



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1996 Volume I: Multiculturalism and the Law

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## **An Analysis of Jim Crow Laws and their Effects on Race Relations**

Curriculum Unit 96.01.01  
by Jennifer Blue

First grade is a magical time. In first grade, students embark on many endeavors where they may find themselves for years to come. For many learners, first grade is when the joys of reading, writing, and even critical thinking are discovered.

It seems appropriate, at this crucial time of development, that a multicultural curriculum is in place. It is inevitable, that in this society, children will be confronted with many cultures and races different from their own. It is a teacher's responsibility, if not every adult's responsibility, to help children understand the differences as well as the similarities between cultures. We know that it is only through education, understanding, and finally acceptance, that one can begin to break down the walls of racism, bigotry, and prejudice, and aspire to co-exist effectively and harmoniously.

It follows logically that while it is necessary to learn about other people, it is also as imperative to study one's own history. This unit, "An Analysis of Jim Crow Laws and Their Effects on Race Relations in America", will focus upon the 60's Civil Rights Movement. The unit is designed for first graders of a New Haven Public School. The students are predominantly African American, belonging to a low socio-economic level. Their academic levels range from very low to high. It is in this teachers opinion, however, that the students are all talented and gifted in some way or another!

My intention for devising the unit is to convey to young learners how laws, based on discrimination, can destroy the basic human spirit of all parties involved. Once the miserable truth is established about Jim Crow, and students gain full comprehension, a discussion will arise on the best route to embrace that would execute the alteration of unfair legislation. Hopefully, these young minds will process the information of their history, and construct meaning pertinent to their lives.

This curriculum unit will evolve in a language based classroom. All projects are geared to achieve one goal: language acquisition. Therefore, all related activities will center around children's literature that illustrates and portrays universal aspects of African American culture from the 1960's through the 1990's.

As a result of the exposure to the literature, students will utilize Writer's Workshop. Writer's Workshop is a teaching strategy which demonstrates that craftspeople (authors, poets, artists, etc.) are actively engaged in creating, exploring, and manipulating materials and ideals for the sake of artistic expression. Students will realize that writing is more than a mere assignment, but it is a process that follows many structured steps.

Instructors must keep in mind that students should be given an amount of freedom to explore topics in a classroom setting. They must have the freedom to write and converse as a means to self-examination and open the door to their own beliefs and theories. The setting must be risk free, with the opportunity for students to share their works in progress.

Due to the sensitive nature of the unit, it will be necessary to implement social development lessons. The city of New Haven has adopted a social development program, called *Project Charlie*. This program is designated to boost the self-esteem of students. It is intended through *Project Charlie* that student decision making skills and self-awareness will increase. Several of the lessons deal with diversity and how to appropriately handle anger. The user of this unit is encouraged to look through the *Primary Project Charlie Manual* and employ the materials already developed.

Jim Crow was the name of an early Negro minstrel song. Throughout this unit, the term Jim Crow will be used. Jim Crow, within the context of this unit, refers to the official discrimination against or segregation of African Americans. Jim Crow legislation was officially instituted by the southern states when racial attitudes hardened in the 1890's, shortly after the Emancipation and abolition of slavery. These laws were to remain instituted throughout the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, close to a century later.

During the years of Jim Crow, state laws mandated racial separation in schools, parks, playgrounds, restaurants, hotels, public transportation, theatres, restrooms, and so on. The allocation of funds for every segregated facility demonstrated unmistakably who was entitled to the best and the worst. Everywhere segregation was a symbol of supposed black inferiority.

The entire concept of Jim Crow is difficult to teach young students in first grade. For some young minds, it is not easy to comprehend a time and space outside of their immediate surroundings and environment. This fact is not so incredible. After all, it is just as difficult for adults to relate to a situation in which they are not directly involved as it is for children. According to Jean Piaget, the Swiss psychologist who is internationally renowned for his studies in the development of children's thinking processes, the mental framework for processing and organizing information and ideas is one's environment. One does not learn in a vacuum. Learning is social.

It is thus the teacher's task to create a setting in which children can understand what life was like, living in the South, before the 1960's for both African Americans and Caucasians. This goal can best be achieved through active experience and social interaction. There is substantial importance of children's actions on the environment. Active experience is a key element in cognitive development.

Actions may be physical manipulations of objects or events or mental manipulations of objects or events (thinking). Active experiences are those that provoke assimilation and accommodation, resulting in cognitive change.

