



Learning from the Past, Creating Our Future: Imagining a Modern Freedom School

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Anchored in the history of racial segregation, this unit aims to teach students about the causes and consequences of the Freedom Summer of 1964. After analyzing the Freedom Schools that were established by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to help Black Mississippians exercise their right to vote, students will explore the history of segregation in Richmond, Virginia and determine similarities and differences between the history of those two places. From there, students will identify major issues facing their communities today and design their own version of a Freedom School within the modern context. This unit relies on historical analysis to contextualize the Freedom Schools within the Civil Rights Movement, but it becomes interdisciplinary as students are encouraged to focus on any modern problem that speaks to their passions and to be creative in designing a lesson to teach the class.

Introduction and Rationale

A 20-minute drive through some of the most popular areas of Richmond, Virginia might take you down Arthur Ashe Boulevard (named after the African American tennis legend and civil rights activist),¹ past Maggie L. Walker Governor's School (named after the first African American woman bank president),² through Virginia Union University (home of the Richmond 34, a group of HBCU students credited with jumpstarting the desegregation movement in the city),³ and eventually to the Shockoe Bottom African Burial Grounds, where the bodies of free and enslaved Black people lay only a few feet below the surface.⁴ In my first two years teaching in Richmond Public Schools, I found myself wondering how students can live in a city rich with Black history and still be so uninterested in the subject. I was surprised to find that they believe African American Studies has no relevance to their modern lives.

By the time they reach high school, most Richmond students already have a general understanding of the causes, effects, and major events of the Civil Rights Movement. My students are socially conscious, and they have near-instant access to discourse about geo-political events at their fingertips. They are "plugged in" and quick to state an opinion, yet they are not interested in being part of the political process in any meaningful way. Most of them fall into one of two categories: those who actively reject anything political because they

want to be seen as “nonchalant” and those who are already so jaded that they think political engagement is a waste of time. As someone who was a very politically active teenager (I was in 8th grade in 2008, and as president and one of three students in our school’s Young Democrats club, canvassed for Barack Obama’s first presidential campaign.), it has been extremely upsetting to hear how disempowered my students feel.

I believe that by framing our study of the Civil Rights Movement through the eyes of the young people who were considered the rabble-rousers of the time, my students will see just how radical those organizers were and they will be more invested in learning about their work. But I want to take it a step further. I want to guide students through some of the same thought-processes that led those young people to take the actions that they did 60 years ago.

My curriculum unit will be focused on the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, especially the Freedom Schools that were established to help Black Mississippians become full participants of their political process. We will begin with learning about the circumstances in Mississippi that led to the Freedom Summer. Then, we will do a study of some of the issues that students have seen in their own communities and ultimately create a plan of action to combat those issues. I hope that through the process of developing their own modern version of a Richmond Freedom School, the deeper lessons about justice and civic responsibility will stick with them and spark their political fire. Hopefully, these will be lessons that students can hold on to as they grow into civic-minded adults.

School Profile

Richmond Community High School (RCHS) is an alternative public high school in the Richmond Public Schools District in Virginia. It is a selective-admissions college preparatory school, with a mission of helping academically gifted students from disadvantaged backgrounds reach their potential. RCHS admits students from all middle schools in the district as well as a select number of 10th grade transfer students. The demographics of RCHS reflect those of Richmond Public Schools with a racially diverse student body of mostly African American and Latinx students, several of whom come from homes where Spanish is the primary language. Each year, RCHS serves approximately 250 students in grades 9-12. Students have the opportunity to complete CTE programs through the Richmond Technical Center or to earn an associates degree from Reynolds Community College through their Early College Academy. RCHS has a 100% graduation rate, and all students graduate with an Advanced Studies Diploma.

My African American Studies class is primarily composed of 9th and 10th grade students who have not taken a U.S. History course since 6th grade. Historically, these students are strong readers and weak writers. They are good at remembering content and understanding broad concepts, but they struggle to interpret primary sources, make original arguments, and communicate those ideas effectively. I would like to use my curriculum unit as an opportunity for them to practice those skills, while creating something meaningful to them that they can bring back to their communities.

I will be using this unit in my general African American Studies class, but it can easily be applied to AP African American History, U.S. History, or Public Speaking courses.

