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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2018 Volume I: Race, Class and Punishment

This is America: Restorative Peace Circles and the decline of Suspensions and Expulsions

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“What's fundamental about restorative justice (practices) is a shift away from thinking about laws being broken, who broke the law, and how we punish the people who broke the laws. There's a shift to: there was harm caused, or there's a disagreement, and how do we repair the harm, address the conflict, so that relationships and community can be repaired and restored, It's a different orientation. It is a shift.” Cheryl Graves- Community Justice for Youth Institute

This curriculum unit focuses on the justification for implementing restorative justice peace circles in American schools. It will also share research and evidence that demonstrates how the vicious cycle of the school to prison pipeline is damaging our cultural foundation. What positions restorative justice peace circles apart from typical punitive methods is that restorative justice does not view crime as an act against the state, but rather “as an act against individuals and their community. Restorative peace circles are designed to provide students, staff, community members and law enforcement officials opportunities to analyze and discuss their issues and or concerns in a safe space. A peace circle is a restorative justice model that, like other restorative justice practices, can be used to address conflict holistically and solve problems. Peace circles emphasize healing and learning through a collective group process, aiming to repair harm done and assign responsibility by talking through the problem. In this unit students will learn a brief history on peace circles and its benefits. The unit will culminate in a PEACE project where students create poetry, technology integrated projects and public service announcements highlighting the benefits of conflict resolution as well as accountability through restorative practices.

(Developed for Social Studies, grades 4-5; recommended for Social Studies, Physical Education, and Health, grades K-8)

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