



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

*to strengthen teaching in public schools®*

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2020 Volume I: American History through American Lives

---

## **Emmett Till: A Historical Inquiry**

Curriculum Unit 20.01.01, published September 2020  
by Brandon Barr

### **Introduction**

---

“I can’t breathe.” - George Floyd<sup>1</sup>

These words have come to define the spring and summer of 2020. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, many in our nation have expressed their collective outrage and pain because of the murder of George Floyd. Many view his death not as an isolated incident, but as another example of systematic racism that has disenfranchised African Americans from being safe in the streets of America. Many also view Floyd’s death as a catalyst for change; streets have been renamed and several statues glorifying our nation’s racist roots have been removed as cities and states grapple with historical legacies and changing times. Companies like Spotify, JC Penney and Mastercard are changing practices to be more inclusive such as allowing Juneteenth to become a holiday for workers.<sup>2</sup> Starbucks is now allowing associates to wear articles of clothing in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Apple is increasing spending with black-owned suppliers as part of a racial equity and justice initiative, and even Nascar has abandoned the Confederate flag from all stadiums and events.<sup>3</sup> These changes did not come from benevolent corporations intent on making the world a better place; they come in response to national outrage.

In the article “Will George Floyd’s Death Become Nation’s ‘Emmett Till Moment?’” the journalist Grace Hauck makes an interesting argument:

The degree of outrage, mobilization and attention spurred by the horrific, visceral recordings of the deaths of Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor could have a catalyzing effect similar to that of Till’s lynching, which shocked the world and gave birth to a generation of civil rights activists. ‘These two tragedies showed the tipping point of society.’<sup>4</sup>

This argument is valid given some of the societal changes that have already occurred and will come to pass soon. It also provides the most valid argument for the importance of a study of the life of Emmett Till. Until systemic changes occur that end racial discrimination in America, our society will continue to have “Emmett Till Moments,” episodes that reignite the pain, struggle, and growth of the civil rights movement. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall observes, “The civil rights movement circulates through American memory in forms and through

channels that are at once powerful, dangerous, and hotly contested.”<sup>5</sup> Till’s mother articulates this thought further when making the following observation in her memoir *Death of Innocence*, “it took quite a while for me to accept how his murder connected to so many things that make us what we are today.”<sup>6</sup> It is important to understand why Till’s name is invoked and is part of American memory and how his death is connected and relevant today. By engaging students in historical inquiry related to the life and times of Emmett Till, it is hoped that my students and others may better understand our current environment as our nation grapples with race.

## Teaching Context

Mark Twain Elementary School is a Chicago Public School located on the southwest side of the city. The student population served by the school is roughly 79% low income and ranges from grades pre-K to 8th grade. The population is also roughly 86% Latino and 12% White. Students that are diverse learners account for roughly 10% of the student population, and roughly 16% of the students in the school receive additional support as part of Twain’s bilingual program.<sup>7</sup> This unit is designed for about 135 sixth grade general education students. Many of these students are not proficient writers as they enter sixth grade and struggle to compose writing that reflects the language of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Many have not ever been taught the difference between primary and secondary sources, evaluating sources for credibility, using multiple sources to construct an argument, or have engaged in Social Science instruction that is guided by inquiry practices.

## Rationale

While I have taught for 14 years, I still consider myself to be a relatively new Social Studies teacher. This last school year was only the second year that I have taught Social Studies in addition to Reading and Writing. In this unit, I am going to give both Social Studies and ELA standards equal treatment because I teach both content areas. This unit represents a stretch for me professionally; the approach to Social Science as well as the language of the Social Studies standards in Illinois have recently changed in my state. The standards changed in 2017 to include standards that are just as rigorous as the Common Core State Standards are for English Language Arts. In my district, Chicago Public Schools, there has been a push to have students engage in more inquiry-based activities. This unit takes those factors into consideration.

For each unit I write, I develop a series of essential questions and enduring understandings to frame each unit of study for my students. This creates a sense of shared inquiry and a focused approach when starting new instructional units. The essential questions and enduring understandings for this unit are provided. There would be posted in my classroom and be continually revisited as the unit is taught.

### Essential Questions

- What is Emmett Till’s legacy and how is it relevant today?
- What can we learn about societal norms in American culture both during Till’s life based on what author’s detail in passages?
- How can evaluate a text for point of view, bias, and credibility?

### Enduring Understandings

- Many argue that Emmett Till’s death was the start of the civil rights movement. Many compare his death to the death of other innocent Blacks today, suggesting that the struggle for civil rights is still an

ongoing process in America. These suggestions only begin to scratch the surface

- Racism existed in both the North and the South in the United States during Emmett Till's life; it still exists today in different forms.
- To evaluate the point of view and bias that a text may show, we need to look at the author's word choices and determine the connotation of important words in sentences that are main ideas. Based on those words, we can infer why an author is writing and how an author feels a topic. To think about an author's credibility, we need to do some research about the author to see if he/she seems like someone who is an expert and someone that we can trust to provide accurate information.

## Content Objectives

---

### Teaching History: An Inquiry Approach

In the text, *Why Learn History: When It's Already on Your Phone*, Sam Wineburg articulates several problems that are facing the study of history and general society. He argues that both students and teachers alike are "overwhelmed by what the internet spews" and that "changes in how information is created and disseminated outpaces our ability to keep up."<sup>8</sup> This argument is important because it speaks to one of the fundamental reasons for an inquiry approach. Lehman and Hayes (1985) argue that inquiry without careful reasoning makes it possible for a student to be "waylaid by misinformation and bias."<sup>9</sup> Teachers must work to build student capacity to determine different author's points of view as well as teach students to support points of view by evaluating available material.<sup>10</sup> Building these skills are at the core of the inquiry approach. For students to engage in inquiry, students need to be directed by teachers who can sort through information presented as well as teach students ways to evaluate historical information.

Wineburg also makes an argument about what to teach as well as how to teach it. He gives the example of Gabriel Prosser and Benjamin Gitlow.<sup>11</sup> He notes that these figures are often tested on national achievement tests (such as the National Assessment of Education Progress), but many students or adults struggle to articulate anything about them; Wineburg argues that testing students on this "minutiae" is something that students could access on their iPhone; it is not teaching students how to navigate different texts and form claims and counterclaims based off the sources.<sup>12</sup> When students are faced with ambiguous texts with unclear sources, many students of history are not prepared for the documents that they have to navigate. This can lead to students reading false information online. Wineburg also gives the example of a presentation he gave to college students in which he projected a web page for a Hitler Historical Museum, which claimed to be "a non-biased, non-profit museum devoted to the study and preservation of world history."<sup>13</sup> If the college students that he was presenting the information could not determine who owned the website in order to evaluate the information appropriately, many younger students would undoubtedly struggle as well unless taught specific skills to assess the credibility of a source.

