

Web Unit Plan

Title: Sixteenth Street: Civil Rights at the Crossroads

Description: The novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963 serve as vehicles for examining racial discrimination and the impact of the civil rights movement on the fight for social justice in the United States.

At a Glance

Grade Level: 6-8

Subject sort (for Web site index): Social Studies

Subject: American History

Topics: Civil Rights Movement

Higher-Order Thinking Skills: Inferring, Reasoning, Evaluation

Key Learnings: Racism, Discrimination, Points of View

Time Needed: 3 weeks, 50-minute lessons, daily

Background: [From the Classroom in Washington, United States](#)

Unit Summary

Students learn about the history of segregated America by studying events of the civil rights movement. They construct a working definition of discrimination, prejudice, and racism, and work in groups to present the personal stories of ordinary men and women who became instrumental in the American civil rights movement. Using *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, by Christopher Paul Curtis, as a launching pad, students study varied accounts of the 1963 Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama; create a newspaper; and conduct a mock trial of Thomas Blanton Jr., one of the men accused in the bombing.

Curriculum-Framing Questions

- **Essential Question**

What are your basic human rights?

- **Unit Questions**

How have African-Americans in the United States struggled for social justice?

What can the civil rights movement teach us about addressing current social justice issues?

- **Content Questions**

What are racism, prejudice, and discrimination?

What factors helped set the stage for the civil rights movement?

Assessment Processes

View how a variety of student-centered [assessments](#) are used in the Sixteenth Street Unit Plan. These assessments help students and teachers set goals; monitor student progress; provide feedback; assess thinking, processes, performances, and products; and reflect on learning throughout the learning cycle.

Instructional Procedures

Introduction

Introduce the topic by providing students with a firsthand experience of injustice. Invite everyone who is left-handed to the front of the class and give each left-handed person a piece of candy.

Afterward, have all students write for five minutes about what just occurred. Invite students to read their papers aloud, and record key words that arise from their own writing. Their own language anchors the students' ideas to the topic and helps set the stage for learning.

Discuss the issues that come up. Ask probing questions about the experience for students who are left-handed and those who are right-handed.

Discuss human rights and what this means to students. Ask them what they consider to be their basic human rights. Ask for examples, both historic and recent, when basic human rights have been denied to certain groups of people.

Build a Framework

Develop the concepts around the following terms:

- Discrimination
- Racism
- Prejudice
- Stereotype
- Intolerance

Provide some real-life examples, and as reinforcement, frame each word in a question and ask students to respond in their journals. For example, couch the word *prejudice* in a question such as, *How do blonde jokes encourage prejudice?* and have students reflect in writing.

Select excerpts from the recommended readings and Web sites that describe events and examples of social injustice and discrimination. Ask students to write a brief summary of each. Ensure that the students have adequate time to complete their summaries; make sure they capture the spirit of each event, not just the details. Afterward, divide the class into small groups and have each group discuss their summaries. As groups discuss their summaries, circulate through the room using the [Observation Checklist](#) to record thinking skills students are using. Have a spokesperson from each group present their conclusions and record prevailing themes on chart paper. Review the common elements of discrimination the class agreed upon. Ask students to write non-examples of discrimination. In other words, write how events would be different if prejudice, discrimination, or intolerance were taken out of the equation.

The Civil Rights Movement

Set the stage for a study of the civil rights movement with the video *The Fateful Decade: From Little Rock to the Civil Rights Bill*. Prior to showing the video, access the students' knowledge with a K-W-L group discussion. During the video,

have students record major events, dates, locations, and key individuals. After viewing the video, discuss the events portrayed in the video, and together create a civil rights timeline to hang in the room for future reference.

Use a variety of resources and methods to teach about seminal topics, such as [Jim Crow laws](#)*, the Montgomery bus boycott, the march on Washington, Little Rock, and the Freedom Riders.

Introduce the idea that history happens to ordinary people (sons, daughters, brothers, and grandparents). People did not get involved in the civil rights movement because it was glamorous or because they wanted to be heroes; they did it because they were tired of discrimination and prejudice and, in some instances, were initially just innocent bystanders. Have student groups study these individuals with the purpose of relating an individual's story to the rest of the class through the [Personal Stories Project](#). In this assignment, each group selects one person and researches the person's life, the challenges that the person faced, and the person's involvement in the civil rights movement. Then, with this information, the group presents their findings to the class using one of the following methods:

- Short skit that illustrates a crucial moment in the work and life of the individual
- Speech by the individual that focuses on what they wanted to accomplish and why
- Interview with questions and answers from the audience
- News report that includes interviews with different members of the community in which this person was trying to make changes
- Panel discussion in which panel members discuss and debate the individual's significance and how successful the individual was in improving the lives of people in the community

Have students complete the [Group and Self-Assessment](#) form.

