

Race in the Classroom

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Introduction

I have the honor of working at Oberle Elementary School in Bear, Delaware. Oberle Elementary School is a Title I Public Elementary School in Christina School District, located in Bear, Delaware. There are 657 students enrolled at Oberle, representing a diverse community of learners. The school represents a diverse mixture of ethnicities, including 55% Hispanic students and 28% African American students. At Oberle, 56% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The students at Oberle have access to all the academic resources required for an Elementary school in Delaware. I am a Kindergarten Teacher at Oberle. I have developed this unit to cover Reading and Social Studies standards for kindergarteners.

In addition, Oberle is a “Leader in Me” school. The school follows Stephen Covey’s Seven Habits of Happy Kids which is a variation of his Seven Habits for Highly Effective People. The habits are designed to inspire students to become effective students and leaders. The “Leader in Me” program gives teachers and students the tools to become leaders in the school and classroom. The program teaches students how to prepare for success in their academic life as well as in their personal life. The teachers spend the first 8 days of school introducing the students to the 7 habits: Be Proactive, Begin with the End in Mind, Put First Things First, Think Win-Win, Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood, Synergize, and Sharpen the Saw. The teachers continue the learning of each habit throughout the year focusing on a single habit each month. Teachers recognize two outstanding students each month that are living the month’s habit.

As a fully inclusive school, students of different ability levels are in my classroom, so I must ensure that all my lessons can be easily differentiated. The students are given different opportunities to apply their skills based on their abilities. This unit will provide the students with different learning strategies including hands-on demonstrations and team building activities.

The areas of struggle for Oberle are typical. The largest struggle is lack of funding. Another struggle is parental participation. Since more than half of our students are ESL (English as a Second Language Learner) and their parents or families often do not speak English either, engagement with the school community can be challenging.

This unit incorporates Common Core Standards, and Delaware State Standards for Social Studies. This unit will allow me to cover multiple standards and apply the skills

into real world applications. This unit will enhance and serve as a supplement to the current curriculum required in Christina School District.

Rationale

This unit is designed to integrate social studies concepts with the reading standards that are required for all teachers to use in their classroom. By using these standards, it creates a cross-curricular unit plan. With little to no specific instruction around our social studies curriculum, this will create a true cross-curricular unit for Kindergarten. This unit will create a curriculum that has never been available for our students. The unit will incorporate activities for the students as well as assessments that will benefit the students in kindergarten.

The goal for this unit is to create an engaging experience for the students that not only incorporates basic writing and reading skills as well as develop critical thinking skills. This unit will include scaffolding as the students' progress which will allow the students to learn on their level.

This unit will also lead the continuous education of the students and staff in my classroom about culture, heritage and race. The displays in my classroom will be reflective of the lessons covered. In addition, I plan to make sure this unit helps to encourage our school librarian to incorporate more culturally inclusive and allow students to see themselves in the stories we read. I will provide the librarian with lists of texts that will help to create this environment.

This unit will be taught at the beginning of the school year when we spend the time to get to know each other and learn about the classroom culture. We will have focused readings about different races and cultures and how the world around us (specifically in our homes and schools) impact our existence in the larger world. Additional lessons may be added throughout the year to encourage students to continue to apply the skills we learned at the beginning of the year.

Enduring Understanding

Students will understand walk away from the lessons with knowledge of the vocabulary that is introduced and taught in the unit. It is important that students learn the vocabulary to be able to take the knowledge and apply it into their personal lives. The students will also understand the value of diversity in our society. This will be taught by first understanding the diversity in our classroom and learning why diversity is so important and special. The last item I'd like for student to understand when we complete this unit is that there are both rewards and challenges of embracing diversity and equality. I want the students to understand why embracing diversity and equality makes society a better

place. They will learn that embracing it in our classroom changes how we all learn and work together, and they will be able to apply those skills outside of the classroom as well.

Content Objectives

With the completion of this unit, students will be able to apply what they have learned to their life in school as well as outside of school. Students will be able to explain how working together with different cultures helps us to be better people. They will understand that everyone is different and that it is ok. They will be able to demonstrate how the differences make us each unique and an important part of society. They will also be able to explain who they are, their own identity and how it impacts the classroom and the rest of society.

Background Knowledge

Student Prior Knowledge

This may be very limited when it comes to the students' prior knowledge because the students are only 5 years old. However, with the diversity in the area my students live in, they will have some knowledge about how racism affects them and their family.

Many of my students will be able to talk about their culture and their families which is what our unit will be focused on. My students love to share different events in their life that relate to their culture which will allow us to have an open dialogue about each other. The students all live close together so they will also be able to discuss the community and how differences of the community make it stronger. The students will be able to discuss their identity as they know it.

