



Citizenship and its Ability to Change Lives

Curriculum Unit 16.03.05

by Rachel Leibiger

Introduction

In many parts of the world being a citizen of this country is a privilege that people would pay great sums of money, even risk their lives, to be. These people come from circumstances where they do not have access to necessities such as enough food and water, housing, safety, education, equal rights, or political representation. That is why people from Mexico pay smugglers thousands of dollars to help them cross the boarder, or why people from Cuba climbed into rafts and attempted to cross the ocean to come to Florida. They made that journey and risked their lives so that they, and their children, could have the better life that America is known to provide. I created this unit because I worry that my students are essentially unaware of these rights, or if they are aware they certainly take them for granted. These rights are the basis for my curriculum unit. My unit will explain the history of gaining these rights, why they are important to us all, and how we can use them to their fullest.

The most important benefits of citizenship that set the United States apart are the federal right to vote and the state right to education. These rights are provided to every citizen in this country, which cannot be said in a number of other countries around the world. In many countries these rights are only provided to men, to privileged minorities, or people that are upper class. In many cases women and poor people are unable to be educated past the elementary level, and they are also unable to vote in any elections, and in many cases there are no elections. In this country, citizenship grants you the right to be educated fully into the secondary level, and the right to vote for all political representation. These rights can be used to assist people who are minorities, poor, or are in any other way underprivileged achieve more than they believe they can. Education is a tool that can help people of any category achieve success. Voting allows people of any category to have a say in their political representation, and even run for office, so that they can effect real change in their communities and the country at large. These rights make it possible for underprivileged people to change their lives for the better, no matter what kind of situation they are in. While discussing these two specific rights that are the focus of this curriculum, we will also discuss amendments to the constitution and rights that coincide with the two main topics.

As great as these rights are for people, many students of them may not be aware of how helpful they can be. Some of them may feel that they do not have the tools they need to better their lives. They feel that their rights as citizens will not do enough for them and that the government has let them down. This is because

they do not fully understand how significant it is that all people have access to these rights and how important education and representation are. This is the basis for my curriculum, teaching my students what their citizenship entitles them to, the history behind ordinary people just like them winning these rights, and how these can benefit their lives.

Background on Students

The students that I will be teaching this curriculum to are students of West Rock Authors Academy. This school is a K-4 school, and the students I work are in grades 2-4. These students are, as a whole, underprivileged and underserved. The majority of them are African American and Hispanic, many come from single parent households, and most of them receive free or reduced lunches. My classes are enrichment classes, these students have scored higher than most of their classmates on standardized tests like the SRI, but they are a small group and there are only 10 of them in total out of the entire school out of a couple hundred. This school is a K-4 school and my students are students in grades 2-4. These students are from families that are low income, sometimes single-parent, and are typically minorities. They are the type of students that have yet to realize the full potential that their rights as citizens will and have already granted them. The aim of the curriculum will aim is to help students identify with their citizenship, discuss with them what the word citizenship actually means and how it effects them, and what they have access to by being citizens. It will also cover how citizenship in the U.S. has changed since the founding and how that has affected the students, for example women gaining the right to vote. Overall I aim to help them understand the benefits that they have and to use them to the fullest.

Content Objectives

The overall content objectives of my unit are as follows. This unit will be taught over the course of 10 classes that meet once a week. The unit will begin with a pre-test and a discussion on what citizenship means as a definition and as a concept to the students. The aim is to discover whether the students identify citizenship as a part of their identity or simply as a concept. If only the latter, the idea is to understand why they do not see being American as a part of their identity or themselves. We will then move to the two specific rights that this unit will cover. The aim is to introduce them as rights that they earn simply by being citizens, as a birthright. We will start by explaining what those rights are and discussing if the students feel like they have or will have access to them. The unit will then lead into the brief history of the struggle for minority groups to obtain these rights, for example the women's suffrage movement and the fight for desegregation in the south. It is important to review for these aspects of history are reviewed during this unit because my students will be able to identify with the groups that were fighting for these rights, for example, any girls in the group can identify with the women's suffrage movement, and any African American students can identify with desegregation. It is important for the students to understand that these rights, which are now fully available to them would not have been available to them, at different points in history. After covering the history we will move to dissect the specific aspects of the two rights. This means that we will take each right individually and use a KWL chart to identify, what do we know, what do we want to know, and what have we learned, and put all of the

information together.