Background Knowledge and Content

For the modern Freedom School project to be effective, students first need a basic understanding of the major events leading to the 1964 Freedom Summer. Students will need to be able to connect the idea of race as a social construct, the long history of legal fights against racial discrimination, and the effects of segregation on African Americans to the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). From there, we will zoom in on Mississippi, where the Freedom Summer happened, and Virginia, where we will look for the roots of major issues in our own city.

The story of segregation must begin in 1619 with the first documented case of Africans being brought to what would become Virginia. Soon after those “20 and odd Negroes” landed at Point Comfort,⁵ Europeans began outlining the social and legal mechanics of race and racial stratification for the purpose of delineating labor roles in the colony. “Race” became a tool used specifically to outline differences between the quickly growing populations of forced and coerced workers, especially indentured servants, who were contracted laborers that worked for a set period of time as punishment for a crime or to pay off a debt, and enslaved people, who were kidnapped laborers that worked for the rest of their lives.

The case of mixed-race laborer Elizabeth Key was essential in establishing legal definitions of race in the early Virginia colony. Key was the daughter of an African woman who had been impregnated by an English planter who claimed ownership of both women. Ownership of Key was transferred to another planter in 1636 with an agreement stating that she would work for nine years, and then be freed. When Key’s father died, the agreement was disregarded and she ended up working for a total of twenty years. In 1656, Key attempted to sue for her freedom under two English common law principles: 1) Englishmen could not enslave fellow Christians, and 2) the doctrine of *partus sequitur patrem*, which established that a child’s status was determined by that of the father.⁶ Since Key had been baptized in the Church of England and her father was a free Englishman, her case should have been an easy slam dunk victory.

Key was successful in arguing for her freedom, but the long-term result ultimately led to new laws around who could and could not claim whiteness and eventually the codification of racial slavery. Christianity was removed as a route to freedom and in 1662, the Virginia General Assembly passed a new law establishing the doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem*, which tied the status of newborn children to that of the mother.⁷ This effectively laid the foundation for the system of chattel slavery that would be the cornerstone of the economy of the American South until the end of the Civil War and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865.

In 1890, decades after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery (except as punishment for a crime) and the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed equal protection under the law, the state of Louisiana enacted the Separate Car Act. The Separate Car Act required racially segregated accommodations on railways. The Committee of Citizens, a Black activist group in New Orleans created a plan to legally challenge the statute in 1892. The group chose Homer Plessy, a man who was only one-eighth Black but was considered Definitely Not White according to the One Drop Rule, to test the bounds of the law by sitting in the Whites Only train car. Plessy was arrested, and his case was eventually brought to the Supreme Court.⁸

The decision in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1894) led to a phrase that would define the next 60 years of American society, “separate but equal.” More specifically, the Court’s majority opinion upheld Louisiana’s law that permitted “equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races.”⁹ This is the verdict that

allowed for racial segregation in *all* public accommodations including but not limited to trains and buses, hospitals, parks, beaches, restaurants, theaters, water fountains, and most relevant to this project, schools.

The *Plessy* ruling stood strong until the 1950s, when the NAACP legal team put into action a plan that was decades in the making. In 1952, the NAACP brought 5 separate cases about school segregation from different parts of the nation: South Carolina, Virginia, Kansas, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. A year later, all those lawsuits were combined in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

When Oliver Brown, a Black man who lived in an integrated neighborhood in Topeka, Kansas, attempted to enroll his daughter, Linda Brown, in the local school, he was denied. Brown was told that Black students were not allowed in the school and that segregation was permitted according to state law. Rather than attending the school that was in her neighborhood, Brown had to commute 2 hours to a Black school. The lawyers from the NAACP took on Brown's case, and he became the lead plaintiff in the case along with 12 other parents of children who were denied entry to school on the grounds of race.¹⁰

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that public school segregation was a violation of the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. This ruling effectively overturned the *Plessy* decision of 1896. Naturally, the ruling was met with resistance from states, especially in the South, that had considered racial segregation as a cornerstone of their society. Little more than a year later, in a case now known as *Brown II*, the Supreme Court doubled down on its previous opinion and added that states must enact desegregation plans "with all deliberate speed."

Because there had been numerous other similar cases tried in lower-level courts, the *Brown* decision was highly anticipated by both legislators and laypeople. Whichever way the Court went, the effects on American society would be monumental. In anticipation of the end of federal protections for segregation, Mississippi policymakers pushed for the practice of "equalization," as in "separate but equal" accommodations.¹¹ However, segregated schools in Mississippi were certainly not equal. Despite the mandates passed down in *Brown* and *Brown II*, Southern governments continued to find ways to maintain the segregation status quo. Tying voting rights to race and educational access became an important method of control in states like Mississippi.

