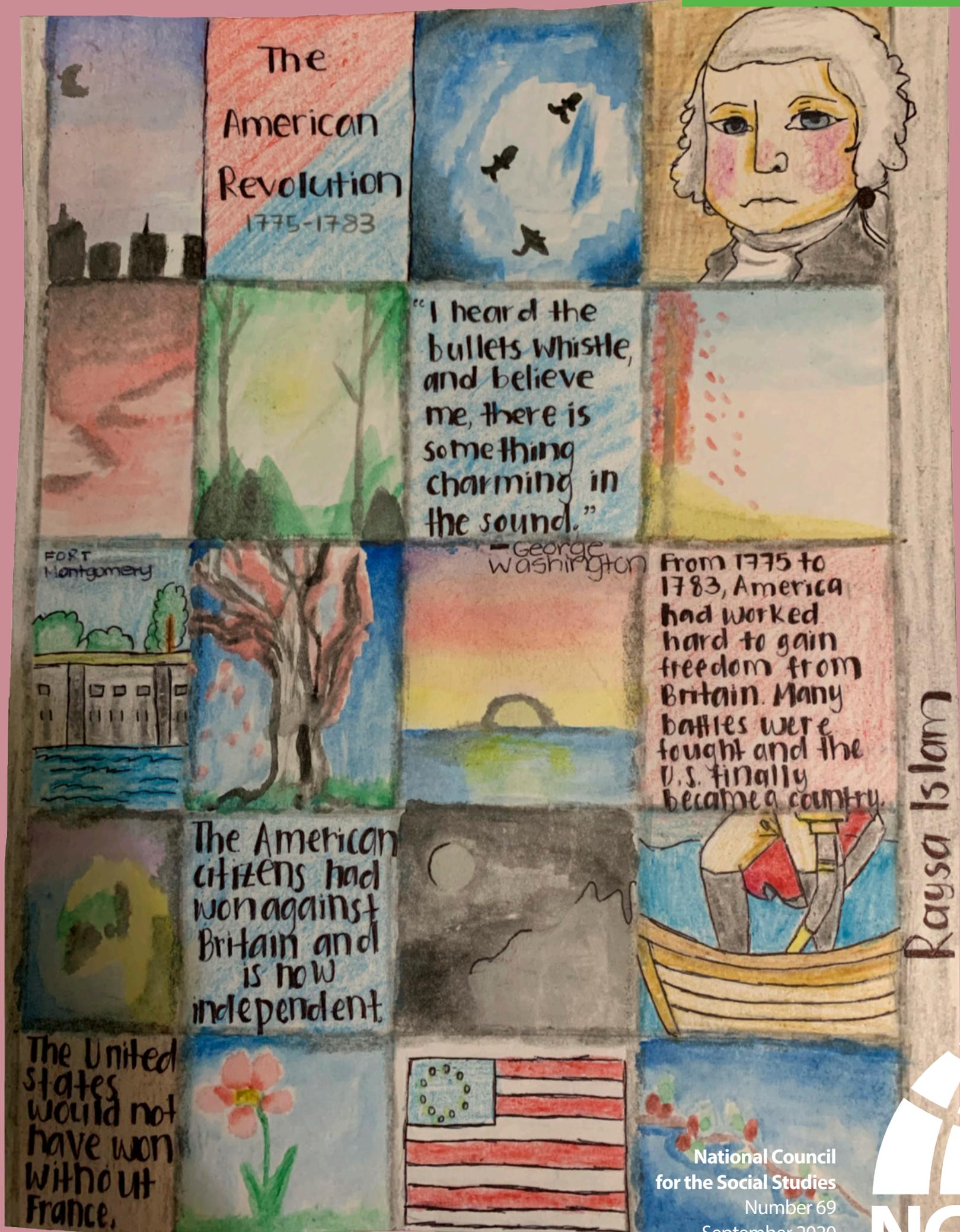


Distance Learning in the Social Studies

mll
middle level learning

also

- Tips for Teaching During A Pandemic and Fully Online
- Harness Student Choice-making via a Q-Sort Activity
- Integrating Poetry in the Social Studies



The Celebration of Learning Quilt

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The Celebration of Learning Quilt: A Review During Distance Teaching

Sara M. Monnat

In mid-March, the students in my district left their school buildings, not knowing that they were leaving those buildings for the rest of the year. Our teachers did the same. Teaching and learning as we knew it changed for the remainder of the year and will continue on a new path this fall.

Though I feared that I would lose connection with my students, I found that the relationships we built in the first three quarters of the school year carried through the last few months. By providing them with engaging lessons and a variety of opportunities that traditional schooling wouldn't allow, most of my seventh graders remained committed. They produced thoughtful work throughout all three months of distance learning. Additionally, many excellent historic sites and national parks nationwide provided incredible virtual field trips and tours that we were able to utilize throughout those months and into the summer months as well.

For their final 7th grade social studies assignment, my students completed a mini project my colleague, Michelle Bradford, and I created called "The Celebration of Learning Quilt." Though the delivery of content and practicing of skills looked different throughout distance teaching than it would have in the classroom, we wanted our students to focus on their achievements. We wanted our students to recognize that they succeeded in learning despite the many challenges presented by schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic, and that we were proud of them. We wanted this final assignment to be fun, creative, and to offer students some freedom, while also evoking key themes of a unit they studied. Additionally, we wanted to ensure that they finished the year on a positive note and that our learners could easily succeed on the final assignment. For this project, they had to incorporate information learned during any unit of the school year to create a "quilt" (digitally or on paper).

Anticipatory sets in asynchronous distance learning took a bit more effort for me. In class, I go for the "wow" factor or an unmistakable connection to my students' lives. While that is more difficult in asynchronous, virtual teaching, it is not impossible. For this assignment, I tried to connect the importance

of quilts in everyday life and important occasions throughout American history to the significant event of completing 7th grade social studies in a distance-learning environment. I included a video as part of the directions to show my excitement for the project and to allow my more auditory learners to hear the instructions instead of just reading them. Another benefit of providing a video recording was that I was able to show my students how to do different skills in Google Classroom. Reminding them ahead of time how to do specific things saved a lot of frustrated emails throughout the project.

Celebration of Learning Quilt

This year, we have studied several units of history, dating back to 10,000 B.C.E. As a closure to our year and a celebration of what we have learned, your last assignment for 7th grade Social Studies will be a **celebration quilt**.

Quilts are blankets made up of pieces of fabric that are stitched together. They have a long history in the United States. Traditionally, quilts were made from scraps of extra or repurposed material. Sometimes quilts are made for important events such as marriages, the birth of a baby, or as a way to tell a story. During the underground railroad, 'stations' may have hung quilts to send messages to fugitives from slavery.