Wineburg also argues that a textbook is not the best tool to support history instruction; he argues that textbooks are busy, cluttered, and are subject to the whims of state adoption boards.<sup>14</sup> This allows for groups that engage in lobbying to have influence over what is taught based on which book is ultimately adopted. Textbooks support instruction of history that relies on "names, dates, and memorized information" in order to answer questions that often appear at the end of each chapter.<sup>15</sup> A textbook-centered history classroom does

not produce good outcomes and is the exact opposite of the inquiry approach that Wineburg advocates for in history instruction. This unit seeks to teach about the life and times of Emmett Till by means of using inquiry. By using this approach to teaching about his life, it is hoped that students may not only think deeply about his story, but also reflect on how the injustice that he experienced parallels similar injustices today.

An inquiry approach situates students in a time and place in history while exploring a specific question of history. It is about teaching students explicitly that history is a discipline; meaning that teachers should strive to get students to “resist first-draft thinking and the flimsy conclusions that are its bitter fruits.”<sup>16</sup> This requires students learning about a time period, close reading documents/primary sources from the period, and making inferences based on contextual information and the documents that were presented. It is recommended that students are grounded in historical context before going into specific historical documents; they need to know the time and space in which historical documents are situated. This goes against the advice of the Common Core State Standards, which encourage the use of “informational texts” without front-loading context that might make reading primary source documents helpful and productive. There are benefits to taking a historical inquiry approach with students. One potential benefit is that it shows the complexity of issues. When thinking about an issue or historical figure, most issues or figures are multifaceted and not one-dimensional or single-sided as they may be presented in a traditional history textbook. Using multiple sources presents history to students in a way that captures the whole landscape of history so that students can make their own discoveries and inferences.<sup>17</sup>

With that in mind, an inquiry approach is markedly different than the traditional history classroom. It requires a teacher to be open to taking a different approach in planning, classroom routines and expected outcomes for Social Studies. In some respects, it almost means completely turning what teachers think about history instruction on its head. For instance, Wineburg argues that the goal of historical inquiry should be to invert Bloom’s Taxonomy. In an ideal approach to history instruction, Wineburg argues that knowledge should be at the top of Bloom’s Taxonomy, followed by understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.<sup>18</sup> Many teachers have been taught that this clear triangle outlines how to get kids to engage in critical thinking; he argues that history is more than just a collection of facts, he states, “it’s [history is] an intellectual enterprise that requires piecing together a cogent and accurate story from partial scraps of faded words.”<sup>19</sup> In this unit, it is hoped that students will be able to reflect on Till’s legacy and why it is relevant today.

### **The Case Study: Emmett Till**

Besides being an important event that acted as a catalyst to the classical period of the civil rights movement, a historical inquiry into Emmett Till is a worthwhile topic because of the amount of resources that are at the disposal of a teacher. In seminar, we focused on how biography can serve to illuminate some of the larger trends of a historical period. Biographies are just one readily available source of information on Till; there are numerous primary sources available by accessing the Chicago Defender archive by doing a basic search in Google Images and YouTube. The resources that I found to be most helpful are listed in the Resource section of the unit. Just as we thought about the life and legacy of Bayard Rustin in context of the long civil rights movement in seminar, there are biographical readings that serve to anchor, illuminate and may even complicate the historical knowledge of students about Till and the long civil rights movement. In approaching a study of Till, it is useful to know the general outline of what happened, to reflect on how the Till case aligns with other trends during the civil rights movement and to connect what happened to Till with the ongoing fight against racism today.

Many people know some general facts related to Emmett Till, but it is important to give an overview for those

who have never heard of him. Emmett Till was a 14-year-old from Chicago. He went to visit his uncle and cousins that lived in Money, Mississippi during the summer in 1955. It is thought that while out with his cousins that Till whistled at a female white store clerk. In response to this, the store clerk's husband and an accomplice abducted Till from his uncle's home, tortured and killed Till. They disposed of the body by attaching Till's body to a fan from a cotton gin and discarded the body in the Tallahatchie River. His body was found but badly disfigured from the torture and being submerged in water. Rather than opt for a closed-casket funeral given the condition of the body, Till's mother decided that she wanted the world to see what had been done to her son. Her choice to have a public, open-casket funeral and allow the black press to document the event meant that what happened to her son was widely circulated. Photos of the funeral featured in *Life* and *Jet* magazines, newspaper articles and television coverage helped to create national interest in what happened to Till; many did not foresee the power that television could have in bringing together African Americans in Mississippi, Chicago and throughout the nation into one congregation that was enraged and inspired to protest for change.<sup>20</sup> After the funeral, the murders of Till were acquitted by an all-white jury. Later, Till's murderers admitted to the crime in a magazine interview and were paid \$3,500 for telling their story.<sup>21</sup> This makes up the big key details of what happened and sums up how Till's story is typically retold and taught in many classrooms. There is a link in the Resource section of this unit to a segment from *60 Minutes* that does a good job of retelling the key events. However, there is much more to Till's story than meets the eye. The recounting from above is the textbook retelling of Emmett Till; historical inquiry takes classroom teaching and thinking much deeper.

It is important to situate Till and the impact of his legacy in the larger civil rights movement. As we discussed in seminar, a couple of key figures like Rustin are helpful in terms of illuminating the evolving nature of the civil rights movement. Till's murder and his mother's actions over time align with some of the broader shifts of the movement. In the article "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," Hall argues that the civil rights movement lasts from the 1940's-1970's and consists of a few phases. In the 1940's, Hall argues that civil rights unionism brought together a broad coalition of individuals that worked together to "combine protection from discrimination with universalistic social welfare policies and individual rights with labor rights;" this is considered to be the decisive first phase of the civil rights movement.<sup>22</sup> After hearing that her son had been taken, one of the first people that Till-Mobley reached out to for support and guidance was her nephew, Rayfield Mooty. Her nephew worked at Inland Steel; he was a union official that had good contacts with politicians and civil rights people from his organizing work.<sup>23</sup> Her nephew, through his connections, put Till's mother in contact with the Chicago branch of the NAACP. This led to exposure in Chicago's newspapers and the involvement of important political figures like Chicago's Mayor, Richard J. Daley, Illinois Governor William Stratton, and Congressman William Dawson.<sup>24</sup> The attention that was drawn from the connections that Mooty had developed over time helped to ensure that that Till's story was not buried in Mississippi as locals were accustomed to and attempted to do with Till.

