

# Project Mulberry – Classroom Lesson Plan

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*Includes Virtual Author Interview*

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## Book Synopsis

Project Mulberry follows Julia Song and her friend Patrick as they prepare a 4-H project about raising silkworms. Set in the American South, the novel explores friendship, cultural identity, racism, artistic collaboration, and self-expression. Through a blend of narrative and meta-commentary between the author and main character, the story examines what it means to represent culture honestly while challenging stereotypes.

## Banned / Challenged Status

Project Mulberry has been challenged in some districts due to discussions of racism, racial slurs within historical context, and themes of discrimination. Critics cite concerns about language and sensitive content. Supporters emphasize that the novel addresses racism directly in order to critique prejudice and promote empathy, cultural understanding, and historical awareness.

## Essential Questions

- How can friendship challenge prejudice?
- What responsibilities do authors have when representing culture?
- How does confronting racism foster growth?

## Lesson Objective

Students will analyze narrative structure and theme to evaluate how the novel addresses cultural identity and racism.

## Lesson Structure (60 Minutes)

- Warm-Up (5 minutes): Why is it important to challenge stereotypes?

- Direct Instruction (15–20 minutes): Examine meta-narrative structure and dialogue. Define: stereotype, cultural identity, bias, representation.
- Guided Practice (15 minutes): Analyze a scene addressing discrimination. Synthesis Question: How does the author-character dialogue shape understanding of racism?
- Independent Practice (15 minutes): Choice-based analytical response.
- Exit Ticket (5 minutes): Identify one way Julia grows in confidence.

## Independent Practice Options

- Option A: Compare Julia’s identity journey with another character.
- Option B: Reflect on how collaboration builds understanding.
- Option C: Write a short author-character dialogue addressing bias.

## Creative Interpretation Option

- Identity collage
- Silkworm project symbolism chart
- Dialogue storyboard

All creative responses must include an artist statement citing textual evidence.

## Reader Impact + Student Voice

- How does the novel confront racism constructively?
- Why might books addressing racial slurs be challenged?
- How can literature promote cultural understanding?
- Should schools include books that openly address discrimination? Why or why not?

## Intellectual Freedom Connection

Writing Prompt: Should schools provide access to literature that includes difficult conversations about racism? Support your reasoning with textual evidence.

## Author Interview

Author interview provided by UNBAN COOLIES.  
Visit: <http://www.youtube.com/@unbanCOOLIES>

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*Lesson materials developed in partnership with UNBAN COOLIES.*