asset to society the next. Greasers are almost like hoods; we steal things and drive old souped-up cars and hold up gas stations and have gang fights once in a while.”⁶

Interestingly, although the boys are on the opposite sides of the social ladder, they are all white. What has made the Greasers “Outsiders” is their inability to fit in the norm, to fit into what the Socs represent in the novel, the “good,” clean cut American of European stock who may get into trouble sometimes but is never understood to be dangerous or threatening to the nation. There seems to be a double standard at work in the society depicted in *The Outsiders*. Both gangs get into trouble, but only one group, the Socs are ever depicted as “an asset to society.” This aspect of the novel will lead to interesting discussion and insights later in this unit.

Native American Removal and Reeducation

Native Americans quickly became “outsiders” in their own land as settlers moved across this country. Westward expansion and the theft of Native American land prompted many Americans to ignore the problem of Native dispossession and genocide. Scores of tribes and millions of people were killed, moved to reservations, and given paltry government subsidies, or “taken care of”—another American myth. It was not until the rise of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the late sixties and the publication of Dee Brown’s book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* that most white Americans really started to take notice of the injustices brought on Native Americans by European invaders.

From the Pilgrims’ annihilation of the Pequot and the northeastern tribes that helped them survive the brutal winters, to Andrew Jackson’s relocation of thousands of Native Americans during the Trail of Tears, to the 7th Cavalry’s revenge at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, the European Americans’ relationship with Native Americans has been one built on lies, broken treaties and land takeover. By the second half of the 19th Century most of the Native American tribes in the United States had been either relocated or put on reservations. In less than two hundred years the cultures of hundreds of Native American tribes were destroyed and taken over by European Americans. Hunters were turned into farmers, tribes from the southwest were moved to Florida, Teepees and wigwams were replaced with log cabins and tribal wear and native clothing was replaced by Western wear

Eugenics in America

Eugenics was the accepted philosophy that this country could be genetically purified. Reynolds, in *Shifting Frames; Pedagogical Interventions in Colorblind Teaching Practice*, defines eugenics as a “scientifically based, ideological movement dedicated to the reification of race.”⁷ This accepted practice of racial purification was an American policy that led to the forced sterilization of thousands of people and, backed by the Supreme

Court, led to widespread discrimination reminiscent of practices that took place in Europe during World War II. By the 1930s sterilization laws were in place in 27 out of 48 states as post World War I crimes came more and more to be blamed on immigrants and the underprivileged.⁸ This is yet another case of our country attempting to create an America out of the people that would be molded to make up its population. In regards to eugenics, the attempt to make a 'more perfect union, really became a race to create a more perfect human. And the movement had momentum.

“Eugenicists organized fairs and exhibitions to promote their ideas and detailed them in books, magazines, and newspapers. Ministers preached eugenics from the pulpit and teachers incorporated it into their lessons. Eugenicists supplied civic groups, social clubs, and libraries with speakers and free study material. They also arranged a variety of contests to introduce Americans to the principles of eugenics-including the idea that intelligence is shaped almost solely by heredity and is linked to morality.”⁹

This attempt by eugenicists to spread the word, led to “Fitter Family Contests” across the country. At county fairs around America, families of purified eugenically worthy families were put in contests like livestock and fruits and vegetables. Family members were checked physically and mentally as to their worthiness or the fitness for the contests. Winners were given medals and recognition in the fairs that was highly sought after. The Fitter Family will be the focus of a culminating project highlighted in the Lessons section of my unit.

The 21st Century Border Crisis in America

Finally, I believe utilizing current events on our southern border will also help students to rethink how we as a nation are treating each other and how we as a nation make immigration decisions based on race and equality. News clips and current events can be utilized here in order to have discussions on what is going on with our southern border and why some are treated as outsiders and others are not.

Teaching Strategies

In this section of the unit I will discuss some of the strategies I will be using in order to bridge the background information with the text which we will be reading in class.

QFT

The Question Formulation Technique is a strategy recently introduced to our district in which students are encouraged to work together to brainstorm questions on a given topic and work with the questions as a group. The technique has been proven to boost student curiosity, help with argumentative writing and boost student engagement.

Not only is the QFT an incredibly helpful process that allows students to practice working together and sharing ideas, but it is also a great way to get students thinking deeply about the information that will help them read/view the material more critically. At the conclusion of QFT group work, you have excellent questions for discussion, journal writing, debate, or further research. These questions are put up in my room for the duration of the unit.

