

The Fillmore

Neighborhoods: The Hidden Cities of San Francisco

TITLE: The Rise of Community Activism

GRADES: 11-12

SUBJECT AREA(S): US History (Twentieth Century)
American Democracy
English/Language Arts

OVERVIEW: When the city of San Francisco announced phase two of “urban renewal” in the Fillmore district, the mostly African American community was skeptical. The real impact of phase one, as James Baldwin noted in 1963, was not improvement of life for residents, but the “removal of Negroes.” This time residents fought back. Ordinary citizens became leaders as they formed the Western Addition Community Organization, a group whose legal victory against the city marked the first time in US history that the people won the right to participate in their community’s redevelopment.

PROGRAM SEGMENTS:

- (1) 0:52-1:04 Fillmore becoming a ghetto; community activist Mary Rogers; Phase A-2 of Urban Renewal; Reverend Hannibal Williams becomes a community leader; the birth of the Western Addition Community Organization; Hamilton hired as Redevelopment Agency director; WACO wins legal victory
- (2) 1:04-1:08 New mayor Joseph Alioto; preservation rather than destruction; promissory notes earned by WACO go unused because residents couldn’t afford new properties
- (3) 1:24 Activist Mary Rogers *is* the community

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will analyze the birth of the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO) and the rise of citizen leaders, and interpret the significance of WACO’s legal victory against the city of San Francisco for communities nationwide.
- Students will relate lessons learned about community organizing and activism to issues today, identifying leadership roles and legal channels to have an impact on their own communities.

NATIONAL

STANDARDS: This lesson addresses the following national content standards found in the McRel Standards Database: www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks.

Grades K-12: United States History:
31. Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

Civics:

1. Understands ideas about civic life, politics and government.
9. Understands the concept of a constitution, the various purposes that constitutions serve, and the conditions that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government.
11. Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society.
14. Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.
28. Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals.
29. Understands the importance of political leadership, public service and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy.

Language Arts:

Writing:

4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

Reading:

5. Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

MATERIALS:

The Fillmore, part 4 of The Neighborhoods of San Francisco
“Resident Experts: Neighbors study, solve problems,” by Benjamin Pimentel, San Francisco Chronicle, 10/1/99
Newspapers

TIME:

2 class periods (60 min. each)

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

Have students:

1. Read “Resident Experts: Neighbors study, solve problems” [www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/1999/10/01/MN76062.DTL] in *The San Francisco Chronicle* (10/1/99).
2. Discuss: What is the article about? How are community groups “expanding their role as watchdogs by hunting down information to solve problems”? How does community-based research differ from “traditional” research, and why does it matter? In your opinion, what importance does community activism have in a democracy? Identify problems in your community and brainstorm strategies for community participation in their solutions.
3. Define: Community organization, activism.
4. Introduce *The Fillmore*, a document about a San Francisco neighborhood that was targeted for urban renewal from 1949 through the 1960s. [Note: If the preceding lesson (Urban Renewal) is not studied, it is advised to view or summarize 0:35-0:52 also and define “urban renewal”.] Define: federal injunction.

FOCUS FOR VIEWING:

Ask students:

1. As you watch, identify:
 - A-2 (urban renewal plan)
 - Justin Herman (city official in charge of redevelopment)
 - Mary Rogers and Hannibal Williams (community activists)
 - WACO (Western Addition Community Organizations) and its accomplishments
2. After watching the video, be prepared to evaluate the successes and failures of WACO's strategies to fight the city government.

VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

Pause the tape after segment 1.

1. Identify community activists. What did they want? How did they become leaders? Discuss their leadership qualities and compare to other ordinary folks who have become leaders (e.g. the Civil Rights Movement, the American Revolution, other countries).
2. Identify WACO. Why was WACO helpless against Justin Herman? What strategies did they employ to protest A-2, and what did they win?

Pause the tape after segment 2.

1. Explain the purpose of the promissory notes WACO won for local residents. Why did 96% go unused?
2. Discuss: In the end, how effective was WACO's legal victory in protecting the interests of the residents of the neighborhood? Consider Carlton Goodlet's statement: "Experience has taught minorities if we don't start outright, we may not end upright." How could WACO have achieved greater results?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

Have students organize to address an issue affecting their school community.

