



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2025 Volume II: History, Science, and Racism: The Long Shadow of Eugenics

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## **Challenging the Standard: Testing & the Fight for Educational Justice**

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This unit invites middle school students to critically examine the origins, implications, and impact of standardized testing in American public education. Drawing on the historical foundations of intelligence testing and its roots in the eugenics movement, students learn how assessments have historically functioned not to support learning, but to sort, exclude, and reinforce racial and class-based hierarchies.

Students explore how standardized testing became central to public education and reflect on how these assessments have shaped their own academic identities. Through inquiry, reflection, discussion, and project-based learning, students confront questions such as: What do test scores say about intelligence and potential? Who created these systems of assessment? Who benefits from them? Who is harmed by them? What might more just and inclusive assessments look like?

The unit culminates in an activism project in which students propose and/or advocate for more equitable approaches in education. Grounded in civic education and informed by the history of educational inequality, this unit empowers students to move from personal reflection to collective action, developing the critical tools they need to become advocates for equity in their schools and beyond.

(Developed for U.S. History, grade 8; recommended for U.S. History, grade 10)

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