Lesson Plan:
Crossing the Veil: A Young W.E.B. DuBois in Rural Tennessee

Grades: High School
Subjects: Advanced Placement, Honors, Regular U.S. History, and English/Language Arts
Time Required: two class periods (70 minutes total)
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OVERVIEW
W.E.B. DuBois encountered the realities of post-Reconstruction life in the rural South during his summers working as a teacher in a seasonal African American school in Alexandria, Tennessee. This lesson plan explores how DuBois’s experiences as a student at Fisk University and his time teaching in rural middle Tennessee shaped his understanding of the challenges facing African Americans and his ideas for uplifting the race. Students will examine how generational viewpoints differed within African American communities and how race relations varied in the different locations that DuBois lived during this early period in his life.

GOAL
Students will understand what life was like in Tennessee during the time that DuBois was a student in the state. They will understand DuBois’s experiences in rural middle Tennessee as he began to interpret what it meant to be African American in the South in the 1880s and how these experiences shaped his understanding of the country’s racial problems.

OBJECTIVES
The student will be able to:
• Explain the racial interactions and relationships DuBois experienced from the northern city to rural Tennessee.
• Explain the historical context of the New South period using excerpts from Henry Grady.
• Analyze a political cartoon and picture to understand the importance of industry and labor in the New South.
• Analyze primary source excerpts from DuBois to understand his thought processes about how to improve the African American community.
• Compare and contrast the differences in rural white schools and rural black schools to understand the development of rural education.

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION
According to DuBois, how did the “Veil” hinder “Progress” for African Americans?
STANDARDS

U.S. History:

- US.3 Explain the impact of the Compromise of 1877, including: Jim Crow laws, lynching, disenfranchisement methods, the efforts of Benjamin “Pap” Singleton and the Exodusters, and the Plessy v. Ferguson decision.

Advanced Placement U.S. History:

- POL-6 Gilded Age politics were intimately tied to big business and focused nationally on economic issues—tariffs, currency, corporate expansion, and laissez-faire economic policy—that engendered numerous calls for reform.

English/Language Arts:

- 11-12.RI.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; support an interpretation of a text by citing and synthesizing relevant textual evidence from multiple sources.
- 11-12.RI.KID.3 Analyze how an author’s choices regarding the ordering of ideas and events, the introduction and development of ideas, and connections among ideas impact meaning.
- 11-12.RI.CS.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.
- 11-12.W.TTP.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to analyze, synthesize, and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection and organization of content.
- 11-12.SL.CC.1 Initiate and participate effectively with varied partners in a range of collaborative discussions on appropriate 11th-12th grade topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing one’s own clearly and persuasively.
- 11-12.SL.PKI.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning; address alternative or opposing perspectives; and organize and develop substance and style appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

RESOURCES

- New York Tribune “Mr. Grady Speaks for the South”
- Queen of Industry
- Iron workers at Ensley, Alabama
- Primary Source Analysis Tool
- Talented Tenth
- Souls of Black Folk
- Niagara Movement
- The Beginnings of Public Education in Rural Tennessee During the Reconstruction Period
- Prezi on Rural Education in America during the 1800s

MATERIALS

- PowerPoint: DuBois Background
- Henry Grady reading excerpt
- Rural schools images
- Compare and contrast graphic organizer
- Reading excerpts with questions (pgs. 6-9)
**PROCEDURE**

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<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Distribute copies of the Henry Grady excerpt and Queen of Industry political cartoon. Have students read the excerpt and answer the first question to build an understanding of the historical context of the New South period. Have students analyze the political cartoon and complete the analysis tool worksheet. Be sure that students address the importance of industry to the New South. Then have students complete the other two questions with the Grady excerpt. Students can complete these in pairs or small groups.</td>
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<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Students will analyze the photograph of iron workers at Ensley, Alabama. Then have students answer the following two questions.</th>
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<td>- What evidence of a “New South” can you see in this photograph?</td>
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<td>- What does this photograph imply about the roles of African American workers and white workers? Explain.</td>
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| Step 3 | Examine the pictures of black and white school buildings during the New South period. Disperse the compare - contrast graphic organizer to investigate rural schools. Have a discussion examining the challenges of rural education in this period. Incorporate excerpts from the essay “The Beginnings of Rural Education in Tennessee” and the Prezi on Rural Education as needed. This can be done in small groups. |