Once you have practiced the QFT process several times with your students, you will find it very useful and can use it throughout this unit or on other topics that you are working on.

Restorative Circles

All teachers in the New Haven school district have been trained in the concept of restorative circles. These circles are meant to give students a chance to voice their opinions and ideas, while building listening and cooperation skills that are vital to a successful school year. The circles can be used as a community building center, a place to solve problems or get issues or concerns voiced and, as with this unit, to allow for discussion and understanding of concepts and ideas rising from the reading of *The Outsiders*.

We usually start out the year very simply with circles. After establishing agreed upon rules for the circles, students utilize a talking piece to introduce themselves, gradually building up to utilizing the circles for discussions of literature and academic ideas. When introducing the concept of Indian schools, I will put up a before and after picture of students inducted in such schools. Looking at the pictures much like we would observe art in a museum, I will ask students what they observe, and then what ideas or thoughts rise from their observations as well as the reasoning behind the things that they brought up.

Journal Writing

Although technology continues to suck all of us into its convenient, high speed techno-world, I continue to have a warm spot in my heart for journals and journal writing. While we do utilize Google Classroom now for nearly all of our written work including research papers, speeches, reading comprehension responses and others, there is still something special about holding a journal in your hand, putting a pen or pencil to paper, doodling in margins and really making the journal a representation of who you are. Students are always on computers these days, in school, at home, in the library, on their phones, or laptops or others. Getting students started early in the year on journal writing and having them write in their journal once or twice a week is a good way to help them to get used not only to writing and responding to your work, but to sharing their work and listening to others. It is a simple tool that really can make a difference in your students and can be utilized abundantly in this unit and any other work that you are working on.

It is important to follow a few guidelines to make journaling successful. Encourage students to share what they have written either with the class or in small groups. Also encourage students to doodle or draw if they like in their journals. I also tell students if they put something personal in their journal that they do not want me to read, they can simply fold the page and I will not read it. Journal should be a place where students can feel free to put down their ideas without being judged, so I do not correct journal like I would an essay or test paper. Finally journals should be kept in a safe place out of the reach of all the other students. Like diaries, journals can contain privileged information that students may not want to share with others. I keep crates of journals near my desk, out of the reach of others.

For this unit students will be utilizing response journals to make many of the connections that I will be expecting them to make between *The Outsiders* and material related to racism and inequality in America. Journaling will take place throughout this unit. Many of the questions that students raise during the QFT sessions will become excellent sources for journal writing and sharing. The following topics may also be utilized and will go along nicely with the unit.

- What is a melting pot? Do you think the United States should be considered a melting pot? Explain.
- Have you ever felt like an Outsider? What made you feel that way? How are others made to feel like

Outsiders?

- Pony Boy and Johnny relive a lot of memorable experiences in the novel. What experience have you had that has changed your life?
- Write a journal entry through the point of view of a Native American student in an “Indian school” who feels like an outsider.
- Why do you think the eugenics movement was able to succeed for as long as it did in the US?
- What might be a solution for the problem on our southern border?
- How does the problem of immigration on our southern border reveal a “new racism?”
- Create a new character for *The Outsiders* who is not white. How would he/she interact with the gang?
- Write a poem that can replace the Robert Frost poem, *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, and highlights a problem that many outsiders feel
- After reading one or two Carrie Buck letters write a letter back to Carrie
- Brainstorm rules for entering a modern day “Fitter Family Contest” How would your rules differ from what we discovered in our study of Eugenics.
- Write about evidence of colorblindness in *The Outsiders*

Visuals

Visuals in any classroom can be helpful in relating materials and helping reach students through multiple learning abilities. The photography of Native Americans by such artists as Edward Curtis or paintings by Frederick Remington can be compared and contrasted with more modern paintings and photography of indigenous people. Before and after photos of Native Americans in Indian Schools can also be utilized in this unit.

Any study of the Eugenics movement in the United States should include looks at the charts and photos that document the era and the concept of eugenics in our country. There are thousands of photos that can be used in this unit to introduce the concept to students and bring about interesting discussion.

Finally, looking at our southern border with Mexico can almost entirely be seen through images of the crisis which is developing there. Ask students to search up images of the Mexican border crisis and see what they come up with. Use images in a QFT session to see what sorts of questions and ideas come to rise as the images are shared in the classroom.

