

Promoting Critical Inquiry

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Discrimination and Civil Rights

Critical pedagogy is concerned with how people exert control over one another in society. In this chapter, we take the principles of critical pedagogy and illustrate how students may use them to explore societal inequity and begin taking social action. Critical pedagogies are designed to help students become more aware of their surroundings, especially when they are structured unfairly. Students are then in a position to envision alternatives to these inequities and work to change them. The beginning, as described in Chapter 1, is an exploration of self in relation to others. The endgame for anyone undertaking a critical inquiry is to take action to change society so that it strives toward its stated goals of equity and fairness.

Much of school puts students in receptive, reactive roles. A critical stance places students in an active role. They seek out information, evaluate its truth value, reflect on what it says about society, and take action to make their society more socially just. This approach also shifts the teacher's role away from being an authority. Rather, they become a fellow inquirer who provides students with a process for carrying out their investigations and constructing their own knowledge about the world around them and their role in it.

Critical literacy helps students develop a frame of mind that is open to understanding the world as they experience and engage with it. It

involves more than the print texts that dominate schoolwork. Rather, it includes engagement with a culture's range of symbol systems. It is not confined to a page, screen, or canvas. It requires proactive social engagement on behalf of societal equity, with attention paid to the structures that invest some people with power and others with limited authority. We assume that when students' interests, concerns, experiences, and cultural orientations become the central texts in the class, they may be more likely to participate than if they follow a path lain by someone else (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Possible Units for Undertaking a Critical Inquiry

A critical pedagogy can be applied to any effort to analyze a society's structure and to identify and address its unfair practices and consequences. If a curriculum allows a thematic approach, it might be applied to any number of units of study. We next briefly illustrate how this practice might be undertaken in a variety of thematic units of inquiry. A teacher could make critical inquiry the overarching concept to guide what Applebee (1996) calls *curricular conversations* that allow discussions to be thematically linked across a year's study. Teachers who take this approach might view the following units as a menu through which an extended curricular conversation might take place. We then devote the remainder of the chapter to demonstrating how a unit might be structured around principles of critical inquiry.

Resources to support these units can be found at http://www.petersmagorinsky.net/Units/Unit_Outlines.htm

Alienation: This unit could focus on the social aspects of alienation—that is, how people make others feel alienated—and how to change the context to promote greater feelings of inclusion.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- Who in society feels alienated, and what are they alienated from?
- What are the causes and consequences of individual and group alienation from society?
- How might feelings of alienation be addressed through changes in the broader system from which people feel excluded?

- What inequities produce a society in which some people feel alienated, especially when their feelings come from being excluded from opportunity?
- What actions could people take in order to change society so that its citizens don't feel alienated from its functions?

The American Dream: The iconic topic of the American dream could help students consider how a particularly nationalistic outlook is available, what nationalism does to limit one's broader understanding, and how society is structured to make dreams available to people in different social positions.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What is the American dream? What is American about it?
- Who has the easiest access to it and why?
- What obstacles make it difficult for some groups of people to achieve the American dream?
- How is access to the American dream enabled to some and limited to other people?
- How might the American dream become equally accessible to all people in the United States?
- What actions are available to everyday citizens to create a society in which this dream is not deferred or obstructed for those who are disadvantaged?

The Banality of Evil: *The banality of evil* refers to the ways in which evil acts are not necessarily perpetrated by evil people but may occur when people dutifully follow orders or comply silently with evil acts, especially when they are undertaken by institutions. This behavior may allow evil to become a normal condition that is tolerated and supported by ordinary people. This unit would focus on instances of the phenomenon and ways to raise awareness to prevent its recurrence.

In Chapter 5, we will see how one student, a Mexican American girl, engaged in a critical analysis of the American dream in a unit aimed at developing students' racial literacies.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What acts in society are prone to the banality of evil?
- What is the cost of silence when people allow evil policies and acts to become the norm?
- How might people complying with evil policies be alerted to the need to change their stance and work toward eradicating those policies?
- What actions might help expose the normalcy of evil practices and stir people to resist them?

Bullying: Bullying has emerged as a critical school problem that allows people in powerful positions to maintain control and limit the opportunities of others. Investigating how bullying operates in schools and society would help students understand power inequities and how the use of force is used to sustain them.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What are some traits or characteristics of a person who engages in bullying, and what are some traits or characteristics of a person who is likely to be bullied?
- What factors produce power in some people and deny it to others?
- How does bullying reinforce those differences?
- What can people do to change social structures to mitigate against power differentials, discourage the ill treatment of those in weak positions by the predations of those in strong positions, and empower people to assert and receive their rights?

Censorship: Censorship is often a problem of power, with those in control deciding what books are considered threats to their social order. Studying what is censored can help students see the importance of books or other censored material, who benefits from their censorship, and what issues are removed from the possibility of being

questioned. It also helps students consider the question of whether a book is ever threatening, and if so, whether its availability should be limited in libraries and school curricula.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- On what grounds can people censor one another's speech and other forms of expression?
- What sorts of ideas are likely to be censored, and who is likely to censor whom in the process?
- What broad social factors give some groups the power of censorship and make some groups more likely to be censored?
- What can be done to change these dynamics?

Conflict with Authority: Conflict with authority may involve bullying, censorship, and other means of keeping people in their place. This unit could investigate the means by which people in authority mute opposition and prevent the emergence of alternative viewpoints and social arrangements. It also provides avenues of protest and resistance when authority is used oppressively.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- In either a personal relationship or conflicts between groups, how is one invested with authority, and how is that authority upheld?
- What rights do those in subordinate positions have in responding to unjust authority?
- What tools do those in subordinate positions have to challenge unfair authority?
- How can people standing outside these conflicts help to create conditions where authority is justly earned and used?

Courageous Action: It takes courage to fight against inequitable power, and this topic could be focused on the courageous actions of those who contest injustice, providing students with pathways forward in their own courageous lives.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What does it mean to act courageously?
- When courage is enacted to challenge unjust social structures, what are the risks and rewards?
- Whose courage is needed to challenge unjust laws, authorities, conditions, and other areas that can produce oppression?
- What sort of courageous action is available and appropriate in challenging different sorts of injustice?
- Is courageous action only required of people affected by discrimination, or is it a trait required of bystanders and outsiders so that there is a broad support system for challenging inequity?

Cultural Conflict: Cultural conflict is rampant as we are writing this book, as evidenced by the culture wars that have polarized a divided nation further. A unit on cultural conflict could focus on current events, with attention to the use of power on both sides of the conflict to gain control of society.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What differences are involved when two or more different cultures come into contact and engage in conflicts?
- Which culture(s) has the greatest power, and what is the source of that power?
- What does the less powerful culture(s) need in order to be on equal footing?
- What is gained and lost through cultural conflict?
- How are cultures hierarchically organized in society in terms of power?
- How do particular cultures gain more or less power depending on the context(s) in which people find themselves?
- How can a critical inquiry help students to understand the nature of cultural conflicts and reduce the bad effects on both sides?

