



African American Registry Unit Plan

Thematic Ideas and Plans for Teachers

Democracy

The following are ten different themes that can be used in Middle and/or High School classrooms to engage students in various subjects. Literature, Music, History, Visual Art, Science, Math and Activism can all be addressed by using the Registry. This site can provide material to draw from, create from, and explore.

These Unit plans are constructed to make use of the site, to encourage ways of creating lessons that are interdisciplinary, and interactive, while still meeting standards.

So often *teaching from a theme* can in itself be inclusive and deep as opposed to teaching separate units on “black poets” African American music.” In this way we do not “other” a culture, race or community, but rather weave them into the inclusive world we want to create in our classrooms while still emphasizing the importance of their unique identity.

As you will see, the Registry provides a natural resource into many themes that connect to student lives, concerns and passions.

Note: You can pick or choose among the suggestions for each Thematic Unit. It could be an activity from the Unit that takes one day; or you may want to pick and choose what activities and lessons you want to do that amount to one week of exploration and instruction. The Registry is ideal in its flexibility. These Units aim to be flexible as well.

MDE Social Emotional Goals—All Are Part of Every Unit Plan for the Registry

Self-control of feelings and behavior

Shared use of space and materials

Identify of self in relations to others

Social and emotional understanding

Relationships and social interactions with familiar adults

Relationships and social interactions

Conflict negotiation

Responsible conduct as a group member



Standards Addressed in the Unit: Democracy

Standards addressed in this unit include

- Citizenship and Government --Civic Skills, 8.1, 9.1
- Geography—9.3,
- Historical Thinking Skills—9.
- United State History—Indigenous and Slave labor-9.4.4.16.5
- United States History—Slaves struggle for rights-9.4.4.19.4
- United States History—Jim Crow –racism 9.4.4.20.5

Language Arts:

- Conventions of English when writing or speaking: 6.11.1.1
- Consulting Reference Materials 6.11..44
- Evaluate Content in Diverse Media 6.5.77
- Write Narratives and Other Creative Texts—7.7.3.3- 12th grade
- Prepare for and Participate in range of conversations –7.9.1.1- grade 12
- Communicate using traditional or digital multimedia formats—7.9.8.8
- Write Narratives and other Creative Texts—9.7.3.3

Theme

Democracy: 'Democracy is a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." (Abraham Lincoln's definition.) In the dictionary definition, democracy "is government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system." This unit is one that asks students to explore what such a definition means, and how well we, in the USA, have retained our democracy.

Intersections: By reading literature as well as history and by noting songs about the fight for rights, as well as the political situation in regard to elections, students will explore the idea of democracy from the disciplines of psychology, history, music, art, government and literature. This creates a multi-perspective, inter-disciplinary approach to learning about democracy.

Age Range: Grades 7-12

Goal: Students will read about famous people who have fought for making the United States a true democracy where every human being has the vote. Basic to our stated belief as a country in one-person, one-vote, it is important to recognize the struggle some groups have had to have the right to cast a ballot. This includes women, African Americans, Immigrants, Native Americans, the formerly incarcerated and others.



Studying history is a way of righting the wrongs of history. This unit will encourage students to explore obstacles and victories in challenging our government in order to be able to exercise their democratic right under the law. The goal is to encourage students to research, connect the past struggle for democracy with the present and to explore the rich heritage in music and literature connected to this struggle. They will collaborate with classmates during the unit.

Materials

Notebooks with subject sections: History, Music, Art, Literature, Government and Current events.

Introducing the Unit

Reproduce the definition above for each student. Ask them to copy this into their notebook as the opening page after the title page. Before engaging in an all class discussion, ask students to write either on their own:

- Democracy is working in the US or
- Democracy is not working for everyone in the US.
- Ask them to give three reasons for their belief in one or the other statement.
- Discuss as a class.

Steps

Step 1: Look at the poem by [Garfield Dandridge](#) in the Registry.

This poem is about African Americans fighting for the right to be considered full human beings. One of the ways they wanted to be recognized as persons was in the right to vote. Lives were lost fighting for that right, as well as fighting for freedom from slavery.