The first step to becoming a voter in Mississippi was registering with the local board of elections, which required people to go into town and pass a literacy test that was administered by the local registrar. Because there was no oversight, the registrar of each town had the power to administer the test however they deemed appropriate, which often resulted in Black people being given ridiculously difficult questions. Black residents from Mississippi also describe intimidation tactics that were used such as having the sheriff present while they were taking the test or the registrar noting that their white employers would be upset to hear that they were trying to vote.¹² Black people had to be willing to risk their livelihoods and their lives to exercise a right that was constitutionally protected by the Fifteenth Amendment. When Bob Moses and the Freedom Summer organizers came to town in 1964, ten years after *Brown*, one of their primary goals was to prepare students for the literacy test and get adults registered.¹³ The work of the Freedom Summer was part of a longer story of grassroots organizing that connected activists across generations and beyond state lines.

On February 1, 1960, after months of planning and coordinating with the women of Bennett College, four Black students from North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University (NCA&T), a historically Black college in Greensboro, North Carolina implemented a nonviolent strategy that would change the course of American history and politics.¹⁴ They sat down, peacefully and respectfully, at the segregated lunch counter at

Woolworth's department store, and ultimately, started a movement. The sit-in strategy, which was successful not only in desegregating Woolworth's lunch counter but also several other public accommodations in Greensboro, eventually spread across the nation. It became clear that there was a need for an organizational structure and some money to keep the work sustainable, so with the help of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) led by Dr. Martin Luther King and the support of veteran organizers like Ella Baker, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was founded on the campus of Shaw University in April 1960.¹⁵

Bob Moses was a student from New York who joined SNCC after learning of the sit-ins, and in the summer of 1960, he went to Mississippi, where he discovered how dire the situation was for Black people in the state.¹⁶ While there was a large Black population in Mississippi, most of whom were poor sharecroppers and manual or domestic laborers, they held almost no political power because very few of them were registered voters. Black Mississippians were afraid to even express a desire to register because they knew that they or their families would likely become victims of violent resistance.¹⁷ Mississippi's economy and social structure, like those of other Southern states, depended on maintaining a Black underclass that was poor, uneducated, and toiling for the benefit of white society. When Moses saw the reality of Black life in Mississippi, increasing voter registration became the goal at the center of his work with SNCC for the next several years.

After trying to register Black voters and being met with extreme backlash, Bob Moses and other civil rights organizers conceived of the Freedom Summer as a way to bring more attention to what was happening in Mississippi. The idea was that they would bring college students from around the country, many of whom were white, to Mississippi in the summer of 1964 as volunteers in the voter registration effort.¹⁸ Freedom Schools were a critical part of the Freedom Summer. Students in Freedom Schools would be trained to become local civil rights leaders and political organizers. The implementation of the alternative school model was especially radical at this time in Mississippi because the segregated schools were providing an entirely inadequate education to Black students. Further, many of those students had to find ways to balance school with their responsibilities to their families and the agricultural labor that was expected of them. The Freedom Schools organizers were detailed in their planning and considered the specific needs of those communities as they created something that could be practically implemented.¹⁹

The SNCC schools that were started in the Mississippi summer of 1964 were revolutionary because of the extreme context in which they were started, but the Freedom School model was not unique to that specific time and place. On June 17, 1963, part of the "Stay Out for Freedom Day" boycott, approximately 3500 students from Boston public schools chose to forgo their typical school classes and attend lessons in other public places in the community.²⁰ These freedom schools were part of a wave of school boycotts throughout the 1960s that occurred in multiple other cities around the United States like Chicago and New York City. The experiences of students in these urban schools were very different from those of the students in Mississippi, but they all expressed a similar concern with the quality of education they received compared to their white counterparts. Richmond Public Schools also has its own set of unique characteristics, but because the city falls somewhere in between the size of large metropolitan areas like New York City and rural towns of Mississippi, it is helpful to consider the entire spectrum of tactics.