Parental Impact

Race and culture are introduced to students from birth. Their parents have the greatest impact on their knowledge and acceptance of their culture, race and sex. How a person sees themselves starts in the home and continues as they begin to become an active part of society. As children make their way into school, the knowledge their parents have equipped them with regarding culture and race will lead them through the rest of their life.

In addition, the parents of my students will be able to help contribute to these lessons throughout the year. I will ask the parents to be part of our heritage, culture and race lessons. They can present about their culture or heritage or they can help to connect with members of the community that would be able to help with these lessons.

Teacher Background Knowledge

Beginnings of Racism

Knowing that most of knowledge my students come into my classroom with stems from what they are or are not educated in their home. I must start by ensuring that I have am equipped with the knowledge to expand my students' knowledge. My researched started with defining and learning about the history of racism.

Webster's dictionary defines race as "a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits." Webster's dictionary defines racism as "a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race." While Ibram Kendi in Stamped from the Beginning says "My definition of a racist idea is a simple one: it is any concept that regards one racial group as inferior or superior to another racial group in any way. I define anti-Black racist ideas- the subject of this book- as any idea suggesting that Black people, or any group of Black people, are inferior in any way to another racial group."¹

The term race was defined as a group, type of people in the 16th century. Race was not considered a fixed identity; it was possible to change and adapt. Classification was used to label civilization status. For example, free or slave or Christian, Jew or Muslim. Skin color was only one of the categories which was explained based on climate, exposure to sun. The thought was that black people could become less black if they spent many generations in other climates. Color was not considered part of the status because of this belief. The theories of monogenesis, defined as the theory that humans are all descended from a single pair of ancestors, helped to make it difficult to see Africans or Amerindians as subhuman.

Racist ideas stemmed from different points of view. As early as 1453, the publication of The Chronicles of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea by Gomes Eanes de Zurara laid out some of the first anti-Black racist ideas. In addition, in 1492, Columbus used the theory of negroes da terra (Blacks from land) to pass along the racial construction of African people to Native Americans. In 1630, after the arrival of African enslaved people, came the first judicial decision dictating punishment for the White man who was caught "lying with a negro".² With the influx of racist ideals, sexist ideals also emerged and are codified. As the settlement of the Americas, you could find assimilationists who believed in a monogenesis or a single human race. You would also find segregationists who believed in a polygenesis, the hypothetical origination of a race or species from several independent stocks, world.

Richard Baxter wrote A Christian Directory in 1664-1665 which dictated that it was important for Christians to save the souls of enslaved peoples as they are bought. The Puritan colonists believed that they were the chosen people and it was imperative to

religiously instruct all slaves and children or “the inferiors”. Leading the belief that the souls of African people were white and good.

Slavery

In 1772, the Virginia House of Burgesses asked King George III to stop importation of slaves for humanitarian, public safety and political economy. Although that didn't work, Virginia continued to look for ways to prevent the importation. In 1774, King George vetoed anti-slave trade legislation. Thomas Jefferson then called for a break from England because he saw this veto as King George's “shameful abuse of power”. In “A Summary View of the Rights of British America”, Thomas Jefferson said, “The abolition of domestic slavery is the great object of desire in those colonies, where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state. But previous to the enfranchisement of the slaves we have, it is necessary to exclude all further importations from Africa; yet our repeated attempts to effect this by prohibitions, and by imposing duties which might amount to a prohibition, have been hitherto defeated by his majesty's negative: Thus preferring the immediate advantages of a few African corsairs to the lasting interests of the American states, and to the rights of human nature, deeply wounded by this infamous practice.” In 1776, Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence charges King George III with perpetuating the slave trade. Jefferson submitted his plan for the new government which ensured that new states had to abolish slavery by 1800. This plan was rejected. Jefferson blamed the south for the rejection of his plan. Eventually, the U.S. Constitution would ban federal action against the international slave trade for twenty years. During all the years of debate, Vermont and Massachusetts abolished slavery in 1777 and 1783 respectively. Although slavery still existed in Massachusetts the judicial decision prevented the state from supporting slavery. Many other states joined Vermont and Massachusetts in the abolish of slavery: Pennsylvania (1780), Rhode Island (1784), Connecticut (1784), New Hampshire (1788-89), New York (1799), Ohio (1802), New Jersey (1804), Indiana (1816), and Illinois (1818). Although the legal status of the African Americans varied from state to state in the North.

