Making Sure All of the Voices Are Heard: Uncovering the Hidden Voices of the Civil Rights Movement

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“I knew then and I know now that, when it comes to justice, there is no easy way to get it. You can't sugarcoat it. You have to take a stand and say, ‘This is not right.’”

Introduction

As a Fellow for the Delaware Teacher’s Institute (DTI) I am required to attend a seminar and create a Unit Plan around a specific topic. I am a new Fellow for DTI and so this is my first seminar. It has been an interesting and enlightening experience so far. My seminar, revolving around the Civil Rights Movement, has witnessed various discussions by the ten participants regarding the whole movement and more recently the hidden voices of the Civil Rights Movement. It is interesting to hear the seminar participants discuss, debate, and compare topics about the Movement, figures of the Movement and the hidden voices of the movement. It is the hidden voices that I am most interested in learning more and teaching my students about; hence, the focus of the Unit will revolve around the hidden voices of the Civil Rights Movement.

I thoroughly enjoy teaching eleventh grade English at Delcastle Technical High School, a vocational school in the New Castle County Vo Tech School District. It is my job to always make sure I am prepared for my students through well planned lessons, updated materials, and by attending various trainings throughout the year to keep my skills sharp and my knowledge current. Eleventh Grade English classes at Delcastle are focused on American Literature. This is perfect for me since it also allows me to teach literature with history, which, in all honesty, should always go hand in hand. I am a firm believer that the reader must know about the author and his/her time period in order to completely understand the literature s/he is reading. Due to the fact that Eleventh Grade English is based around American Literature and follows the theme of “Really Achieving your American Dream”, a large part of my curriculum focuses on the Civil Rights Movement. The amazing literature that came from the Civil Rights Movement makes it easy to gain the interest of the students. Also, because this history is such a huge part of the American Dream for so many Americans from various backgrounds the literature from the Civil Rights Movement and the Harlem Renaissance is easy to fit into the curriculum.

History has always fascinated me. I love learning how one idea, movement, or thought leads to various aspects of a whole nation. What I loved most about the history classes I took in college was learning about the unknown stories of the many figures hidden throughout American History. For instance, I was fascinated to learn about Frederick Douglass’ first
wife-Anna Murray Douglass. Many do not know that she was also an abolitionist. Granted she was not as “involved” as her husband, nor was she known to be as outspoken; however, she was part of the anti-slavery movement and met frequently with other abolitionists while still raising their five children in addition to working to support her family. As a history minor in college I was always interested to know more about Anna’s story and how she felt being married to one of the best known abolitionists of her time.

With that said, my interest in history lies within the hidden stories. The important voices, such as Anna Murray Douglass, which were interwoven into the creation of the United States of America, are so often overshadowed by the more popular or famous counterparts of their time. These hidden voices are still important and should be heard. Since these voices did exist, furthermore still exist, in all aspects of American History; it is important get their stories out. Their stories can be told through teaching others about their contributions to America. The Civil Rights Movement, like the Abolitionist Movement, had many hidden voices. It is imperative to uncover these voices and teach about their contributions to this country.

**Instructional Environment and Challenges**

As a teacher in a vocational school, I face different challenges than a teacher in a comprehensive high school would face. Unlike in a comprehensive high school, where students are there primarily for academics, my students chose the vocational school for their career choice. Specifically, the school attracts prospective students based on their career interests such as Culinary Arts, Nurse Tech, Graphic Arts, and Digital Media, just to name a few. Even though there is a career area focus, students are still required to complete the same number of academic credits that a student at a comprehensive high school has to complete in order to graduate, which includes four years of English on the academic side as well as required credits in Math, Social Studies and Science. Although they have this requirement it does not always make the students happy that they have to be in academic classes instead of in their career area where they feel they are learning what they need for the “real life” that awaits them in their futures.

I must face the reality that English in a Vocational School is not always a student’s favorite class. In reality, English is not always the favorite class for a student in a Vocational High School or a Comprehensive High School. I am fortunate, however, that my students tend to come with good attitudes and are open to learning through various teaching techniques. Since my students are willing to try all the innumerable initiatives thrown at them from a variety of directions, I feel that my students deserve all of my focus and energy to make sure they leave my class fully understanding American History through the countless pieces and types of American Literature, which I bring into the classroom.

