

Lesson 13: Caregiving in Time of Protest

“Every single person actually has the power to protest racist and antiracist policies, to advance them, or, in some small way, to stall them.”

—Ibram X. Kendi

Social Justice Standards: Justice 15, Action 16

Summary

Local, national, and global injustices can bring protests into the spotlight, and oftentimes, educators and caregivers feel ill-equipped to have nuanced conversations with children. We share these points in hopes that they help to add to the fullness of your classroom and family discussions:

1. **Protest Is Part of Our National Identity—and Always Has Been**

Protest has been a part of our national fabric and national identity from the very beginning. Specific acts of protest, from the Boston Tea Party on, led to the very creation of our nation. Protests have continued to be a part of every single social change and advancement across our national history, including civil rights. Our Founding Fathers protected the act of protest by including these two important rights in our constitution: the right to “peaceably assemble” and the right to “petition the government for a redress of grievances.” Protests have continued to be a part of every single social change and advancement across our national history, including civil rights.

2. **Protesting Is a Protected Right.**

The Bill of Rights, written in 1789, grants Americans many important rights, which have come to define our nation and anchor some of our shared national values. Protesting is a reflection of two of those important rights: the right to “peaceably assemble” and the right to “petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

3. **Disruption Is Often the Explicit Purpose of Protest.**

They can disrupt narratives, processes, the economy, or even traffic. Their disruption is rooted in the principle of nonviolence. The disruption serves not only to garner attention but also to represent accountability when it’s perceived to be missing from the system. It’s a method to share the burden of the injustices being protested when no other consequences are available.

4. Direct Action is One Form of NonViolent Protest.

Other forms of nonviolent protest include economic boycotts, organizing collective buying power, awareness and advocacy campaigns, and storytelling through art and dialogue, particularly those that lift up stories that are not often heard. Sometimes an act of protest can be sitting where you're not supposed to or kneeling when you're expected to stand.

5. There Are Usually MANY Leaders

Protests are usually part of movements that include many leaders and many, many different people. Often movement leaders are memorialized differently later, usually in a way that supports a "hero" narrative. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X worked together. They also had different approaches. They were not rivals. Martin Luther King was surrounded by other leaders, like John Lewis, Ella Baker, and Fannie Lou Hamer whose participation was essential but who are often left out of the full narrative. Our familiarity with "hero" narratives sometimes causes us to miss the leaders in our midst because they have not been memorialized yet.

6. How Movements Are Memorialized Often Doesn't Match What Really Happened.

Our understanding of history also shifts as time progresses and citizens' perspectives change. Martin Luther King Jr. was not popular in his lifetime. Many of us know that he was assassinated and under constant death threat and that his home was bombed. We often attribute that hatred and dislike only to the white supremacists at the time and forget, or don't learn, that the majority of the country didn't hold a favorable view of Martin Luther King Jr. A 1966 Gallup poll showed that only 36% of people had a positive view of him. Yet, in 1999 he was second in a list of Americans that other Americans admired most.

7. Social Change Movements Take a Very Long Time

The seeds for Brown vs. Board of Education were planted decades beforehand. There were eight years between the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington. The complex nature of social issues and this long-term view can make it difficult to recognize crystallized moments of "success" even if there is movement and shifting happening in many places.

8. Protest Movements Are Intentional, Purposeful, and Organized

Sometimes stories about protests push forward a narrative that they are spontaneous or develop organically. While there are certainly moments that are unplanned, protest movements tend to be intentional, purposeful and very organized, even if you can't see it. Sometimes the organization, plans, and decision making is intentionally not made transparent in an effort to protect those in leadership roles. Sustained protest campaigns take a lot of pre-planning and are often a part of larger change strategies. In the following lesson, you'll experience stories with a wide variety of reasons for protests and how they come to fruition. Explore the similarities and differences in the stories, and see if you can find any commonalities in their themes.

Booklist

- We Are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom, illustrated by Michaela Goade
- Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez by Kathleen Krull, illustrated by Yuyi Morales
- Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909 by Michelle Markel, illustrated by Melissa Sweet
- Freedom Summer by Deborah Wiles, illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue
- Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down by Andrea Pinkney, illustrated by Brian Pinkney
- Rosa by Nikki Giovanni, illustrated by Bryan Collier

Consider This

- Have you ever participated in a protest? What was the experience like for you?
- What are some things that you feel strongly enough to protest about?
- What protests have you witnessed, near or far, in your lifetime? Is there a trend?
- Is there anything you do regularly that is a form of protest? An example could be not shopping at a certain store because they have a history of being racist or discriminatory against marginalized groups.

Talk Together

- Is there anything you care about that you would be upset or sad if it were taken from you? What would you do with those feelings?
- What do you do when you feel like something is unfair for you or others?
- We have a protected right to speak up about things we believe in. What do you think would happen if that right was taken away?
- Do you think protesting is only for adults?

Engage

- Watch Disney's Ruby Bridges to show how young people can still create big moments.
- Oh no! There are no more cookies allowed in the house! Plan a protest around this or something else that is meaningful to your household. Have conversation about what to do to make the protest meaningful, intentional, and invoke change.

Explore More

- Article Twenty Network's "Parents Guide to Talking with Kids About Protest"
- Learning for Justice's *Mighty Times: The Children's March* (2004)
- Zero to Three's "Racism and Violence: Using Your Power as a Parent to Support Children Aged Two to Five"
- "Talking to My White Kids About Abolition" by Shannon Cofrin Gaggero (Embrace Race)