



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

Multiculturalism: Freedom v. Unity

Guide for Curriculum Unit 96.01.15
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Multiculturalism is currently a “hot topic” of discussion in both the political and educational arenas. The unit I developed is intended to open up discussion among students and teachers so that students can make their own judgments about multiculturalism and the law. The prevailing question I have posed is whether the strong American commitment to constitutional freedoms will negate the prospect of a national cultural unity.

In broaching the topic one must start with some mutual understanding, if not definition, of “multiculturalism.” Identification of people’s similarities and differences is important; however, discussion of relevancy is equally important. How one feels about differences needs to be explored. Appreciation, tolerance or acceptance of others can be discussed.

A study of the Bill of Rights and the constitutional guarantees is advisable in addition to pointing out historical events which exemplified specific rights and/or denied those rights to certain groups of people. Teachers can enhance discussions by coupling rights with responsibilities both legal and ethical.

Our young people want to know what their rights are. Education can provide them with the knowledge to exercise and protect their rights. It could be that the American public wants its individual freedoms and does not want a core national identity.

(Recommended for Social Studies and History, grades 5-8; Law, grades 9-12; and Current Events and Issues, grades 5-12)

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