



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2026 Volume I: The Kids are not the Threat

Visuals and Voices of the Arts & Athletes

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Introduction

My philosophy is “To be more than your environment presents and defy societal views”. I share this with my students to let them know that, regardless of the situation, the circumstances, or how they are viewed, they can be successful and make a difference. As our seminar leader Rod Ferguson stated, “Do your part wherever you are; you can make a difference.” I will continue to use my platform to inspire the next generation of students. This is an ongoing effort to raise awareness, connect with students and the community, and engage them through the fine arts and athletics. Everyone has a voice; let’s teach the right way and lead them by example consistently. This passage is impactful and relevant in many ways.



Caption: 1&2 images of Willie Keener in my youth. Photo credit to: Willie Keener

Blinders

In *Reality Leadership 2.0*, Dr. Adrian B. Johnson says, “This story of a young man who defied societal and parental expectations by pursuing his passion despite pressures to follow a more traditional path illustrates the importance of crafting a personal definition of success. When you identify your true passion, there will inevitably be doubters and naysayers, often well-intentioned family and friends who may not understand the fervor you feel for pursuing your dreams. In such cases, it becomes vital to reevaluate and redefine success on your terms, putting on those blinders to stay unwaveringly committed to your passion and vision, undistracted by external influencers.”[1]

I truly understand this. Although I was raised in a single-parent household until I had to move in with my grandparents. I didn’t have the encouragement simply because they didn’t know how to encourage me. As a young adult with kids and attending college, I was told to leave behind the doubters and naysayers. I followed my vision and held on to what I believed in. I didn’t know what was on the other side, but it had to be better than my past experiences. Through it all, I now really know how to embrace the journey, because the destination is only part of the purpose. Stay focused.

In this unit, students will learn how people in fine arts and athletics used their voices to make a difference during the Civil Rights movement. This will be rooted in what was happening in Texas during this period. Students will also make real-world connections. Students will conduct research at an all-Black school named Blackshear in Hearne. That was during the time of segregation in the 1950s or 60s. This is one of the topics that will be selected because the students will learn about it; it is closed and no longer utilized, but it's still standing. Doing research on Blackshear will give students some background on what was going on in their own community at that time.

Studying Blackshear is relevant because many people who work in Hearne ISD attended the Blackshear school as students and/or served as administrators during that time, and are actively engaged in the current school system. Blackshear was the segregated African American high school in Hearne, Texas. The unit will focus on readings and research that will be done in the initial week or weeks leading into the actual creativity portions--visual Arts, choir, band, theater, and athletics. These were essential components of the civil rights movement that greatly shaped and supported its overall vision. The extracurricular portion of the school district and civil rights movement was woven together by the arts and athletics. The lessons to be studied will come directly from the textbooks the district mandated for use in Texas history.

Rationale

This topic is important because of the historic and present-day effects. It is highly relevant to students and cultures regarding setbacks and/or recurrences. Awareness is critical at this stage to ensure the next generation is informed. Blackshear’s connections to current events involve gerrymandering, the deliberate manipulation of voting district boundaries.

Gerrymandered maps use highly specific voter data. The mapping software for gerrymandering is used to dilute the opposition's voting power, generally by executing two primary tactics: spreading the opposing party's supporters across multiple districts. This is so they are a minority in each and cannot win any of them.

Then there is packing, concentrating as many opposition voters as possible into a few districts.

Background Knowledge

The Civil Rights movement was a very important time in American History. However, my focus will be on the movement in Texas. The information used will come from the district-approved textbook on Texas's history. I will begin with the era prior to the Civil Rights movement. During this time, it was known as the Reconstruction and Black Codes.

These laws limited where people could walk, work, travel, own property, and participate in government. Although the federal government attempted to protect the rights of formerly enslaved people during Reconstruction, many white Texans resisted these changes.

This will be a time to check for understanding and give students a chance to voice their opinions about the policies. Also, it will be a collaborative effort that allows them to work in small groups and end with independent thought. In addition, it will extend the lesson to different visual arts and/or digital media creations. This portion will spread in every section of the unit plan. It will reinforce and/or enhance knowledge for retention.

