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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2006 Volume I: Stories around the World in Film

Cultural Literacy through Media: Breaking Down Stereotypes by Building Up Knowledge

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Students are influenced by everything around them—family, religion, peers, school, and the media. Unfortunately, this means that music videos and television shows play a significant role in their ideas and beliefs. This unit addresses the stereotypes that develop from students' limited exposure. The unit's goal is to break down these stereotypes through new knowledge.

The unit begins by teaching students to see the 'stereotypical American' often portrayed in television shows. This includes the standard gender roles of mischievous boys and beautiful, stay-at-home wives. Students will learn about how the definition of beauty has changed throughout centuries.

After this introduction, the unit uses films, a novel, and several nonfiction texts to increase students' knowledge of Middle Easterners and Native Americans. At the end of each study, students will re-examine their initial stereotypes and use their new knowledge to paint a better picture of each culture. The final project allows students to choose a topic that fills a gap in their own knowledge.

I designed this six- to ten-week unit for my middle school reading class, but it also meets many social studies standards. Teachers can adjust it to meet the needs of high school students as well.

(Developed for Intensive Reading, grade 6; recommended for Reading and Social Studies, grades 5-8)

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