



Teaching Resources to Promote Inquiry and Civic Engagement: School Safety Topics

Background

With student walkouts anticipated over the next few weeks in response to the heartbreaking shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, it is likely that students and teachers will want to discuss issues such as civic participation and school safety in the classroom. Because this is an opportunity to help students develop important citizenship skills, including those necessary for civil discourse, the Learning and Leadership Services division of SDCOE has collected the resources below to help teachers prepare and guide students in civil and civic discussions. Inclusion of these resources is not an endorsement of a particular political viewpoint.

Theoretical Underpinnings

These resources were selected because they support inquiry – what the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, and later the California History and Social Science (H/SS) Framework, call out as those skills that are “necessary for an engaged citizenry.”

[S]tudents need the intellectual power to recognize societal problems; ask good questions and develop robust investigations into them; consider possible solutions and consequences; separate evidence-based claims from parochial opinions; and communicate and act upon what they learn. And most importantly, they must possess the capability and commitment to repeat that process as long as is necessary. Young people need strong tools for, and methods of, clear and disciplined thinking in order to traverse successfully the worlds of college, career, and civic life. (H/SS Framework, 8)

Below are excerpts from Chapter 1 of the California H/SS Framework that informed the selection of the teaching resources and could be used by teachers when planning their lessons:

- In a constitutional democracy, productive civic engagement requires knowledge of the history, principles, and foundations of our American democracy, and the ability to participate in civic and democratic processes. People demonstrate civic engagement when they address public problems individually and collaboratively, and when they maintain, strengthen, and improve communities and societies. Thus, civics is, in part, the study of how people participate in governing society. (page 9)
- The history-social science curriculum places a continuing emphasis on democratic values in the relations between citizens and the state. Whether studying United States history, world history, government,

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Paulette Donnellon Guadalupe González Alicia Muñoz Mark Powell Rick Shea

economics, or geography, students should be aware of the presence, absence, or contestation of fundamental human rights. (page 13)

- Teachers are encouraged to have students use the community to gather information regarding public issues and become familiar with individuals and organizations involved in public affairs. Whenever possible, opportunities should be available for participation and for reflection on the responsibilities of citizens in a free society. (page 14)
- History and the related social sciences offer a unique opportunity for teachers to emphasize the importance of civic virtue in public affairs. At each grade level, students can reflect on the individual responsibility and behavior that create a good society, consider the individual's role in how a society governs itself, and examine the role of law in society. (14)

Resources

Norms – Maintaining a Supportive, Respectful, and Civil Classroom

Engaging in conversations about school safety may trigger fear in students and adults. Therefore, it is important to create an environment where everyone feels safe. While the number of recent active-shooter incidents has brought a heightened perception of risk, it is helpful to remind students that schools are among the safest places for students. According to an [FBI study](#) on active-shooter incidents, any given student has about a one in 3 million chance of being killed or injured in a school shooting.

In addition, before any discussion about sensitive topics, it is important to establish norms, ground rules, and procedures for maintaining civil discourse where viewpoints from different sides of the issue can be explored.

Below are resources that provide ideas and guidance:

- Teaching Tolerance: Civil Discourse in the Classroom https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/Civil_Discourse_in_the_Classroom.pdf
- Facing History and Ourselves: Fostering Civil Discourse https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/publications/Fostering_Civil_Discourse.pdf
- Ground Rules for Civil Discussion <https://michelletiedje.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/ground-rules-for-civil-discussions.pdf>

Prompts

Great discussions often begin with questions that require deep thinking. Below are prompts that can be adapted and used in a variety of ways, including writing activities (before, in the midst of, or after discussion) or small- or whole-group structured dialogue. Choose carefully from the list below to suit your purpose:

The tragic event at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland has impacted all Americans. It also sparked a desire by many high school students to take action. Use information from the reading and other sources of information (e.g. TV, podcasts, social media, prior reading, personal experiences, or discussions with friends and family over the past several days) as you prepare for a discussion about the question below <Teachers, remember you are choosing a limited number from this list, or crafting one yourself>:

- What is motivating students to speak out about school safety?
- What are students asking for?
- What issues are the community (or various constituencies) grappling with?
- What questions do we have? What additional information do we need? Where can we get this information? Who could we talk to?
- Where do I stand on the issues right now? What prior knowledge and experiences inform my current stance?
- What individual responsibilities and behaviors are needed to improve school safety? Consider how good societies govern themselves and the role of laws within that society.
- As members of the school community, what can students do to help prevent acts of school violence?
- How can we frame the issues of school safety or gun control in terms of human rights or civic virtue?

Sources of Evidence – Basing Opinions on Factual Information

While students will come to the discussion with opinions already formulated, they also should take time to research additional information to be better informed.

- A Mass Shooting Generation Cries Out for Change <https://junior.scholastic.com/pages/news/2017-18/a-mass-shooting-generation-cries-out-for-change.html>
- U.S. Department of Education – Working to Keep Schools and Communities Safe <https://www.ed.gov/school-safety>

- Bureau of Justice Assistance – Guide to Preventing and Responding to School Violence
<http://www.theiacp.org/Portals/0/pdfs/schoolviolence2.pdf>
- All Sides (Online news source that provides access to articles from different sides of the political spectrum, including school safety)
<https://www.allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news>

Structured Classroom Discussion – Ensuring All Students Have a Voice

Classroom discourse is most productive when there is a structure in place to ensure that all students have a voice and to help maintain order. Suggestions for discussion structures include:

- Barometer Discussion: Taking a Stand on Controversial Issues <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/barometer-taking-stand-controversial-issues>
- Big Paper: Building a Silent Conversation <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/big-paper-silent-conversation>
- Four Corners Discussion <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/four-corners>
- Socratic Seminar
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/socratic-seminar>
- Structured Academic Controversy <http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/21731>

Post-Discussion Debrief/Writing

After the discussion, students will benefit from an opportunity to reflect on what they have heard and learned, as well as the discussion process. Suggested prompts include:

1. After discussing the issue of school safety with your peers, have any of your initial thoughts and ideas changed? Explain.
2. What actions can high school students take to effect positive change in their communities?
3. What additional questions do you have about school safety?
4. How did our group do in relation to our group norms? What are some examples of when a particular norm was shining through?

Additional Resources

Because of the high level of student interest and engagement, there is an opportunity to move beyond this tragedy and further explore ways to help students become active and engaged citizens.

Student Civic Engagement

- Constitutional Rights Foundation: Civic Action Project
<http://www.crfcap.org/>
- Teaching Tolerance Lessons for Student Activism <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/student-tasks/do-something>
- Facing History and Ourselves: After Parkland, Students Choose to Participate
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/after-parkland-students-choose-participate>
- Youth Participatory Politics Research Network: Ten Questions for Change Makers
<https://yppactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/>

Encouraging Civil Discourse and Discussion

- Facing History and Ourselves: Fostering Civil Discourse
https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/publications/Fostering_Civil_Discourse.pdf
- The New York Times: Talking Across Divides
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/28/learning/lesson-plans/talking-across-divides-10-ways-to-encourage-civil-classroom-conversation-on-difficult-issues.html>

Gathering and Evaluating Evidence

- Stanford History Education Group: Civic Online Reasoning <https://sheg.stanford.edu/civic-online-reasoning>