



# Cultural Relativism: A Lens into Civil Rights



WINTER II 2020 PROJECT

DRIVING QUESTION:

**How can we  
use Cultural  
Relativism as  
a way to view  
civil rights  
issues in the  
past and  
present?**



# Description:

Civil rights struggles have been a concept since the beginning of human existence. Equal rights, social, and political freedom are just some of the categories that we see in civil rights quarrels throughout time. In this unit, students will utilize their lens of cultural relativism, an anthropological term coined by Franz Boas (The Father of Anthropology), to analyze human rights struggles at home and around the world. Students will then utilize this background knowledge to persuade local government officials to honor a prominent author, anthropologist and civil rights activist who called Eau Gallie home.



# Community Connection:

Zora Neale Hurston, a renowned author, poet, civil rights activist and anthropologist, lived one block away from the Verdi EcoSchool in the Eau Gallie Arts District. The Eau Gallie Arts District has worked to preserve history and culture by commemorating prominent individuals through signs outside of their homesteads or historical site. Zora Neale Hurston is not one of them. Students worked to create persuasive presentations in order to convince our local government to commemorate her at the site in which she lived.

## THE EAU GALLIE ARTS DISTRICT



# **OUR PROCESS:**



Students venture through the community.

# Step 1: Empathize and Relate

Why is Cultural Relativism important? What does it mean for us? How can we relate the study of Cultural Relativism to our place?

Students were asked to explore these questions as we embarked on a journey throughout our community to recognize who was represented, who was not and why they thought that might be.

Students discovered that in our neighborhood, only wealthy men were commemorated. Women and People of Color were left out.



# Step 2: Define The Challenge

Students recognized that throughout history, women and people of color have been significantly under-served and under-represented. Zora Neale Hurston is one of them.



Zora Neale Hurston Performs The Crow  
Dance



# Step 3: Imagine and Ideate

Students imagine solutions to the challenge at hand, define what they already know and what they need to know about the challenge and potential solutions and begin planning their implementation of ideas. .



# Step 4: Create

Students begin creating their product that will address the problem at hand. In this case, students began creating their presentations that would convince our local government to commemorate Zora Neale Hurston at her home within the Eau Gallie Arts District.



Students discuss their presentation plan,  
and begin creating!





# Step 5: Implement

At the end of the term, students implemented their ideas by presenting to our local government.



# **Examples of Information used in Presentations:**



# Local Community Input Gathered via Social Media and Interviews:

"As a resident of Eau Gallie, I had no idea that Zora lived here! She is an empowering female and should be recognized for her literary, anthropological and cultural contributions to the Space Coast and beyond!"

"Zora Neale Hurston is responsible for my literary renaissance and I will forever be grateful."

"Zora was inspirational to me because she was a liminary in the Harlem Renaissance and an irreverant, opinionated woman living in a society and time that did not prize these qualities in women, let alone women of color."

"My mentor teacher had one, white male student who is goofy and athletic, take one book to college. It was Their Eyes Were Watching God. He said it was the one book that changes his life and how he looked at the world."

# Important Ideas and Facts Gathered through Research:

Through Zora Neale Hurston's anthropological works, she is responsible for preserving black history and culture that would have otherwise been lost.

Zora Neale Hurston was exceptionally educated, and took risks in order to ensure that she was constantly learning. Her mentor was Franz Boas, Father of Anthropology.

Zora Neale Hurston was a prominent Civil Rights Activist. Although criticized at the time for her approach, Zora sought to combat racism by showcasing humanity.

Although many of Zora's works were published post-humously and has received both high criticism and praise, she is regarded as one of the most inspirational African American authors of her time.

# Showcasing Art and Humanity:

Zora was a storyteller and performer. She kept history alive through her voice. Follow the link below to hear the voice of inspiration:

<https://www.loc.gov/folklife/guides/Hurston.html>

“I love myself when I am laughing. . . and then again when I am looking mean and impressive.” - Zora Neale Hurston

“Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It’s beyond me.” - Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston persevered through challenges. Not only did she fight against racism and sexism while an author, she was also fired for being "too well educated".



# Step 6: Reflect and Evolve

Students reflect on questions like:

- What went well?
- What could improve?
- How can we move forward in order to ensure that we find a resolution?
- How did we impact our community?
- How were you impacted?



Reflection.



## **THE VERDI ECOSCHOOL: AN EDUCATOR'S REFLECTION**

"This was, by far, the most powerful project we've had to date. The students dove straight into the concept of cultural relativism and absorbed themselves into the life and works of Zora Neale Hurston. The students were persuasive, analytical, and intellectual while showing true compassion and empathy surrounding civil rights issues from the past and present."

