



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1998 Volume IV: American Political Thought

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## **Democracy in Action**

Curriculum Unit 98.04.01  
by Mary Stewart Bargar

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION will be a unit of study beginning in January and ending in March. At that point in the school year students are comfortable enough with their power within the classroom to investigate new paradigms. Each week students will be introduced to a new American political thinker. Students will be able to solve problems at class meetings as their favorite political thinker. To help set the stage, simple period dress will be available for the 'problem solver' to wear. Once all four political thinkers have been introduced, the class will draft a vision statement that contains a problem they would like to solve either in school or the larger community. After the vision statement is drawn up they will create an action plan to accomplish their goal.

A diverse and equitable view of our population is necessary to achieve realistic values in political thought. In order to encourage these values I will use the visions and action plans of Cesar Chavez, Jane Addams, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Beecher Stowe, through story tellings. These stories will present a diverse cross section of political thinkers. The abolishment of slavery, suffrage movement, social reform of nineteenth century, and organization of migrant workers have each greatly effected political thought in North America. Students will have the opportunity to take on and explore each of the personalities through problem solving sessions and dramatics. The voices honed here will reemerge during future play productions.

The students will be introduced to the art of murals and marionettes. In their own right each of these art forms have communicated and continue to communicate political unrest, reform and change throughout diverse cultures. Through each of these mediums they will express their vision. The planning of the murals and construction of the marionettes will integrate our math and science curriculum. The writing of the plays and mural narratives will incorporate the writing process. Connections to our school and community's political system will be established through trips to our principle, school planning and management team (1), the mayors office and the board of education. They will present their vision and ask for comments and or suggestions from each organization. Investigating and working with each of these groups will empower the students and contribute to their value systems. They will know how to effect change.

In March parents, community members and the student body will be invited to attend a performance of our marionette plays based on our vision and action plan. Students will communicate to the audience the change they effected and the journey that bought them to that point. Murals and project documentation will also be on display.

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION strives not to isolate curriculum according to subject. Success in life is directly related to our ability to grasp emotional and cognitive aspects of relationships. It is essential that we begin this process in our schools. One's love of learning is influenced by environment, emotions, application of new knowledge, and relevance of the material to one's own life. The curriculum must therefore support integrated and diverse learning models. Storytelling will act as a scaffolding for our class to build on for each of these models.

The students must have opportunities to experience, discuss, accommodate and ultimately assimilate information to promote critical literacy. We as educators are afforded the opportunity to become more diverse in our political thinking, curriculum and instructional methods. Immersing the class in democratic language, art, and literature will enrich our community and ideally be reflected in the daily work of each student. Our three month study will take over every aspect of our room. The walls, displays and learning centers will directly reflect these images. Students will have culturally diverse role models to foster positive self images.

## **Objectives:**

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**TO INFUSE CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF DEMOCRATIC IDEALS AND VALUES INTO THE SCHOOL CULTURE.**

**TO INTRODUCE STUDENTS TO A PROACTIVE PROCESS FOR CHANGE.**

The acquisition of knowledge must be balanced with the application of knowledge. As we are teaching we must not forget that by age nine most value systems are in place. If students cannot apply information to real situations they will not understand the value of the knowledge and may never pursue a deeper understanding. Indoctrination into educational settings do not typically encourage free thinking or development of proactive students and/or educators. This basic fear of Democracy has long puzzled me as an educator and a professional. We need to examine why we do not create classroom environments that encourage debate and discussion. We need to infuse critical appreciation of democratic ideals into our educational lives.

## **Part I: Introductory Concerns**

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### **Why do we fear democracy?**

Literally democracy is 'the rule of the people' from the Greek, demos-kratia. In its purest sense each individual has equal voice and voting power. A true democracy would have little chance of succeeding in society since it lacks a mechanism for decisive decision making. The United States began as a Republic: that which is ruled by elected officials representative of the whole of the people. The Articles of Confederation were believed to give too much power to the individual. It was feared that people would become self serving with such power. The Constitution was thus drafted to set in motion a system of checks and balances so that both the local and National governments would work in unity, strengthening our country. We are now referred to as both a Republic and a Democratic Republic.

Specific ideals of Democracy: discussion, debate and eventual consensus can be explored in small group settings such as classrooms. Here we can become involved in strengthening our community by directly affecting a change. So why is it that this type of interaction is often viewed as unimportant? Educators are employed by the city government. They have accepted a position that regulates their life with set hours of student contact time, staff meetings, unions guidelines and expectations. If educators honestly spoke to their own beliefs, the security they have created in their lives would be jeopardized. I believe they fear such activity in their classrooms will interfere with the expectations of the city government, their employer. The city government in turn is reacting to the expectations of the state. Each group wishes the best education for their students but can feel overwhelmed by the enormity of their jobs. To justify silencing the voices of the students, the experience of free speech is not encouraged in the classroom setting. It is a delicate balance between educating and training. We can train to take tests, but we must be educated in order to think critically .