Discrimination and Civil Rights: U.S. and global histories have always involved issues of discrimination and civil rights. Formal movements have been named: women’s suffrage for voting rights, civil rights to challenge racial discrimination, disability rights to provide better environments for people of bodily difference, and many more. The unit could enable students to study issues of personal interest to them or the class could take on a single issue from multiple perspectives.

See Chapter 4 for an approach to teaching cultural conflict in relation to empathy.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What is a “civil right”?
- Why have there been movements to advance the civil rights of particular groups of people in the United States?
- What is the relation between civil rights and discrimination?
- What laws, rules, beliefs, and procedures have created the circumstances that produce discriminatory social conditions?
- How can a historically disadvantaged group take social action to promote their constitutional and moral rights in society?
- What risks and rewards are possible when a civil rights movement is undertaken?

Efforts at Equality: The Declaration of Independence proclaims that “all men are created equal.” Yet inequality persists. This unit could explore the concept of equality with attention to questions of authority, opportunity, and other matters that contribute to an equitable society.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What does it mean for all people to be created equal? How do they become unequal in terms of societal power, resources, and other advantages?
- What produces inequity, and how do those with status intentionally or unintentionally deny their privilege to others?

- How can society be more fair in opportunity and reward?
- What sorts of actions can make society a place where the greatest possible number of people pursue opportunity with the fewest obstacles?

Gender Roles: Even though “all men are created equal,” women have historically been subordinated and LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning), and other nonbinary people still fight for dignity and respect. This unit could investigate how gender produces inequities that persist and how to approach gender discrimination to produce a more inclusive, humane society.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- How does a gender identity or sexual orientation affect how a person is positioned in society?
- What and who is responsible for this positioning?
- Which gendered groups are accorded power in society, and how do they maintain it?
- How are those without gendered power kept from expanding their authority and feeling safe in society?
- What does gender intersect with (e.g., affluence, race, immigrant status, neurodivergence, and other demographic factors), and how do those intersections affect their potential for power?
- In societies with gendered and sexual inequity, what actions can people undertake to promote democracy and social justice?

Immigration: Immigration is a key topic as we write, especially at the southern U.S. border. Many of the students in schools themselves come from immigrant families, and others are descendants of slaves. This unit could investigate the history of immigration to understand why some people are allowed in and some are not; how immigrants have been treated and how they have assimilated; how immigrants are constructed as a threat to economies, communities, cultures, and other institutions; and how people have advocated for their citizenship.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- Who is a native to a nation, and who is an immigrant?
- Who gets to decide which newcomers are welcome to a nation?
- What prejudices are involved in deciding who may be admitted?
- If a person is a descendant of immigrants, what are that person's obligations to new immigrants?
- What are the perceived risks and rewards that follow from admitting new immigrant groups to a nation?
- How can immigration policies be less discriminatory, and what actions can help change them toward fairness?

Justice: Justice is at the heart of virtually any critical inquiry. This topic is quite broad but involves questions that get to the heart of the operation of a participatory democracy. It might investigate the laws themselves, the people who enforce them, and the judicial system that upholds them.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What does it mean to be *just*?
- What do societal laws do to promote justice?
- Is there such thing as an unjust law?
- Who is responsible for determining which actions serve the ends of justice and whose justice is best served by laws?
- Is justice universal, or is justice a function of situations?
- When people disagree on whether laws and society are just, how might their differences be resolved?
- What action may citizens take when they believe that society is unjust?

Patriotism: The political turmoil of the early 2020s has seen a rise in claims to patriotism as the United States experiences a challenge to

its institutions. This unit would require a definition of the concept and the use of current or past events to refine students' understanding of what constitutes a patriotic action, especially when there is disagreement about the direction the nation is taking.

See Chapter 6 for an approach to teaching patriotism as it is invoked in disagreements about the direction of society.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What does it mean to be a patriot? What does it mean if your definition of a patriot is different from someone else's definition?
- Can people be patriots and still be critical of how a nation is run?
- Can people be patriots and still be silent when they disagree about how a nation conducts itself?
- Are patriots responsible for maintaining a nation's traditions and processes, or are patriots responsible for changing them when they produce inequality?
- If dissent is available to a patriot, what sorts of actions might challenge what a nation needs to do to be better? Who gets to decide what a "better" society looks and acts like?

Progress: The notion of progress assumes that society is on a path to a better future. Yet, as the unit on patriotism suggests, people disagree on their visions of the best possible future as established in the best possible present. The unit would require ideological reflection and attention to questions surrounding whether or not progress is available in society. If so, why and how? If not, why is humanity not getting anywhere?

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- Over time, does a society make progress toward greater enlightenment, or are people the same over time?
- Might the same social development be interpreted as progress by one group of people and regression or stasis by others?
- Who decides which outcomes may be described as progressive, and how do they get the authority to establish their perspective?

- Is it possible for one group's sense of progress to dominate societal functioning, and if so, how?
- Assuming there is disagreement about what a society is progressing toward and how it gets there, how does a society move forward and how can people assert their positions in socially responsible ways?

Social Responsibility: The early 2020s have challenged people to wonder what the responsible citizen does, with great disagreement on what a person may do to act responsibly to make a better society. This unit could explore different visions of a good society and various ways in which people might act to responsibly promote it.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- What are a person's responsibilities in a society?
- What is the tension between a right and a responsibility?
- What principles should people be responsible for maintaining?
- To what extent are people responsible for initiating change when their principles are violated?
- To what extent should people take action to benefit people less fortunate than themselves in regard to citizenship or residency?
- How do people know when their principles benefit society and not only themselves?
- What acts are people responsible for taking when they believe that there is injustice in society? How do they go about undertaking them in responsible ways?

Terrorist or Freedom Fighter? This unit would involve taking perspectives on the ways in which violent actors have attempted to gain authority against those they believe to exercise inequitable power. To some, such actors are great heroes, taking down their enemies and establishing their own order. To others, their use of violence is terrorism, designed to promote fear and destruction. The same group or individual could be studied from multiple points of view to inquire into their use of violence to achieve political ends and to arrive at judgments over their actions.

Here are some sample questions for investigation/discussion during this unit:

- When someone commits violence in order to achieve a social end, how do people decide whether they are terrorists (those who commit violence to create fear in service of promoting political goals) or freedom fighters (those who commit violence to overthrow an unjust regime)?
- Why is the same person often viewed as a terrorist by one group and a freedom fighter by another?
- Is violence ever a justifiable means of promoting social and political change? Why or why not?
- What tactics are involved when violence is used to change society? To what degree are these acts moral or immoral?
- What is the ultimate outcome of a violent approach to change?