Classroom Lessons/Activities

Activity One-Generating Questions about the terminology

Before even starting to read *The Outsiders* I want to begin generating discussions and conversations around fitting in, equality, and racism in America. The QFT process is a great discussion generator that I believe will help raise the students’ comfort level in beginning to discuss these often difficult topics. I will utilize the Amy Tan quote mentioned earlier in the unit (“There is this myth that America is a melting pot, but what happens in assimilation is that we end up deliberately choosing the American things-hot dogs and apple pie-and ignoring the Chinese offerings) but numerous other quotes and images would fit fine here to get students talking about what it is to fit in in America. My hope is that beginning with a discussion of the “Melting Pot,” will lead to discussions using (and getting students used to using) some of the terminology (colorblindness,

racism, critical race theory, etc.) mentioned earlier in the unit.

Students are grouped together in small group of no more than four. The focus question, statement, image or topic (the Qfocus) is put on the board for students to consider. One student is designated the scribe and the other students the questioners. As the questioners brainstorm questions or statements regarding the Qfocus, the scribe writes the questions on chart paper. Four rules are to be followed during the questioning session; Ask as many questions as you can; Do not judge or discuss the questions; Questions are written down exactly as they are stated; Any statements must be turned into a question. After students have been given time to brainstorm questions they go back as a group and label their questions as either "O" for open-ended questions or "C" for closed-ended, which are questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no response. Next students are asked to continue working with their groups to change their questions from an open-ended to a closed and vice versa. This allows students to feel more comfortable with the questions while they think critically about what information is being utilized. Finally, students are asked to prioritize the questions by choosing the three questions that they feel are the most important or the most worthy of continued discussion/research. At this point the the class is called back together to create a master sheet of the top questions from each group. The class can then take the time to reflect on the process, sharing how they came to their conclusions and what about the process they found interesting or challenging.

I will utilize the QFT process to kick off the unit, but will go back to it multiple throughout our reading. The QFT will lead to interesting discussions on racism, historical topics mentioned above as well as literary points from the novel. Once students are used to the questioning process, this tool becomes extremely useful. Again, the QFT can be used on multiple topics, in various subjects and on any grade level. The question formulating process and student interaction is key to the success of the technique.

Objective

Students will be able to work in groups in order to brainstorm ideas around inequality in America that we will be able to utilize in discussion and journal responses. We'll know we've got it when we have brainstormed, categorized and prioritized questions devised from the given quote utilizing the QFT process.

Initiation

Who has ever heard of a "melting pot?" What is it? Lead students in a brief discussion of the term "melting pot."

Procedure

After briefly reviewing the steps to follow in the QFT process, the groups are created, scribes chosen and I write the quote out of the board. Students are given about ten minutes to complete the first step in the process which is simply writing down any ideas or questions that arise thinking about the quote. As mentioned above, all statements should be turned into a question.

After students have had time to develop the questions, students are prompted to categorize questions as to which questions are open questions and which are closed. Closed questions are those that are answerable with a simple "yes" or "no," while open questions require more explanation. Groups of students go through their list labeling each question with an "O" or a "C." At this point I also ask students to experiment with turning closed questions into open ones and vice versa.

Next, I ask the groups to choose their top three, most meaningful questions in order of importance. After a brief period of group discussion, we come back together as a class and I ask students to share out their questions as I consolidate the class' top questions on chart paper. Once we have consolidated the questions I ask groups to choose a question that their group did not create in order to have a brief five minute discussion amongst themselves.

Closure

Finally I ask students to choose a question, write it down in their response journal, and respond to it in a brief seven or eight minute free write session. I always ask for volunteers to share out the work. The earlier in the year that students start to utilize the QFT process and share their work out loud, the better.

Activity Two- Rewriting the scenes

This activity is meant to prompt students to empathize with another group of people who have been made to feel like outsiders in our country. The "Indian Schools" which sprung up across the country during the beginning of the 20th Century were another attempt to strip Native Americans of everything what they had, including their identity. Utilizing before and after photos of Native Americans who were brought to the schools will be a powerful tool in showing students what people are expected to sacrifice in order to become "Americans." The photos of Native American children with their hair cut, their clothing replaced with uniforms, forced to sit in a setting that creates a very European portrait, will reverberate with students. The subjects of the photography look like they feel like "outsiders."