When we speak about slavery, we can not leave out the Abolitionists. Many saw slavery as a blemish on American society and a huge blockade towards progress. It came from middle-class who were already look towards reforms in the prisons, education, equality for women, government and services for the poor. The Abolitionists believed that they had the moral grounds to fight slavery. They cited the Declaration of Independence which states that all people are created equal and the bible as it speaks of equality. There were protests based on the denial of political and civil rights of blacks. Since the Northern States had outlawed slavery or set out a gradual emancipation, there was concern that the south was gaining power and trying to push north of the Missouri Compromise.

Many tried to convince the South to free their slaves. Benjamin Lundy suggested freeing the Southern slaves and investigated the possible colonization in Canada or Haiti with freed slaves. The American Colonization Society suggested that freed slaves be taken back to Africa where they founded a colony in Liberia. David Walker, born to freed slaves, published a pamphlet telling African Americans to use violence, if necessary, to secure their freedom.

Frederick Douglass, well known for being an escaped slave, learned to read and write and mastered a trade while a slave. He earned money from his lectures and writing, which allowed him to buy his own freedom legally. Douglass believed that freedom meant not only emancipation but also full economic and social equality. Although he worked with radical Abolitionists, he decided to move away from the radical behavior and try to solve the problem of slavery working to amend the constitution and working inside the system.

William Lloyd Garrison would prove to hold opposite views than Douglass. Garrison believed in the immediate emancipation of slaves and didn't care about the potential political, social, or economic consequences. Garrison didn't feel like abolitionists should continue down the same paths that had already failed. He had seen compromises fail so he was ready to see the destruction of the Union to gain his ends. Garrison published "The Liberator" which became a key newspaper for Abolitionists. It was considered extremely controversial and was banned in the South. It set out reasons for abolition in a graphic manner. Garrison had many contributions to the abolitionist movement. He opened new views on the abolition. He saw abolition as a revolution not a reform movement. He also believes that true racial equality would lead to full justice for African Americans.

Post Slavery

With the passage of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the constitution, African Americans were expecting all the rights of citizenship. Specifically, the African American males, were expected to receive the right to vote which was stated in the 15th Amendment. The 15th Amendment stated, "The right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."³ The ratification of the fifteenth amendment brought about the evolution of the Jim Crow South. The goal was to ensure that no African Americans could vote in the south. They used grandfather clauses, poll taxes, literacy tests, pressure, fear and intimidation to prevent them from attempting to vote.

One African American that many of us have been introduced to is Booker T. Washington. Mr. Washington believed that black people should work to gain economic security before equal rights.⁴ He also believed that black people will have to earn

equality. He was responsible for developing programs for job training and vocational skills at Tuskegee Institute. He would ask whites to give job opportunities to black people. He was very popular amongst white leaders in both the North and the South. However, he was unpopular with black leaders.

While Washington believed that black people must earn equality, W.E.B. DuBois did not believe that. He strongly opposed Washington's tolerance for segregation. DuBois demanded immediate equality for all black people. He believed that black students should get a classical education. He also felt that it was wrong to expect citizens to earn their rights. W.E.B. DuBois along with other black leaders organized the Niagara Movement organization that led to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Mr. DuBois continued his life in the political arena running for senate in 1951 but it was short lived as he was under investigation by the F.B.I because of his beliefs.

Racial Identity

Janet Helms developed a White Racial Identity Model. It was considered radical and created for people who identify as white. Her model is broken into six statuses. In the first status, contact, the individual sees racial differences but do not see it as relevant. They consider themselves "colorblind" or that we are all the same under our skin. There is no conscious demonstration of racism here. Once a person is confronted with real world experiences that exposes their white privilege they may move on to the next status, disintegration. In disintegration, once confronted with these feelings of privilege, the person might feel guilt and shame. This may also lead the person to a moment of acknowledgement. If they continue to feel the guilt, they often will move onto reintegration. Here they may retreat to what is comfortable and acceptable to their own race group. Once in reintegration, the person may begin to think that they have the privileges because they deserve them and are in some way superior to minority groups. They often either passively or actively support white superiority. If they can fight these feelings, they may find themselves in Pseudoindependence status where they may acknowledge some existence of racism. They may feel that Whites do not deserve privilege. They look to people of color, not themselves, to confront and uncover racism. In the next stage, Immersion/Emersion, the person makes a genuine attempt to connect his/her own white-identity and being a non-racist. Exploring their own culture and discovering what it means to be white in a diverse society. This stage is often accompanied by deep need for understanding and connecting with other Whites who deal with issues of racism. Finally, Autonomy is reached when the individual has a clear understanding of their white racial identity and become an active anti-racist. This identity development model is cyclical. You can achieve one level and then return to a previous level because of something that could happen in your life.