Despite major differences in local context and access to resources, freedom schools of the 1960s were united in their goals and outcomes. Across the board, freedom schools aimed to cultivate youth leadership and guide students to becoming agents for social change.²¹ The students who attended the schools were aware of the effort to keep them socially and politically ignorant through subpar education. They attended these schools with a thirst to learn and an eagerness to embrace the kinds of lessons that were being offered to them. For

many of them, it was the first time they had been exposed to Black history or Black literature, and their time in the freedom schools fundamentally changed their perspectives of themselves and their place in world. It is not a surprise that many of the students who attended freedom schools ended up joining the freedom movement as adults.²²

Richmond Specifics

Through a combination of “massive resistance” at the state level and “passive resistance” at the city level, segregation in Richmond public schools continued for at least a generation after *Brown*.²³ In 1956, Virginia established the Pupil Placement Board with the purpose of determining where students would be assigned to attend school and where they would be allowed to transfer, which were responsibilities that were previously held at the local level.²⁴ Richmond maintained a segregated school system long after federal desegregation by exploiting this loophole. While school systems were legally obligated to take steps toward integration, RPS operated under a policy of tokenism, in which a few Black students might be approved to attend white schools, which could then be called “integrated” in the eyes of the law. In reality, an RPS directory from 1963 still listed “White Schools” and “Negro Schools” separately nine years after *Brown*, and most Black children continued to attend inferior segregated schools throughout the 1960s, either because their applications to white schools were denied by the Pupil Placement Board or because they chose not to endure the psychological trauma of being one of the few to cross the color line.²⁵ In fact, mortgage lenders as early as 1937 had drawn literal lines around the various neighborhoods on maps of Richmond that left deep scars of discrimination on the city and created an environment where school segregation could thrive.

During the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) to prevent foreclosures by assessing the risk of lending in American cities.²⁶ Neighborhoods that had predominantly Black, Jewish, or immigrant populations received the lowest grades and were “redlined”, which meant they were labeled risky for lenders.²⁷ The practice of redlining continued until the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968, but by then, the damage was done.²⁸ As Richmond neighborhoods became more segregated and city planners continued to neglect the infrastructure needs of predominately Black areas, the few white people who already lived in those places started leave the city center for what they believed would be better opportunities in the suburbs in a process known as “white flight.”²⁹ Today, areas that had been redlined nearly a century ago, such Richmond’s Southside and East End, have higher rates of asthma, lower life expectancy at birth, and less tree cover, which all contribute to a lower standard of living compared to other parts of the city.³⁰ Three of the four lowest ranked middle schools in the district are in these areas: Lucille M. Brown and River City Middle Schools in Southside and Martin Luther King Middle School in the East End.³¹ It is difficult to be successful in school when you live in an area that is literally detrimental to your health.

The long history of discriminatory housing practices within the city of Richmond has been useful in perpetuating *de facto* segregation in the schools. Schools in inner city neighborhoods had less access to funding for facility maintenance, teacher salaries, and up-to-date materials, so the Black students who lived in those zones received a substandard education simply because of their address.³² However, the fact that even students of different races who lived next door to each other were assigned to different schools by the 1960s Pupil Placement Board shows that segregation in school ultimately boiled down to the issue of race.³³ Even in neighborhoods in Black-white border areas, when previously all-white schools admitted Black students, they might become resegregated as white families chose to move their children from the newly integrated school to a different school altogether.³⁴ By the end of the 60s, it had become clear that many Southern school

systems, like that in Richmond, were going to continue looking for ways to slow down desegregation, so in the 70s, it was time to try a new strategy: busing.

Similar to RPS, the schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg in North Carolina had remained racially segregated throughout the 60s as white flight and resegregation left the urban Charlotte schools predominantly Black and the suburban Mecklenburg County schools predominately white. In the landmark case *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that busing, or using public transportation to ensure students could attend schools outside of their neighborhoods, was a viable method to enforce desegregation.³⁵ Richmond District Court Judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr., had previously proposed a similar plan that involved merging Richmond city schools with those in the surrounding suburban counties of Henrico and Chesterfield and busing students to schools within those regions.³⁶ Merhige received a lot of backlash, and the Supreme Court ultimately refused to uphold his decision leaving Richmond Public Schools effectively unchanged through the 70s.³⁷ Busing was largely unsuccessful, but proponents of desegregation continued to experiment with new strategies to provide access to high quality education for all Richmond students.

