



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

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## **Race, Language and Separation**

Curriculum Unit 96.01.05  
by Sandra Coleman

When thinking of a topic, in its different forms, I wanted to incorporate things that relate to history and to my students personally. The make-up of my classroom and the school where I teach were the determining factors in choosing this topic. I teach sixth grade and my students are predominately Hispanic and black. I start this unit with my students having some background knowledge in the subject matter and I'll expand on that knowledge so students can see how this subject does affect them personally.

With my students I will explore the idea of "separation" in society. We will take a look back in history and discuss the "separate but equal" laws that governed our country. We will also explore the issue of language being a form of separation in our society.

We will come to the unit having studied the evils of slavery: Africans being torn from their homeland and being forced into a cruel life of servitude because of the color of their skin; Language, culture and identity denied purposely to tear them apart from themselves so that they might ultimately better serve the purposes of their keepers. Even after the ills of slavery, African Americans, which they'd become, continued the struggle for cultural awareness and equal rights.

The Civil Rights Movement worked hard to eradicate the separatism that existed in schools, eating places, at water fountains, and in public facilities.

The unit will discuss the historical case of *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954, and other cultural and legal cases, which led to the demise of the "separate but equal" laws in education. The Court acknowledged the harms of segregation and of treatment that generates feelings of inferiority in African-American children. Movements of the 1970's continued to struggle for the equal rights and recognition of the African-American culture, stressing that cultural identity need not be traded for equality under the law. People worked hard to mend this gash that separated society, only for its citizens to find a new gash.

There are several questions that will be explored in this unit. Is the English-first debate very much like racism in separating the people of this country? When you elect language to a status different from another language, are you also electing the speakers of that language to a different status? This issue has been given new life because of increased immigration that's changing the ethnic complexion of America. More recent immigrants have been from Latino, Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Is "America" trying to enforce separation in society—a separation of those who speak English and of those who do not?

The Supreme Court has recently agreed to review an Arizona case involving that state's official English constitutional amendment, this would establish English as the "language of the ballot, the public schools and all government functions." <sup>1</sup> What about Arizona's citizens whose first language isn't English. Kenji Hakuta reminds us in his book, *The Mirror of Language*, "that English was not built into the constitution of the United States. In fact, the founding fathers deemed it incompatible with the spirit of freedom in the United States." <sup>2</sup> Not only did our forefathers welcome different languages into our new nation, but our institutions of higher learning welcome it also. Yale's students' handbooks mention something to the effect that incoming students should be versed in a foreign language. Likely multiple language skills among people can be of benefit to our country to promote our position in the world marketplace and to strengthen foreign relations.

English is obviously the path to success in this country, and there are many incentives for people to learn English. In fact, so many new arrivals want to learn the language that schools in Los Angeles report 40,000 people on waiting lists for night school. <sup>3</sup>

Some supporters of English-first argue that the most important part of the "melting pot" ideal is a common language. But is this America's monoculture (white, Anglo-Protestant America) trying to conform others, once again, to the ways of his own culture with little respect for the heritage of his fellow citizens? Putting the status of one language above another puts us back in history before "separate but equal" laws. Can citizens have equality under the law and their language too?

My unit will compare these two separations, one based on color, the other, on language and its effects on our society. My unit has a two-fold purpose. One, to develop an awareness and appreciation of our diverse culture in the United States and also to appreciate fellow students and our diverse cultures within our school.

In order to meet the educational needs of all our students our first step is to make students comfortable in their learning environment. Schools should promote diversity in public education. School culture should respect and accommodate the child's home culture. Their classroom should, in all cases, reflect who they are, with a teacher who is sincere in her love and appreciation of her individual students. Classrooms should be littered with literacy—books, pictures, writings, etc., that reflect a multicultural society. The curriculum and the atmosphere within the classroom should reflect a tolerance and an appreciation for the equality of identity and the equality of difference.

The initial part of this unit deals with a segregated South and the segregated minds of people during those times. Jim Crow, *Separate but Equal*, and *Brown vs. Board of Education* will be a point of focus. Through the video series, "Eyes on the Prize," students will gain knowledge from the real-life footage about life in a segregated world. The students will research the historic case, *Brown vs. Board of Education* to see how it ended the separate but equal concept of education. The case paved the way for equal education for racial and ethnic minorities, females, and students with special educational needs.

