

Grade
Level:
Advanced,
grades 11-12

The Great Divide: Separating the Wheat from the Tares

US History, Black History, Women's History, English/Language Arts, Social Studies, Argumentation and Debate

This is a week-long five day unit that can be expanded or contracted based upon grade level and available instruction time.

Learning Objectives:

- To enhance knowledge of an underrepresented figure in American history by studying a defining aspect of her personal narrative (her beating while in jail) which became a key touchstone in her political activism.
- To critically compare and contrast how the legacies of public figures are constructed by studying the legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer as well as the legacy of Officer John L. Basinger, who ordered her jailhouse beating.
- To gain practice analyzing and evaluating primary source information, thereby developing critical thinking, reasoning, and argumentation skills.
- To gain practice engaging in the complex processes of character/characterization analysis and the analysis of public memory.
- To express an informed perspective, supported through the process of primary source evaluation and analysis.
- To consider and reflect upon the opposing viewpoint.

Provided Materials:

- Fannie Lou Hamer's Testimony Before the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic National Convention:
 - A. American Experience video segment, "[Fannie Lou Hamer's Powerful Testimony](#)" (3 min, 40 sec)
 - B. [Complete audio recording of Fannie Lou Hamer's 1964 Democratic National Convention Speech](#) (8 minutes, 10 sec)
 - C. [Transcript of 1964 Democratic National Convention Speech](#)
- [The United States of America v. Earle Wayne Patridge, Thomas J. Herod, Jr., William Surrell, John L. Basinger, and Charles Thomas Perkins](#), Federal Trial Transcript. The full transcript is hundreds of pages long. We recommend focusing on the following testimonies: Hamer's [first](#) and [second](#);

Basinger's first and second; Anelle Ponder's [first](#) and [second](#).

- Fannie Lou Hamer, [Songs My Mother Taught Me](#), Smithsonian Folkways. Select songs are available on YouTube.
- Thomas A. Johnson, "Fannie Lou Hamer Dies; Left Farm to Lead Struggle for Civil Rights," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1977. ([obituary](#))
- National Archives, [Analyze a Written Document Worksheet](#)
- [Fannie Lou Hamer @ISSUE](#), Mississippi Public Broadcasting, October 6, 2017 (27 minutes)
- Fannie Lou Hamer's America, "[Centennial Tribute Video](#)," October 6, 2017 (4 minutes)
- National Archives, [Analyze a Video Worksheet](#)
- Robert L. Long, "[Brothers Create Scholarship](#)" *DeSoto Times-Tribune*, January 13, 2011
- Sarah Sapp, "[Endless Generosity: Winona Couple Preserving the Past, Investing in the Future](#)," *Northwest Now* (Spring 2013): pp. 12-14.
- Read, Write, Think "[Debate Rubric](#)"
- "[John Basinger's Obituary](#)," *Winona Times*, August 26, 2016

Background Knowledge:

Depending upon your familiarity with Fannie Lou Hamer, you may wish to consult this brief [Biographical Sketch of Fannie Lou Hamer](#) and [Timeline](#) before leading this lesson. Excellent book-length biographies have also been written about Hamer, including: Kay Mills' *This Little Light of Mine*, Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, and Maegan Parker Brooks, *A Voice that Could Stir an Army*. Additionally, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Digital Archive contains a [concise overview](#) of the 1963 beatings of civil rights activists in the Winona Jail and Davis W. Houck's lengthier book chapter, "Fannie Lou Hamer on Winona" is available [here](#).

Instruction Steps:

Day One

Anticipatory Set

Step One: Project the following pictures of both young wheat and tares, without labeling the two:



Step Two: Ask students to indicate what type of vegetation is being shown. After students have made an educated guess, ask for a few volunteers to share their responses. After this has transpired, disclose to the students the eerie truth that both pieces of vegetation are not one and the same but are, in fact, different—young wheat and tares. Then explain that in nature, during early stages of development, both types of vegetation appear to look or be the same, but after maturation occurs, it is very easy for an individual with a well-trained or discerning eye to notice the subtle difference. A skilled farmer, like Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, would know that tares are actually weeds, while wheat are grass-like grains used to produce cereal and other edibles. In fact, wheat is the most important worldwide crop, feeding masses of people, while tares have no nutritional value. What’s worse, tares can actually injure people during the wheat harvest. So farmers go to great lengths to carefully separate the tares from the wheat and burn them.

Unit Overview

Step Three: Inform students that during this unit, they will become inspectors, discerning the character, comparability, and subsequent legacy of two,

well-respected and historic figures from the state of Mississippi: Officer John Basinger and Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer. Explain that you will guide students through the process of separating the “wheat” from the “tares.” That is, they will learn to distinguish between facts and falsehoods in relation to each of the aforementioned individuals’ legacies.

