



Democracy: The Rule of the People by the People

Curriculum Unit 08.04.07
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Introduction

This unit is primarily focused on the understanding and interpretation of democracy by various authors in the course of the centuries. It is appropriate for College English 3, College English 4, AP English Language and Composition, and AP English Literature. The unit will start with the following essential questions: What is your interpretation of democracy? What is the most important aspect of democracy? The unit will present various documents: *An Agent, a Green Card, and a Demand for Sex* by Nina Bernstein, excerpts from Aristotle's *Politics* and *Julius Caesar* by W. Shakespeare, some election paintings by George Caleb Bingham - *The County Canvass* also known as *Stump Speaking*, *The Verdict of the People*, and *The County Election*, *America and Let America Be America Again* by Langston Hughes, *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets, one excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck compared to some clips from Henry Fonda film, and the movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* by F. Capra. The unit will analyze visual and written texts in order to understand, to compare and contrast, to synthesize, and to evaluate and discuss the concept of democracy, its causes and effects. It will also require various writing activities throughout the entire unit together with a final project that will be in the form of a documented essay and a presentation, or a simple documented visual for those students who have special needs.

Rationale

In the last five years, I have been teaching Language Arts in Cooperative Arts and Humanities, New Haven, Connecticut. My school is a public magnet school for visual arts. This is a relevant factor because all the students who attend it come from the Greater New Haven area and choose this school because they want to develop their specific artistic interests. I feel honored to teach in such a challenging environment where each student has a unique and talented approach to my subject matter. It is also fascinating since I have the opportunity to engage my students' arts interests and accomplish tasks that are normally considered "boring." Being the only teacher of English for all the juniors gives me the opportunity to instill a real sense of community and acceptance for the individual in spite of our remarkable diversities. Co-op is also a "magnet"

school and this is another important component as we experiment the real concept of diversity and all its connected complications.

Demographically, my students come from all possible backgrounds - 49% African-Americans, 35 % White and 16% Hispanics. I have a group of ten students who are not native and do not have an ESL teacher in the school. Another group of about twenty-four students has various special needs. They are included in all my classes with the exception of the Honors but the Special Education teacher co-teaches with me and works with all students irrespective of their abilities or special needs. This is particularly valuable because it helps overcome the barriers of diversity. About ten percent of all the juniors excel in both writing and reading. All my classes are good examples of the “melting pot” pattern with very effective and positive results as far as learning is concerned. In fact, I constantly see substantial improvements of both the struggling and proficient students.

Our curriculum goals are to develop an understanding and an appreciation of the variety of texts we analyze. The curriculum also requires students to respond to these texts critically and individually in order to achieve a true independence of thought and to build the character of a “real” citizen. The same curriculum for the New Haven Public Schools points out the fact the students need to acquire simple and straightforward strategies both in reading and writing to enhance their abilities to analyze and criticize any texts. Another important factor that is basic in all the units I plan is to offer my student the real possibility to choose the strategy they think to be more appropriate for the interpretation and analysis of the various literary texts. This is curriculum mandated; indeed, it is a powerful means to lead my students to a real independence of thought and judgment. Consequently, at the beginning of the school year, my students and I determine an overarching essential question, which will lead us through the various units. This essential question is important because it helps them understand the material we cover and responds to the curriculum requirements. It is also a steady reference for the promotion of concrete-operational thinking to accept the self and the others, to explore and understand the individual contribution, and to improve the social life of any human being. For my juniors these overarching essential questions are: What is the author’s theory? What is mine?

Another factor needs to be considered: my students belong to a modern and technological society in which everything is fast. They tend to reject the so-called “appropriate” curriculum because it is meaningless and too different from today’s standards. Each unit needs to be planned around their interest and appropriate zone of proximal development in order to have an effective learning segment with a high percentage of proficiency. This allows me to overcome the problem of lack of motivation and to make learning real and not “boring.” I know my students are attentive observers of today’s reality. They easily sympathize with people who live in disadvantageous conditions or who suffer for any form of discrimination or prejudice, and injustices. They share and make these issues their own. Consequently, my unit will be based on the study of today’s democracy from the viewpoint of the “real” people. It will be amazing to see how my students - the next generation - will effectively understand their rights and their position as citizens and free individuals. I have also chosen the texts I mentioned in the introduction because they all convey the main theme of how democracy can sometimes be altered by unscrupulous people. However, these texts will show my students how the concept of democracy is such a potent component to empower people in the detection of any possible fraud or manipulation. People can really defeat the “imperfections” if they are always alert, and reflect about the real reasons behind certain actions. I have also chosen to follow a chronological order because I want my students to understand that manipulation by unscrupulous individuals can occur at any time. Another reason for the chronological order is to teach how the social response to national crisis - Depression - develops. It will be interesting to analyze the strength, the freedom and the power of this social response. The final document will be the movie by Frank Capra because it is the summation of the main

theme - manipulation of the individual - and the proof that the voice and power of a single, simple individual can break any fraudulent system. This will also be the response to our essential question. Timing is also another important factor for its failure or success. If I planned it too early in the school year, I would not be able to use the deep knowledge I have acquired of each of my students, and their complete trust to overcome their spontaneous opposition and rejection of the proposed topic. Due to these considerations, I plan this unit at the beginning of the third marking period because I know that my students will do anything I will ask them by then. They will have internalized the overarching essential question and will have already internalized the Socratic seminar method that I deem pivotal for the development of their skills and thoughts.

In planning my unit, the need for differentiated instruction plays an essential role. I think it is the key for closing the gap because each student is so different and unique that a standard, linear approach would be a complete failure. The theory of multiple intelligences suggests that the individual has strengths and weaknesses in one or several areas. Gardner's multiple intelligence theory suggests the cultivation of desired capabilities. This means each student has a very specific skill. This skill needs to be valued because it helps the student reinforce his/her self-esteem with a direct improvement of the student's learning. Consequently, I will focus on the desired capabilities of each student together with a varied and personalized approach. Following the district's requirements, which I share, my goal is to engage the students in all the stages of the critical thinking process developed by Bloom's Taxonomy throughout the entire process.

