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TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY & ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES

PRESENTS

RESPECT LIFE WEEK CURRICULUM:
RACISM AS A LIFE ISSUE

History of Anti-Black Racism, Racial Justice, and the Catholic Church

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Lesson Overview

Lesson Description: This lesson addresses race and the sin of racism through a historical and modern lens. As a teacher, you may feel apprehensive or unsure about beginning a conversation about race in your classroom. You are not alone. It takes courage, preparation, and a reliance on the Holy Spirit's guidance to hold space for such difficult topics as race and racism. Have confidence - in yourself and in your students - that it is possible to discuss tough topics like these. As educators, it is our job to have honest, clear, and open conversations with students so that they are equipped to confront the sin of racism as they encounter it. We hope that this lesson and the accompanying resources will guide you.

This lesson is designed for high school students in U.S. Catholic schools, and is written for integration in Social Studies. Depending on the class and/or the grade level at which this lesson is taught, the teacher may need to make appropriate adjustments.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- ◆ the historical and current reality of anti-Black racism in the United States and its effects.
- ◆ the stance of Catholic Social Teaching on racism.
- ◆ the exemplary lives of contemporary Black saints.

Students will engage in:

- ◆ discussion/reflection on the complex history of the American Catholic church with regard to complicity in anti-Black racism and working to combat it.
- ◆ structured dialogue with peers around contemporary areas of structural racism that Black Americans face.



Framing the Lesson and Introducing Read One Brief History of Anti-Black Racism

In this lesson, students have the opportunity to investigate historical and contemporary events of anti-Black racism and the struggle toward racial justice in the United States. Often, we may approach history as cold, detached observers, forgetting that the people who lived through these events were also children of God. When available, events and supplementary readings were selected to offer more human perspectives on historical events. The activities ask students and teachers to access their empathetic imaginations, giving special attention to the very real, human impact on the people of the time.

The first day allows students to examine historical and contemporary events of anti-Black racism along with signs of hope. Students have the opportunity to share their research with one another and discuss the impacts and common themes across events. The primer activity is designed to challenge students to consider their own responses in situations where differences based on social identities may occur. A teacher may find it useful to complete the primer activity like a teaser, with little to no explanation of the lesson to come, so as not to influence student responses.

Primer/Anticipation Activity: Four Corners

Without much introduction, ask students to stand in four corners of the classroom. Explain that you will pose a series of statements with four possible responses. Students answer by standing in the corner of the room that corresponds with their response to the statement.

After each question, the teacher will ask groups to explain why they chose that corner and lead a short discussion.

Teacher Note: Arrange the statements in order of low stakes to higher stakes based on your knowledge of your students. If a question doesn't quite fit your context, modify it accordingly. The intent is to get them thinking about issues that arise around race and racism in a personal and accessible way.

Questions

- ◆ When I meet a person who is very different from me, I feel (excited, nervous, curious, uninterested).
- ◆ Our school is diverse in many ways (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree).
- ◆ If I were to be seriously ill, I would feel confident that a hospital would take me seriously (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree).
- ◆ When I see someone treated unjustly, I feel (angry, indifferent, powerless, sad).
- ◆ My family has friends who have different faith traditions or cultures than we do (none, just one, some, many).
- ◆ I feel comfortable spending time in a part of the city where I do not speak the dominant language (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree).
- ◆ I can receive corrections or criticism from a friend without becoming defensive or angry (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree).
- ◆ I can make a good guess at the personality or values of someone I don't know just by looking at them (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree).
- ◆ Add your own questions or make adjustments as necessary.

Opening Prayer: Prayer to Overcome Racism (from the USCCB)

Mary, friend and mother to all, through your Son, God has found a way to unite himself to every human being, called to be one people, sisters and brothers to each other.

We ask for your help in calling on your Son, seeking forgiveness for the times when we have failed to love and respect one another.

We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son the grace we need to overcome the evil of racism and to build a just society.

We ask for your help in following your Son, so that prejudice and animosity will no longer infect our minds or hearts

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but will be replaced with a love that respects the dignity of each person.

