Jim Crow and Segregation: A Text Set For United States History 2

Many students feel disengaged or uninterested in the subject of History. Some describe it as boring or not relative to their lives. Others view it as a monotonous list of names and dates. Almost all detractors of History would point to reading as a source of their dismay. The greatest challenge a History teacher has is engaging their students and making (pardon the cliché) the past come alive. Overcoming the anxiety and boredom related to these issues is essential. Utilizing a diverse and attractive set of alternative readings to the main text can help.

The text set described in this paper was generated for Standards of Learning USII.3c. Upon completion of this unit, my students will describe “racial segregation, the rise of ‘Jim Crow,” and other constraints faced by African-Americans in the post-Reconstruction South.” This text set of nine books and one documentary covers the key understandings, questions, knowledge, and skills required of the SOL. My Eleventh grade United States History class is a diverse group of eighteen students both in an academic and ethnic sense. Some are high achievers while others struggle academically and with reading to an extent. This text set takes the variety of my students’ reading levels into account. It encompasses a range of ten grades (eleven would be ideal), from the fourth grade to fourteenth grade level. Readability was calculated using the Flesch-Kincaid formula and is further discussed for each text utilizing the components of Bader’s Textbook Analysis. The text set offers both a wide range of reading and interest levels. It is represented by memoirs, fiction, philosophical musings, a documentary, and writings by African-American leaders, women, a white man, and a sports figure. Some texts will be used in the classroom while others will serve as outside reading assignments. The employment of these texts will assist students in learning the content and improving their reading comprehension.


*Up From Slavery* is Booker T. Washington’s autobiography and record of philosophical beliefs in regards to race and segregation in the United States. Washington recounts his life, rising from a slave child to the most visible African-American figure of the post-Reconstruction era. He stressed advancement through education and business acumen, and took a separate but equal stance in regards to race. While he remained extremely popular and influential, his views earned him scorn from many black intellectuals, including W.E.B. Du Bois. *Up From Slavery* specifically relates to the key knowledge requirements of the SOL.
The text will be used in combination with works by Du Bois and on Ida B. Wells in a Jigsaw activity in class. Specifically, the chapter on his Atlanta Exposition Address will be focused on for the activity. Three groups of six students will examine and develop fundamental understandings and concepts from each reading. Then six groups of three students from each original group will discuss their findings to each other. The cooperative groups will then lead a class discussion in which I will also participate. This will take two class periods. The activity in itself is a complete PAR activity. In relation to the content this will be used in the Preparation phase.

The Jigsaw activity will hopefully engage my most reluctant learners to both learn the content and comprehend the reading. By comparing and contrasting Washington’s beliefs with others’, students may be able to identify with a particular view. It will facilitate discussion and no doubt some debate. This activity and the readings in it will provide a background for the content area that will augment the official text. It will activate my students’ schema for the rest of the content area reading to follow.

*Up From Slavery* scores a 14 on the Flesch-Kincaid Readability scale. Conceptually, the reading does not pose a problem. Washington writes very eloquently, but some of the sentences are rather long. This may partly explain for the high score. The vocabulary is not too difficult. It is my hope that using cooperative learning groups will act as scaffolding for weaker readers.


(Original work published 1903).

W.E.B. Du Bois’ classic collection of essays stands as a summation of his philosophical beliefs in regards to the plight of African-Americans in the post-Reconstruction United States. In class we will specifically focus on his essay *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others* in the Jigsaw activity. This writing demonstrates Du Bois’ opposition to Washington’s views. Du Bois demanded full equality, without restraints and without boundaries. This text directly relates to the key knowledge in the SOL.

The Jigsaw activity will provide the engagement of all learners as it did with regards to *Up From Slavery*. Again, the opposing view of Du Bois will certainly attract some students, allowing them to “see themselves” in the author. The discourse flowing from reading and comprehending various outlooks will foster knowledge construction.

The Readability score of *The Souls of Black Folk* is 12, although I consider this more difficult than Washington’s work in regards to Bader’s conceptual and linguistic factors. Du Bois writes more concise sentences, but some of his writing is intellectually challenging. In addition, sometime he delves into almost poetic verse. Linguistically this poses issues with vocabulary and conceptually it could be difficult to understand the allusions and symbolism. However, the essay the students are focusing on is rather uncomplicated and should be understood with the help of cooperative learning groups. Later I will discuss the independent reading project. If a student chooses to read *The Souls of Black Folk* and has comprehension issues, they may need my assistance.
This biography is subtitled *Mother of the Civil Rights Movement*. It chronicles Ida B. Wells’ life as a successful businesswoman, an anti-lynching advocate who documented over one hundred cases in newspapers and pamphlets, and a co-founder of the NAACP. The SOL does not require Wells to be taught, but her life gives us a female viewpoint as well as being a contemporary to Washington and Du Bois.

