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Race and Language: A Blueprint for Structuring an Educational Curriculum about the Black Experience in the United States

A Thesis
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by

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It should surprise no one that the condition of race relations in this country is as poor now as they are. With recent and historical events that have occurred in this country in relation to the Black experience (indeed the experience of any of the marginalized communities that call the United States their home), the logical history lesson is that our children should be educated as in the words of George Santayana; “Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it.” In this way, we see the wave of protests, court cases, and rhetoric surrounding race welling up around the nation. Conflicts in the legislative bodies, the court system, the prison system, the educational system, and many more have become increasingly common. With no set curriculum across any of the fifty states to educate youth on the experience of Black folx and African Americans in this country, it should come as no surprise that we do see history repeating itself and racial conditions deteriorating (if they were ever even “better” to begin with).

I would posit that this lack of concentrated progress and improvement is directly related to this lack of a common base of knowledge and understanding. This progress can only be defined as the successful integration of Black folx into a society that neither preys upon them due to race nor must make exceptions in its set rules and positioning of Black folx. The positioning it has outlined for Black folx because the system knowingly preys upon them. In addition, with respect to the prison system, Angela Davis said, “The prison is not the only institution that has posed complex challenges to the people who have lived with it and have become so inured to its presence that they could not conceive society without it”. In this instance, Davis is speaking about prisons, but the idea behind “could not conceive society without it” is incredibly true for the educational system as well. The educational system is deeply rooted in the idea of teaching and teaching the way that has been taught for years. The same way of teaching that has managed to keep Black folx and their children from learning about their heritage; and white youth and

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their children from learning about Black existence and being able to emphasize with, understand, and discuss race. Creating a central system and core content for studying the Black experience is not just for the benefit of Black youth or their families; "The study of and teaching of African American history in all levels of American education institutions, from the classrooms of elementary schools to the ivory towers of the academy, indeed has the potential to help improve, reform, democratize, and enrich American culture and society".  

In this way, we can create a scope and sequence of content, from which a curriculum can be molded, for studying the Black experience is designed to benefit all. This benefit will be in spite of the polarization that we are seeing in this country, it will not be easy; "Instruction with respect to the life and history of the Negro requires probably more preparation than any other phase of social science for the simple reason that no other problems have been so grossly misinterpreted and so general misunderstood. To undertake giving instruction in this field in which one is not prepared then, would be the most expensive error for which future generations must pay in suffering from other misunderstandings like the many which handicap us today".  

As such this fact should invigorate those to make sure it occurs and occurs seamlessly.

To that end, this paper will provide insights as to why the lack of education of the Black experience and Black history in the United States has contributed to poor relations. Linguistic relativity, and the concepts of "interest" and "talk" all lead to the conclusion that without the addition of the Black experience into the regular curriculum in schools, this trend can, and will continue, as the country moves towards becoming more and more polarized. In addition, this paper will discuss how "language" and "talk" must contribute directly to any curriculum that seeks to teach Black experience, and that such teaching must stem from a place of community

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and mutual understanding among students, teachers, and all involved in the classroom. That
being said, language, thought, and hypothetical discussion, are all a privilege to be able to
engage in as many do not have the luxury of having higher-order discussions around race and its
place in their, or their children’s, lives. To understand this fact is to understand why not everyone
wants to resolve the “race” education question the same way, and once that realization is made,
the journey to resolving how it can be taught in school in the United States in a way that
everyone approves of is much much easier.

To begin, understanding why the lack of education about the Black experience in this
country is linked to poorer race relations stems from the findings of Sapir and Whorf in the field
of Linguistics. Sapir-Whorf theorized that language both influences and restricts thought. They
make these claims through the usage of the terms linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity.
The first part, linguistic determinism, refers to the concept that what is said has only some effect
on how concepts are recognized by the mind. This basic concept has been broken down even
further into “strong” and “weak” determinism. Strong determinism refers to a strict view that
what is said is directly responsible for what is seen by the mind. Linguistic relativity then takes
this and applies it to the concept of language itself. It is the idea that language is the reality
through which we see the world. More precisely, the language we have at our disposal is what
we see our own realities with. As a result, the Theory of Linguistic Relativity holds that: “one’s
language shapes one’s view of reality. It is a mould theory in that it “represents language as a
mould in terms of which thought categories are cast”.

