

African American Voices Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan: KRS-One Meets Carter G. Woodson

Subject: American History

Grade level: 11

NGSSS-SS: **SS.912.A.1.2-** Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to identify author, historical significance, audience, and authenticity to understand a historical period.



SS.912.H.1.5- Examine artistic response to social issues and new ideas in various cultures.

**Description/
Abstract of Lesson:** After learning about the educational philosophies of KRS-One and Carter G. Woodson, the students will compare and contrast their view points and determine how they apply today.

Objective(s): The students will

- Demonstrate sensitivity and comprehension for multicultural perspectives on current events.
- Compare and contrast arguments.
- Synthesize differing points of view.

Materials:

- Article by Sean Gonsalves as found at <http://www.freemaninstitute.com/woodson.htm>
- Song: *You Must Learn* by Boogie Down Production
- Copies of lyrics to *You Must Learn* found at <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/boogie-down-productions/you-must-learn.html>
- For further study: On-line or book version of Miseducation of the Negro (On-line version found at <http://historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html>)

Duration: 1 class period

**Lesson Lead In/
Opening:**

The teacher will engage students in a discussion by asking the question "Why is it important to celebrate, honor and learn about Black History?"

Activity:

1. After discussion, the teacher will pass out copies of the lyrics to the song *You Must Learn* and will play the song. The students will read the lyrics as the song plays. Explain that the lyricist to the song is legendary

Hip Hop artist KRS-One. You may reference his biography at:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KRS-One>

2. Discuss with the students what the song *You Must Learn* is about and who the message is intended for.

3. Emphasize that Carter G. Woodson is regarded as the “Father of Black History” and was responsible for introducing the idea for the development of “Negro History Week” (Today called Black History Month). Pass out copies of the article by Sean Gonsalves “Why Black History Month?” Read and discuss both articles as a class using reciprocal teaching methods. Ask the students questions such as: “According to the author, for whom was the study of Black History intended?”

4. Have students break into cooperative learning groups and answer questions based on the song lyrics and the reading:

- How were KRS-One and Carter G. Woodson similar in their educational approach? What did they both argue is the problem? What did they both argue is needed? Provide examples.
- How were the strategies of KRS-One and Carter G. Woodson different in discussing the importance of Black History?
- According to what you read, did KRS-One and Carter G. Woodson believe that children of other cultures would benefit from studying about Black History?
- How could we apply some of what their arguments to explain some of the challenges being experienced today in education?

**Cross Cultural
Extended Lessons:**

- Have the students read the Carter G. Woodson quote from The Mis-education of the Negro: "When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary." Considering that the statement was written in the early 1930s, have the students write an essay about what it means to them and how it would apply today.
- Have the students read the book The Mis-education of the Negro by Carter G. Woodson – available on-line at <http://historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html>
- Have the students compare and contrast the viewpoints of KRS-One and Carter G. Woodson with those of Malcolm X as

expressed in the book Malcolm X on Afro-American History.

Assessment:

- Evaluate answers to questions according to historical accuracy, grammar and neatness.
- Consider cooperation and creativity grades in group activities.

**Suggested Books
In Lesson:**

Woodson, C. G. (2001) Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans
And Africa, 1935 – 1961, The University of North Carolina Press

Woodson, C. G. (1990) The Mis-Education of the Negro, Africa World
Press

Web Resources:

<http://historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html>

http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/c/carter_g_woodson.html

<http://www.cwo.com/~lucumi/woodson.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KRS-One>

<http://www.lyricsdepot.com/boogie-down-productions/you-must-learn.html>

You Must Learn



By Boogie Down Productions (lyrics by KRS-One)

Just like I told you, you must learn

It's calm yet wild the style that I speak
Just filled with facts and you will never get weak in the heart
In fact you'll start to illuminate, knowledge to others in a song
Let me demonstrate the force of knowledge,
knowledge reigned supreme
The ignorant is ripped to smithereens
What do you mean when you say I'm rebellious
'Cause I don't accept everything that you're telling us
What are you selling us the creator dwellin' us
I sit in your unknown class while you're failing' us
I failed your class 'cause I ain't with your reasoning
You're tryin' make me you by seasoning
Up my mind with see Jane run, see John walk in a hardcore New York
Come on now, that's like a chocolate cow
It doesn't exist no way, no how
It seems to me that in a school that's ebony
African history should be pumped up steadily, but it's not
and this has got to stop, See Spot run, run get Spot
Insulting to a Black mentality, a Black way of life
Or a jet Black family, so I include with one concern, that
You must learn

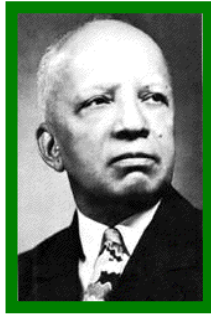
Chorus: Just like I told you, you must learn (twice)