To quell fears of unrest among the masses many teachers count on the "BANKING MODEL OF EDUCATION". (2) This model encourages students to conform and follow authority, a path that many educators also follow. The ideal student is often the one that takes on a passive role imposed upon her, ultimately becoming dominated by the governing institution. At this point it is easy to deposit information and have it returned exactly as it was given. Schools would like to think they are just representing the common culture when in fact they are supporting the dominant culture. This can change. Infusing democratic values would encourage free speech, debate, recognition of the majority and ultimately the ability to promote change. All of which can threaten those in power.

### **What is the role of the teacher in a democratic classroom?**

To assist each student as they become critically literate individuals.

#### **As An Educator**

To facilitate the establishment of principles and morals which can then be applied to real life situations in many different settings.

#### **As An Instructor**

To impart knowledge while teaching can be viewed as the same but in more familiar terms.

#### **As A Trainer**

To furnish students with the opportunity to practice a skill, mental or physical until mastered.

According to Freier,(3) literacy has three levels:

Functional- understanding and decoding print images

Cultural - understanding the print in relation to one's cultural background

Critical - applying the understanding and interpreting the results

Unfortunately we often focus solely on functional and/or cultural literacy. It is possible for a non-reading individual to become critically literate through conversations and audio taped information, since it is

dependent upon the ability to understand, interpret and apply results . Often if a student cannot read we pull them out of a classroom for extended periods of time with an outside resource. Teaching of general knowledge is then often missed, that student lacks information needed to make critical analyses at a later date. The importance of general knowledge and classroom discussions is not always acknowledged.

Educators must be models of social activism and life long learners if we want our pupils to become critically literate. In order to infuse democratic values into the school culture and introduce students to a proactive process for change we must always be striving for cultural literacy at all levels of education.

### **What is the students' role in the democratic classroom?**

Students must become active participants in their personal history. As Freire believes, they need to be able to "read the world critically" .(4) Observation and discussion of situations need to modeled and encouraged rather than making quick decisions. Here is the moment that they can gain control over the process of change, thus their lives. Infusing discussion, debate and consensus into classroom settings creates the environments necessary to effect proactive change. Although this demands extended periods of time initially, the advantages will be great once students become comfortable with the process.

### **The students work with individuals, not independently of them.**

Change can not properly be done for others. Students must recognize and respect the diversity of their community. If they want to facilitate change they will have to address the needs of all community members and assess how the change will effect each of them.

### **Responsibility for decisions must be accepted by the students.**

Once a change has occurred the students need assessment tools in place to insure their vision has been successful. If they find it created unexpected problems, those must be addressed immediately.

### **To assist others in the process of change.**

If one understands the power and importance of effecting change they need to insure others will be able to do the same. Sharing what one has learned is the most direct route to create a positive culture of change in a community.

A culture that infuses democratic values and change will promote ownership of curriculum with the students themselves. Once they accept these responsibilities educators will be working with, not for their students. Such a partnership fosters strong bonds between the student and the educator. This in turn strengthens the community at large. In order for democratic values to succeed in the classroom, students must work with individuals, accept responsibility for their actions and ultimately share their journeys with the community at large. This personifies John Dewey's idea that people learn by doing. (5)

### **Setting the stage for democratic values.**

Whitehead discusses three Stages of Mental Growth. (6) This model of education can be used for infusing democratic values and proactive change.

Romance: introduction of 'newness'

Precision: the how and why

Generalization: application of knowledge

**The Romance:** establishment of a Peaceful Room

The romance can begin in September as the class establishes what a Peaceful Room needs to function productively. The semantics here are important since we want the students to use these principles later when discussing, debating and forming consensus. If the term "Peaceful" is established in September it sets the tone for the year. A peaceful room allows for all students to have a voice and be counted as equals in decision making. It also has regular meetings held to foster discussion, debate and consensus. Students must decide what mechanisms will be used to ensure all are heard and counted. Creating a process to be heard with respect and equality is empowering to all individuals. The students must work in partnership with the educators in establishing this process. The class, to include the educator, should take full advantage of this forum.

**The Precision:** establishment of the hows and whys

Students will quickly want opportunities to vent emotions, problems and inequities they perceive happening in the school community. All too often the classroom can not handle the barrage of requests to be heard. At this point teachers should pose the next question: How will we handle the amount of discussion the class needs and wants? The students now must decide how to streamline the process. Are there issues that can be handled in a less formal setting now that we know how to listen to each other? They will devise a system that supports the class as well as the curriculum materials that need to be covered each term. (One group I had taught decided to report out in the form of a log each week important issues to discuss. Once they were all logged we found out many students shared similar problems. They decided to have problem solving sessions before our class meeting and report their solutions as a group. This cut down on repetitive discussions and arguments.)