Learning Objective:
Using the information learned in a unit of study during the year, create a 'quilt' to illustrate your understanding of the topic.

In the classroom, I would have encouraged students to share whether they had any quilts at home. I also would have asked if any had sewn or helped sew one themselves. But since we

ON THE COVER: Seventh grader Raysa Islam's "Celebration of Learning Quilt" on the American Revolution.

Choose Your Topic

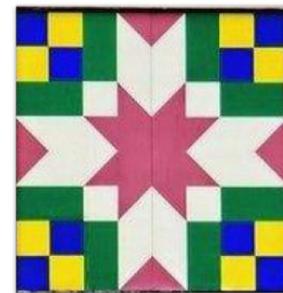
I would like you to think back to everything we have learned together and select **ONE** topic *other than the Civil War* on which to do your final project. **Which one means the most to you? Which one inspired you? Which one caused you the most pride in this country or maybe caused you to rethink prior heros?**

Your choices are:

- ★ United States Geography
- ★ Ancient American Cultures (the Maya, Inca, Aztec, Anasazi)
- ★ The Native Tribes of North America (Eastern Woodlands, Southwest, Plains Indians, etc.)
- ★ Exploration
- ★ Creating the 13 English Settlements
- ★ Causes to the American Revolution
- ★ The American Revolution
- ★ United States Constitution
- ★ United States Government
- ★ The Federalist Era (Washington and Adams)
- ★ Presidency of Jefferson
- ★ Industrial Revolution
- ★ War of 1812
- ★ Westward Expansion

Task

You will design a QUILT that celebrates the specific topic you chose. Quilts are functional and beautiful and so your quilt must include relevant pictures and text plus be visually appealing.



- ★ You will replace the text or image in each “block” with the relevant item that celebrates your unit.
- ★ Your images can be paintings and photographs or symbols, words, colors, and objects that BEST represent your topic.
- ★ You must include one quote from a primary source (the people living at the time). Please link the source to the quote.
- ★ Your information must be historically accurate.
- ★ You may do this digitally (using the template provided) or on paper. If you do it on paper, take a picture and attach it to the assignment in Google Classroom.
- ★ Your finished quilt needs to be visually appealing and meet all criteria. [CLICK HERE FOR EXAMPLE QUILT AND RUBRIC](#)

were working asynchronously, we didn’t have that discussion. I enjoy making quilts and have many in my house that are meaningful to my family. If we were in person, I would have brought these in to show my students. In retrospect, I could have included my quilts in the intro video, but recorded it as a computer screen-only video and not a video of me as well as the screen.

Next, I asked students to choose a unit that we studied during the school year. The questions I asked to engage and inspire thoughtful work were:

- Which one meant the most to you?
- Which one inspired you?
- Which one stimulated the most pride in this country or perhaps caused you to rethink any prior heroes?

After students made their selection, they planned the content according to the task and criteria (see image above, at right.)

To make the task easier, I created a Google Slide as a template (at right) and provided a rubric so they would know how I would grade the assignment. I also created an example on the topic of the Civil War (which is why I asked them not to make their quilts about the Civil War) that demonstrated the quality of work I was looking for. The Special Education teacher and I worked closely with our SpEd students throughout this step to ensure that they understood the task and criteria.

<p>Quote: change font, font size color</p>	<p>Replace Image Click here, select replace image in the menu, and insert image of your choice. (Resize and reposition new image to fit crop. Do not resize crop). <u>(Then add the Link to source)</u></p>	<p>Summary of Topic</p>
<p>Replace Image Click here, select replace image in the menu, and insert image of your choice. (Resize and reposition new image to fit crop. Do not resize crop). <u>(Then add the Link to source)</u></p>	<p>Name of Unit</p>	<p>Replace Image Click here, select replace image in the menu, and insert image of your choice. (Resize and reposition new image to fit crop. Do not resize crop). <u>(Then add the Link to source)</u></p>
<p>Historical Significance</p>	<p>Replace Image Click here, select replace image in the menu, and insert image of your choice. (Resize and reposition new image to fit crop. Do not resize crop). <u>(Then add the Link to source)</u></p>	<p>Important information <small>or</small> Link to a Quizlet, Kahoot, or Quizizz YOU have made (10 question minimum)</p>

This assignment led students to look back over the school year and remember what they had learned in a year where my district, like many others, opted against final exams while distance learning. It was important for me to provide my students with some time for reflection. To my delight, this small project also gave me a glimpse into the students’ favorite units of study. While I expected (and received) a lot of American Revolution projects, I was delighted to see all of the First Industrial Revolution ones.

would make would be to have students include a justification page: “Why did you choose this unit?” “Why did you choose that image?” “How does it represent the unit?” Writing is an essential skill that cannot be practiced enough.

Other changes I am considering include incorporating a “Unit Quilt” at the end of every unit to help students connect the content with their lives. Additionally, this would serve as a jumping-off point for the midterm and final. Lastly, if we are in the classroom, you can bet I am printing their quilts out and making a display! I plan to hang our current celebration quilts

in the hallway (if we are in person or hybrid in the fall) so my former students can come back and see their work. This will also provide my new students with an excellent visual introduction to the course. 🌍

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Yikes! Teaching During a Pandemic and Fully Online: New Teacher Tips

Valerie Ooka Pang and Lynne A. Bercaw

Trusting relationships are key to good teaching. However, in the current circumstances created by the pandemic, with teachers thrown into virtual teaching, making connections with students, and among students, is harder. But it can be done.

For many teachers, teaching online is uncharted territory.¹ Society is in great flux, but you can still create a strong virtual community of learners.² We need to go back to our fundamental values as teachers. Most teachers want to develop a caring classroom where students are treated fairly and learn skills needed to be active citizens in a democracy.³ Focus on ways to make instruction interesting and thought provoking. Though it is hard to make all lessons exciting, “boring” can shut students down.

Some components of effective teaching may seem unattainable in a virtual format. It’s important to capitalize on the unique aspects of online learning that may not exist in face-to-face instruction. We want to look for the strengths and opportunities, while building and maintaining a positive, caring, trusting environment.⁴ We recognize that teaching online is arduous—it is much like dropping someone off in a new land that has a completely different language and cultural norms.

Teachers are adept at creative problem solving, flexibility, and being able to modify and adjust instruction for a range of learners. These are the same abilities we want to embrace for distance teaching. For example, take the engagement strategy “Think, Pair, Share.” In person, a teacher might say, “Think about the section we just read about Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘I Have a Dream Speech,’” give students a moment, and then ask them to share their thoughts with a partner on the major points about equity. Now, imagine how that informal assessment might look virtually. Maybe students do a poll using the “raise your hand function” in video conferencing platforms; maybe they chat with a pre-arranged partner; maybe they write on a virtual whiteboard (such as in Canvas or Flipgrid; see options here <https://ditchthattextbook.com/online-whiteboard/>). This gives the teacher an opportunity to hear what students are thinking. Is this better than in the classroom? Not necessarily.

