Teaching Abolition in the Classroom

Companion Curriculum to

*Enough is Enough!* MPD150 Report
How-to-Use Guide

Summary and rationale

TWIN CITIES, MN - Education is always a political act. When we enshrine textbooks or other curricula as “objective,” we obscure the decisions that went into determining which stories matter enough to be included. We offer this companion curriculum to MPD150’s history of the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) because it matters and is relevant to our lives. We believe the report stands as a critical counter-narrative to the dominant story about the role of police in our communities and that it is imperative to bring that counter-narrative into our classrooms.

This curriculum was developed in the summer of 2020 after a group of educators and students came together around the realization that the murder of George Floyd and the ensuing uprising was too central to be ignored in our classrooms the following fall. All of our lives were deeply impacted. We refuse to return to our previously scheduled programming. We created it as a tool for processing students’ experiences and understandings of police murder, the Minneapolis uprising and the national movement for Black liberation. It is grounded in the voices of Minneapolis residents demanding community safety and justice.

In our weekly meetings, we have found solace, reprieve and inspiration at a time when so many of us feel pushed past our limits. Because of this, we believe that learning our past and listening to one another is the vital enterprise to engender a shift away from reaction and towards empowerment. This is the gift we aim to offer classroom communities - the chance to center empowerment. Like the report teaches us, when we lay out the map of where we’ve been, where we are and where we’re going, we permit ourselves the following; the space to choose, the freedom to pace ourselves and the beauty to arrive in all our moments with our whole selves intact. We are not here to ‘save the day,’ instead, we are here to build the capacity and community and dreams that fruit true equality...with you. Thank you for joining.

“We hope this curriculum travels far & wide and is adapted to fit its new environment.”
How to use this curriculum guide

As educators and learners, we recognize that utilizing a curriculum means making choices that respond to our learning communities. By design, this is a “mix & match” curriculum with options to help you decide which activities to use in your setting. We have developed four mini-units corresponding to Social Studies and English/Language Arts classes at the middle school and high school levels. These mini-units can be taught as part of interdisciplinary studies, as stand-alone units, or as part of in-depth studies of the prison industrial complex, community safety, or racial justice.

The mini-units are intended to provide a framing and application of abolitionist theory. The three lessons in each mini-unit correspond to sections of the MPD150 report, *Enough is Enough*. The first lesson examines the historical context of the 2020 Minneapolis Uprising and seeks to explore the question, “Where have we been?” The second lesson examines the contemporary relationship between Minneapolis residents and the police, considering “Where we’re at.” The third lesson considers the future of policing in Minneapolis and the country, asking, “Where are we going?”

This curriculum addresses police violence and murder, as well as interpersonal and systemic racism. These key issues impact students differently based on their actual or perceived race, class, sexuality, gender and other aspects of identity. Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ people and unhoused people routinely experience risk of harm in police interactions. The MPD has a documented pattern of racist violence towards Black and Native people especially. Educators, particularly white educators, have the responsibility to acknowledge and hold space for traumatic experiences relating to police, and work to establish practices (for example, conversation protocols and affinity spaces) so that students can more safely share and process their experiences in addition to accessing this content as they are able, at the pace they set. For this reason, learners and educators should intentionally establish norms for discussion and listening.

We hope this curriculum is used to highlight the empowering pursuit of co-creating visions of community safety and not just to tell stories of harm and violence. In this way, we intend for the classroom to become an authentic space of abolitionist practice where a classroom community will work together to take care of each member honorably.
How to use the mini-units & appendices

