



Thematic Ideas and Lesson Plans for Teachers

The following are ten different themes that can be used in Middle or High School classrooms to engage students in various subjects. Literature, Music, History, Visual Art, Science, Math and Activism can all be addressed by using the Registry. This site can provide material to draw from, create from, and explore.

These Unit plans are constructed to make use of the site, to encourage ways of creating lessons that are interdisciplinary, and interactive, while still meeting standards.

So often *teaching from a theme* can in itself be inclusive and deep as opposed to teaching separate units on “black poets” African American music”. In this way we do not “other” a culture, race or community, but rather weave them into the inclusive world we want to create in our classrooms.

As you will see, the Registry provides a natural resource into many themes that connect to student lives, concerns and passions.

MDE Social Emotional Goals—All Are Part of Every Unit Plan for the Registry

- Self-control of feelings and behavior
- Shared use of space and materials
- Identify of self in relations to others
- Social and emotional understanding
- Relationships and social interactions with familiar adults
- Relationships and social interactions
- Conflict negotiation
- Responsible conduct as a group member

Standards Addressed in the Unit: Family, Culture and Community

Standards addressed in this unit include:

Citizenship and Government --Civic Skills, 8.1, 9.1

Geography—9.3,

Historical Thinking Skills—9.

United State History—Indigenous and Slave labor-9.4.4.16.5

United States History—Slaves struggle for rights-9.4.4.19.4

United States History—Jim Crow –racism 9.4.4.20.5



Language Arts:

Conventions of English when writing or speaking: 6.11.1.1

Consulting Reference Materials 6.11.44

Evaluate Content in Diverse Media 6.5.77

Write Narratives and Other Creative Texts—7.7.3.3- 12th grade

Prepare for and Participate in range of conversations –7.9.1.1- grade 12

Communicate using traditional or digital multimedia formats—7.9.8.8

Write Narratives and other Creative Texts—9.7.3.3

Theme

Family, Culture and Community: Where Are We From? What is our Family History, our Culture? There are 8 separate experiences and activities that revolve around this theme. Pick and choose from these suggestions or take two weeks to create the experience in more depth. It is an ideal unit for the beginning of the school year yet can be taught any time from September-June.

Intersections: Music, Literature (Autobiography, poetry, fiction), Images, History

Age (Grade) Range: Middle and High School

Goal: Because Family, Culture and Community are so intricately connected to students' view of themselves, this topic can build a bridge between teacher, students, parents, artists in any town, city or neighborhood. Creating work on this theme together as a group can unite a class into a cooperative, attentive, community. It addresses social emotional and academic standards.

Materials

Computer and Whiteboard or screen if possible

Notebooks for each student: Have students create sections. This will also teach them a useful guide for any class subject.

Section 1 Notes for autobiography,

Section 2 Interview section,

Section 3-notes on history, music, art



Steps

Introducing the Unit

Family: Ask students how they define family: Introduce the idea of multiple ways that families form: Grandparents, Foster Parents, Single parents, Gay parents.

- Ask for other suggestions, other ways to see this concept
- Talk about different perspectives on words, concepts we think we know (Critical Thinking skills)
- See Voices That Guide Us: [Carlyle Brown-Admiration for my Grandmother](#)

Culture: Discuss with students what Culture means - (Merriam Webster); the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time: 2. music, art, theatre, literature.

- Ask students to tell you what makes up their culture. List these things on the board. Be specific; not just music but Jazz music, or not just art but specific artists
- See Voices That Guide Us: [Seitu Jones, African American artist](#)
- Ask students to mention, discuss things that their culture believes in

Community: Have students talk about what community might mean for them in small groups. Have one of the students write down their answers.

- Come back together as a class to talk about what makes a community, what they found, what they did not know.
- Use the Voices that Guide Us community activists: [Joseph Selvaggio, Admiration](#)

Activities

1. Begin with having students write an “I am from” list/poem. Ask them to think of the food they eat, the place they live, the celebrations that are part of their lives, the relatives they spend time with, the music they listen to.

If some students cannot write rapidly, ask another student to write for them. You can also ask a student to tell you what they want to say if they feel stuck.

See: [iamfromproject.com](#) for examples of this type of poem. Many diverse poems and videos of I Am From will show students how varied and inclusive we can be.

Have students read aloud their poems in a circle. Each student is asked to listen carefully to his or her classmates, without making comments. Afterwards there can be discussion. This creates a ritual of listening/responding that centers the class around student voices.