Identifying and researching current events on the pursuit of English as an official language for the United States will be dealt with in the latter part of the unit. Students will explore new languages to enrich their lives. Many students in my school are bilingual (most speak Spanish). An introduction to French and Spanish (for non-Spanish-speaking students) affords students an opportunity to enjoy the richness of learning and speaking a new language.

A series of lessons will tie this unit on Race, Language and Separation together to meet these goals:

to develop an understanding of different cultures and acknowledge the value of diversity.  
to develop reading, writing, and thinking skills through class participation.

In order to meet these goals specific lesson are developed with these learner objectives:

to enrich students' lives by learning a language different from their own.  
to develop research and analytical skills.  
to improve writing skills through use of persuasive writing form.

### **Activity 1**

Discuss the word "separate" with students. Have students think of as many words or ideas related to separate. As a class, write a definition for the word separate and have it available for reference throughout the unit.

A new law has been passed in 1996 that requires all black people to walk on one side of the street and all white people to walk on the other.

Have students write an essay for or against this law. Also cite reasons why the government might want this law and counteract the reasons with arguments of their own. Later, have students read essays aloud to assess persuasiveness. Students will then read and discuss the case of Plessy v. Ferguson.

Jim Crow came to signify white dominance over blacks and laws that required segregation of blacks and whites became known as Jim Crow laws. The first Jim Crow law, requiring railroads to carry blacks in separate cars, was passed by Florida in 1887. The rest of the Southern states joined by passing similar laws. Louisiana passed its Jim Crow law regarding railroads in 1890 even though blacks in New Orleans had organized against passage of the bill.

In 1891 a group formed a committee to test the constitutionality of the separate car law. Homer Plessy, an octoroon: seven-eighths white and one-eighth black, was chosen. Albion Tourgee, Plessy's lawyer, went before Judge John H. Ferguson, arguing that the law Mr. Plessy allegedly violated was invalid because it conflicted with the Constitution of the United States. Ferguson ruled against Plessy and the case of Plessy v. Ferguson was born.

During the time that the case of Plessy v. Ferguson was before the Supreme Court new segregation laws were passed. Separate but equal remained the law of the land until Brown v. Board of Education decided that "separate" is "inherently unequal" in 1954. Plessy remained the law of the land for fifty-eight years. During those years American Apartheid reigned supreme as Homer Plessy's case was cited in cases regarding every conceivable type of racial discrimination. <sup>4</sup>

## Activity 2

Without informing students, establish a new class order. Students who have blue eyes receive preferential treatment. Blue-eyed students should be allowed to work together and have an easier assignment. Without telling them about the activity, make suggestive statements about their eye color. Let your manner be warm toward those who have blue eyes and stoic toward those without. Continue until the students begin to see the difference or feel uncomfortable. Next, explain the activity to all the students. Ask students how the activity made them feel. Ask students to relate their feelings to the case of Plessy v. Ferguson.

## Activity 3

Divide class into two groups. One group researches and reports information on Jim Crow laws and the other gathers information on Brown v. Board of Education. Let groups share their findings, and discuss integration and segregation. Watch the videos from the “Eyes on the Prize” series. At this point, students should have an adequate historical knowledge about racial segregation and its effect on our society.

We, as people, are already so very different in many ways. We ought to be finding ways to tolerate one another instead of finding new reasons to distance ourselves from others. There are many ways we can be separated in this world, and we have tried more than a few in history’s time. Separations based on skin color, political beliefs, religion, and economic status are familiar to most. Language, also separates people. In Canada they are trying to resolve the issues of French and English use. Recently, the Supreme Court agreed to review the constitutionality of an Arizona law that requires English to be the “language of the ballot, the public schools, and all government functions and actions.”<sup>5</sup> Twenty-one states and forty cities have already declared English their official language.<sup>6</sup>

It’s hard to assess the actual impact of official English. Symbolic declarations in many states now have little effect on daily life. But more stringent laws could end bilingual ballots, bilingual education and interfere with such matters as providing information about driver’s licenses or permits in a language other than English.

The school where I teach has a large bilingual population. I provide my students with multicultural activities. I like for my students to recognize the many different people who have helped to build our country. I also wish for my students to know that America’s foundation was based of welcoming people from foreign lands and that the Constitution of the United States was written with the awareness of our diversity and went to great strides to protect our diversity. We have always borrowed from other cultures. It is evident in our American culture, and especially in our language.

