



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2022 Volume III: The Social Struggles of Contemporary Black Art

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## **The Resiliency of the African American Financial Narrative Presented through Multiple Media of Art**

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### **Content Objective**

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The overarching objective of this unit is for students to use different forms of art to understand multifaceted situations connected to micro and macroeconomics as it relates to the African American community. The content within the unit will challenge students to see things beyond the surface level and move towards a higher order of thinking and understanding of how resources, education, and systems play an essential part in one's financial foundation. Students should exit the unit with an experience that helps them make better financial choices while understanding how decisions and consequences are interrelated. While I created this with my students in mind, educators can differentiate as needed based on the rigor and expectations you've set in your classroom.

### **Rationale**

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I have many objectives as an educator. I aim to create a space that helps prepare students for real-world challenges. It's time to go beyond philosophy and memorization. Every lesson should, in some way, help prepare students' ability to think more critically, prepare more efficiently and, when necessary, regroup and recover when faced with adversity. The strengthening of these intangibles will help them become more substantial men and women who will have the self-confidence and foresight to take on the challenges found in the future. We have to stop teaching our children that tap dancing for others is a way to a better life (Jarelski Green). Many educators feel you should encourage students to pursue their goals no matter how ambitious or unrealistic. While I appreciate the place such a philosophy comes from, I don't subscribe to it. Yes, students should pursue their ambitions. Their careers should be in demand. And they should be able to perform the task required of that ambition at a high level. Furthermore, whatever they do, they should be compensated well for it. After you live long enough, you begin to understand the responsibilities that come with finance. It's the one language spoken daily in every nation across the globe that never goes out of style. Let me say it plainly. You have more options when you have more money.

Why is this important? About two miles from my school, you'll find the community of Fox Chapel. According to Coldwell Banker, the average cost of a home in this community is \$1,250,000. The median price of a home in my school's community is \$60,000 (1). Although I shouldn't have been, I was surprised to see the demographic difference between the communities. Census Reporter has Fox Chapel at 87 percent white and zero percent black (2). I couldn't believe this, so I checked multiple sources, including Niche (3), the World Population Review (4) and the United States Census Bureau (5). Every single database had the number of African Americans in this area at less than zero percent as opposed to Homewood, which is over 60 percent African American.

My school, Pittsburgh Westinghouse, currently has 11 white students in a school with 679 total students. Cranberry \$315,100. The Demographics are 92% white and 1.4% black, Mount Lebanon's average home price is \$243,800 and has a demographic makeup of 90.6% white and 0.7% black (6); Peters Township average home price \$357,100. Their demographics are 95% white to 0.9% black. The two blackest places in metro Pittsburgh are Homewood with a median home value of \$105,400 and The Hill District which is 77% (7). Why do I bring this up? Because individuals who have access to financial resources are more likely to lead very different lives and not succumb to many of the problems that come with poverty. Money matters, and those who tell you it doesn't are often the ones with it.

If it sounds like this is personal, it's maddening. Black children in Pittsburgh and most American cities are constantly reminded that they are subhuman. When comparing the two communities through the eyes of a child, Baldwin explains in his Debate with William Buckley at Cambridge University,

If you walk out of Harlem, ride out of Harlem, downtown, the world agrees what you see is much bigger, cleaner, whiter, richer, safer than where you are. They collect the garbage. People obviously can pay their life insurance. Their children look happy, safe. You're not. And you go back home, and it would seem that, of course, that it's an act of God that this is true! That you belong where white people have put you" (8).

The idea that they're more likely to be poor is more acceptable than it is intolerable. The same "Allies" who proudly placed their Black Lives Matter sign in their front yard seem unable to find the courage to send their children to predominantly black schools. The idea that their children may for once be the minority, that they may for once give up an ounce of privilege, seems entirely out of the realm of possibility. Do they not know the power that they have? That they can share? I wonder.

For over a decade, I've fought to change this reality; I've tried to reason, advocate and show the morality of reintegrating schools so that the people in predominantly white communities see the promise of black children and vice versa. Such an attempt has been mentally and physically taxing. Neither conservatives nor liberals will amend white privilege. No matter how often the left grandstands in Congress, on CNN, or in the streets, they're not giving up the keys so that people of color can drive the car. In his Bigger & Blacker comedy special, Chris Rock explains,

You see white people pissed off, man. Man, the white man thinks he's losing the country. You watch the news: 'We're losing everything. We're losing.' Affirmative action, and illegal aliens... and we're losing the country.' Losing? Shut up. White people are not losing. If y'all losing, who's winning? It ain't us. Have you driven around this mother\*\*\*\*\*? It ain't us, Ain't a white man in this

room that would change places with me. None of you would change places with me. And I'm rich!" (9)

Rock goes further in his Kill the Messenger special on HBO when he explains what black people have to do to get to the same level as their white counterparts.

