

# Curriculum Guide

## Assata, An Autobiography

### Summary

In 1973, Assata Shakur, a leader in the Black Liberation movement of the 1960's and '70's, was convicted, based on flimsy evidence, of being an accomplice in the murder of a New Jersey State Trooper. (She was also charged multiple times and then acquitted for committing other felonies. She spent six years in prison until making a daring escape with the aid of some of her comrades. After several years in hiding, she was secreted to Cuba where she still lives today.

Her autobiography begins with the horrific experience of her arrest on the New Jersey Turnpike. With the chapters alternating between her growing up years and her years in police custody, Assata's autobiography describes what it was like to be black growing up during this dynamic period of U.S. history. Assata, an intense, sensitive and reflective young woman, was raised by her mother in NYC as well as her grandparents in North Carolina during the 1950's and '60's at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Part of an extraordinary generation, Assata's autobiography reveals her social, psychological, and political evolution as a committed black-nationalist revolutionary.

### What does this Autobiography have to offer students?

Ongoing evidence of racist unemployment, housing, health care, and education continues to plague our society; however, most people remain confused as to why racism persists in spite of the historic and heroic mass struggles to defeat it and the general acknowledgement that racism is wrong. Racism is, in fact, just as real today but less straightforward than the racism of slavery and Jim Crow. As Michelle Alexander describes in her book, *The New Jim Crow*, the racism that exists today is simply "old wine in new bottles". Sound bites of MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963 and Rosa Parks' courageous story are staples of the cultural diet fed to America's youth today, but these fail to illuminate the real reason racism continues to scar American life.

The mass anti-racist movement of the 60's and 70's had the potential to force the American capitalist system to its knees, however, it never finished the job of abolishing racism. Unfortunately, the liberal ruling class succeeded in destroying the radical wing of the Black Power movement with terror and coopting the moderate wing by controlling its leadership. Then, for several decades they implemented a strategy of installing black mayors, school superintendents, governors, police chiefs, and local politicians. Not only did this not end systemic racism, it enabled the rulers to better control the response of the black working class. For subsequent decades, urban unrest lay fallow as mainstream culture did the job of convincing the masses that progress was being made.

The racist double standard of police conduct has just recently become mainstream news once again, even though, in fact, it has been an unending feature of U.S. society since the slave patrols of the 1700's. The recent murders of unarmed blacks have ignited the anger of the working and middle class, especially black and Latino youth, notably in Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland, and many have engaged in mass protest and rebellion for the first times in their lives. In a mass way, the anti-racist consciousness of youth has been awakened, and they are eager to think about the issue of racism.

Most students, therefore, find Assata's story to be highly relevant and inspiring. They admire her willingness to struggle with internalized racism and sexism. They draw strength from her raging spirit of resistance as she stands up to her oppressors in the criminal justice system. Many students are energized by her passionate embrace of the anti-racist movement. They respond to her insights about public education as capitalist institutions that protect the racist status quo and how they condemn American youth to ignorance. Finally, Assata is a wonderful role model for young women, who are motivated by her extraordinary strength and courage.

### Some issues and topics that could be explored in class

#### The historical roots of racism

Some students are aware that the existence of slavery in the U.S. South explains why the U.S. is such a racist country, but most others have not made this connection overtly. Assata's autobiography explores this issue, opening up the opportunity for a class to read about the origin of racism in the early colonies both as a practice of maintaining control of the labor force and an ideology to justify slavery. This can be a watershed experience for students who can come to understand the historical roots of racism, a practice and ideology invented to enable the rich planter class to make money. Lerone Bennett's essay, *The Road Not Taken*, containing a plethora of primary sources, is a great assignment for this purpose.