Different? Yes! We hope to inspire educators to see the possibilities afforded in virtual classrooms. Is it challenging to think differently about pedagogy? Definitely. Impossible? No way.

Ten Tips for Teaching Online

Consider how you can build your virtual skills in small “bites.” The first bite is to build a foundation to help manage the difficulties of the pandemic we are living through. In this unprecedented time, we are seeing an increase in mental health issues and teacher stress.⁵ The demands can feel overwhelming, the ambiguity frustrating, and the uncertainties disquieting. Remember to take deep breaths and think about what you need to keep yourself emotionally and physically healthy. Take breaks; get up from the computer and take a walk. Consider letting your students know specific times when you will be available for questions. Remember, you do not have to answer emails 24/7. We hope the following ten tips will help create a positive distance teaching and learning experience.

Tip 1. Build Trusting Relationships. Great teachers ponder how to make connections with students, especially online. Strong teachers are always building trusting relationships with students and their parents. At the time you read this article, you may have already begun the school year teaching remotely. Consider surprising your students with a personal letter or note in the mail.

Learners will enjoy receiving a handwritten letter or positive note from their teacher. It sends a message that teachers care about them. It can make students feel less vulnerable or isolated with regards to school. You can check with the principal for student information, particularly in the case of students who are displaced or homeless. After the entire town of Paradise, California, was burned in a 2018 wildfire, the local district held school in an airport hanger. The district knew which students were living with relatives or residing in borrowed RVs (Recreational Vehicles).

If you have 40 or more students, you might want to write one letter, have it copied, and include a personal sentence or

two in your own handwriting, as well as signing the note. All students appreciate affirmation from their teachers. Make this an opportunity to praise students and bolster their confidence.

Tip 2. Verify whether students need digital devices or Internet services. Another way to make connections with students is to call them on the phone (since many do have phones.) You can find out how school is going, let them know how excited you are to have them in class, inquire about which activity they most enjoy, and find out which task is the most difficult to do online. They may have very useful feedback.

However, the digital divide can be great if your students do not have the use of a computer, smartphone, Ipad, or ready access to the Internet. Depending on your students' ages or maturity, you might ask to speak with their parents so you can find out about access to digital devices. Many students or their parents may not speak English, so you may need a district translator with you when calling.

Tip 3. Meet students online in small groups. It can be overwhelming for students of any age to always participate with the whole class in Zoom or other video-conferencing software. If you have the chance, occasionally connect with each student one-on-one. This also provides an opportunity to tutor students with specific academic needs. If you have too many students, then group them; connect with four or five students at a time. This could be a pod or group of students for learning specific skills, such as identifying topic sentences in your social studies textbook. Later, you can change the group of students to identify key societal issues. Remember not to keep the small groups permanent. This could lead to academic tracking. In addition, students may get along with some peers better than others.

In small groups, students may feel more comfortable asking questions and making comments, particularly English learners. Placing students in small groups is an excellent learning-environment strategy that can also help build community while distance teaching.

Tip 4. Smile, Laugh, and Be Enthusiastic When you are online, smile and laugh. Your actions can provide that stabilizing affect for which your students already look to you. Your positive attitude will make it more fun for your students. Have you ever watched a speaker who had no energy? How does it make you feel? You may not have been motivated to listen or engage in

the topic. We believe it is important for you to enjoy your time with students. (This is where the importance of your self-care comes in.) To get your students involved in your lessons, you need to model enthusiasm and gusto. With your laughing and positive attitude, students can see your passion for teaching. (Yes...let them get to know you!)

Tip 5. Play games where everyone wins. Not everything in class should be competitive. You want to create an atmosphere of teamwork. Continue the laughing by playing a creative, thinking game called Create A Caption! It might be a funny caption.

Here is a sample of a drawing and caption:



Ask students why the caption "Dressed for Success" is a good one for the person in the sketch.

Share the photos on the next page without any captions. Then give everyone three minutes to come up with a caption for one photo. There are no "right" (or wrong) answers.

The teacher can say, "What is a good slogan or title for each photo?" Give bonus points to everyone who participates. Afterwards, have each student share one caption with a photo. Have them discuss why they picked that specific photo and how they came up with the caption. This is an opportunity for students and teachers to get to know each other. Students may be less intimidated because the focus will be on the photos and not them.

Suggest a caption or title for each photo

HANDOUT











Tip 6. Create a virtual classroom. Many schools have classroom websites. They are typically password protected, where teachers post photos and announcements for students and parents. Consider using this space as you might your physical classroom. Have student “bulletin boards,” where they can post accomplishments—everything from original writings to video links and podcasts. Mrs. Witmeyer’s 6th Grade Classroom website is an excellent example www.sites.google.com/site/mrswitmeyer/home.

Tip 7. Parents Can Be Your Best Partners. It’s important to communicate with parents about the distance learning process. You can create a 10-minute video directed to parents in which you discuss your goals and expectations for students. You can also direct them to your classroom website, where they can get information on their child’s progress. The video can highlight where you will be placing homework assignments and other announcements. This is a good opportunity to explain to parents how they can get in touch with you.

Tip 8. Virtual Field Trips: Engage Students in Distance Learning. Let’s take a trip. Students like to go places and though

we cannot physically visit sites right now, we can tour many online. Here are some suggestions and questions that you can use to generate discussion and student critical thinking.

Interactive Tour of Ellis Island: Struggles of Immigrants

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/tour/>
Each page of this interactive story gives information about the immigration of individuals and families from Europe. Have students click the photo tab so they can see photos of actual immigrants.

Preparation. Ask students to think of these questions while they are on the tour:

From which countries did many immigrants arrive to Ellis Island? What did they carry with them?

Why did some immigrants get off in New York City, while others had to go to Ellis Island first? Why were people treated differently?

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Have your students take a tour with Sonya Delight, who hosts a YouTube travel channel. The tour covers a great deal of information, and it’s not possible to read everything, but students can take pause, write notes and research specific issues or events that they want to know more about.

Preparation. Ask students the following: List the two most important facts that you learned about African American history. Explain why you considered these most significant. Identify one issue that is valuable to you and what more you would like to know. Share your answers with a partner. What further questions did you think about as you went on the tour? Remember that you can stop the tour to write down your notes.