Ask students to think of things they would fight for, they believe strongly in and would risk their lives or personal safety to achieve. They can keep these to themselves, have a discussion as a class, or even create a poem around the idea of fighting for what you believe depending on the class or group.

Step 2: What would a democratic classroom look like?

Ask the class to create rules that would be important in a classroom that allowed for each person to have a voice. What about hurtful language, name calling, constant interruption? What is required to make a democracy work?



Step 3: *Ask students* to read the entry in the Registry about [Alexis de Tocqueville](#)

De Tocqueville was a man who was considered an ally of African Americans. Have students copy this quote from his description in their notebooks: “The book focused on issues such as religion, the press, money, class structure, racism and slavery, the role of government, and the judicial system--issues that are just as relevant today as they were then. "Democracy in America" has undergone several periods of popularity throughout the 20th century, but it has never been as popular as it is now.”

He lists religion, money, class structure, racism as possible areas in which persons in the US are not supported.

Ask students to discuss whether, in this present day, religion or race or poverty or disability hinder people from voting.

Ask them to do research to back up their belief.

Activity 1

Ask students to read about [Fredrick Bartholdi](#), another white European who was horrified by slavery.

His response was to create a sculpture to express his belief in democracy and that sculpture was the Statue of Liberty. Artists and musicians have worked to create work that expresses their political views and values.

Ask students to read about [Jacob Lawrence](#) on the Registry;

Play the accompanying video that goes with this entry which is with Seitu Jones, a visual artist who expresses his African American history and heritage in his work.

Ask students to use art to create a piece about freedom and democracy: this can be a play, a spoken word poem, a song, a painting, a piece of sculpture, a collage or any idea they come up with that makes sense for this project. They can work alone or work with others. Plan for a day when students can show their work to each other. Remind them to look at the definition of the word “democracy” and to think about what this means to them, at the present time.

Activity 2

Ask students to watch the video of [Norman Rice](#) on the Registry:

Have a discussion with students about what it means to be part of a democracy, to take part in public life, and how they view politics. What is their responsibility to vote? Ask them to look at newspapers for the next three days. What do they find in the paper that encourages them to take part in their community? What discourages them? Ask them to come to a consensus on who they would like to invite to their class to talk about being a



publicly elected figure. After inviting this speaker, have students plan questions for his or her visit.

Activity 3

Ask students to look at the description of the [Phyllis Wheatley House](#).

Ask them to research settlement houses in the United States. Such settlement houses often provided services to immigrants and migrants. Help could include food, assistance in finding a place to live and a job. Many people who were helped by these settlement houses were not only African Americans who migrated north but also immigrants from other countries.

[Immigration and Nationality Act Signed.](#)

Ask students to read the history of immigration policy in this Registry entry above. *Ask students* to read about current laws and policies regarding those entering our country now. (bring in articles and books from the library as well as internet resources and links)

Assign them to present what they have found in the form of a paper, citing their references.

Discuss with students what they think should happen to immigrants who have been in the US for many years.

Ask them to meet in small groups to talk about their views on who should be able to be a citizen. Ask each group to create their own “path to citizenship” document. Ask the whole class to discuss each of the documents and work together to create one as a group. This is an example of how compromise works in a democracy.

Activity 4

[William “Bill” Green.](#)

In the above video Bill Greene talks about the importance of law and studying law.

Ask students to list ways in which laws and rules affect them in their lives:

- In school
- On the Street
- Driving a car
- At home
- Voting
- Curfew

Ask them to pick an area of their life they would like to have more of a say in what the laws or rules are: age of voting, for example. Ask them to create a reasoned, well thought out argument for changing a law. Ask them to find out what it would take to do



that: appeal to a figure in power, present a bill to a legislature, bring it up at a city council meeting? Ask students to plan to try and present their argument to those in charge.

Activity 5

Print off a copy of Sarah Walker's biography below. This will be an example of what it takes to work in a democratic system for causes she believes in.

