

Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921

Compelling Question	
Why has the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 been silenced in history books, curriculum and classrooms?	
State Standard(s)	OH Grade 8. History. 1 & 14; American History. 1 & 12 KY 8.I.CC.1; 8.H.CO.3; 8.H.CH.2; HS.UH.I.UE.2; HS.UH.CH.1
C3 Framework Indicator(s)	D1.5.6-8; D2.His.6.6-8; D3.1.6-8; D4.3.6-8 D1.5.9-12; D2.His.9-12; D3.1.9-12; D4.3.9-12
Learning Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students will understand the causes of race massacres in U.S. history. ■ Students will understand that race massacres have been purposefully silenced in history books, curriculums and classrooms. ■ Students will understand the importance of resistance and resilience stories. ■ Students will be able to examine and analyze a historical event. ■ Students will be able to identify and evaluate credible sources. ■ Students will be able to draw parallels between historical events to identify common causes and outcomes. ■ Students will be able to construct an evidence-based explanation using multiple sources.

Supporting Question
What <i>really</i> caused the Tulsa Race Massacre?
Featured Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Book: <i>Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre</i> ■ Video: Greenwood and the Tulsa Race Riots ■ Timeline: 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre
Formative Performance Task
Examine the Past and Make Connections guide

Supporting Question
How is the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 similar to other events in U.S. history?
Featured Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Credible websites: both teacher provided and student chosen
Formative Performance Task
Examine the Past and Make Connections guide

Supporting Question
Why do we need to tell stories of resistance and resilience in U.S. history?
Featured Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Credible websites: both teacher provided and student chosen ■ Book: <i>Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre</i>
Formative Performance Task
Class discussion

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Evidence-based explanation using multiple sources to answer the question - “Why has the Tulsa race Massacre of 1921 been silenced in history books, curriculums and classrooms?”
	EXTENSION Examine current textbooks and educational resources to evaluate if events such as the Tulsa Race Massacre are being included in meaningful ways.
Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND How does the resistance and resilience stories surrounding your event provide a more complete understanding?
	ASSESS Assess how often such stories are shared in history books, curriculums, and classrooms.
	ACT Construct stories of resistance and resilience related to a researched event. Publish the stories on a classroom or school website. To further the experience, students could present the resistance and resilience story in a picture book format, reminiscent of <i>Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre</i> .

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of how history is told and the power of those telling the story. C3 D2 History indicator 6 has students analyzing how people’s perspectives shape written history. The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 serves as a case study as students explore this concept. Along the way, students hone their research skills and evaluate sources for credibility (D1.5 and D3.1).

Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre by Carole Boston Weatherford (2021) is the featured text for this inquiry. This picture book is a powerful telling of the events surrounding the massacre as well as the resistance and resilience of the Black community of Greenwood, OK. While we often think of picture books as simplistic, they can be wonderfully complex and present difficult concepts in approachable formats. You do not need a copy of the text to implement this inquiry. A video of the text being read by Tamar Greene, who portrayed George Washington in *Hamilton* on Broadway, is available at gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/videos/unspeakable-tulsa-race-massacre. In addition, an interview with the author is available at freedomcenter.org/video-library.

Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul’s 2021 *Discussion Guide for Educators and Parents* for the book *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* is a valuable resource for this inquiry. The discussion guide is available at lernerbooks.blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Unspeakable_TeachingGuide.pdf. Cherry-Paul’s guide provides valuable resources for teaching about racism in elementary and middle level classrooms. The guide also provides suggested themes for exploration along with prompts for facilitated discussion for younger and older children. We strongly encourage you to read this guide prior to teaching this inquiry.

This inquiry expands upon the discussion guide’s learning explorations for 7th and 8th grade students. We also encourage high school teachers to use this inquiry and have designed it to be adaptable for middle and high school levels. As always, we encourage teachers to modify the inquiry as needed to meet the needs of their students and classroom.



Throughout, students will engage in social justice work by challenging the normative ways Black Americans have been portrayed in U.S. history. Students will also challenge how history has been presented in history books, classrooms, and curriculum. Additionally, students will make positive change by providing resistance and resilience stories for public consumption. This inquiry embodies the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center principles of courage, cooperation, and perseverance by highlighting such stories.