During the 1940's and early 1950's, it was during this period that Till's family life was centered in Argo, Illinois; Argo is suburb of Chicago. During the 1940's, Hall argues that "practices that were rooted in the folk and family traditions of the South, bound neighborhoods together, and provided the safety net that discriminatory welfare policies denied."<sup>25</sup> This was applicable to Till's family, most of whom had relocated from Mississippi and settled into a tight knit community centered around the Corn Products factory; a family friend noted how "they [Till's family and the Black community of Argo at the time] felt secure in the blackness of their lives."<sup>26</sup> That doesn't mean that Argo was a utopia. Hall indicates, "For black migrants who made their way to the 'promised land' found themselves confronting not Mississippi... but indigenous forms of discrimination and de facto segregation."<sup>27</sup> Till's family still encountered discrimination and racism in the

North as well; Black children in Argo were instructed to not take short cuts through white neighborhoods, nor were they allowed to talk to strangers or go into businesses without an adult.<sup>28</sup> While Till's family waited nervously from the call that his mother learned of his disappearance until she learned of the murder, Till-Mobley was surrounded by family that supported her with practical guidance, such as her Uncle Crosby pulling every possible string he could in the segregated South to ensure that Till's body was returned to Chicago to be buried. A burial plot had been hastily dug to quickly dispose of Till's body in Mississippi, with locals wanting Till's corpse buried quickly to try to stop the story from growing in stature. As events were unfolding, Till-Mobley's home church in Argo was praying for her.<sup>29</sup> One is able to see some elements of the early part of the civil rights movement that Hall addresses at play in Till's early life; Till-Mobley clearly had a village behind her that uplifted her when she needed it.

In thinking about what Hall refers to as the classical period of the civil rights movement during the 1950's and 1960's, she makes an important observation about why the classical period was effective:

In the South, the movement's ability to rally participants, stymie its enemies, and break through the fog of the Cold War came largely from the prophetic tradition within the black church...By contrast, southern civil rights activists, mobilizing the latent themes of justice and deliverance in an otherworldly religion, demanded "freedom now," not gradual, top-down amelioration. That prophetic vision gave believers the courage to engage history as an ongoing process of reconstruction, to risk everything for ideals they might never see fulfilled.<sup>30</sup>

This concept was evident in the choices that Till's mother made in the wake of her son's murder. Soon after burying her son, Mamie Till-Mobley decided that she needed to travel to Mississippi and to attend the court trial. This was a risky endeavor that required significant logistical planning as many whites in Mississippi were openly hostile towards Blacks and other "outside agitators" that were part of the fight for civil rights; Till-Mobley needed to be driven to a couple of safe homes in a sort of reverse Underground Railroad to ensure that she would be able to participate in the court proceedings.<sup>31</sup> In this tense environment, Till-Mobley's faith sustained her; she notes how God was "there for me" as she was questioned in the courtroom.<sup>32</sup> Till's mother going to the South was risky; she had to convince her own mother who was worried she could have potentially lost her daughter in addition to Emmett. She relied on the support of activists and the larger Black community in Chicago to elevate her son's death and share collective grief as well as raise 'fighting dollars' to help with legal fees and organizing during the funeral.<sup>33</sup> The support of the wider community, the church and local and national media ensured that her son's death would not be in vain; her faith sustained her so that she could use what happened to her son to have a real and lasting impact.

By all measures, Till-Mobley's efforts had an important impact. Only one hundred days after Till's murder, Rosa Parks specifically named Emmett Till in shaping her decision to not give up her seat on the city bus in Montgomery.<sup>34</sup> Till-Mobley went on speaking tours for the NAACP that raised significant sums of money to support civil rights work.<sup>35</sup> Gorn (2018) notes how Mamie Till-Mobley's rallies were 'Christian crusades' that often featured the likes of significant historical figures like A. Philip Randolph (an early civil rights advocate and president of the Sleeping Car Porters); Gorn observes, "a powerful institutional network of churches, unions, civic, and civil rights organizations facilitated rallies and speeches."<sup>36</sup> Even though significant sums of money were raised by her speaking, eventually Till-Mobley and the NAACP leadership did not agree on what she should be paid to continue speaking. This found Till-Mobley no longer working in conjunction with a larger civil

rights organization, but rather begin to work in her own manner to preserve the legacy of her son's death and bring about change in the world.

At the end of the classical phase of civil rights movement, more African Americans were in de facto segregated schools. Till-Mobley got certified as a teacher in 1960 and taught in a couple of de facto segregated schools in the Chicago Public School System for over 20 years, developing a group called the Emmett Till Players that taught kids how to perform speeches from the civil rights movement.<sup>37</sup> Rustin argues that a broader movement was needed to impact the change that was desired by African Americans.<sup>38</sup> For example, the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision was the culmination of legal strategy of the NAACP, but then the reality of getting schools and other public places desegregated would require new and varied tactics. This was not lost on Till's mother. Black activism was an element that was at the heart of the entire civil rights struggle, and she remained active in telling and retelling her son's story to bring about change. We shouldn't look at Till-Mobley's efforts after her son's death as her only contribution to the civil rights movement; her efforts were varied and significant long after the death of her son. When we think about the longer civil rights movement that Hall discusses, the longer stretch makes us view figures like Martin Luther King Jr. in different light compared with the apex moments of their lives. King was killed pursuing economic rights by leading a strike of sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968. This goes much further than the frozen moment in time in 1963 in which colorblind conservatives like to uphold.<sup>39</sup> When we take the view of the long civil rights movement, we see that figures like King, Jr., Rustin, and Till-Mobley should not be frozen in specific historical moments. Her decision to put her son's corpse on display was just one of many ways that she led in an impactful manner.

Some injustices that are evident in Till's life and death are reflected in some of the injustices for Black Americans today. In the article "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," Jacquelyn Dowd Hall opens the article by quoting Martin Luther King, Jr., and Thomas King:

The black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws-racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society... and suggests that radical reconstruction of society is the real issue to be faced. -Martin Luther King Jr.

Stories are wonderful things. And they are dangerous. -Thomas King<sup>40</sup>

Till's story has power because it serves as a reminder of the legacy of violence that Black America has faced historically and will continue to face until systematic change occurs in America. The violence and oppression that Till and his family experienced was not just limited to death. For instance, Till's father fought in WWII and was accused of raping women in Italy and was executed for his alleged actions.<sup>41</sup> The death of Till's father reveals the cyclical nature of systematic racism when Louis Till's 'confidential' file was suddenly declassified and leaked to the media in 1955 to try to connect Louis Till's rape conviction with the alleged actions of his son, Emmett.<sup>42</sup> The goal was to plant the idea in the minds of public that the son was like the father and unworthy of justice, that the stereotype of Black males desiring to rape white females results in a disproportionate numbers of Black GIs being convicted of rape according to the logic of Southern lynch law.<sup>43</sup> Mamie Till-Mobley notes in her memoir how painful this was, coming after the death of her son when she was in Washington trying to engage with government officials about civil rights while speaking at mass meetings for civil rights. It was unusual to have records dumped as Louis Till's were shared with the media; Mamie Till-

Mobley had tried to get access to Louis Till's records after WWII through Freedom of Information Act requests, only to be supplied documents that were so heavily redacted that they were not informative.<sup>44</sup> When we think of the instances of racial injustice today, we often see examples of the stories in the media that seek to not only undermine and discredit the victim but also rely on racial stereotypes and biases. This is a problem that impacted Till's mother in her fight for justice and continues to impact society today.