Teaching Strategies

This unit is designed to incorporate the social studies curriculum regarding civics, history and geography. In addition, the ELA curriculum regarding the connection between people, events or pieces of information. The social studies curriculum allows the students to focus on community. With the focus on community, I thought this would be the perfect way to connect the students to each other.

This unit will use many different teaching strategies. First, I think that it is important to use think-pair-share or stand up-hand up-pair up. As I introduce several different concepts with regards to race and culture that the students must work with their classmates to discuss the topic. The students will be asked to think about several concepts that they may have very limited knowledge of, and these strategies will allow the students to share the knowledge that they do have. It will also allow them to share with each what question that they may have regarding the subject or share their concerns for studying the subject.

Another strategy I will be using for this unit is learning stations. The students will work in cooperative groups to learn about the different cultures that in our classroom. The learning stations will allow the students to learn about the different cultures. There will be one station that will be direct teaching from me. The other stations will be hands on activities that allow the students to have a stronger understanding of cultures and race. The students will rotate throughout the classroom. Together the students will discover each cultures signature food, traditional clothing, and language.

Classroom Activities

Vocabulary

Throughout the unit, I will introduce vocabulary for the students to know so that they understand words that will be used frequently throughout the unit. Vocabulary will be the first five to ten minutes of each lesson. Each of the words will be an important part of the unit so I will use the definitions frequently and apply the use of the word as frequently as possible. The words I specifically will want the students to know are culture, heritage, diversity, self-identity and community. There may additional words that will be added to this list as I am going through the unit to ensure that words that the students are unfamiliar with and are important to this unit are discussed for complete understanding. In addition, I will make sure that the students have a visual dictionary for the words that will posted in the classroom as well as in their writing folders for use when needed. The students will be able to use the dictionary when they are working on writing or brainstorming.

Read Aloud

One activity that I will try to continue throughout the entire year is reading to my students about different cultures. This unit allows for me to read stories that tell of fictional characters stories about race and culture. A good example for this subject is Get Ready for Gabi by Marisa Montes. I would provide additional choices such as Nikki & Deja by Karen English. This activity could happen every day or on select days that would work in the classroom. I would read every day to the students and throughout the year on these subjects because it links to our social studies units. In addition, I'd like to incorporate as many of these books into my whole group reading during ELA. If I am able to include this type of texts into the block, I would also be able to incorporate reading response prompts that would allow my students to put themselves in the mindset of the main character or to reflect on the conflicts presented in the texts. In addition, I will also read chapter books to my students at the end of the day. I've found that reading stories to my students at the end of the day allows students to refocus themselves prior to leaving school. The length of this activity will vary based on your choice of books and requirements in your school or district.

Brainstorming

This lesson will take between three to five days. I will lead a discussion with the students about what makes them unique. I will ask the students to describe themselves. First asking students to talk to their partner(s), then to the class. My students will be asked to share about their classmate to assist them with their listening skills. My hope is that the conversation will naturally lead us towards hair color, eye color, and skin color. I will then guide the discussion to also include traditions in their homes, languages spoken at home, and other items about their life outside of school. This activity will be led by the student's suggestions and thoughts; however, I will redirect as necessary for the students to stay on focus. I believe that the discussion will also include their likes and dislikes of colors, foods, games and other items that students might mention. The initial brainstorming will lead us into reading some books that will help the students understanding. We will use books like Same, Same but Different by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw and What do you Celebrate? by Whitney Stewart to help facilitate the discussion or expand the discussion. These stories may lead the students to discover more about themselves and their classmates. These stories and similar stories will allow the students to get more exposure to different cultures, heritages and races. If this book is not available to you, feel free to use a book that helps the students relate to different cultures. After reading the story, I ask students to brainstorm additional things that make people in this world unique. I list the items on chart paper or SmartBoard as suggestions are made. I will continue to read different stories to the class to keep the discussion active for the entire year to ensure the students understand the importance of their uniqueness and how it contributes to our little community in the classroom, our larger community at school and the even larger community outside of school.

Learning Stations

First, this activity will require quite a bit of planning to be able to do it effectively. However, I think this activity will allow the students to become active learners and keep their interest. This activity would occur several times, if possible, for the students to explore in depth different cultures and the heritage of different people. There would be several stations set up through out the room. One station would be a teacher led table where students would learn about the specific culture's history. Another station the students would watch videos about the culture. Another station would be led by a community member familiar with culture would discuss food that is specific to that culture. At this station, there would be an opportunity for students to taste the food and participate in the making of the food. Students would have one station to draw a picture of the dressing for the culture using examples provided. Additional stations may be set up depending on the culture or availability of information and community members willing to assist with the stations. This activity may take between sixty and ninety minutes depending on the number of stations. It may also be spread over several days if necessary.