National Museum of African American History Tour with Sonya Delight, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rawck7tJMKY

For more information about the museum, visit the museum’s website at <https://nmaahc.si.edu/> or watch the opening ceremony at www.youtube.com/watch?v=TU1y_pQYvoQ.

Tip 9. Use Graphic Novels: Focus on Perennial Social Issues such as loss of constitutional rights. Graphic novels offer many opportunities for distance learning focusing on a student’s visual literacy. For example, graphic novels provide the opportunity for students to identify sequence of events, nonverbal messages, and visual clues.⁶ Graphic novels also supply opportuni-

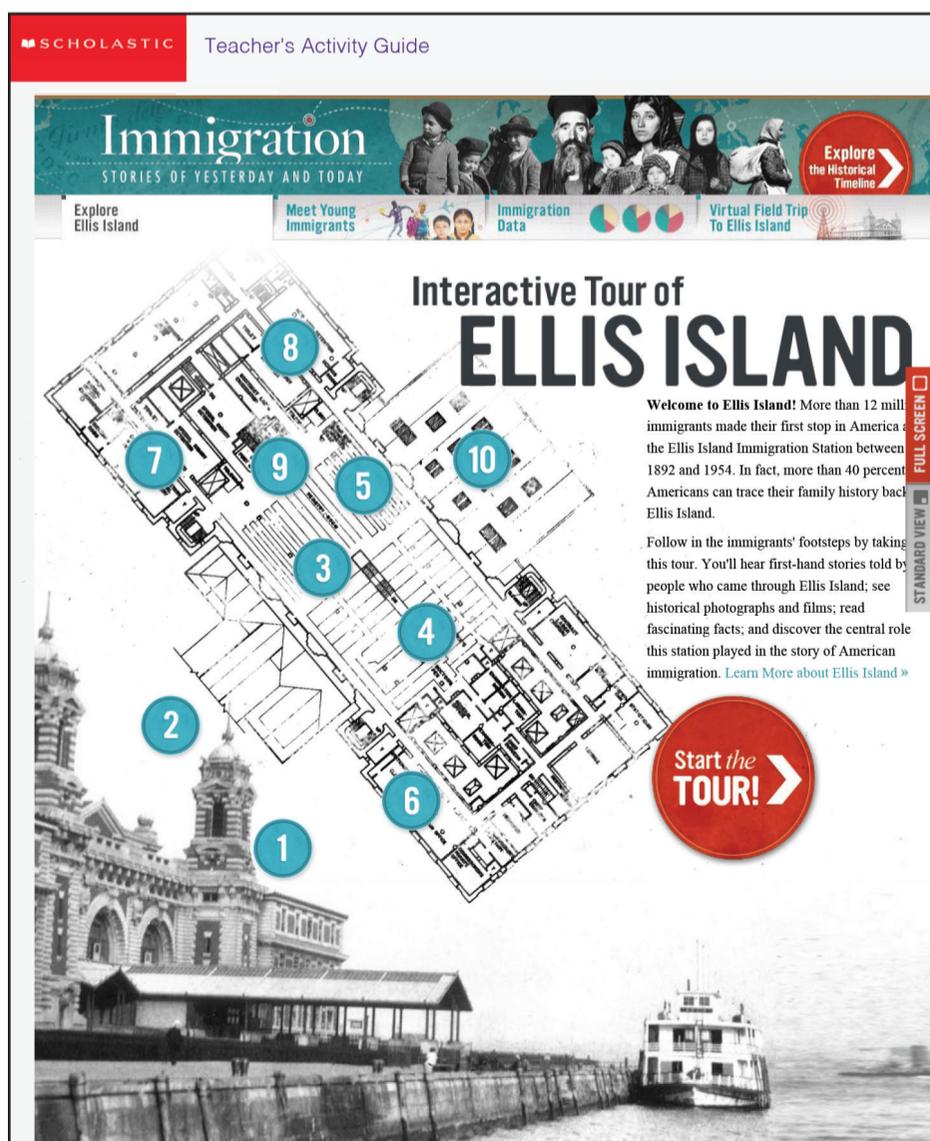
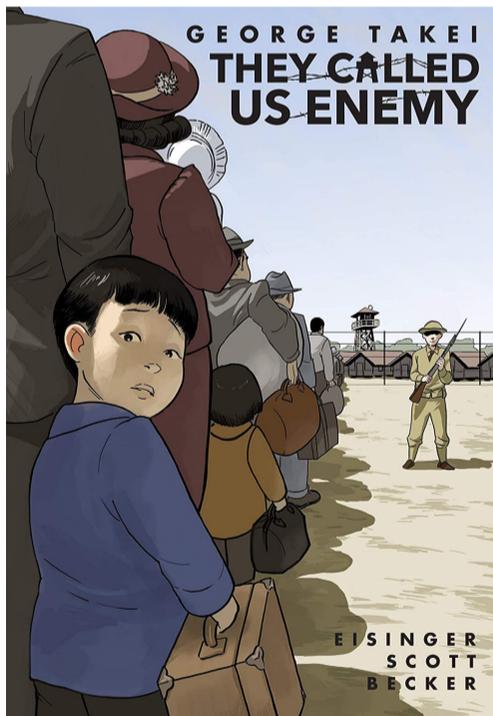


Table 1: **Japanese Americans: Constitutional Freedoms and Rights Denied During World War II**

Freedom of Religion
Freedom of Speech
Freedom of the Press
Right to Assemble
Freedom From Unreasonable Searches and Seizures
Right to an Indictment or To Be Informed of the Charges
Right to Life, Liberty, and Property
Right to Be Confronted with Accusatory Witness
Right to Call Favorable Witnesses
Right to Legal Counsel
Right to Speedy and Public Trial
Right to Reasonable Bail
Freedom from Cruel and Unusual Punishment
Right to Vote
Rights Against Involuntary Servitude
Right to Equal Protection Under the Law
Freedom from Bills of Attainder and Ex Post Facto Laws

ties for differentiated instruction and alternative assessments.⁷

It is a genre that students can emulate, particularly as a way to write about their own experiences during this pandemic. Graphic novels provide access to diverse stories, experiences, and literary elements in ways that differ. *They Call Us Enemy* by George Takei, Justin Eisinger, and Steven Scott is an excellent graphic novel that describes Takei's experience as a Japanese



American imprisoned by his own country during World War II.⁸ Takei was born in the United States and therefore a citizen; why were his constitutional rights taken away? Takei, who was five years old, along with his family was taken from the Los Angeles area to Rohwer, Arkansas, to live in a concentration camp with other Japanese Americans. He was later moved to Tule Lake in northern California, another concentration camp for Japanese Americans.

