



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2021 Volume III: Democracy and Inequality: Challenges and Possible Solutions

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## **Democracy & Inequality: To be or not to be?**

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### **Introduction**

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In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, "Our children should learn the general framework of their government and then they should know where they come in contact with the government, where it touches their daily lives and where their influence is exerted on the government. It must not be a distant thing, someone else's business, but they must see how every cog in the wheel of a democracy is important and bears its share of responsibility for the smooth running of the entire machine." This quote aligns perfectly with this unit because it is important that students understand our government and how it works. They need to be aware of how local, state and national governments affect their daily lives. More importantly, students should feel empowered to make changes to policies that negatively impact them and the world around them.

Education plays a critical role in our democracy. It is our job to educate our students on how to become responsible citizens. So, the question becomes, how can we as educators do a better job at educating our students about our democracy which is pluralistic in nature?

### **Rationale**

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I believe that when students understand something they will participate more in the process of what they are learning. I believe the same thing applies to teaching our students about democracy. When students truly understand democracy and how it works, it will allow them to make informed decisions and be active participants in our society. They will understand that they really have a voice to make a difference. Democracy isn't taught in schools how it should be. Our students are still learning "status quo" history and many of the teachers are not pedagogically digging deep enough.

In a society such as the one that we live in teaching our children about democracy the right will be pivotal to us for years to come. I believe that our children will inspire other children from different nations to speak out, just as Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist for female education did. Without a shadow of a doubt, through this process, our students will develop a greater appreciation for the freedoms that they do have. They will also

understand that they have the right to speak out against and change any policies in place that negatively impact them. As American citizens we are granted freedom of speech. We also are granted the right to peacefully assemble, vote and put pressure on our lawmakers to make change as it is needed.

## Demographics

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I teach at Deneen Elementary School of Excellence, located on the Southside of Chicago. It is a Title 1 school. My school is one hundred percent minority. The total population of students is 482. Ninety eight percent of our students are considered to be low income. Twelve percent of our students have IEPs (Individual Education Plans). Four percent of our student population is homeless. The overall student attendance is ninety seven percent. Our student mobility rate is seventeen percent. About twenty-two percent of our students are chronically truant. Seven percent of our students are chronically absent. I teach Spanish to our Kindergarten through 8th grade students. The attendance for my class is very high. My students have Spanish class two days a week for one semester (20 weeks) Each day, they have Spanish for one hour for a total of 2 hours per week. I will teach this unit to my 3rd - 8th grade scholars. My scholars are from the southside of Chicago. Many of our families reside in high violence and crime ridden areas such as: Englewood, Park Manor, Auburn Gresham and Chatham. My scholars primarily live in economically disadvantaged areas.

My students are very diverse in nature. Spanish is considered to be a resource class so everyone attends. At Deneen, we practice inclusion in our resource classes which enables our students with some academic, social or emotional concerns to participate as their general education peers. This gives them an opportunity that they may not have had otherwise. They thrive and do well with remembering what is taught with the appropriate support and accommodations when needed.

## Content Objectives

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My scholars will specifically identify and make a connection to what democracy, inequality and voting means to them as it relates to their city, state and national governments. They will understand how all three of these concepts intertwine and how they are affected by them. The main goal will be to get them to understand what these concepts are and for them to make personal connections. They will do this with the assistance of their families as we research and discover the ideologies surrounding democracy, inequality and voting.

This unit will allow us the opportunity to look at democracies and the different types of governments in other countries as well. We will compare and contrast how democracies look across the world. Understanding the various types of governments will allow my scholars to have a better understanding of how countries are different in their processes. They will learn firsthand that not every country has a democratic society where people have the right to vote and choose. My scholars will discover that the way we view and understand democracy varies here in the United States too! Especially as it relates to a myriad of ethnic groups and people.

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are

prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.” Educating our youth about democracy is crucial. This unit is crucial in teaching and learning about democracy because our students need to know that they have a choice. We have to educate them on these processes. They need to understand how to choose wisely and freely. Our students will not be successful in this process unless they are educated and prepared for it. Proper preparation prevents poor performance. If students are prepared to identify issues and then solve them, they will be better prepared in life for the real world and the societies that we live in. It is our job to teach them how to be world changers through the democratic process.

