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# Social Studies Education Review

of the Georgia Council for the Social Studies

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## **First Graders' Family Stories: Multimodal Representation of a Key Social Studies Topic**

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### **Abstract**

Teacher educators worked with first-graders from a rural K-8 school to write and illustrate stories about themselves and their families and then helped the children publish their work multimodally as digital stories. In addition to learning to view technology as an authentic tool, students had the opportunity to develop skills in writing, speaking, visual representation, and to draw connections between themselves and their families, communities, and the world. The resulting digital stories became historical artifacts for the children and their families which documented not only events and practices related to *family* as a social studies topic but also the feelings and perspectives held by the students who created these stories. The purpose of this paper is to share with educators the process of working with elementary children to develop digital stories with a social studies theme so that this may be useful in guiding the process in their own classrooms. We observed a positive response from the students when they created family-oriented digital stories and our hope is that other educators may have similar experiences.

**Keywords:** elementary social studies, multimodal literacies, personal narratives, digital storytelling

### **Introduction**

Juliet began her story: “My dad is a builder. He built our house and the chicken coop. My mom is a sewer [seamstress]. Sometimes she stiches my clothes.” Figure 1 shows her invented spelling in her draft of a script for her later narration. Juliet is a reflective and creative first grader who likes to write and illustrate stories. As we met with her to generate ideas for a digital story, Juliet knew immediately what she wanted to write. She talked about her family and what they did as well as how she felt about them and herself as a family member. First, she talked with us about the details she wished to include and then she wrote a profile of each family member. She created a section for each of her family: her dad, mom, older brothers (who “play games with her”); and her “Gramma” who with Juliet “love[s] doing art together”. As Juliet assembled this story on the computer, she made choices: where to pan across her scanned drawing, how she wanted to audio record the

story, and whether to add music and sound effects. When she completed her story, she watched a draft version to determine if changes were needed, then published it so she could screen it for her classmates. We provided a CD with her story to take home and share with her family. Her story affirmed and deepened her understanding of *family* and it also became a family artifact.

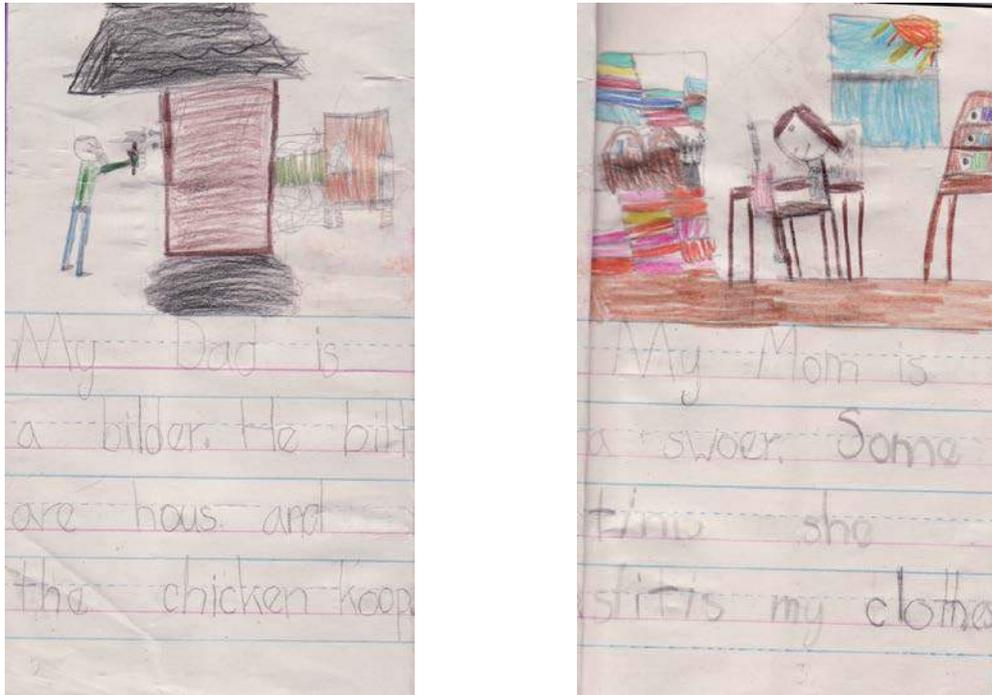


Figure 1: Juliet's drawings and text for her digital story on her family

Here, we describe a project in which two teacher educators worked in an elementary classroom to help students tell their family stories using digital tools. We include what we did with the children and what we learned as a result of this experience. Through our work with these first grade students, we gained understandings about the value and potential benefits of this approach as it might help students develop social studies knowledge about the construct of *family* and acquire digital skills to support their multimodal telling of their family stories. As a result of our experience with these children, we grew in our knowledge of how to more effectively collaborate with classroom teachers and their students to create multimodal stories with a social studies theme and to support this process. We learned lessons related to logistics and scheduling and refined the pedagogical strategies we used with the children and have applied these to the work we continue to do in other classrooms and community contexts.

First, we will offer relevant literature that helps put in context the connection between digital storytelling and social studies in the elementary classroom. Next, we will share a few of our experiences working with the children as we helped them to craft digital stories with a family theme. Last, we offer recommendations for implementing this in other classrooms.

## Relevant Literature

### Social Studies and Family Stories

We lead storied lives. Stories “allow us to take snippets of life and put them together in ways that make it possible for us to learn...and help us create a sense of personal identity in relation to our communities and the world in which we live” (Ohler, 2008, p.9). Children have stories to tell and multiple ways to represent and share them. They often ground their stories in their own interests and experiences which can make their stories personally meaningful and intriguing for themselves as well as their peers. Stories can help children enjoy and make sense of their lives as members of families and communities and as global citizens (Frazel, 2010). It has been our experience that encouraging children to tell family stories using their perspectives on the structures (e.g. family roles), traditions, and events in their families as catalysts can lead to engaged learning and compelling results for both the teller and their audience.

We used intersecting state standards for the English Language Arts (ELA), Information Technology (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.) and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) to inform this work. Specifically, we drew from *Standard 2*, in which children in early grades learn to locate themselves in time and space, and *Standard 4*, stating that young learners develop their personal identities in the context of families, peers, schools, and communities (NCSS, 2010). We also hoped to help students acquire digital, visual, and textual literacies. Recording family stories has the potential to also help students learn key concepts in the NCSS C3 Framework as it relates to the importance of family as a social structure and as a mediator of socialization:

Important components of social structures are institutions such as the economy, government and politics, the educational system, the family, religion, and the health care system. Culture includes the language, norms, values, and material goods of a society. Social structure and culture work in tandem to shape societies... (NCSS, 2013, p. 74)

A fundamental insight of sociology is that individual and group identity is socially constructed through relationships with significant individuals, groups, and society as a whole. Socialization is a life-long process of learning how to function in society. Important socializing agents include family, peers, the media, schools, and religion (NCSS, 2013, p. 74)

Creating family stories provides children opportunities to develop understandings of culture and its connection to *family*, a key social structure that shapes society. Children explore their own and others’ cultures and histories when they connect their roles in families to citizenship in communities. They can begin to see that cultures and histories are not apart *from* them but a part *of* them. These connections may be particularly meaningful for children from non-English speaking homes or from diverse cultures because they see themselves as part of a history worth celebrating by sharing stories that deserve telling. Also, this approach may provide family engagement by inviting participation in the selection of family artifacts that connect to significant, personal events and traditions.

Children belong to many macro and micro systems that influence their understanding of the world (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The most significant of these systems for young children may be family, varying in structure due to culture and circumstance. Children may

define their families as those (biologically or non-related) with whom they live or may expand their circle to family friends, grandparents, or other extended family members. “There is an inextricable linking of family, culture, and community in the teaching and learning of social studies. The evolution of each child’s social understandings about the world begins with self and family” (Mindes, 2005, p. 4). Emphasizing and identifying a unique family history and culture can help to develop a child’s sense of self. When we honor storytellers as individuals with their own tales to tell and as members of both families and communities who contribute to everyday history, we affirm that ‘ordinary people’ make history as we participate in it. Recognizing their own families’ contributions to larger communities has the potential to help children begin to understand history’s immediacy and relevance to their lives.

Children may benefit from talking, writing, drawing, and creating digital representations using family artifacts and events as sources of story since these are both familiar and immediate in their experience of the world. As children tell digital stories about their families, they invite others to share in their family lives, cultures, and communities. For example, Fitts and Gross’s (2010) *Where I’m From* project is a model of young English Language Learners (ELL) creating personally meaningful poems from family artifacts or significant people and then crafting their writings into multimodal poetry.

### **Digital Storytelling for Young Children**

Interactive technologies and computer-based tools can provide creative means for children to tell their stories in text (both written and spoken) with accompanying visuals—drawings, photos, and video—while possibly also supporting their development as 21st century learners. Children who learn to actively create their own digital artifacts may be less likely to become passive users of technology, to resort to lower-level thinking (Welsch & Dooley, 2013), or be mired in drill-and-practice applications (Johnson & Christie, 2009).

Digital Storytelling incorporates any combination of spoken voice, printed text, digital photos, music, scanned drawings, and video to convey a story. This process begins with an idea and progresses through story development which may include the creation of a script and storyboard. Written words or recorded narration usually accompanies child-generated pictures or photos. The multimodal representation of the written and illustrated story may be created with computer software such as PhotoStory or a video editing program (e.g. iMovie for Macintosh or MovieMaker for Windows) to weave in the elements of visuals with narration and/or music.