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In this way, what we speak and what we know about language is enough to conceptualize issues and bring those issues to either the forefront of our minds or not allow us to discuss them at all at any depth. If we do not have the linguistic ability to frame an issue because we either do not possess the words to do so, or we do not use the words to do so, then that issue cannot be discussed or resolved at any depth because the language precludes it from being so, and is a barrier to understanding and progress. An example of linguistic relativity is that the Inuit peoples have a variety of words, with some dialects having around forty, and others having over a hundred words⁶ to describe and discuss the variations of snow that they see in the arctic circle; while in the English language we only have one word to describe snow. The level of conversation that we can have around snow; the type, thickness, variation, etc. is constrained by the fact that we in the end can only describe it with one word, while the Inuits’ level of conversation and thinking can be much more nuanced and intricate because of it. In this way, it is not just whether we use language, but how often we use it that determines the types of conversations, and the depth of those conversations that we have. The more words or contexts you can use to describe a situation the better you are able to discuss nuances and distinctions in that situation. It is obvious therefore how this relates to the discussion of race and education, if we as children are never taught about race or the Black experience, how can we as adults expect to navigate those issues with one another? Moreover, how do we expect to all come to the table and discuss them so as to find resolutions when Black children and adults alike are more aware and affected with the issues of race, than their white peers. The disconnect does not allow for linguistic relativity to fully enable discussions surrounding race or the Black experience,

especially with respect to the educational system. In summation, if we rarely discuss race, or only in terms of race and color, we are less aptly able to discuss it; “Systems of oppression flourish when the language that camouflages their ideological core is accepted as a given and therefore goes both unexamined and unchallenged”,7 meaning that the more we talk [around] race or racism the more we are accommodating the system that allows racism to flourish, be it direct or de jour; “...in highly racialized democracies the use of racism-blind language [much like what exists in schools today when talking about race] is part of a historically normative pattern of racial accommodation to white power that requires people to work within the existing racial order rather than to examine it, much less challenge it.”8 The backdrop of linguistic relativity provides the framing for how this paper will proceed, without the inclusion of the Black experience and race in the educational system in the United States the more polarization and race relations will remain a problem. But one cannot include them without increasing the amount that they are discussed and debated, and in order to do that, we must break away from the tired mold in which we do so. It starts with children, as the adults in question continue to, and will continue to, rail against race education and understanding the Black experience. By educating the youth of the United States, it follows that they will grow up and educate their children, creating generations that understand and respect difference, are capable of having intellectual discourse surrounding race, and most importantly, that they accept their Black peers not just tolerate them. In addition, this education must also include positives, it cannot just be about everything bad that has happened to Black folx in this country. That would not lend to children (Black or otherwise) approaching the material healthily or sustainably. The material must include space for Black achievement, Black joy, and Black resilience.

To continue, in order to grasp and understand the Black experience and race in detail, children must be educated on it, both in historical context and in detail. This involves using Black intellectuals and their teachings, not simply talking about historical events or important things in the timeline of the Black experience in the United States. Personalized recounts of history are only part of the story and fail to illuminate the deeply layered impacts on black lives, communities, and perspectives. As will be discussed later in this paper, children learn when their interest is engaged. Black children will learn history and literature better if it ties into what they themselves identify as, but this will also benefit the children of other races as well; “The strong interest of ... Black intellectuals in linking their scholarly production to the lived experiences of Black people says something about their understanding of the nature of knowledge... The classical scholarship in the Black intellectual tradition suggests that knowledge exists to serve the social welfare of Black people and, by extension, humanity as a whole”.9 In this way, children can be exposed to the depth of thinking required to learn about the Black experience, while also learning that the Black experience itself is deep, broad, and knowledgeable, which we do not learn inside the educational system in the United States currently. Teaching Black history and Black experience does not just mean using higher-order Black intellectuals. It means using Black produced art, thought, concepts, and creations to teach as well. Using these as tools to teach, not things to avoid because they are not traditional. Poetry, art, dance, theater, music, all of these should, and can, be used to teach about the Black experience as well; poetry that looks like the following poem, that can encourage conversation and discussion and not just be a celebration of apparent Black intelligence;

For All of Them” L.V.
Who Scrubs the blood-stained train track, tile, lobby, car, sidewalk?
Who tears down the yellow tape?
Who sends the flowers and cards?
Who sings at the funeral?
Who watches the casket sink into the ground?
Who can get back to their normal life?
Who is holding their breath waiting for the next time?
Who takes a stand?
Who demands justice?
Who knows justice may never come?
Who keeps fighting anyway?
Who fights by protest?
Who fights by teaching?
Who fights by writing a poem?
Who fights by keeping their names alive? 10