#### Violence vs. Non-violence

Assata believes in the need for revolutionary violence even though she asserts her innocence concerning the accusation that she murdered a New Jersey State Policeman. She discusses her discomfort at the non-violent strategy of the Civil Rights Movement and how she arrived at the conviction that an armed revolution is necessary to destroy the American capitalist

system. This is a new concept to young people of today who have, by and large, been convinced by the theory of non-violence; in fact, that's their main take-away about the Civil Rights Movement. They know little or nothing about the Deacons for Defense or other militant responses to oppression and exploitation in the U.S. or around the world. Currently, in the face of opposing Jihadist violence, Western society looks disparagingly and lumps together all kinds of radicalism, including that of serious revolutionaries. Reading Langston Hughes poem "Good Morning Revolution" can help students grasp the difference between different kinds of violence. The film *The Deacons for Defense* shows the militant trend within the Civil Rights Movement and a perspective on the strategy of non-violence.

## Education

Assata is critical of many aspects of the education she received—its Eurocentric content, its whitewashing of history, its mechanical refusal to interconnect different aspects the curriculum. Young people today can relate easily to these criticisms, and they feel affirmed by Assata's critique of education. This can be the basis for a great essay assignment since students can write with authority about a challenging theme in the book. In the Writing Assignments section of this Curriculum Guide, there is a multi-stage assignment based on Assata's Autobiography, Howard Zinn's chapter on Christopher Columbus in *People's History of the United States* and the Introduction of James Loewen's book, *The Lies My Teacher Told Me*.

## Critical Thinking

At one point in the autobiography Assata describes a conversation she is having with some African friends about the Vietnam War. Ridiculed by her friends, she expressed opinions that reflected the nationalist and anti-communist propaganda of the ruling class controlled mass media. Several chapters later she describes her thinking process as she reconsiders and examines her opinions critically. This provides a wonderful opportunity to introduce students to critical thinking. The article "Who's Stealing from Whom" from *Challenge*, a revolutionary communist newspaper, included in the Supplementary Reading Section of this Guide is a good example of a critical examination of a central issue in our lives—the wage system.

## Prison and Crime

Much of the book is about Assata's experiences within the criminal justice system and life in custody. She shows the racist double standard of the justice system resulting in disproportionate numbers of blacks and other minority groups being imprisoned. In her *Address to My People*, a speech that was secretly recorded and aired on national radio, she contrasts the crimes of the average criminal with those of the bankers, landlords, and politicians, showing crime to be a social/political construct. Poetry, written by female prisoners at Framingham State Prison, included in the Supplementary Readings, can be used to counter the mainstream "law and order" view of who is imprisoned and why. An essay by Clarence Darrow, "Address to Prisoners in Cook County Jail" also challenges the mainstream views about crime and criminals. Chapters 2 and 3 from *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison* could be used to critically examine the role of prison under capitalism.

# Chapter by Chapter Quizzes/Discussion Questions/Videos

## Chapter 1

### Quiz

Directions: Answer 5 out of 6 questions.

1. Describe how the police and medical personnel treated Assata during and after her arrest.
2. According to Assata what is the connection of the New Jersey Police Department's to the Nazi's?
3. How did the police try to coerce her (force) into giving information?
4. What was she charged with?
5. Why does Assata have two names?
6. What is one thing that happened when her family came to visit?

### Discussion

1. What did you think of her use of the word "pig" to describe the police?
2. Assata had ambivalent feelings about the blacks who were in positions of authority (nurses, security guard). Why?
3. Slave name?
4. What is a fascist
5. "If We Must Die"—discuss poem (figurative Language)

## Chapter 2

### Quiz

Directions: Answer 5 out of 6 of the questions below:

1. What did Assata learn from her grandparents?
2. What kind of business did Assata's grandparents own in North Carolina?
3. How did Assata's mother manage to get tickets for the amusement park?
4. What were the positive and negative sides of segregated schools in the South, according to Assata?
5. How was Assata influenced by television?
6. What was Assata's criticism of the content of the education she was receiving?