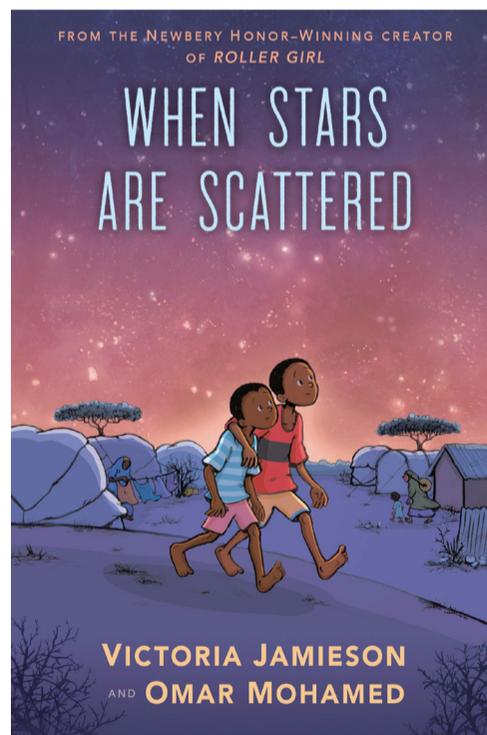
Focus discussion on the constitutional rights (listed in the table above) taken away from Takei and his family members due to their "race."⁹

Ask students to choose three of the most important freedoms or rights and to define each one. Have learners give examples of how citizens' rights or freedoms were taken away in the U.S. concentration camps.

As with any book, it's important to make selections that have a clear purpose for students and their learning.

Other recommended graphic novels:

- *Anne Frank: The Anne Frank House Authorized Graphic Biography* (the only graphic novel authorized by the Anne Frank House) by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010).
- *The Arrival*, Shaun Tan, a story about immigration (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2006).
- *When Stars are Scattered* by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed, a story of refugees and resilience (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2020).



Tip 10. Have Students Listen to Audiobooks. School libraries often have audio books that students can check out. Perhaps the librarian can get a set of five audiobooks for a small group in your classroom. Be sure that you review each book first, to make sure they are age appropriate.

The following books touch on issues of ethnic identity, racial discrimination, institutional racism, classism, and stereotypes:

- *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (Boston, Mass.: HMH Books, 2019). This book, in poetry format, is about Josh, an African American youth who is passionate about basketball and who learns that family is one of his most

important values.

- *Mexican Whiteboy* by Matt de la Peña (Random House Children’s Books, 2010). This novel is about Danny, who is trying to figure out where he fits in society. He is both LatinX and white and grew up in the San Diego area. What can he learn by going to Mexico for a summer? Who is he? He does not speak a second language, but everyone assumes he is Mexican and fluent in Spanish.
- *Outrun the Moon* by Stacy Lee (New York, N.Y.: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2016). Set in San Francisco during the fire of 1906, this story is about how Chinese American protagonist Mercy deals with racial prejudice. It was difficult for Mercy to get people to trust her because of her ethnic and social class backgrounds.

Conclusion

Remote teaching is often challenging, but it can also offer opportunities to include different types of learning activities.¹⁰ Taking a virtual tour of the National Museum of African American History gives students a way to learn about the past and the present in an engaging way. The tour expands how students take in and engage with different people, diverse communities, societal values of equity, and civil rights issues. Teachers may not be able to take their students on an airplane to visit Washington, D.C., but they can encourage students to examine information and viewpoints beyond their textbooks.

Having students read books that are both in print and audio form can enhance students’ literacy experience, especially if the texts are about issues young people can relate to. Building a strong classroom community can support students and encourage collaboration. Distance learning can be hard, so having peers to work with helps create a sense of community.

Distance teaching is demanding, so consider collaborating with other educators. Being part of a circle of teachers who believe in the opportunities that remote teaching can present may be one of the most effective ways for you to learn new methods of instruction. Yes, the pandemic has created a difficult situation, but you are up to the challenge. 🌍

Notes

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8. George Takei, Justin Eisinger, and Steven Scott, *They Called Us Enemy* (Marietta, Ga.: Top Shelf Productions, 2019).
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10. Shelly Bautista, “5 Virtual Ways to Build a Classroom Community,” *PBS Teachers Lounge* (April 1, 2020), www.pbs.org/education/blog/5-virtual-ways-to-build-a-classroom-community.

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Harness Student Choice-making via a Q-Sort Activity

Chaebong Nam and Jenny Chung Greenfield

In a civic action project, students are active learners and knowledge producers, not merely passive receivers of prefixed sets of knowledge. Such a project involves a broad family of experiential learning methods such as community-based learning, asset mapping, youth participatory action research, action civics, youth media production, poetry and spoken word, community arts, junior republics, debate, and Model UN. This kind of project offers students real world-based, hands-on opportunities for "practicing the arts and habits of citizenship collaboratively."¹ Students identify what matters to them and why; tell a story about that issue; articulate the problem in their local community, state, country, or world; find people to work with in addressing the problem; and establish a plan of action to bring about a solution. This process involves a series of choice-making opportunities; at every step of the project, from topic selection, working format (e.g., individual or group), goals, audiences, strategies and tools to collaboration and alliance building—students are required to make choices.² The success of civic action projects, therefore, depends on whether students become authentic, informed, and intentional about their choice-making.

Choice-making, however, is not always explicit or intentional. Often students are not particularly conscious of their choice-making: what they want to achieve with the project and why, what tools they want to choose and why, and (if they're working in a small group or class-wide project) what their group members think. One reason for this is the lack of reflection methods to articulate the choice-making process. To fill the void, we developed a lesson activity, using a Q-sort method, and implemented it in an 8th grade civics classroom. At 45–50 minutes in length, this activity aims to make reflection more intentional and explicit, so that students harness choice-making skills for their civic action projects. In this article, we discuss the following topics:

1. Why authentic and informed choice-making is important in a civic action project.

2. How the Q-sort activity can help 8th graders achieve analytic, authentic, and informed choice-making around voice and influence.
3. What implications this lesson offers to other 8th grade civics classrooms.

Why Choice-making is Important in a Civic Action Project

Among many important moments of choice-making, we particularly focus on one for articulating a type of civic action. There are two distinctive types of civic action: one is *voice* (civic expression) and the other is *influence*.³ They are different but work in parallel. Voice involves a variety of forms of civic expression: the emission of one's opinions (dissenting or assenting) into the world, whether through social media posts, artwork, speeches, or digital or physical performances. It is aimed at changing people's minds or influencing public opinion. People use various tools—such as art, music, and performance—to express their thoughts and inspire others to see different aspects of an issue. Awareness campaigns are a good example. Social media is often used for this type of action, as people click "Like," tweet and retweet, use hashtags, and change profile photos to symbolize an issue. Social media campaigns are oriented towards lightweight engagement, but they can be a gateway to deeper civic engagement.⁴

By contrast, influence involves connecting the use of voice to specific levers of power, whether by contacting office holders, communicating with officials in agencies and businesses, submitting petitions, organizing protests, or otherwise finding and activating allies within the traditional realm of politics. No stark line is drawn between voice and influence. The two work in tandem for systemic change. Without changing people's minds, public policy does not change; without changing public policy, no concrete change is carried out.

