



LESSON PLAN GRADES: 9 -12

Unapologetic: An Introduction to Radical Black Women-Led Activism



OVERVIEW

For far too long, Black women's significant contributions to movements for racial justice in America have been overshadowed and undervalued. The 2020 documentary *Unapologetic* gives Black women leaders within the ongoing Movement for Black Lives their flowers now while they can still smell them. Directed by Ashley O'Shay and produced by Morgan E.

Johnson– two Black women– the film follows two young Chicago-based activists, Janae and Bella, as they fight for justice for the police murders of Rekia Boyd and Laquan McDonald.

Using clips from *Unapologetic*, this lesson provides a framework for viewing radical Black women’s activism in Chicago today as part of a continuum. Students will learn that there is no Janae and Bella without foremothers like Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Margaret Burroughs. The lesson encourages students to think about how the past has shaped the present and how the present will shape the future.

A Note from Curriculum Creator Bella BAHHS

I came into Black womanhood during the first wave of the ongoing Movement for Black Lives and joined other young Black women on the frontlines of direct action protests– with the intention of disrupting, challenging and changing the conditions that have rendered our experiences of (and resistance to) racially gendered violence inconsequential and erasable. I created this lesson plan for the same reason that I agreed to be filmed for *Unapologetic*: to amplify Black women’s leadership and creative and professional contributions to historic Black liberation movements.

The film is so much bigger than me, Janae, Ashley and Morgan. We are all part of a growing collective of Black women who are seeking and becoming examples for what it means to be Black and woman and decompartmentalized, and we do not exist within an ahistorical vacuum. We build upon the legacies of the Black women who dared to engage in radical activism during the movement to abolish slavery, the Reconstruction Era, the Progressive Era, the Women’s Suffrage Movement, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement. Their movements enabled ours.

Our movement popularized the use of hashtags, social media campaigns, interstate takeovers and mutual aid as tools for political education and political defiance. We made defunding police departments a nationwide call to action, and we made police and prison abolition a part of public discourse– all while amplifying the need for intersectional policy analysis and development. What we’ve contributed to this temporal moment is undeniable and has already begun to change the future of this nation.

But we could not have been empowered to lead if we had not learned whom to follow. This lesson plan grounds our work in its relationality to the work of the movement women who paved the way for us to be unapologetic.

Subject Areas

- Black History
- U.S. History
- Women and Gender Studies
- Social Studies
- Political Science
- Current Events
- Criminal Justice
- Sociology

Grade Levels: 9-12

Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Study radical Black women's activism throughout history
- Discuss race and racially gendered violence
- Compare and contrast different eras of racial justice activism

Materials

- Notebooks
- Writing utensils
- Clock / Watch / Timer
- Film clips and equipment to project / screen the film clips
- Ida B Wells [clip](#) and equipment to project / screen it
- Precious Fondren, [The 'Say Her Name' Movement Started for a Reason: We Forget Black Women Killed by Police | Teen Vogue](#), June 11, 2020

- Ron Grossman, [The birth of the sit-in – Chicago Tribune](#), February 23, 2014
- NMAAHC, [Rocy Taylor, Rosa Parks, and the Struggle for Racial Justice | National Museum of African American History and Culture](#), March 15, 2018
- Meredith Francis [“Chicago, I Love You!” Margaret Burroughs' Creative Legacy in Chicago | WTTW Chicago](#), September 17, 2020
- Margaret Burroughs, [What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black](#), 1963

Time Needed

Write the estimated amount of time in terms of class periods, generally we write plans for use in 50-60 minute class periods.

[example: Two to four 45-minute class periods with optional homework in between]

FILM CLIPS

Clip 1: Black Brunch (0:10 - 2:28) length: 2min18s.

The clip begins at 0:10 on a black screen. It ends at 2:28 with archival footage of a Civil Rights march through Chicago.

Chicago is one of the most segregated cities in the nation, and in this scene you can almost feel the racial tensions rising. On New Year's Day 2016, young Black protesters invaded multiple restaurants located within predominantly white Northside communities to raise awareness of the rampant police violence ravaging the city's predominantly Black West and Southside communities. The Black youth are obviously displeased with the fact that they are spending their holiday protesting police murders, and the white restaurant patrons and staff are visibly and audibly bothered by the demonstration.

Clip 2: Meet Janae and Bella (5:02 - 11:06) length: 6min 4s

The clip begins at 5:00 with the camera following behind Janae who is wearing a Black hat. It ends at 11:06 with a photo of Bella and her parents.