These topics will help the students dissect both of the rights further and provide an opportunity for critical thinking and fuller understanding,

Unit Objectives

When students have completed this unit, they will have strengthened skills in several different content areas:

- Social Studies and History: Students will further their knowledge based on the in- depth analysis of the historical significance of these two major rights that we have as citizens and their political ramifications of these rights.
- Analytical skills: Students will participate in activities that require thoughtful out research and analysis of information, for example, in the mock trial activity they will have to research the specific event, analyze the research, and develop an opinion based around that research, and then argue their opinion.
- Critical thinking skills: Students will think critically about a number of different topics all having to do with historical and political conflicts.

Unit Breakdown

The beginning lessons of my unit will start with what citizenship is and what citizenship means to my students. I want them to first define it for themselves so that we can then explain and discuss what the significance of the word is. This first lesson will consist of a pre-test, and then lay the groundwork to explore the student's identification as citizens. The pretest will ask 4 questions:

- Define the word citizenship.
- List some of the people that you know who are citizens.
- What are some of the good things about being a citizen?
- Are there any bad things about being a citizen?

After the pre-test we will then move on to the actual definition of citizenship and talk about the fact that every student is a citizen. The goal of the first lesson is to lay the groundwork to make sure that students understand that they are included and that this unit connects to them specifically. We will talk about the communities to which they belong to and how they know that they belong to then we will, and then ask if they feel that they belong to a larger community- that is, if they feel that they are American. Some of the students may not feel that they have a sense of belonging to this country and it is important to then discuss that they may not feel that they are a part of the country as a whole because it is such a broad concept and much different from feeling a sense of belonging to your neighborhood or family. But by being born in this country they do belong and they are citizens. The other factor to their sense of citizenship is their age. Many young children, including the students at whom this lesson is aimed at, may not feel that their citizenship matters in their lives to day because they are so young that it doesn't seem to play a role in how they live their lives. For

example, they don't have the ability to vote because they aren't 18 yet, so that right may not seem relevant to them. It is important to discuss that just because they are young, their citizenship is still very important. For example, the right to education plays a huge role in their lives, especially because they go to school every day. If they didn't have this right, then they may not grow up to be educated at all. In terms of voting they may not currently be able to vote, but their parents and family members are able to vote and the voting they do now impacts the voting choices that the students will do in the future and secures their right for later in life.

The next step in this unit is to begin to analyze the specific rights we will be discussing and what they actually mean. The two rights we will be covering are the right to free education and the right to vote freely. We will start by looking at them together and discussing first: literally what they mean and what they provide us, second: how do we identify with them and what do they mean to us personally, and third: do we feel that we actually have access to them? The two most important questions here are: how do we identify with these rights and do you think that you have access to them. This is because while they may understand the right that they have intellectually but they may not feel that they actually have access to them or feel that they are able to connect them to their own lives. The goal of the lessons in this section will be to establish what the right to education and voting mean and how they connect to the student's lives. Farther into the curriculum we will delve further into establishing definitively that they do have access to these rights, especially after explaining how these rights were won for minorities and women. The objective of the activities in this section is to develop comprehension of the specific rights that we are discussing and to then relate them to everyday life. For example students should be able to make the connection that by having the right to education they are able to go to school, or that because they and their families have the right to vote that they are able to participate in the presidential election.

One of the lessons that will be used in this section is structured. The lesson covers misconceptions that students have on the two specific rights that we are talking about, in an effort to correct them. The lesson will start by giving a worksheet to the students that has a number of events that occurred in the late 1800s-early 1900s that have to do with the women's suffrage movement and the students will be asked to place the events on a timeline in what they believe is the correct order. After they complete the exercise they will then read a short article from Time for Kids (1) about the women's suffrage movement and then we will put the events in order. The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate that students perceive women won the right to vote long before they actually did and that they underestimate how difficult it was for women. This is the timeline:

1848 The Woman's Rights Convention is held in Seneca Falls, New York. Elizabeth Cady Stanton writes the Declaration of Sentiments.

