



Cause and Effect: Inequality and Activism

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Introduction

Any time I tell someone that I teach middle school debate, they laugh and ask, “What exactly is middle school debate?” That, I reply, is the million dollar question. Amazingly, middle school debate can be whatever my students and I decide we want it to be. Based on my experiences in the classroom and the last few months working with YNI, I feel that I now have a clearer understanding of what middle school debate can be. At its core, middle school debate is a class that teaches observation, resilience, and critical thinking. While not every student has a natural inclination towards public speaking, all students benefit from developing those three skills.

Throughout the last year, students had a front-row seat to activist movements in the United States. Prompted by the death of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter organizers staged protests across the United States. Youth activists are increasingly organizing climate justice rallies. Multiple demonstrations have happened in our city in response to the city and state’s handling of the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial. While some of my students seemed inspired by these movements, many of them also expressed feelings of apathy, doubt, or exhaustion.

Rather than depict movements as grand endeavors, this unit will examine activist movements through a pragmatic lens. First, we must establish the historical and current context of the United States democracy. Then, we will move into understanding the complexities of making and changing laws. Next, we will examine two different activist movements to determine what strategies create a successful movement and which strategies fall short. Finally, students will complete a persuasive writing project.

School Context

I teach in a traditional public middle school in North Tulsa. 100% of students I teach qualify for free-and-reduced lunch. While I don’t currently have exact demographic information, around 50-60% of Monroe students are Black. 30% are LatinX. The remaining students are either Asian American, Native American, or white. Our school has undergone tremendous change in the last three years. Three years ago, Monroe served about 200 students as a magnet school. In Spring 2019, Tulsa Public Schools made the choice to consolidate all North Tulsa middle schools into a neighborhood middle school on the Monroe campus. As a result, the size of our school tripled.

In the last two years, the administration at my school has worked tirelessly to create a school environment where 850+ students feel welcomed and cared for. We still have a long way to go, but a curriculum that challenges and interests students will play a big role in getting our school where it needs to be.

Classroom Context

Next year will be my third year teaching at Monroe and my fifth year teaching overall. I spent the first two years of my career teaching at a school that was consolidated into Monroe in the aforementioned board decision. I taught ELA for three years, which informs my emphasis on literacy skills in the classroom. While I have technically taught debate for one year, there were not many parts of distance learning that I feel are worth repeating. Consequently, I view this as year one of teaching debate.

I have three key goals as an electives teacher. The first goal is to fill gaps in the district-mandated ELA curriculum. Most importantly, the curriculum does not provide many opportunities for students to focus on writing projects for long periods of time. Secondly, I aim for ALL students to learn and enjoy my class. Public speaking will not come naturally to everyone (it may be some students' literal worst fear); however, all students deserve the opportunity to build skills in observation, critical thinking, and resilience. Finally, I want my class to be FUN. Because our school has been in a state of transition for the last 2-3 years, a lot of joy has been lost. As we phase back into school with less COVID-restrictions, I hope to create a learning environment that exemplifies the fun and adventure of learning.

Unit Rationale

My students do not need peer-reviewed journal articles to convince them that the current US democratic system fails them. Their state legislature chronically disinvests in their education. Their mayor refuses to acknowledge the city's fraught history of policy violence towards communities of color. Their representatives in Congress consistently advocate for policies that hurt my students' communities.

This unit is less focused on the shortcomings of democracy, and more about how to go about changing systems. This is not to say that my students will solve the United States' inequality problem (though I hope they do), but rather to acknowledge that we are moving forward with a solutions-oriented approach.

Content Objectives

My content objectives are two-fold. The first part of the content objectives builds out a contextual explanation of American democracy. The intention is to help students understand how American democracy got to a place that activists feel the need to start movements. The second part of the content objectives outline a few modern-day examples.

Requirements for a Successful Democracy

If a democracy requires all of these things, protests emerge when an individual or group feels that one of these things has been violated. For example, Trump voters felt the free and fair election had been compromised, leading to the January 6th insurrection. One could argue that a lack of alternative sources of information also contributed to insurrection. As this unit explores modern-day activist movements, students

must first know the baseline requirements of a successful democracy in order to understand why protests happen.

According to Dahl¹, the six components of a successful large scale democracy are:

1. Elected officials: those making decisions for the general public must be representatives of the people
2. Free, fair, and frequent elections: voters need multiple, consistent opportunities to choose their representatives. These electives should be consistently free of corruption and coercion.
3. Freedom of expression: citizens must be able to express dissent and approval of decisions made by elected officials
4. Alternative sources of information: Diverse sources of information should be available to citizens. The information should be reliable, and conducive to citizens making informed voting decisions.
5. Associational autonomy: citizens have the right to join or form political parties and interest groups.
6. Inclusive citizenship: all residents should retain all of their rights all of the time.