## Activity 4

Have a qualified person come in to teach students the basics of Spanish and French. Students can learn the alphabet and how to count in Spanish and French. Students should also be introduced to more familiar terms and phrases in both languages.

Hopefully, students can see the benefits of learning a new language. The more languages you know the more people you are able to communicate with and interact. By learning another language you increase your knowledge and it also enriches your life. Students will be urged to find ways to use their new language in their everyday lives.

## Activity 5

Invite someone to teach the class in another language (Spanish or French) for a day, half day, or class period. All instruction will be in that language; students must question and respond in that language. It's a good idea to continue this until feel its effect. A helpful teaching example is to explain a new mathematical concept or to teach a "how-to" lesson that involves a series of instructions. Example: arts and crafts projects—origami; sand art; color by number.

This activity demonstrates how non-English speaking citizens might feel when they don't know the language. Students who do not speak or understand the lesson can comment on how they felt during the lesson. Some may have felt lost or frustrated and even given up during the lesson because it was not taught in a language they understood. Get students to transfer that experience to how they might feel if their whole school day, everyday, was taught in a language they didn't understand. How might this effect them outside of school? Without bilingual education they wouldn't get the opportunity to learn the new language through their dominant language.

## Activity 6

Trace a map of your state. On it, label places of Native American, French, or Spanish origin, or places named by the first English settlers. Indicate the origin of each place name. This may be a bulletin board project for the class.

The next lessons will be based on the contributions two cultures have made on the United States of America. You can include more, or choose other cultures and identify their contributions to our country.

English is considered the Great Borrower. The Spanish and the French have influenced parts of the United States. The French were leaders in the early exploration and development of Louisiana, which was named after the French king Louis XIV and purchased from the emperor Napoleon. Some form of French is spoken by many people in Louisiana today. One of these, Creole, is a language derived from the French, developed by the descendants of black slaves from Africa who worked in French households.

Acadian is the form of the language brought by French settlers who moved to Louisiana from Nova Scotia, Canada. The word Acadian became Cajun. The Cajun people of Louisiana have preserved their music, Cuisine and other Customs. Louisiana is known for its Creole and Cajun cooking.

## Activity 7

Discuss French influences in your town, city or state. Is there a store or restaurant with a French name or menu where you live?

Our language has been enriched by thousands of words that we have borrowed French. French has given us many words in art, literature, furniture, food, and clothing.

adieu	buffet	cuisine	naive
avalanche	bureau	detour	resume
avenue	cabaret	elite	rouge
ballet	chassis	entree	serge
beau	chic	envoy	vogue
belle	coupon	facade	7

If some of the words are new to students, look them up in a dictionary. Use them in a sentence or two; have students make them a part of their writing and speaking vocabulary.

### Activity 8

There are many places in the United States that were named by the early French explorers or settlers. The Acadians, when they were driven from Canada, crossed through the center of the country to settle eventually in what is now Louisiana. Identify the following French place names by their English translation.

1. The capital of Louisiana: Red Stick
2. The capital of Idaho: Wooded
3. The capital of Iowa: Of the monks
4. A city, center of automobile making in Michigan: Straits
5. A city in Wisconsin at end of Lake Winnebago: Bottom of lake
6. Canals that connect Lake Huron and Lake Superior to avoid the rapids of the Saint Mary River: Jump Saint Mary
7. A city on the Wabash in Indiana: High Land
8. A New England state: Green mountain
9. The gateway to the lake district of Wisconsin: Clear water
10. The capital of South Dakota: Peter<sup>8</sup>

### Activity 9

Probably because the French are known for their great love of fine food and their skill in the kitchen, many French words are used in English that are related to food and cooking. Choose from the following list to complete the sentences.

saute a la mode hors d'oeuvre cuisine  
chef fondue éclair filet  
souffle vinaigrette mayonnaise crepes<sup>9</sup>

1. He's more than an ordinary cook; he's a wonderful \_\_\_.
2. I prefer my apple pie \_\_\_, with ice cream.
3. Would you rather have \_\_\_ or butter on your sandwich?
4. Please make cubes of French bread to dip in the cheese \_\_\_.