Required Prior Knowledge

To engage in this inquiry, students will need basic knowledge about segregation in the United States. They will need to understand that after the Civil War, racism prevailed throughout the country and led to institutional racism such as legal segregation. Students should understand that racism is problematic beyond the personal and interpersonal levels; institutional racism prevents many Americans from receiving equal opportunities and treatment in the U.S.

Additionally, to meet the D3.1 indicator, students need to utilize multiple sources and evaluate their credibility before use. Here are a few resources for evaluating sources:

- The ABCs of Credible Sources: uscupstate.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=41440807
- Ten Cs for Evaluating Internet Sources: uscupstate.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=56588408

Staging The Compelling Question

Begin by asking students if they have heard of the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. Ask what they know about it, or think they know about it. Explain that you are beginning your inquiry with a picture book, *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre*. You may want to explain that while we often think of picture books as simplistic, they can be wonderfully complex and present difficult concepts in approachable formats. Set the purpose for reading/viewing the text; What was the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921? Read the text aloud, or view the read aloud at gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/videos/unspeakable-tulsa-race-massacre.

After viewing, check for understanding by discussing the question: What was the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921? Then, share how the massacre has been absent from schools for generations. You may have students read *A Conspiracy of Silence: Tulsa Race Massacre Was Absent From Schools for Generations*, from Education Week: edweek.org/teaching-learning/a-conspiracy-of-silence-tulsa-race-massacre-was-absent-from-schools-for-generations/2021/05. Ask students for their thoughts on the compelling question: “Why has the Tulsa race Massacre of 1921 been silenced in history books, curriculums, and classrooms?”

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question – “What *really* caused the Tulsa Race Massacre?” – is the first step in answering the compelling question. Upon learning how the history of the massacre remained hidden for so long, students will examine the events surrounding the Tulsa Massacre of 1921. In doing this, they will not only answer the supporting question, but begin to answer the compelling question as well. By examining supporting question 1:

- **Students will understand** the causes of race massacres in U.S. history.
- **Students will understand** that race massacres have been purposefully silenced in history books, curriculums, and classrooms.
- **Students will be able to** examine and analyze a historical event.

We suggest seizing the opportunity to have a meaningful discussion about terminology and the power of words by asking students the following questions:

- “What is the significance of labeling an event as a massacre or a riot?”

- “What is the difference between the two terms?”
- “How does each term assign blame?”

A useful resource for this discussion is the Tulsa Historical Society and Museum’s “What’s in a Name? Riot vs Massacre” found at tulsahistory.org/exhibit/1921-tulsa-race-massacre/#flexible-content.

Students will answer the supporting question as they research and complete the Examine the Past and Make Connections guide (Appendix A) for the Tulsa race Massacre. We suggest modeling the process, completing the guide as a class using the following resources:

- tulsahistory.org/exhibit/1921-tulsa-race-massacre/#flexible-content
- pbs.org/wnet/boss/video/greenwood-and-tulsa-race-riots-tbkhcr/

Teachers could model the critical analysis required by conducting a Think Aloud as they research the Tulsa Race Riot and complete the guide. The following resources address Think Alouds at the middle and secondary levels:

- middleweb.com/37253/teacher-think-alouds-work-in-every-subject/
- comprehensionstrategiesx10.weebly.com/think-aloud.html
- youtube.com/watch?v=UmhLgsBD1-I

The completed Examine the Past and Make Connections guide (Appendix A) serves as a formative assessment of understanding.

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question – “How is the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 similar to other events in U.S. history?” – has students examine the past and make connections to current events. Students will also make comparisons between the Tulsa Race Massacre and a similar event in U.S. history. By examining supporting question 2:

- **Students will understand** the causes of race massacres in U.S. history.
- **Students will understand** that race massacres have been purposefully silenced in history books, curriculums, and classrooms.
- **Students will be able to** examine and analyze a historical event.
- **Students will be able to** identify and evaluate credible sources.
- **Students will be able to** draw parallels between historical events to identify common causes and outcomes.

Using the Tulsa Race Massacre as an example, students conduct their own research of another historical event individually or in groups. A list of historical events and resources (Appendix B) could be used as starting points for student research. We suggest students complete the guide provided in Appendix A, which has already been modeled, as they conduct research. The completed guides provide formative assessment.

