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Democracy: The Ancient World and Modern Implications

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by Brandon Barr

Introduction

One of the key lessons that I teach my sixth-grade students each year is the difference between denotation and connotation. It is so important that students understand that while words have very literal textbook definitions, reading increasingly rigorous texts requires a reader to recognize the shades of meaning that different word choices create. For my students, many of whom are either English Learners or Diverse Learners, this can be a particularly difficult concept. My school, Mark Twain Elementary, is a Chicago Public School with a student population that is roughly 79% low income and ranges from grades pre-K to 8th grade. Students that are diverse learners account for roughly 10% of the student population, and roughly 16% of the students in the school receive additional support as part of Twain's bilingual program.[1] These students need explicit instruction to make connections. Instruction at the start of the year often starts out with me talking about the difference in feeling between the words house and home and evolves to getting students thinking about the tone of the author based on word choice and finding appropriate textual evidence to justify thinking. I have a clear understanding of how to move students along a continuum to get them thinking in deep ways through my language arts instruction.

As clear as my thinking and teaching is for language arts, it is not as clear as I would like it to be for my Social Studies instruction. Let's consider the word democracy for a moment. If this was my classroom and you were my student, the first question that I would ask is if the word has a positive or negative connotation. I think most students, and in general most people, would agree that it has a positive connotation. Shapiro argues that even authoritarian rulers do not often reject democracy outright; instead, they argue that their nations either aren't ready for democracy or that their government is more democratic than they appear.[2] Most political regimes today, including countries such as Russia and North Korea, fashion themselves as being democratic in some form.

The embrace of democracy is a relatively recent one in history; democracy was considered a "fool's paradise" before the French Revolution with many critics considering the idea too radical and absurd, including some of America's Founding Fathers.[3] It was a slow historical progression for democracy to become a normative tradition, the aspirational ideal. The form of democracy that we have in the United States today, representative democracy, has grown in our country and other nations in response to the inequalities that many have experienced. The solution in the eyes of many citizens of the world when faced with inequalities

such as restricted voting rights, limited access to healthcare, and needed wealth redistribution is demanding more democracy. In the United States, this has led to many different groups who claim to represent the will of the people, which is the pathos of democracy. It has created factions that have polarized many Americans into divergent political camps. Tracing citizenship within the evolution of democracy will help my students better under the influences of the ancient world, but it will also help my students to better understand America's form of government and our current political state.

Rationale

The focus of the "Democracy and Inequality: Challenges and Possible Solutions" seminar, led by Ian Shapiro, is reading about, and reflecting on how inequality and democracy coexist. Superficially, logic would dictate that the more democratic a society is, the more likely that things would be equal. From our reading and discussions, it is apparent that even highly democratic societies experience inequalities among the populace that the government is intended to serve. The work of the seminar included reading case studies (such as the text we read about the evolution of Newark's public schools and school reform), interpreting data, and reading infographics. Inequality in democracy will be briefly explored as one of the potential downfalls of democratic systems.

In sixth grade, our Social Science focus is on the ancient world. This includes general studies of Egypt and the impact of the Nile River, citizenship in Athens and Rome, education in Sparta, the construction of the Great Wall of China, impacts of the Silk Road and introductions to the major religions of the world. I am working towards trying to connect these Social Science fragments into something more cohesive and connected to larger historical trends. I envision a three-week unit to be taught after I have taught about the systems of government in Ancient Athens and Ancient Rome. The purpose of this unit is to make explicit the connection between ancient democratic practices and modern American ones and extend student thinking further about democracy as a form of government and how generous America is with citizenship. By the end of the unit, students should be able to see parallels between ancient democratic and societal practices as well as speak to the conditions that both make possible and threaten democracy as an institution going forward.

I am also still working to adopt and unpack the Social Studies standards in Illinois. The standards changed in 2017 to include standards that are just as rigorous as the Common Core State Standards are for English Language Arts. In my district, there has been a push to have students engage in more inquiry-based activities. This unit is designed for about 135 sixth grade general education students. Social Studies is an area that our entire school is focused on growing and improving practice. This unit takes all those factors into consideration.

Content Objectives

Democracy: Why is it prevalent today?

How did we get to the point that democracy is normative? Living in the United States today, many take it for granted that the democratic society that we live and participate in is the culmination of historical events that made democracy inevitable. Democracy was not inevitable. In *The State of Democratic Theory*, Shapiro notes that many of the reasons why democracy is normative today: economic and military successes of the twentieth-century, agitation from groups that are weak and dispossessed, and desire for international institutions to engage in democratic governance. He further argues that democracy should be thought as ¨a

mechanism for institutionalizing the general will [that] we should recognize its claim to our allegiance as the best available system for managing power relations among people who disagree about the nature of common good, among many other things, but who nonetheless are bound to live together¨.[4] A guiding principle or ideal of democracy that many believe is that democracy ensures greater opportunities and equality for members of a society that adopt democracy as a form of government. Shapiro notes that the presence of poverty makes people ¨vulnerable to the kinds of domination by others¨ and that most democratic systems are not impacted by severe poverty and demonstrate signs of economic growth.[5] Democracy seems normative because it has improved the lot of many people governed under democratic rule.