Unit Overview

The unit will start with an activity where the students will reflect and respond to an essential question: What is your definition of democracy? I also expect them to come up with the usual answer that democracy means freedom, equality or even equal economic opportunities or chances. At this point they will determine which aspect of this definition is the most important and why it is so relevant to them. I will also ask them to write a detailed example where America has failed to maintain the promised ideal of democracy. They will have to analyze their individual example closely and determine the possible cause or causes of that failure. Of course, this pre-reading activity will tap into their prior-knowledge because they can reflect, synthesize and evaluate their "reality." It will place them in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development since their motivation will be aroused to the point they need the teacher's guide to learn more.

After this initial activity all the documents we will study, will follow a precise structure to help my students understand, analyze, discuss, synthesize and evaluate. In fact, I will require them to do the first reading of the written document as homework and to determine the meaning of all the unknown words by either using the context or the dictionary. The first close reading will focus on the process of highlighting whatever strikes their attention and annotating the text in the margin. Since I will consider different levels for each class, I will include modifications to adjust the activity to the various learning needs. The lowest levels will only have to write brief reflections or questions whereas the most advanced group will also have to identify the thesis statement, main ideas, facts, opinions, tone, purpose, and other features that are relevant in the text. The second close reading of the document will require the writing of a response in which they will discuss their first reactions, initial understanding, critical stance or discussion of specific features in the documents either identified by the students themselves or specifically chosen by me. For those students who are at a more advanced level, their first response to the documents will analyze the subject, the purpose, the author's thesis and the tone. A thorough discussion will follow with continuous connections to present day reality in America.

A second, more detailed analytical response will follow. The lowest groups of students will evaluate the author's thesis, purpose and tone, whereas the advanced ones will continue to analyze specific features I will determine. At the end of each studied document, I will ask the students to write a synthesis of the author's perspective. The length and depth of this assignment will vary according to the students' levels.

Similarly, the visual documents - election paintings by George Caleb Bingham - will be studied following a well-determined structure. Our first activity will be to learn analyzing a visual by looking at it, making sense, and responding in writing. This means they will be asked to describe the details they see in the picture as well as the feeling aroused by the same visual. I will require them to respond to the following questions: what do you see in this election painting? This will be immediately followed by: what details don't you see but we would expect to see? Why did the author decide not to paint those missing details? These texts will also offer the opportunity to learn discussing and writing about the image with a specific language based upon perception. It will include terms as focal point, figure-ground contrast, repetition or similarity (shape and size), and color contrast whenever this is possible. I will suggest questions like: what do you think are the key elements or features of the image? How do they contribute to what you see? Look for elements that are similar for size, shape or color, and explain the effects of those elements. Does this image suggest you a story? What does this image tell you about democracy? I will also require my students to compare and contrast the visuals to each other and to the texts covered in this unit. Similarly, the movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* by F. Capra will be compared and contrasted to the written documents. The unit will be concluded with the writing of a document: a synthesis essay in which each student will be required to take a precise position about how democracy is part of our own life. They will have to document their thesis with facts or details from the various visual and written documents examined and studied in the present unit. I will also require them to prepare a presentation with Power Point slides. The students with special needs will conclude the unit with the Power Point presentation only.

Objectives

1. to analyze the concept of democracy and reflect about its real implications
2. to predict, infer, and see causes and effects;
3. apply their prior knowledge in determining this concept and before reading the written texts;
4. write an initial essay analyzing the concept of democracy;
5. draw conclusions and evaluate the eventual benefits
6. read the written documents and start an initial understanding by underlining or highlighting the points and/or parts that grab the students' attention;
7. retell and construct meaning for the initial understanding of the documents with their peers;
8. draw conclusions about the right interpretation of the underlined or highlighted points;
9. understand the specific vocabulary of the various text;
10. understand and learn to use the specific language for the visual interpretation of the texts;
11. understand and analyze the visual documents by taking into consideration the focal point, the contrast, the repetition or similarity for shape and size, and the color contrast;
12. determine the purpose(s) and the perspective(s) of each document;
13. write the close analysis of both the written and visual documents;

14. discuss the close analysis of the written and visual documents with the peers;
15. compare and contrast the various written and visual documents, and draw the appropriate conclusions;
16. write an annotated bibliography of all the studied written and visual documents;
17. write a final essay in which the students will evaluate and theorize about the ideal of democracy with adequate evidential support;
18. illustrate their theories with Power Point and present them to their audience.

Strategies

In teaching this unit, I will implement various strategies and modifications that will take place inside the same class with the clear objective of addressing all the various needs of either the strongest or the weakest students. I also intend to scaffold the various strategies I will teach them continuously. This is an essential component of the unit because I want my students to reach the point of real independence in approaching and analyzing any text.