Segregated schools in Texas suffered from the usual issues. Black schools received less money. Without proper funding, student development suffered. The buildings were often older, and the textbooks were outdated, which always kept students and educators a step behind. To the best of my knowledge, based on what my parents and grandparents told me, they had to walk miles to school in inclement weather.[2]

The next section is on segregation and Jim Crow laws. After Reconstruction ended, many southern states created Jim Crow laws. These laws required racial segregation in schools, transportation, restaurants, parks, and many public places. Although facilities were described as separate but equal, they were almost always unequal. Many African Americans were denied the opportunity to vote through literacy tests, poll taxes, and intimidation. We should look at how segregation became legal; public facilities were separated by race. Voting became difficult for minorities, and Equal rights were denied.[3]

This section will address tenant farmers and sharecropping. Many former slaves and poor white farmers did not own the land. After the Civil War, instead, they rented land from landowners. Sharecroppers paid their rent by giving the landowner part of the crops. Most families remained poor because they borrowed money for seeds, equipment, and food every year. This system trapped families in debt.[4] My grandparents experienced this firsthand.

However, our family's story had a different twist. My grandparents were given one hundred acres of land. According to family history, this happened because my great-grandfather performed a heroic act: he saved the life of his former enslaver. As the story goes, the Session family was among the families that continued to enslave people. There was a determined effort to free those who remained enslaved, and Session's life was threatened because he resisted. People searched for him for days, and my grandfather, Joanas Cox, hid him while providing food and shelter during that time. Afterward, my family was freed and given land.

This next section will be about early civil rights efforts. African Americans began organizing to fight

discrimination. Organizations such as the NAACP worked through the courts to challenge unfair laws. Other organizations encouraged voter registration, education, and equal opportunities. These groups laid the foundation for the civil rights movement.[5]

One such organization, the Congress of Racial Equality, was founded in 1942 and believed in nonviolent protest. The members organized sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and peaceful demonstrations to challenge the atrocities of segregation. This included restaurants, buses, and other public places. Then there was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which was founded in 1960. This gave young people a leading role in the Civil Rights Movement as well as hope, purpose, and a voice. These students organized voter registration drives, which were a critical component of the movement. They also organized peaceful protests and educational programs throughout the South, including Texas. This gave the Civil Rights Movement a different perspective not only on individual states but also on the U.S.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which emphasized peaceful marches. The boycotts and campaigns inspired people across the nation to work for justice through a nonviolent approach. As Rod stated, "This took in-depth and extensive training. They had to role-play and be trained to endure the potential situations they would encounter." This led to the formation of another important organization, the League of United Latin American Citizens. Mexican Americans struggled for their equal rights as well. They were discriminated against in hotels, restaurants, and schools. The League of United Latin American Citizens was formed to address the discrimination that Mexican Americans encountered.



Caption: Image number 3 of Rod deep into educating. Photo credit to: Willie Keener

One of the laws that was significant in Texas civil rights history was *Smith v. Allwright*. In 1944, the Supreme Court struck down the white primary system in Texas and across the country. One of the major figures in the fight to overturn the white primary system was Lulu Bell Mason Madison White. She served as the head of the Houston chapter of the NAACP from 1939 to 1949. Lulu became the organization's state director. Under her leadership, the Houston chapter became the largest in the South.[6]

Despite *Smith v. Allwright*, African Americans were still forced to attend schools separate from white students. In 1946, a Black man named Heman Sweatt applied for admission to the University of Texas School of Law. The school denied the application but created a separate law school for African Americans with the backing of

the NAACP, including Lula Bell Mason. Sweatt filed lawsuits against the university, culminating in the court case *Sweatt v. Painter*. Sweatt argued that he would receive a better education at law school. *Sweatt v. Painter* was the Texas Supreme Court case that ruled that segregated professional schools violated the Constitution. The Texas Supreme Court's decision paved the way for *Brown v. Board of Education*, which eventually ended segregation in public schools. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that separate educational facilities are, by definition, unequal.[7] As we can see, barriers that were in place had to not only be protested but taken to the Texas Supreme Courts and to U.S. Supreme Court.

The next section will engage women in the state's civil rights history, the challenges they faced and the opportunities they created. Texas women fought for recognition of their civil rights in the 1950s. Many women had gone to work during World War II, and some wanted to continue working when the war ended. One such woman, Oveta Culp Hobby believed that women deserved to be treated equally. Hobby was the first woman to win the US Army's Distinguished Service Medal. She also served in President Eisenhower's cabinet as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare.[8]

Many others pursued professional careers as well. In 1956, Hattie Briscoe became the first black woman to graduate from Saint Mary's School of Law in San Antonio. She graduated at the top of her class, but no law firms would hire a black woman, so she opened her own. Benjy Brooks, from Louisville, earned a degree from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston in 1960. She became the first black pediatric surgeon in Texas. Gladys Humphrey recalled working in the meat-packing plant.[9]

