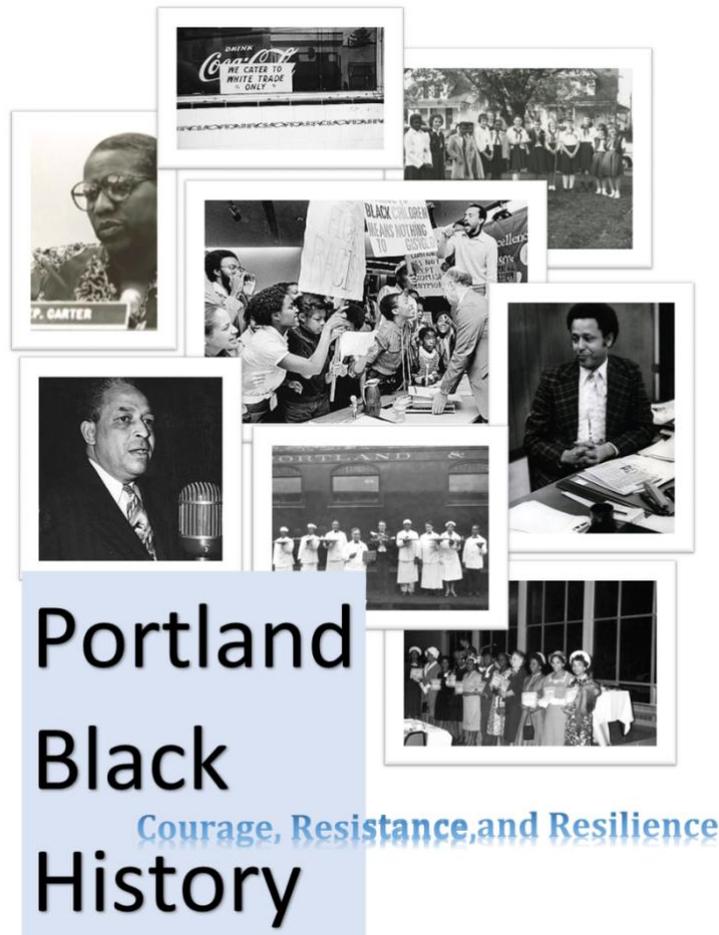


CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL WRONGS

THE BLACK HISTORY OF PORTLAND, OREGON



GRADES 6-8 CURRICULUM AND EDUCATORS GUIDE

Prepared by

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[The Cottonwood School of Civics and Science](#)

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INTRODUCTION

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear educators, parents, partners, and other curriculum leaders,

The Cottonwood School of Civics and Science, understanding the importance of education equity, will create an opportunity for our students to learn the Black History of Portland through the “Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs: The Black History of Portland, Oregon” curriculum. This is not the definitive story of Portland’s Black history. This is a start to telling an evolving story, one that will change as new perspectives are added and current events unfold. Within this curriculum we have attempted to capture images, voices, and commentary on a myriad of people, places, and events associated with Portland’s Black community over the past 170 or so years. It is the result of years of research, conversation, and discovery but it is far from complete. As you lead the lessons, be ready to learn new insights, experiences, and information from your students, partners and parents. Be prepared to identify gaps based on your own racial identity, personal experiences, and/or knowledge. Think of this binder as a living document, one that you can revise and add to over years.

Race and our personal beliefs about race are at the heart of this curriculum. This requires us—the educators—to examine and reflect upon our own biases and assumptions. In order to teach this curriculum, it is imperative that we do this work. This means: take time for reflection, be willing to “lean into discomfort,” process your emotions, and be ready to make mistakes. Consider identifying a network of people to support you and help you process as you prepare and lead this curriculum. A network could be made of fellow educators in your school or organization, or it could be made of friends, family, or other colleagues who are doing similar work. This is one way we can seek growth as educators, preparing to learn alongside our students while also offering them the additional support they may need.

The development of this curriculum was rooted in the philosophies of place-based education and culturally responsive teaching practices. Through our collaborative work writing this text, we have found there is tremendous overlap between these two educational approaches. We believe that employing place-based education and culturally responsive teaching practices is simply good teaching and it is our assumption that the following lessons will be held up by these foundational frameworks.