Educators often focus on Piaget's work on cognitive development in the intellectual growth of children. Another significant factor in cognitive development is social interaction. By social interaction, it is meant the interchange of ideas among people. People can develop concepts classified as follows:

(1) those that have sensorially available physical referents (they can be seen, heard, and so on) and (2) those that do not have such referents. The concept-tree has physical referents; the concept *honesty* does not. A child can develop a socially acceptable concept of tree (physical knowledge) relatively independent of others because referents (trees) are usually available. But the same child can not develop an acceptable concept of honesty (social knowledge) independent of others. To the extent that concepts are socially defined, the child

is dependent on social interaction for the construction and validation of concepts.

Social interaction can be of many kinds. Children interact with peers, parents, and other adults. The events that take place in a schoolroom are most frequently the interaction of students with other students and with their teachers. There is also the interaction with parents and others in the environment. All these interactions are important for cognitive development.

It is my firm belief that the concept of segregation for young learners is an abstract one and thus dependent on social knowledge. In most cases, the aforementioned concept has no physical referents available. Therefore, social interaction is needed.

## **LESSON: MOCK SEGREGATION**

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Students will be segregated within the class based on an arbitrary criteria. This criteria must be socially visible. Students will be randomly assigned stickers circles and squares, for example, which will be worn on the outside of their clothing throughout the experiment. One group, either circles or squares whichever the teacher decides will comprise a majority of the population; the other group will represent the minority. The minority will not be given the same privileges or opportunities as members of the majority.

For example:

1. Majority will be given brand new crayons for class activities.  
Minority must use old broken crayons.
2. Majority will use pencils with the convenience of an attached eraser.  
Minority will have access to only primary pencils without any erasers causing them to scratch out mistakes on their work.
3. Majority will have access to new paper for projects.  
Minority will be permitted to use only recycled scraps of paper.
4. Majority has special permission to eat lunch in Teacher's Room with teacher.  
Minority must eat lunch in cafeteria with the other classes.
5. Majority will be given large workspace in classroom.  
Minority will be cramped into a smaller space.
6. Majority will be dismissed from class first.  
Minority will be dismissed from class only after majority has been dismissed.

The aforementioned “privileges” will be exercised during the course of one full school day.

Students will be required to keep a personal journal throughout the mock segregation. The journals will afford the students the opportunity to discuss the dynamics of segregation and discrimination as well as the emotions involved. The journals will serve as a vehicle for students to explore self-evaluation, expression, and their development as readers, writers, and thinkers. Some thoughts explored will include: how did it feel to be a member of the privileged group? How does it feel to be discriminated against?

Students, within their own respective majority groups will then break up into subsets of four. These subsets will provide an atmosphere for students to share their ideas and thoughts on the mock segregation experiment and all of its ramifications.

The task of the subsets will be to list (through drawings or sentences) the most striking aspect of the mock segregation from the student point of view. Each subset will report their findings to the whole class, as a means to create a Class Feeling Chart On Segregation.

Prior to dividing the class from its minority and majority groups into subsets, the teacher must familiarize students with working in cooperative groups. This can be achieved by assigning the responsibility of the project to each member of the group. Equal distribution of labor as well as the autonomy of problem solving will give students confidence to work with others in the future.

Division of labor is as follows:

**COMMUNICATOR:** This student is responsible for asking the teacher or another team’s communicator for help. The communicator is the only team member who may leave the team and seek help from the teacher or another team’s communicator. The communicator may then share with his or her own team the information obtained.

**MANAGER:** The manager is responsible for picking up and returning the supplies and equipment that the team needs. The manager reports to the teacher if any supplies are damaged or broken.

**TRACKER/CHECKER:** The tracker is responsible for team’s progress through the steps of the team’s activity. The tracker simply keeps the team on task.

**COACH:** The coach is responsible for encouraging teammates to practice the team skills. The coach inspires the team to work cooperatively by looking for positive examples.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that during a mock segregation exercise, there may be some psychological impact on the children in both the “favored” and “disfavored” groups. It is suggested that a letter to the parents of students be drafted, informing them of the objectives of the mock segregation. If any parent is opposed to the idea of their child’s participation, then of course that child is excused from the exercise.

The teacher should also be aware of stressful impacts on the children. Prior to the mock segregation, students should be informed that the exercise is merely an “act”. Teacher must set up a risk free environment allowing adequate amount of time for each and every student to voice his/her opinions and feelings on the mock segregation.

