NO RELUCTANT CITIZENS

Teaching Civics in K-12 Classrooms

Edited by
Jeremiah Clabough
Timothy Lintner

A VOLUME IN: TEACHING AND LEARNING SOCIAL STUDIES

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A Volume in:
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Jeremiah Clabough

A generation ago Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) articulated the idea that the purpose of U.S. schools is to prepare an informed citizenry. Some variation of this idea about the role of schools has been articulated throughout American history by statesmen like Thomas Jefferson (n.d.) and educational thinkers like John Dewey (1910). The challenge to preparing future citizens lies in the unique responsibilities of being a democratic citizen. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) stresses that democratic citizens are stewards for their entire environments and thus responsible for the continued vitality of their local, state, and national government (NCSS, 2013a). This implies that democratic citizenship is not a passive role (Parker, 2015). For example, the end of Jim Crow segregation laws did not just happen but was due to the tireless work of generations of civil rights activists. Citizens must be actively involved with public policies and issues to hold elected officials accountable (Levine, 2007).

Social studies teachers have an important role to play in preparing students to be future citizens. We argue that our social studies classrooms should be "laboratories for democracy" where students research and experiment with solutions to an issue (Clabough & Wooten, 2016). Social studies teachers should design activities that give students the experiences, knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively analyze and discuss the ramifications of public policies (Oliver & Shaver, 1966). Students will then be equipped to make informed decisions on

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candidates and public policies to support (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). The realities of American politics in the 21st century make the process of preparing future citizens more challenging.

POLITICAL PARTISAN RHETORIC AND DIVISION

Over the last 40 years, both the Republican and Democratic Party have moved farther to the political right and left respectively (Heilmann & Halperin, 2014; Perlstein, 2008). This process started with the political realignment due to the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and other cultural and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. However, the last three presidential election cycles have seen this political partisanship extended to an unprecedented level. Both political parties have in large part stopped relying on conveying policies and instead moved to mainly attacking the other party and its candidate. For example, a Super PAC that supported Barack Obama in 2012 subtly implied in a commercial that Mitt Romney's actions with Bain Capital led to a man's wife getting cancer. This example points to a high level of mean spiritedness in contemporary American politics.

Our current political climate is toxic. The roots of this problem can in large part be attributed to many of the grassroots organizations, special interest groups, and news groups that push candidates on both sides of aisle farther to the political right or left. Candidates are put under a microscope with any deviation from conservative or liberal policies being punished. The goal with politics over the last three presidential election cycles is to be perceived as more conservative or liberal than one's primary opponents. This leads candidates to adopt more conservative or liberal policies to secure their base of support. For example, John McCain had to take several steps to the political right in order to secure the Republican primary and base in 2008.

A person's embracement with the extremes of either political philosophy is mostly rewarded. For example, Donald Trump staked the extremes of conservatism on an issue in order to dominate news cycles as can be seen with his stance on illegal immigration during the 2016 election cycle. This approach to politics has forced candidates to react to their primary opponents' stances on issues and thus move farther to the political right or left. Bernie Sanders' policy recommendations pushed Hillary Clinton farther to the left to keep support from Democratic voters. This creates a wider gap between Republicans and Democrats' policies.

Both parties' public policies are hard to objectively measure because their opponents are intent to frame policy recommendations as the worst suggestion with dire consequences to the nation. For example, several Tea Party members within the Republican Party claimed that the Affordable Care Act would lead to "death panels" (Gonyea, 2017). With this kind of rhetoric, healthy public discourse is made more difficult (Hess, 2009). It is made even more difficult by the fact that politically-aligned news outlets like Fox News and MSNBC are working to construct political narratives. For example even before the testimony of James Com-

ey about his interactions with President Trump, MSNBC attempted to position the issue as Watergate version 2.0. Bob Woodward appeared regularly to discuss the parallels between Trump and Nixon along with several commercials of MSNBC commentators trying to make viewers see this connection, even going as far to use the Watergate building as the backdrop for these commercials. This type of dialogue by both parties makes it harder for resolutions on issues to be reached (McAvoy & Hess, 2013).

