



**Can You See Yourself?
Students Finding Themselves in Southern Children's Literature**

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This curriculum Unit is recommended for:
6th grade ELA, Social Studies, and Writing

Keywords: southern children's literature, self-efficacy, hidden curriculum, southern culture, windows, mirrors, sliding doors.

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

Synopsis: *Can You See Yourself?: Students Finding Themselves in Southern Children's Literature* is created to help students of color find themselves depicted in a positive light in southern children's literature. The focus of this unit is on self-efficacy and southern culture seeing that students in my district are southern. Students will analyze how southern culture is depicted in novels with main characters of color and compare their lived definition of southern culture to how it is portrayed in children's literature. Throughout this unit, students will get the chance to have authentic discussions on self-efficacy, southern culture then vs. now, hidden curriculum, and how to find oneself in southern children's literature by looking for windows, mirrors, and sliding doors.

I plan to teach this unit in the spring of 2021-2022 school year to 110 sixth grade students.

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

Can You See Yourself? Students Finding Themselves in Southern Children's Literature

Latonda Mitchell

Introduction/Rationale

“Life is a mirror and will reflect back to the thinker what he thinks into it.”

- Ernest Holmes

So many times, when I was in school, I could never identify how I fit into the literature or the classroom. Everyone and everything I saw looked totally different from me, even my teachers. “[Students] Seeing themselves in books helps children with the vital skill of reading with comprehension and establishes an affinity with reading – the more children enjoy reading, and find meaning there, the more they will come back to books.”¹

I want to open windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for all the students within my classroom. Often minoritized students are not found in southern children's literature and when they are, they are not portrayed as positive characters all the time. In southern children literature the minoritized student sees the person that looks like them being an extra in the book or being rescued by the White hero or heroine. I want to change that for my students. I want to help students create spaces for themselves and find ways to connect with literature within the classroom.

Being that I am a social studies teacher in CMS I find it even more important to help students not only see themselves in literature, which is mostly seen in reading classes, but to also see themselves in the curriculum I am teaching within my classroom. Bolling states, “Students should not only see themselves in books, but also see and learn about those different from themselves. Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange.”² As a teacher my job is to diversify the curriculum and give students the opportunity to see themselves everywhere or find a way to find a relation to the curriculum, text, and content.

My topic connects to my students lives because about 90% of my students are considered minorities. Students are not able to connect with the curriculum because they do not see themselves being accurately portrayed in the literature. Since we live in a southern state, I feel

¹ It is important for children to see themselves in books. Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://nalibali.org/it-is-important-for-children-to-see-themselves-in-books#:~:text=Seeing%20themselves%20in%20books%20helps,will%20come%20back%20to%20books.>

² Bolling, Valerie. “Why Children Need to See Themselves in Books.” International Literacy Association, March 10, 2021. [https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2021/03/10/why-children-need-to-see-the-mselves-in-books.](https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2021/03/10/why-children-need-to-see-the-mselves-in-books)

that it is important for our students to learn about their surroundings but also enjoy reading the novels. All minoritized students will not see themselves in each and every text but whether or not they can find themselves, I feel that it is important for them to be able to connect with the text in some way. My curriculum is already set in motion for me but if I can add in southern children's literature to enhance and enrich the conversations in the classroom it will be all worth it.

Based on the new standard for 6th grade social studies, diversifying the curriculum is the goal on a larger scale but if there isn't intention from teachers, we will continue to crank out the same information we have taught from the beginning of time: whitewashed mirrors, windows, and doors.

School/Student Demographics

Mountain Island Lake Academy is located in the North Learning community of Charlotte Mecklenburg School system. The school was originally named Mountain Island Lake Elementary when it opened in 2002 but changed when the transition to a prek- eight was introduced in 2013. It is the first school in CMS that transitioned from a regular elementary school into a Prekindergarten through eighth grade academy by community choice. Mountain Island Lake Academy is a STEM-focused Cambridge International Program school that uses balanced literacy as a foundation. MILA is a feeder school into Hopewell High school with the same Cambridge program. The school has an enrollment number of 924 students. Within the middle school we offer dance, band, physical education, basketball, football, volleyball, cheerleading, soccer, and many other opportunities for the students.

