

LESSON M-UIII-L2

# Surprising Klansmen

**Unit III:** Historical Context of Terrorism

**Grade Levels:** 6-8

**Time:** 90 Minutes



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## Objective

- Investigate the question: “Why do some people support or become members of the KKK?”

## Key Terms

- Ku Klux Klan
- reconstruction
- Thomas E. Watson
- William J. Simmons

## Lesson Materials

- a brief history of the KKK from the online article “Ku Klux Klan” from West’s Encyclopedia of American Law, 2005 (found at [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Ku\\_Klux\\_Klan.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Ku_Klux_Klan.aspx)) (one copy for each student)
- photo of the Thomas Watson statue (found at <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/statues/watson2.htm>)
- photo of William Joseph Simmons (found at <http://www.imageenvision.com/historic/9128-picture-of-william-joseph-simmons-by-jvpd> or <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91792441/>)
- Photo Analysis Worksheet (found at [http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf))

## Lesson Plan

- Ask students to share their ideas about the type of person who might be attracted to join the Ku Klux Klan. List the characteristics.
- Show the students the image of Thomas E. Watson’s statue. You may wish to enlarge the image so that the writing at the base is clear. The inscription on the base is the following:

EDITOR, LAWYER, HISTORIAN,  
AUTHOR, ORATOR, STATESMAN.  
AUTHOR OF  
RURAL FREE DELIVERY  
A CHAMPION OF RIGHT WHO  
NEVER FALTERED IN THE CAUSE.

- Have students write in their journals about the kind of person they think Thomas Watson was based on the inscription and the fact that this statue is in front of the main entrance to Georgia’s state capitol building.
- Next, show the students the image of William Joseph Simmons.

- Have students study the image and try to determine the time period when the photo was taken and the place and circumstances surrounding the photo.
- Have the students use the Photo Analysis Worksheet to examine the photo and record their thinking in their journals.
- When all students have completed their journal writing, have them share their observations.
- Explain the history behind the statue of Thomas Watson. You may use the following resources:  
[http://www.publicartaroundtheworld.com/Thomas\\_Edward\\_Watson\\_statue.html](http://www.publicartaroundtheworld.com/Thomas_Edward_Watson_statue.html)  
<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2540>
- Explain the history behind the photo of William Joseph Simmons. You may use the following resources:  
<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/ideology/ku-klux-klan/the-ku-klux-klan-o>  
[http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34478/34478-h/34478-h.htm#Page\\_196](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34478/34478-h/34478-h.htm#Page_196)
- Have students read the article, “Ku Klux Klan.”
- Guide the students in discussing the question: “Based on the activities of the Ku Klux Klan and what you know about two people directly involved in the organization, what did you learn about some members of the KKK that you did not expect to discover?”

## Evidence of Understanding

Have the students compare and contrast their preconceived ideas about the type of person who might be attracted to join the Ku Klux Klan with what they learned about the civic leaders Thomas Watson and William Joseph Simmons.

## Additional Activities and Resources

- Research the official attire of the Ku Klux Klan.
  - What are some of the specific features and symbols of the attire?
  - What do these features and symbols represent?
  - Why do members frequently cloak their appearance during Ku Klux Klan activities?
  - Why would prominent men like Watson and Simmons choose to participate in clandestine activities?
  - How has the Ku Klux Klan attire come to be perceived by the general public?
- Have students view the free film, *Shadow of Hate* (found at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6537841104452251371>). Thomas Watson is depicted in the film.
- Research the former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke, who was a member of the House of Representatives in Louisiana. He also unsuccessfully ran for higher state and national positions.
  - What was David Duke’s background?
  - How did the Ku Klux Klan groom Duke for public/political office?
  - Throughout his political career, how did the public receive David Duke?
  - How is David Duke similar to and different than Thomas Watson and William Joseph Simmons?

## Taking Action and Giving Service

- Have the students create a public awareness campaign.
  - Ask the students to imagine they lived during the years when the KKK was an active and highly visible organization.
  - Divide the students into small groups and ask them to design a public awareness campaign about the KKK.
  - Remind them that they can only use the communication tools available to them during that time period (no Internet or social media).
  - After the groups create their plans and present them to the rest of the class, have the class select one campaign and “re-imagine” it for the 21st century (Internet, TV, digital advertising, social media, etc.)
  - Ask the students to compare their KKK campaign to a similar campaign in today’s world.