Everybody Has a Story….What is Yours?

Tasha Russell

Wagner Middle School

I'm writing for black people," she says, "in the same way that Tolstoy was not writing for me, a 14-year-old coloured girl from Lorain, Ohio. I don't have to apologise or consider myself limited because I don't [write about white people]
~Toni Morrison

Abstract

The purpose of this unit is to allow students to explore how critical race theory is being banned from being taught in middle and high schools. The students will also analyze and evaluate the need for critical race theory to be taught in middle and high school because America was built on slavery and every aspect of history in the United States exemplifies slavery as a part of building the country. The story of slavery needs to be told to embody those who have built this country and the impact that enslaved people have had on it. At the end of the unit, students will be able to understand the impact of what happens when a narrative does not share all its aspects and that everyone has a voice and a story to tell. Students will either share a personal experience through digital stories.
Keywords: critical race theory, digital stories, banned, student voice, personal narrative

Overview

The content of this unit will focus on expanding the knowledge of middle school students of how stories are published and how one gets to tell their story. The students will also gain an understanding about how history has been told and what has been left out in the narrative of the history of America. Students will construct meaning, analyze, and evaluate how stories are told and who holds the power in telling the story. According to Negussie (2001), we need to collect personal narratives of cultural experiences and indigeneous inherit information and equate it to scientific findings. Stories help us to make sense of the human experience (Drake, 2002). The students will learn what critical race theory is and why certain states do not want it to be taught in schools. According to Delgado and Stefanic (2012), the movement around critical race theory is a collective of advocates and intellectuals engrossed in learning and modifying the association educators have drawn between power, race, and racism. According to the New York Times, the origin of critical race theory is grounded in the graduate academic world. The term critical race theory was coined by a law professor named Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a law professor at the U.C.L.A. School of Law and Columbia Law School. The question that she poses to America,at present, is why the concern around the term. The interest in critical race theory has been encouraged by a group of conservative right wingers. Critical race theory begins with the idea that racism is expected in American civilization. It also includes an extensive perspective

substantive foundation that includes history, economics, sociology, anthropology, and narrative theory that enables its proponents to interrogate the impact racism has on situations, interest in self and the group self- and group-interest, as well as emotions and those who are unaware as well as the emotional literacy of those who are less aware of their racial privileged(Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). It deviates from conventional judicial scholarship by sometimes utilizing emphasizing the importance of storytelling (Landson-Billings, 1998). The basic tenets of critical race theory are that while race is largely understood as being socially constructed, racism is normalized so that, those considered to be racism is socially constructed, Black/people of colorBiPOC tend to are expected to serve the delight of white groups coined as the term "interest convergence", intersectionality, and the unique position that Black/people of color can speak as the voice for other Black/people of color. (https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory/Basic-tenets-of-critical-race-theory).

According to Education Week, as of January, 2021, there are forty-one states that have bills or laws to ban the teaching of critical race theory. The conflict springs from different conceptions of racism .(Education Week, 2021). Those who oppose the teaching of critical race theory and those who do not want to be seen as oppressors . Middle school educators who thrive in their environment understand that the curriculum omits issues related to privilege, racism, social justice, civil rights,oppression, and other issues that are often not given equal emphasis. Those teachers examine curricula that will provide examples of inclusiveness and anti-racist ideas/ concepts to promote definite and age appropriate discussions about race (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). This unit will examine how slavery has impacted American culture and provide reasons for why it is important to tell why the inclusion of slavery and the Middle Passage is essential to understanding American history. The students will also explore whether racism exists in America and how it is perceived among Americans. The students will create digital stories where students will be able to create their own story and persuade others about the importance of their story as an African American student.