Michael Klarman's Unfinished Business²

In order to understand present-day activism, one must first build out a contextual understanding. Inequitable systems did not appear overnight. In Michael Klarman's book, *Unfinished Business*, Klarman explains the historical and systematic events that have both enabled and prohibited progress towards racial justice, specifically for Black Americans. He argues that progress for racial minorities has often come as an "unintended consequence of other developments." A summary of his book (below) provides the necessary historical insight to build upon for this unit.

The Formation of Democracy

In the early days of the American colonies, wealthy white colonizers rarely discriminated between their white indentured servants and African slaves. Bound labor was bound labor, and laborers provided grueling manual labor regardless of race. However, in the early 1700s this changed for two key reasons. First, England stopped providing so many white indentured servants to the colonies. Secondly, Black slaves started living longer. Consequently, the slave population grew tremendously. ³

As the slave population grew, so did the economy. Especially in the South, the entire economy centered around unpaid labor. Desperate to control their slave population, the conditions and laws pertaining to enslaved people grew more extreme. The law extended protection to slave owners who killed their slaves, while banning enslaved people from learning basic experiences like reading, writing, congregating with others or traveling. ⁴

Furthermore, the experience of Northern and Southern slaves was very different. Because their Northern economies were more industrial than agricultural, white owners often worked alongside their slaves. Most Southern slaves lived on large plantations, largely isolated from the outside world. In contrast, slaves in the North had more exposure to the society they lived in, thus creating more opportunities to assimilate.

As the (then not-named) United States fought for and won independence in the 1770s, many Northern colonies began to reckon with slavery. Many Northern leaders felt unsettled that the fight for liberty did not extend liberation to all human beings. Some states took longer than others, but when the first Constitutional Convention happened in 1787 the North was trending towards abolition. ⁵

1787 Constitutional Convention

The primary goal of the 1787 Constitutional convention was to create a union, not to abolish slavery. A few Northern states had abolished slavery at this point; others were trending in that direction at varying speeds. In contrast, the Southern states largely depended upon slave labor to maintain their economies. Throughout the proceedings, actions by the delegates proved that their main objectives were to create and preserve power, not to create a moral and just union.

While the Constitutional Convention discussions did not center on slavery, slavery played a large role in debates. Rarely did these arguments around slavery appeal to morality or humanity. Rather, the delegates debated about the power of slaveholders and how to regulate the economic impact of slave labor. A prime example is the Three-Fifths Compromise. At the time of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, the five Southern states had roughly the same population as the five Northern states, if slaves counted in the population count. The populations would directly impact the representatives each state received in the newly-forming government. If slaves did not count, the Southern states faced a major numbers disadvantage. Northern delegates, despite being from states that had either emancipated their slaves or were trending towards doing so, argued that Southern slaves should be viewed as property in this instance. In order to preserve their power, the Northern delegates abandoned the morality that slaves should be considered fully human. ⁶

Furthermore, the Northern delegates made more concessions that validated the Southern belief that slaves were property. The 1808 Clause banned Congress from interfering with foreign slave trade in the twenty years that followed the Constitutional Convention. Essentially, Congress bought themselves twenty years to focus on economics, rather than addressing the moral reprehensiveness of slavery. Finally, the delegates also agreed not to protect escaped slaves. Slave owners would be entitled to any slaves that escaped them. In this instance, Northern delegates once again chose to view Southern slaves as property by creating a law consistent with other “property” laws. ⁷

Antebellum Period

After the 1787 Constitutional Convention, the United States entered a phase of increasing tension. The new nation sought to grow in every sense of the word, but conflict between the North and the South prohibited progress. While slavery had been eliminated in much of the North, Black people still did not enjoy basic rights like voting. In the South, plantation owners grew increasingly dependent on slave labor. Consequently, Southern lawmakers viewed any threat to legalized slavery as a threat on their personal livelihoods. Conditions for slaves grew worse and worse. Any sign of rebellion was met with substantial force from Southern whites. ⁸

Also, westward expansion centered slavery in the national conversation. Southerners wanted legal slavery in the new United States territory. Northerners did not. However, Northern opposition was rooted in self-preservation, rather than moral reprehension. White Northerners did not want wealthy Southerners to monopolize westward expansion; they wanted an equal opportunity to capitalize on the newly available land. Throughout this period, lawmakers legislated policies, such as the Missouri Compromise, that bought Congress more time, rather than resolving the conflict. ⁹

Ultimately, tensions escalated further and further. In 1860, the South seceded from the Union. President Lincoln viewed opposition between the North and the South, rather than slavery, as the root cause of the

conflict. He clearly articulated that his primary focus was on unity, not abolition. In summer 1862, he stated,

“If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save this Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union.”¹⁰

Eventually, abolition became a rallying cry for the Northern troops. Black men enlisted into the Northern army and fought for the futures they hoped for. Consequently, the United States Congress wrote and ratified the 13th and 14th Amendments. Unfortunately, despite their reputation, these Civil Rights amendments served, yet again, a different purpose for Northern whites.