Specifically, I will start the unit with a pre-reading activity for each text, either written or visual. The previewing activity, also known as warm-up, is an essential strategy to motivate my students. The choice of effective strategies is the key point of the entire unit. Research says the level of motivation students bring to a task impacts whether and how they will use comprehension strategies. Reading for a real reason and creating an environment rich in high-quality texts are equally important. Sometimes an oral preview of stories, which are then turned into discussions and predictions, increases the story comprehension, and a creative variation

of the preview by having the students compose a narrative based on key words from the upcoming story triggers a deeper comprehension. ¹

Consequently, I will use two different activities: a Quick Write activity at the very beginning of the unit and the Tea Party and/or Probable Passage before the reading of each document. The Tea Party strategy encourages an active participation with the text. This pre-reading strategy allows students to predict what they think will happen in the text while inferring, comparing and contrasting, see casual relationships, and use their prior knowledge. It is extremely effective with unmotivated and/or struggling readers. The Probable Passage forces students to predict, think, infer, reach conclusions, and see casual relationships. It also offers the opportunity to comprehend the vocabulary. ²

The first text I will introduce, *An Agent, a Green Card, and a Demand for Sex* written by Nina Bernstein and published in the New York times on March 21, 2008, I will start by writing the title of the article on the board and will add: What do you think I mean by 'agent,' 'green card,' and 'demand for sex'? They will be given five minutes to respond in their journal. When the time is over, I will write a second prompt: What do you think are the problems the immigrants have to face in this country? Why? Cite specific examples and discuss them. I expect they will illustrate various problems and I also know that these questions will involve all my students because it is something they see every day in our society. I will add another prompt at the end of this second eight minutes' writing: What can the American people do to alleviate these difficulties? What can you, students and future citizens, do to solve the problem(s)? How? What are our suggestions? Why?

This activity will be modified for the struggling students who tend to reject writing because they need to build that prior-knowledge they do not have. This group will start with a different activity, the Tea Party, in which each student will receive an index card with a phrase from the article itself. I will select no more than ten phrases which will be written more than once so that I will have a card for each student. Specifically, "he got his way," "reason to worry," "to be fearful," "passport," "money, not sex," "if I do it, it's like very hard for me," "trust him," "let me go because...," "Nobody is going to help you for nothing," "blunt demand". My students will be instructed to read the card and move around in the room, go to other students and read what they have to as many students as possible. The activity will last for about seven or eight minutes and then they will return to their desk and I will write the following prompt on the board: what do you think the story is about? Why? They will be given eight minutes for writing.

At the end of each previewing activity, the students will share and discuss their writing before I give them the text to read. Sometimes, I might not have the time to read the document in class and consequently it will be assigned as homework. They will also have to underline three unknown words of which they will have to determine the meaning from the context or by consulting a dictionary. I do not give them any vocabulary list because they need to become active learners.

The first close-reading of the article will follow. For this activity, I want them to learn the importance of annotating the text. In fact, I will ask them to read and highlight all those sentence(s), word(s), phrase(s) which grab their attention, and write brief notes in the form of question, comment and, or connection. Since this is not the first time they have annotated the text, I will only model how to determine the author's main idea, the tone and the purpose of the document. This strategy will allow me to point out how corruption is eroding the system itself and exposes millions of people who are noncitizens to avoid the law because this law can use them unscrupulously. I will also point out how the author conveys her ironic criticism by starting the article with, "No problems so far, the immigration agent told ..." (Bernstein), or by brutally reporting the statement, "I want sex" (Bernstein). Why did the immigration agent express his request paternalistically? Why

did the author want to report this news? How do you feel after reading it? How would you react if you were in a similar situation? What would you propose to prevent such behavior? This will certainly lead to a class discussion in which my students will reflect on how the 'rule of the people for the people' can fail so dramatically.

At this point, I will prompt my students with the following statement: Aristotle stated that a citizen is not a citizen because he lives in a certain place. What do you think? What makes a person living in country merely a citizen of that country? Why do we need to be called citizen? Does the lack of citizenship expose the person to any dangers? If so, which and from what or whom? Why? This written assignment will help them explore and understand their position as citizen but it will also lead them to understand the risks that are involved. The assignment will require them to write their personal reflections and to support them with appropriate examples and text references. The students who are in the Honors class or in the Advanced Placement course will also have to analyze the text more in depth. In the Lesson Plans section I will write the questions that can be used for all the various written documents of this unit.

After this first document and the various class discussions about how some people can use the 'system/rule' to exploit others, I am sure to have my students' interest, so I can introduce Aristotle and some of his most famous statements on political systems. I do not plan to present the entire excerpt of Book Three from *Politics* because it would be too difficult and "boring" for my students. On the contrary, I intend to simply write on the board: Aristotle stated that a democracy is the government of the many. He also affirms that "as the number increases it becomes difficult to attain perfection".³ Why? Before requiring them to express their ideas, I will briefly explain that Aristotle lived in Greece, Athens, in 384-322 BC. His works shaped the Latin world and had also a powerful influence on the English-speaking one. His writings were translated and constituted the subject matter of higher education until the 17th century. Many famous English writers like Spenser, Donne, Dryden, and even Dr. Johnson were influenced by him in their writings. I will not evaluate his political thoughts because I want the students to freely express their opinions as representatives of the 21st century. This should give me the chance to discuss whether Aristotle's statements are still valid or not, whether they can illuminate us and helps us avoid imperfections. If we cannot do that, what alternatives are we left with? I will also modify the same question for the struggling students and specifically I will write: Do you think that is it easy or difficult to reach a decision when this decision has to be taken by many people all together? Why? These initial reflections will help me lead my students to reflect about the real meaning of democracy and its possible risks. In the following class discussion, I will lead them to reflect on what the individual can do to correct or avoid the problems and/or risks that are present in any form of democracy. I also want to challenge them further by asking whether they feel active members of our community. If they do not, I want them to analyze why they feel themselves excluded, and what they need to do to change the situation. Of course, my objective is to help them find their own voice. At this point, I will close the analysis of this second document by reminding them the essential questions: After analyzing Aristotle's thought what do you think is the concept of democracy? Does it mean freedom? Does it mean equality? Does it mean equal opportunities?

The next document I will present to my students is an excerpt from *Julius Caesar*, Act III, Scene II.⁴ This scene presents one of those imperfections Aristotle mentioned in his work. In fact, my students will have a glimpse of how the government and the ones in charge of it interact with the citizens. Since we will not read the entire historical tragedy but just one specific scene, I will briefly tell them who Julius Caesar was and what he did. I will also introduce a few details about Rome and its history. I will also add that the excerpt deals with the events which occurred after Caesar's assassination by Brutus, who was his best friend, Cassius and other fellows. My students need also to know that the citizens who were present at the Forum and were taking all

the relevant decisions were less than five. I will point out that this was certainly connected to the theater requirements. It is anyway emblematic of a specific model where you can see “something” in action. I will purposely use the word “something” because I want them to learn how to interpret, analyze and draw the appropriate conclusions.