Rationale

According to Lal & Shin (2015), digital storytelling is a creative, collective, skill based investigative system that includes narration, collaboration, and technology to promote the production of two to three minute video clips that combine pictures, audio and other sound featuring personal stories. Digital storytelling is used in learning, teaching or training, decision making, therapy, community growth, maintaining racial ancestry, and review in the area of qualitative studies to hear the voices of the participants (Khoshkesht, Nikbakht Nasrabadi, & Mardanian Dehkordi. 2020)

Introduction

Wagner Middle School is located in the West Oak Lane section of Philadelphia and serves over 500 children in 6th through 8th grade. All of the students attending are economically disadvantaged. The racial makeup of students in this school is: eighty-nine percentAfrican American, four percent Hispanic/Latino, one percentCaucasian, while six percent identify as Multi-Racial/other. The school participates in an extensive writing program during Black History Month and beyond. The issues raised in this curriculum unit are particularly important in our school because students' voices are often silenced and they do not usually hear about African American history in middle school.

Problem Statement

This unit is for middle school students in grade sixth through eighth grade. Middle school students often want to express themselves and be heard. They are often only focused on themselves and dealing with their peers. Middle school students are often not given the opportunity to voice their opinion about events that extend beyond their immediate circumstance. However, they often think the history taught in schools today is the truth about how America originated and has thrived over the course of its 247-year history. Students need to be aware that the story is often told by those who are in power yet everyone has a story to tell. Students need to tell their own story, allow it to be shared, and understand how their story adds to the entire story of a community.

Content Objectives

Students will be able to examine the rationales for why not teaching an inclusive version of American history and culture is located primarily in middle and high schools. We will endeavor to answer the question of what happens when students do not learn the real history of America. After learning about the politics underlying American history, students will be able to explain the importance of the concept of inclusion, to reflect on a personal experience, to retell a historical event, or to make an argument.

Essential Questions

1. What happens when you aren't allowed to tell your story?
2. What happens when you tell your story through your point of view?
3. How does your story get to wider audiences?

Questions to Consider:

1. What is critical race theory as originally defined by law professors ?
2. Why are conservative right wing people against teaching the full history of America?
3. Who is banning it and why?
4. What are the ramifications of not telling the real history of America?

Standards

ISTE

1.1 Empowered Learner

Students leverage technology to take an active role in choosing, achieving, and demonstrating competency in their learning goals, informed by the learning sciences.

1.2 Digital Citizen

Students recognize the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of living, learning and working in an interconnected digital world, and they act and model in ways that are safe, legal and ethical.

1.3 Knowledge Constructor

Students critically curate a variety of resources using digital tools to construct knowledge, produce creative artifacts and make meaningful learning experiences for themselves and others.

1.4 Innovative Designer

Students use a variety of technologies within a design process to identify and solve problems by creating new, useful or imaginative solutions.

1.5 Computational Thinker

Students develop and employ strategies for understanding and solving problems in ways that leverage the power of technological methods to develop and test solutions.

1.6 Creative Communicator

Students communicate clearly and express themselves creatively for a variety of purposes using the platforms, tools, styles, formats and digital media appropriate to their goals.

1.7 Global Collaborator

Students use digital tools to broaden their perspectives and enrich their learning by collaborating with others and working effectively in teams locally and globally.

ELA PA Standards 6-12

1.4 Writing Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

1.5 Speaking and Listening Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically, and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

Lesson One:

Read What is Critical Race Theory and Why is it Under Attack?
https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05

Facilitating an Effective Discussion

- Make a list of key points.
- Use a partner activity.
- Use a brainstorming activity.
- Pose an opening question and give students a few minutes to record an answer.
- Divide students into small groups to discuss a specific question or issue. Be sure to assign explicit questions and guidelines and give the groups a time limit to complete the exercise. Also ask them to select a recorder and/or a reporter who will report back to the entire discussion group.
- Create an inclusive discussion environment. at the beginning of term, use an icebreaker activity and ask students to introduce themselves and describe their interests and backgrounds so they can get to know one another
    - as the facilitator, you should also learn all of your students' names (using name cards may assist you and your students in accomplishing this task)
    - arrange the seating in the room, if possible, into a semicircle so that the group members can see each other
- Allow students to ask questions or share ideas in class anonymously, or without "speaking out" — circulate note cards for students to write questions or comments, or to answer your questions, perhaps anonymously, and collect and address them.
- Give students low-stakes opportunities to think and discuss content –
- Facilitate smaller discussions among students before you ask students to share with the entire class.
- Facilitate smaller activities before discussion and questions start, so that students have time and space to compose their thoughts.
- Use online resources and content management systems to extend class discussions.
- Have students take turns writing down questions and answers on whiteboards or on large flipchart paper, and then post the notes around the classroom for future

reference—keep them up all term – build running answers to pertinent and revisited questions.

