



EL Education
Learning Expedition Documentation Project



Gun Violence and the Right to Bear Arms
Linking the Foundations of American
Government to Our Community Today
Grades 6-8

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Summary

This expedition used the issue of gun ownership and gun control as a lens into concepts and issues of U.S. History: federal and state power, individual freedoms and rights, and the process of political change. It engaged students in a study of colonial America, the American Revolution, and the U.S. Constitution for an authentic, immediate purpose: building understanding to be able to contribute to solutions to gun violence in the community surrounding the school and cities across America.

An important piece of Maryland's 8th grade Voluntary State Curriculum involves the foundations of American government, the Bill of Rights, and early American history. This topic became immediately relevant to students as they contemplated issues of gun ownership. Students began by investigating the current issue of gun violence and local efforts to stop it. Some questions that sprung from their Building Background Knowledge workshop were: *"Why were guns ever created?"* *"Why doesn't the government just ban guns?"* *"How can we keep guns from falling into the wrong hands?"* and *"Does violence happen in other cities, too?"* Compassion and outrage fueled students' desires to learn more about the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, how laws are made and enforced, why the Second Amendment was ever created, and what life was like in the colonies.

In addition to engaging students deeply in historical content and concepts, the expedition also gave an authentic purpose to focus on language arts skills. Students were compelled to become stronger readers and writers in order to understand text on constitutional law, the debate on gun ownership and gun violence, and to create useful products to contribute to solutions. It also included math in the form of data analysis, particularly in the study of current gun violence in the city.

The expedition built understanding of citizenship and civic roles. Student research into gun control and efforts to control gun violence was supported by fieldwork that included on-site interviews with important members of Baltimore's civic community:

- Baltimore City Police Commissioner
- Baltimore City District Court Judge
- Director of the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice
- Crime Reporter for the Baltimore Sun
- Local foundations and non-profit agencies working on the issue of urban gun violence.



The expedition culminated in efforts by students to contribute to positive change. Students volunteered at a local nonprofit city agency involved in curtailing gun violence, built an exhibition of writing and artwork as a memorial for Baltimore citizens affected by gun violence, and wrote and filmed persuasive podcasts calling citizens of Baltimore to action around gun control.



Guiding Questions

- What freedoms and responsibilities are defined by the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights?
- How have people/groups interpreted freedoms granted in the Constitution?
- How have groups in the past attempted to counteract gun violence?
- How has the U.S. Constitution shaped gun control in the United States?
- How can individuals have an impact on gun control locally? Nationally?
- What is the impact of the media & technology on issues of gun control?

Case Study One: Guns and Laws at the Beginning of our Nation

Summary

This part of the expedition involved students in research about colonial America, the genesis of the American Revolution, the birth of the United States, and the creation of the U.S. Constitution. It addressed the basic structures of U.S. Government, the balance of power among the three branches, the specific responsibilities and practices associated with each branch. It was clear to students that guns and gun ownership played a pivotal role in the U.S. gaining independence.

The expedition focused particularly on issues of rights: Federal versus States Rights, Community versus Individual Rights, and human rights in a democratic society. The Bill of Rights, particularly the First and Second Amendments, were studied in great depth. Students were involved for two class periods in researching and debating mini-case studies of actual legal cases involving First and Second Amendment issues.

Case Study Two: Gun Violence in Baltimore City

Summary

In this case study, students were involved in gathering data on gun violence in Baltimore and the efforts to address this problem. Through researching text and data concerning gun violence in the city, and through gathering data first-hand in the city, students built an understanding of the problem and the challenges in addressing it.



Students had access to written analysis of gun violence patterns, statistical tables and charts, and homicide maps that showed patterns of the communities in the city most affected by gun violence. Students collected and archived articles related to Baltimore gun violence, as well as articles addressing the ongoing debates about gun control locally and nationally. During their fieldwork, students were able to interview local experts about their perceptions of the problem and were able to put their questions and ideas to civic leaders.



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Major Project

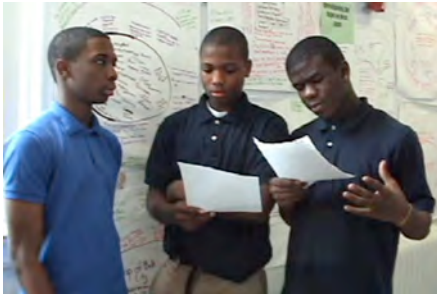
Creating Educational Podcasts to Address Local Issues of Gun Violence

Description

Expert texts gave students a glimpse into gun control perspectives nationwide. An ongoing project throughout this expedition was the collection of data—both qualitative and quantitative—around local initiatives. Students stored any articles about local initiatives in a folder along with their journals, notes and synthesis. These texts and reflections helped them at the end of the expedition as they drafted their podcast scripts directed towards the local community.

Final Product

Using the RAFTS (Role, Audience, Format, Topic, Strong Verb) format, students were tasked with calling citizens of Baltimore to action around gun violence. Before writing, students brainstormed concrete ways various groups of citizens could take action. Ideas ranged from having community



members leave their porch lights on at night, to city officials sponsoring gun buy-backs, to teachers running afterschool programs to keep kids engaged in positive activities. Students then created podcast scripts in groups and revised multiple times for word choice and organization. Students rehearsed their podcasts in front of a live peer audience and received feedback. Finally, their presentations were videoed and converted into a podcast format. The podcasts were shown to students, families and community members.

