Mini-Unit Title: Resistance to Jim Crow in Virginia

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**Grade Level:** Elementary  
**School:** D.G. Cooley Elementary, Clarke County, Virginia  
**Time Estimated:** 4 days (90 minute periods)

**Overview:**
In this unit students will learn how the rights of a significant population of Virginia citizens were systematically denied. The students will work with primary sources to explore not only the history of the laws and institutions but also the effects that were experienced by ordinary citizens. They will learn how people learn to adapt to an unfair environment and how resistance, sometimes overt, but often covert, was ever present. They will see some of the sights and hear some of the voices of those people who experienced firsthand the sting of segregation under Jim Crow. The lessons will cover the time period from 1877 to 1954. There will be three 90-minute lessons and a roundtable discussion.

My class consists of 22 students. There are 12 fifth graders and 10 fourth graders. One child receives special education. Everyone else is on grade level in reading and math. Two students are not white. Everyone speaks English and there are no bilingual students. Socioeconomic status is varied, though most of the students are middle class. Two students, to my knowledge, are eligible for reduced lunch costs. There are eight boys and fourteen girls. They are a good receptive group of learners.

**Historical Background:**
During Reconstruction the 13th Amendment (1865) banning slavery in the U.S., the 14th Amendment (1868) granting citizenship, and the 15th Amendment (1870) granting suffrage allowed African Americans to experience civil rights on a broad scale for the first time in their collective cultural history. In 1860, 25,000 black children went to school. In 1870, the number was 149,581. In 1860 the number of black voters was zero. In 1867, the number was 700,000. (“Reconstruction by the Numbers,” Scholastic Search, Nov./Dec. 1991: pp. 6-7) In 1869, Virginia’s Reconstruction constitution mandated a statewide system of free, state-funded schools for blacks and whites (though not integrated), and the franchise for African American men. After years of bondage and abuse, the future looked promising for African Americans.

In 1877, after a presidential election that was confusing, contested, and filled with conflicting agendas and accusations, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was declared President. In order to gain the votes he needed from southern Democrats, who called themselves the Redeemers, he agreed to pull federal troops out of the South, thus ending Reconstruction. The Redeemers were a white ruling class – white southerners who used terrorist tactics to win back control of the states from the Republicans. These Democrats
took control of southern state legislatures and stepped up their attempt to strip African Americans of the rights they had gained under the Radical Republican controlled Congress. In ending Reconstruction, Hayes allowed southern Democrats to have their way. The door was slammed shut on civil rights for African Americans in the south and cultural prejudice became a matter of law in a very short period of time.

The protests of black Americans fell, for the most part, on deaf ears. One of the few areas where there were some victories was transportation. Some African Americans won their cases regarding discrimination by race or gender on railroad cars, but they were few in number. In Louisiana, an 1890 law pushed for segregation on the railroads, stating that “separate but equal” areas for blacks and whites were mandatory. Homer Plessy, a shoemaker, tested this law. Backed by two groups fighting racism, he refused to leave a “white only” railroad car and was arrested. He took his case to court and four years later the case was heard by the United States Supreme Court. The court ruled in favor of John Howard Ferguson, the Louisiana Supreme Court judge and “separate but equal” became the law of the land. In spite of the arguments made by the defendants in the Supreme Court, the southern politicians had no intention of providing equal status, opportunity, or accommodations for black Americans. Jim Crow became law.

In Virginia, in 1902, the constitution of Reconstruction was replaced by a new constitution with a specific agenda for putting black Americans in their antebellum place. Segregation kept the races apart in every area of life: schools, movie theaters, restaurants, even water fountains. Black children could not enter a library and check out a book. Loopholes were written into the constitution which were deliberately designed to withhold funds from black schools denying black children an “equal” education. Voting laws were designed to make it nearly impossible to cast a ballot and voting restrictions were highly subjective, at the discretion of local officials. Poll taxes, literacy tests, and intimidation were some of the tactics openly used by the “elected” officials, policemen, and sheriffs. This was not just a collection of isolated incidents and vigilante-type actions. This was law.