A successful civic action project requires that students have a clear understanding of these two types of action, because that understanding affects other critical choices, including identify-

ing the right audience and the right tools. For instance, social media or hashtag campaigns are useful for raising awareness (i.e., a voice-oriented project). If, however, students want to pivot from raising awareness to policy change, they need to re-evaluate the usefulness of social media and realign tools and resources. The student also needs to know how to tap into a different type of action and obtain proper knowledge of governmental structure and, tactically, how to use it. The problem is that this issue (i.e., am I pursuing a voice-oriented project or an influence-oriented one, or one that is both?) remains vastly understudied in the domain of civic action projects. We devised and implemented our Q-sort activity to help 8th grade civics students become intentional and explicit in their choice-making around voice and influence.

How the Q-Sort Activity Supports Students in Harnessing Choice-making

The Q-sort method has long been used in psychology to investigate different perspectives and preferences. The key feature of a Q-sort activity involves sorting cards into different piles.⁵ Cards cover a wide range of statements about a particular topic, and participants sort the cards into piles according to the extent of their agreement with a statement. In a study assessing global citizenship attitudes, Sherri Sklarwitz determined that Q-sort's ranked choices can supply a richer and more accurate profile of a participant's view than the traditional linear Likert scale (i.e., rating on a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree).⁶ Sklarwitz's successful modification of the Q-sort for high school students encouraged us to apply this method to the 8th grade level.

For this Q-sort activity, we created 25 statements, which include not only conventional forms of politics (i.e., voting and electoral campaigns) but also conventional ways of participation. The first 12 cards refer to voice-oriented action, such as "I believe shifting one's perspective on an issue is key to change." The related statements also include various tools of participation students might adopt, such as storytelling, public speech, art, media production, and online activities. The cards from 13 to 25 refer to influence-oriented action, such as "I believe chang-

ing laws is more important than changing minds." The related statements mention various levers of power that students can pull to drive influence, such as elections and officeholders, professional media organizations, nongovernmental agencies, and social influencers. (These 25 items can be replaced by other similar items according to the situation.) We implemented this Q-sort activity as part of a civic action project for 8th graders. Through previous lessons, students learned assorted types of civic action young people might take in a digital age and the conceptual difference between voice and influence. The specific learning objects of this activity were to help students accomplish the following:

1. Identify the difference between voice and influence in civic action,
2. Reflect on the types of action they want to achieve (e.g., voice-oriented projects or influence-oriented projects, or both),
3. Consider multiple tools and methods of participation,
4. Rank their choices.

Context of the Classroom

This activity was implemented in 8th grade civics classrooms at an East Coast urban public school that serves a racially, culturally, and socially diverse population. During the 2018–19 school year, there were 289 students, of which 8.7% were Asian, 30.1% were African American, 44.3% were White, 8.7% were Hispanic, and the remaining students were Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, or Multi-Racial.⁷ In spring 2019, about 100 students from four sections engaged in this lesson activity as part of a six-week-long civic action unit that utilized inquiry/problem-based approaches. While a teacher facilitated the students' project development, students worked in groups or individually to ensure student choice and to accommodate varying learning styles and abilities. This Q-sort activity was a critical component of the project planning stage, so that students could have a clear understanding of two distinctive types of action and make informed decisions for their civic action projects.⁸

Figure 2. **Cut-out 25 statements**

[Q_Sort_Cards]

1) I believe discussions of ideas with others can change the world.	2) I believe talking about politics with people, even when I know that we disagree, can make a difference.	3) I believe shifting perspectives on an issue is key to change.	4) I believe bringing attention to issues I care about is an effective way to change the world.	5) I believe changing what the public thinks is the most important thing to be done for change.
6) I believe sharing my story can influence others to think differently.	7) I believe writing an op-ed to a local newspaper can make a difference by raising awareness.	8) I believe making a public speech is an effective way to educate and inspire people about the issue I care about.	9) I believe social media (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, etc.) is an effective tool for expressing my thoughts and raising awareness.	10) I believe the arts (e.g., poetry, drawing, music, murals, plays, crafts, etc.) are a powerful way to communicate my views.
11) I believe media production (e.g., videos, comic strips, podcasts, etc.) is an effective way to express my views and raise awareness.	12) I believe online communities are a great venue for people to share information, build solidarity, and develop their voices for change.	13) I believe changing laws is more important than changing minds.	14) I believe finding others who could help me get involved in policy-making processes is key to making change.	15) I believe convincing other people to join me in organizing public events (e.g., public dialogues, rallies, fundraising, etc.) is critical for making change.
16) I believe contacting someone in the United States government to encourage them to take action is important for making nationwide change.	17) I believe contacting someone in my local government to encourage them to take action is important for making change in my community.	18) I believe voting in presidential and local elections on a regular basis is important for change. (I can encourage my parents and other adults to vote.)	19) I believe leveraging social media influencers (e.g., sports stars, celebrities, actors, etc.) who care about my issue is an effective way to make change.	20) I believe the best way to make social change is by changing policies.
21) I believe identifying nongovernmental organizations that work on the issue I care about and contacting them is key to successful change.	22) I believe identifying trustworthy professional media organizations and contacting and working with them is key to successful change.	23) I believe knowing how to propose a new policy is important to make a concrete change.	24) I believe presenting my opinion before the school committee is important to making change in my school.	25) I believe participating in local government is more effective than participating in state/federal government in making concrete change.