### Group Discussion

1. Besides teaching her a lot about self-respect, her grandmother also tried to teach Assata her class biases about the black community. Rd. p. 20 (bottom para.) – p.21 (“...even if the kid didn't live in an alley.”) Was she judgmental? Where was she coming from? What did Assata think about her grandmother's attitude?
2. In the middle of p. 23 Assata tells about her discovery of the meaning of her grandmother's family name “Freeman”. She says, “After learning this, I saw my ancestors in a new light.” What does she mean by this?
3. Read the last paragraph on p. 31 – the top of p. 32. What does Assata mean when she writes “...at times, we accepted the white man's view of ourselves.” And, “... to varying degrees, we each made them true within ourselves because we believed them.” In light of your discussion, what do you think of the use of the N word today?
4. How do you feel about Assata's attitude toward white people?

## Chapter 3

### Quiz

Directions: Answer 5 out of 6 questions:

1. Why did Assata want to get out of her cell?
2. What was Assata's purpose for making the tape “To My People”?
3. What kinds of crimes were the other woman in jail for?
4. Why did Assata stack up the metal cups on the table next to the bars of her cell every night?
5. What happened to Eva, the big woman, after the riot?
6. Why was the trial moved from Middlesex County to Morris County?

### Discussion

1. In her tape, "To My People", Assata explains who she thinks are the "real" criminals of society. What does she mean by this? How do you relate to it?
2. What is your opinion of Assata's defiant behavior at the workhouse?
3. Was it possible for Assata to have gotten a fair trial? Why or why not? How does this relate to your own experiences?

## Chapters 4 – 5

### Quiz

Directions: Choose 5 out of 6 questions to answer:

1. How did Assata decide to change herself after she turned Joe down and hurt him with her words, “Because you're too black and ugly.”
2. When Assata went to stay with Tina's family, after she ran away, what did Tina's mother teach her?
3. Why did Assata and Kamau tell their lawyers to remain mute (silent)?
4. Why did Assata and Kamau keep getting removed from the courtroom?
5. Why did Evelyn remove herself as Assata's lawyer?
6. After the “hung jury” (when the jury can't agree on a verdict), why did Assata and Kamau feel they were now ready for trial?

### Discussion

1. What is your opinion about Assata's analysis of the problems between her mother and stepfather? When she says, "Just being poor is one of their biggest obstacles.(p. 73)" How big a role does poverty play in people's problems?
2. What is your opinion of Assata's and Kamau's decision to break the court's rules and refuse to participate in what they saw as a mockery of justice?
3. What do you think about Assata's inner conflict about getting pregnant? (p. 92 - 93) Can you relate to her struggle? What do you think about bringing a child into a messed up world?
4. How do lawyers fit into the criminal justice system? Do their attitudes and world view affect the way they do the job?

- When Assata ran away as a young teenager, she received sexist abuse from her boss and from boys at a party and more. How common is this kind of sexist abuse today? What do you think is the root cause of it?
- How do you relate to Assata's statement, "It has always intrigued me how the world can be so beautiful and so ugly at the same time."?

## Chapters 6 – 7

### Quiz

Directions: Answer 5 out of 6 questions:

- Where did Assata go after she ran away from home?
- How did Assata defend herself against abuse?
- What was the positive side of Assata's experience living with her Aunt Evelyn?
- Why was the Nazi Party demonstrating outside of the courthouse in Morristown?
- How did her mother respond when Assata told her she was pregnant?
- Describe the medical care that Assata received after the pregnancy was out in the open?

### Group Work

- When Assata ran away as a young teenager, she received sexist abuse from her boss and from boys at a party, and more. How common is this kind of sexist abuse today? What do you think is the root cause of it?
- Read p. 123 (last paragraph) – p. 124 (middle) How do you relate to Assata's statement, "It has always intrigued me how the world can be so beautiful and so ugly at the same time"?
- How did Assata feel about being pregnant? What do you think about her reaction to the pregnancy?

## Chapters 8 – 10

### Quiz

Directions: Answer 5 out of 7 questions.