Based on the statistics for the year of 2021-2022 there are currently 924 students enrolled, 22.2% are white, 63% African American, 8.4% Multi-racial, and 4% Asian. We have one principal, one elementary assistant principal, one middle school assistant principal, and one dean of students. We currently have 74 staff members that assist or teach the students of Mountain Island. All teachers are certified and 45.8% of the teachers at Mountain Island have Masters Degrees.

Grades 6-8 implement the Cambridge program within the classroom. The Cambridge Programme is an innovative and accelerated method of academic study offered solely through the University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE). The program promotes academic rigor in English, math, and science. In a Cambridge classroom you will find that the teachers are flexible to promote creativity, they emphasize thinking outside the box, inquiry-based learning, prepare students for high school Cambridge programs, and the teachers present a global focus while also promoting cultural sensitivity. Our Pre-k-5 grades implement Cambridge values without implementing the program.

On the elementary side of Mountain Island, the grade level teams have multiple days to perfect their craft through lesson planning with team members, facilitators, and administration. Within these meetings teachers analyze data from common and formal assessment, plan units, talk about

possible academic or behavior problems with students, and share concerns with team or administration about anything.

As a teacher at Mountain Island Lake Academy I use the most valuable resources within the school which are my colleagues to help further my education as a teacher. I am a sixth grade teacher that implements the Cambridge program daily in the classroom. I teach social studies to at least 105 students. At Mountain Island Lake Academy we use the latest North Carolina standards and other research based techniques to help us provide the best education possible to students.

Unit Goals

My goal in writing this curriculum unit is to demystify curricula for all students, with an emphasize on minoritized students. I want to uncover the hidden curriculum, show students different versions of themselves by creating counter narratives, and helping students to look inside of a text but see themselves reflected in a positive light. Another goal that I have in writing this curriculum unit is to promote self-efficacy within my students as readers of non-fiction and fiction text. Studies have shown that there are more books about animals and others produced in children's literature versus minoritized children. 50% of children's literature is centered around White stories. How many windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors are blocked, covered up, or just nonexistent for children who yearn to see themselves reflected in a positive role? I would like to engage students in discussions about what and whose stories are being told and who gets to write books on topics surrounding race and southern culture.

Content Research

Southern Culture

Southern culture can be described in so many ways, but when you research what is southern culture the same types of things are said over and over again. Interexchange says the southern United States can be categorized as friendly small towns, some big cities, music, art, cuisine, and culture.³ Southern culture includes many different musical talents, foods that have been influenced by settlers and conquerors, and other attractions like civil war battle grounds or places, mountains, beaches, and other things. Most of the 'south' is based on certain states like Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Though this is what we want to imagine life in the south to be like, but everything is not always friendly, nice, swell, and all about yall. Being White in the south is different than being Black or minoritized in the south. Often, things look very different for each set of individuals. Thompson and Sloan state:

³ "Southeast." InterExchange. Accessed November 1, 2021.
<https://www.interexchange.org/american-culture/southeast/>.

The “South” is virtually inconceivable without sustained attention to race, yet most scholarly examinations of southern identity have focused almost exclusively on the experiences of white southern, ignoring the experiences of other racial groups in the region, most particularly black southerners. A similar phenomenon occurs in everyday conversations about the South, evidenced by the well-worn habit of talking about “southerners” when actually referring to white southerners. For example, most of us, at one time or another, have heard, or perhaps even said, that “southerners are racist” or “southerners owned slaves.” Such states implicitly connect being southern with being white.⁴

We know there were huge contributions and sacrifices made by Black southerners but we still have just a few monuments dedicated to the memory of those contributions and sacrifices.⁵ Black southern were vital in creating, supporting, enabling, and sustaining the prosperity of many White families, including the growth of many corporations that still enjoy great prosperity till this day.⁶ Where is the recognition in the history books? Where are these accomplishments seen in literature or non-fiction? Who has the leash on publishing companies? Where are the southern heroes and heroines that look like 15% of the Black students sitting in Public schools in 2018?⁷

Though we have large numbers of Black people returning to the south, most people still talk and equate the south with White people. This is often seen in the literature written with a southern historical basis. Whiteness will appear and capture most of the story because southern culture is wrapped around the idea of whiteness like so many other things in the world.