Richmond Community High School was established in 1977 amidst a crisis in Richmond Public Schools when white flight led to loss of public revenue and a subsequent decline in the quality of education that city schools could reasonably provide. This led to not only white families, but also middle class and wealthy Black families relocating to private and suburban schools in the 1970s and 1980s, which further highlighted the problems within RPS schools in the such as disproportionate failure, dropout, and expulsion rates.³⁸ Part of what made Community a success was its public-private funding model that was established at its founding when businessman Andrew Asch, educator Dr. Margaret Dabney, and superintendent Dr. Richard Hunter combined their powers and experience to form the school. From the beginning, Community was created as a place that would use its access to funds to "[focus] especially on minority students and those from low-income backgrounds."³⁹ The founders recognized that there were plenty of talented students within those communities who would thrive if they were given the chance.

The idea of "community" was ingrained in the school from the beginning. When it was first established by the Richmond school board, the school was originally called the Secondary School Experiential Learning Community. It was the first class of students who decided on the name Richmond Community High School and chose the Pharaoh as the mascot and the pyramid as the logo because of the symbolic significance of the imagery.⁴⁰ One other aspect of community that has endured the school's fifty-year history is the minimester tradition, in which each class of students spends an extended period of time bonding and learning on an off-site field trip. The freshman minimester camping trip is a particularly important part of becoming a Pharaoh. During that trip students and teacher chaperones spend a week conducting ecological studies, exploring the history of the region, and camping in the rural Eastern Shore of Maryland. A critical modern aspect of the trip is that students are not allowed to bring electronic devices, especially cell phones. Students who took that trip many decades ago have described it as an important developmental moment for them since for many of them, it was their first time living outside of an urban environment and being away from their families for so long.⁴¹ I have personally seen the impact of that trip on my own students. It is one thing that makes Community unique.

Though Community was not called a "freedom school," it was clearly an extension of that legacy. The vision that the founders of Community had in 1977 Richmond is similar to the one that Bob Moses had in 1964 Mississippi. Today, students are still affected by the legacy of segregation. A key outlier in this pattern is

Richmond Community High School, which has a student body that is 55.9% Black and 40.3% “economically disadvantaged” yet is consistently ranked a top school not only in RPS but in the entire state of Virginia.⁴² Community has access to privilege that is not accessible to most public schools, so it is our responsibility to use that power for good. Yet, in my time as a teacher at Community, I have noticed increasing levels of apathy and disengagement among my students. In 2026, as we teach in an era of heightened political polarization, increased misinformation, and overt racism and xenophobia, it is important to draw on the lessons of those who came before us and continue to do the work.

Bob Moses continued working for equity in education through the end of his life. He said of the importance of student agency, “[Today’s youth], like Mrs. Hamer, Mrs. Devine, E.W. Steptoe, and others who changed the political face of Mississippi in the 1960s, have to demand what everyone says they don’t want.”⁴³ The goal in my unit is to help students practice critical thinking and find meaningful ways to exercise their political power. By exposing students to the work of Freedom Summer volunteers, I hope to show students that they too have the power to change their future. I want them to take charge of their education and find concrete ways to express their wants and needs as budding leaders in the community. The student-centered Freedom School model, which relies on interdisciplinary studies, emotional awareness, and questioning the status quo, can help today’s youth discover their own power. My students deserve that kind of education, and I want them to demand it for themselves.

Teaching Strategies

Guiding Questions

A daily Guiding Question is the touchstone for each lesson. The guiding question should be open-ended and shared with students at the beginning of the class. By the end of the class, students should have multiple answers to the question. You may have students answer this question at the end of the lesson as a formative assessment.

Freedom School Relaxation Strategies

Each day during this unit should incorporate one of the “relaxation activities” that were used in the Freedom Schools to build verbal skills. There are multiple benefits to this. First, it is an easy way to have students directly experience some of the methods that were used in the Freedom School and can help give students a clearer understanding of what it may have been like to be enrolled in one. Participating in those activities will give students more material to draw upon when they are developing the mini-lesson for their final project. Additionally, the activities were designed to help students build skills that were determined to be necessary for political participation such as reading/writing, observation, and oral communication. Finally, the activities are simply fun. They are called “relaxation activities” for a reason and using them serve the same purpose today as they did in the original Freedom Schools: they help build student-to-student and teacher-to-student relationships and create a more open classroom environment.

Graphic Organizers

Since this unit is content-heavy, graphic organizers should be used to help students process their learning and

keep track of information. Students will keep a unit journal that houses all this information so they can reference when creating their mini-lessons. The KWL and Triple-T charts will be particularly helpful.

