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A Glimpse into the Black Experience

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Lesson Plan

Unit Topic: Black Civil Rights

Lesson: A Glimpse into the Black Experience

Rationale for the Lesson: Issues of human rights are often born from a lack of experience and resulting misunderstanding. Being that we learn from experience, our experiences are integral in shaping many aspects of who we are and what we believe. Which is why in many cases until one has experienced something, they have no way of understanding what comes with that experience. Here lies America's current divide on Black civil rights. African Americans today are fighting for the same thing they always have, equality. However from the outside looking in, many believe African Americans are already being treated fairly. Black history is riddled with aggression and oppression. From slavery, to convict leasing, to segregation, it's been a long road to where we are. Because of this progression, many struggle to see inequality in the current black experience as historically it's been far worse. However, progression doesn't mean equality. And while it may seem simple, many have trouble understanding this concept as they've never experienced life as a black man or woman. Therefore it becomes harder to sympathize with this experience, much less to grasp the purpose behind the modern day movements in black civil rights. This lesson will offer students a glimpse into this experience. Enough so that, while students may not fully understand it, they will be more open and sympathetic to the conversation.

Standards

Social Studies: 6.1.P.D.4- Learn about and respect other cultures within the classroom and community.

Social Studies: 6.1.4.D.16- Describe how stereotyping and prejudice can lead to conflict, using examples from the past and present.

Social Studies: 6.1.4.D.19- Explain how experiences and events may be interpreted differently by people with different cultural or individual perspectives.

Social Studies: 6.1.4.D.20- Describe why it is important to understand the perspectives of other cultures in an interconnected world

Essential Question/Guiding Question: How does race affect the black experience? How can all Americans be aware of their role in and understanding impact our potential role in this experience?

Objectives:

Students will learn what microaggression is and be able to identify examples in daily conversation

Students will learn about code switching and it's mental effects

Students will be able to have a conversation about race and the effects of racism in modern day America

Lesson Opener/Anticipatory Set/Lead-In/Do Now: The lesson shall open with a discussion about race and resulting experiences. I will open the conversation with the question:

- How do you identify in terms of race? Describe an experience where you were aware of your racial identity.

After sharing my own experiences and their effect on my identity growing up, I will then give students time to write their answers down on a blank piece of paper.

Step-By-Step Procedures with Time Allocations:

- Opening Discussion about racial identity, 10-15 min
- Introduction to the black experience, 10 min
 - After the opening discussion, I'll introduce the topic of the black experience and its major aspects. Make sure to voice the goal of the lesson plan, which is to create an open dialogue about race. I'll begin by passing out Langston Hughes' "I, Too". After reading the poem aloud once or twice, I will then ask students to take a moments and critically read through the poem. Students will underline or highlight important parts as they read. Next I'll allow students to share their thoughts and quotes with a partner or neighbor. I'll also ask groups to collectively try and find the meaning behind the poem. Finally the class will reconvene for discussion and will share their findings/ thoughts. I'll then ask the class a couple questions about the poem relating to the theme. Questions like:
 - Why do you think Hughes' named the poem I, Too?
 - Through this title, what is Hughes' trying to illustrate?
- Microaggression activity, 15-20 min
 - I'll begin by defining microaggression and its place in modern day racism, making sure to emphasize that microaggression is subtle but potent. While also making sure to emphasize that microaggression often doesn't come from a negative place, just misunderstanding.
 - **Definition:** Microaggression- subtle but offensive comments that are based in race/ prejudice
 - After making sure students have a grasp of the subject, students will begin reading through written scenarios on a handout. These scenarios will include examples of daily conversations and encounters with microaggression. Students will then once again be broken up into groups of 3-4, each being given a handout. Next, reading through each scenario, groups will identify the examples of microaggression and distinguish these examples from the others. I will ask that students think critically and converse in their groups. Keeping in mind the subtlety behind these microaggressive comments as well as their potential impact on identity. The class will then come back together and discuss the activity and their findings. I'll ask a few questions that may include:
 - What are the potential effects of microaggression?