I will follow the same strategies I did with the first document. In fact, soon after the brief introduction, I will write the following prompt on the board: Do you think the citizens are really those who see a problem, denounce it and together decide how to solve it? If not, who does it? Who decides? Why? For the struggling students, I need to stimulate their motivation with a more appropriate activity. In fact, instead of briefly introducing the play and the Quick Write activity, I will write few words from scene two - “public reason,” “satisfied,” “slaves,” “free,” “ambition,” “honorable,” “tyrant,” “censure,” “bondman,” “capitol”.⁵ They will have to distribute these words in one of the following categories: character(s), setting, causes, outcome(s), and unknown words. When they finish categorizing them, I will ask them to write a Gist Statement (concise statement) of what they think those words might refer to. Both previewing activities will be followed by a class discussion in which I will first listen to their reactions and then lead them to look for reason and/or solutions to the imperfections of democracy. The reading of the scene will be assigned as homework.

When we start the analysis of the scene, I want them to first annotate the text and start determining what phrases were used by both Brutus and Antony to change the citizens’ evaluation about Caesar’s government. For the Honors students and those who are in the AP class, I also want them to look at the two political speeches and to determine how repetitions and descriptive devices are used to convince the citizens that the speaker was believable and honest. I also want them to analyze the words Brutus used to introduce the reason why Caesar had to be killed as well as the words used by Antony to explain his theory. All students will also use a reading sheet in which I ask them to determine the main idea of the entire scene and to write which lines express that main idea specifically. The same reading sheet will require them to identify the purpose, the audience, the tone, and other special features they find relevant or interesting. They will always have to write the lines or phrases related to the mentioned rhetorical elements. All students will also be required to write one essay (350 words for the college classes and 500 words for all the others) in which they discuss the author’s thesis, purpose and tone. The second essay - same length - will analyze those specific features they determined in the reading sheet. During the class discussion, which will follow, we will take notes on a poster we will keep for the entire unit.

The next documents are some paintings by George Caleb Bingham. The use of visual documents in any thematic unit is essential because our students are more and more exposed to various forms of visual communication. They need to understand and learn interpreting visuals as if there were written texts. Visual documents are critical for all those students who struggle with the interpretation of the text. These students can learn effective strategies that are applicable to the traditional texts.

For this specific unit, I will show them *The County Canvass* also known as *Stump Speaking*,⁶ *The Verdict of the People*,⁷ and *The County Election*.⁸ Since I do not want them to lose interest, I will not give them any information about the author, George Caleb Bingham in advance. I will hand out the copies of the first painting, *The County Canvas*, and I will ask my students to observe it for a few minutes in silence. At this point, the college students will start their analysis by responding to the following question: What do you see in this picture? They will be given five minutes and then without starting any sharing of their first writing, I will add another question: What do you not see but you expect to see? Why? Another five minutes’ writing will follow. At this point, I want them to start sharing but I do not want them to discuss or respond to any of the various interpretations. This is very important because I want my students to internalize the various

perspectives and help them change or better understand the visual. In fact, soon after this first sharing, I will write the following question: What details do you notice specifically? After listening to your classmates' interpretations, do you see anything differently? Why? I will give them another five minutes' writing and then I will add on the board: What does this painting remind you of? Why? What do you feel looking at this image? Why?

During the Sharing time that will follow our writing activity, I will let them express their interpretations without any interruptions. My intervention will occur only if I see they deviate from the essential question that is to determine what democracy is. If this should happen, I will prompt them with some questions: What is democracy? What details would show you this concept of democracy? Why did the author not include those details you deem important? How would you represent democracy? How do you expect to see democracy today? or Do we represent democracy today? At this point, I will hand out the images of *The 2008 Campaign: Pulling the Lever* from *The New York Times*, Wednesday, April 23, 2008, and will require my students to compare and contrast them to the painting by G. C. Bingham. This activity can be either written in their journals or oral during our sharing time.

The same process will be followed with *The Verdict of the People* and *The County Election*. I foresee some modifications for the special education students. In fact, they will be expected to answer: What is visible in this image? Write down a few notes on what the visual appears to be. During our sharing time they will surely acquire further information they can use to deepen their understanding of the paintings. The students in the AP class and in the Honors will follow a modified strategy. In fact, I expect them to learn determining and analyzing the focal point, the figure-ground contrast, proximity, and similarity. I will start by teaching them that usually there is one central figure which attracts your eye first, and that is called focal point. This is important because it guides you to understand the image. I will guide them with the following questions: What detail catches your attention first? And Why would the artist focus on this detail? What are your theories?

The AP students need to further deepen their analysis of the visual documents because at the exam they might be required to respond questions about the figure-ground contrast, proximity and similarity, color, lines and details. Consequently, I will start with the figure-ground contrast which emphasizes the difference between what is in the front and what is in the back (ground). The figure is often the focal point - What other details do you see other than the focal point? Why would the artist include those details? What are your theories? I also foresee the following modification: Write down any elements or details that seem important or what are the key elements or features of this image? and How do they contribute to what you see?

Grouping according to proximity and similarity is also an important element in visuals. Consequently, I will ask: Which elements and/or details are in the same space? (proximity), Look for elements that are positioned close together. What connections do you see between/among them? The eventual modifications will be: Look for details /elements that are close to each other. Why would the artist include those details? What are your theories? The similarity is another important element in any visual and I will prompt them as follows: Which elements and/or details are close to each other or have the same shape, or size? (similarity), What is/are the effect(s) of those elements on your response to the image? The modification will be: Look for details/elements that are similar for size, shape or color; Why would the artist include those details? What are your theories?