However, this poem is just an example and not enough. It should be any Black-made material that can put the collective human experience that being Black in this country brings into relatable form to enrich and enlighten these discussions. Yes, they are uncomfortable and force young children to confront things they otherwise never would have (because as mentioned previously, we do not talk about these things) but it would help. In this way, children should learn about what the Black experience in the United States has entailed, its extent, how it looks today, but also what was forged in it;

“[If Black and white students do not know the contributions of such figures as Anna Julia Cooper, Carter G Woodson, W.E.B. Du Bois, John Henrik Clarke, Martin R Delany, Marcus Garvey, Asa Philip Randolph, Chandler Owen, Sterling Brown, James Weldon Johnson, Margaret Walker, Arthur PD Davis, Nella Larsen, Lerone Bennett Jr, Chancellor Williams, Carolyn Fowler, and Ida B. Wells, as well as Nathan and Julia Hare, students

should be angry. These Black intellectuals provide some important answers to the questions raised in African-American literature”. 11

By reinforcing the creation mixed in with the struggle, it shows a portion of the Black experience that white children are seldom exposed to, its perseverance.

In order to effectively teach this information, and much much more, the educational system must also look at the relationships between students and teachers as well the relationship between students and the material they are learning. To promote and maintain interest, this paper argues, is the most efficient and effective way to teach children, as children learn better when what they are learning is directly related to themselves, their lives, or their surroundings. To learn, it should be the job of the teacher to attempt to incorporate material that can innately resonate with the students that are learning it;

“Interest has been found to positively affect learning outcomes as well as learning processes. Support for people to develop interest enables them to make personal connections to their learning and improve their performance. It engages them in developing conceptual understanding, leads to the subsequent course enrollment, and provides them with knowledge that they can do the work of the discipline. When individuals have an interest in a task to be accomplished or subject matter to be learned, they have focused attention, goals, and learning strategies; they are more likely to feel self-efficacious and be able to self-regulate”. 12

As this displays, “interest” has the power and ability to impact the learning processes of the learner and enables them to experience their learning and learning environment positively. More

than positively, it has the capability of making or breaking the level of learning the learner is capable of reaching simply due to a line existing between the material that a learner without interest can/will be willing to absorb compared to that of a learner whose interest has been captured by the subject in discussion. This educational psychology is key to understanding that simply adding Black history or pieces of the Black experience into the curriculum, without a plan on how to incorporate them in lessons that will allow the student to engage with them, will do minimal for educating children on the Black experience. In this way, the teacher has the responsibility to the student to engage them with the material, as the student has the responsibility to the teacher to be interested in the material itself; A major lesson ... is that of the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the teacher and the student. In other words, teachers need students as much as students need teachers”. It must be said then, that race and the Black experience have become a politicized thing, and to that end, to teach them is now a political act. But, so is not teaching about them. Consider that in contrast, we do not discuss our current curriculum and its emphasis on Euro-Centric concepts, intellectuals, and things as a political statement; “Again and again, it was necessary to remind everyone that no education is politically neutral. Emphasizing that a white male professor in an English department that teaches only works by “great white men” is making a political decision...”. The unfortunate truth here is that talking about race and the Black experience in the classroom is a political act in today’s United States, but that is exactly what must be done to [hopefully] fix race relations in this country one day. To tie how and what is being taught to the earlier points about linguistic relativity, the nature of talk in the classroom is incredibly important. It is not enough for the teacher to teach at the

students, but the students must also themselves talk with and through the information being given to them; “Without talk, minds can neither grow nor become disciplined. Without disciplined talk, scientific, mathematical, and humanistic knowledge remains static and unused”. In this way, talk is significant in the development of and reinforcement of information for anyone, especially children. What is more, “disciplined talk”, where students have structure, safety, and mutual understanding as to what their common objective is, must be instituted in the classroom. To that end, without talk and conversation, children are incapable of learning social norms, social cues, language, and that which makes interpersonal relationships possible. And if interpersonal connections are impossible without talk and common understanding, we cannot improve race relations or polarization. The fact that we need more of the Black experience in the educational system in order to progress on issues surrounding race and racism in the United States is abundantly clear.