The second section of the 14th Amendment clearly illustrates that the white Northerners still cared more about the preservation of political power than the humanity of the recently emancipated slaves. This section mandated states who disenfranchised Black male voters would lose a proportionate amount of representatives in Congress. (Ex: 40% disenfranchised, loss of 40% of representation.) The Southern states had a much larger Black population than Northern states, meaning this section disproportionately affected them. In theory, Northern states could disenfranchise Black male voters without losing a significant amount of political power.

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The 15th Amendment, which was wildly unpopular with the American people, passed through Congress during a lame duck session. However, as Black Americans gained their suffrage, they capitalized on the opportunity. During peak Reconstruction, nearly 50% of the Mississippi and Louisiana state legislators were Black. However, continued progress for Black Americans largely depended upon consistent support from the federal government. As history tells it, that support did not last.¹²

Following the Reconstruction Era, white supremacy grew in the United States.¹³ Most laws written to prevent racial discrimination placed the burden on the prosecutor to prove racial motivation, which was incredibly difficult to do. The courts tended to rule in favor of discriminatory practices, creating a precedent for white supremacy. The American public at-large did not support integration.

During the Wilson Administration, the Supreme Court ruled in a way that mitigated some discriminatory practices. However, white supremacy had such a foothold that the court rulings held very little bearing. Mindsets began to shift after World War I. War-created labor shortages created job openings for Black workers in the north. Southern Blacks began migrating north, where conditions were much better. An increase in financial capital led to an increase in political power. Similar to the Civil Rights Era, large collectives of Black Americans organized boycotts, elected local leaders, and advocated for better educations for their kids. Furthermore, because the United States advertised the war as a “war for democracy,” many Black leaders felt empowered to ensure that democracy included them. The number of lynchings decreased.

However, as Northern cities saw their Black population grow, segregation grew as well. Residential segregation led to school segregation. Despite a pro-civil rights court rulings, discrimination ran rampant across the United States. World War II created the tipping point that bridged the gap between this era and the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s.

World War II

As the United States fought against Hitler and fascism, Black Americans took advantage of the opportunity to fight for themselves. They continued the trend started in WWI of filling jobs during war-time labor shortages. As Black veterans returned from the war, they took advantage of the GI Bill in order to receive a post-secondary education from predominantly white institutions. ¹⁴

One large reason for the shift in mindset had to do with the Cold War. After World War II, Russia and the United States competed to gain the allegiance of Middle Eastern countries. A nation that endorsed white supremacy would not have a fighting chance in winning over countries with predominantly Black and brown citizens. Russia used segregation, particularly in the South, as anti-American propaganda. America would have to change if they wanted to keep up with Russia. ¹⁵

Lynchers finally faced punishment consistently. More public areas began to desegregate. Universities began to permit Black athletes to play on their sports teams. Black voter registration in the South increased significantly. Any change was either created or reinforced by court rulings. The nation appeared to be trending towards racial equality for whites and Blacks.

Unfortunately, this era is also marked by severe discrimination against Japanese-Americans. Many Japanese-Americans spent time in grueling internment camps during this time. Eventually, many would receive reparations in some form. ¹⁶

The Civil Rights Era and Beyond

In 1954, the Supreme Court famously desegregated public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education*.¹⁷ Across the South, Black protestors continued to organize and recruit to their efforts. The yearlong Montgomery bus boycott demonstrated the power of collective action, and catalyzed an outpouring of financial support from across the country. Prompted by four Black college students in North Carolina, Black and white protestors engaged in “sit-ins” in segregated businesses around the nation. Consequently, the South saw an increase in desegregated businesses. ¹⁸

While the momentum from *Brown v. Board of Education* greatly encouraged racial progressives, it also provoked segregationists towards more extreme forms of protest and violence. Black activists used this to their advantage. Knowing that violent reactions from white segregationists would garner national media attention, many protestors set out to incite violence against themselves. The strategy proved largely effective. Media coverage of violent action taken against protests and Southern politicians’ defiant refusals to concede to Civil Rights activists motivated many Northerners, citizens and lawmakers, to take serious action. ¹⁹