- What kinds of things did Evelyn expose Assata to?
- How did Assata change from living with Evelyn?
- When Assata lived with her grandparents in the South, what was it that attracted her to the Civil Rights Movement and the NAACP?
- Why did she have a hard time with the strategy of non-violence?
- As a young teenager, how did Assata feel about being an American?
- When Assata was working and going to high school at night, what kind of social life did she have?
- What did Assata learn from participating in the Equal Opportunity Conference (when she worked for the black employment agency)?

### Group Work

- Read p. 136 (first two paragraphs) Do you agree with Assata that the teacher was racist? What does Assata mean by "how many ways racism can manifest itself" and "how many ways people fight against it"? Were the students fighting against racism?
- Read p. 149, first full paragraph Why does Assata identify with the company? What does it do for her? What does she come to realize about identifying with the company? Can you relate to this?
- Read p. 154, from the paragraph that starts with "Whiskey..." to the end of the first paragraph on p. 155 What kind of change is Assata going through? What is she realizing about herself?
- Read p. 158, last paragraph to the end of p. 159 This seems to be a decisive moment in Assata's life. Is being organized really that important?

## Chapters 11 – 12

### Quiz

Directions: Answer 5 out of 6 questions.

- What happened to Assata's co-defendant, Rema Olugbala?
- When Assata went on trial for kidnapping and armed robbery, who gave the opening statement and why?
- Why did Assata decide to stop straightening her hair?
- Why did Manhattan Community College turn out to be a good choice for Assata?
- What did Assata learn about the fight against slavery and Pres. Lincoln that had a powerful impact on her?
- What kind of political activity did Assata get involved in when she was a college student? Give an example.

## Group Work

1. Read p. 181 (middle of the page, “The schools we go to...”) Assata is saying that the schools are part of the system that is keeping poor people down. Do you agree? Should we view school and education as the way to a better life? What connections can you make to other things you’ve read or learned about?
2. Read p. 190 (middle of the page to the end of the paragraph at the top of p. 191) Are black people oppressed/exploited because of poverty or also because of color? Do you think any white people are exploited? Is there a basis of unity for black and white to fight together?
3. Read p. 172 (last two lines on the page – p. 173 end of first full paragraph) How are our ideas of beauty affected by our culture? Can you remember a time in your life when you decided to change your style? Were you making a statement about yourself?

## Chapters 13 – 14

### Quiz

Directions: Answer 5 out of 7 questions.

1. What was Assata feeling when MLK was killed?
2. Why did Assata go to the Bay area (Berkeley) in California?
3. What were the Native Americans doing on Alcatraz Island?
4. Why was Assata attracted to the Black Panther Party?
5. Why did Evelyn not defend Assata for the Queens bank robbery trial?
6. How did Assata feel about the spectators in the courtroom?
7. Why did Evelyn not defend Assata for the Queens bank robbery trial?

## Chapters 15 – 17

### Quiz

Directions: Answer 5 out of 7 questions:

1. What was one of Assata’s assignments (what kind of work did she do) when she joined the Black Panther Party?
2. What was Assata’s criticism of the political education in the party?
3. What was Assata’s relationship with Zayd and what kind of person was he?
4. Why was Assata against defending the Party’s office if it got attacked by the police?
5. What was Cointelpro and what were they doing to destroy the Black Panther Party?
6. What finally forced Assata to go into hiding (underground)?
7. Did Assata believe that revolutionary struggle is based mainly on emotions (for example, anger)?

### Discussion

1. What is Cointelpro and what did they do to the Black Panther Party?
2. Today, post 911, much of the domestic spying that Cointelpro did illegally in the 1960’s and ‘70’s has been made legal by the Patriot Act. Do you trust the government with these powers? Upon what do you base your opinion?
3. What do you think of black nationalism—the idea that blacks have separate interests from whites and have to organize separately?

### YOUTUBE Videos

Alcatraz

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mg6tLE6sKlk>

Black Panther Party

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMnc2KjS7Vw>

Kathleen Cleaver, Cultural Pride

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwLpoy0nfng&list=PL7055098504953AF4>

The Sixties: The years that shaped a generation (first 10 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUc2eLe-ruI>

The Women’s Movement

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/left-on-pearl#>

Cointelpro

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ds7NDC2-SM>

## Chapters 18 – Postscript

### Quiz

Directions: Answer 5 out of 7 questions.