POLITICAL LOBBYISTS, SUPER PACS, AND THE "NEW GILDED AGE"

Public policies impact every citizen. One piece of legislation can reshape American society. Therefore, it is not surprising that large corporations are more than willing to donate exorbitant amounts of money on elections for candidates and policies that favor their interests. This can be seen especially in the late 1800s. Political corruption, due in large part to the financial contributions of big businesses, led to this epoch in American history to be referred to as the Gilded Age. The last 40 years has seen a "New Gilded Age" emerge where money from corporations drives U.S. politics (Bartels, 2016). I should preface this by saying that the "New Gilded Age" does not reflect all aspects of the Gilded Age of the late 1800s. For example, there are no women working in New York factories without fire exits. However, there are many parallels between the late 1800s compared to contemporary American society. The most striking being the influence of money in our current elections.

There are many examples of how money has influenced American politics. The U.S. economy was not that strong under the George W. Bush administration, but this did not prevent political lobbyists from being one of the largest sectors of job growth during his administration. By the very nature of their job, political lobbyists are trying to influence politicians' policies through campaign funds. Politicians are very dependent on donations to their campaign funds from special interest groups. For example, a special election for a House of Representative's seat in Georgia during the summer of 2017 resulted in about $55 million dollars being spent most of which was donated by special interest groups (Parlapiano & Shorey, 2017). This spending on the House seat pales in comparison to a national campaign. The 2016 presidential election resulted in an estimated 2.65 billion dollars being spent (Berr, 2016). The important thing to remember is that lobbyists and special interest groups expect a return on their investment through public policies and even appointments to positions of power, which can be seen with the current Secretary of Education and her predecessor. This results in many public policies of the country being driven by the interests of certain corporations and special interest groups.

Another connected item is the rise of Super PACS. Super PACS raise funds to support a candidate and use this money to help the interests of that individual. For example, the Super PACS supporting Mitt Romney effectively ran political ads

that cut at Newt Gingrich's lead in the polls and destroyed his chances of winning the 2012 Republican primaries. While this process unfolded, Mitt Romney was able to sit back and claim that his hands were clean (Heilmann & Halperin, 2014). This example from the 2012 Republican primaries demonstrates what the infusion of large sums of money in American politics has unleashed on our politics.

Considering the influence and large financial investments of political lobbyists, Super PACS, and big corporations in state and national elections, a case can be made to parallels between the Gilded Age of the late 1800s to contemporary U.S. politics. The difference is in how these entities due to advancements in technology can now target voters. Voters are bombarded by political advertisements through television commercials and social media outlets. These political advertisements are designed to manipulate voters to support certain candidates and policies with an issue. This means that our citizens more than ever need to possess media literacy skills to research and analyze messages within political advertisements (Sperry & Baker, 2016). Social studies teachers have to prepare future citizens to detect the biases, values, and perspectives embedded within media messages (Journell, 2017).

FAKE NEWS

The 2016 presidential election cycle and its aftermath have unleashed political forces that hurt the ability of a democracy to function. Specifically, the idea that news sources and statements contained within them are unreliable and inaccurate, which has been coined fake news. It is worth mentioning that fake news has been around in this country for a long time. For example, the 1960 Democratic primary saw John F. Kennedy's operatives spread anti-Catholic literature in the state of Wisconsin and blame the Hubert Humphrey campaign for these discriminatory texts (Pietrusza, 2008). What is striking with fake news in the 2016 presidential election is the ease in which these inaccurate stories could be spread through social media. Social media allows people to connect and share these inaccurate stories with others across the world. This creates a cycle where fake news stories can take on a life of their own and influence people's perceptions about an issue or candidate.