In my neighborhood, there are four black people. Hundreds of houses, four black people. Who are these black people? Well, there's me, Mary J Blige, Jay-Z and Eddie Murphy. Only black people in the whole neighborhood. So, let's break it down. Me, I'm a decent comedian, I'm all right. Mary J Blige. Mary J Blige is one of the greatest R&B singers ever to walk the earth. Jay-Z, one of the greatest rappers to ever live; Eddie Murphy, one of the funniest actors to ever, ever do it. Do you know what the white man next door to me does for a living? He's a f\*\*\*\*\* dentist. He isn't going to the dental hall of fame. He's just a yank-your-tooth-out dentist." Rock spells out the point with a devastating punchline: "The black man gotta fly to get to somethin' the white man can walk to. (10)

White America is too comfortable with their societal place to moonwalk back and let someone else have a turn voluntarily. I don't think this is a matter of opinion. There has been much evidence presented in just the past few years. For example, voter suppression handed down by state and federal legislative bodies has made things more challenging for African Americans to climb the opportunity ladder. From Supreme Court rulings and the assault on our nation's capital, White America won't allow themselves or their children's livelihood to be placed in jeopardy so that the marginalized could potentially compete for the number one spot (11). Like his dream for equality, Dr. King has died, with Charles Darwin's philosophy of survival of the fittest winning out again (12).

Having changed my attempt to bring the two communities together because I think it's morally right, I have now focused on creating a mindset that leans more toward currency as people understand and respect money. It brings influence, opens doors, and creates opportunities that words themselves cannot do on their own. I'm not saying that our children should feel they have to make millions to become successful. Success is a relative term. Still, every child, especially black children, should appreciate how a sustainable income stream opens doors that were once closed due to the combination of racism and poverty. Our children cannot, nor should they ever want to change who they are or their heritage, but for many, a change in financial circumstances could help alleviate many of the stressors that come from living in poverty.

Conversations surrounding finances are often considered taboo and embarrassing for some. Schools often teach children Calculus but don't take the time to calculate how problematic student loan payments can and will be for students when they want to buy a home on their own. While I wouldn't say the classic form of education is entirely obsolete, I think we have to do a better job of being honest regarding real-world responsibilities. "Whether you broke or rich, you gotta get biz. Having' money's the everything that havin not having it is." (13)

## We Shall Overcome? Someday? How long do we Plan on Waiting?

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According to "The Ever Growing G.A.P.," if the average black family wealth continues to grow at the same pace it has over the past three decades, it would take black families 228 years to amass the same amount of wealth white families have today. That's just 17 years shorter than this country's 245-year span of slavery. For the average Latino family, it would take 84 years to amass the same wealth White families have today—that's the year 2097. (14)

The idea of African Americans struggling in America isn't new; in fact, the concept of a world where people of color felt they were made the priority is beyond the scope of imagination for some. The *White Lion* was the first of the slave ships to arrive at Jamestown in 1619. They followed a vessel called the *Treasure*, and soon after, thousands of other ships carried millions of Africans via the Triangular Trade (15). "The volume of enslaved people carried off from Africa reached 30,000 per year in the 1690s and 85,000 per year a century later. More than eight out of ten Africans forced into the slave trade crossed the Atlantic between 1700 and 1850. The decade 1821 to 1830 saw more than 80,000 people a year leaving Africa in slave ships. Well over a million more—one-tenth of the volume carried off in the slave trade era—followed within the next twenty years" (16). Although this was a costly process, wages were never a part of the idea of enslaved people from Africa. An enslaved person is just that, someone who is working against their will without pay or profit.

During slavery, black men and women begin to build the American infrastructure. Between 1795 and 1801, enslaved people worked to rebuild the White House; their masters were the only ones that received any compensation (17). Wall Street also used forced labor to construct many of its buildings. The University of North Carolina, the oldest public university in America, also used slaves in its early construction projects (18). Baldwin explains, "Let me put it this way, that from a very literal point of view, the harbors and the ports, and the railroads of the country—the economy, especially of the Southern states—could not conceivably be what it has become, if they had not had, and do not still have, indeed for so long, for many generations, cheap labor. I am stating very seriously, and this is not an overstatement: \*I\* picked the cotton, \*I\* carried it to the market, and \*I\* built the railroads under someone else's whip for nothing. For nothing" (19). For centuries black people would work from their birth until their death, working away to make other people rich beyond their imaginations. All the while, the children of those not enslaved benefited directly from their actions and can step forward to enjoy the privileges that slavery gave them. By the time the 13th amendment is ratified, African Americans are miles behind; by the time the Civil Rights Bill is signed, they're so behind financially that it's almost impossible to close the gap. According to Americanprogress.org, in 2016, the median wealth of a black family living in the United States was \$17,600 compared to the white family at \$171,000 (20).

Growing up, my mother used to send my cousin, sister, and me to spend time with our grandparents in Holt, Alabama. During this time, we spent many a morning, afternoon, and evening at Weeping Mary Church, less than one hundred yards from my grandparents' home. Although it was many years ago, I still can hear different sermons where members would sing "Swing Low," "This Little Light of Mine," and "We Shall Not Be Moved". The most familiar of them is "We Shall Overcome." Today, I have more questions than answers about this song and its message of overcoming. "Black People Will Struggle " has consistently been the message, the expectation, and the idea behind the black experience in America. How can this be an acceptable standard of existence at Weeping Mary in Holt Alabama, with an entirely African American congregation and not the expectation of the predominantly white congregations of Notre Dame or St. Patrick's Cathedral?