Hidden Curriculum

“Hidden curriculum refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school. While the “formal” curriculum consists of the courses, lessons, and learning activities students participate in, as well as the knowledge and skills educators intentionally teach to students, the hidden curriculum consists of the unspoken or

⁴ Thompson, Ashley B., and Melissa M. Sloan. “Race as Region, Region as Race: How Black and White Southerners Understand Their Regional Identities.” *Southern Cultures*. The University of North Carolina Press, November 4, 2012. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/489261/pdf>.

⁵ Thompson, Ashley B., and Melissa M. Sloan. “Race as Region, Region as Race: How Black and White Southerners Understand Their Regional Identities.” *Southern Cultures*. The University of North Carolina Press, November 4, 2012. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/489261/pdf>.

⁶ Thompson, Ashley B., and Melissa M. Sloan. “Race as Region, Region as Race: How Black and White Southerners Understand Their Regional Identities.” *Southern Cultures*. The University of North Carolina Press, November 4, 2012. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/489261/pdf>.

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics. *Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools*, May 2021. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cge>.

implicit academic, social, and cultural messages that are communicated to students while they are in school”⁸

Hidden curriculum is present across the globe. How we perceive each other based on how a person identifies themselves, how we are supposed to act, and to teach others is based all in the hidden curriculum. Often what is not being taught is more important than what is being taught. Students are consistently receiving messages of who is important and who is worthy to have curriculum taught about them and their cultures. Hidden curriculum is not a new phenomenon. It has been around since the time of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates. These men sent the message that the African continent or people did not attribute anything to their intelligence but some of their philosophies can be traced back to Ancient Egyptians.⁹ Though the intention may not have been to conceal the true authors of the curriculum, there is still a tainted view of the African continent.¹⁰ Portelli states that hidden curriculum could be hidden intentionally or unintentionally.¹¹ Instead of continuing to ask surface level questions when it comes to hidden curriculum like *what* is being hidden, we have to start asking ourselves *by whom and from whom* is the curriculum being hidden from.¹² When we start asking those questions, we will get to the root of the issue and develop strategies to keep those in power from keeping curriculum from students. The process of finding out why, by whom, and from whom is complex and has to come from individuals with the intention of changing the structure of education.

Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Doors

“Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been crated or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a windows can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.”¹³

⁸ “Hidden Curriculum .” The Glossary of Education Reform, July 13, 2015. <https://www.edglossary.org/hidden-curriculum/>.

⁹ James, George M. *Stolen Legacy: "Greek Philosophy Is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy"*. Drewryville, VA: Khalifah's Booksellers & Associates, 2005.

¹⁰ James, George M. *Stolen Legacy: "Greek Philosophy Is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy"*. Drewryville, VA: Khalifah's Booksellers & Associates, 2005.

¹¹ Portelli, John P. “Exposing the Hidden Curriculum.” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 25, no. 4 (1993): 343–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027930250404>.

¹² Portelli, John P. “Exposing the Hidden Curriculum.” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 25, no. 4 (1993): 343–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027930250404>.

¹³ Bishop, Dr. Rudine Sims. “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors .” *Reading is Fundamental*, 1990.

Windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors oh my. Dr. Bishop coined the phrase to explain how children see themselves in books and how they can also learn about the lives of others through literature.¹⁴ Often we find there are no avenues to access a window, mirror, or sliding glass door for students who are minoritized. In 2018, there was an image placed in the public eye depicting the lack of diversity in children's books. Looking at the picture is overwhelming and shows the lack of attention students of minoritized background have placed on their stories and lives. 50% of books are written about White children, 27% are written about animals/other, 10% are written about African American children, 7% Asian Pacific Islander/Asian Pacific American children, 5% Latinx, and 1% American Indians/ First Nations.¹⁵ 50% of books are written about White children. 50%! There is even 27% of books written about animals and other things. Based on these statistics, can children of minoritized background adequately see themselves depicted truly in the text? If we go back to the purpose of the windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors phrase, it is to help students see themselves in books and learn about the lives of others. Looking at the data, most of the time, students are learning about White culture and Whiteness. Students are also learning about animals but unfortunately there isn't a lot of room to learn about minoritized students. The voices of these people are silenced and left for someone else to worry about.

Included in children's books being overwhelmingly from or about the White perspective, teachers don't even think the textbooks they teach from accurately reflect people of color. Knowing that the teaching force is dominated by White women, it is important to note that at least 4 out of 5 do not believe the textbooks accurately and fully reflect the experiences of people of color.¹⁶ Unfortunately on a larger scale, we have teachers who do believe that people of color are represented accurately in textbooks and the textbook full reflects the experiences of people of color.¹⁷ If we have teachers in the classrooms believing this information, we have a larger issue

<https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf>.

¹⁴ Potter, Cathy. "Windows and Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors: Ensuring Students See Themselves and Others in Literature." Institute for Humane Education, September 30, 2020. <https://humaneeducation.org/windows-and-mirrors-and-sliding-glass-doors-ensuring-students-see-themselves-and-others-in-literature/#:~:text=In%20the%20essay%2C%20Dr.,lives%20of%20others%20through%20literature.>

¹⁵ Stechyson, Natalie. "Most Kids Books Are about White People, Then Animals. That's a Problem." HuffPost. HuffPost, July 3, 2019. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/diversity-kids-books-statistics_1_61087501e4b0497e67026f1c.

¹⁶ Gewertz, Catherine. "Survey of Mostly-White Educators Finds 1 in 5 Think Textbooks Accurately Reflect People of Color." Education Week. Education Week, November 19, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/survey-of-mostly-white-educators-finds-1-in-5-think-textbooks-accurately-reflect-people-of-color/2020/06>.

¹⁷ Gewertz, Catherine. "Survey of Mostly-White Educators Finds 1 in 5 Think Textbooks Accurately Reflect People of Color." Education Week. Education Week, November 19, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/survey-of-mostly-white-educators-finds-1-in-5-think-textbooks-accurately-reflect-people-of-color/2020/06>.

on our hands. So often we notice when fiction depicts a person of color in a falsehood of life but we tend to not look at the textbooks sent out around the world. How are they reflecting minoritized individuals for students in the classroom? Is it like most books and textbooks, where you have to find the minoritized person being introduced when they have to interact with the White characters or people? How can we strategically change the narrative so all voices are recognized and valued within the curriculum?

As a minoritized person who teaches, before I read anything to my students I read it myself. 85% of my students are Black. I want those students and any of my other minoritized students to see themselves reflected within the curriculum and I am not just talking about slavery. Too often the window we allow for our Black students involve looking at themselves during slavery. There are more stories to Black people than slavery. Black people are not monolithic. Until we take the time to sit down with the curriculum and include those counter narratives for our students, we will continue to cover their windows with Whitewash curriculum, block out all mirrors with a reflection that is not relatable, and gatekeep voices that sound like them with a pad lock on their sliding glass door.

Self- Efficacy

“Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one’s own motivation, behavior, and social environment.”¹⁸

Self-efficacy is so important for students but I would argue the major importance for the development of self-efficacy in students middle school years. Students in middle school are dealing with so many changes and without the foundation of believing in oneself or having control over some aspects in their life, some students can fall through the cracks or worse. As we live in a southern culture, it is important to build self-efficacy in schools through literature and through the lenses of students of color. Students of color cannot be the sidekick in the novels where they must be saved by a White heroin or hero. Students of color need to see themselves being depicted as strong, intelligent, resilient, and dealing with real issues without always making them the victim from the hood or the villain.

