Lesson Plan: Understanding Systemic Racism
Objectives:

- Define systemic racism and differentiate it from individual racism.
- Identify examples of systemic racism in social, economic, and political systems.
- Discuss ways to challenge systemic racism in their community.

Materials

- Whiteboard and markers
- Projector and internet access
- Handouts with definitions and examples of systemic racism
- Short video clip (related to systemic racism in housing, education, etc.)
- Art supplies (poster paper, markers, colored pencils)
- Graph paper (for math activity)
- Computers or tablets (for technology research)

Procedures

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Define the term "systemic racism" on the whiteboard.
- Explain the difference between individual racism (actions by individuals) and systemic racism (embedded in systems and institutions).
- Show a short video clip (3-5 minutes) illustrating systemic racism (such as redlining or school segregation).
- Facilitate a brief discussion on students' initial thoughts or reactions to the video.

2. Group Activity (15 minutes)

- Divide students into small groups and provide each group with a different handout on systemic racism in areas such as education, healthcare, housing, or criminal justice.
- Each group will read and discuss the information on their handout.
- Have each group identify one example of systemic racism from their handout and discuss how it affects racial groups differently.
- Groups will share their findings with the class.

3. Class Discussion (10 minutes)

- As a class, brainstorm how systemic racism affects daily life for marginalized groups.
- Write student ideas on the whiteboard in categories: social, economic, political.
- Discuss how individuals and communities can challenge systemic racism through activism, policy changes, or education.

4. Reflection and Poster Creation (15 minutes)
- Ask students to reflect on what they learned and create a poster illustrating one example of systemic racism they found impactful.
- Provide art supplies and poster paper.
- Students can work individually or in pairs to create a visual representation (e.g., illustrating housing discrimination or unequal access to education).
- Students will briefly present their posters to the class.

5. Closing (5 minutes)
- Summarize the key takeaways about systemic racism.
- Ask students to think about how they can talk about what they learned with their families or friends.

Assessment
- Participation in group discussions and class activities.
- Quality and clarity of the poster presentations.
- Informal assessment of student reflections and understanding of the topic through class discussions.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Art

- Objective: Students will create visual representations of systemic racism in societal systems.
- Procedure:
  1. Explain how art has been used historically to express social issues.
  2. Have students create posters illustrating the impact of systemic racism (housing, education, or healthcare).
  3. Display the posters in the classroom and allow students to present them briefly.

Language Arts

- Objective: Students will analyze how authors write about systemic racism.
- Procedure:
  1. Provide an excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" or a similar text.
  2. Have students read the text and identify how the author describes systemic racism.
  3. Conduct a class discussion on the power of words in fighting against systemic injustice.

Foreign Languages

- Objective: Students will explore how racism is discussed in different languages and cultures.
- Procedure:
  1. Introduce basic vocabulary in the target foreign language related to social justice (e.g., "injusticia" in Spanish).
  2. Have students research an issue of systemic racism in a country where the foreign language is spoken.
  3. Students will present their findings in both English and the target language.

Math

- Objective: Students will use data to understand disparities in income and education between racial groups.
- Procedure:
  1. Provide students with statistical data on racial income inequality or graduation rates.
  2. Have students create graphs or charts that display the disparities.
  3. Students analyze and discuss the real-world implications of these numbers.

Music

- Objective: Students will explore how music has been used to protest systemic racism.

- Procedure:
  1. Play a song such as "A Change is Gonna Come" by Sam Cooke or "This is America" by Childish Gambino.
  2. Analyze the lyrics in relation to the social issues of the time.
  3. Have students write their own short song or poem about a current issue related to systemic racism.

Physical Education

- Objective: Students will discuss the unequal access to sports and recreational opportunities due to systemic racism.
- Procedure:
  1. Introduce famous athletes who have spoken out against racism (e.g., Colin Kaepernick).
  2. Facilitate a discussion about how systemic racism can limit opportunities in sports for certain racial groups.
  3. Students research athletes who used their platform to promote social change.