## How a Photo Communicates a Thousand Stories

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Gordon Parks is one of the leading photographers of the last century. His primary focus was communicating the African American experience socially, economically, and spiritually through several artistic media such as music, poetry, and painting. However, he is most famous for his work with the still film camera. He bought his first camera at a pawnshop and then worked for the United States government in the Office of War Information. During that time, he worked to document the black experience in America. He had the opportunity to report historical events such as the Great Migration, the portraits of Duke Ellington, The Tuskegee Airmen, Muhammad Ali, and other African Americans of influence.

Parks wanted to use his photography to explain how he felt the African Americans fit and did not fit in the American dream. Phillip Brookman explains:

A photographer can be a storyteller. Images of experience captured on film, when put together like words, can weave tales of feeling and emotion as bold as literature.... [Photographers] bring together fact and fiction, experience, imagination, and feelings in a visual dialogue that has an enormous impact on how we observe and relate to the external world and our internal selves (21).

A photographer is a storyteller, and Parks wanted to tell the story of America's people of color.

While Parks did a phenomenal job of taking photos that communicated works of historical events, he made sure to capture images that spoke to the injustices pervasive in American economics and culture. During the summer of 1955, Montgomery Life asked Parks to document the racial tensions and protests in the South. During that time, Parks took pictures that told the story of two very different worlds, the power dynamics that shaped that world and how those dynamics created financial struggles for people of color (22). During his assignment, he accompanied a black reporter called Freddie; he used this alias to conceal Freddie's real name because he may have faced retribution if people were ever able to identify him.

Parks has a way of showing the power dynamics through his lens by using accepted everyday realities to show the unfair and unacceptable realities of life in the South. One of his most famous images is of a White mother and her nanny holding a white baby in an Atlanta airport. This idea of African American women "helping" white mothers raise their children had been a staple in white culture since slavery. Parks does a phenomenal job of communicating that this existence was very much alive and exercised by the ruling class in his image. This single photo serves as a vehicle to inform, anger, and addresses what some believe should be accepted dynamics of America's social and economic structures (23).

## Titus Kaphar: A Rebranding of Political Portraits

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Titus Kaphar found his place in American art by using classical portraits of people on the covers of history books in every American library. “Kaphar converts figures into puzzle pieces. He crumples portraits of white protagonists and isolates and elevates the representation of previously subordinate Blacks in the background, making them more visible. In his revolutionary Voodoo, he turns history upside down. Kaphar is one of the frontline warriors in this battle against institutionalized white supremacy” (24). Kaphar sheds a different light on some individuals, including Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Christopher Columbus, and more. Titus's painting peels back the curtain literally and figuratively regarding social and economic structures in America. Kaphar explains, “I'm not in the business of trying to demonize our Founding Fathers. I don't think there's any benefit to that. However, I'm also not trying to deify them. And so that particular piece is pulling back the curtain on these ideas, these illusions, these stories that we tell ourselves about the Founding Fathers” (25). His paintings represent the history behind the history, the realities often intentionally forgotten to serve a specific type of people and a particular purpose.

One of the most iconic paintings that Kaphar created was using a classical depiction of The Founding Fathers and then placing a strong, confident Muhammad Ali standing atop their documents staring down with conviction and anger. This painting, *Self-Evidence*, serves as an inspirational tool to pay homage to the late Ali and question the words and the writers of the Declaration of Independence and The Constitution (26).

Kaphar's paintings question America's heroes, people who created systems and situations that have intentionally put people of color in a place that has not historically presented them with the same opportunities as white Americans. Kaphar explains, “If we are not honest about our past, then we cannot have a clear direction towards our future” (27). By understanding what systems were meant to do we can better understand the economic and psychological consequences of their consistent practice over several generations of American History.

## The Economic Underlying Messages in “*A Raisin in the Sun*”

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The stage has always been an art form used to communicate the similar economic struggles of black people in America. *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry opened in March 1959 on Broadway and provided Americans with an understanding of what it meant not only to be black, but black with ambitions of economic prosperity, the type that had been reserved for whites from the first days of our nation.

So much of the idea behind blackness is a struggle. Still, producers, networks, and musicians alike have used various methods to show the battle and the potential of acquiring the American dream through economic mobility and uplift. The play follows Walter Younger and his mother, Lena, who both yearn to move their family out of Chicago's South Side neighborhood in search of better lives. When Lena's late husband's insurance check arrives, Lena hopes to use it to buy a house in a white community. On the other hand, Walter would like to invest the money in a liquor business (28).

There are several underlying messages within this artistic masterpiece connected to finance. First, although the deceased Big Walter is not in the play, he represents what society has thought of black people for



centuries: simple field hands, void of dreams beyond athletics and manual labor. Today in our schools, black children are constantly pushed towards trades and not professions involving more intellect. Walter Jr's mother explains, "Big Walter used to say, he'd get right wet in the eyes sometimes, lean his head back with the water standing in his eyes and say, 'Seem like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams - but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile.'" Act 1, Scene 1, pg. 29 (29). Lena believes that moving her family to a white neighborhood will get them "The Good Life." That home, that life, is connected to money.

Walter Jr., the patriarch of the family, must understand the time and gender roles that play a part in his mindset. If nothing else, he is a provider and wants to do more, but he cannot with his current occupation. Walter Jr's dream of ownership in a liquor store is dependent on his mother's money. Walter's dreams of economic mobility become so immersed that he discounts the pursuit of the younger members of his home. His sister, Beneatha, wanted to become a physician, and his mother felt that some of the money could go towards his son's tuition (30).

