



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2021 Volume II: Race, Class, and Gender in Today's America

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry: Historical Context through a Critical Lens

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The attempt of this unit is to provide students with historical depth of knowledge needed to access and critically analyze complex text. In elementary schools and districts across the United States, social studies content is being taught less in favor of dedicating more classroom hours to developing elementary students' literacy and mathematical conceptual understanding. This however creates issues when students are presented with works of historical fiction in middle and high school that they are expected to critically engage with. This unit will serve to bridge that gap by enhancing student understanding of the historical legacy and ramifications of Jim Crow, the laws that preceded it, and the laws that came after. Through this exploration students will learn not only how the past has shaped their current reality, but they will also gain a deeper understanding of how the laws of the past left room for the continued reign of white supremacy today. Students will analyze the laws and acts such as the 13th and 14th amendments, Plessy v. Ferguson, Jim Crow laws and Black Codes, and Brown v. Board of Education which have repeatedly left room and enabled racism to cement itself into American law and life. We will analyze these stories for the historical context that they fit into and how they relate to the anecdotes from our anchor text: Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, by Mildred Taylor. Students will need to continually compare past to present and ask themselves: "Have things become better since Jim Crow? If so, how much? If not, why?" and "What can be done about it?"

This unit is written for 6th grade English Language Arts classes, but the core unit content and historical background provided could be suitable for students of all middle school ages or early high school.

(Developed for English Language Arts, grade 6; recommended for English, grades 7-8, and U. S. History, grades 6-8)

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