



Exploring the science and social emotion component to hair in Early Childhood

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Ashley Park

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Pre-K classes

Keywords: European hair, Social Movement of Hair, Hairism, and “Good Hair”

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

Synopsis: The main goal of this curriculum unit is to teach pre-k students about concepts of hair, introduce chemicals, relate it to how it can change hair, teach students to respect and embrace hair from different cultures, in an age appropriate way teach brief history of African American hair, and build their self-esteem related to hair. Students will build language, comprehension, cognitive, social emotional, and math skills through this unit. They will listen to stories that promote hair affirmations, explore hands on chemical concepts, explore and measure hair, and learn how to embrace the differences in hair.

*I plan to teach this unit **WHEN?***

This unit will be taught in the last trimester of the 2021-2022 school year to approximately 16 pre-k students.

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Introduction

Rationale:

Pre -K students are building on their literacy, language, social emotional, math and fine motor skills. I believe this unit will help the students enhance these different domains. This unit will also help the students become aware of how important it is to respect and embrace different hair styles. Children will work on embracing and finding a love for their hair.

School Background and Information

The NC Report Card provides information and data about Ashley Park. Less than 20 percent of students entering 6th grade are proficient. Students that are economically disadvantaged is 74.9 percent.

The pre-k classroom has 12 students. One student has an IEP. The students are 4 and 5 years old. There are 6 boys and 6 girls. Three students are Hispanic. Nine of the students are African American.

Ashley Park has a GEP afterschool program for students in kindergarten through 6th grade. GEP is big on family engagement. The program also collaborates with the staff and community for resources to provide opportunities for students.

Every student that attends GEP must have a home visit. Last year and past years, the program provided assistance to families for paying rent and/or bills. They had to discontinue the financial assistance due to the budget. GEP helps families obtain their GED and job placement. They partner with Central Piedmont Community College. The program provides opportunities for the student and their families to attend a variety of outings.

GEP helps the students with their homework. They provide snack to the students after school. Students are able to attend free field trips such as Hornets basketball games. The staff from GEP collaborates with the teachers to assist students having challenges. They also work with different companies such as Nike to provide resources to the students and their families.

Ashley Park has a high homeless population. Another program at Ashely Park is a Child's Place. Child's Place helps students and their families that are homeless. They help create plans to keep the students in school and promote academic success. The program assists with making sure the student's basic needs are met. Social workers are also involved to assist with employment, health issues, food, domestic violence, financial management, and housing.

Ashley Park offers a variety of recreation activities to the middle school students that meet grade and attendance qualifications. They offer football, cheerleading, volleyball, softball, basketball, track and field, baseball, and soccer. The school also has the program Girls on the Run.

Unit Goals

This unit will build self-concept and hair affirmation through literacy, math, and art activities. Books that display examples of hair affirmation, diversity in hair, and build self-concepts of children. The books will be age appropriate for 4 and 5 year olds. Each book will be read three times to give the students a clear understanding of the story and the teacher to push in examples of hair affirmations and the variety of hair styles. The first and second read aloud will be during whole group and third read aloud will be in small groups. The students will have opportunities to share out their opinions and interpretations of the book. Students will also share their positive thoughts on their hair and other student's hair.

Content Research

(History)

There has always been an importance with black hair. The article *Why We Need a Crown Act* states, "hair helped to illustrate status, culture, and beauty for both men and women throughout the African continent drew attention from notably influenced European descriptions of African people." Religion was also connected to certain hairstyles. Slave owners noticed the importance of black hair to them and as a result they cut and destroyed their hair.

During slavery hair that was more like white women was considered better and had extra benefits. Black hair that was of a kinky texture was related to being ugly. Because black people who had ugly or bad hair made the slave owners look bad, they began to find ways to cover their hair and find styles that were similar to white hairstyles. Women that had hair that was similar to white people's hair did not have to work in the fields, but they were more likely to be subject to sexual abuse by slave owners and encountered negativity from other slaves because of their hair. A slave who had hair that was long and straight used her hair to prove that she was of white decent and her and children could not be slaves. Slave owners used the descriptions of slave's hair to catch them when they ran away, but slaves became aware of this and begin to change their hair styles prior to running away.

