From Cornrow Village to Corporate City I

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Abstract:

This unit, designed for use in science classes, is offered in tandem with the Life Skills Guidance designed by Karon Waters. Together the units address a transition faced by African American teenagers that we are calling “From Cornrows to Corporate.” “Cornrows” stands for a cultural and social way of being with distinctly African roots. In my unit, we explore differences and similarities across the African diaspora in three arenas for artistic self-expression: hair styles, food, and music. All three areas are linked to the health of body, spirit, and community life, but each allows ample room for historically contingent styles of expression. The close integration of art and life is in keeping with core African values, and places people who hold those values at odds with the principles of Western civilization that carve life up into separate spheres for art, family, work, religion, business and community. As Sterling Stuckey describes the process in *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundation of Black America*, “coming from cultures in which work and art were united so completely that any notion of art for art’s sake lacked meaning, Africans in North America created while working, as they had done before. For all the comparative leisure available to whites, the African used his imagination to reflect on life in the new land with an originality sufficient to bring indigenous artistic forms into being.”

This unit emphasizes an empirical approach to self-discovery for the diverse African American population at University City High School. Exploring the cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds of students, this unit challenges them to research and further define who they really are, relying on empirical methods.

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