

**Walking on Water:  
A Brief History on Black Surfers**

**Directed by Rhasaan Nichols**

**LESSON PLAN**

# study guides

This study guide was created by the Global Sport Institute at Arizona State University. <https://globalsport.asu.edu>

**Walking on Water: a Brief History on Black Surfers - Lesson Plan**  
**Directed by Rhasaan Nichols**

*Duration: 35 - 70 minutes with options below*

<https://youtu.be/da17wFbY5Ik>

Black print: Instructions for the teacher

Blue print: Spoken instructions from teacher to participants

**1. Documentary and Worksheet Questions (13-16 minutes)**

- a. While watching this 12-minute documentary, write down answers to the following questions. Watch after the credits for a great, extra interview! You'll also have a few minutes after it's over to finish your answers.
- b. Provide individual worksheets and start the documentary. (Watch after the credits for a great, extra interview!)

1. What was the Jim Crow order/Era?

- a. Give an example of a Jim Crow law.
  - Jim Crow Laws were state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century. The laws were enforced until 1965. Jim Crow laws were heavily practiced in the Southern States. Jim Crow institutionalized the economic, educational and social disadvantages of African Americans and other people of color in the South.
  - Examples: "Whites Only" seating areas in restaurants or separate drinking fountains for "whites" and "colored".

2. Who was Nick Gabaldon? Why is he important?

- Nick Gabaldon was the first documented surfer of color. He was African American and Latino. His presence alone challenged the segregation and discrimination that was happening during this time. He is considered a pioneer and role model.

3. What was the African American Migration also known as the Great Migration?

- a. What drove the migration West?
  - The Great Migration, sometimes known as the Great Northward Migration or the Black Migration, was the movement of 6 million African Americans out of the rural Southern United States to the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West that occurred between 1916 and 1970.

- The California Dream, the idea and promise of new opportunity, employment, escaping Jim Crow, the warm weather, and the beautiful scenery were all attractive reasons to migrate West.
4. What are the main goals of the Surf Academy, Surf Bus Foundation and YMCA youth program?
- The program provides opportunities for kids to get outside, meet other kids, go to the beach (for some of their first times), play in nature
  - The program also seeks to address the legacy of segregation in the county of Los Angeles. They want the beach and ocean needs to reflect the demographics of Los Angeles.

## 2. Discussion Questions (5-15 minutes)

This discussion can be done in a full group or broken down into small groups.

- Option to have student write answers down first
1. Racial segregation and Jim Crow laws made great impacts on American society and culture. What lasting effects has segregation had on the United States?
    - Can you think of examples that are holdovers from Jim Crow laws?

For information on Jim Crow Laws and Examples:

[PBS: Jim Crow Laws](#)

[National Park Services: Jim Crow Law Examples](#)

2. Nick Gabaldon was one of the first people of color to do what he did. Who are some other examples like him (in sports or other areas of society), and why is it important to tell their stories?
3. Why do you think the kids in the YMCA program did not know how to swim? What barriers might they face?

There is a long history of black people being kept out of public spaces such as pools and beaches. Before desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement, many public pools and beaches were “Whites Only”. As the Jim Crow Era came, the same rules and regulations remained. The limited or restricted access was experienced by many minorities intergenerationally. When you have parents who do not know how to swim, it is more likely that they will not teach their children, and thus the cycle continues. The intersection of race, space and class help to explain why some black and brown children do not know how to swim today. While there has been a rise in numbers of black and brown children who know

how to swim, the numbers are still small when compared to their white counterparts. Furthermore, racial myths such as “black people can’t swim” might be another driving factor. History, access, cost and fear are all contributing factors.

4. Do you think Nick Gabalon’s experience would have been different had he been a woman of color instead of a man? Why or why not?
5. Before watching the documentary, did you consider surfing a diverse and inclusive sport? Has that thought changed since watching the documentary? Why or why not?

### **3. Worksheet Discussion Activities** (15 - 35 minutes - can eliminate 1 if needed for time)

This discussion can be done in a full group or broken down into small groups.

1. In this documentary surfing is used as a tool for community building and sharing history. In your opinion, why does sport matter? Write 2-3 ways sport has benefited your life, people you know, and/or your community.
2. Think about an activity or hobby you enjoy (playing piano, running, fixing cars, etc.). Who is an important person in the history of this activity/hobby that helped make it what it is today? Write their name, what they did for this activity/hobby, and list 3-4 ways how it would look different today if that person never took up this activity or hobby.
3. Many of the kids in this documentary, including the little boy at the very end, rarely or have never been to the beach, let alone learned how to surf. What is an activity, skill, or location that you think people could benefit from if they were introduced to it? Example - hiking in mountains/parks, playing the drums, etc. Develop a preliminary plan for how you could introduce more people to this activity/skill/location. Be sure to include why you think this activity/skill/location is important, what the potential benefits are, the target audience (and why), how to reach them, and what equipment and/or services you'd need (e.g. transportation, surf boards and wetsuits, lessons).

- a. What is it?
- b. Why is it important and what are its potential benefits?
- c. Who is the target audience, and why?
- d. How will you reach this target audience?
- e. What equipment and/or services would you need?

**4. Conclusion** (3-5 minutes)

- What did you learn about Nick Gabaldon and/or the beaches of Los Angeles?
- How can sport be used as a tool to positively impact society?
- How might greater awareness about the topics we learned and talked about improve the world?