1869 Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (shown) form the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). Only women can join. Lucy Stone forms the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). It is open to men and women.

1872 Anthony and supporters vote in the presidential election. They are arrested.

1878 A woman suffrage amendment is first introduced in the U.S. Congress.

1890 The NWSA and AWSA merge to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

1912-14 Women hold rallies in New York City and Washington, D.C.

1917 Police arrest women who are picketing outside the White House. By 1918, about half the states have granted full or partial voting rights to women.

1919 Congress passes the 19th Amendment, called the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. It is ratified, or confirmed, one year later. (2)

We will then move on to a discussion on how women's suffrage has affected us today, what we might have done if we were in the suffragettes place, and where we would be if women in the 19th century hadn't fought for the right to vote. This discussion will hopefully lead to the topic of why the suffrage movement was so important and potentially the topic of how today we might take for granted the right for women to be able to vote. Finally we will move into a short writing prompt. The prompt is: How would you feel if you were living in the era where women did not have as many rights as they have today? How would you feel if you required to get married a, as a woman, were of a young age and were unable to go to college or have a career? The prompt is aimed at putting students in the mindset of understanding that today they have many more freedoms than they would have had a hundred years ago and that the rights that others fought for are much more important than they may realize.

The next section of the curriculum, which develops a deeper understanding of the context of these rights is the history based section. This section gives students the chance to understand where their rights come from and how they developed over time. The two areas of history that are the most important to focus on are the women's suffrage movement and the civil rights movement, in regards to desegregation of schools. These two areas of history are the two focal points in this curriculum because, as stated above, the students that this curriculum will be taught to are generally from minority or poor families and I feel that they will best be able to relate to these movements in relation to the specific rights that we are talking about.

The first couple of lessons will cover the history of voting rights. The main goal in these lessons is to impart the challenges of gaining voting rights. We will mainly discuss the women's suffrage movement, beginning in the mid 1800s. We will discuss historical figures such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy Stone. The lesson arch will cover the events spanning from the Women's Rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 up to the passing of the 19th Amendment and women voting in the 1920 presidential election. Throughout the lessons we will have activities that will challenge students to question what they would have done during the movement, if they would have potentially done things differently, or if they agree with all of the choices that were made. One of the main events that I think will be important to discuss is Susan B. Anthony voting in 1872 in Rochester, New York and her subsequent arrest for voting. For this event there will be a mock trial activity, in which students will be asked to take sides and either prosecute or defend Anthony with the teacher as the judge. Students will be asked to do research regarding the event, understand her motives for voting despite knowing that she would break the law, do research into understanding what it meant to be a woman voting at this point in history, and argue the sides. The students will be assessed based on their arguments and their comprehension of the event and the political ramifications. This activity will also give the students insight into how serious voting rights were and the drama of Anthony's actions. In the Time for Kids article that will be used earlier in the unit it discusses the events of the suffrage movement and chronicles the important events of the movement. There is a quote from this article that will be used at the end of the mock trial activity as a short writing prompt: "On November 2, 1920, 8 million American women voted in a presidential election for the first time. The women who blazed the trail did not live to see that historic day. In her last speech, one month before she died, in 1906, Anthony urged women to continue to fight for the vote. 'Failure,' she told her audience, 'is impossible.'" (3) This quote is significant and very powerful because I think that her words will resonate with students, and I think it is also very significant that

she did not actually live to see women's suffrage accomplished.

A topic that will also be interwoven with the women's suffrage movement will be African Americans working to gain the right to vote at the same time. It is important to note that African Americans were fighting for voting rights at the same time as women, and were able to gain that right before women. During the overarching discussion of voting we will take time to discuss both the 15th and 19th Amendments. An argument that I will take time to discuss is the place of African American women, and what sides they took, and how my students feel about that. In a journal article by Faye Dudden that speaks to the mindset of the women fighting for suffrage at the time, Dudden states that "By January or February 1869 there was no longer any chance, fighting or otherwise, to win woman suffrage. According to the 'claim the uttermost and you are sure to get something' adage, it was time for these woman suffrage leaders to concede that the 'something' they would have to settle for was black (male) suffrage." (4) This quote goes to the struggle between two oppressed groups fighting for the same goal, and I am curious to see how students would react to this predicament if they were in this position. This quote, and other reading from the article "The Fight over the Fifteenth Amendment" would be used in a worksheet created to get students thinking about this serious topic. It would be interesting to pose the question "What group would you back for the 15th amendment?"

