



educating for cultural literacy
and mutual respect

Creating Inclusive and Equitable Communities – A Call to Action

*Understanding the origins and impact of bigotry in the
U.S. today and what we can do about it*

Lesson 13: Responding to Racism – Collective Action Lesson

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Introduction

This lesson calls upon students to explore past collective actions and to brainstorm current actions which they can join or even create themselves to combat racism. These collective actions draw on past and common strategies for countering racial, economic, and other injustices and working towards a more equitable society for all citizens. From protests to social media posts to more long-term strategies such as joining organizations that focus on specific issues of racial and economic injustice, collective actions both empower and are energized by participants. Hopefully what students learn in this lesson will transcend the classroom and inspire them to take at least one collective action and encourage them to engage in activism in their adult lives.

Theme: Social Movements and Equity

Disciplinary Area: General Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 5, 6

Relevant Curriculum Standards

California's [Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards](#):

- **Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies: RH.9.10.2; RH.11.12.9**
 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
 - Integrate information from diverse sources both primary and secondary into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

- **Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: WHST.9.10.2; 9.10.7; 9.10.9; 9.10.10**
 - Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.
 - Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
 - Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
 - Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Background Information for Educators

Collective action has been a major factor in the United States, both historically and in recent decades, as a force for creating consciousness and change around racial, economic, political and other social justice inequities. These actions have ranged from the labor movement which began in the 19th century to address some of the terrible working conditions that accompanied industrialization, through the suffrage movement which culminated in women's right to vote in 1920, the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s in response to Jim Crow laws, to recent protests against the environmentally devastating Dakota pipeline and the Travel Ban that mainly impacts people from Muslim-majority countries. Collective action has proven to be an often long and painful but effective tool to counter injustice, create a more equitable society, and work for long-term social change.¹

Learning Objectives

Identity: *How will my instruction help students learn something about themselves and/or others?*

¹ Christopher Wink, "Gauging the Effectiveness of Protests," Generocity Philly, October 29, 2020, <https://generocity.org/philly/2020/10/29/effectiveness-of-protests-walter-wallace-repost/>.

- Students will be able to learn about people and groups who have engaged in collective actions.
- Students will be able to identify collective actions that they will commit to.
- Students will be able to identify local organizations and movements involved to collective action against racism.

Skills: *How will my instruction build students' skills relating to the content?*

- Students will be able to describe past examples of community organizing, activism, and collective actions aimed at social change.
- Students will be able to understand concepts relating to collective action.

Intellect: *How will my instruction build students' knowledge and mental powers?*

- Students will be able to brainstorm individual or collective strategies for engaging in social change.
- Students will be able to evaluate the efficacy of various types of activism.

Criticality: *How will my instruction inform students' views of power and equity and the disruption of oppression?*

- Students will be able to understand the importance and impact of working collectively to challenge oppression and societal inequities.

Guiding Questions

1. What are some historic collective actions that have mobilized people to challenge injustice and racism in the United States?
2. What are some recent examples of collective action that communities continue to engage in?
3. What collective actions are you committed to engaging in?

Key Concepts and Terminology

- **Collective action** - a group of people working together to achieve a common objective, often around inequality.
- **Social change** - changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions over time.
- **Activism** - working to achieve political or social change.
- **Community organizing** - a process where people in the same vicinity come together to act collectively on their shared interests.
- **Grassroots initiatives** - social or political efforts which organize a local community to address a need in their community.

