



**Observing the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of Jamestown**

**A Curriculum for K-12**

## **About the 400 Years of Inequality Initiative**

400 Years of Inequality is a diverse coalition of organizations and individuals calling on everyone—families, friends, communities, institutions—to plan their own solemn observance of 1619, learn about their own stories and local places, and organize for a more just and equal future. We are dedicated to dismantling structural inequality and building strong, healthy communities. To learn more about the coalition's work, please visit our website: <http://www.400yearsofinequality.org/>

## **About the 400 Years of Inequality Curriculum**

We have developed this curriculum guide for K-12 teachers to use in formal and informal educational spaces--traditional classrooms, afterschool programs, and community groups. The curriculum spans one-week beginning with a discussion of identity and community, a reflection on the 400 years of inequality, a meditation of one's place in this history, and a call to conduct a place-based observance of this moment as a way to pause and consider what kind of future we want to create collectively.

Educators should feel free to amend, revise, or recreate these lessons for one's own purposes and context. Please email us at [400yearsofinequality@gmail.com](mailto:400yearsofinequality@gmail.com) if you have any questions or suggestions. To share what you have done, visit: <http://www.400yearsofinequality.org/the-response.html>

# 400 Years of Inequality: A Curriculum

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## **Module 1: A History of Inequality**

### **Preparation:**

Print copies of the worksheets for Activity 1: Read *A Call to Observe* and Activity 2: Write an *I Am From...* poem. Each student will need their own copies of the worksheets.

### **Foundation Discussion:**

Before beginning the discussion of the 400 Years of Inequality initiative, we encourage educators to have an honest, frank discussion with their students about the current state of discrimination, injustice, and inequity in our society. You should feel free to begin this conversation as you see fit, but you might also think about the following questions to frame the discussion:

1. What is discrimination?
2. Can you give me examples of how you have experienced discrimination in society?
3. How do you feel about your place in the community or our society?
4. Do you feel that you are asked to change your behavior, ideas, or dispositions more than those that discriminate against you?

### **Introduction to the 400 Years of Inequality Initiative**

*(Teacher reads to class or asks for volunteers to read)*

We do not know the exact date in 1619 when a boat carrying twenty or so Africans arrived at Point Comfort near the port of Jamestown in the Colony of Virginia to be sold into bondage. We do know that these and thousands of other similarly bonded laborers had almost no rights and were forced to work in extremely harsh conditions for long periods of time. We also know that colonialists with political and economic power developed from this system of bondage the even harsher and far more oppressive one of chattel slavery.

Nearly 400,000 men, women, and children from Africa would be capture, enslave, and moved directly to North America becoming, over time, a population of millions that would be enslaved for generations. Racism, the idea that one group of people is naturally superior to another and, therefore, entitled to privilege, was used to legitimize oppression and terrorize people into submission. Enslavement and racism expanded the struggle for freedom from oppressive labor conditions to include the most essential and fundamental of freedom, recognition of each person's full and unquestioned humanity.

Over the past year, individuals have come together to study the history that preceded and followed the events near and at Jamestown in 1619. We have learned that the combination of

settler colonialism—the taking of Native American land and the genocidal campaigns that killed millions of the first peoples of this continent—and slavery established place-based structures and processes of inequality, exploitation, and discrimination that still define how we relate to each other today.

The history of inequality is painfully difficult to process. At the same time, it is a history of freedom struggles forged through collaboration, resistance, alliances, and hope. We have experienced setbacks and we have moved forward. We have inherited both sadness and hope.

If we—all of us—are to engage in and build on the struggles for equality and freedom that our ancestors started, we need to come together to imagine and act toward the history of a different future. Each of us brings our own history and ideas to this work. Yet, by coming together to observe the 400th anniversary of Jamestown we have the opportunity to learn that we all connected through the histories that have shaped the world we share and must, working together, contribute to the world that is to come. As Mindy Fullilove, the founding of the 400 Years of Inequality Initiative, says, “We shape our world and are then shaped by it.” Therefore, when we come together to reflect on the history of 400 years of inequality we begin the essential process of reshaping our world and, therefore, ourselves.