Walter explains, "I'm thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room - (*very quietly*) - and all I got to give him are stories about how rich white people are" (31). He continues to state his case to his mother, who he believes holds the key to happiness, when he says "Sometimes it's like I can see the future stretched out in front of me - just plain as day. The future, Mama. Hanging over there at the edge of my days. Just waiting for me - a big, looming blank space - full of nothing. Just waiting for me. But it don't have to be." (32). Some would say that Walter is wrong to press his mother in such a way, but they could also look at the idea of responsibility as Walter Sr, Walter's father, left this money to take care of his family. Walter is tired of watching others indulge in a lifestyle earmarked for white parents. Why should his son not go to the finest schools? Why can't his mother live in a nice home with a garden and not an apartment? Should only white women be pampered while Walter's wife waits for what they no longer want or need?"

Walter dreams of the reality many people no longer have the courage to fathom. When challenged about his ambitions, Walter replies, "What's the matter with you all! I didn't make this world! It was given to me this way! Hell, yes, I want me some yachts someday! Yes, I want to hang some real pearls 'round my wife's neck. Ain't she supposed to wear no pearls? Somebody tell me—tell me, who decides which woman is suppose to wear pearls in this world. I tell you, I am a man—and I think my wife should wear some pearls in this world." Walter dreams of a reality that many, if not most, blacks at that time could not relate to. His exposure to driving white business people and their wives from home to work is both a gift and a curse. He can see the realities of what's possible, but his place in such a reality is to remain an illusion that becomes a nightmare. Just because you're black, are you supposed to be poor? Should you not be able to live in a particular neighborhood? I'd recommend you look through your eyes.

*A Raisin in the Sun* does a masterful job of describing what happened when black families tried to move into white communities, the pushback they received, and the rationale behind it. For example, after Walter's mother puts the down payment on the home in Claybourne Park, a white neighborhood, Mr. Linder from the neighborhood planning community comes to speak with them and get them to change their mind. He explains

You've got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain way. And at the moment, the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better and take more of a common interest in the community's life when they share a common background. I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice

simply doesn't enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Claybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their communities (33).

The welcome committee is quite the opposite. Mr. Linder presents the family with, "Our association is prepared, through the collective effort of our people, to buy the house from you at a financial gain to your family." Walter pushes back against Mr. Linder's request, and Mr. Linder continues. "Well, I don't understand why you people are reacting this way. What do you think you will gain by moving into a neighborhood where you just aren't wanted and where some elements, well, people can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life." After being asked to leave, he says "You just can't force people to change their hearts, son." (34).

The conversation with Mr. Linder is more than a simple disagreement between two people. It's a purposeful and problematic representation of the type of barriers intentionally set forth by the dominant class to suppress the upward mobility of black people. A small part of a bigger picture. "The table of the American Dream is not a buffet, but a sit-down dinner, and only a select few have reservations. The unit focuses on four topics to help students understand these realities: The Constitutional Convention and Federal Legislation, Education in America, Economic Opportunity, and the Judicial System (35). Linder is a spokesman for not only the welcoming committee but a representation of the United States system of oppression. He is an embodiment of the Make America Great Again Movement. Mr. Linder is intentionally trying to keep Walter's family away from Kanye's "Good Life."

## **The Screen Communicates the Possibilities and Potential of *The Fresh Prince***

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*The Fresh Prince* was a show in the 1990s that represented a family who worked their way to a life of privilege reserved for white Americans. The show's central character is Will Smith, a teenager getting into trouble in his underserved community in Philadelphia who is sent by his mother after seeing her son get into a fight and fears for his safety. Will's mother is a single parent. She struggles financially to provide for her son. She wants better for him. So, after some contemplation, she sends Will to live with his uncle, a judge, and his wife Vivian to live in Bel Air, California (36).

The sitcom connects black people in multiple ways. First, the geographic location of their home is located at 251 N Bristol Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90049. The home is currently appraised at \$10,594,600 (37). The medium value of a home in the community of Bel Air is \$4,750,000 (38). Compare this to the average home price in 2022 of \$449,000 (39). The physical structure of the home is remarkable, but the schools that Uncle Phil's children attend are even more impressive. Although Bel-Air Academy is a fictitious academy, the privilege that comes from private schools like it is real. Today, in Bel-Air, Harvard-Westlake is ranked as the #3 private school in California. It costs \$42,600 for one year of general admission. Nearby, you'll find The Winward School, ranked #15 in California, which comes in at a total cost of \$42,245, and The Oakwood School, ranked number #29 in California, has a tuition of \$44,310 a year (40). Bel Air Academy helps audiences unpack the benefits of elite institutions and the opportunities they can provide. More important than material possessions is the supportive family dynamic that Uncle Phil and Auntie Viv create within their home. At the beginning of



the series, Philip (played by James Avery) is a senior partner at Wynn and Meyer, a prosperous legal practice within the Bel Air neighborhood. In the show's third season, he is appointed to the Judiciary when his mentor, Carl Robertson, dies unexpectedly. The pathway to such an accomplishment isn't an easy one. To finish law school, an individual has to complete their undergraduate degree, take the LSAT, enroll in a law school, pass the bar and then serve as a lawyer before they're ever able to become a judge (41). Uncle Phil provides a type of exposure to a reality that is hard to grasp but not entirely out of reach.

