
Dear Mrs. Naidu: What rights should young people have in school?

English and Language Arts/Social Studies

Grades 6 - 10

- CCSS ELA Reading: Literature Standard 2
 - CCSS ELA Writing Standard 7
 - C3 Framework Civic and Political Institutions D2.Civ.2
 - C3 Framework Participation and Deliberation D2.Civ.7
 - C3 Framework Taking Informed Action D4.8
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Overview

This lesson is appropriate for use in middle school classrooms and for some 9th or 10th grade classrooms. *Dear Mrs. Naidu* is set in a location that most of them will never experience personally, but because the story's themes are universal students will be exposed to diversity while finding much that they recognize in themselves. This windows and mirrors approach to literature leads to a consideration of personal civic engagement as the ultimate goal of the lesson.

Objectives

- Students will practice identifying the central theme of a text, analyzing its development and providing a summary.
- Students will be able to explain specific roles played by citizens in the democratic process.
- Students will identify something within their schools or communities that they would like to engage with.
- Students will conduct a short research project in order to determine several possible avenues of civic engagement.

Materials Needed

- *Dear Mrs. Naidu* by Mathangi Subramanian
- Computers or tablets for research
- Appendix A handouts copied for all students

Bell-Ringer

When class begins, ask students to think-pair-share (<http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/using-think-pair-share-30626.html>) a list in response to the following question:

What rights should young people have in a democracy?

Compile the results on the board at the front of the room. Discuss which rights were most frequently cited.

Materials

- *Dear Mrs. Naidu* by Mathangi Subramanian (Young Zubaan, 2015)

Other Resources

- National Literacy Association's Strategy Guides: <http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides>
- Center for Civic Education <http://civiced.org/>
- UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child: <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

Students should finish the bell-ringer by completing this sentence frame: “The most important right that young people have is _____; it is the responsibility of _____ to ensure access to that right.”

Pre-Read Context

If your students have not studied Indian history and contemporary issues in any depth, you should give them a little bit of information to contextualize the novel:

- Explore a map of India and identify Bangalore (a city in the southern part of the country).
- As India’s economy grows, improvements in people’s lives have not been experienced evenly. Bangalore is home to a large number of technology companies. This has led to great success for some, but has only widened the gap between rich and poor because some families have not benefited from the rapid change that has resulted. In the novel you will be able to see how caste, class, faith, and gender all play a role in shaping the lives of the poor.
- India was part of the British Empire until 1947. There were many attempts to gain independence before then – the Quit India movement was one of them.
- When India achieved independence in 1947, it was as part of an event called Partition. Pakistan was also created at that time. This division was an attempt to address a very complicated set of concerns regarding religious minorities. Tensions between various religious, ethnic and linguistic groups have continued to flare up since then as a result of political and social unrest that can be traced back to the experience of Partition.

Close Reading

As students read, they should keep a chart going of windows (things that allow them to see into an unfamiliar life) and mirrors (things that remind them of their own experiences).

Group Analysis

Once they have completed reading the novel, students should be divided into groups of three or four. They should share their windows and mirrors charts with each other and identify similarities between their charts.

Lastly, they should consider how many of them recorded insights regarding child rights. Did they see those as windows or mirrors?

Child Rights Brainstorm

Have students complete this sentence starter with something they should have or do: “Students in my community should have the right to _____.”

Could that statement be turned into a research question? Give students an example: “Students in my community have the right to recess at school.” The research question that follows might be: “How much time to play do students have now?” Lead students in a discussion of what questions might develop from there – “How much time to play should students have?” and “What is needed to increase the amount of time given for recess?” and “Who determines how much time for recess students get?”

Research Project

Pair students up to investigate one of their research questions. If two students had the same topic they should be put together or they can be randomly paired and then discuss which of their two they would like to proceed with. They should complete the assignment provided in Appendix A together.

Extension (Optional)

Have the student pairs present the results of their research. Vote as a class on which right they would like to pursue and then take action!

Appendix A Researching Your Rights

Names: _____

1. The statement of rights that we chose was “Students in my community should have the right to _____.”

2. Brainstorm the reasons why you think that is a right:

3. Brainstorm the reasons why you think that you have not been allowed to exercise that right:

4. Write a research question to begin your inquiry with:

Where can you find the answer to that question?

What is the answer?

5. What question does that answer lead you to?

Where can you find the answer to that question?

What is the answer?

6. Are there any other questions you need to ask to understand your right? Find the answers!

7. Now that you have researched the right you believe you should have, do you think that it is important enough to fight for? Explain.

8. If you still believe that it is important, what can you do to get that right? Who do you need to contact? If you don't believe it is important enough to pursue, is there something else you wish you'd identified? Explain.

9. Consider UNICEF's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):

http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf

Do you think that the right you identified fits within the CRC? Explain.

10. Now that you've seen a framework for child rights, do you still think that the right you identified is important? Explain how the right you've been researching fits into the CRC or why you think that it does not.