Sarah Catherine Walker ([email](#)) spent five years as the Chief Operating Officer at [180 Degrees, Inc.](#) During her time at 180 Degrees, Inc. she founded the [Minnesota Second Chance Coalition](#). Sarah is a graduate of Carleton College and is currently completing her doctorate in the [Department of Sociology](#) at University of Minnesota. Prior to entering the Department of Sociology, Sarah completed three years of doctoral work in the University of Minnesota Department of Political Science where she studied interest groups, social movements, and media framing of unpopular political issues. She brings extensive research experience to issues of politics, inequality, criminal justice reform and the role of philanthropic organizations in setting interest group agendas.

Her previous positions include as Research Consultant at the Council on Crime and Justice, Director of Workforce Development at the [Center for Court Innovation](#), Executive Director of the [Youth Justice Funding Collaborative](#), and Interim Research Director at the Council on Crime and Justice. Sarah also serves as a board member of the William Mitchell Reentry Clinic Advisory Board, [St. Paul African American Leadership Council](#) and [Twin Cities Rise](#). Sarah is currently a member of the [Minnesota DFL State Central Committee](#) and is a past member of the Minnesota Supreme Court's Racial Fairness Committee. In 2010, Governor Pawlenty appointed Sarah to the [Council on Black Minnesotans](#) and, in 2011, Governor Dayton appointed her to [Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission](#). In January of 2011, Sarah accepted the Presidency of the Coalition for Impartial Justice and is leading efforts to ensure a fair and impartial judiciary in Minnesota.

Sarah's public policy work has received many accolades. She was the recipient of the 2010 Minnesota Council of Non-Profits Statewide Advocacy Award; 2010 Hennepin County Bar Association Advancing Justice Award; and 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2014 winner of the Politics in Minnesota's Leaders in Public Policy Award. Most recently she was named to 2016 [40 under 40](#) by Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal.

Ask students to watch an interview segment with [Sarah Walker](#).

Ask them to discuss, given the biography, what they believe is her passion. What does it mean, given what she says, to pursue a goal or a cause or a passion? What is involved?



Assign students to attend a state legislative session, a city council meeting, a school board meeting, a student council meeting or a community meeting around an issue. These are all examples of a democratic process in a smaller context than the federal government.

Ask them to describe the meeting they attended to the class:

- Who was in charge of the meeting?
- What were the rules for running the meeting?
- Who spoke? What issues, concerns came up during the meeting? Who was included? Was anyone ignored or excluded? Did people seem to believe in what they were doing, working for?
- Students can pair up and go to the same meeting. They can present to the class what they found.
- The question becomes: do you have the energy and passion to work for something you believe in in our democracy? Do you do it through politics, community organizing, art, music?

Activity 6

Ask students to interview an elder in their community or family about what they feel is a true democracy. If you have not done so, talk about what is important for a successful interview.

They can read the definition of democracy to this individual or individuals. Ask the interviewee to talk about their beliefs on democracy in this country. Students can think up interview questions together with their peers before conducting their interview.

Ask students to write up their thoughts and responses to this experience. This can be in the form of an essay, a poem, or simply a transcription of the interview with each question followed by the answer of the elder. In this way they will learn interviewing technique.

Activity 7

Ask students to watch the video of [Mahmoud El-Kati](#) talk about this work in Black Studies. He talks about doing it his way. What are some ways that are not in the mainstream that we can achieve what we want? What does it mean to be a revolutionary in the struggle for justice?

Ask students to think of ways to live within the structures of our democracy and to challenge it at the same time. Who are those you admire in your own life who challenged the system and survived; who even took advantage of living within a system defined as a democracy and challenged that very democracy?



Some challenge with their art, their voice, their advocacy. *Ask students* to watch the interview with [Jearlyn Steele](#). She is an advocate for women and for hope. She has her own way of changing the world through music.

Ask students: What is your choice, your route to making a difference in this democracy we live in: through political, community channels, or through an art area, or teaching or developing a cure for cancer. The ways are endless to directly be part of creating a true democracy, or indirectly through a life path. What do you envision?