**The Generalization:** application of the process

There will come a meeting that you no longer need to run. A student will ask if they could facilitate the session. The process has become a part of their thinking, their learning, their heart. You must now guide your partner. Many more will want the chance to facilitate meetings. A new problem to solve. How will we decide who facilitates fairly?

## **Part II: Stories of Democratic changemakers with discussion of lessons**

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## Week 1: Change and Cesar Chavez

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April 1, 1970 marked the first nation's first table grape agreement between the United Farm Workers Organization, David Freeman & Co. and the Wonder Palms ranch. It provided a 6% increase, picking bonuses, provisions for health insurance and pesticide regulations. Prior to this date the horrors experienced by migrant farm workers were ignored by the general public. They were shuffled from camp to camp, given poor or no shelter. There were no running water facilities or waste areas. Promised wages were never paid and little food made available. The children attended school sporadically and for short amounts of time. Often teachers paid little attention to them. Their migratory pattern of living made it easy for them to be ignored and forgotten.

Cesar Chavez established and directed the National Farm Workers Association in 1962. His dedication to the Mexican-American migrant workers was a life long commitment. He began by organizing classes in English and educating his colleagues on the politics of farmers and migrant workers. He understood that they were intimidated by their lack of proficiency with the English language and political savvy. These classes assisted non-citizens in attaining confidence in the English language to apply for citizenship. Cesar's understanding and sensitivity to the needs of his community made him a natural leader and catalyst for change. The people around him understood this. Farmers did not want him near their workers, but workers wanted and sought his advice. He was a man not afraid to speak and he understood the basic ingredient for long term change, solidarity of the workers and economic independence.

Migrant workers who joined the Association were afforded the opportunities that most Americans of the time took for granted, stores that sold affordable products, access to lawyers and money lending. Most important they were now part of political organization that encouraged voter registration and lobbying. Key to their evolution was the recognition of the power of numbers. Alone they were not successful in affecting change, but together they were.

Young children can comprehend the concept of change through the use of age appropriate literature. Students will read, discuss and compare *Amazing Grace* and *Signs of Protest*. These discussions will be their introduction to the power of the individual and the power of the community.

*Amazing Grace*: Grace wishes desperately to win the role of Peter Pan in the class play. Her classmates point out two specific reasons why she is unable to apply for the role. First she is a girl and girls can't be Peter Pan. Second she is black and who ever heard of a black Peter Pan? Grace returns home and relays all this information to her family. They promptly point out that the choice is no ones but hers. Grace decides to try out for the part and is chosen by her peers to play Peter Pan. The power of her personal convictions led her to attain her goal.

*Signs of Protest*: When the town has money problems, Edward, the mayor's nephew, helps find a way for people to work together to meet the needs of Parkside Elementary School and the Senior Citizen's Center. Residents of Parkside recognize that the changes they effected were the direct result of their ability to organize and work as a community.

Once the students have had an opportunity to discuss each book thoroughly, they will chart typical problems they encounter in life. Students will generate a list of individuals that can support them in problem solving. From this list identify the types of problems that the students can solve themselves and those for which a larger school community is needed. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of solving problems yourself and with the help of a large group. These charts should be posted in the general meeting area so they can be

referenced and/or changed quickly. Photographs of individual and groups can be used to illustrate who might solve the problems.

The class is now ready to meet Cesar Chavez through storytelling. When you enter the room in period dress students will be amazed and amused. This is the magic of storytelling. You will notice a repetitive phrase has been used in his story: Yo puedo hacer un cambio con mis amigos. The phrase is to be chanted by the students each time 'Cesar' clinches his fists. This will draw them into the story and focus their attention. Once 'Cesar' is finished speaking, hang his costume in a prominent spot in your meeting area. Explain to your students that they can wear the costume of 'Cesar' if they wish to solve problems as he did, problems that needed the community. Review the list that was generated earlier and see if anyone can identify problems that may need the voice of Cesar Chavez. Students will need a way to sign up to be Cesar and solve a problem. In our classroom they write their name on the daily agenda and are acknowledged at the next meeting.

### **Yo Puedo Hacer un Cambio Con Mis Amigos**

(I can make a change with my friends)

a storytelling by

Mary Stewart Bargar

I came to the United States from Mexico when I was five years old. My family settled on land in Arizona. They cut down cactus, plowed, and watered the sandy soil. We grew melons, peppers, corn and beans. We worked together as a family!

No matter how the work. In my heart I knew....