- Positively reinforce student contributions.
- Use a "token system" to encourage discussion.
- Silence in the classroom is okay – it is actually good – and if you become comfortable with it, students will too.
- Limit your own involvement.
- Balance students' voices during the discussion. Here are some strategies for dealing with problem group members who can affect the level of student participation:
    - Discourage students who monopolize the discussion by implementing a structured activity that requires each group member to be involved, avoiding eye contact with him/her, assigning a specific role to the dominant student that limits participation (e.g., discussion recorder), or implementing time limits on individual contributions.
    - Draw quiet students into the discussion by posing non-threatening questions that don't require a detailed or correct response, assigning a small specific task to the student (e.g., obtaining information for next class), sitting next to him/her, or positively reinforcing contributions he/she does make.
    - Clarify confusing student contributions by asking the student to rephrase/explain the comment, paraphrasing the comment if you can interpret it, asking the student probing questions, or encouraging him/her to use concrete examples and metaphors.
- Keep the discussion focused.
- Repeat the key point of all comments or questions for the rest of the class, using your microphone if possible. For instance: "Jennifer just asked..."
- Take notes. Be sure to jot down key points that emerge from the discussion and use these for summarizing the session.
- Be alert for signs that the discussion is deteriorating. Indications that the discussion is breaking down include: subgroups engaging in private conversations, members not listening to each other and trying to force their ideas, excessive "nit-picking," and lack of participation. Changing the pace by introducing a new activity or question can jump-start the discussion.
- If students are having trouble communicating, avoid making remarks such as: “Slow down,” “Take a breath,” or “Relax.”
- Prevent the discussion from deteriorating into a heated argument.
- Bring closure to the discussion.
- Remember that not all students are comfortable with extended direct eye contact.
- Ask students to write a one-minute paper.
- Ask students to respond to specific questions about the discussion.

- Conduct your own informal evaluation of the discussion.

Lesson Two:

Read and Discuss Unpacking the Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh
https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf

Questions to consider:
1) What caught your attention or surprised you in this article?
2) Did anything on the list relate to your personal experiences?
3) Did anything in the excerpt raise questions for you?
4) What does McIntosh say is necessary to redesign social systems? What do you think of this?

Lesson Three:
Vocabulary
Sphinx
Soul
reign
Students can read and discuss
What if there were no Black people
https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/texts/what-if-there-were-no-black-people
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoNU2hoEC90

Lesson Three:

In response to the quote taken from "How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America" by Clinton Smith

> The history of slavery is the history of the United States. It was not peripheral to our founding; it was central to it. It is not irrelevant to our contemporary society; it created it. This history is in our soil, it is in our policies, and it must, too, be in our memories.

How the Word Is Passed focuses mostly on sites where slavery is remembered and misremembered.

Students will respond by answering What sites would you choose if the purpose of the book were to focus exclusively on resistance to slavery?

Lesson Four:

To explain how and why African cultures are present in American culture;

Using the following image from the African Burial Ground respond to the following questions:

The African Burial Ground National Monument is made of dark granite and inscribed with many symbols from around the world. Each symbol captures a meaning or value that revolves around concepts like death, change, and remembrance. The buildings behind it are government offices.

Questions for Photo 1: African Burial Ground National Monument, 2009.

1) Use the photograph to describe the African Burial Ground National Monument in your own words. Where are the symbols? What image do you see in the center of the memorial floor?

2) How did the Burial Ground site and New York City change between 1755 and 2009?Compare evidence from Photo 1 with what you learned from Map 1 and Reading 1.

3) Archeologists studied this place in the early 1990s because the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires historians and archeologists to study land that the government wants to develop. If there was no National Historic Preservation Act, what might this place look like today? Why?

https://www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/education/upload/Twhp-Lesson_AfricanBurialGroundNM2017.pdf

Lesson Five

Objective: Students will explain how and why African cultures are present in American culture.