Protest was nearly impossible because racism was institutionalized. Open resistance was dangerous and difficult. And yet many black southerners did resist. They formed organizations to publicize the unfair system under which they lived. They formed aid societies and self-help organizations. One champion in the fight for equal rights in Virginia was John Mitchell, Jr., editor of The Richmond Planet. Born a slave, he became editor of the paper at the age of 21 and for 45 years he wrote articles and editorials, drew cartoons, and gave speeches protesting the treatment of colored people. In 1895, his paper was instrumental in organizing a successful boycott of the city streetcars because of segregation and the mistreatment of colored passengers. A constant that was evident in his writing was his belief that segregation hurt everyone in Virginia, black and white, The masthead of The Richmond Planet was a flexed, muscular arm and a clenched fist with thunderbolts exploding from it. Power, perhaps, and judgment.

It is interesting that transportation is a theme throughout the struggle for equal rights. From the symbolic Underground Railroad that carried slaves to freedom, to the
Montgomery bus boycott, freedom of movement carried all of us, finally, to the freedom movement of the 20th century.

**Major Understanding:**
Actions demand reactions, but circumstances do not necessarily determine how an individual will react. Resistance to oppression manifests itself in many ways. The idea of living “in spite of” and not “because of” one’s circumstances is key to understanding the Jim Crow era in Virginia. Using examples of resistance, both overt and covert, this mini-unit will help illuminate the struggle. The example of people like John Mitchell, Jr. will show that there were active forces of change out there. But there was also the undercurrent of change by people who simply refused to ride in the colored section or simply refused to ride at all. Hearing the voices of some of the people forced to live under these circumstances will bring home the imperative of civil rights for all people residing in this country.

**Objectives:**
Students will:
1. Use primary sources to help understand the era of the Jim Crow society.
2. Compare and contrast different perspectives on issues raised concerning civil rights.
3. Sequence the events leading up to and including the Jim Crow era with special emphasis on:
   a. The political events that made it possible
   b. The effects it had on the populace of Virginia
   c. The resistance to its unfair policies and practices.

**Standards of Learning:**
**Skills:**
VS.1 The student will develop skills for historical and geographical analysis including the ability to
   a) identify and interpret artifacts and primary and secondary sources
   b) determine cause and effect relationships
   c) compare and contrast historical events
   d) draw conclusions and make generalizations
   e) make connections between past and present
   f) sequence events in Virginia history
   g) interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives
   h) discuss issues orally and in writing.

VS.8 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the reconstruction of Virginia following the Civil War by
   b) identifying the effects of segregation and “Jim Crow” on life in Virginia.

VS.9 The student will demonstrate knowledge of 20th century Virginia by
b) identifying the social and political events in Virginia linked to desegregation and Massive Resistance and the relationship to national history
c) identifying the political and or economic contributions made by Maggie Walker, Harry F. Byrd, Sr.

**Culminating Assessment:**
The students will make a timeline of events leading up to and including the Jim Crow Era from 1877 to 1954. This collective or class timeline will reflect both the Jim Crow laws and strategies used to keep African Americans subservient, as well as African Americans’ responses and resistance to the Jim Crow system.

**References:**

**Books & Media**
This book is a companion volume to audio discs in which African Americans recount the struggles they faced living during the Jim Crow era.

This is a comprehensive resource of events and people in American history, listed alphabetically. Topics used include: Black Codes, page 108; *Plessy v Ferguson*, pages 844-845; Reconstruction, pages 917-924; and Segregation, pages 976-978.

This is a wonderful guide to a great number of dependable online resources. It also includes hints on navigating the net and a glossary of common Internet terms.

The articles in these books help put the civil rights struggle in order in both a chronological and comprehensive fashion, giving valuable background information to the Jim Crow era. Chapters consulted include: Chapter 29: “Beautiful Cruel Year of Transition in the Black Struggle” by Vincent Harding (volume I), Chapter 30: “The Checkered History of the Great Fourteenth Amendment” by Eric Foner (volume I), and Chapter 11: “African Americans and the Quest for Civil Rights” by Sean Dennis Cashman (volume II).

