Background:

"Hubert: His Story" is a documentary film about Hubert Roberts, an activist and mentor in Flint, Michigan. A resident of Flint for years, Mr. Roberts has seen the city transform from booming metropolis to poisoned city. He teaches local high school students about the impact of history on their lives. He also acts as a role model and father-figure to dozens of at-risk students in the city.

Before his role as a mentor to high school students, Mr. Roberts served 17.5 years of a 16.5- to 25-year prison sentence for conspiracy to commit kidnapping and aggravated assault of a man, who stole $1,700 in quarters and small bills from Roberts’ home. Roberts had collected the coins as an employee of Buford vending company. Roberts was 29 years old when he entered prison and 46 years old when he left.

In 1999, he was granted parole and worked in the Detroit area until he was allowed to move back to Flint. Shortly after his release, Roberts underwent several unsuccessful surgeries to remove a pituitary tumor he manages with the help of, he says, great doctors and medication.

Roberts has since worked through the challenges that former inmates face as they re-settle into communities, and in the process, he’s emerged as a community leader and mentor in Flint.

The documentary film explores Hubert Roberts’ life and his mission to educate Flint’s population about Black culture. Along with the documentary, MSU Transdisciplinary Artist in Residence, Stacey Fox, and student artists, designed a comic book called “Growing up Flint-Style” that incorporates significant events in African American history.

The aim is to get readers to appreciate the contributions of Black Americans and/or critically analyze racial discrimination. Perhaps the comic book will also encourage youth to tell stories of the Black experience and their family history.

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Questions to ask prior to the screening:

- Ask students how they view Flint. How much do they know about African American history and culture? Do they know about Hubert Roberts’ contributions to building the Flint community? Do they know about racial inequities in Flint and elsewhere? Are they aware of Flint’s role in the automotive industry?
- Exploring the link between Flint and the rest of Michigan will provide students with insight into how everyone is connected through the resources and the people in the state.
- You should also discuss the coverage of Flint in the news media, concentrating on the Flint water crisis. With negative coverage, many only know the city through tragedies. What other negative events and issues in Flint have also been the subject of news stories? Make a list of positive and negative news stories.
- If any of your students are from Flint or have family members in Flint, ask them about how they feel other Michigan residents view the city, and how they feel about it.

Questions to ask after the screening:

- According to the film, one in three adults cannot read or write in Flint. Specifically at Northwestern High School, where Hubert Roberts is a mentor, 9 out of 10 students are economically disadvantaged and only 6 out of 10 will graduate from high school. Discuss with students the realities of poverty and its link to education.
- Another important theme in the documentary is the importance of positive role models. Ask students to think about some of the positive role models in their lives and the impact of those individuals.
- These questions will help generate dialogue and allow students to contextualize their own place prior to watching the film.
1. What are your interactions like with people from Flint? In what ways are Flint residents the same and different from you?

2. What cultural/racial factors inhibit the residents of Flint? What/who is responsible for these different factors?

3. What are some of the attributes that Mr. Roberts exhibits that makes him a good role model for the students of Northwestern High School?

4. Students and mentors describe the lives of youth in Flint as troubled and characterized with drug use and other negative behaviors. Sometimes students lack a father figure. For such students, what sort of difference could a group like Involved Dads make in those students' lives?

5. What do you think of Mr. Roberts’ use of history to teach students? Is it a good teaching method? Why or why not? Do you agree with his interpretations of history? Why or why not?

6. How was taking students to the prison an effective experience for the students? Do you think it would teach you? Why or why not?

7. Why do you think the students of Northwestern High School respond positively to Mr. Roberts? On the other hand, why do think his son has stopped communicating with him?

8. Why do you think Mr. Roberts is so passionate about reaching out to students and teaching them even when he does not get paid for it?
Activity One  Impact of a Father Figure

**Objective:** After watching the film, explore strategies for building stronger communication, relationships and empathy skills.

**Directions:**

First, ask students to talk about some of the positive male role models in their lives. It can be a brother, father, uncle, teacher or other male figure. What about these men makes them models for students?

Second, ask students what it would be like without this person in their lives. How would life be different without them? Would there be certain activities that would be harder to do without their guidance?

Have students work together in small groups to create a list of attributes they associate with the positive male figures in their lives. The attributes can be as general as “good” if the students have an argument for it.

Have groups share their lists with the class. Ask students how it could be hard for someone who doesn't have that type of figure in their life, and how things could be different for them than for someone who had that influence.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you see any patterns in the lists?
2. Do you see any of these attributes in your own personality traits?
Activity Two  Mr. Roberts’ Shirts

Objective: After watching the film, develop “connecting the dots” strategies and critical thinking skills.

Directions: Have students think of some of the shirt choices Mr. Roberts makes throughout the documentary. Some of the examples are nice, button up shirts, the “Black Lives Don't Matter T-shirt,” “I Am Trayvon Martin” T-shirt and many more.

Have the students break up into groups to discuss the T-shirts and the messages Mr. Roberts could be trying to impart. Ask a couple volunteers to share their thoughts with the class.

Discussion Questions:
1. Why would Mr. Roberts use shirts as a form of spreading a message? Is this method impactful?
2. Think of some of the shirts you have. Do you feel those are sending a message to people who see them?
Objective: After reading the comic book, address history and the importance of remembering the past.

Directions: Have students write down two or three stories that an older member of their family has told them or a memory of their family that they have made themselves. Collect the stories and redistribute them.

Ask students to form small groups. Each student should read their paper aloud to their group. Have the students discuss why that memory might have particularly stuck out in the student's mind for them to write it down.

After the students have shared with their group, have everyone join together as a class again. Have a couple students share some of the stories and talk about the merits again and why it's important to remember this story.

Discussion Questions:
1. What about that story made it stick out in the student's mind?
2. Is it important to remember history? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think Marcus didn't want to do the history project at first? How did he overcome his initial worries?
4. Review the comic book. Marcus' mom and grandmother engaged in historic events and movements. Which information had you heard of? Which was new? Which information angered you? Which made you proud?