

Ida B. Wells and the Long Crusade to Outlaw Lynching



Lesson Plan: **Ida B. Wells and the Long Crusade to Outlaw Lynching**

Overview: Born into slavery, Ida B. Wells later became an educator, an investigative journalist and an early civil rights activist, shedding light on the plight of Black Americans across the South. After the brutal deaths of three friends who were victims of lynching, Wells began chronicling mob violence, publishing her findings in articles and pamphlets. The American public eventually became less tolerant of lynching, in part because of the awareness created by Wells and the N.A.A.C.P., which she helped to establish. But efforts to pass federal antilynching legislation did not succeed until 2022, in the wake of nationwide protests over police killings of Black Americans.

Subjects: English Language Arts, Civics & Government, U.S. History

- English Language Arts – students will be writing and acting as an investigative journalist
- Civics & Government – students will be analyzing the federal antilynching law
- U.S. History – students will be discussing periods of history, including the Reconstruction era

Grade Level: 9-12

Lesson Duration:

- 1-3 classes (of a traditional 45-60 minute class period).

Essential Questions:

- What happened during and after the Reconstruction period? Why were Black Americans targets of violence?
- How did Ida B. Wells and others advocate for an antilynching law?
- What steps were taken to pass an antilynching law? Why did it take a long time?
- What can individuals do to address racial hatred and violence in America?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Explore the work Ida B. Wells did as an investigative journalist and activist, and her efforts to outlaw lynching.
- Articulate a comprehensive understanding of the federal antilynching law.
- Examine the role of investigative journalists and the impact that individuals can have in society.

Materials:

- Retro Report film “[Ida B. Wells and the Long Crusade to Outlaw Lynching](#)” ([Transcript](#))
- [Student Activity](#) handout
- [Southern Violence During Reconstruction](#) | American Experience
- Equal Justice Initiative: Reconstruction in America
 - [Racial Violence During Reconstruction, 1865-1876](#)
 - [Racial Terror and Reconstruction: A State Snapshot](#)

- [“Red Record of Lynching Map”](#) | National Archives
- [Emmett Till antilynching Law text](#) | Congress.gov
- [Remarks by President Biden at signing ceremony](#) | WhiteHouse.gov

Procedure:

1. Have students examine the following quote and respond with what it means to them and examples of how they have experienced this in their own lives:
 - a. “The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.”
2. Next, students will use two resources to gain background knowledge about the Reconstruction era in U.S. history, along with the use of lynching as a tool of violence and intimidation.
 - a. [Southern Violence During Reconstruction](#) | American Experience
 - i. Students should read the short passages from historians and answer the questions provided.
 - b. Students will use two links from the Equal Justice Initiative: Reconstruction in America website to gain information about how violence was used during the era.
 - i. [Figure 1: Racial Violence During Reconstruction, 1865-1876](#)
 - ii. [Racial Terror and Reconstruction: A State Snapshot](#)
3. Introduce the film and tell students that as they watch, they should think about how they would craft their response to the following essential question:
 - a. There were more than 200 attempts to pass a federal antilynching law before 2022. Why did it take so long?
4. Have students answer the provided questions that accompany the film. You might want to stop and allow time for students to write their responses or discuss them at strategic points throughout the film.
 - a. Depending on the method you use to view the film, students may need to watch it twice.
5. Next, students will analyze one of the primary sources in the film, the [“Red Record of Lynching Map.”](#)
 - a. This can be done as a large group, in small groups or with students on their own.
 - b. For younger students, the teacher may want to go through the first question with the class. There are several numbers and different colors on this map, and it can be difficult to decipher.
6. Students will then return to their responses to the questions from the film to craft their answer to the essential question:
 - a. There were more than 200 attempts to pass a federal antilynching law before 2022. Why did it take so long?
 - b. Make sure they know to use evidence presented to them from the film and other provided resources in their response.
7. Allow your students to read and analyze the Emmett Till Antilynching Act and an excerpt from President Biden’s speech at the signing ceremony.
 - a. Students are directed to summarize the law, and to ask additional questions and hypothesize about the potential impact of the law.

Extension Activity:

1. Ask students to reflect on Michelle Duster’s quote, “One person can make a difference... justice is worth fighting for.”

- a. Students can analyze examples of contemporary racial violence and intimidation.
 - b. Then have students respond to the prompt: “What can individuals do to address racial hatred and violence in America?”
 - c. This Extension Activity is included on the existing student activity sheet.
2. Introduce students to the Equal Justice Initiative and its museums:
- a. [The Legacy Museum](#) chronicles the Black experience from slavery to contemporary oppression and racial prejudice.
 - b. [The National Memorial for Peace and Justice](#) in Montgomery, Ala., tells the story of over 4,400 Black people killed in lynchings in the United States.
3. Identify a local N.A.A.C.P. chapter in your area, and invite them to speak to your class or student organization. Prepare a presentation about the accomplishments of the local N.A.A.C.P. or other civil rights organizations in your community.
- a. [N.A.A.C.P.: Working in Your Region](#)

Relevant Standards/ Frameworks:

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies

- D2.Civ.3.9-12. Analyze the impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, and international agreements on the maintenance of national and international order
- D2.Civ.5.9-12. Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.
- D2.Civ.12.9-12. Analyze how people use and challenge local, state, national, and international laws to address a variety of public issues.
- D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
- D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

Common Core Literacy Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

About the Author:

Dr. Shelina Warren is an award-winning social studies teacher, instructional coach and academy director at a public high school in Washington.