Today, in class we will be doing two things. First, we will be reading an excerpt of the 400 years of Inequality’s *Call to Observe* as a class and then we will write and share *I Am From...* poems as a way to tell our own histories and prepare to engage in this work together. These activities will prepare us to step more deeply into the complicated and important history of inequality.

### **Two Activities:**

See below for the activity worksheets.

The Activity 1: Read *A Call to Observe* worksheet has lines so that your class may assign readers for those parts. Everyone should read the lines that say ALL.

Once students have had a chance to work on their Activity 2: Write an *I Am From...* poem, have students who are comfortable doing so share their poems in small groups or with the whole class.

### **Reflection:**

When the students have finished writing and sharing their *I Am From...* poems, we encourage you to have them reflect on what they have experienced. To build a reflection focused on resistance and action, we use the image of the North Star. You may read the following paragraph to your students to introduce the image and place it in historical context. Alternately, please feel free to share with your students one of the many picture books that highlight the importance of the North Star in the freedom struggle.

## **Follow the North Star to Freedom**

*(teacher reads to class or asks for volunteers to read)*

For centuries, individuals seeking freedom from oppression and slavery have relied on the North Star to guide their journey. First Nations people used the North Star to migrate to new lands. Harriet Tubman, who escaped from slavery and helped thousands of others out of bondage through the Underground Railroad, relied on the North Star to navigate enslaved people to the North. In some ways, the North Star can be used as a sign of resistance against inequality and injustice.

### **Optional Activity:**

For the Optional Activity: Write a *North Star* Letter, we'd like you to think about a person in your life who you consider to be your North Star. This person can be anyone who you rely on for guidance and advice. Write a letter to that person explaining why you picked them as the person who mostly closely aligns with the idea of the North Star. If you feel comfortable, we encourage you to give the letter to them.

### **Activity 1: Read A Call to Observe Worksheet**

Instructions: Decide who will read each of the lines of *A Call to Observe*. Write the names of the readers in the spaces provided. Everyone reads the lines marked "ALL READ" at the same time, like a chorus.

\_\_\_\_\_ We call on everyone to observe the 400th Anniversary of the arrival in 1619 at Jamestown of the first Africans to be sold into bondage.

\_\_\_\_\_ Soon after this event, colonialism and slavery became law.

\_\_\_\_\_ These practices remain formidable barriers against our efforts to unite against dispossession and occupation of lands, and exploitative and oppressive life and work conditions.

\_\_\_\_\_ We need desperately to link arms and continue the work for full freedom, equity, and justice.

\_\_\_\_\_ By coming together to remember the events at Jamestown we prepare to meet the challenges ahead, including climate change, under resourced schools, uneven access to health care, insufficient affordable housing, and a lack of work that honors our humanity.

**ALL:** We call on everyone to prepare observances for the 400th Anniversary of Jamestown.

\_\_\_\_\_ We do this to reject structures of inequality.

\_\_\_\_\_ We do this to showcase our fundamental and unconditional equality.

**ALL:** We remember and in doing so refuse to participate in and reproduce structures of injustice, exploitation, oppression, and inequity.

## Activity 2: Write an *I Am From...* Poem

Instructions: The poem is created as you fill in the open spaces on each of the lines below. The prompts below each of the open spaces will let you know what words or phrases to add to that part of the poem. Note that the last line of each stanza or verse of the poem is the same as the very first line of the poem.