A Critical Inquiry Approach

A critical pedagogy provides for inquiries into open-ended social phenomena that call for action. Most typically, these investigations concern inequities in how people are positioned in society. They are often conducted from the perspective of those marginalized, although they could conceivably be undertaken regardless of the investigator's social position. Building classroom inquiries on students' experiences, social positioning, personal goals, and social group goals may provide some motivation for them to participate in these units. The questions posed in Chapter 1 concerning the individual's identities in relation to others could equip students with tools for conducting critical inquiries. This active, investigative, interpretive approach might help address the long-observed international phenomenon that school, for many students, is boring and irrelevant (Dewey, 1938; Montessori, 1909; Nett et al., 2016; Robinson, 1975).

Critical pedagogy provides one avenue for making school a place where students' heartfelt interests may be encouraged and where they may be provided with tools for investigation. Yet it has produced more theory than specific ideas about practice. We have found that the procedures outlined by Jones (2006) provide teachers and students with a series of practical, critical moves that help students examine their surroundings with a view toward positive change.

- 1. Identify the topic:** First, students need to discuss their social surroundings and identify topics for their inquiries. The teacher might suggest broad categories within a unit that students could explore in either groups or a whole-class discussion. If, for instance, this inquiry takes place in a unit on immigration, the teacher might look to the news to help students generate topics. In the early 2020s, these might include the question of how immigrants affect the job market, how methods of detention and expulsion may be considered humane or inhumane, whether children born in the U.S. to undocumented parents may stay while their parents are deported, and many more subjects culled from daily news reports.
- 2. Gather information:** The students' inquiry into the problem would involve researching it. This stage benefits from instruction into examining the reliability of information sources, a major problem in an era of fake news, propaganda, deep fake videos, and other efforts at deception in the media. Virtually any position can be supported by a source from somewhere, so learning how to evaluate a source is a valuable life skill.
- 3. Deconstruct the problem:** Once information has been assembled, the critical inquirer carefully breaks down and examines the problem under study. This process of deconstruction involves analyzing an idea, event, or phenomenon to examine its features, processes, impacts, and other components. In this stage, a principal task is the identification of inequity in power and positioning in society. This analysis would include a breakdown of how power is distributed, sustained, denied, and asserted by one group over another. The deconstruction process is central to critical inquiry, given that it sets the terms for the actions that follow.
- 4. Reconstruct a solution:** After breaking down the situation and articulating its problems, the critical inquirer imagines a better way. This vision ought to be skeptical enough to anticipate problems that the solution itself might produce. It may be idealistic in that it imagines the best of all possible worlds, one that might not be attainable yet that is worth striving toward. This process is open-ended and subject to the influence of discussion, different

perspectives, reality checks, new information about similar sorts of efforts, legal limitations, and other factors that might inform the development of strategies for generating alternatives. This stage also needs to anticipate how a resolution will be received by people who are ideologically opposed to it.

- 5. Take social action:** The final stage of the process involves taking informed social action to produce change. Typically, writing process stage theories stop at the point of publication, which might take place on a classroom bulletin board or other limited media. Our conception argues that *social action* ought to be the outcome of a critical inquiry so that all of the work has a concrete, practical outcome grounded in notions of social justice (Johnson et al., 2018). A critical inquiry without social action eliminates the most consequential phase of the process. This action might take many forms: producing public texts that speak to the inequities, participating in demonstrations or protests, working in settings that provide essential services to disadvantaged people, advocating in political settings, and/or participating in other actions designed to effect change.

Critical inquiry assumes that all human environments are open to interpretation, critique, and reformation through a variety of means. The steps suggested by Jones (2006) create an action plan for implementing the ideas of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2000), who believed that the terrible inequities in his society could be challenged through social activism (Baltodano et al., 2009). Positive, effective action requires the study of the structural inequities that need to be challenged if society is to become a place of equal opportunity. Those who challenge inequity might be victims of it or sympathetic allies committed to equality.

It's important to understand that people cannot name themselves as allies. Rather, that recognition can only come from the people being allied with. *It is by invitation only*. It requires a genuine effort, rather than *performative allyship*, which refers to actions that are designed to advance the reputation of a person with privilege through the appearance of social justice activism. The performative ally might use social media to create appearances while doing little actual work. It is also distinct from *co-optation*, which takes place when someone with

advantages joins a movement and takes it over for their own purposes (see Mondainé, 2020).

Co-conspirators are those with greater commitment, the people with privilege who take personal risks to create equity for those who experience oppression. Love (2019) illustrates the distinction between an ally and a co-conspirator with the example of the removal of a Confederate flag in South Carolina by Bree Newsome, a Black woman. An ally might take part in a protest without being exposed to danger. The co-conspirator in this case was James Tyson, a white man who had positioned himself close to the action rather than securely on the periphery of the incident. When the police approached the flagpole with tasers, with the intention of weaponizing the pole and electro-shocking Newsome, Tyson held the pole so that if they tased it, they would injure him as well. He thus risked his own safety to stand with the demonstrators.

Remarkably, this part of the story is often omitted from much news coverage of the event (e.g., Helms, 2015), which tends to focus on the feel-good aspects of Tyson's testimony that "Black America needs to see that white people are willing to step up and put some skin in the game." To Love (2019), his risk of serious injury from a deadly instrument distinguished him as a person of unusual commitment and courage: as a co-conspirator in the fight against racial injustice.

Applying Critical Inquiry in the Classroom

We next illustrate the role of critical inquiry in a thematic unit on discrimination and civil rights. The United States has been the site of many civil rights movements. Women earned the right to vote in 1920 after decades of fighting for what they asserted was their franchise as citizens. They again worked to establish various laws giving them equal rights in society, such as the Equal Rights Amendment, originally proposed in 1921 and still only passed into law at the state level. African Americans have fought for rights, dating from enslavement and extending to the modern Black Lives Matter movement. There have been civil rights movements for LGBTQ+ people, people of Latin descent, Native Americans, the bodily disabled, and many others.

There have also been backlash civil rights movements. For example, religious liberty advocates have contended that private business owners ought to be allowed to operate their businesses in the way they choose.

As such, they asserted that they have the religious right to refuse service to those who they believe conduct themselves in a way that goes against the morals and values written in their sacred texts and have sought legal changes to allow them this right by law. Most notably, those who have been refused service are people who identify as LGBTQ+, who are simultaneously asserting their own civil rights. There is more than one side to this story, and students should reflect on how one's own values shape the perspective that emerges in questions of whose rights should be respected most.

Teachers need to anticipate the sorts of stances their students will take in the name of challenging injustice, whether they agree with them or not. Explorations of civil rights issues and discrimination thus are potentially volatile, leading many educators to discourage their attention and focus simply on the curriculum as written, without provocation. In this view, passions should be tempered to muffle the intense feelings that often accompany ideological differences. From a critical inquiry perspective, ignoring and silencing students' fervency contributes to students' belief that school is boring and irrelevant. If silence is complicity, then curricular silence is also complicit in the perpetuation of inequity.