In this climate of challenges and progress, African Americans across the nation began to practice nonviolence and resistance to end discrimination and segregation. Protesters staged boycotts and sit-in protests, sitting down in public facilities and refusing to leave. Several Texas students held sit-ins at the lunch counters and other dining facilities. A group in Kingsville, TX forced the integration of a local drive-in restaurant. One of the protesters recalled, "We started just parking our cars up there and wouldn't move. Finally, they started serving us." [10]

There was a Texan named James Farmer. He was a national leader of the civil rights movement. Through his organization—the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), he led Civil rights protests. He organized activists on bus rides called Freedom Rides through the South. Black and white activists rode together on buses to protest segregation.[11]

Mexican Americans continued to struggle for advances as well. In 1956, Democrat Henry B. Gonzalez had become the first Mexican American elected to the Texas Senate in the 1900s. As a state senator, he was a fierce opponent of segregation in 1957. Gonzales and a fellow senator spoke for 36 straight hours to block passage of several bills. These were bills that would have kept Texas schools segregated. Texas Mexican Americans were also elected to city, county, and state offices. In 1957, Raymond L. Telles was the first Mexican American to be elected mayor of El Paso. He held several national positions as well. Including Ambassador to Costa Rica and as an advisor to President John Kennedy.[12]

The push for civil rights by Hispanic Americans continued into the nineteen sixties. Through their protest marches and political organizations, they were able to begin a significant movement. The political association of Spanish-speaking organizations played a role in change. The American GI Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) led the movement for the equal rights of Hispanic Americans. With leadership from Hector P Garcia and Albert Peña Junior, these groups hoped to spur Hispanic voters to become more active and to make their concerns known to lawmakers. They were successful in doing so.[13]

In his address to congress in 1963, President Lyndon B Johnson said, “We have talked long enough in this country about equal rights. We have talked for 100 years or more. It is time now to write the next chapter- and to write it in the books of law. I urge you... to enact a civil rights law so that we can move forward to eliminate from this Nation every trace of discrimination and oppression that is based upon race or color.”[14] With this speech, he championed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Because of the success of the Civil Rights movement, African Americans gained more positions in government. In Texas, African Americans began to win state offices for the first time since Reconstruction. In 1966, Barbara Jordan of Houston was elected to the state senate. Jordan was elected to the US House of Representatives in 1972, becoming the first African American to represent Texas in the US Congress.[15]

Women made significant political gains. In the following years, five women were elected to the state legislature. In addition, Frances Farenthold made a serious bid for governor. On the national level, the Republican Party chose Texan Anne Armstrong as speaker and co-chair of the National Republican Committee. She was the first woman Co-chair and the first female to give a keynote address at a National Party convention. Carol Keaton McLennan, later Strayhorn, became the first woman president of the Austin School Board and served as mayor of Austin from 1977 to 1983. She later served on the Railroad Commission and as state Comptroller.[16]

By 1980, many more women had been elected to political office. For instance, there’s Waco city council member Andrea Jackson Barefield. She and her husband, Elijah Barfield, are pillars of the community and educational system in Waco, Texas. I spoke with Adrea and asked her questions; as always, her genuine responses reflect her core values and belief in the power of people, which is always inspiring.

1. What sparked your interest in politics?

“My interest in politics didn't begin with politics. It began with people. I grew up always understanding that government has the power to shape whether families have opportunities or barriers. Watching my mother, Dr. Mae Jackson, serve as mayor showed me that public service wasn't about titles or recognition. It was about showing up, listening, solving problems, and leaving your community better than you found it. Even then, I never set out thinking, "I want to be a politician." My career was rooted in community engagement, relationship-building, and helping organizations connect people with opportunities.”

“Whether I was working in the nonprofit sector, economic development, or community partnerships, I kept finding myself at the intersection of people and policy. Eventually I realized that if I wanted to address the issues I cared about—economic opportunity, education, housing, infrastructure, and creating pathways for people to thrive- I needed a seat at the table where those decisions were being made. That's what ultimately led me to run for City Council. Politics, for me, has never been about power. It's always been about purpose.”