It should be known that my school runs on a ninety-minute block schedule in which I have the students every day for half of the school year. The first semester runs from August to January and the second semester runs from January to June. The semester courses tend to
complicate or restrict me from going too deep into one particular topic due to the fact that within the eleventh grade curriculum I must also complete four units that are district mandated, three extensive portfolio papers, and four district mandated assessments. Therefore, the unit that follows will have to be a two-week maximum unit, which calculates to ten 90-minute classes.

**Instructional Rationale and Focus**

It is so important that I keep updated on all aspects of the curriculum. I want my students to fully understand the history of America through the literature in which I am exposing them to throughout the course of the semester. During the semester my students learn about various aspects of the American Dream taught through American Literature, American Narratives, and Historical Documents. The theme “Really Achieving your American Dream” is a relatable topic for my students; therefore, it makes the conversations real life and interesting for the students. My students get involved in talking about the various aspect of the American Dream; however, to fully understand the dream we must travel through time from the beginning of this great country to the present day. I start the course with the Essential Questions:

1. What does the American Dream title mean to you?
2. What is your American Dream?

Of course I get various answers, which mainly focus on making money and being successful in a particular job. Some students mention the idyllic house (complete with white picket fence), kids, significant other, and dog. I use those answers later in the course when we dig deeper into the American Dream and the theme “Really achieving your American Dream”.

Due to my curriculum’s focus on the theme “Really Achieving the American Dream,” I find my involvement in the Civil Rights Seminar to be beneficial and enjoyable. The creation of this unit is important to my classroom because through the seminar I have learned various ways of examining the movement and how the movement consisted of well known figures as well as less known figures. It was fascinating, to say the least, to hear various accounts about the Civil Rights Movement. It was shocking to hear that some, in particular Clayborne Carson in his article “Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charismatic Leadership in a Mass Struggle”, believe that the movement would have happened with or without Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. while others believe that without Dr. King the movement may have never happened:

“Though King influenced the struggles that took place in the Black Belt regions of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, those movements were also guided by self-reliant leaders…” Clayborne goes on to say that the “guided self-reliant leaders would conduct their own meetings and occasionally call on Dr. King for guidance, but never relied on him to be with them during protest (Clayborne, 1987). Clayborne’s accusations, which are discussed in further detail in the next section, were eye opening to me since when I ask my students what they know about the Civil Rights Movement they always say, “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X”. It will be mind blowing for them to be introduced to the idea that some believe that Dr. King was not a necessity for the movement to take place. I also feel that some of my students will be offended by this idea, and this
offense may lead to more in depth discussions on the importance of the “leaders” and the unknown voices of the Civil Rights Movement.

This is important because when I begin the Civil Rights Unit I always begin with the following Essential Questions:

1. What is the Civil Rights Movement?
2. What does the Civil Rights Movement mean to you?
3. Who was involved in the Civil Rights Movement?

When my students are presented with the first and second questions they give unclear and vague answers to what the Civil Rights Movement really was and how it affects them today. The students feel they are so far removed from the Civil Rights Movement that it does not affect them anymore. I want them to understand that due to the movement their lives will always be affected. Now, when answering the third question regarding who was involved in the movement, the students, as stated above, always give the predictable answers of Dr. King, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X. It is important for the students to understand that although these three figures are important to the movement there are so many other figures that were just as important to the movement; however, they did not get media time like Dr. King, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X did. Once this discussion takes place, our unit and our journey to uncover hidden voices can begin to take place.

Seminar Literature and Research

Throughout the seminar we have been reading various pieces of literature that not only highlight the movement, but also introduce us to diverse leaders of the movement as well as the unknown/forgotten voices of the movement. I want my students to understand the Civil Rights Movement through learning all of the intricate details and individual contributions that went into making the movement. With that said, my students need to hear about the leaders and the quiet forces that are the hidden voices since they did not get any media attention.

Of course, my students are familiar with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his contribution to the Civil Rights Movement, but do they know why he was considered the leader or why the media focused on him so much? Here I am trying to focus on the hidden voices; however, if the media did not like you (even if you were part of the fight) the media was not going to give you any time. Dr. King has been and was commemorated by the people:

One aspect of the emerging King myth has been the depiction of him in the mass media, not only as the preeminent leader of the civil rights movement, but also as the initiator and sole indispensable element in the southern black struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. As in other historical myths, a Great Man is seen as the decisive factor in the process of social change, and the unique qualities of a leader are used to explain major historical events. iv

It is important for my students to understand that although Dr. King was a great man and...
necessary to the movement (unlike what Clayborne Carson states later in his article), he would not have had as much success without media involvement. With that said, my students will need to recognize that not all members of the movement received the media’s attention; however, that does not diminish their role in the movement:

Recently, scholars have begun to examine that black struggle as a locally based mass movement, rather than simply a reform movement led by national civil rights leaders. The new orientation in scholarship indicates that King's role was different from that suggested in King-centered biographies and journalistic accounts. King was certainly not the only significant leader of the civil rights movement, for sustained protest movements arose in many southern communities in which King had little or no direct involvement.