I believe that if you're teaching history
Filled with straight up facts no mystery
Teach the student what needs to be taught
'Cause Black and White kids both take shorts
When one doesn't know about the other ones' culture
Ignorance swoops down like a vulture
'Cause you don't know that you ain't just a janitor

No one told you about Benjamin Banneker
A brilliant Black man that invented the almanac
Can't you see where KRS is coming at
With Eli Whitney, Haile Selassie
Granville Woods made the walkie-talkie
Lewis Latimer improved on Edison
Charles Drew did a lot for medicine
Garrett Morgan made the traffic lights
Harriet Tubman freed the slaves at night
Madame CJ Walker made a straightenin comb
But you won't know this is you weren't shown
The point I'm gettin' at it it might be harsh
'Cause we're just walkin' around brainwashed
So what I'm sayin' is not to diss a man
we need the 89 school system
One that caters to a Black return because
You must learn

Chorus

WHY BLACK HISTORY MONTH?



By Sean Gonsalves

(Carter G.) Woodson, whose best-known book "The Miseducation of the Negro," was born in 1875 in Buckingham County, Virginia. The son of former slaves, he worked in mines and quarries until the age of 20 when he decided that his mind would be a terrible thing to waste - long before the sentiment became a slogan for the United Negro College Fund.

Woodson received his high school diploma at the age of 22 and went on to get a master's degree in history from the University of Chicago. In 1912, Woodson received a doctorate in history from Harvard.

Unable to land a teaching post at the elite university because Harvard wasn't hiring black professors, Woodson went to teach at one of the nation's leading black colleges, Howard University.

In 1915, Woodson became the director of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. A year later he was named editor of the association's scholarly quarterly, "The Journal of Negro History."

Woodson believed the study of black history, using the tools of scholarly research and writing, could serve a dual purpose. It could be used to counter white racial chauvinism, which was used to rationalize the oppression of black people in America.

The distortions and deletions in the American historical record as it pertains to race matters, Woodson believed, was detrimental to the health of a nation whose inherent promise is life, liberty and justice for all.

Perhaps more importantly, Woodson knew that in a society where black intelligence and moral worth is incessantly demeaned and devalued, studying black history would serve as a psychological defense shield for black students against the assaults of white supremacy.

So he embarked on a quest to establish a national celebration of black heritage. In 1926, Negro History Week was born.

"Besides building self-esteem among blacks, (Black History Week) would help eliminate prejudice among whites," Woodson concluded.

It wasn't until after the civil rights movement of the 1960s that Black History Week was taken seriously outside of the educated black community and expanded into Black History Month.

February was chosen as Black History Month because the birthdays of the esteemed black abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the celebrated black poet Langston Hughes fall during that month. It's also the month the NAACP was founded. It just so happens that February is the shortest and one of the coldest months of the year.

So how come there is no official White History Month? In the words of a Tulane University Black History Month Web site, "a White History Month is not needed because the contributions of whites are already acknowledged by society. Black History Month is meant to remedy this inequity of representation."

Of course, if standard U.S. history curriculum did a better job of teaching both the tragic and triumphant aspects of the expansion of democratic freedoms on this continent and its inextricable link to Americans of black African descent, then a Black History Month would be wholly unnecessary.

But when educated Americans at the dawn of the 21st century make statements like: My grandparents were immigrants who faced discrimination and made it. Why can't blacks? All societies had slaves. Besides, some blacks were sold into slavery by black Africans -- it's clear to anyone familiar with the history of white-skin privilege in America that Black History Month has not outlived its usefulness.

This isn't to deny the importance of individual initiative or to lay a guilt-trip on white brothers and sisters for every failure in the black community. On the other hand, black social mobility, (or lack thereof) cannot be understood without understanding the devastating impact of not only two centuries of slavery but a hundred years of organized, state-supported attacks on "free" black communities after slavery.

For sure, there have been many blacks who have overcome the odds, which is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. But those blacks who have "succeeded" did so in spite of white-skin privilege; not because of it.

Instead of asking why can't blacks make it - a grossly imprecise question that ignores the significant achievements of thousands of African-Americans - we'd do better to ask: what obstacles have impeded the economic, political and social development of many black Americans? To candidly answer that complex question, the study of black history is inescapable.

Source: <http://www.freemaninstitute.com/woodson.htm>



- How were KRS-One and Carter G. Woodson similar in their educational approach? What did they both argue is the problem? What did they both argue is needed? Provide examples.
- How were the strategies of KRS-One and Carter G. Woodson different in discussing the importance of Black History?
- According to what you read, did KRS-One and Carter G. Woodson believe that children of other cultures would benefit from studying about Black History?
- How could we apply some of what they were arguing to explain some of the things we are experiencing today in education?