In his book, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee; Native America from 1890 to the Present*, author David Treuer discusses the origins of the Indian schools. In 1879 Richard Henry Pratt, determined to civilize the natives, opened the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania asserting his philosophy to "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."¹⁰ Children of great chiefs and warriors were forbidden from speaking their native language, forced to cut their hair and punished for minor offenses. The students were forced to give up the clothing of their native tribes and given western clothing that they were extremely uncomfortable with. By the turn of the century, there were "twenty boarding schools run by the Office of Indian Affairs, dozens of 'agency schools' on or near Indian agencies around the country, and dozens more boarding schools run by religious orders."¹¹ By the end of the reign of the Indian schools in America, Treuer asserts "tens of thousands" of children were separated from their families and cultures and re-educated through this attempt at creating Americans of the natives. Again, what does it take to fit into the "melting pot?" Americans thought they were doing the "savages" a favor by giving them haircuts, dressing them in western clothing and reeducating them. Who decides who must give what up to be a member of this country? Who decides what is acceptable and what is not? What we see through examination of our own colorblindness that it is the dominant European culture that has always and continues to determine what is American and what is not.

Although the setting of *The Outsiders* is never implicitly stated, it is generally agreed that the author, S.E. Hinton based her fictional Western town around her hometown of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Interestingly, Oklahoma was also the destination point for thousands of Native Americans at the end of the log trek known as The Trail of Tears. This forced removal of Native tribes east of the Mississippi, under Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830 was just the beginning of decades of genocide that would end with the relocation, resettlement and annihilation of scores of Native American tribes. Looking at the book through a critical race lense, a logical question that arises is "Where are all the Native Americans?" In fact there are no people of color in the book at all. Written in 1967, in the heat of the civil rights movement, and just a few years before the rise of a Native

American movement, one could ask, was the book written through a colorblind lens?

Objective

Students will be able to make connections between students of “Indian Schools” and characters from *The Outsiders*. We’ll know we’ve got it when we have created response journals in which characters from *The Outsiders* react to the photographs of students from the “Indian Schools.”

Initiation

Utilizing a wall map of the United States, I will begin this activity by asking students to pinpoint Oklahoma on the map. I will begin introducing the students to the “Trail of Tears” with the viewing of clips the 2006 award winning documentary *The Trail of Tears; Cherokee Legacy*. We will go back to the map and follow the trek that so many were forced to walk under Jackson’s Indian Removal Act.

Procedure

After viewing the film, I will lead a brief discussion on the history of Native American relocation in our country. This is a good opportunity to form a circle and discuss colorblindness in the novel utilizing some of the vocabulary introduced earlier in the unit. We will discuss the date of publication and the things going on, particularly in regards to Civil Rights, in our country at that time. I will encourage students to discuss why they think that people of color do not appear in the novel. Have they simply disappeared or do they not exist in this world that the author has created? Is this another example of the author’s colorblindness? How could the fact that no people of color appear in the novel be an example of “modern racism?”

Next, I will ask students to look at photos of school children before and after their indoctrination into “Indian Schools,” I will ask students to share what they see in the photos and how the photos make them feel. I will give students a few minutes to work together in order to create Venn Diagrams comparing characters from the book with the students they see. For example, after the murder of Rob, one of the Socs, Johnny and Pony boy are forced to flee in order to avoid prosecution for the crime. Hiding in an abandoned church in the mountains, the boys attempt to alter their identities by cutting and bleaching their hair. This interesting scene shows two boys trying to shed their identities. But, instead of becoming someone else or changing their identities at all, the boys simply become Pony Boy and Johnny with bleached and cut hair. Similarly, by cutting hair, changing some clothes and forcing Native Americans to sleep on beds in cabins, proponents of Indian schools thought changing the appearance of human beings might change their identity and make them more American.

After we share our findings I will ask students why they think no Native Americans appear in the novel and what might change about the novel if they were. We will discuss the possibilities of writing in characters of color into the novel. Next, I will challenge students to work in pairs to recreate a scene from *The Outsiders* in which they include a Native American or person of color in the scene. Students will choose random scenes from a hat (the movie theater scene, the rumble scene, the home life scene, the hospital scene, etc) and utilize the books in order to recreate the scenes, adding dialogue and interactions between characters. Students will need substantial time to work on this, but when they are ready, I will bring the class together to discuss our findings, and have students share out their ideas.

Closure

Finally, I will ask students to reflect in their journals about what changed when they rewrote scenes from the book. How has their perception of the book changed? What suggestions or ideas might you share with the author if given the chance?

Activity Three-Revisiting the “Fitter Family.”

