



Thematic “Freedom” Ideas and 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.

Note: You can pick or choose among the suggestions for each Thematic Unit. It could be an activity from the Unit that takes one day; or you may want to pick and choose what activities and lessons you want to do that amount to one week of exploration and instruction. The Registry is ideal in its flexibility. These Units aim to be flexible as well.



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-9.44.19.4

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



African American Registry, Unit Plan: Freedom

Theme: Freedom- For One, For All

Making a connection to students in their personal lives, with the issues that matter to them, can be a way of leading them into broader discussions, research, writing, celebrating. This unit is designed to expand the conversation from personal freedom to freedom's connection to our democracy and to social justice activism. Mandela said, "I am because you are", or Ubuntu.

What does this mean for us and our connection to others? How can we lead our students to explore this concept both personally and abstractly, locally and globally?

Intersections: Music, Literature, Writing, Images, History, Art

Age Range: Middle and High School

Goal: This topic can motivate students in many different ways, to write, research, listen, debate, work collaboratively and reflect individually on what the concept of freedom means for the. It touches on history, literature, music, visual art and human connection, both personal and global. By the end of the time allotted for this theme, students will have a deeper understanding of history, culture, context and expression around the concept of freedom.

Materials: Notebooks with sections created for Research, Notes, Diary Entries, Interviews and Artistic interpretations.

Steps

Introducing the Unit

Freedom- Personal: Ask students to write their own definition of freedom—not what is academic, but rather what do they feel is a real definition of freedom—for them personally. Have them list the things they are free to do, those that they are not free to do (because of age requirements) and those that they feel are too dangerous to do. (Talk back to a policeman? Walk around certain streets at night? Pick mushrooms in the forest and eat them?) Read these lists aloud.



Show the AA Registry poem [“To Satch” by Samuel Allen](#) Have them list things they would like to do, be free to do, today, right now in their life. “Play music in the cafeteria? Use their cell phones in the middle of class? Stay out till two in the morning? Not to have to go to work after school? Dance? Encourage them to be imaginative here, not restricted, but let themselves list “crazy” things they would like to feel free to do.

Freedom- citizens of a country: Now ask students to do this for the country: what does freedom mean for them as citizens of the United States? Do they feel free or restricted by being a citizen, part of society? Where does our personal freedom intersect with our community freedom? What rules do we need to have that might restrict our freedom but will make us safe? (Stop signs, etc.). Have a discussion around this in small groups or as a whole class.

Use [Elizabeth Alexander’s “Praise Song For the Day”](#) **From the Registry Poetry section** “Say it plain, that many have died for this day. Sing the names of the dead who brought us here, who laid the train tracks, raised the bridges, picked the cotton and the lettuce, built brick by brick the glittering edifices they would then keep clean and work inside of.”

In order for us to have our freedom, who do we depend upon? Meet in small groups to make a list those in your life you would want to praise, who drive the bus, who grow the food...Individuals, those in the past, those now.

Put these group lists on the butcher block paper and post.

Have students walk around the room observing what other groups posted.

Activities

1. Music and Freedom:

Read the Poem [“Jazzy Street Walk” by Charles Braxton,](#) from the Registry.

Bring in music to go along with what he says in the poem. Ask students to write a poem about what music means to them. What kinds of music do they listen to, do their parents and grandparents parents listen to? They can do this in groups, pairs, on their own.

When they are done ask them to read or sing their poems to the class.

Use [“The Song Turning Back into Itself” by Al Young](#) from the Registry. Talk about the role music played in the struggles for freedom in the US.



Read the story of [Emma Hackley](#) from the Registry. Ask students to find other examples of the connection in history between music and freedom using the registry. They can also do research on the internet or at the library.

2. Fighting for Freedom

Show the video [Grading Today's Athletes, with Harry Edwards](#) from the Registry. Ask students to discuss freedom to protest, freedom to march, freedom to sit-in. What is the cost of fighting for freedom? Look at the words of the first amendment. What does that mean to you? Ask students to write three sentences on what the 1st amendment means for them.