- Does microaggression always comes from a negative place?
 - Can microaggression impact identity? How?
 - Finally I'll allow students to share any experiences they've had with microaggression and how it made them feel.
- Code Switching, 10-15 min
 - I'll begin by asking students if they've ever heard of code switching before, allowing any students who have to share their idea of it. I will then briefly define code switching for the class, providing quick examples from personal experience for understanding. Next I'll show students a trailer for the documentary *American Promise*. After explaining the premise of the film, I'll introduce the films two protagonists, Idris and Seun. Next, I'll show a clip in which Idris, one of the children followed in the documentary, speaks on being made fun for speaking "like a white boy" by teammates on his basketball team. I'll then let students share their reactions to the clip. Next I'll ask the class several questions about the clip, mainly focusing on why Idris is being made fun of and how he is handling it. Questions may include:
 - Why do you think Idris is getting made fun of by his teammates?
 - Why don't you think Idris gets made fun of at Dalton?
 - Why does idris lie to his parents about switching the way he talks?
 - Watching the clip, how do you think Idris feels about having to switch back and forth constantly depending on who he is around?
 - What do you think Idris' teammates mean when they say he "talks like a white boy"
 - Should there be a difference?
 - I'll then re-introduce the concept of code switching and relate it back to what Idris talks about in the clip. I'll highlight how young Idris is in the clip, making sure students realize that code switching often starts at a young age and happens naturally. I'll then ask students a couple questions about the long term effects of code switching.
 - Why do we code switch?
 - Does race play a role?
 - How can code switching affect one's identity?
 - Finally, I'll allow students to share any experiences they've had with code switching, also asking students to share how this made them feel or if they even realized they were doing it.

Lesson Closure (If one runs out of time): After closing out the class discussion on code switching, the class will reconvene for a final discussion on what they've learned. Here I'll highlight the importance behind topics covered and their role in the black experience. Using I, Too, microaggression, and code switching, I'll explain to students that these topics are universal struggles in the black experience. That as a sole result of race, black people may be treated differently on a daily basis. The main purpose in all this is acknowledgement and hopefully understanding. I'll ask that students remember that while they may not all be black, they may have also experienced some of the effects of some of these topics. Therefore students should try to be sympathetic and more open to conversations about experiences

with race in the future. As well, being that students are now aware of all this, they should try to be cognizant of the potential effects of how they talk to fellow students and the long lasting potential effects on identity.

- Questions for discussion:
 - Why is all of this important?
 - With all that you've learned, what role does race play in our identity?
 - How can we work to make our experiences more positive ones?

Lesson Closure (Extra time): Rap Genius

I'll begin by informing students that many artists use creativity and expression as an outlet when dealing with their experiences, much like I too with Langston Hughes. I'll then highlight some notable artists who've released music dealing with the black experience, artists like Jay Z, Solange, Beyonce, Tupac, and Kendrick Lamar. Next I'll ask the class if they've ever heard Kendrick Lamar's popular song "Alright". After gauging their reaction, I will ask that we take a moment to listen to the songs introduction and chorus (clean version). Depending on how much time we have, I'll play the song's introduction and chorus two to three times. I'll then ask the class if they have any idea what Lamar is alluding to throughout his lyrics. After letting those who'd like to offer their opinions, I will then highlight that through these verses, Lamar is informing listeners of the constant struggle that comes with being black. Being that the intro's "All's my life I has to fight" lyrics are an ode to the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel The Color Purple, Lamar uses these lyrics to unite the black experience through a common understanding of struggle. Encouraging listeners to continue to fight as their ancestors did, no matter how hard it becomes. I'll then explain that the "we gon be alright" part of chorus is meant to bring hope and inspiration for those still struggling with their identity. Eventually leading activist in the BLM movement to adopt the song as a chant during protests. After finishing my analyzation with the class, I'll move to relate this songs message to lessons theme through class discussion.

- Questions for discussion:
 - How do we continue this "fight" moving forward?
 - In what ways do code switching, microaggression, and identity relate to this struggle Lamar alludes to?
 - How do you think what you've learned today will influence your "experience" moving forward?

Materials and Equipment Needed:

- Access to computer or projector
- Speakers
- Computer paper for handouts

Assignment: I'll ask that students think critically during each activity. Keeping in mind the importance and relevance of each topic discussed.

Assessment: Student understanding will be evaluated based on their responses during class discussion and activities.

Modifications for diverse learners: The Lesson plan is presented for either audio or visual learners. I also plan on being an open guide throughout the class. Meaning that should there ever be a question or need for clarification, I'll be there to offer an answer.

