



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

Affirmative Action Debate

Guide for Curriculum Unit 96.01.12
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The issue of affirmative action is complex. The relations among races and between sexes, assertions of individual rights, and demands for equality in distributions of society's benefits constitute the fundamental social problems of our times.

The purpose of this unit is to look at situations for which individuals can get preferential treatment and in which situations they cannot. This is an important issue because preference is given to many individuals under government pressure through affirmative action programs. It is not clear that the results of such pressure not always agree with justice.

This unit is designed for students in grades 4-8. The focus will be on content which specifically addresses affirmative action laws and court decisions. Students will understand that it is up to the courts to decide the different forms of preferential treatment. The courts will make decisions on their constitutionality and on their justice.

The school will have an important role in shaping attitudes about issues that deal with affirmative action. Teachers serve increasingly diverse student populations from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Culture shapes how individuals perceive, relate to, and interpret their environment. The school must reform the bureaucratic processes. On one hand, there are those who view the affirmative action policies as necessary to provide equity to minorities, but on the other hand, there are those who see it as reverse discrimination. This poses a problem because people are fearful of what their differences mean in a multicultural society.

Hopefully this unit will raise a level of awareness and provide some information and activities that will bring meaning to the Affirmative Action Debate.

Included in this unit is content materials, lesson plans, resource materials, a list of field trips, and a bibliography. An electronic version of this unit is available.

(Recommended for Life Skills, Language Arts, Social Studies and U.S. History, grades 6-8)

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