Vivian Smith is played by Janet Hubert (seasons 1-3) and Daphne Maxwell (seasons 4-6). Vivian's character very much serves as a narrative of perseverance. Vivian is a high school dropout who once left home when she fell in love with a young man in high school. The man she ran off with abandoned her, and she quickly learned how cruel the world can be. Nevertheless, she collects herself, reassesses the situation, and begins to take a long but worthy journey of success. She earns her G.E.D., then a bachelor's, and later a P.H.D. Vivian's character represents what is possible when perseverance meets opportunity.

Their professions are critical to the messaging because they can garnish salaries well into the six figures. Such professions provide leverage, power, and impact. When Will and Carlton are in jail, he can get them out the same night because of his influence. They have several guests visiting their home, including Donald Trump.

This combined income allows the two to provide financial security that gives their children positive experiences and resources. They have more time to be parents because they have more control over their schedules and can take trips. In season two, episode 13, the family goes skiing at a lodge. In season three, episode eight, *Boyz in the Woods*, Uncle Phil takes his boys on a camping trip that nearly kills them due to a lack of preparation and foresight, but in the end, it helps them bond.

Unless you hit the lottery, you're going to work. The question is, how much is your time worth, and is someone willing to pay you your rate? Uncle Phil is a hard worker, but he is paid handsomely for his effort and doesn't need to work nights to make ends meet. He can invest his time into his children by not having to take on other jobs to provide them with every opportunity. He can be a father that is not only present but respected.

One of the most challenging episodes of the show is when Will's father comes to visit Bel Air. Although absent most of Will's life, Will still yearns for his father, Lue's, approval. In "Papa's Got a Brand New Excuse," Will's father makes an effort to get to know his son. When Lue tries to leave home without Will knowing, Phil confronts the man about his actions and the consequences that will surely follow. When faced with the reality that he could lose his son a second time, Lue falters and tells Will that he has to leave. Will becomes cold, unwilling to address his father with anything other than "Lue." Although Uncle Phil has done everything to support, love, and provide for Will, he can only hold him as he becomes inconsolable. *The Fresh Prince* is an example of black America being able to touch the "good life" without losing its identity. Each character is their person but is also black. They are both straightforward and have underlying examinations of systemic and social issues too. Most of all, the show represents a positive lens of the black family out of an impoverished state.

## The Cosby Show

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Although it's important to acknowledge the alleged acts of inappropriate behavior connected to Bill Cosby's past, I feel that *The Cosby Show* remains one of television's most positive portrayals of a black nuclear family to an audience that was black and white. The family is called the Huxtables. They live in New York. The parents are Cliff and Clair. They have five children: Theo, Rudy, Vanessa, Denise, and Sondra. The show's magic is its ability to cross cultural barriers and communicate to all people by creating an environment where it seems normal to see a thriving black family, as something other than a miracle (42).

Anson explains that "white families not only relate to the Huxtables, but they also do not have to feel guilty about America's past, since Cosby offers a clean slate through his program. By presenting a black family to which white viewers can relate, Bill Cosby appears to have united people through his sitcom, based on the show's ratings and overall popularity (43). Cord Jefferson of the New York Times explains, "after a day of fighting for your dignity, it can feel good to come home, sit on your couch and watch a black family not fighting for theirs. A normal family. A family who never talks about its race because it is unimportant compared to all its other admirable qualities. The unspoken dream made manifest by "The Cosby Show" was an America in which black people were allowed to live exactly as white people lived." (44). By creating a space where all parties are eager to invest their time and attention, you're able to show the best of humanity, in this case, black society, to a group who often finds themselves on the defensive end of things. For various reasons, the Huxtables were "safe," which can be good and bad.

Dr. Huxtable played the part of a successful obstetrician, and Claire was a partner at a law firm. These occupations are intentionally cast. They represent professions that garnish healthy salaries and are looked upon by society respectfully. According to a U.S. News report, the average obstetrician makes \$208,000 a year, while the median income of a law firm in America is \$238,754 (45). Both are positions of authority and influence.

Would the same dynamic occur if they had different occupations? Possibly. For instance, the show would often be compared to competing sitcoms such as *Roc*, which portrayed its lead character in a similar role as a figurehead. Still, *Roc*'s occupation as a trashman and the writer's willingness to speak on social issues may not have been as attractive to whiter audiences, limiting the rating ceiling, thus limiting its run time to three seasons compared to Cosby's eight. While *The Cosby Show* focuses on the opportunities that come from occupations, it does through the vehicle of college. Nearly every episode of *The Cosby Show* consistently plays on one theme: the importance of education. According to Anson Ferguson of Lehigh University, "This is how the Huxtable family attained their status in society. At some point, each of the Huxtable children faced a school-related dilemma concerning poor grades or underachievement in studies. In this area, punishment from Cliff and Clair was swiftest and harshest, proving that this particular household would have zero tolerance for deficiencies in academics. Unlike the subtle display of African American culture, education was featured prominently by Cosby throughout the program's existence on television." Mary Murphy, a columnist for T.V. Guide, expresses this sentiment: "Suddenly...you really got what they were trying to say in this show: 'I am educated, my wife is educated, and my children will be educated.'" (46). *The Cosby Show* is an American masterpiece. While at times it may have seemed out of touch for some, it did provide a place where viewers could relate to more similarities than differences.

