



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1994 Volume IV: Racism and Nativism in American Political Culture

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## In Search of Rights

Guide for Curriculum Unit 94.04.07  
by Carolyn Williams

The overall thrust of this unit is to link America's multi-ethnic past to its present social relations among ethnic groups, with the intent of directing the course of our inheritance in its future. It is intended as a brief examination of the Constitution—the spirit and the letter of its laws, as it relates to equal rights for all American citizens. Through this unit students are encouraged to make critical evaluations of their own sense of justice and fairness, as it relates to the rights of others.

While America boasts equality for all, the dominant group practices an overt racism which continually grants preferred status to a favored few of its citizenry. However, we have only to look back through the history of racial protests and civil unrest, religious struggles, and women suffrage to remind ourselves that the term “we the people” as stated in our Constitution is reserved for those favored few who are “truly” American. In an attempt to explore both the theoretical and practical sides of the expression “we the people” a cursory investigation into human rights for all of America's citizens will be unavoidable. As a part of this exploration, I raise the question: What does it profit America to violate the rights of so many of its citizens in order to grant preferred status to a favored few?

It is this idea of equal rights for all, around which I will build an eighteen- week study unit in future studies for use with seventh-grade students in the Resource Room Program for Gifted. The study initiates yet another call to action for change in the direction of social growth in this country while providing a safe forum for open and honest dialogue among the differing cultural groups who make up this class. This study will afford students opportunities to research Supreme Court cases, formally debate court rulings, write a scenario portraying a possible futuristic America, and participate in a field practicum for media production, while evaluating various social, economic and racial conflicts that exist among America's ethnic groups. It employs as its core lesson a simulation “equality,” which is intended to be used in conjunction with factual information about this society. It examines the discrepancies that exist among rich and poor and among the various ethnic groups who call America home, and it invites students to take a new and unbiased approach to viewing that which keeps us separated as a people.

The teacher who chooses to implement this unit naturally has freedom to augment the lesson ideas in a way that is conducive to teacher planning time and to the learning styles of the students. Keep in mind that the study is student-oriented with the teacher serving as facilitator. It is designed with the idea that there are two teachers involved in the implementation and that students are comfortably familiar with independent learning strategies. While the unit is intended for students who are being serviced through Gifted programming, it is

easily adapted to any grade level and to numerous academic disciplines in the regular education programs.

(Recommended for Social Studies, grades 7-9, and History, grade 10)

**Keywords**

*Civil Rights Constitutional American History*

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