KWL

KWL stands for Know, Want to Know, and Learned. The goal is for students to identify prior knowledge and generate some questions about the topic before they are presented with any new information. In addition to being a good way to slowly introduce a new topic, the KWL chart empowers students by demonstrating the value of their own knowledge and experience rather than treating them as empty vessels to receive information.

Completing the Learned section helps review and reinforce main takeaways from the unit. It is important to give students this space to reframe information in their own words as this acts as a low-stakes opportunity to check for understanding. This final section of the KWL chart can be updated throughout the unit or at the end of it based on teacher preference.

Triple-T Chart

The Triple-T Chart is a three-column chart that is used to compare two subjects. The first and last columns are labeled with the two subjects, and the middle column should list specific concepts to be compared. Because the chart is organized both horizontally and vertically, it acts like an analog spreadsheet that students can easily refer to throughout the unit.

Primary Source Analysis

In the study of history, it is always important to use primary source material as often as possible. In studying recent history, it is especially important to lean on the experiences of the people who lived through it to avoid conflating the past with the perspectives of the present. Primary source material can be written (e.g. books, poems, newspaper or magazine articles, diary entries), visual (e.g. film or video clips, art pieces, textiles and clothing), audio (e.g. songs, oral histories, speeches), or anything else that can be found from the time. The faces and voices of real people from the past bring history to life for students.

For analysis, it is critical that students understand the difference between objectivity and subjectivity. Both are useful in primary source analysis. I like to use the Primary Source Analysis Tool from the Library of Congress, which encourages students to observe, reflect, and question.⁴⁴ In the observe section, students should practice objectivity by looking for facts from the source such as direct quotes in interviews or speeches or colors and materials in art or textiles. In the reflection section, students will incorporate their own opinions by explaining what the source made them think or feel. From there, students should formulate several questions about the source. The answers to those questions can then become the basis of their original analysis of the source.

CER Framework

The Claim-Evidence-Reasoning framework is used to help students improve the structure of their argumentative writing. The first step is for students to make a specific claim in response to the prompt. For our project, student claims should explain what issue they identified in their communities that necessitates a Freedom School lesson. For the evidence piece, students should reference the research that they have done to help them determine that there is truly a need for education around their topic. Evidence could include

information from news articles, personal experiences, or historical research. Finally, students need to use reasoning to connect the evidence to their claim. The CER framework is helpful because it requires students to take a stance and explain their thinking rather than simply listing information.

CRAAP Test

CRAAP is an acronym used to help students evaluate the credibility of secondary sources. C is for currency: students should check the date of the source to ensure the information is current. R is for relevancy: students should make sure whatever source they are looking at is relevant to the topic they are researching. A is for authority: students should consider the trustworthiness of the author and publisher of the source. A is also for accuracy: students should cross-check the information in the source with other sources and against their own knowledge. P is for purpose: students need to identify the author's purpose for creating the source and be aware of potential biases.

Think-Pair-Share

Give students time to think independently about a question, talk about their answers with a neighbor, then share out with the whole class. This strategy helps students build confidence in discussion and gives quieter students a way to participate without putting them on the spot. It is also a good opportunity for students to hear more perspectives that may influence their own thinking.

Free Write

A free write activity is designed to get students to process their thoughts on paper. Free writes should be completed within a specific time limit, and the only goal is to keep the pencil moving the whole time. Grammar does not matter in a free write. This activity can be used for grounding after a particularly tough assignment, or it can be used to generate ideas for further research.

Classroom Activities

These lessons are designed for 6-8 ninety-minute classes that meet Monday through Friday. Before beginning this unit, students must understand major ideas and events leading to the Civil Rights Movement. At minimum, students should already be familiar with the Reconstruction Amendments (Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution) as well as the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions.

Day One

Guiding Question: What was the Freedom Summer? Examine events leading to the Freedom Summer project.

Complete the first two columns of a KWL chart about the Civil Rights Movement. Guide students to be as specific as possible in their answers. For example, if they say they know people were fighting for "rights," ask *which* rights people wanted.

Show photos from the 1960 Greensboro Woolworth's sit-in. Read aloud the *Greensboro Record* reporting from

the following day.⁴⁵

Describe the origin of SNCC and how it grew out of the student-led movement we just read. Ask students to identify the main priorities of those student activists: desegregation of public spaces.

