



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
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Democracy (in)Action: Promoting Critical Youth Consciousness and Participation

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"Why should I learn this?", "This shit doesn't matter.", "Things will never change, anyway." These are the sentiments of many of my students - black, Latino, Chinese, Filipino, Samoan, white, Cambodian, among many others; poor and working-class; male and female; cynical and at times angry. The purpose of this unit will be to engage my students to hold established power and themselves, accountable to actualize the vision of the founders of America - to unite democratic *theory* on the one hand with conscious youth and student *action* on the other.

Given the rate of incarceration, violence and other social ills afflicting working-class, poor, youth of color, any level of participation in the democratic process (traditional or otherwise) needs to be furthered exponentially and in a way that more effectively reforms, alters, challenges and even counters the existing prescription for change. That prescription being: follow the rules, go to school, work hard, get a good job and live "the Dream".

In my process of coming into consciousness, I realized that the recipe for improving one's life is actually more complex than that. Indeed, our students need to do these things, but they must do more. The commonly held belief that the existing system is fine and the cause of failure is intrinsic to the students themselves, denies the institutional nature of the problem. This is an attempt to expand my students' analysis of the various problems facing them and their respective communities, as well as compel them to take critical action to address the problems.

This unit, *Democracy (in) Action: Promoting Critical Youth Consciousness and Participation*, will be implemented in my 12th grade, American Democracy class, at Balboa High School. Couched in the Southeast section of San Francisco - an historically working-class and immigrant community of the City - my students will have a broad range of issues and problems from which to apply their newly learned tools.

As they enter broader society, I wish for this 6-week series of lessons to provide concrete, relevant and convincing responses to their queries - that they may answer definitively, "I need to learn this, because this can change my life and the lives of my people."

(Developed for American Democracy, grade 12; recommended for American Government, grade 12)

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