This means that education and curricula development should seek to establish and develop children's interest in the subject matter. To be effective, one must do so in ways that make everyone want to learn, not just the students that are most representative of the material that education on the Black experience provides. Interest must be cultivated across all students, no matter their race. This could mean that the classroom takes a local approach to certain target concepts surrounding this racial education, teaching about concepts that are relevant to local families and understandable for the children in a local concept so that they do not have to attempt to attach a significant meaning to an abstract concept or concept that has no personal meaning for anyone involved. As discussed above, children are more likely to learn when they, and their

friends, are personally invested or involved in the subject matter. This means that a personal connection for the student is the way to maintain interest and make such an educational endeavor worthwhile. Therefore, a teacher must first identify what aspects of the classroom, and the children that inhabit it, are going to resonate with the curricula. What is more, the curriculum and classroom must do this without alienating or singling out the children in question, but rather make them feel like they are learning about the subject the same as everyone, as though it is simply a product of the machinery this country has long had with respect to race, and not as though it is their, or their family’s fault that these concepts apply to them. This of course raises the question of teaching accountability; while we should not actively seek to alienate children that are not Black by discussing the history of race, we also must teach them that it happened and that people that looked like them were responsible. But looking like someone, and being responsible for their actions are not the same thing. We must teach these children therefore that while we may look similar, or look different, we are all human, and it is that we must speak to and understand. That it is the “human” thing to want to care about this history, that it is the “human” thing to learn so as not to repeat. They should not walk away with the belief that learning about Black history is exposing them as culpable for its darkest parts. This does not require placing blame, but rather acknowledging that it happened, it is a part of history, and there is nothing we can do to change that fact. The classroom must be a place where everyone understands that fact and understands that learning about the Black experience will ensure that such a history does not repeat itself, not that learning such a history is so that the blame can be placed at the feet of those alive today.
To continue, promoting interest and engagement with students about the Black experience inevitably must lead to the fostering of community amongst everyone involved in the classroom experience:

"Deferring our personal aesthetic preferences to those of the author necessitates curiosity, sensitivity, and a keen awareness of one’s own positionality. If we aspire for our students to offer insight into one another’s work, then we need to incorporate such skills building into our curriculum. To foster a community, participants must exercise joint ownership...This goes beyond sharing physical space. Real communities are collective rather than individualistic, active rather than passive. Centered on trust rather than transaction".16

With that being said, the next focus of this theory of developing a Black curriculum is fashioning the community in each classroom in which such education is occurring. Without the community aspect, across racial, socio-economic, and other marginalized lines, this curriculum will not work. The mentality around racial education, especially around the Black experience should not be the trend that it has become. Today it has become an “us” or “them” relationship, where it is white families fear that their children will be told that they are actively racist, or heaven forbid, informed of the past horrors of the country and what those mean for the children of color in their classroom. For this curriculum to work, to truly work, it requires that students, and their teachers, mutually understand what is being discussed, and how it touches everyone’s lives in ways that are seen and unseen. It is not enough to tell the students that ____ has occurred and impacted ____ life, they must understand what that means for each student, their families, and the greater community as a whole that they are all part of. In this way, this curriculum is designed to be

16 Felicia Rose Chavez, The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom (Haymarket, 2021): 134.
centered around the experiences, and impacts, of all participating in its usage, not just to use pedagogy as a means to regurgitate tired historical tropes and much-to-often-discussed events. In this way, this curricula adopts some of the tenets of Dr. Gholdy Muhammad’s “Historically Responsive Literacy” Curriculum Model that, “Students carry rich experiences and ways of knowing, speaking to, and being in the world. In order to teach...teachers must spend time cultivating the mind (their intellect), the heart (how they feel about youth), and the hands (*strategies and methods craft of teaching)*.17

To continue then, a curriculum that is structured on the above tenets should be treated like a living and breathing document. It should not have the tainting of the opinions of those that may not understand its full reason for existing and likewise should not be static. Education itself should never be static. Individual students are individual students and as such, the material they learn should never be the exact same from student to student, year to year. After all, every single student takes something different away from the material, even if they all, generally, take away a shared conclusion. Because of this, a curriculum that is focused on educating youth about the Black experience in the United States is not and should not be written and designed by any one individual, because how could that individual possibly accommodate for all of the necessary classroom dynamics, relationships, reading ability, comprehension skills of the students that will be learning from the curriculum. In that way, this paper will compile a scope and sequence, designed to outline how the curriculum that a teacher or school may design around this endeavor may look. A scope and sequence illuminate the necessary material without limiting the educator to having to teach it in a certain way. However, it should be noted that as discussed in this paper, any educator should teach this material (and all material) with the students they are educating in

mind first, and the material second. The lessons should be tailored to the students and not tailored to the material, meaning, what the students take away from the lesson should be more important than it is absolutely necessary to touch on x topic for y amount of time and for z proficiency at the end. In this way, a scope and sequence allow for the development of integral parts of the curriculum to fit the specific class that they are being brought into while also providing a guide for how the curriculum can be guided and shaped to maintain interest, flow, and conceptual understanding. As a result, to really get into what this means for a curriculum that will be built off of the below scope and sequence;