It is our hope that through this curriculum students will recognize the multiple perspectives and experiences *that can take place in one city*. An essential insight we wish to impart is that different groups of people have unique experiences of history and place. Students who often do not see themselves represented in the dominant historical narrative—including African-American, Latino, Asian, Native Hawaiian, American Indian, Alaska Native and more—may see within this curriculum that there are alternatives to traditional history and avenues to share their story. If we as educators want to change the story, we must change the story tellers. As educators, it is imperative for us to listen. In order for our young people to better understand their communities and their neighbors, we need to give them access to stories that have been silenced for too long. It is only by examining the past and their own understanding of the present, that they will become empowered agents of change in their lifetime, if not in ours.

Again, we offer this curriculum as a living, breathing document. We offer it with humility and the belief that you need to start somewhere. We are certainly open to feedback and suggestions—feel free to connect with us as you take this on.

Thank you for doing this work,

Sarah Anderson and Lisa Colombo

Who Are We?

The two primary authors of this curriculum are staff members of the Cottonwood School of Civics and Science in Portland, Oregon. Lisa Colombo is the 6th grade teacher and has been with the school since it opened in 2007. Sarah Anderson came to the school as the 7th/8th grade humanities teacher in 2008 and then transitioned into the position of fieldwork and place-based education coordinator. We are both white women who work at a school with a primarily white student body. Neither of us grew up in Oregon. We struggled at many moments and junctures of this process with the question, “Should we be the ones to write this curriculum? Is it our place to tell these stories?” There were times when our uncertainty slowed us down, but we were continuously bolstered and re-energized by colleagues and associates, many of them people of color, who assured us that we could do this. But we didn’t need to do it alone and realized that, we actually *shouldn’t* do it alone.

We recognized early on that this work could not be done in isolation without inviting and including the direction and perspectives of others, especially of those who have lived this story. We deferred to the knowledge and experience of associates and colleagues who are

much more intimate with the Black history of Portland and for whom this is not an academic task; it is part of their life. We are deeply indebted to the following individuals for their assistance and consultation:

Darrell Millner, emeritus professor of history and former head of the Black Studies Department at Portland State University, guided us as we wrote the history in this curriculum. Professor Millner’s many suggestions and revisions have enabled us to produce a more honest and accurate narrative.

John Lenssen and Hector Roche served as equity consultants for the first leg of this project. John and Hector brought process and reflection to the forefront of the curriculum and helped us to recognize our own biases embedded in the text. With their assistance, we designed the diverse perspectives worksheet and worked to create documents that will help all educators be more self-reflective.

David Martinez and the focus group of PPS Teachers served as advisors as we prepared revisions to our “final” draft. David is the Multicultural Curriculum Curator for Portland Public Schools. He gave initial feedback and worked to gather a group of diverse educators to provide recommendations. The team’s comments helped to identify weak spots, missing content, and areas that generally needed improvement.

Joyce Harris, Kendra Hughes and Victor Cato came on as consultants towards the end of the process to address the feedback from the PPS advisory group and generally enhance the curriculum. All three had a hand in bringing the curriculum to the next level, but we would especially like to acknowledge Victor for his work aligning lessons to state and national standards; Kendra for her work designing and preparing the three-day teacher training that accompanied the launch of this curriculum, and Joyce for making sure we got the story right, and when we didn’t—fixing it.

We are extremely grateful to have worked with such talented and thoughtful people. Without their contributions, this curriculum would lack texture, insight, and heart. It would fall flat. This has been a truly collaborative process; we continue to learn more with every conversation and connection. Thank you.

Why This Curriculum?

We initially decided to teach the Civil Rights Movement to our middle school students at the Cottonwood School of Civics and Science because we wanted to share its lessons of courage, perseverance, resilience, and compassion. The educational mission of our school is place-based, which means that we aim to teach national and global themes through a local lens. This drove us to find local connections to the national story.