YO PUEDO HACER UN CAMBIO CON MIS AMIGOS.

When I was ten years old the state of Arizona told all the farmers that we had to pay taxes. If we could not pay their taxes they would have to give their land to the state and leave. We moved to California. They needed farmers to pick the fields. We thought we were very lucky. In my heart I knew....

YO PUEDO HACER UN CAMBIO CON MIS AMIGOS.

When we arrived we were not so happy. Our family lived in one hot room. It had no water or bathrooms. We worked from dawn until dusk and never made enough money to buy clothes or shoes for all eight of us. We just could buy enough food to survive. When I was old enough to live on my own I left my family and worked in the vineyards. I lived in barracks with other men and had regular meals, but I did not forget how my family struggled and stayed together. In my heart I knew....

YO PUEDO HACER UN CAMBIO CON MIS AMIGOS.

I also never forgot all the families living without enough food, clothes or education, while the farm owners lived a rich life. I began to talk to other workers. We banded together and asked the farm owners for better wages and homes. In my heart

I knew....



YO PUEDO HACER UN CAMBIO CON MIS AMIGOS.

At first they ignored us. As times went on our numbers grew and we had a plan. We would travel to cities all over the United States and tell people how the workers were treated and that they should boycott grapes. And we did it! Families all over the United States were mad when they heard how we lived and how little we were paid. They boycotted grapes. The owner of the vineyards met with us. For the first time farm workers had a voice in the work force! My friends and I formed the National Farm Workers Association. In my heart I knew...

YO PUEDO HACER UN CAMBIO CON MIS AMIGOS.

## Week 2: Poverty and Jane Addams

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Hull House was located in one of the worst neighborhoods in the Chicago slums. Tenements were filthy with buildings crumbling around the community. Garbage was piled high, a breeding ground for disease and fumes. Running water was often limited to faucets in the backyards. These were the conditions endured by poor

immigrant families that came to America in search of a hopeful future in the turn of the 19th century. Jane Addams founded and lived in Hull House for nearly 40 years. She was a pioneer in social work and was able to base her programs on the needs of the Community because she was a member of the community. She did not work for the people but with the people. She developed programs for infant care, kindergarten, youth clubs, workers groups, classes in citizenship and reading. All the programs were aimed at self respect and self reliance. And being poor did not mean you were not entitled to enriching class in the arts and music! Jane made sure of that.

Her work gained national attention and recognition. She campaigned for peace, reform of child labor laws, woman's rights and the protection of civil liberties. Above all she accepted people with diverse views and never lost sight of her place in this unique community. She did not view herself as a director but as a resident whose work it was to organize with the community, not for the community. The success of Hull House encouraged replication of the program to varying degrees. No one would encounter Jane Addams success however, unless they too could become a true member of the targeted community.

The respect given by Jane Addams to all people can be explored in the *Lady in the Box* and *Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen*. Poverty is dealt with great sensitivity and honesty. It is essential the very young children be given clear messages that poverty does not translate into pity.

*The Lady in the Box*: Ben and his sister meet Dorrie. She is homeless and lives over a particular grate near the deli. It is a warm spot and she considers it her home. When the deli owner tries to evict Dorrie from her location the kids finally share the dilemma with their Mother. She advocates for Dorrie to retain her home in spite of the deli owners resistance. This book deals with the issue of poverty and homelessness with sensitivity and respect. As with Ms. Addams, these characters work with Dorrie, not for Dorrie.

*Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen*: Children are ushered into the world of soup kitchens with warmth, dispelling many myths that are attached to the individuals that use them. The diversity of the population allows students to grow in their understanding of poverty.



You are now ready to introduce Jane Addams to your class. She will help the children explore their fears and myths of those living in poverty. She too has a repetitive phrase embedded into the storytelling: I just never knew. The phrase is to be chanted by the students each time 'Jane' raises her hands above her shoulders. Add her costume to Cesar's. The students will now have two voices to assist them as they solve problems each week. It is very important for young children to have many opportunities to explore similar experiences solving problems over and over again. This is how they make sense of the world around them and form social competencies.

## **I Just Never Knew**

a storytelling by

Mary Stewart Bargar

I traveled all over the world. I could fly to any country, eat in any restaurant any time I wanted. I never knew that many, if not most of the people in the world could not go to exciting events like the theater or concerts. I JUST NEVER KNEW!

I just never knew that many people were not equal or free to do as they wished. I visited a settlement house when I was traveling in England. Here people were given the opportunity to enjoy books, plays, art , what ever interested them. The classes were organized by those who lived in the settlement house. The residents of the settlement house had talents in these areas and wanted to share them with the community. I JUST NEVER KNEW ! and what a great idea.