In Montgomery, for example, local black leaders such as E. D. Nixon, Rosa Parks, and Jo Ann Robinson started the bus boycott before King became the leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association. Thus, although King inspired blacks in Montgomery and black residents recognized that they were fortunate to have such a spokesperson; talented local leaders other than King played decisive roles in initiating and sustaining the boycott movement.\(^{v}\)

It is critical to note here that Clayborne is insinuating that other leaders were important and if King never existed than the Civil Rights Movement would have still occurred, “If King had never lived, the black struggle would have followed a course of development similar to the one it did. The Montgomery bus boycott would have occurred, because King did not initiate it”\(^{vi}\). This particular quote was discussed thoroughly in the course of the seminar with participants both agreeing or disagreeing with the statement.

On a personal note, I fully believe that Dr. King was a necessary part of the movement; however, I also feel that it was his charisma that attracted the media and in turn it was the media that made him who he was in the eyes of the civil rights activist and followers. Considering both Clayborne’s beliefs and my feelings towards his beliefs (that will most likely be apparent to my students through my discussions around this subject matter), it is my certainty that my students would have a hard time grasping the fact that some believe the Civil Rights Movement would have happened with or without Dr. King. However, this discussion would lead to a rather in depth debate among those who agree and those who disagree with Clayborne, and that debate alone would eventually help students understand the true impact the Civil Rights Movement had on this country. Ultimately, I want them to understand that people can be pushed down for way too long before they begin to push back. If we can connect this thought to what Clayborne is saying in his article than his argument may begin to make sense to my students, as well as to me, and we may be able to see the movement with a new and clear lens. This new lens will eventually allow us all to consider and appreciate the other intricate participants of the movement.

**Unit Literature**
During the two-week unit the students will be introduced to the voices that did not make it to the news or who did and were quickly forgotten about. The focus of this unit will be based around analyzing aspects of the book *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* by Phillip Hoose; viewing segments of the miniseries *Eyes on the Prize*; and reading a chapter from Anne Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, chapter 6, “Sit-ins” from *The Civil Rights Movement* by Bruce J. Dierenfield, and various articles that highlight the hidden voices or unrecognized heroes of the Civil Rights Movement.

In order to have the students understand the importance of the Civil Rights Movement, the unit will start by asking the Essential Questions mentioned above regarding what the students know about the Civil Rights Movement. The students will hold onto their answers to the questions to revisit and revise at the end of the unit. The students will watch the first twenty-five minutes of episode one of *Eyes on the Prize*, which is narrated by Julian Bond and shows various clips of interviews from participants and those affected by the events of the Civil Rights Movement. The segment will give the students a visual of the abuse the students at the Woolworths Counter faced, and they will hear short pieces of Dr. King’s famous speech. This segment will also allow the students to create a working definition of segregation based on first hand accounts from the citizens of that time. The viewing of *Eyes on the Prize* will be followed by Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech in which the students will be watching from beginning to end. It is important for the students to be given the opportunity to see the whole speech in order to view the crowd, watch the marching, and listen to the complete speech while they read a copy of the text as well:

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

The words of Dr. King’s Speech are already familiar to the students in an abstruse way. Most students have heard the “I Have A Dream that one day…” part of the speech, but few have heard the whole speech. With that said, the voice may be familiar, but the whole speech, beginning to end, will not be familiar. I start with the speech because it helps the students ease into the unit with something they already know.

A thorough reading of the poem “Let America Be America Again” by Langston Hughes will follow the videos. Students will be asked to read the poem with the perspective of a news lens in context with what they just viewed (*Eyes on the Prize* and Dr. King’s Speech). After a brief class discussion of the poem the students will answer the following questions:
a.) What are the authors aiming for in each piece of work?
b.) What symbolizes America for Langston Hughes and Dr. King?
c.) How do both Hughes and King visualize their futures in this country—
their country, your country?
d.) What connection, if any, can you make with each piece of literature?