Microaggression Handout

- Microaggressions are often subtle and may go unnoticed. Here are a couple examples of scenarios or comments that may or may not exhibit microaggression.
1. Seeing that you have dreads, a student asks you, "Do you wash your hair? How does that work?"
 2. Wearing a Make America Great Again hat to school.
 3. "You're pretty for a black girl"
 4. "I don't see color!"
 5. While you are learning of the civil war, a classmate defends the confederate flag as it represents a "way of life."
 6. "White people are so....."
 7. When drawing stick figures of classmates on the board, a classmate colors your face in so that it could, "look more like you"
 8. "I'm not racist, my best friend is Latino!"
 9. You and your friend are the only minorities in your english class. On the first day of class, the teacher pulls you and your friend aside as she is scared that neither of you will be able to keep up.
 10. "You act pretty white for a black person."

Annotated Bibliography

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: an American Lyric*. Penguin, 2015.

Citizen by Claudia Rankine is a book of poems and essays that aim to expose readers to the black experience. The book does this in a variety of ways, however I find the way in which Rankine writes the majority of her chapters to be most intriguing. Rankine's use of the word "you" puts the reader in the place of the poem's speaker. Therefore when reading Rankine's poems, the reader feels as if they are experiencing the evils of racism first hand, and as a result, it makes them think. It makes the reader wonder what their classmate meant by saying, "you smell good and have features more like a white person" (Rankine 3). The reader is immediately left to question it. Was that meant to be a compliment? What does she mean by "features more like a white person"? How does one respond? Should I be angry? Here lies the beauty in Rankine's writing. While not quite the real thing, the thought process one undergoes in attempting to analyze what such comments mean, opens one's eyes to what it feels and sounds like to experience racism. Through the speaker's experiences as a child, Rankine illustrates how African Americans often times grow up struggling with a core part of their identity, their race. Aside from her poetry, Rankine also writes essays that analyze the black experience in popular media, and utilizes striking imagery all related to creatively expressing black oppression. *Citizen* is a great read and helps readers to not only understand the consequences of microaggression, but the evolution of racism in today's society.

Canedy, Dana. "The Talk: After Ferguson, a Shaded Conversation About Race." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 13 Dec. 2014.

Trayvon Martin's murder did a lot of things. For a lot of people, it was a reminder that racism still exists. That people can be killed for being suspicious, and that standing your ground is a good enough defense. For blacks, it was a vicious reminder of what comes with their blackness. A reminder that your blackness may scare people. A reminder that your blackness can cost you your life. For black parents, this sparked a conversation. Many were left to talk to their kids about what it means to be black, and more importantly, how to stay safe. This article explores Canedy and her conversation with her son Jordan on these topics. Canedy struggled to explain to Jordan that his blackness could be taken as a threat. That he would have to be cautious and especially polite around police officers. The interesting take away from the conversation is her son's response, "Can I just pretend I'm white" (Canedy 884). It's important to keep in mind that while having this conversation, Canedy's son Jordan is just a child. This speaks to the black experience with identity. From the time they are young, black children learn of oppression. They

learn of their ancestors and slavery, then their great grandparents and segregation. Finally their parents teach them that their blackness can be dangerous and that it's important to be cautious. Essentially being black and learning what that means is exhausting to an extent. As a result of all this, some grow to hate their blackness and all that it entails. Being white begins to seem like a much easier alternative. But that's all apart of the experience.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. Text Publishing Company, 2015.