Chemistry of Black hair

The article *Black Women's Hair Products are Killing Us. Why isn't More Being Done* by Tayo Bero, discusses how products put in African American hair is linked to health issues. Studies have shown that women who used permanent hair dye had an extremely higher chance of getting breast cancer. Black women use hair and skin products to try to meet the level of 'white standards of beauty. Sometimes black women are not aware of how harmful these products are to their bodies and there is not any regulations to protect black women. Research has shown that less than 25% of products advertised to black women have limited ingredients that can be damaging to their health and most products have a lot more ingredients that can be damaging to their health. Because there is very little warnings about these products, black women are using these products oblivious to knowing it can be harmful to their bodies.

Caring Environments

Young children need environments that create an emotional and physical safe place. Forming environments that promotes black children to have self-love and embrace their physical features promotes positive outcomes. Because black children need to learn self-love there has been a lot of books written for children that focus on children embracing their physical features. Some of the books focus on loving the variety of hairstyles and hair textures. The unit will use the books that focus on black children embracing their hair such as *Hair Love*. The article explains that young black children need to be exposed to these books to create that emotional and physical safe place.

The topic of hair is important to black people and it effects how they interact in the world. Black children start to develop view points and opinions about hair at a young age. Girls relate hair styles to social status. Hair styles that are against social expectations can be used to oppress black girls. This unit is very important, because we teach and interact with black girls and boys. Since hair has such an impact on children at a young age it is important we teach social, emotional, and self-confidence skills related to hair. The article directly discusses the opinions that black children are forming about their hair, but as opinions are forming in black children they are also forming in children of other races. When teaching this unit you are also teaching students of other races to respect the culture of black hair.

Children Literature in Education

Experiences related to hair when children are young will follow them until children are grown-ups. African American children see different images of hair in the media that are

¹ (Donahoo 2021)
(Bero 2021)
(Idara and wood 2020)
(Wanda and McNair 2014)

different from their hair. The images they see are from European decent which they have long straight hair. In addition to seeing opposite images of their hair in the media, they are sometimes surrounded by criticisms of their type of hair. This curriculum unit will focus on providing an environment that helps children embrace the different styles, textures, and lengths of hair.

There are different theoretical perspectives on black hair. A black feminist believed women of color can never achieve the beauty standards of European decent and as a result they endure the pain of it. The article also points out there is a direct connection between black hair and beauty. A theory from a lot of scholars point out that black people hair can have a direct impact on their economic and social emotional life. People have also studied the effects of media on black hair. They have found over the years there has been strides to combat the European interpretation of beauty. There has been documentaries, songs created, books, and television shows that highlight the variety of textures and styles of black women's hair.

Children's books have been used to reverse the consistent image of European beauty. Books are better at showing the details and culture behind African American hair compared to television. During the past and present, stories have played a role in African Americans views on hair. Children books like *Hair Love* convey the cultural aspect of telling stories while doing hair including them in the story line.

Books help African American children see themselves as beautiful. The books are used to show African American children that their hair is beautiful and accept it the way it is. European hair has been portrayed as what hair should look like. These books help young children have a point of view that their hair is normal.

Research was done to analyze children's books that highlight African American hair. The study found that most of the children literature had "the perspective that all hair is good, the connection between Black hair and African American history, and the bonding of females while hair is being combed and/or styled."

The book *Hair Love* is used in this curriculum unit to point out the advantages the character has with her hair because she can create many hairstyles. Pointing out the positive things about having black hair conveys the idea that all hair is good. The word cornrows is connected to share cropping during slavery. Hair Love also ties the history of the word cornrows into the text through comparing her cornrows to the rows of how they grew their vegetables. During the story Hair Love the girl is embarrassed of her hair and her teacher helps her by connecting hair to the past. She explained hair was a way to display they were pleased about their heritage. This experience between the girl and her teacher shows the bonding between black females related to their hair. The article White Parents Black Hair points out that a biracial female that has a white mother did not have the bonding that takes place over hair that black children experience.

