

W.E.B. Du Bois and the 1900 Paris Exposition

By David J. Cope

Overview

In this lesson, students will study primary and secondary sources to discover how W.E.B. Du Bois portrayed African Americans at the 1900 Paris Exposition. They also will create a similar exhibit using their classroom as the example. This lesson serves as a great complementary lesson to the early years of the Jim Crow era and can easily be adapted for upper elementary through high school students.

Curriculum Standards

For a list of standards that this unit addresses, [click here](#).

Time Required

One to two days for background readings, discussion, Internet research, and project preparation.

Materials Needed

Web sites:

- **Paris Universelle Exposition** collection in the Jim Crow History Image Gallery
- http://www.boondocksnet.com/expos/wfe_dubois00.html
- **Paris Exposition Essay**

The Lesson

Anticipatory Set

Instruct the students to look around the classroom and decide those things that characterize the class. Then, ask them: "Which positive and negative images did you identify that apply to your group?" Have students repeat the tasks above for the entire school building. After they have agreed on only those images that would present a positive view of education, have students write their results on the board.

Procedures

1. Have the students read "**The Paris Exposition of 1900 and W.E.B. Du Bois**" essay. Ask them:
 - What was Du Bois' purpose and how did he go about achieving that purpose?
 - Can you think of a more effective approach that he might have used?

2. Instruct the students to view the Du Bois collection. Have them to pick ten images Du Bois used for the Exposition and write a caption for each one.
3. Tell students to enter the "Boondocks" Internet site and read Du Bois' essay on the Exposition and exhibit. Ask them to discover his intentions for using the photographs for an international audience. Then, allow the students to return to the Jim Crow Image Gallery and ask them to review their captions and decide whether Du Bois fulfilled his intent. Discuss students' answers as a class.
4. Bring in a camera and take pictures of the room from the consensus list on the board. After processing them, mount the photographs and present them to another class or period. Have that group of students write a caption for the photos and return them to your class.
5. Ask them: Did your class achieve its goal of presenting a positive image of their educational experience?

Assessment

You should assess the students based on your observations during the class discussions, as well as the written assignments and project provided in the Procedures section.

Interdisciplinary Links

The photography project allows for a great interdisciplinary link with curricula in the visual arts and English.

This lesson was submitted by David J. Cope, Honors teacher at Titusville Senior High School, Titusville, Pennsylvania