According to *National Geographic*, “The ancient Greeks were the first to create a democracy. The word “democracy” comes from two Greek words that mean people (*demos*) and rule (*kratos*). Democracy is the idea that the citizens of a country should take an active role in the government of their country and manage it directly or through elected representatives.” *Miriam Webster dictionary* defines democracy as: “Democracy is government of the people; or rule of the majority.”

To begin to identify the process, we must take a look at who is the majority? Who are the people that truly run our country? These are just two questions to ponder upon based on the definition of democracy. In Larry Bartel’s book “*Unequal Democracy*” he makes a reference to a question that Dahl poses in his book “*On Democracy*” that asked: “In a political system where nearly every adult may vote but where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually governs?”<sup>1</sup> During our seminar, we had discussions and concerns about who the majority is and who are the people that control our country. Our democracy has raised many concerns due to the fact that it is the elite and wealthy people that control our country. They have the money. Money equates to power. You have to have money to run as a politician. This realistically leaves all of the power to the people with money. This is one of the downfalls of our democracy. It isn’t fair because the people in control really aren’t the majority, they just have the money to rule. In addition to this, voter suppression occurs in a country where we are all supposed to be free and have the right to vote. If and when people do vote, do they know what they are really voting for? Voters oftentimes are voting uninformed. This is to the advantage of the elite. In addition to those people who do not vote because they don’t feel that their vote will matter. Another reason that our democracy is questionable is because we have a two-party system. We discussed two party systems during our seminar and came to the conclusion that it doesn’t give our country many choices when it comes to voting. The same people remain in power due to corruption, voter suppression and other tactics that aren’t published for the regular citizen to be aware of.

According to the *National Low Income Housing Coalition*, “Voter suppression is an unfortunate but consistent feature of the U.S. political system. Limitations on the right to vote were codified in the June 2013 case of *Shelby County v. Holder*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act. This decision no longer required states and localities with a history of suppressing voting rights to submit changes in their election laws to the U.S. Justice Department for review. Since this ruling, 25 states have created new obstacles to vote.” This has created division. “Since its founding, the United States has systematically disenfranchised African American citizens. This painful legacy has continued in the wake of the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* that allows all states, including those with a history of white supremacy and voter suppression, to manipulate their voting procedures without federal oversight. Since then, lawmakers in states across the country have expanded efforts to suppress African American voters. The poll taxes and literacy tests of the Jim Crow era have morphed into discriminatory poll closures and strict voter ID requirements. The 2018 Supreme Court decision in *Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Institute* compounded these problems by giving all states the green light to purge registered voters from their rolls.”<sup>2</sup>

Voter suppression dates back to over two centuries ago. As time has moved on, rights have been given, however, the challenges many have to face just to cast their ballot to vote still exist. Within the last 20 years, we have seen it resurface and with a vengeance in states such as Georgia. In Georgia there is a law that was signed within the last year that reduced the number of voting ballot boxes, shrunk the window for early voting, added additional identification requirements, allow the state officials to go around the county election officials and made it illegal for any outside groups to give food or water to the people that are coming to vote who may be stuck in long lines. This goes back to the old mentality that we have seen that says, if we can't win fair and square, we will simply suppress the vote. This has created additional tension between the constituents and the local and state governments. Georgia state Senate Minority Leader Gloria Butler said, "We are witnessing right now a massive and unabashed assault on voting rights unlike anything we've seen since the Jim Crow era." Georgia is not the only state that has assaulted our democracy in this way. According to the *Brennan Center for Justice*, "As of March 24, legislators have introduced 361 bills with restrictive provisions in 47 states." This shows the level of aggressiveness and vengeance that state governments are operating at. It is a way for them to try and control who actually votes in the elections. Some state governments have seen an increase in participation in the election process in many states such as Georgia so they create systems to slow down the process and momentum. "The United States is supposed to be a bastion of political freedom and democratic participation. Indeed, our foreign policy explicitly claims to advance these values abroad. But if we are suppressing the vote at home, what does that say about the values we supposedly hold? Fifty-six years after passing the Voting Rights Act to counter the systemic oppression encoded into law through the Jim Crow regime, we find ourselves right back in the fight to ensure that every American has the opportunity to help direct the future of the nation." <sup>3</sup>