Figure 3. The first sorting

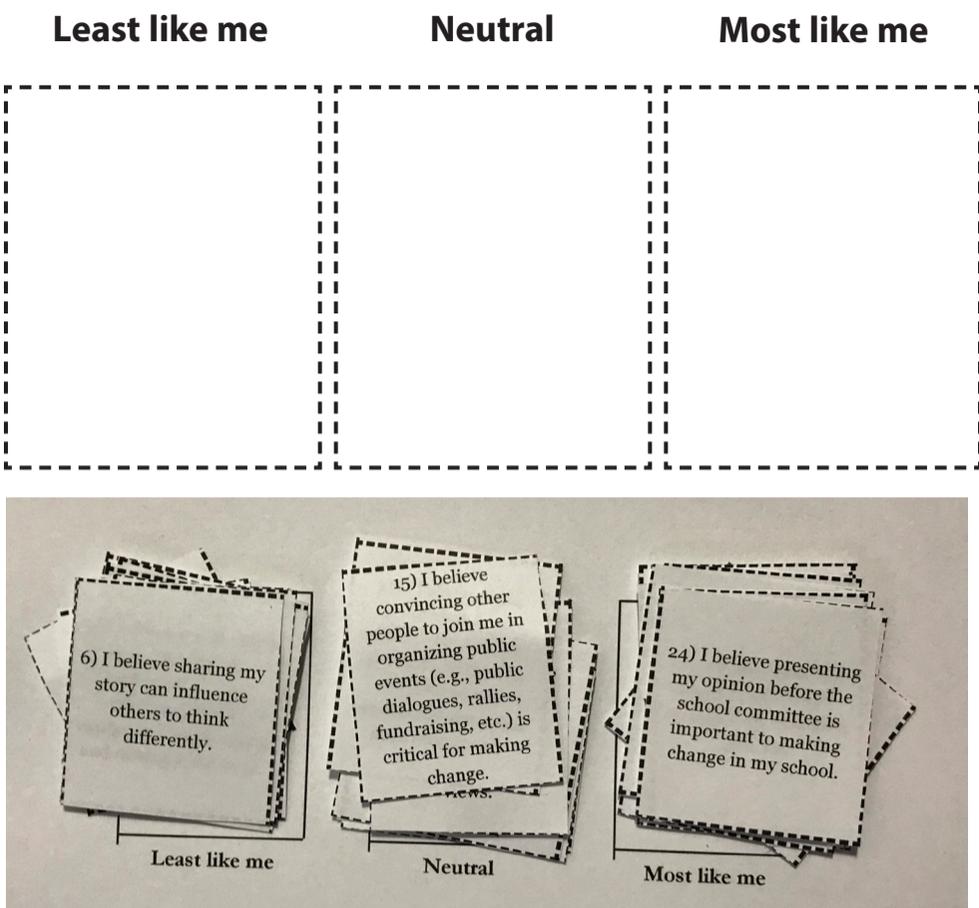
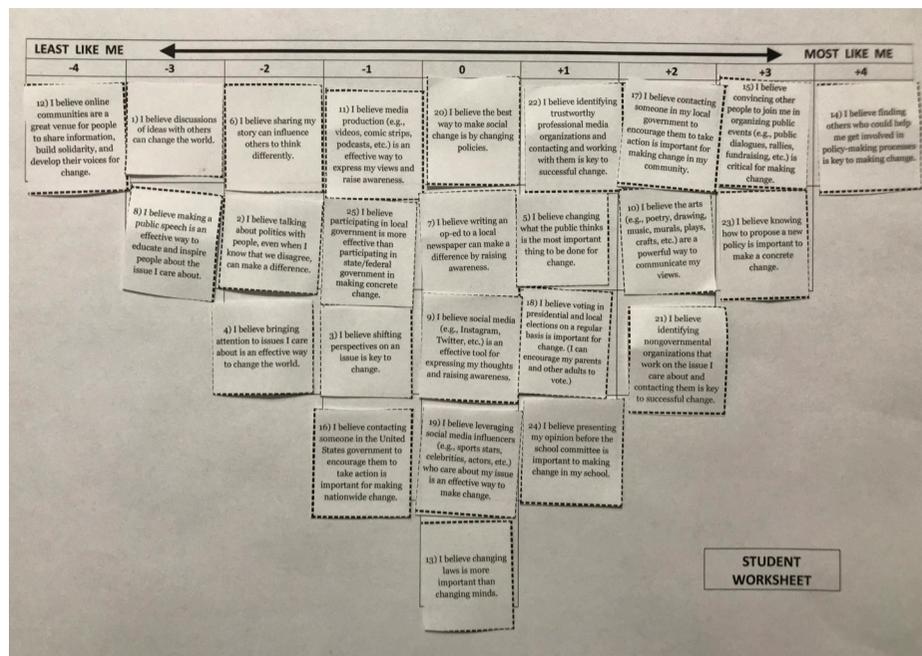


Figure 4. The second sorting



Steps to Follow

Step 1: Distribute materials to each student: The Q-sort Worksheet (Figure 1) and Cut-out statements (Figure 2).

Step 2: Ask students to read through all 25 randomly numbered cards. After students read each card, ask them to place each in one of the three boxes: “Least like me,” “Neutral,” and “Most like me” (Figure 3).

Step 3: Ask students to take the cards from the “Most like me” pile, and read through them again. Then, ask them to place the **one** statement that is the **most** like them into the +4 box of their Q-sort Worksheet (all the way to the right). From the remaining cards, ask students to place the next **two** statements that are the most like them into the +3 boxes, and so on, until the cards from the “Most like me” pile are gone (Figure 4).

Step 4: Ask students to take the cards from the “Least like me” pile, and read through them again. Ask them to place the **one** statement that is the **least** like them into the -4 box of their Q-sort Worksheet (all the way to the left). From the remaining cards, ask them to place the next **two** statements that are the least like them into the -3 boxes, and so on, until the cards from the “Least like me” pile are gone (Figure 4).

Step 5: Ask students to take the remaining cards from the “Neutral” pile, and read through them again, and to place them on the Student Worksheet according to how much the statements are like them (Figure 4).

Step 6: Ask students to look over the Q-sort Worksheet and make any final changes (Figure 4).

Step 7: Each card is now on a square of the Q-sort Worksheet. Ask them to write the number from each card on its square on the Q-sort Worksheet (Figure 4).

Step 8: With a partner, or in small groups, ask students to compare with others their statement locations on the Q-sort Worksheet. Students should converse about their preferences with respect to voice and influence, how their preferences are similar or different, and how they might coordinate different preferences and strategies in their groups.

Step 9: Debrief students' choices in a large group. Ask students to share what most surprised them, and what new things they learned about themselves and group members from this activity. Ask students what type of action they chose and why (voice-oriented or influence-oriented or both). In the following class,

help students incorporate their choices into the projects and solidify plans for action.

What Did We Learn?

From this activity, we witnessed how the Q-sort method can help 8th graders engage in analytic, authentic, and informed choice-making in their civic action projects. We outline three practical implications for other civics classrooms.

Analytic Thinking: Informed Choice-making

The Q-sort activity aids in the development of analytic thinking skills. It presents students with a string of choice-making moments, asking for more thought behind their choices. Students are used to completing Likert scale items. In the Q-sort, however, they could not simply reply “3” or neutral to every item, but rather had to think deeply about what mattered to them. While reading each statement, students had to examine its meaning, compare it to other statements, consider which one had a higher priority, and rank choices. This exercise of sorting into three categories, then further distilling preferences helped students grasp the concepts of voice and influence in a tangible way and become intentional and analytic about choice-making. One student reported that her group was choosing voice-oriented action because they wanted to raise awareness and change the minds of people in denial about an issue.