### FIRST STANZA

**I am** \_\_\_\_\_ **and** \_\_\_\_\_  
(a word that describes you) (another word that describes you)

**I wonder** \_\_\_\_\_  
(something you are curious about in the world)

**I hear** \_\_\_\_\_  
(your favorite sound--real or imagined)

**I see** \_\_\_\_\_  
(your favorite thing to look at--real or imagined)

**I want** \_\_\_\_\_  
(an actual desire)

**I am** \_\_\_\_\_ **and** \_\_\_\_\_  
(a word that describes you) (another word that describes you)

### SECOND STANZA

**I pretend** \_\_\_\_\_  
(something you actually pretend to do)

**I feel** \_\_\_\_\_  
(a feeling you often have about yourself or the world)

**I touch** \_\_\_\_\_  
(an imaginary touch)

**I worry** \_\_\_\_\_  
(something that bothers you)

**I cry** \_\_\_\_\_  
(something that makes you sad)

**I am** \_\_\_\_\_ **and** \_\_\_\_\_  
(a word that describes you) (another word that describes you)



### THIRD STANZA

**I understand** \_\_\_\_\_  
(something that is true)

**I say** \_\_\_\_\_  
(something you believe in)

**I dream** \_\_\_\_\_  
(something you dream about)

**I try** \_\_\_\_\_  
(something you really make an effort about)

**I hope** \_\_\_\_\_  
(something you actually hope for)

**I am** \_\_\_\_\_ **and** \_\_\_\_\_  
(a word that describes you) (another word that describes you)

**I am** \_\_\_\_\_  
(your name)

## **Module 2: A Timeline of Inequality**

### **Preparation:**

1. Display the 400 Years of Inequality Timeline. You can do this by taping up a paper copy of the timeline, projecting a digital copy of the timeline, or providing each student with a folded copy of the timeline. You can download a digital, printable version of the timeline here: <http://www.400yearsofinequality.org/400-years-timeline.html>
2. Provide each student with a small packet of post-its

### **Foundation Discussion:**

Before you begin this lesson, guide the students in a brief discussion on the strengths and limitations of a timeline. Can they think of examples of timelines that they have studied or used in school? What did they learn from these tools? In what ways does a timeline convey a sense of the past? What might be missing?

### ***Creating a 400 Years of Inequality Timeline***

(teacher reads)

During the first and second years of the 400 Years of Inequality initiative, graduate students in Dr. Mindy Fullilove's *400 Years of Inequality* course at The New School created a timeline that shows events and individuals that promoted inequality and events and people who struggled for equality. The events and individuals on this timeline are by no means exhaustive. Many events and individuals are missing from this timeline. Some of the missing events and individuals may be particularly significant to you and your community. In this class, you will have a chance to study the timeline and will help fill in the gaps.

#### Activity 1: Add to the *400 Years of Inequality Timeline*

Each of you has a small packet of post-it notes on your desk. For the next 8 minutes, I would like you to look at and reflect on the timeline. We will be doing this in silence. You may not talk to your classmates or ask them questions. Instead, as you look at this timeline, I want you to think about your own story, your family's story, and the individuals who came before you. I want you to write your thoughts, reactions, and questions about the timeline on the post-it notes and place those on the timeline. There is no right answer, no perfect question. But, this is a serious exercise that will help us build towards our observance. Please remember that.

When the 8 minutes have finished, ask students to remain in silence and to read what their classmates have written. This should last about 5 minutes.

### **Activity 2: Discuss the 400 Years of Inequality Timeline**

When they have completed this task, divide students into groups of 2 or 3 and ask them to answer the following questions:

1. When you look at the timeline, who do you see? What moment or event from your life or your family's life comes to mind?
2. When you look at the timeline, what do you hear? What sounds from your life or your family's life comes to mind?
3. When you look at the timeline, what do you feel? What events or individuals from your life or your family's life come to mind?
4. When you look at the timeline, what is missing? What experiences from your life or your family's life would you want to add?

When the students have completed this, ask them to share their ideas and perspectives. How does the information on this timeline connect to their lives? What the missing links? What might they want to add? How might the class do that?

### **Activity 3: Write a 400 Years of Inequality Timeline Letter**

We want to return to the idea of the North Star. Ask students to look at the timeline and select an event or person that they wonder about. Once students have selected that event or person, ask students to write a short letter about the event or person. The letter should be a personal one that includes reflections or questions about the ways in which this person or event shaped the history of inequality.