Fortunately, digital storytelling need not be expensive because age-appropriate, child-friendly software is readily available. For instance, 30 Hands is one of many iPad apps that support digital storytelling for young children and WeVideo, a more sophisticated, cloud-based video editor, is also used in classrooms to support student multimodal projects. Other tools such as Photo Story can be downloaded free from the Microsoft website (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=11132>). Although Photo Story is an older program, it can run successfully on both current and past Windows operating systems and is useful for classrooms with older computers. The software is uncomplicated enough to allow children to upload digital images (photos, scanned drawings) and to narrate their stories using a headset or computer microphone.

With the first graders in this project, we found Photo Story a good match for our purposes. For greater control and flexibility, other free or low cost video editing software can also be used to create digital stories. In addition to a device (e.g. computer, iPad) with the appropriate digital tool (e.g. app, software) it is helpful to have access to a flatbed scanner, headset, and digital camera. Many schools have these peripheral devices available for use by teachers. After developing a script and storyboard, gathering or creating visuals, and recording narration, children are ready to publish their digital stories. They export their final project into a movie file for screening with their peers.

The story students create can be non-fiction, fantasy, poetry, or sequential narrative. Central to the digital storytelling process is the assertion that ideas and decisions about the story originate with the child who first imagines and then makes each of the digital story ingredients. The digital technology is the tool for creative expression, but the story is the central focus. “Story without digital works but digital without story, doesn’t” (Ohler, 2008, p.1). Children draw from many sources, including family traditions and histories, to develop their stories. When children investigate “their own family history...it engages them [and] can motivate them to share with others, to draw personal conclusions, and sometimes to dig deeper” (Frazel, 2010, p.123).

So, should young learners use technology if the story is what truly matters? Some educators ask this question because technology use by young children is not universally endorsed. However, many researchers and educators do see the value of digital tools when used properly considering the developmental age of the student. With regard to technology’s potential use as a creative tool, elementary education professionals support the developmentally appropriate use of it to support learning. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in its joint statement on *Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* (2012) asserts that to be most effective for children, technology must be “hands-on, engaging, and empowering; giv[ing] the child control...young children need tools that help them explore, create, problem solve, consider, think, listen and view critically, make decisions” (p.8).

### **Family Digital Stories in a First Grade Classroom**

Over the summer prior to the start of the school year, we met with a first grade teacher and explained that we wanted to work with her students to create digital stories related to their personal lives, including a focus on the topic of family. The teacher was enthusiastic and invited our participation as part of her daily, morning writing time. We visited her classroom weekly for a 45 minute time frame over the course of the school year and worked with students at first one-on-one, and then, once the children were comfortable with the process, in small groups. It was important to both the classroom teacher and to us that our work be a natural part of her instructional day and neither an interruption or something “extra” that she and the children had to do.

For this project, we gave each of the children a *Story Ideas* journal in which they could write their story ideas and then later develop an idea into a script that they would use to audio record narration for pictures that they also drew in their journals. Students could also use photos for their stories and a few did with help from their parents, who assisted in supporting their child’s digital story. Other children who wished to use photos gathered

relevant images from the internet to illustrate their stories. We took a workshop approach with a heavy emphasis on conferencing with the children as they developed their story ideas. The initial contact with each child started with a conversation often asking “What’s a story you would like to tell?” or “What is a story you want to tell about you and your family?” We also introduced the idea of *family artifacts* and told the children that a family artifact may be a concrete object from the child’s home (e.g. a rope swing) or an event that is memorable such as a trip to the beach or a visit to a museum.

We began the conversation with each child about their responses and ideas. In turn, we nurtured the child’s seed of an idea about a family story and the process was underway. The conversation led next to a written draft of the child capturing the key ideas from the story he wanted to tell. In some cases, students preferred to draw their pictures or choose their photos first and then write about them while the reverse was true for other students. We tried, where possible, to honor the students’ process and preferences for creating their stories with the goal of supporting their creative choices. In one case, a student also wished to add background music to her story while another provided his own sound effects during his narration.

Once the students had their media components (e.g. text, images, music), they were ready to assemble their story using digital tools. Because we were using Photo Story, we first scanned the students’ drawings and imported them into the software. Next, students practiced their written script to prepare for audio recording their story and once they were ready, recorded their narration using a headset. After recording, the students listened to make sure they were satisfied and if not, re-recorded their script. After all images and narration were included, we helped the students add a title and credits and then exported the story so that they could watch it from beginning to end and if they wished, share it with their peers and family members.

### **More Vignettes: Children Create Digital Stories**

Mara, a shy first grader, created a digital story about the rope swing in her backyard with which she and her brother “can sit or stand” and “go high”. This artifact was a significant and shared object from her family life and served as the catalyst for telling about her brother as a key playmate and her dad who “built” the rope swing and fixed it when it would break. For other children, their family artifact was more abstract, such as a shared event (perhaps a trip or a celebration), a significant location, a family value such as love of nature, or a special person woven into the life and history of the family.

Liyoni wanted to share one of her family outings as a digital story. In an initial story conference, she talked animatedly about a recent family visit to a local Native American Museum and village. She wanted to include the music she heard to accompany her narration with photos she took. After we conducted the initial conference about the trip, she decided to use family photos. At home, Liyoni and her father looked through and selected photos from their visit to the Native American site. As she and her father reviewed each photo, they talked about the trip and Liyoni began to consider what to say in crafting her digital story. Later, her father helped her revise her story guiding her to make changes such as using the term *Native Americans* in her text rather than *Indians*. Throughout the process, Liyoni saw the story as her own and said that she “really liked” having her father’s

help. She added public domain music from the Internet and her own written script from her story journal which her father helped her revise before crafting her story on the computer.

Josh's story focused on a family trip to Maine. He wrote about and illustrated where they went but also what he learned in a local museum—for example, how octopi and squid differ. He also talked and wrote of visiting a historical pirate ship and exploring tide pools with his parents and grandparents. Since the location of this trip was far away from where he lived, he decided to include a map we found on the internet as a visual element.

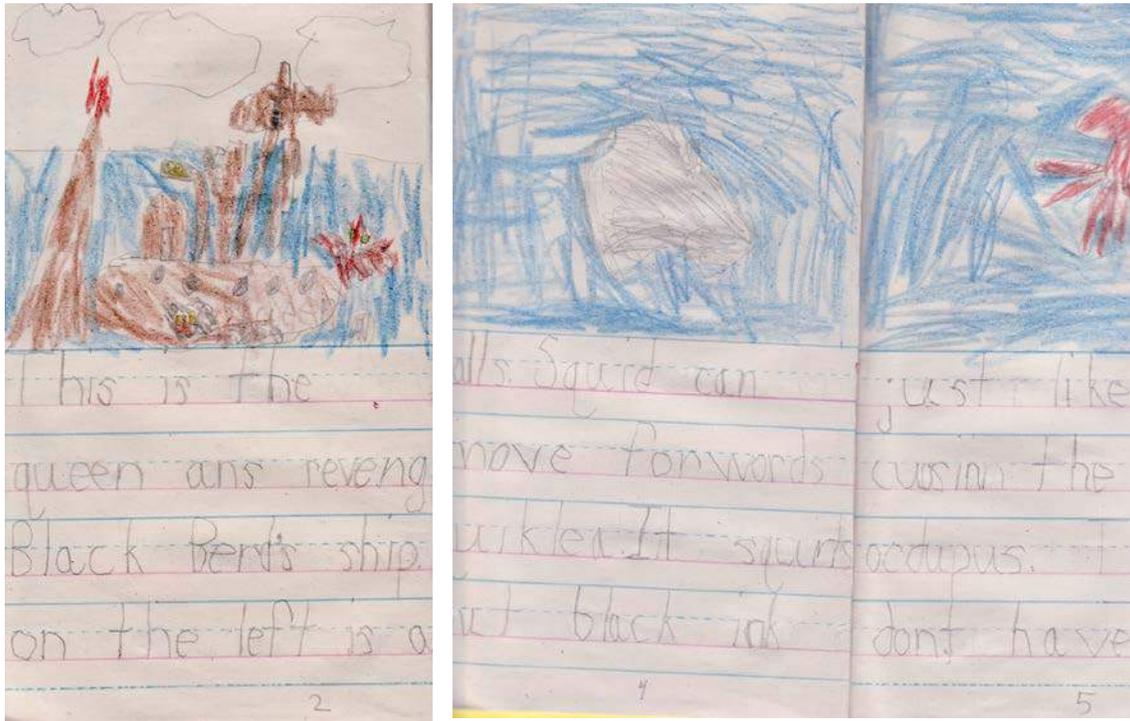


Figure 2: Josh's drawing and script for a family trip to his grandparents

We conferenced with Kristin about her story of the family dog who “chases and scares other animals.” She decided to draw pictures to illustrate her text and later wanted to add photographs, but she was uncertain of photos to include. We thought together and asked: What if she were to include *her* photo in the story in tandem with her drawings of her family pet? Kristin liked this idea so we helped her add a digital photo of her reading her story at the beginning of her piece; integrated her scanned drawings into the middle of the story; and finished with another photo of her in the last frame. Her narration synchronized with the visuals. Her *Story Ideas* journal provided the script: “I am reading my story about my dog.” She read what she wrote about each drawing and concluded with her smiling photo saying “The End”.