We meet Janae, a leader of BYP100 and PhD candidate, at a community organizing event hosted by young Black activists in Chicago. Then we meet Bella, a raptivist, at a children-led #SayHerName march to amplify and uplift Black women and girls harmed by police violence. a young woman who was killed by a Chicago police officer. We see Bella perform outside of Cook County Juvenile Center, one of the largest youth jails in the country. And we learn that Bella is the daughter of formerly incarcerated parents.

Clip 3: I Am Rekia Boyd (16:58 - 22:32) length: 5min30s

The clip begins at 16:58 with the date March 21, 2012 on the screen. It ends at 22:32 with daytime b-roll footage of CPD officers and cruisers.

We learn that on March 21, 2012, Rekia Boyd, a 22-year-old Black woman, was shot in the back of the head and killed by an off duty CPD officer Dante Servin on the city's West Side. We also learn that criminal charges against Servin were vacated, and– like most police officers– he gets away with murder and keeps his job. We meet Martinez, Rekia's brother, in 2015 at a Chicago Police Board meeting, where organizers amplify the family's demand that Servin be fired from the police force.

Clip 4: Justice for Laquan (42:43 - 48:36) length: 5min 53s

The clip begins at 42:43 with a view of the lake and the Chicago skyline in the distance. It ends at 48:36 with Bella on-screen talking.

Protesters respond to the release of the video showing Laquan McDonald, a 17 year old Black boy, being shot 16 times by Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke. We see protesters clash with police, take over streets and shut down an expressway. We hear from Bella about her experience being threatened with physical violence by an officer that night.

ACTIVITIES

DAY ONE: Understanding the legacies of Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Margaret Burroughs

STEP ONE: *Free write/stream of consciousness journal warm-up (15 minutes)*

The goal here is for students to begin to explore and examine their subconscious thoughts around five topics: Chicago, activism, safety, beauty and Black Lives Matter. Instruct students to let their writing about each topic flow without putting their pens down or erasing anything– disregarding spelling, grammar and punctuation– for 3 minutes. Give them one topic at a time and three minutes to write each response.

Call on students or ask for volunteers to share what they wrote. Take note of how many times Black women are mentioned as students begin to share. Guide a discussion on why it may be that few Black women immediately come to mind when first thinking about these topics.

STEP TWO: *Connecting the Past to the Present*

Tell students they will be watching clips from a 2020 documentary film about two young Black women– Bella and Janae– who are activists fighting against Chicago police violence. But first, they must be introduced to the work and legacies of two women who paved the way for Bella and Janae: Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Margaret Burroughs.

First, [show the video clip](#) about Ida B Wells-Barnett & encourage students to take notes about what they learn.

Next, pass out copies of the WTTW article about Margaret Burroughs and her poem “What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black.” Instruct students to read along and take notes as you read aloud the article first then the poem.

Discussion. Guide students in a conversation asking the following questions:

- What causes did Ida and Margaret fight for, respectively?
- What was going on in their lifetimes that inspired them to fight for change?
- What did they do to create change?
- How did the poem make students feel?

- What do the students associate with the color white and what do they associate with the color black?
- What is the role of art in activism?

STEP THREE: Introducing & Contextualizing Unapologetic

Introduce students to the film Unapologetic. You may show them [this trailer](#) as a broad introduction. Encourage them to take notes as they watch clips from the film.

1. Watch the clip titled “Meet Janae and Bella” first, then the clip titled “Black Brunch.”
2. Discuss what’s going on in Janae and Bella’s lives that inspires them to fight for change.
 - a. Guiding Questions: How did students feel watching the Black Brunch protests? Did they empathize more with the protesters or the patrons? Discuss the role of disruption in protests and whether or not students believe change can happen without disruption.
3. Hand out copies of the Teen Vogue article, the NMAAHC article, and the Tribune article. Ask volunteers to read the Teen Vogue article first.
 - a. Discuss the Say Her Name movement and why violence against Black women is less visible than violence against Black men. Ask if anyone knows who Rosa Parks is, then if anyone knows who Recy Taylor is.
4. Read the NMAAHC article aloud.

(Note: Be sure to point out that Rosa Parks worked as an activist on behalf of Black women survivors of racially gendered violence 11 years before she refused to give up her seat on the bus.)

 - a. Discuss Parks’ work with the Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor in comparison to the work of the *Say Her Name* movement.

DAY TWO: Deepening Historical and Contemporary Connections Continued

5. Begin class by reading the Tribune article aloud.
 - a. Have students work with a partner to compare and contrast the objectives and tactics of the Black Brunch protest and the coffee shop sit-in.
 - b. Ask: How is modern segregation different from segregation in 1942?