- Each mini-unit includes three lessons. They are split into a “warm up,” an “activity,” and a “closing.” For a 55-minute class period, we suggest allocating 10 minutes for the warm up, 40 minutes for the activity and 5 minutes for the closing. Each lesson may take more than one class period, depending on which options you choose.
- While the MPD150 report is the central text of the curriculum, each “warm up,” “activity,” and “closing” includes additional resources and activities. Outside resources are hyperlinked in the document.
- With longer class sessions or additional asynchronous learning time, we imagine that these lessons could be taught in a minimum of three days. However, we recommend giving each lesson at least two or three days, and encourage educators to consider turning these lessons into a longer unit of study.
- All lessons were designed for the grade levels noted in the mini-unit title. For example, ‘high school’ means 9-12th. However, most activities can easily be adapted to middle school, out of school or higher education settings as well.
- Opportunities for formative assessment and student reflection are woven into each mini-unit.
- Each mini-unit is aligned to MN State Standards, Common Core ELA Standards and the C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards. These standards are listed in Appendix BL. The BL stands for ‘Black Lives,’ in tribute to the BLM movement.
- Additional activity options are included in Appendix M. The M stands for ‘Matter,’ to tribute the BLM movement.

Icon system

As educators and learners, we recognize that lesson planning requires deep consideration for how a given curriculum will play out with a particular group of students in a particular context. Racism and police violence are inherently vulnerable topics. Sharing and reflecting on these topics may not feel safe for all students, many of whom may become escalated, dysregulated, or triggered when reflecting or discussing. We know that effective teaching and learning is built on trusting relationships and the co-creation of spaces where we can be vulnerable. As you consider the options offered, reflect on how much trust your students have built with each other and with you and how much vulnerability you are asking from your students.

- □ Slow down: A yellow square denotes that the following content may not be suitable for all classroom communities/learning modalities. An educator might wish to pause, slow down and choose an activity that will best suit your classroom community. We believe the activity would be best suited to a community with a high level of trust. This can look like: Learners in the community call each other in when
microaggressions happen; shared norms developed in the learning setting provide opportunities for all voices to contribute.

- **Digital adaptation:** A magenta square denotes possible adaptations for digital learning environments or integration.

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**Youth-Centered Practices to Incorporate**

**Embodied Practice:** Throughout these lessons, we encourage educators to consider/continue using embodied practice with their classes. This can look like physical movement as part of the lesson time, physical interpretations or expressions related to the content such as tableaus and/or body scans.

**Setting Norms:** Students are often more receptive to classroom norms if they have the opportunity to create them.

One way to establish classroom norms is to create a simple T-chart with "Rights" on the left and "Responsibilities" on the right. Students work in small groups to brainstorm what rights they have in the classroom ("I have the right to be safe, I have the right to express myself, I have the right to learn," etc.) Once those are established to their satisfaction, the class decides what responsibilities we all have in the space if those rights are to be protected. (For example, for "I have the right to be safe,": "We will choose our words carefully and avoid harmful language," "We will use classroom materials safely," etc.) At the end of the process, the educator may synthesize the brainstorm (if there are any non-negotiables that have been left out, this is the time to add them!) and ask for consensus. Finally, ask each class member to sign.

Educators should also consider best practices for themselves as they hold space for students. Consider:

- At the beginning of the unit, establish the protocol for either affinity spaces, healing spaces, or visits with a trusted adult for students who are triggered by topics in the curriculum.
- Interrogate your own identity and potential biases. Stay reflective and open to feedback about how these biases may be showing up in your practice.
- Avoid putting students on the spot. Do not "cold call" during these lessons, but only call on students who have volunteered to share. Find alternative ways to hear from students who are not comfortable sharing in front of the class: writing, partner conversations, one-on-one meetings with you, etc.

**Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Project (for larger unit):** One way to use this curriculum is to kick off a year-long YPAR project for your
class. You would support students with learning and defining theory, community and trust. This would look different for each class depending on what questions are coming up for students, what conversations are happening in your school and neighborhoods and what kinds of relationships exist or need to be built in the class. For an introduction and many resources to support this work, check out UC Berkeley’s YPAR Hub.

Questions to consider:

- What is the school community asking or wanting to learn more about?
- What could be taught or shared with other grades and classes?

This could be explored by students thinking about their physical neighborhoods, or defining digital community safety.

**Overarching Compelling Questions**

- How does knowing a history help us understand current events?
- How does racism manifest in social institutions?
- What role has the police department played in the Minneapolis community?
- When is an institution “unreformable”?
- How can people keep one another safe and hold one another accountable?
- What keeps people safe?