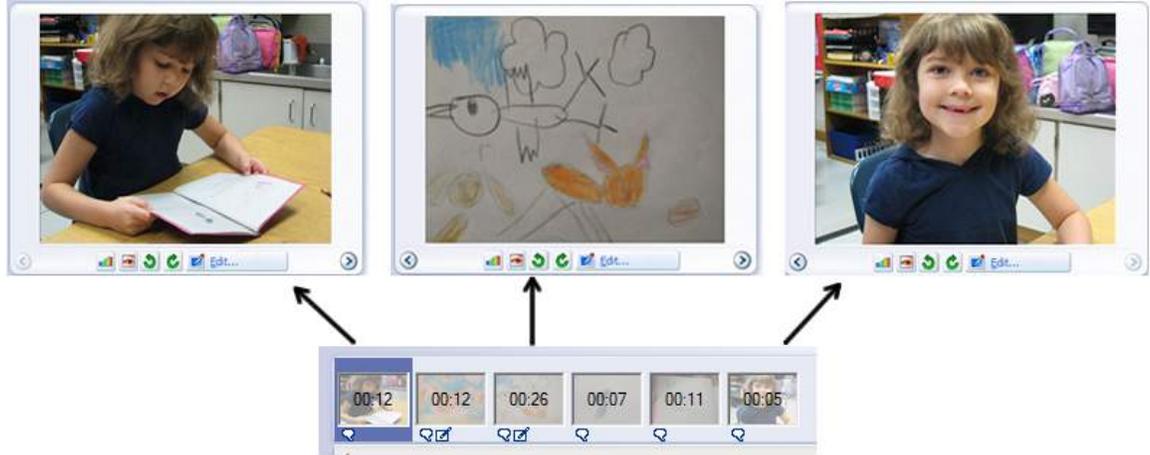


Figure 3: Kristin's storyboard in Photo Story about the family pet

Paul drew rich illustrations for his family story on *The Beach*. First, he conferenced with an adult who helped guide him in the digital storytelling process and then wrote his script in his *Story Ideas* journal. Next, he selected a title and narrated scanned drawings using a headset and the Photo Story software. We burned his completed story to a CD for him to share with his family since he wanted to show it to them right away. The next day, he asked to add more to his story. He had thought about it and now believed "It wasn't done." Since we had saved his Photo Story project file, we re-opened it, included his additions, exported the new movie file, and re-burned it to CD for his family to enjoy. The idea that a story can be a work in progress is not limited to traditional written text but also applies to multimodal digital stories.

Because their stories evolve from written text and drawings to a digital multimodal product, children benefit from seeing examples of other children's digital stories. We tried to share examples that were close to the students' developmental levels to model motivational yet realistic projects. Once digital stories are generated by the children in the classroom, they can serve as examples for their peers. Not only do students enjoy seeing each other's digital stories showcased, but they also demonstrate a sense of accomplishment and pride when their own digital works are screened publicly for peers and parents. At the end of the year, with their classroom teacher, we invited parents for a showing of the children's digital stories as a capstone to the project and then presented each child with a digital copy of their story or stories on CD. At this event, many parents commented that their children described the process of digital storytelling and also looked forward to these activities in class (reflecting on an idea, planning, writing, drawing, and digital publishing) as well as enjoyed sharing the finished product. As children created and shared their own digital stories, their products motivated their peers.

### Recommendations

We offer a few suggestions for those who wish to try this in their own classrooms related to the logistics of implementing this with students as well as the importance of having sufficient pedagogical and technical knowledge to help children make their own creative decisions. First, we recommend that adults who work with children in developing

digital stories should allow them enough time to develop, talk about, write about, and revise their family stories. Lambert (2003) reminds us that digital storytellers need to own their stories. By helping the young children in this first grade classroom learn to make decisions about their stories, we observed that they seemed to gain in independence, confidence, esteem, and may even have developed a stronger sense of self. The key was to be open to what the students could teach us about the digital storytelling process as well as the focus of *family* as an important social studies topic.

Second, teachers also need time and training to learn and practice using technology so that they may in turn apply it toward working with students who will create digital stories. In workshops we have provided to teachers, we have found it useful to teach the technology tools by having teachers go through the process of crafting their own family stories. In addition to learning the technical and pedagogical process of digital storytelling, teachers also must consider the logistics of creating digital stories with their students. Our best advice is to begin small, take time with the process, and persist. We also found that working in a classroom brings with it challenges including finding a quiet space in which to record narration. In the first grade classroom, we were given a designated space in the centers area that worked well but because there were other activities taking place in the classroom, some background noise could be heard. We found this bothered us as adults more than the children and when asked, the children said that it was just the “real life” of their classroom.

What we found best for this project over time was to first work with children individually, then, to set up conferencing sessions with students in pairs, and finally, with adult support and supervision, collaborate in small groups. We used the class’s scheduled writing time and collaborated with the classroom teacher so that this project was a natural blend with, and not an add-on, to the instructional day. Other possible means of support could be parent volunteers or older students, who have been trained as “tech buddies”. We started with direct adult support of individual students and gradually the children learned that they could also help each other. Soon, these first graders became proficient with the process – both in writing family stories and using digital tools. Our hope was that as they grew more independent, perhaps they also developed a deeper understanding of family, became more confident writers, learned how to represent ideas in multimodal ways, and used digital tools authentically.

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## **The Impact of Using Oral Histories in a Fourth Grade Social Studies Class**

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### **Abstract**

Traditional textbook histories fail to provide a rounded and inclusive history of certain peoples and groups. This article reveals how conducting oral histories helped history come alive for a group of fourth grade students. The article shares the experiences of the teacher as she led her students to learn how Utah received its name, how the Ute Indians and Mormon pioneers interacted, and how each impacted the development and settlements in Utah. The narrative is important in showing how oral histories provide a more robust and inclusive history than can be found in traditional texts.

**Keywords:** oral history, Native American, lived stories

### **A Classroom Story**

If your experiences teaching social studies are anything like mine were, you probably provide students with a social studies textbook and teach the approved state Core. As a fourth grade teacher, I followed the social studies curriculum provided by the state office of education by teaching a unit on “American Indians” (Utah Education Network, 2010). At a parent-teacher conference, while meeting with one of my student’s parents, I informed her that her son had done extremely well with the American Indian unit. She turned to her son and asked if he had informed me that he was an American Indian. He said, “No, we weren’t talking about *those* kinds of Indians.” I could not fathom what he meant. Of course we were talking about American Indians. How could he not identify with what I had taught? His mother informed me that possibly because I had taught about American Indians generally, and her son was Cherokee, her son may not be able to “see” himself in what I taught. In response to this conversation, my class and I spent the next few weeks learning a history of the state from a Cherokee American Indian perspective, the parent of my student. The perspective provided by this parent proved to be different from the materials I was provided by the district. Exploring pictures and objects brought in by the parent to help us learn, prompted questions and thoughtful contemplation by my students and myself. We began to have questions about civil equity and how the Native Americans had been treated throughout history. After spending time exploring this Cherokee’s perspective, I invited the student’s grandfather to come share his experiences

with my class. He added greater insight and perspective to how the Cherokee people are treated currently and how they were treated in the past. My students became enthralled with his story. They asked questions about growing up on the reservation, educational disparity, and the things he has done to preserve the Cherokee story. I now realized there was much more to be known about the state's history than was represented in curriculum materials I was sharing with my students.

In order for students to think historically, it is imperative that students “hear” the many voices of history. As an educator, I believe that it is important for students (and their teachers) to develop a critical historical consciousness. One way to develop this critical historical consciousness is by telling and hearing the lived stories of diverse participants of particular times and places. As students experience the telling and hearing of personal stories, they will develop a greater understanding of experiences of diverse groups and individuals. Although history texts and children's books *speak to* students about their state history, they do not share the complete story. Often textbook histories are one-sided, the included content being selected based off political, cultural, and economically driven agendas (Crawford, 2003). Oral histories and personal texts often provide histories that otherwise might be hidden or forgotten. Oral histories provide new interpretations to the history (Ritchie, 2003).

The State Social Studies Core Standard for fourth grade in Utah (Utah Education Network, 2010), Standard 2 states, “Students will understand how Utah's history has been shaped by many diverse people, events, and ideas.” The Benchmark preceding the standard explains, “The history of Utah has been shaped by many diverse people,...The story of Utah includes American Indians...” Objective 1 of the standard indicates that students will be able to “Describe the historical and current impact of various cultural groups in Utah.” Indicator b. of that objective states that students will be able to, “Explore points of view about life in Utah from a variety of cultural groups using primary source documents.”

Meeting this standard can be a complex task. Often, as evidenced in McPherson (2016), non-American Indians have written the American Indian primary documents students explore in school. As it is written, the curriculum does not support historical inquiry into what happened and why it happened. Thus, students receive a one-sided history of the American Indians in Utah. A teacher striving to get his or her students to be critical thinkers naturally wants a more robust curriculum.

Utah has a unique history of how the land became bounded, bordered, and populated as the United States grew. The history in textbooks and timelines jump from wars between the Mormons and the Utes to the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 at Promontory Summit. This event leads to many immigrants coming to the Utah territory, many for the mining industry. A gap of information about the Utes exists after 1896 when Utah becomes a state. All that is recorded in the texts for children (McCormick, 2011) is that Utah became the 45<sup>th</sup> state and was named after the Ute tribe. Surprisingly, the Utes are only mentioned in the history book two more times. One time in the description of the Posey War (1923) between Utes and ranchers and one other time in a comment that lists the five Indian nations in Utah today. The Utes then become invisible in Utah history text, in the very state that bears their name.