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A critical stance seeks to arouse students' most heartfelt feelings about society and put them to work as the impetus for change. Given that people disagree on the direction society ought to take, this shift in emphasis can potentially make classrooms disputatious, emotional, and edgy. The critical pedagogue welcomes such affective engagement, understands emotions to be the fount of cognition (as argued by Haidt, 2012, and others), and gives it an outlet through the tools of critical inquiry.

Another issue with this approach is that the inequities that students challenge might be practiced by the adults in their school. Johnson et al. (2018) describe how a critical project ran afoul of the school administration when the students exposed the long-standing problem of sexual harassment in the school, in which male students routinely acted aggressively toward female students. The administration told the teacher that they needed to address both sides of the issue rather than only that of the girls. More recently, a school administrator in Texas

told the faculty, “Make sure that if you have a book on the Holocaust, that you have one that has an opposing—that has other perspectives” (Associated Press, 2021). Critical pedagogies can be uncomfortable and threatening, and teachers undertaking them should know what they’re getting into before they take on their challenges.

Introductory Activity

To introduce the unit on discrimination and civil rights (see Smagorinsky et al., 1987, for more extensive attention to introductory activities), you could begin with an opinionnaire designed to provoke discussion. Ideally, there will be a range of responses to the items. Some might be controversial enough to generate passionate disagreement, to which the critical pedagogue would say, “Right on! Keep it 100!” An introductory activity of this sort is designed to allow students to explore a topic prior to engaging with material so that they have established a cognitive, social, and emotional map for navigating the topic before they begin exploring it in texts. The opinionnaire might be constructed as follows:

Read each of the next ten statements carefully. Each is based on a real event or is an actual quote. For each statement, align yourself in relation to the perspective offered, and explain why you believe as you do. You are welcome to agree, disagree, have mixed feelings, or feel the need to interrogate the statement further. Be prepared to share your opinion and defend your views and to be open to persuasion by those with whom you initially disagree.

1. These truths are self-evident: That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
2. Roughly 56% of all college students are women. Girls get better grades by about 6% than boys do at all ages, including in math and science. Women now comprise 23% of the U.S. House of Representatives, 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs, 7% of Fortune 100 company executives, 30% of university presidents, and 15% of orthopedic surgeons. Sixty percent of attorneys are women; 15% are equity partners in their firms. Women make up 4% of managing partners in the 200 biggest private practice law firms.

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3. The religious beliefs of some private business operators have led them to claim that they may refuse service or employment to people whose sexuality they believe is considered profane in their holy books. These businesspeople feel they are victims of laws that discriminate against their religious beliefs and feel they should be able to run their private business enterprises how they choose and according to their personal/religious beliefs.
4. Research shows that although many white people claim to believe in racial equality, their thinking and actions are influenced by subconscious prejudices that are buried deep within their psyche and produce racist beliefs and actions that, in turn, are built into the structure of society.
5. During the COVID-19 outbreak of the 2020s, many people refused to wear masks and get vaccines that scientists believed would limit the spread of the virus. These people claimed that they were conscientious objectors and victims of government overreach and stated that they lived in a free country that gave them the liberty to go maskless.
6. A large chain of stores did not provide an emergency facilities break to an employee with an illness called irritable bowel syndrome (which produces cramping, abdominal pain, bloating, gas, and diarrhea or constipation) and fibromyalgia (a condition that results in widespread pain, fatigue, and sleep, memory, and mood issues). The store fired her for violating company policy by leaving her post unattended when she took an unscheduled break to relieve her pain. The employee filed a lawsuit charging the company with discrimination against a disabled worker.
7. Many states have laws that deny voting rights to people who do not have what they consider to be a valid form of identification such as a driver's license or state-issued ID card.
8. Many state legislatures have passed laws barring convicted felons—people who have been jailed for committing serious crimes—from ever voting again, even after serving their time and being released.
9. The Supreme Court ruled against a Confederate group that wanted the state of Texas to approve a specialty license plate with

the Confederate flag. The petitioners believed that the license plate was a form of free speech that expressed pride in their identities. The justices ruled that the license plate was government property and therefore not subject to free speech protections.

10. A state policy allows transgender girls to compete in girls' sports. To some, this rule represents a civil rights victory for transgender girls. To others, it violates the civil rights of cisgender girls who, they believe, are competing against individuals whose bodies provide unfair advantages in size, strength, and speed.

Many of these issues have perplexed people in the United States and produced great ideological disagreement and legal contention. Most have gone through the courts, including the Supreme Court, without ending their controversial role in society. Principled adults find it difficult to agree on what is constitutionally defensible, as the 5–4 Supreme Court ruling on the Confederate flag license plate item and many other cases suggest. These items therefore potentially promote vivid discussions on discrimination and civil rights questions among students, whose opinions are every bit as passionate as those of adults and often as well informed.

To participate, students don't need specialized legal knowledge. They only need to know what they already know, and feel what they already feel, about discriminatory practices and rules (broadly speaking). At the same time, these questions may motivate students to get their facts straight, which would give teachers the opportunity to help them evaluate news sources for reliability. The discussions should be open-ended enough that shifts are likely as students explore the questions and engage with one another's ideas. These personal perspectives could build on the reflective activities described in Chapter 1.

There are several ways to use the opinionnaire. One is for each individual student to read and respond to the items and then assemble with others for a whole-class discussion in which they participate when they have something to say. Another is to begin the discussion in small groups, where students may be more likely to be honest with their views than if they share them without reflection and feedback with their whole class. These groups needn't reach agreement or consensus; the purpose

is to lower the risk of discussing hot-button issues and give each student floor space in reviewing them. The small-group session would then be followed by whole-class discussion involving exchanges with other classmates.

It's possible that the ten items would each require extensive discussion, so it's important to monitor the time commitment to the activity so that it explores the issues without taking up too much time. This introductory activity should help acquaint students with a variety of civil rights issues and get them thinking about questions surrounding societal discrimination and opportunity. From there, they will launch their own investigations.

A Look at the Assignment

This exploration of discrimination and civil rights relies on the following process: identify the topic, gather information, deconstruct the problem, reconstruct a solution, and take social action. Following this process, students investigate a civil rights issue that affects their lives and produce a text or action to address it. The philosophical goal for such a unit is to learn enough about a civil rights inequity to become an advocate for action. The ultimate means of expression might be available through a culminating assignment, such as the following:

Either by yourself or in a small group, produce a text that represents a civil rights problem that involves discrimination, and address it with a possible solution.

- Your text may be prepared using a medium of your choice. It may be written, performed, produced through computer images, produced through an art form, or prepared through any other medium that we agree on. Ideally, you will then enter your text into the public realm via the internet, community postings, school event, or another medium.
- You should provide information about the discriminatory policies or actions that produce a civil rights inequity that you gather either from firsthand accounts (interviews, observations, etc.) or secondhand accounts (the media, sourcebooks, etc.).

These sources should be evaluated for their reliability so that your text has persuasive potential.