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question – “Why do we need to tell stories of resistance and resilience in U.S. history?” – engages students in an examination of how history is told and how Black communities are presented in history. We suggest exploring this question through a facilitated class discussion. By exploring supporting question 3:

- **Students will understand** the importance of resistance and resilience stories.
- **Students will be able to** draw parallels between historical event to identify common causes and outcomes.

We recommend reading/viewing *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* a second time. This time, the purpose for reading/viewing are questions posed in Cherry-Paul's (2021) discussion guide:

- In what ways was Greenwood itself an act of resistance by African Americans in response to segregation and racism?
- How did the residents and the Black-owned businesses they created help Greenwood become self-sustaining?

Additional questions to facilitate class discussion include:

- For so long, this story of Tulsa in 1921 has been silenced. Now, there is a picture book on the subject. What changed? Should children learn about traumatic events and racism?
- How are Black communities typically presented in history? Can you think of examples?
- Are Black Americans often viewed as victims? Is this problematic? Why?
- Why are resistance and resilience storied essential?
- How does the resistance and resilience stories surrounding your event provide a more complete understanding?

Summative Performance Task

In this task, students construct an evidence-based explanation using multiple sources to answer the question “Why has the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 been silenced in history books, curriculums and classrooms?” Most of the evidence needed to answer the question will be gathered when answering the supporting questions and completing the research guides. We suggest having students work in groups to construct explanations, sharing their research on various related events. Guide students to use the parallels between events to answer the compelling question.

To extend their arguments, students could examine current textbooks and educational resources to evaluate if events such as the Tulsa Race Massacre are being included in meaningful ways.

Taking Informed Action

Students can take their work into the public sphere by compiling their findings and highlighting stories of resistance and resilience within the Black community. During the research, analysis, and discussion that occurred in answering the supporting questions, students identified and came to understand how communities demonstrated resistance and resilience. In answering supporting question 3, students also engaged in a conversation about the importance of resistance and resilience stories. Now, students should assess how often such stories are shared in history books, curriculums, and classrooms.

As a final step, encourage students to act by taking their findings and constructing stories of resistance and resilience related to their researched event. Publish the stories on a classroom or school website. An example of the resistance and resilience of the Black community in Tulsa can be found at: nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/in-tulsa-incredible-american-story-black-resilience-finally-recognized

To further the experience, students could present the resistance and resilience story in a picture book format, reminiscent of *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre*. Presenting the story in this genre would require students to summarize the event and focus on the key elements and concepts that people, specifically children, should understand.

Appendix A

Event:

Location and date:

Examine the Past

1. Contextualize the event. What was going on in the world, country, and local area at the time?
2. What was the root cause of the event? Consider the system or institution that some white Americans felt was threatened by the Black population.
3. What triggered the event?
4. Was it a massacre or a riot? Explain.
5. What was the immediate response of the nation? Consider how it was reported. Was there a response from the government?
6. How did the black population demonstrate resistance and resilience before, during, and after the event?
7. What were the long-term impacts of the event?

Make Connections

9. What are the significant similarities between this event and the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921?
10. How does understanding this event improve your understanding of current events? How does this event connect to a current event?

Appendix B

Suggested Historical Events for Student Research

New Orleans, LA – 1866

- National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/neworleansmassacre.htm>
- Black Past: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/new-orleans-massacre-1866/>

Colfax, LA – 1873

- Smithsonian Magazine: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/1873-colfax-massacre-crippled-reconstruction-180958746/>

Wilmington, NC – 1898

- Zinn Education Project: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/wilmington-massacre-2/>

Atlanta, GA – 1906

- History.com: <https://www.history.com/news/atlanta-race-massacre-fearmongering>
- New Georgia Encyclopedia: <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/atlanta-race-riot-of-1906/>

Springfield, IL – 1908

- Zinn Education Project: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/springfield-massacre/>
- Black Past: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/springfield-race-riot-1908/>

Elaine, AR – 1919

- Smithsonian Magazine: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/death-hundreds-elaine-massacre-led-supreme-court-take-major-step-toward-equal-justice-african-americans-180969863/>

Rosewood, FL – 1923

- History.com: <https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/rosewood-massacre>
- Zinn Education Project: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/rosewood-massacre/>
- Black Past: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/rosewood-massacre-1923/>

Detroit, MI – 1943

- Black Past: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/detroit-race-riot-1943/>
- Wayne State University: https://projects.lib.wayne.edu/12thstreetdetroit/exhibits/show/beforeunrest/1943_raceriot

References

Boston Weatherford, C. (2021). *Unspeakable: The Tulsa race massacre*. MN: Lerner Publishing.