Till's mother was thrust into the role of being a civil rights activist by the events that transpired after the murder of her son. In seminar, we had many discussions about how history is taught; one conversation centered on Rosa Parks, who was identified by Wineburg as one of the most famous figures in history that teens could identify.<sup>45</sup> In a textbook-driven or distilled version of her experiences, many students are taught incorrectly that Parks was tired after a long day at work as a seamstress and decided that she would give up her seat because of that. When history instruction ignores Parks long-standing work as a leader in her local branch of the NAACP or fails to think about her work after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, it makes it seem that her actions were random, isolated and not connected to a larger history. In a similar vein, many do not dive deeply into the actions of Till's mother, who spent the next 48 years of her life after Till's death fighting for civil rights and to bring meaning to her son's death. Till's mother had to testify against the killers of her son; at the end of her testimony she makes the following recollection, "as I stepped off the stand, thought, I felt... like I really hadn't connected at all. Like I didn't matter at all...I felt that my words didn't mean any more to those people than a piece of paper, like trash, blowing down the street."<sup>46</sup> She could have been easily discouraged by her experiences, but she pressed on and was an important figure in her own right; Till's mother is not the only person who history has elevated or will elevate by circumstance to fight against racial injustice. We see many individuals that are being elevated in this moment in our country.

In speaking about what happened to his cousin, Wheeler Parker Jr., shares some of the challenges that his family faced immediately after Till's death in an interview in the courthouse where the all-white jury acquitted Till's murders in 2018. The link to the interview is in the Resource section. In speaking about how the white media portrayed Till, he notes that they made him out to seem like a menacing figure, when that wasn't the case at all. Parker Jr. notes how Till cried when they accidentally hit a dog while driving in the country. He also recounts how he encountered the wife of someone in the white media who wrote about Till who reminded him that white newspapers did not generally write about stories like what happened to Till at that time. In some respect, Parker Jr. seems to suggest that they were lucky to have made the white newspaper at all, despite the coverage painting Till in an inaccurate light. In addition to this, he recalls how Emmett's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, was afraid that she would be killed the moment she left the courtroom while the trial went on in Mississippi, noting that it was the first time that he could recall that white people were being tried for crime that was perpetrated against Blacks.<sup>47</sup> In the same breath, he notes that his grandfather would sleep in a local cemetery because he was restless and couldn't sleep in his home for fears of retribution; he notes how whites we around the family home and could have very easily gotten away with murder because "Black lives didn't matter at the time."<sup>48</sup> When you think about the substance of this short interview, you recognize the historical scope of the phrase Black Lives Matter. For so long, the lives of Black people in America have not mattered to those in power. Wheeler Parker Jr. does not seem to say it as a sign of protest as many do today, he almost sounds resigned to the fact that life at the time in Mississippi was that way. Fortunately, many people are not resigned to the fact that racism exists today and are fighting to ensure that there is lasting change related to race in America.

To frame a study of Emmett Till, it is important to understand the time and space in which Till lived. Chicago was just as segregated as Mississippi in the 1950's. Racism manifested itself differently in both regions. Before



heading to Mississippi to visit extended family, Till's mother Mamie Till Mobley had to have a talk with her son about some of the differences between the North and the overtly segregated and racist South. In an interview, Wheeler Parker Jr. confirms the account that Till's mother gave Emmett what amounted to a crash course in how to behave in the South, but that there was no way of him knowing that the men that came to abduct him intended to kill him that night.<sup>49</sup> Some argue that Till did not understand the norms of the South, that had he known how to conduct himself according to the norms of the Jim Crow South that he might not have acted as he did. This is problematic for a couple of reasons. Even Carolyn Bryant Donham, the wife of one of the murders, indicated that nothing that Till said warranted what happened to him. It is also partially inaccurate; Till's mother made sure that Till left Chicago knowing how norms in the South were different than norms in the North. In her memoir, Till-Mobley recalls teaching her son how to properly respond to adults, how to humble himself while visiting in the South, that if he had to get on his knees that he should.<sup>50</sup> With that noted, Till-Mobley seems proud of the fact that her son was not only taught that "he was just as good as anyone else," he was "also made to feel that way."<sup>51</sup> With that in mind, Till-Mobley notes that Money, Mississippi didn't have many of the warning signs that she spoke of with her son; there were no "white" or "colored" drinking fountains, no segregated sections on buses, nobody stepping off sidewalks to let white folks pass because Money, Mississippi was a small lazy Southern town with rigid racial lines that people knew and was poor.<sup>52</sup> The racism that existed in Money ran deeper and cut not only across racial lines, but the racism that existed there was also shaded by poverty and class. To fully understand all the invisible lines, Till would to have had a worldly knowledge that many children his age simply don't have, nor should they be expected to have.

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall notes that many individuals like to focus exclusively on the classic era of the civil rights movement from the Brown in 1955 decision until the passage of the civil rights bill in 1964, but she argues that the civil rights movement is "longer" and needs to be explored in part as a movement that started other movements and experienced backlash as a result.<sup>53</sup> What happened to Emmett Till is an tragic form of backlash. The biography *The Blood of Emmett Till* by Timothy B. Tyson starts with a rather jarring premise. The book opens with Tyson interviewing Carolyn Bryant Donham, the octogenarian woman that claimed that Till not only whistled at her, but also grabbed at her waist. The interview is particularly interesting because Bryant Donham led a relatively reclusive life that tried to avoid all mention or association with what happened to Till after his murder. The end of the opening chapter ends with Bryant Donham not only admitting that part of the story that she told in response to Till's murder was a lie, but she also believed that, "nothing that boy did could ever justify what happened to him."<sup>54</sup> This interview was profound in that it paints a picture of Bryant Donham as a coward. If she genuinely felt that the nothing Till did justified what happened to him, she should have acted differently as events unfolded. To try to make amends so long after the murder, her sympathy rings hollow. That may have been the author's purpose in the opening chapter and throughout the book. This biography does a lot to highlight Bryant Donham's role and existence in a way that other the biographies in this unit have not. In this respect, the reader develops a more nuanced understanding of what happened by learning about what shaped Bryant Donham's life. By extension, we learn more about the South during this period as well.