"Our nation's "founding fathers" wrote about a fair and just democracy for all, but this ideal was not realized in the early stages of the American experiment. Only land-owning white men were able to vote. As time passed, laws were modified to allow states to make their own election rules, allowing less privileged people like farmers and commoners the ability to vote, but it did not extend voting rights to all. In 1776, New Jersey gave voting rights to all who lived in the state, but then quickly passed a law to disenfranchise all women and Black men. Native Americans, African Americans, women, and immigrants were barred from voting, and places like Maryland also banned Jewish people from voting." <sup>4</sup> The 15th amendment of the constitution guaranteed people the right to vote but it also gave states the right and power to make changes as they saw fit. This gave states the power to overturn decisions, etc. that would affect the outcome of the election. "Shortly after the Civil War, Mississippi's Democrats were appalled when two Black men became members of the Senate. They then initiated a campaign of intimidation at the polls that succeeded in restoring white Democrats to power in Mississippi by 1881. Mississippi became one of the first states to put forth a "grandfather clause" that permitted registering anyone whose grandfather was qualified to vote before the Civil War. This voter-suppression tactic cut the percentage of Black men eligible to vote from over 90% to less than 6% in 1892. Women still could not vote. Many other states implemented such tactics as poll taxes, literacy tests, and English-language requirements to deliberately reduce voting among African Americans, immigrants, and low-income populations. These tactics became known as Jim Crow Laws. Efforts like the one in Mississippi and other southern states lasted for almost a century." <sup>5</sup> This led to a substantial decrease in voter participation. This was clearly a way for them to control the vote yet once again. How does Black men eligible to vote decrease from 90 percent to only 6 percent? Clearly, these were aggressive moves. The voter suppression tactics were just as aggressive during the onset of voting as they are today in states such as Georgia.

As we can see there are some components of our democracy that are deemed not fair. How can we change

this? What can citizens do? “It is time to stop the real steal. We need new federal legislation that will defend voting rights against the encroachment of unscrupulous lawmakers. And we also need the Supreme Court to do its job in vindicating minority rights against the tyranny of white supremacy and systemic racism.”<sup>6</sup> Legislation is definitely needed to defend everyone’s voting rights. Another way to change this is to vote. Despite popular belief, our voices can be heard through voting. This is why they are trying to suppress the voting rights in Georgia. When the majority began to see there was a shift in the number of minorities, specifically African Americans coming out to vote, they began to try to enforce laws to discourage them from coming to the polling places.

Although voter suppression still exists, it is a right, privilege and responsibility of every citizen who is at least 18 years old in the United States. Generally speaking, voter turnout in the United States is very low in comparison to countries such as Australia where the voter turnout is much higher because they are mandated to vote. Dr. Ian Shapiro mentions this in Dahl’s book, *“On Democracy”*. When we look at the history of voting, voter suppression was a concern from the onset of elections. Many were not able to vote. Only white males that were 21 years of age or older were allowed to vote. “Women were afforded the right to vote by the 19th amendment to the Constitution in 1920. In practice, though, only white women were able to take advantage of this provision. The 1950s and 60s were a time of civil unrest in the U.S. as the civil rights, anti-war, and feminist movements gained prominence. As the civil rights movement grew, activists sought equality for African Americans, and voting rights were a major focus. Many states used poll taxes to keep marginalized people from voting. Others enacted grandfather clauses that reinstated the right to vote for many white people who had previously been allowed to vote but were disallowed because they could not pay poll taxes. The 24th Amendment outlawed poll taxes, but while the amendment extended the right to vote to many African Americans, it was not enough.”<sup>7</sup> This is when activists such Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and Rosa Parks organized peaceful protests and marches. These marches took place from Selma Alabama to Montgomery Alabama in March of 1965. During these marches against the social injustices at that time, the people marching for what was right were attacked by the police. Some of the people marching were beaten by the police so bad that they bled. The treatment was cruel and truly an injustice. They marched during a time when Black Americans were not treated in high regard.

