

Marian Anderson Triumphs, Overcoming Racial Discrimination Barriers in America

Lesson Type: Humanities

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This lesson plan is geared towards a fifth grade level, but may be adapted for use by any age group. It meets the following National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (Middle Grades):

Theme: Culture

- Articulate the implications of cultural diversity, as well as cohesion, within and across groups

Theme: Time, Continuity and Change

- Identify and describe selected historical periods and patterns of change within and across cultures, such as the rise of civilizations, the development of transportation systems, the growth and breakdown of colonial systems, and others
- Develop critical sensitivities such as empathy and skepticism regarding attitudes, values, and behaviors of people in different historical contexts
- Use knowledge of facts and concepts drawn from history, along with methods of historical inquiry, to inform decision-making about and action-taking on public issues

Theme: Individual Development and Identity

- Relate personal changes to social, cultural, and historical contexts
- Describe the ways family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and institutional affiliations contribute to personal identity
- Identify and describe ways regional, ethnic, and national cultures influence individuals' daily lives
- Identify and interpret examples of stereotyping, conformity, and altruism

Theme: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

- Demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups
- Analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture
- Describe the various forms institutions take and the interactions of people with institutions
- Identify and analyze examples of tensions between expressions of individuality and group or institutional efforts to promote social conformity
- Identify and analyze examples of tensions between belief systems and government policies and laws

Theme: Global Connections

- Demonstrate understanding of concerns, standards, issues, and conflicts related to universal human rights

Theme: Civic Ideals and Practices

- Examine the origins and continuing influence of key ideals of the democratic republican form of government, such as individual human dignity, liberty, justice, equality, and the rule of law
- Identify and interpret sources and examples of the rights and responsibilities of citizens
- Analyze the effectiveness of selected public policies and citizen behaviors in realizing the stated ideals of a democratic republican form of government

Standards taken from: *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. National Council for the Social Studies, April 1994. ISBN 0-87986-065-0

Goals:

1. Students will learn about the difficulties Marian Anderson and other African-Americans faced in the form of segregation, racial discrimination, and Jim Crow Laws.
2. Students will learn that despite many obstacles, dreams can be accomplished through hard work, determination, and focus, as demonstrated by the life of Marian Anderson.

Objectives:

1. To understand the segregated climate of the United States in the 20th century.
2. To recognize how racial discrimination affected Marian Anderson's life and career.
3. To discover how Marian Anderson overcame racial discrimination to become the first African-American woman to sing at The Metropolitan Opera House.

Resources Needed: Bag of Hershey's Kisses (or any other similar candy)

Approx. Time Required: One and a half hours

Lesson:

Activity:

Separate students into two groups: one group that wears glasses, and another group that does not. Divide the classroom in half and place one group of students on each side. Offer to sell the group with glasses one Hershey Kiss for one cent (students can buy “on credit” if they don’t have any money). When the children without glasses ask to buy candy, explain that they cannot buy any since they are excluded from entering the side of the classroom reserved for “glasses only.”

Questions:

Ask the students without glasses:

- How did you feel about not being able to buy candy?
- Was this treatment fair considering that you can’t help the fact that you do not need to wear glasses?
- Would this treatment affect your performance in the classroom for the rest of the day?

Going Further:

1. Introduce the following terms:

- a. *discrimination*: favoring or treating one person or group of people better than another.
- b. *segregation*: the separation of blacks and whites.
- c. *Jim Crow Laws*: laws that enforced segregation, or the separation of whites and blacks, in the South.

2. Discuss examples of Jim Crow Laws in the South.

Examples:

All schools were segregated and most restaurants and hotels were segregated or had separate sections for blacks and whites; blacks had to ride in separate cars on trains and were not allowed into train dining cars; in Atlanta, Georgia, courtrooms had separate Bibles for black and white witnesses; Oklahoma required separate telephone booths for blacks and whites; Alabama prohibited whites and blacks from playing checkers with each other; throughout the South, blacks and whites had separate public drinking fountains and restrooms.

3. Relate examples of discrimination in Marian Anderson's life:

- a. Marian tried to apply for admission into a music school in Philadelphia, but she was told that the school was for whites only.
- b. When traveling by train on concert tours through the South, Marian and her black accompanist would have to ride in the "colored only" car, which was located directly behind the engine. It was noisy, crowded, hot, filthy and extremely uncomfortable. Soot came pouring through the windows whenever they were opened.
- c. By 1939, Marian was a world-famous singer, but she was barred from performing at Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. due to its "white performers only" policy. Plans were made to perform the concert in front of the Lincoln Memorial, across the way from Constitution Hall. Seventy five thousand people attended the 30 minute performance, which was broadcast across the country and was a huge success.
- d. For many years, blacks could only purchase tickets to one small section of the theatre where Marian would be performing. This section would contain the poorest seats in the theatre. All the better seats would be sold to whites only.

Closure / Reflection:

Discuss how Marian triumphed over discrimination and achieved her dreams of becoming a world-famous singer, eventually becoming the first African-American woman to sing at The Metropolitan Opera House.

Assessment and Follow-up (to ensure goals and objectives were met):

Ask students if they have heard of Rosa Parks. If not, describe how she refused to move from her seat on a bus and virtually began the Civil Rights movement in this country. Would they have had her courage? What other famous African-American leaders fought for civil rights in this country? Have any of the students in the class experienced racial discrimination in their own lives? What can be done about this?

Homework (optional):

Imagine that you are sitting comfortably on a train for a long ride in a clean, air-conditioned car in the middle of the summer; about an hour later, the conductor comes and tells you that **because of your skin color**, you must move to a different car that is dirty, not air-conditioned and has much less comfortable seats. Moreover, because the car is right behind the engine, if you open the windows for some air, lots of soot and dirt blows in. If you leave the windows closed, it is unbearably hot. Write a letter to a close friend or relative (mother, sister, etc). explaining what you would do about this situation, if anything, and how this would make you feel.