



Ethnic Studies Lesson 1Ha: Introduction—Affirmative Action Debate, Part 1

TOPIC:
INTRODUCTION

GRADE LEVELS:
11-12

TIME:
1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Themes:

4. Social Movements and Equity

Values and Principles:

6. Connect ourselves to past and contemporary social movements that struggle for social justice and an equitable and democratic society, and conceptualize, imagine, and build new possibilities for a post-racist, post-systemic-racism society that promotes collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):

Speaking and Listening—(SL.11-12)

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (SL.11-12.1)

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives. (SL.11-12.1b)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):

History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)

Lesson Purpose

Students will research the pros and cons of affirmative action in the US, take a position, and debate its merits in addressing race-based educational opportunities.

Essential Questions

What are some of the pros and cons of affirmative action in education in the US? How successful has it been in addressing race-based educational opportunities?

Why is studying American history through ethnicity important?

Materials

[DEBATE RUBRIC](#)

[Cornell Law School: Affirmative action](#)

[Pearson: Why Is Affirmative Action So Controversial and Do We Still Need It?](#)

[ChatGPT](#)

[KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

affirmative action

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, let students know that today we will prepare for our first classroom debate. We will spend one day preparing and one day debating. Just as the class had developed classroom norms, the class will also use debate norms. Show students the [DEBATE RUBRIC](#). Take time to review each norm, and let students know they will be evaluating themselves and the other team when the debate is concluded.

Step 2:

- As a class, ask students what they already know about affirmative action in education. As a class, use a group reading strategy such as round robin or popcorn to read [Cornell Law School: Affirmative action](#). As students listen, they should take notes to help define affirmative action.
- When students have completed their notes, have them help create a classroom working definition of *affirmative action*.

Step 3:

- As a class, have students watch [Pearson: Why Is Affirmative Action So Controversial and Do We Still Need It?](#) (video 7 minutes, 56 seconds). As students listen, they should take notes on where they stand on the question of, “Is affirmative action still necessary today to address race-based educational opportunities?”
- Once students have completed their notes, give every student a 3 x 5 card. Write the question, “Is affirmative action still necessary today to address race-based educational opportunities?” and the following table on the board:

1 - Yes, it is very necessary today.	2 - Yes, it is still somewhat necessary today.	3 - No, it is not as necessary today.	4 - No, it is not necessary at all today.
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- On their 3 x 5 card, students should **NOT** put their name. They should put the question and the table, with their answer circled. Collect the cards from students and shuffle them. Students will be conducting an anonymized debate—meaning they may have to debate from someone else’s point of view (see more about this teaching strategy in Additional Resources at the end of this lesson.)
- Give students a card and have them line up from 1 to 4. This process gives students an opportunity to see what range of opinions exist in the room. Students that have a 1 to 2 card will form one debate team that is **FOR** the question, and students with cards for 3 to 4 will form one group that is **AGAINST** the question. Some adjustments may need to be made in the group numbers in order to

Step 4:

- As a class, let students know that they will be presenting their arguments only from authoritative sources that must be cited. They will not use their own ideas or opinions. Researching affirmative action and all its nuances could take a lifetime. In order to find salient facts for a 20-minute debate, introduce the class to [ChatGPT](#).
- As a class, let students know that they may have used ChatGPT in order to find a quick question to a problem or to unethically write an essay. In this class, there will be essay assignments, but the essays and paragraphs will come from what was discussed and cited in class—making it impossible to pull the “correct” answers from ChatGPT. On the other hand, ChatGPT can be helpful in quickly filling in holes in understanding and can lead to appropriate websites in order to find citations.
- Add the following prompts to ChatGPT and share the results with students:

As an expert in high school ethnic studies and using educational websites, create a table about the pros and cons of affirmative action and its merits in addressing race-based educational opportunities in the US. Embed website citations in the text and include a list of works cited at the end.

As an expert in high school ethnic studies and using educational websites, write an essay on when affirmative action began and when it ended. Include the role of state legislatures in its implementation and how it is used in 2024. Embed website citations in the text and include a list of works cited at the end.

As an expert in high school ethnic studies and using educational websites, write an essay about how marginalized groups such as Asians and Jews have felt about affirmative action in education both in the past and in the present. Include examples of specific people and how the laws have impacted them. Embed website citations in the text and include a list of works cited at the end.

