



“Freedom Schools”: Exploring Racism, Tolerance, and Prejudice

by Kimberly Palmer, 2014 CTI Fellow
Ridge Road Middle School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
8th Grade Language Arts

Keywords: Racism, Tolerance, Prejudice, Freedom Schools, Blacks, Whites, Mississippi

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: This unit focuses on the various events and ideas that shaped the integration of schools in the U.S. history that is taught in U.S. schools. Specifically, the texts in this unit explore events of racism, tolerance, and prejudice towards African-Americans during the 1960s. Students will read texts that take place during the events of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project and the integration process. They will see how hard people fought to go to school, something many take for granted now. In order to complete this unit successfully, students will need to have a firm grasp on how to extract the central idea and support their claims and ideas with textual evidence. The activities in the unit will ask students to analyze texts and make connections among details, ideas, and events. The goal of the unit is to challenge preconceived notions made about this precious time in U.S. history. Students will study picture books (illustrations; content), do close readings, make connections, and analyze ideas throughout the unit. Lastly, the culminating activity will require students to choose, analyze and argue which event during this time in history was the most pivotal by creating a digital/media presentation of their argument.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 115 students in 8th grade Language Arts.

I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.

“Freedom Schools”: Exploring Racism, Tolerance, and Prejudice

Kimberly Palmer

Introduction: We are Freedom School

Everyone has his or her own ideas of what occurred in the 1960s with racism, due to educational exposure of some sort. In school, this time in U.S. history is briefly covered in one class or another, in order to fulfill whatever requirements need to be met by the school. However, the students that fill today’s classrooms don’t have a real understanding, due to the lack of historical presentation within the classroom. One month, out of the ten that students are in school, there is a focus on “black history.” Is this enough for students to be aware of the past that our country has? Some teachers find a way to incorporate more than just the Langston Hughes poem here, or the Martin Luther King Jr. speech there. They find a way to make the students view and analyze what really happened and what led to the few images and literary pieces they now read. They find a way to have students relate in ways they never thought they could and greatly expand their educational horizons. Students learn to appreciate and take full advantage of all of the educational sources that are provided to them, understanding how fortuitous of a position they are in.

Rationale

The primary texts for this unit will be literature from both African-American and Caucasian authors and illustrators/photographers. I would like students to take note if the author’s and illustrators/photographers race changes the perspective of the story and how it’s written. I want to see if they are able to tell the race of the author by how the story is written and if the race truly matters when understanding the events during this time. The texts will be based on both races’ (primarily African-American) experiences with racism, prejudice and tolerance during the 1960s. The stories show the reactions to segregation and integration. I will be using some books that have real pictures and accounts from people that were present during these events. In this unit, we will be exploring the impact segregation and integration had on children and even those students in school today. Since the goal of this unit is to use textual information to support the ideas and analyses they come across, students will need to engage in discussion and continually have textual evidence. They will work individually, in partners, small groups, and as an entire class. The class will be set up where students are a part of a group of three, always allowing for small group discussion and sharing of materials. Texts can be interpreted in so many different ways, especially when students are doing close readings of the many pictures that will be provided to them. Some students may see specific things in these stories that can be essential in interpretation and understanding, when another student might not see the same detail as being as significant.

Demographic Background

Ridge Road Middle School is a Charlotte Mecklenburg School that is located in the Highland Creek neighborhood. Currently we have 968 students enrolled: 4% Asian, 7% of our students are Native American, 10% Hispanic students, 23% are Caucasian students, and 56% are African-American students. There are also two classes of self-contained exceptional children (SAC classrooms). The school as a whole has also been very successful academically in all subjects, including Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. For the 2013-2014 school year, Ridge Road was recognized because of the continual high growth percentages and the positive growth achieved in every tested subject area. High growth was achieved in all areas. All of the school's AMO targets were met. Overall, 91% of our students tested scored on/above grade level. The increase has built a sense of pride among students, parents, teachers, and staff.