Color in visuals has a specific connotation and conveys meaning and feelings. In fact, it can focus our attention, create contrast, appeal to emotions and help communicate the message. I will ask my students: How do the color(s) or degree of shading appeal to emotions? The eventual modification will be: Did the artist use colors that you did not expect? What are your theories? What emotions does this specific color appeal to?

Would you use the same colors the artist did? Why? Would you use different colors? Why?

Lines also provide a sense of movement. A line can convey mood (in the AP English Language and Composition class, and those in the Honors class already know the meaning of mood). Lines can create a sense of calm and equilibrium, uncertainty, or movement and stress. Soft lines may imply softness, flow, or change: Look at the lines in this image. Describe these lines (horizontal, vertical, soft, thick, or wavy). Why did the artist include those lines? What are your theories? I foresee modifications: Would you use the same lines? Why? Would you use different lines? Why? What do you think the artist wanted to tell us?

Most times artists do not include all the details the viewer expects to see in the visual document. This is because the artist wants the viewer to predict and imagine. Leaving information out creates interest, generates tension contributing to the understanding of the artist's message, and promotes the viewer's participation. This is called closure. In order to understand this specific detail, my students will be helped with the following questions: What is not visible? Why? What are your theories? What question you would ask the artist? Why? The possible modification will be: What does this image suggest you? What does this image tell you about democracy?

During our sharing time, I will simply read aloud what I wrote and then my students will be encouraged to do the same (since we are in the third marking period, they do it automatically, but if you never did it before, the students need encouragement). I will also tell them that we will not spend any time discussing their writings, we will simply share them. At this point, I will ask them to briefly research who G.C. Bingham was and to share the information in class. Soon after, I will write the following questions on the board: What is the purpose of this image? What detail or details mentioned by your peers caused you to see this image differently? How do your experience and knowledge affect the reading of the image? Think about the image in term of context: historical, personal, technical, or cultural. Use the title as a theory and parts of the visual as clues to detect and specify the interrelationships in the graphic. I will modify the previous questions as follows: Highlight the words of the title of the visual if available. Are there any connections between the title and the visual? What are your final thoughts about the visual as a whole.

Before presenting them with another document, I expect my students to write a brief essay in which they compare and contrast the visual with the text we previously studied. I will modify the activity for the weakest students. In fact, I will require them to draw a T-chart and list all the essential elements, feelings, reactions, and/or interpretations of the visual and of the text first in order to determine any possible similarities and differences.

The next document we will analyze is *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets.⁹ Since my students need to have some background information, I will require them to research the authors and determine the historical background connected to the time when Clifford Odets lived, wrote and-or produced this play. I also want them to research what the social and political conditions in the country were. I deem this activity essential because my students need to understand that sometimes democracy may mean corruption too. I want my students to be able to detect any of these distortions because they have to become "real" independent thinkers. Of course, this will be assigned as homework. Specifically, they will have to write the summary of the documents they find in their journal. In class, we will share and discuss the results of this research and I will also ask them to take notes in the journal. They already know how to take note because this is the first strategy I teach them at the beginning of the school year. These notes, together with their summaries of the historical, economic and social conditions of Odets' times, will be the basis of their understanding of the entire play. Now, the college students will read the entire play in class with me whereas the Honors and AP students

will do the first reading at home.

Before reading the document, the college students will be exposed to a pre-reading activity. Specifically, I will write the title - *Waiting for Lefty* - on the board followed by these questions: Who is waiting for Lefty? Who do you think Lefty is? Who is waiting for him? Why? After the five minutes writing, I will add on the board: "...Lefty took a run-out powder" and "I honest to God don't know, but he didn't take no run-out powder." followed by these questions: What do they mean? Why? What is his position or responsibility? When do you think a person can decide to disappear? Why? After responding those questions, I will add: "They need food and clothes" followed by: Who is the author referring to with "they"? ¹⁰ What might be the causes of this situation? What is the connection between Lefty and the lack of food and clothes? What will happen next? I know that all my students will be actively involved and interested in this situation. The use of the vernacular should not be a problem; differently I think it will involve them much more because they tend to read and appreciate whatever connects to their own lifestyles.

Soon after these initial activities, we will follow the same strategies. This persistent scaffolding is extremely important because my students need to internalize these strategies in order to become independent thinkers and learners but also to help them focus on the understanding of the text rather than on the execution of the strategy. Consequently, after the first reading, they will annotate the text. I expect them to highlight all those phrases, words or paragraphs that grab their attention. They also have to briefly annotate the reason in the margin. The Honors and the AP students will also have to determine the words and phrases which determine the tone and the purpose of this play. They will have to annotate any other special features they find interesting. Briefly, they will write why that phrase or word is relevant in the play. When the annotation is concluded, I will further lead them to understand the play in view of the essential question of the unit. In fact, I will write the following question on the board: Why is Fatt against the strike? Does Fatt have any concerns for the other workers? What do you think is his personal reward? The students will be given seven to eight minutes to respond and then they will be required to determine some quotes proving what the workers' conditions were. They will have to write the quote and add their own commentary. They will also have to determine the quote proving which side Fatt takes. At this point, the students will have to write their commentaries but they will also have to analyze the language used by Fatt in order to achieve his objectives.

The next activity will be focused on the analysis of how the accurate use of certain expressions can lead the 'people' to determinate actions and reactions. To help them understand and analyze this specific situation, I will form three groups: the first group will determine the quotes where Fatt tries to show the workers the inutility of their strike. When they have found these quotes, they will underline the words or phrases that Fatt used to convince the workers and write their commentaries. The second group will approach the relation between Miller, the lab assistant and Fayette, an industrialist, and the third group will analyze the episode between Dr. Barnes and Dr. Benjamin. At the end of this closer analysis, my students will have to use their notes and commentaries to write an analytical essay (350 words for the college students and 500 words for the Honors and AP ones). They will have to further analyze this text by reflecting and responding to the following prompt: Aristotle stated that democracy is the rule of the people by the people. Does *Odets play - Waiting for Lefty* - reflect this concept? Or does it not? Why? The college students will be asked to respond in an essay format, whereas all the others will discuss this question and will write their reflections on the poster that we keep on the board.

