

ACTIVITY

Supporting Question 3: Using Democratic Tools to Pursue Freedom

Overview

About This Activity

Students explore Supporting Question 3 through a series of activities designed to help them examine how historical actors have used democratic tools to pursue freedom. First, they analyze the actions of Fannie Lou Hamer through an introduction to the “levers of power” framework. Next, they read additional examples of how people have used democratic tools to pursue freedom through a modified Jigsaw activity. To conclude, they draw, label, and explain a democratic tool that would be most useful for them to enact change.

Supporting Question	How have people used the tools of democracy to fight for their freedoms in the United States?
Formative Task	Draw, label, and explain a democratic tool that would be most useful to enact change.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video: Fannie Lou Hamer Risked Her Life for the Right to Vote • Reading: “Board of Education: Chinese Mother Letter,” <i>Daily Alta California</i>, 1885 • Reading: Excerpts from “Andrew G. Imutan 1965–1974,” Essays by UFW Volunteers • Handout: Introduction to Levers of Power Graphic Organizer <p>Find these materials in this Google Folder.</p>

Preparing to Teach

A Note to Teachers

Before teaching this lesson, please review the following information to help guide your preparation process.

Chronology in Source Examples

In this lesson, students will look at a few examples of people who have used democratic tools to fight for their freedoms. It is important to let students know that these sources do not go in chronological order, but instead are meant to be examples of people fighting for their rights and freedoms throughout US history.

Procedure

Activity 1: Introduce the Levers of Power Framework through a Video

Remind students that yesterday they explored what democracy means in the United States. Explain that today they will apply that by looking at examples of how people have used the tools of democracy to fight for their freedoms. Introduce the concept of “levers of power” by sharing the following quote by former president Barack Obama: “You have to go through life with more than just passion for change; you need a strategy.”¹ Have one or two students volunteer to say what they think that means.

Distribute the **Introduction to Levers of Power Graphic Organizer** handout. You might spend a moment exploring the metaphor of the lever in the title. In a literal sense, a lever is a tool that allows one to pick up or move something much heavier than could be lifted without it. In other words, a lever allows someone to use a small amount of force to have a big impact. Within the context and structure of a democracy, sometimes we need to work with organizations, government, and other community members to amplify our voice and our desire for change. By influencing or making use of these “levers,” individuals might have a larger impact on their community or society. Using the levers of power is one example of a democratic tool that people use to bring about change in their communities.

Have the class watch the video [Fannie Lou Hamer Risked Her Life for the Right to Vote](#). After viewing the video, have students work with partners or in small groups to fill in the **Introduction to Levers of Power Graphic Organizer**. Students will answer the following questions by looking at the actions of Fannie Lou Hamer in her quest to become a voter:

- What type of freedom did the individual(s) in this source want?
- What democratic tool(s) did the individual(s) use in order to advocate for that freedom?
- Which powerful people or organizations (“levers of power”) did the individual(s) attempt to influence? How?

¹ White House Office of the Press Secretary, “[Remarks by the President at Howard University Commencement Ceremony](#),” speech delivered by Barack Obama at Howard University, Washington, DC, May 7, 2016. Accessed April 6, 2023.

After students have answered the questions about the Fannie Lou Hamer video, have volunteers share their thoughts with the whole class. Check for understanding that:

- Fannie Lou Hamer fought for African American voting rights.
- One democratic tool that she used was to run for the US Senate to bring attention to the issue of voting disenfranchisement in the South.
- The lever of power that she influenced was the Democratic Party when she spoke at their convention.

Activity 2: Historic Examples of Levers of Power Using a Modified Jigsaw

Divide the class into two groups. Tell students that each group will read a different source that demonstrates how people have used democratic tools to fight for freedoms in the United States, using the same graphic organizer as they did for the Fannie Lou Hamer video. Hand out **Excerpts from “Board of Education: Chinese Mother Letter,” *Daily Alta California*, 1885** to one group of students and **Excerpts from “Andrew G. Imutan 1965–1974,” *Essays by UFW Volunteers*** to the rest. Then have students read the sources and complete their section of the graphic organizer in groups with the same reading, similar to a [jigsaw](#) activity.

After students have finished reading the source and filling out the graphic organizer, have each student choose a partner who read the other source. Now students will work in pairs to fill out the final section of their graphic organizer as they discuss each of the sources.

If time permits, have students share with the whole class their findings from the sources.

Formative Task

Create a Found Poem

To close, have students reflect on different democratic tools that they read about in the sources today. They will now each draw a picture of a democratic tool that could be useful to enact change on a pressing issue in their own lives or communities. For example, if they thought that organizing was a democratic tool that they could use, they might draw a picture of a protest or of a strike. If they thought that Mary Tape’s letter writing was a democratic tool that they would use, they might draw a picture of a letter. Then, after drawing the picture of the tool, they should label the drawing and explain why the particular tool resonated with them as something that could help them enact change.