



Ethnic Studies Lesson 11: Introduction—Personal and Collective Agency

TOPIC:
INTRODUCTION

GRADE LEVELS:
11-12

TIME:
1½ HOURS

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

Themes:

1. Identity
2. History and Movement
4. Social Movements and Equity

Values and Principles:

2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.
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):

Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums, including which details are emphasized in each account. (RI.11-12.7)

Writing—(W.11-12)

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. (W.11-12.1)

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

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

Lesson Purpose

Students will investigate personal and collective agency across American ethnicities to see examples where groups have advanced, including by resisting and overcoming discrimination. Students will also investigate cultural traits that can either enhance or take away from personal and collective agency.

Essential Questions

What are examples of personal and collective agency by American ethnicities, and how have they helped those ethnicities advance, including by resisting and overcoming discrimination?

Why is studying American history through ethnicity important?

Materials

[James Madison Program in Ideals and Institutions: Agency, Not Equity: A Path to Achieve Excellence for All](#)

[PBS: Pullman Porters Plant the Seeds of Civil Rights](#)

[Brookings: Asian-American success and the pitfalls of generalization](#)

[KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

personal agency

collective agency

cultural traits

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, post these two statements, “What matters to me most is what has been done to me” or “What matters to me most is what I do about what has been done to me.” Ask students to discuss these comments. Have students watch minutes 3:13-14:17 from [James Madison Program in Ideals and Institutions: Agency, Not Equity: A Path to Achieve Excellence for All](#) (video 14 minutes, 17 seconds). As students watch, have them take notes on what the term *agency* might mean for an individual.
- When students have completed their notes, have them pair with one other student to share their notes. Have pairs of students share with the class to develop a working definition of *agency*. Help students see that people with a high sense of personal agency are more likely to feel in control of their actions and hopeful for their ability to change their own circumstances.

Step 2:

- As a class, ask students what they believe collective agency might mean. Have students watch [PBS: Pullman Porters Plant the Seeds of Civil Rights](#) (video 4 minutes, 25 seconds). As students watch, have students take notes on what collective agency might mean. Students should also take notes on examples of collective agency from the Pullman Porters.
- When students have completed watching, have students pair with another student and share their notes. As a class, have pairs of students share their notes in order to develop a class working definition of collective agency. Help students to see that collective agency happens when a group acts together to seek change.

Step 3:

- As a class, ask students what types of cultural factors could improve and what cultural factors could get in the way of a sense of personal or collective agency. Remind students that some aspects of culture might include: family, religion, education, language, values, rituals, ethics, individualism, and norms—or ways to live, such as education, types of work, drive, or work habits. As a class, have students read [Brookings: Asian-American success and the pitfalls of generalization](#). As students read, have them take notes on examples of cultural traits that could potentially improve collective agency and what traits could potentially limit collective agency. Ask students how the same trait can be both a good thing and a bad thing at the same time.
- When students have completed their reading, have students pair with another student to discuss their notes. As a class, have pairs of students share their ideas.
- Let students know that this course will show examples of both the wrongs that have been perpetrated on different ethnicities as well as the collective agency that ethnic groups have used to resist and overcome those wrongs. Students should watch for examples of personal and collective agency in the following types of lessons:
 - Examples of prominent figures in business, politics, arts, athletics, and civil rights
 - Examples of civil rights movements
 - Examples of legal and court challenges
 - Examples of civic organizations and community activism
 - Examples of military service
 - Examples of educational excellence
 - Examples of cultural pride and preservation
 - Examples of resilience and persistence in the face of difficulties
 - Examples of resistance to removal, slavery, segregation, internment, violence, and racism
- (The class can be encouraged to keep this list of agency examples in the classroom to check each lesson's relevance to personal or collective agency.)

Step 4:

- As a class, ask students this lesson's questions, "What are examples of personal and collective agency by American ethnicities, and how have they helped those ethnicities advance, including by resisting and overcoming discrimination?" 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

Also, students should reflect on the unit's question, "Why is studying American history through ethnicity important?" through the lens of the unit's themes: race, ethnicity, pseudo-scientific racism, white supremacy, stressors, and agency. Students can access the unit's KWL chart and class assignments for citations. Students should write a one-page essay addressing the unit's question and cite their sources carefully.

Additional Readings and Resources

Sowell, Thomas. *Race and Culture*. Basic Books, 1997, 3-4, 9, 227.

INTRODUCTION

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 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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