Showing students, they are worthy of being studied in their own backyard in school where most of the curriculum is not inclusive, will give students of color a way to engage and feel they have some control over their ever-changing lives.

Instructional Implementation

Teaching Strategies

¹⁸ Carey, Michael P, and Andrew D Forsyth. “Self-Efficacy Teaching Tip Sheet.” American Psychological Association. American Psychological Association, 2009. <https://www.apa.org/pi/aids/resources/education/self-efficacy>.

Before starting any year or unit that could lead to critical/tough conversations in the classroom, I send out a letter to all families.

“This year [this unit], we are going to have some critical or tough conversations in class that deal with all difficult cultures, race, and religion. Since this class has a huge emphasis on world civilizations, we will discuss the rise and fall of many different nations from many different perspectives. Any content, articles, sources, and discussion are not to target one group of people and we are not blaming one group of people while learning. We will respect the opinions of everyone in the classroom, but any type of hate speech will not be tolerated in the classroom. Anytime we have a critical or tough conversation in the classroom, I will give students time to reflect on their thoughts and feelings. I feel that they have the right to express themselves in a constructive way in the classroom. This specific unit will ring awareness and create a safe space for students to talk about race, gender equality, and equity vs equality. The purpose of the specific unit is to open windows, mirrors and sliding doors for our students of color. So often their stories are hidden, put on the back burner, or celebrated one month out of the year. It is important for student of color to see themselves within the curriculum and important for all students to see diversity and truth.”

Every one of these activities can be changed, motivated, or deleted to accommodate the class. I have not taught this unit with my students yet because of multiple reasons. Before teaching them content that I have created, I want to make sure I have everything in place because I would hate to be ill-informed about a topic and create more trauma for my students and I do mean all my students. Though the unit has a focus on Black and Brown students, it is important that ALL student learn why it is critical for everyone to be able to lose themselves in a novel because it opens windows, mirrors, and sliding doors for them.

This unit should take around 3-4 weeks to teach the students because we are going to use excerpts from the novels and one of the novels will be used more later within the year in a different class. I will teach this unit in the spring of 2021-2022 school year.

Here are some of the teaching strategies I will use to help facilitate the unit:

- Breaks as needed: Students will get time to take breaks from the curriculum if the content is too heavy or after having a critical conversation. This will give students time to process the conversations and reflect on a more honest level.
- Reflection: It is important for students to have time to reflect on conversations and content we have in the classroom.
- Cooperative learning: small groups
- Presentations: virtual and in-person. Students will get a choice on how they would like to present their information.
- Discussions/Critical conversations: a way for students to share their ideas and collaborate with other in the classroom and across different classes on multiple platforms
- Projects

- Accountable Talks: meaningful and respectful speaking that helps the talker become a good listener as well.
- Academic Vocabulary: vocabulary pertaining to the books and content
- Think-pair-share: a way for students to collaborate with those people in their class
- Comprehension questions: a way to check for understanding
- Comparing and contrasting: students will compare and contrast movie to the book, book to life, book to what they see as southern culture

Classroom Activities for the Unit

Novels

Both novels, *Watson's go to Birmingham -1963* and *Hidden Figures: Young Readers Edition*, are important to the overall flow of the unit, but they also bring a view of what the 1960's looked like in different areas of the south. You can find southern culture embedded in the frame of both novels. Both novels have a focus on Black southern culture and the difficulty navigating Blackness within the 1960's, but both novels offer different ways for students to see themselves without it being Whitewashed or overshadowed by a White character taking the lead. Both books were adapted into movies and can be used in the classroom to help compare the book to the movie. Though the movie does not give you everything you would get from the book, there are multiple ways to find how southern culture weaves itself within the fabric of stories.

Watson's go to Birmingham - 1963

The Watson's go to Birmingham -1963 is a story written by Christopher Paul Curtis. Though the book is not originally set in the south, the family travels to Birmingham, Alabama to get help with their unruly teenage son for the summer because he continues to get in trouble back in Flint, Michigan. Though the family takes the summer in Alabama because of Byron, the oldest son, the book has a focus on the younger brother Kenneth Watson, who is the narrator of the book, and everything is seen from Kenneth's point of view. During the time the family travels to Alabama to get help with their eldest son, the world is in a state of war against itself.