The next document is an excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. ¹¹ The AP and Honors students will be required to read the entire novel as homework. I might give them a couple of days in class, but essentially I expect their first reactions during our Sharing Time. In our class discussion, I expect them to

discuss the setting, issues, and main characters. I will ask them to determine the time period and the purpose for writing this novel. I also want them to take notes during our discussion because they will have to verify their first interpretations by researching who John Steinbeck is, when and where he lived, what the economic/social conditions of the country were. All the other College students will start with a pre-reading activity. In fact, I will begin by writing on the board the following prompt: What does Grapes of Wrath mean? What is the meaning of wrath? How can we have 'grapes of wrath'? The first obstacle I expect will be the meaning of the word 'wrath'. Consequently, I will ask one student to use a dictionary to determine it clearly and I will also ask to write the definition on the board. I will further modify this step for the weakest students. In fact, I expect to spend few more minutes so that they can use this new word in new sentences or can even try to visualize and draw it in their journals. Soon after this practice, I will let them respond the prompt for five minutes and then I will add another question: What or who might cause a serious outburst? Why? They will be given another five minutes before sharing their writings. When this activity is concluded, I will assign them to research the author, John Steinbeck, his time period together with the social and economic conditions in the nation. They will have to briefly summarize the main points or simply take notes in their journals - modification for the struggling students. This research will be followed by a class discussion in which they will share their findings and will be prompted to think about how they would expect people to react to the economic difficulties during the Great Depression. I also want the College students to research the synopsis of the novel so they understand the excerpt we will study closely. A further modification for some of the weakest students is to watch the movie soon after the pre-reading activities.

The excerpt I want them to analyze is chapter 22 in which Steinbeck presents the situation of the camp where many migrants end up in their desperate search for a job. ¹² This chapter is extremely interesting because it shows how common people can govern each other. Moreover, it could be interpreted as the perfect example of the Aristotelian concept, if it were not for some subtle conditions that my students will have to infer. The Honors and AP students will start rereading this chapter in class and will also annotate it. I expect them to determine who the main characters in this excerpt are and what they precisely say or do. I also want them to underline or highlight all those quotes/words/phrases that can arise any possible wonder whys. They need to determine the purpose of this camp and the tone of the entire chapter. While they are underlining these elements, they have to briefly annotate their first reactions/interpretations/ inferences on the sticky notes.

When the annotations are concluded and shared in class, we will read this excerpt together aloud. This time I want them to form groups of three or four and spend ten minutes selecting three quotes, writing the commentary for each of them, and any possible connections to today's world. When they have concluded this activity, each group member will have to exchange the journal with the other partners, read the selected quotes and subsequent commentaries, and respond - commentary and connection. Sharing time will follow with class discussion and notes taking. After this class activity, I will ask them to write their first interpretation of the excerpt, taking into account both the personal quotes and interpretations as well as the other students' ones. The College students will have to produce a 350-word essay whereas the Honors and AP students will have to write a 500-word essay. Of course, I might implement a further modification for the struggling students. This group of students will anyway start with the selection of one quote but this task will be immediately followed by Sharing Time because I want to further help them select those quotes which are meaningful for the understanding of the excerpt. An easy method to teach the students how to find the important quotes is to lead them to the answer by simply asking: Do you read the response to your wonder why in the text? Of course, when they realize their wonder why question is meaningless because they already know the answer, I will explain them that they need to select quotes whose meaning is not immediately clear because it is not written in the text. In order to respond their wonder why, they need to use their common sense and some clues from the text. At this point, they will be given another ten minutes to select another

quote followed by another Sharing Time. When this task is clear, they can start responding and exchanging their journals.

After this initial close-reading, I expect the Honors and AP students to write a second essay in which they discuss the tone, the audience, purpose, and any other features (figurative language) they deem interesting. They will have to support the essay with various text references. In analyzing the purpose of this excerpt, I expect them to consider the essential question of the unit - What is a democracy? In responding to this question, I expect my students to support their reflections and/or statements with references to the texts we previously studied. All the other College students will simply write their conclusions in response to the essential question with support from both this excerpt and any other previous texts. This task can be assigned either as homework or class activity during one ninety-minute period. Sharing Time and note taking on the poster we keep in the room will follow.

The next two documents I will introduce are *America* and *Let America Be America Again* by Langston Hughes. ¹³ This time I will start the study of these two texts by reading both of them aloud in class. The poems are not difficult to understand, so we can immediately pass to the task to annotate the text. In our Sharing Time we will express our reactions and/or reflections about *America* first. I want my students to express their initial reflections and I will also expect a real discussion. If this should not happen, I will write on the board the following questions: Why does Langston Hughes start this poem with “Little dark baby, Little Jew baby, Little outcast”? Why did he repeat the word “little” three times? Why did he want to address “babies”? How can a baby be an “outcast”? I also want them to compare Hughes’s audience to the audience the other authors were addressing - Why did the other authors not talk to babies? What do you think Hughes meant with “baby”? Another line I will eventually point out is “the building and struggle of this new one” - world. How was America constituted? What could the word “building” mean or refer to? What did this American democracy have to offer to its people? Why does Hughes continuously repeat the word “dream”? What does he mean when the poet identifies himself as *America* ? Why? Soon after the conclusion of our initial analysis of *America* , we will start to interpret *Let America Be America Again* . I will follow the same strategy and the eventual questions will be written on the board: Who is Hughes’s audience in this poem? Why does he now address adults instead of babies? How does he depict democracy? Why does he say that “Liberty is crowned with no false wreath”? If America is a democracy why does he use the verb ‘crown’ that is more appropriate for a monarchy? What does he want to communicate? What is the result of the dream he had? Why does the poet identify himself as a “farmer, bondsman to the soil... worker sold to the machine”? Who are these people? What do they represent? After this initial discussion, I will expect my students to write their first response in which they will analyze, discuss and compare the two poems. This first writing will be followed by a second one where the AP and Honors students will have to analyze and discuss the purpose, the tone and the figurative language of the two poems. The lower level students will be required to continue their analysis by responding to the following prompt: Langston Hughes writes, “We, the people, must redeem the land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.” What did he mean? Why? What is the tone of these lines? Why? Does it remind you of anyone else who asked the people to redeem America? Another class discussion will follow and this time I also want them to take notes to have other students’ interpretations and perspectives. Before closing our sharing time, I will ask the students: What does Langston Hughes think about democracy? What does he point out? Does it differ from the concept Aristotle handed out to us? Why? The conclusive thoughts will be recorded on the poster we keep on the board throughout the entire unit.