2. What do you want your legacy to be?

“I hope my legacy isn't measured by the offices I held, but by the opportunities that exist because I was there. I want people to say that I helped build bridges where others saw barriers. That I brought people together who didn't always agree, found common ground, and focused on what was possible instead of what was political. I hope the physical projects matter—the infrastructure, the investment, the Bledsoe-Miller STEAM Center, stronger neighborhoods, and expanded economic opportunities—but even more than that, I hope people remember that I believed in them before they believed in themselves. If a young woman, especially a young Black woman, sees my journey and believes there's a place for her in leadership, then I've succeeded. Ultimately, I want my legacy to be one of service with integrity, leadership with humility, and a commitment to

leaving every community stronger, more connected, and more hopeful than I found it.” Covering the diverse history of civil rights struggles in Texas, my unit will demonstrate to students the significant role that our state has played in the advancement of civil rights in the U.S.

Content

My unit is unique because of its emphasis on extracurricular programs as significant pedagogical tools. Throughout, I will work with my colleagues in these areas so that students can see their significance in civil rights history. It is my sincere belief that extracurricular programs teach students how to work with others, resolve conflicts that arise in and out of school, communicate effectively to reach common ground or understanding, build confidence, which develops leadership skills, show empathy so we can put ourselves in other people's situations and find respect for it, and develop resilience. These skills support and enhance both academic and personal success. I have almost two decades of teaching experience and a plethora of life experiences to support my beliefs. Although most Freedom Schools operated only during the summer of 1964, their influence continued long afterward. Thousands of students gained confidence, leadership skills, and a stronger understanding of democracy and civil rights. Many participants later became teachers, community organizers, elected officials, and advocates for social justice. The Freedom School model has inspired educational programs across the United States that emphasize student voice, civic engagement, culturally relevant teaching, and experiential learning. What is needed today is educational and civic duty on the part of educators.

The emphasis of Freedom Schools was based on asking questions and independent thinking. It also emphasized leadership, social responsibility, and community service. This was the foundation of Civic participation. When we encourage creative and innovative activities, such as extracurricular involvement, we help students think more creatively and in greater depth and solve problems more effectively. They are more willing to take risks, express ideas, and explore new perspectives. These develop confidence in presenting their work and, more importantly, intrinsically motivate them. That said, creative thinking also improves performance in subjects such as math, science, and language arts. Fine Arts programs and Athletics have a remarkably strong correlation to academic growth.

Band

Dr. King's book *Trumpet of Conscience* suggests the historic role that the trumpet has had. This instrument has historically been used to announce important news and to call communities to unite. It also signaled the beginning of celebrations, and at times there were some, but seemingly short-lived. It's my belief that it primarily serves as a warning and ultimately inspires courage in the oppressed. Through the figure of the trumpet, King believed people should hear the call to justice for all as written in the Constitution. I remember hearing the trumpet across a field being played at my father's funeral for his military service. He was a Vietnam War veteran, and the trumpet helped us to focus on my father's life and memory. By focusing on music, my students can learn the significant role it played in civil rights struggles.

Choir

Related to band is the choir. During the civil rights movement, young people would form choirs and sing freedom songs. "We Shall Overcome" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around" are noteworthy. Music builds courage, unity, and hope. Also, this was what preserved thought through the times of tragedy and triumph.[17]

Choir improves reading fluency and helps language development. Listening and memory are critical in every stage of development. Academics, politics, and life. The confidence that comes from this will help develop public speaking skills. This is another part of the overall development of civic responsibility. We can see why the curriculum was structured as such. The holistic development of the students enabled them to use the tools they were given.[18]

Theater

Viewing and creating plays was an important part of the civil rights movement. Theater helps students build reading comprehension and public speaking skills. Collaboration is also a critical component. The creative aspects also bring this art to life. Empathy is also an important lesson through theater arts. The confidence that comes from this allows them to move forward into life with focus, and they are more thoughtful. Within the Freedom Schools, students performed dramatic readings and historical reenactments. They also performed community plays, and I'm sure they were connected to the movement at that time. Role-playing activities about voting rights and civil rights were the most important part. This was preparation for the challenges to come.[19]

Visual Arts

My innate ability to find that special thing in a student and to grow and develop with them has completely, intrinsically, and holistically transformed students' lives and given them different perspectives. Our students at Hearne ISD have proven themselves not only locally and regionally but also statewide. They are also well recognized nationally. Through Fine Arts, we have changed the climate and culture for students here in Hearne ISD. They are confident, not afraid to fail, and always willing to learn.