1. What happened to Assata's lawyer, Stanley Cohen?
2. Who supported Assata who she never had the opportunity to thank?
3. What challenges did Assata face with the prisoners in the maximum security unit at Alderson, the women's prison in West Virginia?
4. What happened when Assata's little girl came to visit her in jail?
5. According to Assata, what was life like in Cuba?
6. Why, at first, was Evelyn cold and distant when Assata called her from Cuba?
7. Why did Assata object being identified as a "mulatta"?

### Discussion

As a class read parts of the interview with Assata that describe her escape and subsequent experience in Cuba.  
<http://www.thetalkingdrum.com/bla4.html>

## Ideas for Introducing Assata, An Autobiography

After the Boston Marathon bombing, Assata Shakur was put on the FBI's "Most Wanted Terrorist" list. Why? What was the rationale? Is she a danger to the citizens of the United States? Was she ever? The following video clips and internet sites are a good way to show how controversial a figure she is and provoke curiosity about her life.

- Link to Huffington Post May 2013—Assata Shakur added to list of FBI's most wanted terrorist  
<http://live.huffingtonpost.com/r/segment/fbi-doubles-/51828e26fe3444064600024b>
- FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists [http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted\\_terrorists](http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists)
- Flier "Hands off Assata Shakur" [http://www.assatashakur.org/docs/flyer\\_assata2.pdf](http://www.assatashakur.org/docs/flyer_assata2.pdf)
- Petition <https://www.change.org/p/president-barack-obama-remove-assata-shakur-from-the-fbi-s-most-wanted-terrorists-list>
- Eyes of the Rainbow [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt5uoQt6\\_es](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt5uoQt6_es)

Read the first chapter out loud to help motivate them.

## Writing Assignments

### I Analytical Writing—"A Crime by Any Other Name...."/Marlboro Secret

In one paragraph, answer the following questions: What is the main point of chapter 2? Is this an important and/or useful point? To whom would it be useful? Explain. What is the main point of "Marlboro Secret said to be Ammonia"? How is it an example of the point made in chapter 2? Explain.

In your introductory sentence, use the title of chapter 2, "A Crime By Any Other Name" and the title of the book it came from, **The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison**. Use correct punctuation. Later in the paragraph, use the title of the news article "Marlboro Secret said to be Ammonia".

(Based on Chapter 2 of *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison* and a news article, "Marlboro's Secret...") Both readings are included in the Miscellaneous Handouts section of the Curriculum Guide)

### II Assata/Lies My Teacher Told Me

Now, you will consolidate the work you have done into a composition that shows the relationship between Assata's experience and Loewen's analysis of the failure of US schools to teach history. You will conclude by explaining how you relate to these ideas.

First paragraph:

Summarize what Loewen says has gone wrong with the teaching of American history. Begin your paragraph with an introductory sentence that includes the title, author, and main idea.

Second paragraph:

Discuss Assata's experience with education

- Begin the paragraph with a transition sentence that connects it to paragraph 1
- Include the quotation you selected from Assata's autobiography (Preparation worksheet). Interpret and explain it in your own words. Then, explain how it relates to Loewen's analysis.

Third paragraph:

Discuss how you relate to Loewen's and Assata's ideas. Discuss your own experience learning history in school.

(Based on the introduction (abbreviated version) to *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James Loewen—included in Miscellaneous Handouts section) (Preparation for writing Composition: Assata's View of Education/*Lies My Teacher Told Me* in Miscellaneous Handouts section)

### III What forces shaped Assata?

Figuring out how we fit into society is a complicated process that every young person must undergo. In her autobiography, Assata describes what this process was like for her as a sensitive and intense young woman, growing up in a tumultuous historical period. Choose one of the following factors and explain the impact it had on her growing-up process. Describe and discuss two examples from the text that will illustrate your point.