**Enduring Understandings**

- Students will understand the historical and contemporary context of structural racism within the MPD.
- Students will understand the reasons why Minneapolis community members are demanding that the police department be abolished.
- Students will understand that communities have the potential to develop community safety structures that do not include the Minneapolis Police Department.

**Enduring Skills**

- Students will identify patterns of government response to community issues.
- Students will use historical thinking and research to contextualize a current problem.
- Students will analyze the evidence and reasoning used to develop the central claim of a non-fiction text.
- Students will use action research methods to gather and interpret multiple perspectives on a local issue and design evidence-based responses to that issue.
- Students will share their perspectives and learn to take other perspectives that they haven’t considered before.
It is with gratitude and celebration that this group was able to support the work of the MPD150 report & website creators.

In solidarity,
-the authors
*Lesson 1 - The Past*

**Time needed:** 1 to 3 class periods.

**Lesson Overview:**
In this lesson, students reflect and revisit their experience of the summer of 2020, and discuss the Movement for Black Lives. They read the “Intro” and “Where We’ve Been” sections of the MPD150 report as an example of historical research. Materials and resources are hyperlinked in the lesson plan.

**Compelling Questions:**
- How does knowing a history help us understand current events?

**Enduring Understandings:**
- Students will understand the historical and present context of structural racism within the MPD.

**Enduring Skills:**
- Students will use historical thinking and research to contextualize current events.

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**Warm-up**

**Option 1:**
Show “How Black Lives Matter Reached Every Corner of America.” Invite students to respond to the following prompts in their journals: What do you see? What does that tell you about what is happening in the US and happened this summer? What does it make you remember about what happened and is happening in the Twin Cities? In your own words, what is BLM all about?

**Option 2:**
Show article [11] / stills from video [21]. Invite students to respond to the following prompts in their learning journals: In the United States this summer, a police precinct was burned down by citizens, many of them youth. What historical factors do you think led to this event?

Possible images to show during journaling:
- [Welcome to MPLS] / [George Floyd by Shirien Damra]

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**Icon key:**
- □ slow down  □ digital adaptation
Activity

Show: "Understanding the Past, Unlocks the Future" Kmart, July 2020. Introduce MPD150 as they define themselves and the report as a document of study. Briefly note when the report was made, and how it is available to the public.

Discuss: Based on the image and report, invite learners to think about why history can be an important lens to understand current events. Do you agree that understanding the past unlocks the future? Why or why not? What are the limits of this claim?

Further questions for discussion:
- When do you start a history?
- Whose stories do you tell?
- How is time represented (linear, circular, by year or season)?

Read or listen to the “Past” section of the MPD150 report. If students read this in class, it will likely take at least two class periods.

☐ Students can read the report independently or in small groups and upload a photo of their annotations, or create a shared document with vocabulary words and questions.

Focus on vocabulary: Invite students who have finished reading/listening to investigate 3-5 terms that they circled. Encourage students to “deep dive” into the root words, common/contemporary usage, dictionary definitions, and their own interpretation of each word. Have students capture their learning with posters for the words they chose.

Focus on vocabulary: Invite students who have finished reading/listening to investigate 3-5 terms that they circled. Encourage students to “deep dive” into the root words, common/contemporary usage, dictionary definitions, and their own interpretation of each word. Have students capture their learning with posters for the words they chose.

Review Terms: Historical Perspectives, Primary Sources, and Research Methods (Historiography, Qualitative + Quantitative Data).

☐ Small groups can make a quick digital mind-map for each term, or look up a definition and cite it in a shared slideshow.

Discuss: How is the MPD150 report research? What is research? Who does research?

Closing

Brainstorm: What is a possible research question or project about policing in America?
Introduce Homework: Answer the following prompt in your learning journal: What is the main idea of the "Past" section of the MPD150 report? Write three historical events that stand out to you from this section, using annotation skills.

option Students can fill out a document analysis form to help them understand aspects of the MPD150 report as a historical document.

option Extension resource: Invite students to listen to the podcast from NPR’s Throughline, American Police.

