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.

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
Teaching Abolition in the Classroom
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Enough is Enough! MPD150 Report
Middle School English Mini-Unit
3 Lessons - past, present, future

*Lesson 1 - “Where We’ve Been”*

Time needed: 2 to 3 class periods.

Lesson Overview:
In this lesson, students reflect and revisit their experience of the summer of 2020. They co-create a collective understanding of what happened by interviewing each other and then identifying important or common themes in their interviews.

Compelling Questions:
- How do our memories and experiences become a part of history?

Enduring Understandings:
- Students will recognize that they are agents of history.
- Students will understand collective experiences of themselves and their classmates as the context for the study of policing.

Enduring Skills:
- Students will tell their stories and memories, elaborating on key details.
- Students will listen actively, asking “tell me more” questions to learn as much as they can from their interviewees.
- Students will identify patterns and key ideas that emerge from their oral histories.

Warm-up

**Prompted Writing**
Brainstorm what you remember about George Floyd’s death and the protests that came after.

Share Thoughts
Invite students to share their thoughts with a neighbor (they don’t have to read their writing, just share a few thoughts related to the questions, or listen to a neighbor).

*Icon key:* □ = digital adaptation
Consider using tools such as Padlet, Talkwall, or Jamboard for a digital version of this activity.

If appropriate to your context (your school is in Minneapolis):

**Circle Discussion**
Where were you & what do you remember from the time of George Floyd’s death and the uprising. (while talking, have students look at & put pins on a map of the Twin Cities; discuss places they went, what they witnessed, what they heard about).

**Activity**

**Oral history**
Students interview each other about their memories of May/June 2020.

Students may interview a friend or family member instead of a student in class, or conduct phone or Zoom interviews with a classmate of their choice.

**Closing**

**Identify themes**
Students write key words/themes/ideas from their interviews on four large chart papers (one for each question) posted around the room.

Students write key words/themes/ideas from their interviews on a padlet divided into four sections (one for each question)

*Lesson 2 - “How We Got Here”*

Time needed: 2-3 class periods.

Lesson Overview:
In this lesson, dig into the MPD 150 report. Continuing with the skill of identifying patterns and themes in text, they work together to categorize the report’s findings and draw conclusions based on the patterns they identify.

Compelling Questions:
- What role has the police department played in the Minneapolis community?
- How has the relationship between the police department and the community changed (or not) over time?
Enduring Understandings:
- Students will understand the history of the Minneapolis Police Department and the failures of the many reform efforts of the past to prevent further violence and murder.

Enduring Skills:
- 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

**Gallery Walk**
Silent gallery walk to read chart paper/padlet created yesterday.

**Journal**
What big ideas or themes do you see emerge? What might this reveal about our experiences and communities?

Activity

Use a preferred reading strategy (read aloud, partner read, solo silent read, etc.) to read excerpts from the MPD 150 report.

Possible scaffolds:
- Provide different students with different excerpts, some shorter or easier to comprehend, others more complex and have them share what they read with their mixed-ability group
- Use clips of the [audio](https://example.com/audio) recording for students to follow along as they read
- Pre-teach vocabulary or provide a glossary

In table groups, have students cut their excerpts into individual sentences or phrases. Then, reorganize sentences under themes (police violence, community uprising, reforms). Each group shares a conclusion about one theme.

In breakout rooms, copy and paste quotes from excerpts onto Google Docs or Padlets labeled “police violence,” “community uprising,” and “reforms.”

Collaborate to create a “found poem” or “blackout poem” out of a section of the report.
### Closing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Journal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write 1-2 sentences in your journal reflecting on the report. What do you notice? What patterns do you see? What did you learn (the big takeaways) from the report? What does the report make you think about?</td>
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<th>Option</th>
<th>Share Thoughts</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Students reflect together in small groups on their understanding of the report. What patterns do we see? What did we learn? What are we thinking about now?</td>
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<th>Option</th>
<th>Share Work</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Students share part or all of their found poem or blackout poem with a small group.</td>
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### *Lesson 3 - The Future*

Time needed: 2-3 class periods.

Lesson Overview:
In this lesson, students are guided toward considering alternatives to the violent policing system under which we currently live.

**Compelling Questions:**
- What keeps people safe?
- How do people keep each other safe and hold each other accountable?

**Enduring Understandings:**
- 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 share their perspectives and learn to take other perspectives that they haven’t considered before.

### Warm-up

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<td>Review your journal writing (or poem) from the end of class yesterday. Do you think the Minneapolis Police keep the people of Minneapolis safe enough? Explain your thinking.</td>
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<th>Option</th>
<th>Journal and Share</th>
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<td>What makes you feel safe in your community? What could your community do to help everyone feel safer?</td>
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**Activity**

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<tr>
<td>Gallery Walk</td>
<td>Alternatives to policing flyers.</td>
<td>Students react on sticky notes. Students create their own “alternatives to policing” flyers, specific to their community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read</td>
<td>Read an article about a local alternatives to policing initiative, or bring in local activists to talk about work currently going on!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zoom in</td>
<td>Zoom in on discipline and punishment at your school. Ask students to design “alternatives to being sent out of class” or “alternatives to suspension” posters and share their ideas about how schools could do a better job of meeting students’ needs.</td>
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**Closing**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
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<td>Share final product (alternatives to policing flyers or alternative discipline flyers).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss Extension Questions</td>
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<td>What are the benefits of studying policing in our communities? Who needs to learn more about this? What do you want to know more about?</td>
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**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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