Guided Practice

Step Four: If this is the students’ first introduction to Fannie Lou Hamer, consider showing the excerpt from her memorable 1964 DNC Credentials Committee Speech, playing the speech in its entirety (roughly eight minutes), and providing them with a transcript of the speech. You can also provide additional background information about who she was and why she is a significant historical figure by drawing upon information gleaned from the Biographical Sketch and Timeline linked in the Background Information section.

Step Five: If your students are already familiar with Fannie Lou Hamer and have a general understanding of her historical significance, then you can distribute excerpts from the transcript of the trial: [The United States of America v. Earle Wayne Patridge, Thomas J. Herod, Jr., William Surrell, John L. Basinger, and Charles Thomas Perkins](#), wherein Basinger and other law enforcement officers are accused of allegedly beating Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer and other members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Winona, Mississippi in June of 1963.

Step Six: Demonstrate how to “inspect” facts using textual evidence and the assistance of a T-chart. Label the first column Claim, the second column Wheat (indicating truth), and the third column Tare (non-truth). Show students how to closely engage with the text to determine the information for each column. If possible, project excerpts from the transcripts so all students can follow along and encourage them to mark up the text by underlining and making annotations. See example of how the chart should look below.

T-Chart (Basinger 1)

Claim	Wheat	Tare
p. 643 Earlier in Basinger’s testimony, he claims that none of the prisoners resisted arrest.	Basinger’s statement of the prisoners not resisting arrest was corroborated by the testimonies of the prisoners themselves implicitly (Hamer 1; pp. 141-142); (Ponder 1; pp. 78-79); and by himself on pp. 643-644.	p. 649 Basinger claims that James West resisted arrest.

Collaborative Inquiry

Step Seven: Divide students into small groups. Instruct the groups to closely read, examine, identify, and analyze the claims made by Basinger and Hamer. Encourage the students to work together to complete T charts for each of the testimonies.

Closure

Step Eight: Direct students to reflect upon their personal observations, thoughts, and emotions associated with the excerpts from the trial transcript they analyzed. Ask them further to explain why they think they feel the way that they do about this material. Then invite volunteers to share their reflections with the class.

This closure is significant for at least two reasons: (1) it encourages students to internalize and processing the information presented to them; and (2) it helps them begin to form opinions regarding Basinger and Hamer’s legacies.

Day Two

Anticipatory Set

Step One: As students enter the class, you may wish to center their attention on today’s focus: Fannie Lou Hamer. You can do so by playing songs from the Songs My Mother Taught Me, Smithsonian Folkways Album (selected songs are available on YouTube and linked in the Provided Materials section above).

Guided Practice

Step Two: Explain that the focus of today’s lesson will be on assessing Fannie Lou Hamer’s legacy. To do so, the class will analyze two sources (1) Thomas A. Johnson’s obituary of Fannie Lou Hamer and (2) Mississippi Public Broadcasting’s video, “Fannie Lou Hamer@ISSUE” (27 minutes) OR Fannie Lou Hamer’s America “Centennial Tribute” (4 minutes)—depending on the time you have to devote to this session.

Step Three: Distribute and explain the National Archives’ “Analyzing a Written Document” worksheet. Also, distribute copies and/or project Johnson’s obituary of Fannie Lou Hamer.

Independent Practice

Step Four: Circulate as students read and analyze Johnson’s obituary of Hamer. Remind them that they will be asked to share their findings in a class discussion following their analysis.

Discussion

Step Five: Pose large questions to engender student discussion: how does Johnson’s obituary of Fannie Lou Hamer begin to construct her legacy? What about her life does it emphasize? Are there important aspects of her life that it overlooks? Ask what other insights students gained from their analysis of the obituary.

Guided Practice

Step Six: Transition to considering a more contemporary artifact that is contributing to the construction of Hamer’s legacy. Show students the Mississippi Public Broadcasting “Fannie Lou Hamer@ISSUE” episode. Preview this episode by explaining that the video provides biographical information about Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer from the point of view of scholars and fellow civil rights activists and that it was released in honor of Fannie Lou Hamer’s 100th Birthday. If time does not permit to show this nearly thirty minute video, you can show the four minute Centennial Tribute, which was also released in honor of Fannie Lou Hamer’s 100th Birthday.

Step Seven: Distribute and explain the National Archives’ “Analyze a Video” worksheet. Encourage students to take notes on this worksheet while watching the video.

Closure

Step Eight: Return to the large questions you posed when asking students to analyze Hamer’s obituary, now asking the group to consider: how does this video of Fannie Lou Hamer construct her legacy? What about her life does it emphasize? Are there important aspects of her life that it overlooks? Ask what other insights students gained from their analysis of the video. And close with a discussion of if and how these sources have changed their developing assessment of Fannie Lou Hamer’s character.