The linear perspective of Utah's history goes directly from Native populations and explorers to religious groups and then to the joining of the transcontinental railroad. The history continues with immigrants, miners, and wars and then onto current day economics

and businesses. The story of the state is rarely told in a circular fashion where it could include things such as talking about forced movements and relocation of peoples, power relationships, child slavery, division of resources with controlled hunting, fishing, and mineral rights. This may be due to the time constraints teachers feel on teaching social studies, a non-tested subject (Walker, 2014). Additionally, some teachers may feel that since these topics are considered controversial, they are not appropriate for young students (Wineburg, 2001). Other reasons for not teaching it is because some teachers are unaware of other knowledge constructs (Wineburg, 2001). Regardless of the reason, students are being short-changed in their learning of Utah's history. Using oral histories is one way which teachers can overcome the shortfall of many history textbooks.

An example of the differences between traditional texts and oral histories can be seen in the naming of Utah. Utah History books teach students that the United States government, named Utah after the Ute Indian Tribe (McCormick, 2011). Students that read that version of Utah's history should have questions including: where the Utes were living during this time, if they shared resources with the newly arrived settlers, and if the land was considered Ute land, how was it divided up. But, in my experiences, the students, nor myself, asked these questions.

I always accepted the territorial naming of the area as Utah territory, but failed to question how or if Utah and Utes are the same. Why was it not the Ute territory? My first inkling about the connection of naming Utah for the Utes does not come from the textbook, *Utah, Our Home* (McCormick, 2011), nor from the State Office of Education's suggested websites, but from searching "How did Utah get its name?" on Google (How did Utah get its name?, 2016; Netstate, 2016). A quick review of search results suggests two theories exist concerning the origins of Utah's name. The first is that Utah derived from the word "Ute," meaning "people of the mountains." The other stipulates Utah's name comes from the Native American word "yuttahih," meaning "higher up." Both theories point to origins in Native American languages.

During an oral history interview, a member of the Uncompahgre-Ute tribe offered a counter story that helped me and my students gain a new perspective of how Utah was named:

And on that note, the research I have done...I once was asked for...oh, I can't remember, was in New Mexico...and the history there, I was—I learned that the Pueblo Indians and the Utes when they coexisted there—they—the Pueblos brought in the Spanish into the Mesa Verde occupied by the Utes and they called them the Utahs. And they referred to them here as the Utahs. And Ute for short for the people that we—that our name for ourselves was Muche, Muche, M-u-c-h-e. And Muchu is plural. But we call ourselves Muche. That's who we are. Utes is an English or Spanish word or Puebloan, if I guess, but that's how I, in my research learned, was that's where the word was first used—was by the Pueblos. And they referred to the people living here as Utahs. (R. McCook, personal narrative July 18, 2008).

The voices of the Ute Indians are left out of the traditional Utah history. Their voices being significantly different than what is found in textbooks. The traditional (textbook and website) explanations for how Utah was named, not only reveals contradictions from the

oral histories of actual Ute Indians, but it also reveals that certain histories are being neglected and kept from the general public. As evident in this example, Indigenous knowledge is often absent from classrooms (Battiste, 2000).

### **Oral Histories**

My experience at the parent-teacher conference was the impetus for teaching differently. I began using and having my students conduct oral histories. Oral histories are a great way to help students think more deeply, develop language skills, and increase critical thinking (Ritchie, 2003).

In preparing my students to conduct oral histories, I teach some key steps that help them collect insightful data. The steps were adapted from the work of Sommer and Quinlan, (2002). First I help students identify what they wanted to know and the themes of their questioning. The next step is to have students research their topic. In the case of the unit on American Indians, some of the things my students researched were which Indian tribes are native to Utah, where each tribe lived, living conditions during the particular time period, and the types of interactions between “whites” and the “Indians. Following the research stage, I have students develop a list of questions they either want to verify from their research or questions their research sparked. Pre-writing interview questions help students focus on the things they think are important during and following their research. The final step before conducting interviews, is to practice asking interview questions to their peers. Additionally, I teach my students to ask follow-up questions when they don’t fully understand a response.

As I started changing how I taught the state’s history through oral histories, my students became concerned about the possibility that Ute Indians lived in the very spaces where they (the students) now live. They questioned whether or not Ute Indians historically inhabited the area where their elementary school is now. One student asked another student, who had previously identified herself as Ute, whether or not her family had always lived here. The student denied that she had any information on the Ute tribe because a she had been adopted by a non-Indian family at birth. Some students began their own discussions of local “Indians”. They concluded that the Indians were no longer living, because if they were, they would certainly be able to identify them because they would look and dress differently than them. Students discussed Ute Indians as always living on the reservation and probably not near where their school boundaries now lie. These student-led discussions were enlightening. My students no longer accepted history passively, instead they thought more deeply about what the histories meant, what were the causes of certain histories, and of the implications of histories. Interestingly, the statistics for this year for the school district where these children reside show that of the 414,209 total populations 2,512 are identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Of the American Indian categories, only the Cherokee, Chippewa, and Navajo tribal groupings are identified. Utes are not even on the list. Yet, the Northern Ute history written by members of the Ute tribe, states that the Utes considered their homeland the Utah Valley Lake area (Cuch, 2000). This area is just 14 miles south of where the school is now built. In the early 1850’s, within six years after their arrival, the Mormon population grew to outnumber the Utes and there were Mormon settlers within the boundaries of where the school is now. Halverson (2011) speaks of

finding arrowheads and knives near a cottonwood tree not far from where the school currently is. He also indicates the location must be “the site of their Indian summer home, burial grounds and hunting area.”

My students not only collected oral histories from Native peoples, but also from elderly people who had lived in the area. The following quotes reveal another perspective about the “Indians.” Neff’s, Helbig’s, and Smith’s interviews each portray the Indians as doing physical feats and engaging in war.

Indian wrestle. Do you know what that is? You lay on the floor and you put your legs together and try to flip them over. Dad would do that with us... They lived in a log cabin. And grandma would tell how she could hear the Indians war whooping around her cabin. And so Grandma would tell us all these stories. And we’d want her to tell us over and over (E. Neff, personal communication, February 18, 2008).

Well, my neighbor was my—my friend. We always played cowboys and Indians (W. Helbig, personal communication, February 18 2008).

It seems unreal to me that Indians went on the warpath when my parents were little. But they lived in the Uinta Basin and when the Indians would get mad over something they would beat on their drums for days (W. Smith, personal communication, February 18, 2008).

These oral histories recorded by students identify the clustering of “Indians” as one grouping, no identity of tribal units, and that “Indians” becomes synonymous with “war.” Pioneer stories on the other hand appear to be “courageous” and “great” and *your ancestors*, whether you were related to the pioneers or not. There is an underlying contrast between pioneers and cowboys with Indians. The students were able to “see” themselves positively within the pioneers and cowboys but not within the Native peoples. They were able to see a transformation from pioneers to whom they are today but failed to recognize American Indians from the same time period to the present.

One reason for students identifying with one group and not others, might be because of the different discourses of Utah history that gets perpetuated and what remains hidden. For example, the Mormon pioneers believed that because of their sufferings in Missouri, Illinois, and along the trail to the Salt Lake Valley, that they would be rewarded by God. One such reward was that the Salt Lake Valley land was reserved for their inheritance (Allphin, 2007). They felt that God had preserved this land for them. At this same time the Northern Utes’ history states:

The initial arrival of the Mormons in the Salt Lake Valley did not bother the Utes too much because the valley was considered neutral territory or a buffer zone between the Utes to the south, the Goshutes to the west, and the Shoshone to the north. Indeed, the Utes perceived that the Mormon presence created an opportunity for them to trade for European goods... When the Mormons soon expanded into Utah Lake Valley, the Utes viewed it as an invasion into their homeland and Ute-Mormon troubles began (p. 187).

These two oral histories each portray a different message. While different, each history provides a more robust learning than students ever receive with traditional texts.

### **Outcomes from Using Oral Histories**

The goal of the Utah fourth grade social studies curriculum is to connect students to their state and the history of people who have helped create it. I no longer wanted to perpetuate teaching history as static. Instead I chose to present a story in motion. I want my students to experience what people felt, thought, and experienced.

Each year following this incident, while trying to enact a newer, updated, closer interrogation of Utah history, I find myself turning to oral histories in books and in community stories. In an effort to find valuable primary information about the state's history, fourth graders at my elementary school started an oral history project (Rose Creek Elementary School, 2008). The project was funded by a grant from the Utah Division of State History and the Utah Humanities Council. The majority of my students interviewed their grandparents or great grandparents. Many of those interviewed had lived in Utah most all their lives and their answers to questions about their family life included remembrances of interactions with local people and events including American Indians. Since that initial project there has been revitalization of looking for the past in pictures and memories in social media as well.

Collecting oral histories have allowed my students to hear and recognize a different line of inquiry and evidence. Local community members have become involved in collecting and sharing oral histories. Recently, a community website uploaded personal pictures depicting Ute Indians hunting in the area in the late 1890s. Students can now recognize the space in the picture as an area that is now populated with their homes, the school, and the mining areas. Local residents are now remembering hearing stories about their grandmothers and great-grandmothers offering bread to the "Indians" because the land was over utilized and the Native People were being pushed out or starving.