Cherry-Paul, S. (2021). *Discussion guide for educators and parents Unspeakable: The Tulsa race massacre*. Lerner Publishing Group. https://lernerbooks.blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Unspeakable_TeachingGuide.pdf

Crowe, A. *Comprehension strategies for the middle school classroom: Think aloud (Monitor comprehension)*. <https://comprehensionstrategiesx10.weebly.com/think-aloud.html>

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/videos/unspeakable-tulsa-race-massacre>

Goodloe, T. (2008, March 23). *Rosewood massacre (1923)*. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/rosewood-massacre-1923>

Greenwood Davis, H. (2021, May 28). In Tulsa, an ‘incredible American story’ of Black resilience is finally recognized. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/in-tulsa-incredible-american-story-black-resilience-finally-recognized>

History.com Editors. (2021, April 20). *Rosewood massacre*. <https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/rosewood-massacre>

National Park Service. “An absolute massacre” – The New Orleans slaughter of July 30, 1866. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/neworleansmassacre.htm>

Kareem Nittle, N. (2021, Sept. 14). *The 1906 Atlanta massacre: How fearmongering led to violence*. <https://www.history.com/news/atlanta-race-massacre-fearmongering>

Kuhn, C. & Mixon, G. (2020, Aug. 27). *Atlanta race riot of 1906*. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/atlanta-race-riot-of-1906>

Lewis, D. (2016, April 13). *The 1873 Colfax massacre crippled the Reconstruction era*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/1873-colfax-massacre-crippled-reconstruction-180958746/>

Martinez-Keel, N. (2021, May 26). ‘A conspiracy of silence’: Tulsa race massacre was absent from schools for generations, Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/a-conspiracy-of-silence-tulsa-race-massacre-was-absent-from-schools-for-generations/2021/05>

Ness, M. (2018, March 18). *Teacher think alouds work in every subject*. <https://www.middleweb.com/37253/teacher-think-alouds-work-in-every-subject>

PBS. (2109, Feb. 22). Boss. *The Black experience in business: Greenwood and the Tulsa race riots*. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/boss/video/greenwood-and-tulsa-race-riots-tbkhcr>

Smekens Education Solutions. (2019, Jan. 11). *Go beyond a model; Reveal a think aloud*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmhLgsBD1-I>

Stolp-Smith, M. (2011, April 7). *New Orleans massacre (1866)*. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/new-orleans-massacre-1866>



References (cont.)

Uenuma, F. (2018, Aug. 2). *The massacre of Black sharecroppers that led the Supreme Court to curb the racial disparities of the justice system*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/death-hundreds-elaine-massacre-led-supreme-court-take-major-step-toward-equal-justice-african-americans-180969863>

University of South Carolina Upstate. (2021, Aug. 27). *The ABCs of credible sources*. https://uscupstate.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=41440807

University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. (2009, June 23). "Ten Cs for evaluating internet sources". https://uscupstate.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=56588408

Wag, T. (2008, July 3). *Detroit race riot (1923)*. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/detroit-race-riot-1943>

Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University. *Special focus: 1943 race riot*. https://projects.lib.wayne.edu/12thstreetdetroit/exhibits/show/beforeunrest/1943_raceriot

Yu, K. (2008, June 29). *Springfield race riot, 1908*. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/springfield-race-riot-1908>

Zinn Education Project. (2021). *Jan. 1, 1923: Rosewood massacre*. <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/rosewood-massacre>

Zinn Education Project. (2021). *Nov. 10, 1898: Wilmington massacre*. <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/wilmington-massacre-2>

Zinn Education Project: (2021). *Aug. 14, 1908: Springfield massacre*. <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/springfield-massacre>