

X. Gathering Places

Subject(s):

Time Needed: 50 minute class session

Objectives:

- ✓ reaffirm the importance of community spaces
- ✓ reflect on student experiences outside of school
- ✓ recognize the historical manifestations of difference as it is reflected in public space and mobility
- ✓ highlight current social and cultural divisions
- ✓ connect with the situations of other students and individuals

Areas/Disciplines Covered:

African American/Black Studies (Jim Crow segregation, race)
American Studies (physical space, public consumption)
History (U.S., local, African American)
Sociology (human interaction and behavior)
Urban Studies (physical space, location)

Materials:

- 10-15 minute video clip from “Eyes on the Prize” or other Civil Rights film or documentary which demonstrates Jim Crow segregation (ex: “white only” v. “colored only”)
- situations chosen from “Brass City Life” (www.brasscitylife.org) which discuss neighborhood associations, churches, civic organizations, and other gathering places (for example: Zita Smolskis quote from “Brooklyn”)
- chalk and chalkboard, or chart paper and markers
- homework assignment

Procedure:

1. Start out the class by introducing the students to the idea of public space. Discuss with them popular understandings of those places such as public libraries, swimming pools, and the mall. Ask them: “Where is your favorite place to go?” Collect responses on the chalkboard or chart paper. After gaining a few responses, ask the children *why* those are their favorite places. Is it because they can get away from home? Because they can meet their friends there?

2. Bring the conversation to Waterbury as a city. Ask the students, “Based on the work we’ve done so far on ‘Brass City Life’, where are the places that people gather(ed) in their neighborhoods?” Photocopy a few quotes from the site in order to jog the students’ memory and provide reading aloud opportunities. Some additional questions to ask are:

What do people do there?
Who goes there? Why?

Why are those places important?

3. Next transition into a discussion on limitations; times and places where certain individuals couldn't go or do what they wanted to do. Ask the students if they can name any of those people or places. A local example would be the period when women were not allowed to attend Yale College (admitted in 1969). At some point, one of your students may mention African Americans. Use that as your platform to give a brief history of Jim Crow segregation, beginning with a basic understanding that African Americans historically have been denied basic American freedoms. Some points to cover:

- 1863: Emancipation Proclamation
- 1865: 13th amendment abolishing slavery. This same year the Black Codes entered into law in the south, which prohibited the free movement of Black citizens through limitations on where they could go, when, and with whom.
- 1868: 14th Amendment giving all people born in the US citizenship
- 1870: 15th amendment giving all male citizens the right to vote
- 1896: *Plessy v. Ferguson*: The Supreme Court decides that separate but equal shall rule race and spacial relationships
- Jim Crow--named after the character Jim Crow from antebellum days--is in effect in the country as African Americans struggle to be treated equally. It is a process of complete disfranchisement of African Americans. They cannot buy homes where they want to, work where they want to, go to school when and where they want to, shop where they want to or vote when and for whom they want to.
- 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education* overturns *Plessy* in education and demands integration of all public schools in America.
- 1957: Little Rock Central high school in Arkansas is integrated in small steps by 9 Black students and draws international media attention.
- 1964: the Civil Rights Act is signed into law. It officially calls for an end to discrimination in many areas of American life including housing, employment, and voting.

****Highlight the fact that there was 100 years of unequal freedom in America****

4. Introduce your film clip, which should clearly identify for the students the situation that African American citizens were in prior to the end of Jim Crow and the triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement. A good clip will show easily identifiable imagery such as “whites only” signs and the National Guard ushering Black students into school during educational desegregation (ex: Little Rock, AR (1957)). Follow the film with a reflection and then a series of large group discussion questions, such as:

Was there ever a time when you couldn't go somewhere? Why couldn't you go there?

Have you ever been treated differently by other people in any public space?

5. Allow the students to divulge some (often hurtful) scenarios and speak to each other. End by offering them more space to outline what they are discussing through a short homework assignment to the effect of:

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT: How did you feel seeing the film today? What did you learn that was new? Are there places that you can't go or things that you can't do? Where your neighbor or friend can't go? Why can't you go there? How does that make you feel? Make them feel? What do you think, if anything, should change so that everyone can enjoy the same things? (200-250 words)

Related Resources:

“Eyes on the Prize” PBS documentary: (<http://pbsvideodb.pbs.org/resources/eyes/>), includes maps, timelines, series specific lessons for each video

Gathering Places Worksheet

On this sheet, answer the following questions: How did you feel seeing the film today? What did you learn that was new? Are there places that you can't go or things that you can't do? Where your neighbor or friend can't go? Why can't you go there? How does that make you feel? Make them feel? What do you think, if anything, should change so that everyone can enjoy the same things? (200-250 words)