Knowledge About Self: Authentic Choice-making

Effective civic participation requires a strong basis of self-knowledge. The Q-sort's ranking feature contributes to this development through deep self-reflection. It continually reminds students of what matters to them and why, what goals they want to pursue, what type of action they wish to adopt accordingly, and how to get to the final destination. This reflection also encourages students to consider a range of possibilities, including prior experiences, unique talents, or personal interests (e.g., drawing comic strips, creating websites or videos, or performing poetry and music). In the process, students can better understand who they are, what they value and why, and what they are interested in, which makes a robust foundation for authentic choice-making. Moreover, students will be able to see that civic life is broadly connected to who they are and in what they are interested. This kind of authentic inquiry supports the C3 Framework by offering “a

historic, and essential, opportunity to expand and deepen students' engagement in civic life through action.”⁸

Knowledge About Others: Informed Choice-making

The importance of group discussion can never be overstated. As illustrated in Step 8, students have a group discussion where they compare their cards with other group members and discuss what values/experiences in their lives have led them to choose their +4 and -4 statements. Whereas self-examination in the prior section is an intrapersonal inquiry, this group reflection is an interpersonal inquiry that leads to knowledge about the others and the world. Successful civic participation requires students to see beyond themselves what others think about the topic. Democracy is not just about the self, but about seeing an issue as greater than the self and building equitable relations with others. It necessitates constant coordination of divergent kinds of self-interests and different perspectives. The group discussion provides students with an opportunity to exercise the habit—in sharing and comparing their choices, students build knowledge about others, recognize any differences in goals and strategies, and work toward harmonizing differences. The reckoning of internal differences plays a part in community building, conflict resolution, and effective planning, when students work in a group or on a class-wide project. The 8th graders who participated in the Q-sort activity reported that it helped them see the different preferences and orientations among group members; students who perceived their peers to be more outgoing and activist were surprised to learn that they in fact were more interested in the voice-oriented type of action than in the other.

Important Tips for Your Classroom Application

We believe that the Q-sort's ranking comparison allows students to practice analytic, authentic, and informed choice-making. Students can hone analytic thinking, gain more in-depth knowledge about themselves and their relations to others. This connection is essential to civic learning and growth, not only for the civic action project but for future civic life. While this is a useful tool, it should be noted that significant preparation is required beforehand. Because this activity helps students explore their own choice-making, each student needs their own worksheet. We recommend laminating the worksheets and cutouts for use in future years.

Although initially designed and implemented for 8th grade civic action projects, this activity can be modified for other grade levels, as well. 🌍

Notes

1. Meira Levinson and Peter Levin, “Taking Informed Action to Engage Students in Civic Life,” *Social Education* 77, no. 6 (November/December 2013): 339–41.
2. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Civics Project Guide Book, Massachusetts, 2019. Available at www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/2019_mass_dese_civics-guidance.pdf
3. Danielle Allen, “Reconceptualizing Public Sphere: The Flow Dynamics Model”, in *From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age*, eds. Danielle Allen and Jennifer S. Light (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 178–207.
4. Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2011).
5. Jack Block, *The Q-sort Method in Personality Assessment and Psychiatric Research* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1978).

6. Sherri Sklarwitz, “Assessing Global Citizenship Attitudes with Q Methodology,” *The Journal of Social Studies Research* 41, no. 3 (2017): 171–82.
7. Beyond race, 20.1% spoke a first language other than English, 1.4% were English language learners, 23.9% were students with disabilities, 40.5% were considered “high need,” and 24.9% were economically disadvantaged.
8. Levinson and Levine, 2013.

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MIDDLE LEVEL LEARNING

Jennifer Bauduy, *MLL* Editor • Michael Simpson, Director of Publications • Rich Palmer, Art Manager

A Teaching Activity About Voting

Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong

One of our basic rights and privileges as citizens in the United States is the vote we can cast in every local, state, and national election. This poem and teaching activity can launch an excellent lesson on elections and voting.

Voting by Diane Mayr

Step in a line.
Someone hands you a ballot.
Then you'll head into a booth.
Pull a curtain.
Think carefully.
Make a choice.

Vote for a man or woman
To do a job—
An important job.
To run your town,
Or your state,
Or your country.

Turn in your ballot.
Your vote will be counted,
A winner will be named.
You have done your duty,
Made your voice heard,
A citizen voting on Election Day.

Poem © 2015 Diane Mayr from *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations*, Teacher/Librarian Edition, eds. Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong. Pomelo Books, 2015.

Resources

J. Wong. *Declaration of Interdependence: Poems for an Election Year*. Princeton, N.J.: Pomelo Books, 2012.

Online Resources

"America's History of Voting" www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWECwclJg8M

League of Women Voters www.lwv.org

"You Can Do It Right Now" by Janet Wong
www.pinterest.com/pin/361625045084417452/

Social Studies Standards

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

6 POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

How people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance

SYLVIA VARDELL, author of *Children's Literature in Action*, is Professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman's University and teaches graduate courses in children's and young adult literature. **JANET WONG**, a graduate of Yale Law School, is a former lawyer who switched careers to become a children's author of more than 30 books for young readers. Together, Vardell and Wong are the creative forces behind *The Poetry Friday Anthology series* and the *Poetry Friday Power Book series* published by Pomelo Books.

Take 5! Activities

1. Present students with a choice between two bookmarks (or other pair of similar items) and challenge them to vote for their choice as an example of the process of voting and majority rule. Tell students, "Now that you've experienced the process, here is a poem titled 'Voting,'" and then read the above poem aloud slowly and clearly.
2. Divide students into three groups and share the poem again. Have each group chime in on one of the key "constituencies" mentioned (*town, state, or country*), while you read the rest of the poem aloud.
3. Show how the process of voting in the United States has evolved over the years with this two-minute video, *America's History of Voting* (see online resources), featuring ballots and voting machines at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.
4. Lead a discussion about how voting is both an opportunity to express an opinion and a responsibility to shape government in our town, state, and country—once citizens turn 18. Work together to identify your local, state, and national elected officials. Historically, the League of Women Voters provides resources for nonpartisan information about elections, elected officials, and voting rights (see online resources).
5. Extend the learning by sharing more poems about active citizenship like, "You Can Do It Right Now" by Janet Wong (see resources above), and with poems from *Declaration of Interdependence: Poems for an Election Year* also by Janet Wong.