The last document we will analyze is the movie, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* by Frank Capra. I have chosen this document to conclude my unit because I want my students to understand how democracy works and how to counteract the perils it involves. Throughout the unit they have constantly seen that the rule of the people

according to the Aristotelian principle is open to very dangerous attacks by the people themselves. In fact, the same people who are called to rule the people are the most vulnerable to corruption and betrayal. Nonetheless, as pointed out in the first article - *An Agent, A Green Card, and a Demand for Sex* - the vulnerability of the “political person” reflects its consequences on the simple, innocuous citizen who would never expect to be manipulated by those he/she trusted. I also want them to reflect on the “real” meaning of “truth”, “liberty” and “compromise” which are the essential concepts developed in Capra’s movie. Specifically, I want my students to analyze how honesty and truthfulness are used in the movie to destroy the reputation of Mr. Smith, and how the same two concepts are used in everyday’ life - i.e. in school, office or any other environments - to alienate or denigrate an individual. I want them to be aware of their environment and I want them to be able to detect any possible attempt of corruption or manipulation.

I will start this final part of the unit by watching the entire movie. All students irrespective of their differentiated learning levels can do this activity. I will not introduce the same movie with any prompt. Soon after watching this movie, I will ask them to write down any lingering question they have in reference to the movie. In the following Sharing Time, I will write on the board all their questions so my students can focus on some of the key concepts developed by F. Capra. Soon after, I will write on the board “truth”, “liberty”, “corruption”, “greed”, and “compromise” and I will require them to list the various forms of liberty, compromise, corruption, greed, and truth they know. This activity will prompt them to the analysis of today’s society and in the discussion that will follow we will compare and contrast this reality to the one represented in the movie. Before writing the next prompt, I will show them the scenes of Mr. Smith in Congress at the very beginning of his parliamentary experience and during his filibuster. Soon after, I will write, “Look at the body language the Senators display in the various scenes. What does it tell you? Why? What specific element would have alerted Mr. Smith about the real situation behind his election? Why?” My students will be given ten to fifteen minutes to respond and elaborate. At this point, my students will have a list of behaviors and attitudes they can reflect on and teach them to infer and understand the reality behind certain situations. This discussion will also bring out more awareness of the concepts of ‘honesty’ and “truth’. Before concluding the analysis of the visual document, I want them to compare and contrast Senator Paine’s honor and reputation with those of Shakespeare’s Brutus, and Mr. Smith’s experience to that of the 22-year-old Colombian woman - *An Agent, a Green Card, and a Demand for Sex* - to determine whether anything has changed in the course of the centuries. This writing activity will certainly teach my students to become independent thinkers.

The unit will be concluded with an essay - five to six pages in length - in which they have to determine their concept of democracy. I also want them to support their theory with three of the sources we analyzed. The struggling students will follow the same prompt but they can prepare a Power Point presentation.

Classroom activities

Task One: Previewing

The choice of differentiated instruction with flexible grouping requires the implementation of pre-reading activities that can accommodate all my students’ needs. All the documents and texts we will analyze will be initiated with a simple Quick Write or a Probable Passage, or a Tea Party.

Quick Write activity (at the very beginning of the unit):

1. Prompt: "What is your definition of democracy? What are the qualities of a democracy? Why? What are the possible negative aspects of a democracy? Why? Support your thoughts with some examples."

I always participate to all my students' activities because it improves their engagement and makes the activity "real."

2. Sharing Time: all my students will be sitting in a circle. One of us (either the teacher or a student) will start reading aloud and taking brief notes. Any other student can respond to the writer and/or share the writing.

3. When Sharing Time is over, I will ask them to go through their notes and determine the reasons and causes just shared in class. I will write the list of causes and effects on a Post-It board.

4. At this point, I will ask them to spend some other minutes and write if their initial position has changed after our discussion/sharing time, and why.

Probable Passage Activity (pre-reading activity):

When I present my students this activity for the first time, I model it. Then, we do it together on our second time. I also form groups of three or four students.

1. I will write on the board a list of words from the passage we are about to read.

2. I will ask them to distribute those words in one of the following categories: character(s), setting, causes, outcome(s), and unknown words.

3. When they finish categorizing the words, I will ask them to write a Gist Statement (concise statement).

4. Sharing Time: I will ask the students to say/share how they categorized those words. I will write them on the board together with their gist statements.

Tea Party activity (pre-reading activity):

(I would not suggest modeling it because "not knowing how to do it" triggers more thinking.)

1. I will prepare fifteen or twenty index card with one phrase from the document they will be reading. I can repeat those phrases two or three times, so you can have one card per student.

2. I will give one card to each student and ask them to move from student to student. While moving, they have to share their card, listen to others as they read their cards, discuss how these cards might refer to, and suggest what these cards might mean.