After this revelation, the second-fourth chapters pivot back to Till's life in Chicago. Tyson paints a very realistic picture of what growing in Chicago and Argo (a suburb right outside of Chicago and only a short drive from my school). Tyson makes an argument that is clear and profound, Till did not need "to take a train south to discover that being black made him a potential target, any more than he needed his mother to explain that fact."<sup>55</sup> Tyson also goes to great lengths to highlight how Till had a loving and supportive upbringing. Even though his father was not in the picture, Till and his mother had a tight relationship that was supported further by family and extending family within the community. Argo was considered like a "Little Mississippi" that was

filled with many individuals that had migrated from Mississippi to work at a local factory. In their immediate vicinity they had a church that Till's mother, Mamie was active and involved in with her mother; the school was right across the street and the factory was visible in the distance. Everyone would speak freely and "felt secure in their blackness."<sup>56</sup> It paints as ideal an upbringing that Black Americans could have had in Chicago during the 1950's.

The fifth chapter turns the focus back on Bryant Donham. I initially found the weaving of the narrative to be a curious choice, given that the spotlight of the text should have remained tightly focused on Till. After reading it, I learned a lot more about the context of the period by understanding Bryant Donham's upbringing and her eventual relationship with the men that killed Till. Chapter five's title is "Pistol-Whipping at Christmas;" I found this to be an interesting choice of title because of the juxtaposition of the violence it evokes during what is supposed to be a happy holiday. The reader learns that Bryant Donham's father worked as a guard/inmate driver in a prison that was set up on a plantation. Tyson links the similarities between plantation life and prison life; this included the guards whipping prisoners and driving them to work faster. When her father died when she was 15, Bryant Donham moved with her mother to a small town called Indianola. She was considered to be quite beautiful, winning a beauty contest in high school and had a boyfriend who showed her where Blacks had been hung; Tyson makes it clear that being born pretty and white was a privilege for her. Tyson suggests that Bryant Donham did not view it as a privilege and views getting involved with the Milam-Bryant family as an "innocent wandering into a place she didn't quite belong."<sup>57</sup> I found this line to be highly ironic because many over time have used a similar description of Till's trip to Mississippi; the fact that Bryant Donham would suggest that indicates a desire on her part to consider herself to be a victim as well.

One observation that Tyson makes is a simile in which he compares the social world of Jim Crow Mississippi to a stack of pancakes; with Blacks on the bottom and middle- and lower- class whites trying to find a place for themselves in the stack.<sup>58</sup> The Bryant-Milam family was close knit, but they weren't too much higher in the stack of pancakes than Blacks, as they engaged in a lot of illicit activities such as selling cigarettes and illegal whiskey. Despite this, one area that did ensure their privilege was connections with the local law enforcement. The family felt that they had 'clout' because of their connection to a local sheriff. This local sheriff, H.C. Strider, provided the Bryant-Milam family protection by making them feel they were above the law; Tyson makes the humorous argument that Strider was "a lordly ally, his vassals [the Bryant-Milam family and other families like them] remained penniless peckerwoods."<sup>59</sup> In thinking about the present, one recurring motif that is playing out in numerous ways are the concepts of white fragility and white privilege. If it was possible to insert the Bryant-Milam family into the present day, they would most likely argue that they have not experienced anything remotely near white privilege, even though members of their family got away with murder and were protected from being held accountable. They might feel threatened by many of the changes that are happening in the world such as confederate iconography being removed from the public domain.

This long civil rights movement made use of the mass media; this made the protests "one of the great news stories of the modern era."<sup>60</sup> The publication and wide distribution of images of Till's mangled body was an early instance of strategically using mass media to mobilize public opinion. One argument that I found Tyson making was related to the role of media in the death of Till. Tyson notes that newspapers like the *Chicago Defender*, magazines like *Jet* that showed his mutilated body, and television coverage created a 'media circus' that made it impossible to confine civil rights stories to a "minority or Americans or a particular region."<sup>61</sup> Tyson goes on to quote the sociologist Adam Green, who shares the impact that the media had on getting Till's story out and acted upon in the world:

The spectacle surrounding Emmett Till's death 'convened' black Chicago and black Mississippi into one congregation that trumpeted the tragedy to the world. These voices of mourning and protest emerged exactly as Mamie hoped they would. Members of this black national congregation launched rallies, letter campaigns. And fund drives that transformed another Southern horror story into a call for action.<sup>62</sup>

This argument has enormous implications for mobilizing actions and movements today; the goal is the same, but the mediums have shifted. With the advent of social media and smart phones, individuals have new tools at their disposal to document injustice and get their story out without the need to coordinate a media campaign like Till's mother. These tools are used today to amplify voices that have been long been silenced or ignored as well as document violence or inequities.

## Teaching Strategies

---

### **Evaluating Texts: Point of view, Author's Purpose, Denotation/Connotation, Author's Credibility**

To teach students about an author's point of view, you need to teach students the concepts of denotation and connotation. Many of my middle school students do not know the definitions before they enter the room, and it is so important to detect shades of meanings used by authors as they write to infer point of view. If you struggle to teach the difference between denotation and connotation, there is an excellent video that is available and student-friendly on Flocabulary; it gives many examples that you could use to show how different words may have similar meanings but different feelings behind them. When students are working to identify the author's point of view, I often have them start by copying down a couple of sentences they think are the main ideas of the text. I have them highlight the words that have a strong connotation and show what the author may feel (which also helps with identifying bias) and then I have students use the author's purpose acronym PIES-Persuade, Inform, Entertain, Sell to have students write what they think the author's point of view is based on the text evidence and word choices of the author. Finally, in order to get students thinking about the reliability and credibility of the author, I have students either Google the author or check the "About Us" section of the website and have students reflect: Does this author/organization appear to be an expert on this topic? Does this seem like a group or individual that I should trust?

### **Popcorn Discussion**

In a popcorn discussion, the teacher acts as a facilitator of a conversation. The teacher asks a question, calls on the first person to start the conversation for the classroom, and then the next person can speak once the first person is finished. I start this procedure right at the beginning of the school year to get students comfortable with speaking in front of class and with one another. As students are speaking, I am tracking participation as well as listening to what students have to say without interrupting unless necessary to redirect the conversation. There are always a handful of students that are not comfortable talking in front of the class. I allow those students to listen and type their thoughts to each question and share them with me in an email at the end of class; that way I know that they are actively listening and thinking as well.

## Notice and Note-Nonfiction Annotations

To grow in their proficiency and independence reading nonfiction text, students are taught strategies to read and annotate text independently during their first read. My colleague introduced me to the text *Notice and Note* for both fiction and nonfiction. We use the strategies and mini lessons in these texts to introduce students to ways that authors create meaning in both fiction and nonfiction. See the supplemental resource section for a citation for the book. Students are taught what each symbol means, have guided practice with a suggested reading from the *Notice and Note* text, and then use the system to annotate their first read of the text. As we have our popcorn discussion on a text, students are encouraged to add to their annotations with any new insights that they have as they participate and listen to their classmates.

