



Thematic Ideas and Plans for Teachers

Title: Justice

The following is one of ten different themes that can be used in Middle and/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 while still emphasizing the importance of their unique identity.

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: Justice

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



Theme: Justice

Justice: Our study of history and contemporary civilization is often centered around the idea of justice. Nations and peoples fight for justice, fight against injustice, demand justice in our current times. It is a theme that expands across centuries.

Intersections: History, Literature, Music, Law, Psychology, Art, Writing skills

Age Range: 6th grade – 12th grade.

Goal: This unit will present a variety of ways for students to explore justice, from their personal experience and interpretation of how it applies in their own lives to the role justice plays in history, in theater or art or literature. Such a topic can include the music from the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, to novels and plays that center around the struggle for justice of main characters around the world. Students can create systems of justice as they would like to see it played out in the context of their lives. It is a theme that encourages students to become activists in addressing what they consider an injustice in their community, in the world or even in their school. It is a topic that can inspire historical research, as well as the study of heroes in our world who fight for justice in our time. It is a way to build essay writing skills, creative writing and art making, historical research, and interviewing abilities. The topic is only limited by our own imaginations.

Materials: Notebook, computer access for research and use of the African American Registry, poster making materials, audio for listening to music.

Introducing the Unit:

Justice: 1. fairness in the way people are dealt with: 2. the system of laws in a country that judges and punishes people: 3. a judge in a law court.

Print this 3-part definition on a large sheet of paper and post it in the front of the room.

Ask students to decide if this is a good definition of justice. What else would they add?

Have them list times when they or someone they knew was wronged. What should have been done? Was what was done, effective?

Share these in a large group.



Step 1. Divide the class into two groups

Group one will discuss the idea of fairness in the way people are treated.

Group two will talk about the system of laws in our country that judge and punish people.

Where does each group see problems in the way justice is handled between people? in our system of laws and law enforcement?

Ask each group to write three suggestions: group 1 suggestions for improving the way people are treated; group 2 suggestions for the way the law is applied.

What can we, as a people do to change what is wrong and preserve what is right in our system of Justice?

Step 2: Legal Justice

[Justice Prevails 39 Years After Church Bombing](#)

Read the story above about Justice finally obtained years and years after the crime occurred.

What does this say about what we may need to achieve justice? It may take years but perseverance and a refusal to give up may be w today, where certain groups of people do not have justice? Immigrants, Prisoners? African Americans?

What are some ways we can finally achieve justice for all?

Step 3: Economic Justice

Read the poem of the Billy Holiday song: [God Bless the Child](#).

What do you see as ways to deal with poverty, with some having more, some having less and the impact on children? How can we change this and bring about economic justice? What do you think Holiday means at the end when she sings “God Bless the Child that’s Got his own”?

In groups of 7 or 8, discuss these questions. Look up Economic Justice on the internet. List some groups or individuals who are trying to do something about poverty, lack of economic possibility? Present your findings to the class.

Step 4: Allies in Justice

Look at the article on: [the Southern Poverty Law Center](#)

Watch the video that accompanies this of Harry Davis after reading a story.

[Is The Civil Rights Movement Over](#)

Research the Southern Poverty Law Center to learn more about their efforts toward justice. Do you agree with Harry Davis that the civil rights struggle will never be over? The Southern Poverty Law Center is made up of people of color and white people. Can



you find other justice organizations and causes that include all Americans, no matter what the color of their skin?

Create posters about these organizations who are working toward Economic justice. Display them in your school's library or cafeteria.

Step 5: Community/School Justice

In what ways in your own life do you see injustice? In your school, are there forms of injustice you would like to change? This can involve unfairness you witness during your days at school. It can also involve unfairness you see in other parts of your life—at home, in your neighborhood or town, in sports activities, in the laws regarding age for driving, drinking, signing up for the army, playing on a varsity team, in connection to those with disabilities, LGBT status.

Look at the video with [Stephanie Johnson](#).

Is everyone treated fairly in your school? On the streets?

Write a play, a poem a song an essay about what your vision is for true justice in your life, where you live and work.

Create a piece of visual art: a painting, a piece of sculpture, a photograph collage that speaks to what you are concerned about, want to change.

