

# Introduction to Ethnic Studies

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Given the deeply complex and personal concepts, localized context and collaborative nature of Ethnic Studies, it is highly recommended that any teacher that teaches Ethnic Studies commits to the following:

1. **Experiential Learning:** This includes taking a 20+ hour course that onboards the teacher to this Intro to Ethnic Studies course and curriculum by experiencing the pedagogy, frameworks and content/concepts of the course themselves with a cohort of colleagues/peers. This course requires for teachers to do internal reflection on their own positionality in society and relationship to their students and role in the course.
2. **Local Placed-Based Learning:** This includes learning about in depth case studies of Boston's local communities in order to apply the frameworks of the course to real-life contexts from the communities that our students come from.
3. **Peer Cohort and Coaching:** This includes a commitment to a year long 1:1 relationship with a BPS Ethnic Studies instructional coach with whom teachers would co-plan and co-teach units. This would also include a year long commitment to a cohort of Ethnic Studies teachers who would meet on a regular basis to address problems of practice and provide support to each other as well as feedback for the revision of the curriculum.

## Course Description

The introduction to Ethnic Studies course provides an interactive introduction to the experiences of people of color in the United States. The focus of the course is on the construction and transformation of identity, power, and collective action. Beginning with the examination of personal, familial, and community narratives, the course provides a healing-centered space where cultural wealth, intersectionality, and critical reflection are valued. The course also utilizes an intersectional lens to analyze how power and oppression as well as the construction of race and racism have shaped the lives of students and their communities in Boston, the United States and globally. By having students study resistance movements and reconstruct their personal narratives, the course aims to empower, inspire and provide transformative tools that can be used to understand, develop awareness and take action in order to begin to realize personal and societal transformation and social justice.

The Introduction to Ethnic Studies course is based on the following vision and framework of Ethnic Studies in Boston Public Schools:

## BPS Ethnic Studies Vision

The vision for Ethnic Studies in Boston Public Schools centers the history and experiences of people of color to empower us to collaboratively read, write, and imagine the world, while honoring and affirming our intersectional identities. Through Ethnic Studies we develop our capacity to interrogate and critique systems of power while building solidarity with others in order to realize a world without racism and other forms of oppression. Ethnic Studies builds on the collective power of communities of color and their social movements to inspire us to act locally and globally toward justice and transformation.

## BPS Ethnic Studies Framework

Ethnic Studies will **RECONSTRUCT** educational spaces to:

1. **RESPOND** to the historical and current marginalization that people of color face in the United States by holistically representing their histories, experiences, and knowledge
2. **RESIST** systems of power and oppression (i.e. white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy)
3. **RESTORE** humanity by providing healing spaces and tools for students to examine and embrace their intersectional identities
4. **REVITALIZE** communities by valuing their cultural wealth and (re)connecting students themselves to their families and their communities
5. **REALIZE** societal transformation and social justice by providing opportunities for student agency through solidarity and collective action

## Unit Overviews

The course includes the following units and core concepts:

### UNIT 1: Narrative, Identity, and Why Ethnic Studies?

- Intersectionality (Kimberlé Crenshaw)
- Cultural Wealth (Tara Yosso)

### UNIT 2: Systems of Power and Oppression

- 4 I's of Oppression (John Bell)
- 3 Pillars of White Supremacy and Heteropatriarchy (Andrea Smith)
  - Racial Capitalism (Cedric Robinson, Robin D.G. Kelly)
  - Orientalism (Edward Said)
  - Colonialism and Genocide (Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, Frantz Fanon)
- Theater of the Oppressed (Augusto Boal)

### UNIT 3: Resistance, Transformation, Action, and Change

- Transformative Resistance (Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Bernal)
- Praxis (Paulo Freire)
- Restorative Justice (Fania Davis)

## UNIT 1: Narrative, Identity and Why Ethnic Studies?

**Essential Unit Question:** How can I realize my own power by exploring the stories of my family, community, and self?

### Unit Purpose:

We, as teachers and students of BPS, are on the journey of taking this Ethnic Studies course. Many forces and influences landed us where we are now. We are here because of decisions (by choice or not) that others and we ourselves have made. We have also experienced situations, individually in our personal lives and family histories as well as collectively and historically in our communities, in which we may have had power or not had power to determine who we have become. If we are able to recognize the pivots and the changes that people have made within history and how they have affected our current situation and lives, then we will be more prepared to make decisions individually and collectively for our futures.