Mother of the Church, the Spirit of your Son Jesus warms our hearts: pray for us.

Amen.

Activity: A Very Brief History of Anti-Black Racism

In this activity, students will work in pairs to investigate law, events, and cultural movements following the Emancipation Proclamation to now.

Teacher Note: If possible, pair students in racially/ethnically diverse working pairs.

Assign each pair a different point on the timeline and the associated article.

Timeline

- **1838:** Jesuit Plantation Owners in Maryland sold enslaved people to cover debts of founding Georgetown University
- **1865-1870:** Congress passes 13th, 14th, 15th Amendments
- **1868:** Former Confederate States of America states begin passing “Black codes” better known as Jim Crow Laws
- **1854-1897:** Life of Venerable Father Augustus Tolton
- **1908:** Springfield, IL 5000 white people lynch 8 Black people over several days
- **1920’s:** Harlem Renaissance
- **1921:** Riot destroys Tulsa’s Black Wall Street
- **1937-1990:** Life of Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman
- **1947:** Jackie Robinson joins Brooklyn Dodgers
- **1955:** 15 year old Claudette Colvin (and later Rosa Parks) refuse to move to the back of busses
- **1955:** All white jury acquits two men of lynching 14 year old Emmett Till in Mississippi
- **1957:** Little Rock Nine. Eisenhower federalizes the National Guard to enforce desegregation
- **1961:** Freedom Riders
- **1963:** Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King pens the Letter from a Birmingham Jail
- **1968:** Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King assassinated
- **1986:** Anti-Drug Acts introduces mandatory sentencing leading to mass incarceration
- **1991:** Rodney King beaten by police; LA riots
- **1995:** Million Man March
- **2008:** Barack Obama elected 44th president of U.S.
- **2013:** Black Lives Matter movement starts
- **2018:** U.S. Bishops release “Open Wide Our Hearts”
- **2020:** George Floyd killed by police in Minneapolis
- **2023:** Tracy Gaeta killed by police officer who fired over 30 rounds in Stockton, CA

Articles

1838: Jesuit Plantation Owners in Maryland sold enslaved people to cover debts of founding Georgetown University:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2023/06/15/georgetown-jesuits-enslaved-sold/>

1865-1870: Congress passes 13th, 14th, 15th Amendments
<http://www.vgskole.net/prosjekt/slavrute/46.htm> (Excerpt from Slave Narratives, Frederick Douglass)

1868: Former Confederate States of America states begin passing “black codes” better known as Jim Crow Laws
<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/remembering/blacks.html>

1854-1897: Life of Venerable Father Augustus Tolton
<https://tolton.archchicago.org/about/biography>

1908: Springfield, IL 5000 white people lynch 8 black people over several days
<https://presidentlincoln.illinois.gov/Resources/310ee587-5442-444c-8165-7916f8903c85/springfield-race-riot-catalog.pdf>
Pages 27-32 (Triggering language here, but historical accounts and eye witnesses quotes)

1920's: Harlem Renaissance
<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-11-08-me-54439-story.html>

1921: Riot destroys Tulsa's Black Wall Street
<https://www.tulsaohistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2021.170.001.pdf>
(Pgs 5-6. This is a personal letter with some very triggering language and somewhat graphic description of the riot, but accurate.)

1937-1990: Life of Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman
<https://www.sistertheabowman.com/biography/>

1947: Jackie Robinson joins Brooklyn Dodgers
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/jackie-robinson-baseball/articles-and-essays/baseball-the-color-line-and-jackie-robinson/1940-to-1946/>

1955: 15 year old Claudette Colvin (and later Rosa Parks) refuse to move to the back of busses
<https://www.npr.org/2009/03/15/101719889/before-rosa-parks-there-was-claudette-colvin>

1955: All white jury acquits two men of lynching 14 year old Emmett Till in Mississippi
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/emmett-trial-jw-milam-and-roy-bryant/>

1957: Little Rock Nine. Eisenhower federalized the National Guard to enforce desegregation
<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/civil-rights-little-rock/1957-09-24-press-release.pdf>

Articles cont.