1. As a class, brainstorm problems affecting students' learning at the school, exploring their causes within and outside the school. Examples might include: violence, class size, school size, resources, teacher turn-over, disciplinary policies, health conditions, class offerings, Internet access.
2. By vote, choose one issue to address as a class. As a class, hypothesize about possible causes of the problem. Based on their interests, have students form teams to research the causes. Teams will collect data, conduct interviews of authorities with influence over the situation, and formulate a report. Teams will select a leader from their group to report out to the class.
3. Invite a community organizer or activist from your city to talk with the class about his/her job and strategies for making change from the grassroots level.
4. Hold a strategy session in class. (For a straight-forward guidebook about community organizing, visit www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/welcome.html) Based on the qualities identified earlier, the class should vote for a leader(s) to facilitate the session who will spearhead future action steps. The leader(s) will:
 - REPORT: Have each team report on their findings.

- GOALS: Lead the class in defining the goals of change and the key authority figures who can help achieve them.

- **SCOPE:** Lead the class in evaluating the scope of the goals to make sure they are concrete, realistic, and highest-impact.
 - **ACTION PLAN:** Lead the class in developing an action plan based on clear strategies. Possibilities include: rally (action), write-in campaign, petition (Internet or paper), sit-in, or even a lawsuit. The action plan should state clearly the responses expected of authority figures.
 - **DELEGATE ROLES:** All class members should have a job to prepare for the action plan. Jobs may include: **Event planning** (organizing the space, microphones, multimedia for presentations, etc.), **Promotion** (attracting members of the community to attend, including other students, parents, teacher, administrators, and politicians; consider how the Internet can be used to draw participants, e.g. protesters at the World Trade Organization Summit in Seattle), **Publicity** (attracting media coverage of the event, including newspaper, online, radio and television reporters), **Managing speakers** (inviting and coaching both ordinary people affected by the issue and authorities or experts).
5. Hold your event!
 6. Afterwards, have students take 20 minutes to write a reflective piece about the experience. What worked and what would they do differently next time? How did it change their feeling of power to make change? In what ways are people who bind together stronger than individuals in confronting problems?

EXTENSIONS:

- **Lessons of History: Civil Rights and the end of Apartheid—** Research strategies used by Civil Rights activists and opponents of South Africa’s Apartheid regime to achieve change. Explore how local activism, combined with national and international organizing, achieved results.
- **Community organizing around key local issues —** Extend the community organizing activity by connecting with other classes, schools, or local community organizations to achieve greater impact. Study recent success stories, such as Oakland Community Organizations’ Action for Small Schools (Oakland, CA 11/8/99, search [The Oakland Tribune](#) [www.newschoice.com/newspapers/alameda/tribune]) to gain ideas for effective strategies. Interview members of effective groups in person, by telephone, or via e-mail.
- **Leadership —** Invite community leaders to speak in class. How did they become leaders? Did they always see themselves as leaders, or did their concern for an issue require them to become one? What does it take to be an effective leader and what mentorship possibilities exist for students?
- **Media Advocacy —** Study the role of media in community activism (see www.communitychange.org/media.htm). Contact KQED to learn about the [KQED Youth Media Corps](#) [www.kqed.org/ednet/mediaeducation/youthmedia/index.html] where students learn how to use the media to express issues of importance in their lives.

- Connecting & Talking Back — Participate in online petitions and debates on issues of importance to the local community as well as national and international communities. Visit www.e-thepeople.com or find talk-back sections on your local newspapers' websites (such as www.sfgate.com/vet/sunday). Join existing discussions or start new ones.

ASSESSMENT:

1. Evaluate students' written and oral reports, including understanding of the goals of community organizing/activism, depth of research, and rationale for suggested action steps.
2. Have students review their own and peers' performance in preparing and running the community organizing activity, offering suggestions to improve effectiveness.
3. Read and respond to each student's reflective writings, offering feedback on talents/abilities you observed him/her contributing to the community.