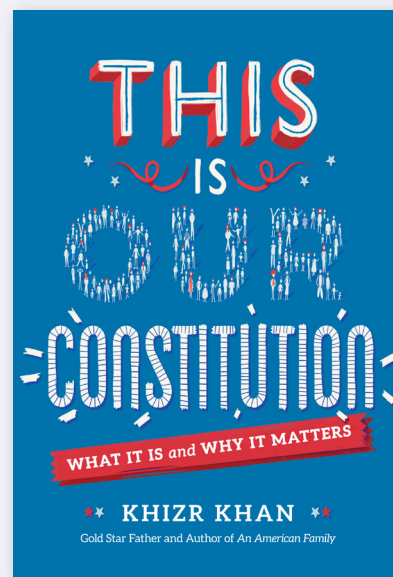
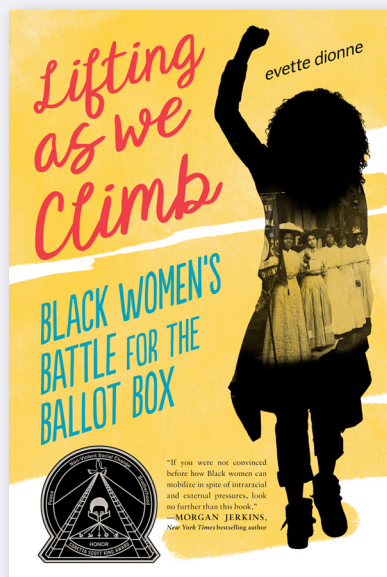
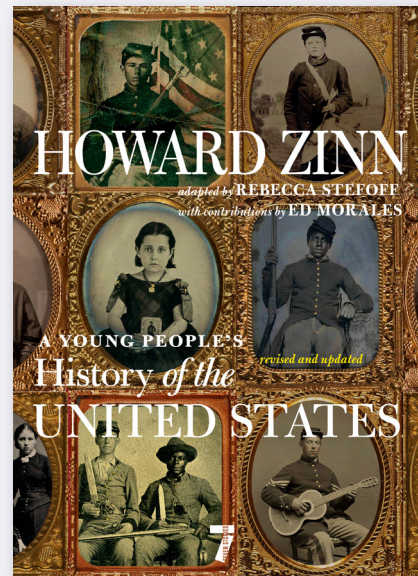
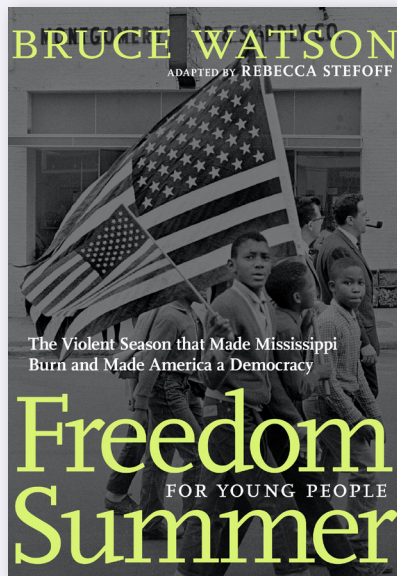


THEMATIC GUIDE

Teaching Civic Rights & Responsibilities
MIDDLE SCHOOL



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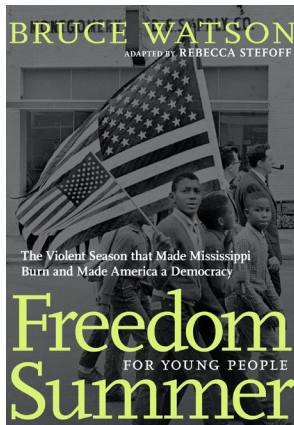
■ INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States effectively gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This decision freed nine states to alter election laws without federal approval. Since then, voter suppression efforts have multiplied at an alarming rate, with restrictive policies disproportionately targeting people of color and our nation’s youth. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, these barriers prohibit “American citizens from fully participating in our democracy and being fairly represented by our government. Informed citizens are our best defense.”

The effort to build a knowledgeable electorate must start long before students reach the legal age to vote. In a culture where news is circulated through social media and adults are engaged in polarizing politics, young people can be unsure who to trust or believe. Media literacy is integral to preserving our democratic processes, as is a thorough understanding of our nation’s voting laws and history.

The books in this text set focus on the concept of civic responsibility by addressing the following lines of inquiry: What are the rights and responsibilities of citizens in the twenty-first century? What role did past generations play in securing these rights? What is my role in meeting these responsibilities? Middle school teachers can choose one or any combination of books and strategies to use as they empower students to become informed and fully participating citizens who influence the social and political systems that shape their lives.