Another component to fake news is the fact that Donald Trump has labeled entities like CNN and *The New York Times* as fake news for stories that are unfavorable to his administration (Trump, 2017). U.S. Presidents have historically had contentious relationships with the free press. Thomas Jefferson was an advocate for the free press prior to becoming the President of the United States. "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter" (Lewis, 1993). However, his sentiments changed once assuming the presidency. "Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle" (Lewis, 1993). Similar sentiments can be seen with other presidents throughout American his-

tory. What makes Trump's contentious relationship different is his moves to delegitimize the free press by questioning the veracity of stories unfavorable to his administration. His political move of questioning the accuracy and validity of statements in a story is designed to muddy the waters so that a reader is left uncertain about the truth of a reporter's claims (Journell, 2017).

To prepare students as future citizens to deal with fake news and accusations that stories are fake news, social studies teachers must equip students with the media literacy and research skills to analyze the claims in a story. The recent position statement by NCSS can be a useful guide to structure activities to develop and strengthen students' media literacy skills (Sperry & Baker, 2016). Additionally, the Inquiry Arc of the C3 Framework may be utilized to help students analyze a person's claim (NCSS, 2013b). These items help students use evidence to support the validity and accuracy of a person's statements (Engle & Ochoa, 1988).

The hyper partisanship, exorbitant spending on elections by special interests groups and corporations, and fake news complicate the process of preparing students to be future citizens. There are other challenges in American society such as people consuming news in a tribal fashion based on party identification and people's inability to civilly discuss issues. This edited volume is designed to help social studies teachers prepare their students to be future citizens by addressing many of these contemporary challenges.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

This edited volume is divided into two sections: section one focuses on topics in civic education for grades K–6 and section two concentrates on grades 7–12. Each chapter looks at an important topic in civic education like controversial issues, civic literacy, or fake news. The chapter author provides a series of activities connected to his or her topic. While the activities are focused on a specific grade band, they can be adapted to be used with other grade levels. The activities also connect with the best intentions of the Inquiry Arc of the C3 Framework.

Section one focuses on issues of civic education in K–6 classrooms. Chapter two by Jeremiah Clabough looks at the importance of civic literacy in the elementary social studies classroom. Then, Thomas N. Turner in chapter three discusses how to utilize activities to strengthen an elementary character education program. Chapter four by Janie Hubbard examines ways to promote diversity issues in a civic education program. Jason Harshman and Lauren Darby in chapter five focus on examining social justice issues with state history. Kristy Brugar in chapter six provides lesson plans to look at issues of human rights as well as the agency of people to address these social injustices through trade books. Finally, Brooke Blevins and Karon LaCompte's chapter closes this section with a series of activities that promote students' civic action.

Section two looks at issues of civic education in 7–12 classrooms. Chapter eight by Timothy Lintner articulates ways to teach controversial issues in the social studies curriculum. Wayne Journell utilizes a series of activities designed to

equip students to critically analyze fake news in chapter nine. In chapter ten, Scott Roberts and Charles Elfer give activities to teach about American politics on a local and state level. Mark Pearcy discusses how simulations may be utilized to examine civic issues in chapter eleven. In chapter twelve, Greg Samuels articulates a series of steps to engage students in a variety of service-learning activities connected to social justice issues. Natalie Keefer examines how to discuss human rights issues with a series of activities in chapter thirteen. Finally, Ken Carano focuses on ways to teach about global education issues within a civic education curriculum in chapter fourteen.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

There are a multitude of challenges facing U.S. democracy in the 21st century. This edited volume attempts to provide some ways to meaningfully discuss these issues in our social studies classrooms. The key to success with a civics education curriculum is enabling our students to see the relevancy of topics to their daily lives. The activities in each chapter are designed to do just that. Through the activities in this edited volume, students are able to analyze different solutions to issues and more importantly see their roles and responsibilities as citizens to address such issues. It is this level of civic activism by democratic citizens that is required for the continued vitality of our democracy (Levine, 2007).

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CHAPTER 2

CIVIC LITERACY

The Building Blocks for Creating an Active and Informed Citizenry

Jeremiah Clabough

Recent education reform movements like the C3 Framework by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) have shifted the focus in the social studies classroom. The shift has been from memorization of facts to the promotion of higher order thinking through inquiry-based learning (NCSS, 2013a; Lee & Swan, 2013). Social studies teachers need to implement activities that develop students' analysis skills through the exploration of open-ended questions. These analysis skills help to prepare students for their roles as future citizens (NCSS, 2013b). Social studies teachers have a vital part to play in preparing students for their future roles as citizens (Dewey, 1916; NCSS, 2013c; NCSS, 2016).

In this chapter, the author explores how the concept of civic literacy reflects the best intentions of the C3 Framework. There has been a push over the last two decades to develop students' content-area reading strategies through historical thinking skills (Nokes, 2013; VanSledright, 2002, 2014; Wineburg, 2001). Historical thinking skills refer to having students utilize the analysis skills employed by historians when studying primary, secondary, or tertiary sources. These analysis skills include noting an author's biases, values, and perspectives in a

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source (Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2012). The logic behind replicating the thinking processes of a historian is that students explore content material in more depth. These analysis skills not only serve students within the academic confines of a social studies classroom but also equip them with the knowledge and ability to carry out the many responsibilities of being a democratic citizen (NCSS, 2013b).

Students' civic literacy skills are an underdeveloped area of scholarship in social studies education. While historical thinking and civic literacy skills are similar in some respects, there are some subtle differences that will be explored. I start by discussing the unique nature of civic education in elementary schools. The focus of this chapter then shifts to providing a definition of citizenship and civic literacy skills. Then, I elaborate on four components of civic literacy skills. These four components serve as the foundation for four activities. The four activities provide a window for elementary students into the ways that democratic citizens must be actively involved and informed about issues.

GOALS OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Elementary schools have a pivotal role to play in civic education programs. During their years in elementary school, students are beginning to develop an understanding of the world around them and are also forming their personal identity (NCSS, 2017). Elementary social studies teachers need to utilize activities that take advantage of students' innate curiosity and help develop their civic identities. By developing students' civic identities, social studies teachers are helping to prepare them for their future roles as democratic citizens (Valbuena, 2015). Civic identity refers to helping students see and define their rights, roles, and responsibilities in relation to their society and government. For example, some people in the 1960s and 1970s saw it as their responsibility to the U.S. government to protest policies in Vietnam that they saw counter to the democratic principles of this country while others saw it as their responsibility to defend U.S. foreign policies abroad regardless of their personal feelings. The development of students' civic identities helps prepare them for their participation in a democracy (Rubin, 2010).

There are many approaches to building a student's civic identity. One way is to organize classroom instruction around the four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc in the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013b). The four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc are provided below.

1. Developing questions and planning inquiries.
2. Applying disciplinary concepts and tools.
3. Evaluating sources and using evidence.
4. Communicating conclusions and taking informed action.

Students are able to research and analyze the claims made by individuals and groups. They utilize evidence to reach their own conclusions with an issue and then take action to impact the public discourse about an issue.

Students can see their agency as they work to positively impact their local community, state, and nation (Levstik & Barton, 2015). Agency refers to people's ability to impact and change existing social, cultural, and political institutions by their actions (Barton, 2012). It is important for students to realize that they can act as powerful change agents. The realization of their agency helps students see the relevancy of their roles as democratic citizens (Barton, 2011).

CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC LITERACY

Scholars, writers, and thinkers historically have stressed that the role of schools is to prepare an informed citizenry (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977). However, people's definitions of citizenship vary based on their political, social, cultural, and regional biases, values, and beliefs (Santora, 2011). People generally agree that a citizen in a democracy has certain roles and responsibilities. For example, citizens have to be actively involved in voting for their representatives. However, citizenship goes beyond people's interactions with elected officials.

Elementary students need to realize that they are the stewards of their communities and of their entire environments (NCSS, 2013c). Communities prosper and decline based in large part on the actions and inactions of citizens. Citizens must be willing to take action to address the needs in their local communities. Students need to realize that the vitality of a democracy is dependent on the active participation of her citizens (Levine, 2007).