In answering the questions, I am hoping that my students will come closer to a working
definition of what the Civil Rights Movement means to them. Following this poetry activity,
the students will be introduced to various articles of less known activist from the movement
such as Chude Pam Parker Allen. Chude was a Caucasian activist with the movement and
wrote the article “Loneliness in the Circle of Trust,” which discussed her role in the
movement and the impact she had in the movement. After reading this article and answering
questions about the article the students will be introduced to Claudette Colvin through both a
video and the book Phillip Hoose wrote about her, Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice.
I will introduce the students to various chapters from the book about her contribution to the
movement. The students will be working in small groups as the chapters will be used in a
scaffolding assignment in order for us to get through more of the book in a shorter period of
time. Each group will report out about what the chapter they were assigned discussed. This
book will be the final piece of literature the students will read and discuss before they start
their research to find a hidden voice of the movement. This project will lead to an editorial
as well as a presentation. Each student will conduct research on one particular hidden voice
and introduce this hidden activist to the class in order for us all to learn about various hidden
voices that just never got the media attention the well-known leaders always received.

Strategies

It is important to use various strategies in order to engage the students. Throughout this unit
I will use a variety of strategies in order to involve the students as well as utilizing a variety
of modalities to actively engross students into the unit. I will break the students into focus
groups, which will allow me to introduce countless types of literature to the different groups
and allow the students to teach each other about the movement based off of what each group
is reading. I will also tap into the student’s prior knowledge before the unit begins by having
the students answer a questionnaire on what they know about the Civil Rights Movement. In
addition to these activities, I will also be using video clips, which will illustrate the
innumerable aspects of the movement as well.

Essential Questions
What is the Civil Rights Movement?
What does the Civil Rights Movement mean to you?
What were the origins, actions, and implications of the Civil Rights Movement?
What strategies were used during the Civil Rights Movement?
Who was involved in implementing these strategies?
Classroom Activities

Lesson One

Since this lesson is for an eleventh grade classroom, I would assume that the students are familiar with the Civil Rights Movement. With that said, the first day should be focused on tapping into prior knowledge as well as setting the foundation to build upon that prior knowledge.

Students will begin the unit in focus groups of five (they will remain in these groups throughout the unit) tapping into their prior knowledge on what they know about the Civil Rights Movement. The students will be answering a “Why, What, When, Where, and How” worksheet in the groups and each group will be reporting out. This sheet will be revisited and revised at the end of the unit. A brief clip will follow the group work. The clip is from the Documentary “Eyes on the Prize”. Students will hear interviews from citizens who either partook in the movement or were witnesses to some part of the movement. A brief discussion will take place to discuss their feelings about the first hand accounts.

The documentary will be followed by viewing the whole “I have a Dream” speech from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I feel it is extremely important for students to see the speech from beginning to end since most students know the popular “I have a Dream” section of the speech, but few have ever heard the whole speech. It is also important for the students to visualize the march into the capital. It shows the protection Dr. King needed, the mixed crowd, and energy of the day. When a listener/reader just hears the speech or reads the speech, the listener/reader does not get the full effect of the energy of the day. It is so important for the students to get the full effect of the speech in order to begin the journey they are about to take through the Civil Rights Movement.

The viewing of the documentary and speech will lead to an exit pass assignment with this question posed for the students to answer: How do the documentary and the viewing of Dr. King’s speech illustrate the civil rights movement? The students will turn in their responses as they leave. The response should be written in paragraph form (a minimum of five complete sentences). Their answers will be used in the beginning of the class the following day.

Lesson Two

I will use the students’ responses from the Exit Passes from the previous day to begin the lesson. I will read aloud some of the more detailed responses to the question: How do the documentary and the viewing of Dr. King’s speech illustrate the civil rights movement? I will allow the students to discuss what they heard, first in their focus groups of five students and then as a whole class. I will then pass out Langston Hughes Poem, “Let America Be America Again” and have the each group first read the poem alone and then as a group.
They will be asked to write down a few key points about the poem and how it connects to the documentary and Dr. King’s speech. I will have each group answer the following questions:

a.) What are the authors aiming for in each separate piece of work?

b.) What symbolizes America for Langston Hughes or Dr. King?

c.) How do Hughes, Dr. King, as well as the participants in the documentary visualize their futures in this country, their country, your country?

d.) What connection, if any, can you make with each piece of literature?

The groups will have time to answer the questions before expected to report out. After the allotted time, I feel the students need to reconvene as a whole class and answer the questions as a class. The teacher should take notes to be displayed for the students to be able to visualize throughout the unit.