■ ABOUT THE TITLES IN THIS COLLECTION



Freedom Summer For Young People

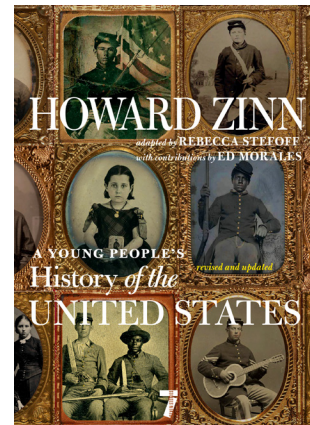
The Violent Season that Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy

BRUCE WATSON, adapted by REBECCA STEFOFF

978-1-64421-010-9

Paperback | Triangle Square
448 pages | \$22.95

Bruce Watson's *Freedom Summer for Young People* recalls the 1964 campaign by more than 700 college students to register Mississippi's black voters and democratize America's elections.



A Young People's History of the United States

Revised and Updated

HOWARD ZINN, adapted by REBECCA STEFOFF

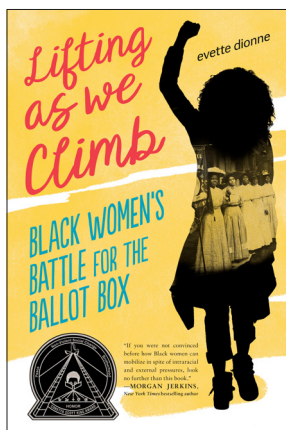
978-1-64421-251-6

Paperback | Triangle Square

544 pages | \$23.95

Also available: E-Book

A Young People's History of the United States, by Howard Zinn, provides an honest lens by which to view our nation's history in order to examine our policies and preserve our democracy.



Lifting As We Climb

Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box

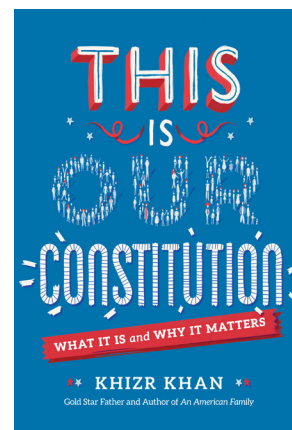
EVETTE DIONNE

978-0-451-48155-9

Paperback | Viking Books for Young Readers
176 pages | \$9.99

Also available: E-Book

In *Lifting as We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box*, Evette Dionne highlights the battle by women of color to establish their rightful place in the American suffrage movement.



This Is Our Constitution

What It Is and Why It Matters

KHIZR KHAN

978-1-5247-7094-5

Paperback | Viking Books for Young Readers
224 pages | \$8.99 | Lexile: 1190L

Also available: Audio Download, E-Book

Gold Star father and Pakistani immigrant Khizr Khan's *This is Our Constitution* challenges readers to be informed citizens who recognize the inclusive, fundamental rights established in our country's founding documents.

■ BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

The following lessons build student knowledge around founding documents and the roles of race and gender in our nation's voting history.

COMPARE-CONTRAST

Build knowledge around the purpose and impact of our nation's founding documents. Show students the scene from Disney's *National Treasure* (<https://tinyurl.com/NationalTreasurevid>) where the main character says, "Of all the ideas that became the United States, there's a line here that's at the heart of all the others." He then reads from the Declaration of Independence: "When a long train of abuses and usurpations... evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty to throw off such government."

After students watch the clip, ask: Do you agree with the speaker when he says that those who have the *ability* to take action also have the *responsibility* to take action? What are some current and historic examples of citizens taking action against wrongs? Explain to students that in order to preserve, protect, and uphold our democracy, we need to understand how our civic rights and responsibilities are laid out in our nation's founding documents.

Next, provide students with a copy of the essay "Constituting Liberty: From the Declaration to the Bill of Rights" (https://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/13_Exhibition_Pamphlet.pdf). Ask students to read the first page and highlight or annotate similarities and differences among the Declaration, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Together as a class, discuss findings and create a Venn diagram of the three documents that students can keep in their notebooks to reference as they read the upcoming texts.

POINT OF VIEW PRACTICE

Demonstrate how historical, social, and political perspectives differ depending on the lens through which an observer sees. Provide students with a news article or short story with multiple perspectives. Ask students to perform several reads, each time with a different "lens," looking for evidence of a specific perspective. Afterwards, hold a class discussion on how the story changes depending on the point of view applied.

■ CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

MULTIMEDIA ANALYSIS

Both *Freedom Summer for Young People* and *A Young People's History of the United States* detail the harrowing treatment of black citizens and civil rights volunteers during the voter registration drive of 1964. Use multiple forms of media to underscore for students the lasting legacy of this summer. Show students the movie trailer from the 1988 film *Mississippi Burning* (<https://tinyurl.com/MississippiBurningvid>) and the Herbert L. Block 1964 political cartoon entitled "Investigation in Mississippi" (<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/herblock-gallery/herblock-looks-at-1964.html>).

Ask students to draw comparisons between imagery in these texts. Students should

note the movie line: “These people crawled out of the sewer!” and the white-hooded Klan snake hiding under a rock in the cartoon. When done, ask the class the following questions: Why does the snake wear a sign that says “Law Enforcement Agents” in quotation marks? What tools and knowledge of human nature do artists use to make their point in the film trailer and political cartoon?

Next, ask the class to analyze the subtitle of Bruce Watson’s *Freedom Summer: The Violent Season that Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy*. Ask students: What are the multiple ways Mississippi was “burning” that summer? Talk about the heat, the Ku Klux Klan fires, and the disintegration of morality. Next ask: How did these events “make America a democracy”? Discuss the national shock and determination that resulted from that summer, and led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Finally, ask students: How does the novel(s) we are reading deepen our understanding of this imagery? As an extension, students might create their own political cartoon or movie trailer to illustrate themes from the text they are reading.

CONNECT, EXTEND, CHALLENGE

Deepen students’ understanding and contemporary connections to the work seen in *Lifting as We Climb: Black Women’s Battle for the Ballot Box* and *Freedom Summer*. Show students the Brennan Center for Justice article “The Impact of Restrictive Voting Legislation” (<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/impact-restrictive-voting-legislation>). Ask the class to take note of the article’s “big idea,” that “new legislation will disproportionately suppress voters from marginalized groups.” Provide time to read the article, then ask students to take notes using the “connect, extend, challenge” protocol. Annotations include student “connections” to the article, new information and ideas that “extend” their thinking, and “challenges” or confusing areas. After reading, discuss the following questions as a class: What are some specific suppression efforts impacting current Latino, Black, tribal, and rural citizens, as well as citizens with disabilities? Students should note legislation around early voting, third-party registration, polling sites, and voter IDs.

In order to personalize these disenfranchised groups and highlight the continued impact of Black women on election equity, direct students to the voting rights website Fair Fight (<https://fairfight.com/why-we-fight/>). Explain to students that the Fair Fight Action organization was founded by former Georgia House Representative Stacey Abrams, a Black female advocate, politician, and author who continues to fight for election equity across the nation. Invite students to select one of the “We Fight For” links that detail personal stories of recently disenfranchised voters.

After reading their selected story, students can turn and talk with a classmate about the different suppression techniques that are impacting real people right now. As a class, make a list of these suppression strategies. When finished, discuss the following topics: What connections do we see between current voter suppression techniques and the historical events we have been reading about? Ask students to work with their partner, peruse the website, and find advocacy ideas that are suggested or currently being used. Add these tools in a separate column on the class list. Wrap up by asking: How do historic and contemporary examples of voter suppression impact your attitude toward voting?

SPEECH ANALYSIS

In *Lifting as We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box*, the author details the racism Black females faced from all areas of society, even from white women who were slow to support their sister suffragettes. Connect these issues of race and gender equity to contemporary events by showing students the ABC news segment about Vice President Kamala Harris's election (<https://tinyurl.com/KHspeech>). Ask students to make note of words and phrases from the reporter and crowd that focus on race and gender. Students might note quotes like "Her elevation to Vice-President serves as an inspiration to young girls and women of color looking to see themselves represented on the world stage" and "This is a historic moment for Black women in particular, for people of color, but also for any voice that has been unheard."

Next, provide students with the text of Harris's victory speech (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/11/07/kamala-harris-victory-speech-transcript>). Ask students to annotate any language referencing women of color in the speech. What does she mean when she says Joe Biden had the "audacity" to select a woman as his running mate? At the end of her speech, Harris affirms "women who fought and sacrificed so much for equality, liberty, and justice for all, including the Black women, who are often, too often, overlooked, but...are the backbone of our democracy." Ask students: What might Harris mean here? How is our understanding of Harris's viewpoint deepened by the text we are reading?

