

Boulder County Latino History Project

Lesson Plans

Title: Assimilation and Acculturation: What Does It Mean To Be An American?

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Overview

Lesson Overview	In evaluating the term, “What Does It Mean to Be An American?,” students will develop an evaluatory conclusion as to the extent, or lack thereof, of acculturation and/or assimilation required to be considered an “American.” Furthermore, students will discuss whether “becoming American” is the “goal” of all ethnic groups (“assimilation” vs. “acculturation”) and evaluate the state of multiculturalism in America today. Students will employ the Michael Walzer article, “What Does It Mean to Be An American?” (1990), primary and secondary source data from the BCLHP, and research from the PEW Research Center, June 2015.
Author(s)	Chris Barnes
Grade Level/ Course	High School, U.S. Government
Standards	CDE Standards: 4.1.a.: Engage ethically in civic activities including discussing current issues, advocating for their rights and the rights of others, practicing their responsibilities, influencing governmental actions, and other community service learning opportunities. 4.3.a.: Discuss multiple perspectives on local issues and options for participating in civic life. 4.3.b.: Analyze and discuss multiple perspectives on state issues and option for participating in civic affairs by shaping policies.
Time Required	Three 90-minute class periods.
Topics	Immigration, Civil rights activity, Government/government programs/laws, Political or community participation Outline topics: Challenging racism, increasing inclusion, searching for identity; Epilogue, Echoes of the Past, Voices of the Future
Time Periods	1940-1965, 1966-1980, 1980s-1990s, 2000-2013



Tags (key words)	acculturation, assimilation, citizenship, community, democracy, naturalization, patriotism, Immigration, Civil rights activity, Government/government programs/laws, Political or community participation
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Preparation (*Links to worksheets, primary sources and other materials*):

Materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “<i>What Does It Mean to Be an American?</i>” essay 2. Various YouTube clips of interviewees describing inclusion / exclusion in Boulder County 3. Various images of Latinos in particularly “Anglo” fashion (military uniforms, cars, dogs, etc.) 4. Various interview transcripts describing inclusion / exclusion in Boulder County 5. Various <u>other</u> images, transcripts, and newspaper articles that will aid in “evidentiary support” for assimilation and acculturation, or lack is thereof 6. “Samples of ‘Americanization’” 7. “Samples of ‘Ostracism’” 8. Report by the PEW Research Center on Multiracial America
Resources/Links	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “<i>What Does...American?</i>” essay 2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dlUTucR17w (Clip from an audio interview with Virginia Maestas, from 2013, describing racism in Longmont and Boulder during the late 1940s/ early 1950s and her mother’s embarrassment about Latino customs) 3. https://youtu.be/c8gW9XzNBw0 (Clip from an audio interview with Doris Gonzalez in 2013, who had light skin, describing how she was not served initially at a restaurant in Longmont with a “white trade only” sign in 1947, and other examples of racism) 4. http://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/document/oral-history-alex-gonzales-pt-2 (Part of transcript of interview with Alex Gonzales, around 1987, describing racism, “White Trade Only” signs, and how he removed one of them) 5. https://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/document/transcript-interview-mary-gonzales-tafoya-p-2 (Part of an interview transcript, 2009, in which Mary Gonzales Tafoya describes how her dad tore down the racist sign when a Longmont restaurant wouldn’t serve his brother, who had just returned from fighting in WWII) 6. http://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/newspaper/4th-grade-students-prepare-mexican-lunch-1965 (Newspaper article from 1965 about 4th grade students preparing Mexican lunch, part of effort to make Boulder schools more international) 7. https://youtu.be/DvGKv5sjWa4 (Segment of audio interview with Virginia Maestas, 1978, describing how some young Latinos in the 1950s and 1960s felt pressured to assimilate and were ambivalent about retaining their culture/ identity)



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	<p>8. A variety of other images, transcripts, and newspaper articles. Teacher should click here and search for the following terms by ID, although this is not an exhaustive list: FP-158, LHS-022, LHS-068, LHS-150, LHS-202, LHS-321, MKM-267_0, MKM-413, MKM-527, MKM-701, SCW-022, SCW-075, SCW-076, SCW-077, SCW-078, SCW-091. See “Samples of ‘Americanization’” here and “Samples of ‘Ostracism’” here for organized and categorized images and prompts.</p> <p>9. A survey by PEW Research Center on Multiracial America.</p>
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Lesson Procedure *(Step by Step Instructions):*

One of the most important introductory themes of American government is the discussion and evaluation of the foundations of the government system as one that is similar to, yet distinctly different from, the governments of Europe. Many of these differences arose from the fact that in order for the Colonies to collectively individuate from their European brethren, early Founders had to consider themselves distinctly American, not English or otherwise European. In the words of Thomas Paine, author of *Common Sense*: “[W]e are young, and we have been distressed; but our concord hath withstood our troubles, and fixes a memorable area for posterity to glory in.”

