

Introduction to Lesson Plan – “Most Southern Place,” July 2015

Because of the “Most Southern Place” workshop, I plan to add a more comprehensive civil rights unit to my AP English Language and Composition class. In that class, I regularly include two texts that center on the experiences of African-Americans: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and Rebecca Skloot’s *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Douglass’s text conveys a firsthand account of an American slave from the 1800’s, and Skloot’s delves into the medical treatment of a young African-American woman, Henrietta Lacks, suffering from cancer in the 1940’s. By investigating the treatment and legacy of Lacks, Skloot constructs an overview of the limited medical services and civil rights given blacks. I include Douglass’s book near the beginning of the year to augment the AP US History teacher’s curriculum, and I include Skloot’s near the middle of the year to augment the AP Biology teacher’s. Because of the powerful epiphany (actually, epiphanies) I experienced in the “Most Southern Place” Workshop, I am making a major change to my use of these texts.

At the conclusion of Douglass’s text, I will incorporate a group research assignment that centers on key Civil Rights Movement people and events (many of which are directly tied to the Mississippi Delta). The draft assignment sheet is on the next page. Following student presentations, we will read Skloot’s text. At the conclusion of that book, we will consider the current state of equality throughout the US, with a specific focus on African-Americans.

Some students will be disinclined to engage in this study. My small Ogden, Utah, school of about 400 students is primarily white; we have only a handful of African-Americans, and about 25% of our students are Hispanic. The student body is roughly 50% free/reduced lunch. It is difficult for many of our students to feel concerned about issues that seem unconnected to their lives, and even the recent past seems distant: for example, to them 9/11 is a part of ancient history. For those students, anything that happens outside their school or town is foreign, unless, perhaps, it involves a favorite celebrity. Many other more academically-engaged students who follow current events closely and/or are interested in history seem unsympathetic to ongoing discussions about blacks’ civil rights – they believe that the issue was dealt with decades ago and blacks now enjoy all the rights and benefits they do. I am leaving the “Most Southern Place” workshop more committed to finding articles and data on current race issues to help my students become more aware of the disparities that still exist, and I believe that a more thorough look at the history of civil rights will produce a good platform for greater understanding.

The draft assignment sheet is my initial approach to this project. I will refine it after its first implementation, using both feedback from my students and my increasing knowledge. I am committed to being a lifelong student of civil rights issues. I left the NEH workshop with a long list of books to read and documentaries to watch. Additionally, I hope to come back to the Delta soon, perhaps next summer, and bring one of my granddaughters along. This workshop has taught me a great deal about the background of what I believe is one of our nation’s greatest issues, the lack of equity among races, and about what I’ve always believed was one of our greatest treasures, the cultural contributions of African-Americans. I want to become more knowledgeable, and I want to be effective in introducing my students to the richness and complexity of all that is wrapped up in the Mississippi Delta.

Group Project – Civil Rights

Culminating project for *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass presents a first-hand account of what it was like to be an American slave. Published in 1845, the text gave many northern readers at that time their first realistic portrayal of slavery. However, the book did not result in immediate action: the Emancipation Proclamation was not issued until 17 years later; the Constitutional amendment outlawing slavery was not ratified for three years after that. And it took the bloodiest war in US history to bring about those two steps.

The abolishment of slavery did not produce equality for blacks. Jim Crow laws produced harsh living conditions for African-Americans, and even the overthrow of those laws did not result in true civil rights. To gain a better appreciation of the civil rights abuses that African-Americans have experienced as well as key events in the civil rights movement, your group will examine an assigned topic and share your findings with the class.

Group 1 – Sharecropping

Group 2 – The Great Migration (of blacks to the north from the south)

Group 3 – Scottsboro Boys Trial

Group 4 – Brown vs the Board of Education

Group 5 – Citizens' Councils (resistance movement prompted by school desegregation)

Group 6 – Emmett Till

Group 7 – Freedom Riders

Group 8 – Fannie Lou Hamer

Your presentation to the class must include the following:

- An effective Power Point presentation (a rubric will be provided)
- An effective note-taking guide
- Extra credit: You can show an appropriate video clip (not longer than 5 minutes)

Make sure you include the following in your group presentation:

- ✓ What was the timeframe?
- ✓ What exactly was involved? (What were the issues, who was involved, what is the significance of this event/person?)
- ✓ What was media coverage like at the time? (Look at primary sources, and include multiple views on the topic: how was this depicted in the black press? By the local white press? National press? By the international press?)
- ✓ What current situations, in the US or another country, are similar to the topic?