Dahl refers to the twentieth century as the "Century of Democratic Triumph," but in the same sentence notes that this should be viewed with caution as only 65 of 192 countries are democracies, and only 35 of the 62 he considers to be "most democratic."[6] He outlines several factors why democracy as a form of government is flourishing at this point in world history: colonial powers that would have been likely to intervene are not nearly as powerful as they were before WWII, totalitarian governments and military dictatorships have fallen and struggle to adapt to the modern world, and market-capitalism that has spread from country-to-country often creates a middle class that is sympathetic to democratic beliefs.[7] The last point about market-capitalism is a particularly important factor in the growth of democracy. In a market economy, private citizens create businesses and produce goods that are not owned by the state. They do this with relative independence to earn a living, not to pursue some interest of the government. The competing entities that produce goods and services tend to do so in a way that is efficient, orderly and has historically led to economic growth. When economies flourish, this leads to a reduction in both political and economic conflicts because there are resources available to pursue quality-of-life improvements (such as expanding access to education), and it negates the need for a strong central government to direct resources.[8] Without market-capitalism, the government is responsible for the quality of life that is maintained by the citizenry. This would require effective planning and wise use of enormous resources. There are many historical examples of leaders that have used a nation's resources to consolidate and maintain power (which is anti-democratic). Market-capitalism and democracy generally go together.

Even though there are significant factors that make democracy a more likely form of government for many nations, there are also factors that can threaten the growth and prosperity of democratic government. Knowing that market-capitalism and democracy often align, there are challenges produced by market forces that make equality within a democracy difficult to achieve. The levers of democratic governments are often moved when individuals come together through leaders, movements, parties, and elections to redress inequalities that are created in a market system.[9] Governments are pushed to regulate and intervene in ways that should prevent people from being harmed, but democratic governments often must weigh these regulations and protections against potential benefits.

Much also depends on the relative power of the discontented or the individuals who experience inequalities created by market-capitalism. These groups may struggle to build coalitions or develop "proximate goals" that bring people together and serve as "benchmarks for success that can help motivate people when the going gets tough".[10] The power and planning of individuals to get the government to intervene is critical to creating change. Graetz and Shapiro note the relative effectiveness of the Tea Party in influencing legislation by getting their candidates elected in primaries compared with the Occupy Movement that had too broad a coalition (the 1% versus the 99% percent), undefined proximate goals, and diffuse leadership.[11] When these groups can come together, it is apparent that they can induce significant interventions by the government into different facets of American life. Dahl outlines a number of ways in which the United States intervenes in

the economy; it is a rather long list that isn't exhaustive which includes: "unemployment insurance, old age annuities, fiscal policy to avoid inflation and economic recession, safety in food, drugs, airlines, highways, public health and control of infectious diseases, health insurance, education, setting building standards, licensing professionals in a number of industries, maintaining state and national parks, and regulating business firms from damaging the environment.[12] Despite these interventions, there are many inequalities that still exist in the United States. This creates challenges for democracy in the United States and other similarly situated governments in the rest of the world.

While reading *On Democracy*, I was struck by the thought that democracy vanished from the earth for over a thousand years. Democracy has become so normative, that it is hard to envision it not existing at any given point. Slipping into first person, Dahl writes, "I assume that democracy can be independently invented and reinvented whenever the appropriate conditions exist. And the appropriate conditions have enlisted, I believe, at different times and in different places."[13] This point is important because if Rome and Athens are ideological precursors to the system of government we have today in our country, it is important that students know what needs to be in place for democracy to rise again and flourish. There are several conditions that make democracy a more likely form of government (that will be explored at the end of the content section). Shapiro notes that democracies can develop gradually, as in the cases of the United States and Britain, imitation such as in India, cascades and collapses such as what happened with the fall of the Soviet Union, revolutions such as in Portugal, negotiated settlements or impositions.[14] However, a democratic government comes into existence, it is important to consider what sort of decisions that leaders make while forming the government. Sometimes these decisions fossilize problems that are difficult to address and sustain democracy later.

By whatever means democratic state formation takes place, instituting a democratic government often requires locking in long-term concessions which can impact conditions for equity. Rosenbluth and Shapiro give the example of America´s capitulation to slavery as an example of the types of concessions that get baked into democratic governments that make society inequitable and create considerable problems that eventually need to be addressed to sustain democracy. American colonies preserved their power in the formation of future states in the form of the Senate; these tiny states hold significant power despite their relatively small populations. This action at the onset of the nation's formation has a legacy, as these states shift political discourse and do not represent the median voter when considering the whole of the nation.[15] These deals often bake in inequality that manifest problems that need to be addressed at some point.

Democracy in the Ancient World

Each year, I have students look at a few primary source documents and have them consider how generous both Athenian and Roman society were in granting citizenship within their respective society, the Athenian practice of ostracism, the Rome practice of having censors, the compositions of the Athenian Assembly and the Roman Senate. Through this, they are supposed to see enough patterns to fully connect these ancient practices with modern-day democratic practices to begin to look for parallels and ideological forebearers in the ancient world. The materials that I have used provide little context or content area text in both the ancient world as well as the evolution of democracy for students to make meaningful connections. It is important for students to be knowledgeable about the shapes and forms that democracy took in these two ancient societies before exploring how they are different from the democratic forms of government that exist in the modern world. It is important for students to understand the cyclical nature of some of the problems that were created in both ancient democratic systems as well as the modern democracy in the United States today.