Social Movements for Hair

A social movement that was started for black hair used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The different platforms created a place where discussions about natural black hair could take place. Black females could share styles and ideas in a place they were accepted. Although this was supposed to create a community for black hair, women that had kinkier or coily hair was not a part of the movement. To combat being omitted these women that was omitted created a community for them using these platforms as well. The community shared ideas about products they could use and peoples personal experiences with hair.

Social media, songs and online videos are used to promote, teach and, embrace black hair. The YouTube song by Sesame Street- I Love My Hair is a song about loving and embracing the hair you have. It encourages the point that hair is fine the way it is and there is not a need to change it. It combats the idea that black girls need to change their hair to be more like European hair.

Why We Need a National Crown Act

African American naturel hairstyles can have a negative impact on African American lives according to the article Why We Need a Crown Act. Black people with naturel hair may get disciplined or can be dismissed from places, such a work or school. This can cause fear and prevent them from keeping their hair in naturel hair styles. The Crown Act protects black people from discrimination based on their hair, so they can't be disciplined for wearing certain hair styles in a public place. Although hair discrimination of blacks is happening all over the country, only certain states have passed The Crown Act.

Different types of black hair are subject to more condemnation. Certain types of black hair are considered inadequate hair. The article Why We Need a National Crown Act states, “hairism supports racism by classifying Black hair as bad (short, kinky, wooly and coily) because it is the antithesis to White hair, which is straight, long, smooth, and therefore, good”. (pg 3) Hair styles such as dreadlocks can cause black women to be referred to as lesbian. Black women who wear their hair in styles that are more straight which is similar to white women are considered more attractive. Women who wear their hair similar to white people can be considered smarter which can lead to jobs that will earn them more money.

Lessons

Pre Lessons:

Before beginning the unit, teachers will have to self-reflect on their bias related to hair. They will have to explore how they complement students on their hair. Are we giving complements only

² (Wanda and McNair 2014)
(Donahoo 2021) (Goulston 2021)
(Street n.d.)

when a child has their hair straighten? When we are complementing different races are we unintentionally hurting the self-esteem of other children, and our displays in the classroom are we using a variety of hair styles when using pictures in the classroom.

After the teacher has explored her or his bias, in an age appropriate way students will be guiding in exploring their opinions of hair. Students will be asked to reflect on how they like their hair, what are some of their favorite hair styles, and what don't they like about their hair. In the process of exploring their hair the teacher will push in how everyone has different textures and styles for their hair and respecting people hair styles. Children literature will also be pushed in to teach how people reflect their hair and the emotions they feel.

Lesson 1

History of Hair.

Students will receive a brief history on the background of African American hair. The teacher will create a power point explaining the history of black hair in an age appropriate way. The power point will consist of 4 slides. The first slide will state a long time ago African Americans had oils and things to create different hair styles, and then they were taken from their homes. The second slide will state, they were taken from their homes on boats. The people who took them cut their hair. The third slide will state when they arrived to the new land, they did not receive any of the products and things they used to style their at home. Since they didn't have the products it caused their hair to become matted and tangled. The fourth slide will state African Americans began to use head rags and handkerchiefs to cover their hair. Add age appropriate pictures to match the words on the slides. Because of the age of the students we will not use white in a negative context as it relates to African Americans. It can be difficult for students that young to understand and they may generalize the people who took the African Americans in a negative perspective. After reading the power point, ask how do you think the African Americans felt when they didn't have their hair products they were used to having for their hair, how do you think they felt if people teased them about how their hair looked, and how do you feel if your hair is not done the way you like?

Lesson 2

The class will explore the science aspect of hair. The class will start by exploring what happens when you wet certain objects. The teacher and students will wet a variety of objects that have different reactions and chart what happens to the different objects. After exploring objects we will move on to hair. The class will start by exploring what happens when their hair gets wet. After the students share what happens when the students hair gets wet, the teacher will have them reflect on the answers with questions such as how is it the same, how is it different, and why do you think it's different. While the students are sharing their ideas the teacher will write them down and discuss letter formation, beginning sounds, and punctuations.

