
GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

15-20 days

SPREADING THE WORD AND THE PASSION THROUGH LOCAL WORK

OVERVIEW

While much of what is involved in grassroots organizing has already been covered in this class, a brief history of grassroots organizing combined with use of effective techniques in management and growth can empower students to grow their ideas beyond the scope of the class. The skills are crucial, especially as the students exit the structured classroom setting for the “real” world.

It may, in fact, be tempting to use this unit early in the semester to allow students to use the skills throughout their work, gathering support from those around them. We would encourage this unit to fall, however, at the very least after the essay-writing unit, and probably after the public speaking unit so that the students have the framework to spread their ideas. For, if students are spreading a faulty or incomplete idea, the process of grassroots organizing may backfire. This unit is, however, the best time to start the students thinking about what happens at the end of the semester – will they be done with their issue, or want to continue? And if they continue, in what manner do they wish to do so? How can the skills they are learning here help them to take their project beyond the classroom? And how can they use the rest of the semester to set up those possibilities?

In addition, the time management, organization, and marketing skills needed for grassroots organizing will prove crucial to students in their future activities, from continued education to the work world.

COLORADO CIVICS STANDARDS ADDRESSED: 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 2.3, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4

SAMPLE JOURNAL QUESTIONS

- Where can your work continue to grow? How?
- What would be the best way for your group to attract more people to your cause? Explain why you think this strategy would work?
- How does the work of Cesar Chavez differ from that of Dr, Martin Luther King, Jr.? From SNCC? What pieces of each leadership style could advance your work?
- Is it ever right to break the law? If so, under what circumstances do you think breaking the law is the right thing to do?
- What are your strengths in terms of the skills needed for grassroots organizing? What are your challenges?

VOCABULARY

Agenda: Schedule of items to be considered in a meeting.

Bylaws: Set of rules governing the operation of an organization.

Civil disobedience: Refusal to obey laws regarded as unjust, usually by employing methods of passive resistance and willingness to accept legal consequences.

Grassroots: Arising from the members of a community rather than the leaders.

Interest group: Organized body of individuals who share same goals and try to influence public policy to meet those goals.

Litigation: Legal proceedings.

Lobbying: Trying to influence policymakers to adopt a particular position.

Mediation: Act of resolving or settling differences by using an intermediary agent who works with the conflicting parties.

Negotiation: Process of arranging an agreement or settling a dispute through conferring or discussing.

RESOURCES

- Alinsky, Saul. *Rules for Radicals*. New York: Vintage, 1989.
- The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers' Struggle, <http://www.pbs.org/itvs/fightfields/cesarchavez.html>
- Halberstam, David. *The Children*. New York: Random House, 1998.
- King, Martin Luther Jr. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King*. Clayborne Carson, ed. New York: Intellectual Properties Management, Inc. in association with Warner Books, 1998.