Their new form of government, though in fact very similar to that of the representative British government, became based on principles of democracy, representation, and the Latin *civitas* (“community” or “collective state”). However, early factions developed as to how, when, and to what extent, would citizens of the new nation be incorporated into the Republic. Would the Republic be represented and served by Federalists or Anti-Federalists? Coastal or rural dwellers? Propertied landowners? Whites or blacks? In essence, “What Does It Mean to Be An American?”

With this pivotal phrase, students will need to evaluate the process of “becoming an American,” when that process starts and reaches completion, and ultimately, whether one must assimilate or acculturate. Can an “American” be quantified? For example, must someone “eat hot dogs and play baseball” in order to become an American? Learn English? Students will need to evaluate these ideas, and more.

The end of this discussion will evolve into yet another discussion of whether or not certain ethnic and cultural groups desire to “be American” or to assume someone’s “standard” of what an “American” truly is. This discussion will take us into the concepts of “assimilation” vs. “acculturation.” Students will challenge the concept of “American” as a quantifiable vs. qualifiable concept. Lastly, students will discuss the state of multiculturalism and multiracialism in today’s America. The lesson outline is as follows:

DAY 1

1. After initial discussion of classroom norms, expectations, and reminders about etiquette and verbiage regarding discussions of race/ethnicity, teacher will ask students to think silently on the question of “What Does It Mean to Be An American?” (5 minutes)
2. On a separate sheet of paper, students will jot down their response to the question. At teacher’s discretion, students may discuss their answers, but the activation of student’s own background knowledge, particularly for themselves going forward, is paramount.



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3. Teacher will distribute copies of Walzer's essay. Students will read silently, and answer the questions below at teacher's discretion (20 - 25 minutes):
 - a. From the first two body paragraphs, list three (3) "oddities" or "uniquenesses" about Americans that make us different from other countries.
 - b. One of the biggest points of argument in "America" is the question: At what point do the rest of us, native grown, become natives? When you get to this point of the article, stop reading, and answer the question right away: In your opinion, when DOES a person become "an American"?
 - c. What is unique and frustrating about American symbols? Why do we fight over them?
 - d. What is a "hyphenate"? Why are their lives lived "emphatically to the left of the hyphen"?
 - e. What is the difference between an "ethnic American" and an "American-American"?
 - f. CONCLUSION: What's one thing you liked about this article?
4. Teacher will lead a classroom discussion, discussing any of the above questions, although special emphasis should be placed on Question B above (15 - 20 minutes). Teacher may or may not choose to record answers or important responses on the board, have the students respond with a [Padlet](#), record their reactions to others' answers on a separate sheet of paper, move around the room, etc. Teacher should pay special attention to valuing everyone's responses, embracing and praising all answers, yet be conscientious of the appropriate nature of speech.
5. Teacher will attempt to create additional guided discussions (15 - 20 minutes) around the absolute, yet very subjective responses to questions such as the following:

"In order to be an American, must an individual...

 - a. *...become a citizen?*
 - b. *...be born in the United States?*
 - c. *...pledge allegiance to the flag?*
 - d. *...'engage' or 'participate' in something 'patriotic'? For example, 'wear red, white, and blue' on Fourth of July, be 'emotionally impacted' by images or videos of national tragedies such as 9/11 or Pearl Harbor, cheer for 'Team USA' in the Olympics or World Cup?*
 - e. *...hold only (1) citizenship card? In other words, no dual citizenship?*
 - f. *...serve or defend the country in the Armed Forces?*
 - g. *...be able to pass a citizenship test?*
 - h. *...become proficient in English or American History?*
 - i. *...etc., etc.*
6. Teacher will ask students to revisit their answers to Question B, rewrite or rephrase their answers if they now feel differently, or underline, circle, or emblazon individual words or phrases in their answers if they continue to agree. Teacher will end class with a discussion of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and his vision that although very different, the early colonies found themselves lumped together as Americans because...
 - a. *"...we are young, and we have been distressed; but our concord hath withstood our troubles, and fixes a memorable area for posterity to glory in."*

...and therein lays our similarity. If teacher needs help, they may illustrate the discussion of "we" and "they" by discussing what makes their class / block a "we", regardless of who's inside of it, and distinctly different from other classes / blocks, the "they." The reason? They're all inside your classroom at this given time. Everyone else is "they."