In the case of my student's oral history discoveries, students are now able to understand the conflicting tensions that are represented in their texts. My students no longer accept texts at face value, but now question the validity and question what is being left out of the text. Additionally, as my students collect oral histories within their community, community members are remembering for themselves what was forgotten. The Ute Indians have no longer disappeared but are made part of the history of the place where the students live.

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## **“Do we still need labor unions?”: A C3 Framework-Aligned Critical Inquiry on the Relevance of Labor Unions**

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### **Abstract**

This inquiry-based expanded lesson plan, or learning segment, prompts students to investigate the utility of labor unions in the 21st century. It aligns with the C3 Framework for Social Studies and its inquiry-based approach to social studies that tasks students to investigate compelling questions with disciplinary sources and tools before constructing arguments and taking informed action. In this lesson students explore the historical role of labor unions in the 20th century before they evaluate competing claims and evidence found in contemporary sources. Students use their accumulated knowledge to construct an evidence-based argument on labor unions in general and to engage in an expanded service learning project related to a labor issue in their local community. This highly-scaffolded culminating project is embedded with critical literacies and concepts to support students in what the author refers to as enacting critical change. Taken together the structure of this lesson showcases how social justice-oriented teachers may use and expand upon the C3 Framework to engage students in meaningful and open-ended social justice work.

**Keywords:** C3 framework, critical inquiry, critical literacy, inquiry-based social studies

### **Introduction**

The publication of the College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards [C3 Framework] in 2013 brought new excitement to the social studies community after years of marginalization from federal and state policies and a century’s worth of ineffective transmission model pedagogies that have dominated most classrooms. For the first time since the dawn of social studies more than 100 years ago, there would be a national standards document that explicitly endorsed an inquiry-centric approach to social studies. Unlike other standards documents or initiatives, the C3 Framework did not prescribe a set list of content standards. Rather, it was created as a guidance document to support individual states during standards revision initiatives and to support individual teachers and schools interested in enacting a novel approach to inquiry-based social studies (National Council for Social Studies, 2013). The C3 Framework itself consists of four dimensions, each making up an integral step in what is referred to as the inquiry arc. Dimension 1 tasks teachers with developing questions and planning inquiries. Next, students apply disciplinary skills and tools in Dimension 2 before evaluating evidence and making claims in Dimension 3. The inquiry arc concludes in Dimension 4

with students posing a summative argument to answer the compelling question in addition to taking informed action on the issue in their classrooms, schools, or local communities.

Grant, Swan, and Lee (2015) helped bring the C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards to life with the creation of a C3 Framework-aligned curricula development tool called the Inquiry Design Model (IDM). IDM consists of a one-page blueprint or template that can be used to create a C3 Framework-aligned inquiry learning experience for students. Its features include compelling and supporting questions that are aligned with featured sources and formative performance tasks. These features build upon one another towards students' summative arguments and taking informed action experiences. The IDM blueprint also has an introductory task to stage the compelling question and multimodal extensions of summative arguments. The inquiry process, as spelled out by both the C3 Framework and IDM, offers a structured approach for students to perform disciplinary analyses and to engage in taking informed action projects. Although neither explicitly endorses social justice or critical perspectives, they can both be easily adapted to help enact meaningful social justice or critical projects.

### **Lesson Plan Structure**

IDM can be easily tweaked to incorporate essential critical concepts. This inquiry-based lesson serves as an example of an open-ended “critical inquiry” which augments various parts of IDM with numerous concepts from critical education. In this critical inquiry students will investigate the compelling question “Do we still need labor unions?” through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources. They work towards constructing an argument with evidence and counterevidence from a variety of sources in preparation of *enacting critical change*. This critical inquiry expands on existing IDM-generated inquiries by embedding critical literacies, pedagogies, and scaffolds throughout the tasks. It expands the scope of the *taking informed action* project by providing students opportunities to apply critical concepts and skills. However, a central consideration throughout the design of this inquiry was that it must be open-ended; it does not presume an answer to the compelling question. Thus, even though students will use critical tools to evaluate the question, they will still be exposed to featured sources that promote contrasting worldviews, opinions, and evidence.

This inquiry is expected to take about four weeks to complete and is designed for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. As is encouraged for all inquiries, this inquiry can be expanded or shrunk to accommodate the diverse needs of teachers, students, and communities. For instance, teachers may want to add or substitute supporting questions, formative performance tasks, or featured sources. They may even consider simply incorporating the last component of this inquiry--enacting critical change—or embedding aspects of this inquiry to save time.

### **Inquiry Rationale**

The historical contributions of labor unions are often glossed over in history classrooms, and labor unions today are largely ignored wholesale or even vilified as outdated remnants of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the debates surrounding labor unions today rely on recycled and vapid ideological rhetoric, rather than result from informed

analyses of evidence. This is particularly troublesome considering the deleterious impacts of governmental and corporate policies on industrial workers and cities throughout the United States. Right to work laws and free trade agreements have placed the labor movement, an arguably the American middle class, in jeopardy.

This inquiry provides students an opportunity to investigate whether or not the labor movement still serves a purpose today. Students will be charged with taking a critical eye towards the pro- and anti-union narratives that percolate on both sides of the political spectrum. This allows students to become active inquisitors of knowledge production and political narratives. Armed with critical understanding, students will then be tasked with applying disciplinary skills and concepts built up through the inquiry onto a meaningful service project in their community to *enact critical change*.

### **Day 1: Staging the Compelling Question**

Teachers may open the inquiry with a point-counterpoint activity to stage the question: “Do we still need labor unions?” Students begin the inquiry by watching a Fox News video clip that questions the usefulness and even motives of labor unions today. Students then view an anti-right-to-work video from Youtube blogger, Keith Hughes (See Appendix A). Teachers may want to give students the “I hear, I think, I wonder” prompt to guide their thinking as they watch the videos. Watching these clips is designed to produce cognitive dissonance in order to help capture students’ interest and attention. This opening day culminates with students making hypotheses into the compelling question, discussing the factors that influence their nascent opinions, and brainstorming a “research plan” for how they might go about answering the compelling question on their own.

### **Day 2 and 3: Supporting Question 1**

The first supporting question—“Why were labor unions first created?”—introduces students to the historical context behind labor unions in the United States. The formative performance task prompts students to create a graphic organizer displaying reasons why labor unions were first created. Students will explore three featured archives from the Library of Congress, Gompers Papers, and the Digital Public Library of America to build up their understanding of the historical context (See Appendix A). To support students in this task, teachers may consider having them perform a SCIM-C (summarize, contextualize, infer, monitor, corroborate) disciplinary analysis to facilitate historical thinking. Teachers may consider selecting particular documents and adapting them with tools like <https://rewordify.com> to meet the needs of emerging readers. Teachers may also want to provide some students with adapted textual sources related to a seminal event or provide visual sources, such as photos of the aftermath of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory disaster, to scaffold this process for emerging readers.

### **Day 4 and 5: Supporting Question 2**

The first week of the inquiry concludes with students investigating the second supporting question—“What arguments are made against the usefulness of labor unions today?” This introduces students to contemporary anti-union narratives that are made by conservative think tanks, activists, and news agencies. Featured Source A is a lecture given to the Heritage Foundation by Reed Larson, former President of the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, on December 11, 1989. Featured Source B is a conservative blog from *Redstate* on September 5, 2011 arguing that labor unions kill jobs (See Appendix A). Featured Source C is student selected. Students will be tasked with independently finding evidence to corroborate or reject claims made in Featured Sources A and B. The formative performance task leads students to complete a claims/evidence graphic organizer (See Appendix B). Teachers may consider adapting the sources for various reading levels or by tasking students to analyze documents for ethos, pathos, and logos. They may also expand on the inquiry by discussing the role of self-selection bias in terms of news consumer choices, partisan news in terms of radicalizing public opinion, and logical fallacies often used in partisan news sources to propagandize.

### **Day 6 and 7: Supporting Question 3**

The second week of the inquiry begins with students exploring the third supporting question—“What arguments are made for the usefulness of labor unions today?” This introduces students to contemporary pro-union narratives made by liberal organizations and agencies. The formative performance task leads students to finish the claims/evidence graphic organizer begun in supporting question 2. Featured Source A is an article by anti-union apostate, Henry Blodget, published in *Business Insider* on December 2, 2012. Featured Source B comes from an AFL-CIO blog by Jackie Tortora on March 7, 2013 addressing the future of labor unions in the United States (See Appendix A). As was true in supporting question 2, students will have an opportunity to select Featured Source C for themselves. Students find sources to fact check claims made in Featured Sources A and B and can use the ethos, pathos, logos analytical heuristic to guide their analyses. Teachers may want to continue the conversation about partisan news and/or explicitly discuss strategies for fact checking including ways to determine the credibility of fact checking websites.

### **Day 8 and 9: Supporting Question 4**

The fourth supporting question—“Who benefits from the pro and anti- labor union narratives?”—prompts students to attempt to peel back the Wizard of Oz’s curtain to see the behind-the-scenes nature of how narratives on labor unions are constructed. Students return to previous featured sources and extend their analyses to independently explore special interests involved in making pro- or anti-union narratives, methods used to spread information or misinformation, economic realities of claims, and how narratives influence equity in students’ lives and the people in their communities. This begins the *understanding* component of *enacting critical change*. Students will independently research funding behind partisan pro- or anti-labor organizations. For instance, students may explore the role

of the Koch Brothers in terms of funding conservative causes or specific union activists in terms of supporting pro-labor causes. The formative performance task is for students to participate in a Structured Academic Controversy related to the supporting question. This will also provide students with an opportunity to express claims and emerging arguments in support of their overall argument related to the compelling question.