Guests

As an addition to the activities that I have already included, I will offer several opportunities for community members to come into my classroom to share their knowledge and allow the students to ask questions. My first thought is to turn to the parents of my students as well as staff members in the building. I would use the resources available to me to find other community members to come into the classroom to share about their own heritage. I will read out to the other schools to see if they have other resources for bringing in members of different cultural groups to come into the classroom. I think this process is important because it will bring attention to the unit we are teaching and allow other teachers to latch onto the lessons. Each of the visitor will come during different times throughout the unit. The guests that decide to come in will be given 15-20 minutes to present depending on the type of presentation. The students will listen to their presentations. After the presentation, the students ask each visitor questions about their culture and heritage. Since we are a "Leader in Me" School, exposing the students to different cultures and heritage allows the students to become stronger leaders in society. I'd love to turn these presentations into school wide presentations to allow all the students in my school an opportunity to be exposed to different heritage and cultures.

Linking Culture to Lessons

As we move forward throughout the year, I will tie culture lessons into our everyday lessons as often as possible. My goal would to incorporate this at least once a month and not always tying it into a major holiday. For instance, the students and I would explore "a day in the life..." of cultures we discover throughout the unit. We could also look at holidays such as Thanksgiving, Winter Holidays, Valentine's Day, and similar days, we will spend time looking at how other cultures celebrate these types of occasions and how

they compare to our celebration in the United States. The goal would be able to have continuous discussions around recognizing and celebrating the similarities and differences we have with other cultures.

Resources

Student Resources

English, Karen. 2007. *Nikki and Deja Series*. Clarion Books.

This series is a good read aloud for the students to hear about another culture.

Kostecki-Shaw, Jenny Sue. 2011. *Same, Same but Different*. New York, NY. Henry Holt & Co.

This is a good book to use to help students start to identify the similarities and differences between each other.

Montes, Marisa. 2003. *Get Ready for Gabi Series*. New York, NY. Scholastic Inc.

This series is a good read aloud for the students to hear about another culture.

Stewart, Whitney. 2019. *What do you Celebrate?: Holidays and Festivals Around the World*. New York, NY. Sterling Children's Books.

This book is a good choice for exposing students to different holidays around the world.

Bibliography

Brown, Kefferlyn D., and Anthony L. Brown. 2011. "Teaching K-8 Students about Race: African Americans, Racism, and the Struggle for Social Justice in the U.S." *Multicultural Education* 19 (1): 9-13.

This Article is a good resource to use when looking for background knowledge while teaching this unit.

Causey, Virginia E, Christine D. Thomas, and Beverly J. Armento. 2000. "Cultural Diversity is Basically a Foreign Term to Me: The Challenges of Diversity for Preservice Teacher Education." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 16 (1): 33-45. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(99\)00039-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(99)00039-6).

This Article is good look at how challenging it is for teachers to learn how to teach diversity in the current education setting for preservice teachers.

Emdin, Christopher. 2017 *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education*. Beacon Press

This is another good resource for teachers to additional background on teaching diversity in the classroom.

Helms, Janet E. 1992. *A Race Is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White Persons in Your Life*. San Diego; Cognella.

This is a resource that could be used to have additional knowledge for teaching this unit.

Kendi, Ibram X. 2017. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. New York, NY; Bold Type Books.

This is an excellent resource on the history of racism which will give you a lot of knowledge and help you to be able to answer most questions you may get.

Putnam, JoAnne W. 1993. *Cooperative Learning and Strategies for Inclusion: Celebrating Diversity in the Classroom. Children, You & Change: Sociocultural Prospectives*. Paul H.

This is a resource on diversity in the classroom. It will give you additional information for this unit.

Washington, Booker T. 1919. *Up from Slavery*. United Kingdom: Doubleday.

This book will give additional information regarding the history of racism in the United States.

Appendix 1

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.3 With prompting and support, describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.9 With prompting and support, identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic (e.g., in illustrations, descriptions, or procedures).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.2 Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.8 With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.3 Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.

Delaware State Standards for Social Studies

K-3a: Students will demonstrate the skills necessary for participating in a group, including defining an objective, dividing responsibilities, and working cooperatively.

Notes

¹ Kendi, Ibram X. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. New York, NY: Bold Type Books, 2017, 5.

² Kendi. *Stamped*, 39.

³ U.S. Const. amend. XV.

⁴ Washington, Booker T. *Up from Slavery*. United Kingdom: Doubleday, 1919.