“As teachers, we need to dedicate ourselves to teaching Charlottesville along with a more honest, full history of the United States. That story can’t be told without acknowledging those who have fought and died fighting racism and oppression. We need a history that honors Takiyah Thompsons and Heather Heyers, not the Robert E. Lee’s. But more than that, we need a history that helps us learn how to move beyond tearing down statues and toward tearing down the racist system that those statues represent”.18

To continue, this curriculum could be taught by anyone, but the statistics surrounding the number of Black educators in the United States cannot and should not be ignored either. We lack sufficient Black educators. In 2018, there were 254,252 Black teachers in the United States, with those teachers making up 8.95% of all teachers in the United States. 19 Even that percentage of teachers then causes other issues; where they are concentrated, level that they teach, status as a permanent teacher or substitute, to this end, many students never have a black teacher. Many of the issues that we have with race can, and could, be alleviated if children encountered adults of

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substance (i.e. their teachers) that were Black at earlier ages. Their perceptions, understanding, preconceived notions, and even racist teachings that they bring to that classroom would all inevitably change and alter with that teacher’s instruction; “These students, like most white Americans, had been taught all their lives – through direct statements, gestures, jokes, innuendos, movies, books, glances, dinner conversation, and other actions – that Blacks are inferior to them. Therefore, when they find themselves in a competent Black professor’s class, we should all expect them to undergo changes in their perception of Blackness in the reality of the human being charged with the job of teaching them”. 20 It is with this focus in mind that we should seek to educate our youth, not just White Americans, but Black Americans as well. No child should fear their legacy due to lack of information; that being said, the work to better our youth so that future generations will have a better understanding and be able to talk about these issues that we ourselves seem incapable of discussing does not fall solo on the content that the children are being taught; It also falls on the teachers to be able to teach this curriculum with the earnest and ability that many educators bring to their classroom. That being said, these teachers have the job of having to learn and be able to construct classrooms that center this curriculum, center being able to have tough conversations; that is avoided in today’s classrooms, and do so in ways that promote the aforementioned interest in the continued study for the students as well as connecting to the lived experiences of students without alienating them or making light of the sense of trauma they have that comes with being Black in the United States. All this being said, it falls squarely on the shoulders of the teachers to leverage this kind of curriculum into something that the students can learn from and take from so that it does not matter whether the home life of a student is shrouded by racism. So that the tools they learn at school (from these teachers), will

prepare them to at least be present in these conversations. Being present allows for the thoughts and conversation to at least enter the mind, even if they are not capable at that moment of engaging with the material in a way that will improve what they think about the material. Being, at the very least, present ensures that the aforementioned classroom culture of community allows the student to understand that what is being discussed is important and requires their respect and attention, which will allow them to engage with the material even more as the conversations gain depth and build upon prior material. This holds true for the conversations inside the school walls and outside in the real world. As is witnessed by this quote, “An educator’s style, instructional technology, and organization of materials may all contribute to learners’ interest and performance. For example, they can arrange tasks to actively engage learners, and such enhanced participation is likely to increase students’ levels of interest... Researchers have also reported that human aspects, ethically controversial concepts, suspense, and choice may lead to more sustained student interest”, 21 as the more engaged a teacher is with the material only will promote the interest and engagement of material that this paper earlier outlined. In this way, without teachers there can be no interest management, but without the students there can be nothing for the teacher to latch onto in order to promote interest and engagement. With this in mind, any curriculum that adopts the principles of the Scope and Sequence outlined in this paper must seek to use the guiding principles laid out by Ghouldy Muhammad about historically responsive literacy;

“Historically Responsive Literacy Calls for Knowledge of:
• Self and our own ideologies
• Culture and identity
• Our students’ lives
• Our historical and current social times

• History and the authentic histories of our content areas
• Instructional methods of responsive pedagogy
• A natural sense of imagination, innovation and artistic sensibilities of teaching”

