Teaching Ideas to Discuss Police Violence and Protest in Chicago

This lesson idea seeks to help your students to process the recent protests in Chicago in response to the death of George Floyd. Given the complexity and emotion of the current moment, please modify as appropriate for your students and classroom community.

Preparing for teaching the lesson:
Please consider these questions to address virtual teaching:
- What communication should you consider sending to parents and caregivers to make them aware of the conversations you are having? How can you help bridge and support connections between school conversations and those happening in your students’ lives outside of school as well?
- With the challenge of a digital environment, how will you make sure all students are able to engage honestly and without harm?
- Given students’ access to the internet, what discussions are you facilitating about the impact of looking at graphic and dehumanizing videos or imagery?

What should I consider as an educator?
- What are your goals and how will you articulate why you’re having conversations about the protests in Chicago in response to the death of George Floyd? And what are your goals for discussing your students’ relationships to current events?
- As you enter the conversation, how will you prioritize considerations related to your racial identity, your students’ racial identities, and your relationship with your students?
- As parts of this story continue to develop, how will you learn alongside your students?
- Whose voices are you bringing into the conversation? How are you making sure to lift up Black voices in the texts and documents you are looking at?
- How will you highlight acts of resistance and agency of Black Americans, throughout history and today? How will you include the activism of allies who resisted the socialization of white supremacy and adopted anti-racism?

Online Teaching Ideas:

1. **Contracting:** Revisit your online classroom contract and norms. What modifications might you need to make in order to discuss the protests in Chicago in response to the death of George Floyd, and in order to discuss your students’ relationships to current events. Invite students to modify the contract and norms.
2. What have you heard? & What do you wonder?: Have students complete a T-chart considering each of the questions below. Determine if your students will share their responses aloud, if they will share them on a discussion thread, or you may ask your students to send you an email with their responses so that you compile them and return to clarify any misinformation.
   - What have you heard/do you think you know about the protests in Chicago and across the country?
   - What are you wondering about the protests in Chicago and across the country?

Analyzing Visual Images: Ask students to view images of the protests and its aftermath, such as these from the Chicago Tribune. They can use the See, Think, Wonder teaching strategy to more deeply analyze an image that resonates with them, and may add to their chart.

3. Ask Questions, Read and Learn: Choose one of the following activities to help your students answer questions that they have.

   A. Racist Roots of American Policing

      Explore the resources below as you process this tragedy and the broader histories of violence in which it is embedded. Ask students to read this piece from The Conversation The Racist Roots of American Policing: From Slave Patrols to Traffic Stops

      Then ask students to reflect on the article and respond to the following, James Baldwin said, “history is literally present in all that we do.” How do you think personal experiences with the police shape interactions today?

   B. Statements from leaders

      Invite students to read the statements from current leaders and ask them to underline important ideas in the letter. After reading and underlining, ask them to create a list of questions that they have for the leaders.

      Congressman John Lewis
      Former President Barack Obama
      Mayor Lori Lightfoot

   C. News Literacy

      Ask students to read two different news sources about the protests in Chicago and answer the following about both articles.
      - Where was this piece of information first published? Who created it?
      - What do you think the main purpose is (to persuade, inform, distort, entertain, sell, publicize)?
      - What is the overall tone? Is the language neutral or do you detect some bias? Provide specific examples and, where needed, suggest more neutral language.
- What specific claims are made?
- Whose perspectives are missing from this news source?

4. **How do we respond to injustice?**

**Explore the definitions of “protest” “civil unrest” “uprising” and “riot”:** Your students might have questions about terms that are being used to describe what is happening. Consider asking students to look up words and discuss their thinking.

**Watch, Read and Discuss:** Watch the brief video of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as he shares that a “riot is the “voice of the unheard” or share the excerpt below from a 1968 speech “The Other America”.

> “Certain conditions continue to exist in our society, which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And so in a real sense our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention.”

Ask students to record the words and phrases that stuck out to you in your journal.

After reading or watching, in your own words, what is it that America has failed to hear?

Next, read the reflection below from opera singer Jessye Norman in *Twilight LA*, a film about the LA Riot in 1992 on what that cry might sound like. Ask students to respond in their journal about what they think Jessye Norman meant.

> But I think that if I were a person already you know a teenager sort of a youngster 20 or something And I felt that I were being heard for the first time It would not be singing as we know it It would be a roar. Oh I think it would be a roar Oh it would come Oh it would come from the bottom of my feet It would be I really think It would be like a lion
just roaring
it wouldn't be words
it would just be
like the earth's first utterance.

5. **From Reflection to Action:** Ask students to write a letter to themselves in which they respond to the following...

   I have learned...
   Now I think...
   I will do...