3. I will ask them to form groups of three or four students and write what they think about those statements in the cards and why.
4. Sharing Time: I will ask the students to read what they wrote and I take notes on the board.
5. After reading the text, we will have another Sharing Time to compare and contrast their predictions and the text. This step also helps them understand how the explorers drew their conclusions and how the researcher has to find out the validity of these conclusions.

Task Two: Close Reading and Analytical Writing

For advanced grade-level readers, Honors students, and AP students, I do the following:

1. Read the passage/document again;
2. Underline interesting, important, and/or unusual/unexpected words, phrases, and language structures, and label them in the margin;
3. Determine connections and draw arrows from one part of the passage to another to mark those connections;
4. Highlight the descriptions, the reflections, the facts, or the purpose.
5. What is the main idea or subject of the text? How do you know? How is it presented? Does the author introduce it immediately? Does the author express this main idea, or do you have to infer it? How do you infer it? What clues support your theory?
6. When did this situation occur? Why? How do you know or determine the time and place this situation occurred? Is it clearly stated? Do you infer it? How do you infer it? What clues confirm your theory?
7. Who is the audience? How do you know? Is it clearly stated? How? How do you infer it? What clues confirm your theory?
8. Who is the voice that tells the story? Is it the author? How do you know? What assumptions can you make about this voice? Can you assume what age, education, social status, hidden reasons for writing this document?
9. What is/are the purpose(s) of the document? What's the reason(s) behind the text? How do you know? What reaction(s) in the audience does the writer want to achieve? Why? How do you know? What techniques does the author use to achieve this purpose? How do you think the audience will feel? What is the effect the author wants to achieve?
10. What is the tone of this document? How do you know? What word(s) or phrase(s) determine this tone? Why? What details, sentence structures, or images convey this tone? Why?
11. Sharing Time: the students share their analysis, discuss and take notes in their journals.
12. Do you notice any difference(s)/similarity(ies) between this document and the previous one(s) you analyzed?
13. Can you notice/infer any difference(s)/similarity(ies) between the author of this document and the previous one(s)?
14. Do you notice any stylistic difference(s)/similarity(ies) between this document and the

previous one(s) you analyzed?

Modification:

1. Read the passage/document again;
2. Underline interesting, important, and/or unusual/unexpected words, phrases, and language structures;
3. Determine connections and draw arrows from one part of the passage to another to mark those connections;
4. Write a “Wonder Why” question for each interesting, important, unusual, or unexpected word/phrase. Write your theory(ies) and support it with clear references to the text.
5. Sharing Time: the students share, discuss their interpretations, and take notes of the peer’s thoughts in their journals.

Task Three: Final Paper

The Final Paper will be a synthesis essay with an annotated bibliography. This documented essay will follow various stages. In fact, we will start determining the thesis statement in response to the essential question, “What is a democracy?” In order to determine a strong thesis statement, the students have to:

1. Reread their journals/responses/notes and highlight the details, information you want to use to support your theory;
2. Write a possible idea/theory, share, and discuss it with the peers;

3. Write a discovery draft with a thesis statement and reasons;
4. Write a first draft containing the thesis statement, the reasons, the supports/references from the documents, and the analysis/discussion why those references support the assertions. This draft will be followed by a group work of peer revision;
5. Write a second draft including the suggestions from the peer's revision. This will be followed by a group work of peer's editing;
6. Write a third draft followed by a conference with the teacher.
7. Write the annotated bibliography of the documents cited in the essay. They will have a model for the MLA requirements. Each source will be followed by few lines describing the content of the source.

Modification:

1. Reread their journals/responses/notes and highlight the details, information you want to use to support your theory;
2. Write the thesis in response to the essential question and use one Power Point slide;
3. Determine and write the reasons for your theory/thesis and use one Power Point slide;
4. Find the evidences in the documents and write them in other slides.
5. Write a brief conclusion on a slide.
6. Sharing Time: each student will read the slides and discuss his/her theory and the evidence(s) with the class.

The students who will write the documented essay will prepare the presentation (sharing time) with slides that will illustrate their theory, reasons, references to sources, connections between support and reason, and conclusion.

Appendix: Implementing District Standards

The teaching implemented in this unit reflects the requirements of the Connecticut's Common Core of Learning K-12 Content Standards. The curriculum for Language Arts in the New Haven District adheres to the state standards and each unit offers the opportunity to teach, deepen or scaffold the four essential standards: Reading and Responding, Exploring and Responding to Literature, Communicating with Others, and English Language Conventions. My unit is primarily built on either the scaffolding or teaching of the following:

Content Standard One: Reading and Responding

Students read, comprehend and respond in individual, literal, critical and evaluative ways to literary, informational and persuasive texts in multimedia formats.

1.1 Students use appropriate strategies before, during and after reading in order to construct meaning.

1.2 Students interpret, analyze and evaluate text in order to extend understanding and appreciation.

1.3 Students select and apply strategies to facilitate word recognition and develop a vocabulary to comprehend the text.

1.4 Students communicate with others to create interpretations of written, oral and visual texts.

Content Standard Two: Exploring and Responding to Literature

Students read and respond to classical and contemporary text from many cultures and literary periods.

2.1 Students recognize how literary devices and conventions engage the reader.

2.2 Students explore multiple responses.

Content Standard Three: Communicating with Others

Students produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.

3.1 Students use descriptive, narrative, expository, persuasive and poetic modes.

3.2 Students prepare, publish and/or present work appropriate to audience, purpose and task.

Content Standard Four: Applying English Language Conventions

Students apply the conventions of Standard English in oral, written and visual communication.

4.1 Students use knowledge of their language and culture to improve competency in English.

4.2 Students speak and write using standard language structures and diction appropriate to audience and task.

4.3 Students use Standard English for composing and revising written text.

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