My Classroom and the Curriculum

Although similar, the demographics of my classes have shifted from last year. Last year, I had a slightly more diverse population. I had 9 Asian students, 5 Native American students, 31 Hispanic students, 33 Caucasian students, and 44 African American students. The set-up of my classes has changed; I now have two standard classes, one inclusion class, and one Honors class. Last year I had three standard and one Honors. My numbers have dropped since last year, especially in my Honors class. Last year I had 38 students in that one class, now I have 25. The majority of my Honors students are Caucasian, when last year they were more diverse. My Honors class needs to be challenged way above my other three classes. I have 504s (6 spread amongst all four of my blocks) and IEPs (7 total, mainly in my inclusion) this year, however the behavioral issues have dropped significantly since last year. These students are ready and eager to learn, despite their learning abilities. Aside from my Honors class, my classes are fairly close academically. All of the factors mentioned play a role in how I designed the unit plan. I wanted to create a curriculum unit that was challenging to both my Honors class and my standard/inclusion classes, but also can meet every student's need by scaling back or being raised higher. During the eighth grade, students are expected to engage in text analysis that encourages them to dig deeper into the "why" behind everything in a text. I feel like they get tired of me asking, "Why? Why? Why?" in everything they read and analyze. They are also expected to use a vast amount of textual evidence to support every conclusion they come to about the "why." In order to fulfill this standard in my classroom, I will use the strategy "Notice and Note". This strategy will be very useful in the group discussion and building their discussion skills. One of the main strategies within Notice and Note is the "Aha Moment". This is the one that I use very often in my class that allows students to see when the character realizes what is going on as it is happening in the story, making it much easier to understand an underlying message or a resolution of conflict.

Objectives

This unit is designed to last for approximately 10-12 days. Each activity is made to take place over one or two days. Some classes may need more guidance and time to grasp a concept, which would naturally lengthen the lesson. More importantly than that would be the objective that the unit is to meet. I will serve most importantly as a facilitator. Students will have all of the necessary guidance, materials, and expectations to successfully carry out the lesson. Regardless of the time length, by the end of the unit, students should be able to perform the Common Core Objectives and 21st Century Skills stated in Appendix 1.

Texts

Picture Books

I will start the unit off by using picture books so I can introduce the idea of segregation from different perspectives. Some of the stories will focus on the early stages of school integrations and some during the later part. Regardless, each book introduces the topic to the students and allows them to see what is occurring through the eyes of children, adults, whites and blacks. The stories are all very different, but have relating messages.

White Socks Only by Evelyn Coleman, Illustrated by Tyrone Geter

This is the fictional story of a little African-American girl who lived in Mississippi. She snuck into town one day and saw the “Whites Only” sign on a water fountain. Not knowing exactly what the sign meant, she slipped off her shoes-- wearing her clean white socks-- and stepped up to take a drink. She had no idea what she would spark. This is a great book to start off with because it sparks interest in the topic and shows the innocence and naivety of children during that time. This book is a great example of the point of view of African-American children during this time in U.S. history. A lot of personal accounts of stories during this time are from African-American adults.

Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins by Carole Boston Weatherford, Illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue

This nonfiction story focuses on eight-year-old Connie. All over town there are signs telling her where she can and cannot go. Connie sees the Greensboro Four (four young men) take a stand for equal rights at a Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. While she is too young to march or give speeches, she helps her brother and sister make equality signs. So much happens in this story that relates to the historical changes in her town, but being that she is so young, all she wants to do is “eat a banana

split like everyone else”. This is another great story that displays the bravery and innocence of children during the times of segregation.

The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles, Illustrated by George Ford

This nonfiction story takes place in the 1960s. Ruby Bridges and her family have moved to New Orleans in search of a better life. A judge orders Ruby to attend first grade at an all-white school, where she faces angry mobs of parents that refuse to have their children go to school with her. Students will get an understanding of how some children, although put in hard situations; can be brave beyond their years.

Freedom School, Yes! by Amy Little sugar, Illustrated by Floyd Cooper

This is the story (historical fiction) of little Jolie. She has a lot to be scared of because the new Freedom School teacher, Annie, has been living with her family. Freedom School hasn't even started yet and people are sending notes filled with hatred and bricks are being thrown through her house's windows at night. One of Jolie's worst fears comes true when she finds out people have burnt down the church where Freedom School was to be held. This story is based on the 1964 Mississippi Freedom School Summer Project. Before the class goes into all of the historical details, this will be a great story to ease into some of the events that happened, especially told from a young perspective. It will give students a more innocent and real view of what was occurring at that time. As we read and continue the unit, we will be exploring the concepts “innocent” and “real”. It is important they know what is meant by these two terms in order to do the close readings that we will be doing.