*Lesson 2 - The Present*

Time needed: 2-3 class periods.

Lesson Overview:
In this lesson, students build on their previous reading of the history of the Minneapolis Police by comparing the MPD150 report to the narrative displayed on the Minneapolis Police Department’s website. They engage with the “Present” section of the MPD150 report to practice identifying a central claim in a text and evidence that supports the claim.

Compelling Questions:
- How does racism manifest in social institutions?
- When is an institution “unreformable”?

Enduring Understandings:
- Students will understand the historical and present context of structural racism within the MPD.

Enduring skills:
- Students will use historical thinking and research to contextualize current events.
- Students will analyze the evidence and reasoning used to develop the central claim of a non-fiction text.
- Students will identify patterns of government response to community issues.
- Students will share their perspectives and learn to take other perspectives that they haven’t considered before.

Warm-up

Introduce and watch Tim Jenkins’ history of policing (90 secs). Hold a short discussion about the video, using the following prompts:
- According to Mr. Jenkins, what is the police mission to “protect and serve” all about?
• What words or events would you want to learn more about?
• What connections are there between Mr. Jenkins’ explanation of the history of policing and what we have read in the MPD150 report?

Activity

Create a class timeline: Invite students to add three events from the “Past” section that they pulled out for homework to a class timeline, starting in 1862 – present. For in-person learning, this activity can be completed on sticky notes placed on a class chart.

Note: MPD150’s website includes a digital timeline that educators may wish to access for comparison.

- The timeline could be created on a Padlet template.

Analyze patterns: Invite students to draw out patterns in the history by defining and then identifying examples of the following key terms: reform, riot, commission report. This can be done by physically categorizing and stacking sticky notes, or color-coding entries on the Padlet timeline.

Discuss the patterns that emerge, using the following prompts as suggestions:
• What are some significant events in the history of the MPD?
• How have people responded when there is a problem? How has the city/government responded?
• How has the MPD responded?
• What has changed over time, and what hasn’t?

Share MPD History from their website. Invite students to compare the MPD’s history to the MPD150 report, using some of the following prompts:
• What is the perspective taken here?
• What kinds of events were considered important in this telling of history?
• How is it different from what you learned in the MPD150 report?
• What questions do you still have?

- To scaffold comparisons, small groups of students could use a digital Venn diagram to compare and contrast information included in the different documents.

Invite students to journal on the following questions:
• What do you think the role of police is?
• When, and from whom, did you first learn about the police and their role?
• How have your experiences with police impacted your thinking and/or how has your participation in this unit impacted your thinking?

In small groups, students can share stories based on their responses.
Closing

**Introduce Homework:** Ask students to continue reading and listening to the “Present” section of the report. They can respond to the following prompts in their journals:
- Choose 1-3 sentences that you think is the claim/thesis of the MPD150 report based upon their research and findings.
- What is one piece of evidence supporting MPD150’s claim that stands out to you?

**Reflective Journal Prompt:** What is your initial reaction to the claim of the MPD150 report [i.e. that the MPD cannot be reformed]? What questions do you have?

*Lesson 3 - The Future*

**Time needed:** 2-3 class periods.

**Lesson Overview:**
In this lesson, students discuss solutions to the problem of police violence. The lesson focuses on two approaches: reform and abolition. Students engage with the “Future” section of the MPD150 report, and discuss the role of interviews in historical research. They brainstorm ideas for community safety in the future. In closing, students reflect on the unit and choose an option for an action project.

**Compelling Questions:**
- What role has the police department played in the Minneapolis community?
- What keeps people safe?

**Enduring Understandings:**
- Students will understand the reasons why Minneapolis community members are demanding that the police department be abolished.
- Students will understand that communities have the potential to develop community safety structures that do not include the Minneapolis Police Department.

