The Mountaintop: Planning for Change

*This lesson was adapted from Tacoma Arts Live's original curricula for the theatrical production, **Thurgood** in Winter 2018*

Grades	7 – 12
Objective	Identify a civil rights goal then backwards plan a series of concrete steps to arrive at that goal
Materials	Mountaintop Worksheet
	Internet Access for Research (optional)

Background

It is easy to say you want justice, equality or fairness. It is another thing to plan the steps to make these ideals happen. For example, we might call for the end to police brutality or racial profiling. But, making those goals a reality takes more than angry social media posts or even turning out at demonstrations. The Civil Rights Movement began long before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus, or Dr. King shared his dream. For over twenty years, a legal team focused on dismantling the laws of segregation by addressing school segregation. To arrive at the moment of victory in 1954's *Brown v. the Board of Education* took both hard work and careful strategy. Activists had to decide how to challenge the Jim Crow laws that were the backbone of segregation: Through the creation of new laws in the legislative branch or through the enforcement of existing constitutional rights through the courts? What about state laws versus federal laws? Where could they find real-life people and situations they could advance as promising court cases? What type of logic would be used in the courtroom and how did facts support those arguments? Once the law passed, a new generation of activist had to decide which tactics they would use to turn the court ruling into reality and utilized boycotts, marches, sit-ins, the media and the courts to advance their cause.

In this activity, students will identify a societal goal – it could be ending police brutality, increasing school integration, LGBTQ rights, voting rights, immigration reform, an environmental reform, etc. Once they have a goal in mind, they will create a "backwards plan" toward that goal using the Mountaintop Worksheet.

Lesson Procedure

Survey students' concerns regarding social issues. Borrow from recent headlines to spark discussion or use the following testimonial of a young activist to initiate conversation.

Today's Civil Rights Activists: Bree Newsome on PBS Learning Media.
https://kcts9.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/eotp16-soc-newsome/wgbh-world-channel-todays-civil-rights-activists-bree-newsome/?#.WnkM53lG2Uk

As a class or in small groups, have students share the issues they are concerned about and then flip those issues into the underlying societal goals. For example, an issue might be Black Lives Matter, but the underlying issue might be an end to racial profiling or equitable law enforcement.

Using the Mountaintop Worksheet, students will reflect on the specifics of their issue: Is it an issue of federal, state or local jurisdiction? Is it a law that needs to be created or changed? Is it a public health or environmental concern? Is it a question of rights denied or opportunities unevenly distributed?

Students will reflect on how to educate themselves better on this issue by identifying reliable sources.

Next, they consider three concrete ways they can address their issue. There is a list of individual and collective actions they can consider.

Once that work is complete, students complete the diagram on the back of the worksheet, by starting with their overarching social goal (issue) and working down to legislative, collective and individual actions that lead toward that goal.

As a class or in small groups, students discuss strategies for making progress on their issue. Consider asking students to contrast how it feels to have concrete steps versus simply being aware of the issue through media and social media without having a plan of action.

Extension

To deepen the project, consider having students survey current issues online or conducting research late in the project to identify social movements and organizations already connected to their issues.