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<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Review the previous day’s lesson. What were key characteristics of the New South period? Hold a whole class discussion using the DuBois PowerPoint to highlight important aspects of his life up to his time teaching in Alexandria. (Note: Teachers will find quotes and key ideas to highlight in the note section for most slides.)</td>
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| Step 5 | Distribute copies of the DuBois excerpts (pgs. 6-8). Students will read independently and then move to small groups to discuss their thoughts about DuBois’s perspective. Then students will complete questions to further their understanding of DuBois’s viewpoint regarding the South. |

| Step 6 | Students will use the work they have completed to answer the investigative question: How did the “Veil” hinder “Progress” for African Americans? |

**EVALUATION:**

- Essay: 50 pts.
- New South and Rural South analysis: 25 pts.
- Reading excerpts: 25 pts.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY:**

- **Compare and Contrast teaching contracts:** Students will analyze W.E.B. Du Bois’ Southern teaching contract with that of a Northern white woman from the same time period. Students will complete the questions to determine the differences and similarities in the teaching certificates.

- **Niagara Movement and NAACP:** Students will study the exhibit, paying particular attention to the Prelude section, to determine what W.E.B. Du Bois was trying to achieve for African Americans through the NAACP. Students can speculate about the method that the organization planned to use for African Americans to gain their legal rights. How did this method compare with DuBois’s writing that students read in this lesson?
Henry Grady Excerpt, “The New South”, 1886

Henry Grady, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, describes the possibilities of a New South that could develop with the growth of business and industry at speech given to the New England Club in New York in December 1886. The speech was printed in the New York Tribune on December 23, 1886. The following is an excerpt from that speech.

“There was a South of slavery and secession—that South is dead. There is a South of union and freedom—that South, thank God, is living, breathing, growing every hour….The old South rested everything on slavery and agriculture, unconscious that these could never give nor maintain healthy growth. The new South presents a perfect democracy….a social system compact and closely knitted, less splendid on the surface, but stronger at the core…and a diversified industry that meets the complex needs of this complex age.”

1. Describe the “New South” period Henry Grady envisions.

2. How does the cartoon “Queen of Industry” link to the Henry Grady excerpt above?

3. Compare and contrast the “old” and the “new” South.
### Rural School Buildings

**Wheeler School in DeKalb County (1994)**

This building was used as an African American school in the late 1800s and is the building that W.E.B. DuBois taught in. The building was also used as a storage barn.

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**Doe Creek School in Henderson County (ca. 2006)**

This building was originally built in the 1870s and used as a Baptist church and school for white students.
There I found at last a little school. Josie told me of it; she was a thin, homely girl of twenty, with a dark
brown face and thick, hard hair. I had crossed the stream at Watertown, and rested under the great willows; then I had gone to the little cabin in the lot where Josie was resting on her way to town. The gaunt
farmer made me welcome, and Josie, hearing my errand, told me anxiously that they wanted a school
over the hill; that but once since the war had a teacher been there; that she herself longed to learn,—and thus she ran on, talking fast and loud, with much earnestness and energy.

Next morning I crossed the tall round hill then plunged into the wood, and came out at Josie’s home. It was a dull frame cottage with four rooms, perched just below the brow of the hill, amid peach-trees. The father was a quiet, simple soul, calmly ignorant, with no touch of vulgarity. The mother was different,—strong, bustling, and energetic, with a quick, restless tongue, and an ambition to live “like folks.” There was a crowd of children. Two boys had gone away. There remained two growing girls; a shy midget of eight; John, tall, awkward, and eighteen; Jim; and two babies of indefinite age. Then there was Josie herself. She seemed to be the centre of the family: always busy at service, or at home, or berry-picking; a little nervous and inclined to scold, like her mother, yet faithful, too, like her father. She had about her a certain fineness, the shadow of an unconscious moral heroism that would willingly give all of life to make life broader, deeper, and fuller. I saw much of this family afterwards, and grew to love them for their honest efforts to be decent and comfortable, and for their knowledge of their own ignorance. There was with them no affectation. The mother would scold the father for being so “easy”; Josie would roundly berate the boys for carelessness; and all knew that it was a hard thing to dig a living out of a rocky side-hill.