One of the themes in the novel *The Outsiders* is the importance of family. While the Socs come to epitomize children of privilege, with their preppy clothes, fast cars and snooty attitudes, the Greasers come to represent broken families that are damaged and needy. Pony Boy’s parents are dead, and he and his two brothers are allowed to live together in a home that at times resembles a frat house more than a nurturing home. Similarly, Johnny has a family, but his mother is an alcoholic and his father beats her and Johnny regularly. Right before the boys are jumped and forced into hiding, Johnny confides in Pony Boy that he likes it better when his father is beating him because, “At least then I know he knows who I am. I walk in that house and nobody says anything. I stay away all night, and nobody notices.”¹²

Part of the popularity of the novel surely stems from an honest look at family dynamics that many of us can relate to. There are far fewer perfect families in our country than our politicians would like to admit. And perhaps that is one of the problems that our country has always faced. Why is it that we have so much trouble accepting people and families simply as human beings, as who they are?

The Eugenics Movement is a vast and complex topic that can be explored in depth depending on teacher and students’ needs and curriculum. For this unit I give students some background information on what we as a nation have been willing to do in order to blend as a nation of immigrants. Much like the introduction of Indian schools, I use photos and visuals around the Eugenics movement in order to introduce the topic to my students. They will respond in response journals to several topics related to the eugenics movement including the “Fitter Family Contests” and letters written by Carrie Buck. Finally, the students will design modern versions of what a Fitter Family Contest might look like today, in a more diverse America.

The “Fitter Family” contests will be the basis for an activity which will take place at the end of this unit. As mentioned earlier the concept of the “Fitter Family” contest came out of the eugenics movement and was celebrated throughout the country at fairs and gatherings. The “Fitter Family” of the 20th Century encompassed values and characteristics of a dominant white society. My goal with this activity is to challenge students to flip the “Fitter Family” contest on itself and define the contest today in terms of what they see as the values of the 21st Century.

The project will be a group project in which students will examine the rules of the “Fitter Family” contests of the eugenics movement and rethink what the rules might be in today’s world. After the concept of the “Fitter Family,” including looking at pictures and on line resources, students will work in groups of three to four, research the rules or guidelines set out for fitter family contests, then working within their groups, determine what might be the rules for modern day “Fitter Family” contest. We will discuss which of the “families” from *The Outsiders* might belong in a family then or today and why. Finally, students will work together in order to create a visual representation comparing the families of yesterday with a possible family of today. Students may choose to create a poster or collage which will represent the families then present their findings to the class.

Objective

Students will be able to determine how or if family values have changed over the past century. Groups of

students will determine the guidelines for a modern “Fitter Family,” compare their guidelines with those of the original contest and determine what needs to change if the “Fitter Family” Contest of the 20th Century were to be held today.

Initiation

I will put photos of the “Fitter Families” of the 20th Century on the board and ask for students’ reactions to the photos. We will have a brief discussion of our observations, and try to compare the contests to anything that we might see or know of today.

Procedure

Students will work in groups in order to determine what guidelines were used in the 20th Century “Fitter Family” and determine what the contest guidelines would follow today. Each group will come up with their own guidelines for a modern “Fitter Family” and create a presentation that will compare our modern rendition of the “Fitter Family with the original. Students will create posters, collages, or live presentations of the family winners and discuss them as a class.

Closure

Finally our discussion of what makes a fitter family will conclude this unit and discussion of *The Outsiders*. (A restorative circle discussion might be a good way to approach this section.) What groups of characters from *The Outsiders* might have been winners in the “Fitter Family” contest of the 20th Century? What characters or groups of characters would be winners under the group’s modified guidelines? What has changed in our modern day version of this contest? What has not changed? What still needs to change?

Conclusion

Teaching *The Outsiders* from critical race perspective gives me the opportunity to begin utilizing the knowledge and insight that I have gained from taking the seminar, “Teaching about Race and Racism Across the Disciplines,” and pass it along to my students. Ironically, as I conclude this unit I realize that, despite its popularity and inclusion in the cannon of literature taught to so many young people in our country, the inclusion of *The Outsiders* in our Language Arts curriculum can be considered yet another example of modern racism. Furthermore, to continue teaching the novel through a non-critical race theory lens is really to continue teaching as a colorblind teacher.

One thing I believe all of my colleagues could agree on at the end of the seminar is what a massive undertaking that we as teachers and we as a nation must face in order to make this country a truly fair and just one where all are treated equally. Robin Diangelo comments in *White Fragility*;

“Interrupting racism takes courage and intentionality; the interruption is by definition not passive or complacent. So in our answer the question ‘Where do we go from here?’ I offer that we must never consider ourselves finished with our learning. Even if challenging all the racism and superiority we have internalized was quick and easy to do, our racism would be reinforced all over

again just by virtue of living in the culture.”¹³

Appendix: Common Core Standards-English Language Arts

The following six Common Core standards will be utilized during both the journal writing section of the unit as well as the rewriting of scenes from *The Outsiders*;

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3.a

Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3.b

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3.d

Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.3

Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

The following standard will be utilized during the final “Fitter Family” project in which students analyze, compare and contrast the “Fitter Family” contest of the 20th Century with a fictional contest to be held in modern times;

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.9

Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.

