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AMERICAN CULTURE STUDIES
The African-American Experience: From the Slave Ship to the White House

Unit I: 1600-1865

Unit II: 1865-Present (not included in this project)

North Mesquite High School resides on the east side of Dallas County in Texas. The local demographic indicates a substantial shift in both ethnic and economic diversity since 2000. The historically prominent White ethnic category has declined from seventy-five percent to approximately forty-one percent, while the Hispanic population has risen from twelve percent to almost thirty-five percent. The African American population increased from about twelve percent to almost twenty percent during the same period. The ethnic shift ushered in a lower socio-economic status, but a significant middle of upper-middle class has remained in the area. The public school system recognized the rapid shift several years ago and implemented strategies affecting the emerging educational milieu. For the academic year 2009-2010, NMHS improved from Academically “Acceptable” to “Recognized” according to the State of Texas public school evaluation system.

Within this context the American Culture Studies fulfills a curricular elective. For the most part the students have completed the secondary level of American history. Thus, the objective of the course is to enable students to answer the question: “**What is America,**” in an analytical and rational manner. The scope and sequence of the one semester course explores the cultural relationships of the early European colonists and nation builders who encounter significant challenges with the Native American, African slave, and Mexican cultures. Students explore how American economic policies, democratic governance, and religious freedom combined to form a unified pluralistic American culture. The course affords students the opportunity to confront controversial topics of religion and politics, and to discuss these issues in a thoughtful and respectful manner. In essence, the course becomes a microcosmic laboratory practicum focused on the many voices of America interacting, listening, constructing, and adapting to become a more unified cohesive whole.

The specific class population ethnic and economic demographic mirrors that of the school as discussed earlier. The students are an eclectic academic conglomeration including; honor students, disaffected learners, standard graduation track students, ESL, and SPED students. Each class lasts 90 minutes for a one semester. The variation of reading and reasoning skills often presents a challenge for content delivery, comprehension, interpersonal communication, and class discourse. Differentiation is essential. Subjective and objective tests are avoided as a means of assessment, relying more on writing samples, digital portfolios, and various projects to assess learning. The course does reinforce state standards, but is not directly linked to the Social Studies state assessment. Thus, students learn only if they find the subject matter relevant and important with assessment taking the form of a variety of projects; e.g., critical essays, panel discussions, participation in a Lincoln-Douglas debate, primary source journal entries, and a digital portfolio.

Students will have previously analyzed European colonization and their clashing cultural exchange with the Native Americans. During the previous unit students will have explored early American religious experiences and how those experiences shaped colonial life. The first unit of the African-American experience from 1600-1865 allows students to think critically about an intensely relevant subject to them. The issue of racism and slavery tends to evoke a powerful response from the diverse population group in this course. Students will be challenged to set aside their emotions to look at the issue of abolitionism in an objective manner through a series focusing on the religious nature of abolitionism through the lens of primary documents and significant interpersonal dialogue throughout the unit.

Unit Objective:

In order to evaluate the various methods of social change employed during antebellum America via immediatism and gradualism, students will engage in thoughtful dialogue, explicate primary sources, review instructional content, and analyze the social, economic, political, and religious issues that created an impetus for the 19th century abolitionism as a reform movement.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills:

The unit will support specific state curriculum standards related to the following pedagogical elements:

1. The student understands traditional historical points of reference in U.S. history through 1877.

2. The student understands how political, economic, and social factors led to the growth of sectionalism and the Civil War.
3. The student will compare the effects of political, economic, and social factors on slaves and free blacks.
4. The student will analyze the impact of slavery on different sections of the United States.
5. The student understands the importance of the expression of different points of view in a democratic society.
6. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society.
7. The student understands the relationships between and among people from various groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious groups, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.
8. The student understands the major reform movements of the 19th century. describe the historical development of the abolitionist movement.
9. The student understands the impact of religion on the American way of life.
10. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology.
11. The student will identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference which influenced the participants.
12. The student will support a point of view on a social studies issue or event.
13. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms.
14. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings.
15. The student will use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution

The Big Understanding:

Through the lens of immediate vs. gradual abolitionism, how can cultural, social, economic, and religious factors coalesce together to form a powerful social movement and affect change in America?