Science

- Objective: Students will explore the concept of environmental racism.
- Procedure:
  1. Define environmental racism and give examples (e.g., polluted areas near marginalized communities).
  2. Discuss the health impacts of environmental racism on racial groups.
  3. Have students research a case study (e.g., Flint water crisis) and write a short report on its long-term effects on communities of color.

Technology

- Objective: Students will use digital tools to research systemic racism and find solutions.
- Procedure:
  1. Assign students to research examples of systemic racism using online resources and databases.
  2. Teach students to use tools like Google Slides or Canva to create a presentation on their findings.
  3. Students present their digital work to the class, explaining both the problem and possible solutions.

Family and Community Involvement

- Discussion at Home: Encourage students to have a conversation with their families about systemic racism. They can ask their family members about any experiences or observations of racism in their community.
- Community Project: Organize a community panel or forum where students and local activists discuss the impacts of systemic racism and ways to address it.

Additional Resources

- Books: "Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You" by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi
- Videos: PBS Documentary "Race: The Power of an Illusion"
- Websites: Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance) – Lesson plans and articles about systemic racism

Key Definitions Related to Systemic Racism

Systemic Racism: Racism that is part of the rules, policies, and systems in a society. It affects many areas like schools, jobs, housing, and healthcare, making it harder for some racial groups to have the same opportunities as others.

Institutional Racism: This happens when the rules or practices of a school, business, or government agency treat people unfairly because of their race, even if it's not done on purpose. It can show up in things like unfair hiring or unequal access to resources.

Structural Racism: This refers to the way racism is woven into multiple parts of society, like education, healthcare, and jobs, and how these areas work together to keep racial inequality in place.

Racial Disparities: Differences in how people of different races are treated or what they experience. This includes things like income differences, differences in how often people are arrested, or differences in healthcare outcomes.

Implicit Bias: These are the unconscious thoughts or beliefs people have about others based on race. Implicit bias can cause people to treat others unfairly without even realizing it.

Racial Privilege: The advantages that people may have just because of their race. For example, in the U.S., white people often have certain privileges, like being treated better in some situations, even if they don't ask for it.

Equity vs. Equality: Equality means treating everyone the same. Equity means giving people what they need based on their situation, which might be different from others. Equity helps make things fair for everyone, especially when it comes to dealing with systemic racism.

Microaggressions: Small, sometimes unintentional, actions or comments that insult or harm someone because of their race. Even though they might seem small, they can add up and contribute to racism.

Redlining: A practice from the past where banks wouldn't lend money to people living in certain neighborhoods, usually ones with many Black or other minority families. This created unequal opportunities in housing and wealth.

Mass Incarceration: The large number of people, especially Black and Latino people, who are put in prison because of unfair laws or unequal treatment in the legal system.

Intersectionality: The idea that people can face discrimination in more than one way at the same time, like being treated unfairly because of both their race and gender.

Affirmative Action: Policies that help give more opportunities to groups of people who have been treated unfairly in the past, like helping more students of color get into college or find jobs.

Examples of Systemic Racism

Housing Discrimination (Redlining)

In the 1940s and 1950s, many families in the United States were trying to buy homes and settle down. But for Black families, it wasn't that simple. Banks refused to give loans to people in certain neighborhoods, and these neighborhoods were often where Black families lived. This practice was called "redlining."

Redlining got its name because banks and real estate companies would literally draw red lines on maps around areas they considered "risky" for giving loans. These areas were usually home to Black families, no matter how hard they worked or how much money they had. Because of this, Black families couldn't get the loans they needed to buy homes, while white families in other areas had no problem getting loans to buy homes and build wealth.

This wasn't just about not being able to buy a house. Homeownership is one of the biggest ways families build wealth over time. When Black families were kept from buying homes, they were also kept from building wealth that they could pass on to their children. This put them at a disadvantage, while white families in other neighborhoods were able to build wealth, move into better areas, and pass down their homes to their children.