Process:

1. Students will read the following passage:
   New York City in modern New York state is a crowded place. Instead of building out, city planners built up over the centuries. New streets and buildings are constructed on top of the old ones over the centuries since its founding. There is history beneath its surface. In1991, archeologists uncovered a cemetery of thousands of enslaved people in the middle of Lower Manhattan. They knew there was something important there, but they did not know they were about to uncover the oldest and largest urban cemetery for enslaved people of African descent. Dutch traders founded New Amsterdam, later called New York, in 1626. The Dutch used enslaved African labor to build it. One-third of the city's population was African or African American. Slavery continued when Great Britain seized the city in 1664 and renamed it New York. Enslaved Africans chopped down trees, tilled soil into farmland, built roads, buildings, and walls – including the wall in "Wall Street", a name for the famous business district in New York City today. Africans and their American descendants could not bury loved ones in the other cemeteries in the city. In the late 1600s, city planners

found a plot of land outside of city limits and created a segregated cemetery for enslaved residents. An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 men, women, and children were buried there in the 18th century as the population grew. The burial ground covered five city blocks when the cemetery closed in 1794. City planners turned the cemetery into plots for houses a year after it closed. They created level ground for houses by flattening hills and filling in holes with dirt. They piled 25 feet of soil on top of the human remains at the site. The soil helped to preserve the bodies over the years, but it also erased the cemetery from view. It was hidden under sidewalks, roads, and buildings. The area became a part of the new street grid system for planning Manhattan in the 19th century. The cemetery was invisible to the naked eye in the 20th century. The old "Negros Buriel Ground" became the site of New York's City Hall and courthouses. In the early 1990s, a federal agency wanted to construct an office building on the site. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires government construction projects to study the history of the place before they start building. So, archeologists examined the site and they discovered human remains from over 200 years ago. Between 1991 and 1992, archeologists excavated the bodies of 419 individuals. Half of these were children under the age of 12. In 1999, they excavated nine more graves from under a sidewalk. The bones provided evidence about the health of the enslaved. people in New York City, and the stress that slavery put on their bodies. Many were malnourished and died young. The graves also provide evidence for different religious and cultural practices tied to many different African societies. For example, archeologists identified glass beads, white shells, coins over eye sockets, and copper pins. In the Bakongo African tribe, white seashells symbolized immortality and water and allowed human spirits to stay afloat after death. Other tribes may have had other meanings for the same object. The different cultures represented at the burial ground shared similar beliefs in an afterlife. Scholars think some of the artifacts are thought to be placed at the graves to satisfy the needs of the spirits and encourage them to not haunt or torment the living. All the bodies were buried so they would face east, toward the African continent. People argued over what to do next and groups struggled for control after the discovery. They had different ideas about how to study, protect, and remember the people buried at the site. Some of the descendants wanted the archeologists to study the remains to learn about their past. Others did not want their ancestors' remains disturbed. In 1993, the U.S. Congress decided that the plans for the federal building should be changed to accommodate the site. Congress asked scholars at Howard University to lead research on the skeletal remains in Washington, DC. The University's archeologists brought descendants into the research process. They worked together to build a research design and a memorial for the deceased. The National Park Service listed the African Burial Ground on the National Register for Historic Places that same year. In 2006, the Secretary of the Interior designated the site as a National Historic Landmark. The National Park Service opened the African Burial Ground National Monument to the public on October 5, 2007. The opening ceremony was filled with prayers, songs, dances, and speeches. 419 drummers performed to honor the 419

individuals discovered. The memorial includes a large monument to the people buried there. The monument is made of dark granite and inscribed with symbols from African cultures. It is now a solemn space in the middle of a bustling city to reflect on the past.

2. Respond to the passage.
   Questions for Reading 1: “Rediscovering the African Burial Ground”

   1) Who was buried at the African Burial Ground? What did archeologists learn from this discovery?
   2) Name one kind of cultural or religious object found at the Burial Ground. What does this item suggest about the person buried with it?
   3) How was the African Burial Ground lost? Describe how New York City changed over 200 years. Why did it change?
   4) Imagine your ancestors’ lost graves were uncovered at a construction site today. Would you want archeologists to study them in a lab? Why or why not? How would you want them to be remembered?