DAY 2



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1. Teacher will begin class, again, with a reflection on the phrase, “What Does It Mean to Be An American?” Today, students will discuss, elaborate, and evaluate whether or not “American” is quantifiable, as in: if one does this, they will be qualified as “an American. (5 minutes)
2. Students will use realia (again, attached [here](#) if teacher would like to use it) of Boulder County Latino history as evidence with which to make their claim. Their guiding question is: “When did these people become American?” Students will use the realia as evidence to answer the question however they see fit. (20 minutes)
3. Students will create an evaluatory statement of “quantifiable Americanization” using at least one piece of evidence from the categories of realia: migration, farming, icons, allegiance, assimilation (10 minutes). Student will attempt to identify the exact point (where, when, how) “Americanization” occurred. Students will share with a partner, in a quad, and finally, share out in a class discussion. Teacher will attempt to navigate students into a finite point of Americanization. For example, was Americanization achieved when Mexicans and/or Mexican-Americans...
 - a. ...crossed the border into the United States or the border from New Mexico into Colorado?
 - b. ...were employed in an American business?
 - c. ...loved cars and dogs?
 - d. ...played baseball?
 - e. ...joined the high school basketball or wrestling team?
 - f. ...served in the armed forces?
 - g. ...swore allegiance by signing the GI Forum?
 - h. ...disavowed allegiance to the I.W.W.?
 - i. ...identified the struggle of assimilation and advocated the desire for more education and empowerment?

Class discussion can range from 10 to 20 minutes. When teacher feels that class is ready to move on, teacher will introduce Handout #2, found [here](#), that includes samples of ostracism that Mexican Americans experienced in Boulder County. (15 to 45 minutes, depending on teacher inclusion of audio and video material)

4. This part of the class will attempt to challenge any previously-established points of achieved Americanization. A point of discussion may include a reference to the following question:
 - a. *“If someone achieves ‘Americanization’ when they play high school baseball, why, then, are they still referred to as ‘tamale eaters’ at the segregated movie theater?”*
5. When students have completed examination of Ostracism Samples, students will attempt to rationalize their original responses of “Americanization achieved” vs. “Ostracism experienced”. As time permits, teacher may request students to write a response or lead class in a discussion.

DAY 3

1. Teacher will begin class, again, with a reflection on the phrase, “What Does It Mean to Be An American?” The teacher will recap the past (2) days’ lessons, from the reading of the essay to the “quantifiable nature” of Americanization to the ostracism that newcomers continue to experience. Today, students will discuss whether or not Americanization is goal of migrants and ethnic minorities and, furthermore, if one person’s view of “Americanization” can differ from that of another. Students will be accessing data from the PEW Research Center (found [here](#)) with the ultimate goal of challenging preconceived notions of “white”, “minority”, and in sum, “American.”
2. Teacher may choose to use data and its discussion in any way they choose but may desire to start [here](#) with an interactive graphic on census data over time.



3. In regards to the interactive graphic, some guiding questions can include:
 - a. What ethnic and/or racial groups comprised the original census data? the data from 2010?
 - b. List the census years in which various ethnic and/or racial groups appeared on the census.
 - c. Why do you think that the Hispanic race was included on the census in 1930 and then, not again until 1970?
 - d. Compare census data from 1990 and 2000. What has changed?
 - e. Why do you think a “black person” has (3) racial options from which to choose? an “Hispanic” person?
4. In regards to data from the PEW Research Center, some guiding questions can include:
 - a. Is multiculturalism / multiracialism a point of pride? advantage? challenge? Why or why not?
 - b. Choose (3) pieces of data that surprise you.
 - c. What is the largest multiracial group in the United States? Why do you think this is so?
 - d. Why don't some people choose to identify as multiracial?
 - e. For multiracial citizens, is the “white” component generally a “hindrance” or a “blessing”? Expand.
5. The teacher may choose to directly reference Chapter 7 of the data report specifically on Hispanic Americans found [here](#). Guiding questions can include:
 - a. Provide data for Hispanic America today in terms of percentages and raw numbers.
 - b. What differences can you find between the terms “Hispanic”, “Latino”, and “Chicano”?
 - c. Why is it hard for today’s Hispanic/Latino/Chicano/Mexican-American citizens to identify with just one category?
 - d. How do multiracial Hispanics believe they are viewed by others?
 - e. ANALYSIS: If someone identifies with “Mexican” or “indigenous” as part of their racial make up, can they still be “American”?
6. Teacher may choose to have students respond in written form to preassigned answers, share in groups, continue to expand upon previous answers, etc., etc.
7. At the end of session, teacher will prompt students to answer the summative question (which was the essential question for the three-day unit): “What Does It Mean to Be An American?”

Evaluation/Assessment: *(Methods for collecting evidence of student learning)*

1. Evaluations (questions, elaboration, guided discussion, “tickets out”) are discussed within lesson plan procedure, but a summary is listed below:
 - a. (6) questions related to “*American*” essay
 - b. Evaluatory conclusion, using at least (1) piece of evidence per section of “Samples of Americanization,” that proves when “Americanization” is achieved.
 - c. Evaluatory conclusion, using at least (1) piece of evidence per section of “Samples of Ostracism,” that contributes to, or challenges, their answers in previous evaluatory paragraph.
 - d. Per teacher decision, any answers related to data from the PEW Research Center and/or the interactive census data.



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e. Final, summative answer to the question: “What Does It Mean to Be An American?”
Students may read [this](#) article to help them finalize their opinions.



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