1961: Freedom Riders

<https://www.crmvet.org/nars/green1.htm>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/peoplescentury/episodes/skindeep/zwergrtranscript.html>

1963: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King pens the Letter from a Birmingham Jail

<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/letter-from-birmingham-city-jail-excerpts/>

(Parts 3 - 6)

1968: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King assassinated

1986: Anti-Drug Acts introduces mandatory sentencing leading to mass incarceration

<https://eji.org/news/racial-double-standard-in-drug-laws-persists-today/>

1991: Rodney King beaten by police; LA riots

<https://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney-king-riots>

1995: Million Man March

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-million-man-march-revisited-three-stories/2015/10/06/d8018bce-66e7-11e5-9ef3-fde182507eac_story.html

2008: Barack Obama elected 44th president of U.S.

2013: Black Lives Matter movement starts

<https://undergroundrailroadhistory.org/the-black-lives-matter-movement-an-origin-story/>

2018: U.S. Bishops release “Open Wide Our Hearts”

<https://cacatholic.org/article/open-wide-our-hearts-us-bishops-pastoral-letter-raci>

2020: George Floyd killed by police in Minneapolis

2023: Tracy Gaeta killed by police officer who fired over 30 rounds in Stockton, CA

<https://stocktonia.org/news/public-safety/2023/01/16/family-of-woman-fatally-shot-by-stockton-pd-officers-files-lawsuit/>

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Students read the article and discuss the following questions with their partner:

- ◆ How would characterize this event in the march towards fair and equitable treatment of Black folks in America? Is it a setback or progress? Why?
- ◆ What do you think the long term effects of this event were on Black folks in America? Think about any and all historical, cultural, monetary, personal, implications.
- ◆ What does justice look like in this situation? Do you think justice was present here? Why or why not?

In chronological order of events, students share a brief recount of their assigned event and article, and their discussion of the three prompts with the class. As they share, ask for a volunteer to draw/build a collective timeline (on board or on large butcher paper) documenting the events and effects.

Teacher Note: This is not meant to be a deep dive into research, just a short minute introduction to the broad picture of anti-Black racism in America.

After all groups have shared, remind the students that although we can mark historical events on a timeline, the effects or even events themselves can be ongoing.

Discussion

Moderate a short class discussion focusing on the effects of these events. Some questions might include:

- ◆ Can we still see/feel the effects of these events today? How?
- ◆ Ask students a final wrap up question: What connections can you make from timeline events to other contemporary events or issues?

Leave the timeline up in the classroom for the next lesson.

Closing Activity: Check Out Circle

Check in with students at the end of the day's lesson:

- ◆ What emotions came up for you as we discussed these events today?
- ◆ How might these emotions affect you and the people around you?



Framing the Lesson and Introducing Day Two The Church & Racial Justice

During day 2, students will be challenged to think critically about the ways in which the Catholic Church, and the broader American Christian churches, have influenced racial justice in U.S. history. Through their work and reading, students will see Catholics in the United States acting as a positive force in the struggle for racial justice. They will also examine the many times individual Christians, religious orders, and Church leaders condoned racism and helped to build and support racist structures. Students will be asked to grapple with this reality and how they might be called to respond as young members of the Church today.

It is important to note that it is not the intention of this curriculum to condemn the historical or current Church, but rather to present students with a clear-eyed

view of the historical record. Racism is both a personal sin (i.e., attitudes and belief) and a structural sin (i.e., impacting organization of society in ways that impact institutions like economic and political life, educational opportunities, housing, etc.); the Catholic Church is not exempt. However, we understand that young people often find it difficult to separate their experience of personal faith from their experience of the Church. In the case of this curriculum, a critical discussion of the Church may feel like a criticism of the Catholic faith. As educators, it may be helpful to examine our own understanding of this distinction in advance, so as to guide students to be able to think critically about the actions of the Church without feeling that the truth of the Catholic faith itself is being scrutinized.

Opening Prayer: Prayer to Overcome Racism (from the USCCB)

Mary, friend and mother to all, through your Son, God has found a way to unite himself to every human being, called to be one people, sisters and brothers to each other.