The next group of lessons will cover the right to education. This topic connects most to students of a young age because they are in fact currently in school. Many students do not enjoy going to school and sometimes feel that school is unnecessary or uninteresting, but what would students think if they weren't allowed to go to school? Or how would they feel if they were in a segregated school? To begin this section, it is first important to discuss the definition of segregation and why schools were segregated. In the first lesson of this section, I would pass out a Do Now with the question simply put: Why did children of different races go to different schools in the 1960s? How do you feel about this? Since this can be a sensitive subject it is important to gauge how students feel about this topic so that you know how to proceed.

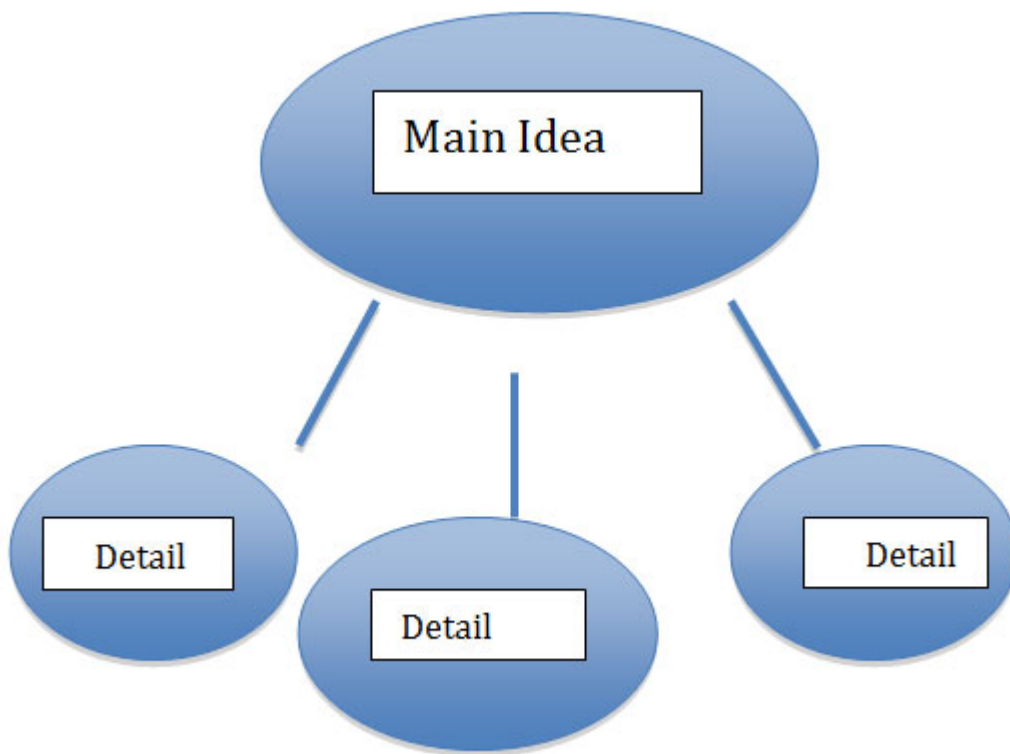
We would then move on to the main topic: for many years after slavery ended, white and black people were kept segregated, or separated in many parts of the country. This was also the case in schools in the south, black students were not allowed to go to the same schools as white students, and black schools were usually poorer schools that were not given new desks or gym equipment or books. Because of this black students did not receive the same level of education as white students and they were not able to get into college or get good jobs like white people. This imbalance deepened the inequality in American society, but in the 1960s the civil rights movement, occurred and many people fought for the right for black people to be given the same rights as white people. Thousands of people protested, picketed, and faced incredibly dangerous situations so that they could be treated the same as everyone else. The main focus in this curriculum is the right to education, so historically I would like to focus on Brown vs. Board of Education, the Supreme Court case that led to desegregation of schools. In the court decision Chief Justice Warren stated that:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local government. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society.... It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values in preparing him for

later professional training and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment... Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right, which must be made available to all on equal terms. (5)

