



Confronting the House

Common Core Standards

RH.9-10.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussion with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- To introduce students to the lesson, have them answer two “Think, Write, Share” questions:
 - When you read the words “American Exceptionalism,” what comes to mind?
 - What is the difference between a house and a home?

Part 1: Topic Introduction

What general historical context should be provided so students have the necessary knowledge to effectively engage in content?

- Explain to students that this lesson is a strictly text-based lesson with two additional Malcolm X videos. Remind them of discussion norms/agreements and encourage them as they engage with the sources to make connections to Black experiences in the United States today.
- Review the definitions of *democracy*, *hypocrisy*, and *agency*. If necessary, review/teach what a metaphor is, and explain to students they will be using the metaphors of a house and home to consider the United States as a country.
- Distribute the excerpts of the texts: Frederick Douglass’s “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” speech (1854), Stokely Carmichael’s “Black Power” speech (1966), Chapter 2 of Isabel Wilkerson’s *Caste* (2020), and Toni Morrison’s “Race Matters” essay/speech.

Approx. Time



60–90 minutes over 1–2 days

Success Criteria



- Compare and contrast key claims made by Black intellectuals about American democracy and justice.
- Explain how the metaphor of a house/home can be used to describe the history of the United States.

Big Questions



- This lesson provides a means to make connections between different historical time periods over the performance of American Democracy. In addition, this lesson uses multiple Black intellectual perspectives and engaging Malcolm X clips to make connections between Black past, present, and future.

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Lesson Plan

- Direct students to read the Douglass excerpt with the following read-to-understand questions:
 - What does Douglass say about the Fourth of July?
 - What does he point out about the United States?
- After reading and check for understanding (CFU), probe with the following rigorous questioning:
 - Why does Douglass believe America is false to the past and present?
 - Do you believe that is true today?
 - Why does he call the Fourth of July celebration shocking?
 - Does this change your understanding of the Fourth of July?
 - For Douglass, is America a house or a home for him and other Black people?
- After discussing the questions above, pause and emphasize Douglass's agency by stating something like the following: "Wow. I can't even imagine the courage it takes to speak up and give a speech like that, criticizing America's history and identity at a time when slavery still existed. Let me ask you this tricky question: When slavery ended, we know that America's 'house' was still not fair to Black people. Would it have been better to just create their own house or perhaps even move back to Africa like some wanted, or should they work to reform America's house so it could become a home for them too?"

Part 2: Sankofa Deep Dive

What path are the students taking to meet the objective?

- Explain to students they are going to review what a Black nationalist said about this 112 years later. Quickly explain who Stokely Carmichael was and, if necessary, review growing frustrations over the Civil Rights Movement. Direct student to an excerpt of his speech and ask the following check-for-understanding questions:
 - What does Carmichael say about freedom?
 - What does he say about civil rights bills?
- After reading and CFU, probe with the following rigorous discussion questions:
 - When people think about the Civil Rights Act and a law that was passed banning segregation, they usually consider it as something done for Black people. How does Carmichael reframe that?
 - Why is it important to remember a "man is born" free and the bill was passed for White people?
 - What is the difference between fighting for integration and fighting against white supremacy?
 - Why do you think discussion caused some White people to fear Black power?
 - Does Carmichael want to fix America's house or start a new one?



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Part 3: Isabel Wilkerson

- Direct students to the Isabel Wilkerson excerpt and briefly explain her background as a Black historian. Provide the following read-to-understand question:
 - How does Wilkerson use the metaphor of a house to describe the history of the United States?
- After reading and CFU, probe with the following rigorous discussion questions:
 - Wilkerson argues that we inherited America's house. What does that mean for Black people?
 - How is she also talking directly to White people?