The momentum carried into the Johnson Administration, ultimately resulting in the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The act ended literacy tests. Within four years, Black voter registration multiplied by ten. In contrast to the death of the Reconstruction Era, largely fueled by the court’s lack of involvement, the Civil Rights Era thrived with backing from the judiciary. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of protections for the NAACP and its members. They offered free speech protections to protestors and changed procedures to ensure the protection of civil rights advocates. ²⁰

Unfortunately, none of the legislation or judicial decisions from this era made significant improvements for impoverished Black Americans. While many forms of segregation were now considered illegal, more subtle

forms of discrimination persisted. White Americans were not ready to embrace fair housing legislation. The wealth gap grew larger, with race operating as a strong predictive measure. The impact of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 clearly illustrated how far the United States still had to go towards racial equality.²¹ Presently, there is clear evidence of racial inequality, from voter suppression to police brutality to representation in government.

Final Thoughts on Klarman

There are two key takeaways from *Unfinished Business* as it pertains to this unit. The first is that the movement towards racial equality lives and dies with the Court. The Reconstruction Era ended when the Court gave up on it. The Civil Rights Era flourished when it had the support of the Court. Secondly, Klarman's work demonstrates that much progress for racial minorities comes as a secondary consequence. In the Civil War, President Lincoln cared far more about uniting the states than abolishing slavery.

Even without the police killings in summer of 2020, racial minorities would still have plenty to protest about the American experience. *Unfinished Business* shows that racial inequality is about much more than singular events, which often prompt activist movements. Racial inequality is woven into the American fabric intentionally and strategically. One singular movement cannot fix the system, just as one singular movement cannot break it.

Influencing Democracy through Policy-Making

When you ask most middle schoolers to explain how elected officials create laws, they most likely would explain it following the chronology of SchoolHouse Rock's "I'm Just a Bill." Unfortunately, the process is not so straightforward. As seen over the course of American history, money and special-interest groups play a huge role in the law-making process. Students typically do not learn the role of money in politics until they take an AP-level high school history course. Further, curriculums rarely address the back-door deals and lobbying that set and control political agendas. In order to make a determination on the effectiveness of policy-making, students must understand the historical context of democracy.

Hamilton: The Musical

To understand the back-door dealing of American politics, we will turn to the transcendent musical *Hamilton*. In the second act of the musical, Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton is working to pass his economic plan through Congress. Despite having the support of President George Washington, he does not have the number of votes needed to get his plan approved. "You don't have the votes," Jefferson and Madison taunt him in the song *Cabinet Battle #1*. President Washington then implores Hamilton to get the votes, otherwise "I imagine they'll call for your removal." From here, Hamilton engages in the kind of closed-door deal making that continues to define the American political system today. The song "The Room Where it Happens" documents a private dinner between Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison. The meeting concludes with, according to the song lyrics, "The immigrant (Hamilton) emerges with unprecedented financial power, A system he can shape however he wants, The Virginians (Jefferson and Madison) emerge with the nation's capital." The song goes on to discuss the nature of politics, emphasizing the point that deals are made with only the dealmakers in the room. Through this example, students can see that turning an idea into a bill into a law takes a lot more than starting with a good idea. However, the challenges of law-making do not stop here. In the time between Hamilton serving as the nation's first Secretary of State and now, the role of money in politics has only upped the ante.

In 1974, United States Congress overruled President Ford's veto to mandate limitations on donations and

expenditures to political campaigns. However, in 1976, the Supreme Court struck down much of that legislation in the case *Buckley v. Valeo*. The Supreme Court posited that money is speech and restrictions on campaign expenditures violated the First Amendment. Furthermore, the court ruled that leveling the playing field between candidates with varying degrees of wealth was not constitutional.

In January of 2010, the Supreme Court expanded upon the *Buckley vs. Valeo* decision in their *Citizens United vs. FEC* ruling. The *Citizens United* decision upheld that not only is money speech, but also that corporations are entitled to free speech. Consequently, “the American political system became awash in unlimited, untraceable cash.”²² Super-political action committees (super-PACs) created a pipeline for corporations and wealthy individuals to pump dark money into elections. Super-PACs require virtually no transparency, meaning that the mega-rich can set election agendas without being held accountable.²³

For example, support for universal background checks polled at 97% in 2018, including amongst gun owners.²⁴ Unfortunately for voters, the NRA has pumped 54 million dollars, including 34 million dollars of dark money, a year into pro-gun, anti-background checks candidates since 2016.²⁵ This presents a clear example that money, not votes, gives people and institutions mega-phones for setting political agendas. While voters determine the outcome of elections, money determines what and who is on the ballot.