Even though redlining is now illegal, its effects can still be seen today. Many neighborhoods that were once redlined are still poorer, with fewer resources like schools, parks, and healthcare. Black families continue to face barriers in buying homes, and the racial wealth gap, which is partly due to redlining, continues to affect many people. Understanding how redlining shaped the past helps us see why there are still inequalities in housing and wealth today, and why it's important to work toward solutions.

Unequal School Funding

In many cities across the U.S., there's a big difference between schools in wealthy areas and schools in poorer areas. Schools in wealthier neighborhoods often get more money from taxes because the houses in those areas are more expensive. These schools can afford better things, like new textbooks, the latest technology, and even safer school buildings. However, schools in poorer neighborhoods, where many students of color live, don't get as much money. This creates a huge gap in opportunities.

For example, imagine two middle schools in the same city. One is in a wealthy neighborhood. The school has smartboards in every classroom, up-to-date textbooks, and even a fully equipped science lab. The other school, located in a lower-income area, doesn't have enough textbooks for each student, and the books they do have are old and falling apart. The school's computers are outdated, and some classrooms have broken windows or leaky roofs. The students in the wealthier school have more resources, and it shows in their test scores and overall experience.

Because the poorer schools don't have the same funding, the students miss out on things that could help them succeed. Without access to modern technology, students struggle to keep up with assignments. Without a safe and comfortable learning environment, it's harder to focus. The teachers at these schools work just as hard, but they have to make do with what they have, which isn't always enough.

This unequal funding means that students in underfunded schools often fall behind. They don't get the same chances as students in wealthier schools. Even though all students should have an equal opportunity to learn, the reality is that the money a school has can affect how well students do. This is why equal school funding is such an important issue to address for a fairer future.

Racial Pay Gap

In the United States, not everyone gets paid the same, even if they are doing the same job. This is called the racial pay gap, and it especially affects Black and Latino workers. They are often paid less than their white coworkers, even when they have the same skills, education, and experience. This unfair difference in pay makes it harder for people of color to take care of their families and get ahead financially.

For example, imagine two people, one Black and one white, working at the same company as accountants. Both went to college and earned their degrees, and both work hard every day. But at the end of the week, the Black accountant gets paid less than the white accountant for doing the exact same job. This might not seem like a big difference at first, but over time, it adds up. The white worker can save more money, buy a nicer house, or afford to send their kids to better schools. Meanwhile, the Black worker is struggling just to cover the basic needs like rent, food, and healthcare.

The racial pay gap affects families in many ways. With less money, families of color may not be able to save for emergencies or invest in their children's education. This can lead to a cycle of poverty, where each generation has a harder time getting ahead. It's not just about the paycheck—it's about the opportunities that money provides.

Fixing the racial pay gap is important because everyone deserves to be paid fairly for their work. Laws and policies that make sure companies treat all workers equally can help close this gap. When people are paid what they deserve, they can take better care of their families, invest in their futures, and create a more equal society for everyone.

Police Brutality

In the United States, many people have noticed that Black people and other people of color are treated unfairly by the police. They are more likely to be stopped, searched, or even arrested, even when they haven't done anything wrong. Sometimes, these situations lead to police using violence against them, which is known as police brutality. This unfair treatment happens more often to people of color than to white people, and it has caused a lot of pain and anger in communities of color.

For example, imagine a Black teenager walking home from school. He's not causing any trouble, but a police officer stops him and starts asking questions, assuming he's done something wrong just because of how he looks. Meanwhile, a white teenager in the same neighborhood might walk by without being stopped. This type of situation happens all the time, and sometimes it ends in violence, with police using force against people who are innocent.

Police brutality has led to serious consequences. There have been many cases where people of color have been hurt or even killed by the police, sparking outrage across the country. This is one of the main reasons why the Black Lives Matter movement began. Black Lives Matter is a movement that aims to bring attention to this unfair treatment and fight for justice. They want to stop police brutality and make sure everyone is treated equally, no matter their skin color.

The movement has organized protests, marches, and other actions to raise awareness about police brutality. People involved in Black Lives Matter want to create a world where people of color don't have to fear being treated unfairly by the police. By standing up and speaking out, they hope to bring about real change and make the world a safer, fairer place for everyone.