After this, the Voting Rights Act was signed by former President Lyndon B. Johnson. This signed law banned voter suppression. It also gave the Federal government the right to step in and oversee states that have had a known history of voter suppression. Native Americans, Black women and immigrants were granted the right to vote with this act being signed by former President Johnson.

Some thought by this act being signed into law, that it would end voter suppression. There was still some voter suppression but after the Voting Rights Act was passed and signed, this encouraged others to stand up for their voting rights. Men drafted to the Vietnam War felt that they should have the right to vote. The 26th Amendment granted anyone over the age of 18 the right to vote. Many changes occurred as the result of the Voting Rights Act being signed into law. The diversity of our country continued to grow, so Congress protected those members of language minority groups by providing the voting materials in their native language. This was clearly the right thing to do. People that live here, pay taxes and are citizens deserve the right to vote regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, etc.

With all of the historical context surrounding voter’s rights, it is imperative that we look at the time line on the history of the voting process. Scholastic provides a great timeline to teach and share information with students about the history of voting. This will be a huge piece to develop their understanding of the voting process and the significance of it to our history in understanding voter suppression. The history of voting is

depicted in the timeline below.

## History of Voting

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1788: The founding fathers of the United States established the Electoral College. The American people do not directly elect the President. Instead, the Electoral College elects the President.

The Electoral College votes are divided among the states. Each state gets two votes for its two Senators and a vote for each of its Representatives in Congress. The number of congressional representatives varies from state to state depending on the state's population.

If a candidate wins the popular vote (a vote cast by a citizen) in a state, they win that state's Electoral College vote. It is possible, mathematically, to win the popular vote and lose the presidential election if the candidate does not win enough Electoral votes.

1789: The U.S. elects George Washington as its first President.

1820-1830: As states join the union, they create their own state constitutions outlining who is allowed to vote. Eligible voters are mostly white males who own property. A small number of free black men were allowed to vote but no women were allowed to.

1840: Women begin to organize to petition for suffrage, or the right to vote. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton are two of the most famous leaders of the Suffragette Movement.

1848: Wisconsin enters the union and has the most liberal voting laws. They allow people living here from other countries the right to vote if they had lived in Wisconsin for one year and plan to become citizens of the United States. But even in Wisconsin, women do not have the right to vote.

1850: Groups like the "No-Nothings" create literacy laws that state that those who wish to vote must pass a literacy test. Since many blacks and immigrants cannot read or write they are denied the right to vote. This was an attempt to keep the vote in the hands of the white male population.

1860: The Democratic party divides into Northern and Southern wings. South Carolina secedes from the United States after Abraham Lincoln is elected President.

1861-1865: The American Civil War

1861: Jefferson Davis is elected President of the Confederate States of America.

1866: The 14th Amendment to the Constitution is passed by Congress. It states that men age 21 and over who are residents of the United States have the right to vote. Any state preventing these rights will lose electors in the Electoral College. Women still do not have the right to vote.

1869: Congress passes the 15th Amendment to the Constitution. That amendment grants all men the right to vote regardless of race, color, or if they were formally slaves. The Amendment does not give women the right to vote.



In Wyoming Territory women are given the right to vote, and those rights continue after Wyoming becomes a state in 1890.

1870: Utah territory gives women the right to vote.

1877: After the presidential election of 1876, the Electoral Commission gives disputed Electoral votes to Rutherford B. Hayes, despite the fact that Samuel Tilden wins the popular vote.

1878: An act to amend the Constitution and give women the right to vote is introduced into Congress but does not pass.

1890: Many states begin to use secret ballots so that voters cannot be bullied into voting for candidates they do not support.

1893: New Zealand women receive the right to vote.

1896: Idaho grants women the right to vote.

1911: California gives women the right to vote.

1917: Canadian women receive the right to vote.