- You should deconstruct the inequity created by discrimination by detailing how one social group has claimed civil liberties for themselves and denied them to others.
- You should reconstruct the situation by imagining what would need to change in order for civil rights to become equally available to all.
- You should detail, and ideally put into practice, social action that could address the problem and produce a better world.

The following procedures suggest how students could approach each phase of the assignment.

Identify the Topic

The process begins with the identification of issues to investigate and the consideration of actions to remedy them. This phase could involve students discussing possibilities in small groups. They would not have obligations to continue working in these groups but could use them to form collaborative investigative teams to carry them through the rest of the unit. The primary point of this stage is for students to think through possibilities with their classmates. The teacher's role would be to listen in on the conversations, be available as a resource, keep the conversations moving and on task, and agree on the choices students make for topics to pursue.

This last point might require teachers to set aside their own beliefs when students wish to explain a type of discrimination in which the teacher's views oppose those of the students. Most of the feedback would come from other students during the sharing sessions that are explained in the next segment. Peers, rather than teachers, have the responsibility to critique one another's assumptions and perspectives. The point of these lessons is to provide students with tools for inquiry and with a classroom of students to bounce ideas off and thus grow in their understandings.

Gather Information

The next step could involve gathering information through library research or in-class searching if the school's classrooms are outfitted with sufficient technology and infrastructure for online investigations. Students should keep in mind a set of guidelines, such as the following:

- What is my topic, and how do I search for reliable information on it?
- How do my own experiences, perspectives, emotions, and socialization contribute to my interest in this topic?
- Which sources are credible and provide valid information and persuasive arguments, and which rely on false or misleading information, conspiracies, fabrications, and other dubious sources?
- What are the facts surrounding the civil rights issue under investigation? What sorts of opinions and perspectives do the facts support?
- What emotions are stirred in different people by the issue, and what belief systems do these emotions support?
- Who is being unfair to whom and how? What are the consequences of the inequities and discrimination being investigated?
- What conclusions can I draw based on my investigation into how civil rights are compromised by discriminatory behavior in relation to this topic?

From this initial exploration of the available information, students should prepare some sort of document that summarizes their findings. At this point, research teams or individuals could share what they have found with their classmates via presentation or document sharing, getting feedback and informing one another about the forms of discrimination they have found relative to their topic. Those investigating the same topic could use this session as an opportunity to revisit their own research findings and consider their topic in a new light. This possibility is especially helpful when different students take opposing views on the same topic.

Deconstruct the Problem

With information available, students could begin their formal critique. Undoubtedly, they would begin this process during their search for facts and perspectives. For the deconstruction phase, they could engage in a more formal critique of how civil rights are violated and how inequity is sustained. Again, this phase could conclude with a whole-class sharing session that could prompt discussion about discrimination across topics and help generate ideas that contribute to a solution.

Reconstruct a Solution

The next task would be to envision how society could move forward with a more equitable structure and process. Students could consider questions such as the following: What would need to change for society to be fair to those whose identities are marginalized? How might those changes be undertaken? What is preventing such change from taking place? How might these oppositional forces be addressed? What would a reformed society look like for those whose civil rights are being investigated? What would other people need to do to enable their lives to proceed with greater equity? A concluding activity in this stage could be a whole-class sharing of visions of societal restructuring to reduce discrimination and advance civil rights.

Take Social Action

The final task of the unit would be to take action to combat inequity. What could students produce to express their feelings and beliefs and persuade others that change is needed? There could be any manner of ways of doing so, including but not limited to the following:

Written position papers: Students could outline their critique in a conventional piece of persuasive writing in which they break the problem down and propose their solutions. They could then submit them to whatever forum would best advance their perspective.

Written creative work: Students could produce poetry, fiction, drama, or another written art form through which they present the issues in ways that produce emotional responses that may form the basis for principles to guide future action in favor of civil rights. These

projects could be submitted to websites featuring the work of activists concerned with social change or to publications specifically created to feature student work, such as *Merlin's Pen*.

Nonverbal products: Students could produce all manner of ideological art that depicts the inequities they have identified and suggest their consequences. This art could take any conceivable form and could be produced to appear on canvas; as part of a musical score; on public walls (e.g., murals), screens, or other surfaces; or as sculpture, animation, or another material medium. It could take the form of an informational website that includes multiple media. The possibilities here are endless.

Actions: Students could take it to the streets or to a political office or other official space to advocate personally on behalf of civil rights. To conclude the unit, the class could hold a public event or gallery walk in which they present their work and encourage or exhort their community members to take up the cause of civil rights.

A Look at Assessment

Many teachers find open-ended tasks difficult to assess because one student's work might look very different from another's. This task also leaves open the possibility for collaborative activity, which distributes a grade across group membership. We offer several ways of evaluating the students' work to allow flexibility in teaching the unit.

Many teachers are required to issue grades frequently, which tends to work against process-oriented teaching. Because this unit includes one large project rather than a lot of small, discrete assignments, one solution would be to conduct formative assessments following each stage of the analytic process. This work could be done in peer groups in conjunction with consultation by the teacher, with peers assessing one another's progress and/or students conducting self-assessments of their own work. Figure 2.1 shows a rubric that details one tentative set of criteria for each stage of the project, all of which could be bundled to issue a final grade of the sort required in schools.

A rubric thus needs to be clear enough to make responsibilities evident yet flexible enough that students investigating different problems

and producing different sorts of texts or actions have equal access to rewarding grades. Again, the question arises as to how that grade gets determined. We know that rubrics in and of themselves do not guard against personal bias or preference on the assessors' part. We believe, however, that rubrics can provide specific guidance about expectations and characteristics of work that represent different levels of quality on particular tasks. Using rubrics across the life of a project as a tool for formative assessment helps teachers and students more easily identify the areas in which students' work is strong and areas that need greater development. Such a process helps teachers and students to practice greater equity in supporting students in producing their best work. The success of the project should come through its responsible means of persuasion. Do other people find the project compelling and its ideas worth adopting? Students themselves could serve as one judge of a project's success. The intended audience outside the classroom could also provide feedback that could influence a grade.

With those features in mind and with a standard A–F grading scale in play, one way to produce such a rubric might look similar to Figure 2.1. We assume it would be adapted by particular classes as the students plan and produce their projects.

FIGURE 2.1 Sample Rubric

GRADE	A	B	C	D	F
Topic and Introduction	The topic clearly fits the unit theme of discrimination and civil rights and is explained clearly through examples from research.	The topic fits the unit theme of discrimination and civil rights and is explained through examples from research.	The topic is about discrimination and civil rights, but not necessarily both, and may include examples without those illustrations clearly representing the inequity.	The topic has only a marginal relation to the unit theme of discrimination and civil rights and may have little or no grounding in research.	The topic in no way fits the unit theme of discrimination and civil rights and has no research support.