We also wanted to teach about Black history specifically because we felt it was imperative to address race and racist history, above all because it is not history. The Civil Rights Movement started over sixty years ago, but the struggle continues. In Oregon, segregation is still a reality in our schools and neighborhoods, police brutality occurs with little consequence to the authorities, and white supremacy under the guise of the “Alt Right” is on the rise. We found that Teaching Tolerance and the Southern Poverty Law Center gave Oregon an “F” on their report card for civil rights coverage in state standards ¹and we wanted to change that.

When we set out to develop the first version of this curriculum in 2009, we had difficulty locating a student text to teach the black history of Portland to middle school students, so we did our own research into both primary and secondary sources written for adult audiences. It quickly became clear that even though Portland and Oregon did not feature on the main stage of the Civil Rights Movement, there is an equally important story to tell here.

In 2016, the Cottonwood School received a dissemination grant through the Oregon Department of Education to train other teachers in the place-based education approach and to share our curricula. We selected the black history unit because we believe there is a real need for both teachers and students, citizens of Portland and Oregon, to become familiar with this history. Based on our experience, there is also a lack of resources for teaching a comprehensive unit. It is our sincerest hope that educators will find lessons, ideas, and stories to bring into their classrooms that will inspire honest, meaningful conversations about race, history, current events, and this place we all call home. Through these teaching and learning experiences, it is our hope that educators lean in and share experiences that focus on the challenges, successes, resilience and strength of the black community.

¹ “Teaching the Movement: State Grades.” Teaching Tolerance. 2014. Accessed 12/26/2017, <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/teaching-the-movement-2014/2014-state-grades>

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs is intended as a 6th-8th grade social studies unit, although it could easily be adapted for other grade levels. It can augment a local history or civil rights study, or it can be taught on its own. The curriculum has three primary objectives:

1. To teach the history of African-Americans in Portland, Oregon;
2. To explore issues of racial identity and continuing patterns of racism and discrimination both locally and nationally;
3. To give students the opportunity to practice skills used by historians.

Curriculum Outline

There are four main sections in *Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs*. The first section (Lessons 1-5) prepares students with the skills and reflective opportunities they will need to discuss difficult content and work with primary documents. Note that the first section is meant to be foundational; it is not intended to be optional. Think of the lessons as a prerequisite for teaching the rest of the curriculum.

In the second section (Lessons 6-13) students are introduced to the content, perform the jigsaw, and complete follow-up lessons to help solidify understanding. Some of the lessons in this section (and in the assessment section) also work to connect history to current events in Portland.

For the jigsaw, we explore Portland Black History through nine different experiences

1. Exclusion, White Supremacy, and Designing a White Homeland
2. Housing Discrimination and Redlining
3. Vanport
4. Civil Rights Laws
5. Black Community in Albina
6. Urban Renewal and Displacement
7. Police and the Black Community
8. School Segregation and Integration
9. Racist Violence Against the Black Community

This curriculum further approaches the study of Portland Black History in four ways:

1. Black men and women (community and civil rights leaders)
2. Events
3. Locations and Places
4. Time periods

The third section connects the content to place by offering a fieldwork plan (more below, under *Fieldwork and Guest Speakers*). The fourth section outlines several options for assessment (more below, under *Assessment*).

We have also included a comprehensive vocabulary list for you to use with your students at your discretion.

Needed Materials

Student Journals: Most of the lessons include journal prompts. Your students should have access to a journal in whatever form you use in your classroom. These will be places for personal reflections. Students can choose to share from their journals when they like, but otherwise they are confidential and not meant for public viewing. Reflecting in their journals is an essential component of student learning in this curriculum; it helps students as they sort through content and emotions, ultimately helping with long term retention. Make sure you allow time for journaling when included in the lesson plans.

Copies of Student Sheets: Many of the lessons include student handouts, located in the “Student Sheets” section of the curriculum. Each lesson will alert you in the “Materials Needed” section as to what sheets you will need to copy or print in order to be prepared for that day.

Magnifying Glasses/Lenses: These will help students see details and fine print in the primary documents that otherwise would be difficult to see.

Computers with Internet Access: These may be useful in certain areas of the curriculum, but they are not required in order to lead the lessons.