Step 6: Whose History of Justice? Watch this video: [Help Kids See](#)

Think about whose perspective from whom we see issues of justice and the history. Is it the same to be African American as it is to be White or Hmong or Latino when reading courses about our history? What can be done to make sure all students see themselves in our buildings: from who teaches us, to what we read, to how we are treated by the system.

Break into small groups to talk about this, and to arrive at three conclusions about what will work to have a just classroom, school, society. Present these to the rest of the class.

Step 7: Unconscious Injustice

Study the phenomenon called Implicit Bias.”

Defining Implicit Bias

“Also known as implicit social cognition, implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an *unconscious manner*. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness. Rather, implicit biases are not accessible through introspection.”
Merriam Webster Dictionary



How do we see implicit bias in our relation to gender, race, culture, age, sexual orientation, poverty? What are things we do without meaning to—who we listen to, what we assume about a person based on his or her looks, language, age or skin color? If we are not aware of our biases, how can we change them? Read about Implicit bias training using the internet. Present your findings and recommendations to the class.

What do you assume about a person with gray hair? What do you believe about a person who is dressed in thread bare clothes, old shoes? Are you accepting of someone you hear speaking in a language other than English? Do you assume anything about a how a white person, or how a Black person will treat you, given their race? The key to understanding this is to be honest with yourself. T

[Take the Implicit Bias Test through Harvard University](#) to see where you come out.

Activity 1. A Trial

Read in the Registry about [Thurgood Marshall](#). After reading the story, scroll down to the bottom of the articles page and watch the referenced video with **William “Bill” Green**. Notice what he says about the law, what is involved, what it means to go into a courtroom.

Create a performance piece involving a trial. As a class choose what you would like to perform. This can be the trial of a historical figure, even the trial of a whole country for their actions. It can be the trial of some case recently in the news.

Assign roles to a Defendant, Plaintiff, Defense Lawyers, Prosecutors, Judge, Jury.

You will have to do research on the case, on the situation. Examples include taking land from Native Indigenous people in this country, Slavery, a shooting in the newspaper, a situation at your school involving suspension, expulsion, you can explore other topics, times in history, situations, you want to explore and feel passionate about. Create a performance together with a group or one other person. It can include music, video, poetry. It can be a play in spoken word.

Invite another class to see the performance. They can vote on whose side in the trial should win, given the strength of the arguments on each side.

Activity 2. Who teaches, who learns, who acts.

Often, we know what the right thing is to do. Yet we don't always do the right thing. What prevents us from being just and good? Peer pressure? Fear? Indifference? Not wanting to “get involved?” Wanting to be in with a certain crowd? Afraid to challenge someone on their behavior that is hurting another?

Watch the three video selections from the Registry:

[David Gholar](#)

[Rayo Daniels](#)

[Steve Asencio](#)



In each of these videos someone is talking about what moves them, what they feel they need to do to be a good person, to understand and to make change. Explore the registry youth views section and find more discussions of what it is like to be young now, what are the challenges.

What keeps you motivated to do the right thing, the thing you know is just and fair?
What prevents you from doing that?

Write a list of these situations, times you have done something brave and times you did not. We all have both times in our lives. What do you believe will bring about more people acting in the right way? What do we need to do as a country, and even globally, to create economic and racial justice? Turn this writing into anything you want: dialogue (even a dialogue with yourself), poem, essay, or some research in psychology about what motivates us to do right.

At the end of this project you can gather what you have done all together: papers, lists, art work, plays, essays into a portfolio.

As a class have a final presentation around the topic of doing justice. Invite others.

As an individual: find a community organization working on an issue of justice you are interested in: Black Lives Matter, Climate Change, LGBT rights, Bullying...the list is yours to create, and then to choose one from.

Visit an office or website of the group you have chosen. Attend a meeting, a musical event, a reading or performance connected to this organization. Or send an email to the contact information to find out more about how the organization works

Present to the class what you have found out. Discuss with them why or why not you want to follow up with this group.

Or:

As a class, choose a group that is working toward justice you want to know more about. It can be some group that funds schools in countries where there are none for children. It can be one that registers people to vote or works to get rid of plastic bottles to help create a planet that can survive.

Invite a person from that organization to come to your class and talk about what they do, what their plans are, what they believe in.

As a final reflection piece: write a journal entry, song poem, short story about **hope**: what you see as possible for our country, our world.