Children usually develop interesting concepts about rules. For example, within the context of a child’s game,

during the egocentric stage of cognitive development (age 2-5) children become aware of the existence of rules, and imitate older people. However, the cognitively egocentric child functions by himself or herself without actually wanting to win. Their play in groups is characterized by a lack of social interaction or true cooperation. They play alongside other children but do not truly interact. At this stage of reasoning about rules, children believe everyone can win. Rules are viewed as fixed and respect for them is unilateral.

It is usually not until age 7 or 8 that children begin to cooperate socially in playing games. Around this time, there is a clearer understanding of the rules of a known game. The objective of the game for children becomes to win. Their reasoning processes are logical. Children will come to understand that rules are, or can be made by the group; the group can change rules; and rules are necessary for fair play.

Because of the progression of cognitive development in young children, it is anticipated that students will be well equipped to handle the dynamics and implications of a mock segregation exercise, given the opportunity for discussion and expression.

## **LESSON: LITERATURE LINK**

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There is a literature link to the mock segregation component of this unit. As a read aloud experience, students will experience *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles, a story of the first African American child to attend an all white elementary school. I have selected this story as opposed to the story of Elizabeth Eckford and the Little Rock Nine because my students are first graders and would probably relate more to the former story.

Students will respond to literature through Writer's Workshop. They will be given 20-30 minutes of free-writing time in response to the story (pre-emergent and emergent readers may use pictures as well). Each student will have the chance to share creations (poems, stories, drawings), during Author's Chair. Author's Chair is an actual chair in which a student who is sharing his work sits. During Author's Chair, students give the person complete attention. The student in Author's Chair receives feedback on his work from peers in the form of a P(praise), Q(question), or S(suggestion).

The premise behind the PQS is it allows each student to feel confident about his creation. Students are empowered to explain, elaborate on, or even defend their work. Students are required to employ good listening skills and respect classmates by displaying the discipline to listen while others speak. Students are also given the opportunity to demonstrate that the writing of their work was indeed a process.

All final products will be displayed in the classroom.

It is the goal of this component of the unit to promote a clear understanding of Jim Crow laws. An integral literature link to this goal is the poetry of Langston Hughes.

Langston Hughes is one of the most controversial names in the history of American poetry. He is among the most eloquent American poets to have sung about the wounds caused by injustice (Jim Crow Laws). For many readers, Langston Hughes' poems are lyrical beauty beyond issues such as race and justice. The poems that will be studied are: MERRY GO ROUND, DREAM VARIATIONS, MY PEOPLE, and THE DREAM KEEPER. Among many writers, it is believed that childhood memories contribute to the writing process. Children write about what is alive and vital and real for them and their writing becomes the curriculum.

The instructor should help students write a memory list or draw pictures of things that they consider beautiful. For visual learners, provide an ample amount of magazines and other media where students can cut and paste beautiful things. Give students who are willing, time to share their word or picture memory lists with the class.

At this time introduce Langston Hughes and read aloud the poem *My People*. You can even distribute a copy of the poem. Ask children to respond to the poem by writing their own. Encourage them to incorporate the words or ideals that they had previously generated.

Read aloud the poem, *Merry Go Round*. Ask children if they have ever felt out of place or dejected. Encourage students to engage in a class discussion. Again, allow time for a written or artistic response from students. Students can share their poetry with the whole class during Author's Chair. Display work around the classroom.

For each of the Langston Hughes poems, allow students sufficient time to respond in writing or drawings. Be sure to facilitate the link of the aforementioned poems to Jim Crow, African American pride, anger, despair, and hope.

Other readings that serve as extensions to the mock segregation:

1. STELLALUNA by Janell Cannon: an allegory about acceptance, adjustment, and assimilation.
2. PASS IT ON: AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY FOR CHILDREN: a collection of poems for the young reader.
3. AMAZING GRACE by Mary Hoffman: a story about an African American girl's rise to become anything in which she aspires
4. HONEY I LOVE AND OTHER POEMS by Eloise Greenfield: a collection of poems about relationships and self

## Poems by Langston Hughes

MERRY-GO-ROUND: colored child at a carnival  
Where is the Jim Crow section  
On this merry-go-round,  
Mister, cause I want to ride?  
Down South where I come from  
White and colored  
Can't sit side by side.  
Down South on the train  
There's a Jim Crow car.  
On the bus we're put in the back—  
But there ain't no back

To a merry-go-round!  
Where's the horse  
For a kid that's black?