I have witnessed students from different backgrounds and cultures grow and develop in ways that help them understand who they are and find a purpose in life. They also rely on each other to peer-teach and succeed. In my classes, I often serve as a facilitator, allowing students to work in groups. We teach students the importance of working with people from different backgrounds to achieve a common goal. I've had students who may not have gotten along at the beginning of the school year, but by the end of the school year, they have mutual respect. It's not my teaching style; their learning styles make the difference.

The Texas Art Education Association (TAEA) aligns with the District of Distinction to ensure that Texas students have a robust and well-rounded learning experience. This is a 14-point rubric that includes reading and writing, as well as presentations (basically public speaking). It also supports District and Community Events that support students' holistic growth and learning from one another locally, regionally, and statewide. These events occur across Texas at specific times each year, alongside the professional development we provide throughout the year. This ensures the best outcomes for the students. The Texas Art Education Association of Visual Arts. So, basically, this curriculum will cover different points. It will also allow them to express themselves creatively and learn from history.

As for how we utilize as many cross-curricular opportunities as we can, we conduct extensive research in art and art history. This is our foundation, and we spiral through it year-round. Summer school provides supplemental program support, helps change behaviors, increases student attendance, and creates lifelong learners. This is a segue into the Freedom Schools curriculum. The arts are intertwined throughout the Civil Rights movement.

Visual arts played an important role in Freedom Schools. Students learned to create posters and murals, which led to protest signs, political cartoons, and community artwork. Visual arts became a means of communicating messages of justice and equality. Students developed observation skills and creativity. Visual literacy was important as well; it is when critical thinking comes into effect. We do a lot of research in my art classes and in cross-curricular activities. Problem-solving skills are built. I put a lot of emphasis on this because it is the difference-maker. Fine motor skill development offers a wide range of benefits in the early stages of growth. Art skills support science, engineering, reading, and mathematics. These skills help create manipulatives and reinforce and enhance learning. Kinesthetic skills also help with muscle memory and information retention.

Athletics

Myrtis Dightman Sr.

Physical and mental well-being are key components in this unit. Sports, dance, marching bands, theater, and other activities reduce stress. This also improves physical health, builds self-esteem, fosters supportive friendships, and increases motivation. Students who feel connected to peers and adults at school often report greater overall well-being. This ultimately builds mental toughness. Although we know and understand that football is king in Texas, I want to introduce a person who set the standard of perseverance. He is a Hall of Fame Bull rider from Texas named Myrtis Dightman.

With BEA-REAL 4.0 LLC Consulting, I was able to meet and work with Myrtis Dightman Sr./Jr. and learned a lot about him over the last few months. This Texas Monthly article was very insightful, along with personal conversations with the Dightmans. Myrtis Dightman occupies a unique place in American history as one of the most influential pioneers in professional rodeo. Often referred to as the "Jackie Robinson of Rodeo," Dightman challenged racial barriers in one of America's most traditional sports during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. His achievements demonstrated that the struggle for equality extended beyond schools, buses, and courtrooms into the ranches, arenas, and rodeo circuits of the American West. Although he never captured a Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) World Championship, his perseverance transformed the sport and paved the way for future generations of Black cowboys. In conversations with

Myrtis Jr., he often spoke about his father's experiences. He wanted his father to get his flowers while he was still alive. He has made a diligent effort to do so.

Born on May 7, 1935, near Crockett, Texas, less than 100 miles from Hearne, Texas, Dightman grew up on the Karl Leediker Ranch, where his father worked as a ranch hand. Like many rural Black families during the Jim Crow era, the Dightmans lived without electricity and relied on hard work to survive. By the age of ten, Myrtis was already branding cattle, repairing fences, and driving livestock across East Texas. He left school after the seventh grade to work full time on the ranch, developing the horsemanship and work ethic that would later define his rodeo career.[20]

One of Dightman's most important contributions occurred in 1957 when he co-founded the Prairie View Trail Riders Association alongside James Francies Jr. and Dr. Alfred Poindexter. Created after Black riders were excluded from Houston's Livestock Show and Rodeo parade, the organization became the first Black trail riding association in Texas and eventually grew into one of the largest African American equestrian organizations in the United States. The Prairie View Trail Riders Association preserved Black cowboy traditions while increasing visibility for African American riders throughout Texas.[21]



Caption: Image number 4 of Myrtis Dightman Sr/Jr award. Photo credit to: Myrtis Dightman Jr.

