

Our conversation with you about “This is what Democracy Looks Like!”



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If you have attended a protest rally in the last ten years, you have undoubtedly heard this call and response: “Tell me what democracy looks like.” “THIS is what democracy looks like!”

We have always liked the assumption in that chant that democracy can be seen. It can be seen in protesters on the street; in voting booths; in letters to the editor; in citizen-created flyers; in a free press; in official documents, from the Magna Carta to the Bill of Rights to the Nineteenth Amendment to the Voting Rights Act; and in deliberative meetings in classrooms, schools, towns, state legislatures, federal branches of government, and international bodies.

It is worth noting that the College, Career, and Civic Live (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards offers a structure by which to explore what democracy looks like, with its emphasis on developing questions, evaluating sources, and using evidence toward the end of communicating conclusions and taking informed action. As that guiding document notes, “active and responsible citizens identify and analyze public problems; deliberate with other people about how to define and address issues; take constructive, collaborative action; reflect on their actions; create and sustain groups; and influence institutions both large and small.”¹

The authors in this issue describe classrooms where democracy is alive and well—where teachers trust students to help steer the curriculum and where they allocate time for students to research, deliberate, analyze, write, and act on complex social issues.

In “Cultivating Curiosity and Active Citizenship: Teaching Voting and the History of Voting Rights,” **Rebecca Valbuena** describes how her fifth graders’ study of the history of voting rights informed their creation of pamphlets to spur voter turnout in their community.

In “Deliberation and Democracy: How History Simulations Equip Students for Civic Participation,” **Lorraine S. McGarry** and **Donnan M. Stoicovy** describe their use of deliberative forums with their fifth graders as a structure for teaching his-

torical decision points and considering difficult current social problems.

“I Don’t Buy It’: Critical Media Literacy in the Fifth Grade” by **Alice Miriam Sullivan** explains how she scaffolded students’ learning regarding the analysis of political advertisements, thereby enhancing their ability to be informed, engaged citizens in an election year and beyond. The classroom handouts for these activities constitute the PULLOUT for this issue.

In “Activist Education: Nurturing Students to Work for Social Change,” fifth grade teachers, **Lauren Brown, Arielle Notterman, Allison Ontell, Elena Rappaport, and Jennifer Sherwood** detail their study of historical and current social action movements that culminated in students creating their own plans for social change on a variety of issues.

Roi Kawai’s “Civic Zines: Writing, Discussing, and Doing Citizenship” recounts a project in which fifth graders researched and wrote homemade magazines centered on current events topics of great interest to them, ultimately leading to informed civic action.

“Classroom Archaeology: Letting Students Dig Up the Curriculum” by **Miriam Sicherman** chronicles a serendipitous discovery of a dusty artifact by a student in a fourth grade classroom closet. That beginning event was allowed to grow into an open-ended project in which the entire class became involved, giving new meaning to the concept of a democratic classroom.

Which begs the question... What does democracy look like in your classroom and with respect to your curriculum?

- To what extent would you describe your classroom as democratic? In what respects?
- To what extent have you had success with using deliberative forums in your classroom?
- What kinds of social action projects have most resonated with your students? At what grade levels?
- To what extent do you think your students connect their

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own social action projects with past and/or recent movements for social justice?

- To what extent do any of your lessons on democracy connect with Common Core literacy standards?
- To what extent do you focus on media literacy as an aspect of being a citizen in a democracy?
- How much importance do you attach to anniversaries that mark the expansion of democracy (e.g., 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act; 60th anniversary of Rosa Parks' arrest; 95th anniversary of the women's suffrage 19th Amendment; 150th anniversary of the 13th Amendment that abolished slavery; 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta)? To what extent do you plan lessons around those anniversaries?

- Many of the manuscripts we received were for intermediate grades. How do you teach about democracy in the primary grades?

We look forward to the thoughtful conversation about your conceptions of what democracy looks like in an elementary classroom and curriculum at NCSS Connections. Please join us!

—Andrea and Jeannette

Notes

1. NCSS, "The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History" (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013), 19. Visit www.socialstudies.org/c3.

Social Studies for the Next Generation: The C3 Framework for Social Studies

Social Studies for the Next Generation: Purposes, Practices, and Implications of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. National Council for the Social Studies.

NCSS Bulletin 113, 144 pp. (including introductory chapters), 2013.

This important book breaks new ground with its inquiry-based framework for enhancing social studies state standards and linking social studies education to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies. The book includes the entire C3 document, "College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History," which was produced by social studies curriculum experts working in collaboration with a Task Force of 15 professional organizations in the field of social studies. It also presents valuable introductory chapters that interpret the Framework, and discuss its context, the central concept of the Inquiry Arc, the connections between C3 and the Common Core standards, the links between C3 and the national social studies standards, and appropriate assessments for C3.

Item #130113

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