In-Class Activities

1. **The Hook** - Introduce the terms “collective action,” “community organizing,” and “activism.” For each term, brainstorm as a class what students already know about these topics, what they would like to know more about, and questions they have.
2. **Main Activity** - Students watch the first two minutes of the short video “[Collective Action: Definition, Theory, Logic & Problems](#)” that introduces the concept of collective action. After watching, students should brainstorm different types of collective action (protests, organizations, marches, boycotts, letter writing, social media campaign, etc.) and make a list of at least ten common collective actions. Next, break the class into groups and ask each group to identify a local problem that they would like to address utilizing one or two of the collective actions on the list. Discussions should include the pros and cons of each action before deciding upon them. Finally, ask groups to present their issue and the collective action(s) they chose to the rest of the class. The class can ask questions about why they chose their action to help students refine their case study.
3. **Class Discussion** – As a class, have students brainstorm historical and/or contemporary examples of racial and ethnic justice activism (Civil Rights marches, Freedom Schools, Freedom Riders, Dakota Access Pipeline protests, Travel Ban protests, BLM). Students reflect on the successes/shortcomings of these movements.
 - What worked and why?
 - What didn’t and why not?
 - What can we learn from these experiences?
4. **Reflection** – First, use the Discussion Questions (pages 4-5) to reinforce the lesson’s main takeaways. Next, ask students to reflect on their own experiences joining a collective action or movement or any group activity for a cause outside of themselves. What was empowering about the experience? What was challenging? If they haven’t joined such an action, why not?
5. **Extension Activities** - Here are some ideas for further student exploration:
 - Students research a collective action and create either a PowerPoint or digital collage with images from the action and names of leaders and organizations associated with the action or movement.
 - In small groups, students brainstorm and create a list of collective actions that they can take in their school, neighborhood, or community. These can include starting a book club that reads books about racism, its roots and how to overcome it; starting a blog or writing for the school newspaper about racism and the importance of creating an inclusive school environment; or creating murals or art pieces about forgotten aspects of American history that highlight the experience of marginalized voices.

Discussion Questions

1. Why are collective actions more effective than individual actions?
2. What are common elements of all collective actions?
3. What are some differences between them?
4. How do people get energized enough to join a collective action?
5. How do collective actions inspire other people to get involved in the issue?
6. What are reasons that people might disengage from collective actions?

Homework

Option 1: In small groups or individually, students research a historic or recent collective action to counter racism, social inequity, or an oppressive government policy, and summarize the strategies, shortcomings, and achievements, including why they worked or failed. Examples include Civil Rights marches, Freedom Schools, Freedom Riders, Dakota Access Pipeline protests, Travel Ban protests, anti-ICE detention activism, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Students share their research with the rest of the class.

Option 2: Students research local organizations working on issues relating to racial or ethnic justice that they would like to get involved with. Students can use the Local Activist Organizations sheet (page 6) to take notes.

Option 3: Students identify a local activist and interview him/her. Students create a short video based on the interview or write a reflective essay on the experience, including what was most inspiring to them.

Option 4: Students research an historic community organizer or social justice activist and write a short biography about him/her, including images and what was most inspiring to them.

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

- Refer to steps 3-4 of the In-Class Activities section

Additional Resources

- Katherine Schulten, “The Power to Change the World: A Teaching Unit on Student Activism in History and Today,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2018 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/07/learning/lesson-plans/the-power-to-change-the-world-a-teaching-unit-on-student-activism-in-history-and-today.html>
- Teaching Tolerance, “Defining Activism” - <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/defining-activism>

- “Movement for Black Lives organizations and key movement supporters” - <https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/black-led-organizations.html>
- History.com, “Civil Rights Movement,” updated June, 23, 2020 - <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement#:~:text=The%20civil%20rights%20movement%20was,law%20in%20the%20United%20States.>
- Islamic Networks Group, Intercultural Speakers Bureau (ICSB) Calls to Action to Counter Bigotry - https://ing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ING_ICSB_Calls_to_Action_Resource.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0EDNABISeh_mEBTHcD1EyENm6O3mzhIR9Ok2ceWn0CCniuGBSH7bdIVz4

Student Worksheets

Local Activist Organizations

Students can use this worksheet to fill out information about local organizations working on issues relating to racial or ethnic justice that they would like to get involved with.

Name of organization	Address and contact info	Focus of organization	Founders	Staff