Content and Skill Standards Addressed in the Learning Expedition

Reading

- I can distinguish between fact and opinion.
- I can notate, summarize, and synthesize non-fiction texts regarding gun violence in preparation for an informed debate on a controversial issue like gun control.
- I can deepen my understanding of a societal issue like gun violence through the examination of fiction including Paul Langan’s novel, *The Bully*.
- I can develop strong questions for discussion when I am the designated “Discussion Director.”

Writing

- I can compose an educational podcast calling citizens to action around an issue like gun violence.
- I can revise a script according to peer feedback.



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Math

- I can evaluate data in a variety of forms to draw conclusions about the status of gun violence in Baltimore City.
- I can use online programs like the *Baltimore Sun's* Baltimore City Homicide Map to sort data by gender, race, age, location, and cause of death.
- I can gather data for analysis on the issue of gun violence in Baltimore.

Character (performance and relational)

- I can formulate my own opinion on the gun control debate, based on research and data.
- I can offer helpful and productive peer feedback.



Science and Technology

- I can create an informative podcast about the current situation involving youth and gun violence in Baltimore City.

Social Studies

- I can explain the political and social effects of the American Revolution on American society and culture.
- I can explain the importance of the Bill of Rights and interpret the freedoms granted within the First and Second Amendments.
- I can list the three branches of the government and explain the powers of each.
- I can consider factors like gender, age, race, and geography when developing my understanding of an issue like gun violence.

Visual and Performing Arts

- I can present an educational podcast calling citizens to action around an issue like gun violence before a live audience and for video.

Health and Wellness

- I can draw connections between gun violence and community health.



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Connections to State and District Standards

8th grade Social Studies

Political Science

- Describe the significance of principles in the development of the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, Preamble, U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights
- Compare how the powers and functions of the three branches of government are divided and how they are shared to protect popular sovereignty
- Evaluate the role and responsibility of a legislator in a representative democracy
- Evaluate the power and authority of the government on individuals
- Analyze the influence of the media on political life
- Evaluate ways the citizens should use, monitor and influence the formation and implementation of public policy
- Describe responsibilities associated with certain basic rights of citizens, such as freedom of speech, religion, and press, and explain why these responsibilities are important
- Explain how rules and laws protect individual rights and protect the common good
- Analyze the political effects of the American Revolution on American society and culture

6th-8th grade English Language Arts – Reading Comprehension Strategies

Comprehension of Informational Texts

- Apply comprehension skills by selecting, reading, and analyzing a variety of print and electronic informational texts
 - Read, use and identify the characteristics of primary and secondary sources of academic information
 - Read, use and identify the characteristics of workplace and other real-world documents
- Analyze text features to facilitate and extend understanding of informational texts.
 - Print Features (large bold print, font size/type, italics, colored print, quotation marks, underlining)
 - Graphic Aids (illustrations, photographs, drawings, sketches, cartoons, maps [key, legend, scale], graphs, charts/tables, diagrams)



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- Informational Aids (introductions/overviews, materials lists, timelines, captions, labels, numbered steps, bulleted lists, footnoted words, pronunciation key, transition words, end notes, works cited)
- Organizational Aids (titles/chapter titles/subtitles, headings/subheadings, tables of content, numbered steps, glossaries, indices, transition words)
- Online Features (URLs, links, sidebars, dropdown menus, homepages, site maps)
- Relationship between text features and content
- Determine important ideas and messages in the text
 - Identify and explain the author's/text's purpose & intended audience
 - Identify and explain the author's opinion/viewpoint
 - State and support main ideas or messages
 - Identify and explain information not related to the main idea
 - Distinguish between fact & opinion
 - Explain the implications of the text or how someone might use the text
- Read critically to evaluate informational texts
 - Explain the extent to which the text fulfills the reading purpose
 - Suggest changes or additions to the structure and features that would make the text easier to understand
 - Evaluate the text for reliability
 - Identify and explain language and other techniques intended to persuade the reader



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Connections to the Community and Larger World

Fieldwork

- Baltimore Sun newspaper
- City and state agencies, nonprofits involved in the gun control debate (examples in Baltimore include the Mayor's Office, Operation Safe Streets, The Abell Foundation)

Experts

The class hosted an “expert speaker series” throughout the expedition. Students prepared for the speakers’ visits by studying local responses to gun violence, learning about their roles in the city, and generating questions to ask. The goal was that each visit would deepen students’ knowledge of local reform efforts (both successful and unsuccessful) and show them multiple perspectives on complex issues.

- Frederick H. Bealefeld – Police Commissioner, Baltimore City
- Judge Timothy Doory – Baltimore City District Court Judge
- Elizabeth Embry – Assistant Solicitor
- Sheryl Goldstein – Director of the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice
- Gus Sentementes – Crime Reporter, Baltimore Sun



Service Learning

- Students hosted a podcast viewing and evening conversation to peers/community members and talk about gun violence
- Students volunteered at a local city agency/nonprofit involved in gun control. Examples include Baltimore City's “Block Parties,” sponsored by the Mayor's office and designed to enrich community life and share resources with citizens in neighborhoods with high violent crime rates.

Exhibitions

- Podcast viewing for students, families and community members
- Memorial for Baltimore citizens affected by gun violence (poems, artwork, letters)