Freedom Summer by Deborah Wiles, Illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue

This nonfiction story, for children (ages 7-12) is about two little boys, Joe and John. They have so much in common, from shooting marbles, wanting to be firemen, and loving to swim. The only differences between the two are Joe is white and John is black. The story takes place in the South in 1964. It is a great story that shows the adventures of two little boys, so alike, yet so different, during a time that was difficult for many.

Excerpts

Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement by Ann Bausum

This book can have some complicated parts for my students. This book is filled with real pictures from events described, along with eyewitness accounts and personal stories. I wanted to choose certain excerpts to use in order to get the valuable information that is presented, without overwhelming them with the various stories and events in this one

book. I will do this for the longer books/novels that I will use, but are important. I want my students to get the most historical information from these books, without becoming overwhelmed and confused. The details presented will be very helpful and should be easy to comprehend because it is intended for children ages 5 and up. [

Revolution by Deborah Wiles

From *Freedom Riders* and this book, *Revolution*, I want to incorporate real pictures and stories from people that participated in various Civil Rights events. It is important to dig into the real events that emphasize the feelings, thoughts, and ideas of people during that time.

Read: Warriors Don't Cry

This is a children's (ages 8-12) magazine from 1997 that discusses stories from integrating schools, Jim Crow laws, and some events from Little Rock High. The main parts of this small magazine that will be used are the plays. As a class, we will be reading/acting out the plays that are included in the magazine. It will be a more interactive way of reading a part of U.S. history, rather than just having a discussion. The good parts about the plays are that they are set in a school, so it is relatable for the children.

The Freedom Summer Murders by Don Mitchell

This book is about the three men killed in 1964 by the Ku Klux Klan for trying to help black Americans vote as a part of the 1964 Freedom Summer registration effort in Mississippi. It tells that tragic story of those three brave men and the result, their untimely death. There is a piece/excerpt of this book that directly relates to Freedom Summer and Freedom Schools that I will use in class in order to give a history aspect to the picture books that we have already spent time studying.

Poem

"Unfair" by John Paschalis, Mt. Prospect, III

This poem really encompasses the whole unit. Paschalis looks at the school and the halls as a symbol of freedom, yet feeling lonely and nervous due to the newness of the segregated halls. He sits in class and all of a sudden there is a sun shining on the dull earth, like a sense of hope.

Strategies

Quick Writes

Students will do quick writes in their day books in order to gather their thoughts on the topic presented, before we discuss it as a whole.

Read Aloud

I will read all of the picture books for this unit to the class, while in groups they will follow along and study the pictures, on designated days (going along with the lesson for the day) and hold discussion based on what I have read. We will read the picture books based on the lesson I have planned for the day, eventually easing into the more complicated books where they will get a majority of the historical information. I will have colored print outs of some of the pictures from the books so students can look at them, if I don't have enough books for students to view up close. One of the major connection pictures that will be studied will be one from *White Socks Only*. While discussing innocence within the main character of the story, we will focus in on the picture of the little girl taking a sip from the water fountain labeled "Whites Only". This is where the title is derived from and the students will be able to make the correlation. We can discuss why this is wrong in the eyes of the Caucasian people of the town described, and how this little girl made the mistake of drinking from such a fountain.

Think Aloud

As I read the text, I will stop and voice any thoughts I have had while reading. This will allow students to get an idea on what questions they should be continually asking themselves as they read. Some questions would include: What is happening with the main character? What is the conflict? Etc. Questions can be based off of the Notice and Note strategy.

Think-Pair-Share

Students will think about the idea/question that I present them after a reading, then they will turn to someone sitting next to, behind, or in front of them and share their ideas. Not all students like to raise their hand and speak out, so this will give them a chance to express their ideas. As I walk around and listen to their discussions, I will pick a few to share with the entire class and that can sometimes lead to further discussion (if time permits). The question will get them thinking individually about a certain topic (will vary depending on the day's lesson).

Timer

This is where I simply time some of the activities (Think-Pair-Share, Quick Writes). Some students really get into discussions or activities and find it easy to get carried away, but this balances out the time given.

Ticket Out

On a slip of scrap paper, I will ask students to answer one or two short questions, or write a thought or idea. An example of a question would stem from the Notice and Note reading strategy. I would ask students to list any “Tough Questions” that the character had to ask herself (in *White Socks Only*). Also, I would have them list any “Words of the Wiser” moments within the story and what life lesson the main character learned. This allows me to assess what the students have taken away from the stories or activities given. These I check more for content and understanding than anything else. They will hand it to me or place it in a basket before they go on to their next class.