### **Day 10-11: Summative Argument and Extension**

On these days teachers may want to assess students' understanding of the compelling question by having them use evidence from multiple sources to construct an argument in response to the question "Do we still need labor unions?" Arguments can be made in a variety of formats including a detailed outline, podcast, or essay. Student arguments could be extended by creating a visual "trail" of narrative creation. This trail includes winners and losers from the narratives, illustrations, and selected evidence in a chronological or thematic structure. To save time, teachers may consider combining supporting question 4 and the summative argument. Alternatively, teachers may want to combine the summative argument with the enacting critical change task below. Student arguments likely will vary, but could include the following:

- Labor unions are just as needed today as they have ever been to support middle class workers and families
- Labor unions are no longer needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century globalized work force
- Anti-union narratives are created by reactionary political forces designed to increase the gap between the rich and the poor
- Pro-union narratives are created by liberal special interest groups designed to create more government intrusion into the private business sphere

### **Days 12-20: Enacting Critical Change**

The final nine days provide time for students to build off of their emerging understandings in order to *enact critical change* in their local community. First students work on a *critical self check* by unpacking their privileges, intersectionalities, and situatedness in the community. Teachers may want to consider Wise and Case's (2013) strategies for unpacking privilege without shame or guilt to support students in this regard. They may also consider having students privately complete implicit bias tests, which can be found at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>. This step may be essential if students are to engage in meaningful social justice work. If teachers and students plunge into community-based social justice work without having cultural competence or cultural self awareness, their efforts may come across as naive, patronizing, or offensive. This *critical self check* can help students to understand how their own identities impact the way they see the world, the way the world sees them, and how this evolving and complicated interplay impacts their civic life.

Students then progress to *critical understanding* in which they use critically-scaffolded questions to investigate the impact of a specific labor policy enacted in their community or state. Teachers may encourage individual students or groups to interview

pro- and anti-union advocates such as local congressmen, labor organizers, and/or business leaders in their local community relevant to the labor policy. At this stage students will be specifically looking at the claims made by both sides to consider the following questions:

- What is the economic impact of the labor policy?
- Who are the winners and the losers from the labor policy?
- How does each side communicate their narrative?
- Does the policy foster any kind of oppression and inequity?
- If so, are the winners and losers conscious of the potential oppression that would be caused from the labor policy?

The next step in the inquiry will be for students to engage in a *critical assessment* of the policy. Here they begin to create an inventory of community allies, assets, and antagonists to begin the process of enacting meaningful long-term change. Students will create an action plan related to the labor policy before engaging in critical peer review. Note that students are encouraged to take either side of the debate; however, they must use evidence to support their claims and arguments. Here students will critique each others' plans using the following critically-scaffolded questions:

- Does this plan promote personally-responsible, participatory, or justice-oriented view of citizenship?
- Are all possible community assets and allies identified?
- Is there a promotional campaign to reach additional audience members?
- Does the plan avoid deficit thinking of the community?
- Is there an evaluation component to measure overall effectiveness?
- Is the plan realistic?

Students will then begin the process of *critical action* in which they enact all of, or part of, their action plans. Students themselves should select the form of civic action that they will take; however, they may consider leading a community-issues forum, creating a petition, or building an awareness website. The penultimate step is for students and community members to partake in *critical celebration* in which work is showcased, acknowledged, and celebrated. Finally, the inquiry concludes with students completing a *critical reflection* in which they discuss successes, challenges, and ideas for moving forward.

### **Conclusion**

This inquiry was designed to give students an opportunity to dive into an enduring issue: the role of labor unions in the workforce. Throughout this inquiry students will wrestle with enduring tensions between worker and employee rights and will be tasked with both developing and utilizing relevant inquiry civic skills throughout the four week-long experience. It provides students with multiple opportunities to evaluate competing claims both independently and with support from a teacher. However, the inquiry was also designed to engage students with essential concepts from critical or social justice education.

This lesson was designed with three core principles. First, it posits that if students are to become informed citizens, they must have extended, scaffolded practice engaging in authentic discourse and inquiry. This requires that teachers provide students with opportunities to evaluate competing claims independently with a clear understanding of how bias, both of the author and themselves, impacts their own understanding. Second, if students are to become engaged citizens, they need practice with rigorous civic action that requires careful consideration to the role of intersectionality and epistemology. Thus, one cannot take informed action if she does not fully understand the historic factors that underlay the situatedness and thought processes of community groups and individuals, including herself. This inquiry arms students with critical consciousness and cultural competency to act with, not on, their local communities in order to avoid patronizing or superficial community service projects. Third, if social justice educators are to reach their ambitious goals, they must promote an open-ended inquiry process in order to fight back against accusations of political bias that have left social justice education far too marginalized in schools. This inquiry presented students with competing narratives and evidence on the labor union issue and provided avenues for them to explore alternative perspectives. As such, this inquiry seeks to be part of a broader effort to take advantage of a “critical” opportunity presented by the proliferation of IDM usage to help make the efforts of critical educators more meaningful and mainstream thus allowing our schools to become real agents of change.

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**Appendix A**

Featured Archives/Sources Links

Staging the Compelling Question	A: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSgJ5wBLbh4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSgJ5wBLbh4</a> B: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTIS_BbI8GY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTIS_BbI8GY</a>
Supporting Question 1	A: <a href="http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/work/">http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/work/</a> B: <a href="http://www.gompers.umd.edu/">http://www.gompers.umd.edu/</a> C: <a href="https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/sets/the-homestead-strike">https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/sets/the-homestead-strike</a>
Supporting Question 2	A: <a href="http://www.heritage.org/research/lecture/domestic-issues-labor-unions-and-political-reform">http://www.heritage.org/research/lecture/domestic-issues-labor-unions-and-political-reform</a> B: <a href="http://www.redstate.com/diary/laborunionreport/2011/09/05/labor-day-the-union-tax-how-unions-kill-jobs/">http://www.redstate.com/diary/laborunionreport/2011/09/05/labor-day-the-union-tax-how-unions-kill-jobs/</a> C: Students pick
Supporting Question 3	A: <a href="http://www.businessinsider.com/we-may-need-labor-unions-after-all-2012-12">http://www.businessinsider.com/we-may-need-labor-unions-after-all-2012-12</a> B: <a href="http://www.aflcio.org/Blog/Organizing-Bargaining/Future-of-Unions-New-Models-of-Worker-Representation">http://www.aflcio.org/Blog/Organizing-Bargaining/Future-of-Unions-New-Models-of-Worker-Representation</a> C: Students pick
Supporting Question 4	A: Review previous sources B: Students pick

**Appendix B**

Claims/Evidence Sourcing Worksheet

<b>Source Title:</b>		<b>Author:</b>	
<b>Source Type (e.g., Think Tank article):</b>		<b>Credentials of author(s):</b>	
<b>Claims</b>	<b>Evidence to Support Claim</b>	<b>Questions Left Unanswered</b>	
1.			
2.			
3.			
<b>Additional Questions</b>			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What factors strengthen or weaken the validity of the source?</li> <li>2. Does the source appeal more to the logic or emotions of the reader?</li> </ol>			

3. Does the author adequately support his or her claims?
4. What additional information is needed to verify the accuracy of the claims?
5. Do other sources corroborate or invalidate the claims? How so? (note: question answered after students seek out and analyze additional sources)

### **About the Author**

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## **Un-Silencing Voices: Investigating Human Rights Violations Regarding Violence against African American Males**

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### **Abstract**

This article encourages social studies educators to examine approaches for incorporating controversial topics and challenging conversations in the classroom while utilizing viable instructional methods to engage with student-centered pedagogy. We start with discussions of the problems associated with including controversial issues in secondary social studies curricula, why it is important to do so despite difficulties, and a rationale for incorporating specific pedagogical tools for facilitating challenging conversations. The article concludes with a secondary social studies lesson in which students will analyze the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and consider how recent cases connect to the idea of human rights. Activities in the lesson include: 1) a webquest, 2) a framework for a structured classroom discussion and 3) reflections and tips on lesson implementation in a U.S. Government class. The lesson serves to “unsilence” the concept of race and encourages students to act as critical agents by examining recent cases of violence involving the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray.

**Keywords:** Black Lives Matter, controversial issues, human rights, social justice, webquest

### **Introduction**

Well, if one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected — those, precisely, who need the law's protection most! — and listens to their testimony. Ask any Mexican, any Puerto Rican, any black man, any poor person — ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know, not whether or not the country is

just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it. It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have. (Baldwin, 1972/2000, p. 149)

Although social studies content includes potentially controversial topics in a historical context, when thinking about current-day issues, these topics are often avoided or silenced. For example, although it is common practice to hold debates focused on the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or American involvement in the Vietnam Conflict, it is much less common for teachers to engage students in discourse involving current controversial events (Barton & McCully, 2007; Cuenca, 2010), especially when the matters are related to race and outside the discussion put forth by the textbook (Bolgatz, 2005; Mazzei, 2008). This is particularly problematic when considering the recent shootings of African American males that have drawn national attention. Although the intent of such avoidance may be to evade potential discomfort or intimidation on the part of the teacher and/or students, circumventing certain topics sends the message that such topics are not to be discussed or that they do not have a place in the classroom context (Pitts, 2016). As teachers, it is critical to ensure students feel comfortable and safe; however, it is also within the scope of the teacher's responsibility to equip students with tools to critically think, draw evidence-based conclusions, engage in disruptive discourse, and serve as critical agents for change. As emphasized by Giroux (2007), teachers have the opportunity to reframe the present to influence a more democratic future. Consequently, if the current environment serves to minimize or avoid issues related to race and the legacy of racism, it is within the teacher's scope of influence to restructure the environment to democratize the classroom, foster inclusivity, and give voice to those topics being silenced (Howard, 2003; Mazzei, 2008). The teacher has the opportunity to give voice to racial minority populations who have been historically marginalized and disempowered to expose and examine issues related to privilege, power, and oppression. The teacher has the opportunity and responsibility to respond to the racial climate and racial structures by creating age-appropriate entry points and incorporating learning activities to explore race in an open, honest, empowering, and productive manner.