Once these activities are complete the unit can begin. The students will begin to travel through the Civil Rights Movement in order to uncover the hidden voices in which they are currently unaware; hopefully the students will be able to define what the movement meant to this country and more personally to them.

Lesson Five

By this point the students have read various articles (Anne Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, chapter 6, “Sit-ins” from *The Civil Rights Movement* by Bruce J. Dierenfield, Clayborne Carson’s, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charismatic Leadership in a Mass Struggle, Chude Pam Parker Allen’s “Loneliness in the Circle of Trust”, as well as other various articles that highlight the hidden voices or unrecognized heroes of the Civil Rights Movement) from the viewpoints of civil rights activist discussing their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and have begun to think about their final project, which consist of finding their own hidden voice during the movement and creating an editorial as well as a timeline visual to share with the class.

The book by Phillip Hoose, *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*, has also been introduced to the students. The students are not reading the whole book; they are reading different chapters to gain and understanding of the incident Claudette faced and will be asked to contemplate why Claudette’s story never made the papers like the Rosa Park’s story did. During this lesson each focus group is reading a different chapter from the book about Claudette. Here are the chapter being read:

- “We Seemed to Hate Ourselves”
- It’s My Constitutional Right”
- “’Crazy” Times”
- “Another Negro Woman Got Arrested”
- “Second Front, Second Chance”

Each group will read their chapter and create a lesson to teach to the class so that the class has a full understanding of the chapter. The group will be expected to create a worksheet for the groups to fill out, a poster or illustration for the chapter and point out the main ideas of
the chapter as well as three pieces of evidence that supports the main ideas. I will be grading the students off of a rubric. I think it is important for the students to have a copy of the rubric before they begin the assignment; therefore, I will have the rubric handed out to each group as I explain the assignment.

Lesson Nine

By the end of the unit, I want the students to conduct their own research to uncover a hidden voice of the movement. The students will find some information about a civil rights activist and write an editorial about the person as well as create a timeline of the person’s involvement in the movement. They will present their editorials to the class. The timeline will be the visual for the unit. I like to give my students the option to use IMovie, PowerPoint, or Prezi when they are to create a visual. I really feel that IMovie is the best for a timeline; however, it is also important for students to have choice so I allow them that with these options.

I feel this is such an important assignment because students need to realize that there were more people than just Dr. King, Malcolm X and Rosa Parks involved in the Civil Rights Movement. By researching their own activist and learning enough in order to write an editorial about the person allows the student to really get to know another activist involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

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i Phillip Hoose, *Claudette Colvin: Twice Towards Justice*, (New York: Square Fish, 2010).

ii Anna Murray Douglass (b. circa 1813 - d. 1882)  MSA SC 5496-051245 Accom plice to Slave Flight, Caroline County, Maryland


ix King, Jr., Martin Luther, "I have a Dream on August 28, 1963," *MLK*, Documentary, Web, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRf4WzU1w.

x "But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition."

### Curriculum Unit Title

Making Sure All Of The Voices Are Heard: Uncovering The Hidden Voices of Within the Civil Rights Movement

### Author

Nicole Irani

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### KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.

To fully understand the Civil Rights Movement as well as the impact it had on the citizens of the United States then and now. The students will uncover the various hidden voices of the Civil Rights Movement and their influence on the movement.

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### ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT

- **What is the Civil Rights Movement? What were the origins, actions, and implications of the Civil Rights Movement? What strategies were used during the Civil Rights Movement? Who was involved in implementing these strategies?**
- **What does the Civil Rights Movement mean to you?**

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### CONCEPT A

**Identify the initial causes of the Civil Rights Movement**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A**

How do both Hughes and King visualize their futures in this country—their country—your country?

**VOCABULARY A**

Pioneer, liberty, equality, bartered, ancient, graft, and stealth

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### CONCEPT B

Uncovering unknown voices of the Civil Rights Movement

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B**

Even though there were many well-known individuals involved in the Civil Rights Movement, there were many unknown individuals as well. Do you know of any names of less known Civil Rights Activist?

**VOCABULARY A**

Abiding, sinews, flourish, triumph, progress, trauma, vigil, consequence

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### CONCEPT C

Making the connection between unknown and famous Civil Rights Activist.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C**

Who is Claudette Colvin and what does she have in common with Rosa Parks?

**VOCABULARY A**

Humiliate, coot, segregation, squirm, gouged, boycott

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES