

Benjamin Banneker | Lesson Plan

Why is it important not to pass judgment or make assumptions about others?

Students will recognize the value of hard work and perseverance by investigating Benjamin Banneker's life and extraordinary contributions. They will understand the dangers of prejudice and realize that all people should be treated fairly and equally.

Learning Objectives:

- Investigate the life of mathematician, astronomer, almanac compiler, inventor, and writer, Benjamin Banneker.
- Explain the importance of treating others respectfully and fairly, regardless of their background, culture, or skin color.
- Describe the negative effects prejudice has on society.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Prejudice:** A preconceived opinion or judgment about someone or something, often based on insufficient knowledge or stereotypes, leading to unfair treatment or discrimination.
- **Bias:** A tendency or inclination to favor or disfavor a person, group, idea, or thing, often in a way that is considered unfair, resulting from personal preferences, experiences, or preconceived notions.
- **Persevere:** To continue striving toward a goal or overcoming obstacles, difficulties, or discouragement with determination and persistence.
- **Almanac:** A yearly publication that contains a calendar, astronomical data, weather forecasts, tide tables, and other useful information related to nature, often including various articles and statistical information on a wide range of topics.
- **Civil Rights:** The rights of individuals to receive equal treatment and be free from discrimination in various settings, including employment, education, and access to public facilities, as guaranteed by laws and the Constitution, ensuring protection against unfair treatment by the government and other entities.

Educational Standards: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.SL.4, CCRA.W.2

Academic Subject Areas: Biography, Racism, Hard Work

What You'll Need

- Video: *Benjamin Banneker: Surveying the Future of America* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Benjamin Banneker: Surveying the Future of America* (Click [Here](#))
- Index cards



Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

Warm-Up: (20 minutes)

1. Give each student an index card. Instruct students to write something about themselves on the card that people would not know just by looking at them.
2. Collect the cards and read them aloud one at a time, inviting the class to guess who wrote each one. Thank students for sharing, and conclude that you learned a lot of interesting things about each person you may not have ever known otherwise.
3. Convey the importance of getting to know someone before passing judgment or making assumptions based on appearance or other factors beyond their control.
4. Read the following quote aloud: "I have a dream that my children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." –Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
5. Briefly discuss the meaning, implications, and wisdom of the above quote.
6. Explain that the class will watch a video about Benjamin Banneker—a mathematician, astronomer, almanac compiler, inventor, and writer who persevered regardless of racial prejudice against him. Growing up, Banneker was largely self-taught and learned many things by reading borrowed books. He is known for helping survey the land that would later become Washington, D.C. Benjamin Banneker strongly opposed slavery and fought for civil rights.
7. Display the worksheet and distribute individual copies to students.
8. Read over the worksheet as a class so that students know what to listen for during the video.

Watch and Complete: (15 minutes)

1. Watch the video.
2. Pause throughout the video to allow students to complete answers and notes on the worksheet. Assist as needed.

Wrap-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Allow students several minutes to complete the worksheet independently.
2. Invite volunteers to share their responses to item 9 on the worksheet.
3. Conclude by highlighting the importance of treating others with respect and fairness and not judging or making assumptions based on skin color or any other external factor.
4. Collect the worksheet as a formative assessment or participation grade.
5. As a culminating exercise, pose the following questions for classroom discussion:
 - What specific things did Benjamin Banneker want to say in his letter to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson?
 - How did Banneker overcome prejudice to become a successful mathematician, astronomer, inventor, and writer?
 - Why do you think it's important not to pass judgment or make assumptions about people based on factors they cannot control?

6. Summarize the lesson by reviewing the main idea: The quality of a person's work and the content of their character should be more important than their appearance or background. Hard work and perseverance through difficult circumstances can lead to great success.
7. Encourage students to reflect on the significance of studying Benjamin Banneker's life. His example teaches us valuable lessons: the importance of curiosity, the power of hard work despite unfair obstacles, and the assurance that the American dream is possible and worth fighting for!

Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (15-20 minutes)

Distribute the worksheet and allow students to complete it while they follow along with the video.