Freedom’s Song: 100 Years of African-American struggle and triumph

The documentary film, Freedom’s Song: 100 years of African-American struggle and triumph, highlights significant milestones in the history of the African-American experience during the past century. It includes living testimonials designed to put a personal face on the actual historical events featured in the film. The Freedom’s Song package is free to educators and includes a DVD copy of the film, engaging and thought-provoking lesson plans and an interactive web site that will be continually updated with audio and video content. This roundtable will highlight the curriculum and use the DVD to illuminate culturally responsive curriculum.

The package appears to be a curriculum guide with a companion DVD, but it is really an invitation to join a unique educational partnership. By implementing this curriculum in classrooms, teachers will be making an essential contribution to the quest for educational excellence.

The Curriculum Design Team in the College of Education at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS) designed the Freedom’s Song curriculum using the national standards of the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) and the culturally responsive teaching framework of Dr. Geneva Gay. In collaboration with the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) and Farmers Insurance Group, it has been our goal to provide classroom teachers with teaching materials that combine the most current historical scholarship and the most effective methods of instruction in a package that can be easily implemented in the classroom.

According to Gay, a Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Washington, culturally responsive teaching can be described as, “using the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of students who are ethnically diverse to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them.” Gay adds that the goal of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) “is to give meaning to diversity without hierarchy.” Research has shown that CRT can be an
effective tool for delivering instruction to students of varied cultural backgrounds and cognitive abilities.

The UCCS Curriculum Design Team, all of who are former educators, reviewed middle and high school history textbooks and identified one pivotal event for each decade of the 20th Century that was either omitted from textbooks or marginally addressed. They designed 10 lesson plans-- one per decade-- and a companion DVD. Each lesson plan is culturally responsive and provides activities that are differentiated for learners with diverse cognitive abilities. Moreover, these lesson plans incorporate interdisciplinary multicultural information, resources, and materials that will spark the genius of all students and enable them to more accurately celebrate United States history.

Following the vision of its founder, the noted historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson, ASALH has worked for more than 90 years to rectify the longstanding neglect and misrepresentation of African American history reflected in the textbooks, curriculum, and in the canon of United States history. This curriculum package is the latest panoply of distinctive resources for educators that ASALH provides. That panoply includes the Black History Bulletin, its journal for classroom teachers, the Journal of African American History, and its annual Black History Month Resource kits.

As the underwriter of this project, Farmers Insurance has, once again, demonstrated its ongoing commitment to strengthening communities by providing educators with a powerful resource that will benefit children of all backgrounds.

This roundtable will highlight the use of the DVD (multimedia) with the curriculum in classrooms for secondary classrooms as well as social studies methods classrooms at colleges of education. You will also be given details on how to get your free copy of the Freedom’s Song package which includes the DVD, curriculum with 10 lesson plans, timelines, and resources.