Democracy in Ancient Greece

Ancient Athens is the first substantial example in world history that had significant influence over future adaptations and manifestations of democracy. Democracy in ancient Athens was a direct democracy. There were shared communal norms, shared religious beliefs, and a shared vision that one would for the good of all. The people of classical Athens would meet in large public assemblies to randomly select individuals to serve in key offices of the government. This did not allow for people to be nonconformists, "their [the people of Ancient Greece] collective freedom to wield their power was perfectly compatible with the complete subjection of the individual to the community."[16] In classical Athens, while there weren't free and fair elections that have become a hallmark of modern approaches to democracy, average citizens would often participate in assemblies up to 40 times a year, and average citizens would also act as members of juries to decide legal issues.[17] Participation was expected and was a cultural norm in their society.

The full-scale implementation of a democratic approach in Athens is largely credited to the leader Cleisthenes. He initiated several reforms that made political participation in Athens and surrounding Greek settlements more inclusive. As a result of his changes, a new term was coined, demokratia, in which "ordinary citizens (demos) all had equal access to kratos (political power)."[18] Cleisthenes approach to gathering support among the masses was to tout the need for democratic reform. In 508 BC, the Athenian masses stood up to the Spartan army that was coming to occupy Athens and attempt to force Cleisthenes into exile to install an oligarch that was friendly to Sparta. The commoners of Athens stood up to this invading force, and Cleisthenes had a mandate to execute his vision for a more inclusive governing body. He reinvented many of the city's institutions such as allowing all citizens (adult, free-born males with a native Athenian father) the open access to the Assembly to weigh in on legislative matters, he reorganized groups into ten civic tribes based on geography and were given a hero to worship that promoted unity among the group, and he expanded the Council of 500 to include an equal number of people from each tribe (50) to represent the views of each tribe.[19] These reforms, along with the selection for the Council of 500 by lottery creating the opportunity for most adult males to serve at least once but no more than twice on Council during their lifetime, demonstrate the far-ranging political efforts of Cleisthenes to make Athens a more democratic society.

The involvement of average citizens was not embraced by enlightened thinkers of the day. Some thinkers who lived in democratic Athens such as Plato disliked the notion that the city was run by public opinion and not knowledge. He and his contemporaries worried that eloquent speakers with nefarious agendas could easily sway public opinion and guide the populace towards unfortunate outcomes.[20] The participation of citizens was probably the largest influence that Athens had on modern political philosophy, but Dahl notes that this impact may be relatively minor as few elements of ancient Greek political institutions can be directly identified as inspirations for representative democracies that are part of modern democratic societies today.[21] Even though it may be hard to trace the direct impact of the Athenian democracy to modern day democratic systems and efforts, there are lessons that can be gleaned from Athens and their approach to democracy that are relevant to consider, particularly related to how citizenship was extended to others.

Democracy did not last in Athens because of problems related to citizenship. Participating in civic life was an expected duty for free, native-born adult males in Athens. Obviously, these requirements excluded many individuals and was far from the universal suffrage that is a hallmark of modern democracy in America. Dahl argues that the Achilles heel for assembly democracy was that small self-governing units such as the city-states of ancient Greece were no match for centralized nation states that had a bigger capacity to build stronger militaries and not retreat to the instability of smaller units that would engage in constant bickering or

coalesce to form a nation to big in size to maintain assembly democracy.[22] Athens as a city-state was defeated by Philip of Macedon in 322 B.C.E because they were able to mobilize a much stronger force than was possible in a city-state.

Even though Athens limited who it extended citizenship to, there were still too many individuals to be accommodated in its assembly democracy. The assembly democracy that Athens employed was problematic because participation in the assembly was limited due to the number of participants, few people actively participate (such as speak during a meeting) because it isn't feasible for everyone to participate, members that did participate became de facto representatives for the members that did not participate (but that doesn't necessarily mean that participating members views were representative of nonparticipating members).[23] The size of the democratic structure is important. Representative democracy like America has today relies on citizens being comfortable with delegating their power to representatives. An assembly democracy was never feasible in America at a national level. It would not have been possible for everyone in the newly formed democracy to show up in New York or Washington. The concept of representative democracy was a thrilling revelation for thinkers at the time of the founding of the United States. The concept of electing representatives was not foreign to people in the eighteenth century, but leading thinkers such as Destutt de Tracy thought that by broadening suffrage that representative democracy would have staying power as the United States grew.[24]   This thinking also still allowed for participatory activities that happened in small town meetings and local governments (which would have functioned much like an Athenian assembly). Ancient Rome also had representative democracy but faced its own set of issues that could serve as a case study for modern democracies to consider.