Explain that they will now listen to a speech by woman who was a poor sharecropper in Mississippi and attended the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Let them know that it is a firsthand account that includes some graphic details of racialized and gendered violence. While the topic may be difficult to hear, it is important not to edit or omit her words.

Read and listen to Fannie Lou Hamer's testimony.⁴⁶ You may choose to do a relaxation activity or find another way to help students get grounded after listening to the speech. Explain that Hamer's testimony represents the obstacles many Black Mississippians faced as they tried to exercise their right to vote as guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment.

As a class, complete a Venn Diagram comparing the background and primary concerns of college students like the Greensboro Four to those of Mississippi sharecroppers like Fannie Lou Hamer. Explain that the leaders of SNCC realized that they would have to use different tactics if they wanted to secure civil rights for Black people in the Deep South.

Have students do a 5-10 minute free write on what it means to be free. Allow time for volunteers to share with the class.

Day Two

Guiding Question: How do Freedom Schools fit into the larger Civil Rights Movement? Experience the Freedom School model.

Introduce students to the idea of the Freedom Summer. Explain that the implementation of Freedom Schools was one of the main goals for SNCC in the summer of 1964. Then, tell students that they will be experiencing a lesson that was created for Freedom Schools in Mississippi.

Ask students what they learn in school besides their basic graded subjects. Encourage students to think deeply about what they may have learned about themselves, other people, the United States and their place in it, their city and their place in it, and the world at large. Allow students to be open and honest.

Read the Pledge of Allegiance and Bill of Rights. Lead class in a discussion of what they teach us. Ask questions like: (1) Do you feel that you have those rights? (2) Do Americans practice and believe them? This is a conversation that can bring up a lot of passion in people, so remind students of classroom expectations around respect.

Ask students to identify anything else they may have learned in school or from their family that is untrue. Have they learned anything about Black people? About immigrants? About poor people? Compile a list on the board. Keep this list visible so students can reference it when they are ready to create their mini-lesson at the end of the unit.

Show students the list of myths about the Negro that was created for the Freedom School.⁴⁷ Explain that the list is representative of the way Black History was generally taught in Southern schools at the time.

Split class into four small groups and assign each group one section of the Guide to Negro History.⁴⁸ Remind students that these were the documents used in the Freedom Schools to try to challenge racist ideas that were taught in Mississippi schools. Each group should read their section and underline or highlight evidence that could be used to refute one of the myths about the Negro. Student groups share what they learned with the class.

Close class with a discussion of students' experience with the lesson. For an exit ticket, give students time at the end of class to respond to the daily guiding question.

Day Three

Guiding Question: How were Black Mississippians impacted by the Freedom Summer? Analyze primary sources from people who lived it.

Begin by guiding students in a reflection of their experience with the Freedom School lesson from the previous day. They should think about what they enjoyed, what they would change, and how it compares to their own experience in school.

Introduce the key words for the day: “subjective” and “objective.” Tell students that they have been practicing being subjective, or relying on their own opinion to draw a conclusion. Emphasize that while their opinion is valuable, studying history often depends on their ability to be objective. That is the skill that they will practice in this lesson.

Explain that you will be analyzing several sources related to the Freedom Summer to determine if they were successful, and that they can practice objectivity by looking for evidence about the effects of the Freedom Schools.

Show the Freedom Schools clip and have students record direct quotes about the goals and outcomes of the school.⁴⁹

Introduce the Primary Source Analysis tool. Using the quotes that they chose, model for students how to complete select evidence, analyze that evidence, and ask follow-up questions.

Return to the analysis of Fannie Lou Hamer’s testimony from Day One. Discuss the connection between Hamer’s experience and the Freedom Schools. Give students time to complete the Primary Source Analysis Tool for the speech, then review their responses. Students may have chosen different quotes or written different reflections.

Finally, distribute the Remembrances of Freedom Schools Students document.⁵⁰ Have students analyze the document independently. For an exit ticket, students will use the CER framework to answer the guiding question.

Day Four

Guiding Question: How did the Freedom Summer, specifically the Freedom Schools, affect places outside of Mississippi?

Begin by returning the KWL chart from the first day. Try to answer some of the questions from the first day. Add to the Learned section.