## Assessing Historical Knowledge

Wineburg makes an argument that is relevant to many teachers, especially for teachers that teach history in urban schools that face academic pressure to perform well on assessments. He argues that history teachers in these environments have been set up for failure because the “system conspires to make them [students] look dumb.”<sup>63</sup> When assessments align to a symmetrical bell curve using multiple-choice questions, the purpose becomes to rank students against norms. This means that questions that are created with distractors to ensure that roughly 40-60% of students can answer the question correctly. If a question yields 100% of students being able to answer it accurately; it is often considered to be a bad question. This is problematic for a number of reasons, but Wineburg identifies three factors why this happens in assessment of history: “(A) a culture of testing that rewards trickery and deception, (B) items intended to distract, not educate children, (C) a view of history that turns it into Trivial Pursuit.”<sup>64</sup> Teachers often create assessments that mirror the type of standardized assessments that are given within their districts. Teachers face pressures to ensure that their assessment practices are standards-based and rigorous, but in doing so many may fall into the same pitfalls that are evident in the questions that are on standardized assessments. As Wineburg argues, “practices of item analysis, discrimination, biserial or item-test correlations, and spread are so ingrained in the culture of testing...results from most large-scale objective tests fit the traditional bell curve.”<sup>65</sup> As teachers of history, we need to think deeply about our assessment practices to ensure that we are assessing students in a way that reflects their learning. Assessment in the history classroom needs to align with classroom practices and should show what students are capable of when presented with authentic historical documents. For this unit, my assessment would be simple. I would ask students to respond to the Essential Questions drawing textual evidence from the readings that we have done in class.

## Classroom Activities

---

In order to teach the content, I envision students engaging in the following readings/viewing over the course of a three week unit; these texts would be read as a class and annotated on by students using the signpost lessons (from the Notice and Note text-see Resource section) and classroom conversations using the questions in the table for each excerpt:

-*The Blood of Emmett Till* by Timothy B. Tyson

-*Let the People See: The Story of Emmett Till* by Elliott J. Gorn

*-Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America* by Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson

These are the selected texts that I recommend for use in an inquiry study of Emmett Till. I would start with having students view the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary. The YouTube URL is included; the documentary runs about ten minutes, allowing for viewing more than once. When I teach the unit, I plan on making the questions that I have included into a worksheet for students to answer as they view the documentary. The list of questions is detailed and requires students to view the documentary very carefully. The documentary provides a good overview of the key events related to Till as well as grounds students visually in that specific historical period.

I have included questions for excerpts from two biographies and one memoir. These questions should be discussed before students work on the Source Investigation Sheet for each text, which is located below the table of questions. When I teach the unit, I will have students read one excerpt at a time and annotate it on their own first. Students will then add to their annotations as we discuss the questions for each excerpt as a class, and then students will complete a Source Investigation Sheet for each text to evaluate each source based on what they read.

<b><i>The Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America</i> by Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson Pages-Introduction pages xx-xxiii, pages 24-25, 39-41, 149-151</b>	<b><i>The Blood of Emmett Till</i> by Timothy B. Tyson Pages 1-6, 13-24, 144-top of 148, 160-top of 161;165-168</b>
---	---

<p>Pages xx-xxiii-Mamie’s broad recollection and feelings towards her son’s death and legacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mamie writes this book many years after her son’s death. Based on what she says, what impact has her son’s death had on her life?</li> <li>• What purpose does she have for writing the book? How might her purpose for writing be different than other authors who do biographies on Emmett Till?</li> </ul> <p>Pages 23-25-Mamie’s friendship with her friend Ollie</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does this section reveal about Mamie as a person?</li> <li>• What does this section reveal about how life was in Argo during Mamie’s childhood?</li> <li>• What does her friendship with Ollie reveal about what Mamie valued as a person?</li> </ul> <p>Pages 39-41- Emmett stuttering and his relationship with cousin Wheeler</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did Emmett’s family help him overcome his stuttering? What does this show about his family?</li> <li>• Why was being able to speak clearly important to Till’s family?</li> <li>• Who is Wheeler and how did Emmett feel about him?</li> <li>• How was Emmett prepared for school by his family?</li> </ul> <p>Pages 149-151-Till’s mother’s choice to attend the trial of the murders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost immediately after the funeral in Chicago, Till’s mother decided to go to the trial in Mississippi. Why was this dangerous?</li> <li>• In making her decision to attend the trial, how did Till’s mother feel?</li> <li>• There are several people that helped make it possible for Till’s mother to attend the trial. Who are they and why were they helpful?</li> </ul>	<p>Pages 1-6-Recent interview with Carolyn Bryant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you think Carolyn decided to speak after all these years?</li> <li>• Why did the author and Carolyn get in contact? Why do you think the author includes this detail?</li> <li>• How was the Murrow case like what happened to Till?</li> <li>• Why do you think ‘miscegenation’ (aka race-mixing) was a big deal in the South during the 1950’s? Think about how they tried to keep people separate through segregation.</li> <li>• Why do you think she admits to lying on page 6?</li> <li>• Why do you think the author opens the book with his interview of Carolyn Bryant, when the book is about Till?</li> </ul> <p>Pages 13-24-a comparison of racism in Chicago and Mississippi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the author mean when he says on page 14, “one stock theme in stories of Emmett Till is that being from the North, he died in Mississippi because he just didn’t know any better?” What argument is the author trying to make in that paragraph and the following paragraphs?</li> <li>• Was there racism in Chicago? Was it similar or different than what we know about life in the South at that time? What do you think about some examples that the author shares?</li> <li>• At the bottom of page 17, you see “the New Negro” is in quotes and starts with capital letters. This means it is a proper noun and is a thing. What is it? Use the context clues in the paragraph to make an inference, then take a moment to do a Google search and add to you inference.</li> <li>• How was/is racism evident in real estate? How did it work in Chicago?</li> <li>• How did politicians reinforce segregation in Chicago?</li> <li>• By focusing so heavily on racism in Chicago that happened right before Till left for Mississippi, what is the author trying to show?</li> </ul> <p>Pages 144-top of 148-recap of Moses Wright speaking at the trial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go back and reread page 144. The author does a good job using language describing the setting to create a mood for the reader. Based on the description that the author uses, what mood is created for you as a reader?</li> <li>• Who is Moses Wright? What did he do during the trial that was so important? What impact did it have for the trial? What impact did it have on his personal life after the trial?</li> <li>• What did the lawyers for the murders try to do to make Moses Wright seem less credible?</li> </ul> <p>Pages 160-top of 161; 165-168-Carolyn Bryant’s testimony w/ author’s context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was Carolyn thinking during the trial?</li> <li>• Look at the bottom of 160 and top of 161. What plans did African Americans who were going to testify must make to ensure they were safe?</li> <li>• Looking at the top of page 165, how was justice different in the South in 1955 than justice today?</li> <li>• What do you think of the testimony that Carolyn provided? What does it show about the South at that time?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Let the People See by Eliot Gorn</b>  <b>Pages 162-170, 269-273, 290-295 (last)</b></p>	<p><b>Documentary Eyes on the Prize-Emmett Till website:</b>  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ie5Jnt_QWVs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ie5Jnt_QWVs</a></p>

