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IDRA's Knowledge is Power is a national resource for educators and advocates to help you do your work for equity and excellence in education in the midst of classroom censorship policies.

In this edition...

- We Can and Must Talk about Racism in Classroom Lessons
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See previous editions of [Knowledge is Power](#) and related resources online.



We Can and Must Talk about Racism in Classroom Lessons

by Hector Bojorquez

We urge all teachers to create classroom experiences that value everything students bring to the classroom. As our national founding documents state that all people are created equal, we must value students' fullest expression of themselves. We must value the totality of their identity.

We can, and must, do this in light of current laws enacted across the country. The laws are affecting students of color, who are already experiencing achievement gaps and are underrepresented in higher education, in STEM fields and in the arts. It is these very students whom we must invite to discuss the totality of their being, their experiences and challenges.

Regrettably, the chilling effects are already being seen. A library has begun to censor books highlighting people of color, a principal who dared talk about national reconciliation is being dismissed, and schoolboards in pockets across the nation have become battlegrounds where the

ill-informed have disrupted decades of work designed to close achievement gaps that can only benefit our nation's workforce.

No student should fear bringing their experiences to the classroom. As educators, we must facilitate discussions that include students' backgrounds, family histories, and how those are tied to our country's victories and struggles, regardless of the current environment.

For example, there is no controversy in the following lesson plan that I adapted from my earlier days in the classroom.



Sample Lesson

Grade 8 Texas TEKS (Texas standard)

Students discuss how and whether the actions of U.S. citizens and the local, state and federal governments have achieved the ideals espoused in the founding documents. (§113.20 Social Studies, Grade 8)

Objective

Students will describe the role of their community in achieving the ideals espoused in the founding documents.

Activities

In groups, students will...

- Use local newspaper archives and create a timeline of local events leading up to the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and/or the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Create five to 10 interview questions about their communities' involvement, memories and thoughts concerning the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 and/or the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965.
- Interview family members, community leaders, civics groups, elders, tribal councils, etc.
- Write a journal entry about their experiences interviewing community members.
- Create a video about their family members, community leaders, civics groups, elders and tribal council contributions to the passing of these laws that have been universally accepted as "espousing the ideals in the founding documents."

Such a lesson plan can help transform our discussions about contentious issues. It also centers the experiences our students' families and communities in achieving the ideals of the founding documents. It is a lesson that only begins to scratch the surface of our community's shared experiences.

It is a starting point to discuss current issues as well and is well within the bounds of the Texas law, for example, that states, "A school district or open-enrollment charter school may not implement, interpret or enforce any rules or student code of conduct in a manner that would result in the punishment of a student for discussing, or have a chilling effect on student discussion of... American values, slavery and racism are anything other than deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to, the authentic founding principles of the United States, which include liberty and equality." (See: [What does HB 3979 Do?](#))

While it is the informed opinion of researchers that no statehouse should be in the business of curriculum writing, it is explicit in this section that we can discuss the aberration and deviation

that is racism and slavery.

I encourage you to assert our common American experiences by creating the type of lessons and classrooms that affirm the background and culture that our students bring to us. This absolutely means that we can and must talk about racism. The current law, with all of its problems and questionable intentions, could not ignore the historical facts of slavery and racism. So, while many have already felt the chilling effects, we must have the courage to invite students' voices.

We should have no fear in creating the uncensored spaces that allow us to discuss how those deviations happened and how many continue to do the work of achieving the more perfect union espoused in our founding documents.

[Learn more about protecting student civil rights from the IDRA EAC-South, the equity assistance center serving schools in the U.S. South.](#)

Educators! Tell us how classroom censorship policies and proposals are affecting your school!

Fill out our educator survey



Students Want School to be Relevant and Inclusive

Two students spoke with reporters during a recent press briefing held by IDRA and the Teach Coalition. Below are some of their remarks.

“Oftentimes my family would talk about history being so boring for them. But at the back of my mind, I would be thinking, ‘History is so boring because you have nothing to connect to. You have no people to connect to. The only figures that you can connect to in history books are Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King... History needs to stop being boring, and start being educational.’”

Autumn, student

”

“By limiting these conversations about race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and current events, we are upholding the systems that work against students from minority groups. We are also creating an education system whose sole purpose is to censor the students and indoctrinate, rather than giving rise to a more tolerant, caring, and open-minded generation.”

Emaan, student

”

“Just by having the opportunity to talk about how we have those negative stereotypes and how they came to be, we would actually be able to apply history to real life. Oftentimes, [students ask,] ‘What is the purpose of history? We’re just learning facts and people and events.’ But by actually learning how those events perpetuate in society today, and how they contribute to many of the problems we face today, us students will be better able to solve them.”

Autumn, student

”

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Schools Should Teach the Truth – A Letter from a Parent

by Dr. Lizette Goodloe, Northside ISD Parent

It is important for my son to learn the truth about history from multiple perspectives. I want him to grow and develop into a critical thinker, critical reader and a person who challenges the status quo based on the events of history that have shaped our people. I don't want my child to learn one version or a portion of history that has been whitewashed and deemed appropriate by people who are not teaching the youth of our country.

As a parent, it is my responsibility to share in the educational landscape by providing resources, support and information to educators who need assistance. These resources vary based on the needs of the teacher, school or district but are not limited to books, music or classroom décor.

Serving the needs of our students by exposing them to different cultures is necessary for their development as informed, inquisitive and empathetic people. This is an essential aspect of education that prepares our children for life after high school.

It takes a village to raise a child. In many states, the system is attempting to dilute, eliminate and destroy our children's education even further. As parents, community members and concerned citizens, it is our obligation to stand united and demand that all aspects of history be included in curriculum. Simply sharing one version of history is detrimental to our future leaders and scholars.

Our expectation is that children continue learning from the obstacles our ancestors encountered and gain a deeper appreciation for the struggles overcome by many people throughout history.

As a parent, former educator and member of the TEACH coalition, I stand in solidarity with the students in Texas who desire for the truth to be taught in their schools.



IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

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