The Great Divide Debate: Days Three, Four, and Five

Anticipatory Set

Step One: The focus for this day’s lesson will be on assessing Officer John Basinger’s legacy. Share that we will do this by reading and analyzing two articles written about his legacy (1) “Brothers Create Scholarship” and (2) “Endless Generosities.” To begin, provide students with five minutes to reflect in writing on what they learned about Basinger on Day 1 of this unit. Invite several students to share their reflections with the class; record their observations on the board.

Guided Practice

Step Two: Distribute the article, “Brothers Create Scholarship,” and two copies of the National Archives’ “Analyze a Written Document”

per student. Ask students to first read the “Brothers Create Scholarship” article and then, as a class and with the National Archives’ document, work through the analysis of the article together. Return to the previous day’s big questions, asking them now about Basinger: how does this article about Basinger construct his legacy? What about his life does it emphasize? Are there important aspects of his life that it overlooks?

Independent Application

Step Three: Distribute the article “Endless Generosities” and ask students to read and complete their second “Analyze a Written Document” worksheet based on their engagement with this article.

Discussion

Step Four: Divide the students into small groups and ask them to consider the same set of large questions, now based on the “Endless Generosities” article: how does this article about Basinger construct his legacy? What about his life does it emphasize? Are there important aspects of his life that it overlooks?

Step Five: Reconvene as a large group and ask students to report what character traits were emphasized in the two articles they read and analyzed about Basinger. Record these on the board next to the initial traits and observations they made at the beginning of the session. Note the clear division concerning Basinger’s character and legacy.

Teacher Input/Day 3 Closure

Step Six: Remind students of the opening “wheat” and “tare” exercise they engaged in on the first day of this unit. And remind them that they have been engaging in this primary source analysis to become inspectors. Based upon their analysis, students must take a stance in response to the question: is Officer John Basinger a “wheat” or a “tare”?

Find Your Voice Highlights

Through the process of primary source analysis and in the face of competing claims, students will be encouraged to develop an opinion on a controversial issue and argue for one side. Students will also consider the merits of the opposing side and reflect on the complexity of public memory.

Step Seven: Split the class into two teams and assign one team to argue that Basinger should be remembered as a “wheat,” someone who nourished Mississippi.

Assign the other team the opposing view, Basinger should be remembered as a “tare” someone who caused great injury. During the following session, students will reconvene and collaboratively construct their case. Consider assigning as homework that each student review their notes and come to class with arguments and evidence in support of their case.

Day Four/Step Eight: Review the Great Divide Debate Assignment and provide students with a working class session to collaboratively construct their cases and to nominate two speakers from each side.

Day Five/Step Nine: For the Great Divide Debate, distribute and explain the Read, Write, Think Debate Rubric. Ask the students who are not speaking during the debate to use this rubric and take notes about each of the four speakers.

Step Ten: Provide each team with two opportunities to speak. A representative from Team Wheat goes first, speaking for four minutes. A representative from Team Tare goes second, speaking for four minutes. Provide a working break from the debate, wherein each side can consider the other’s arguments and collaboratively decide how to respond during their final speech. After the break, Team Wheat provides a two-minute rebuttal and then Team Tare provides the final two minute speech.

Closure

Step Eleven: After the debate, ask students to provide feedback, based upon the rubric, to their peers.

Step Twelve: Engage in a larger concluding discussion about the contested nature of public memory. You might raise questions, such as: How can there be compelling arguments on each side of this debate? How do we determine (is it possible to determine?) the truth in this instance? Whose truth would this be? Does John Basinger’s legacy impact Fannie Lou Hamer’s legacy? If so, why? How?

Assessment of Student Learning: Student learning is assessed at multiple points during this five-day unit. First, students will create T charts based upon their close reading of testimonies from a federal trial transcript. Next, students will complete worksheets based on their analysis of written documents and videos. Further, students will collaboratively create oral arguments for and against a proposition. Finally, student participation in this unit can be assessed through their engagement in multiple reflection discussions.

Lesson Plan Author: Mrs. Latasha S. Rodgers, Ed.S.

Mrs. Latasha S. Rodgers, Ed.S., is a seventeen-year veteran educator from Greenville, Mississippi. She has taught elementary, middle school, and high school English/Language Arts courses in both urban and rural school districts. Mrs. Rodgers believes in teaching the whole child and is very passionate about promoting self-directed learning as well as critical thinking. Over the years, Mrs. Rodgers has won numerous awards for her excellence in teaching and has been a mentor, faculty advisor, teacher consultant, professional development coordinator and lead teacher.