It can be a beneficial process for teachers to reflect on how to best encourage inclusivity and facilitate challenging conversations; however, for the purposes of this article, secondary social studies content will be underscored through the provided pedagogical framework that explores how to engage student learning and discourse regarding violence against African American males. Additionally, while the provided lesson focuses on the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray, the instructional framework serves to foster best practices in research, critical analysis, and application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to develop a stance on the critical question: In what ways does the recent violence against African American males relate to the notion of human rights?

## **Fostering Discussion-Based Strategies in the Social Studies Classroom**

Since traditional lecture and teacher talk continue to be the most common practices used for presenting information in today's social studies classrooms (Burenheide, 2007), it is critical to consider alternative avenues to foster student voice, enhance engagement, and apply best practices to promote critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation of content. Despite the fact that classroom discussion, particularly in relation to potentially controversial issues, is advantageous for student engagement, such discussion is declining in the social studies classroom (Cuenca, 2010; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2015). Even though participation in discussion of challenging, open-ended topics serves to inspire future civic engagement and positive educational outcomes, discourse on controversial topics is minimally represented in the classroom setting (Barton & McCully, 2007; Cuenca, 2010; Hess, 2009; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2015; Moore, 2012; Parker, 2012). Not knowing what is safe to say, teachers often fear criticism from parents or potentially negative consequences from school leaders, so they may decide to circumvent potentially polarizing topics by omitting these topics (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2015). Along with perceived potential backlash from parents or criticism from school administrators, educators themselves may feel intimidated or uncomfortable engaging in such controversial discussions as dialogue centered on race, personal difference, and equity are not emphasized, and frequently avoided in educational preparation, professional development, and schools (Boske, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2000). As a result many educators hesitate to incorporate topics of race and racial disparities in the classroom or silence them completely (Mazzei, 2008; Moore, 2012; Pitts, 2016; Samuels, 2013).

Since race continues to serve as a unique social construct and impacts historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components of American society (Ladson-Billings, 2006), social studies teachers do an injustice to students by silencing related dialogues and strategically excluding them as learning opportunities. Considering the positive relationship between engaging in controversial conversations and increased civic engagement (Barton & McCully, 2007; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2015), teachers can promote educational equity by affording students the opportunity to engage in discussion-based strategies. It is important to take into account that many students show interest in such topics because they are current, relevant, and often directly relate to students' lives (Pitts, 2016). Therefore, it seems both practical and reasonable for teachers to capitalize on these opportunities. By first selecting topics of interest and then scaffolding learning, encouraging multiple perspectives, and facilitating structured discussions of controversial issues, teachers can promote student engagement and inquiry, as well as nurture a social justice approach. In addition, inclusion of this information in the classroom context sends a clear and comprehensive message that issues involving race, racial disparities, and sociopolitical implications of racism should not be silenced.

## **Facilitating Webquests**

In an effort to shift the focus from traditional lecture to student-centered pedagogy, as well as provide a structured format for exploring challenging topics, the highlighted lesson is designed as a webquest to scaffold learning and promote student inquiry in relation to race and deeply-rooted implications of racism. Webquests serve as learner-centered, inquiry-oriented activities where some or all of the information learners explore comes from Internet-based content (Dodge, 2001; VanFossen, 2004). Over the last two decades, webquests have been introduced into the educational scene and have increased in popularity. Designed for most academic subjects, this pedagogical approach facilitates Internet-based learning as a way to promote inquiry and critical thinking activities (VanFossen, 2009). Webquests are strategic given their design to direct learners to pre-selected, pertinent information to promote inquiry related to the current topic. As highlighted by Crocco and Cramer (2005), the rationale in the design is “to use learners’ time well, to focus on using information rather than looking for it, and to support learners’ thinking at the levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation” (p.144).

Comparable to other best practices, there are guiding principles involved in designing and facilitating this web-inquiry technique. In an article titled, “Five Rules for Writing a Great Webquest” (2001), founder of the Webquest model Bernie Dodge customizes the process by providing the acronym FOCUS to encourage best practice recommendations for this inquiry-orientated format. Dodge emphasizes the importance of: 1) Finding great sites, 2) Orchestrating learners and resources, 3) Challenging learners to think, 4) Using the medium, and 5) Scaffolding learning to promote high expectations. Facilitation of the inquiry-based design of the webquest serves to foster a student-centered approach for synthesizing data, as well as un-silencing student voice with scaffolding that prepares students to discuss controversial issues. As such, in order to promote inquiry-oriented learning, as well as a student-centered approach, the highlighted lesson is designed as a webquest so students can navigate controversial information in a structured manner while analyzing and evaluating related content.

### **Webquest: Technology-Based Lesson Plan**

Many believe human rights violations are something that occur in countries outside the United States, for example in countries categorized as developing nations; however, the recent attention that has been brought to violence against African American males in the United States through enhanced mainstream media coverage is being scrutinized under a critical lens. Even though some consider such events to be a national crisis, possibly serving as a catalyst for sparking a modern civil rights movement, others are less concerned and see the males involved in the cases as individuals who were doing something wrong and, subsequently, are responsible for the outcome (regardless of how tragic). Nevertheless, despite a person’s position, the cases have sparked intense media attention and have resulted in disruptive protests throughout the nation, as well as inspired organized movements such as Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter.

In an attempt to help students critically examine current issues and engage in discourse on this multi-faceted controversial topic, the lesson is designed for secondary social studies students to research cases involving the deaths of African American males to

explore how such violence relates to the notion of human rights. The lesson plan provides: 1) whole-class exploration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 2) a webquest designed for students to examine cases and collect evidence and, 3) protocols for a structured class discussion around the critical question: In what ways does violence against African American males relate to the notion of human rights. Strategies are designed to appeal to diverse learners and can be facilitated to encourage students to act as critical agents and investigate potential human rights violations while incorporating primary source analysis, racial literacy, and student voice. The following webquest can be accessed through Google Sites (2015) with the link found in the references.

## **Standards**

The lesson corresponds with both National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Themes and Strands, as well as Common Core Standards for English and Language Arts. In relation to social studies content, the lesson encourages students to explore the role of culture and diversity, identify social changes and development, and examine how individual rights are protected or challenged. Common Core Standards are supported through students' use of citing textual evidence, evaluating multiple sources and mediums of information, as well as integrating diverse sources to develop a coherent understanding of content, details, and uncertainties.

## **Overview of the Activity**

The lesson is multi-faceted and includes a large-group introductory portion where students are presented with the concept of human rights, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights primary source. The lesson then transitions into a webquest designed to encourage online inquiry to explore a comprehensive, yet objective, review of recent cases involving violence against African American males. In the lesson students will work to examine cases (as assigned by the teacher) through completion of the webquest. Students will complete readings and activities related to the following tabs: 1) Trayvon Martin, 2) Eric Garner, 3) Michel Brown, 4) Tamir Rice, 5) Walter Scott, and 6) Freddie Gray. As students analyze sources for each case, they will take notes on the provided graphic organizer. The notes will serve as evidence to help students develop a stance on the critical question. Upon completion of the webquest, students will organize their thoughts related to the evidence in order to engage in a structured class discussion. Protocols are provided for facilitating a successful student-centered, evidence-based discussion. While the teacher has the liberty to implement the lesson in its entirety, suggestions are also provided for abbreviated formats. As a result, the suggested time frame for implementation is between three and five class periods.

## **Objectives**

Participation in the lesson supports multiple learning objectives. Students will be able to: 1) Analyze the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 2) Apply the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to recent news events to develop a stance on the following question: In what ways does violence against African American males relate to the notion

of human rights? 3) Evaluate how recent cases of violence against African American males relate to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### **Instructional Sequence**

**Introduction.** During the preview, students will be prompted to activate prior knowledge by exploring their ideas related to a series of open-ended questions related to human rights. Questions include:

- 1) As human beings, what rights are we guaranteed?
- 2) Are human rights the same for all people in all countries? Explain.
- 3) What could be considered violations of human rights? Provide examples.

After time for individual reflection and large-group discussion of their thoughts, students will be provided the opportunity to watch a ten-minute documentary from United for Human Rights (2016) that provides an overview of human rights, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and cites examples of modern human rights violations in the global context. Questions are included to promote student focus during the video and align with the following:

- 1) What are human rights?
- 2) Describe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- 3) List some examples that suggest violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Upon conclusion of the video, large group discussion will be facilitated to explore students' ideas and emphasize important points. Then, in order to develop a thorough understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, students will read the document and follow directions for text marking explained by the teacher. Based on the teacher's knowledge of students, if the teacher believes the primary source from the United Nations (2016) is too complex, a simplified version of the document is available from Youth for Human Rights (2016).

