

Safeguarding Democracy through Education

If the political turmoil roiling our country has you feeling a bit discouraged, you are not alone. Several of the articles in this issue of *American Educator* make the case that democracy is at risk. But they also highlight how educators, by building students' knowledge, can help improve our national discourse and ultimately the state of the world.

As educators know, ignorance threatens basic freedoms. Our nation's founders knew the importance of an informed and engaged citizenry in a constitutional democracy. For instance, Thomas Jefferson famously wrote about the need for educating the masses in order to protect freedom.

Amid today's heated political debates, valuing freedom should be one area of common ground. After all, as many political scientists and philosophers agree, power left unchecked in the hands of a few erodes freedom. To teach this lesson to students, explore Share My Lesson's "Foundations of Democracy" collection, which discusses terms such as "authority" and "rule of law," as well as the rise of fake news.

The need for educators to fill troubling knowledge gaps is clear. One recent survey found that 49 percent of millennials cannot name a single Nazi concentration camp and 41 percent do not believe that 6 million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. Fortunately, 9 out of 10 survey respondents felt that students should learn about the Holocaust in school.* Visit Share My Lesson's new "Holocaust Remembrance" collection to find resources for teaching this tragic history.

Equally worrying is a report by the Southern Poverty Law Center that high school seniors struggle to answer basic questions about slavery in the United

*To read the survey, visit www.claimscon.org/study.

States, and that teachers report a lack of strong resources in order to teach it well.† Visit our updated "American Slavery" collection to find resources from several partners to supplement your lessons on this difficult topic.

Hook Students with Current Events

In learning about issues of the day, many young people become engaged in their schools and communities. Visit our newly reorganized "Climate Change" collection to build on student interest in animal welfare and the environment.

Many young people also feel strongly about addressing gun violence. Share My Lesson's new "Gun Violence in the United States" collection contains dozens of resources as well as a keynote webinar, "When Enough Is Enough," that features a panel of experts discussing solutions.

Are your students passionate about gender equality, immigration, or racial justice? Visit our "Social Justice Issues" collection dedicated to the #MeToo and #MeTooK12 movements.

Perhaps the growing wealth gap in the United States and worldwide interests

†To read the report, visit www.splcenter.org/teaching-hard-history-american-slavery.

your students? Our "Labor Union History and Social Justice" collection provides lesson plans, videos, and other resources to help students understand the ways in which organized labor promotes workers' rights at home and abroad.

Build Strong Participation Skills

Last but not least, we must help students engage effectively in our democracy. Take a look at our free webinars on "Civil Discourse, Current Events, and Global Issues," where there is bound to be one of interest. For example, if you are eager to enhance your curriculum by having students try to solve real-world problems, check out the webinars "Teaching Big Ideas for Real-World Transfer of Learning" and "Tackling World Issues by Fostering Global Competence in the Classroom."

Whatever lesson you choose, your efforts will go a long way toward strengthening our democracy. Hats off to all our users, partners, and contributors who make Share My Lesson a world-class website for learning and who contribute to the civic mission of schools. Send an email to content@sharemylesson.com with any comments or ideas for how we can further support you.

—THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

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Recommended Resources

"Foundations of Democracy"
<http://go.aft.org/AE218sml1>

"Holocaust Remembrance"
<http://go.aft.org/AE218sml2>

"American Slavery"
<http://go.aft.org/AE218sml3>

"Climate Change"
<http://go.aft.org/AE218sml4>

"Gun Violence in the United States"
<http://go.aft.org/AE218sml5>

"Social Justice Issues"
<http://go.aft.org/AE218sml6>

"Labor Union History and Social Justice"
<http://go.aft.org/AE218sml7>

"Civil Discourse, Current Events, and Global Issues"
<http://go.aft.org/AE218sml8>