These two audio discs present the experiences of African Americans who lived during the era of Jim Crow. This mini-unit will use two sound recordings recounting experiences
under Jim Crow from “Remembering Jim Crow” in collaboration with the Behind the Veil Project. One will be used to model evaluation of a sound recording and the other will be used for student evaluation.

Oral history, with a roundtable discussion of local people who lived during the eras of Jim Crow and Massive Resistance.

**Websites**

The National Archives (NARA) provides a wealth of information on American history. On reaching the homepage, select “educators and students” from the right-hand side. This will take you to a “homepage” for educators. Search this selection only for Jim Crow.

NARA worksheets available on written documents, sound recordings, images, etc.

[http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu](http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu)
This site offers primary documents, a guide to interpreting the evidence they hold, and links to many other valid resources. Key word: Jim Crow.

This site provides much information on the Jim Crow era, and categorizes various venues, in this case, the press.

[http://www.lcweb2.loc.gov/amhome.html](http://www.lcweb2.loc.gov/amhome.html)
This site offers many insights and resources with guides to using them in the classroom. Go to “teachers” and on that “homepage” search Jim Crow.

[http://www.jschoolmuseum.org](http://www.jschoolmuseum.org)
This museum is in the original Josephine School that was built by and for African Americans. The site gives contact information only. The award-winning museum traces the local history of the black community in Clarke County Virginia.

[http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whoweare/exhibits/mitchell/](http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whoweare/exhibits/mitchell/)
This Library of Virginia site offers information on Virginia history and is easy to navigate. Although this address leads you to an exhibit on John Mitchell, Jr. and *The Richmond Planet*, there is much more information here regarding civil rights, including two articles with illustrations from *The Richmond Planet*. One article deals with boycotting the city’s trolley cars, and the other is a front page article/advertisement about the Planet. The front page will be used to model use of a primary source and the article will be evaluated by the students. Both can be accessed at this website.

This is an excellent site for an interactive look at the world of Jim Crow. There are suggested lessons and studies. Check it out before you have your class explore it, as there are some strong images and language. Adapt this to your students’ levels of understanding. A portion of a literacy test from Alabama, 1965 may be accessed at this website as part of an interactive activity, “Trying to vote, then and now” will be used as a hook in one of the lessons.

http://www.umich.edu/~lawrace
This site will give teachers some solid background information regarding geography, race, and the impact they have on history and political clout.

**Lesson 1:** Jim Crow: From Bias to Law

**Time Estimated:** 90 minutes, one afternoon

**Objectives:**
Students will:
1. Share prior knowledge of Jim Crow and events leading up to this era.
2. Sequence major events leading to the establishment of Jim Crow laws.
3. Place prior events and newly learned events on a rudimentary timeline.

**Materials:**
- Seven sets of index cards with events prior to Jim Crow. Each card will have a magnetic strip on the back. Some cards will be blank for the students to fill in any other events they see as important. Each set of cards will have the following information:

  **SET I**
  1. John Brown’s Raid
  2. Emancipation Proclamation
  3. Reconstruction begins
  4. Amendments 13, 14 and 15 to the U.S. Constitution
  5. Virginia’s Reconstruction constitution, 1867-1868
     (Note to teacher: this constitution was ratified in 1869)
  6. Reconstruction ends

  **SET II**
  1. Rutherford B. Hayes becomes President
  2. Virginia’s Redeemers Constitution 1901-1902
  3. John Mitchell becomes editor of *The Richmond Planet*
  4. Maggie Lena Walker’s “Penny Bank” established
  5. Brown v. Board of Education
  6. Massive Resistance

- Virginia history textbook, such as *Social Studies Virginia*, Scott Foresman
• Colored Pencils
• Magnetic tape (available at craft or fabric stores)
• Handout: Vocabulary Worksheet of people and terms including:
  2. Rutherford B. Hayes
  3. Redeemers
  4. Jim Crow
  5. Constitution
  6. Civil rights
  7. Compromise
  8. Boycott
  9. *The Richmond Planet*
  10. Prejudice
  11. Maggie Lena Walker
  12. Harry Byrd, Sr.
  13. Brown v. Board of Education
  14. Massive Resistance