In this nation, many conservative thinkers argue (and children are taught), that discussing race and racism is enough to further polarize or expose children to trauma that they do not deserve to be exposed to. That they are “too young” or “too innocent” that children should not be robbed of their youth with such “heavy” adult issues. I raise the question of why we worry about whether our children are exposed to such adult topics when we do not discuss them as adults either. We allow people to stew in hatred, to bask in their ignorance as adults when simply talking about them as youth would fix almost all of these issues. I counter the claim that this narrative of ignoring discussing race and racism with our children actually succeeds in perpetuating some of the same problems and racism that Black people and Black youth face on a regular basis (discussing the robbery of Black youth). A simple example of this is the description of Black youth that have been killed in police encounters: being described as “men”, “large”, “strong”. But when we encounter similar instances for the youth of other races, the descriptions are “young”, “innocent”, “meek”, “weak”. This use of language, as we have discussed already, influences how we view Black youth. If a twelve-year-old that is shot and killed by police is described as an adult, or a large man, we have not just robbed him of his youth or innocence, we have robbed him of his identity as well as his life at the hands of the police. It is not just this singular event that educating all youth will eventually help avoid, it is the robbery of youth, of innocence, of livelihood, and life that it will help avoid. We are taught collectively that to teach about race is to acknowledge that racism is alive and well, nevermind the statistics about prisons,

the Justice System, politics, or poverty; “We have had a Black president! What more could you ask for?” Freedom is like a tree; is a tree ever satisfied with its growth? Or like us, does it strive to reach the tallest of heights, stretching its many branches skyward. However, its roots are equally spread out below the Earth, the foundation of what makes its heavenward process possible. Freedom is like that tree, and education about the Black experience is one of its many roots; “Freedom then, as Nelson Mandela taught, is not an event but a process... Icon Frederick Douglass, who himself tested the limits of freedom as policy and practice, made his own fateful advances towards freedom more than once. Freedom Day is not an endpoint, it is where we begin”.

As a result, every day we educate our youth on the Black experience we better ourselves, our democracy, and our legacy. Everyday we educate our youth is Freedom Day, everyday we educate our youth we educate ourselves, and by doing so, we improve our lives and everyone’s lives. As such, we must seek to do that educating in a way that is responsible and does right by everyone involved. A curriculum that will ensure that every day is Freedom Day must ensure that the children learning from it are doing so in a way that promotes mutual respect, acceptance, understanding, community, and engagement between everyone involved. In order to ensure this, it is the responsibility of anyone structuring a curriculum in the mold detailed above, that the children that are learning are the most important, but that everyone must be interested, engaged, and willing to learn. Only have all of these conditions been met, will the students learning about the Black experience truly bring about Freedom Day, only then will we begin to truly understand and be able to communicate with one another. Only then will we be able to truly see each other for who we are; people first, learners second, and individuals working towards ridding the country of the polarization it is so rapidly experiencing. It must also be said that as the United States becomes more and more diverse, Culturally Responsible learning must be

required for all regardless of race. In order to be better as a society, we must take the care to learn about everyone. Freedom Day looks like a culturally responsible society across the board, for all, for everyone.
The following Scope and Sequence is constructed with the following tenets in mind (in addition to the above-discussed concepts); while not used in the above writing, they guide the personal aspects of the scope and sequence of self-authored lesson plans. These principles are how I see the teaching of Black history, and as such, were not outlined as integral to creating a curriculum about the Black experience. While I believe in their usefulness, I once again stress that a curriculum on the Black experience must be created and adapted to the students and classroom it is being taught. As such, these principles can aid in some classrooms and be ineffective in others.

- Historicize the African American experience while developing what Peter Seixas has called a "multiperspectival historical truth" for their times
- Acquire knowledge and understanding of African American history based on analyses of the existing historiography, multiple interpretations, conflicting accounts, and primary sources
- Recognize African Americans’ various contributions in the creation of the United States culture and history in relationship to other groups of American peoples
- Place African American history within diasporic and international historical contexts
- Decipher how African Americans have historically responded to legal and extralegal forms of racial-, class, and gender-motivated oppression
- Determine what historical factors make African Americans a unique group despite their intraracial diversity and commonalities with other American peoples
- Imagine-from Afrocentric, authentically descriptive, and explicitly non presentist perspectives-what life was like for African Americans during the different historical periods under consideration.
• Construct their own insightful and practical systems for explaining, comprehending, and operationalizing African American history. 

SCOPE and SEQUENCE

**Kindergarten - Second Grade**

- Difference
- Community Building
- Respect
- Understanding

In this age group, students should begin to learn what “difference” is. This age group is being prepped to engage in conversations about race and the Black experience, but the foundation of how the curriculum should be developed starts here. Students learn what it means to be a part of their classroom community, while also learning to respect one another and their differences. Students, at the completion of second grade, should be expected to comprehend what it means to understand one another in a way that is respectful even if the student disagrees with what the other student is saying.