2. You can also ask them to choose four or five lines from their poem to contribute to an “I Am From” classroom poem you will compile. Students who can copy easily can take the lines and create a large “class community” poem on butcher block paper. You can keep this up and ask students to read aloud their lines. They can also add on to the poem as the days go on.

Add music and dance. Get students moving. Have them read this class poem to music or drumming. Emphasize they are creating their own Community together.

Use the Registry Search under Music to bring up [Congo Square](#). Play the accompanying video with Terrence Blanchard. This shows community building through music.

3. Ask students to create a personal time line of events in their life filling in important events. Use the [Birthday](#) function from the Registry to have them see others that were born on this day over the years. This timeline starts at their birth and then can include moves from one house, neighborhood to another, the addition of a member to the family, a death in their family, an accomplishment. It is up to each student to include what they want on their own timeline.

Put your own timeline up to show them what a longer one looks like, how history is experienced differently for us depending on our age. Pull up your birthdate using the Registry’s [Birthday](#) function.

You can also ask students to use the AAR [Search the Registry](#) link for the dates they have as important on their timeline. In this way they will see how history coincides with personal events. They can choose to put one of those up on a date on their personal timeline if they would like.

Ask them to interview an elder in their family or community. Give them time to create a timeline for this elder. elders in their family. Again, using the birthday link they can explore events that went on for the elder over the years.

4. Ask them to write a two to three-page Autobiography. Read [Rita Dove’s poem Fifth Grade Autobiography](#) found on the Registry. This poem is an example of how an autobiography can be in poem form as well as prose. Go To [Margaret Walker](#) on the Registry. Discuss her life with the class, reading aloud all or part of the entry. Play the accompanying video of Carolyn Holbrook talking about being a teacher.

Find a poem on the internet called “For My People.” By Margaret Walker. Read the poem aloud. Ask students to write a group poem with small groups, that has the phrase “For My People” as a prompt throughout it. Read their poems aloud.



5. Ask them to do a more in-depth interview with a member of their family or someone in the community-including grandparents if they choose, uncles, cousins, teachers, shop owners, bus drivers. Think of questions ahead of time, as a class, for what they want to ask to get Information. Again, information from these interviews can be used to explore events in history on the Registry. If computers are available to them, or even on phones, ask them to show their elder the Registry website and the birthdate function.

6. Read Robert Hayden's "[Those Long Sundays](#)" found on the Registry. This will encourage them to explore their own connections to meaningful adults in their lives. Who do they take for granted? Who do they not see enough of? What do adults do for them that they are not always thankful for or aware of?

Read the poem "Lineage" by Margaret Walker. This will also give them a sense of where family comes, where their times intersect with historical events.

7. What Music do they come from? Show the [Jeralyn Steele](#) video from "Voices That Guide Us" to show how music is part of who we are.

Also play the [Maurice Jacox](#) video about where jazz evolved, where it is from.

Read the poem [When Mahalia Sings by Quandra Prettyman](#) from the Registry, and have them think about whether song is important to them, their families.

8. Read the poem [Good Times by Lucille Clifton](#) from the Registry. Have them do a list of the good times in their lives, in their family, community lives. Where do these times fit on their timeline? How do good times differ today from when they were little or when their parents were growing.? (video games, Facebook, etc.)

9. Ask students to research something that has come up from working on the family unit. It can be history; (using the [Birthday link](#) from the Registry) it could be a place from their history or family's history or memory, (using the Voices that Guide us section and birthday link). It might be an issue that has come up during this time. Using the [Voices that Guide Us](#) function ask them to explore the category of Activists/Abolitionist to see if there are some voices that echo their own concerns, issues, themes that have come from the Family/Community. Culture Theme.

Activist Possibilities:

In exploring their family connections, history, music, students can create their own responses to their life now. It all leads to this moment for them.

Using [Voices that Guide Us](#) and given time to explore this resource, they can watch and listen to those who have been exploring "where they are from" in their own ways. See



[Danez Smith](#) and [Seitu Jones](#), as examples of those who build statements from their poetry and visual art. There are many more.

10. Students can create a play, song, poster, performance, collaboration, photography exhibit, around what they feel passionately about.

- Who is our human family?
- Who is our community?
- What do we want for our future?
- What do we want to see on our timelines in the future?