- Friendships
- Family
- Personality
- The historical period in which she grew up

Begin your composition by introducing your topic in a general way. Then present and discuss your examples. Finally, draw a conclusion about what you have discussed.

Your purpose for this composition is to explain how Assata's friendships, family, personality, or the historical period in which she grew up helped shape her into the woman she became.

### IV My Reading of Assata

A remarkable aspect of Assata's autobiography was her ability to reflect on her own thinking—her unexamined ideas, her complex emotional reactions, her assumptions upon which she based conclusions. In this final composition, you will reflect on your reading of Assata's autobiography, which is different from all other readings. You formed a unique relationship to her story because you brought to bear your own values, experiences, biases, and opinions.

Drawing from your posts on the on-line forum, write a composition in which you critically analyze your own reactions to Assata's autobiography. Include the quotes you responded to (2 - 3) and explain why you think you reacted as you did. What does it tell us about you and what is important to you? On what assumptions are your opinions based? What life experiences led you to feel and think the way you do?

Start your composition with an introductory paragraph in which you summarize the autobiography (completely in your own words). Include a topic sentence that states how you related to the book.

### V Deacons for Defense/Assata

Your last composition will compare and contrast Marcus, the main character in the film, *Deacons for Defense*, and Assata.

In paragraph 1,

discuss what influenced both Assata and Marcus to commit themselves to the struggle for change. You may refer to Assata's "Letter to my People" on p. 52 when she discusses what makes black revolutionaries. As for Marcus, discuss what made him decide to become a leader.

In paragraph 2,

compare and contrast the goals of Marcus and Assata. How were their goals similar? How were they different?

In paragraph 3,

describe one scene from the film that you see as pivotal to the change that occurred in Bogalusa, Louisiana in 1965. How did you feel/react when you were watching it? Explain/discuss your response.

### VI Express Yourself!

An aesthetic response is a representation of your emotional reaction to a piece of literature, art, music, dance, film or drama. Becoming aware of our emotional responses heightens our appreciation of any artistic and creative work; then, sharing it connects us to the human experience. This assignment is to capture your aesthetic response as you read Assata Shakur's autobiography.

Choose one of the following projects:

- Design a Tattoo for Assata accompanied by a narrative that fully explains the choices you made (image, colors, size, placement on body).
- Make a collage that through images and words represents Assata's life. Write a narrative that explains your collage.
- Choose one of Assata's poems from her autobiography to read to the class accompanied by a musical selection. Write an introduction to the poem that tells its meaning, what it reveals about Assata, and why you chose it (how you relate to it).

Note:

- The written parts of this project should follow the format of a college paper.
- A Collage: a picture made by sticking cloth, pieces of paper, photographs, and other objects onto a surface.

## Supplementary Readings and Resources

- Who's Stealing from Whom? Challenge Newspaper 9/5/07 p. 4  
static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/461158/4901703/1259428245780/cd090507.pdf?token=gevynnwy27ySHOBnlRJTBUHSAJM%3D
- Good Morning Revolution by Langston Hughes [theworkersdreadnought.wordpress.com/2008/12/13/good-morning-revolution-langston-hughes-1932](http://theworkersdreadnought.wordpress.com/2008/12/13/good-morning-revolution-langston-hughes-1932)
- White Man by Langston Hughes <http://www.poetrynook.com/poem/white-man>
- If We Must Die by Claude McKay [www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/if-we-must-die](http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/if-we-must-die)
- Poems from Prison by Anne Flaherty (p.7) [www.sabes.org/sites/sabes.org/files/resources/fn123.pdf](http://www.sabes.org/sites/sabes.org/files/resources/fn123.pdf)
- Michelle Alexander on the Irrational Race Bias of the Criminal Justice and Prison Systems [truthout.org/opinion/item/10629-truthout-interviews-michelle-alexander-on-the-irrational-race-bias-of-the-criminal-justice-and-prison-system](http://truthout.org/opinion/item/10629-truthout-interviews-michelle-alexander-on-the-irrational-race-bias-of-the-criminal-justice-and-prison-system)
- Assata's letter to Pope John Paul II [genius.com/Assata-shakur-open-letter-to-pope-john-paul-ii-annotated](http://genius.com/Assata-shakur-open-letter-to-pope-john-paul-ii-annotated)
- The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison by Jeffrey Reiman (chapters 2 and 3)
- The People's History of the United States by Howard Zinn (chapter 1)
- Lies My Teacher Told Me by James Loewen (Introduction)
- The Road Not Taken by Lerone Bennett