The book takes place during the Civil Rights Movement and more specifically the historic church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. During that bombing 4 girls are killed and many more people are injured. Christopher Paul Curtis does not use the September 15th date when the original tragedy happened because he wanted the event to coincide with the summertime for the Watson's. The KKK members who bombed the church left a devastating effect on the people in the town, but the event increased the help needed during the Civil Rights Movement.

The book tells of a young boy being bullied and protected by his older brother who gets in way too much trouble. When they arrive in Alabama to their grandmother Sands house, Kenny wants to see how Byron gets his hind handed to him, but he is quickly disappointed. All grandma Sands has to say is a couple of words to Byron and he is being respectful and behaving. Things are different in the town than in Flint. Things are "separate but equal." Their grandmother warns them not to go down to swimming hole because of the whirlpool but because of her thick accent,

Kenny believes that she says Wool Pooh. Kenny does not listen to his grandmother and goes down their anyway and soon the whirlpool starts to take him down. He is saved by his brother, but he believes the Wool Pooh tried to “take him out.” Later in the book, the bombing of the church occurs, and Kenny is concerned because he believes his little sister is in the church. He goes to find her but believes he sees the Wool Pooh clinging to the shoe of his sister. Kenny runs back to his grandmother’s house to find his sister is at the house and she believes that he called her back to the house and knew nothing about the bombing at the church.

Kenny is shaken by this experience and when the family immediately goes back to Flint, he retreats to his hiding place, behind the couch. That is until his brother coaxes him out and gets him to be open about his experience. The book has a huge focus on family and how those people we love the most can help us out of our deepest and darkest places.

This book is important to curriculum unit because it shows how students of color dealing with real life issues as simple as a sibling getting in trouble can also be an ally when you need them most. The book features the main character as a bullied 4th grader who has an older brother that defends him against others. Throughout the book you see how important the relationship with the two brothers is to the dynamics of the family. Students in 6th grade can learn that even in tragedy, family will always have your back and seeing themselves in the triumphs of the family becoming closer and supporting each other is what the goal. Emphasizing the importance of the relationship and not the trauma during the time is important to the curriculum unit. This could build self-efficacy within the students. Confidence that someone has their back, even when they are going against recommendations or when the world seems to not have your back.

Hidden Figures: Young Readers Edition

Hidden Figures: Young Readers Edition takes place in Virginia at the Langley Research Center during the 1960’s. The book is written by Margot Lee Shetterly. The book talks specifically about 4 women of color, Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, Katherine Johnson, and Christine Darden. During this time, women were not respected in the same manner as they are now. These mathematicians or known as human computers at the time, used pencils, slide rulers, and adding machines to calculate the number that would launch rockets, and astronauts into space. The four women who the book is based around changed the face of NASA and the country forever but did not get the recognition because they were not just women, but they were Black women.

Each woman has her own story imbedded within the novel and shows the determination of each to be noticed in a world and time when being a woman made men look at you as not their equal but also being Black women made things even more difficult. This book is important to the curriculum because it opens a window into a world that looks unattainable to some students of color. When students are young, they often dream about being “heroes” like teachers, doctors, astronauts, police, firefighters and so much more. Unfortunately, those “heroes” don’t often look like students of color or how they are depicted in novels to look like students of color. Many students of color see themselves depicted as the villain or someone who needs sympathy because of their “unfortunate” situation. *Hidden Figures: Young Readers Edition* shares a different side of the Black experience. It shows resilience, determination, and brilliance which is not always associated with Black excellence. Students of color need to see that even in the face of a world

that looks at their skin color as a deficit, they are worthy, intelligent, and they belong in the world for many reasons beyond being a target.