Elementary students do not enter our classrooms equipped with the skills to be actively engaged citizens. Social studies teachers must design activities that prepare students for their future roles as citizens (Mitra & Serriere, 2015). In other words, our classrooms must become "laboratories of democracy" where students can explore democratic ideas and principles in a safe and open manner (Clabough & Wooten, 2016). Students need opportunities to examine issues in depth. These opportunities expose students to the complexity of contemporary issues and public policies. For example, an examination of urban poverty in many contemporary African American communities can often be linked to generational poverty caused by segregation during the 19th and 20th century. Students need to be able to make these kinds of connections.

Schools need to develop students' civic literacy skills. There are many steps to building these skills. The first step is to build students' foundational understanding about democratic institutions and laws in our country. This background knowledge enables students to gain an understanding for the democratic principles, values, and laws of the United States.

After building this foundational knowledge, the focus of civic literacy skills pivots to students analyzing the contents of a source for the author's biases, values, beliefs, and perspectives, which reflects the processes advocated in the body

of literature on historical thinking (Nokes, 2013; VanSledright, 2002, 2014; Wineburg, 2001; Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2012). The emphasis on this analysis is on deconstructing a source to examine the author's arguments and opens up further questions to explore related to the reasons that an author feels and believes a certain way about a topic. When utilizing historical thinking skills in this manner, students are engaged as historical detectives using the clues of one source to lead those found in another source. The assemblage of clues from sources allows them to create an argument about a topic, which embodies the essence of how historians construct their arguments (VanSledright, 2002). The development of students' civic literacy skills does not end there.

After this initial analysis, students discuss how an author's words and actions do or do not reflect democratic principles and values outlined in the laws of our country (Teitelbaum, 2011). Students need to deconstruct a source as mentioned in the previous paragraph and then compare an author's claims to the laws in our country. For example, Jim Crow segregation laws put in place after the U.S. Civil War run counter to the intentions of the U.S. Constitution. The comparisons between public policies and laws of our country allow students to examine and reach their own conclusions about the merits and validity of public policies.

The emphasis on how people's ideas, actions, and policies reflect or do not reflect democratic principles and values within the laws of a country separates civic literacy skills from those articulated in historical thinking skills. In essence, students are engaged in two layers of analysis with civic literacy skills. First, they are employing all of the analysis skills associated with historical thinking. Then, in the second layer of analysis, they are connecting their examination to how a person is either positively or negatively reflecting democratic values, principles, and laws in his or her words, policies, or actions.

Civic literacy is not just about the two layers of analysis skills needed to explore historical or contemporary civic issues. These are simply the base layers. Elementary students must use the knowledge gained from the two layers of analysis to become actively involved in addressing a societal need (Teitelbaum, 2011). This layer focusing on civic action also reflects the fourth dimension of the Inquiry Arc (NCSS, 2013b). It is important for the teacher to design different types of activities to demonstrate the variety of ways that elementary students can be actively involved as citizens. For example, students can volunteer in a soup kitchen, work on a beautification project in a community park, or participate in a town hall meeting about a local issue. These are just three of the many ways that citizens can be actively involved. Elementary students need to understand that they have a role to play in solving the challenges facing the nation (Mitra & Serriere, 2015).

Civic literacy is an umbrella term containing many components. Educators may disagree on some components of civic literacy skills and feel certain elements should be emphasized more than others. For the purposes of this chapter, I will only focus on what I believe to be four essential components to civic literacy. Below is a list of these four components.

1. Students need to be able to analyze federal and state laws.

2. Students should be able to articulate how people have divergent beliefs.
3. Students will be able to convey how people have been actively engaged to change and impact society.
4. Students can express their own civic identity as it relates to contemporary issues.

Each of these four components develops students' in-depth understanding about an issue. In the next sections, I discuss an activity for each of these four components of civic literacy. The activities explored are a combination of historical and contemporary civic issues in the United States.

STRENGTHENING STUDENTS' BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LAWS

The first step to building students' civic literacy skills is for them to gain an understanding of the seminal government documents that discuss the rights, liberties, and freedoms of U.S. citizens. These include the U.S. Constitution and state constitutions. This knowledge is pivotal for students to understand whether people's actions and policies reflect the laws of our country (Valbuena, 2015).