This quote goes to the heart of this curriculum, the fact that school and education are undeniably essential to children and that the state should have to do its utmost to provide an exceptional educational experience. In the lesson on the history behind desegregation, I would start the class by giving this quote on the board and asking students for their thoughts about it. I would like to see how many agree is education that important? Do they feel that their school is the basis for democracy? Is school the most important that? Or are their more important things? Like playing with friends or watching TV? After discussing this quote, it is important to discuss that Brown vs. Board of Education was a legal decision that meant that states were required to integrate, but that many states fought it and that black people still had to fight for equal schools. I would then read aloud or in groups the story of Ruby Bridges (6), a young girl who was escorted into school by National Guardsmen, whose life was threatened by complete strangers, and who only wanted to go to a good school. I think that this book would help students connect on a personal level and help them understand how serious the fight for desegregation was. I would then give a worksheet with discussion questions on both the Brown decision and the Ruby Bridges book, split them into groups, and have the groups discuss their thoughts. After the group discussion one person from each group would report their thoughts and feelings about what they discussed and I think that would help the entire class really process their emotions.

The final section of this curriculum unit will explore how these rights affect the students in their lives. Knowing how these rights affected people in the past is only part of the discovery, what is the most important aspect is these students knowing that they have tools and using them for the better. This section of the unit will involve multiple lessons that involve brainstorming and creating opportunities. Now because these students are younger it will be hard for them to connect school and voting to the rest of their lives, but this section takes learning what the rights are and learning how people fought for them and makes it relatable to my students' everyday lives. In the main lesson I would like to use a KWL chart: what do we know, what do we want to know, and what have we learned? The chart asks these three questions so that we can break down the information, what do we know already about these rights? What is important, main idea information that will help us understand the big picture? Next, what do we want to know? What haven't we learned that we feel is vital information that will either give us more on the main idea or critical details? Finally, what have we learned? Let's put everything together, but while we may have one column for it we aren't just going to put it all in one big pile. Instead we are going to break it down even further. After the KWL chart we will make an organizing web. An organizing web looks as follows:



This web takes everything from the KWL chart and, as the name implies, organizes it into a clean main idea and details. This main idea question that would be answered by the web would be what rights are most important to me? The details will center on the following questions: are what do these rights mean to me? How do they impact my life? What am I going to do with them? This KWL and web project leads into the final project, “My citizenship means _____ to me.”

Final Project of the Unit

The final project of the unit takes the lessons and makes them one final cohesive idea. The goal of the project is to have students use a medium of their choosing, PowerPoint, poster board, binder, and explain to the group how they want their rights to impact their lives. The project has a couple of parts. It starts with the KWL and web worksheets, these worksheets ask the students to organize their thoughts on what they learned in each part of the unit. For example, one student might have felt very impacted by the Ruby Bridges story. So in his KWL under W, he might put that he wants to learn more about the actual desegregation of schools, how many students were treated. That might have connected to him because he if he’s ever felt bullied or picked on at one in school. Another student might organize her web with the central focus being voting rights and maybe she was interested in the women’s suffrage movement. Once their webs are done, they will look at the W on the KWL and pick a topic to research on the computer. This topic is up to them because they will also be researching and thinking about how they want their rights to impact their lives in the future. The goal of the project is to be able to on how they want either their voting rights or their right to education to impact their lives in the future, how is what they now know going to make a difference to them?

Common Core State Standards

RL.4.1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

W.4.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

W.4.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

SL.4.3: Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points.

Notes

(1) "Women's History Month." The Fight to Vote. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 May 2016.

(2) "Women's History Month." The Fight to Vote. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 May 2016.

(3) "Women's History Month." The Fight to Vote. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 May 2016.

(4) Dudden, Faye E. "The Fight over the Fifteenth Amendment." *Fighting Chance The Struggle over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America* (2011): 161-88. Web. 15 May 2016.

(5) "Brown vs. Board of Education." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 12.3 (1974): 31-32. Web.

(6) Ruby Bridges. N.p.: Walt Disney, 2000. Print

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