### **Homework: Find a Photograph of or Object from A Place Where I am Known and Loved**

Ask students to bring in a photograph or material that represents a place where they feel known and loved.

## **Module 3: Seven Generations Principle**

### **Preparation:**

1. Print copies of the *Seven Generations Meditation* for the teachers and students who will facilitate the activity.
2. Have paper and pencils or pens available for the *Letter to the Future* activity.
3. Ask students to place their photographs of or objects from *A Place Where I Am Known and Loved* somewhere in the classroom. Select a place that is out of the way until the photographs and objects are needed.

### ***The Principle of Seven Generations***

(read by teachers and/or students)

Today's activity is inspired by the Native American *Principle of Seven Generations*. According to this principle, each generation's most important thoughts and actions shape the world for seven generations into the future. According to this principle, we are making decisions today that will influence the lives of our children, our grandchildren, our great grandchildren, all the way to our great great great great great great grandchildren and their living relatives. Basically, everyone.

This *Principle of Seven Generations* suggests that our lives today are shaped by the thoughts and actions of the seven generations that came before us, by our parents, grandparents, great grandparents and great great grandparents, all the way to our great great great great great grandparents. These generations of people who came before us are called our ancestors. The generations that will come after us are called our descendants.

According to this *Principle of Seven Generations*, we have inherited a world of inequality made many generations ago. Yet, this history includes the influence of millions in generations past who devoted their lives to fighting for and living lives of equality. Their efforts produced important changes. We have inherited their spirit of freedom and their vision of justice. Now we ask: are we acting in ways that help keep our world unequal or are our actions moving our world to full equality? We decide. The *Seven Generations Principle* asks us to consider how the actions we make today will affect the lives of seven generations to come.

We are now going to practice a meditation that guides us to think back and imagine the lives of our ancestors. To do this, we need to sit comfortably in our chairs, close our eyes, and be guided by our imaginations as we try to really visualize, and feel, and hear what life was like way back in the past. After the meditation we can also imagine forward and think about how our thoughts and actions may shape the future.

### **Activity 1: Practice the *Seven Generations Meditation***

The teacher(s) and/or students can facilitate the meditation. It is important that the facilitator(s) familiarize themselves with the text and are clear on the tone of the meditation. It will be especially helpful if the facilitator(s) can practice reading the meditation guide. They can also listen to the recording of the meditation, which is available here: <https://soundcloud.com/user-773139664/7-20-generations-meditation>

#### **Seven Generations Meditation**

(teachers and/or student facilitators read)

If you're ready to begin, sit back comfortable in your chair.

Relax your shoulders and your legs.

Close your eyes or just let your eyes rest on something with a soft, slightly blurry focus.

Breath in and out gently.

Remember, no talking. We will have plenty of time after the meditation to share what we see and hear in our imaginations.

To begin, let's be quiet together for a little while [pause for one minute].

Thank you. Continue to notice your breathing—breath in softly and exhale softly. Good.

Think of your ancestors, beginning with your parents. Where are they from? What do you know about their lives?

Now think about your grandparents. What do you know about their lives? Remember things they have told you or stories you have heard about them.

Can you hear those stories? Listen carefully and you will hear their voices.

Can you imagine seeing some of the things they have shared with you? Maybe you have seen photographs of them when they were children. Imagine them when they were at school.

How have your parents and grandparents experienced inequality in their lives?

Now think about your great grandparents. These are your parents' grandmothers and grandfathers. You may never have met them or if you have they will be quite old. Can you feel them at the edges of your memory?

Think even further back to their parents, your great, great, great grandparents. This is where your imagination really needs to work. They grew up in a world without cell phones or the Internet, before video games and hundreds of television channels. In fact, they may not have had television as children. What did they do for fun? If you listen carefully you will hear them playing. Maybe they are playing on the sidewalks and in the streets or are in a playground

talking with their friends. You probably don't know the names of these and your even older ancestors. Draw on what you know from the history you have learned to imagine the worlds in which these older generations lived. What inequalities did they experience?