Pages 162-170-Recap of the closing arguments of the murder case

- Chatham is the lawyer that is representing Till's family seeking the murderers to be charged guilty for murder. Look at page 164-165. What does he argue? How does he try to relate to the jurors?
- On pages 165-66, what argument does Chatham make about the doctor and identifying the body?
- Carlton was the lawyer the murderers had. Look at the middle of page 167. What arguments does he make to defend the murderers?
- At the top of page 168, the lawyer for the murderers reminded the jury that they don't have to prove that it was Till's body in the river, but that if they had a reasonable doubt it was not Till's body that they could not convict the two men for murder. What do you think about the legal standard? Was it fair? Does it make sense in this case?
- Based on the description of the concluding arguments on page 169, who do you think a more convincing closing argument? Why?
- Based on what you read about in this excerpt, how do you feel about the decision that was reached in finding the murderers not guilty?

Pages 269-273-What was Till's legacy after his death

- What impact did Till's death have on Black Americans born during the "Emmett Till generation?" (1930's and 1940's)
- How did Till's story come back into broader historical awareness?
- Why was the documentary *Eyes on the Prize* important?

Pages 290-295-Connections between Till and modern-day Black Lives Matter and continuing civil rights movement

- Why is it important that "somehow the Chicago kid's murder broke the silence?" (Gorn 290). Look at the bottom paragraph on page 291 before you share your thoughts.
- Oprah said, "when you look at the story of Emmett Till...and you think about what's happening in our community today with black men unarmed being shot, it's like a new Emmett Till every week." What do you think about what she had to say?
- Why does Emmett Till's story still important today? Look at the bottom of page 292 and 293 as you formulate your thoughts. There are many potential points to make here.
- What do you think about Carolyn Bryant as we finish our study? Would it have been better for her to not say anything all these years?

1. Why were tensions high in the South before Till headed to Mississippi?

2. What group worked to maintain white supremacy according to the documentary?
3. What did groups like the KKK do to cause Blacks to live in fear?
4. What was Money, Mississippi like based on the video and description?
5. What did Till's cousin say that happened in the store?
6. Who is Mose Wright?
7. What did Wright share happened to Emmett Till?
8. How was Wright able to identify Till's body?
9. Why did Till's mother insist on an open casket to display the body?
10. How did people react to seeing Till's body?
11. Sumner, the place that the murder trial was held, was called "A Good Place to Raise a Boy." Why is this ironic?
12. How was the courtroom segregated? Who sat where?
13. What argument did the lawyers make who were defending the murderers?
14. Why was Mose Wright brace according to his nephew?
15. How much did the murderers get paid for selling their story to the press?
16. What did Till's mom hope would happen from his death?

Enrichment Activity: [https://c2.staticflickr.com/2/1329/1388299617\\_ab84704bc9\\_b.jpg](https://c2.staticflickr.com/2/1329/1388299617_ab84704bc9_b.jpg)

This is a link to a magazine article that tries to smear Till-Mobley's actions as a mother. It would be a worthwhile activity to have students evaluate it for bias using the Source Evaluation Sheet below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Room: \_\_\_\_\_

Source Investigation Sheet

Title of Text and Page # : \_\_\_\_\_

Topic Addressed: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Once we have finished reading and discussing an excerpt, we will dive deeper into the text to think about the author's tone, purpose, and potential bias. Copy two statements from the reading that you think are important and show the author's thinking.

Important Statement	Copy important sentences from the text; be sure to include a citation after the direct quote.
#1	
#2	

1. Highlight any words that carry a strong connotation (feeling). You need to highlight at least one word from each statement.
2. Based on the words that you highlighted, what do you think the author's tone (what he/she thinks and feels) about the topic addressed in this section? Explain your thinking in a couple of sentences.
3. Based on what you have read and what we discussed, what do you think the author's point of view in this section? By including this information about Emmett Till, what is the author trying to show?
4. Finally, is this an author or source that demonstrates reliability and credibility? Think about the following as you circle and explain your rating:
  - o What makes the author an authority/expert on this issue? Is the author a historian or a primary source like a person or newspaper from that time?
  - o Does the text cite other authors or key people with citations in the book?
  - o Is the author trying to tell a complete story or is only telling one side of the story?
  - o Does the authors language seem fair and balanced, or does it seem like the author feels so strongly about something that he is ignoring part of the story?

Based on the criteria listed above, rate how much you trust this author on the following scale:

**I completely trust this text**                      **Somewhat trust this text**   **Don't trust this text**

1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10

Explain your rating in at least four detailed sentences that give two examples from the text to back up your thinking. You can use the sentences from above that you copied in your explanation.



## Resources

---

### Recommended Supplemental Resources for Inquiry on Emmett Till

- <https://www.loc.gov/item/2015669110/#:~:text=%2D%20Wheeler%20Parker%20was%20born%20in,%2D%20In%20English>. This is a Library of Congress interview with Wheeler Parker, Jr.; Parker is Till's cousin. It runs a bit over an hour and is very comprehensive.
- <https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/local/alabama/2019/09/25/emmett-till-cousin-wheeler-parker-impatient-new-federal-investigation-racial-murder-in-mississippi/2438586001/> This is a newspaper article from 2018 that includes an embedded 8 minute video of Wheeler Parker recounting what happened the night that Till was abducted in the courtroom that the killers were acquitted.

### Other Supplemental Resources for Pedagogy

- Beers, Kylene, and Robert E. Probst. *Notice and Note Strategies for Close Reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2013. This book is useful for the nonfiction Reading mini lessons that support the chart that I use in my classroom teaching; the reading signposts are taught to my students by using this text.
- <https://www.flocabulary.com/unit/word-choice/> This may require a subscription to the Flocabulary website, but it is a wonderful resource to teach elementary aged students about word choice, denotation, and connotation. This is important for students to understand to determine an author's tone and point of view.

## Appendix: Implementing District Standards

---

### Reading

The focus of the American History Through American Lives seminar, led by David Engerman, is reading and discussing individual life stories and family histories to teach American history. Inherent in this work is reading biographies, memoir, and other nonfiction genres; this can also mean viewing film and documentaries, as well evaluating multiple primary sources. This directly aligns with a couple of CCSS:

RI.6.9-Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).<sup>66</sup> In the unit, students will read and respond to excerpts from multiple biographies about Emmett Till in order to draw conclusions about his life and legacy. While reading, students will think about specific word choices that an author uses, details that are included and are omitted, and other choices authors specifically make related to Till.

RI.6.3-Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).<sup>67</sup> In this unit, the life of Emmett Till we will be the central focus. Both the students and I will look carefully at specific details throughout a couple of texts to construct an argument about Emmett Till's legacy.