- Make sure that students see that the web links often do not work in the current version of ChatGPT. Even though AI is excellent for giving them ideas, it rarely leads to the exact source, and it makes mistakes. It is not appropriate for copying verbatim, and it cannot be cited. They will need to find the source in order to create a citation for their argument. Citations should also come from reputable sources.
- Give student groups 3 x 5 cards in order to write down their evidence with citations. Give students time to form a strategy and to divide the work among their members. Students will finish researching and form the debate in the next lesson.

Step 5:

- As a class, ask students what they have learned so far about this lesson’s questions, “What are some of the pros and cons of affirmative action in education in the US? How successful has it been in addressing race-based educational opportunities?” and this unit’s question, “Why is studying American history through ethnicity important?” Make note of what was learned on this unit’s KWL chart—along with additional questions.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

For homework, students can continue to conduct research and find evidence for their debate in the next class session.

Additional Readings and Resources

[Affirmative Action: Who does it really help? | Thomas Sowell](#)

Boghossian, Peter, and James Lindsay. *How to Have Impossible Conversations: A Very Practical Guide*. Lifelong Books, 2019.

Boonin, David. "Two Cheers for Affirmative Action." In his *Should Race Matter?: Unusual Answers to the Usual Questions*. Cambridge University Press, 2011. <https://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/phil1200,SP08/boonin.pdf>

Carter, Stephen L. "I Am an Affirmative Action Baby." *New York Times*, August 5, 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/05/opinion/i-am-an-affirmative-action-baby.html>

Carter, Stephen L. "Interview on Richard Heffner's Open Mind." November 30, 1991. <https://www.thirteen.org/openmind-archive/civil-rights/reflections-of-an-affirmative-action-baby/>

Carter, Stephen L. *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*. Basic Books, 1991.

[CATO Institute: Affirmative Action in College Admissions](#)

[Foundation for Economic Education: Affirmative Action](#)

Garrow, David L. "Review of 'Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby,' by Stephen L. Carter." *New York Times Book Review*, September 1, 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/01/books/is-there-a-correct-way-to-be-black.html>

[National Association for Independent Schools: Facilitating Politically Sensitive Discussions](#)

Paul, Pamela. "This 1991 Book Was Stunningly Prescient About Affirmative Action." *New York Times*, May 25, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/25/opinion/columnists/affirmative-action-stephen-carter.html>

Sander, Richard H., and Stuart Taylor Jr. *Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students It's Intended to Help, and Why Universities Won't Admit It*. Basic Books, 2012.

Sowell, Thomas. *Affirmative Action around the World: An Empirical Study*. Yale University Press, 2005.

Sowell, Thomas. "Affirmative Action Around the World," *The Thomas Sowell Reader*. Basic Books, 2011, 287-304.

Sowell, Thomas. "Assumptions Behind Affirmative Action," *The Thomas Sowell Reader*. Basic Books, 2011, 269-271.

Sowell, Thomas. *Barbarians Inside the Gates*. Hoover Institution Press, 1999, 168-171.

Sowell, Thomas. "End It, Don't Mend It," *Barbarians Inside the Gates*. Hoover Institution Press, 1999, 171-173.

Sowell, Thomas. "Phoney Arguments for Quotas," *Barbarians Inside the Gates*. Hoover Institution Press, 1999, 113-115.

Sowell, Thomas. "Quotas Against Asians," *Is Reality Optional?* Hoover Institution Press, 1993, 121-122.

[Thomas Sowell—Affirmative Action](#)

Williams, Walter E. "Affirmative action can't be mended." *Cato Journal*, 1997.

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NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 1Ha: Debate Rubric

Rate on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being did well in adhering to the norm and 3 being did not do well in adhering to norm.

FOR TEAM
(1 to 3) and comments

AGAINST TEAM
(1 to 3) and comments

Adhered to classroom norms of respect and allowing others to speak		
Included evidence with citation or attribution while inside the circle		
Provided supporting evidence with citation or attribution while outside the circle		
Participated in a lively debate even if the topic was not their first choice		
Encouraged different viewpoints, reflected on own biases and assumptions, challenged others to maintain an open mind		
Listened actively while not speaking		
Acknowledged differing points of view and maintained civility		

Ethnic Studies 1B: KWL Chart

KNOW**WONDER****LEARNED**

What do we think we already know about this topic?

What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.

After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.

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