## Black-ish

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*Blackish* recently ended its run as America's latest African American sitcom to present an America where black people can be exposed to the same realities and expectations of their white peers. Created by Kenya Barris, the sitcom ran for eight seasons. Andre, "Dre" Johnson is the protagonist in the sitcom. He is an advertising executive who went to Howard University. His wife, Rainbow, is an anesthesiologist who graduated from Brown University and went on to attend medical school. She and Andre have great careers that provide a good life for their family of five children. That said, they're constantly fighting the assimilation battle Homa Khaleeli of the Guardian explains, "Dre's central dilemma (which gives the show its name) mirrors Barris's anxieties: that by giving his children privileged lives that are so different from his own impoverished childhood, they might lose their cultural heritage" (47). Like the other sitcoms, Dre and Rainbow can provide a lifestyle that is foreign to many people. They're able to send their four older children to private schools. They take a trip to Disney World estimated to cost \$20,000. Their neighbors and classmates are predominantly white and have connected them to opportunities often reserved for other Caucasians (48). Salamishah Tillet of the New York Times provides some perspective when she says "a central dilemma is Dre's battle between his financial aspirations and racial authenticity, his moving-on-up and his loyalty to his working-class roots." (49). How does one navigate a white world while remaining black? This is the idea of Code-Switching and not sabotaging an opportunity because "Dre's parents worked hard to provide him with an education, Dre did not inherit wealth, making his upper-middle-class status both new and fragile. (50)

Unlike *The Cosby Show* and *Fresh Prince*, *Blackish* takes on the issues of race, privilege, and identity more so than any of the other sitcoms within the unit. Social struggles and conversations are displayed on *Blackish* more than in any other sitcom presented in this unit. The producers and writers of the show made sure to tackle one social issue each week, a gamble when it comes to possibly turning off fans who are reluctant to favor one political party over another and simply watching the show for its comedic genius.

## Activities

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### **Gordon Parks: The What, Why, and How of Socially Conscious Images**

Students will take a virtual tour of the Gordon Parks photography archive presented by the Gordon Parks Foundation. Their assignment is to select three images that speak to them. They should be able to answer the following three questions: what is in the image and what is it communicating? Why is the image speaking to them personally? How can this image be used to ignite social and economic change in America?

### **Titus Kaphar: Pulling the Curtain Back on American History:**

Students should find a portrait of an American President or other political figure. Next, they should learn about their history and how the political policies and the legislation they pushed impacted people of color. Students should pay close attention to how their policies impacted African Americans/ marginalized peoples' financial situations and how those policies impacted them in the justice system, the economic system, and the judicial system. The instructor should provide history books and technology to help the students find resources highlighting these figures. They should also be ready with markers, paint, crayons, coloring pencils, and poster

paper/white canvas paper. The main goal is for the students to use their imagination and create an artistic depiction of their understanding of the historical reality and its decisions and consequences.

### **Connecting Illustrations to the Overarching Idea of America and the Good Life**

Close read article the entitled, "The Haunt of One Yet Faintly Present: Noah Davis, Still at Home." After it's finished, ask the class what they learned from the reading and the art on display. What words/sentences stand out to you and how does what is written in the article help to illustrate the illustrations present? How do the images connect to the different works of art both on the stage and screen? How can we connect some of the overarching ideas in the Fresh Prince and Blackish to the artistic themes found within the article? Once students share out ideas as a class, the next step is to get students to communicate what they've learned in a free write or journalistic assignment. (51)

### **The Soundtrack of Economic Empowerment**

One of the best media for connecting with my students is using the medium of music as a device to get them thinking. The following are a few songs explaining themes related to financial independence and the freedom that comes from an understanding of financial literacy, ownership, maturity, and working toward a goal.

#### **Pharrell "Entrepreneurship"**

In this song, Pharrell speaks to the younger generation, pushing them to take chances and to turn away from depending on a system that doesn't see them as a priority. The line when "Jack gets paid, do you?" makes the listener question who is getting paid and how much. This is a wise lesson because it shows a monetary imbalance in compensation. To examine another line from the song, we have "Forever one Gucci, support to Fubu's?" Why? Fubu represents a black-owned company. The idea of circulating money in the community isn't foreign, but it needs to be practiced more often.

Furthermore, "If you can't buy the building, at least stock the shelf (Word). Then keep on stackin' 'til you stockin' for yourself, uh" explains to the student that you may not necessarily be able to buy an entire company by yourself, but instead, buy pieces of it through the stock market and watch as your investments grow along with your opportunities." (52)

#### **Jay-Z and Nas on 'Sorry Not Sorry' offer valuable lessons on Financial Literacy**

"Sorry, Not Sorry" is a collaboration between Jay-Z and Nas. Once sworn enemies, the two have matured with age and worked on several projects. Now older, their collaboration "Sorry not Sorry" is a tool to connect young people to think about business, entrepreneurship, and financial independence. Nas begins the song, "Hear ye, hear ye, only kings stand near me. Silicon Valley money mixed with Henny, that's a Fendi." Here, he explains the importance of solid circles. Young people should understand the company they keep plays a part in their future. Nas and Jay Z are perfect examples of surrounding yourself with people who will make you better. Both are millionaires, have several businesses, and are family men too. The reference to Silicon Valley shows their understanding of innovation as Silicon Valley is one of the premier locations for tech in America, according to the U.S. today. (53)

Nas continues to say "Winner in life, f\*\*\* a coin toss I'm coin-based, basically cryptocurrency Scarface." Here, he shows an ability to invest and take calculated chances. At the same time, this unit won't claim that crypto is a sound investment. We must take educated chances when investing and trying to grow one's portfolio.