In 1964, the same year Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, Dightman became the first African American to qualify for the National Finals Rodeo (NFR), the championship event of professional rodeo. His qualification shattered one of the sport's most enduring racial barriers. Although he finished seventeenth overall that season, his appearance demonstrated that Black cowboys belonged on rodeo's biggest stage.[22]

Dightman's greatest competitive season came in 1967. During a rodeo in Edmonton, Alberta, he produced an outstanding eight-second ride that propelled him to the number one ranking in the world standings, making him the first Black cowboy ever to lead professional bull riding. Newspapers across the United States celebrated the accomplishment with headlines announcing that a Black cowboy had taken the world lead. Sportswriters soon began referring to him as the "Jackie Robinson of Rodeo," a title that has remained

associated with his legacy.[23]

Despite suffering numerous injuries—including a devastating head injury in 1969 that required seventy stitches—Dightman continued competing throughout the early 1970s. He qualified for the National Finals Rodeo seven times, won prestigious competitions such as the Calgary Stampede and Cheyenne Frontier Days, and became one of the most respected bull riders in North America. His persistence earned the admiration of fellow competitors, many of whom later acknowledged that his accomplishments permanently changed professional rodeo.[24]

Perhaps Dightman's greatest legacy emerged through mentorship. In the early 1970s, he encouraged a young California bull rider named Charlie Sampson to complete his education while pursuing a career in rodeo. Dightman later trained and mentored Sampson throughout his professional career. In 1982, Sampson became the first African American to win the PRCA World Championship in bull riding. After Sampson secured the title, he credited Dightman for opening the door that made his own success possible. Dightman reportedly told his protégé, "I never won it, but I didn't have to. You won it for me." [25]

Recognition for Dightman's accomplishments continued long after his retirement. He won four consecutive Old Timers Rodeo Association championships during the 1980s, was inducted into the National Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1997, the Professional Bull Riders Ring of Honor in 2003, and the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame in 2011. Today, his annual Labor Day rodeo in Crockett, Texas, celebrates Black cowboy heritage while providing scholarships and opportunities for young competitors.[26]



Caption: Image number 5 of Azspyn Keener winning the Myrtis Dightman Sr./Jr. Mother's Day Mutton Championship. Photo credit to: Willie Keener

Myrtis Dightman's story demonstrates that the Civil Rights Movement unfolded in places often overlooked by traditional history textbooks. While Martin Luther King Jr. challenged segregation through nonviolent protest and Thurgood Marshall fought discrimination in the courts, Dightman confronted prejudice inside rodeo arenas through determination, athletic excellence, and quiet resilience. His courage expanded opportunities for future generations of Black cowboys and ensured that African Americans would remain an essential part of the history and culture of the American West. His legacy reminds students that civil rights history was not confined to politics or legislation; it was also written in sports, agriculture, ranching, and rodeo.[27]

Teaching Strategies

As an art and photography teacher, I will engage students in researching, analyzing, and creating works inspired by the Texas Civil Rights Movement. Students will examine photographs, murals, paintings, protest posters, and other visual media to understand how artists documented history, expressed emotions, and inspired social change. Through observation and discussion, students will analyze the elements and principles of art, historical context, symbolism, and the messages conveyed through visual imagery.

The arts are essential to learning because they foster creativity, critical thinking, communication, and meaningful student engagement. Throughout my teaching career, I have found that students achieve greater success when complex artistic processes are broken into manageable steps. Early in my career, I studied exemplary works of art and photography, identifying the techniques and decisions that shaped each finished piece. I then guided students through these stages, allowing them to focus on one skill at a time while gradually building confidence and independence.

Students in this unit will engage in historical inquiry, visual analysis, collaborative discussions, sketchbook planning, photography composition exercises, and studio-based art production. They will also participate in peer critiques, self-reflection, and presentations that link their artistic choices to historical events and themes of the Texas Civil Rights Movement. By combining historical research with creative expression, students will deepen their understanding of how art and photography preserve history, amplify voices, and inspire positive social change.

Classroom Activities

Introduction Lesson 1: Visuals and Voices of the Arts & Athletes

Students will first be introduced to the Texas Civil Rights Movement through district-approved textbooks and primary sources. Using a blended learning approach, students will research key events, people, and historical perspectives while participating in virtual museum tours to draw meaningful connections between history and the visual arts. Collaborative group activities, guided discussions, and reflective writing will encourage students to analyze historical events, share ideas, and connect the Civil Rights Movement's impact to art, photography, and society. This will spiral weekly to reinforce and/or enhance learning.