Show students the Richmond 34 video clip.⁵¹ Identify the goals and tactics of the group. Review what students have learned about different tactics in the Civil Rights Movement. Discuss how the Richmond sit-ins fit into that story. Civil disobedience tactics like sit-ins successfully desegregated public places like restaurants, theaters, and stores across the United States. However, public schools remained segregated long afterward. Ask students to consider why that is.

Define redlining and show the “Redlining Richmond” website. Explain the largely unsuccessful efforts to use busing to desegregate schools in Richmond throughout the 1970s.

Now, we are going to start connecting the past to the present. Explore the structure of our school. My classes will read a piece that is specific to our school. You could find a similar piece of history for your location, use your school mission or vision statement as a primary source, or you might use our school information as a case study.

We will read “Richmond Community High School: A Successful Experiment in Urban Education.” There are six short chapters, so split the class into small groups; each group will become the expert of one chapter. As they read, students should look for evidence to answer the question: What was the purpose of creating RCHS? Have them mark up the chapter by highlighting/underlining important people and dates, putting a star next to key quotes, and writing questions or reflections in the margins. Groups will teach the class about their chapter.

As a class, complete a Triple-T Chart with information on the Freedom Schools and RCHS. Suggested categories include: Who founded it? Who attended it? Who paid for it? What was taught? Ask class if they found any information that surprised them.

Have students do a 5-10 minute free write about their experience in school so far and how it aligns with the founders’ vision.

Day Five

Guiding Question: Take a closer look at your city. What are the major issues in our community? Use your own experience as residents and explore local news sites to see what other people are talking about.

Explain that students will now start to think about how they can apply what they have learned to their lives today. Remind students that segregation did not end because of lawmakers and political leaders; segregation ended when regular people stood up and decided to end it.

Ask students to brainstorm current issues in your community. Encourage them to keep their ideas at the state or local level because anything bigger than that can be difficult to work with. Use the think-pair-share strategy here. Record answers on the board.

Select a few local news sources to explore with the class. As a class, examine the front page on the website to each of those sources. Identify common themes that pop up and write them on the board along with the answers from the earlier think-pair-share.

Introduce the Unit Project: Imagine you are starting your own Freedom School based on a need you’ve noticed in our community. What would you include in the curriculum? Select one idea to create a mini-lesson about. Students will select one issue and design a mini-lesson around it inspired by the Freedom Schools. Their project should have a clearly defined local issue, a historical background of the issue, and an activity designed

to teach people how to take action around it. Encourage creativity! Here are some action activity ideas that I thought of: how to contact lawmakers, how to organize a demonstration, how to grow your own food, how to write a protest song, how to practice yoga.

Students will pick one issue that they will research. Have them find at least 3 sources about the issue and complete the CRAAP Test.

To focus their ideas, have students use the CER method to respond to the following prompt: Describe an issue or need in your community that you wish to change. Explain why making this change would positively impact your community.

Homework: interview 2 people from outside our class about what issues they see in the community.

Day Six and Beyond

Allocate time in class for students to share their work with a classmate and get feedback. Meet with individual students regularly to check their progress. Allow students to change their subject after gathering more information, but be sure that they have an accurate source list for whichever topic they will submit.

Give each student time to present their mini-lesson to the class. This is a project that is meant to be shared in your classroom and outside of it. Remind your students that they have the power to make real change in their community if they put effort into it.

Appendix on Implementing State Standards

According to the Virginia Department of Education's Course Map for the African American History elective, by the end of the course, students should understand the following topics.

Redlining

The course map says that students should be able to "define redlining" and "develop questions about the modern-day impact redlining continues to have on African Americans." This is accomplished on Day Four when we explore the Redlining Richmond website.

The Road to "Brown"

The course map says that student should be able to: "analyze and explain the social impacts of segregation and desegregation," "analyze and explain the impact of Brown vs Board of Education," and "investigate and describe the main factors involved in the struggle to desegregate America." All of these objectives are accomplished in Days One, Two, and Three when we discuss the context surrounding the origins of SNCC and the reasons for organizing the Freedom Summer.

The Country in Transition

The course map says that students should "examine the patterns of urbanization and white flight that took place in the 1970s." This is accomplished on Day Four when we examine the circumstances leading to the

founding of Richmond Community High School.

Social Justice Today, Advocacy and Change

The course map says that students should “determine the necessary next steps and develop a plan to influence public policy and advocate for social change.” This is accomplished with the unit project. Students should also be able to “identify practical ways for young people to engage in civic action and advocacy.” This is accomplished with the unit project as well.

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