

Ten Lessons From Black Literary Societies

Through my study of African American literary societies, I found 10 central lessons related to literacy instruction, which helped me to understand the ways educators today could use the tenets of Black literary societies to rethink learning in classrooms. These lessons also serve as the prelude of defining Historically Responsive Literacy. (For a further explanation of each lesson, see pages 32–35).

1. Literacy learning encompassed cognition (reading and writing skills) as well as social and cultural practices (learning about identity and equity).
2. Literacy was the foundation and was central to all disciplinary learning.
3. Literacy learning involved print and oral literacy, and these were developed simultaneously.
4. Literacy instruction was responsive to the social events and people of the time.
5. Literacy was tied to joy, love, and aesthetic fulfillment.
6. Learners of different literacies and experiences came together to learn from one another—using each other’s ways of knowing as resources for new learning.
7. Literacy learning was highly collaborative, and a shared learning space was created.
8. Literacy learning involved reading and writing diverse text genres and authorship.
9. Literacy learning also focused on how to reclaim the power of authority in language through critical literacy.
10. Identity and intellectual development were cultivated alongside literacy learning.