Week 1

We will study artwork and photography from this period. There will be virtual tours of various museums. All student work is research-based, and blended learning will be used throughout the six-week process. This is my approach to applying the Elements of Art, Principles of Art, and Components of Photography in the visual arts. Additionally, taking notes helps identify what they have learned on critique sheets and then summarize it. Research is critical to our visual arts program. We need background knowledge to support comprehension and creativity. We will compete in local, regional, and statewide contests while developing portfolios. This will spiral weekly to reinforce and/or enhance learning.

Week 2

Students will begin by brainstorming ideas for their artwork inspired by the Texas Civil Rights Movement. Using a blended learning approach, they will participate in pair-share activities to research artists, photographers, and historical images related to the movement. Students will use laptops to explore topics of interest, collect reference images, and record key information to guide their artistic process.

Following their research, students will engage in an open classroom dialogue where everyone can share ideas, perspectives, and artistic concepts in a respectful environment. The focus is on listening, learning, and understanding one another through dialogue. This collaborative process helps students refine their ideas and ensures every student has a voice before beginning their final artwork. Students will also compete in local, regional, and statewide contests while developing portfolios. This will spiral weekly to reinforce and/or enhance learning.

Week 3

Students will use a Mind Map to organize and document their ideas, research, and learning throughout the unit. This strategy helps students connect prior knowledge with new concepts while fostering curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. Mind Maps also support differentiated instruction by enabling each student to build on their own experiences and understanding.

Throughout the unit, students will continuously update their Mind Maps as they research, develop ideas, and refine their artwork. This ongoing process of planning, researching, creating, and reflecting is a consistent instructional practice that will be incorporated into every lesson. Students will also compete in local, regional, and statewide contests while developing portfolios. This will spiral weekly to reinforce and/or enhance learning.

Week 4

The students have created portfolios documenting their learning throughout the unit. Each portfolio will include process notes, research, data collection, reference images, sketches, reflections, and connections between the Texas Civil Rights Movement and art. The emphasis is on the learning process rather than the final product.

As students continue researching and developing their artwork, they will regularly add evidence of their thinking, planning, and artistic growth to their portfolios. This ongoing documentation fosters reflection, organization, and a deeper understanding of both the historical content and the creative process.

Week 5

Students will continue developing their artwork while researching through a blended learning approach. As they refine their projects, they will add details, apply artistic techniques, and deepen historical connections through peer teaching and collaboration. Students will provide constructive feedback, share ideas and strategies, and learn from one another throughout the creative process. This collaborative approach fosters critical thinking, creativity, and a deeper understanding of both the Texas Civil Rights Movement and the artistic process.

Week 6

Students will present their completed artwork, using teacher-created sentence stems to strengthen public speaking, communication, and leadership skills. Each presentation will allow students to explain their research, artistic choices, and the historical connections between their artwork and the Texas Civil Rights Movement.

After the presentations, students will participate in a Gallery Walk to view and appreciate one another's artwork. Using a teacher-provided critique sheet, students will practice giving respectful, constructive feedback as they analyze artistic techniques, historical connections, and creative expression. This activity fosters reflection, collaboration, and appreciation for diverse perspectives and artistic approaches.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

RULE §117.102 Art, Kindergarten, Adopted 2013

- (a) Introduction.
 - (1) Fine arts incorporate the study of dance, music, theatre, and visual arts to offer unique experiences and empower students to explore realities, relationships, and ideas. These disciplines engage and motivate all students through active learning, critical thinking, and innovative problem-solving. Fine arts develop cognitive functioning and increase student academic achievement, higher-order thinking, communication, and collaboration skills, making the fine arts applicable to college readiness, career opportunities, workplace environments, social skills, and everyday life. Students develop aesthetic and cultural awareness through exploration, leading to creative expression. Creativity, encouraged through the study of the fine arts, is essential to nurture and develop the whole child.
 - (2) Four basic strands--foundations: observation and perception; creative expression; historical and cultural relevance; and critical evaluation and response--provide broad, unifying structures for organizing the knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire. Each strand is of equal value and may be presented in any order throughout the year. Students rely on personal observations and perceptions, which are developed through increasing visual literacy and sensitivity to surroundings, communities, memories, imaginings, and life experiences, as sources for thinking about, planning, and creating original artworks. Students communicate their thoughts and ideas with innovation and creativity. Through art, students challenge their imaginations, foster critical thinking, collaborate with others, and build reflective skills. While exercising meaningful problem-solving skills, students develop the lifelong ability to make informed judgments.
 - (3) Statements that contain the word "including" reference content that must be mastered, while those containing the phrase "such as" are intended as possible illustrative examples.
- (b) Knowledge and skills.
 - (1) Foundations: observation and perception. The student develops and expands visual literacy skills using critical thinking, imagination, and the senses to observe and explore the world by learning about, understanding, and applying the elements of art, principles of design, and expressive qualities. The student uses what the student sees, knows, and has experienced as

sources for examining, understanding, and creating artworks. The student is expected to:

- (A) gather information from subjects in the environment using the senses; and
 - (B) identify the elements of art, including line, shape, color, texture, and form, and the principles of design, including repetition/pattern and balance, in the environment.
 - (2) Creative expression. The student communicates ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media and demonstrating appropriate skills. The student expresses thoughts and ideas creatively while challenging the imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem-solving skills. The student is expected to:
 - (A) Create artworks using a variety of lines, shapes, colors, textures, and forms.
 - (B) Arrange components intuitively to create artwork; and
 - (C) Use a variety of materials to develop manipulative skills while engaging in opportunities for exploration through drawing, painting, printmaking, constructing artworks, and sculpting, including modeled forms.
 - (3) Historical and cultural relevance. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture by analyzing artistic styles, historical periods, and diverse cultures. The student develops global awareness and respect for the traditions and contributions of diverse cultures. The student is expected to:
 - (A) Identify simple subjects expressed in artworks.
 - (B) Share ideas about personal experiences, such as family and friends, and develop awareness and sensitivity to differing experiences and opinions through artwork.
 - (C) Identify the uses of art in everyday life; and
 - (D) Relate visual art concepts to other disciplines.
 - (4) Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and analyzes artworks of self and others, contributing to the development of lifelong skills of making informed judgments and reasoned evaluations. The student is expected to:
 - (A) express ideas about personal artworks or portfolios.
 - (B) express ideas found in collections such as real or virtual art museums, galleries, portfolios, or exhibitions using original artworks created by artists or peers; and
 - (C) Compile collections of artwork, such as physical artwork, electronic images, sketchbooks, or portfolios, for self-evaluations or exhibitions.
- Title 19
 - EDUCATION
 - Part 2
 - TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY
 - Chapter 113
 - TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
 - Subchapter B
 - MIDDLE SCHOOL
 - Rule §113.19
 - Social Studies, Grade 7, Adopted 2022
 - a) Implementation. The provisions of this section shall be implemented by school districts beginning with the 2024-2025 school year.
 - (b) Introduction.
 - (1) In Grade 7, students study the history of Texas from early times to the present. Content is presented with more depth and breadth than in Grade 4. Students examine the full scope of Texas history, including Natural Texas and its People; Age of Contact; Spanish Colonial;

Mexican National; Revolution and Republic; Early Statehood; Texas in the Civil War and Reconstruction; Cotton, Cattle, and Railroads; Age of Oil; Texas in the Great Depression and World War II; Civil Rights and Conservatism; and Contemporary Texas eras. The focus in each era is on key individuals, events, and issues and their impact. Students identify regions of Texas and the distribution of population within and among the regions and explain the factors that caused Texas to change from an agrarian to an urban society. Students describe the structure and functions of municipal, county, and state governments, explain the influence of the U.S. Constitution on the Texas Constitution, and examine the rights and responsibilities of Texas citizens. Students use primary and secondary sources to examine the rich and diverse cultural background of Texas as they identify the racial and ethnic groups that settled there to build a republic and then a state. Students analyze the impact of scientific discoveries and technological innovations on Texas's development across industries such as agriculture, energy, medicine, computing, and aerospace. Students use primary and secondary sources to acquire information about Texas.

- (2) To support the teaching of the essential knowledge and skills, the use of a variety of rich primary and secondary source material such as biographies, autobiographies, novels, speeches, letters, diaries, poetry, songs, and images is encouraged. Motivating resources are available from museums, historical sites, presidential libraries, and local and state preservation societies.
- (3) The eight strands of the essential knowledge and skills for social studies are intended to be integrated for instructional purposes. Skills listed in the social studies skills strand in subsection (c) of this section should be incorporated into the teaching of all essential knowledge and skills for social studies. A greater depth of understanding of complex content material can be attained when integrated social studies content from the various disciplines and critical-thinking skills are taught together. Statements that contain the word "including" refer to content that must be mastered, while those containing the phrase "such as" are intended as illustrative examples.

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