I decided right then and there that I would found a settlement house in Chicago. But I needed help. I called my good friend Ellen Starr and she offered her time. We chose a part of Chicago that didn't have chances for people to socialize. Most of the families worked all day for little money and were very tired. Even the children worked. I JUST NEVER KNEW!

We opened Hull House and it was never empty. We ran a nursery, kindergarten, art classes and book readings. When the community was in need we responded. WE JUST NEVER KNEW how wonderful it could be when we were all equal and free to enjoy our lives.

## **Week 3: Sojourner Truth and Liberation**

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Isabella Baumfree was the birth name of Sojourner Truth. She was born to James and Betsy, both slaves of Colonel Ardinburgh in Ulster County, New York. At the age of nine she was sold for \$100 to John Nealy. Here she experienced frequent and brutal beating. Isabella only spoke Dutch, as she had been taught by the Ardinburgh family and the Nealys were infuriated each time Isabella did not follow directions. She was bought for \$105 by a fisherman named Scriver. Isabella spent about a year and half with his family before being sold to the Dumonts. Here Isabella wanted to please the Dumont family very much because here she "married" Thomas and had five children.

Dumont used the excuse of a diseased hand not to give Isabella her freedom on July 4, 1827, as outlined in the New York Emancipation Act of 1827 (7). She took flight with her infant son and was given sanctuary at the home of the Van Wagener's. While living here Isabella's son Peter was illegally sold South. She became the first black woman to sue a white man and win! She was a truly courageous woman.

The depressed economy of the late 1830s and forties made Isabella aware of the lack of respect people had for each other. The poor were not only ill served by the rich but by each other. She also felt she could contribute much more to society. On June 1, 1843 Isabella took the name Sojourner (wander or traveler) Truth and left New York to preach truth to all people. She believed that this was her God given mission in life. Sojourner Truth dedicated her life to reform. She championed equal rights, women's rights, and post Civil War housing for freed people. Sojourner's wit and charm allowed her to speak out on the highly heated issue of how to assist the adaptation of freed blacks in a white, highly prejudicial, society. The 'wanderer of truth' never allowed fear to paralyze her ability to effect change.

To understand the incredible odds Sojourner Truth overcame in our society we must visit the hearts of young characters our students can identify with. Minna is a young girl kidnapped in Africa and forced into slavery here in America, in the story, *Now Let Me Fly: The Story of a Slave Family*. She herself never escaped the bonds of slavery, but takes solace in the fact that two of her children escape to freedom. Equally powerful are the images created by *The Wagon*. The narrator is a young boy who dreams that the wagon he has helped build will be his chariot to freedom. The story also deals with the eventual liberation of the enslaved.

Once both these stories unfold try to have students identify a moment when they felt very scared. Next ask them to try to remember how wonderful it felt when they weren't scared any longer. Many new stories will emerge. Allowing each student a chance to share at some point during the week will assist them in understanding the meaning of liberation.

Sojourner is now ready to enter. She can share with your students the greatness of her will and her ability to overcome fear. Each time Sojourner passes her hand towards an open door or window the children will join in the chant: *Run, Run to courage and truth together they will set you free*. The power of slogans and ads is only too prevalent in our image rich society. Educators are aware of the popular children's television and video heroes on a daily basis. Dismissing their impact by banning or ignoring them will only add to their popularity. If however we consciously introduce strong, positive and uplifting individuals, with catchy chants, and child centered messages, we will give our students a more diverse pool of role models from which to choose.

## **Isabella**

a storytelling by

Mary Stewart Bargar

I was born a slave. I will always remember the pain in my heart the day I was sold and had to leave my parents. I was nine years old. Although I worked very hard the people that bought me were very mean to me. I dreamed of my father rescuing me from this awful place. If I ran away I would be caught and punished. I never stopped believing I could RUN, RUN TO COURAGE AND TRUTH TOGETHER THEY WOULD SET ME FREE, and so I did.

I worked harder and longer each day. And I dreamed of someday being set free, with a home for my family. For many years I held onto this dream. I married and had five children, still we were slaves and still I believed RUN, RUN TO COURAGE AND TRUTH TOGETHER THEY WOULD SET ME FREE.

In 1827 New York passed an emancipation act. It did not free all slaves, only those that had performed a certain number of years of work. I struck an agreement with the family that owned me on the date of my emancipation. During this time I hurt my hand. My owners said I could not finish my work and therefore would

not be set free. I knew that I worked harder than three people. I also knew they did not want me to be free. I knew what to do RUN, RUN TO COURAGE AND TRUTH TOGETHER THEY WOULD SET ME FREE.