## **Financial Freedom in 4:44**

In the song "The Story of O.J.," Jay Z speaks to the idea of ownership vs. renting when he says, "Please don't die over the neighborhood. That your Mama renting, Take your drug money and buy the community. That's how you rinse it."

Another line speaks to the mistakes youth make with money and how silly one can look when looking back on past decisions: "I bought every V12 engine. I wish I could take it back to the beginning. I could have bought a place in Dumbo before it was Dumbo. For like 2 million. That same building today is worth 25 million. Guess how I'm feeling?" Here, Jay Z talks about a decision he made at a younger age buying materialistic things when he could have invested in something that would grow in value. Poor spending habits are common mistakes for people who are just coming into money, but it's one that his fans should be mindful of so that they don't make the same early mistakes. One of the most telling lines in the song is "Financial Freedom our only hope, stop living rich and dying broke."

## **Teaching Strategies**

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### **Adapting to learning styles/multiple intelligences**

The cognitive theory of multiple intelligences posits that students learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways, including various intelligence, such as musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. As a cognitive theory, learning styles/multiple intelligences is controversial. Still, it has proved helpful to classroom teachers in fostering different interests, providing variety and differentiation in instruction, and developing the whole child (54).

### **Meta-Cognition**

When studying this unit, it is a good idea for teachers to have students think about actions and consequences. According to Sean Killen from the University of Nebraska, when using meta-cognition, your students may think about what strategies they could use before choosing one. Students may think about how effective their choice was (after reflecting on their success or lack thereof) before continuing with or changing their chosen strategy. (55)

### **Class Discussions**

According to Yale University, class discussions can be utilized in seminars and lectures. This can be used in several ways, and the instructor can tailor the discussion to fit the class's objectives—questions, topics, and art. Issues and questions should be analyzed differently by different people, which not only demands but encourages diversity in answers and ideas. This flexibility stems largely from grounding in Vygotskyian social learning theory, which emphasizes knowledge and conceptual gain through peer-to-peer dialogue.

### **Art Integration**

Arts integration focuses on weaving the arts and standard curricula together to make a stronger, deeper, and

more lasting experience for students. Learning is a two-way street with general teachers infusing the arts into their classrooms and arts teachers supporting general classroom curricula. The key is collaboration, planning, and flexibility. The results are increased student motivation, attendance, and test scores! (56)

## Appendix on Implementing District Standards

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### CC.SS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5

Analyze how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

### CC.SS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

### CC.SS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

### CC.SS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

### CC.SS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

### CC.SS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1.B

Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant data and evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claim(s) and counterclaims in a discipline-appropriate form anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.

### CC.SS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience.

### CC.SS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.



#### PA Standard - 9.2.12.D

Analyze a work of art from its historical and cultural perspective.

#### PA Standard - 9.2.12.E

Analyze how historical events and culture impact forms, techniques and purposes of works in the arts (e.g., Gilbert and Sullivan operettas)

#### PA Standard - 9.2.12.K

Identify, explain and analyze traditions as they relate to works in the arts (e.g., storytelling – plays, oral histories- poetry, work songs- blue grass).

#### PA Standard - 9.3.12.D

Analyze and interpret works in the arts and humanities from different societies using culturally specific vocabulary of critical response.

#### PA Standard - 9.3.12.E

Examine and evaluate various types of critical analysis of works in the arts and humanities.

- Contextual criticism
- Formal criticism
- Intuitive criticism

#### PA Standard - 9.4.12.C

Compare and contrast the attributes of various audiences' environment

#### PA Standard - 9.4.12.D

Analyze and interpret a philosophical position identified in works in the arts and humanities

## Art and Economic Activities

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### **"You Can Find Me In Club"- The Financial Book Club**

The instructor should try to read a few financial literacy texts before presenting this information to their students. Once they've had a few under their belt, the teacher should pick two-three books and order the year prior to teaching the lesson so they're readily available. If they've been able to partner with a university, philanthropic organization, or PTA, or if their building has the funds to do it, they should order copies of one or two books on financial literacy for students to study and keep. The students should close read chapters at home, understanding that they'll be tested, and the class will discuss the information when they return to school the following day.

The instructor will have the choice between the following text: "Your Money or your life," "Why Didn't They Teach Me This in School," and "The Simple Path to Wealth." Also, "Psychology and Money;" " " Broke Millennial;" "What You Should have Learned About Money But Never Did;" The Early Investor;" and "I Want More Pizza."