Part 4: Malcolm X

- Explain to students they are going to consider this metaphor of a house. Review as necessary Malcolm X's biography and (re)address stereotypes students might have about him. Students then watch "[Malcolm X's Fiery Speech Addressing Police Brutality](#)," with these watch-to-understand questions:
 - What does Malcolm X want Black people to do about oppression?
 - In your own words, what is Malcolm X trying to say about "hate"?
 - What does he say about America's house?
- After watching and CFU, say something like the following: "Oh man, y'all, Malcolm X just called to burn down America's house, woah." Probe with the following rigorous discussion questions:
 - Does he want to fix the house? Why not?
 - Is burning down the house a form of justice for Black people? Why or why not?
- Tell students they are going to watch another video from Malcolm X speaking about democracy, police brutality, White victimhood, and justice. Students then watch [Malcolm X Speech "Democracy is Hypocrisy"](#) with these watch-to-understand questions:
 - What does Malcolm X say about police brutality?
 - What evidence does he provide that Black people rarely get justice in the legal system?
 - Why does he believe America's democracy is a hypocrisy?
- After CFU, follow up with these rigorous discussion questions:
 - Where do we see this playing out today? False White victimhood? Provide the example of [Amy Cooper in Central Park](#) calling the cops on Christian Cooper the birdwatcher and/or [Shiloh Hendrix raising money](#) after calling a young child a racial slur on the playground.

If additional time permits, ask these discussion questions:

- What do you think Malcolm X would say about the Black Lives Matter movement?
- What do you think he would say about gun violence in urban cities?



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Part 5: Toni Morrison

- Briefly review Toni Morrison’s biography. Explain that students will consider an essay by her for a different perspective on America’s house. Provide these read-to-understand questions:
 - What does Morrison want to do to the house?
 - How does Morrison relate house to home?
 - What does Morrison say about race?
- After CFU, follow up with these rigorous discussion questions:
 - Why do you think it’s important for Morrison as a writer to build a home?
 - If the “racial house” is a racist one that White people built, is it Black people’s individual or collective responsibility to rebuild it?
 - How can White people rebuild the house without Black people?
- Say, “So we have engaged in many sources now and different perspectives on the idea of America. Are Black people part of America’s house? Can America be a home for Black people? Can it be reformed? Or should it be burned down?”
- After discussion, direct students to star or highlight one quote related to the conversation they want to use in their exit ticket. Cold-call on students for their selections. Explain to students they are to use what they selected in their writing.

Exit Ticket/Assessment

How will you assess student understanding of the objective?

- Option 1: What should be done with America’s “house”? In your response, cite evidence from one of the sources used today.
- Option 2: What role does justice play in rebuilding America’s house? In your response, cite evidence from one of the sources used today.

Homework/Lesson Extension Ideas

- Option 1: What connections can be made between what you learned in the sources today and how Kathleen Cleaver describes the history of the Black Panther Party? (video watch)
- Option 2: Students read Langston Hughes’s “I, Too.” How are Langston Hughes’s thoughts about America different from what we discussed in the lesson today?



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Lesson Plan

Links & Additional Resources

Lesson Resources

- Malcolm X's Fiery Speech Addressing Police Brutality: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_uYWDyYNUg
- Malcolm X Speech "Democracy is Hypocrisy": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNfAFfu6VD0\>
- Amy Cooper, White Woman Who Called Police On Black Bird-Watcher, Has Charge Dismissed: <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/16/968372253/white-woman-who-called-police-on-black-man-bird-watching-has-charges-dismissed>
- How MAGA centrists blamed a viral racist rant on the 'woke': <https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/shiloh-hendrix-woke-right-viral-racist-crowdfund-trump-maga-rcna205251>
- Kathleen Cleaver Interview | American Black Journal: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sx0qIEi3QV8>

Additional Resources

- "Why the Time Requires Us to Teach Like Malcolm" by Sharif El-Mekki: <https://www.edpost.com/stories/why-the-time-requires-us-to-teach-like-malcolm>
- "What Malcolm X Taught Me About Education" by Ismael Jimenez: <https://phillys7thward.org/2025/05/what-malcolm-x-taught-me-about-education/>
- Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Won't Stand: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka0446tibig>
- Angela Davis on the BPP and BLM: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WRDrkBZYA4>
- What We Leave Out When We Teach About Brown: <https://www.chalkbeat.org/philadelphia/2024/05/15/when-we-teach-about-brown-vs-board-we-need-to-teach-about-freedom-schools/>