Preface to The Mis-Education of the Negro

By Carter G. Woodson

HEREIN are recorded not opinions but the reflections of one who for forty years has participated in the education of the black, brown, yellow and white races in both hemispheres and in tropical and temperate regions. Such experience, too, has been with students in all grades from the kindergarten to the university. The author, moreover, has traveled around the world to observe not only modern school systems in various countries but to study the special systems set up by private agencies and governments to educate the natives in their colonies and dependencies. Some of these observations, too, have been checked against more recent studies on a later tour.

Discussing herein the mistakes made in the education of the Negro, the writer frankly admits that he has committed some of these errors himself. In several chapters, moreover, he specifically points out wherein he himself has strayed from the path of wisdom. This book, then, is not intended as a broadside against any particular person or class, but it is given as a corrective for methods which have not produced satisfactory results.

The author does not support the once popular view that in matters of education Negroes are rightfully subjected to the will of others on the presumption that these poor people are not large taxpayers and must be content with charitable contributions to their uplift. The author takes the position that the consumer pays the tax, and as such every individual of the social order should be given unlimited opportunity make the most of himself. Such opportunity, too, should not be determined from without by forces set to direct the proscribed element in a way to redound solely to the good of others but should be determined by the make-up of the Negro himself and by what his environment requires of him.

This new program of uplift, the author contends, should not be decided upon by the trial and error method in the application of devices used in dealing with others in a different situation and at another epoch. Only by careful study of the Negro himself and the life which he is forced to lead can we arrive at the proper procedure in this crisis. The mere imparting of information is not education. Above all things, the effort must result in making a man think and do for himself just as the Jews have done in spite of universal persecution.

In thus estimating the results obtained from the so-called education of the Negro the author does not go to the census figures to show the progress of the race. It may be of no importance to the race to be able to boast today of many times as many "educated" members as it had in 1865. If they are of the wrong kind the increase in numbers will be a disadvantage rather than an advantage. The only question which concerns us here is whether these "educated" persons are actually equipped to face the ordeal before them or unconsciously contribute to their own undoing by perpetuating the regime of the oppressor.

Herein, however, lies no argument for the oft-heard contention that education for the white man should mean one thing and for the Negro a different thing. The element of race does not enter here. It is merely a matter of exercising common sense in approaching people through their environment in order to deal with conditions as they are rather than as you would like to see them or imagine that they are. There may be a difference in method of attack, but the principle remains the same.

"Highly educated" Negroes denounce persons who advocate for the Negro a sort of education different in some respects from that now given the white man. Negroes who have been so long inconvenienced and denied opportunities for development are naturally afraid of anything that sounds like discrimination. They are anxious to have everything the white man has even if it is harmful. The possibility of originality in the Negro, therefore, is discounted one hundred per cent to maintain a nominal equality. If the whites decide to take up Mormonism the Negroes must follow their lead. If the whites neglect such a study, then the Negroes must do likewise.

The author, however, does not have such an attitude. He considers the educational system as it has developed both in Europe and America an antiquated process which does not hit the mark even in the case of the needs of the white man himself. If the white man wants to hold on to it, let him do so; but the Negro, so far as he is able, should develop and carry out a program of his own.

The so-called modern education, with all its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples. For example, the philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching. The oppressor has the right to exploit, to handicap, and to kill the oppressed. Negroes daily educated in the tenets of such a religion of the strong have accepted the status of the weak as divinely ordained, and during the last three generations of their nominal freedom they have done practically nothing to change it. Their pouting and resolutions indulged in by a few of the race have been of little avail.

No systematic effort toward change has been possible, for, taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature and religion which have established the present code of morals, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor. The problem of holding the Negro down, therefore, is easily solved. When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worth while, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro thus educated is a hopeless liability of the race.

The difficulty is that the "educated Negro" is compelled to live and move among his own people whom he has been taught to despise. As a rule, therefore, the "educated Negro" prefers to buy his food from a white grocer because he has been taught that the Negro is not clean. It does not matter how often a Negro washes his hands, then, he cannot clean them, and it does not matter how often a white man uses his hands he cannot soil them. The educated Negro, moreover, is disinclined to take part in Negro business, because he has been taught in economics that Negroes cannot operate in this particular sphere. The "educated Negro" gets less and less pleasure out of the Negro church, not on account of its primitiveness and increasing corruption, but because of his preference for the seats of "righteousness" controlled by his oppressor. This has been his education, and nothing else can be expected of him.

If the "educated Negro" could go off and be white he might be happy, but only a mulatto now and then can do this. The large majority of this class, then, must go through life denouncing white people because they are trying to run away from the blacks and decrying the blacks because they are not white.