## Social Studies

There are also two key Social Studies standards that are addressed in the seminar and unit as well:

SS.H.1.6-8.MC. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.<sup>68</sup> Students will do a close reading of each excerpt, looking specifically for central ideas that an author is trying to make, the author's POV, and assessing the credibility of and reliability of a source as well as potentially develop questions for further research.

SS.H.4.6-8.MC. Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.<sup>69</sup> Students will use the excerpts of selected readings in class to construct an argument about Emmett Till and his legacy, drawing on the group of readings that I have collated for them.

This unit will complement the work that is expected of students in other units throughout the school year. I envision a three-week unit to be taught towards the middle of the school year. Before this unit, students will need me to teach them a lot of skills to thrive in this unit. These skills include a close reading annotation system, how to incorporate and cite textual evidence, how to organize and outline their thoughts, and how to assess information to ensure that it is credible and reliable. This work will be my first attempt at using a historical inquiry approach with students.

## Reference List

---

"Emmett Till's Death Inspired a Movement," July 18, 2019.

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/emmett-tills-death-inspired-movement>.

"English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Informational Text » Grade 6." English Language

Arts Standards » Reading: Informational Text » Grade 6 | Common Core State Standards

Initiative. (accessed July 16, 2019). <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RI/6/>.

"Factbox: What Changes Are Companies Making in Response to George Floyd Protests?" June

16, 2020, [www.reuters.com/article/us-minneapolis-police-companies-factbox/factbox-what-changes-are-companies-making-in-response-to-george-floyd-protests-idUSKBN23N2P6](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-minneapolis-police-companies-factbox/factbox-what-changes-are-companies-making-in-response-to-george-floyd-protests-idUSKBN23N2P6).

Gordon-Taylor, Airicka. "Legacy." Mamie Till Mobley Memorial Foundation. Accessed July

14, 2020. <https://mamietillmobley.webs.com/legacy-2>.

Gorn, Elliott J. *Let the People See: The Story of Emmett Till*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past."

*Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3660172>.

Hauck, Grace. "Will George Floyd's Death Become Nation's 'Emmett Till Moment'?" *USA*

*Today (Reprinted in Chicago Sun-Times)*, 14 June 2020, pp. 30-31.

"Illinois Social Science Learning Standards," Illinois State Board of Education, accessed June 18, 2020, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/K-12-SS-Standards.pdf>

Lehman, Barbara & David Hayes (1985) Advancing Critical Reading through Historical Fiction and Biography, *The Social Studies*, 76:4, 165-169, DOI: 10.1080/00377996.1985.9958278

Lindquist, Tarry. "'Why and How I Teach with Historical Fiction.'" *Scholastic*, Oct. 1995, [www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/why-and-how-i-teach-historical-fiction/](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/why-and-how-i-teach-historical-fiction/).

Newkirk, Pamela. "Separate Deaths of Emmett Till and His Father Louis Suggest a Pattern of Injustice: John Edgar Wideman Probes the Separate Killings of Louis and Emmett Till,

Father and Son." WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post.

Reeves, Jay. "Emmett Till Cousin on Inquiry: 'What Is the Holdup?'" *The Montgomery*

*Advertiser*. *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 25, 2019.

<https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/local/alabama/2019/09/25/emmett-till-cousin-wheeler-par-ker-impatient-new-federal-investigation-racial-murder-in-mississippi/2438586001/>.

Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2005.

"Twain," Chicago Public Schools, accessed June 18, 2020,

<https://schoolinfo.cps.edu/schoolprofile/schooldetails.aspx?SchoolID=610206> (5)

Tyson, Timothy B. *The Blood of Emmett Till*. Farmington Hills, Mich: Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning, 2017.

Wineburg, Sam. *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, Greg et al, “Factbox: What Changes Are Companies Making in Response to George Floyd Protests?”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Hauck, Grace. “Will George Floyd's Death Become Nation's 'Emmett Till Moment'?”

<sup>5</sup> Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past.”

<sup>6</sup> Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> “Twain,” Chicago Public Schools School Report Card

<sup>8</sup> Wineburg, Sam. *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*, 5

<sup>9</sup> Lehman, Barbara & David Hayes. “Advancing Critical Reading through Historical Fiction and Biography,” 165

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Wineburg, Sam. *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*, 6

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 27

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 26

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 91

<sup>17</sup> Lindquist, Tarry. “Why and How I Teach with Historical Fiction.”

<sup>18</sup> Wineburg, Sam. *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*, 82

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 83

<sup>20</sup> Tyson, Timothy B. *The Blood of Emmett Till*, 75

<sup>21</sup> Hauck, Grace. “Will George Floyd's Death Become Nation's 'Emmett Till Moment'?”

<sup>22</sup> Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1245

<sup>23</sup> Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, 119

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 120

<sup>25</sup> Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1240

<sup>26</sup> Tyson, Timothy B. *The Blood of Emmett Till*, 27

<sup>27</sup> Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1240

<sup>28</sup> Tyson, Timothy B. *The Blood of Emmett Till*, 27

<sup>29</sup> Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, 130

<sup>30</sup> Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1251

<sup>31</sup> Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, 151-152

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 181

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 143

<sup>34</sup> "Emmett Till's Death Inspired a Movement"

<sup>35</sup> Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, 207-208

<sup>36</sup> Gorn, Elliott J. *Let the People See: The Story of Emmett Till*, 190; 193

<sup>37</sup> Gordon-Taylor, Airicka. "Legacy," Mamie Till Mobley Memorial Foundation.

<sup>38</sup> Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1240

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 1247

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Tyson, Timothy B. *The Blood of Emmett Till*, 29

<sup>42</sup> Newkirk, Pamela. "Separate Deaths of Emmett Till and His Father Louis Suggest a Pattern of Injustice: John Edgar Wideman Probes the Separate Killings of Louis and Emmett Till, Father and Son."

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

- 44 Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, 202-203
- 45 Wineburg, Sam. *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*,164
- 46 Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, 181
- 47 Reeves, Jay. "Emmett Till Cousin on Inquiry: 'What Is the Holdup?'"
- 48 Ibid
- 49 Ibid
- 50 Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, 101
- 51 Ibid, 100
- 52 Ibid, 121
- 53 Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1240
- 54 Tyson, Timothy B. *The Blood of Emmett Till*, 7
- 55 Ibid, 34
- 56 Ibid, 27
- 57 Ibid, 41
- 58 Ibid, 45
- 59 Ibid, 47
- 60 Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1245
- 61 Tyson, Timothy B. *The Blood of Emmett Till*, 75
- 62 Ibid
- 63 Wineburg, Sam. *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*, 16
- 64 Ibid, 19
- 65 Ibid, 20
- 66 "English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Informational Text » Grade 6."

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> “Illinois Social Science Learning Standards”

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

---

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit [https://teachers.yale.edu/terms\\_of\\_use](https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use)