I ran to the Van Wagner's home. They did not believe in slavery. When my owner arrived the Van Wagner's paid for my services and my infant daughter for one year. This gave me the time I needed to not only work off my debt, but gain my permanent freedom. I spent the rest of my life as Sojourner Truth preaching the rights of all people and the need for equality between woman and men. No matter how hard my life was I knew to RUN, RUN TO COURAGE AND TRUTH TOGETHER THEY WOULD SET ME FREE. AND THEY DID.

## **Week 4: The Power of Writing and Harriette Beecher Stowe**

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Harriet Beecher was born June 14, 1811. She was the seventh child of a famous protestant preacher. Harriet and Catharine worked together teachers. In 1833 Harriet produced her first publication: a geography for children, under her sister's name. In 1836, Harriet married widower Calvin Stowe and together they had seven children. Stowe helped to support her family financially by writing for local and religious periodicals. During her life, she wrote poems, travel books, biographical sketches, and children's books, as well as adult novels. She loved to corresponded with people to include Lady Byron, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and George Eliot. She died in Hartford Connecticut at the age of eighty five.

Harriet Beecher Stowe is most widely known for her first, Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) although she wrote a minimum of ten adult novels. Uncle Tom's Cabin began as an extremely controversial serial for the Washington anti-slavery weekly, the National Era, and focused public interest on the issue of slavery. In writing the book, Stowe drew on her personal experiences. She often spend time on slave plantations that friends of her family owned. The death of her child inspired Stowe to understand the great sorrow enslaved people suffered. She quickly became a celebrity, speaking against slavery both in America and Europe. Many critics tried to discredit her work. In response Harriet wrote A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin (1853) documenting the realities on which the book was based. She also published a second anti-slavery novel, Dred in 1856. The claim that President Lincoln, greeted her as "the little lady who made this big war" (Civil War) has little validity and is viewed as a legend. Caroline Norton was one social reformist that respected and drew upon her work.

The political aspects of Stowe's antislavery publications has unfortunately overshadowed the significance of her other work. Many categorize her work as uneven. At its worst, it indulges the over romantic Christian audience of her time while at her best, Stowe was a early and effective realist. Her settings are often accurately and detailedly described. Her ability to portray the subtleties of society even in the smallest of characters attests to her talents as a writer. In her commitment to realism, and her serious narrative use of local dialect, Stowe predated works like Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn by 30 years, and influenced later regionalist writers including Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman.

The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center is a nonprofit educational institution that operates the restored Harriet Beecher Stowe House and the Stowe-Day Library. The Center's program series focuses on social issues, such as race relations and women's roles, that interested Stowe and her circle. The Center is located at 71 Forest Street in Hartford, CT.

### **I Did Not Like That!**

a storytelling by

Mary Stewart Bargar

I went and studied at the University that my sister Catherine founded. Because of her I read great novels, and learned about many people in the world who wanted all of us to be free and equal. No matter what color your skin was, no matter if you were a man or woman.

When I married and had children I was expected to cook and clean and not make time for my writing. My writing was what I loved more than anything else in the world. I DID NOT LIKE THAT. I never stopped writing!

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST? WHAT IF IT WAS TAKEN AWAY?

When one of my children died, I was crushed, I cried and cried for days. I DID NOT LIKE THAT. I forgot how to be happy. This made me think of something awful, truly awful. I use to visit the plantations of my families friends in the south as a girl. They had beautiful homes. Many people took care of the homes and us. I realized that they were not allowed to speak , have an opinion or play with us. I realized the meaning of the word slave. Because they had dark skin we were allowed to own them as a piece of property. I think they must have felt as bad as I do now that my child died. I DID NOT LIKE THAT.

I decided to write about it. I wrote for hours. I wrote for days. I wrote for months. Then something truly amazing happened. People read what I wrote and agreed with me, Harriet Beecher Stowe, a woman. My first really popular book was Uncle Tom's Cabin. Remember I told you how my child died and it made me think about the horrible way people were made slaves, well I wrote a book and called it Uncle Tom's Cabin. I wanted the whole world to know it was wrong to enslave anyone. I DIDN'T LIKE THAT.

You see it was very unusual for a woman to be listened to in my day. They not only wrote to me but many people visited me and talked with me and soon we had groups of people, of woman who wanted to change things. So we helped each other write and publish and earn the respect that men were given. And guess what I REALLY LIKED THAT!

### **Lesson: The Plan of Action**

Time: Week 4

Intelligences: Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Verbal /Linguistic

Objective: Creation of an action plan to effect a change in the school community.

Procedure:

Once you have delivered the storytelling of Harriet Beecher Stowe entitled, *I Didn't Like That!* have your students brainstorm things they don't like. Ask them if there is anything they don't like at school. Post all their ideas on large sheets of paper. Now they are ready to identify and group similar concerns. As the list is condensed ask them how they may effect a change on any of the problems they have generated. The conversation will begin to revolve around specific problems. The students must now chose one to address in depth.