Healthcare Inequality

In the United States, people of color often experience something called healthcare inequality. This means that they don't always get the same quality of healthcare as white people. Even though everyone should receive the same care when they are sick or injured, this isn't always the case for many Black, Latino, and Native American families.

For example, people of color might not have access to doctors and hospitals in their neighborhoods. In some communities, there are fewer clinics, hospitals, or doctors, making it hard to get the medical attention they need. If they do have doctors nearby, those doctors might not have the best resources, meaning people don't always get the right tests or treatments. In contrast, wealthier, mostly white neighborhoods often have better access to high-quality healthcare, with more hospitals and better-equipped doctors.

Even when people of color do see a doctor, they might not get the same treatment as white patients. Studies have shown that doctors sometimes spend less time with patients of color or don't take their symptoms as seriously. This can mean that diseases are not caught early, leading to more severe health problems later on. For example, Black women are three times more likely to die during childbirth than white women, even though the medical care should be the same for everyone.

This healthcare inequality can lead to worse health outcomes for people of color. It means that people in these communities are more likely to get sick and less likely to get the care they need to stay healthy. To fix this, we need to ensure that everyone, no matter their race or where they live, has access to good healthcare. By addressing these issues, we can create a fairer healthcare system that works for everyone.

Mass Incarceration

In the United States, there's a serious problem called mass incarceration, where large numbers of people, especially Black and Latino individuals, are sent to prison. What's even more troubling is that Black and Latino people are much more likely to be arrested, charged, and sent to prison than white people, even when they commit the same crimes. This unfair treatment is part of something called systemic racism in the justice system.

Imagine two teenagers, one Black and one white, both caught with a small amount of marijuana. Even though they committed the same crime, the Black teenager might be more likely to be arrested and face harsher charges, while the white teenager might get off with just a warning. This kind of unequal treatment happens every day across the country. Black and Latino people often face tougher sentences and are more likely to end up in prison.

There are many reasons for this. One reason is that neighborhoods where Black and Latino people live are often more heavily policed, meaning there are more officers and more chances for people to be arrested. Another reason is that the legal system itself is biased, meaning people of color are more likely to be treated unfairly in court. Judges and juries may have unconscious biases that cause them to give harsher punishments to people of color than to white people.

Mass incarceration has huge consequences for families and communities. When someone is sent to prison, they are separated from their family, and it becomes harder to find a job once they are released. This leads to poverty and makes it difficult to move forward in life. The high number of Black and Latino people in prison also affects whole communities, making it hard to break the cycle of poverty and crime.

To address mass incarceration, the justice system needs to be reformed to treat everyone fairly, regardless of their race, so that everyone has an equal chance at justice.

Job discrimination

Job discrimination happens when people of color are treated unfairly at work. This can happen when employers make decisions about hiring or promotions based on race. For example, an employer might choose a white person over a person of color, even though both are equally qualified for the job. This makes it harder for Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American people to get good jobs and move up in their careers.

Imagine two people applying for the same job. One person is white, and the other is Black. Both have the same education, experience, and skills. But the employer chooses the white candidate, not because they are better but because of an unconscious bias. This happens more often than people realize, and it's unfair.

Job discrimination doesn't just happen in hiring. It can also happen when it comes to promotions. For example, if a Black or Latino employee has been working hard for years but keeps getting passed over for a promotion, even though they are qualified, this is a sign of discrimination. The employer might not see their hard work because of racial stereotypes or biases. This can make it feel like people of color have to work twice as hard to get the same opportunities as their white coworkers.

Job discrimination affects people in many ways. Without access to good jobs or promotions, people of color might not be able to earn enough money to support their families. It also means that fewer people of color are in leadership positions, which makes it harder to fight against discrimination from the inside.

Laws exist to protect against job discrimination, but the problem still happens. To create a fair workplace, employers need to treat everyone equally, hire based on skills and experience, and ensure promotions are given fairly, regardless of race. This would give everyone an equal chance to succeed.