Democracy in Ancient Rome

Another interesting way to get students thinking about connotations in the Social Science realm would be for them to compare the denotation and connotation of the words "emperor" and "president." Emperors in Ancient Rome shared many of the same traits that we come to associate with the modern American presidency. Cullen Murphy, author of the text *Are We Rome: The Fall of an Empire and The Fate of America*, opens his text with an anecdote outlining how a traveling emperor from Rome and a traveling president share many of the same people surrounding them.

> Imagine the scene: a summer day, late in the third century A.D., somewhere beyond Italy in the province of the Roman Empire....The emperor here is perhaps Diocletian, a man of the hinterland, from Dalmatia, and wherever the emperor resides, so resides the imperial government....Before the emperor's arrival, advance men known as mensors would have been sent ahead to requisition supplies and arranges for security....You will also encounter a defensive ring a few miles outside of your destination, and find the roads dense with military traffic; and as you draw closer the characters of the armed forces will change, from auxiliaries to legionaries to the imperial bodyguard, a force known as protectores....At last, in the center, you will find the comitatus itself, the sprawling apparatus, several thousand strong, that encompasses not only the emperor's household and personnel- the eunuchs and secretaries, the slaves of every variety-but also the ministries of government, the lawyers, the diplomats, the adjutants, the messengers, the interpreters, the intellectuals.[25]

Murphy then has the reader consider the modern presidential visit and all the trappings that surround a president as he travels with his executive office, the defenses that support travel, the relative luxury that a president has at his disposal.[26] This is just one of many comparisons that individuals draw between ancient life

in Roman empire and modern American government. Murphy continues that no one is surprised when an individual makes a reference to an 'imperial presidency' or when the president's aides are compared to 'Praetorian Guard,' or when 'American legions' are sent abroad.[27] All of this connotes the legacy of Rome that has permeated American society.

There is no denying that America's 'Founding Fathers' weren't in some ways influenced by the ancient world, particularly the Roman Republic. The ancient world provided a usable past that contained parallels and guidelines to search for solutions to problems presented as they structured a new government. Ricks argues that the first four American presidents were aware that "classically shaped behavior was the road to respectability."[28]   For example, George Washington was often compared to the Roman leader Cincinnatus who was prompted into service by fellow citizens during an invasion, achieved victory, and promptly gave up his power and returned to his farm. John Adams believed in the merits of a classical education to be prepared to be a virtuous man and good citizen. Thomas Jefferson believed that the power of the nation was in the hands of the farmer-soldier-citizen, as roughly 90 percent of America's population in the year 1800 were farmers. He also thought that Roman architecture was important and imported what he learned into the building of his own home, the Virginia statehouse, and the University of Virginia.[29] Given the nature of their education and the novelty of what they were doing in creating a republic from scratch, the ancient world would have been influential in their decision-making and view of their world.

These parallels and connections pale in comparison to the importance of the influence that the Roman Republic (not the Empire) had on the 'Founding Fathers' when it came to creating governmental structures. So many hallmarks of the Roman Republic were carried over into different elements of the model that was created in America. America and the Roman Republic share being pluralistic, durable, flexible in policy, possess balanced constitutions, agricultural economies (the United States at its inception), tolerance of religious differences, and a focus on virtues such as patriotism, self-sacrifice, and frugality.[30] Both the Roman Republic and the government created in America have balanced powers with representatives that acted behalf of the citizenry. In both instances, the power of the government was distributed with the intention of maintaining equilibrium so that any branch did not become more powerful than the other. Given the experience that the Framers had, it is evident that they were influenced in part by Rome.

The end of the Roman Republic and Empire is also something that should have brief consideration. Some of the key reasons why republican rule ended in Rome was civil unrest, war, militarization, corruption, and a decline in civic spirit.[31] Around the year 200 BCE, Rome started to grow and expand by taking over foreign lands. The Roman army conquered as far west as modern-day Scotland and Spain, as far south as Africa and Egypt, as far east as the Tigris River in Asia. By the time that Julius Caesar came to power in 44 BCE, there was no real competition for the Roman Republic; they were the world's superpower. Caesar consolidated his power and made himself emperor, with the Roman Empire experiencing peace and an improving quality of life from the wealth for nearly two centuries. As the empire grew, it ran into problems. There were several nations at the outer edges of the empire that were conquered and did not want to be Romans. This required Rome to extend its military to these regions, which put a strain on resources in other areas of the empire. There isn't a hard and fast point that Rome dies as an empire, it drifts through the third through fifth century with the upper classes living very comfortable lives while the military fights battles to preserve the empire. Finally, in the fifth century, Italy gets sacked and badly beaten by outsiders. Parts of the empire exist after this, but Rome was no longer the dominant world power.[32] Many people like to draw parallels between the United States and Rome because of the size and might of their armies, a perceived decline in civic life, and decadence that exists for some in a very unequal distribution of wealth.