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GRADE	A	B	C	D	F
Deconstruction	The material covered clearly depicts how the topic involves inequity based on discrimination and civil rights.	The material covered depicts how the topic involves inequity based on discrimination and civil rights.	The material covered depicts how the topic involves inequity based on discrimination and civil rights but does not establish the relationship.	The material covered only marginally relates to inequity based on discrimination and civil rights.	The material covered in no way considers inequity based on discrimination and civil rights.
Reconstruction	The project offers a vision of how alternative structures might produce greater equity.	The project offers a limited vision of how alternative structures might produce greater equity.	The project offers a vision of how alternative structures might produce greater equity, but that vision might be contradictory, unrealistic, or otherwise difficult to realize.	The project offers a cursory vision of how alternative structures might produce greater equity.	The project offers no vision of how alternative structures might produce greater equity.
Social Change	The project concludes with a plan for social action that is appropriate to the problem and has a reasonable chance of contributing to positive social change.	The project concludes with a plan for social action that is reasonably appropriate to the problem and has a possibility of contributing to positive social change.	The project concludes with a plan for social action, but that plan may be unrealistic to implement or have little chance of producing change.	The project concludes with a plan for social action that has little chance of producing social change.	The project does not provide a plan for social action.
Form	The form of the produced text allows for an audience to clearly understand the ideas conveyed through the project.	The form of the produced text allows for an audience to understand the ideas conveyed through the project.	The form of the produced text may cause confusion in the reader's ability to grasp the concepts presented.	The form of the produced text only marginally allows for an audience to understand the ideas conveyed through the project.	The form of the produced text allows for no understanding of the ideas conveyed through the project.

Critical Inquiry in Practice: Jackson, Mississippi

Chaka Mason teaches in Jackson, Mississippi, a city that serves as the state capital and hosts Jackson State University, a Historically Black University. It is the state's largest city, with a population in 2020 of 154,340, a drop of about 20,000 residents from the previous decade. Yet it is more populous than the state's second-biggest city, Gulfport, by over 100,000 people. The city's racial composition is primarily Black (82%) and white (17%). About 26% of the residents have graduated from high school, and 16% have graduated from college (Gumprecht, 2003).

In Jackson, poverty affects most non-white racial groups far more than it does the white population. *U.S. News & World Report* (2020) ranks the state of Mississippi low in areas that often reflect equity, including health care, education, economy, infrastructure, opportunity, fiscal stability, and crime and corrections. These factors become amplified in impact during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. We report these figures not to pathologize Jackson or Mississippi but to make a case for why Jackson appears to be a good place to undertake critical inquiries into inequity.

Next, we include Chaka's teaching narrative. After running the introductory activity included in this chapter, he took the unit in a direction suitable to his school and personal circumstances. It's important to situate any teaching in its local context, which includes the school curriculum, the autonomy available to teachers, the testing requirements, peer pressure from other faculty members, parent activism, and other influences. The 2020–2021 school year added another contextual factor: the COVID-19 pandemic and the inclusion of remote teaching. With the realities of remote teaching in mind, Chaka reports how, after opening with an adaptation of the introductory opinionnaire described earlier, he moved the instruction forward within the constraints surrounding his teaching.

Here is Chaka's reflection on how he implemented the critical inquiry into discrimination and civil rights in his classroom:

In the words of rap artist Jay-Z, “allow me to introduce myself.” My name is Chaka Lumumba Mason. I am a heterosexual Black male. I was born in Chicago in 1972. I moved to Mississippi in 1979 and graduated from the same high school where I now teach. I got my BA in English from Morehouse College and my MS in English education from Georgia State University. Since 2003, when I started teaching, almost all of my students have been Black, with a sprinkling of representation from other racial and ethnic groups. During the year I taught this unit, I had one white student and three Latinx students.

I teach in a Title I school in what most would call a “failing district.” All students in my district receive free lunch and, like many urban districts, we suffer from funding shortfalls. My students are not part of a magnet program or labeled as advanced. They would be classified as general education, but every year I have some shining stars, and this year was no exception. Many students I have taught and am teaching have the potential to excel academically and succeed in life. What many lack is a propensity for perseverance in an academic setting. To combat this mindset, I believe it is necessary to raise our expectations of our students in “failing districts” and provide them with the tools, skills, and practice to overcome a scarcity of self-efficacy and hope. I believe this unit was a step in the right direction. As a teacher, I strive to provide my students with as much rigor as they can handle and more work than they want. With these thoughts in mind, I augmented and eagerly implemented this unit.

Step One: Introducing the Unit

Students were provided with a capstone assignment adapted from the one presented earlier in the chapter. I always want to give my students a road map of where we are headed and what we will be exploring. With this unit, I felt that was even more important because most of my students believed that this inquiry and assignment would be extremely daunting. I wanted to set their mind at ease by telling them that we would walk our way carefully to the end project, and we would fully explore many of the concepts that they did not understand by using what they know and combining it with things that they would learn.

Step Two: Scaffolding Vocabulary

I identified six vocabulary concepts that I thought students would need to fully understand our inquiry: implicit bias, prejudice, stereotype, discrimination, civil rights, and civil liberties. In future units, I will include white privilege. I found two YouTube videos that I thought addressed the subject in an interesting and nonthreatening manner. I also broke the concepts into two separate discussion posts. I grouped implicit bias, prejudice, stereotype, and discrimination in one post and civil rights and civil liberties in the other. I explained and led a class discussion on the first four concepts and allowed them to explore the video and create their own understanding of the last two. I then provided the following prompt to launch the assignment and discussions:

What Are Discrimination, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties?

So that we clearly understand what these words mean, I have included two videos that we will watch together and from which you will take notes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7P0iP2Zm6a4>

<https://youtu.be/kbwsF-A2sTg>

Then, in the discussion, you will define *discrimination*, *implicit bias*, *stereotype*, *prejudice*, *civil rights*, and *civil liberties* and provide an example of each of these concepts. Then you will respond to one of your classmates. Remember our ABCs of discussion posts (see <https://elearningindustry.com/abcs-high-quality-online-discussions>). This assignment will count as two grades.

Step Three: Discussion

The discussions took place both virtually and in class due to pandemic conditions. They were robust and engaging in both mediums. I gave students an assessment in which they were provided with different scenarios and multiple-choice options to determine which of the concepts were most applicable. Figure 2.2 shares some of the definitions and illustrations that some of the students came up with.

See Chapter 6 to develop this discussion into activities on writing extended definition essays.