Voting Rights

Voting is a basic right in the United States, but some people face more challenges than others when trying to cast their vote. In some states, voting restrictions make it harder for people of color, especially Black and Latino voters, to participate in elections. These rules, like requiring certain IDs or limiting voting locations, can keep people from having a say in their government.

For example, in some states, voters are required to show a government-issued ID, like a driver's license, before they can vote. While this might not seem like a big deal, many people of color, especially those who are poor or elderly, may not have these IDs or may find it difficult to get one. They might not have a car to drive to a government office or may not have the money to pay for the ID. Without an ID, they can't vote, even if they've been voting for years.

Another problem is the number of voting locations. In some areas with large Black or Latino populations, the number of polling places has been reduced, meaning people have to travel farther and wait in longer lines to vote. This makes it difficult for people who work long hours or don't have reliable transportation to make it to the polls. In contrast, wealthier, mostly white neighborhoods often have more voting locations, making it easier for those residents to vote quickly and easily.

These restrictions limit the voices of people of color in elections. When they can't vote, they have less power to influence laws and policies that affect their lives, like healthcare, jobs, and education. Voting should be fair and equal for everyone, and removing these barriers is important to ensuring that everyone, regardless of their race, has a say in the future of the country.

Environmental Racism

Environmental racism happens when communities of color are more likely to live in areas with pollution or toxic waste. These areas might be near factories, highways, or landfills. Because of unfair decisions about where to build these harmful things, people in these neighborhoods face serious health risks, like asthma, heart disease, and even cancer.

For example, in many cities, factories are built near Black and Latino neighborhoods. These factories release harmful chemicals into the air, making it hard for residents to breathe clean air. Some families might live close to highways where the constant traffic causes air pollution. Meanwhile, wealthier, mostly white neighborhoods are often kept away from these types of places, so the people living there don't have to deal with the same health problems.

Another example is when companies choose to dump their toxic waste in or near communities of color. This waste can get into the water supply, making it unsafe to drink. One well-known case is in Flint, Michigan, where the majority of residents are Black. The city's water supply was contaminated with lead, causing a public health crisis. People in the community got sick, and it took years for the problem to get attention and begin to be fixed.

Environmental racism shows how decisions made by the government and companies can harm certain communities more than others. Even though everyone should have the right to clean air, water, and land, people of color often don't get the same protections. This unfair treatment is part of a larger problem that affects many areas, including housing, healthcare, and education.

To fight environmental racism, we need to make sure that all communities are treated equally when it comes to where factories are built or waste is dumped. Everyone deserves to live in a healthy environment, no matter where they live or the color of their skin.

Racial Stereotyping in Schools

Racial stereotyping in schools happens when students of color are unfairly judged by teachers or administrators because of their race. Sometimes, Black, Latino, and other minority students are labeled as "troublemakers," even when they aren't doing anything wrong. This can lead to these students being punished more often, such as being suspended or expelled, which makes it harder for them to succeed in school.

For example, imagine two students in the same classroom, one Black and one white, both talking during class. The teacher might quickly send the Black student to the principal's office for being disruptive, while giving the white student just a warning. This happens because of racial stereotypes—ideas that certain racial groups are more likely to cause trouble, even if it's not true. As a result, Black and Latino students might face harsher punishments than white students for the same behavior.

These unfair punishments can have long-term effects on students. When students are suspended or expelled, they miss valuable class time, making it harder to keep up with schoolwork. If a student is constantly punished, they might feel discouraged, lose interest in school, or even drop out. This can limit their future opportunities, like getting into college or finding a good job.

The problem doesn't just stop with discipline. Racial stereotypes can also affect how teachers treat students in other ways, such as not giving students of color the same chances to succeed. For example, teachers might not push them as hard or encourage them to join advanced classes because they expect less from them.

To address racial stereotyping in schools, it's important for teachers and administrators to recognize their biases and treat all students fairly. Every student deserves the chance to succeed, and schools should work to create a welcoming, supportive environment for everyone, no matter their race.