Close Readings

This reading strategy is an easy way of interacting with a complex text and thoroughly examining its meaning. Student will do this with various pictures we find in picture books. Due to the simplicity of the words in these stories, we will dig deeper with the images that are presented. The students will be divided in groups and each group will have a different set of pictures from *Freedom School, Yes!* They will re-read the words, but after they focus on the pictures. I want them to see if the pictures are telling a story without necessarily having to read the words alone.

Daily Activity Plan

Day 1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2

Activity 1: Write Into the Day- Each day students will be asked to write one paragraph to kick off their day and stretch their writing and thinking muscles. The overall topic will be the same over the course of the unit, however, the daily prompts will vary. *Please write one paragraph on the following topic: How do you define racism?*

Activity 2: Race division activity- I will divide the class into the racial groups that are commonly known (African-American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, Native American- Primarily the ones that compose our school). I will then purposefully treat one group of students better than the other. See student reactions to unfair treatment and discuss and relate their reactions to the unfair treatment of African Americans during the 1960s, especially the students that were trying to go to school. Explain that in some places, people are still treated differently due to certain uncontrollable things like skin color.

Activity 3: Children's Innocence/Naivety Discussion- Discuss the innocence of children. Discuss how and what children/young adults had to face during times of segregation and integration. How they reacted to certain events and the naivety they had to certain events (direct racism, hatred).

Activity 4: White Socks Only (read aloud to students)- Stop and show students pictures (if there aren't enough copies for each student to see). Ask questions about what is occurring as we read and how the child is being naïve to what is occurring around her.

Activity 5: Individual/Group Activity- Using Google Classroom, open up a monitored discussion in which all students must participate (can be monitored by teacher, easily) to the question: How do children learn race and racism? Where does it stem from? How do we change the views of such young minds? Students will then write a short account/personal story of a time they experienced or saw racism. Going further, they will include if they have viewed any racial naivety.

Day 2

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2

Activity 1: Write Into the Day-: How would you feel if you were denied service at your favorite restaurant because of your race?

Activity 2: Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins (read aloud to students)

Activity 3: Group Activity- Close Reading

Activity 4: Individual Activity- Quick Write

Activity 5: Ticket Out

Day 3

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2

Activity 1: Write Into the Day- What is the most difficult thing you face while attending school each year?

Activity 2: Freedom School, Yes! by Amy Little sugar (read aloud to students)

Activity 3: Think aloud

Activity 4: Group Activity- Close Reading

Activity 5: Think-Pair-Share

Day 4

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2

Activity 1: Write Into the Day- What would you do/how would you feel if each day you came to school, you were greeted by an angry mob of people that didn't want you there based on your skin color?

Activity 2: The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles (read aloud to students)

Activity 3: Group Activity- Close Reading

Activity 4: Individual Activity- Quick Write

Activity 5: Ticket Out

Day 5

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2

Activity 1: Write Into the Day- How would you feel if you had a best friend of a different race and either you or he/she weren't able to do certain things (like drink from a water fountain, or go to a certain park) solely because of race?

Activity 2: Freedom Summer by Deborah Wiles

Activity 3: "Unfair" by John Paschalis, Mt. Prospect, III

Activity 4: Individual Activity- Quick Write

Activity 5: Culminating Project introduction: The culminating activity will require students to choose, analyze and argue which event during this time in history was the most pivotal. They will be creating a digital/media presentation of their argument. Students will be able to create different methods of presentations such as power point, Prezi, iMovie, Glogster, etc. but it must be in a digital format of some sort.

Day 6

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1.B

Activity 1: Write Into the Day- How do you define bravery?

Activity 2: Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement by Ann Bausum

Activity 3: Think-Pair-Share

Activity 4: Individual Activity- Quick Write

Activity 5: Culminating Project introduction: The culminating activity will require students to choose, analyze and argue which event during this time in history was the most pivotal. They will be creating a digital/media presentation of their argument. Students will also be required to discuss how the authors' race of the various books we have read, plays a role in the composition of the stories themselves.

Day 7

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1.B

Activity 1: Write Into the Day- Do you think that there is still racism present today?

Activity 2: Revolution by Deborah Wiles

Activity 3: Group Activity

Activity 4: Culminating Project introduction and work time

Activity 5: Ticket Out

Day 8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.

Activity 1: Write Into the Day- Do you think it is important to vote? What about helping people register to vote? Would you risk your life to help?