• Print out one copy of the Hayes-Tilden controversy and compromise from the “Rise and Fall of Jim Crow,” PBS website: [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_election.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_election.html)
• Create a copy and make handouts from Library of Virginia site on John Mitchell: advertisement for *The Richmond Planet* at [http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whoweare/exhibits/mitchell/planhq.htm](http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whoweare/exhibits/mitchell/planhq.htm)
• Create a copy and make handouts from the article “Jim Crow” Street-Car Law Set to Catch Negroes: Only White Folks in the Trap at [http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whoweare/exhibits/mitchell/trap.htm](http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whoweare/exhibits/mitchell/trap.htm)
• Create handouts from the National Archives worksheet: “Written Document Analysis Worksheet” (2 per student) available at [http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets)

**Strategies:**

1. Announce that we will be studying the Jim Crow era in Virginia.

2. **Hook:** Divide the students into groups of three. Hand out the “Set I” index cards with events listed. Let the students know you have some blank cards if they would like to add some events. They may use their books to research dates if needed. Using magnetic surfaces around the classroom, have the students display the events in the order in which they occurred. Suggest that they write the dates on the cards.

3. Discuss any differences between groups. Display the correct order of events on the dry-erase board or another easily seen magnetic surface (lockers, cabinets). Lead a discussion on the events listed and any others the students may have added. Discuss the origin of the term “Jim Crow” and ask the students to give some examples of Jim Crow laws. (The term comes from a minstrel show song
containing the refrain “jump-jump-jump Jim Crow.”

4. Hand out the “Set II” index cards. Check students’ prior knowledge of these items.

5. Ask: who was John Mitchell, Jr.? Using the textbook, read the excerpt on John Mitchell Jr., pages 338-339 (If you do not use this textbook, a brief biography of Mitchell is available at the Library of Virginia site listed under websites). Place John Mitchell, Jr. on the timelines.

6. Ask: who were the “Redeemers.” (See historical background.) If students have not referred to the new constitution that Virginia was required to write after the Civil War, remind them of the requirements needed for Virginia to re-enter the Union. Note this constitution was ratified in 1869, but this was not the Redeemers’ constitution. Discuss the prefix “re” (again; again “deem”) and the meaning of the word “redeem” (to buy back, or to get or win back). Guide students to the understanding: With the 1869 constitution in place, what do you think the Redeemers wanted to do? They wanted to get back to the way things used to be before Reconstruction. How could they do this?

7. Where does Rutherford B. Hayes fit into this picture? Briefly explain the boondoggle of the Hayes-Tilden election. Tilden had the popular vote, but was one vote shy in the Electoral College. Hayes was a Republican; the Redeemers were southern Democrats. A deal was struck. If Hayes agreed to end Reconstruction, the southern Democrats would back his election. Hayes agreed and with that, the door slammed shut on civil rights for African Americans in Virginia and the rest of the south. The national government pretty much told the black populace they were on their own and gave the Redeemers free rein. If time permits, read the PBS excerpt about the Hayes-Tilden election found at the Jim Crow website listed above. In 1870, Virginia was re-admitted to the Union. By 1877 getting back to good old boy business as usual was moving forward.

8. Primary Sources:
   Note that, even though things got very bad very fast for African Americans after 1877, and would get worse, there were always ways to protest the unfair environment of Jim Crow.
   • Hand out copies of the advertisement for The Richmond Planet and the National Archives sheet for evaluating written documents. Model how to really look at the primary source documents, filling out the sheet together.
   • Hand out copies of the “streetcar” source and an evaluation sheet from the National Archives. (Note: the date for this is 1904. This is not shown on the article, and should be written on the handout. The students will not be able to read the entire article, but will be able to get the general idea of the boycott.) Allow the students at least 20 minutes to work on this. At the end of that time, discuss their findings and write them on the board. Hand out and read
the excerpt from the Jim Crow history site that gives information on the boycott of and eventual bankruptcy of the Virginia Passenger and Power Company.