I avoid voting at all costs. Here is the forum to hone skills in consensus. It may take one meeting or it may take five meetings for the group to agree on one problem to tackle, but the process is the most important

step.

Outline the elements of an action plan to the class:

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

CHANGE YOU WOULD MAKE

THE ORDER IN WHICH THE CHANGE NEED TO HAPPEN

HOW WILL YOU DOCUMENT THE CHANGE

Post your action plan in a prominent area of the room so it can be referred to on a regular basis and progress charted.

Follow-Up:

Remind your students of how Harriet Beecher Stowe addressed many problems she faced, through her writing. Keep a class and/or individual journals of each step of the change process. These journals will be an invaluable tool for final documentation of the change process.

Assessment:

The ability of the group to come to consensus and the completed action plan will serve as authentic assessment tools.

## **Part III: The Change and Town Meeting**

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Establishment of the plan of action is the beginning of our cycle of change. Students may decide to create an outdoor classroom, an improved lunch program or rally for bus assistants. These are a few the major issues that are raised annually in my classes. The key is to not to impose the value system of the adults onto the students. Free from the mandates and accountability teachers experience, young minds can often see both problems and solutions easier and with greater clarity than the adults in charge of their education. We as educators can become guides, offering our experience and knowledge of established political systems.

### **Weeks 5-6: Meeting the Political System**

Meetings will be scheduled with the principal, school planning and management team, the mayors office and the board of education. At each meeting students will present their action plan and ask for support where and when needed. A well thought our action plan will take into account issues of funding, time and accountability. Comments and suggestions from each of the political organizations will assist the students as they edit or modify their original document.

During this period students will complete the work needed to achieve their cycle of change. It could include letter writing campaigns, physical labor, acquisition of supplies or rescheduling of instructional days. It may involve parents, community members or classmates. All this depends upon their action plan, and the specific needs of the individuals in a class.

## **Week 7: Playwriting and Marionettes**

The writing process is employed as the teacher meets with each small group to develop plays for their marionettes. Assist the students as they organize themselves into small group of 4-6. Each group can write one act of a play that tells the story of the change they are effecting. Works in progress are presented to the whole class at share meeting. The students receive constructive criticism and suggestions. Instructional points are reviewed by the teacher for the whole class. The teacher also acts as a scribe and records information for later revisions. Upon completion of the play introduce marionette making to your students to create the characters needed to communicate their work. Students design and create scenery for the plays. Rehearsals begin and lines are memorized. Excitement mounts! A student made stage and props is used to augment the marionettes. Imagine.....what they have accomplished. (9)

### **Lesson: Birth of a Marionette**

Time: Week 7

Intelligences: Logical/Mathematical, Visual/Spatial, Body/Kinesthetic

Objective: Construction of a marionette

Marionette Background: The word originated in France during the Middle Ages. Marionettes used in religious plays called "Les Mysteres". These plays were performed in front of cathedrals. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a central character in many plays and the inspiration for their name, "Les Petites Maries" or "The Little Marys". Through the evolution of linguistics Marie transformed into Marion.

Marionette became little Mary. During the Renaissance the term marionette was given to stringed puppets in Italy. Today in the English language marionette means the same. In France however it means any figure in an animated show.

Materials: paper tubes, scrap wood, screw eyes, fishing line or thin string, beads, notions and tongue depressors. All materials can be recycled from student's homes or local businesses.

Construction:

1. Attach the screw eyes to the wood scrap body.
2. Use a piece of cloth and glue to secure the paper tube head to the back of the wood body.
3. String beads for limbs and attach to the screw eyes.
4. Create a personality by adding hair, facial expression and clothes.
5. Tape or tie two tongue depressors in an X formation.
6. Thread the first string through the should screw eyes and tie it to the tongue depressor crossbars.
7. Attach the arms to the crossbar tongue depressor.
8. Go for a walk

Assessment: Student will walk their marionettes to meeting and introduce them to the group. The finished marionette will serve as the assessment.

## **Week 8: Murals**

Small groups of students will use the work of Thomas Hart Benton (8) as inspiration to create original murals of our change process. They will choose key visual scenes to tell the school community of the change we wish to effect. Once completed they will be hung through out the school. Written explanations will be posted with each so all members of the school attain a greater understanding of our message. Murals allow for visual learners to communicate and understand concepts more fully.

### **Lesson: Spread the Vision**

Time: week 8

Intelligence's: Visual/Spatial, Logical/Mathematical, Interpersonal

Objective:

Communication of an identified problem in the school.

Materials:

Precut one piece of 8'x4' butcher block paper or canvas per group. A faux acrylic paint can be created by mixing four parts tempera paint to one part Elmer glue. The paint will adhere to the surface smoothly and you will avoid flaking paint. Colored chalk and a variety of brushes will also be used.