The Fradin’s book will be used alongside *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Up From Slavery* in the Jigsaw activity. The students will examine her life and relate it to Washington and Du Bois’ beliefs. This will activate the students’ learning by bridging the beliefs of two figures to the actions of a woman’s everyday life. This woman’s perspective may activate the schema of some of the female students as well as demonstrating for others the horrible realities of segregation and Jim Crow laws.

*Ida B. Wells* has a Readability level of 7. The text provides no discernable linguistic, conceptual, or stylistic issues. Many pictures enhance the format and the font is larger than normal. This text should be easily accessible to most students.

---


*Black Boy* is an autobiographical account of growing up as an African American in the Deep South during the early twentieth century. Wright grew up in abject poverty and moved habitually. He was constantly hungry, exceptionally intelligent and inquisitive, and the victim of physical and mental abuse on a daily basis. The work grapples with race relations, gender roles, religion, abuse, literacy and education. Most of the essential understanding, questions, knowledge, and skills integral to the SOL can be found in or answered by reading *Black Boy*.

I believe that students will identify with Richard Wright. His account starts when he is four years old and nearly burns down his parents’ house. It reals you in from the start. It will engage reluctant readers because it triggers feelings of anger, sorrow, guilt, and shock. It carries a great emotional impact while relating the realities of life in the Jim Crow South. Students’ schema will be activated because of the emotional pull of the characters and the narrative provides numerous examples of discrimination and segregation.

Students will be able to read this text outside of class to augment the official text. Students will pick one of the any nine written texts to read and write a paper on. The paper will focus on answering the essential questions as outlined in the SOL by giving examples from the text they chose. This activity will be used in the Assistance and Reflection stages. It exhibits maintaining purpose, building comprehension, demonstrating learning, and retention. Ultimately, the students will participate in a class wide discussion about their reading experiences and how it relates to the content unit.

Readability is on a 9th grade level (although it was a 7 when I previously used the Fry readability for the Literature Lesson Plan). Much of *Black Boy* is dialogue driven and very readable. The narrative at times reads like stream of conscious and the
sentences can run on. This writing style could pose problems for some. It poses no significant linguistic or conceptual issues.


*Invisible Man* is the first work of fiction in the text set, but certainly carries a great amount of truth in its’ story. It encompasses a dizzying array of characters and scenarios. It tells the story of a black man from his upbringing in the South to adulthood in Harlem. It is an intoxicating story full of metaphor, allusions, and symbolism. Again, it is a book that will touch the foundation of the SOL. It will serve as one of the outsider class reading choices.

The Readability level of *Invisible Man* is 11. This text is one of the longer and more challenging books in the set. It could prove conceptually and intellectually difficult for some students. Ellison used many literary devices to conceal meaning. To overcome these difficulties it may be necessary to familiarize students with certain literary devices—simply to make them aware of their function in this book. Of course most students may not choose this book because of its breadth and depth, but if they do there are many opportunities to make connections with the content. *Invisible Man* bridges the Jim Crow South with the Harlem Renaissance, Communism, and the Civil Rights Movement. It shows that segregation was not exclusive to the South. The scope of this text will activate the schema for a variety of related areas for students. Some students may see themselves in the unnamed protagonist as someone on an unpredictable journey.


Hurston’s well-regarded book is the recollection of one Janie Crawford’s life. It is a woman’s journey through love, heartache, hope, and tragedy. It deals with racism in the South, but also with the empowerment of women. Many in the African-American literary establishment criticized Hurston harshly, including Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, who claimed that it’s use of phonetic dialogue made blacks appear ignorant. Today it is considered a classic.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* offers a different point of view on the effects of segregation and Jim Crow in the South, that of the woman. This perspective will appeal to some of my female students in the same way that Ida Wells’s biography will, but Janie Crawford’s stirring persona may seem more vibrant and charm some students more than a historical figure. Hurston’s work is also full of biblical allusions, which could attract some of my more religious students. A rich conversation could develop between students who read Ellison and Wright with those who read Hurston regarding the criticism of her work by those authors. There are many ways in which this book is a tool for learning.

The Readability of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* offers a different point of view on the effects of segregation and Jim Crow in the South, that of the woman. This perspective will appeal to some of my female students in the same way that Ida Wells’s biography will, but Janie Crawford’s stirring persona may seem more vibrant and charm some students more than a historical figure. Hurston’s work is also full of biblical allusions, which could attract some of my more religious students. A rich conversation could develop between students who read Ellison and Wright with those who read Hurston regarding the criticism of her work by those authors. There are many ways in which this book is a tool for learning.