### **Understanding the Psychological and Social Dilemmas within "Raisin in the Sun"**

As a class, students will close read the play "Raisin in the Sun." Before opening the book, the teacher will provide context regarding the characters. As the class begins to read the stage play, students should compare and contrast many of the reoccurring economic ideas within the stage play and society today. Students will take notes and put them in separate categories. They should have peer-to-peer conversations that module accountable talk. Although every teacher is free to create the overarching ideas within these thinktanks, examples could be (Economics, Opportunity, Dreams, and Psychology)

Once the class has finished the reading, they'll have the chance to answer open-ended document-based questions or a free write that provides insight on how economics is attached to psychology, opportunity, struggle, mental health, and witnesses show up in the play.

### **Warren Buffett & Jay - Z - Billionaire Investing Secrets (Interview with Forbes)**

Students will watch and analyze conversations with two billionaires from very different backgrounds. Students should A) write down five lessons each individual learned growing up, B) Five decisions and the consequences of those decisions, C) Five economic strategies that each has used to build their portfolio and overall income, D) Two mistakes the individuals made growing up E) How they've used their platform and economic power to create opportunities for others. The teacher can then create a prompt of their choosing that encourages the students to use the evidence they've collected to answer a rigorous question summarizing the learning that has taken place.

### **The Implicit/Explicit Economic Implications of Kanye West First Three Albums:**

Kanye West's earlier albums "College Dropout," "Late Registration," and "Graduation" have a theme of transition in each one and how that transition plays out through his lyrics. Students will analyze the following songs "All Falls Down;" "Graduation Day;" "School Spirit1 and 2;" "Through the Wire;" "Heard 'Em Say;" "Touch the Sky;" "Hey Mama" "Good Morning;" "Cant' tell me Nothing;" and "The Good Life."

Students will analyze these songs in and out of the classroom, and they should expect to share out some of the common themes around wealth, struggle, income, advancement, and the relevance/worth of a college degree. Once they've collected their ideas and feedback, they should turn and talk to their elbow partner about what they learned. A collective classroom conversation will follow. Throughout this activity students should be recognizing similarities and differences picked up from their partners examination of the lyrics, they should also activate prior knowledge taken from the text and see where it reveals itself within the music.

### **Show and Tell: Showcasing and Artists and their Art**

Students should bring one artist that speaks to struggle, uplift, and income. What messages does that artist communicate about financial literacy through their Art?

### **One Entrepreneur or Minority Owned Business Report**

Students will write a one-page paper about a minority Entrepreneur they've learned about on their own. Their

report should answer what the person does, why that person is an inspiration to them, and how they went about building their business.

### **Ted Talk on Finance: One Pager**

Students will have a series of homework assignments where they will listen to TedTalks about upward mobility, savings, investments, and entrepreneurship. They will use their mobile devices at home and send feedback to the class, recalling four things they learned, three strategies they took away, and one question they'd like to ask the speaker.

### **The Philanthropic Project**

Students will use their technology to look up two minority philanthropists using their technology. One should be local, and one should be out of the state where they currently reside. They should answer the following questions. 1) How did that person build their business? 2) How do they use their power/platform to give back to others? To take thing a step further, students can get a hands-on learning experience by interning in a philanthropic organization of their choosing to see how they are organized, managed and how exactly they serve people in the surrounding community.

### **Drawing Your Financial and Life Goals and plan to achieve them**

In this project-based activity, students will create a roadmap regarding their financial plan over the next five years. This drawing/ artistic illustration explains to the viewer how they plan to move forward with an entrepreneurial/financially literate mindset. Students draw, paint, sculpt, etc., to communicate their path. Once completed, they'll share their Art with the class and explain how it connects to the overarching ideas and goals of the unit.

### **When Your Budget Meets Your Life**

This activity is a game-based learning platform that starts with the instructor creating flashcards that present economic situations. The students will break up into small groups no larger than three. Each group will be given fake money. They'll then create a budget, picking things to prioritize while having a savings account. The flashcards with scenarios will be pulled from the center of the class; some will help students build wealth, while others will ask them to make tough choices. Students will work together to figure out how to best deal with the situations as they arise and see how unexpected expenses can change things quickly. Some students will flourish while others will become bankrupt, but everyone should learn. Throughout the process students should be using reciprocal questioning techniques to learn from one another and the financial wins and loses they incur.

### **A Different World and HBCU Story**

Students will watch "UNSUNG"-A different world, connecting them to the HBCU series from the early 90s. As they watch the documentary, they should note how the show represents inspiration, upward mobility, educational investment, black pride, and economics. Once the documentary ends, students should use their technology to research an HBCU of their choice. Throughout this lesson they should activate their prior knowledge when it comes to investing, supply and demand, and calculated decision making.

## The Tale of Two Dads and The Fresh Prince

Students will watch the clip from The Fresh Prince's "Papa's Got a Brand New Excuse" the episode is emotional, and students should ask themselves how economics connects with Will's dad and Uncle Phil. How can both men provide different lifestyles for their families due to their economic situations? How do their professional lives play a part in this equation? Should this be an excuse for lack of accountability regarding parenting? How does financial planning come into play with both situations? How does empathy?

### Creating a Financial Comic Strip

Students will use their artistic minds to create a comic strip that speaks to actions and consequences regarding money. They can illustrate investing, savings, financial planning, excess spending, frugality, etc. (57)

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