Procedure:

The size of the group generally should not exceed five students. Have each group discuss and draw a small version of their mural. They will need to identify the major figures they wish to paint and how these figures will convey their message. Once completed they can use the colored chalk to outline their mural onto the larger surface. If you have an overhead projector available it is exciting and fun to produce the image on the paper and have the students merely trace the original. The students now can use their faux acrylics to bring their mural to life.

Follow-up:

Once the murals are dry each group must write an explanation of their mural for their display. The murals should be strategically placed for greatest exposure. Students should be encouraged to explain their work to friends and faculty alike. By engaging individuals in conversation surrounding their work they are spreading their message quickly and efficiently.

Assessment: the completed murals and written explanations will act as authentic assessment.

## **Town Meeting**

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The change we have effected in our school will be celebrated and documented in two ways: the plays produced by the students and their murals. Each of these art forms will facilitate the students as they share with us their saga with the New Haven Public School Political System at our monthly town meeting.

The students enhance their writing skills by conceiving ideas and selecting and using examples, illustrations,



evidence and logic to develop topics throughout their play writing and organization of an action plan. The students enhance their interpersonal relations by participating actively in reaching group decisions during writing, political meetings, mural completion and performance. At the town meeting students, parents, community members and teachers celebrate the knowledge gained and skills achieved when the plays are performed and discussed in post production sessions.

To what extent my students achieve their goal will depend greatly on the topic they choose to tackle. The product is secondary to the process they have experienced.

They will address their success as well as their defeats at our Town Meeting, since both are important in the change process. Many adults find it difficult to work collaboratively, seek constructive criticism, and edit their goals when necessary. If we could hone such skills in our educational institutions, we may find a larger and more diverse pool of leaders emerge in the future.

## End Notes

1. The school planning and management team or SPMT is the governing body at our school. It is comprised of educators, administrators, parents, students, custodial and dietary staff. Decisions are based on the goals we write into our comprehensive school plan, which is align with the New Haven Frameworks. Each decision is made when consensus is met. 2. The "Banking Model of Education" is one traditional method of education that deposits information and expects an equal return. See Girouz, Henry A., Penna, Anthony N. Pinar, William F. Curriculum and Instruction. Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing, 1981. 3. Friere, Pablo. Macedo, Donaldo. Literacy: Reading the Word and the World. New York: Bergen and Garvey, 1987. 4. Friere, Pablo. The Politics of Education. New York: Bergin and Garvey Press, 1985. For a practical application see Hooks, Bell. Talking Back. Boston: South End Press, 1989. 5. Dewey, John 6. Whitehead, Alfred North. The Aims of Education. Macmillan Company, 1929. Outlined in his essay, The Rhythm of Education. 7. Painter, Nell Irvin. Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol. Norton and Company, 1996. The guidelines of the New York Emancipation Act of 1827, as well as the effects it had on Sojourner's Truth entire Family are discussed here. 8. Benton, Thomas Hart, painter, 1889-1975, American painter; b. Neosho, Mo.; grandnephew of Sen. Thomas Hart BENTON. The best-known American muralist of the 1930s and early 40s, he won fame for such murals as those at the New School for Social Research (N.Y.C.). Benton is noted for his dramatization of American themes, as in July Hay (1943; Metropolitan Mus.). Arts of the South is hung permanently in the New Britain Museum of American Art. A children's guide is available this as well as 17 other permanent pieces in the CT. museum. 9. For a free extended guide to writing and producing your play request Playwrights and Marionettes by Mary Stewart Bargar from the CT Celebration of Excellence at ACES (203) 404-4400.

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Excellent source of information on non-traditional woman.

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## **STUDENT BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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An illustrated biography of Sojourner Truth presents the inspirational story of a woman born into slavery, who gained freedom for both her son and herself and who earned fame preaching about the evils of slavery and the rights of women.

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The text and illustrations portray a bustling, friendly group of workers who welcome the young narrator into the caring world of the soup kitchen. Issues are dealt with at an appropriate level for young children. Ages 5-up  
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Uncle Tom's Cabin was America's first protest novel, "the first book ever written against a law" and a runaway bestseller in its time. This biography is less about Stowe's famous book than it is about her life and times as a woman in an eminent family in the mid-19th century.

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A woman born into slavery, who gained freedom for both her son and herself and who earned fame preaching about the evils of slavery and the rights of women.

McGovern, Ann. *The Lady in the Box*. Turtle books, 1997.

In Lizzie and Ben's neighborhood, a woman lives in a box, grateful for the warm air that escapes through a vent in the sidewalk. After watching this "lady in a box, ' the brother and sister decide to help her, despite their mother's admonition to never talk to strangers. Ages 5-up

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