Democracy and Citizenship in America

In the unit that I teach preceding this unit, are asked to consider if ancient Athens or Rome were more generous in providing citizenship to their citizens. There are several documents that students consider as they work to think students about and begin to answer that question. Citizenship and democracy in the United States is an equally interesting and important topic to explore. Going back to the notion that Shapiro notes that a hallmark of democracy is structuring power relations to limit domination, it is important to think about how America has struggled historically in this regard with issues related to slavery and more recently with illegal immigration.[33] Thinking deeper about power relations and limiting domination, Dahl makes note of a few key questions to consider how much democracy is enough and who should take part:

> In arriving at decisions, does the government of the association ensure equal consideration to the good and interest of every person bound by those decisions? Are any of the members of the association so definitely better qualified than others to govern that they should be entrusted with complete and final authority over the government of the association? If not, then in governing the association, must we not regard the members of the association as political equals? If the members are political equals, then should the government of the association not meet democratic criteria? If it should, then to what extent does the association provide its members with opportunities for effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understanding and exercising final control over the agenda?[34]

Dahl argues that whatever the circumstances may be in a country, there is always room for democracy and for nation's that already have democratic structures, there is usually room for even more democratic structures.[35] Some of these considerations that both Shapiro and Dahl put forward need to be deeply reflected upon in this moment in the United States; there is room for more democracy.

If I asked students to consider how generous America has been in extending citizenship to the masses throughout the nation's history, students would have a number of areas to consider in which America has been slow to realize the rhetoric that is espoused about freedom and equality: participation of men who only owned property at the onset of the nation, poll taxes, slavery and the Three-fifths Compromise, Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow segregation, universal suffrage for women, the representation of illegal immigrants, and even modern restrictions on voting rights. Beyond historical moments in the nation has fallen short of being inclusive and offering "more democracy," citizenship requirements in the United States are still fairly stringent: an individual must be 18 years of age, legally admitted to the US, must have lived in the US five years (if single) or three years (if married), must have no prison record, must be able to speak, read and write English, must pass a test on US history and the Constitution, and must swear allegiance to the United States.[36] These requirements are a nice starting point for considering how democratic America's approach to citizenship is and whether more democracy is possible or beneficial.

America's Founding Fathers held a multitude of beliefs that shaped their conception of democracy and subsequent actions. It is extremely easy for individuals in the present to look back and unpack and be critical of some of the choices they made. Dahl speaks to the problem when he observes, "as with many inventions, the originators of the American presidential system could not possibly foresee how their creation would evolve over the next two centuries. Nor could they foresee that parliamentary government was just about to develop as an alternative and more widely adopted solution."[37] Some choices that were made are clearly wrong looking back from the 21st century, especially choices made that prolonged slavery and discrimination in the United States by codifying it into law. For example, a modern perspective may find it frustrating that

abolishing the North Atlantic slave trade in the 1830s had to be a "well-chosen waystation on the road to outlawing slavery altogether." [38] Decisions like these have led the United States to a peculiar system compared with other modern democracies. Dahl notes, "the American system is exceedingly complicated and would probably not work nearly as well in any other country. In any case, it has not been widely copied. Probably it should not be."[39] Thomas Jefferson, influenced by the French and American Revolutions, thought that a revolution every generation could yield new growth and opportunities; Dahl contends that instead of a revolution that an assembly of constitutional minds should come together to refine the constitution considering better information and learning from other democracies.[40] The Founding Fathers shooting in the dark while making difficult choices have given the United States a unique system that can be made better and more democratic.

Implications for Democracy in the Modern World

Could democracy disappear from the modern world? If it has disappeared for a substantial period of human history, what is to stop it from happening again. Once the Roman Republic ended, wide scale democracy disappeared for nearly 1,500 years. So many societies throughout the world value the ideal of democracy and seek to democratize elements of their respective societies, but is it possible for this to change? Dahl outlines four of the threats to democracy and opportunities to reform to preserve and strengthen democratic governments.

The first challenge to democracy that Dahl explores is the economic order and how democracy and market-capitalism interact with each other and create inequality. As the world stands right now, Dahl contends that it is hard to envision a situation in which democracy could thrive in a non-market economy. For much of the last two centuries, individuals such as socialists and technocrats have entertained ways that economic decisions could be made more justly and equitably, but the application of this thinking has not produced viable changes.[41] Workers are currently not seeking to nationalize industries, nor are they advocating for new economic orders in which workers are empowered with ownership and control. If inequality continues to grow, a tension exists between those who are thriving in a market-based economy and those who are not benefiting.[42] This tension will need to be addressed, and it could pose a threat to democracy.

Another challenge that Dahl puts forward for democracy is cultural diversity. Homogeneity made the adoption of democracy easier in many nations, but the world is becoming increasingly diverse due to migration and historically oppressed groups fighting for rights. Dahl observes, "cultural diversity in the older democratic countries was magnified by an increased number of immigrants, who were usually marked by ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences that made them distinguishable from the dominant population."[43] Migration and immigration aren't going to stop, especially as inequity, violence and war will force population movements within states and across nations. In the book *Are We Rome: The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America*, Murphy proposes that Americas learn more than one language, noting that everyone in Rome spoke two as a means of instilling an appreciation of the wider world in the populace; he argues that America has a "powerfully absorptive" culture that would benefit from being inclusive of immigrants rather than building fences.[44] Fighting inequality within and addressing new populations within countries will create pressure from within and from outside of a democracy. These pressures will require democracies to be flexible in the arrangements they make to survive and thrive in the future.

