

Look Before You Leap: Connecting History with Future Peacebuilding

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Introduction

As a republic, the majority of legislation within the United States of America is passed through representatives within government rather than through the direct votes of the civilians of the nation(i).With the majority of those in government coming from non-minority backgrounds, there are often laws passed for a group of people or community by members of government that are not a part of the groups that their legislation will impact(ii,iii).

Throughout my time teaching Civics and American History with my students, over 90% of whom are people of color (iv), students examine the legislative process and those who have power within it. From this, my students begin to question the role of their own voices and abilities within the change making process. While I have already created a teaching tool that uses an understanding of the legislative process as a means for peacebuilding and furthering rights(v), the vital goal of this research is to teach students how to increase rights through peacebuilding practices within communities through the examination of systems and local projects, rather than through only legislative means.

I plan to use the historical timeline of various rights movements presented within the Civics and American History curricula to explore the continuity and change, comparisons, causes and effects, and strategies behind movements over time. I will then use a series of guiding explorations that connect the history with the Eight Pillars of Peace with the peacebuilding process of planning an effective and replicable peace project.

Research/Data Collection

Patricia Shafer of the Alliance for Peacebuilding directed me to examine UNLEASH, a program aimed at helping youth plan impactful peacebuilding initiatives (vi). I was also able to utilize research from the Institute for Economics and Peace concerning the Eight Pillars of Peace and their importance and impact within pursuing peace(vii).



Classroom Implementation

Throughout the school year in American History and Civics, students will be learning about the different social movements within the United States and will be tracking the timeline of how these different movements progressed throughout the course of history and over the academic school year. Once students have mapped out the timeline of various movements, including but not limited to the Abolition Movement, Worker’s Rights Movement, Women’s Suffrage Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement, students will pick a movement that resonates most with them in terms of their interests, lived experiences, and their understanding of the topics to examine for modern relevance in terms of changes that can still be made to increase the efforts of these movements.

In the activity students will start by plotting key events that impact the furthering or limiting the objectives of a movement onto a timeline. These events should include legislative moves from various levels and branches of government, civilian reactions and responses to government actions, protests led by civilians and activists, counter movements that emerged, alongside a brief listing of the causes and effects of these key moments in time. Students will then examine which actions and groups limited the objectives of the movements, and those that furthered them. This position is meant to help students understand what strategies furthered the objectives of their chosen movement and which were counterproductive and why.



The Eight Pillars of (Positive) Peace

Objectives, Evaluation and Results

Students will research the rights that they are wanting to further alongside the workability of their proposed peace project with members of the target community they plan to impact, local organizations that are working on similar projects, and by understand where and how their project should be implemented to have maximum impact.

Students will be expected to engage with and present results on their peace projects at the end of the year while also documenting their experience throughout the process.

References

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The Right to Rights

The theme for this research is to increase student understanding of their right to rights. This is accomplished through students learning what their rights are, who fought for them, how they were fought for, and the challenges that have led to the limitation of rights over time.



Student Inquiry

The examination of both the history of a right and how a specific human right exists and is protected within the United States through the lens of the Eight Pillars of Peace and how it can be furthered through the examination of what can still be done within each of the Eight Pillars will allow students to understand the multiple factors that impact and uphold one’s access to that human right.

With this understanding of the history of a right, what is currently present in terms of protections for this right, and what can still be added for the expansion of any specific human right, students will be able to unpack the possibilities of change within singular pillar of peace to create an implementable action plan.