Modern-Day Activist Movement #1 The WNBA

When it comes to athlete activism, Colin Kaepernick is typically the first name mentioned. While Colin, and other NFL and NBA players, have done a lot to advocate for social justice, the WNBA is often unduly overlooked. The league, founded in 1997²⁶, and its players have been advocates since their foundation. Advocacy is inherent in the nature of the WNBA. As a majority-Black league, the players deeply understand what it means to live in a system that seeks to oppress them. Many of their players identify as gay. From the beginning, players had to negotiate for better salaries and benefits. They had to advocate for maternity leave. They had to push the league to create an environment that celebrates its players. Over the years, the WNBA became an increasingly equitable environment.

In June of 2016, the Minnesota Lynx protested police brutality by wearing shirts to a game that said, “Change starts with us. Justice & Accountability.” This happened nearly two months before Colin Kaepernick sat through the national anthem, and received significantly less media attention.

Between 2016 and 2020, the WNBA continued to support social justice movements. Teams often wore shirts advocating for various forms of societal change, often pertaining to race and gender. WNBA fans began to more loudly support these issues. Furthermore, social justice advocates became new fans of the WNBA. In 2018, the WNBA gave fans the option to donate a portion of their ticket cost to non-profit organizations that promoted the leagues’ values. During the height of the #metoo movement, many WNBA players, including league MVP Breanna Stewart, publicly came out as survivors of sexual assault. Her leadership and vulnerability continued to build an environment where players and fans felt safe to share their experiences.

Then, in June of 2020, as Black Lives Matter protests responded to the police killing of George Floyd, Georgia Senator Kelly Loeffler described the Black Lives Matter organization as “a very divisive organization.” She accused the movement of inciting “violence and destruction across the country.”²⁷ The WNBA players on the Atlanta Dream, a team which Kelly Loeffler owned at the time, responded. The players, most of whom are Black women, wrote a public letter, which in part read, “Our team is united in the Movement for Black lies matter.” This statement put the national spotlight onto Kelly Loeffler. In spite of the Atlanta Dream players’

intentions, Loeffler's campaign donations only grew and she weaponized their letter as a symptom of "cancel culture."²⁸

Eventually, the WNBA players union met and determined that giving Senator Loeffler more attention for her views was not productive. Instead, they decided to research her political opposition and find a candidate to support. Through consultation with state leaders, including Stacey Abrams, the players selected Reverend Raphael Warnock. On August 4th, players across the WNBA arrived at their games wearing shirts that read, "Vote Warnock." On August 5th, the Warnock campaign brought in 20% more money than it had been in previous days. Furthermore, the shirts shifted the national conversation from the WNBA vs. Loeffler to Warnock vs. Loeffler.²⁹ While the campaign and election results are now history, the activist efforts of the WNBA catalyzed players from other professional sports leagues to use their platforms to advocate for social justice issues.

Modern-Day Activist Movement #2: Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party

In 2008, big banks were staring down bankruptcy as the result of a burst housing bubble. The stock market was in freefall. Ultimately, the federal government chose to bail out the banks, in spite of calls from protestors that the banks had caused this crisis in the first place.³⁰ Two years later, Wall Street was well on its way to recovery. 93% of all market recovery went to the wealthiest 1% of Americans. Meanwhile, the labor market suffered. 60% of new jobs were low-wage positions, such as cooks, temp workers, or custodians. Two activist movements, Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party emerged from this moment.

Occupy Wall Street

As the wealth gap grew, organizers began to plan for what would become the Occupy Wall Street protests. It started with an *Adbusters* blog post on July 13th, 2011. The post called for a convergence on Wall Street in Manhattan in protest of the Wall Street elite who owned a majority of the nation's wealth.³¹ Between the blog post and the first march on September 17th, organizers used social media to build traction for the movement. Then, in September of 2011, Occupy Wall Street protestors took over Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan, beginning the occupation.

Intentionally, the protestors did not select a leader.³² Consequently, the movement began to fracture and fragment. Arguments broke out amongst the protestors about the true end game. From the first march until the last, media coverage depicted a leaderless movement. Further, the protesters were often met with opposition from law enforcement, and many protesters were arrested. In mid-November of 2011, the NYPD removed the last of the protestors from the park.³³ Protesters attempted a few re-occupations of the park over the next year; however, they could never regain their original momentum.³⁴

Furthermore, their lack of leader led to the demise of their social media accounts. At the start of the movement, social media served a key role in organizing protestors and volunteers. To follow the spirit of the leaderless protests, multiple organizers had access to the log-in information of the accounts. One day in 2014, one of the password-holders changed the log-in information, effectively locking his fellow protestors out of the accounts. Once Occupy Wall Street's greatest weapon, social media was now a point of contention (Moynihan).

