

The Unscripted

Series

Topic:
Black History
In Schools

About

There are scripts running all the time in the classroom that tell us how to act, what to say, what's right and what isn't. In education these scripts are often referred to as the curriculum. The curriculum is very familiar to educators. It represents the formal resources that have been explicitly chosen to help students learn (E.g. Official textbooks or lesson plans). But a lesser known kind of curriculum is also simultaneously operating in the background. This quiet script has been dubbed the "hidden curriculum" by several educators to describe the unintentional side effects of what we've chosen to teach. In the sections below, we hope to help you consider what has been excluded from your formal curriculum. We know that you can only cover so much material in the limited amount of time you have with your students. We know you can't tackle everything, but if we can help you become a little more conscious of how bias or prejudice operates - we will have achieved a major goal toward unpacking the power of scripts in both the formal and hidden curriculum not only for your students, but for you too!

What?

For the purposes of this project, our primary concern is not whether Black History should or shouldn't be taught. Scripts about Black History are always running in the classroom. That said, our interest isn't "if" you are teaching Black History (because you are...) but rather "how" you are teaching Black History. To dig deeper, first consider how Black culture is represented in the formal curriculum you are using. Is the Black experience referred to at all? If so, how is it represented? Do you need to supplement the script students are being exposed to? Second, consider what might students unintentionally be learning when you teach them about the history of the United States? Some scripts about American history embed contributions from African-Americans in all aspects of culture, other scripts center the experience of slavery in the birth of the nation, while still others marginalize or exclude Black experiences all together. Regardless of the racial composition of your students, Black History is central to understanding American History and becoming responsible citizens in modern society.

So What?

In classrooms across the country, racial bias and prejudice is created, maintained and perpetuated through powerful scripts that are deployed in both the formal and hidden curriculum. The collective impact that this has had over the years in framing Black History in America can't be understated. At times in our country's history, shared racial biases and prejudices have morph into powerful ideologies that have directly affected educational policy decisions resulting in social change. One powerful example can be found in the landmark Supreme Court case "Brown vs the Board of Education". As a direct result of slavery and Jim Crow laws, public schools throughout the South were segregated. On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court heard a case from Oliver Brown, et al. versus the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas, et al. The High Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for States to segregate public schools and overturned a long standing "separate but equal" ideology at work in education. The Brown vs the Board of Education ruling paved the way for integrating public schools and mandating that equal protections of the law are given to all. Following Brown vs. the Board of Education, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) championed the new found rights of black students to register in previously segregated schools throughout the country. One especially powerful example can be found in "The Little Rock Nine" - a group of nine African-American students who enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957 with the support of the NAACP. The Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus initially prevented these students from entering the school until President Dwight D. Eisenhower intervened by issuing an Executive Order that compelled the National Guard to protect these student's rights. The photographs of these nine students going to school under the protection of armed guards represents a powerful moment of Black History and social change.

Now What?

As you reflect on the formal and hidden curriculum here are some additional resources for consideration:

For discussion:

- Read "Savage Inequalities" by Jonathan Kozal. Does segregation still exist in public schools? Why or why not?
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/95388/savage-inequalities-by-jonathan-kozol/>
- Question for discussion: "In what ways could common cultural scripts of celebrating the Rev. Dr. MLK National Day of Service or Black History Month contribute to the erasure of important but painful Black History?"
- Zinn Education project role playing classroom activity "40 Acres and a Mule" <https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/what-reconstruction-could-have-been/>
- Online resources defining racism <https://www.dismantlingracism.org/racism-defined.html>
- 10 Ideas for Teaching Black History Month: <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/10-ideas-for-teaching-black-history-month>
- Black History Month Lessons & Resources: <http://www.nea.org/tools/lessons/black-history-month.htm>
- Online article: "Black History is American History. We Should Teach It That Way" by Sachel Harris <https://tntp.org/blog/post/black-history-is-american-history-we-should-teach-it-that-way>
- How to Improve How Black History is Taught in Schools by Natalie Colarossi <https://www.insider.com/how-to-improve-how-black-history-is-taught-in-schools-2020-6>