Your ancestors seven generations ago may have been alive when slavery still existed in this country and other parts of the world. What do you think they experienced or felt or did or thought about? What can they teach us about inequality? What can they teach us about ways to make a world of equality? What do you see? What do you hear?

Now, gently open or focus your eyes. Feel yourself coming back into your room.

Thank you for your focus and attention.

Thinking about you ancestors is a way to connect to the impact history has had on each and every one of us. We all come from history but we are also more than our history. There are things we can and must learn from the past, from our ancestors and there are things we will want to leave behind, things we will remember and will not repeat.

### **Activity 2: Share the Memories and Feelings Inspired by the *Seven Generations Meditation***

Now let's share where our imaginations took us.

Get out a piece of paper and write for 3 - 5 minutes about how that process made you feel. It is perfectly fine to record if it was uncomfortable for you.

Also, think about the places and people that you thought about during the meditation. Where are those places? Who are those people? What meaning do they have in your life?

Ask for student volunteers to share what they have written. Jot these ideas on the board or flip chart paper.

### **Activity 3: Share Your Photograph of or Object From *A Place Where I am Known and Loved***

Ask students to get their artifact about the place where they feel known and loved. If possible, have students sit in a circle or in small groups to share out what they brought and why. Encourage them to connect these items back to their *I Am From...* poems. As they process this, have them pick three words to describe their item or place. Make a word collage of these words to see what words pop up the most among the class.

When they are finished with, assemble the materials in a collage and share the word collage, ask the students to reflect on what things these places and items have in common, how are they different, why might they be significant?

**Activity 4: Write a Letter to the Future**

Returning again to the image of the North Star. Ask students to write a letter about the world they want to help create. Students should address this Letter to the future to someone who has not been born yet, perhaps a future relative or a future elected representative. Encourage them to write about specific actions they can envision themselves taking to make the future world. It may help to revisit some of the issues raised in the opening discussion of Module 1 about the current state of discrimination, injustice, and inequality in our society.

## **Module 4: Place-Based Observance**

### **Preparation:**

1. Ask students to take out their photographs of or objects from a place where they are known and loved. Arrange these in a place where the whole class can see them.
2. Write on a board or sheet of flipchart paper or project on a whiteboard the three components of an anniversary observance plan: Tell a Story, Choose a Place for Your Story, Find the Best Way to Tell Your Story.
3. Print copies of the Activity 1: Create your Observance of the 400th Anniversary of Jamestown worksheet. Have enough worksheets for each of the small groups that will undertake the initial anniversary planning process.

### **Foundation Discussion:**

Take a gallery tour of the photographs and artifacts brought into class on Day 3. Ask what these artifacts reveal about the places where we live our everyday lives. Invite students to share stories about the neighborhoods they know best. Ask what these stories teach us about the how history is connected to place. Suggest that experiences of inequality, discrimination, and oppression break our connection to place. We feel unsafe, unwelcome, anxious, depressed, and angry. To feel at home, we need to be able to tell our stories, be heard, and join with others in making the changes that ensure we are all welcome and safe.

### **Activity 1: Create Your Observance of the 400th Anniversary of Jamestown**

Have students form groups of 4. Ask them to discuss how they might, as a class, craft a place-based observance. Remind them that each 400 Years of Recovery observance contributes to the process of collective recovery, which is a way for communities to heal from trauma. It may help to read or have one of the students read the following statement:

#### **Collective Recovery**

Inequality separates and isolates us from each other. These separations are created and maintained by violence, discrimination, prejudice, and suffering. It is understandable that many of us feel overwhelmed, hopeless and afraid, in other words traumatized by our and others' experiences of inequality. We know that when people experience trauma their instinct can be to retreat from others and become isolated. People heal is by making connections. Holding observances is a powerful ways to invite people to become connected to each other.