Lesson Six

Objective/ Overview

Warm-up:

1. The signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 is often presented as the foundational event of U.S. history. Referring to the text of the Declaration of Independence, answer the following questions as a class:

- What are the values stated in the Declaration of Independence?
- In what ways can you see those values working in contemporary U.S. society? In what ways can you see them failing?
- How has the interpretation of those values changed over time? Who is responsible for creating those changes?

Read the Excerpt:

https://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/pdf_for_lesson_essay_excerpt_0.pdf

https://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/printable_pdf_exploring_the_idea_of_america_by_nikole_hannah-jones_1.pdf

Lesson Seven

Objective: Students will learn how to create a digital story and create a personal narrative through a digital story or tell the story about why it is important to learn about African American history.

What is Digital Storytelling?

Digital storytelling is something anyone can do no matter what level of experience they have telling stories or using technology. It allows people to share their stories of recovery in creative ways. In sharing their own messages of healing, storytellers can support the recovery and healing of others.

Process:

1. Develop an Idea- Brainstorming/Researching/ Interviewing Topics & People
2. Plan-Set a timeline/define a purpose/ identify audiences/think about access/decide on your viewing audience
3. Outline an Idea-Practice Writing exercises/ Practice telling your story/Write the Beginning/Middle/End of a Story
4. StoryBoard-Write out the frames for how your story will be told
5. Film/Record- film yourself and your storyteller or a storyteller and an interviewer/ Add audio and visual parts
6. Finish- Edit your video
7. Publish/Share- Figure out where your video will be shown and what audience will/find ways to engage your audience/
8. Review- Reflect on what worked and what didn't work and ways to have your story told and share with the public

Resources/Appendix

Basic tenets of critical race theory
https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory/Basic-tenets-of-critical-race-theory

Bishop, P. A., & Harrison, L. M. (2021). *The successful middle school: This we believe*. Association for Middle Level Education.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory : an introduction.* 2nd ed. New York: New York University Press.

Drake E. E. (2002). The power of story. *The Journal of perinatal education*, *11*(2), ix–xi. https://doi.org/10.1624/105812402X88650

Facilitating Effective Discussions. https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/alternatives-lecturing/discussions/facilitating-effective-discussions

Fortin, J. (2021, November 8). *Critical Race Theory: A Brief History*. Retrieved June 25, 2022, from https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-critical-race-theory.html.

How the Word Is Passed: Discussion Questions, Writing Prompts, and Teaching Ideas https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/how-the-word-is-passed-teaching-ideas/

How the word is passed: a reckoning with the history of slavery across america

SMITH - LITTLE, BROWN - 2022

Khoshkesht, S., Nikbakht Nasrabadi, A., & Mardanian Dehkordi, L. (2020). Digital Storytelling: The New Arts-Based Research Method. *Iranian journal of public health*, *49*(7), 1395–1396. https://doi.org/10.18502/ijph.v49i7.3602

Lal S, Donnelly C, Shin J. (2015). Digital storytelling: an innovative tool for practice, education, and research. *Occup Ther Health Care*, 29(1):54–62.

Ladson-Billings, Glora (1998) Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11:1, 7-24, DOI: 10.1080/095183998236863

Morrison, Toni https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/25/toni-morrison-books-interview-god-help-the-child

Negussie B. Cultural wisdom, traditional inherited knowledge, and modern science: Gathering the global stories of nurses. *Journal of Nursing Education.* 2001;40(5):195–196.
Share your Story

https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tacs/samhsa...

Teaching with Historic Places U.S. Department ... - National Park Service

National Park Service 1 Teaching with Historic Places . U.S. Department of the Interior . Discover the African Burial Ground National Monument. Discover the African Burial Ground National Monument: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places . Credit: National Park Service photographs. Overlay map courtesy Library of Congress.

https://www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/education/upload/Twhp-Lesson_AfricanBurialGroundNM2017.pdf

What if there were no Black people

https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/texts/what-if-there-were-no-black-people

What is critical race theory? (2021). *Education Week*, *40*(36), 18-18.