



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2021 Volume II: Developing Anti-Racist Curriculum and Pedagogy

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## **Anti-Racist Pedagogy and Counter-Narrative Repertoire for the Middle School Orchestra**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 21.02.01  
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This is a curricular unit designed specifically for the middle school string orchestra, but the concepts, ideas and pedagogical practices put forth within it can be implemented in most performing ensembles. The unit seeks to broaden the repertoire and pedagogical techniques utilized in directing middle school orchestra. It aims to do this by rethinking dominant pedagogical approaches and reexamining which narratives are presented in rehearsals and for what purpose. The curriculum is divided into four units that will provide specific activities for the teacher and includes the resources to facilitate implementation. The resources include:

- Original string orchestra arrangements for the middle school-level musician to be used as repertoire
- Original presentations using the interactive web-based platform Padlet
- Rethinking dominant approaches for teaching basic rhythmic reading skills through the presentation of the South Indian rhythmic system solkattu
- Techniques for creating community within the orchestra through socially minded rehearsal pedagogy

The curriculum makes the case that there is a need for not only a refocusing of what the goals of musical performing ensembles should be, but that widely accepted teaching practices of performance ensembles has been co-opted by an agenda that seeks to serve and maintain white supremacy within the discipline of music education. By examining the widely accepted practices and routines of music education, this unit will provide the rationale and distinct moves by which the educator can counter these inequities. In doing so, the teacher reaches more students regardless of their background because students will be made aware of counter-narratives that is rife with dominant narratives. The curriculum will help the teacher include counter-narratives in their instruction in a seamless manner and provide a framework for restructuring instruction moving forward. The inclusion of counter-narratives also provides the teacher with the opportunity to dialog with students about history and other issues surrounding Civil Rights and equity more broadly in a way that will feel more organic and less “forced” as these discussions will relate directly to the material in the lessons. In that way, this is not really a curricular unit to begin and finish, but a way to start rethinking what, how and why we teach a performance class like orchestra.

(Developed for Orchestra, grades 5-8; recommended for Orchestra and Strings, grades 5-8)

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