The following standard will be utilized throughout the reading of *The Outsiders*:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.10

By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Annotated Bibliography

Blackmon, Douglas A. *Slavery by Another Name; The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*. New York: Anchor Books: 2008. This Pulitzer Prize winning bestseller examines the little known re-enslavement of African Americans from the Civil War up until WWII and its implications in today's racial landscape.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, "Post-Racial" America*. *American Behavioral Scientist*. Sage Publications, 2015. In this article Bonilla-Silva discusses some of the terminology discussed in our seminar, including colorblindness, racism and new racism.

Brown, Austin Channing. *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*. New York: Convergent Books: 2018. A wonderfully written memoir which explores growing up in a colorblind America.

Cohen, Adam. *Imbeciles; The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck*. New York: Penguin Press: 2016. This investigation examines the Buck vs Bell case which famously became a Supreme Court case which upheld the sterilization of Carrie Buck and made legal the sterilization of thousands during the eugenics movement.

Diangelo, Robin. *White Fragility: Why it's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*. Boston: Beacon Press: 2018. In this book on racism in America, author Robin Diangelo examines white fragility as a cause of continued racism in the US.

Ehle, John. *Trail of Tears; The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation*. New York: Anchor Books: 1988. A thorough investigation into the circumstances around the forced removal of thousands of Native Americans from their native lands under the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc. *Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement*. Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves: 2002. A collection of readings, photographs, connections and questions related to the eugenics movement.

Isenberg, Nancy. *White Trash; The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*. New York: Viking: 2016. Isenberg examines class in America including an examination of the history leading up to the "eugenics craze."

Jabbar, Kareem Abdul and Raymond Obstefeld. *Writing on the Wall; Searching for New Equality beyond Black and White*; New York: Liberty Street: 2016. The former NBA legend examines social racism and inequality in America, offering some solutions from his unique perspective.

Shukla, Nikesh and Chimene Suleyman, editors. *The Good Immigrant; 26 Writers Reflect on America*. New York: Little, Brown and Company: 2019. A collection of essays on the modern American immigrant experience.

Stevenson, Bryan. *Just Mercy; A Story of Justice and Redemption*. New York: Spiegel & Grau: 2014. This inspiring investigation into those unjustly confined in America's prisons is written by the founder of the Legal Justice Initiative, an organization that helps victims of an unjust criminal justice system.

Resources for Students and Teachers

1. <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/list3.pl/> An image archive database on the American eugenics movement.
2. <https://undark.org/article/carrie-buck-letters-eugenics/> Primary source letters about and by Carrie Buck are posted on this site along with a short summary of the conditions around Buck's sterilization.
3. <https://www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian>. This site gives a brief history of Native American boarding schools and has several photos of students before and after recruitment.
4. <https://rightquestion.org/education/> This site gives a thorough overview of the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) utilized in this unit.
5. <https://eji.org/> This site is the home of the Equal Justice Initiative, an Alabama-based organization dedicated to achieving gains in racial injustice.
6. Thomas, Angie. *The Hate You Give*. New York: Balzar & Bray: 2017. This timely work of fiction explores racism in America as the African American protagonist, Starr Carter, witnesses the murder of her friend at the hands of police officers.

Notes

- ¹ Milton Reynolds in *Pedagogical Interventions in Colorblind Teaching Practices*, 353.
- ² Caitlan L. Ryan and Adreienne D. Dixson, in *Rethinking Pedagogy to Re-Center Race: Some Reflections*, 175.
- ³ Ibid, 176.
- ⁴ Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, "Post-Racial" America*, 1.
- ⁵ Brainy Quotes
- ⁶ SE Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 3.
- ⁷ *Seeing Race Again; Countering Colorblindness across Disciplines*, 356.
- ⁸ In *Reckless Hands*, 20.
- ⁹ *Race and Membership in American History*, 142.
- ¹⁰ Treuer, David. *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee; Native America from 1890 to the Present*, 134.
- ¹¹ Treuer, 137.

¹² Hinton, 51.

¹³ Diangelo, 153.

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