1920: On August 18, Congress passes the 19th Amendment to the Constitution giving women the right to vote.

1928: Women in the United Kingdom and Ireland receive the right to vote.

1944: Women in France receive the right to vote.

1950: Women in India receive the right to vote.

1964: On January 23 Congress passes the 24th Amendment to the Constitution outlawing poll taxes. Poll taxes, or tax fees for voting, have been used to discourage poor people from voting.

1965: The Voting Rights Act is signed by President Lyndon Johnson. The act enforces the 15th Amendment by explicitly stating that obstacles, such as literacy tests or complicated ballot instructions, are against federal law.

1971: On July 1, the 26th Amendment was passed by Congress lowering the voting age from 21 to 18. The law is meant to resolve the disparity that 18-year-old men are old enough to be drafted to fight in the Vietnam War, yet did not have the right to vote.

1975: Congress expands the Voting Rights Act to protect the voting rights of those people who do not speak or read English.

1990: The Soviet Union holds its first elections.

1994: First multiracial election in South Africa takes place. Until now, only white people have been allowed to vote.

2000: For the first time in United States history, in a close and controversial election, the President of the United States is chosen based on a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Al Gore wins the nation's popular vote, but George W. Bush has the lead in the Electoral College. The vote in Florida is too close to call and plagued with voting irregularities. Vice President and Democratic candidate for President, Al Gore, requests a recount. The recount must be done by the state's deadline to cast their Electoral College vote, so the Florida Supreme Court votes to extend the deadline. The U.S. Supreme Court suspends the recount and enforces the state's deadline. George W. Bush was declared President-elect on December 13, more than one month after the November 4 election.

“Over the last 20 years, states have put barriers in front of the ballot box — imposing strict voter ID laws, cutting voting times, restricting registration, and purging voter rolls. These efforts, which received a boost when the Supreme Court weakened the Voting Rights Act in 2013, have kept significant numbers of eligible voters from the polls, hitting all Americans, but placing special burdens on racial minorities, poor people, and young and old voters.”<sup>8</sup> It is easy to discourage people such as those living in impoverished areas from voting. To begin, many of these eligible voters feel that their vote doesn’t matter anyway. Hence, the low voter turnout. Today, African Americans and Hispanics have by far the highest poverty rates.<sup>9</sup> People of color tend to vote more democratic so voter suppression is a way to help Republicans continue to remain in power and keep people of color from voting. Many believe poor people don’t care about politics and voting. That is dead wrong. Minorities are so beaten down by many other things that voting is not at the top of the list. Survival is more important than voting. “What we are seeing across the country are effectively Republican attempts to resurrect a poll tax — to use poverty and income inequality (which white supremacy helps to create) to further racial oppression. We are witnessing attempts to use poverty and disadvantage as tools to silence voices. It is a further dehumanizing and delegitimizing of the poor.”<sup>10</sup> This indicates that the majority is most definitely fearful of what the minority vote could do at the polling places when it is time to vote. Wrongfully stripping people of their rights is a clear way to suppress them to keep control. The theme that remains and sounds loud is that people have power. We have more power than we tend to believe. Having the ability to exercise that right is one thing. Doing so is another. When people are prevented from exercising their basic rights, it should be a concern and problem for every American. *According to Politico*, Donald Trump admitted as much in 2016, saying, “Many Blacks didn’t go out to vote for Hillary ’cause they liked me. That was almost as good as getting the vote, you know, and it was great.”<sup>11</sup> So in essence, Blacks not going to the polls to vote, gave him an advantage. “Suppressing a Black vote is almost as good as earning a white one, and you don’t have to make any campaign promises when you do. Republicans don’t want to earn Black votes, they want to erase them. And to do that, they are using poverty as their proxy.”<sup>12</sup>

After researching the history of voting, we can see a multitude of inequality as the process began and continues. Voter suppression and inequality has existed for centuries. The rich continue to remain in power because the lower classes are not as motivated to participate in the process due to many reasons. “For many Americans, voting is not a “prime time” event. Less than 60 percent of eligible voters voted in the 2012 general election. Yet, for other Americans, voting is a very meaningful, almost sacred duty.”<sup>13</sup> Through the inequalities that the Black and Brown have faced, many do feel that going to the polling places and voting is important to them. It is truly a way for our voices to be heard. This is why the suppression occurred in Georgia. In many of the urban areas, people went to the polls to express that they were seeking change. The majority didn’t like that.