### Unit Overview:

This unit uses the power of personal narrative to help students explore and know their own stories and the stories of their families and their communities. This allows students to center their own lives from the margins of history and develop clarity about where they come from, whose shoulders they stand on, their

place, voice and purpose in the world. Personal narrative is a tool that allows students to sharpen their analysis of their own experiences and connect their experiences to a larger story of their community. Ultimately, knowing their own narrative is the initial step in personal and societal transformation.

**After this unit, students will:**

- Begin to build relationships and a sense of community with each other through listening to each other's stories.
- Reflect on and explore their own personal narrative through the lens of intersectionality.
- Place the story of their family and themselves into the larger history of their community and people.
- Begin to recognize their cultural wealth as a form of power

**Enduring Understandings:**

- Race and ethnicity are social constructs that are central to understanding my personal identity.
- My identity is linked to the story and history of my family, community and people (locally and globally).
- The ability to tell our own story liberates and empowers us to reclaim our histories and identities within society.

**Essential Sub Unit Questions:**

- Who Am I? What are the identities that make up who I am?
- How can stories of my family help me understand my identity, my family and my community today?
- What parts of my culture and identity make me feel powerful or powerless in my life?

**Formative Performance Tasks / Assessments:**

- Written Narrative Reflection: What is it like to be \_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_?
- Google Mapping: Family Interview Points of Significance
- Written/Performance: Where I'm From Poem

## UNIT 2: Systems of Power and Oppression

**Essential Unit Question:** How has power and oppression impacted me, my community and my world?

**Unit Purpose:**

Having explored our own identities and stories from our own lives, families, and communities, we now explore the institutions of power to see how patterns of oppression emerge across stories and experiences. Ideology shapes the way that larger systems and institutions are run which in turn affects the relationships between others and ourselves, and ultimately impacts the way we see ourselves.

**Unit Overview:**

After spending the first unit telling their own narratives, this unit allows students to take the next step towards transformation by using three frameworks to "read the world"—in other words, to interpret and analyze their own lived racial experience against the backdrop of a larger history. The 4 I's of Oppression (ideological, institutional, interpersonal and internalized) framework allows students to see how oppression affects others and themselves on many levels. The framework of white supremacy allows students to see how their own lives are intertwined with and have been impacted by different systems that uphold white supremacy. Finally, the praxis framework gives students a tool to critically analyze the cyclical nature of problems in their own lives and in history.

**After this unit, students will:**

- Use the framework of the 4 I's of Oppression to analyze their own experience, especially through the

context of race.

- Identify the components that uphold white supremacy, how white supremacy has been normalized and apply the logics of white supremacy to analyze historical and current events.
- Explore and describe the dominant narrative of their race, ethnicity, nationality and culture.
- Use the praxis framework and Theater of the Oppressed's forum theatre to analyze their interpersonal relationships and imagine alternative solutions to an identified problem.
- Reflect on ways that they have internalized the dominant narrative and how that makes them feel and act.

### **Enduring Understandings**

- Racism and other forms of oppression occur at different levels—ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized.
- White supremacy is normalized and upheld by ideas and systems of capitalism/slavery, orientalism/war, genocide/colonialism, and heteropatriarchy.
- The dominant narrative normalizes, upholds and maintains the white supremacist power structure.
- Institutional, ideological, and internalized oppression can cause conflict in interpersonal relationships. Using a praxis framework is necessary to continuously address conflict, reflect and take action against oppression.
- Internalization of the dominant narrative controls our thoughts and actions, therefore validating white supremacy.