INFORMATION EVALUATION

In *This is Our Constitution*, Presidential Medal of Honor recipient Khizr Khan emphasizes young people's responsibility to be informed citizens. Explain to students that informed citizens must be media literate. Responsible consumers of news articles and social media must know whose story is being told and whose voice is left out. Ask students:

- What are your current sources for local, state, and national news?
- What do you know about the trustworthiness of those sources?
- How might your current and future life be impacted if you are receiving faulty information or not choosing to receive information at all?
- Discuss the prevalence of "fake news" and how unvetted information threatens our democracy by undermining truth and prioritizes one set of voices over another.
- Explain the significance of evaluating all news to distinguish legitimate sources from less reputable ones.

Next, distribute two news stories from an online newspaper, Facebook feed, or other source. One of the texts should be from a valid source and the other from a questionable or missing source. Ask the class to analyze the validity of each article by applying the ESCAPE method of information evaluation, where students analyze evidence, source, context, audience, purpose, and execution. Students can analyze the articles independently or in partners. As a class, share findings and determine which news story is "fake" or "junk" news and which is a more trustworthy information source. Encourage students to use this method every time they are reading about or listening to current event news. In this way, they can truly be informed citizens ready and able to

discuss and defend their point of view. For more information on the ESCAPE method of information analysis, see <https://newseumed.org/sites/default/files/legacy/2017/05/ESCAPE-Junk-News-Poster-w-FB.pdf>.

FOUR A'S PROTOCOL

The authors of *A Young People's History of the United States* and *This is Our Constitution* emphasize the rights and responsibilities outlined in our founding documents, and how those documents compel citizens to address wrongs. Howard Zinn writes, "The basic principles of democracy are laid out in the Declaration of Independence, which...makes it clear that governments are not holy, not beyond criticism" (p. xi). Khizr Khan adds, "Everyday I'm inspired by all the young Americans who call out injustice, insist upon equal rights, push back against bullies, stay informed about public issues, and perform countless acts of kindness and courage. This is patriotism" (p. 7). Discuss with students: Do you agree that it is our responsibility to address wrongs when we see them?

Next, ask students to apply the Four A's Protocol to the *Rolling Stone* article "Year in Review: How Black Lives Matter Inspired a New Generation of Youth Activists" (<https://tinyurl.com/RollingStoneBLM>). While reading, students should highlight and annotate assumptions, agreements, arguments, and aspirations. Ask the class to share their highlighted "aspirations" either verbally or digitally via Padlet, Pear Deck, or Jamboard. For example, students might select the quote: "I think a lot of the time young people are not looked to as leaders...This really taught me that we can speak up, use our voice, and make a difference." Discuss with students: What are some other current movements where young citizens are using their voices and the power of protest to fight injustice? What does Khan mean when he says youth advocates are "patriots"? For more information and uses of the 4A's protocol, see <https://www.nsrharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/FourAsTextProtocol-N.pdf>.

As an extension, students might choose to research an advocacy movement and publish their learning via a digital storyboard like VoiceThread or an interactive web page like Google Sites or Adobe Spark. Movements might include Fridays for Future, the Disability Visibility Project, or The Trevor Project.

■ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions integrate themes found throughout the texts in this set and can be used for journals, essays, small-group discussions, and large-group seminars.

1. What values should we respect and expect in our fellow citizens? What attitudes and actions should we refuse to tolerate?
2. What is the role of network news and social media in influencing civic participation? Where should I gather my information in order to be an informed citizen?
3. Did the passage of the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments make voting accessible to people of color and women? What about the Voting Rights Act(s) ?
4. Who has access to voting? Who does not? What needs to happen to ensure equity in our voting systems?

5. How do our nation's founding documents shape the current landscape of civic rights and responsibilities? What is being upheld? What is being challenged? How do we uphold these founding principles while protecting the rights of all?
6. What can a frank examination of our nation's history tell us about our current political and civic landscape? What lessons can we learn in order to preserve our democracy?
7. What is the relationship between politics and social movements, both past and present?
8. How do I envision my role, moving forward, to uphold, protect, and preserve my civic rights and responsibilities?

■ RESOURCES

The following resources provide more information and ideas for engaging students in civics education.

CivXNow: <https://civxnow.org/>

Project Zero: <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/50th/civic-agency>

National Constitution Center:

<https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/the-constitution>

Educating For American Democracy:

<https://www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org/the-roadmap/>

Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools:

<https://tinyurl.com/CivicMissionSchools>

■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

Laura Reis Mayer is a high school instructional coach and National Board Certified Teacher in Asheville, North Carolina. She has taught middle, high school, and college English, speech, drama, and literacy. As a consultant to various national organizations, she develops and facilitates professional learning on college and career-ready standards, teacher leadership, and National Board Certification. She has authored more than twenty Penguin Random House teacher's guides.

Visit our website, PenguinRandomHouseEducation.com
to browse more civics titles.