5. Before dinner, they served stuffed mushrooms as an \_\_\_\_.
6. My favorite pastry is a custard-filled chocolate \_\_\_\_.
7. \_\_\_\_ Suzette, which are very thin pancakes flavored with an orange liqueur, are served flaming!
8. Do you want Russian dressing, bleu cheese, or a simple \_\_\_\_ on your salad?
9. Heat the butter and gently \_\_\_\_ the onions until they are brown.
10. She is an expert in the art of Chinese \_\_\_\_.
11. Be careful or the beautiful chocolate \_\_\_\_ will collapse and fall.
12. Ask them to remove all the bones. I prefer my fish as a \_\_\_\_.

The Spanish language has had equally important influence on America. At one time, most of the western United States was settled by people who spoke Spanish. Today many familiar western words are Spanish in origin.

A Spanish-speaking place that is special to the United States is Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is an island in the West Indies. It used to be a possession of the United States. Since 1952, it has had a special partnership with our country. It is called an “associated free state,” or the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Its people are United States citizens.

Just by the representation of these two cultures we can appreciate the diversity of our nation and how we have borrowed and adapted things into our American culture.

### Activity 10

Name places within your own state where people speak Spanish. There are millions of Spanish-speaking people who live in the United States.

Fill in the blanks to complete the words.

1. American states that were once part of the Spanish Empire, and later of Mexico.

C \_\_\_ f \_\_\_ \_ a T \_\_\_ a \_  
 Co \_\_\_ r \_\_\_ d \_\_\_ New M \_\_\_ \_ c \_\_\_  
 Ar \_\_\_ \_ \_ a

2. The southern part of this state became home for thousands of Cubans after Cuba became a Communist country. There are many Cuban Americans there.

F \_ \_ r \_ d \_

3. Cities in the United States with large Hispanic populations:

New \_ \_ \_ \_

C \_ i \_ a g \_

W \_ s h \_ \_ g \_ o \_ , D . \_ . L \_ \_ A \_ \_ e \_ \_ s

S \_ \_ A \_ t o \_ i o

### Activity 11

Answer en español. Write the number words.

1. Half a hundred \_\_\_
2. A dozen \_\_\_
3. Days in a week \_\_\_
4. Number of states in the U.S. \_\_\_
5. Your age \_\_\_
6. Years in a decade \_\_\_
7. Seconds in a minute \_\_\_
8. Students in class today \_\_\_
9. In leap year, February has \_\_\_ days.

Make up math problems and say them in Spanish. Here are some examples:

Dos y (+) dos son (=)

Diez menos (−) cinco son (=)

Cuatro por (x) cinco son (=)

Doce dividido por (÷) tres es (=)



## Activity 12

Match the Spanish word with the meanings listed below.

- |       |       |                 |                 |
|-------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|
| adios | burro | ?Como se llama? | con mucho gusto |
| Maria | amigo | ocho pinata     | San si uno      |
- eight
  - yes
  - good-bye
  - What's your name?
  - container full of candy and other goodies
  - girl's name
  - one
  - friend
  - donkey
  - with much pleasure
  - saint

## Activity 13

At one time, most of the western United States was settled by people who spoke Spanish. Today many familiar western words are Spanish in origin. Choose from among the following words to replace the underlined expressions in the sentences.

rodeo      taco      lariat      sombrero  
bronco    plaza    poncho    canyon  
vigilante    burro    siesta    loco <sup>10</sup>

- The cowboy tried hard to stay on the bucking half-wild horse.
- Many people came to the round-up show to see the cowboys perform.
- The crowd gathered for a concert in the main square of the town.
- He is an expert in throwing a kind of looped rope around a calf's neck.
- The clown rode in on a small donkey instead of a horse.
- Everyone took a short nap after eating lunch.
- The cowboy put on his broad-brimmed hat in the hot sun.
- The water rushed through the deep narrow valley with steep rocky sides.
- If it rains, be sure to wear your waterproof cover with a hole to put your head through.
- They served a meat-filled tortilla for lunch.
- He went out of his mind when he heard the news.
- A man who takes the law into his own hands can be dangerous.

## Activity 14

Many cities, states, and other geographical features of the United States have names that came from the Spanish explorers or early settlers. Identify the following examples of borrowed Spanish words by recognizing their English equivalents.