### **Essential Sub Unit Questions:**

- How do the 4 I's of Oppression impact me, my community and my world?
- How has ideological and institutional oppression impacted me, my community and my world?
- What does the dominant narrative say about me, my family, and my community?
- How are my interpersonal relationships impacted by oppression?
- How has the dominant narrative shaped how I feel about myself, my actions, and my worldview?

### **Formative Performance Tasks / Assessments:**

- Google Mapping: The 3 Pillars of White Supremacy and Heteropatriarchy in Boston
- Artistic Silhouette of Dominant Culture and Stereotypes of Self
- Theater of the Oppressed Forum Theater
- 4 I's of Oppression: Mapping a Personal Experience of Oppression

## **UNIT 3: Resistance, Transformation, Action, and Change**

**Essential Unit Question:** How can we build upon the legacies of resistance and healing to collectively realize social transformation and revitalize our communities?

### **Unit Purpose:**

We cannot only explore systems of oppression; we must also explore how people of color have resisted oppression and continue to fight for liberation and change. Resistance and humanizing each other is essential today and in the future for communities of color to not only survive, but to thrive. Throughout history, our ancestors have used healing practices to imagine an alternative future and form collective hope in order to challenge oppression and power. Examining resistance narratives of those that came before us gives us tools to transform, heal, and build solidarity with other peoples of color. Through self-analysis and reflection, we will realize shared experiences and identities with people from the past and present. This will empower us to repair the harm that was brought by centuries of oppression and ultimately transform ourselves, our relationships and the communities in which we live, learn and love.

**Unit Overview:**

This unit allows opportunities for students to reflect on the ways they have responded to oppression in the past and to develop transformative resistance skills for the future. Students will analyze historical narratives using the praxis model to develop an awareness of the multiple ways in which people of color have resisted oppression. They will also examine healing practices that communities of color have used past and present, while creating healing spaces for themselves. Ultimately, students will identify and analyze a problem and develop an action plan to revitalize and realize transformative change in their lives and their community.

**After this unit, students will:**

- Reflect on ways they have responded to oppression and begin to develop strategies for resisting oppression and for transforming their lives, relationships, and communities.
- Use the praxis framework, evaluate past and present methods and strategies of resistance used by communities of color to fight against institutional, ideological, interpersonal and internalized oppression for liberation and change.
- Engage in self reflection and internal healing practices with self and others in order to humanize each other.
- Use their cultural wealth to collaborate in the development of an action plan to realize societal transformation and social justice in order to revitalize and humanize their communities.

**Enduring Understandings:**

- Transformative resistance is the most effective way to resist oppression.
- We stand on the shoulders of communities of color who have resisted oppression and we have an obligation to current and future generations to resist for our continued survival.
- People of color have used a variety of strategies to resist systemic and institutional oppression as well as restore and heal interpersonal relationships.
- Building solidarity between communities of color allows us to repair the harm wrought by centuries of oppression and leads us together towards a path of healing, helping us to imagine a future free of oppression
- Cycles of planning, action, and reflection are essential to address societal problems to change our living conditions.

**Essential Sub Unit Questions:**

- How can I effectively resist oppression?
- How have communities of color resisted and fought for liberation and change?
- How can I use reflection and healing practices with myself and others in order to humanize each other?
- How can we collaborate and use our cultural wealth to make an action plan to revitalize our community?

**Formative Performance Tasks / Assessments:**

- Written/Performed Counter Narrative
- Google Mapping/Tour: Praxis and Resistance in Boston
- Google Mapping/Tour: Sites of Healing
- Google Mapping: Action Plan to Transform Our Communities

The Ethnic Studies Curriculum Workgroup was started in 2018 after the History & Social Studies Department obtained grants from the NoVo Foundation and Teaching Tolerance. Five educators worked with the History and Social Studies Department to develop this curriculum framework and the pilot of the 9th grade Ethnic Studies semester long course. The curriculum will be continuously revised as teacher, student and community feedback is received.