

Dissent in Democracy

(90-120 minutes + assignments)



“There’s a struggle going on in the world today, and it’s a struggle about what the future of this country’s about. And young people are not going to stay neutral, they are going to be involved.”

—Jerry Rubin



COMMUNITY
CLASSROOM

Dissent in Democracy

(90-120 minutes + assignments)

Objectives: Students will

- analyze and critically read background information
- analyze and critically view film as text
- discuss in groups and as a class
- create their own media

Skills: Stating and supporting opinions in class discussions and in writing, critical reading and viewing and research

Materials: Board/overhead, chart paper, Discussion Guide for Chicago 10, CHICAGO 10 Video Modules or full film, art supplies

Democracy is designed to be open to differing views and diversity of opinion. This exercise looks at how dissent is manifested in American democracy and then delves into the protests surrounding the 1968 Democratic National Convention as a form of dissent. Finally, students will create their own expressions of dissent regarding an issue that affects them.

Procedures

1. Have students copy the following definition and quote:

- Dissent: (n.) refusal to agree with an official decision or accepted opinion.
- “While some people think that dissent is unpatriotic, I would argue that dissent is the highest form of patriotism.” –Howard Zinn, historian

Have students write a response using these sentence stems:

- “I think Zinn means that...”
- “I agree/disagree with him because...”

Call on students to share different responses.

2. Break into small groups and have students read the “Frequently Asked Questions on Political Conventions” from the America.gov Web site (<http://www.america.gov/st/elections08-english/2008/August/20080804174936hmnietsua0.5952417.html>) and the article “1968 Democratic Convention: The Bosses Strike Back” by Haynes Johnson from Smithsonian magazine (<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/1968-democratic-convention.html>).

Have students respond using the following prompts:

- Who is the audience and what is the purpose of the America.gov article?
- How does the Web site view the conventions?
- Why might political conventions be a site for protest?
- What kinds of issues were raised at the 2008 Conventions, the Beijing Olympics, etc.?
- How did the host cities and government officials respond?

3. Read “Selected Individuals Featured in Chicago 10” and “Background Information” from the Discussion Guide.

Have each group brainstorm a list of questions about the historical context, the timeline, the players or any other issues. Discuss the events leading up to the 1968 Democratic Convention. Discuss differences between the organizations involved in the protests. Refer to these pages for more background information:

- Yippie manifestos (<http://www.hippy.com/article-358.html>)
- MOBE (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Mobilization_Committee_to_End_the_War_in_Vietnam)
- SDS (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Students_for_a_Democratic_Society)
- Black Panthers (<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USApantherB.htm>)

4. View CHICAGO 10 modules 1 & 2. Have students respond using the following prompts:
- Compare and contrast the speeches of protesters from different organizations. What policies did they disagree with? What did they want?
 - List some of the strategies of dissent seen in the film. What forms of media did the protesters use? How effective were they? What other strategies could they have used?
 - What strategies did the government use to contain the protest? What forms of media did they use? How effective were they? In what other ways could they have responded?
 - Compare and contrast the organizers' strategies on the street versus their guerrilla theater and entertainment activities in the park.
 - Discuss and debate the role and importance of dissent and the government's response to dissent in the events of 1968.
5. Have students read the article "Dissent Takes Many Forms in United States" by Lea Terhune from the America.gov Web site (<http://www.america.gov/st/usg-english/2008/August/20080808174922mlenuhret0.8254206.html>). Discuss the different types of dissent outlined in the article. Identify the America.gov Web site's opinion/perspective toward dissent. Consider:
- Should there be rules and regulations regarding protest?
 - How should the government respond to dissent? To protest?
 - Is all protest protected by free speech?
 - Are there other forms of dissent that the article has overlooked?
 - How might modern technology and the internet have changed how dissent is expressed?
6. Brainstorm any forms of dissent that students may have seen in the news recently or learned about previously, as well as any new forms they can think of. Include a discussion of the 2008 Presidential Campaign, the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, the 2008 Beijing Olympics, current world events such as the war in Iraq and other controversial events and issues in which there have been dissenting groups. Ask students to consider decisions and policies made that have caused them or people in their communities to protest a policy or an accepted opinion. Ask them how people have organized and expressed their dissent—or how they might do so—using the following chart on an overhead projector:

Policy	How people expressed dissent	Response from authority	Resolution
Example: Maria's parents require that she has a curfew, but they don't require that her brother have one.	Maria refuses to do her chores. She also gets her brother and her friends to advocate her case to her parents on her behalf.	At first Maria's parents punish her by taking away her phone. After hearing from the other people advocating for Maria, they agree to talk to her about a compromise.	On two weekends a month, Maria is allowed to stay out without a curfew, as long as she phones her parents to let them know where she is.