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates aims to offer a glimpse into what it takes to raise a black child in America. Often forgotten in the black experience is the process of learning what it means to be black. From the perspective of the parent, this can be a very daunting task. On one hand, you get the opportunity to introduce your child to the beauty of black culture. On the other hand, parents are left with the task of explaining what blackness may mean to others. In other words, black parents have to warn their children about the dangers of being black in America. Children see good in everything and everybody. Therefore this part process almost feels like corrupting their purity. Taking away their child sense of wonder. *Between the World and Me* focuses on the difficult conversations that Black parents have with their children while raising them. The conversations about a reality that can be hard to cope with. In addition to Coates describing the conversations that grow out of real life situations and news headlines, Coates also shows the importance and necessity in having these conversations. Coates speaks on this by stating, "I would not have you descend into your own dream. I would have you be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world" (Coates 108). Essentially, Coates wants his son to be aware of the world and what life will mean for him as a black man, while not letting it hinder his ability to see the beauty in the world. These difficult conversations are the only way black parents can truly ensure a sense of awareness in their children. While difficult, they are necessary, especially if you're black.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. Penguin Books, 2016.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* speaks to the mental aspect of the black experience. Many black kids struggle with their identity growing up. People's prejudice often determines what being black "should" mean. Therefore, there are many expectations as to how you should act, what music you should listen to, or even who you should be around when your black. It becomes exhausting as these expectations may not fit who you are. Resultantly, Black children often find themselves struggling to fit the molds of these all expectations. Eventually leading them to question why it doesn't come naturally, or whether they should even have to fit these expectations. These factors don't allow some to live an authentic life. It becomes harder to be yourself when society is constantly trying to tell you who you are. This is the phenomenon *Invisible Man* aimed to show the American public. Ellison speaks on this experience through the quote, "I am an invisible man. ... I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (Ellison 3). Here the narrator equates this constant struggle of meeting expectations to the concept of being invisible, being that regardless people fail to see who he truly is. While published in 1952, this theme of invisibility is still incredibly relevant to the modern black experience as these expectations continue to inspire identity crises in many.

Wilkinson, Alissa. "Get Out Is a Horror Film about Benevolent Racism. It's Spine-Chilling." *Vox*, Vox, 24 Feb. 2017, www.vox.com/culture/2017/2/24/14698632/get-out-review-jordan-peelee.

Barack Obama's election was important for many reasons. First and most importantly, Obama was America's first president of African American descent. This represented a time of progression and hope for many. It felt like the impossible had finally been achieved. Secondly, it seemed to solve racism. Not actually, however many saw Obama's presidency as the end of racism's run as a national issue. How could America be a racist country when the president is black? Here lies the importance of movies like *Get Out*. In 2017, *Get Out* served as a shocking reminder of a cruel reality for many. *Get Out* highlights the microaggressive form of racism that is often seen in today's society, while also exhibiting America's sometimes fetish like obsession with black culture. The movie does this in a beautiful and realistic way. When meeting Rose's family in the film, Chris seems apprehensive. This is because Rose's family weren't acting natural when talking to him. This is one of the important takeaways from the film, it shows the horror in day to day conversations with casual racists. Rose's family was overtly attempting to show they weren't racists while constantly inquiring about his experiences and abilities as a black man. This serves as a reminder that aggressively trying not to be racist doesn't make encounters less racist, it just makes the conversation feel unnatural. It's fitting that *Get Out* is a horror film as well. Being that what Chris' experiences throughout the remainder of the film is just a dramatization of a scary reality for modern blacks. What's truly important about *Get Out* is the conversation that comes from watching it. Watching *Get Out* isn't the same as experiencing life as a black individual in today's society, but it helps to build understanding of what the black experience looks, sounds, and feels like.

Stone, Rolling. "Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly': Track by Track." *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 16 Mar. 2015, www.rollingstone.com/music/features/kendrick-lamars-to-pimp-a-butterfly-a-track-by-track-guide-20150316.

To Pimp a Butterfly by Kendrick Lamar is one of the most important albums to come out in recent years. The album focuses on many aspects of the black experience, as well their effects on one's mentality as a black individual. The album begins with a sample of Boris Gardiner's "Every ni**er is a star". In analyzing Lamar's album, one can see why Lamar chose the song to open his sophomore showing. Boris Gardiner's "Every ni**er is a star" was a song originally intended to inform black people around the world of their worth. Through "Wesley's Theory", Lamar repurposed the classic song to illustrate how those in power often exploit the talents of black individuals before throwing them back in the system. The sample and opening track serve as a cautionary tale for listeners. While reminding the audience of their worth as black people, Lamar also reminds listeners that their worth can be exploited. This is a rough place to start the album, however this song simply illustrates the importance Lamar felt in making the album. *To Pimp a Butterfly* tackles the difficult reality blacks must cope with living in America. Every song is an exploration into a different aspect of the same experience. Lamar doesn't hesitate or hold back on *To Pimp a Butterfly*, and for good reason. Resultantly, listening to the album is an emotional, eye opening, and informative experience.