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

# The Dangers of Pseudoscience. Eugenics: When Science Meets Racism

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This unit invites students and teachers to examine and confront the pseudoscience of eugenics. Taught at the end of the biology course, it asks students to revisit and question what they have learnt about genetics. Eugenics claimed to be science, and at some point, was the dominant narrative, backed by the most important universities and scientific institutions in the USA, but it used flawed biology to justify racism, classism, ableism and even violence. Eugenics is not a thing of the past, its legacy can be observed today in the way we talk about intelligence, crime, health or beauty.

Students will use their scientific knowledge and critical thinking skills to dismantle eugenic myths and investigate how these ideas grew and shaped U.S. history, including their own city. They will conduct historical research, scientific analysis and collaborative projects to reflect about eugenic ideas and learn how to spot its legacy in modern examples.

This unit is a call to think critically about how science is used and misused in our society. Teaching students that science is not neutral and needs ethical reflection will empower them to recognize pseudoscience, confront injustice and contribute to a more equitable future.

(Developed for Biology, grades 9-12; recommended for Biology, secondary grades, and Science, elementary grades)

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