Unit Timespan

Entire Unit

Vocabulary

Purpose: Under the language that is used throughout the unit

Objective: The students will understand and use vocabulary throughout the entire unit. Students will make connections with the vocabulary and activities

Procedure: Before starting the unit and during the unit, students will learn key vocabulary to help them throughout the unit. Some of the words are sex (female/male), gender, critical, race, self-efficacy, mirrors/windows/sliding doors, hidden curriculum, southern culture, and etc. The students will take the word and find the definition, picture, example, and create a sentence to go along with the word. Students will create Frayer models from the vocabulary words and place them in their interactive notebooks. The student will use Quizlet to help them practice the words.

Novel Reading

Purpose: Understand how southern culture and self can be seen in southern literature.

Objective: The students will analyze sections of the book to understand how southern culture plays a major role in the novels and relate it back to their own life.

Procedure: Teacher will take excerpts from the novels and read parts of the novels with the students. Students will be put into small groups and read the novels based on different factors. Some of those factors include but are not limited to reading ability, maturity level, and group dynamics. Students will create an excerpt analysis that includes telling 3 things that relate back to southern culture, 2 ways they feel like they or someone else can relate to the excerpt, and 1 question the students have.

Lessons/Activities

Talk Show – Using Watson’s go to Birmingham - 1963

Purpose: understand how different characters play a role in building different parts of the novel

Objective: Students will take a scene from the book and create a talk show where the different characters, played by the students, respond based on their personality and role in the scene

Procedure: Students will each take a role as one of the Watson children. Students will write a script for the talk show and the talk show host should have questions ready to ask the Watson children. Students will base the Watson children's visit to the talk show around one of the major events in the book. Students playing the roles of the children should do all they can to act as if they were one of the Watson children.

Comprehension Questions

Purpose: Checking for understanding

Objective: Students will answer comprehension questions to check for understanding of the novel

Procedure: Students will use the novel to help them answer open and closed questions asked by the teacher

Compare and Contrasting

Purpose: Students will see the intersections between the novel, themselves, movie, and southern culture

Objective: students will be able to compare the novel, self, movie, and show how they depict southern culture

Procedure: students will use Venn diagrams to show their comparisons of each group as it relates to southern culture. Students will then take the information from the Venn diagrams and create a 3-paragraph essay explaining their findings. This could be modified for struggling students will a guided paragraph, group work, and limited responses on the Venn diagram.

Reflection

Purpose: The purpose of the reflection piece is to give students sometime to break from the content and make connections to what they have experienced

Objective: Students will reflect on how the books give them a look into the life of southern culture during the 1960s and how they can relate it back to their own southern culture

Procedure: Students will use their interactive notebooks or canvas assignments to write a series of 5-7 one paragraph reflections on the different southern culture they experienced in the text and how it relates back to the southern culture they experience each day of their lives.

One Pager- both novels

Purpose: Show what students see as southern culture based on the book and their lived experience

Objective: Student will depict their understanding of southern culture in novels and their own experience

Procedure: The students will create two one pagers that shows their understanding of what southern culture is in the novels and what southern culture looks like to them based on their lived experiences.

Appendix 1: Teaching Standards

- RI.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text
- RI.6.3 Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text
- RI.6.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text
- 6.G.1 Understand the geographical factors that influence human migration and settlement
- 6.H.1 Understand the development of civilizations and societies from various perspectives

Appendix 2: All Activities

Google Folder for activities and more- Watson's Go to Birmingham

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1imq0HCTR8NsdGNO-OvAU8NeTWVz3K-xZ?usp=sharing>

Student Resources

Both text below is used in class for students to learn about southern culture.

Fiction Text

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Watson's Go to Birmingham*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1995.

Nonfiction Text

Shetterly, Margot Lee. *Hidden Figures: Young Readers Edition*. William Morrow and Company, 2016.

Teacher Resources

Additional Lessons that could help the teachers with incorporating the books into 6th grade curriculum.

Hidden Figures: Young Readers Edition

“Comprehensive Core Curriculum on Integrated Digital Platform: Smart Curriculum. Smarter Teaching.” LearnZillion. Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://learnzillion.com/>. *Unit 4 of the ELL curriculum is focused on the book. Teachers can incorporate different activities that focus on southern culture to help them within the unit.*

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