A final challenge that Dahl tackles is related to civic education. The shape and forms that civic education takes will dictate how individuals engage in civic life in democracy going forward. Information is readily available

now to inform citizens; political parties are also well-known enough that people generally trust whatever party they vote for to follow a general platform. The amount of information that the average citizen has access to is vast and the information is complex, so complex at times that it requires skills that average citizens may not possess to be informed enough to participate fully in civic life.[45] Many people argue that one of the reasons that democracy fell in Rome was a decline in the quality of civic life. This shows that democracy is somewhat dependent at least in part on having an informed and active citizenry. Shapiro discounts an exaggerated importance on civic life, noting the trend in the United States since the 1960's towards a decline in community socializing and political participation. He observes, "it is difficult to see a compelling case, conceptual or empirical, that low levels of civic trust are subversive of democracy, or that, if they are, they are more subversive of democracy than of nondemocracy."[46] Historically, as alluded to earlier, great thinkers have thought of democracy as a foolish endeavor because of a lack of faith in the average individual to act in a way that benefits society. The amount of attention a nation pays to its quality of civic life may have an impact of the health of the nation's democracy.

In considering applications to the modern world, Ian Shapiro weighs in with a few considerations about democracy as well that are particularly relevant in America today. In *The State of Democratic Theory* he observes, "we find in some countries governments stage coups rather than give up power when they are voted out of office, yet no defeated American president seriously contemplates sending the tanks down Pennsylvania Avenue." [47] Part of democracy's survival in America and more broadly in the world depends on the loser of a political office accepting political defeat knowing that it is to the politician's advantage to work within the rules of the system rather than destroy the system. Shapiro notes that individuals who lose political office must believe that "that there is enough uncertainty about the future that they might win the next time, perhaps as part of a different coalition, or that they will prevail on enough other issues to warrant continuing participation."[48] The capacity for someone who has been defeated to recognize the "crosscutting cleavages" among the preferences of multiple groups creates uncertainty that is almost institutionalized in American democracy.[49] This uncertainty has generally helped to maintain peaceful transfers of power in the United States, but it can also be threatened by populist forces that claim to represent the will of the people despite poor election results. The relative wealth of a nation is an important factor.[50] In wealthy nations, there may be simply too much to lose by not following the rules. In poor countries, democracy is more fragile as there is less at stake for leaders to lose by risking civil war or a coup attempt. To sum things up, successful democracies have a way for leaders to save face when defeated.

Shapiro takes Dahl's observations about cultural diversity and explores them in a slightly different lens. He notes that "politicized identities evolve with time and circumstance."[51] This observation is particularly relevant considering the strong pull towards factions in the United States today. Shapiro's observation that even though these identities are created over time, it doesn't mean that they are malleable. He notes that "the goal should be to reshape such constraints, where possible, so that at the margins identities evolve in ways that are more, rather than less, hospitable to democratic politics….to the degree that politicized identities are malleable, it tends to produce the wrong ones."[52] As a nation, it is critical that we recognize politicized identities that have grown over time and reflect on how those identities have the capacity to impact democracy in a negative way. Going back to Dahl, the United States is growing less homogeneous. With growing diversity, it is a challenge for political parties and the coalitions they build to govern to capitalize on these changes in a way that is productive and doesn't stoke hate among the populace or distrust of governmental institutions. Politicians and political operatives need to think carefully about the crosscutting cleavages that will lead to many groups being represented versus operating in silos. As these strong politicized identities grow, it is critical to think about how this will shape democracy in the United States and

other democratic nations.

A final extension in considering challenges for democracy that Shapiro explores is the importance of exploring inequality. Inequality is a major problem both within democracies and for democracies as a form of government. There are two main problems that Shapiro explores. The lower per capita income gets, the more likely that democracy fails. There are some exceptions to this such as India, but it there is correlation to the relative wealth of a democracy and its stability. Graetz and Shapiro note how politicians exploit for voters' beliefs and ideologies for political gain:

> Many voters oppose [economic] redistribution, misunderstand the sources and extent of economic inequality, or care more about other things: race, guns, and abortion are common candidates. Richard Nixon's Southern strategy took advantage of this reality. Nixon assumed—correctly, as it turned out—that white working-class resentment of the 1960s civil rights legislation was intense enough to create an opening for the Republicans in the traditionally Democratic South, even when Democrats favored economic policies that would benefit many of those white working-class voters. When ethnic, racial, or religious identities matter more to people than bread-and-butter distributive issues, the median voter might be anywhere in the income distribution.[53]

In seminar, Professor Shapiro made it a point to touch on Nixon's Southern strategy several times. Politicians have used and will continue to use wedges issues like Nixon to distract from increasing downward mobility. Murphy advises that government can step in and do big things well; think of Social Security, safe drug, highways, guaranteed student loans, Medicare, noting that these "promote a sense of common alliance…and serve as a counterforce to inequality and the widening divisions of income and class."[54] It isn't entirely clear is how far unchecked inequality can go before a democracy becomes fragile.

Inquiry Question

-How influential were democracies of the ancient world in developing the beliefs and practices of American systems of government?

Related Essential Questions

-What is democracy?

-How is the democracy we have in the United States different from the democracies that existed in Athens and Rome?