We must teach our children that it is okay to enact change through processes that are granted to us by the



Constitution of the United States. If the voter turnout is high enough, it would most definitely change the trajectory of the election process. This is what the majority is afraid of. There is power in numbers. When people show up, things change. We must challenge our communities and think of creative ways to get people out to vote that would not normally show up at the election polls. One way we can increase voter turnout is by eliminating the strict identification laws. We can also prevent unnecessary poll closures, prohibit harmful voter purges, prioritize black and brown voters in political outreach and/or recruit African American candidates to run for political office at the local, state and national level. If any of these changes occur at the national level for any state that has participated in voter suppression, we would see an increase in the number of participants in the electoral process. If coalitions and national groups focused on reaching out to those that do not generally participate in the electoral process, we would see more people going to the polls. First and foremost, people have to understand why it is important for them to participate in the process. This is a movement where the slogan, “Each one, teach one stay stronger longer” is real.

“African Americans overcome tremendous hurdles to vote at some of the highest rates of any demographic group in the United States. Even so, less than 60 percent of eligible African American citizens voted in the 2016 presidential election. This level of turnout undermines U.S. democracy. Policymakers must remove barriers to political participation to ensure that communities of color can participate fully in their nation’s democracy—because in a true democracy, voting should be uncomplicated and accessible to all.”<sup>14</sup> The fact that it is complicated and inaccessible for many proves to a great extent that our society is not as democratic as it appears to be. We must challenge ourselves and challenge our students to be empowered to make a difference. If it doesn’t challenge us, it won’t change us.

## Teaching Strategies

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**Differentiated instruction:** teacher will make sure that every student understands content at their level. For example, the teacher will use an article from Freckle but each student will read that article at their present level of reading performance. With differentiated instruction, assignments are created to fit the needs of each student. The content, processes we use or actual learning environment can be differentiated so that students understand. Differentiated instruction allows us to be flexible as educators.

**Behavior Management:** Establishing and sustaining an orderly environment increases meaningful academic learning and facilitates social and emotional growth. It is important to establish this in any classroom but especially where topics and conversations can become intense.

**Double Entry Journal:** The students will use a double entry journal to understand vocabulary and for writing quotations from the text to check for their understanding. For the vocabulary words, students may draw pictures instead of words to help them understand the concepts.

**Visuals to teach vocabulary/concepts -** The teacher will use visuals to teach vocabulary and concepts. This will allow our students to have a greater understanding of the vocabulary. For example, visuals of vocabulary concepts such as: flags, the constitution, elections, voting and freedom will be used in this unit.

**Think Pair Share -** This strategy will first allow students to think critically on their own. They will then pair with a partner and then share their thoughts with each other. To extend this activity further, students will pair with

other pairs of students to share their thoughts on whatever the subject matter is.

Silent Conversations: Teacher will post questions, quotations or thoughts on big chart paper for the students to respond to. Students will also respond to one another.

Gallery Walk: During the gallery walk, students will explore various pictures depicting the various concepts of democracy, inequality and voting. They will leave comments using a post it note near each picture to share what the picture means to them. Students will verbally discuss the pictures collectively as a group. This is an excellent strategy for students that are kinesthetic learners and like to move around while learning.

Debate - Students will be given a topic to argue their point. The topics are student centered and teacher created. This will teach them how to think quickly on their feet recalling facts.

Student Led Activity - Students will create an election of their own. They will formally go through the process. This will be created and led by the students with very little input from the teacher unless they ask for guidance.

Word Wall - teacher will create a word wall with pertinent vocabulary words that relate to our unit. Students will be able to refer back to those words throughout the unit. This will assist them with using the vocabulary words they have learned throughout the unit. We will also use "me on the map" which will allow them to have an interactive sound wall.