6. Move on to clips #3 and #4 from *Unapologetic*. After students have watched and taken notes on all the clips, discuss how Bella and Janae build upon the legacies of Ida B Wells-Barnett, Margaret Burroughs and Rosa Parks.
 - a. Guiding Questions: What causes do the activists in *Unapologetic* fight for? What do they do to create change? Where do they protest and why? What do they disrupt? In what ways are they similar and different from Ida B Wells-Barnett, Margaret Burroughs, and Rosa Parks?
 7. Finally, have students write a five paragraph journal response to the following prompt:
 - a. In *Unapologetic*, Bella suggests that the work started by Ida B. Wells-Barnett more than 100 years ago isn't yet complete when she calls the highly publicized video of the 2014 police murder of Laquan McDonald a modern day lynching. What has changed about the fight against racial violence in America and what has stayed the same from the Progressive Era when Ida B. Wells was alive to the present?
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EXTENSIONS

Offer students an opportunity to peer-edit their essays as they work towards a final draft.

Have students share highlights from their essays as a class.

Have students write a letter to a Black woman/femme activist in their own community.

RESOURCES

Resource List

A Long Walk Home (ALWH)

<https://www.alongwalkhome.org>

A national art organization based in Chicago that empowers young people to end violence against girls and women.

Assata's Daughters

<https://www.assatasdaughters.org>

A Black woman-led, young person directed organization that provides young Black people in Chicago with political education, leadership development, mentorship and revolutionary services.

Bella BAHHS

<https://www.bellabahhs.com>

Keep up with film subject Bella BAHHS (Black Ancestors Here Healing Society) and support her art.

Black Lives Matter Chicago

<https://www.blacklivesmatterchicago.com>

A volunteer-run organization that works to support and stand in resistance with families that have been impacted by police and state violence,

Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100)

<https://www.byp100.org>

A member-based organization and national collective of Black 18-35 year old activists and organizers that emphasizes building chapters throughout the country to hone in on grassroots organizing and community mobilization on local levels.

Brave Space Alliance

<https://www.bravespacealliance.org>

The first Black-led, trans-led LGBTQ+ Center located on the South Side of Chicago dedicated to creating and providing affirming, culturally competent, for-us-by-us resources, programming and services for LGBTQ+ individuals on the South and West sides of the city.

Equity and Transformation (EAT)

<https://www.eatchicago.org>

Founded by and for formerly incarcerated and marginalized Black people in Chicago, EAT strives to uplift the faces, voices and power of individuals that operate within the informal economy.

For the People Artists Collective

<http://www.forthethepeoplecollective.org>

A radical squad of Black and POC arts activists in Chicago who create work that uplifts and projects struggle, resistance, liberation, and survival within and for marginalized communities and freedom movements.

GoodKidsMadCity (GKMC)

<https://www.facebook.com/GKMC2018/>

Works to challenge the hyper-criminalization of Black youth in discourse about urban violence by developing young leaders to advocate for resources that will allow them to create sustainable, livable community conditions.

The #LetUsBreathe Collective

<https://www.letusbreathecollective.com>

An alliance of artists and activists organizing through a creative lens to imagine a world without prisons and police.

The National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression

<https://naarpr.org>

Founded in Chicago in 1973 to mount organized action against the unjust treatment of individuals because of their race or political beliefs.

Sista Afya

<https://www.sistaafya.com>

A social enterprise that provides free and low-cost mental wellness services that center the experiences of Black women.

Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation (SOUL)

<https://www.soulinchicago.org>

Assists low-income people of color in the Chicago Southland to build and leverage power to fight for their own interests and liberation.

The TRiiBE

<https://thetriibe.com/author/bella-bahhs/>

A digital media platform that is reshaping the narrative and capturing the multifaceted essence of Black Chicago in pursuit of truth and liberation while giving ownership back to the people. The Revolutionary Column is a monthly series by Bella BAHHS where she applies abolitionist thought to current events affecting local and national policy. Read her 2021 interviews with Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx.

The Third Strike Campaign

<https://www.thirdstrikecampaign.com>

The first online digital storytelling platform for life-sentenced drug offenders in America.

Unapologetic

<https://www.unapologeticfilm.com/merch>

Keep up with the film and buy merchandise to support it!

The Women's Justice Institute (WJI)

<https://womensjustice.net>

Promotes decarceration, harm reduction, and improving well-being and outcomes for impacted women, their children, families and communities.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1.d

Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1.d

Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.1.d

Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.d

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.c

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A

Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B

Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.2

Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bella BAHHS is a revolutionary Chicago-based raptivist and columnist, nationally known for making sedition irresistible through her art, activism and advocacy for prison industrial complex abolition. <https://www.bellabahhs.com/bio>