The Readability of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is on the 4th Grade level, a misleading score in my estimation. The use of phonetic dialogue could prove linguistically and stylistically difficult for the strongest readers. Some students will get stuck on the print processors before they can determine meaning. Many will need a period of acclimation before they get used to this new language.

This is the true account of a white man, John Howard Griffin, who underwent skin darkening treatments, disguised himself as a black man, and traveled the Deep South for six weeks in the late 1950s. He hid his identity only through appearance. The treatment he received because of his skin color is a telling indictment of racism and Jim Crow laws in the South. *Black Like Me* takes place after most of the other texts in this content area, but it’s story and issues are certainly topical.

This text gives yet another perspective in which to engage students, that of a white man. This may resonate more with some students. It will make them understand that the issues surrounding this unit of learning simply come down to skin color. In addition, it is a tense and suspenseful true story. Like the previous texts, *Black Like Me* will be used in the Assistance stage as independent reading and in the Reflection stage as the topic of a paper and whole class discussion.

Readability is on the 8th Grade level. This is one of the least problematic texts in the set. It is conceptually and linguistically accessible, the vocabulary is age appropriate, and the writing style is succinct and smooth.


Buck O’Neil was a solid if not spectacular baseball player in the Negro Leagues. He achieved prominence through his appearance in Ken Burns *Baseball* documentary and became a spokesman for a much forgotten generation of athletes. *I Was Right On Time* chronicles his playing days with such greats as Jackie Robinson, Satchel Paige, and Josh Gibson; but more significantly speaks of the discrimination they faced under the guise of Jim Crow and segregation in the South.

Buck O’Neil’s story offers yet another option for students to connect to this material with. Some reluctant students may find this an exciting alternative to some of the traditional literature in the text set because of their love of sports. This book is replete with examples of segregation in the time of Jim Crow and exhibits how one man coped with these difficult times. This selection will connect with certain students and help them with content comprehension.

*I Was Right On Time* scores a 13 on the Flesch-Kincaid Readability scale, although this score appears a little misleading. This book reads like an oral history rather than a standard narrative. It is as if O’Neil is actively telling you what happened. This informal structure and his tendency for run on sentences probably skew the readability a bit higher, but will not pose problems for most readers. The only scaffolding necessary may be with terminology. The book is full of team names and nicknames that may appear new to some students, but overall the vocabulary is age appropriate.

Sara Brooks grew up on a farm in Alabama in the early twentieth century. This is her story (as told to Thordis Simonsen) of being a poor, black female in the rural segregationist south. Her mother dies when she is an infant, she is raised by various family members, gets married and is violently abused by her husband, and flees to Cleveland to carve out an existence for her children and herself. It is another rich and honest account of survival from a female perspective.

This selection may appeal to the same students who want to read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* or *Ida B. Wells*, but would rather read a memoir than a piece of fiction or a biography. Like many of these texts, it is the story of endurance amidst great odds. This may also interest students with rural backgrounds. Sara Brooks’ account is an important contribution to the history of African Americans living in the Jim Crow South.

The Readability score of *You May Plow Here* is an 8. The narrative contains some phonetic spelling but not to the extent of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. As Sara Brooks told this story to someone, it reads like an oral history much in the way *I Was Right On Time* does. Overall, the score is an accurate one as the text does not create any major problems using Bader’s Textbook Analysis.


In 1931, nine black teenagers were falsely accused of raping two white women on a train in Alabama. They were immediately arrested, brought to trial, convicted, and sentenced to death. The case gained notoriety and was appealed. Many appeals and court cases later, eight of the nine were finally released and one escaped from prison. *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy* is a distressing and arresting story of racism, segregation, and the lack of justice for African-Americans in the Jim Crow South.

This video will be used in the Reflection stage of our lesson plan. Videos are a foolproof way of engaging reluctant learners. The story serves as a prime example of the questions we have raised and knowledge we have learned throughout the unit. The students will relate to the accused not only because of indignation of the overt racism, but also the universal appeal of justice. This text will serve to extend the reading experience, activate the students’ schema for the content of this unit, and build a bridge to other areas of study.

*Scottsboro* touches on many issues we have covered in studying this content, among them Jim Crow laws, lynching, the NAACP, and poverty. Students will watch this video actively looking for these examples and any others they have encountered in their reading. They will construct their thoughts to share with the class and we will make connections to other areas of content. Hopefully, their comprehension of the material will be strong enough to make these connections. Not only does the video touch upon these various issues of segregation, but also the Depression, Communism, the United States Courts System, Anti-Semitism, and North-South relations. Students will link these
concepts to the lesson at hand and expand them to other areas of History. This will to serve to enhance their comprehension of this content and their studies as a whole.