**Homework:** Have the students complete the vocabulary worksheet of people and terms.

**Differentiation:**
Student collaboration will aid struggling learners. This lesson provides expression by kinesthetic learners as well as auditory and visual learners.

**Lesson 2: Plessy v. Ferguson and the World of Jim Crow**

**Time Estimate:** 90 minutes, one afternoon

**Objectives:**
1. The students will show understanding of the following terms
   - grandfather clause
   - poll tax
   - literacy test
2. The students will place *Plessy v. Ferguson* on a timeline and be able to explain the importance and ramifications of this ruling.
3. The students will compare and contrast the perspectives of:
   - Southern African Americans
   - Southern poor whites
   - Southern politicians
   - Northern African Americans
   - Northern whites
   - Supreme Court justices

**Materials:**
- Handout: Create a handout in which you select questions from a literacy test found on the PBS site “The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow”
- Handout: Create a handout with the following Jim Crow terms
  - voting
  - grandfather clause
  - poll tax
  - literacy test
- Handout: Create a handout listing the six groups:
  - Southern African Americans
  - Southern poor whites
  - Southern politicians
  - Northern African Americans
Northern whites
  o Supreme Court justices
  o Sound recording of oral history “Remembering Jim Crow” from Behind the Veil Project. Track 7, Charles Gratton (2 minutes and 17 seconds)
  o National Archives’ sheets for the evaluation of a sound recording available at http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets
  o Blank index card with magnetic tape on the back.

Strategies:
1. **Hook:** Tell the students you have a quiz for them to take. Using the first 10 questions of the literacy test found on the PBS site listed above, give the students 10 minutes to answer them. (Note: the test has a total of 68 questions and cannot be printed from the site. I retyped the first ten questions and did not include a heading because I didn’t want them to know this was a literacy test.)

2. **Discuss:** Go over the test together. No one should get all the questions right. Ask them how they are feeling. Angry? Upset? Why? Ask them why they think the test was unfair. Reveal to them that these are actual questions taken from a literacy test in Louisiana in 1965 and that the original test had 68 questions. Not everyone had to take the test. Discuss who would, who wouldn’t, and who might.

3. **Explain:**
   - Voting, Jim Crow Style: Write the terms “literacy test,” “poll tax,” and “grandfather clause” on the board. Lead a DLTA (directed-thinking-listening-activity) to brainstorm what these mean. The students may know “poll tax” from previous lessons. Explain to them that the grandfather clause stated that anyone who was descended from a voter pre-1867 was exempt from taking a literacy test and from paying the poll tax. Lead a class discussion about who this would not include (all blacks, many poor whites).
   
   - *Plessy v. Ferguson:* Who was Homer Plessy? Review John Mitchell’s promotion of the boycott of Richmond streetcars in 1904. Tell the students that others had also protested segregation on transportation vehicles. Discuss why this would be an issue. Note that the railroads weren’t either “southern” or “northern”. Guide the students to an understanding that not all of the U.S. states practiced segregation by law. How could a commercial enterprise (common carriers) that crossed state boundaries, practice segregation? Introduce Homer Plessy and the Louisiana Supreme Court (notably Justice Ferguson). Note that, Plessy (like Rosa Parks, years later), deliberately sat in a white only rail car and refused to move. Also, Plessy (like Parks), had the backing of groups trying to end segregation. In 1896 his case was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court where the decision was made in favor of the state of Louisiana. Note that the reason this is so important is that the highest court in the land was, in effect, sanctioning the south’s “right” to
segregation. Fill out an index card (with magnetic tape on the back) with the words *Plessy v. Ferguson* and discuss where to place it on the timeline.

- Listening to the voice of survivors of the Jim Crow era: Charles Gratton. Hand out the National Archives worksheet for the evaluation of a sound recording. Go over the steps together. Tell the students the class will be listening to an oral history of someone who lived under Jim Crow in North Carolina. As they listen, think about some of the things on the sheet in front of them, but don’t write anything. Listen to the selection. Together, discuss and fill out the sheet. Invite further response.