-What is needed for democracy to thrive or decay in a society?

Teaching Strategies

The approach of this unit is using inquiry for students to develop understanding as they consider new information presented to them. At the heart of the inquiry approach, the development of questions "signal the unfinished nature of historical knowledge, the way its fragments can never be wholly reassembled." [55] The

way that political scientists and historians work through problems of history is guided by good questions, research, and the evaluation of source material. One way to organize materials for an inquiry approach is what Wineburg refers to as an archive bin. In his archive bins, he took a plastic tub an includes a slew of resources that contain a "heap of documents of varying trustworthiness and authority…. some written hundreds of years before; others, more contemporary, were by historians who themselves couldn't agree…. navigating through a fog of questions."[56] This bin is what organizes the inquiry for students.

The inquiry approach unfolds in the following manner. The teacher selects a front-loading text for students to consider. It should be a document that is relevant and engaging for students to consider. This is important because students are more willing to do the work of historians when they find the topic interesting and relevant. The teacher will pose the big inquiry question and usually invite students to ask other relevant questions as the front-loading document is discussed. Teachers take those questions and use them to curate documents for students to review and consider. As students evaluate those documents (the archive bin that Wineburg suggests), students should evaluate each source and consider what it adds to their understanding of the inquiry question as well as the questions that they have as well.

While students are working through their archive bin, both teachers and students should engage in elements of thinking aloud. A think aloud is a strategy in which either the student or the teacher shares what is being thought about while reading a document. The teacher or student is explicit in sharing what he, she or they are thinking while evaluating a document. The goal is to make "audible what is normally invisible."[57] Wineburg encourages teachers to have students consider sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration while evaluating these sources. He ended up writing books and a free inquiry curriculum that is useful in adapting when trying to teach using this approach. I have included a link in the resource section.

Once students have worked through all the texts/documents in the archive bin, students should select a way to communicate their learning. This can take many forms, and I have included a link to a helpful document from the Illinois State Board of Education that is a list of different culminating activities for communicating learning from an inquiry. The goal of the culminating activity is for students to act, be engaged, and champion causes. It positions students to be active participants in their learning and use the information they learn to make the world a better place.

Classroom Activities

These are some of the items that will go in the archive bin to help students address the inquiry question. I include guiding questions to help students think about the document and unpack it further.

Document A-Democracy Definition for Kids – YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LabV7EFHHeo

- What is the definition of democracy?
- What are the two types of democracy and how do they differ?
- What kind of democracy was in Athens? What kind of democracy do we have in the United States today?

Document B-Infographic About Democracy

https://www.visualcapitalist.com/mapped-the-worlds-oldest-democracies/

- According to the infographic, what is the oldest democracy that is still active today?
- What conditions need to be in place for a country to be considered a democracy?
- When did a lot of nations become democracies? Why?
- Why wouldn't Athenian democracy count in this infographic? What would disqualify it?

Document C-Rome's Transition from Republic to Empire | National

https://www.visualcapitalist.com/mapped-the-worlds-oldest-democracies/Geographic Society

- How was a republic first established in Rome?
- What did the Roman Senate do?
- What were Assemblies? What powers did they have and what role did the play in conducting the government?
- Who was Julius Caesar and how did he gain power and become an emperor?
- How big did Rome grow as an empire?
- What problems did Rome have that caused it to lose power and influence?

Document D-Exhibit: Ancient Rome & America - YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQDhlQ7A6Vk

- Why was the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center important according to the video? What did it cause presidents to do?
- How did the Roman state change over time, especially when the Roman empire fell?
- Why did Rome fall according to the video? Explain the reason provided.
- How does America compare to ancient Rome? What do our societies have in common?
- What is the point of view of this short film? What claim do you think it is making about the United States based on what happened in Rome?

Document E-Is America Falling Like Rome? | Casual Historian - YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6UwxurYlFw

- Why do people like to compare Rome with the United States?
- Since Rome had a hard time maintaining an army with Roman citizens, what problem did that create? The video mentions the term mercenary which means a paid soldier.
- According to the video, how are migrants from Latin America that come to the United States thought of by some as being like the barbarians? How are Latin American migrants different from the barbarians that invaded Rome? What do you think about this comparison?
- What was the problem that Rome had in defending its empire? How is it like the United States today according to the video?
- What problem did Diocletian have to address? How is it like the United States today?
- What is the best comparison to make between Rome and the United States according to the video? What do you think about the claim that the person in the video makes about the fall of the Roman Republic and the United States today? Why should we perhaps be worried?

Document F-Greek Influence on U.S. Democracy-National Geographic Society

https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/greek-influence-us-democracy/

- When a national government was formed in the United States, why were states created? How did ancient Greece inspire the decision making?
- How was ancient Greece responsible for the creation of law?
- How did ancient Greece inspire the Founding Fathers in writing the Constitution of the United States?
- What is a representative democracy according to the reading?
- Who could vote early on United States history? How has that changed over time?