Teaching Methods

We use the jigsaw model as the centerpiece of this curriculum because we believe in its ability to motivate student learning and promote individual accountability. We also found out that the jigsaw model was originally designed to introduce equity in racially diverse classrooms. To learn more, go to <https://www.jigsaw.org/> or watch this [video](#).

If you are uncomfortable with the jigsaw model, our curriculum can be taught in a more traditional format using the primary and secondary sources as the primary text. If you choose to do this, we highly suggest that you maintain elements of inquiry and small group work in order to keep student interest high and promote critical thinking.

Navigating Conflicting Information

One thing to be aware of when leading these lessons where students work with primary sources is that some of the sources offer divergent perspectives on the same event. For example:

- In the section about police relations (Section 7) there is one press release from the Portland Police Department and another press release from the Black United Front;
- Also in the Section 7, there is an *Oregonian* article about the Irving Park Riots that refers to the young people in Albina as “teenage vandals.” Compare this with another article from the *Oregonian* in which the reporter interviewed several young people from Albina and printed their perspective;
- In Section 5 about the Black community around North Williams Avenue in the 1950s and 1960s, one document refers to the neighborhood as a slum while a photo shows a group of Campfire Girls gathered on a park green in front of tidy houses.

As your students investigate these documents, help them to negotiate such conflicting messages. Don't let students be dismissive, but rather point the conflicts out if necessary and ask questions about why two documents about the same place or same event relay different facts or paint contrasting pictures. Some of these differences can be subtle, but noticing them is key to understanding that diverse perspectives and experiences are what make up a more accurate view of history. It will be equally important for students to understand that beyond being diverse, there are alternate motivations behind different perspectives. For example, the Portland Development Commission benefited from labeling the Albina neighborhood a "slum" because it made it easier for them to justify urban development.

Fieldwork and Classroom Speakers

As stated above, at the Cottonwood School, we teach this *Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs* as a place-based unit over the course of twelve weeks. In addition to exploring primary documents and reading secondary sources, we augment student learning with African American/Black speakers from local culturally specific organizations and individuals who have had personal experience with aspects of this history.

The highlight of the unit at our school is a day-long field trip to locations in the city that are significant in black history. Students journal, take photos, and interview people along the way. There are many possible configurations for a citywide tour of locations significant in Portland's black history. Our section on fieldwork offers some ideas.

Although it may be difficult to coordinate a full-day field trip around the city, most schools can accommodate guest speakers. As you prepare to teach this curriculum, consider who you might invite into your classroom to bring this story alive for your students and truly root it in our place.

Assessment

Student assessment is sprinkled throughout this curriculum to help give insight into student learning. While most lessons culminate in journaling, some include group activities, worksheets, or other written work. You also may consider creating a system for observing and tracking participation in class, both during discussion and group work. The posters students make during the jigsaw includes a rubric for assessment.

Section 4 offers several options for final assessment of the unit. These literacy-based assessments vary by length and complexity. The letter to the editor will most likely take the least amount of time in-class, while the biography project will take the most amount of time. Choose according to your students and your planning needs.

As part of their black history study at the Cottonwood School, our students create some type of product to help share their learning. In past years, students have gone on to write and produce a play, craft a zine, and narrate a film all about Portland's black history. We have included a list of ideas in the fourth section for educators who are willing and able to extend learning into a longer project.

Timeline: When to Teach and for How Long?

Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs can be taught any time of year. It may be a good one to teach at the beginning of the year so that the foundational lessons can help you to set up class norms. But, leading this curriculum at any time of year will help refresh class norms or help students learn more about each other.

This curriculum could take from three to six weeks to teach assuming you are teaching one hour a day, five days a week. All lessons are conducted in class; however, students may have the option to complete special projects out of class.

There are several variables contributing to the actual length of time it will take to teach.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- How much experience do your students have with primary documents?
- How much experience do you and your students have with group work and independent learning?
- Will student conduct any research outside of the classroom, or will it all be completed during class time?
- Will you invite guest speakers into your classroom? Will you be going on field trips?
- Which assessment option will you choose?

It is recommended that you teach all of the lessons in order and adjust the timeline according to your student needs.