FIGURE 2.2 Student Definitions and Examples

IN-CLASS STUDENTS		VIRTUAL STUDENTS	
STUDENT #1 BLACK MALE	STUDENT #2 BLACK FEMALE	STUDENT #3 BLACK FEMALE	STUDENT #4 BLACK MALE
<p>Implicit Bias: Implied preference</p> <p>Example: When a Black and white people explaining a situation and the white police officer take the white person side.</p>	<p>Implicit Bias: To unconsciously choose one thing over another</p> <p>Example: When you go to the store and walk past candy to get the one you always get</p>	<p>Implicit Bias: People being bias and prejudice without knowing</p> <p>Example: My Muslim boss interviewed a African man, a Korean woman, and a Muslim man for a teaching job and she hired the Muslim man.</p>	<p>Implicit Bias: Something about your beliefs of a person (people) or what you believe about them whether it's right or wrong</p> <p>Example: Just because most people don't like a person, I won't like the person and we'll all have a certain attitude towards him/her.</p>

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IN-CLASS STUDENTS		VIRTUAL STUDENTS	
STUDENT #1 BLACK MALE	STUDENT #2 BLACK FEMALE	STUDENT #3 BLACK FEMALE	STUDENT #4 BLACK MALE
<p>Prejudice: An unjustified, typically negative, attitude toward an individual or group</p> <p>Example: A white police officer is patient with the white man but yells and is impatient with the Black man when they stop their car.</p>	<p>Prejudice: Pre-judgment against gender, ethnic, socioeconomic status, or culture</p> <p>Example: Upper class people downing lower class people because they don't look like them or can't afford the stuff they buy.</p>	<p>Prejudice: Negative judgment or an opinion about something or someone</p> <p>Example: Kelly doesn't like the LGBTQ community, because she thinks that what they are doing is wrong and that God will not approve.</p>	<p>Prejudice: An unjustified, typically negative, attitude toward an individual or group</p> <p>Example: The girl wanted to try out for the football team, but she couldn't because of her gender.</p>
<p>Stereotype: An overgeneralized belief about a particular group of people</p> <p>Example: When a store is robbed and a Black man walks by and the police stop him because they believe that all Black people steal.</p>	<p>Stereotype: An overgeneralized belief about a particular group of people</p> <p>Example: When you see Black people fight so automatically think all Black people fight.</p>	<p>Stereotype: Overgeneralized belief about a particular group of people</p> <p>Example: A lot of people think Africans are poor and are living in poverty.</p>	<p>Stereotype: An overgeneralized belief about a particular group of people</p> <p>Example: People call other religions terrorists because of what they hear but not of what they see, so just because a lot of people call them terrorists then other groups will continue to believe what they hear.</p>
<p>Discrimination: Behavior or action</p> <p>Example: When a white police officer has caught two thieves. One Black and the other white. The police officer pushes the Black thief on the ground.</p>	<p>Discrimination: When stereotypical beliefs combined with opinions</p> <p>Example: When white people say something bad or judge Black people.</p>	<p>Discrimination: Unfair treatment because of the person's characteristics</p> <p>Example: At the restaurant this white lady looked at me weird, because I was Black.</p>	<p>Discrimination: When stereotypical beliefs combine with prejudicial attitudes and emotions, like fear and hostility</p> <p>Example: Not letting someone be promoted because they're pregnant or being treated more badly because of your race.</p>
<p>Civil Rights: The rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality</p>	<p>Civil Rights: Civil rights are an essential component of democracy. They're guarantees of equal social opportunities and protection under the law, regardless of race, religion, or other characteristics</p>	<p>Civil Rights: Curbs on the power of majorities to make decisions that would benefit some at the expense of others. Guarantees of equal citizenship and they mean that citizens are protected from discrimination</p>	<p>Civil Rights: Curbs on the power of majorities to make decisions that would benefit some at the expense of others (guarantees of equal citizenship)</p>

IN-CLASS STUDENTS		VIRTUAL STUDENTS	
STUDENT #1 BLACK MALE	STUDENT #2 BLACK FEMALE	STUDENT #3 BLACK FEMALE	STUDENT #4 BLACK MALE
Example: Some examples of civil rights is your right to vote and also a right to a public education.	Example: The rights to vote, to a fair trial, to government services, and to a public education.	Example: Black people now have the right to vote.	Example: The right for everyone to vote, and the right for everyone to have equal education.
Civil Liberties: The state of being subject only to laws established for the good of the community Example: An example for civil liberties is the freedom of religion and also the freedom of press.	Civil Liberties: Individual rights protected by law from unjust governmental or other interference Example: Right to privacy. Right to a jury trial. Right to freedom of religion. Right to travel free. Right to freedom of speech.	Civil Liberties: Things the government can't do to interfere with your personal freedom Example: People can swim anytime they want at the community pool.	Civil Liberties: Limitations placed on the government Example: Freedom of speech, right to bear arms, right to marry

When I started this unit, I expected the same blank screens with only a name in my virtual classroom, and in person, the same blank stares I see when I start any new unit, especially one this demanding. I was pleasantly surprised to find something different. In my virtual classroom, several students showed ceiling fans and faces, and the chat was vibrant and teeming with energy, comments, and questions. In my in-person classroom, the vacant stares were replaced with furrowed brows and inquisitive expressions followed by questions, peer answers, and an almost rowdy discourse. Some engaged in the discussion but did not complete the assignment. Some remained missing in action and disengaged—but I had far fewer of those students than in previous lessons or units.

Step Four: Activities Toward the Final Project

The lesson was a rousing success. The students were engaged, challenged, and learning. The fact that they were intellectualizing their personal and perceived experiences was interesting and rewarding. They were able to differentiate vocabulary words that were closely related (civil rights/civil liberties) and apply them to a given situation. Many were able to create their own scenarios that exemplified the definition. This type of thinking works at the highest levels of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, requiring each level identified in his 1956 formulation: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It also addressed the requirements of our state standards (Bloom, 1956). It was an impactful lesson and required scaffolding for these students to be able to complete the culminating performance task, but it set the stage for the activities that I created based on the original unit design so that my students would be able to create their final project. (See Figure 2.3.)

FIGURE 2.3 Scaffolded Activities to Support Discrimination and Civil Rights Unit

<p>Day 2</p>	<p>Currency, Reliability, Authority, and Purpose (C.R.A.P.) Test: Evaluating Websites and Articles</p> <p>We will watch the video, and you will use this rubric to start evaluating websites and articles for reliability. All websites are not created equal. Some have obvious biases, some include information from sources that are unreliable, and some are out of date. It is important that you can start distinguishing good resources from bad resources as you begin to conduct research.</p> <p>C.R.A.P. Test Rubric</p>				
	<p>TITLE:</p>	<p>POOR (0 POINTS)</p>	<p>FAIR (1 POINT)</p>	<p>GOOD (3 POINTS)</p>	<p>EXCELLENT (5 POINTS)</p>
	<p>Currency</p> <p>When was it published? When was the last update?</p> <p>How recent do you need it to be?</p>	<p>No date indicated; no updates shown; information is out of date.</p>	<p>Published date is shown but not updated in a long time.</p>	<p>Update is shown but is slightly out of date.</p>	<p>Updates are shown, regular, and current</p>
	<p>Reliability</p> <p>What kind of information is included?</p> <p>How complete is this information?</p>	<p>Information is difficult to understand and may include errors, with incomplete or inaccurate information.</p>	<p>Has grammatical and spelling errors. Consistent line of thought but information is superficial.</p>	<p>Easy to understand; has some spelling and grammar errors; information is current and accurate.</p>	<p>No errors; clear and concise; well written; information is current, accurate, and relevant. An in-depth understanding of the related issues shows the author's familiarity with the subject. Links are also reliable. Has a bibliography. Information can be verified from other sources.</p>
	<p>Authority</p> <p>Who wrote the information? What are their credentials? Who is the publisher/ sponsor?</p>	<p>No author or publisher is identified.</p>	<p>Author is identified but no credentials or contact details are given. The publisher is not reputable.</p>	<p>Author is identified, contact details given, and credentials are valid. The publisher is identified and reputable.</p>	<p>Author and publisher are clearly identified, respected, and reliable. Able to confirm legitimacy of the author and content.</p>