One ideal source to use is the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights was constructed to dissuade the fears of Anti-Federalists that individuals would not be guaranteed certain rights and liberties within the U.S. Constitution. The teacher needs to start by providing students with some background knowledge with the debates between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists.

Then, the students work in pairs to analyze two amendments in the Bill of Rights. As students explore their two amendments, they complete the graphic organizer (Table 2.1) provided in the next section. The teacher should model how to answer the questions in the graphic organizer for the first two amendments in the Bill of Rights. The first question in the graphic organizer helps students summarize the rights and liberties of U.S. citizens discussed in an amendment. The second question helps students grasp why each amendment is important for the healthy functioning of a democracy.

After the pairs complete the graphic organizer, the teacher needs to bring the students back together for a class debriefing. Students take notes while peers share their findings. The teacher guides this debriefing and clarifies any of the students' misconceptions. Some questions that the teacher may use to guide this debriefing include the following.

1. How can citizens apply ideas contained in your amendment in their daily lives?
2. Are there limitations to a citizen's rights within your amendment?
3. Why do you think that your amendment was considered to be important?

These questions enable students to see each amendment's relevance in their daily lives.

TABLE 2.1. Graphic Organizer for Analyzing Amendments in the Bill of Rights

Amendment	What does this amendment mean to you?	Why is this amendment important for your life?

After the debriefing, the teacher asks students to select one of the amendments discussed and summarize its content in two sentences. Students write their brief explanations on a sticky note and submit the writing assignment at the end of class. This activity enables elementary students to demonstrate their understanding with amendments in the Bill of Rights.

An understanding of the Bill of Rights is pivotal for students to examine issues and people's policies in respect to the laws of the country. Many people claim that their policies reflect the U.S. Constitution, especially with issues connected to the Bill of Rights. This is due to the fact people interpret many of these amendments differently. This activity allows students to understand the essence of each amendment. Through future class activities, elementary students can apply their knowledge about the Bill of Rights to real-life situations (Brown, Notterman, Ontell, & Sherwood, 2015).

ANALYZING DIFFERENCES IN PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES

In a democracy, people disagree a lot. People have different interpretations of issues and public policies (Blevins & LeCompte, 2015). It is important for social

studies teachers to construct activities that enable students to see differences in opinion by groups about issues and examine the reasons for these differences. The easiest way to approach the examination of contemporary issues in American society is by looking at the differences in ideology between the Republican and Democratic parties. There are obviously variations of perspectives within members of both political parties. However, an exploration of the two major political parties frames the stark differences of opinion about the role of the federal government.

In prior lessons, the teacher should provide a basic overview of the core principles and values of both parties. Some of the principles and values discussed could look at each party's stance on the role of the federal government and that of the U.S. in foreign affairs. The teacher selects key issues that get at the core principles for both parties.

Then, the students in groups of three work with one of the 2016 party platforms. The party platforms can be accessed from the American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php. The teacher provides students with some topics that they can explore in each party platform and gives excerpts from each platform where certain issues are discussed. For example, both parties talk about issues related to healthcare (Republicans do so on page 31 and Democrats discuss healthcare on page 34). Some topics might include the role of the federal regulations, healthcare, and public education. With the topics that the teacher provides, students annotate on the excerpts of the platform where selected issues are discussed. They should highlight where certain topics are mentioned and jot notes on the document and then share their findings with group members.

The teacher will want to put a printed copy of the platform on the Smartboard for the class to annotate together. Then, students share their findings. As students share their findings, the teacher needs to get them to consider what one party's stance on an issue says about its values, biases, and beliefs. Some questions that may evoke this deeper level of thinking include the following.

1. What does the party's stances on an issue say about its members' collective beliefs?
2. What biases are revealed about a party's stance on an issue?
3. What groups in society benefit the most from a party's stance on an issue?

These questions and class discussion help strengthen students' understanding of both political parties.