Ultimately, Wall Street did not change. Corporate CEOs continued to make millions and billions of dollars. Income inequality persisted. Today, billionaires are putting themselves on rockets to space while Amazon

workers hope for more than fifteen minutes of break-time a day.

The Tea Party

To say that Dave Ramsey started the Tea Party movement might be giving him too much credit. However, it's not entirely false. Ramsey was appalled by the Wall Street bailout and publicly called for reform. His outcry resulted in the Tea party (TEA standing for "taxed enough already"). The Tea Party contains multiple "strands" and is best understood as a movement, rather than a single entity. Their values are "fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and personal responsibility within free market capitalism."³⁵

Unlike Occupy Wall Street, which was politically left-leaning, the Tea Party was ideologically conservative. The Tea Party saw the bailouts as a violation of the free market economy. They also adamantly opposed President Obama's healthcare plan. Though the Tea Party branded as a "grassroots movement," they were bankrolled by billionaires such as the Koch Brothers.

One key difference from Occupy Wall Street is that the Tea Party committed to a leadership structure. They ensured that their organization would directly impact politics, which it did and still does. The Tea Party helped evolve the Republican Party further right ideologically. They have seen the most success in impacting local and state politics, but maintain strong energy towards impacting national politics. Today, many notable politicians identify with the Tea Party. Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, and Rick Perry serve as a few examples.

Distributive Politics

According to Graetz and Shapiro, the six building blocks are: build coalitions, advance moral commitments, pursue proximate goals, entrench proximations, deploy resources, and find effective leaders.³⁶

Build coalitions: By definition, a coalition is an "alliance for combined action," which seems simple enough. However, while finding individuals with shared views and agendas may not be difficult, holding a coalition together long enough to cause change poses a much greater challenge. If a coalition is too small, it might not gain enough legitimacy to create change. Contrarily, large coalitions run the risk of becoming too fragmented to work towards a singular goal. Even finding the perfect sized coalition puts the group at risk of defection.

Advance moral commitments: In order to prevent against aforementioned defections, coalitions must have some sort of moral or ideological glue. Creating significant societal change requires personal sacrifice. In order to make that sacrifice enticing, coalitions must present ideologies that keep coalitions together in the face of adversity.

Pursue proximate goals: Getting from the status quo to the ideal society happens one step at a time. Successful coalitions achieve their goals brick by brick.

Entrench proximate gains: In order to prevent a movement from fizzling out, coalitions must find ways to create systems that will advance their cause regardless of the coalition's personnel.

Deploy resources: Movements require money. Successful movements require well-spent money.

Find effective leaders: Leaders serve three key functions in this context. First, they determine how resources are spent. Next, they find allies. Lastly, they are the ones responsible for creating moral commitments and entrenching proximate gains.

Teaching Strategies

Multi-media Anchor “Texts”

To learn about the two modern-day activist movements, we will use a combination of video and reading. The ESPN documentary *144*³⁷ follows the organizational efforts of the WNBA players in the 2020 WNBA playoff bubble. Additionally, there are a variety of op-eds, open letters, and interviews from various players that further shine a light on their strategies in building a successful coalition.

For Occupy Wall Street, we will use excerpts from Michael Gould-Wartofsky's *The Occupiers*³⁸ to gain background on why the movement began. Then, we will read news articles from 2011 to understand how the media portrayed the movement in real-time. Finally, the New York Times created a variety of educational resources for teachers during the protests.³⁹ We will use their lesson on Occupy Wall Street slogan analysis to examine successes and failures of the movement.

Chalk Talk

A Chalk Talk is a silent activity designed to give students the chance to share ideas without having a few students dominate the conversation. In this activity, large pieces of paper are placed around the classroom with questions written at the top. Students walk around the room and write their reactions or responses to each question directly on the paper. As the activity continues, they can respond to their classmates' ideas. Chalk Talks can serve a variety of purposes: assessing students' prior knowledge, collaboration with others, assessment of what students have already learned.

Spar Debates

Spar debates are “spontaneous argument” debates between two students. At the beginning, students are given a topic. (Example: Grassroots activism can effectively change democratic systems.) Then, students have two minutes to prepare their arguments. The “pro” speaker gives a one minute affirmative speech with their pre-prepared arguments. Then, the “con” speaker does the same, arguing for the other side. Then, the debaters have thirty seconds to prepare for a three-minute cross-examination session where they can ask clarifying or pointed questions. The debate ends with each speaker giving a one minute closing statement.

