

Lesson

25



The Souls of Black Folk

by W. E. B. DuBois

PURPOSE

Today's lesson takes on the topic of competition while encouraging students to take apart an argument that is not made explicit in the text.

Students will:

- Complete an argument only outlined by the author.
- Generate their own reasons for a particular result or conclusion.
- Discuss different forms of competition.

INTRODUCTION

All students, whether they like it or not, have engaged in and will continue to engage in a great deal of competitive activity. It seems to be a necessary part of life—particularly in modern industrial and technological societies. And, regardless of whether we like it or not, some competition is socially useful even though other kinds are harmful and destructive. Sometimes competition is said to bring out the best in people. Sometimes, as we all know, it can bring out the worst. But it is often far from clear which forms of competition bring out the best and which result merely in destructive conflict. This text and lesson will encourage the students to raise this issue explicitly in the individual work, the small group work, and the discussion as well.

The book from which today's text is taken was published in 1903, and is now a recognized classic of sociology. DuBois was an influential sociologist and social theorist. The book is a study of the social, cultural, and economic conditions of African Americans in the South, with special emphasis on relations between the races. His main purpose here is to provide inspiration and guidance for the full integration of the races, which he thought must happen for the survival of the nation. A Northerner himself, he thought that the South would be the focus of these changes.

The passage presented here comes from a section in which DuBois proposes to describe the various ways in which African-Americans and whites are brought into contact with one another. What he describes as the forms of contact would hold for any two groups of people. He knows that these contacts will not all be cooperative and friendly, and that they will often involve direct competition. He wishes to focus this competition on socially useful ends, and away from selfish and harmful ones. As part of his analysis, he presents a list of ways in which human beings come into contact with one another. This list claims to be comprehensive. In each type of social contact, competition is a possibility. But competition is neither always good nor always bad. It comes in various forms and has different purposes. The student worksheet for this class will have the students consider different kinds of competition and will make them distinguish good and bad forms of competition. It will be up to the students in this class to fill in the gaps—to suggest what ought to happen in contacts between different groups of people. This is an important skill: to be able to take an outline or a list and create reasons for a particular result or conclusion. DuBois only lists the forms of social contact. He does not praise or blame anyone, nor does he say what ought to be done in connection with praise or blame. He only says that any contact and competition should benefit all parties. You might ask if there has been competition in the discussion classes and how students would describe it. Has it been beneficial or harmful to the group?

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

DuBois states that, in future competition among the races, we should all strive to achieve goodness, beauty, and truth, instead of greed, aggressiveness, and cruelty. This competition will arise from the various forms of social contact. These are, Who lives next to whom? Who gets what jobs? Who controls how the city or state is run? Who reads what and who attends what schools? What moral teachings are advanced?

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO RAISE

- What is it that makes competition good or bad?
- Can the same activity (*basketball, five people applying for the same job, running for president, etc.*) encourage good competition and bad competition?
- Is cooperation ever a bad thing?
- What are some examples of good competition?
- Can a destructive form of competition be made to be constructive?
- Are the kinds of competition DuBois lists good or bad? (*housing, jobs, election of politicians, etc.*)
- Does competition occur in Touchstones Discussions? Is it ever useful? How?

SUGGESTION

Remember that students often are repeating second-hand opinions, instead of ones that are really their own. They are therefore not necessarily committed to keeping those opinions. However, in the tense and competitive environment of an argument, students might feel that they have to defend what they say. This situation is one of the reasons why it is so important to give students an opportunity to explore the way in which they understand the world. Through discussions, they will learn that discovering how a different perspective makes sense is more important than immediately having the right or best opinion. In addition, these discussions give the students the occasion to develop their own opinions by comparing them with those of other students and with those of the text. This process, however, is something that will happen slowly over time. So you must keep in mind that many opinions that the students offer are what they have heard from friends, family, television, movies, or music. For the students to get enough distance from their own perspectives and begin examining their opinions, often for the first time, takes time and effort. Using the text as a tool can help students gain that necessary distance.

LESSON PLAN 25

Activity Time

- 1. ARRANGE CLASSROOM..... 3 min.
- 2. TEXT 3 min.



- 3. INDIVIDUAL WORK 5 min.
 - You may want to add more kinds of competition for students to think about, but be careful not to hint whether the kinds are good or bad.



- 4. PAIR WORK..... 5 min.
 - Have the students form pairs and compare lists. Students should give reasons to each other for each of their choices.



- 5. SMALL GROUP WORK 8 min.
 - Combine the pairs into small groups of four students each.
 - Students should try to agree on two items in each list to be reported to the whole group. Let them decide for themselves how they will reduce their individual lists.



- 6. DISCUSSION 21 min.
 - With the students in a whole group, have each small group report on the short lists it agreed on. You may want to keep a running list on the board. In addition, ask each small group to report on how it reduced its many items of “good” and “bad” competition down to two of each.

Total: 45 minutes

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(STUDENT VOLUME, P. 63)



It is, then, the task of all honorable men of the twentieth century to see that in the future competition of races, the survival of the fittest shall mean the victory of goodness, beauty, and truth. We must preserve for future civilization all that is fine, and noble, and strong. We must not continue to reward greed, aggressiveness, and cruelty. To bring this hope to realization we are forced every day to turn more and more to a continuous study of the contacts between the races. This study must be honest and fair and not colored by our wishes and fears.

In the civilized life of today, the contact of men and their relations to each other fall in a few main groups of forms of social communication. There is, first, the nearness or distance of homes to one another, the way in which neighborhoods group themselves, and which neighbors live next to which. Secondly, and in our times most importantly, there are economic relations—the methods by which individuals cooperate for earning a living, for the mutual satisfaction of needs, and for the production of wealth. Thirdly, there are political relations, the cooperation in social control, in group government, and in paying of taxes. In the fourth place, there are the less obvious but very important forms of intellectual contact. These include the exchange of ideas through conversations, conferences, magazines, and libraries, and, especially, the formation within each community of public opinion. Connected with this are the various forms of social contact in everyday life, in travel, theaters, house parties, and weddings. Finally, there are the different forms of religious activity, moral teachings, and public service. These are the main ways in which human beings living in the same communities are brought in contact with each other.

Worksheet 25: The Souls of Black Folk



INDIVIDUAL WORK

Complete the following exercise individually after reading the text.

DuBois says that competition between people can be good or bad. Competition comes in various forms. There is competition between people playing a game (for example, basketball or running), between two people who like the same boy or girl, in a boxing match, in applying for one job, and so forth.

List three kinds of competition that are good and three that are bad.

1. Good Competition:

a)

b)

c)

2. Bad Competition:

a)

b)

c)



PAIR WORK

Help each other complete the lists that you began in the Individual Work. Make sure you can give reasons for what you have chosen.



SMALL GROUP WORK

1. Appoint a chairperson.
2. As a group choose two items for each list. Make sure each member of the group is able to tell the rest of the class how the group made its decision about what to include on the lists and what to leave off.
3. Each person should write the group's choices on his or her own worksheet.

4. Good Competition:

a)

b)

5. Bad Competition:

a)

b)