Go back in history some years to show [Hartman Turnbow's Leadership](#) video. Here people from Mississippi were trying to register to vote. How important is the vote to your own sense of freedom?

3. Freedom and Fear

Show the David Dennis video [Treasured Moments in Activism](#). David Dennis says he was given the choice to live in freedom or live with God. That woke him up to fight for his right to vote, to drink water at the same fountain as white people, to shop in stores, eat at lunch counters.

Ask students: In what ways do we live in fear and how does that limit our freedom today? What can we do about it?

Ask students to make a class list of Ways to be Free: What does it take to conquer fear? Can you give examples of today, when people have been unafraid to ask for their rights? What makes a place...city street, house, apartment, state, country, safe for all?

Interview: Ask students to interview three people: an elder, a person around their age, and an elementary student. Ask them what freedom means to them. What things do they want to do to feel free? If possible, record the interviews. How do different ages react to the idea of Freedom?

4. Freedom and Collaboration

Show the video ["Freedom House EMS Memories."](#)

In much of the history of fighting for freedom, it takes a group working together, having each other's backs, even at times of fear and uncertainty. Freedom, in history of Activism, comes about when people join together. Who are those in your life who have your back? How does that allow you more freedom? Students can make lists or write a portrait of one person they think of who has their back.



In the case of the EMS Freedom House team, it allowed them to work at a job they wanted to work at and allowed them to support each other.

At one moment on the video a woman says, “I saw so much compassion!” And she ends her part of the filming by saying she was “allowed to be compassionate all those years as an EMS worker.”

Ask students: Can you think of a connection between freedom and compassion, care for others in your own life? If you step away from a group of friends who want to tease another classmate, that is exercising your freedom. Can you give other examples of being free to care about others?

Students can create skits, plays, songs, stories about times to feel free to care. These can mention how difficult this can be, and what it takes to go outside of one’s comfort zone and act on your own for what is right.

5. Freedom to Be with Those Not Like Me

Show [Black Love, Black Critique](#) and [Fake, Geek Rayo Daniels](#) clips from **Voices That Guide Us**.

Questions for discussion: What are the risks of stepping out from your culture, your peer group and interacting with others who are not like you? Do you feel you have the freedom to do that, or are you bound by what your group thinks, expects, wants from you?

Read [“Learning to Read” by Frances Harper](#).

Reading for Frances Harper was freedom. It was also part of a collaboration, during slavery and beyond, between whites who came down to teach and African Americans who came to learn.

Ask students to; Write a poem (it can rhyme or not—you have seen many examples of free verse and rhyming poems in this unit) about doing something they wanted to do no matter what people said, no matter what they told him or her. Below are some of the verses from Learning to Read that show what the narrator of the poem was able to do by NOT believing what others said she could do:

“And I longed to read my Bible,
For precious words it said;
But when I began to learn it,
Folks just shook their heads,

And said there is no use trying,
Oh! Chloe you’re too late;



But as I was rising sixty,
I had no time to wait.

So I got a pair of glasses,
And straight to work I went,
And never stopped till I could read
The hymns and Testament.”

Create a dance, a drawing, a poster, a poem or essay or play about doing what YOU want to do in your life, no matter what those around you say. How do you want to claim your freedom?

6. Research or Creative Project:

Tell students: Pick an issue or topic having to do with freedom...whether it be personal freedom to be whom you are, a historical time when many survived NOT being free, music and its influence on the fight for freedom, or music and your survival, your freedom. Think up an issue or topic around freedom that we have not covered. Global Freedom is one suggestion: how free are other countries? What is the life like for someone having to flee his or her country to attain freedom—this can be in the past or now.

You can write a short story or play or long poem about your topic, or you can do a research paper, using the Registry and other sources on the Net or at the library in books to explore what you are interested in.

You may want to do a project with one other person. Working in pairs and dividing up the tasks, you may complete this requirement together.

You may also go to the lesson plan in the Registry’s [Teachers Forum: How to Write A Book](#) and make this your final project. This would be creating a children’s book around the theme of Freedom.