

Lesson Plan for “Right is slow and tardy...” by Robin Helms Allen
published in the online anthology [Nobody’s Home: Modern Southern Folklore](#)

CCSS Standard(s): CCS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RH.11-12.3, 6, 7, 8, 9 ([Social Studies](#))

Objective(s): To consider how prominent public officials affect ordinary people’s beliefs

Essential Question(s): Who was Jesse Helms, and what is his legacy?

Preparation for Teacher (Strategy and Purpose): Using a variety of resources, gather information about the late Jess Helms, former US senator from North Carolina. Helms was a prominent figure in conservative politics in the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s whose perspectives on social issues often created a stir. Read Robin Helms Allen’s “Right is slow and tardy . . .” about her experiences with Helms. Other sources could include: archives from the [Jesse Helms Center](#), his 2008 *New York Times* [obituary](#), a 2008 [NPR](#) story about him, and a [critique of him in Mother Jones](#).

Preparation of Students (Strategy and Purpose): The teacher should provide students with background material about the late Jesse Helms. These materials should come from a variety of perspectives: sympathetic, critical, and neutral.

In-class activities (recommended): Prior to class, students should be given time to read materials about Jesse Helms, which should include the Allen essay. In class, they should be divided into three groups – supporters, detractors, and neutral – for an in-class debate about the US senator’s legacy. The teacher should prepare questions in advance and should allow each group to answer each question within a limited timeframe. Those questions could include:

- What was the narrative that Jesse Helms created, endorsed, or sought to advance?
- Did Helms roots as a Southerner affect his beliefs? How?
- Could Helms have won public office in the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s by supporting the opposite positions?
- Could a politician win public office today by supporting the opposite positions?

Lesson Follow-up (Recommendations): At the end of the debate, students could cast a secret ballot to declare what they believe the tone of the longstanding narrative about Jesse Helms will be: supportive, detracting, or neutral?

Technology: SmartBoard, Elmo, other device for sharing the texts

Tiered Instruction/Intervention/Differentiation: Accommodations per needs, IEPs, or 504s

Assessment: Each group should turn in a report about their findings and how they based their arguments and positions on facts.

Homework: See assessment suggestion above.

Comments: This lesson will ask students to consider perspectives other than their own, which could be problematic for some. To ensure that the debate is about facts and analysis, not personal opinions, students should not choose their own groups.