**Task.** Following the introduction, the specific inquiry-based tasks are explained. The purpose of this stage is to analyze recent news events involving violence against African American males to collect evidence, analyze information, and develop an informed position on the critical question: In what ways does violence against African American males relate to the notion of human rights?

Information is provided on six cases. Depending on the teacher's directions, students may work individually or in small groups to examine the cases. In addition, aligned with the teacher's instructions, students may investigate all available cases or select an assigned number of cases to explore. Students will thoroughly review the cases to develop a clear understanding of each scenario, surrounding events, and outcomes. Upon completion, students will be asked to engage in a discussion where they will be expected to provide strong evidence to defend their response to the critical question. Consequently, it is essential for students to develop a thorough understanding of each case to collectively examine how violence against African American males relates to the notion of human rights. Students should use the provided graphic organizer to take detailed notes on each case as they read the provided overview and examine video clips, time lines, articles, reenactments, audio clips, and interviews from a variety of sources.

**Process.** During the process stage, students will initially have time to reflect, organize their thoughts, and develop a critical position to aid in the upcoming discussion. It is important to inform students of the expectations to refer to factual information and cite resources in the discussion to support their arguments. In addition, the value of the discussion rests, not in the students' yes/no answers to the questions, but rather in the exploration of facts to develop and support their ideas. As a result, the activity should be structured as a formal discussion (*not* a debate) where students are expected to listen to others' responses and think critically about what is being said. Protocols for discussion are included, as well as possible discussion prompts such as:

1. How do the cases you explored relate to the notion of human rights?
2. What evidence do you have that may suggest a violation of human rights?
3. What evidence do you have that does not suggest a violation of human rights?
4. How do we know when there is an abuse of power by law enforcement?
5. Why do you think many of these cases became (and continue to be) so controversial?
6. Based on the evidence, did race play a role in the actions or the outcomes?
7. How do we use this information to counter violence against African American males?
8. In what ways can we use this information to further promote or encourage human rights?

**Resources.** In order to access the webquest on the Google Site (2015), the link is provided in the references. The Google Site includes the information discussed in the overview and instructional sequence and is structured as a webquest that includes all learning components so it can be incorporated for student use in the classroom. In addition, the Google Site (2015) includes a resource tab that highlights resources accessible to the teacher to foster a social justice approach and create a sense of urgency regarding controversial issues discussions, as well as an extension activity to deepen student learning.

### **Reflections on Lesson Implementation**

The lesson was implemented in its entirety in two U.S. Government classes in a large suburban school in the South. While the classes were primarily comprised of ninth graders, there were also a few seniors in each class. The lesson was incorporated in a unit on Civil Liberties and Civil Rights. In one class, students were organized in groups of two or three to complete the online research on the given cases. In the other class, students worked individually to complete the research-based task. As observers, it is interesting to note that students appeared more engaged and energetic when they were paired together. The groupings seemed to encourage conversation and questions about the cases during the research portion of the activity as evidenced by frequent dialogue between students and multiple content-related questions directed to the teacher. Consequently, by the time students engaged in the structured whole-class discussion, most students had already shared their thoughts and questions with their groupmates which appeared to increase student comfort and engagement in large group.

In addition to observing implementation of the lesson, we also spoke with the teacher to further explore her perceptions regarding lesson facilitation. During our discussion, she first emphasized the structured, pre-designed lesson format. Since the webquest was already made and she was not responsible for creating the activities, she

communicated an enhanced level of comfort. In addition, since the lesson was based on real-world cases, when students had questions, rather than feeling pressured to state her feelings or opinions, she was able to redirect students to the evidence in the resources. She expressed, "I definitely felt more comfortable teaching these topics since the lesson was structured with provided materials, aligned to standards, and clearly connected with evidence." Considering a holistic view of the lesson, the teacher perceived students to be engaged in the learning tasks. In addition, she felt it positioned her to better respond to current events related to injustice. For example, she reflected on students' energy regarding the Trayvon Martin case. During the trial, she remembered students' passion about the case and their strong desire to ask questions and discuss their related feelings. However, given the overwhelming amount of material she is responsible for covering in her course, she believed she did not have the time to dedicate to such discussion. Reflecting on this activity, since the lesson was aligned to standards, she felt justified in using class time to incorporate the material.

Speaking about the discussion model, the teacher commented on her appreciation of the structure of the discussion prompts. Since the questions were scaffold and started with evidence-based conversations related to human rights, students were able to enter into the discussion without presenting their own feelings or opinions about the content. This approach seemed to minimize the risk involved in participating. Then, when the discussion evolved and questions about race were posed, as a result of the natural momentum of the discussion, most students seemed willing to contribute.

The teacher also expressed her beliefs about the need to purposefully use the established discussion protocols to create a safe space and explicitly highlight the fact that everyone's experiences are real, unique, authentic, and need to be respected. As such, according to the teacher, it is important to establish a climate where students do not attempt to discredit each other. For example, instead of contesting or disagreeing with a person, she emphasized the importance of having students focus their comments and connect to ideas. This approach helps to minimize the danger of an "Us and Them" mindset unfolding. She shared, "Instead of making comments that further divide, it is critical to teach them how to structure comments and disagree in an honest and respectful way."

She also discussed the need to consider de-escalation strategies for the discussion in advance. For instance, in the lesson, when a student commented on how most of the individuals who were killed were doing something wrong and questioned why they just did not do what the police said, the teacher communicated that several students appeared agitated and expressed non-verbal frustration. In response, another student shouted out, "Why were they shot if they weren't armed?" As a result, the teacher reasoned, "Let's bring it back to the evidence. How do their actions of not adhering to the police's directives align with human rights? Can we make any connections?" Based on the teacher's perceptions, this strategy appeared to minimize the rising emotion and brought the conversation back to the center of the discussion. She stated, "Although it is never easy to talk about race, it is important for students to consider the automatic assumptions of guilt or innocence based on a person's racial background. If we are going to talk about Civil Liberties and Civil Rights, we also have to talk about the suppressions and injustices. We have to go outside the textbook and talk about what is going on in our world right now." Overall, the teacher perceived value in the lesson and expressed that she would continue to implement the

lesson and similar inquiry-based strategies as a way to incorporate current social concerns and issues about race.

### Conclusion

It is understandable why teachers might elect to limit or silence race-based topics from their classrooms; however, given the positive influence on pedagogical aims while simultaneously fostering student-centered pedagogy, it is critical for teachers to consider how such dialogue can be fostered in a safe, non-threatening way. When students are provided the opportunity to critically think, reflect, and engage in discourse to further unpack race and racial disparities, inclusivity is cultivated and the learning space is further democratized. The provided lesson serves as a practical, structured approach to engage the use of controversy and “unsilence” the discussion of race in schools. While its impact may be seemingly small, if race, racial disparities, white privilege, power, and oppression begin to enter the dominant discourse and racial literacy is encouraged, such teaching can result in far-reaching implications. No longer denying, avoiding, or minimizing the role of race and race-related biases, when teachers encourage all students to explore current realities related to injustice, silence and marginalization are challenged. Viewing the approach as a journey rather than an end point, teachers can work to minimize discomfort and intimidation that often result from race-related conversations by increasing awareness to the legacy of racism, underscoring the evils of injustice, and creating shared spaces to imagine a world with increased advocacy, equity, and justice for all students, particularly those who have been historically relegated, unprotected, and silenced.

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**Appendix**

Figure 1. Graphic Organizer for the Webquest.

**Investigating Human Rights Violations Regarding  
Violence against African American Males**

Directions: Complete the graphic organizer with details discovered about each case in the webquest.

	<b>Summary of the Case</b>	<b>Important Details</b>	<b>Evidence <u>for</u> Human Rights Violation(s)</b>	<b>Evidence <u>against</u> Human Rights Violation(s)</b>
<b>Trayvon Martin</b>				
<b>Eric Garner</b>				
<b>Michael Brown</b>				

	<b>Summary of the Case</b>	<b>Important Details</b>	<b>Evidence <u>for</u> Human Rights Violation</b>	<b>Evidence <u>against</u> Human Rights Violation</b>
<b>Tamir Rice</b>				
<b>Walter Scott</b>				
<b>Freddie Gray</b>				

Figure 2. Standards Aligned with the Lesson.

## **Standards**

### **NCSS Themes and Strands**

- Culture: Explore the role culture plays in societal development, as well as the role of diversity and how it is maintained in a culture.
- Time, Continuity, and Change: Identify societal changes over time that result in new ideals, values, and ways of life.
- Power, Authority, and Governance: Examine the proper scope and limits of authority, as well as how individual rights are protected and challenged.

### **Common Core**

- Key Ideas and Details: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- Key Ideas and Details: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Figure 3. Protocols for Class Discussion.

## **Protocols for Class Discussion**

1. How do the cases you explored relate to the notion of human rights?
2. What evidence do you have that may suggest a violation of human rights?
3. What evidence do you have that does not suggest a violation of human rights?
4. How do we know when there is an abuse of power by law enforcement?
5. Why do you think many of these cases became (and continue to be) so controversial?
6. Based on the evidence, did race play a role in the actions or the outcomes?
7. How do we use this information to counter violence against African American males?
8. In what ways can we use this information to further promote or encourage human rights?

### **About the Authors**

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