Jigsaw

A jigsaw is an activity where the teacher separates students into groups. Each member of the group is responsible for learning a different part of the material. After students have learned their parts, they report back to the group and share what they learned. The jigsaw method holds students accountable for each others' learning and encourages students to work together,

Use of Technology

As a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, technology is now ubiquitous in classrooms. I will use a variety of educational technology to supplement and guide our learning. Each student at my school has their own Chromebook. Canvas is the main learning platform that Tulsa Public Schools uses. I will utilize PearDeck to make the class slides interactive. I will use JamBoard to help gather student input and information in a digital format.

Simulations

A classroom simulation is using an actual situation to teach a concept. Primarily, we will use role-playing simulations in this unit. Using an online resource called iCivics, students will play a game called LawCraft. In this game, students start by learning about an issue. Then, they read letters from constituents to determine why and how the issue matters to their community. From there, students go through a simulation of writing a bill and passing it through legislation. Already, students will begin to see how lengthy the process of turning a bill into a law can be, even without adding the dynamic factors of modern-day politics.

Weekly Journals

Students will keep a notebook throughout the unit for weekly journal and drawing prompts. In the unit intro, students will brainstorm a list of words and phrases to describe their ideal society, whether that includes democracy or not. Once a week, students will take 10-15 minutes to free-write or draw their interpretations and reactions to that word. These journals play a significant role in the culminating project.

Guest Speakers

Within the city of Tulsa, there are an abundance of activists and organizers. I hope to bring some of these adults and high school students into my class so that my students can learn from their expertise. I also want them to see how activism is actively impacting their community.

Culminating Writing Project

For the last two weeks of the unit, students will craft a persuasive essay with an accompanying visual component. For the essay, students will select an activist movement related to their interests. This could range from athlete protests to climate strikes to product boycotts. Students will research their movements and determine if the activists were successful or not. They will analyze the movement through the lens of the six building blocks of distributive politics. Ultimately, they will explain how solving this issue would lead to their ideal world, which they have brainstormed in their weekly journal free-writes. For the visual component, students will create a poster for the issue they have selected. They will find a slogan and include a visual component.

The final, and arguably most important, phase of the writing process is publishing. In previous years, I've hosted writing fairs as opportunities for students to share their work with the community. For the fairs, students spread out around a community space (gym, cafeteria, etc.) and community members, families, and fellow students visit the fair to read students' work alongside them. I plan to host a writing fair at the end of this unit as well.

Classroom Activities

Unit Intro

The unit introduction will revolve around four key questions:

1. What is a democracy?

2. Who does a democracy work for?
3. Who does a democracy not work for?
4. Does democracy work for you?

Activity #1: Game Theory

Before students can think about an activist approach, they need preliminary knowledge on how people make decisions within systems. To this end, my students will participate in a few game theory simulations. Dixit writes, “Game theory starts with an unfair advantage over most other scientific subjects—it is applicable to numerous interesting and thought-provoking aspects of decision making in economics, business, politics, social interactions, and indeed to much of everyday life, making it automatically appealing to students.”⁴⁰

First, we will participate in the divide-a-dollar activity. Students will split into groups of three. Each group will start out with an equal number of pennies (let’s say ten). I will give them the instruction that they need to split the pennies amongst themselves and that they must decide by majority rule. After a few rounds, we will talk about how the game could go on forever without any sort of intervention or parameter.

To illustrate the strength of coalitions, I will then say that any student who can earn six pennies according to the rules of the game can exchange them for a bag of chips. Assuming that it won’t take very long for each group to work out a solution, we will then have a discussion around the following questions:

1. How did your group make decisions about the pennies before the rules changed?
2. What happened once Ms. Grisham introduced the chip option?
3. How is your group planning on sharing the chips, if at all?

The discussion following that activity sets students up to think about coalitions. By giving students opportunities to create alliances, they will have a shared experience of working together towards a common goal.

Next, we will do the flag challenge, which comes from a challenge used on season 6 of the CBS show, *Survivor*. We will start by watching the challenge from the actual episode. The challenge pits two players against one another. They are presented with 21 flags. On their turns, they can choose to take one, two, or three flags from the field of play. The players alternate back and forth until there are no more flags. The player who removes the last flag wins. The solution is for the player who goes first to take one flag on the first turn and then leave a multiple of four (16, 12, 8, 4) on each remaining turn.

After we watch the episode, I will have two students play (using 21 pennies) as a demonstration for the class. Students will continue to play in pairs until the class begins to notice winning strategies. Perhaps with a little help from me, we will verbalize the winning strategy.