Document G-Mankind The Story of All of Us: Birth of Democracy-History-Youtube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IndRAsYX4W4

- How did democracy face a challenge in Athens? What happened?
- How did they vote in Ancient Greece? With what item?
- Who could vote in Ancient Athens?
- Why did Athenian warriors beat the Persians?
- Why didn't ancient Athens have elections? What did they have instead?
- What is a direct democracy?
- What was the ecclesia?
- What purpose did the Council of 500 serve?
- How did ancient Athens stop groups from becoming too powerful?
- Who was denied citizenship in ancient Athens?
- Why does democracy have a positive connotation, so much so that non-democratic countries like to appear democratic?
- What is the problem with elections for office according to the video?
- How do some traditions from ancient Greece survive today?

Resources

www.ilclassroomsinaction.org/uploads/2/6/0/8/26089560/inquiry_skills_culminating_activity_samples.pdf -This is a link to a list of different culminating activities for communicating learning from an inquiry from the Illinois State Board of Education

https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons- This is a link to curriculum resources for SS inquiry units. It includes posters for skills such as sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration as well as ready-made units that can be adapted for your specific teaching context.

Assessment/Culminating Activity

Students will write a two-paragraph response exploring the inquiry question. One paragraph will be about ancient Greece and one paragraph will be about the ancient Rome. Students will be expected to use information gathered from the questions in the documents while constructing their paragraphs.

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

The work done in seminar will translate into instruction aligns with several relevant Social Studies standards ("Illinois Social Science Learning Standards"):

SS.H.1.6-8.LC. Classify series of historical events and developments as examples of change and/or continuity. This standard is addressed in the unit as students learn about the conditions necessary for democracy and how those conditions were evident in the ancient world as well as at the founding of America. The cyclical nature of conditions that support democracy or encourage its demise will address this standard.

SS.H.2.6-8.LC. Explain how and why perspectives of people have changed over time. This standard will be addressed as students learn more about democracy and why even several undemocratic governments like to espouse their actions as being democratic.

SS.H.4.6-8.LC. Explain multiple causes and effects of historical events. This standard will be addressed by considering the conditions needed for democracy and exploring how those conditions improved the likelihood of democracy thriving in the ancient world as well as at the time of the founding of the United States.

Notes

[1] "Twain," Chicago Public Schools School Report Card

[2] Shapiro, Ian. *The State of Democratic Theory*, 1

[3] Miller, James. *Can Democracy Work: A Short History of a Radical Idea, from Ancient Athens to Our World*.

[4] Shapiro, Ian. *The State of Democratic Theory*, 146

[5] Ibid, 150

[6] Dahl, Robert. *On Democracy*, 164-165

[7] Ibid, 164

[8] Ibid, 168

[9] Ibid, 174

[10] Graetz, Michael and Ian Shapiro. *Wolf At The Door: The Menace of Economic Insecurity and How to Fight It*, 49

[11] Ibid, 50

[12] Dahl, Robert. *On Democracy*, 176

[13] Ibid, 9

[14] Shapiro, Ian. *The State of Democratic Theory*, 80

[15] Rosenbluth, Frances and Ian Shapiro, "Empower Political Parties to Revive Democratic Accountability."

[16] Miller, James. *Can Democracy Work: A Short History of a Radical Idea, from Ancient Athens to Our World*, 15

[17] Ibid

[18] Ibid, 28

[19] Ibid, 24-5

[20] Ibid

[21] Dahl, Robert. *On Democracy*, 12-13

[22] Ibid, 112

[23] Ibid, 106-108

[24] Ibid, 104

[25] Murphy, Cullen. *Are We Rome: The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America*, 1-2

[26] Ibid, 5

[27] Ibid

[28] Ricks, Thomas E. *First Principles What America's Founders Learned from the Greeks and Romans and How That Shaped Our Country*, 13

[29] McCheskey, Matthew, ed. "Rome's Influence on the United States."

[30] Ibid

[31] Dahl, Robert. *On Democracy*, 14

[32] Ward-Perkins, Bryan. *The Fall of Rome: And the End of Civilization*, 1-114

[33] Shapiro, Ian. *The State of Democratic Theory*, 52

[34] Dahl, Robert. *On Democracy*, 118

[35] Ibid

[36] "What Are the U.S. Citizenship Requirements for Naturalization?"

[37] Dahl, Robert. *On Democracy*, 123

[38] Graetz, Michael and Ian Shapiro. *Wolf At The Door: The Menace of Economic Insecurity and How to Fight It*, 49

[39] Dahl, Robert. *On Democracy*, 140

[40] Ibid, 141

[41] Ibid, 182

[42] Ibid, 200

[43] Ibid, 183

[44] Murphy, Cullen. *Are We Rome: The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America,* 203-204

[45] Dahl, Robert. On Democracy, 187

[46] Shapiro, Ian. *The State of Democratic Theory*, 93

[47] Ibid, 87

[48] Ibid, 88

[49] Ibid

[50] Ibid, 89

[51] Ibid, 95

[52] Ibid

[53] Graetz, Michael and Ian Shapiro. *Wolf At The Door: The Menace of Economic Insecurity and How to Fight It*, 40

[54] Murphy, Cullen. *Are We Rome: The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America,* 203

[55] Wineburg, Sam. *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*, 56

[56] Ibid, 108

[57] Ibid, 121