



Building Constituencies

Overview

This lesson introduces students to the importance of building a constituency to support or oppose public policies using the case study of the Montgomery Bus Boycott as an example. First, students read primary documents from the boycott and discuss how the documents show how leaders tried to build support. Then in small groups, students brainstorm how they can get support for their CAP issue. Finally, as homework, students write a plan for building support for their CAP issue.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how building constituencies is an important civic action using the Montgomery Bus Boycott as an example.
- Analyze a primary document to identify civic actions, including methods that boycott leaders either used or thought of to build support for the boycott.
- Brainstorm ideas for gaining support for their CAP issue.
- Create and write a short plan for gaining support for their CAP issue.

Preparation & Materials

- [Handout A: The Montgomery Bus Boycott](#)—1 per student
- [Handout B: Document Exploration](#)—1 per student
- [Handout C: Documents](#)—1 document per group
- [Handout D: Gaining Support](#)—1 per student

Procedure

I. Focus Discussion

A. Help students build on prior knowledge about the civil rights movement by asking what they know about it, who Martin Luther King was, Rosa Parks, etc.

Explain that though they may have learned about the civil rights movement in their history classes, looking at events from this era through the lens of CAP can be helpful in thinking about influencing policy and effective citizenship.

Explain that citizens who have affected community problems through policy change have almost always had to build support from others; they had to build a constituency. Today students are going to look at a historic example of people working together to right a wrong.

B. Distribute [Handout A: The Montgomery Bus Boycott](#). Ask students to read the handout and then hold a brief discussion by asking students to use their existing knowledge and the information they read to answer these questions:

- What was the boycott about?
- How was it ultimately resolved?
- Boycotts almost always fail. Why do you think this one was successful?

C. Tell students that they are going to examine documents related to the beginning of the bus boycott to explore the civic actions, especially the civic action of gaining support to build a constituency.

II. Small-Group Activity—Document Exploration

A. Divide students into eight groups. Distribute [Handout B: Document Exploration](#) to each student. Assign and distribute to each group one or more of the eight documents from [Handout C: Documents](#).

B. When students are ready, hold a brief discussion on the documents by calling on the groups in order (Document 1 first and Document 8 last), asking what the document is and what it teaches about building support.

III. Debrief and Homework—Gaining Support

A. Explain that as students try to influence the policy issue they have chosen, they will be more effective if they can get others to support them. Distribute [Handout D: Gaining](#)

Support and discuss the homework assignment (writing a description of how they would gain greater support for their CAP issue/problem/policy).

B. After completing this lesson, have students return to the Citizenship Brainstorm, identifying and adding to the lists.