UNIT

My Part of the Story: Exploring Identity in the United States

Overview

Essential Question
What is the identity of the United States, and how do I fit into it?

About This Unit
My Part of the Story is a collection of six lessons designed to launch a course about United States history, literature, or civic life through an examination of students’ individual identities. Adolescence is a time when many young people struggle with issues of independence, trust, freedom, and responsibility. It is also a time when life centers around peer groups and mutual relationships. The materials in this unit support and challenge students in their efforts to define their own identity and their relationship to society as a whole. This approach empowers students to develop their own voices in both the classroom and the world at large, and it engages students in a study of the United States by showing them that their voices are integral to the story of the country.

Students will begin the unit by reflecting on their own choices and circumstances to better understand themselves and their experiences. Next, they will examine the factors that help make each of us who we are, including the influences of names, labels, choices, and family legacies, and from there students will begin to examine what makes up the identity of the United States, exploring how individuals and groups have defined what makes the nation what it is. The final lessons and activities in the unit help students both to understand that the identity of the United States is dynamic, not static, and to see that their choices and their stories fuel this dynamism.

Throughout the unit, students will read and discuss texts, as well as watch videos and create visual representations of identity. All of the activities are meant to develop their understanding of how we all become who we are and how we all contribute, in different ways, to our national context. For students living in the United States, the unit is meant to help them see how their personal stories are part of the greater national narrative. For those living outside the United States, the lessons will help them explore their own identities, and hopefully the same learning about personal and national identity will transfer to their own context.

The impact of this unit will be heightened if the course that follows is designed to revisit regularly the complexity of both individual and national identity. The strategies used here to help students explore the factors that influence their own identities can be adapted to analyze and build historical empathy for individuals in history and deeper understanding of characters in literature.
The engagement that this unit ignites in students can be sustained throughout the entire year if the course is constructed to be inclusive of the experiences and perspectives of the diversity of individuals and groups who have made crucial contributions to the history, literature, and culture of the United States.

**Learning Goals**

Students will understand that:

- Identity is dynamic, complex, and personal, and it affects both how we see ourselves and how we interact with others.
- Our environment influences how we understand ourselves and others.
- The identity of a nation like the United States is the product of collaboration and conflict between a variety of individual voices and groups—some famous, but many not.

Students will be able to:

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.
- Make connections between the history and literature they study and their current lived experience.

**What's Included**

This unit is made up of the following lessons and assessment. Find all lesson plans and accompanying student materials in the [Google Folder](#) for this unit.

- Lesson 1: Finding Your Voice
- Lesson 2: Identity and Names
- Lesson 3: Identity and Labels
- Lesson 4: Identity and Choices
- Lesson 5: Connecting to the Past
- Lesson 6: Many Voices, One National Identity
- My Part of the Story Assessment Ideas