We ask for your help in calling on your Son, seeking forgiveness for the times when we have failed to love and respect one another.

We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son the grace we need to overcome the evil of racism and to build a just society.

We ask for your help in following your Son, so that prejudice and animosity will no longer infect our minds or hearts but will be replaced with a love that respects the dignity of each person.

Mother of the Church, the Spirit of your Son Jesus warms our hearts: pray for us.

Amen.

Review

Revisit the timeline from the previous lesson, focusing students on the effects of racism on people of color, specifically Black folks. Ask students to share something they learned in the previous lesson that they did not know before. Ask why they think they were not aware of this historical event.

Teacher Note: Students may not know why they do not know about certain events. Ask them to think deeper on why different parts of history might be easier or more difficult to access.

Activity: Levels of Racism Exploration

Racism is complex, and can occur on different levels. Give students the following terms, and ask them to brainstorm definitions (either individually or in pairs):

- ◆ Internalized racism
- ◆ Interpersonal racism
- ◆ Structural racism

Activity: Levels of Racism Exploration

Allow students some time to share the definitions they came up with before providing the following definitions:

- ◆ Internalized racism is ingraining of stereotypes, values, images and ideologies perpetuated by the dominant society into one's personal beliefs about one's one racial group. Internalized racism can take the form of both internalized racial inferiority or superiority.
- ◆ Interpersonal racism occurs when a person's conscious or subconscious racial bias influences their interactions with other people.
- ◆ Structural racism refers to biased laws, policies, or practices that restrict people's access to services, opportunities, and resources because of their race.
- ◆ Illustrate the complex nature of racism by asking students to graphically organize the relationship between these three levels of racism. (Hint: There are many ideas here, concentric circles seems to be a useful image, but there are others.)
- ◆ Ask students to draw out and defend their suggestions.

Group Work: Catholic Church and Racial Justice

Return to the collaborative timeline as an example of the levels of racism. Ask students to review the timeline and discuss two good examples of each level of racism. Ask students:

Where was the Church throughout this time, and now? Was the Church speaking out against racial injustice or condoning it?

Put students in small groups of about five to investigate the following historical and doctrinal realities:

1. Catholic Social Teachings on Dignity of the Human Person, Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, and Solidarity. <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching>
2. 1838: Jesuit Plantation Owners in Maryland sold enslaved people to cover debts of founding Georgetown University <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/us/georgetown-university-search-for-slave-descendants.html>
3. 1854-1897: Life of Venerable Father Augustus Tolton <https://tolton.archchicago.org/about/biography>
4. Excerpts from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963), performed by Anna Deavere Smith (5:41-15:30) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpI5rN96JPU&ab_channel=Stanford
5. 1937-1990: Life of Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman <https://www.sistertheabowman.com/biography/>

Student Presentations

Groups present their topics for 3-4 minutes each, addressing the following questions:

- ◆ What does your topic reveal about the Catholic Church and its relationship to racial justice?
- ◆ How did the action or inaction of the Church affect people of color and/or specifically Black folks?
- ◆ In what ways are Black folks at the center in this event, teaching, or story? What does that reveal about the thinking of the Church in the U.S. at the time?
- ◆ Which level(s) of racism does this event, teaching or story address? How do you know? What does that tell us about the Church as an actor at that time?

Closing Activity: Check Out Circle

Ask students the following questions:

- ◆ How does today's discussion inspire you to act?

Homework/Preparation for Day 3

Assign students to small groups of 3-4 students (these can be the same groups used for the group work activity or new groups).

Ask students to work in groups of about three or four to brainstorm one personal, local, or community issue that is connected to race or racism. This could be

- ◆ A personal experience one student has had with racism
- ◆ An event that has affected the community
- ◆ An observation about diversity or representation in the school or local community
- ◆ A more general topic area such as redlining, maternal mortality, environmental racism, workplace discrimination applied to the local context

In their groups, prepare to present the problem, its stakeholders (people directly involved and people affected by it), and any action they have personally taken in the situation if applicable.

