

INQUIRY

In Pursuit of Democracy and Freedom: A US History Inquiry

Overview

About This Inquiry

This [C3-style inquiry](#) introduces students to the ideals of democracy and freedom through the use of students' lived experiences as well as examples of those who have used democratic tools to fight for their freedoms.

By the end of the inquiry, students will have a deeper understanding of the complexities of democracy and freedom in US history as well as in their own lives.

This inquiry is a foundational resource for the thematic throughline of democracy and freedom that runs throughout Facing History's US history program, a curated set of updated, new, and existing resources that can shape and supplement US history coursework.

Compelling Question	How can we make real the ideals of democracy and freedom?
Supporting Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What can freedom mean in the United States? 2. What can democracy mean in the United States? 3. How have people used the tools of democracy to fight for their freedoms in the United States?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Analyze the multiple ways in which freedom and democracy are defined in the United States.
- Reflect on their own understanding of democracy and freedom.
- Explain how people have used democratic tools in pursuit of their freedom.

Rationale & Additional Background

In this inquiry, students explore the compelling question, "How can we make real the ideals of democracy and freedom?" This resource engages students in an exploration of the ideals of democracy and freedom, the central theme of Facing History's US history program. While this

inquiry provides a snapshot of the voices and stories students will encounter in a US history course, it is not designed to be a comprehensive study of one historical era or event. Students will further explore the meanings of democracy and freedom as they go deeper into the resources aligned with our US history program, including inquiries and units on the history of the US founding, the era of Reconstruction, and Asian exclusion through our nation's earliest immigration laws.

This inquiry draws from students' lived experiences by asking them to think critically about what democracy and freedom mean in US history and in their own lives. Students reflect on complexities within the concept of freedom, exploring how meanings of freedom have evolved and the differences between positive and negative freedom. They also consider the meaning of democracy both inside and outside of the government, examining government actions along with the ways their schools and communities function as microcosms of democracy.

As political philosopher Danielle Allen points out, "'Democracy' refers to a set of procedures; it doesn't 'govern' anything or anybody. Democratic citizens govern. The question is, are American citizens up to the task of governing themselves democratically?" Allen's question emphasizes an understanding of democracy as among the most fragile of human enterprises, one that could only be achieved and maintained through the active, thoughtful, and responsible participation of its citizens.

For this reason, this inquiry highlights individuals and groups struggling for freedom and self-determination as pillars for achieving and expanding a healthy democracy. Students examine, for instance, the story of Mary Tape, a Chinese American who fought in court for her children to go to school with white children. They also explore the activism of Fannie Lou Hamer and farmworkers from the California farmworkers movement, both of whom used the tools of democracy in pursuit of their own freedoms and rights to "life, liberty, and happiness."

Preparing to Teach

Notes to Teacher:

1. Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question ("How can we make real the ideals of democracy and freedom?"), students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument supported by a variety of evidence.

See the **Inquiry Blueprint** for an at-a-glance view of all inquiry materials.

2. Length of the Inquiry

This inquiry is expected to take five to seven 50-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences or historical background information.

Teachers may adapt the inquiry and resources in order to meet the needs and interests of their students.

3. Prerequisite Knowledge

This inquiry is intended to introduce students to the ideals of freedom and democracy in US history. Therefore, no background knowledge is required, and it is expected that students will be learning this material in the beginning of the year. If taught within Facing History's US history program, the inquiry will come after students have completed the [Back to School toolkit](#) and [My Part of the Story unit](#).

Inquiry Blueprint

Compelling Question: How can we make real the ideals of democracy and freedom?	
Staging the Compelling Question	Students will use their lived experiences to reflect on the complexities of democracy and freedom through a Four Corners activity.
Supporting Question 1 What can freedom mean in the United States?	Supporting Question 2 What can democracy mean in the United States?
Formative Task Draw and label a "Freedom of . . ." or "Freedom from . . ." sign.	Formative Task Create a headline that addresses the meaning of democracy in the United States.
Featured Sources Handout: What Can Freedom Mean? Images: <i>Four Freedoms</i> by Norman Rockwell (1945) Images: <i>For Freedoms</i> by Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur (2018) Handout: "Freedom from . . ." Handout: "Freedom of . . ."	Featured Sources Handout: Definition of "Democracy" from <i>Merriam-Webster's Dictionary</i> Reading: What Is Democracy? Handout: Working Definition of "Democracy"
	Supporting Question 3 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 from the sources that would be most useful to enact change.
	Featured Sources Video: Fannie Lou Hamer Risked Her Life for the Right to Vote Reading: Excerpts from "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

Summative Performance Task	<p>ARGUMENT “How can we make real the ideals of democracy and freedom?” In a format of your choice (e.g., digital presentation, poster, paragraph, short essay), discuss freedom and democracy in the United States. Think about one or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How freedom and democracy have been defined in the United States • How freedom and democracy relate to one another in the United States • How people have used the tools of democracy to fight for freedom
Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND As noted in the video about the life and activism of Fannie Lou Hamer, voting rights have been contested since the founding of the United States. In the pursuit of expanding democracy, many people throughout US history have taken individual and collective action to gain access to the ballot box. Students will research contemporary organizations that use democratic tools to continue the pursuit of equitable voting access. Some examples of nonpartisan organizations currently dedicated to voting access are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Voting Rights Alliance • League of Women Voters • When We All Vote • HeadCount <p>ASSESS Identify one organization that works to ensure voting access in the United States today.</p> <p>ACT Using a format of your choice, educate your school or local community about how your chosen organization uses democratic tools to secure equitable voting access in the United States.</p> <p>This might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting experts and/or community members to speak to the school about voting access efforts in the local community • Creating a digital or paper pamphlet or poster about an organization that works to expand voting access in the languages most used in the local community • Interviewing community members who work with voting rights groups—or who are members of a voting rights group—and publishing your interviews in a podcast or on social media in the languages most used in the community