Explain that while the observance may take any form, the anniversary observance plan must tell a story and must be unique to the place where it will be held. Encourage students to invent creative



ways to tell the stories. Provide each group with a copy of the *Crafting a Place Based Observance* worksheet to help guide their discussion.

Place-based observances could be anything, but to give students an idea of what they could be, you might want to share the following experiences/ideas with your students:

1. An intergenerational meeting with elders in the community to learn about the history of a particular place
2. A musical or artistic performance that illustrates key historical moments and their impact on life today.

After 10-15 minutes of small group discussions, have the students come together as a class to brainstorm what you might want to do together.

### **Activity 2: Share Observance of the 400th Anniversary of Jamestown**

After you have developed your observance, anchored it in a location, and set a date, join the 400 Years community online by sharing your observance with others at [www.400yearsofinequality.org](http://www.400yearsofinequality.org). Sharing your observance will invite the larger 400 Years community to experience your observance and inspire others to host their own. To share your observance, visit:

<http://www.400yearsofinequality.org/the-response.html>

### **Examples of Observances:**

While we encourage teachers to work with their students to develop their own, unique place-based observances, we wanted to provide a few examples of place-based observances that have already taken place.

Below you will find an example of an observance taken from work that Robert Sember, co-founder of the 400 Years of Inequality Initiative, did at PS 140 located in the New York City's Lower East Side. Other examples may be found on our website: <http://www.400yearsofinequality.org/>

### **Example of a Place-Based Observance: A Map of Echoes**

After almost three years of listening together and making recordings of Lower East Side neighborhoods, we have learned something about the presence of history in our world today. This year, we are trying to listen to the deep history of the Lower East Side, which is to say we are trying to hear sounds that no longer exist, sounds that are buried under the noise, bustle, and ambition of the present time. We call this project, A Map of Echoes because echoes, like memories, come back and last beyond the events that cause them.

To make this map, we want to hear through the noise to the lives of people who no longer live here. We also want to hear the histories of communities that call the Lower East Side home today. Many of these communities face uncertain futures as the forces of gentrification change the neighborhoods.

Echoes are fragile and easy to miss. We are learning new ways of listening so that we can hear the “echoes of history.” This involves doing research, looking at historic photographs, and listening to old recording and different kinds of music.

To make this Map of Echoes we are learning about the histories of many of the communities that have called this place home, including Jewish, Irish, Puerto Rican, and Dominican immigrants. We begin, however, with the first people to call this place home, the members of the Lenape Nation. We also celebrate the enslaved and free Africans who built community in this place in the face of incredible odds.

We are visiting places of historical importance to each community in order to “return” or honor their presence in the form of musical recordings made by their descendants. We play these recordings through speakers we bring to these places, and listen to the echoes they inspire. As we play this music we make a new recording in which we can hear the sounds of the past—the music—mixing with the sounds of the present—the everyday sounds of the streets. This process is making us to think about the echoes that will be heard in this place as a result of the lives we live now on the Lower East Side.

What is the big lesson after all of these years of listening? It is that sound, like time, is part of the stream of life and just keeps coming. So, after almost three years of asking, “What is the sound of the Lower East Side?” we have learned that we can never finish answering the question. The story of the Lower East Side is the story of change and with those changes what we hear also changes.

We just need to keep on listening.

**Activity 1: Create your Observance of the 400th Anniversary of Jamestown Worksheet**

**Crafting a Place Based Observance**

Together, think about how you might answer the following questions.

**Consider the story that you want to explore or tell**

What story do you want to explore or tell? How does it relate to your own story/history?

**Choose a location for your story**

After selecting the story you and your team wish to share, choose a location for your observance. Where will you hold your observance? Is there a specific place that gives context to your story? Do you want to tell the story of a specific park, building, street, and/or neighborhood? Why did you choose this place?

**Find the best way to share your story with others**

Think about the community you represent (family, community organization, institution, neighborhood, etc.). What would be the most meaningful way to express your story of inequality and resistance? Who is your intended audience? What message would you like to relay to those you are sharing with?