Children should, and the teacher as well, be okay with “failure”. The students are learning, and grasping concepts, if they say things, or ask seemingly inappropriate questions, it is because they are young children who are learning, it will happen! That is why building community is important, building community and fostering the idea of doing this learning together rather than individually will aid in this.

- Overarching - Community, Respect, Differences

**Third Grade - Fifth Grade**

- Melanin
  - Chemistry aspect
- Race and Racism
- Community Fostering
  - Overarching - Community, Respect, Differences

  This age cluster will begin to introduce Race and the Black experience in earnest. In this age cluster, students will begin to discuss race as it pertains to one another. How we are scientifically different (melanin) and how that may make us look different, but further proves how similar we all are. The elements of community and differences are strong in this age group, as tough discussions surrounding race must be held, and the students should be encouraged to talk and have class conversations about these topics. Racism should be discussed here, and how it can affect anyone, and what its effects mean for all those involved. Students should be encouraged to think about their personal experiences to this point, and how racism has impacted their, their friends, their families, and others’ lives. This age cluster is preparing students to begin learning about Black history in earnest and should reflect this.

Sixth Grade - Eighth Grade

- Slavery
  - How it has morphed over time
  - Indentured Servitude, Slavery, Sharecropping, Mass Incarceration

- The Amendments
  - 13th, 14th, 15th
    - Voting Rights Act of 1965

- Brown v. Board of Education

- Possible Reading
  - “International Library of Afro-American Life and History: I Too Am America” 25

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Section One and Section Two

Provides a black perspective and account of the years that led to slavery as well as slavery itself. Too often, what curriculums that do teach slavery do so in a way that centers the white policies and practices that caused slavery to exist as well proliferate in the United States. This reading will flip that script, and center the Black perspective.

“Saltwater Slavery”26

This book details the sordid details of the journey from Africa to the United States. It discusses the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in depth with perspective. While a bit deep, it is the perfect way for students to think about Slavery in a way that is human, intense, and respectful.

This grade cluster is designed to give an overview of the key events in Black history in the United States. This grade cluster will seek to teach these events from a Black perspective, and as such, will provide opportunities to read first-person accounts, letters, and other objects of history that are so often left out of traditional teachings about the Black experience. As always discussion and talk is an important element to how this cluster will be taught, but the discussion and discursive elements will be secondary to learning about the material. Talk will serve to reinforce, not be the principal way of learning.

- Overarching - Community, Respect, Differences

Ninth Grade - Tenth Grade

- A comprehensive discussion of black history from 1619 to the Present.

This should build off the teachings about slavery and its transformations in the United States. While much of what will have been covered by the 6th-8th grade section encompasses this section as well, this should incorporate more elements outside of the institution of slavery itself. It should factor in black culture, life, and history beyond slavery as well. This is where this will depart from the traditional teachings on slavery.

- Potential Readings
  - “The Black Condition”

This age cluster will begin to incorporate more discursive elements about Black history, as students will be tasked with taking the skills (and core elements of any curriculum) and applying them to their learning about Black history. As such, this age group will use discussions to highlight the material being learned; tasking students to share opinions, thoughts, and information that they find interesting or of particular note about each segment taught in this cluster. While talk is central to all of the age clusters, it is in this one in particular where talk meets learning, as the class will learn the material in question through discussion, posing the elements of lessons to the students to talk to and learn from one another about the material.

- Overarching - Community, Respect, Differences

Eleventh Grade - Twelfth Grade

- The Harlem Renaissance
- Forgotten Pieces of Black History
  - Black Wall Street
  - Seneca Village

In the 11th and 12th grades, students should now know and understand what it means to be able to discuss race. They should be able to understand how they all contribute to conversations, situations, and education around race. With the understanding that race and racism exist, students should be able to use the knowledge that they have gained from 12 years of study about difference, respect, understanding, and community, to discuss issues that currently exist with respect to the Black experience. Students should be able to apply these same core ideas to better understand current issues, as well as frame them with respect to their classmates and peers. Conversations should be student-led and student-centered, with the teacher serving as a guide, not the main contributor. This grade cluster should include a deep dive into Black joy, Black creativity, and Black resilience. Again, this is a stiff departure from the norm of what is taught about Black history in any current curriculum in the United States. However, a curriculum about the Black experience must include the positives about the Black experience in this country, and as a matter of fact, should incorporate elements of it throughout the curriculum, not just at its closure, but this age group will go into it in-depth. In addition, this age cluster will dive into forgotten or ignored parts of Black history; parts that have been thrown to the wayside because they do not fit the narrative of Black history that exists today.
Lesson One - First Grade