There are three takeaways from this game:

1. The importance of working backwards from the solution to find the best strategy.
2. The importance of ignoring strategies that might distract from the final solution
3. Sometimes the best way to learn how to do something is by doing it multiple times (rather than someone telling you the strategy).

Throughout the rest of the unit, I will prompt students to make connections between these games and the examples they are learning from.

Activity #2: Distributive Politics

Before moving into activism, we will learn about the six building blocks of distributive politics, as discussed in the seminar. In middle school, students can understand these concepts through the example of a student council trying to change the school uniform policy.

Build coalitions: A student council too small might not capture the scope of opinions about uniform policy. A student council too large might not be able to overcome differences about what free dress should entail and fail to pass a new school policy that most students would support.

Advance moral commitments: A student council member who does not mind the uniforms will need a reason to care about changing the rule. Because the student council is founded on the premise of representing the student body, not their own personal interests, the student council member has a moral obligation to advocate for a free dress policy.

Pursue proximate goals: Perhaps the school principal adamantly opposes free dress. Instead of pitching a losing argument, the student council could advocate for “t-shirt and jeans Fridays.”

Entrench proximate gains: “T-shirt and jeans Fridays” is not free dress. Building on the momentum from that, students might advocate for “Free Dress Fridays.” However, what happens when all of the eighth graders on the student council graduate? How will they ensure that the principal doesn’t re-adopt uniforms once they all graduate? One answer would be to create a student council agenda to be used every year by the student council. One yearly point on the agenda would be student dress code.

Deploy resources: While a student council may not have a huge budget, they can use both their small budget and their social capital to create a school-wide campaign to build interest.

Find effective leaders: For our student council, they need a leader, most likely an eighth grader who can be the face of the free dress movement. They need someone to recruit teachers and parents who will advocate for them. They need someone who can keep the group motivated, even when it seems like the school administration will not budge.

Activity #3: Slogan Analysis⁴¹

Students will be grouped into 6 groups, each containing 3-4 students. Each group will receive a slogan on a piece of paper. The six slogans are: democracy not corporatization, end the oligarchy, human need not corporate greed, save the American Dream, we are the 99%, and jobs, justice, and education. Each group will take five minutes to learn more about their slogan using the Internet. At the end of their research time, each group should have rewritten the slogan in their own words.

Then, the class will have a discussion around these questions:

1. Based on what you may have heard and on these slogans, what do you think the activists are protesting?
2. What do you think they care about and want?
3. What other movements and protests does this one remind you of, and why?

Once we have answered these questions, students will read through New York Times articles from the protests. At the end, we will have a discussion using these questions:

1. Do you think that there is a central message of protestors at Occupy Wall Street? If so, what would you say it is?
2. From what you have read, what would you classify as the most important events of the protests thus far? Why do you think these events were the most important?
3. How would you characterize the police response to the protests?
4. What more do you want to know about these protests?
5. Would you consider joining these protests? Why or why not?

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.A Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.B Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.C Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.D Establish and maintain a formal style.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.E Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2 Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3 Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

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Notes

¹ Dahl. *On Democracy*. P. 85.

² Klarman. *Unfinished Business*.

³ Klarman. *Unfinished Business*. Page 11.

⁴ Klarman. *Unfinished Business*. Page 12.

⁵ Klarman. *Unfinished Business*. Page 24.

⁶ Klarman. *Unfinished Business*. Page 17.

⁷ Klarman. *Unfinished Business*. Page 23.

⁸ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Page 27.

⁹ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Page 31-32

¹⁰ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Page 47.

¹¹ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Pages 51-55.

¹² Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Page 57.

- ¹³ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Page 74.
- ¹⁴ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Pages 111-113
- ¹⁵ Karman. *Unfinished Business* Pages 131-133.
- ¹⁶ Klarman. *Unfinished Business*. Page 145.
- ¹⁷ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Page 148.
- ¹⁸ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Pages 167-169.
- ¹⁹ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Page 171
- ²⁰ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Pages 176-179.
- ²¹ Klarman. *Unfinished Business* Pages 184-187.
- ²² GRAETZ MICHAEL J. SHAPIRO, IAN. *WOLF at the Door: The Menace of Economic Insecurity and How to Fight It*.
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- ³¹ Chappell, Bill. "The Landscape for Campaign Finance, 10 Years after Citizens United." NPR.
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³⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/search?query=occupy+wall+street>

⁴⁰ Dixit, Avinash. "Restoring Fun to Game Theory." *The Journal of Economic Education*

⁴¹ <https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/11/who-are-the-99-ways-to-teach-about-occupy-wall-street/>

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