It was a hot morning late in July when the school opened. I trembled when I heard the patter of little feet down the dusty road, and saw the growing row of dark solemn faces and bright eager eyes facing me. First came Josie and her brothers and sisters. The longing to know, to be a student in the great school at Nashville, hovered like a star above this child-woman amid her work and worry, and she studied doggedly.

Best of all I loved to go to Josie’s, and sit on the porch, eating peaches, while the mother bustled and talked: how Josie had bought the sewing-machine; how Josie worked at service in winter, but that four dollars a month was “mighty little” wages; how Josie longed to go away to school, but that it “looked like” they never could get far enough ahead to let her; how the crops failed and the well was yet unfinished; and, finally, how “mean” some of the white folks were.

I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and Opportunity. All this caused us to think some thoughts together. Those whose eyes twenty-five and more years before had seen “the glory of the coming of the Lord,” saw in every present hindrance or...
help a dark fatalism bound to bring all things right in His own good time. The mass of those to whom slavery was a dim recollection of childhood found the world a puzzling thing: it asked little of them, and they answered with little, and yet it ridiculed their offering. Such a paradox they could not understand, and therefore sank into listless indifference, or shiftlessness, or reckless bravado. There were, however, some—such as Josie, Jim, and Ben—to whom War, Hell, and Slavery were but childhood tales, whose young appetites had been whetted to an edge by school and story and half-awakened thought.

The ten years that follow youth, these were the years that passed after I left my little school. When they were past, I came by chance once more to the walls of Fisk University, to the halls of the chapel of melody. As I lingered there in the joy and pain of meeting old school-friends, there swept over me a sudden longing, and to see the homes and the school of other days, and to learn how life had gone with my school-children; and I went.

Josie was dead, and the gray-haired mother said simply, “We ’ve had a heap of trouble since you ’ve been away.” I had feared for Jim. With a cultured parentage and a social caste to uphold him, he might have made a venturesome merchant or a West Point cadet. But here he was, angry with life and reckless; and when Farmer Durham charged him with stealing wheat, the old man had to ride fast to escape the stones which the furious fool hurled after him. They told Jim to run away; but he would not run, and the constable came that afternoon. It grieved Josie, and great awkward John walked nine miles every day to see his little brother through the bars of Lebanon jail. At last the two came back together in the dark night. Josie grew thin and silent, yet worked the more. The hill became steep for the quiet old father, and with the boys away there was little to do in the valley. Josie helped them to sell the old farm, and they moved nearer town. Josie toiled a year in Nashville, and brought back ninety dollars to furnish the house and change it to a home.

Josie shivered and worked on, with the vision of schooldays all fled, with a face wan and tired,—worked until, on a summer’s day, some one married another; then Josie crept to her mother like a hurt child, and slept—and sleeps.

My log schoolhouse was gone. In its place stood Progress; and Progress, I understand, is necessarily ugly.…How shall man measure Progress there where the dark-faced Josie lies?…Thus sadly musing, I rode to Nashville in the Jim Crow car.
**Talented Tenth** [1903] (excerpt)

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races. Now the training of men is a difficult and intricate task. Its technique is a matter for educational experts, but its object is for the vision of seers. If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men. Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools—intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it—this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underlie true life. On this foundation we may build bread winning, skill of hand and quickness of brain, with never a fear lest the child and man mistake the means of living for the object of life.

**Niagara Movement Speech** [1905] (excerpt)

Fifth, We want our children educated. The school system in the country districts of the South is a disgrace and in few towns and cities are Negro schools what they ought to be. We want the national government to step in and wipe out illiteracy in the South. Either the United States will destroy ignorance or ignorance will destroy the United States.

And when we call for education we mean real education. We believe in work. We ourselves are workers, but work is not necessarily education. Education is the development of power and ideal. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be, and we will fight for all time against any proposal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people. They have a right to know, to think, to aspire.
1. Describe DuBois’s impressions of Josie and her family upon meeting them.

2. Compare and contrast Great Barrington, Fisk University, and Alexandria.

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3. How did the life experiences of older and younger individuals (generational differences) in the African American community in Alexandria create conflict?

4. Analyze the changes in Josie’s life from the time of DuBois’s departure to his return ten years later.

5. Using evidence from all three excerpts, list the challenges that DuBois sees to African American education.
Using all of the sources in this lesson and previous class discussion, answer the following question. Please be sure to cite textual evidence from each of the readings in your answer.

Essay Prompt: How did the “Veil” hinder “Progress” for African Americans?

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