‘Celebrating Differences; The “Hand” Activity’

Activity: Making construction paper hands

Need: different color construction paper, scissors, tape, Pens

1. Ask the children to pick a piece of construction paper
   a. Each child will then trace their hand on the construction paper before cutting it out along the outside of the lines
   b. Each student will then write their name on the cutout hand and tape it on a classroom wall, all of the hands together
   c. After doing this, students will return to their seats and prepare to discuss the hands

2. The teacher will then lead a discussion similar to the following...
   a. “Okay everyone, can someone please tell me what is similar about our projects that are now on the wall?”
      i. Target responses
         1. “They’re all hands!”
         2. “Even though they are different colors, they are all hands!”
         3. If no target response is given, guide the children to it
   b. “Now, can anyone tell me what is different about the hands?”
      i. Target responses
         1. “They’re all different colors!”
         2. “They’re all different sizes!”
         3. If no target response is given, guide the children to it
c. “What does it mean that no two hands on the wall are the same?”

i. **Target Response**

   1. “That we all have hands even if they are different sizes or colors?”

d. **Conclude the lesson with a statement such as this**

   i. “Right! Even if you picked red or blue, your hand is big or small, we all have hands! Even if our hands are different, we all have them! Which means that no matter what, we all can pick up our books, or raise our hands to ask questions in class … (in a classroom with children with disabilities this activity works as well, but the language should be tailored to understanding what those children are and are not able to do) No matter what our differences are, we are all apart of this classroom, and we bring our hands to it no matter how different they are!”

   ii. Ask the students if they have any questions or ideas as to what this means and conclude class leaving it with an open discussion.

This lesson should emphasize

- Community
- Differences
- Respect
- Talk and Communication

- At the end of this lesson, students should be able to understand how they are all different but share characteristics and qualities that make them human!

- This lesson should be used to prepare for discussing race in the next grade cluster, it should set up students to begin thinking about how they differ and yet are still similar.
Lesson Two- 3rd - 5th

COLOR ME HUMAN - Exploratorium

"Skin-we’ve all got it, and it comes in a range of colors and shades."

https://www.exploratorium.edu/snacks/color-me-human

This lesson should build off the lesson taught to first graders about “difference”; the “hand” activity. As such, parallels should be drawn. The teacher may ask students how they remember doing the hand activity and whether this new activity makes sense in comparison. This lesson should build on the target points of community, respect, and understanding. While this activity includes melanin, a conversation about race afterward might be in order, such a conversation should seek to, once again, emphasize similarities, not differences. It should point out that like the “hand” activity, we all have melanin and it is just one of the things that make us different. However, it does not make any one of us lesser, it just provides a bit of uniqueness to each individual.

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Lesson Three - 9th and 10th

“Language & Microaggressions”

3. Ask for the children’s definitions of Microaggressions
   a. Promoting Talk, Communication, and Community

4. Create a Shared Classroom Definition
   a. Talk
   b. Language
   c. Community

5. Watch a Video defining and Discussing Microaggressions
   a. Perhaps this one, a TedTalk on Microaggressions
      i. https://youtu.be/cPqVit6TJjw

6. Discuss the video
   a. What does this mean to you?
      i. To your classmates?
   b. Have this be a structured but open discussions
      i. Once again promoting talk, community, and language

7. Now that we have defined Microaggressions...
   a. Would anyone like to share if they have experienced these?
   b. Would anyone like to share how they have said or believed any microaggressions?
      i. Accountability, promoting the idea that you can be on the wrong side of things but it is okay because you are actively trying to learn and not repeat the same mistakes.

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8. Now that we have discussed...
   a. Should we change our shared definition?
   b. Can our definition be better?

This lesson should emphasize
   - Language
   - Communication
   - Community
   - Accountability

- At the end of this lesson, students should be able to recognize, define, and understand what Microaggressions are and how the language we use can lead to microaggressions being uttered.

- This understanding should also conclude that it is possible to knowingly and unknowingly engage in microaggressions.

- This lesson should be used to prepare for later conversations surrounding current events and our roles in conversations surrounding them and race.

These lessons are designed to provide a blueprint or an idea for how one might structure their own lessons. As outlined above, no lesson should ever be used exactly as designed, every classroom is different, every student is different, and every teacher is different. The lesson should be adapted to suit the needs of the students in the class, as well as the environment in which they are learning. That being said, these lessons provide a structure to see how the core of the possible curriculum can extend to each individual age group in the scope and sequence, as well as how those same core elements are present at each level of any potential curriculum.
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