## Videos

- Deacons for Defense (Youtube)
- The Sixties—The Years That Shaped a Generation (Youtube)
- Attica (by Cinda Firestone Fox)

## Miscellaneous Handouts

### Full-text readings, other useful handouts related to readings

1. Glossary – Introduction Lies My Teacher Told Me
  - p. 1
    - invariably—always or almost always
    - wide berth—keep far away from
    - requiting—returning
    - disabusing—making someone realize an idea is not true
    - charges—students/somebody being taken care of
    - deems—judges, considers
  - p. 2
    - spellbind—fascinate
    - melodrama—a drama that is stereotyped, exaggerated, simplistic
    - illuminate—shed light on
    - conversely—opposite
  - p. 3
    - dearth—absence
    - alienated—cut off from
    - bland—lacking flavor, character, interest
    - nationalism—proud loyalty to a nation
    - culprits—the cause of the problem
    - inquiry—a questioning mind
    - indoctrinate—brainwash
    - synapses—nerve endings responsible for communicating with the brain
  - p.4
    - stifle—suffocate, prevent the development of something
    - suppressing causation—preventing the understanding that one thing causes another
    - coherently—logically, consistently
    - unverifiable—can't be proven
    - omission—leaving out
    - mar—spoil
    - controversial—causing argument

retrospect—looking back

hamstrung—made powerless or ineffective

2. Preparation for writing Composition: Assata's View of Education/Lies My Teacher Told Me

Directions:

In your 2nd composition, you will relate Assata's view of her education (particularly history) with the Introduction to Lies My Teacher Told Me and also write your own opinion.

- Find a quotation from Assata (p. 29 (bottom), p. 32 – 33, p. 35, p. 175, p. 176 (top)) that in some way relates to the introduction. Write the quotation here:
  - Discuss Assata's words. Restate them and explain them in your own words. What is your opinion about her point? Explain
  - Now, explain how her words relate to the introduction from Lies.... Refer specifically to two of Loewen's points
3. Excerpt from US History text reprinted in Lies My Teacher Told Me by James Loewen

### **What is the story that US history textbooks tell about Christopher Columbus?**

#### **Directions**

Here is an excerpt from a U.S. history textbook used in many American High schools. How does it illustrate the points that James Loewen makes in his introduction to Lies My Teacher Told Me? Find at least three ways.

Born in Genoa, Italy, of humble parents, Christopher Columbus grew up to become an experienced seafarer. He sailed the Atlantic as far as Iceland and West Africa. His adventures convinced him that the world must be round. Therefore the fabled riches of the East — spices, silk, and gold — could be had by sailing west, superseding the overland route through the Middle East, which the Turks had closed off to commerce. To get funding for his enterprise, Columbus beseeched monarch after monarch in western Europe. After at first being dismissed by Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Columbus finally got his chance when Queen Isabella decided to underwrite a modest expedition.

Columbus outfitted three pitifully small ships, the Nina, the Pinto, and the Santa Maria, and set forth from Spain. The journey was difficult. The ships sailed west into the unknown Atlantic for more than two months. The crew almost mutinied and threatened to throw Columbus overboard. Finally they reached the West Indies on October 12, 1492.

Although Columbus made three more voyages to America, he never really knew he had discovered a New World. He died in obscurity, unappreciated and penniless. Yet without his daring American history would have been very different, for in a sense Columbus made it all possible.



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