History Doesn't Happen to Strangers

In this next part, students learn more about the history of racism in the United States and gain empathy by reading *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, by Christopher Paul Curtis. Ask students to read the front and back cover, the dedication, the information about the author, and the title of chapter one. Ask them to predict what the themes will be in the book and through whose eyes they will witness the events of the early 1960s.

Read the first chapter aloud and compare students' predictions about themes with the events in the beginning of the book.

Set the students to reading *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* in literature circles. (To learn more about implementing literature circles, purchase [Literature Circles](#)*, by Harvey Daniels or visit Seattle University's [Literature Circles Resource Center](#)*.)

Teaching ideas that correspond to this book can be found at Random House's [Teacher's Guide](#)*.

After reading the book, help students integrate their earlier studies with their reading by making a multimedia slideshow, [newspaper](#), or book titled *What*

America Was Like When the Watsons Went to Birmingham in 1963. This can be done in small groups. Provide the [Newspaper Rubric](#) to groups and review to help ensure students understand the assessment criteria. Newspapers should include articles that address the following:

- Reactions to the book *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*
- How African-Americans have struggled for social justice
- The factors that set the stage for the civil rights movement
- What the civil rights movement can teach us about addressing current social justice issues

As students work on this project, schedule conferences to assess their understanding and the writing process, and to allow for giving feedback, clarifying misunderstandings, or providing additional lessons if necessary.

Birmingham—The Past Meets the Present

Stage a mock trial of the last living defendant accused in the Baptist Church bombing, Thomas Blanton Jr. (Note that this case was recently concluded; therefore, you can share the real outcome with students following the mock trial.)

Select mock trial methods that work best for you from the following Web resources: [American Bar Association Mock Trial Resources](#)*, [Titanic Model Trial Site](#)*, and [Illinois 19th Circuit Court mock trial tutorial](#)*.

Have students take on roles that reflect different points of view, such as witnesses, prosecution and defense attorneys, families of the girls, reporters, and different citizens of the town (old, young, white, black, and so on).

Have students research their roles and write interpretations of the events from the points of view of their characters.

Get help from the local trial lawyer association in staging the mock trial in a real courtroom or practice courtroom at a local law school.

When finished, have students complete the [Mock Trial Reflection](#) sheet.

Prerequisite Skills

- Multimedia skills
- Experience in open-ended project learning activities

Differentiated Instruction

Resource Student

- Make modifications as dictated in the student's IEP
- Shorten assignments to core features
- Deliver instruction in a variety of ways, using models of acceptable work when possible
- Provide extra time for completing assignments
- Provide intermediary checkpoints throughout the duration of the unit

Gifted Student

- Support deeper and more extensive study and outcomes
- Allow the student to pursue related topics such as affirmative action and quota-based hiring

English Language Learner

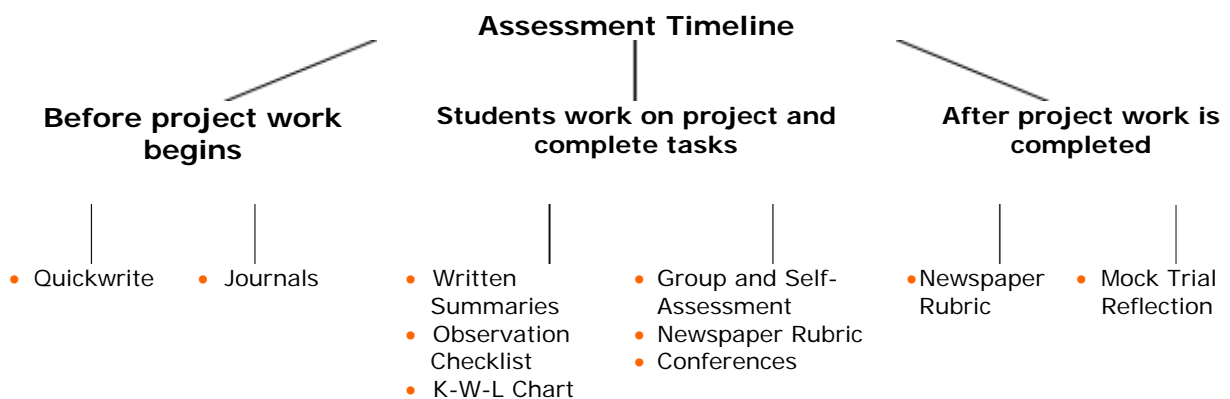
- Encourage support from common language speakers with greater English proficiency
- Consider having students research civil rights campaigns from their culture of origin
- Provide extra time for completing assignments
- Enlist support from parent helpers or teacher's aide

Credits

Anne Shroeder participated in the Intel® Teach Program, which resulted in this idea for a classroom project. A team of teachers expanded the plan into the example you see here.