1. A California city on a bay named for Saint Francis
2. A Nevada town known for its gambling: The plains
3. The river between Texas and Mexico: The big river
4. The state discovered on Easter by Ponce de Leon who was looking for the fountain of youth: Flowery
5. A town in Texas known for its yellow roses: Yellow
6. A range of mountains in eastern California: Snow-covered mountains
7. A town on the Texas-Mexico border opposite Ciudad Juarez: The pass
8. A city in south central Colorado, probably named for the Indian towns of that area: People, town
9. The oldest city in the country in Florida: Saint Augustus
10. The capital of New Mexico: Holy faith <sup>11</sup>

“Place Names—A Rap Song” can be performed with classmates. It reinforces the previous lessons language contributions. It is also a fun culmination activity so students appreciate the many different cultures that have contributed to our American culture.

## Activity 15

The U.S.A. has many faces,  
From snow-capped mountains to tropical places.  
Strange-sounding names from here and there,  
From Santa Fe, Monterrey, to Eau Claire.  
Baton Rouge means a large red cane.  
Say there, buddy, have you ever been to Maine?  
I know a place called Pennsylvania,  
Don't get it confused with Transylvania  
The Big Apple, New York City,

The Dutch left names that are really pretty.  
Brooklyn, Harlem. Yonkers, ooh!  
Take the “A” train and enjoy the view.  
Detroit, gee, means the “City of Straits,”  
Let’s go there, for it must be great.  
Jamestown, Potomac, and Susquehanna,  
Turkey Isle, Stingray Isle, and Urbana.  
A few names have been mentioned, it’s true.  
I can’t remember them all, can you?  
On behalf of California and Louisiana, too:  
Good-bye, farewell, so long, adieu.  
—Jeri Perkins

***Final questions for written response and discussion:***

How has foreign culture influenced American culture?

What are some effects of race separation and language separation on society?

How does the “melting pot” concept apply to you personally?

## Notes

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1. The Sunday Republican, “Debate Hot On English As Official Language,” (Waterbury Newspaper, March 31, 1996), p. 4A.
2. Kenji Hakuta, *Mirror of Language* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986), p. 184, 195.
3. Theodore Anderson and Mildred Taylor, *Bilingual Schooling in the United States II* (Blain, Ethridge Books, 1976), p. 203.
4. Joel D. Joseph, *Black Mondays* (Maryland: National Press, 1987), p. 162.
5. Sunday Republican, p. 4A.
6. Sunday Republican, p. 4A.
7. Dana F. Kellerman, ed. *The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* (Chicago: The English Language Institute of America, 1975), p. BT35-BT49.
8. Gosh Garcon, *Exploring Language* , p. 53.
9. Kellerman, ed., p. BT35-BT49.
10. Kellerman, ed., p. BT35-BT49.
11. Garcon, p. 40.

## Reading List For Students

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Joseph, Joel D. *Black Mondays* . Bethesda, MD: National Press, 1987.

This book can also be used a teaching aid. It chronicles the worst decisions made by the Supreme Court. Good information on discrimination cases.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Now Is Your Time !* New York: Harper Collins, 1991.

This book contains a history of the African-American struggle for freedom and equality, beginning with the capture of Africans and up to contemporary times. When ordered through the publisher it comes with a teacher's guide.

Taylor, Mildred. *Roll of Thunder Hear Mr Cry* . Santa Barbara, CA: Cornerstone Books, 1995.

This is the story of a black family living in the South during the 1930's and is faced with prejudice and discrimination which the children do not understand.

## Bibliography

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Anderson, Theodore and Mildred Taylor. *Bilingual Schooling in the United States II* . Ethridge Books, 1976.

This is a good research book for background information on bilingual education.

Hakuta, Kenji. *Mirror of Language* . New York: Basic Books, 1986. This book gives information on bilingual education in New Haven. He also gives historical information on how language is used in society.

Joseph, Joel. *Black Mondays* . Bethesda, MD: National Press, 1987. *Black Mondays* describes major blunders handed down by the Supreme Court.

Massaro, Toni Marie. *Constitutional Literacy, A Core Curriculum For A Multicultural Nation* . London: Duke University Press, 1993.

This book gives solid arguments for and against cultural diversity.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Now Is Your Time !* New York: Harper Collins, 1991.

This book is a must read for teachers and students. It gives a history of African-Americans for all to understand.

Simon, Paul. *The Tongue Tied American* . New York: Continuum, 1980. This book discusses the importance of language in our world today.

Stent, Madelon; W. Hazard; H. Rivlin. *Cultural Pluralism in Education* . New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973. Various essays on bicultural education and how we can implement change.

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