Activity 2: The Freedom Summer Murders by Don Mitchell

Activity 3: Think aloud.

Activity 4: Individual Activity- Quick Write

Activity 5: Culminating Project introduction and work time

Day 9

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3

Activity 1: Write Into the Day- How do you interpret the poem title “Warriors Don’t Cry”?

Activity 2: Read: Warriors Don’t Cry

Activity 3: Class Play and discussion on Little Rock High

Activity 4: Culminating Project introduction and work time

Activity 5: Ticket Out

Day 10

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1

Activity 1: Write Into the Day- What do you find to be the hardest part about being an African American student your age, during the 1960s?

Activity 2: Read: Warriors Don’t Cry: Finish play if necessary

Activity 3: Presentation of arguments: “Digital Gallery Crawl”- Students have document shared on Google Drive/Classroom. It is posted to the entire class and students are able to read their class’ arguments, and must comment (nothing negative) on each person’s work. Must be true comments to spark conversation, not “good job”, etc.

Activity 4: Ticket Out

Appendix 1: Implementing Teaching Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Students will need to be able to use various texts/textual evidence to support their ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

Students will need to be able to read a text and correctly identify the theme over the development.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

Students will need to be able to read a text and cite lines from the text that reveal author's style of writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.3 Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

Students will analyze how a text makes connections among distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1.B Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

Students will need to be able to use various texts to support claims made.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Students will need to be able to organize their ideas and write texts in relation to the specific content.

Bibliography

Bausum, Ann. *Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement*. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006.

This book can have some complicated parts for my students. This book is filled with real pictures from events described, along with eyewitness accounts and personal stories. I wanted to choose certain excerpts to use in order to get the valuable information that is presented, without overwhelming them with the various stories and events in this one book.

Beals, Melba Patillo. "Warriors Don't Cry." *Read*, February 7, 1997, 8-17.

This is a 90s children's magazine that exposes them to real world issues. It has a ton of information, fun quizzes, stories, and plays that enable students to get "news" in a way that they aren't necessarily bored with.

Boston, Carole. *Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins*. Illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2007.

This nonfiction story focuses on eight-year-old Connie. All over town there are signs telling her where she can and cannot go. Connie sees the Greensboro Four (four young men) take a stand for equal rights at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. While she is too young to march or give speeches, she helps her brother and sister make equality signs. So much happens in this story that relates to the historical changes in her town, but being that she is so young, all she wants to do is "eat a banana split like everyone else".

Coleman, Evelyn. *White Socks Only*. Illustrated by Tyrone Geter. Park Ridge, IL: Albert Whitman & Company, 1996.

This is the fictional story of a little African-American girl who lived in Mississippi. She snuck into town one day and saw the "Whites Only" sign on a water fountain. Not knowing exactly what the sign meant, she slipped off her shoes-- wearing her clean white socks-- and stepped up to take a drink. She had no idea what she would spark.

Coles, Robert. *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. Illustrated by George Ford. New York, NY: Scholastic, 1995.

This nonfiction story takes place in the 1960s. Ruby Bridges and her family have moved to New Orleans in search of a better life. A judge orders Ruby to attend first grade at an all-white school, where she faces angry mobs of parents that refuse to have their children go to school with her. Students will get an understanding of how some children, although put in hard situations; can be brave beyond their years.

Littlesugar, Amy. *Freedom School, Yes!* Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. New York, NY: Penguin Putnam, 2001.

This is the story (historical fiction) of little Jolie. She has a lot to be scared of because the new Freedom School teacher, Annie, has been living with her family. Freedom School hasn't even started yet and people are sending notes filled with hatred and bricks are being thrown through her house's windows at night. One of Jolie's worst fears comes true when she finds out people have burnt down the church where Freedom School was to be held. This story is based on the 1964 Mississippi Freedom School Summer Project.

Mitchell, Don. *The Freedom Summer Murders*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 2014.

This chapter book is filled with the real world stories of victims of segregation during the 60s. It particularly focuses in on three important men that played a large role in the Mississippi Voting Project.

Paschalis, John. "Unfair." *Read*, February 7, 1997, 2.

Wiles, Deborah. *Freedom Summer*. Illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2001.

This poem really encompasses the whole unit. Paschalis looks at the school and the halls as a symbol of freedom, yet feeling lonely and nervous due to the newness of the segregated halls. He sits in class and all of a sudden there is a sun shining on the dull earth, like a sense of hope.