After this process has been completed for both parties, the students create a Poems for Two Voices (Table 2.2). Poems for Two Voices lets students explore two people or groups' differences and similarities when it comes to certain topics (Finney, 2003). This makes Poems for Two Voices an ideal approach for looking at contemporary political parties. In groups of three, students start by putting one of the party's beliefs on either the left or right-hand side of the document

TABLE 2.2. Poem for Two Voices Template.

Spoken Alone by Voice One for the Democratic Party	Both Voices Say Together	Spoken Alone by Voice One for the Republican Party
1. The federal government has a role to play to ensure that all students get a high- quality education.		1. More control of schools and school related-issues should be handled on the local level to ensure the best decisions are made for our children's education.
	1. The United States needs the highest quality public schools in the world.	
2. The government has a role to play to ensure that student debt on a college degree does not cripple his or her future by limiting the debt to a person's ability to pay it.		2. Private sector organizations should be involved to drive down student debt costs for obtaining a college degree
	2. Steps need to be taken to prevent debt with obtaining a higher education degree.	
3. More funds need to be invested in K–12 schools.		3. The public has not got what we wanted from our investment from public education.
	3. Funds need to be invested wisely in our K–12 schools.	

Adapted from Northern Nevada Writing Project and Writing Fix (2008)

below and then use the other side for the other political party. Then, they put the ideas that both parties agree on about an issue in the middle. The completion of the Poems from Two Voices below enables students to see the differences and similarities between Republicans and Democrats on certain issues.

The analysis of the two-party platforms and the completion of the Poems for Two Voices activity lets students see how political affiliations can shape and impact people's arguments for public policy. Elementary students need to weigh the merits of people's arguments and see how those positions are connected to regional, cultural, social, economic, and political factors (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). For example, it would not be surprising for students to make the connection that big oil companies are not in favor of policies supporting alternative fuels because this would be against their economic interests. Social studies teachers to need to set up activities to help students make these types of connections. This insight into the causes that help to shape people's arguments enables students to make more informed decisions about public policies and political parties to support (Engle & Ochoa, 1988).

EXPLORING THE IMPACT THAT PEOPLE CAN HAVE ON THEIR WORLD

Many children and adults are cynical that they can impact the course of events as citizens in a democracy. Social studies teachers must attempt to address this issue. One way is for social studies teachers to design activities demonstrating how people have been actively involved as citizens to change the social, cultural, and political institutions in the United States (Barton, 2012). An ideal topic for this type of examination of U.S. history is the Seneca Falls Convention.

The Seneca Falls Convention was held in 1848 to discuss issues connected to women's rights. The teacher should start by providing students with some background knowledge about this event. Students need to understand the goals for people that gathered in Seneca, New York.

Next, the teacher splits students into groups of three to explore the Declaration of Sentiments. The Declaration of Sentiments captures the values and beliefs of some delegates at this convention in regards to women's rights. This primary source can be accessed at http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/senecafalls.asp. The teacher may want to simplify the language of this source. As groups read this source, they complete the graphic organizer provided in the next section. The questions in this graphic organizer (Table 2.3) are designed to help students see how people that attended the Seneca Convention believed changes to federal laws were needed for women to have equal rights in American society. Students must support their answers to the questions in the graphic organizer with evidence from this source.

After the groups finish discussing these questions, the teacher needs to bring the students back together for a class debriefing. It is important that the teacher stress students sharing their evidence to support the answers to these questions. The teacher may use the following questions to facilitate this discussion.

1. Why would the writers of this document model it after the Declaration of Independence?
2. How does the document contextualize issues important to women during the 1840s?
3. What do the writers of this document want to change in U.S. society?

This class debriefing helps students explore the contents of this document in more depth. Students gain an understanding of how people construct ideas in documents to capture their thoughts and feelings. Documents like the Declaration of Sentiments can serve as a rallying cry for some to change public policy.

Students use information gained from group work and the class debriefing to write a one paragraph op-ed piece. In their op-ed piece, they assume the role of a local newspaper writer supporting the ideas espoused in the Declaration of Sentiments. Students' paragraphs should emphasize the important issues for women's rights discussed in the Declaration of Sentiments. Op-ed pieces allow students