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Excerpts

Confronting the House Documents

Isabel Wilkerson: Excerpt from Chapter 2 of *Caste*, 2020

America is an old house. We can never declare the work over. Wind, flood, drought and human upheavals batter a structure that is already fighting whatever flaws were left unattended in the original foundation. When you live in an old house, you may not want to go into the basement after a storm to see what the rains have wrought. Choose not to look, however, at your own peril. The owner of an old house knows that whatever you are ignoring will never go away. Whatever is lurking will fester whether you choose to look or not. Ignorance is no protection from the consequence of inaction. Whatever you are wishing away will gnaw at you until you gather the courage to face what you would rather not see.

We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say, “I have nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves.” And yes, Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.

Stokely Carmichael: Excerpt from “Black Power” speech, 1966

People ought to understand that; we were never fighting for the right to integrate, we were fighting against white supremacy. In order to understand white supremacy we must dismiss the fallacious notion that white people can give anybody his freedom. A man is born free. You may enslave a man after he is born free, and that is in fact what this country does. It enslaves blacks after they’re born. The only thing white people can do is stop denying black people their freedom.

I maintain that every civil rights bill in this country was passed for white people, not for black people. For example, I am black. I know that. I also know that while I am black I am a human being. Therefore I have the right to go into any public place. White people don’t know that. Every time I tried to go into a public place they stopped me. So some boys had to write a bill to tell that white man, “He’s a human being; don’t stop him.” That bill was for the white man, not for me. I knew I could vote all the time and that it wasn’t a privilege but my right. Every time I tried I was shot, killed or jailed, beaten or economically deprived. So somebody had to write a bill to tell white people, “When a black man comes to vote, don’t bother him.” That bill was for white people. I know I can live anywhere I want to live. It is white people across this country who are incapable of allowing me to live where I want. You need a civil rights bill, not me.



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Excerpts

Frederick Douglass: “What to the Slave Is the 4th of July,” 1854

I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future.

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.

Toni Morrison: Keynote Speech at Princeton’s Race Matters Conference, 1994

If I have to live in a racial house, it was important at the least to rebuild it so that it was not a windowless prison into which I was forced, a thick-walled, impenetrable container from which no sound could be heard, but rather an open house, grounded, yet generous in its supply of windows and doors. Or at the grounded, yet generous in its supply of windows and doors. Or at the most, it became imperative for me to transform this house completely. I was tempted to convert it into a palace where racism didn’t hurt so much; to crouch in one of its many rooms where coexistence offered the delusion of agency. At some point I tried to use the race house as a scaffolding from which to launch a movable feast that could operate, be celebrated on any number of chosen sites. That was the authority, the glossy comfort, the redemptive quality, the freedom writing at first seemed to promise. Yet in that freedom, as in all freedoms (especial stolen ones), lay danger. Could I redecorate, redesign, even reconceive the racial house without forfeiting a home of my own? Would this forged willed freedom demand an equally forged homelessness? Would it condemn me to eternal bouts of nostalgia for the home I have never had and would never know? In short, wasn’t I always tethered to a death-dealing ideology even when I honed all my intelligence to subverting it?

These questions, which have engaged so many, have troubled all of my work. How to be both free and situated; how to convert a racist house into a race-specific, yet nonracist home? How to enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal cling? They are questions of concept, of language, of trajectory, of habituation, of occupation, and, although my engagement with them has been fierce, fitful, and constantly evolving, they remain in my thought as aesthetically and politically unresolved ... because so much of what seems to lie about discourses about race concerns legitimacy, authenticity, community, belonging—is, in fact, about home. An intellectual home; a spiritual home; family and community as home; force and displaced labor in destruction of home ... The estranged body, the legislated body, the body as home. In virtually all of these formations, whatever the terrain, race magnifies the matter that matters.