We will use wigs and dolls and wet their hair. The class will predict what they think will happen when we wet the different hair types. We will create a chart on their predictions and the results.. The students will be prompted to describe the textures and differences amongst what happens to the wigs and dolls hair. The predictions will be used to create a graph and tally to demonstrate the similarities of the effects of water on the wigs and dolls hair.

Lesson 3

After exploring the changes in hair when wet, the students will be introduced to chemicals in an age appropriate way. The teachers will describe when things are mixed with chemicals they change from their original way. The students will mix baking soda and vinegar. After mixing they will reflect on the changes. The students will explore what happens when we use different amounts of baking soda and vinegar. How does it change when you use more or less baking soda and vinegar? The next day we will discuss how chemicals can change someone's hair. We will use YouTube videos to help give the students visuals of how chemicals can change the color or texture of someone's hair. After the videos the class will create a chart and list how the hair changed with chemicals. During the activity the teacher will discuss letter formation, beginning sounds and punctuations will be discussed. The next day the class will review the chart how chemicals change hair and the class will create another chart titled why do you think people put those chemicals in their hair?

Lesson 4

The class will do 3 read aloud of the book *Hair Love*. During the first read aloud the students will predict what they think the story will be about, the teacher will make comments during the story to enhance vocabulary, and after the story the students will explain how the character felt about her hair. During the second read aloud, the students will recall details from the story, and while listening to the story the students will comment on the character hair and emotions. During the third read aloud the students will be prompted to retell the story line in sequence and help fill in parts of the story. After reading the story three times the students will use yarn, fake hair, different textures of paper, and people cut outs to create a girl with different hair styles. When the students finish creating their hair styles on their people cut outs, they will share their style with the class. While sharing their work with the class they will be prompted to discuss the textures they used and explain why they used that texture.

Lesson 5

The class will discuss the word length. The teacher will ask the students do they know what the word length means. After the students share ideas the teacher will explain length is how long something is. Students will have a turn and talk about the length of their hair. Turn and talk will be for 1 minute. The teacher will facilitate the conversations. After turn and talk the teacher will explain there are different lengths to hair, some are short and some are long and explain the importance of embracing the different lengths of hair. The students will measure different pieces of hair. The students will use unifix cubes to measure the hair. The teacher will model building a

tower of unifix cubes to match the length of hair and counting how many unifix cubes long the hair is. The next day the teacher will introduce ordering the hair from shortest to longest. The teacher will model a few examples and some students will be selected to have a turn. After modeling the students will participate in the activity independently during choice time.

Assessment

At the Pre-K level, assessment are conducted by writing notes on what the children say during activities, using a chart such as the one below:

Date	Child's Name	Notes

Beginning Sound Checklist

Date	Name	Number of Beginning sounds identified

Measurement Checklist

Date	Name	Uses unifix cubes correctly to measure	Counts unifix cubes and correctly states

			how many cubes long

Teaching Strategies:

Here is a list of strategies that can be used throughout the unit.

- Visuals and Examples: Throughout the unit the students will be exposed to a lot of vocabulary words. Use of visuals to explain the vocabulary. Give examples of the vocabulary that the students can make connections with.
- Push in Vocabulary and Concepts: While the students are engaged in different activities related to the vocabulary discuss the concepts with them. Help them recall the concepts and vocabulary words.
- Questioning: Ask the students questions that will give them opportunities to explore their feelings about the concept, the vocabulary introduced, and recall events from the story.
- Model: Model how to use the vocabulary and the materials
- Hand Over Hand: Use hand over hand for students who need assistance with mixing the materials
- Extra read alouds: Students having a difficulty picking up the vocabulary or understanding the story, pull them in groups of 1 to 3 and read the story to them and reinforce the vocabulary and details in the story.