Opening Hook: (2 full class periods)

We Are Marshall: The movie re-enacts the Marshall University football team tragic plane crash threatening the future of the entire football program. The town of Huntington, WV and the university divides over restarting the football program the following year into a “forward looking” group and a “looking to the past” group. The division into groups in the movie provides a dialogue for students to discuss how people of a similar experience can have divergent deeply rooted feelings. Students will be asked, “How would you classify the groups in the movie?” Guide discussion toward a divide of those who wanted to play football immediately, and those who did not want to play football immediately. Students will describe and analyze the two groups and postulate motives why specific characters arrived at their position. Students should also describe characters who are conflicted or ambiguous regarding their position toward restarting football. The conclusion to the exercise will elicit a model for students to emulate when discussing controversial topics contrasting the characteristics of “discussion” or a “debate.” Students will demonstrate their understanding by creating a journal entry stating ways in which they can make a positive contribution regarding controversial topics in the class discussions.

Instructional Strategies/Student Activities:

1. Primary sources of the slave ship to Civil War (45 minutes/half a class session)

Students will explicate primary sources of slavery recording their observations and insights of each document. Each entry should be at least two or three sentences. Slave Ship to Civil War PPT.

2. Contextualization of Abolitionism (45 minutes)

Place the Abolitionist movement in historical context via cultural, economic, political, and religious components that created a crusading environment for **immediatism vs. gradualism**. Review the Lundy Plan as a class, highlighting the key components to the plan. Students record using Cornell notes.

3. Evaluation of Primary Sources: (90 minutes)

- Biography/Bibliography for Confessions of Nat Turner

- John Brown's Body
- Fredrick Douglass 4th of July Speech
- Thornton Stringfellow
- Abolition Intelligencer and Missionary Magazine (Shelbyville, KY)

The students will perform an analysis of the primary documents listed above identifying the thesis, supporting propositions, religious perspectives, socio-economic references, and justice issues. Using Google Squared as a research tool the students will create a bibliography and biography of the assigned primary source highlighting the impact on antebellum slavery debate.

4. **Religious Context of Millennialism-Scripture in 19th Century Abolitionism**

Use Stauffer's content to generate an understanding of 19th century millennialism, followed by a class dialogue concerning the use of religion as a force of social change, or a manipulative tool.

5. **Summative Critical Essay (Choose One)**

- The students should adopt a position of either immediatism or gradualism. The students will write a persuasive letter attempting to convince a family member of the opposite view to accept the view of the student. The student should utilize the primary documents to formulate a document reflecting the primary documents and views of the the abolitionist period.
- The students will write a critical essay using the following prompt: Use your imagination to describe how gradualism was successful in ending 19th century slavery. What would be different today, if it had worked?
- Write a critical essay describing the strengths of immediatism and gradualism. If you lived in antebellum America, which method do you think you would have supported to resolve the slavery issue? Defend your position.

Assessment Evidence:

- Discussion contribution journal entry.
- Records for explication of primary sources.
- Cornell Notes of economics, race, and religion building up to Civil War.
- Group analysis of primary documents/autobiography.
- Summative writing assignment of letter and/or critical essay.

Materials and Resources:

- We Are Marshall
- Primary Sources
- Copies of key characters of Abolitionism primary sources.
- Computer lab

Grouping Patterns:

- Differentiated as determined by teacher.

Miscellaneous Thoughts:

Characteristics of a Crusading Environment

- Clear injustice/victim group.
- Coalition of the forceful willing to agitate for change.
- Creation of a divisive argument pitting one side against the other. “If you are not for me, you are against me mentality.”
- Religious and political climate susceptible to a crusading mentality.

See, Gustaud, P. 191, view of the church in slavery.

What are potential social benefits and consequences of immediatism and gradualism as employed in policy formation?

How is immediatism similar to and different from current progressive social policies?

How is gradualism similar to and different from current conservative policies?