THINGS YOU NEED (highlight box)

Assessment Plan



To determine readiness for the unit, review discussions, quickwrites, and journal entries and adjust instruction as necessary. Use an [observation checklist](#) to observe thinking skills as students discuss social injustice and discrimination issues.

Ask students to self-assess and peer-assess their personal stories assignment using the [Group and Self-Assessment](#) form. Assess the newspaper project with the [Newspaper Rubric](#). Have students self-assess their preparation for and participation in the mock trial using the [Mock Trial Reflection](#) sheet. Use this same sheet to assess these skills as well.

As a final assessment of learning to see what students now know that they did not know before, read excerpts from the [Civil Rights Act of 1964*](#), and ask students to respond to the following:

- *Are the rights guaranteed in the Civil Rights Act upheld today? If so, in what ways?*
- *What problems remain?*
- *What additional statements can you add to the Civil Rights Act to address problems that persist today?*

Compare these responses to the initial writings in students' journals to document growth.

Content Standards and Objectives

Targeted Content Standards and Benchmarks

Washington Essential Academic Learning Requirements

Social Studies: History Essential Academic Learning Requirements

Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping United States, world, and Washington State history

Understand and analyze historical time and chronology

- Using evidence for support, identify, analyze, and explain possible causal factors contributing to given historical events

Social Studies Skills: Essential Academic Learning Requirements

Inquiry and Information Skills

- Create a product that uses social studies content to support findings; present the product in an appropriate manner to a meaningful audience

Critical Thinking Skills

- Analyze and evaluate the impact of ideas, events, and/or people on groups, environments, economic systems, and/or subsequent events

Student Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Understand events within a historical context
- Become aware of the complexity of social problems in the United States
- Identify with individuals from a past era by writing and speaking from their points of view
- Understand the civil rights era of the 1960s by reading from a variety of historical fiction and expository texts

Resources

Materials and Resources

Printed Materials

- Curtis, C. (1995). *The Watsons go to Birmingham—1963*. New York: Delacorte.

- Kasher, S. (1996). *The civil rights movement: A photographic history, 1954-68*. New York: Abbeville Press.
- McKnight, G. (1998). *The last crusade: Martin Luther King Jr., the FBI, and the poor people's campaign*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Internet Resources

For the Teacher:

- The American Bar Association Mock Trial Resources
www.abanet.org/publiced/volunteer/youthmock.html*
An online guide for putting together a mock trial
- American Memory Project, Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ammemhome.html>*
Resource that can be used to find documents related to the civil rights movement by doing a search using "civil rights movement"
- Illinois 19th Circuit Court Mock Trial Resources
www.19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/bkshelf/resource/mt_conduct.htm*
A guide to conducting mock trials
- Titanic Trial Simulation
www.andersonkill.com/titanic/home.htm*
A model for conducting a mock trial
- Literature Circles
www.stenhouse.com/productcart/pc/viewPrd.asp?idcategory=0&idproduct=333*
Information about the book by Harvey Daniels
- Literature Circles Resource Center
<http://fac-staff.seattleu.edu/kschlnoe/LitCircles>*
Seattle University's online resource for setting up and conducting literature circles
- Random House Teacher's Guide
www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=044022800X&view=tg*
Ideas for teaching *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*

For Students

- In Memory of Four Little Girls
www.useekufind.com/peace/timeline2.htm*
A timeline of the investigation of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing
- See the Girls at Spartacus
www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAC16.htm*
Information about the girls killed at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing
- Birmingham Church Bombing Timeline
www.cnn.com/2000/LAW/05/17/bomb.timeline/index.html*
A timeline of the Birmingham bombing
- We Shall Overcome

www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights*

Historic places of the civil rights movement

- Jim Crow Laws

www.nps.gov/malu/documents/jim_crow_laws.htm*

Examples of Jim Crow laws

- Civil Rights Act of 1964

www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/civil_rights_act/civil_rights_act.html*

Excerpts from the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Other Resources

- *The Fateful Decade: From Little Rock to the Civil Rights Bill* (video)

www.films.com/Films_Home/Item.cfm/1/2609/ixs*

A 27-minute overview video that can be ordered online

Technology—Hardware

- Computers for Internet research and creating multimedia presentations
- Internet connection for conducting Internet research on the civil rights movement
- Television for viewing civil rights video(s)
- VCR or DVD player for viewing civil rights video(s)

Technology—Software

- Desktop publishing for developing civil rights newspaper
- Multimedia software for developing Web site or slideshow presentation about the civil rights movement