NOTE: See Teacher Handout A

7. Assignment: Expression of Dissent

Have students think of a policy or decision that affects them and that they disagree with. It could be at school, home or in the neighborhood and it could be a local, state, national or international issue. Have students conduct research about their issue and decide who their target audience is and what their desired outcome is. Students will then each produce an expression of dissent toward that policy or decision. Have them first consider which forms of dissent and strategies are most effective and which fit their personality and style. Some ideas include: a poster, a political cartoon, a song/rap, a position paper, an opinion-editorial, a blog/vlog, protest slogans and signs, guerilla theater or a speech. Post text, audio, visual and video creations online to Youth Media Exchange (<http://ymex.org>), SchoolTube.com or a teacher-created classroom blog. Have students comment on each other's creations and respond to comments from the public, furthering dialogue and awareness about the issue.

Have them conclude by writing a self-reflection about how they view protest and dissent and what they feel their role is in expressing dissenting views. Include reflection on these questions:

- What will the impact/result of these protest expressions be when they reach the public?
- What would be the result if there is no public dissent or greater awareness of the issue? What would be the result of choosing to remain silent?
- How can your individual action expand to become a group or collective effort?
- What are the differences between individual action vs. collective action?

Extension Activities:

1. Invite a panel of guest speakers to come into the classroom to address student questions and comments about strategies of dissent: past and present. They can be representatives from national and community organizations, community organizers, unions, or similar. Include intergenerational voices, such as people who remember or experienced the 1968 Convention, the Civil Rights Movement, etc. Have students prepare questions for the panel in advance. Follow up in class by discussing the insights that students gained from each of the panelists.

2. Ask students to select a modern technology and evaluate its uses and potential for expressing dissent. Ask them to consider how it might change dissent, its pros and cons and how people in authority might respond to its use.

3. Have students read "Dissent In Pursuit Of Equality, Life, Liberty and Happiness: An Interview With Historian Howard Zinn" from the TomPaine.com Web site (<http://www.tompaine.com/Archive/scontent/5908.html>) and write a letter responding to Zinn's views and asking further questions.

4. Select one of the other films (PLEASE VOTE FOR ME, IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA, AN UNREASONABLE MAN) and show it to the students. Ask them: How is dissent portrayed in this film? How is dissent manifested in other countries?

5. Distribute examples of posters and artwork designed by Emory Douglas, Black Panther Minister of Culture: (http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Emory_Art/Emory_Douglas_Art.html). Explain that these posters are one form of expressing dissent, disseminating information and mobilizing people towards a cause. Discuss the pros and cons of this form of dissent and brainstorm a list of other strategies and forms of expressing dissent. Compare it with contemporary works of political art from artists such as Banksy (<http://www.banksy.co.uk/menu.html>), Favianna Rodriguez (http://favianna.com/port_prints/prints1.php) and Shepard Fairey (<http://obeygiant.com/>). In addition, the University of Virginia Library has protest artwork on their Web site that you can show to students: (<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/exhibits/sixties/index.html> and <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/exhibits/sixties/radical.html>). Have students create their own posters expressing their views on an issue.

6. Research the lyrics and background information about the musicians and songs featured in CHICAGO 10. Analyze the message and impact on the viewers. Have students create their own play list of protest songs and include liner notes explaining why they chose them and their significance.

Teacher Handout A

Policy	How people expressed dissent	Response from authority	Resolution
<p><i>Example:</i> Maria's parents require that she has a curfew, but they don't require that her brother have one.</p>	<p>Maria refuses to do her chores. She also gets her brother and her friends to advocate her case to her parents on her behalf.</p>	<p>At first Maria's parents punish her by taking away her phone. After hearing from the other people advocating for Maria, they agree to talk to her about a compromise.</p>	<p>On two weekends a month, Maria is allowed to stay out without a curfew, as long as she phones her parents to let them know where she is.</p>