Day 3 & 4 Discussion Circles

During Days 3 and 4 of this lesson, students will enter into a structured dialogue designed to encourage reflection, diverse opinions, and personal responsibility for action. This type of "circle conversation" begins with a problem or challenge that has to do with racism, ideally sourced from the community. Students will discuss all aspects of the issue over several structured "rounds" of dialogue, each round with its own focus and goal. Structured dialogue like this may be a new challenge for many students. It is as much focused on the problem presented as it is focused on how the dialogue is maintained: with respect for one another's speaking time and opinions, a sensitivity to how our words impact others, and

the ability to accept that the problem may not be solved. There may be further community agreements for dialogue you or the students may like to add.

As educators, we know better than most that the current generation of young people is coming of age in a world full of conflict. To their immense credit, they have converted this turmoil into a fervent passion for justice in all its forms, and are taking various actions across the country and the world. We hope that you will encourage your students to pay special attention to Round 5, where they will be asked to consider, in the light of faith, positive actions to address the challenges they bring to the discussion. For indeed, as St. Teresa of Calcutta said, “Love in action is faith, faith action is service. By putting our faith into living acts of love, we put ourselves in contact with God Himself, with Jesus our Lord.”

Activity: Discussion Circles

Teacher Note: This is a structured discussion process and it will take time. You may only get to one or two groups per class period. Don't rush! Challenge students to be as detailed and specific as possible in their exploration of all aspects of a problem and possible actions. It may be a good idea to ask one group to work with you ahead of time to model the procedures.

Begin the activity by explaining that students will participate in a group discussion that will be completed in several steps. There may be moments where we all feel uncomfortable or challenged by something we hear. This is a good/productive type of discomfort! It may lead to positive change in our community and relationships.

Introduce Community Agreements

There are a few community agreements that will guide the structured discussion:

- ◆ Monitor your air time: If you are a talker, make sure you leave space for others. If you are on the quieter side, be sure to share too.
- ◆ We are all experts in our own experiences! Where possible, use “I” statements instead of “you” statements.
- ◆ It is okay to disagree respectfully. We will not “solve” everything today.
- ◆ Mindful of our words and how they can harm and help.

Teacher Note: The community agreements will be most effective if students have practiced them prior to this discussion.

Round 1: Presentation of Challenge (7 minutes)

One small group will present the problem that they have brainstormed:

- ◆ The problem or challenge
- ◆ How it touches internalized, interpersonal, and/or structural racism
- ◆ Its stakeholders (people directly involved and people affected by it)
- ◆ Barriers to change or positive action in this situation
- ◆ Any action they have personally taken in the situation
- ◆ Why they chose this issue to present

Round 2: Clarifying Questions (5-7 minutes)

The rest of the class will ask clarifying questions of the small group. These are questions that have simple, straightforward answers and are meant to solidify the large group's understanding of the issue.

Round 3: Probing Questions (10 minutes)

The rest of the class will ask probing questions of the small group. These are questions that have complex answers. They might begin with "why or how" and are intended to challenge the small group to consider the issue in a new way.

Round 4: Large Group Discussion (15 minutes)

The large group will discuss what has been presented to them without the input of the presenting group. The presenting group sits outside the circle and listens without responding.

The large group should address:

- ◆ Their understanding of the problem presented
- ◆ Possible positive actions and their effects
- ◆ Barriers to possible positive actions
- ◆ Any lingering questions they have

Round 5: Final Discussion and Action (7-10 minutes)

The small group rejoins the discussion and reflects back what they heard. Together the entire class imagines positive action they could take and addresses how they might overcome the barriers to positive action.

Repeat all rounds with another group as desired.

Final Reflection

At the end of the final day of this curriculum, ask students to write a short response to their experiences over the past few days by choosing one or more prompts below:

- ◆ Racism is a sin that permeates our culture. What do you feel is your own personal responsibility to address it? What does that responsibility look like in your daily life?
- ◆ Justice is a crucial part of our Catholic faith. How do you feel we have a collective responsibility as Catholics to address racism at all levels (internalized, interpersonal, structural)?
- ◆ What can your generation teach the world about justice? What wisdom can your generation gain from your elders about justice?

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