	TITLE:	POOR (0 POINTS)	FAIR (1 POINT)	GOOD (3 POINTS)	EXCELLENT (5 POINTS)
	Purpose Why has the person or organization created this resource? Is it fact, opinion, or propaganda? Is it biased or stereotyped?	Information is presented with emotive words, unbalanced views, or questionable facts.	Contains some questionable content with a few emotive words. The content is the opinion of the author with little support of facts.	Facts are presented free from bias; information is thorough.	Facts are presented free from bias; information is thorough; multiple viewpoints are given. Purpose is clearly identifiable as educational with an intended audience.
Day 3	Gathering Information: Our Library We have learned how to use the C.R.A.P. test to evaluate resources we may decide to use for a research project. We are going to create a resource for everyone to use. This resource will make our research a little bit easier. Everyone will collect three resources about the topics that I will assign to you. This does not mean that you must complete your research project based on this topic. You will find three credible sources about the topic and put links to them in the discussion. Be sure to include both the topic and the links. This way, everyone will be able to use the research in the discussion, and we can use this resource as we complete our research projects. This discussion will be our little library. You may still find your own resources, but this material will be available in case you want to use it.				
Day 4	Choosing your topic and providing a rationale for the choice (300 words) Based on the ten statements in the opinionnaire we have discussed, you will choose a topic for further exploration and explain why you chose it. In this assignment, you should summarize your answers to these questions. Your first sentence should be a statement of your topic and your position. For example: Discrimination is not allowed based on federal law, so it is unfair and illegal for any business that serves the public to treat one group or individual differently from another group or individual. The Process: Step One: Take a position and explain how you feel about the topic and why you chose it. Step Two: Use your research to support or refute how you felt. Step Three: Add a summary that explains whether you were right or wrong and why. Your full response should be 300 words.				
Day 5	Deconstruction: Analyzing the problem: It's all about power. Now that you have chosen your topic, let's dig a little deeper. After conducting your research, you should know quite a bit about your topic. First, tell me what your topic is. Use the R.A.C.E. strategy [restate the question, answer the question, cite evidence, and explain your answer] to answer each of these questions. Your cited evidence should come from sources you used to research your topic or the knowledge you have acquired about the subject. Then answer these questions about your topic: Who has the power?				

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	<p>Whose power is being taken away?</p> <p>How is it being taken away?</p> <p>Why is it being taken away?</p> <p>How can the person whose power is being limited get some back?</p>
Day 6	<p>Reconstruction: How can we fix it? Equity versus Equality</p> <p>In matters of discrimination and civil rights, <i>equality</i> is a word that has been used as the solution to these issues. It is important that we start to envision how society could move forward with a more equitable structure and process.</p> <p>(1) Watch this video that explains the difference between equality and equity.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APDxrpvtKQ</p> <p>Explain the difference between these two concepts in your own words using R.A.C.E.</p> <p>(2) Based on your topic, answer each of these questions. Please copy and paste the questions to a Google Doc and then provide your answers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would need to change for society to be fair to those whose identities are marginalized? • How might those changes be undertaken? • What is preventing such change from taking place? • How might these oppositional forces be addressed? • What would a reformed society look like for those whose civil rights are being investigated? • What would other people need to do to enable their lives to proceed with greater equity?
Day 7	<p>The final step: My action plan—<i>What are you going to do to fix it?</i></p> <p>In our final step, you will create a text using the medium of your choice. It may be written, performed, produced through computer images, produced through an art form, or prepared through any other medium that we agree on that details the issues surrounding your topic and provides actionable solutions that might help to alleviate or eliminate the problem.</p> <p>Some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an action plan that details steps you will take to create change. • Write a letter to the appropriate entity that addresses your concerns and possible solutions to alleviate them. • Organize a rally or protest. • Write and act out a play that addresses the situation and provides solutions. • Create a public service announcement (PSA). • Create a poster (digital or paper).

Using these activities to scaffold the students' progress toward the final assignment worked well. The "days" were merely a way to keep a sequential order for the activities, but some of them took longer than a day. The students' responses were thoughtful and showed that they were really interested in the topics they explored. They realized that 300 words was not that much to write when you have something to write about. Some found that they had voice and kindred spirits. Some found they were on an island, but they were often unafraid to stand alone. Some found their island of ideas to be ill-conceived and changed their perspectives. All these results were welcomed and lauded, regardless of my personal convictions. (No poisoning of the well of inquiry!) I was surprised to hear how they felt about many of the topics, and their responses caused me to explore my feelings and conduct my own inquiry. I think they were surprised to discover the truth about their feelings and the world in general.

Because it was the end of the year, we ran out of time to really dig into the final project. Nevertheless, the real learning and inquiry were happening along the way. Many of these concepts—evaluating articles for reliability, equity versus equality, evaluating power constructs, and creating an action plan—are not widely taught to general-education ninth graders, if ever. This unit gave me the space and impetus I needed to figure out how to make these necessary concepts accessible, and I was able to teach the college and career readiness standards that were required at a level of rigor that is needed to build better thinkers, readers, and writers. It is always difficult to keep students engaged until the end of the school year, especially after testing, but this unit was a great ending to a challenging school year.

Reflecting on Critical Inquiry in the Classroom

A critical inquiry unit may not change the whole world. But it has the potential to help students learn about themselves in relation to others. It cultivates critical thinking skills, research skills, interpretive skills, and compositional skills that may enable them to break down problems and arrive at reasonable, possibly effective solutions. They will learn that emotions and cognition are not separate but work in conjunction in the process of thinking. They also might learn that school doesn't have to be boring and irrelevant but can provide them with the means by which to change their surroundings and themselves for the better.



Reflection Questions

For both formative and summative evaluations of the unit, teachers might consider questions such as the following:

1. Did the unit produce discussions that people found uncomfortable, that they resisted, or that they felt vulnerable in? If so, how did I manage them and how might I have managed them more effectively?
2. What sorts of actions did the unit produce among students? Is discussion alone sufficiently valuable, or is action necessary for the unit to have been a success?
3. Ultimately, how were power relationships explored, and to what ends? Was power maintained or shifted as a result of the critical inquiries?
4. What might I do differently as a result of the ways in which the unit played out, including how it was received outside the classroom by colleagues, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders?