



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1992 Volume IV: The National Experience: American Art and Culture

Colonial Living: A Look at the Arts, Crafts, History, and Literature of Early Americans

Guide for Curriculum Unit 92.04.02
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My 1992 curriculum unit has been designed to be used in my special needs classroom. My students are all working on a remedial level and they have problems when they are forced to learn in a traditional manner. These students need classroom instruction that is creative, flexible and relevant. I created this unit which looks at the role of African-Americans during our nation’s colonial period because I saw a need in my students to be connected to their past. All too often in our classrooms today, we are forced to rush through a curriculum. I was stunned to discover how little American history my students knew and their knowledge of the colonial period and Revolutionary War was next to nil.

“Colonial Living: A Look at the Arts, Crafts, History, and Literature of Early Americans” is meant to be taught to fifth and sixth graders in two subject areas: language arts and social studies. In language arts the students will learn about the people, events, and lifestyles of the colonial period by reading three novels: “Phoebe the Spy” by Judith Berry Griffen, “War Comes to Willy Freeman” and “My Brother Sam Is Dead” by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier. These novels deal with real historical situations that have been fictionalized and centered around adolescent heroes. In two of the novels the heroes are African-American females.

These novels will lead the students into the non-fiction portion of the unit. In social studies class the students will research the colonial period using a wide variety of resources which will include: the text, “Living In Our Country,” “Black in America 1619-1790” by Florence and J.B. Jackson, the classroom computer system including the Comptons encyclopedia, the school library, and field trips. The students will learn about colonial life by researching and experimenting with such daily skills as cooking, quilting, and plant lore.

This comprehensive study of colonial life will introduce students to the famous figures of that period such as George Washington and Ben Franklin. The students will learn about the traditional heroes of the Revolutionary War as well as some of the unsung heroes such as Crispus Attucks and Phillis Wheatley. The students will study the people of New England and contrast them with the people of the South. They will study the lives of free blacks and slaves as well as the traditional white colonist.

I hope to give my students their “past” through the teaching of this unit. I also hope that a knowledge of the past will enrich their present. I have designed this unit to be eclectic in style. I think that the wide variety of materials and techniques I have chosen will work for my “problem” learners or for any other New Haven Public School students.

(Recommended for Language Arts and Social Studies, grades 5-6)

Key Words

Slavery Afro-American Colonial History American Revolutionary War Literature General Wars

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