**Enduring skills:**
- Students will use historical thinking and research to contextualize current events.
- Students will analyze the evidence and reasoning used to develop the central claim of a non-fiction text.
- Students will identify patterns of government response to community issues.
- Students will share their perspectives and learn to take other perspectives that they haven't considered before.
- Students will use action research methods to gather and interpret multiple perspectives on a local issue and design evidence-based responses to that issue.
Warm-up

**Journal:** Think of a time when you felt safe. Draw or write about it. What did it feel like in your body? What helped you to feel safe?

Activity

**Revisit central claim:** Students write the sentences that they chose as the claim / thesis of the MPD150 Report onto sticky notes (DL: padlet).

**Review class responses:** What were the similarities? Differences? Have students try to collectively together in their own words paraphrase the report’s central claim / thesis.

**Review** interviews as primary source + evidence.
- Why are interviews / primary sources important when conducting research?
- What considerations does a researcher have to take when using interviews in their evidence?
- What does this kind of research value?

**Discuss:** In small groups, ask students to return to the purpose of the MPD150 report, using the following prompts and their timeline and notes for reference:
- According to the MPD150 report, what is the problem with the police in Minneapolis? How do the interviews in the report provide evidence that there is a problem?
- Who is impacted by this problem? How do the interviews in the report provide evidence for who is impacted?
- What solutions have been proposed to deal with this problem?
- What have been the consequences of these solutions?
- Given this context, how do we keep our communities safe?

**Explain:** Today we are going to be looking at current proposals to deal with the problem of police violence and the impacts of structural racism. There have been two primary approaches you may have heard about in the media this summer: reform, and abolition.

If needed, invite students to define the two terms through mind-mapping, etymology and dictionary research, or other vocabulary practices.

**Read** together *“Cities Ask if it’s Time to Defund Police and ‘Reimagine’ Public Safety”.*

**Questions for discussion:**
- What was the perspective of the writer(s) [reform or abolition]? Why do you think they were advocating for this position?
- What was some of their evidence for what they believed would be the best for community safety?
- Think about your personal vision for safety. How do you feel in your body when you consider the writer’s proposal?

**Jigsaw:** Students choose an article about the debate on modern police reform and abolition to read in pairs or small groups [1] [2] [3] [4] or see other options from MPD150’s Resources page.

**Questions for discussion:**
- What was the perspective of the writer(s) or interviewee(s) [reform or abolition]? Why do you think they were advocating for this position?
- What was some of their evidence for what they believed would be the best for community safety?
- Think about your personal vision for safety. How do you feel in your body when you consider the writer’s proposal?

**Review** MPD150’s “10 Actions for a Police-Free Future.” Consider school-wide, local, state, national scale of action.

**Discuss:** While the Minneapolis Charter Commission has put the City Council’s current proposal to change the city charter on hold, it is likely that the debate over policing in Minneapolis will continue. Based on their research and discussions with community members, MPD150 has created ideas for what a future without police could look like. Look at these ideas. How do they fit into your vision of community safety?

**Closing Project idea:**
Students write their own newspaper editorials based on what they think would make their community and city safer. Make sure to share and give feedback.

**Closing Project idea:**
- Students in small groups or as a class come up with action research project questions based upon what they have learned and embark on their own research related to community safety for their school, neighborhood, city.

This might include revisiting policies for discipline at the school, or learning more about other schools and their responses to School Resource Officers (see Curriculum Introduction: How to Use This Unit for more ideas about YPAR)

**Closing Project idea:**
What is the current conversation on policing in your city? Your school?
Your neighborhood and block? Students can learn more about the Minneapolis charter amendment and organizations advocating for policy change: [1] [2]

**Closing**

**Freewrite response to study of policing:** [show image] by Nikki Ann.

- Looking back at your older journal entries, what have you learned that you didn’t know before? What has changed? What in your thinking has stayed the same?
- If you could research anything further about this topic, what would you research?

**Reminder — Standards & More**

- MN State Standards and Common Core Standards are included as Appendix BL. The BL stands for ‘Black Lives,’ to tribute the BLM movement.
- More activity options are included as Appendix M. The M stands for ‘Matter,’ to tribute the BLM movement.

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