4. **Compare/Contrast:** Jigsaw Assessment: Hand out the list of people from above. Have the students count off by sixes. Assign them to take on the role of the person from the list above that corresponds with their number. Have them answer the questions below, and ask students to write the questions on the handout. For example, if the student has a card with #1 printed on it, they would answer these questions from the perspective of a “Southern African American”.
   - Define and tell me what you think of the grandfather clause.
   - Define and tell me what you think of the poll tax.
   - Define and tell me what you think of the literacy test.
   - If you could change one thing about the Jim Crow laws, what would it be?

Remind the students that you know people are individuals and it is not fair to say everyone in a certain group would think the same way, but that you are looking for trends and generalizations in this assignment.

**Differentiation:**
The whole class working together on the National Archives’ sheet will support students for whom this is a difficult task. Assignment may be modified for some learners.

**Lesson 3:** The World of Jim Crow: Wrap-up
**Time Estimated:** 90 minutes

**Objectives:**
- Students will:
  1. Share the experience of Jim Crow from various viewpoints
  2. Respond and evaluate a sound recording from the era
  3. Work collaboratively to design a timeline of the Jim Crow era, using the events we’ve discussed.

**Materials:**
- Sound Recording from “Remembering Jim Crow,” Behind the Veil Project, Track # 5, Olivia Cherry (2 minutes, 37 seconds)
- Colored pencils, drawing paper
- Large (bulletin board) paper, about six feet long
• Popsicle sticks

Strategies:
1. **Hook:** Separate students into their designated “groups” of people from the lesson on the previous day. Give those students 10 minutes to discuss the answers they came up with to the questions posed and ask them to make up a list of answers to present. Circulate and help.

2. Have students share the perspectives of the different groups of people. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being a part of each of the groups.

3. Discuss the use of primary sources and the ways to use them, noting the primary sources they have used in this mini-unit. Discuss using the Internet and how to know if you can trust sources.

4. Revisit the oral recording discussion from the day before. Pass out the National Archives worksheet to evaluate sound recordings and have the students listen to Olivia Cherry’s account and respond. Discuss as whole class.

5. On the board write events and/or people from the “index-card” timeline we have been working on as well as vocabulary terms we have learned. Designate students to write about one to three things listed. Students can design illustrations to accompany their writing.

6. Using the bulletin board paper, arrange the events on the timeline. The vocabulary terms can be used as part of a border.

7. Incorporate popsicle sticks to help illustrate John Mitchell, Jr.’s advocacy of the boycott and Homer Plessy’s suit regarding trains. The popsicle sticks can be arranged in a parallel fashion, going across the poster like train tracks. A title such as “No Free Ride to Freedom” or the song title, “No Easy Walk to Freedom” could be written at the top.

    NOTE: This project could be done by the whole class, by groups, or individually, depending on time and the dynamics of your class.

**Differentiation:**
These activities incorporate a variety of learning styles. Group collaboration will aid struggling learners.

**Lesson 4:** Bringing it Home

**Time Estimated:** 90 minutes
Objectives:
Students will:
1. Respond to oral history by local people.

Materials:
• Student-generated questions.

Strategies:
1. Invite people who lived through Jim Crow for a roundtable discussion. If possible, visit a local museum to hold this forum.

2. Have the students prepare a list of 3 to 5 questions for our guests, based on the primary sources and discussions that are part of this mini-unit.

3. Have each guest give some background information and invite each to tell us how Jim Crow affected their life by sharing personal anecdotes.

4. Allow the students to ask questions.

5. Share the timeline we made with our guests.
Glossary of People and Terms  (Use with Lesson 1)

2. Rutherford B. Hayes
3. Redeemers
4. Jim Crow
5. Constitution
6. Civil rights
7. Compromise
8. Boycott
9. The Richmond Planet
10. Prejudice
11. Maggie Lena Walker
12. Harry Byrd, Sr.
13. Brown v The Board of Education
14. Massive Resistance