Dialogue/Skit: Students will create a very short dialogue/skit in Spanish speaking up for their rights. Students will select premade sentence stems to assist them with developing their sentences.

## Classroom Activities

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What is democracy? Teacher will ask the students what democracy is and create a list together of common features of a democracy. We will also collectively discuss why they think democracy exists.

Students will view a YouTube Video about Democracy for kids. This will provide them with some background information and knowledge about democracy.

Students will then examine and discuss what makes democracy fair? The teacher will begin by asking what does the word fair mean to them? Additional discussion questions will be "What makes something unfair?" "What can you do about something that is unfair?"

Teacher will engage in a conversation with students about voting. Teacher will ask the students if they know someone who has voted before? Teacher will also ask if they have ever gone to a polling place during any election with a parent or family member? Teacher will explain that although they are not old enough to vote in an actual election, they can create and participate in a mock election. Teacher will explain to them that they are going to set up a mock polling place over the next several weeks. The students will create ballots and ballot boxes. We will discuss the election process and how it can change different policies in place. This activity is a part of the culminating activity. They will use the ballots and the ballot boxes at the end of the unit.

Students will view additional videos about democracy from around the world. We will specifically take a deep dive look at Mexico and Canada.

Students will research and examine the voting process over the past two centuries and how it has changed. Students will create an active timeline together to gain an appreciation of the ability to vote and to also look at the history of voting in the United States.

Teacher will give students voting cards. They will use the cards to have the opportunity to vote on different issues. There will be various rounds of voting. During each round only certain color voting cards will be able to vote to show who was actually able to vote during this time. This will prompt discussions about democracy and inequality. After the activity is completed the teachers will ask the students if it is fair that some people couldn't vote in the United States back in the 18 and 1900's due to their race or gender?

Middle school students will argue for a change to their own democratic system - it will be either on how the senate is created, how votes are cast or to change who is allowed to vote. This allows them to develop their own theories or ideologies about said topics.

Students will engage in discussions about voter suppression and the electoral college. This will prompt another discussion around if we really have freedom if voters are suppressed.

Students will research how countries have worked to create fairer systems. They will have selected two out of the four and do a quick comparison and contrast of how their governments have worked to create fairer systems.

The students will write a letter to one of our local government officials from our class about a policy in our community or city that we would like to see changed. Students will decide collectively about what they will write about and want to see changed.

For their culminating activity, students will create and run their own election. This will be a 4 week process. The teacher will inform the students at the beginning of the unit that they will have this project to complete. The students will create various components that they will need for the election throughout the unit.

## **Appendix on Implementing District Standards**

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My unit will incorporate the following Common Core State Standards and the World Readiness Standards for Learning Language. By the end of the unit, students will be able to synthesize and demonstrate their understanding of what they are learning through the standards. Some of the Common Core State Standards will be used daily. There will be certain portions of this unit where students will have the opportunity to speak in Spanish to state or argue their point of view. In addition to this, with their culminating activity, they will create signs and information in Spanish as well to represent the 2nd most widely spoken language in the Chicagoland area.

World Readiness Standards for Learning Language - Interpersonal Communication: Learners interact and negotiate meaning in spoken, signed, or written conversations to share information, reactions, feelings, and opinions.

World Readiness Standards for Learning Language - Interpretive Communication: Learners understand, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics.

World Readiness Standards for Learning Language - Presentational Communication: Learners present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers, or viewers.

World Readiness Standards for Learning Language - Making Connections: Learners build, reinforce, and expand their knowledge of other disciplines while using the language to develop critical thinking and to solve problems creatively

World Readiness Standards for Learning Language - Acquiring Information and Diverse Perspectives: Learner's access and evaluate information and diverse perspectives that are available through the language and its cultures.

World Readiness Standards for Learning Language - Language Comparisons: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own

World Readiness Standards for Learning Language - Cultural Comparisons: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

World Readiness Standards for Learning Language - School and Global Communities: Learners use the language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world.