#### MY PEOPLE

The night is beautiful,  
So the faces of my people.  
The stars are beautiful,  
So the eyes of my people.  
Beautiful, also, is the sun.  
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

#### DREAM VARIATIONS

To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance,  
Til the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
Dark like me—  
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening . . .  
A tall, slim tree . . .  
Night coming tenderly  
Black like me.

#### THE DREAM KEEPER

Bring me all of your dreams,  
You dreamers,  
Bring me all of your  
Heart melodies  
That I may wrap them  
In a blue cloud-cloth  
Away from the too-rough fingers  
Of the world.

## **LESSON: HOW DOES ONE DISMANTLE OR ALTER UNJUST LAWS?**

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The above question will be addressed to the whole class. The class should be divided into cooperative learning groups of four. There will be jobs within the groups as detailed earlier in the unit. Each student is responsible for a certain task. Children can choose with whom they'd like to work or the teacher can assign the groups. Each group is encouraged to establish at least two ideas on how to change laws or rules. Ask children if their method of change is appropriate or inappropriate; violent or non-violent. The instructor must remind students to reflect on the mock segregation exercise. Use a specific "law" from the mock segregation exercise and dismantle it. (It is suggested that the teacher carefully implement social development lessons on conflict resolution here [ *Project Charlie* ]).

Some engaging activities include dramatic role play and feigned letters to legislators.

Students will be assigned an independent writing activity. In some style, be it prose, verse, poetry, short story, or essay, students must share an unfair event in their lives. Beginning writers can "tell" their work to another, ( teacher or peer), who will act as a scribe.

## **LESSON: WHY DR. KING IS A HERO?**

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This component of the unit is closure.

It is at this part of the unit that students are introduced to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This introduction is made at Storytime through children's literature centering on his heroism. The instructor will read aloud the literature.

Martin Luther King embraced the concept of civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance. MLK hoped to awaken the sense of moral shame in the opponent, (white supremacists and institutionalized racist structures), so that in the end, there will be redemption and reconciliation. Nonviolence involves the willingness to love the other, to attack forces of evil rather than the individual, and to forgive. New Haven public school social development program, *Project Charlie* could be implemented here.

The bibliography is as follows:

1. A PICTURE BOOK OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.  
by David Adler
2. HAPPY BIRTHDAY DR. KING  
by Kathryn Jones
3. HAPPY BIRTHDAY MARTIN LUTHER KING  
by Jean Marzollo



In response to the literature, students will independently write in some form why they feel King is a hero. This work will be a work in progress. Upon editing and revisions, all student work will be compiled in a class book to be displayed in a school showcase.

Another activity would be for students to share a dream. Remind children that MLK always sought peaceful solutions to problems. He dreamed that people could live together without being mean to one another. If possible play a recording of the I Have a Dream Speech. Point out some of the images MLK had for the future. Instruct students to write their own speech.

## Teacher's Bibliography

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3. The Writer in All of Us: Improving Your Writing Through Childhood Memories.  
by June Gould; Penguin; 1991.
4. Portfolio Assessment in the Reading-Writing Classroom  
by Robert J. Tierney, Mark A. Carter, and Laura E. Desai; Christopher-Gordon Pub, Inc.,  
Norwood, MA; 1991.
5. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive and Affective Development  
by Barry J. Wadsworth; Longman Inc, White Plains, NY; 1989.
6. Civil Rights: The 1960's Freedom Struggle  
by Rhoda Lois Blumberg; Twayne Pub; 1984.
7. The Piaget Primer: Thinking Learning Teachers  
by Ed Labinowicz; Addison-Wessley; 1980.
8. The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes  
ed. by Arnold Rampersad; Vintage Books, New York; 1995.

## Student Bibliography

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1. THE STORY OF RUBY BRIDGES by Robert Coles
2. STELLALUNA by Janell Cannon
3. PASS IT ON: AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY FOR CHILDREN
4. AMAZING GRACE by Mary Hoffman
5. HONEY I LOVE AND OTHER POEMS by Eloise Greenfield
6. A PICTURE BOOK OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. by David Adler
7. HAPPY BIRTHDAY DR. KING by Kathryn Jones
8. HAPPY BIRTHDAY MARTIN LUTHER KING by Jean Marzollo

## MATERIALS

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drawing paper  
writing paper  
journals (notebooks)  
crayons  
pencils  
markers  
tape recorder  
magazines  
scissors  
glue  
recording of I Have A Dream speech  
stickers

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