Appendix 1

Teaching Standards

Teaching Strategies Gold

Social Emotional

- Establishes and sustains positive relationships: Responds to emotional cues, interacts with peers, and makes friends
- Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations: Balances needs and rights of self and others and solves social problems

Language

- Uses language to express thoughts and needs: Uses expanding expressive vocabulary, speaks clearly,
- Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills: Engages in conversations

Literacy

- Demonstrates Knowledge of print and it's uses: Uses and appreciates books
- Comprehends and responds to books and other text: Interacts during read-alouds and book conversations, Uses emergent reading skills, and retell stories

Math

- Uses number concepts and operation
- Counts
- Compares and measures

Social Studies:

- Begins to recognize and appreciate similarities and differences in people
- Demonstrates knowledge about self

Appendix 2

Teacher Resources

Books that give opportunities to teach students about loving the diversity of hair

Hair Like Mine

Perry, LaTashia M., and Bea Jackson. *Hair like Mine*. G Publishing LLC, 2015.

In an age appropriate way this book reflects on it okay to have different kinds of hair. It conveys the message to have children embrace the hair they and the differences and other hair.

Love Your Hair

Austin, Phoenyx. *Love Your Hair!* Phoenyx Austin, 2015.

This book promotes a love for the different textures of African American hair.

Curls

Forman, Ruth., *Curl*. Little Simon, 2020

This book will encourage acceptance of the different textures and styles of black girl's hair.

Student Resources

(These are minimal due to the very young age of the children.)

Materials

- Chart Paper
- Wigs
- Dolls
- A variety of objects that have different reactions when wet
- Hair Love book
- Baking Soda

- Vinegar
- Unfix cubes
- Variety of strips of hair
- Yarn
- Variety of cut texture hair
- Glue
- People cut outs

Appendix 3

Lesson 2 Charts

Day 1

Objects	What happened when the object was wet?
Paper	
Bread	
Stuff	
Sock	

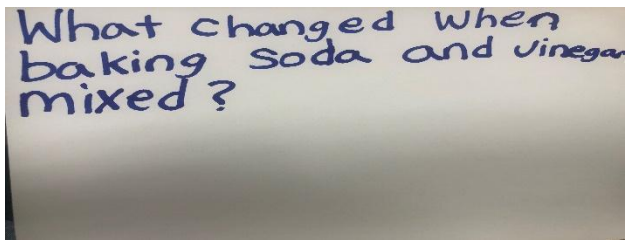
Day 2

Objects	What happened when the object was wet?

Wig	
Doll	
Braids	
Teacher Hair	
Weave Track	

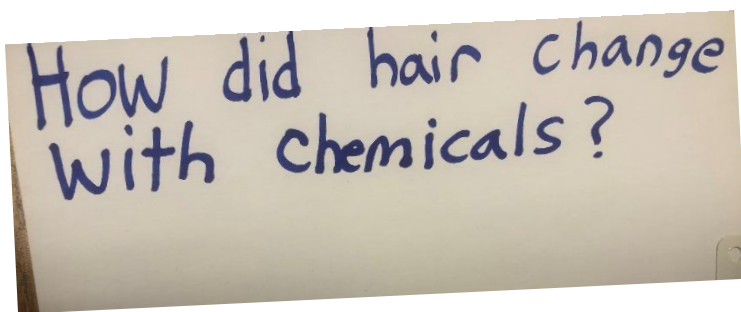
Lesson 3

Day 1 Anchor Chart



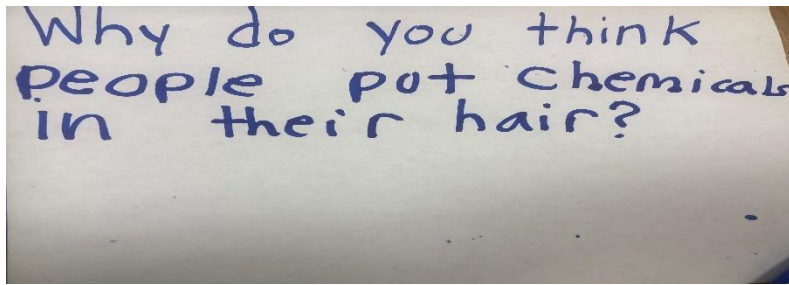
What changed when
baking soda and vinegar
mixed?

Day 2 Anchor Chart



How did hair change
with chemicals?

Day 3 Anchor Chart



Sources

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- Bero Tayo-Black women’s hair products are killing us. Why isn’t more being done? <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jul/27/black-women-hair-products-health-hazards-study>