Lifelong Learning: Learners set goals and reflect on their progress in using languages for enjoyment, enrichment, and advancement.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1, LITERACY.RL.4.1, LITERACY.RL.5.1, LITERACY.RL.6.1, LITERACY.RL.7.1, LITERACY.RL.8.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1, LITERACY.RL.4.1, LITERACY.RL.5.1, LITERACY.RL.6.1, LITERACY.RL.7.1, LITERACY.RL.8.1

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1, LITERACY.RL.4.1, LITERACY.RL.5.1, LITERACY.RL.6.1, LITERACY.RL.7.1, LITERACY.RL.8.1

Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1, LITERACY.RL.4.1, LITERACY.RL.5.1, LITERACY.RL.6.1, LITERACY.RL.7.1,

## LITERACY.RL.8.1

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).

Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.1, LITERACY.W.4.1, LITERACY.W.5.1, LITERACY.W.6.1, LITERACY.W.7.1, LITERACY.W.8.1

With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 4 here.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1, SL.4.1, SL.5.1, SL.6.1, SL.7.1, SL.8.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade level topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4, SL.4.4, SL.5.4, SL.6.4, SL.7.4, SL.8.4

Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.3, SL.3.4, SL.3.5, SL.3.6, SL.3.7, SL.3.8

Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.

## **Bibliography/Teacher Resources**

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Dahl, Robert. Shapiro, Ian. *On Democracy*, Yale University Press

Dahl, Robert. *Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City*, Yale University Press, 1961

Deaton, Angus. *The Great Escape: health, wealth and the origins of inequality*, Princeton University Press, 2013

Russakof, Dale. *The Prize-Who's in charge of America's schools?* First Mariner Books, 2020

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2018/07/18/453663/5-ways-increase-voter-turnout-african-american-communities/>

<https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/ensure-every-american-can-vote/vote-suppression>

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/04/19/georgias-voter-suppression-bill-is-an-assault-on-our-d>

emocracy/

[https://www.ducksters.com/history/us\\_government/democracy.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/us_government/democracy.php) (quote)

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_inequality\\_keeps\\_people\\_from\\_voting](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_inequality_keeps_people_from_voting)

National Low Income Housing Coalition <https://nlihc.org/resource/history-voter-suppression>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/17/opinion/republican-voter-suppression.html>

<https://www.pbs.org/video/the-open-mind-inequality-and-democracy/> (for me to view to prepare my unit)

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/democracy-ancient-greece/#:~:text=The%20ancient%20Greeks%20were%20the> (Where does the word democracy come from)

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/history-voting/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Eu6G5YrBt4> (Democracy in Australia)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmrO44KM7yk> (Democracy for kids) To build background information

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfcNP7mMiZ4> (Different types of governments)

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/latino-millennials-could-be-major-voting-bloc-if-they-vote>

## End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Dahl, Robert, "Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City. 1961, pg 1

<sup>2</sup> The American Progress. "5 ways to increase voter turnout in African American communities, <https://www.americanprogress.org>

<sup>3</sup> Brookings. "Georgia's voter suppression bill is an assault on our democracy". [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)

<sup>4</sup> National Low Income Housing. "History of voter suppression". [www.nlihc.org](http://www.nlihc.org)

<sup>5</sup> Brookings. "Georgia's voter suppression bill is an assault on our democracy". [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)

<sup>6</sup> Brookings. "Georgia's voter suppression bill is an assault on our democracy". [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)

<sup>7</sup> National Low Income Housing. "History of voter suppression". [www.nlihc.org](http://www.nlihc.org)

<sup>8</sup> Brennan Center. "Voter suppression". [www.brennancenter.org](http://www.brennancenter.org)

<sup>9</sup> Deaton, Angus, "The Great Escape", 2013, pg 181



<sup>10</sup> NY Times. “Republican voter suppression”. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

<sup>11</sup> NY Times. “Republican voter suppression”. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

<sup>12</sup> NY Times. “Republican voter suppression”. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

<sup>13</sup> PBS. “The open mind – inequality and democracy”. [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)

<sup>14</sup> The American Progress. “5 ways to increase voter turnout in African American communities,” <https://www.americanprogress.org>

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<https://teachers.yale.edu>

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